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“Breathing the Freedom’s Air”: The African American Struggle for Equal
Citizenship in Iowa, 1830-1900

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ABSTRACT

“Breathing the Freedom’s Air”: The African American Struggle for Equal Citizenship in Iowa,
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David Brodnax, Sr.

This dissertation explores a seventy-year period of community growth and activism among African Americans in nineteenth-century Iowa, showing how citizenship was defined, contested, expanded and confined. Antebellum black migrants lived on the margins of a hostile society and struggled for equal citizenship using their labor, their community institutions, the legal system, and the forum of public discourse. This sometimes meant forming client-patron relations with powerful whites, while at other times it focused on a rights-based appeal. On the eve of the Civil War, though, Iowa’s racial dynamics remained fundamentally unchanged.

The war, however, brought new opportunities through migration and military service. African Americans used their wartime loyalty as political capital and integrated the ballot box and the schoolroom, although most blacks remained confined to menial jobs, while their still-small numbers prevented the election of black officials. Iowa’s black communities continued to grow in later years, and community activists employed the traditional tactics through lawsuits, petitions, public celebrations, and other venues.

Finally, a sea change occurred in the 1890s. Community leadership was assumed by a younger generation that had grown up free in Iowa after the war, attended integrated schools, and

sought to address more contemporary problems while still honoring the past. Despite increasing racial hostility in Iowa and nationally, African Americans achieved two milestone institutional victories with the state's first black elected officials and viable black newspaper. Finally, in 1900 the mining town of Buxton was established, creating a thriving environment that had a black majority in this still overwhelmingly white state.

Although this story is largely unknown in the historiography, this work does not simply seek to tell a story that has never been told before. Using social, political, and legal methodology and primary sources, it reveals useful insights about race, gender, class, family and black visions of citizenship in the nineteenth-century Midwest. It shows how African Americans innovatively engaged in politics by other means. And it confronts the common assumption that blacks were not capable of creating social change or protecting their rights in states where they lived in small numbers.

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Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my son, David Brodnax, Jr. For the last five years of his life, he has been forced to share his father with this project, and I've watched him grow from an infant to a young boy of whom I am immensely proud. This is for you, kid.

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Introduction

In 1804, a band of thirty-three explorers led by Meriweather Lewis and William Clark camped near present-day Sioux City on their way up the Missouri River. At that time, the site was part of the Louisiana Purchase, acquired from France only a year before. The stop in Sioux City was notable for several reasons. On August 20, Sergeant Charles Floyd became the only casualty of the expedition when he died of appendicitis. Another of the explorers was the only one who had not volunteered for the trip: York, the slave of Virginia native William Clark. When the company camped on the eastern side of the Missouri, he became the first African American to set foot in what is now Iowa. Clark wrote in his journal that York had cared for Floyd in his last days and showed his skill with a gun, shooting an elk for the company to eat. After sharing an equal portion of the dangers and responsibilities of the two-year journey, York expected to be manumitted and allowed to return to his wife in Louisville, but Clark refused to set him free until some time after 1811. One of the many tall tales told about him in later years held that he escaped and headed west to live with Native Americans.¹

York's story, though only briefly connected to Iowa history, contains many elements of the stories of other African Americans who came to Iowa before the Civil War: the struggle to be free from slavery, the role that river travel played in physical movement, work and culture; the importance of family; and marginalization in a white-dominated society that did not want them there. And yet unlike York, many of these other black Iowans would stay much longer, challenging and expanding the meaning of citizenship in their new homes over a seven decade period.

¹ Robert B. Betts, *In Search of York: The Slave Who Went to the Pacific with Lewis and Clark* (University Press of Colorado, 2000), 13, 84, 106-07, 112-13, 123, 135-43.

The first chapter of this book discusses the African Americans who followed York to Iowa during the antebellum period. The first slaves, former slaves and fugitive slaves arrived during the frontier period of the early 1830s. Most hoped to escape southern bondage or the entrenched racism of the East and create a free society where they could work, travel, attend school, vote, be free of violence, and rise as high as their talents could take them; this is how they defined equal citizenship. Like other early black Midwesterners, though, they found this a difficult proposition. Their conception of what this new society could be was overwhelmed by the desire of their neighbors to create a white state where there were neither slaves nor free blacks; anything else, many whites feared, would encourage a massive influx of southern blacks and eventually lead to social equality, intermarriage, race war, or all of the above. This desire forced the small black population into a subordinate position, best manifested in a legal system that denied them many of the basic rights of citizenship. One of the only rights that they retained was the right to work; despite the anti-migration rhetoric, from the very beginning blacks played an essential role in Iowa's economy by taking dangerous, low-paying jobs as farm laborers, dock workers and servants. This tension between wanting to keep blacks out entirely and depending on their labor for economic growth persisted through the rest of the century, and African Americans were able to exploit it for just as long.

Living primarily in Mississippi River towns such as Dubuque and Muscatine, antebellum blacks formed small but cohesive communities with churches, schools and other institutions. These communities expressed both a strong sense of racial solidarity and notions of elitist privilege among some of their more affluent members, albeit less so in the worldview of leading black citizen Alexander Clark. African Americans also developed two distinct but closely

connected strategies in the struggle for equal citizenship. The first was perhaps inevitable, given that their inferior position demographically and socioeconomically. Skilled artisans, prosperous entrepreneurs and poor laborers alike cultivated patronage relationships with the white elite. Although this strategy varied across time, space and specific circumstances, it became a useful method in escaping slavery, finding work, establishing businesses, keeping community institutions afloat, and combating both the legal system and extralegal pressure.

The second strategy was based on the notion of rights. Declaring that they were entitled to the very privileges and responsibilities of citizenship that were being denied them, African Americans advocated for change in the courts, the legislature, and in the forum of public opinion. This strategy often intersected with the patronage approach since it required support from sympathetic whites, but without the same presumption of subservience. It was also less successful, given the strength of racist opposition, the small size of the black population, and blacks' lack of direct access to the political process. Nevertheless, they engaged in politics by other means, using the press, legislative petitions, and politicized behavior in everyday life to influence the electorate. In the context of hostile race relations, even seemingly mundane actions such as purchasing a home became political. This concept of the "politicization of everyday life" has been explored by other scholars in areas where blacks were a majority or significant minority (primarily the South and Caribbean) but it remains to be seen how it plays out in an overwhelmingly white Midwestern state.² Exploring both strategies also necessitates an analysis

² Dorothy Sterling, *The Trouble They Seen: The Story of Reconstruction in the Words of African-Americans* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Richard D.E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness:*

of white attitudes on race, politics and citizenship, since those attitudes shaped the environment with which blacks had to contend. This work is primarily about black Iowans, but it also has a great deal to say about Midwestern racial dynamics in general.

Although African Americans had some success in the struggle against slavery, especially as white opposition to the peculiar institution grew in the late antebellum period, other efforts were less successful. On the eve of the Civil War little had changed and equal citizenship was still little more than a dream. The war fundamentally transformed this situation, helping Iowa move in a direction dramatically different from other Midwestern states. Chapter II focuses on two major events that contributed to this change: migration and military service. The war brought thousands of slaves into Iowa, most of whom came from Missouri and settled in southeastern Iowa, although others went to Des Moines, the smaller towns of the eastern interior, and to sparsely populated rural areas around the state. The balance of power among black Iowans now shifted from the old Mississippi River towns to the southeast, Des Moines and Davenport.

Whether they were members of large enclaves like Keokuk or the single black resident of an isolated farming township, these migrants used kinship networks, labor, and community

Afroclubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997); Elizabeth Rauh Bethel, *The Roots of African-American Identity: Memory and History in Free Antebellum Communities* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Celeste Ray, ed., *Southern Heritage on Display: Public Ritual and Ethnic Diversity within Southern Regionalism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003); John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Sharon M. Harris, *Executing Race: Early American Women's Narratives of Race, Society, and the Law* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005); Richard B. Pierce, *Polite Protest: The Political Economy of Race in Indianapolis, 1920-1970* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

institutions to acclimate to their new environment and assert their right to equal citizenship. They defined this much as earlier black settlers had, but the war had increased their ability to do so. This discussion draws on the rich body of existing work on black migration in order to more effectively explore these broader themes in Iowa.³ It also reiterates the earlier argument that the importance of black labor eventually helped create progress, albeit in a way that did not challenge white dominance. With so many white men away, blacks became even more important to the economy, and the significant civil rights victory came when the old anti-migration law was struck down. Ultimately, though, the lack of open farmland and large cities discouraged migration to Iowa on the same scale as in the northeast or even some other Midwestern states, and although the black population grew in size dramatically, it remained a small percentage of the population. Several hundred of these migrants served in the 60th U.S.C.I., Iowa's only black Civil War regiment. This chapter's discussion of the 60th employs newspaper articles, diaries of white soldiers (unfortunately, the black troops left none behind) and military records, including some that have heretofore been too disorganized to use effectively to analyze its organization and service.

The greatest legacy of this regiment was not its military record but rather its contribution to postwar civil rights victories, the subject of Chapter III. Like other African Americans around the country, black Iowans saw suffrage as the greatest prize in the struggle for equal citizenship.

³ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879-80* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991); Carol Stack, *Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996); Joe W. Trotter and Earl Lewis, *African Americans in the Industrial Age: A Documentary History, 1915-1945* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996); Michael P. Johnson, "Out of Egypt: The Migration of Former Slaves to the Midwest during the 1860s in Comparative Perspective," in Hine and McLeod, *Crossing Boundaries*; Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

A series of events between 1865 and 1868 reversed three decades of failure on this issue, making Iowa one of the first northern states to grant black men the right to vote. Other scholars have offered compelling arguments to explain this remarkable turn of events, but the role that African Americans themselves played, along with several other factors, has often been overlooked. The rhetoric of black wartime loyalty, expressed by leaders of both races (particularly in the city of Davenport), proved extremely compelling in a state that virtually defined itself by its Civil War record, enabling blacks to use their military service as political capital. The rights-based strategy was more dominant during this period than perhaps any other, although patronage ties helped create a receptive audience for this discourse. Veterans and civilian leaders alike saw the ballot as something that they had earned with their wartime loyalty, and although their rhetoric remained moderate, it nonetheless made it clear that further denial of this right was a mockery of democracy. The small number of African Americans in Iowa also played a major role in the suffrage victory. They had reached a “critical mass”: there were enough of them to effectively press the political system for suffrage change, but still so few that most whites realized that even with the franchise they would not be able to take political power. All of these factors, along with those offered by other scholars, help explain why black Iowans won the right to vote when so their counterparts in so many other northern states did not.

Only a few months before the 1868 suffrage referendum, the state supreme court struck down racial segregation in public schools, a policy whose roots went back as far as the one that had barred blacks from voting. Chapter IV examines the struggle to gain access to education, which was considered not only an essential element of equal citizenship but also a key tool in instilling citizenship in the next generation. Initially barred from attending public schools, a few

blacks attended white private or black-run learning centers – thus showing the continuing importance of the themes of patronage and institutions – but most were unable to get any education at all. This began to change when the state legislature created segregated black public schools before the war, which expanded rapidly with the wartime influx and created a dilemma among black parents and community leaders. Although desegregating the schools (a process that took longer than anticipated due to the reluctance of some districts to comply with the law) was beneficial in many ways, it also destroyed important community institutions and put black teachers out of their jobs. Furthermore, the enduring power of racism prevented blacks from fully enjoying the benefits of the education that they had fought so hard for. All of this shows that equal citizenship and rights were themselves sometimes an elusive, sometimes poorly defined target. Nevertheless, lacking the means to fundamentally transform society and make it truly egalitarian, the rights-based approach remained a useful tactic for African Americans in this and other struggles.⁴

This ambivalence manifested in other ways during the 1870s and 1880s, the focus of Chapter V. Since this period lacks a transformative event like war or the struggle against slavery, this chapter is ultimately an exploration of how many of the earlier themes played out in the years when the wartime liberal fervor was slowly replaced by racial conservatism. African Americans continued to use the press, public expressions of culture, the legislative process, the rhetoric of loyalty and military service, the courtroom, and labor to advocate for their rights. Now that slavery and disenfranchisement were a thing of the past, their major concerns were fair treatment in businesses and common carriers, racial prejudice in the criminal justice system,

⁴ For more information on this concept, see Patricia Williams, *Alchemical Notes: Reconstructed Ideals From Deconstructed Rights*, 22 Harv. Civil Rights-Civil Liberties L. Rev. 401 (1987).

access to better jobs, and defining the past in their own terms. The patronage strategy continued to produce some results, primarily for a few black elites but also in unexpected ways for working-class blacks. Most concerns, though, were not resolved in a satisfactory manner. Although African Americans continued to increase in numbers, particularly in the mining camps of south central Iowa and the northwestern railroad hub of Sioux City, they were unable to overcome white apathy and hostility. Even apparent victories in the courtroom and legislature failed to produce real results, thus showing that seeking rights via the legal process was meaningless if those rights were not protected or respected. By the 1890s, black Iowans retained rights that were now denied in the South but remained in a subordinate position economically, politically, socially and (despite the fact that all formal race-based restrictions were gone) legally.

Chapter VI focuses on the Nodaway Valley, an isolated corner of southwestern Iowa where the black community carried out a unique struggle for equal citizenship. The hundreds of fugitive slaves from western Missouri who settled in this frontier region experienced an unusual measure of success due to two factors: their importance to the economy and their patronage strategy, which in many ways applied the ideas of Booker T. Washington to the rural Midwest. Although their institutions (particularly Emancipation Day celebrations) were politicized, they largely avoided overt political activity and legal activism, offering instead a tacit acceptance of second-class citizenship. This enabled them to create stable institutions and kinship networks, establish an Emancipation Day tradition that became culturally and economically viable to people of both races, and improve their lot economically, if not on the same level as whites. The community eventually faded away in the early twentieth century as the younger generation

sought new opportunities in the larger cities of the Midwest, but it left behind its story in thousands of newspaper articles and other documents, comprising a collection of primary sources unparalleled in nineteenth-century black Iowa.

This generational shift is also a major theme of the final chapter, which explores the sea changes of the 1890s that ushered in a new historical era. Many of these events deal primarily with the black elite, thus creating a certain emphasis on that group in the chapter. First, the death of Alexander Clark signaled a transfer of power to the younger generation that had grown up free and educated in Iowa with no memory of slavery, migration or war. Second, the continued growth of Des Moines' black community made possible the creation of the *Iowa Bystander* newspaper, and this entirely new institution enabled black Iowans to tell their own story for the first time after six decades of contending with an often indifferent or hostile white press. This was even more important given the state's increasing racial hostility, as seen in civil rights setbacks in Sioux City, Davenport and elsewhere. Some members of the black elite retreated from a rights-based discourse and became even more concerned with clientage. Leadership of black institutions became not only a means to uplift the less fortunate but also to announce to whites that they were more "respectable" than other African Americans; this shows that even the national movement to turn inward involved key links to whites, if not overt civil rights activism. The third sea change was the 1900 creation of the Buxton mining camp, which for thirty years was home to thousands of African Americans. They lived and thrived in a place where they were a demographic, political, economic and cultural majority, and when the mines played out they took their experience of living in the state's only true black metropolis to other parts of Iowa, helping to shape its twentieth century racial dynamics in the process. As the single most

important event in the beginning of a new era, it naturally brings an end to the previous one and thus the dissertation as well.

When the nineteenth century came to an end, black Iowa still faced a number of challenges. They had helped end slavery and win the Civil War, overcame legally mandated racism (at least in theory), and made a significant economic contribution on the farms, the docks, and in the cities and mines. They had established community institutions, kinship networks, and a rhetoric of loyal citizenship that also had a major impact. And finally, they were able to hold on to their hard-fought rights. They had not, however, yet fully realized the dream of equal citizenship, and they were still a small minority, so outnumbered that they would find their story largely overlooked by historians in the decades to come.

Most of the archival information used to write this book consists of newspapers, county histories, memoirs and legal documents. As such, there are several inherent biases. First, very few of these sources were created by African Americans themselves. The obituaries and “local color” pieces written about elderly blacks are valuable for learning about migration and employment, but some of their more dubious embellishments must be disregarded. These sources also have a relative lack of information about tension within the black community along lines of gender, complexion and class. The documents’ focus on more privileged blacks means that this work has a great deal to say about Iowa’s black entrepreneurs, politicians, club leaders and other elites, but the voices of working class blacks (or for that matter those of the unemployed and the itinerant) are less prevalent. Many of the individual stories come from the middle and upper class, and even information on working-class blacks tends to focus on things like work and church life with little to say about less “respectable” community activity unless it involved

lawbreaking, which white journalists were always eager to report on. There is still another story to be told on nineteenth-century Iowa, although it may always be difficult or impossible to do so unless new sources become available.

Much of this work is defined in a specifically Midwestern context, which helps to address the historiographic confusion as to where Iowa belongs geographically. Some scholars of Midwestern history exclude it because it was not part of the Northwest Territory, while most Western specialists do not discuss it because it is east of the Missouri River. Iowa's similarity to other Midwestern states, though, makes it clear where this work belongs. Unlike most parts of the West, it was largely settled by blacks and whites before the Civil War, which makes that event transformative in a wholly different manner. Furthermore, recent scholarship on the West has shown the importance of moving past a biracial dichotomy to examine relations between not only blacks and whites but also Native Americans, Latin Americans and Asians, but this valuable perspective does not apply to Iowa.⁵ Like other Midwestern states, it was almost entirely populated by blacks and whites and had few representatives of the other groups; thus the traditional dichotomy actually applies in Iowa, as it does in neighboring states.

There are also other, far more important historiographic implications in this work. Until now, no comprehensive social history (or any other type of history) of nineteenth-century black Iowans has been attempted. With many scholars unaware that there even were African

⁵ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998); William A. Dobak and Thomas D. Phillips, *The Black Regulars, 1866-1898* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); Clare V. McKanna Jr., *Race and Homicide in Nineteenth-Century California* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002); Paul H. Carlson, *The Buffalo Soldier Tragedy of 1877* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003); Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore eds., *African American Women Confront the West, 1600-2000* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003); William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Stephanie Cole and Alison M. Parker, eds. *Beyond Black & White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004); Ken Gonzalez-Day, *Lynching in the West: 1850-1935* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

Americans in Iowa during the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that this history has been so woefully overlooked. The early state histories briefly mention abolitionism, military participation and other key events in black history but without fully exploring them, as do more recent works by Leland Sage, Dorothy Schweider, and Joseph Frazier Wall.⁶ Leola Nelson Bergmann's 1949 article "The Negro in Iowa" offers a fuller account, but in a somewhat cursory manner and without the benefit of newer evidence and analytical insights.⁷

Over the last thirty years, a number of scholars have sought explanations for the unique civil rights victories of the 1860s. Most notable among these is Robert Dykstra's *Bright Radical Star*, which contains some of the first analysis of primary sources on black history since Bergmann's work.⁸ Neither Dykstra nor other scholars, though, fully explore the history of black Iowans, relegating this to a sub-section of white political history. The recent flowering of research on nineteenth-century blacks in the Midwest and West has brought little new information about Iowa,⁹ while newer topical books about the Hawkeye State mention African

⁶ S.H.M. Byers, *Iowa in War Times* (Des Moines: 1888); Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Century History Company, 1903); Olynthus B. Clark, *The Politics of Iowa during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Iowa City: Clio Press, 1911); Leland L. Sage, *A History of Iowa* (Ames, IA: 1974); Joseph Frazier Wall, *Iowa: A Bicentennial History* (New York: 1978); Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: 1996).

⁷ Leola Nelson Bergmann, *The Negro In Iowa* (Iowa City: Iowa State Historical Society, 1969).

⁸ Robert R. Dykstra and Harlan Hahn, "Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage," *The Clash of Political Subcultures: An Analysis of the Iowa Referenda on Negro Suffrage 1857-1868*, Center for the Study of Federalism (Philadelphia: Temple University); Daniel J. Elazar, "Political Culture and Negro Suffrage: A Re-Examination of the Iowa Case," *The Clash of Political Subcultures: An Analysis of the Iowa Referenda on Negro Suffrage 1857-1868*, Center for the Study of Federalism (Philadelphia: Temple University); V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro during the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Dykstra, "Iowa: 'Bright Radical Star,'" in James C. Mohr, ed., *Radical Republicans in the North: State Politics during Reconstruction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Hubert H. Wubben, "The Uncertain Trumpet: Iowa Republicans and Black Suffrage, 1860-1868," *Annals of Iowa* 47 (1984): 409-429; Dykstra, "The Issue Squarely Met: Toward an Explanation of Iowa's Racial Attitudes, 1865-1868," *Annals of Iowa* 47 (1984): 430-50; Wubben, "Further Reflections on the Iowa Black Suffrage Victory," *Annals of Iowa* 47 (1984): 544-546; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star: Black Freedom and White Supremacy on the Hawkeye Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Robert Cook, *Baptism of Fire: The Republican Party in Iowa, 1838-1878* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994)

⁹ James E. Devries, *Race and Kinship in a Midwestern Town: The Black Experience in Monroe, Michigan, 1900-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); William Cheek and Aimee Lee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and*

Americans only in passing.¹⁰ Finally, the last few years have seen the publication of insightful journal articles and collections of narratives on various aspects of black Iowa history, but none of these tell the full story.¹¹ This work is thus the first attempt to pull together over a century of historiography with sources never used before, others that have not yet been mined for their insights on black history, and a fresh analytical focus. This is primarily a social history, but one

the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829-1865 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws in the Old Northwest: A Documentary History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993); Wanda A. Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Club Women in Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Stephen A. Vincent, *Southern Seed, Northern Soil: African-American Farm Communities in the Midwest* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); James Simeone, *Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois: The Bottomland Republic* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Barbara Young Welke, *Recasting American Freedom: Gender, Race, Law, and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Thomas C. Buchanan, *Black Life on the Mississippi: Slaves, Free Blacks, and the Western Steamboat World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*; Keith P. Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom: African Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004); James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: The New Press, 2005); Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005); Nikki M. Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005); Robert H. Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover: A Fugitive Slave, the Constitution, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Dorothy Schwieder, *Black Diamonds: Life and Work in Iowa's Coal Mining Communities, 1895-1925* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1983); Wilson J. Warren, *Struggling with "Iowa's Pride": Labor Relations, Unionism, and Politics in the Rural Midwest Since 1877* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000); Russell L. Johnson, "'Volunteer While You May': Manpower Mobilization in Dubuque, Iowa," in *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front*, eds. Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); Johnson, *Warriors into Workers: The Civil War and the Formation of Urban-Industrial Society in a Northern City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Arnie Cooper, "A Stony Road: Black Education in Iowa, 1838-1860," *Annals of Iowa* 48 (1986): 113-134; Thomas A. Lucas, "Men Were Too Fiery for Much Talk: The Grinnell Anti-Abolitionist Riot of 1860," *Palimpsest* 68 (1987): 12-21; 186-197; Richard Acton, "To Go Free," *Palimpsest* 70 (1989): 50-61; William L. Hewitt, "So Few Undesirables: Race, Residence, and Occupation in Sioux City, 1890-1925," *Annals of Iowa* 50 (1989): 158-180; William L. Hewitt, "Blackface in the White Mind: Stereotypes in Sioux City, Iowa, 1874-1910," *Palimpsest* 71 (1990): 68-79; Charline J. Barnes and Floyd Bumpers, *Iowa's Black Legacy* (Charleston: 2000); Barnes, ed., *Life Narratives of African Americans In Iowa* (Chicago: Arcardia, 2001); Ronald E. Butchard and Amy F. Roller, "Iowa Teachers among the Freedpeople of the South, 1862-1876," *Annals of Iowa* 62 (2003): 1-29; Leslie A. Schwalm, "Emancipation Day Celebrations: The Commemoration of Slavery and Freedom in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 62 (2003): 291-332. Also see the *Iowa Griot*, the journal of the African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa (hereafter cited as AAHMCCI), which regularly publishes excellent articles on various aspects of black Iowan history. A legal history of Iowa written by Richard and Patricia Nassif Acton also includes some of these themes. Richard Acton and Patricia Nassif Acton, *To Go Free: A Treasury of Iowa's Legal Heritage* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995).

that also draws on political, legal, cultural and labor scholarship in order to fully explore the story of African Americans in the Hawkeye State during the nineteenth century.

This work, however, does not simply seek to tell a story that has never been told before. It reveals useful insights about race, gender, class, family and black visions of citizenship in the nineteenth-century Midwest. It also shows how African Americans innovatively engaged in politics by other means. And it confronts the common assumption that blacks were not capable of creating social change or protecting their rights in states where they lived in small numbers. Through slavery, war, Reconstruction, redemption and the beginning of a new century, African Americans defined and expanded the meaning of equal citizenship in Iowa, even as they played a central role in the state's economy, helped to establish institutions, and transformed its legal system.

Chapter II

“In Favor of Justice and Oppressed Humanity”: Freedom, Slavery, and Race Relations before the Civil War

Until the early 1830s, Iowa was still controlled by Native Americans and very few other settlers, black or white, had gone there. Land cessions by Native Americans to the federal government, however, caused this to change. The territory was still politically unorganized (except as part of the Louisiana Purchase) until 1834, when it became part of the Michigan Territory. At that point Iowa was split into the two massive counties of DuBuque and DeMoine, an appropriate division since nearly all of Iowa’s ten thousand residents lived in or near the towns of Dubuque and Burlington, which became the two county seats. In 1836 the Wisconsin Territory, including Iowa, was separated from Michigan. Iowa was now known as West Wisconsin, with Burlington as the territorial capitol. Two years later, Congress approved the creation of the Iowa Territory. DuBuque and DeMoine Counties were divided into twenty-two smaller counties that comprised most of eastern Iowa and still exist today in largely their original form. Western Iowa remained unorganized and largely unsettled, but the territorial population, which had more than doubled since 1836, would double again over the next two years, reaching 43,112 by 1840.¹²

When South Carolina senator and proslavery zealot John C. Calhoun opposed the creation of the Iowa Territory for fear that the South would come under attack from another antislavery northern state, the territorial delegate assured him that Iowans “hated abolitionism as

¹² “Steps to Statehood,” *Annals of Iowa* 27 (1945): 217; *Burlington, Iowa Souvenir Book* (1896), 6; Donald L. Kimball, *A History of Iowa, Volume One: Heritage and Settlement Antiquity, 1838* (Fayette, IA: Historic Publications, 1987), 137; Emory H. English, “As Iowa Approached Statehood,” *Annals of Iowa* (1946): 207.

much as any Southerner.”¹³ In fact, a large number of the early settlers were southerners like Calhoun, and this would fundamentally shape racial dynamics in Iowa for years to come. Historians have traditionally explained Iowa’s antebellum conservatism by pointing to the southern settlers who brought proslavery, anti-black sentiments with them; this changed only when large numbers of New Englanders came to the state.¹⁴ This analysis, however, has been overly simplistic in several ways. First, explaining Iowans’ opinions on race and slavery simply by their state of origin ignores the fact that many southern migrants came to Iowa *because* they were opposed to slavery. Robert E. Lee’s cousin Robert Lee Smith of Clinton County, for example, hated slavery so much that he arranged for an inscription on his gravestone proclaiming that he had been an abolitionist, while Kentucky native John Edwards manumitted the four slaves that he inherited from his father, made “liberal provision for them for life,” and became one of the few antebellum Iowa politicians who supported black suffrage.¹⁵

¹³ Calhoun was unconvinced by this argument, predicting (correctly) that antislavery settlers from New England would eventually outnumber the proslavery factions, and the bill to create the Iowa Territory did not pass until he was absent from Senate chambers. Joel H. Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” *Iowa Journal of History* 55 (1957): 293-94.

¹⁴ For example, see Frank C. Arena, “Southern Sympathy in Iowa during Civil War Days,” *Annals of Iowa* 30, No. 7 (January 1951): 487; Donald G. Nieman, *Promises to Keep: African-Americans and the Constitutional Order, 1776 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 15; F.I. Herriott, “Iowa and the First Nomination of Abraham Lincoln,” *Annals of Iowa* 8 (1907): 198-99. Connor points out that simply looking at the state of origin listed on the census and labeling all southern-born Iowans “proslavery” can be misleading, since an examination of their lives and actions shows otherwise. James Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” *Annals of Iowa* 40 (1979): 351-52.

¹⁵ P.B. Wolfe, ed., *Wolfe’s History of Clinton County, Iowa I* (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Co., 1911), 391-96; Estelle LePrevost Youle, *History of Clinton County, Iowa* (1946), 176; “General John Edwards,” *Annals of Iowa* 8 (1870): 376-78. Nearly every county in Iowa compiled histories between the 1870s and 1910s, and many of these contain antislavery stories. They were thus written at a time when hardly anyone in Iowa still wanted to defend slavery (even if they once had), but there are other biographies of southern migrants that do not claim an antislavery stance, so the antislavery tales are probably exaggerations but not outright lies. For example, see *Portrait and Biographical Album of Fayette County, Iowa* (Chicago: Lake City Publishing Company, 1891), 235-37, 354; *Portrait and Biographical Album of Lee County, Iowa* (Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1887), 473; *History of Polk County, Iowa* (Des Moines: Union Historical Company, 1880), 610; Leonard F. Parker, *History of Poweshiek County, Iowa I* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1911), 329-30.

And yet, the connection between southern origin and racial conservatism cannot be completely dismissed, especially since being antislavery and being racially egalitarian were hardly the same thing. Many of Iowa's early settlers were yeoman farmers who, in the words of Burlington's Judge George Frazee, "were of the class in the South that never owned a slave, and who had migrated from that blissful land to the free soil of Iowa principally because they had become certain that if they remained in their original locality they would never be able to own one...but unfortunately, they brought with them all their local prejudices and habits, and especially their imbibed hatred of the negro." Twenty of the thirty-eight members of the first general assembly had been born in the South, and throughout the antebellum era, the counties most strongly opposed to civil rights also had the highest percentage of southern-born residents.¹⁶

There were also many settlers of foreign birth or from the lower Midwest who were fiercely loyal to the Democratic Party and its doctrines of anti-abolition and white supremacy. As in other parts of the country, Democrats emphasized a doctrine of whiteness in order to attract poor whites and immigrants whose economic status was often not much better than that of free blacks. Others with no personal connection to the South or the lower Midwest nonetheless had strong economic incentives to at least be indifferent on slavery. Until the emergence of railroads decades later, Iowa's largest markets for exported goods were down the Mississippi, on which Dubuque, Davenport and Burlington also lay. An 1849 magazine article declared that the river unified the Midwest and the South; "wheat-growing and lead-producing Iowa and Illinois vend their wares, and buy their sugar and cotton in the markets of their southern sisters, while their

¹⁶ Silbey, "Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa"; George Frazee, *Fugitive Slave Case: Ruel Daggs v. Elihu Frazier, et. als.* (Burlington, IA: Morgan & McKenny, 1850), 128; Arena, "Southern Sympathy in Iowa," 489-90, 504-505.

highway river holds open invitation to come and go in unrestrained profit and good will, and rebukes the intemperate folly of sectional aggression.” Davenport farmer J.M.D. Burrows was blunter, writing that “New Orleans was a good place for beans, they being needed for the negroes, and I...[expected] to make a small fortune.”¹⁷

The small number of Iowa Whigs, who had far less power than the Democrats, were generally more moderate on racial issues than Democrats but rarely acted on their feelings. Furthermore, some of the religious groups who had come west to create morally homogeneous towns also disliked slavery but did not want to take a stand against it.¹⁸ Many whites who disliked slavery still considered abolitionists dangerous fanatics who would destroy the republic for the sake of black people. In 1848, the *Bloomington* (now Muscatine) *Herald* insisted that although “there is no such animal in the town of Bloomington as an abolitionist...there are men here who will not see injustice done to any man, black or white.”¹⁹ Racial conservatism was so strong that even liberals were compelled to distance themselves rhetorically from abolition.

Even those who opposed slavery did not want to share their territory with people of color. As Joseph Frazier Wall has written, “The Indian had to be driven out and the black man should not be allowed in. The typical Iowan had no love for slavery or for the slave. This was white

¹⁷ Robert Cook, “The Political Culture of Antebellum Iowa: An Overview,” *Annals of Iowa* 52 (1993): 235-38; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 294; Arena, “Southern Sympathy in Iowa,” 494-95; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Philip McPartland, “From Pro to Anti Slavery,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye Gazette*, 27 August 1946; “The King of the Rivers,” *United States Democratic Review* 25 (December 1849): 506-07; J.M.D. Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa: Being the Personal Reminiscences of J.M.D. Burrows* (Davenport: Glass & Company, 1888), 175.

¹⁸ Lucas, “Grinnell Anti-Abolitionist Riot,” 13; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*; Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” 346, 361-62; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 299; Cook, “The Political Culture of Antebellum Iowa,” 233-37, 240; Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 8; “Dr. Salter Was Pastor 64 Years,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 17 November 1963; Works Progress Administration Federal Writer’s Project, “The Negro in Iowa” (hereafter cited as WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa”), State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City (hereafter cited as SHSI-IC), Box 1, Folder 8, Chapter 4: The Underground Railroad (Part 2 of 5), 72; Augustine M. Antrobus, *History of Des Moines County, Iowa, and Its People I* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke, 1915), 472; Lloyd Maffitt, “Pioneers Served by the Circuit Riders,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 17 November 1963.

¹⁹ “The Negro Case,” *Bloomington Herald*, 18 November 1848.

man's country by conquest and occupation, and he intended to keep it that way."²⁰ Fear of miscegenation and job competition, along with a general desire to be free of the race/slavery issue, led most antebellum whites to support measures that would create a white state devoid of both slaves and free blacks. One of the earliest examples of this occurred at the very first territorial legislative session in 1838. Although the minutes from this session have not survived, the legal precedents established there have. First and foremost among these was the "Act to Regulate Blacks and Mulattoes," written for the express purpose of creating a whites-only territory.

The "Act" stated that no person of African descent could settle in Iowa without showing written proof of their legal freedom and posting a \$500 bond (they could also get a sponsor to co-sign) as a guarantee of their "good behavior" and as proof that they would not become a public charge. Any criminal conviction resulted in forfeiture of the bond. Those who entered Iowa without posting any bond could be hired out for six months at "the best price in cash that can be had." Although slavery was illegal, blacks could be reduced to a state of virtual slavery with relative ease. The law did not, however, apply to actual slaves, since visiting or traveling slaveholders were granted a "sojourner's provision." The "Act" further stated that anyone who might "knowingly engage, or hire, or harbor" African Americans in violation of the law could be fined up to one hundred dollars.²¹ The opposition to slavery was based in large part on the desire that white working men should not have to compete for jobs with African Americans, and thus white employers were given this incentive to avoid undercutting white wages. Other laws passed

²⁰ Wall, *Iowa: A Bicentennial History*, 55.

²¹ *The Statute Laws of the Territory of Iowa, Enacted at the First Session of the Legislative Assembly of Said Territory, Held at Burlington, A.D. 1838-'39* (Dubuque: Russell & Reeves, 1839) (hereafter cited as *1838-39 Laws of Iowa*), 65-66; Dykstra, "White Men, Black Laws: Territorial Iowans and Civil Rights, 1838-1843," *Annals of Iowa* 46, No. 6 (Fall 1982): 409-10.

in 1838 banned African Americans from the ballot box, the state House, public schools, juries, and the state militia. There was a fugitive slave act but not a ban on interracial marriage, simply because the legislators forgot to write one; they corrected this oversight at the next session by determining that “all marriages of white persons with negroes or mulattoes are declared to be illegal and void.” An 1841 law banned African Americans from receiving welfare, even though the “Act” had already ensured that they could not become public charges.²² By the early 1840s, legally mandated white supremacy was well established in the Iowa Territory.

These statutes were based on several concepts, precedents and events. There was a steady flow of freedpersons leaving the South and heading north, especially after the 1831 Nat Turner Rebellion. Many Midwesterners feared that slaveholders were emancipating their old and crippled slaves to avoid caring for them, and now they would become a burden on the northern states. This concern existed throughout the Midwest but was acutely felt in Iowa, which had a sizable border with a slave state and could be reached relatively easily from the South via the Mississippi River. Iowa lawmakers also had a strong body of existing law from other states to draw on in making its own racist laws. Ohio had created the first such statutes in 1807, and by the time that the Iowa Territory was organized, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin had followed suit. This was also part of the larger phenomenon of Jacksonian Democracy in which white voting rights expanded while black voting rights disappeared.²³

²² *1838-39 Laws of Iowa*, 30, 33, 180-81, 188-89, 277, 329; Dykstra, “White Men, Black Laws,” 408; *Laws of the Territory of Iowa, Enacted at the Session of the Legislature Commencing on the First Monday of November, A.D. 1839* (Burlington, IA: J.H. McKenny, 1840), 33-34; *Laws of the Territory of Iowa, Enacted at the Session of the Legislature Which Commenced on the First Monday of December, A.D., 1841* (Iowa City: Van Antwerp & Hughes, 1841), 58.

²³ Horton and Horton, *In Search of Liberty*, 102; Middleton, *Black Laws in the Old Northwest*, 3, 159-61, 271-74, 345-47, 381-83; *History of Monroe County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1878), 371-72; Sage, *A History of Iowa*, 83-84; Middleton, *The Black Laws*; Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790,*

Finally, white men used those expanded voting rights to elect “doughfaces” – northerners with southern sympathies – to public office, most notably Augustus Caesar Dodge and George Wallace Jones, the territory’s first two senators. Jones, a longtime personal friend of Jefferson Davis, was more concerned with white supremacy and property rights than with slavery itself. Dodge, on the other hand, defended the peculiar institution with as much vigor as any southerner, declaring that he would personally assist in the pursuit of runaway slaves and that “As long as the two races inhabit the same country, the white race will maintain its superiority over the black race...the acknowledgement of that superiority is the only condition upon which these races can ever live together in peace.”²⁴ Iowa’s laws and choice of political representatives both made it clear that there was no place for abolitionism or racial equality within its borders.

There was, however, room for slavery. Although it was illegal in Iowa under the Missouri Compromise and its own legislation, some early settlers brought slaves anyway. Like attitudes on black migration and the laws that came out of those attitudes, the presence of slaves was part of a larger regional trend that also included southern Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. Some of Iowa’s slaves were owned by military officers and Indian Bureau agents in Fort Des Moines, but most lived on or near the Mississippi River. The first American flag ever flown in Dubuque was apparently made by a slave woman in 1834. Catholic Church records from the city of Keokuk show that in 1832, the local priest baptized three year old Mary Jane and six month old John

1860 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 1; Nieman, *Promises to Keep*, 28; Dykstra, “White Men, Black Laws,” 405-09; Wubben, “The Uncertain Trumpet,” 410.

²⁴ Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” 347-48, 351; *Portrait and Biographical Record of Dubuque, Jones and Clayton Counties, Iowa* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing, 1894), 153; Louis Pelzer, *Augustus Caesar Dodge: A Study in American Politics* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1908), 3, 7; H.W. Lathrop, *The Life and Times of Samuel J. Kirkwood* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1893), 70; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 290-91, 296-97, 304.

Jackson, the slaves of a fur trader who had recently come from Illinois. Dred and Harriet Scott's residency near Davenport with their master in the mid-1830s became the basis for their unsuccessful lawsuit twenty years later. Some of the most prominent whites of the antebellum period owned slaves, including territorial governor John Chambers, Senators Dodge and Jones, and secretary O.W.H. Stull, who purchased a young boy in Virginia before moving to Iowa City so that he could live "in style."²⁵

The largest number of slaves lived in Dubuque. Sixteen were reported on the 1840 census, showing that local slaveholders had little fear of being sanctioned. According to a story told over a century later, one of these slaves was a woman named Lydia Fisher, who was told by an abolitionist that "This is a free country up here. Go home and tell [your master] that people up here get paid for their work!" Her master resisted until a man named William Lawther hired her as a servant. He eventually left her land and money in his will, and she lived in Dubuque until her death after World War I.²⁶ Oral history also reports the existence of slavery well into the late

²⁵ Simeone, *Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois*; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana: A Study of a Minority* (Indiana Historical Bureau, 1957); Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 6; "Record of Freeing Slave 110 Years Ago Found in Deed Book," *Keokuk Gate City and Constitution*, 7 May 1947; Will Porter, *Annals of Polk County and Des Moines* (Des Moines: George A. Miller Printing Co., 1896), 364, 904; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Box 1, Folder 19, Chapter 10: The Negro in Des Moines and Polk County, 337; "Slavery in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 10 (1872): 303-04; "Keokuk Had Slaves Despite Fact Iowa Was a Free State," *Keokuk Gate City and Constitution-Democrat*, 1 July 1947; Acton, "To Go Free," 51; Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam: Black Iowans before the Civil War," *Palimpsest* 63 (1982): 68-69, 74-75; *History of Van Buren County* (1878), 489; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Box 2, Folder 1, Research Materials, "Topical Papers by Essie Britton, History of the Colored Race of People Residing in Keokuk and Vicinity," 1; Pearl Gordon Vestal, "Old Abstract Reveals Purchase of Slave Boy in Hancock," *Keokuk Gate City and Constitution-Democrat*, 5 January 1954; Lea VanderVelde and Sandhya Subramanian, *Mrs. Dred Scott*, 106 Yale L.J. 1033, 1042-1049 (1997); Charles E. Snyder, "John Emerson, Owner of Dred Scott," *Annals of Iowa* (October 1938): 454; Benjamin F. Gue, *The Pioneer Period*, vol. 1 of *History of Iowa, From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (New York: 1903), 207; Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam," 69, 74-75; "Message Clear to Blacks in Early Iowa: Go Away," *Des Moines Register*, 28 April 1996; *History of Johnson County, Iowa* (Iowa City, 1883), 463. It was also said that whites in the Van Buren County towns of Bonaparte and Keosauqua owned slaves in the 1830s. "Slave Owned by Keokuk Man," unidentified news clipping (hereafter cited as UNC), Keokuk Public Library, Keokuk, IA (hereafter cited as KPL), Vertical Files: Ethnology Section, Folder - Negro in Iowa, Newspaper Clippings.

²⁶ Dubuque, "Negro Slave Finds Freedom and Friends in Old Dubuque," *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*, 9 June 1957; 1860 U.S. Census.

antebellum period.²⁷ One story tells of a judge who used slaves to build his house in Keokuk, while in 1858 the Des Moines-based *Tri-Weekly Citizen* listed slaves available for sale at southern markets.²⁸ In addition to those who were openly held as slaves, there were probably many more publicly identified by their masters as servants in order to avoid public censure. Although the 1850 census records no slaves in Iowa, it does show several African Americans who lived with white families of southern origin who shared their last names and employed the blacks as “servant” or “laborer.”²⁹ Overall, it seems that a number of white settlers were able to bring slaves to their new home despite the legal prohibitions against this. Because these slaves worked as personal servants rather than in agriculture or industry, they did not greatly affect white laborers and their owners escaped public censure. The Iowan desire to be free of both slaves and free blacks could be modified to indulge community leaders so long as their use of slaves was not done overtly and did not damage the economic standing of other whites.

For every black Iowan who worked as an enslaved domestic, there were many more employed in that same position as free wage laborers. During the 1830s and 1840, hundreds of free blacks moved to Mississippi River towns such as Burlington, Clinton, Davenport, Keokuk, and Muscatine, and those who did not were still relatively close to the river. There were probably

²⁷ Homer L. Calkin, “A Slaveowner in Iowa,” *Palimpsest* 22 (1941): 344-345; Frances Hawthorne Papers (hereafter Hawthorne Papers), Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa (hereafter IWA), Research Materials, Black History in Iowa – Federal Papers, 1937-1941 (Folder 2); L.L. Taylor, ed., *Past and Present of Appanoose County, Iowa* v. 1 & 2 (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1913), 255-56.

²⁸ Britton, “History of the Colored Race of People Residing in Keokuk and Vicinity,” 1; *Keokuk Daily Gate City*, 13 April 1939, quoted in Britton, “Old Stone House Erected by Slave Labor,” KPL, Negro in Iowa, Newspaper Clippings; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” The Negro in Des Moines and Polk County, 337-38. Some white Iowans directly benefited from slavery without ever bringing any slaves into the state. One Cedar Rapids woman, for example, held a prenuptial agreement allowing her to receive income from 35 slaves that she still owned in South Carolina. Carly Bossert, “African-American Museum Discovery Illuminates Past,” *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 20 June 2003.

²⁹ Dykstra, “Dr. Emerson’s Sam,” 71; 1850 U.S. Census.

many more black residents who were not listed because they moved frequently, were ignored by census counters, or were fugitive slaves who deliberately avoided the census takers. Like whites, most of these early migrants had journeyed up the Mississippi or crossed it on their way into Iowa from Illinois. Aged Burlington residents later recalled that after earning their freedom, they came north on steamboats; some also took work on the boats, although this was considered only temporary employment since it was in some ways as exhausting and dangerous as slave labor. Some found alternative employment as domestic servants and farm laborers, trying to save enough money to send for family members still in bondage. Other early settlers had come to Iowa with their former masters and took jobs as servants. Elderly Maryland freedperson Edward “Uncle Ned” Delaney went to Grinnell with his former owners, who wanted to “give him a good home in his old age,” and was buried in the family plot when he died. Another unusual story belongs to Jane Elizabeth Manning James and her sister Angeline, who traveled west with the Mormon settlement in 1844 and worked in Burlington while the rest of the group was in Nauvoo, Illinois; Manning also gave birth to a child in western Iowa several years later.³⁰

Some black settlers were able to rise above the status of laborer. Benjamin Mathews of Muscatine purchased a square mile of undeveloped land near town with a white partner, while a portion of Jones County became known as “Negro Point” because a black man (whose name is

³⁰ 1840 U.S. Census; Galin Berrier, “The Underground Railroad in Iowa,” *The Scene* 3 (Winter 2001): 57; Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 6, 13-14; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 1, 207; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 290-291, 297; Acton, “To Go Free,” 51; VanderVelde and Subramanian, *Mrs. Dred Scott*, 1042-1049 (1997); Dykstra, “Dr. Emerson’s Sam,” 68-75; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Box 1, Folder 16, Chapter 7: The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 279; Buchanan, *Black Life on the Mississippi*; “Black Residents Arrived Early, Contributed to Social Reforms,” *Fort Madison Daily Democrat*, 29 April 1988; Mary Wood, interview by Kathryn Neal, 22 May 1997, in IWA, “Giving Voice to Their Memories: Oral Histories of African-American Women in Iowa,”; Parker, *History of Poweshiek County* (1911), 324, 330; Pamela Nosek, “Connection to Our Past: African Americans in Early Poweshiek County,” *Iowa Griot* 3 (Spring 2002): 3; Ronald G. Coleman, “Is There No Blessing for Me?: Jane Elizabeth Manning James, a Mormon African American Woman,” Taylor and Wilson Moore, *African American Women Confront the West*, 146-47.

lost to history) was the owner. Further west, a man named John Hiler settled in Mahaska County in 1844 and made his living by illegally trading guns and liquor with Native Americans. One of the only other examples of interaction between blacks, whites and Native Americans occurred in Johnson County in 1837; all three races were present at the county's first ever public meeting, which was later described as "large and respectable." Otherwise, since Native Americans in Iowa had already ceded their land to the government and moved further east by the time that African Americans arrived in the 1830s, there was little "frontier exchange" between them as there was in the western U.S. or had been in the southeast in earlier years.³¹

These early black settlers also became involved in regional and national community institutions and were the topic of discussion among such groups. The National Convention of Colored Citizens and Rev. John B. Meachum of the African Baptist Church in St. Louis called on free blacks to establish farming colonies in Iowa, although few seem to have responded. Between 1838 and 1840, AME preacher Jordan W. Early and his wife Sarah Jane Woodson Early of Missouri were "engaged heartily in the Church work" in Burlington and Dubuque. The latter town was also home to a sales agent for Martin Delaney's Pittsburgh-based newspaper *The Mystery*, which began publication in 1843; this was as far west as the newspaper reached.³²

³¹ Irving B. Richman, *History of Muscatine County, Iowa I* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1911), 285-86; *History of Jones County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1879), 513; Martha Jordan Soland, "Geraldine Brown: Burlington's Black History," IWA, Frances Hawthorne Papers, Box 1; "Vignette: Prairie Township," unidentified clipping, Oskaloosa Public Library, Oskaloosa, IA, Vertical Files (hereafter cited as OPL), Mahaska County – Cities & Towns/New Sharon; Charles Ray Aurner, *Leading Events in Johnson County Iowa History I* (Cedar Rapids: Western Historical Press, 1912), 23. For a rare example of interaction between African Americans, Native Americans and whites, see "Nineteenth Century African American History in Fort Dodge, Iowa," *Iowa Griot* 1 (Fall 2000): 6.

³² *Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens: Held at Buffalo, on the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th of August 1843* (New York, 1843), 32-34, and Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (Washington D.C., 1918), 21-30, quoted in Peter C. Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers, Volume V: The United States, 1859-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 82-83; John B. Meachum, *An Address to All the Colored Citizens of the United States* (Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1846), 24-26; Sarah Jane Woodson Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W. Early, One of the Pioneers of African Methodism in the West and South* (Nashville:

Successful blacks did, however, face a dilemma not experienced by poorer migrants. The importance of black laborers meant that there was little effort to enforce the anti-migration policy, and the only blacks who bothered to post the required bond were prosperous businesspeople who actually had more to lose than poorer blacks. White entrepreneurs could have used the law to rid themselves of a competitor, while resentful poor whites could gain the satisfaction of expelling a successful African American. Thomas C. Motts of Muscatine posted his bond with help from Suel Foster and agreed to “at all times behave himself well – and in a quiet, peaceable and orderly manner,” while Francis and Maria Reno of Johnson County signed a contract stating that they would not “at any time become chargeable to the said County of Johnson nor to any other County, in this Territory, and shall at all times conduct and behave themselves in an Orderly and Lawful manner.” Although John Green Garner of far southwestern Fremont County had been able to purchase a sixty-acre farm with one-third of the purchase price paid up front, this was only a fraction of the price of the bond that two local abolitionists posted for him and his family.³³ The “Act” was so harsh that even prosperous black landowners could not afford to pay their bond in full and needed help from white allies. This, along with the contracts that they were required to sign, was no doubt a humiliating reminder that financial success did not bring equal citizenship. In a sense, they were at a disadvantage to poorer African Americans, who did not have to promise to behave themselves. This law also meant that

AME Church Sunday School Union, 1894), 15, 28; C.S. Smith, *A History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the AME Church, 1922), 35; Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delaney: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 44-49.

³³ *Heritage Reflections* (Muscatine: Muscatine Area Heritage Association, 1981), 16; “Freeman’s Bond,” Francis Reno Papers, Freeman’s Bond, SHSI-IC; *Fremont County, County Commissioners Book I*, 16 August 1854, in Walter Farwell Papers, Folder 11 - African-Americans in Fremont County, Iowa, from 1840s-1880s, SHSI-IC; *Thumbprints in Time: Fremont County, Iowa* (Fremont County Heritage Book Committee, 1996), 76.

prosperous blacks were forced into a dependent patronage position with whatever even more prosperous white person had posted the bond on their behalf.

Although the anti-migration laws were not enforced against most black settlers, other parts of the legal code were. In 1844, a white man named Thomas McGregor traveled from Illinois to Indiana Township, Marion County in the center of the Iowa Territory and asked his new neighbor George Henry to lodge him and his wife until McGregor could get a cabin built on his land. Henry agreed until he saw Thomas' wife Rose Ann, a "full-blooded African, about as dark as the darkest of the race." He refused to take them in, and they were forced to temporarily sleep outdoors on their property, but this was not enough for Henry, and he had them arrested for violating the law against interracial marriage, although a jury failed to indict them for unknown reasons. When the police went to the McGregor homestead to enforce the anti-migration ban against Rose Ann, the extremely large woman (who was rumored to be deadly with a gun) turned them away but then appeared in court the next day and posted bond, which had been raised with the help of another neighbor. Even so, the McGregors left Marion County shortly thereafter; it may be that the bond left them unable to maintain their farm, or perhaps they simply wanted to avoid being harassed.³⁴ In any event, whites had succeeded in using the law to rid themselves of their only black settler.

In comparison to this African American community of one, the town of Dubuque must have seemed like a black metropolis. Once an important Mesquakie village, lead mining helped bring in Irish immigrants, southern migrants, and a small number of free blacks beginning in the early 1830s. The earliest known black settlers were the Aaron family. Mrs. Aaron (whose first

³⁴ It was rumored that Thomas took Rose Ann south to Missouri and sold her into slavery, which some believed had been his intention all along, although no proof of this exists today. William M. Donnel, "Pioneers of Marion County," *Annals of Iowa* 8 (1870): 225-29.

and maiden name were not recorded) was born a slave in Kentucky and was later taken to Missouri, where she married fellow slave John Baptiste Aaron. They managed to save \$1,500, bought their family's freedom with \$1,000, and used the rest to build a house in Dubuque in the early 1830s, where Mrs. Aaron lived until her death in 1881 at the age of 96.³⁵

By 1840 there were seventy-two African Americans in Dubuque County, comprising only five percent of the county population but thirty-eight percent of the territory's total black population, and most were not as prosperous as the Aarons. Forty lived in independent households, while the other fifteen free blacks and sixteen slaves lived with white families. Most worked in the mines, as laborers, or as domestic servants. Despite their precarious position, though, they played an important role in the creation of Dubuque's early institutions. Seven African Americans (most of them slaves) donated funds to build the town's first church in 1834, giving donations ranging from 12 ½ cents to a dollar, and one of the twelve charter members, Charlotte Morgan, was also black. In a place thought of as "isolated from civilization...subject to no restraint of law," the church not only filled spiritual needs but also served as Dubuque's courthouse, schoolhouse and government meeting hall. The black donations and membership were minor when compared with those from whites, but they made an important symbolic statement: African Americans were as much a part of the community as anyone else.³⁶

³⁵ Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam," 70; Dubuque County Early Settlers' Association, *Brief Early History of Iowa and Dubuque County* (Dubuque: Times-Journal, 1910), 5, 8; *The History of Dubuque County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1880), 460; Franklin T. Oldt and P.J. Quigley eds., *History of Dubuque County Iowa* (Chicago: Goodspeed Historical Association, 1911), 24; "Death of Mrs. Aaron," *Dubuque Daily Times*, 28 December 1881; "Funeral of the Late Mrs. Aaron," UNC, 1881, AAHMCCI, Vertical Files, Towns – Dubuque #1.

³⁶ 1840 U.S. Census; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 7; Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam," 71, 75; Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 55, 58; *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 828-31; *The History of Muscatine County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1879), 171; Ruth A. Gallaher, "The First Church in Iowa," *Palimpsest* 7 (1926): 4-5, 7, 9-10; DCESA, *Brief Early History of Iowa and Dubuque County*, 8.

Over a decade before Dred Scott's legal battle against slavery, a similar case was decided in Dubuque with decidedly different results. A St. Louis slave named Ralph Montgomery heard "glowing tales of boundless wealth" from Dubuque and struck a bargain with his master Jordan Montgomery: he would work there for five years and then purchase his freedom for \$550.³⁷ Jordan hoped that this money would reverse his own sinking economic fortunes while freeing him of the obligation to care for his slave, while Ralph wanted to free himself and his sister Tilda (one of the contributors to the Methodist church), who was enslaved in Dubuque. Neither man, however, would get their wish. Ralph barely made enough money to buy food and clothes, and in early 1839 his master sent agents to bring him back to Missouri so that he could be sold at market. They seized him at his mining camp with the help of a sheriff (who had been told that Ralph was a fugitive slave) and then headed towards the Mississippi, avoiding the city in case anyone tried to interfere. Unfortunately for them, Ralph made such a commotion that he drew the attention of one Alexander Butterworth. This Irish-born migrant owned a lead mine next to Ralph's but unlike the Missourian had become prosperous enough to open a grocery store, win election to the city council, take in an unnamed black boarder (possibly Ralph himself) and purchase a farm, which is where he was when the abduction took place.³⁸ His racial views were also more liberal than most of Dubuque's other Irish immigrants, possibly based on a sense of shared oppression.³⁹ Butterworth rushed to the courthouse for a writ of *habeas corpus* and then

³⁷ "Slavery Question Settled in Iowa," (*Burlington*) *Iowa Patriot*, 11 July 1839; *Dubuque Daily Times*, 24 July 1870.

³⁸ "Slavery Question Settled in Iowa," *Iowa Patriot*, 11 July 1839; Edward H. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers and Public Men of Early Iowa* (Des Moines: Homestead Publishing Co., 1916), 20-21; Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 41, 53-56; Gallaher, "The First Church in Iowa," 5; J.A. Swisher, "The Case of Ralph," *Annals of Iowa* 7 (1926): 34; 1840 U.S. Census.

³⁹ Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 42; Swisher, "The Case of Ralph," 36; *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 385. In the 1987 play "In the Matter of Ralph, A Black Man," Butterworth's character says "It's not colored ya have to be to know the tune of a whip to your backside. It's a tune the English play daily on the backs of the Irish, well I know."

chased down the slavecatchers near the docks, ironically with help from the same sheriff who had helped capture Ralph in the first place. All parties then agreed that the controversy should be decided by the Iowa Supreme Court, in what would be only the second case in its history.⁴⁰

Ralph was represented *pro bono* by David Rorer, a native Virginian and Burlington resident who had manumitted his own slaves years earlier and become a local legend for giving Iowa the nickname “Hawk-Eye” and chairing a committee that led to the organization of the Iowa Territory. Now he argued that although territorial law required that fugitive slaves be returned to their masters, Ralph could not be considered one since he had left Missouri with his master’s consent. In effect, Montgomery had accidentally freed him by allowing him to enter a state where slavery was illegal. Ralph could be held liable for his debt, Rorer conceded, but nothing in the law allowed him to be enslaved as punishment for non-payment: the “very fact of [Jordan Montgomery’s] contracting,” he argued, “presupposes a state of freedom on the part of the slave.”⁴¹ Rorer and Ralph thus saw a direct connection between freedom and one’s ability to bargain or control one’s own labor. If Jordan Montgomery had not wanted Ralph to become free, they were saying, he should not have treated Ralph like a free man.

His master’s lawyer contended, on the other hand, that the failure to pay the debt did in fact make Ralph a fugitive.⁴² He had reason to expect a judgment in his favor; all three justices

Nothin’ Irish in Ireland runs free, ‘ception our blood.” Chris Grabow et al., *In the Matter of Ralph, a Black Man* (1987) (1), 8.

⁴⁰ “Slavery Question Settled in Iowa,” *Iowa Patriot*, 11 July 1839; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 8; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Box 1, Folder 15: The Negro in Iowa Preceding Territorial Days,” 19; Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 55-56; *Pioneer Law-Makers Association of Iowa, Reunion of 1892* (Des Moines: G.H. Ragsdale, 1893), 24. *In re Ralph* has often been referred to as the first case ever heard before the Iowa Supreme Court; it was actually the second heard but the first published in the state law reports. Henry K. Peterson, “The First Decision Rendered by the Supreme Court of Iowa,” *Annals of Iowa* 34 (1958): 304-07.

⁴¹ Antrobus, *History of Des Moines County I* (1915), 399.

⁴² *In re Ralph*, 1 Morris 1-5 (1839); Dykstra, “Dr. Emerson’s Sam,” 72; E. Stiles, “David Rorer,” *Annals of Iowa* 8 (1907): 121-23; *Pioneer Law-Makers Reunion of 1892*, 24; Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 28-29, 54-58.

were Democrats, and only a few months earlier, Chief Justice Charles Mason had adjudicated a jury trial where another Missourian won judgments against two Iowans who had helped his slave escape.⁴³ This decision, though, would be different. On Independence Day 1839, Mason handed down a unanimous opinion that accepted every aspect of Rorer's argument, including the idea that "the master who...permits his slave to become a resident here, cannot, afterwards, exercise any acts of ownership over him within this Territory...The law does not take away his property in express terms, but declares it no longer to be property at all." As the law extended "equal protection to men of all colors and conditions," Mason concluded, Ralph was a free man. The Burlington-based *Iowa Patriot* asserted that "this decision will doubtless secure the approbation of all who profess to be the friends of humanity and law throughout the Country." The following year, Ralph would repay Justice Mason in his own way, showing up in his garden one morning and explaining that "I want to work for you one day every spring to show that I never forget you."⁴⁴

Montgomery struck a rich lode after returning to the lead mines but then lost his money gambling (or by being swindled out of it, according to one story). His unnamed spouse, remembered only as "Black Rafe's wife," worked as a domestic to support the family, while he became a gardener; the labor that had once been his gift to Judge Mason was now his only means of support. He eventually moved to Muscatine, spent his last years in a poor house, and

⁴³ "Henry County District Court," *Annals of Iowa* 11 (1913): 179. Mason adjudicated another trial in Burlington after the *Ralph* case with similar results. New Orleans native Thomas Stanley Easton, now a resident of Burlington, successfully sued David Hendershott for taking his slave Rachel from his custody, also seeking one thousand dollars in damages. Mason ruled that Rachel must be returned to Easton but apparently did not award any damages. "Damages Paid for Concealing Run-away Slave," *Burlington Gazette*, 28 March 1840, 3; Unnamed legal documents, AAHMCCI, Vertical Files, Towns – Burlington #2.

⁴⁴ "Negro Case," *Iowa Patriot*, 11 July 1839; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 1, 198-99; Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 48-49; *In re Ralph* 17; E. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches*, 21.

contracted a fatal case of smallpox in 1870 while nursing a sick neighbor.⁴⁵ As other Dubuque blacks knew, freedom was a precious commodity, but poverty and racism could be just as crippling as slavery. Even so, they could take comfort in the knowledge that their white neighbors had come to Montgomery's aid and that their Supreme Court had recognized his right to freedom. Just over a year later, however, the death of a leading black resident reminded them of how precarious their status was.

Nathaniel and Charlotte Morgan had migrated to Dubuque from nearby Galena, Illinois in 1833. Nathaniel worked as a cook and waiter in a hotel, while his wife Charlotte served as the laundress. The young couple was prosperous enough to purchase a home, which they shared with a black boarder. Some believed that Nathaniel occasionally stole cigars and socks from hotel guests, but others would later say that these items had been gifts; one account declared that "no charge of felony or misdemeanor had ever been alleged against himself or household, and they pursued the even tenor of their way without the tinge of suspicion attaching that the lives they led were not free from guile."⁴⁶ When a trunk of clothes came up missing from the hotel in early September of 1840, though, some immediately suspected Nathaniel. Led by the local militia commander, a group of white men later characterized as "loafers" and "grog-bruizers" dragged him from the hotel while he was serving dinner and demanded that he confess. He hysterically

⁴⁵ *Pioneer Law-Makers Association of Iowa: A Brief History of the Organization, and Proceedings of the Reunions of 1886 and 1890* (Des Moines: G.H. Ragsdale, 1890), 79, 88; *History of Des Moines County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1879), 661; *Iowa State Register*, 4 March 1863, quoted in Clark, *The Politics of Iowa*; E. Stiles, "David Rorer," 117-23; E. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches*, 22, 240-41; *Pioneer Law-Makers Reunion of 1892*, 21-24, 37; "Charles Mason (1838-1847)," <http://www.judicial.state.ia.us/wfdata/frame1773-1463/pressrell.asp> (last visited 12 April 2007); Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 47-48; *Dubuque Daily Times*, 24 July 1870; 1850 U.S. Census; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 10; Swisher, "The Case of Ralph," 43.

⁴⁶ Gallaher, "The First Church in Iowa," 7; *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 395; Hulda Freeborn to C. Childs, 23 September 1865, William Allen Papers, SHSI-IC; 1840 U.S. Census; Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam," 73; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 10; *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 356-59, 395; Grabow et al., *In the Matter of Ralph, a Black Man* (1), 10; "Black Population a Part of Dubuque's History," UNC, *Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, AAHMCCI, Vertical Files, Towns – Dubuque #2.

proclaimed his innocence, but the mob took him down to the riverbank and whipped him between thirty-nine and several hundred times (according to varying accounts) until he told them where he had hidden the trunk. When they arrived at the alleged hiding place, however, nothing was found, and they resumed whipping him until he explained that he had actually hidden it in his home. Nothing was found there either, and the beating resumed. Now nearly dead, Morgan then confessed that the trunk was really on the river bluff. Although it was clear to some that he was telling his captors whatever they wanted to hear, the mob did not care. They dragged him into the woods for further beatings – threatening a white doctor who tried to intervene with the same treatment – and when they returned he was dead, his back and ribs horrifically broken.⁴⁷

Word of the lynching reached as far east as Chicago, where an antislavery newspaper wrote, ““If there is any law in [the territory], with power to enforce it, these detestable murderers will, let us hope, be discovered and brought to punishment.””⁴⁸ Morgan’s attackers were in fact charged with murder, but an all-white jury acquitted them, saying there was no proof that they had intended to commit the crime. Charlotte Morgan eventually lost her house and job and by 1850 was the live-in housekeeper for two immigrant miners; a woman who had once exercised social and economic freedom from both white society and her husband was now reduced to a status typical of antebellum northern black women.⁴⁹ The missing clothes were never found.

Aside from the abolitionist newspaper report, the Morgan lynching went unpublicized and was largely forgotten as the years went by. Dubuque’s first county history, written in 1879, discusses the lynching in little more than a footnote, albeit a sympathetic one; later editions do

⁴⁷ “Horrid Murder at Du Buque,” *Galena North Western Gazette & Advertiser*, 11 September 1840; Freeborn to Childs; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 10; Dykstra, “Dr. Emerson’s Sam,” 73.

⁴⁸ “Awful Cruelty,” *The American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter* (November 1840), 72.

⁴⁹ Dykstra, “Dr. Emerson’s Sam,” 73-75; 1850 U.S. Census.

not mention it at all. Even the widow of Morgan's own employer, a pioneer settler who had brought him from Galena and given him work for seven years, said little about his death, except in an 1856 letter where she mentions it impartially as a curious anecdote from the past. The unnamed witness whose letter provides us with many of the details was more sympathetic but nonetheless believed that the lynching was not indicative of the values of the "good people of Dubuque," blaming the entire affair on the "drunken rabble." City leader Lucius H. Langworthy took a somewhat different approach, referring to the lynchers as good people who had fallen prey to "a mistaken zeal" and "no doubt...regretted their rashness and folly when too late." Historian Robert Dykstra, on the other hand, argues that the overall climate of race relations in Dubuque more closely resembled the attitudes of Morgan's attackers than of Ralph's benefactors.⁵⁰ This analysis, however, presumes that the two events are mutually exclusive, that one represents the true nature of Dubuque's racial attitudes while the other is an anomaly.

The reality is that both the *Ralph* decision and the Morgan lynching are indicative of antebellum racial dynamics. Simply put, whites in Dubuque and throughout the Midwest wanted to be free of both slavery and free blacks. They were not willing to interfere with slavery in the South, given their economic and social ties to it and the presence of community leaders like Bishop Mathias Loras (who had lived in the South and "felt no marked distaste for slavery") but they did not want it to spread into their new Midwestern home. Far more troubling was the thought of free black migrants, and even those who found slavery distasteful were committed to white supremacy. Only a few months before the Morgan lynching, editor James Clark declared,

⁵⁰ Freeborn to Childs; "A Former Dubuquer," *Pioneer Press* (date unknown), William Allen Papers; "Death of Mrs. Hulda Freeborn" (1888), William Allen Papers; *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 395; *Portrait and Biographical Record of Dubuque, Jones and Clayton Counties*; Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911); Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam," 74; "Horrid Murder at Du Buque"; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 10-11.

“It is true that a few of our population are willing to place themselves on an equal with the negro, but like visits from the angels, they are few and far between.” This was especially true of Bishop Loras’ Irish-born parishioners, most of whom were less financially successful and open-minded than Alexander Butterworth and did not want to compete with free blacks for jobs in the mines or on the waterfront. Furthermore, African Americans and Irish Americans were coming into contact in Dubuque at the precise moment in history when the latter group was “becoming white” by embracing white supremacy. David Roediger has convincingly shown that the two groups did not fight for jobs in the East as often as was previously thought, but in Dubuque they were, and so the situation there can be explained not only by his theories but also by the traditional framework that he has sought to supplant.⁵¹

Thus Dubuque’s racial attitudes were more than just transplanted southern racism with a little flavor from the Emerald Isle thrown in; local whites were developing a uniquely Midwestern brand of racism. Southerners often complained of the trials and tribulations of living in a society that depended on slave labor and also had many free blacks, but they themselves had created this society and were unwilling to relinquish its benefits. Midwesterners, on the other hand, envisioned new, comfortably white societies where they could live apart from slavery, apart from free blacks, and apart from questions of race altogether.⁵² Their attitudes thus differed from those of not only the South but also the Northeast, where there were relatively few people who had fled from slave societies because they could not compete with the aristocracy. Furthermore, while all three regions feared an influx of free blacks, Midwesterners saw the issue

⁵¹ Kimball, *A History of Iowa I*, 183-84; McPartland, “From Pro to Anti Slavery”; Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 144-50.

⁵² Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 299; Lucas, “Grinnell Anti-Abolitionist Riot,” 13; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*; Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” 346.

in a somewhat different light since their land was far more open and their societies far newer than in the East. Although the *Ralph* decision reflected their distaste for slavery, it also raised the possibility of a new era of racial liberalism and black migration in this frontier town where society was still in flux. For the three major white groups in Dubuque – southerners, northerners with economic ties to the South, and Irish immigrants – the Morgan lynching was an attempt to prevent that from happening.

These racial dynamics are best exemplified in the attitudes of Chief Justice Charles Mason. Despite having helped free Ralph Montgomery, the native New Yorker was “a Democrat of the old school...naturally averse to the so-called Abolition of the times.” A year after the Civil War, he viciously attacked the idea of black voting rights, arguing that it would lead to black domination and interracial marriage, which was little different than “social equality and fraternity with the chimpanzee, the gorilla and the whole monkey tribe.”⁵³ It is possible that a quarter-century of sectional conflict and war had hardened Mason’s racial attitudes, but his feelings were typical of Dubuque and the surrounding region during the 1830s and 1840s; northern blacks may have been entitled to freedom from slavery, but they were not entitled to equality.

When viewed in this light, it becomes clear why whites in Dubuque viewed Nathaniel and Charlotte Morgan as a threat to the status quo. Ralph Montgomery had asserted his humanity by defining the terms of his own labor, resisting his captors and seeking justice in the courts, but he was still a propertyless slave with no connection to Dubuque’s institutions. The seemingly mundane lives of the Morgans, on the other hand, were in fact politicized through their subtle,

⁵³ E. Stiles, “David Rorer,” 116-24; Charles Mason, “Negro Equality and Its Consequences,” 1866, Charles Mason Papers, SHSI-IC, Box 44 – Miscellaneous.

implicit challenge to white supremacy. Cooking and washing clothes was not the most desirable of professions, but it was certainly better than the danger and drudgery of the lead mines. The Morgans had also given their time and money to help establish a predominantly white church in an era of strictly enforced segregated worship. They were one of the few black Dubuque families able to purchase a house, and they had generated further income by renting a room to another African American.⁵⁴ Their level of success was thus beyond not only most other Dubuque blacks but also the members of the lynch mob.

Even the act of renting a room was an economic and psychological challenge to the racial order. First, it meant that the rent money stayed within the black community. Second, it questioned the common arrangement in which white folks owned houses and black folks rented from them. Finally, white upper and middle-class homeowners could try to control the size of Dubuque's black community by refusing to rent to black migrants or by expelling current tenants, but the Morgans raised the possibility that black homeowners might rent to new arrivals who might then stick around and save enough money to buy their own homes, thus repeating the cycle. Boarding was "an important social and economic institution in nineteenth-century black communities" throughout the North, but in larger cities like Chicago or Cincinnati it was fairly common, whereas in smaller, less diverse Dubuque it violated the status quo.⁵⁵ It is not known whether Nathaniel and Charlotte fully contemplated the political meaning of their seemingly apolitical lives, but they must have known that their unusual success was not celebrated by everyone. The white community that supported both Montgomery's freedom and Morgan's lynching envisioned a world where all power would rest in the hands of whites, not a

⁵⁴ 1840 U.S. Census.

⁵⁵ Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 96-98.

multicultural society where black people bought property, helped build biracial churches, and shared in the economic and cultural life.

One could argue that Morgan's death was simply an example of crude justice in this "rough-and-tumble frontier mining community," but it was exceptional even in this light. The locals followed a crude but comparatively fair code of justice which combined southern migrants' notion of lynch law with the Whiggish dedication to formal law brought by settlers from the northeast, possibly with Native American influences as well.⁵⁶ After a particularly shocking murder in 1835, the miners decided that all thieves and "other characters of questionable repute" would be forced to leave town within thirty-six hours on pain of hanging. This must have worked, because in 1859 the press recalled that this "inflexible impartiality" had prevented "acts of extreme lawlessness." When one Patrick O'Connor killed a fellow miner, he was allowed to choose his lawyer and jury and was ministered to by a preacher before his execution.⁵⁷ Similar systems existed in other nearby towns. Accused criminals throughout antebellum Iowa, including three river bandits who murdered Davenport city founder George Davenport, were tried in courts of law and in some cases even acquitted. One convicted thief was

⁵⁶ Johnson, *Warriors into Workers*, 23-24; *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 370; *Dubuque Herald*, 17 April 1859. Michael Pfeifer has argued that this clash of cultures epitomized Iowa's attitudes towards lynching in the late 19th and early 20th century, but the roots of those attitudes were already firmly in place decades earlier. Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). During the winter of 1835-36, a small band of Sac and Fox (or perhaps Winnebago) killed one of their members and left him on the ice outside of town as punishment for excessive cruelty to his wife. Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 49. While other parts of the country established a stronger tradition of antiblack violence based on an older framework of racial violence against Native Americans and Mexicans, no such framework existed in Iowa because the former group had been expelled relatively bloodlessly while the latter was hardly represented at all. For example, see Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*.

⁵⁷ One early study of mob violence in Iowa counted this incident as a lynching but nonetheless noted the unique "calmness and deliberation which characterized the entire proceeding." A 1942 Works Projects Administration history did not consider it a lynching at all, commenting that "the importance of this affair lay in the fact that O'Connor was not lynched, as might easily have happened in a pioneer mining village not yet under any form of legal jurisdiction." Paul Walton Black, "Lynchings in Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 10 (1912): 155, 168-70; *Dubuque County History* (Federal Works Agency, 1940), 35.

given drinks of brandy during his whipping, and another mitigated his “sentence” by proclaiming that he, like many members of the mob, was a southerner. Overall, although the rule of law was crude and bloody by today’s standards, it provided whites with a modicum of fairness and formality never offered to Nathaniel Morgan, the only accused criminal in Mississippi River Iowa to be killed without benefit of any sort of trial. As Ralph Montgomery states in “In the Case of Ralph,” “Ain’t the law saved Ralph, nor killed Nat. Men saved Ralph – killed Nat.”⁵⁸

Ten years after the Morgan lynching, his neighbors’ desires for an all-white city had nearly been fulfilled. Dubuque’s black population had dwindled to twenty-eight, even though lead production reached all-time highs and the white population had nearly tripled. Most African Americans had moved further down the Mississippi River, in part because new jobs were available there but also because Dubuque had become the most Democratic and racially hostile town in the state. A white merchant, for example, was shot for remarking that he considered “a negro as good as himself, or as an Irishman, if he behaved himself.”⁵⁹ There would always be a black presence in Dubuque in the decades to come, but never more than a token one, and the city was only marginally involved in the political, legal, economic and cultural changes caused by the efforts of black Iowans during and after the Civil War.

As Dubuque’s black community went into decline, another town further down the Mississippi became the new black population center. Muscatine was founded during the 1830s as

⁵⁸ *Jackson County History, Iowa* (Iowa Writers’ Program, 1942), 36-43; Roald Tweet, *Quad Cities: An American Mosaic* (Rock Island, IL: East Hall Press, 1996), 15; Black, “Lynchings in Iowa,” 163-64, 170-71, 362-66; *Dubuque County History* (1942), 35; William Roba, *The River and the Prairie: A History of the Quad Cities, 1812-1960* (Quad Cities: Hesperian Press, 1986), 35; *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 399-400; Johnson, *Warriors into Workers*, 24; Grabow et al., *In the Matter of Ralph, a Black Man* (2), 38.

⁵⁹ Dykstra, “Dr. Emerson’s Sam,” 75; 1840 U.S. Census; 1850 U.S. Census; *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 463; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, 9 August 1856; Black, “Lynchings in Iowa,” 186.

a trading post called Bloomington. Although it grew into an important lumber and trade port, it never rose above a moderate size; still, for a decade it was home to Iowa's most economically and politically active black community. The 1840 census lists only twenty-five blacks in Muscatine County (although this was still the second highest of any county), but by 1850 there had been several key changes. Most Muscatine blacks had once lived in white households as boarders or servants, but now there were only four, including a mixed-race child living with her white family. As in Dubuque several years earlier, many black homeowners took in boarders, including new arrivals and children from other families whose own homes had become too crowded; this small community was creating new kinship ties and an atmosphere of mutual support to combat poverty and racial hostility. Although most blacks were employed as servants, dock workers or in other menial positions, there were also several skilled artisans and entrepreneurs.⁶⁰

In 1850 the community established Bethel African Methodist Episcopalian Church on the outskirts of town. Like many other northern black churches, it became important in civil rights activism as an institutional base, as a place for nurturing leadership, and as the facility for a black school.⁶¹ One of its early pastors was Richard Cain (holding his first ever pastoral position), a native Virginian who later served in South Carolina's constitutional convention and congressional delegation during Reconstruction. Bethel's \$1300 brick structure with stained-

⁶⁰ The four African Americans living with white families were two hotel boarders, the mixed-race child, and one other individual. Kent Sissel, interview by author, Muscatine, Iowa, 19 September 2003; Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam," 76-78; 1840 U.S. Census; 1850 U.S. Census; 1865 Iowa State Census. The 1840 census instructions mandated that only professions for men would be listed, so it should not be assumed that other black Iowan women did not work. Willis Goudy, "Selected demographics: Iowa's African-American residents, 1840-2000," 28, in Bill Silag, Susan Koch-Bridgford and Hal Chase, eds., *Outside In: African-American History in Iowa, 1838-2000* (Des Moines: State Historical Society of Iowa, 2001), 28.

⁶¹ 1850 U.S. Census. In her study of Cincinnati, Nikki Taylor points out that schools could be as important as churches for "[providing] the community with a political, social, and educational space...[and] centers of protest and activism." Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 5.

glass windows was much more luxurious than most antebellum black Midwestern churches, in part because of the wealth of some of its members.⁶² Teamster Benjamin Mathews and his brother in law Edmund Mathews sat on the trustee board, while his stepfather Daniel Anderson (a whitewasher) served as steward.⁶³ Fellow trustee Thomas Motts was even more prosperous. Born in Maryland around 1809, Motts came to Muscatine in 1840 and opened a barber shop, using the proceeds to invest in lumber and coal. Within a few years he was wealthy enough to retire from barbering, although he continued to own several shops. By 1850 his net worth of six thousand dollars, including thirty properties and a race horse, made him the richest African American in the state and the seventh-richest person of any race in Muscatine.⁶⁴

Motts was also not above using racist laws for his own benefit. During an 1855 lawsuit against several white men, the defendants attempted to bring an African American named Hinton to the stand, but Motts pointed out that state law barred blacks from testifying against whites. The defendants appealed to the Iowa Supreme Court, arguing that “this provision was designed for the benefit of, and to protect the white person; and...the plaintiff, being a negro, cannot object.” The court, however, affirmed the lower decision on the grounds that blacks could be induced by their poverty to testify falsely or conversely “confederate to the great prejudice and

⁶² Allen Johnson, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929), 403-04; William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (Cleveland: Geo. M. Rewell & Co., 1887), 866; “Photograph of Bethel A.M.E. Church, 514 E. 7th, 83rd Anniversary, 20 November 1932,” Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa, O.G. #3397; Barnes, *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, 73; *History of Muscatine County* (1879), 527. “Bethel” was also the name of several historically significant AME churches in the east. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 116, 137.

⁶³ Dykstra, “Dr. Emerson’s Sam,” 77. According to one source, a man named Morgan Ride was also a trustee. Barnes, *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, 73.

⁶⁴ John J. Witmer, “Thomas C. Motts: In a Quiet, Peaceable & Orderly Manner,” *Heritage Reflections* (1981), 8-9, 11-13; *Washington Press*, 20 July 1898, quoted in “Mahala Motts & Family,” *Heritage Reflections* (1981), 17; 1850 U.S. Census; Dykstra, “Dr. Emerson’s Sam,” 77.

injury of white suitors” due to their clannishness.⁶⁵ Motts won the case, but at the expense of using a discriminatory law. It is difficult to discern his motives – he may have considered Hinton a lackey for whites, he may have viewed his tactic an ironic way of turning a racist law on its head, or he may have simply considered racial solidarity secondary to financial gain – but in any case he retained his high standing in the community after the case.⁶⁶

The last Bethel AME trustee, who also served as Sunday school superintendent, eventually became the most prominent black Iowan of the nineteenth century. Alexander Clark was born in 1826 in Washington County, Pennsylvania.⁶⁷ His father John Clark had been a slave until his Irish master and father freed him and his mixed-race mother. Alexander’s own mother was Rebecca Darnes, a free woman of unmixed African ancestry who lived to be more than one hundred years old. He received a “limited education” but became an avid reader and at age thirteen headed west to Cincinnati, where he learned the barbering trade from an uncle. In 1841 he left the town working as a bartender on a steamboat and arrived in Muscatine the following year. Oral history suggests that his choice of destination may have been influenced by the presence of a prominent white family that was related to him through his grandfather. If so, then his later business enterprises may have enjoyed the patronage of his white relatives and their friends; such an informal family relationship across the color line helped give rise to the small

⁶⁵ Appellee’s brief from *Motts v. Thayer*, 5 February 1855, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines (hereafter cited as SHSI-DM), File 2454, N36/09/06; *Motts v. Usher & Thayer*, 2 Iowa 82 (1855), 84.

⁶⁶ The prohibition against black witness testimony could sometimes backfire. In 1843, a black man named Brown was arrested in Iowa City for a string of robberies and confessed that a white man named Haines was his partner; the authorities could not arrest Haines, though, since the only evidence against him came from an African American. *History of Johnson County* (1883), 213-14.

⁶⁷ “Alexander Clark, P.G.M.,” 62. This article actually lists his birthday as February 26, but later county and biographical dictionaries state that it was February 25. *History of Muscatine County* (1879), 597; *The United States Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men, Iowa Volume* (Chicago: American Biographical Publishing Co., 1878), 536.

black middle class of the antebellum North.⁶⁸ His main motive for leaving Cincinnati, though, was probably the 1841 race riot in which Kentucky slaveholders and proslavery Ohioans nearly destroyed the black community. Although he never lived in the Queen City again, his brief experience with its prominent black churches, schools, middle class, alliances with liberal whites, and resistance to slavery and racism surely left a marked impression on the young man.⁶⁹

Clark opened his own barber shop shortly after his arrival in Muscatine. He began to develop close relationships with white clients (even if the stories about white family ties are not true, there were not enough black men in town to keep him in business) through his inquisitiveness and quiet strength. Neighbors later recalled that he “always conducted himself in such a way as to make and hold friends... In a modest and becoming manner, he rose far above his early surroundings and... battle for the right and the uplifting of mankind.” Another prominent client remarked that Clark was “very inquisitive and desirous of learning something from every one who came to his shop. He would ply questions on various subjects and to persons of every calling and profession. He was determined to get information from every person shaved by him. I noticed that marked peculiarity in him at the time. I saw he was not to be held in ignorance. I also noticed that he had ideas of his own.” While Davenport elites never seemed to take their relationship with white elites past the level of obsequiousness, Clark learned at a young age to subtly interrogate his clients in order to gain a deeper understanding of racial dynamics in Iowa as well as helpful financial information.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Sissel, interview; Dykstra, “Dr. Emerson’s Sam,” 77. For other examples of this, see Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston*, and Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Archibald Grimké: Portrait of a Black Independent* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993). Rebecca was the daughter of George and Lettice Darnes. “Alexander Clark, P.G.M.,” 62.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*; Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom*, 53-57.

⁷⁰ Marilyn Jackson, “Alexander Clark: A Rediscovered Black Leader,” *The Iowan* 23 (1975): 43-44, 48-49; Loren Nelson Horton, “Town Planning, Growth, and Architecture in Selected Mississippi River Towns of Iowa, 1833-

Using all of these assets, Clark also began to expand his businesses. He had the good fortune of arriving in Muscatine just as the local steamboat industry took off, and he made a small fortune by supplying firewood to the boats. This money in turn went into real estate investments, including some of the town's "finest architectural specimens" in the downtown business district. He also built a sturdy home and became an active member of a Prince Hall Masonic lodge in St. Louis. Not yet twenty-five, Clark had attained a level of financial security that allowed him to devote most of his time to community affairs and civil rights.⁷¹ The motivation for this activism came in part from his family. Like his father, his wife Catherine Griffin, a woman of African and Native American ancestry whom he married in Iowa City in 1848, had been born in bondage. Their three children Rebecca, Susan and Alexander Jr. (two others, John and Ellen, died in infancy), though, would never know slavery or poverty, and each played their own role in Muscatine's civil rights legacy.⁷²

These five community leaders – Benjamin and Edmund Mathews, Daniel Anderson, Thomas Motts, and Alexander Clark – shared several key characteristics. All were men; although Ellen "Aunt Nellie" Anderson wielded considerable power behind the scenes as the matriarch of the Anderson/Mathews family, it was her husband, brother and son who held formal leadership. Most were employed in something higher than general labor, although Clark may have been the

1860" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1978), 312. "Clark benefited from the lightness of his skin, his free-born origins, and atypical grammar school education." Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 76.

⁷¹ Jackson, "Alexander Clark," 43-44; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, 31 December 1878; "Alexander Clark, P.G.M.," 62; Alexander G. Clark, Jr., *Clark's History of Prince Hall Freemasonry (1775-1945)* (Des Moines: Iowa Bystander, 1947), 24. By 1850 he was worth \$1200, which made him the third-wealthiest African American in Iowa; ten years later this had increased to \$10,300. 1850 U.S. Census; 1860 U.S. Census.

⁷² Catherine Griffin Clark was born in Virginia and was not technically manumitted until 1857 while she and her master were living in Linn County, Iowa. She largely disappears from the historical record after her marriage, but a contemporary account describes her as "a woman in every way suited to his companionship and worthy of her husband... highly esteemed for her Christian leadership." "Alexander Clark, P.G.M.," 63; Verla A. Williams, ed., *Johnson County, Iowa Marriages, 1839-1868* (1988); Manumission certificate for Catharine Griffin, 17 August 1857, AAHMCCI, Vertical Files, History – Slavery #1.

only one who could read or write. All had close ties with each other. All were of mixed racial ancestry or married to women who were. All of them were fairly young, which was not uncommon in the new frontier cities of the Midwest. Finally, all of them had business ties to whites; although Muscatine whites did not choose the black community's leaders, their connections to certain African Americans enabled those individuals to accumulate wealth and prestige, which in turn led to the black community choosing them as leaders.⁷³

Two years before the church was built, though, the community used other civil rights tactics. Jim White left St. Louis to work in a Muscatine hotel in 1848 with his master's blessing, but then refused to return to slavery when summoned. After White's master sent an agent to bring him back by force, he took refuge in the home of Alexander Clark, who had the would-be slave catcher arrested for kidnapping. With Clark's friend and attorney J. Scott Richman as counsel, White went before the justice of the peace, who followed the *Ralph* precedent in ruling that he was a free man since slavery was illegal in Iowa and not a fugitive slave either since his master had allowed him to enter free territory. Afterwards, the justice stood outside the courthouse with his hand on Jim White's arm and dramatically stated to the crowd, "Gentlemen, here is a free man."⁷⁴

These dramatics notwithstanding, White was still not safe. His master sent another agent named Michael Greene, who told Ben and Nellie Matthews that he would take White to Chicago; this offer was passed on to Clark, who suspected a trap but nevertheless played along. The

⁷³ For example, ten year old Charles Matthews lived with the Clark family. Barnes, *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, 73; "Alexander Clark, P.G.M.," 63; Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam," 77; 1850 U.S. Census; Witmer, "Thomas C. Motts," 16; "Mahala Motts & Family," 18.

⁷⁴ Ironically, the slavecatcher was named Horace Freeman, which meant that a "Freeman" was trying to return a "White" to slavery. J.P. Walton, "Unwritten History of Bloomington (Now Muscatine) in Early Years," *Annals of Iowa* 1 (1882): 47; "The Negro Case," *Bloomington Herald*, 18 November 1848.

parties agreed that Greene would cross the river before dark and wait for White to come across on a skiff after nightfall. When night came Clark, White and two others did in fact start across the river, but once they had gone out too far to be seen from the shore, they stopped rowing and quietly floated down river; as they left, they heard three other boats searching for them. They disembarked south of town, headed back to Muscatine, and went to bed while their pursuers spent the rest of the night searching the river and woods. White's master, though still did not give up; several days later he traveled to Dubuque to get a federal warrant for Jim's arrest. White was taken into custody again, but his lawyer appealed to Iowa Supreme Court Chief Justice S. Clinton Hastings, who voided the Dubuque warrant and issued a writ of *habeas corpus* requiring his immediate release. The *Bloomington Herald* offered guarded praise, fearing that "the end is not yet" but confident that "the moral sense of this community... will not long tolerate the persecution of any man, black or white. Whom the law makes free, is free, and he that is unwilling to support the law, when it frees a man, is unfit to be a freeman himself, and possesses all the attributes of a petty tyrant." After that, Jim White was able to live in peace in Muscatine as a free man for many years, becoming known as a "great shouter" at Bethel AME.⁷⁵

There is no indication that the prosperous, freeborn entrepreneur Alexander Clark had any connection to the poor Missouri slave other than race. Yet he risked alienating moderate townspeople (who might not have minded a black man cutting their hair or selling them lumber but drew the line at harboring slaves and having white men arrested) with his actions, using his ingenuity, knowledge of the legal system, and ties to prominent whites to help Jim White win his freedom. This early example of black Muscatine's civil rights activism was only one of the many often-overlooked struggles against slavery by black communities in Midwestern river towns, and

⁷⁵ Walton, "Unwritten History of Bloomington," 49; "The Negro Case," *Bloomington Herald*, 18 November 1848.

it also reiterates the importance of homeownership for black community leaders.⁷⁶ The home was both a sign of prosperity and a refuge from racism, for the owner but also for the black community as a whole. The Clarks might have been more apprehensive about hiding Jim White in their home if they had rented or boarded with whites, but the independence that came with ownership enabled them to use their place of residence as a tool of racial uplift.

Despite this and other successes, though, Muscatine blacks were still subjected to the same racist laws and customs as other black Iowans; even wealthy men like Clark and Motts could not vote or send their children to public schools, while the local press was cautiously antislavery but still avoided the term “abolitionist.” One of the few outspoken white residents was Rev. Alden Robbins of the Congregational church. Robbins became such a staunch advocate for civil rights (a decade later he would call the Civil War “the Rebellion of man against God”) that during postwar black community celebrations, African Americans gave three cheers in front of his house. Even his church, though, did not agree on slavery or civil rights. In 1854 an unnamed black woman sought admission, but the members rejected her on the grounds that “the reasons of the applicant for being received into this Church rather than to labor for Christ in the Church and among the people of her own color are not satisfactory.” Several years later, though, a Missouri-born member who accused Robbins of lying about the South was allowed to stay. Despite this turn of events, conservatives mocked the church as “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ See also Buchanan, *Black Life on the Mississippi*; Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom*; Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 119-26.

⁷⁷ “The Negro Case,” *Bloomington Herald*, 18 November 1848; *The History of Lee County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1879), 671; *Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County, Iowa* (Chicago: Acme Publishing Co., 1889), 337; Richman, *History of Muscatine County I* (1911), 317; Curt Harnack, “The Iowa Underground Railroad,” *The Iowan* 4 (1956): 47. Under the Congregational system, major decisions are made by voting, so the decision to admit the black woman or expel the pro-southern member was not up to Robbins. During the second controversy, the general membership rejected a resolution that would have expelled the Missourian (incidentally, this was the first time in the church’s history that women were allowed to vote, although this right was

Muscatine blacks also experience this racial hostility when they appealed to other white Iowans for civil rights reform. In 1855, Alexander Clark and thirty-two other “free colored persons” sent a petition to the state legislature asking it to repeal the “Act to Regulate Blacks and Mulattoes.” The author (probably Clark himself) made the case in misspelled but forceful words:

“We your petitioners deem it onnessary to say anything about the injustus of the Law, or its oppresstive influences upon us as free Colord Citizens of the United States of America, but we will submit it to the honest consideration of your Honorable body ever hoping that the god of heaven may gide and direct your acts in favor of Justus and opprest humanity.”⁷⁸

Democrats tabled the resolution, though, and the anti-migration law remained intact.⁷⁹ Neither economic standing nor connections to prominent whites had enabled Muscatine’s black elite to change the state’s legal policies. This was not, however, the last time that white Iowans would hear from Alexander Clark.

Aside from Muscatine, Iowa’s most prominent antebellum black elites lived in Davenport.⁸⁰ Davenport was even larger and more prosperous than Muscatine, but its black community was still much smaller; the 1850 census listed only fifteen living in Scott County. According to one story, the first black resident was Henry O. Wagoner, who had been born free in Maryland, learned the printing trade, and came to Davenport in 1842. Race prejudice prevented him from working in his chosen field, though, so he opened a fruit stand. African Americans were so rare that the few who did live there were considered part of the exotic flavor

taken from them again at a subsequent meeting). A month later, however, he was expelled for unknown reasons. Richman, “Congregational Life in Muscatine, 1843-1893,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 21 (July 1923), 348, 355-59.

⁷⁸ “Message Clear to Blacks in Early Iowa: Go Away,” *Des Moines Register*, 28 April 1996.

⁷⁹ The petition was presented to the body by Muscatine’s Whig delegate Reasin Pritchard. The same legislature also considered giving state subsidies to African Americans who were willing to leave Iowa for Liberia. Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 77-78.

⁸⁰ Davenport was part of the Tri-Cities region that also included the Illinois cities of Rock Island and Moline. This area is now known as the Quad Cities due to the inclusion of Bettendorf.

of frontier life. An 1849 *Davenport Gazette* article stated that “A black man visiting the place is regarded with a curious gaze, much as an Indian in the cities to our east,” and several years later the paper proudly but inaccurately stated that there was “not a single negro in this place.” The only interaction that most whites had with African Americans came from traveling minstrel groups or productions of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” advertised as authentic depictions of the “peculiarities of the negro character.”⁸¹

Given this cultural atmosphere, it was perhaps not surprising that the early black community leaders assumed an accommodating, subservient attitude with white elites. While leaders like Clark constantly shifted between patronage and a rights-based approach to community uplift, the most prominent blacks in Davenport largely avoided the latter and focused almost entirely on the former. One of these leaders was John Warwick, who was born a slave in Richmond in 1822 and was given his freedom in childhood. He learned the barber trade as a teenager and became the personal servant for a government employee, who took him to New York, Paris and Washington D.C. Further travels show the limitations and possibilities for nineteenth century free blacks around the country, taking him to rural Arkansas (which he left because he did not like farm life), Little Rock (where he feared being kidnapped back into slavery), Pittsburgh, and St. Louis before coming to Davenport in 1848 with his wife, a prosperous woman of African and Native American ancestry. Once in Iowa Warwick opened a new barbershop, which became popular among the white elite due to his “affability and

⁸¹ 1850 U.S. Census; Joseph S. Shick, *The Early Theater in Eastern Iowa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 188, 209, 213; “City Features,” *Davenport Gazette*, 9 August 1849; “Local Matters,” *Davenport Gazette*, 11 August 1853; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 1 January 1852, 21-22 May 1856, 6 July 1856, 2 September 1856, 31 October 1859. These and many other newspaper articles from the Tri Cities were originally found by Craig Klein, to whom I am deeply indebted for his hard work, scholarly insights and friendship.

politeness.”⁸² He was recognized as a community leader and afforded certain token privileges, and in turn he did very little to challenge the status quo; despite some similarities to Alexander Clark, he never became as forceful an activist as the Muscatine barber.

The same was true of “Prince” Albert Nuckolls, a former slave foreman who came to Davenport in 1854 with his master and wife, who like Nuckolls was the son of a prominent white man. Albert bought their freedom for \$1,600 and then found work as a “city bill poster and whitener” but maintained close ties with his former master, also cultivating ties to other elites through his quiet and cheerful manner; the *Davenport Democrat* later remembered him as “the dispenser of mirth, jokes and good cheer...witty and smart and extremely well liked by the white race,” while the *Gazette* called him “the paragon of colored gentlemen.” Although it was also said that he “loved his race and gave employment and assisted colored people, even though some of them may have been wholly undeserving of a favor,” for the most part his activism was limited to white patronage and leading community organizations in a non-confrontational manner.⁸³

Emmanuel Franklin took a somewhat more confrontational approach when his own master brought him to Davenport. He was also given the chance to purchase his freedom, but instead he declared that he should not have to pay anything now that he was “breathing the

⁸² “The Last Summons: It Comes to Levi Davis and J.H. Warwick,” UNC, 17 February 1895, quoted in Craig R. Klein, *Davenport’s Pioneer African-American Community: A Sourcebook* (hereafter cited as *A Sourcebook*), Master File #3: African-American Churches and Fraternal Organizations, 95-97; Unidentified clipping, August Richter Papers, Box 2 – Newspaper Clippings: Negroes, Negroes, SHSI-IC; William H. Van Der Zee, “Early Days in Iowa (Special to the Bystander),” *Iowa Bystander; Twin Cities Directory and Business Mirror for the Year 1860 I* (Davenport: Luse, Lane & Co., 1859), 134; “Who’s Who in African Red Book of Davenport: Where Have You Seen These Faces?,” *Davenport Democrat*, 18 April 1915; “The Last Rites,” *Davenport Democrat*, 18 February 1895.

⁸³ August Richter, “Prince Albert,” Richter Papers; Van Der Zee, “Early Days in Iowa”; Richter, “Albert Nuckolls,” Richter Papers; “First Iowa Colored Man to Serve as Juror”; “African Red Book of Davenport”; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 29 December 1865; *Davenport City Directory for 1870-71* (Davenport: Griggs, Watson & Day, 1871), 183, quoted in Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1: African-American Time Line of Davenport, Iowa, 26.

Freedom's air" in the North. What happened next is not clear, but Franklin did eventually earn his freedom and then opened a livery shop. These events did not, however, prevent him from cultivating his own patronage ties. After John Warwick traveled down to St. Louis to bring his wife Betsie to Davenport, a white church raised \$900 to purchase her son's freedom.⁸⁴ This strategy could also bring about civil rights changes, albeit in a limited, individualistic manner. When William Van Der Zee arrived from New York in the 1850s and was hired as a foreman at the opera house construction site, some of the white workers protested; heir employer threatened to replace them, though, and they backed down.⁸⁵

Other antebellum blacks were not quite as successful at generating a positive public image. Bill Jones owned and operated the O.K. Saloon, a "one-horse whiskey mill" that was often the site of fighting and armed robbery, while Peter Starks was arrested four times during a five-day stretch in 1860 for various petty crimes. This sort of behavior was no doubt mortifying to Nuckolls, Warwick, and other black community leaders whose standing depended on cultivating an image of servile respectability with white elites. It also helped, though, that the black community, both free black and fugitive slave, remained small until the start of the Civil War.⁸⁶

This situation was far different in other parts of Iowa, where a small but dedicated group of white activists rejected the hostility and indifference of their neighbors on the slavery issue and "promoted an open defiance of the southern institution." In far southeastern Iowa, several

⁸⁴ Richter, "Davenport Purchased a Slave," Richter Papers.

⁸⁵ Van Der Zee, "Early Days in Iowa."

⁸⁶ "A Hard Set," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 12 January 1860"; "On a Spree," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 23 June 1860; "Mayor's Court," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 28 June 1860; "Taken Up," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 29 June 1860; "Result of Laziness," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 18 July 1860.

small religious communities dedicated themselves to abolitionism and morally upright living. The village of Denmark was settled by Congregationalist migrants from New England and led by Reverend Asa Turner, who established Iowa's first antislavery society in 1840. His allies in the nearby town of Montrose had already been publishing the *Western Adventurer* since 1837, leading a conservative Burlington editor to lament that "we flattered ourselves that abolitionism had no votaries in this Territory, and above all, we did not believe that the proprietor of any newspaper would be willing to prostitute his columns to a purpose, at once so silly, unjust, impracticable and evil."⁸⁷

In 1841 Quakers established another anti-slavery society in Salem, about 30 miles to the north. It became a sanctuary for abolitionist settlers, although some of the more conservative townspeople who felt that southern slaves were "better off there than in Africa" established their own Meeting House only a few feet away.⁸⁸ There was also internal conflict in the third religious community. The Washington County villages of Crawfordsville and Washington were largely settled by Reformed Presbyterians known as "Seceders," but there were also other villagers who did not share their views; in 1842, a mob disrupted an antislavery convention by forcibly removing the keynote speaker. The Seceders were also hindered by the fact that their denomination, unlike the Quakers and Congregationalists, did not strongly oppose slavery on a national level; the same was true of other groups such as the Presbyterians of Des Moines

⁸⁷ Connor, "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa," 359; Dykstra, "White Men, Black Laws," 413, 417; Richman, "Congregational Life in Muscatine," 348; *History of Lee County* (1879), 671; "The Harvest Truly is Plenteous: Historical Eastern Iowa Church Plans 20th God's Portion Day," *Keokuk Daily Gate City*, 8 October 1967; *Burlington Advertiser*, 12 October 1837.

⁸⁸ Dykstra, "White Men, Black Laws," 415-17; Connor, "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa," 359; O.A. Garretson, "Travelling on the Underground Railroad in Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 22 (1924): 420-21, 429-30, 443, 445, 447-50. After the Civil War, the two Meetings reunited. *The Place of Peace: Memories of Salem, Iowa, 1835-1996* (Marceline, MO: Marceline Publishing Company, 1996), 10, 190; Connor, "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa," 359.

County and the Swedenborgians of Iowa County.⁸⁹ This was much less of a problem in the village of Tabor, hundreds of miles away in southwestern Iowa, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six. One final group in the southeast, the Congregationalists of Henry County and its county seat of Mount Pleasant, were not as dedicated to creating a religiously homogeneous city on a hill but ultimately had a far greater impact on race relations in Iowa.

In 1843, all of these southeastern abolitionists formed the Iowa Anti-Slavery Society. Although they were perhaps more radical on the slavery issue than any other white Iowans, their new organization was decidedly moderate by national standards; they rejected, for example, the idea that “no consistent abolitionist can support a church or ministry that is not found in active opposition to slavery” since they felt that encouraging religious schism was as sinful as slavery. At the same time, they also pledged themselves to immediate emancipation, opposed the national Fugitive Slave Law and the annexation of Texas, and declared that under the “principle of equality...the laws of this Territory, making a distinction on account of color, are wrong.”⁹⁰

To that end, they immediately began appealing to the Iowa legislature to change those laws. This had actually begun in 1841, when Salem residents sent a petition calling for a repeal of the black laws, while a Denmark lawmaker introduced a bill requiring jury trials for accused runaways. The bill ran into a “hornet’s nest of opposition” from Democrats, who warned of an “influx of runaway slaves and out-cast blacks” and threatened to strengthen the “Act to Regulate Blacks and Mulattoes” by banning all African Americans from the state. Only three legislators, two from Henry County, voted for the bill. This threat became a popular tactic to silence liberal

⁸⁹ Dykstra, “White Men, Black Laws,” 418-20, 424-26; Garretson, “Travelling on the Underground Railroad in Iowa,” 452; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Underground Railroad* (Part 2), 85; Berrier, “The Underground Railroad in Iowa,” *The Scene*, 49; Charles Arthur Hawley, “Historical Background of the Attitude of the Jasper Colony toward Slavery and the Civil War,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 192-93.

⁹⁰ (*Chicago*) *Western Citizen*, 23 November 1843, quoted in Dykstra, “White Men, Black Laws,” 429-38.

politicians, and it also indicated the profound lack of political power among Iowa's abolitionists, who were despised by the Democrats, ignored by the Whigs, and unable to mount an effective third-party campaign.⁹¹

Another opportunity to change the law came in the summer of 1844, when political leaders met in Iowa City to write a constitution for the purpose of Iowa's admission to statehood. Residents of Henry and Washington counties sent another petition declaring that under the Declaration of Independence, people of color were entitled to "all such rights and privileges, civil, social, moral, and educational, under the same circumstances and upon the same conditions as are secured to others." The petition was passed on to a subcommittee, which also considered the merits of enacting a permanent total ban on black migration; while some saw the convention as a chance to liberalize Iowa's policies, others wanted to make the existing restrictions even stronger.⁹²

Perhaps realizing this, the committee decided to maintain the status quo on both issues. Although the delegates agreed that all men were created equal, they considered this "a mere abstract proposition" that applied in a state of nature but not in society. The committee further declared that since blacks were not involved in the creation of the constitution, they were not entitled to benefit from it. Finally, it was argued that although the "degraded condition of the negroes" was pitiable, liberalizing the law would

⁹¹ Dykstra, "White Men, Black Laws," 420-26, 430; "Reminiscences Set Down by the Late Daniel F. Miller of Lee County," reprinted in "Negroes and Mormons in Iowa in 1840," *Burlington Post*, 18 June 1932; *Pioneer Law-Makers' Association of Iowa, Reunion of 1894* (Des Moines: G.H. Ragsdale, 1894), 57; Connor, "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa," 360.

⁹² English, "As Iowa Approached Statehood," 211-12; Connor, "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa," 357; *Journal of the Convention for the Formation of a Constitution for the State of Iowa* (Iowa City: Jesse Williams, 1845), 26-27, 32-34, 44, 68-69, 82; Carl H. Erbe, "Constitutional Provisions for the Suffrage in Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 22 (1924): 164-65, 168; Benjamin F. Shambaugh, *Fragments of the Debates of the Iowa Constitutional Conventions of 1844 and 1846* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1900), 26-29, 33; Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 13-14; Shambaugh, *The Constitutions of Iowa* (Iowa City: State Historical Society, 1934), 155-56.

“[D]rive the whole black population of the Union upon us. The ballot box would fall into their hands and a train of evils would follow that in the opinion of your committee would be incalculable... There are strong reasons to induce the belief that the two races could not exist in the same government upon an equality without discord and violence, that might eventuate in insurrection, bloodshed and final extermination of one of the two races. No one can doubt that a degraded prostitution of moral feeling would ensure, a tendency to amalgamate the two races would be superinduced, a degraded and reckless population would follow; idleness, crime and misery would come in their train, and government itself would fall into anarchy or despotism”⁹³

A writer from the *Iowa Capital Reporter* expressed the sentiments of many whites when it hoped that “this black subject will now rest in Iowa forever.” As they had on other occasions, whites had put their hope to be free of discussions of slavery and race altogether. The only victory for African Americans was the convention’s rejection of the total migration ban and another proposal that would have placed a permanent gag on discussions of black suffrage; the latter resolution failed, though, not because of sympathy for blacks but because the delegates feared that it would prevent Iowa from being admitted to statehood by Congress.⁹⁴

Despite these failures, white liberals in southeastern Iowa refused to let the matter of slavery and civil rights rest. The Mount Pleasant-based *Iowa Freeman* began publication in 1848, becoming Iowa’s first fully abolitionist newspaper and the official mouthpiece of the antislavery Liberty Party. This continued in 1850 when it was purchased by Samuel Luke Howe (who also advocated for female suffrage and the abolition of the death penalty) and renamed the *Iowa True Democrat*. One source later said that the paper “produced a marked sensation among

⁹³ *Journal of the Convention* (1845), 52, 54.

⁹⁴ Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 13, 15; Shambaugh, *History of the Constitutions of Iowa* (Des Moines: Historical Department of Iowa, 1902), 218; *Journal of the Convention* (1845), 5, 32-33, 110-111, 121; Shambaugh, *The Constitutions of Iowa*, 142; Shambaugh, *Fragments of the Debates*, 123, 221. This constitution was twice rejected by Iowan voters the following year (for reasons having nothing do with race), so a second convention assembled in the summer of 1846 and completed a document that was finally accepted by the voters. The issue of black citizenship was not even discussed here, since two years earlier the first group of delegates had resolved that no future meetings of the body politic would entertain it. Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” 358-59; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 295.

the people of the West, and served to educate many young men as to their political duties,” but it lasted only two more years before going out of business.⁹⁵ Abolitionists also experienced failure in the 1848 presidential campaign, when the Liberty Party ran on a platform condemning slavery and the black laws and finished dead last.⁹⁶

Not surprisingly, their greatest success came not in the political arena but in the effort to help fugitive slaves reach freedom. Accurately telling this story is extremely difficult due to the many embellishments, legends, and bold-faced lies that emerged in the postwar period. As an 1879 Henry County history stated, “where once the name [abolitionist] was used only as an epithet of scorn, it is now revered as a title of honor,” and many whites became eager to reinvent themselves as wily, fearless conductors on the Underground Railroad whether they had earned that title or not. As time went on, their stories – whether true or not – were retold so often that they became truth for most people. Furthermore, since few abolitionists wrote down what they were doing at the time, most antislavery stories are postwar memoirs, making the historian’s task even more difficult.⁹⁷

In spite of these problems, it is possible to draw some conclusion about Iowa’s fugitive slave history. Most fugitives were from Missouri and were only passing through Iowa on their way to Canada or larger Midwestern cities like Chicago and Detroit, where there were greater

⁹⁵ *History of Henry County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1879), 447, 451, 569; *Portrait and Biographical Album of Henry County, Iowa* (Chicago: Acme Publishing Co., 1888), 655; Ruth Mallams and Mabel Tonkinson, “Notes on History of Mount Pleasant and Center Township, Book 1,” 50; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 299; “Iowa,” (*Washington D.C.*) *National Era*, 13 July 1848. The *Anamosa Eureka*, first published in 1856 in Jones County (about thirty miles north of Iowa City), may also have had an antislavery focus; its first editor was J.E. Lovejoy, who had been learning the printing trade in Alton, Illinois with his famous abolitionist brother Elijah when he was murdered by a proslavery mob, and it was originally called the *Anamosa Free Soiler*. *History of Jones County, Iowa* (1879), 436-37, 656.

⁹⁶ Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 299; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 1, 249, 258-59; “Iowa,” *National Era*.

⁹⁷ Mabel Erie Brown, “Dusky Landing,” *Palimpsest* 4 (1928): 243, 245; *History of Henry County* (1879), 449; Berrier, “The Underground Railroad in Iowa,” in *Outside In*, 45.

opportunities and more anonymity.⁹⁸ The most common route was entering southeastern Iowa, resting in one of the abolitionist villages, and then going to Illinois through Burlington. Some also decided to stay in Mississippi River towns or the abolitionist villages, where they worked as farm laborers; in fact one of the first black churches in Iowa in fact may have been a congregation that met near Salem. This region was especially active in the antislavery struggle due to its proximity to the Des Moines River, which comprises the border between northeastern Missouri and southeastern Iowa. Further west, many fugitives crossed into Iowa across the Missouri River. Thus river passage played a key role in the journey to freedom just as it did for slaves further east who crossed the Ohio River, even though crossing the Mississippi or Missouri did not create any change in their legal status. Some abolitionists became so active near the border that slaveholders began patrolling the state line, but most waited for the runaways to come to them.⁹⁹

Although the fugitives themselves were typically viewed as passive recipients of white largesse, their initiative, creativity and dedication comes through even in the most racially biased accounts. Two men who had been captured and jailed in Achison, Missouri asked for a pail of drinking water and a kettle of hot coals to keep warm, then burned a hole through the jail floor with the coals, put the fire out with the water, and made their way to Tabor. On another occasion, a light-skinned woman and her much darker husband crossed through Clinton into Illinois by pretending to be master and servant, the same strategy made famous by William and Ellen Craft.

⁹⁸ Harnack, "The Iowa Underground Railroad," 20. Missouri was home to 58,240 slaves in 1840, more than 87,000 ten years later, and nearly 115,000 by 1860. 1840 U.S. Census; 1850 U.S. Census; 1860 U.S. Census.

⁹⁹ Brown, "Dusky Landing," 245-48; Garretson, "Travelling on the Underground Railroad in Iowa," 429-30, 441; Jacob Van Ek, "Underground Railroad in Iowa." *Palimpsest* 2, No. 5 (1921), 134; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 1, 372-73; Berrier, "The Underground Railroad in Iowa," *The Scene*, 49, 57; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Underground Railroad (Part 2)*, 73, 76, 78, 89; *The Place of Peace*, 130; Britton, "Freedom for the Negroes," KPL, *Negro in Iowa, Newspaper Clippings*, 2.

Light-skinned fugitives had other advantages as well; a white abolitionist later recalled that it was easier to conceal and transport them since they stood out less, although it probably also helped that their complexion made them more sympathetic to whites.¹⁰⁰

Other fugitives were less willing to accept help from whites. One man traveling through Henry County carried a club and knife, rejected all assistance except food, and only ate that after it was left at a safe distance. A woman remembered as Aunt Polly did not trust anyone of either race when she passed through Keosauqua, attacking five local blacks until she realized that they were trying to help her. She had left Mississippi with her fourteen children, but eight had died along the way and four others were left with another family along the way, leaving only the two youngest by the time she reached Iowa. Even though she had finally reached free land, the strain of her tragic journey proved too much for her mind to bear; she eventually died in a home for the mentally ill, and her children were adopted by black families.¹⁰¹

These efforts by Keosauqua blacks were actually typical of the Underground Railroad in Iowa. Black Iowans (many of whom were former slaves themselves) living on the Mississippi and in smaller numbers in southern Iowa “made it their business to aid their escaping brethren.” The black community in the southeastern village of Fairfield was so famous for this that “white people could tell if their Negro neighbors had out-of-town visitors. If the house was dark and there was no response to knocking, it meant they were not at home to anyone that night.” William Watts, an “exceedingly courteous” freedman from Missouri, operated a popular tavern in the river town of Camanche that also served as an Underground Railroad station; local court

¹⁰⁰ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Box 1, Folder 9, Chapter 4: The Underground Railroad (Part 3 of 5), 94-95, 122-23; *History of Clinton County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1879), 415.

¹⁰¹ Garretson, “Traveling on the Underground Railroad,” 420; *Van Buren County* (Federal Works Agency, 1940), 24; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” The Underground Railroad (Part 2), 77-78.

officers and attorneys were regular customers, and he may have quietly gathered intelligence that helped him sneak fugitives across the Mississippi.¹⁰² Aside from Aunt Polly, the fugitives themselves were probably more willing to rely on assistance from fellow African Americans than from white abolitionists, who were not always above the racist attitudes of the day.¹⁰³ Many of their memoirs contain the words “nigger” and “darkey,” negative references to black intelligence levels, more favorable descriptions of mixed-race fugitives, and an inability to see the people who they assisted as individuals. One unnamed Iowan wrote, “I am as much of an abolitionist as you are, but I don’t carry it quite so far. The slaves ought to be free but I don’t know what business they have in this country...I don’t want the ‘niggers’ around me.”¹⁰⁴ These attitudes may have been part of the reason that many fugitives chose to keep traveling on to Canada or larger cities rather than seeking their freedom and fortune in the Hawkeye State.

¹⁰² Brown, “Dusky Landing,” 243, 245; Berrier, “The Underground Railroad in Iowa,” *The Scene*, 46; Van Ek, “Underground Railroad in Iowa,” 138; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” The Underground Railroad (Part 2), 82. Despite his work on behalf of his race, though, Watts bizarrely referred to himself as “the first white man in Camanche.” WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” The Underground Railroad (Part 3), 122; *History of Clinton County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1879), 659.

¹⁰³ For more biographical information on Iowa’s white abolitionists, see: Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 1, 372-73; Josiah B. Grinnell, *Men and Events of Forty Years*, 217, quoted in WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” The Underground Railroad (Part 3), 111-12, 119; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Box 1, Folder 10, Chapter 4: The Underground Railroad (Part 4 of 5), 143; *History of Jasper County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1878), 386; William B. Friedrichs, *Covering Iowa: The History of the Des Moines Register and Tribune Company, 1849-1985* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 2000), 17-18; “The Quakers...And Their ‘Underground Railroad,’” pamphlet, Lewelling Quaker Shrine, Salem, Iowa. Some of the more implausible stories of the Underground Railroad can be found in the following sources: WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” The Underground Railroad (Part 2), 83; *Lee County History, Iowa* (Iowa Writers’ Program, 1942), 54; IWA, Hawthorne Papers, Federal Papers, 1937-1941 (Folder 2); James B. Weaver, ed., *Past and Present of Jasper County, Iowa I* (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Co., 1912), 373-74; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” The Underground Railroad (Part 4), 142-43; Garretson, “Travelling on the Underground Railroad in Iowa,” 428; “Very Early Pioneer Times,” *Keokuk Constitution-Democrat*, 19 October 1899.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, “Dusky Landing,” 248; Garretson, “Travelling on the Underground Railroad in Iowa,” 429; Clark Smith, untitled memoir, 1859, p. 1, Nodaway Valley Historical Museum (hereafter cited as NVHM), Clarinda, Iowa, Miscellaneous Box; Christian S. Byrkit, “A Derailment on the Railway Invisible,” *Annals of Iowa* 14 (1923): 98; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” The Underground Railroad (Part 2), 85; Alex R. Miller, “Helping the Fugitive Slave Thru Iowa,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 15 May 1921; Joanna Harris Haines, “Seventy Years in Iowa,” *Annals of Iowa* 27 (1945): 114; Leonard F. Parker, “Stereotyped Abolitionism,” undated speech, Leonard Parker Papers, Box 5, Folder 16 – Miscellaneous Essays, SHSI-IC.

An even greater problem, though, was Iowa's proslavery activists, who were motivated by their conservative beliefs, the desire to earn the bounties on fugitives, or both. Although these conservatives also targeted whites who hired black migrants, especially in isolated rural areas – one farmer in far southern Davis County was ordered to fire his new employee by a “duly appointed pro-slavery committee” – their primary target was the fugitives themselves.¹⁰⁵ Runaways had to be wary of any would-be helper, since proslavery people often pretended to be abolitionists in order to gain their confidence. Black settlers throughout the state also lived in constant fear of being kidnapped and returned to slavery, or in the case of those who had been born to free parents being enslaved for the first time, with little legal recourse if this happened. For every Ralph Montgomery who found white allies and won his freedom, there were others like Mary and Versa Old. In 1860 these two orphans were on the outskirts of Iowa City with white Tennesseans John Curtis when a policeman arrested Curtis for kidnapping, believing that he planned to sell the Old children into slavery down south. Curtis, though, avoided prosecution by signing an affidavit declaring his “love, regard and affection” for the children and his desire to adopt them. Several months later, though, he sold them in Memphis. It was this precarious atmosphere that led black settlers like Henry Hannah of Washington County to obtain free papers from the local judge (he thought that his employer was planning to kidnap and sell him) but then move to Burlington anyway, where the larger black community and access to the Mississippi offered him at least some safety. Another man in Mount Pleasant was not even this optimistic; when he feared that he was about to be recaptured, he simply committed suicide.¹⁰⁶ Even when

¹⁰⁵ Thompson's response was so fierce and profane that the committee left without taking further action. WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Underground Railroad* (Part 4), 139.

¹⁰⁶ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Underground Railroad* (Part 2), 77, 84, 88; *History of Johnson County* (1883), 463-64; George Mills, “Iowa in the Civil War: Grim Crowds Gathered,” *Des Moines Sunday Register*, 1

the legal system got involved, it was relatively easy for African Americans in Iowa to be forced into southern bondage.

In spite of these problems, another new black community began to grow in far southeastern Iowa during the 1850s. The town of Keokuk, which lay at the confluence of the Mississippi and Des Moines rivers, experienced a massive economic boom as a growing center of industry, the point of departure for western migrants, and the place where goods were brought into southern Iowa. This brought many new job opportunities for unskilled laborers, and the “Gate City” grew to 15,000 residents, including more than two hundred African Americans. By the time the Civil War started, Keokuk had the largest black population in Iowa.¹⁰⁷

The most famous of these residents was Charlotta Pyles. In the fall of 1853, this woman of African, German and Seminole ancestry fled from her Kentucky plantation with her free husband Harry, eleven children, and five grandchildren. With the help of a white minister and their former master’s daughter, they headed towards Canada but arrived in Keokuk during the winter and decided to stay. Harry built a house and found work as a carpenter and stone mason, while some of the children also found jobs and got married. Other children still had spouses enslaved in Kentucky, though, and so to raise the funds to purchase their freedom and help care for her family, Charlotta spent six months making antislavery speeches in Philadelphia, working

November 1959; Faye Erma Harris, “A Frontier Community: The Economic, Social, and Political Development of Keokuk, Iowa from 1820 to 1866” (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1965), 113.

¹⁰⁷ *History of Lee County* (1879), 624-25; Nelson C. Roberts and S.W. Moorhead, *Story of Lee County, Iowa I* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1914), 151; “Brief History of Keokuk,” *Annals of Iowa* 36 (1962): 373; Harris, “A Frontier Community,” 199; Clarence M. Heinz, “WPA Survey of State and Local Historical Records: 1936, Iowa Historical Records Survey, Church Records Form, Bethel A.M.E. Church,” KPL, WPA Church Records.

with activists like Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony. The reunited family stayed in Keokuk for decades, turning its home into a way station for other fugitive slaves.¹⁰⁸

Although they came to Keokuk as fugitives, the Pyles became an integral part of the black community as workers and activists. Their actions showed the importance of family for former slaves. Charlotta and her kin went to great lengths to keep the clan together, both for emotional reasons and because the sons-in-law were important wage earners. The Pyles' emphasis on work and education as the indicators of freedom was also typical for former slaves in Iowa and elsewhere in the North. Although they recognized that Keokuk was no racial paradise, they could at least earn a living and purchase property. Finally, like many other antebellum black community leaders, they were involved in the antislavery struggle. With direct memories of slavery and family members still in bondage, they were not as far removed from the lives of southern slaves as the black elite in older eastern cities, even though Charlotta's mixed ancestry and Harry's vocational skills placed their family in a much better position than that of many other former slaves.

Several years before the Pyles came to Keokuk, Iowa's most publicized fugitive slave incident since the Ralph Montgomery case took place. With small but steadily growing numbers of black fugitives, dedicated abolitionists, and equally determined proslavery Iowans allied with slaveholders just across the state line, another direct conflict over the peculiar institution was

¹⁰⁸ Berrier, "The Underground Railroad in Iowa," *The Scene*, 48; Britton, "Early Negro Families in Iowa and the Underground Railroad" (date unknown), KPL, Vertical Files: Charlotta Gordon McHenry Pyles; Hallie Q. Brown, ed., *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* (Xenia, OH: Aldine Publishing Company, 1926), 35, 37; Harris, "A Frontier Community," 207; "City Death Records, Keokuk, Lee, Iowa," KPL, Vertical Files: Pyles; "Died," *Keokuk Daily Gate City*, 15 December 1870; "Died," *Keokuk Daily Gate City*, 21 January 1880; Oakland Cemetery Burial Records, Index Block 3, KPL, Vertical Files: Pyles; Plaintiff's Petition, *Isaac Prugh vs. Charlotte T. Smith, Administratrix of the Estate of Charlotta Pyle Deed, and Julia A. Kendricks, Emily Walker, Barney Pyle, Ellen Morris, Sarah A. Askew, Charlotte T. Smith, Elizabeth Pyle, Henry Pyle, Mary J. Luckette, Heirs of Charlotte Pyle Deed*, Lee County Circuit Court (June Term 1881), KPL, Vertical Files: Pyles.

inevitable. It was said that Ruel Daggs of Kahoka, Missouri treated his sixteen slaves comparatively well, but when they heard that he was planning to sell them in 1848, they decided to leave. A group consisting of middle-aged couple Samuel and Dorcas Fletcher, young couple John and Julia Walker, and their four children crossed the dangerously swollen Des Moines River on a homemade raft and hid in the woods near Salem, where Quakers brought them food.¹⁰⁹

When they entered town, though, someone sent word to Daggs, and he in turn sent a posse to Salem with arrest warrants for several townspeople. The posse began searching homes for the fugitives, but some residents were old frontiersmen who did not share the Quaker commitment to non-violence. When the men came to the home of Paul Way, he said, “There are three negroes hidden away in that loft. But mind you, it is risky business to make an attempt to carry out the search. The first man who touches a rung of that ladder is in danger of his life. I am armed, gentlemen, with enough of these instruments to make just thirteen holes in your flesh.” The Missourians left without their quarry, but the next day they caught the fugitives hiding outside of town. They were heading home when three Quakers intercepted them. Although one declared that he would “wade in Missouri blood before the Negroes should be taken,” the group decided to let the courts decide the issue. The bounty hunters must have immediately regretted this decision, because when the group returned to town, a crowd formed and enabled several of the fugitives to escape, while the others were officially given their freedom when the justice of the peace ruled that the slavecatchers lacked sufficient grounds to take them back to Missouri.

¹⁰⁹ McPartland, “City Figures in 3 Slavery Cases,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 15 December 1968; “Important Trial,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 11 July 1850; “Henry Co. Group Sued 105 Years Ago for Aiding Slaves,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 2 February 1953; Garretson, “Travelling on the Underground Railroad in Iowa,” 431-32; *History of Henry County* (1879), 542.

The conservative *Keokuk Register* angrily criticized this turn of events, saying, “Individual opinion in regard to certain laws, afford no excuse for a violation of those laws.”¹¹⁰

This anti-abolitionist anger later proved useful to Ruel Daggs. In September he brought suit against seventeen Salem residents in Burlington’s federal court, asking \$10,000 in damages for the slaves’ value and lost labor from those who had “[prevented] the return of said fugitives from labor to his service.”¹¹¹ His legal representative was none other than David Rorer, Ralph Montgomery’s old lawyer. This seemingly bizarre turn of events was actually consistent with Rorer’s moderate antislavery views. It was one thing for a slave to enter Iowa with their master’s permission and gain their freedom through legal channels, but it was quite another matter when mobs violated law and order by interfering with the recovery of fugitives.¹¹²

Defendants’ counsel J.C. Hall argued that his clients were perfectly within their rights to give aid and comfort to the black visitors since there was no evidence that they were fugitive slaves. Although in Missouri “the presumption...is that every black man is a slave,” Hall argued, in Iowa “we recognize no person as a slave” and “the presumption of freedom is universal.” His clients’ best hope was that the jury would vote its conscience, since the evidence left little doubt that the nine blacks in question were in fact Daggs’ fugitives and that the people of Salem had knowingly assisted them. One observer believed that there were “enough loopholes in the plaintiff’s case for any jury with antislavery tendencies to dismiss the suit if they so desired,” but

¹¹⁰ *History of Henry County* (1879), 542-43; “Important Trial”; Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” 363-64; Garretson, “Travelling on the Underground Railroad in Iowa,” 433-35, 437; McPartland, “City Figures in 3 Slavery Cases”; “Riot at Salem,” *Keokuk Register*, 8 June 1848; “Abduction of Slaves,” *Keokuk Register*, 15 June 1848.

¹¹¹ “Important Trial”; Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” 364; “Henry Co. Group Sued 105 Years Ago for Aiding Slaves.” One of the other defendants was Eli Jessup, who six years earlier had signed the Henry County petition asking the constitutional convention to grant equal rights to blacks. “Amendment to the Declaration,” *Ruel v. Daggs*, Henry County District Court (January 1849); *Journal of the Convention* (1845), 32.

¹¹² Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” 364; Frazee, *Fugitive Slave Case*, 3.

Burlington was not nearly as liberal as Salem, and Rorer had an even more effective strategy planned.¹¹³

It was true, Daggs' lawyer conceded, that Iowans should not assume that every black person was a fugitive, he conceded, but these particular blacks were "*strange negroes*...skulking in the bushes and endeavoring to conceal themselves." Just as Ralph Montgomery had shown his free status by acting like a free man, the Salem fugitives had raised the presumption that they were fugitive slaves through their own actions. Rorer also reminded the jurors of their duty to respect the law, including the fugitive slave laws and Missouri's right to hold slaves, which the defendants had not done. He asked them,

"Shall we now repudiate the contract we have made – shall we be the first to violate it? Shall we affirm that there is a moral law above this, and that we must obey it at all hazards? Shall we be permitted to prate about morals and sympathy with canting hypocrites or maddened fanatics, when we ourselves sanctioned the institution of slavery by entering, with full knowledge, into a contract of which it forms a part?"¹¹⁴

These moderate antislavery views, Rorer knew, were shared by most Iowans. Few were willing to break the law in order to end slavery, while the defendants were "fanatics" who "assume that there is a moral law, paramount to the Constitution." This was not simply rhetoric; that very year, the annual meeting of Iowa's Congregationalists had declared that "the principles of civil and religious liberty forbid our acknowledging the right of property in man or the obligation of any law requiring us to aid in the delivering up of fugitives from oppression."¹¹⁵

Rorer may not have been aware of this resolution, but he was correct in pointing out that many

¹¹³ Frazee, *Fugitive Slave Case*, 12-14, 16-17; "Important Trial"; Garretson, "Travelling on the Underground Railroad in Iowa," 437-38; Connor, "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa," 364-65.

¹¹⁴ Frazee, *Fugitive Slave Case*, 22-23, 25, 27; Connor, "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa," 365-66.

¹¹⁵ Connor, "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa," 366-67; Frazee, *Fugitive Slave Case*, 24; Garretson, "Travelling on the Underground Railroad in Iowa," 419, 422-23, 445; Brown, "Dusky Landing," 244.

abolitionists, including the defendants, considered their morals more important than the law. As far as he was concerned, they were free to hold these beliefs, but they could not act on them without legal censure. “Men have a right to be abolitionists,” he declared, “and there is no harm in it, if, as all opinions should be, they keep their sentiments within the prescribed limits of the law...[O]ur sympathy should manumit our own, and not other people’s slaves.”¹¹⁶ In closing, Rorer skillfully played upon the jurors’ concerns over sectional tensions. “The very subject upon which you are called to decide,” he stated, “is now agitating our country from Washington to the most distant borders. It has been a source of contention and distrust among the people of both North and South – of slave-holding and non-slave-holding States. Your verdict will show whether there is just ground for this suspicion, as to us.”¹¹⁷ The jurors had to prove if they were true Americans or fanatics who would destroy the country over a moral question.

These opinions were shared by Judge Dyer, shared Rorer’s moderate antislavery views. Dyer warned the jury that “our great Confederacy is...threatened with destruction” on the issue, instructing it that “Our business now is with the laws and Constitution as they are, and not as we may think they ought to be. It was no surprise that the jury decided in Daggs’ favor, although he was awarded only \$2900, less than a third of what he had requested. This can be viewed as a compromise; the jurors had upheld the rule of law, tried to decrease sectional tension, and condemned acts of fanatical abolitionism, but they also sent a subtle message of distaste to slaveholders by refusing to fully compensate Daggs, who was economically worse off than he had been before his slaves ran away. Even so, Senator Dodge proudly cited this case in Congress, calling it proof that Iowa courts would compensate slaveholders who had been

¹¹⁶ Frazee, *Fugitive Slave Case*, 23.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

wronged by abolitionists.¹¹⁸ Iowans may have wanted to create a white state and avoid the slavery issue altogether, but it had helped them make the national news.

Around the same time, a new black community emerged nearly two hundred miles away in northeastern Iowa. The “Fayette mulattoes” were a clan of about eighty African Americans given their name by whites in Fayette County. Although classified as black, they also claimed white, Native American and even East Indian ancestry; one local white distinguished them from other African Americans by saying that “their features are much more regular than the African with whom we are familiar, and they were more progressive, more intelligent, and much more industrious and frugal.” The clan originated with the Bass family of North Carolina, which had been part of the free landowning black elite since before the Revolution. When the racial climate worsened for free blacks in the early 19th century, the family migrated west to Indiana and then Illinois.¹¹⁹

By 1850 the colony needed more farmland, so patriarch Sion Bass, Jr. decided to relocate. A white minister and friend named David Watrous told Bass that land was available for purchase from the government in Fayette County, and after several members of the group traveled there to verify this, they immediately sent for the rest. By 1856, more than fifty people had settled on ten plots in Westfield Township; an area that had no blacks at all in 1850 had the state’s fifth-largest black community by 1860. They were actually part of a larger wave of

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 34-37, 39-40; Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” 364-65; Pelzer, *August Caesar Dodge*, 146.

¹¹⁹ Dykstra, “Dr. Emerson’s Sam,” 79-80; *Past and Present of Fayette County, Iowa I* (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Co., 1910), 131-32; Vincent, *Southern Seed, Northern Soil*, 14-19, 26-45; Thomas Draper Peterman, *Historical Sketches of Fayette County, Iowa, in the Forties and Fifties* (Ford Dodge, 1916), 77, 80; Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana*, 32-33; Frances Hawthorne, *African Americans in Iowa: A Chronicle of Contributions, 1830-1992* (Des Moines: Iowa Civil Rights Commission, 1995), 8.

migration into Fayette County, which before the 1850s had been largely unsettled by whites as well. Like their white neighbors, every family in the colony began raising cattle and corn; Sion Bass served as the blacksmith.¹²⁰

Some of those neighbors did not appreciate the blacks' presence and held meetings to discuss driving them out, but since they had unquestionable title to their land, this could be accomplished only by force, which did not happen. Whites may have been calmed by the fact that the colony seemingly had no interest in integration. Being independent farmers rather than entrepreneurs, laborers or domestic servants, they had less need for interaction with whites than did African Americans elsewhere in the state. They also began creating their own separate institutions. A brick building served as both school and church, and after local whites refused to integrate the town cemetery to bury a man killed in a cave-in, the colonists built Stonehouse Cemetery on their own land.¹²¹

The irony is that this was one of the only black cemeteries ever established in Iowa, even though its owners had little interest in racial uplift through independent black institutions. Over time, they earned a grudging respect from whites by working hard and keeping to themselves. It was later said that none of them ever spent time in the poor house or prison or "troubled" the courts with litigation, which could be another way of saying that they did not try to assert their civil rights. Aside from their relationship with Father Watrous, their only meaningful interaction

¹²⁰ Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam," 80-81; Peterman, *Historical Sketches of Fayette County*, 62-66, 77, 79; "Message Clear to Blacks in Early Iowa: Go Away," *Des Moines Register*, 28 April 1996; Hawthorne, *African Americans in Iowa*, 8; *Plat Book of Fayette County, Iowa* (Philadelphia: Union Publishing Co., 1896), 15; *Past and Present of Fayette County*, 131; *The History of Fayette County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1878), 516-17; 1850 U.S. Census; 1860 U.S. Census.

¹²¹ Peterman, *Historical Sketches of Fayette County*, 33, 77-78; Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam," 81; Hawthorne, *African Americans in Iowa*, 8; *Past and Present of Fayette County*, 131-32. More than 30 of the 160 people interred at what is now called the Fayette County African American Cemetery have the surname of Bass. Connie L. Ellis, "Pleasant Hill Cemetery," UNC, AAHMCCI, Counties-Fayette.

with local whites occurred when one began teaching some of the older settlers to read and write. The distance between them and other black communities, both physically and psychologically, was considerable. While most other black Iowans lived in Mississippi River towns, southeastern Iowa, and eventually interior cities with railroad connections, making communication and movement comparatively easy, the Fayette mulattoes farmed on what amounted to a large communal plot of land in what is still an isolated part of the state.¹²² Over the next fifty years their distance, the demands of farm life, and their sense of being different kept them separated from other black Iowans, and they did not take part in any of the statewide struggles for civil rights. They were a unique kind of mixed-race gentry, although not an elite one, since few were wealthy or literate.¹²³ In North Carolina they had distanced themselves from other African Americans by their mixed ancestry, free status, and property ownership; in northeastern Iowa, their isolation did it for them.

The Fayette mulattoes may have been disconnected from larger race-related issues, but most other Iowans were not. In the last ten years before the Civil War, the national crisis over slavery transformed Iowa politics in numerous ways. There seemed to be little sign of this change at the beginning of the decade, when most Iowans enthusiastically supported the controversial Compromise of 1850. Most believed that it had settled the slavery question forever,

¹²² Peterman, *Historical Sketches of Fayette County*, 79-80. "They have been prosperous and generally inclined not to intermingle, but have kept to themselves." With little influx of new black settlers, and with hardly any intermarriage with local whites, many of the Fayette mulattoes moved elsewhere to form families or simply died away; by 1916, some families had "become almost extinct." *Past and Present of Fayette County*, 132; "Stepps and Dixons," unidentified document, AAHMCCI, Bios "S"; Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam," 81; Veryl Sanderson, "Blacks Successful with Livestock, Melons," 5 September 1971, UNC, AAHMCCI, Vertical Files, Bios "S." For a present-day discussion of this area, see Stephen G. Bloom, *Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America* (Harvest, 2001).

¹²³ Peterman, *Historical Sketches of Fayette County*, 78-79; 1850 U.S. Census.

and even those who opposed its fugitive slave provision believed that, as one Muscatine newspaper put it, “Every good citizen should overlook the little of evil that may result, and be satisfied with the vast amount of good to flow from a definite and permanent adjustment of questions which have always proved too much for American equanimity.”¹²⁴

The momentum from the Compromise enabled the Democratic-dominated legislature to finally make good on an old threat. In 1851, it passed a total ban on black settlement. Those who already lived in Iowa could stay, but any African American who entered the state thereafter would be arrested and fined two dollars each day until they left. This was the first such law passed by a northern state in the nineteenth century, although others quickly followed suit.¹²⁵ The editor of the *Mount Pleasant True Democrat* (which had the responsibility of printing the state’s legislative acts), though, declared this act “a legislative monstrosity” and refused to print it, believing that state laws did not go into effect if they were not published.¹²⁶

It seemed that things could not get any worse for black Iowans. The old racist laws had been made even more restrictive, and whites had again chosen national peace over civil rights. A liberal shift began in 1854, though, when the Kansas-Nebraska Act allowed Nebraska to decide

¹²⁴ *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., 1086-86, 1333, Appendix 910, 1716, quoted in Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 300-02; *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 2 sess., Appendix 311, quoted in Morton M. Rosenberg, “Iowa Politics and the Compromise of 1850,” *Iowa Journal of History* 56 (1958): 193-95, 197-99, 201-06; Pelzer, *August Caesar Dodge*, 143-45; Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War: A Decade of Frontier Politics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 35-37, 40-42, 45-50, 52; Ansel Briggs, “Second Biennial Message,” 3 December 1850, reprinted in Shambaugh, ed., *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa I* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1903), 409-410; Erik McKinley Eriksson, “William Penn Clarke,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 25 (1927): 39-61; *History of Henry County* (1879), 450.

¹²⁵ *Acts, Resolutions and Memorials Passed at the Regular Session of the Third General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Iowa City: Palmer & Paul, 1851), 600-01; Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 15; “Monthly Record of Current Events,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 2 (December 1850-May 1851); Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 2. Absolute exclusion laws passed in New Jersey and Massachusetts in the 1780s had been repealed in 1798 and 1834, respectively. This was not simply part of an overall wave of conservative feeling; the same legislature liberalized state policies regarding white women’s property ownership, child custody rights and ability to make contracts. Dykstra, “The Issue Squarely Met,” 431; *Code of 1851*, ch. 84, sec. 1447, 1448, 1450, 1454, 1456, 1462, quoted in Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 73.

¹²⁶ (Des Moines) *Iowa State Register*, 21 January 1863, quoted in Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 15.

whether it would be slave or free. Senator Dodge had believed that most Iowans would accept the unpleasantness of slavery's expansion in exchange for the economic benefits of opening white settlement in Nebraska, which would bring railroads through their own state, but this proved to be a gross miscalculation.¹²⁷ A growing number of people saw the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, which had long been viewed as almost sacred, as a sign that the federal government was controlled by a decadent slaveocracy determined to "impose its immoral and backward institution on the rest of the country." In theory, the new policy meant that Minnesota and even federally owned lands in northwestern Iowa could be opened up to slavery; although this was implausible, it nonetheless touched a nerve in a state that had long wanted to be free of the slavery issue. They had always thought that although the institution might expand in the South, it would never enter the North so long as they respected southerners' property rights, but now they found themselves in danger of being surrounded by slave states. As a result, many more of them were willing to "set aside fine points of constitutionality and listen more sympathetically to the arguments of native antislavery advocates."¹²⁸

Opposition to Kansas-Nebraska gradually helped nurture more liberal views on racial issues. Although some politicians criticized recent events on Free Soil grounds (the legislature, for example, passed a resolution in support of colonization), others came to believe that African Americans were entitled to the same rights to freedom of movement and testifying in court, if not

¹²⁷ Rosenberg, *Iowa On the Eve of the Civil War*, 79-83, 86; Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 10-11; Cook, *Baptism of Fire* (1994), 45; Pelzer, *Augustus Caesar Dodge*, 189-94; Connor, "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa," 369-70; Herriott, "James W. Grimes Versus the Southrons," *Annals of Iowa* 15 (1926): 340.

¹²⁸ Rosenberg, *Iowa On the Eve of the Civil War*, 83-87; Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 14-25; Cook, "The Political Culture of Antebellum Iowa," 247-48; Nieman, *Promises to Keep*, 42; Silbey, "Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa," 309-10; Connor, "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa," 370-71; Pelzer, "The Origin and Organization of the Republican Party in Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 4 (1906): 488.

suffrage.¹²⁹ The abolitionist movement continued to grow, most noticeably in a new community in central Iowa. The town of Grinnell was founded in 1854 by Rev. Josiah Bushnell Grinnell as a “morally righteous community bounded together by common ideals.” A New York native who had once led an integrated church and helped raise funds for the *Amistad* rebels, Grinnell combined religious zeal, politics, social activism, and capitalism. Alcohol was banned, and Grinnell’s own house had a “liberty chamber” where he hid fugitive slaves, but he also retained one-quarter of the town’s land for his own private development and was elected to the state senate.¹³⁰ Other Iowans took an even more direct role in the struggle against slavery, traveling to “Bleeding Kansas” to take part in the fighting against proslavery settlers or providing assistance to those who did.¹³¹

Most people were still not quite this radical, but Kansas-Nebraska drove enough of them from the Democratic Party that James Grimes was elected Iowa’s first Whig governor in 1854. Grimes toned down his own antislavery attitudes during the campaign, stating that he only wanted to prevent the institution from expanding into “soil now consecrated to freedom.” This helped attract voters like Shade Burleson, who had believed that Grimes was an “avowed abolitionist” and opposed his candidacy until hearing him speak; afterwards, Burleson

¹²⁹ *Acts, Resolutions and Memorials Passed at the Regular Session of the Fifth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Iowa City: D.A. Mahoney & J.B. Dorr, 1855), 190; Nieman, *Promises to Keep*, 43.

¹³⁰ Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” 374-75; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Underground Railroad* (Part 4 of 5), 132; Lucas, “Grinnell Anti-Abolitionist Riot,” 14; Anne C. Rose, *Victorian America and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 76; Charles E. Payne, *Josiah Bushnell Grinnell* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1938), 12-15, 20, 22-23; Van Ek, “Underground Railroad in Iowa,” 132.

¹³¹ Cyrus Clay Carpenter, “Slavery and Freedom” (unidentified speech, 1859), Cyrus Clay Carpenter Papers, Box 20, SHSI-IC; Dykstra, “The Know Nothings Nobody Knows: Political Nativists in Antebellum Iowa,” *Annals of Iowa* 53 (1994): 16-19, 22-23; Ronald Matthias, “The Know Nothings in Iowa: Opportunity and Frustration in Antebellum Politics,” *Annals of Iowa* 53 (1994): 28; Hawley, “Attitude of the Jasper Colony,” 192; *Burlington Daily Hawk-Eye and Telegraph*, 9 April 1856, quoted in Pelzer, “Origin of Republican Party in Iowa,” 493-95, 509, 512-13, 518-19, 523; Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War*, 128-31, 138-40; (Burlington) *Iowa State Gazette*, 18 October 1856, quoted in Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 312; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 58-59, 62; Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 43, 119; *History of Henry County* (1879), 450; *Portrait and Biographical Album of Henry County*, 337-38; *The History of Marion County, Iowa* (Des Moines: Union Historical Company, 1881), 458.

approached the platform and said, “By thunder, Grimes, if that’s abolitionism, I’ve been one all the time, and I’m such a fool that I did not know it.”¹³² The Whigs also took control of the state legislature and ended Augustus Dodge’s long tenure in the Senate.¹³³ This massive political shift continued a year later when the Whig Party was replaced locally and nationally by the new Republican Party, although the old stance of denying racial equality and opposing slavery primarily on Free Soil grounds continued.¹³⁴ It still remained to be seen if this turn of events would bring about new freedom or opportunities for black Iowans.

One positive change came in 1855, when there was another fugitive slave controversy in the southeastern part of the state. A large middle-aged man remembered only as Dick escaped from bondage in Missouri with help from Burlington abolitionist Dr. Edwin James, who was already famous for being the first white man to climb Pike’s Peak. When the two crossed into Illinois, agents of Dick’s master captured them, even though Dick was carrying an old pistol and “intended to make a desperate fight for his liberty.” They all returned to Burlington, where they were met by a crowd of proslavery townspeople and a second group that sided with Dick because

¹³² Aurner, *Leading Events in Johnson County Iowa History*, vol. 2 (1912), 260-61; (*Des Moines*) *Iowa Citizen*, 14 September 1859, quoted in Dan Elbert Clark, *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1917), 76, 86, 173-74; Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War*, 29-31, 90-93, 95-97, 108, 118-21; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 1, 274-75; Dykstra, “Know Nothings,” 8-9; Cook, “The Political Culture of Antebellum Iowa,” 246; Eriksson, “William Penn Clarke,” 45; Matthias, “The Know Nothings in Iowa,” 26, 31, 34-36; Charles Wilson Emery, “The Iowa Germans in the Election of 1860,” *Annals of Iowa* 22 (1940): 422-25; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 46-47, 57; William Salter, *The Life of James Grimes, with His Collected Correspondence* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1876), quoted in Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” 372-74; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 311; “Sen. Grimes Was Congregationalist,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 17 November 1963; Herriott, “James W. Grimes Versus the Southrons,” 352; *Jackson County History* (1942), 57-58.

¹³³ Grimes actually won by only 2,000 votes, and his victory was also based on his endorsement of a homestead law and regulated banks. Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 49; Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War*, 98-102, 105-06, 109-114; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 311-12; Dykstra, “Know Nothings,” 8; Clark, *The Politics of Iowa*, 4.

¹³⁴ Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 53; Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War*, 128-29; Herriott, “Whence Came the Pioneers?,” 371, quoted in Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 312; *Muscatine Journal*, 14 January 1856, quoted in Pelzer, “Origin of Republican Party in Iowa,” 499-500.

“the sight of a victim of the system, seized by a couple of voluntary bloodhounds while seeking to escape from bondage, stirred [their] blood.”¹³⁵ Although the first group had custody of Dick and therefore held the upper hand, they agreed to let the legal system decide his fate, possibly expecting the same favorable outcome that Ruel Daggs had gotten a few years earlier.

Their case immediately got off to a bad start, though, when David Rorer decided to represent Dick. The case was more factually similar to *Daggs* than *Ralph*, but it may be that recent national controversies over slavery had radicalized his views. The case got even stranger when the slaveholder’s son took the witness stand and admitted that he had never seen Dick before. Apparently his father was seeking another slave of a similar description who had fled from Missouri around the same time, which was not improbable given the large number of fugitives passing through Iowa during the 1850s, and the young man apparently did not realize that since the Fugitive Slave Act prevented Dick from testifying he could have lied and taken the fugitive anyway.¹³⁶ The judge gave him his freedom (and his pistol), and he was escorted to a ferry by a crowd of cheering whites, never to be seen again.

Three years later, a “very personable, light complexioned woman” named Sophia escaped from her master William Tull and went to Mount Pleasant. Tull and two of his friends followed her there, but when they saw “threatening activity generating among the townspeople,” they decided to leave without her and spend the night in Salem. The people of Salem, though, forced

¹³⁵ Governor James Grimes to Elizabeth Grimes, 27 June 1855, reprinted in Salter, *The Life of James W. Grimes*, 72-73, quoted in Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 17-18; Frazee, “The Iowa Fugitive Slave Case,” *Annals of Iowa* 4 (1899): 118, 125-28, 133; “Underground Station for Slaves, on the Old Rock Springs Road,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 24 June 1928; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 65.

¹³⁶ Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 18; Frazee, “The Iowa Fugitive Slave Case,” 132-33. Conservatives continued to rail against abolitionists even as statewide attitudes about them changed. In 1857, for example, the *Fort Madison Plaindealer* complained that the people of Denmark “occasionally engage in negro-stealing, at the same time professing the religion of the gospel. Men of less shrewdness have been hanged – have received their just desserts – for engaging in the practices of which respectable citizens of Denmark have been accused.” *Fort Madison Plain Dealer*, 27 May 1857.

them from their hotel room and took them to the jail in Mount Pleasant, where the residents “swarmed around the jail like infuriated bees,” leading the sheriff to post a heavy guard and arm the prisoners with wooden table legs in case the jail was breached. They were eventually charged with conspiracy to commit kidnapping, but an implicit compromise was made: the charges were dropped and Tull and his friends went home, but Sophia remained a free woman.¹³⁷

These decisions further showed Iowans’ changing attitudes on the issue of slavery. During Dick’s trial, Governor Grimes had stated that he would “do nothing in aid of the claimant, and would and could prevent State officials from affording assistance,” while the judge later recalled that many townspeople, who felt “intruded upon by the southern system,” would not have allowed the Missourians to leave with Dick regardless of the case’s legal outcome.¹³⁸ The Sophia matter evinced these changes even more dramatically; less than ten years earlier Ruel Daggs had won a lawsuit against the people of Salem for virtually the same behavior, but this time the slaveholder found himself, not the fugitive or her supporters, in the clutches of the legal system.

Another sign of the changing atmosphere came in 1856 when the legislature repealed the 20-year old ban against African Americans testifying in court. This was the first time in state history that a racial law was modified *in favor* of African Americans.¹³⁹ Many Iowans also joined

¹³⁷ Deatrck, “Runaway Slaves Caused Strife between Missouri and Iowa,” *Keokuk Gate City and Constitution*, 17 February 1953.

¹³⁸ Grimes to Grimes, 27 June 1855, quoted in Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 18; Frazee, “The Iowa Fugitive Slave Case,” 130-31, 133-34, 136; Antrobus, *History of Des Moines County I* (1915), 407; McPartland, “In June, 1855, City in Uproar over Slavery Trials,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 26 December 1968; Cyrus W. Carpenter, “James W. Grimes, Governor and Senator,” *Annals of Iowa* 1: 130-34, quoted in WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Underground Railroad* (Part 2 of 5), 70; “Sen. Grimes Was Congregationalist.”

¹³⁹ *Acts, Resolutions and Memorials Passed at the Regular Session of the Regular Session of the Sixth General Assembly of the State of Iowa, Which Convened at the Capitol in Iowa City, on the First Day of December, A.D. 1856* (Iowa City: P. Moriarty, 1857), 325-26. This was part of a broader wave of slow-moving liberalism among Midwestern Republicans; GOP leaders in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois supported similar laws in their states, and that

black and white northerners around the country in opposing the Dred Scott decision a year later, although their main concern was the desire to keep slavery out of the North, not sympathy for blacks.¹⁴⁰ Even so, this national controversy had direct bearing on the life of at least one black Iowan. In Bradford, Fayette County, an unnamed black man sued a white neighbor for stealing his watch. The evidence clearly showed the white man's guilt, but the judge was a staunch white supremacist and champion of *Dred Scott*. Knowing these sympathies, the defendant's lawyer moved for dismissal on the grounds that under the law the plaintiff had no right to sue a white person. The judge said, though, "That may be good politics, but Dred Scott decision or no Dred Scott decision, this nigger's going to have his watch."¹⁴¹

Although African Americans apparently had the right to recover stolen watches, they were still barred from voting, attending public schools, holding public office, or settling in the state at all. Many of their white neighbors had changed their views on slavery, but the notion of a multiracial society with equal citizenship for all was still unthinkable. The Colonization Society of Iowa, for example, declared that "it is only from wild and deluded fanaticism that any attempt or any effort to make [blacks] morally, socially, and politically equal to the white population, can

same year the Iowa legislature also approved the return of a band of Mesquakie Native Americans to Tama County. Nieman, *Promises to Keep*, 44; *Acts, Resolutions and Memorials Passed at the Extra Session of the Fifth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Iowa City: P. Moriarty, 1856), 274.

¹⁴⁰ Joint Resolution 12, *Acts of the Seventh General Assembly*, 1858, quoted in Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 95; Louis Pelzer, "The Negro and Slavery in Early Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 2 (1904): 482; Carpenter, "Slavery and Freedom"; Samuel J. Kirkwood to Aaron Brown, 21 March 1857, Samuel Kirkwood Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, SHSI-IC. Benjamin Gue later wrote that "this vital issue was revolutionizing parties, dividing churches and even families; every neighborhood was aroused to earnest discussion of the absorbing topic." Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 1, 361-65.

¹⁴¹ Peterman, *Historical Sketches of Fayette County*, 78.

emanate,” and the state legislature considered bills encouraging blacks to immigrate to Liberia.¹⁴²

Another opportunity for change came in 1857 when white political leaders met to write a new state constitution.¹⁴³ Although blacks were not directly represented at the constitutional convention, their cause would be taken up by liberals such as William Penn Clarke of Iowa City, J.A. Parvin and Rufus L.B. Clarke of Muscatine, and several Henry County delegates. Their primary opponents were J.C. Hall of Burlington, a staunch supporter of colonization, and Ottumwa’s George Gillaspay, a Kentucky native whose incendiary comments at the convention would be the most visceral manifestation of its racial animus.¹⁴⁴ In large part because of Gillaspay, the delegates, who had come to discuss banking laws, spent most of their time on racial issues.

The debates over the rights of African Americans focused on three specific issues: black testimony in court, access to public schools, and voting rights. The education issue (which will be further discussed in Chapter IV) was a hotly contested but partial victory, with the school system opened up to blacks on a segregated basis. The testimony issue proceeded in a similar fashion. Rufus Clarke proposed a constitutional provision recognizing blacks’ right to testify in

¹⁴² *Annual Report of the Colonization Society of the State of Iowa, with the Proceedings of the Second Anniversary, in the Capitol, January 23, 1857* (Iowa City: Sylvester, Harrison & Brother, 1857), 5-14; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 313.

¹⁴³ *Annual Report of the Colonization Society*, 5-14; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 313. The call for a new constitution was made possible by Grimes’ election and motivated by Republican desires to remove the old Democratic ban against banks of issue, provide for the popular election of supreme court justices, and change the infrastructure of the state and local governments. Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 75, 77-78; Dykstra and Hahn, “Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage,” 7; *The Debates of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Iowa, Assembled at Iowa City, Monday, January 19, 1857 I* (Davenport: Luse, Lane & Co., 1857), ii.

¹⁴⁴ Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 313-314; *Pioneer Law-Maker’s Association of Iowa, Reunion of 1898* (Des Moines: F.R. Conaway, 1898), 34-36; Erbe, “Constitutional Provisions,” 185-87, 189; Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 86-88; *Annual Report of the Colonization Society* (1857), 4, 10; Shambaugh, *The Constitutions of Iowa*, 244-45; Swisher, “Constitution Making in 1857,” *Annals of Iowa* 7 (1926): 84. Technically, Gillaspay served as Ottumwa’s first board president in 1851; the town did not have a mayor until it was incorporated in 1857. Harrison L. Waterman, ed., *History of Wapello County, Iowa I* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1914), 118.

court, thus making permanent the state legislature's recent law just in case the Democrats ever regained political power. Even Clarke (who had already endorsed black suffrage and equal rights under the law) felt compelled to publicly affirm his belief in white supremacy, stating that "there is probably no man who has a greater repugnance naturally to that race than I have" and that he did not want to encourage black migration into Iowa, only to create a constitution that did not recognize "any difference in the classes of men."¹⁴⁵ Other delegates pointed out that whites might need blacks to testify on their behalf, while John Clarke of Allamakee County accused the Democrats of using race baiting as a substitute for intelligent discourse and argued that the status of African Americans was not their fault:

"It is true, that we find that the negro in this country, as a general thing, is degraded, but I think I can show from the history of the country that that degradation is owing, not to any defect in his nature, but to the unnatural position which, through generations the negro race has been compelled to occupy in the world... [There] was a time when this same race was on a level with the rest of mankind, and when, in fact, they excelled in the arts and sciences. For some reasons, after this period, the Christian world became the vultures that preyed upon the flesh and sinews of this race of people, and traders repaired to the coast of Africa, and with their gold and silver stirred up the different tribes to intestine wars, for the purpose of securing captives – and this has gone on from generation to generation, so that... it is no wonder that you find the African the ignorant and degraded being that he is. But you may take the history of any other people in the world where they have been oppressed and ground down for ages, and you will find that the same results will follow... The question arises here now, whether we, who profess to be free, and declare that all men are created free and equal, shall extend freedom to this down-trodden class among us, or whether we shall help to crush out the last lingering, remaining principle of intelligence and integrity, which now remains in their bosoms... While we cast reproaches and stigmas upon the black man, we ourselves are slaves to the very worst principles that ever emanated from the breast of man."¹⁴⁶

After further discussion, it was pointed out that three weeks had passed and the delegates had not even written a Bill of Rights, so the question was called. Rufus Clarke's proposal passed

¹⁴⁵ *Debates of the Constitutional Convention*, vol. 1 (1857), 80, 129-30; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 84-85; Shambaugh, *The Constitutions of Iowa*, 246-47; Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 88.

¹⁴⁶ *Debates of the Constitutional Convention*, vol. 1 (1857), 172-75, 178-79, 181-83, 191-92.

18-14 along strict party lines, and African Americans' right to testify in court was now protected by the constitution. These events received a great deal of attention around the state. Nearly two hundred residents of Muscatine, black and white, somehow came to believe that the convention had banned black testimony and property ownership and sent a petition in protest; the *Dubuque Herald*, on the other hand, complained that the delegates would next blacks and Native Americans to "acquire citizenship with all the rights of the whites...to court white daughters and have white wives."¹⁴⁷ Even those who had voted in favor of the testimony clause shared this opposition to social equality and intermarriage and worried that black migration would lead to both; their ballots reflected a desire to protect the rights of African Americans already living in Iowa without encouraging others to come in.

The delegates also discussed, and rejected, a proposal to admit blacks into the state militia, with both the liberals who supported it and the conservatives who carried the issue fully aware that militia service gave African Americans a strong claim to equal citizenship.¹⁴⁸ The issue of black suffrage proved far more controversial. On February 4, J.A. Parvin presented a petition signed by thirty-two Muscatine blacks calling for equal voting rights. A subcommittee was formed to discuss the issue and released its report three weeks later.¹⁴⁹ The three Republican members recommended that when the new constitution was presented to the voters for ratification, they should also be asked to decide via referendum if all racial restrictions should be removed. This politically savvy idea was consistent with democratic principles but also saved the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 200, 209, 395, 676; *Dubuque Express and Herald*, 24 December 1856, quoted in Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 340.

¹⁴⁸ *Journal of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Iowa* (Muscatine: John Mahin, 1857), 232; *Debates of the Constitutional Convention I* (1857), 641-42; Shambaugh, *The Constitutions of Iowa*, 249-50.

¹⁴⁹ The committee consisted of Republicans Harvey Skiff of Jasper County, Rufus Clark, and Albert Marvin of Monticello County, along with Democrats J.C. Hall and Daniel W. Price of Council Bluffs. *Debates of the Constitutional Convention*, vol. 1 (1857), 216-19; *Journal of the Constitutional Convention* (1857), 119; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 85; Erbe, "Constitutional Provisions," 187.

delegates from having to take a stand on the issue, since supporting black suffrage would have been political suicide for many of them, and they no doubt believed that it had no chance to pass anyway. The Democrats' minority report, on the other hand, did not believe that the issue was even worth submitting to the voters, but it nonetheless repeated almost verbatim the "train of evils" statement from the 1844 convention, which had declared that black suffrage would lead to race mixing and race war and eventually destroy Iowa.¹⁵⁰

A fierce, partisan and racially charged debate then ensued. Republicans accused their opponents of betraying the spirit of the Revolution for the sake of the "slave interests of the South," while Democrats accused the "Black Republicans" of wanting to create social equality. Although one delegate cited the Muscatine petition as proof that African Americans were capable of exercising the rights of citizenship, most Republicans who supported the referendum idea did so from a standpoint of white supremacy. Rufus Clarke declared that he simply thought that such an important decision should be decided by the people (although he also expressed a desire for "a constitution for the whole people without any distinction of men"), while George Ells of Davenport promised that southern blacks would not move to Iowa even with suffrage reform because they found the climate and the people too inhospitable. Although he had the same racial prejudice as most white people, Ells continued, he always forgot about it when in the presence of "an intelligent being," which may have been an indirect reference to the deferential black elite of his home city. Others built on this idea by theorizing that black suffrage would not create any significant political change given Iowa's small black population. David Bunker, for

¹⁵⁰ *Debates of the Constitutional Convention*, vol. 1 (1857), 598-640; *Debates of the Constitutional Convention*, vol. 2 (1857), 649-51; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 85; *Pioneer Law-Maker's Association Reunion of 1898*, 34; Erbe, "Constitutional Provisions," 202; Shambaugh, *The Constitutions of Iowa*, 241-43; *Journal of the Constitutional Convention* (1857), 239-44.

example, had been opposed to black suffrage until the debates led him to view the referendum as an opportunity for progressive change that ultimately had no real consequence; “we would be in far greater danger of sapping the principles of civil liberty,” he declared, “than we would by allowing the few negroes who may be in the State the privilege of voting at our elections.”¹⁵¹ In response, Democrats brought out the usual specter of black migration, race mixing and societal collapse.¹⁵² The debate had become a proxy referendum on slavery, sectional tension, and the meaning, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship in Iowa.

The convention seemed hopelessly deadlocked on the issue until Republican James F. Wilson offered a compromise. The proposed referendum would pass, he suggested, only if it received at least as many votes as the constitution itself; a simple majority would not suffice. Now that there was virtually no chance that blacks would win the right to vote, moderate and conservative Republicans acquiesced – one declared that “I know of no better way to get rid of [the issue], than by submitting it to the people” – and Wilson’s proposal passed along strict party lines.¹⁵³ Although the convention had now rejected integrated schools, kept the state militia all-white, and effectively prevented black suffrage, they also rejected a constitutional ban on black migration (borrowed from a recently passed Indiana statute); there was of course already a state law to that effect, but as people would discover in a few years, it was much easier to strike down a racist law via the courts or the legislature than a constitutional amendment.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Immediately after his speech, D.P. Palmer of Davis County sarcastically congratulated Bunker on his “conversion to abolitionism.” *Debates of the Constitutional Convention*, vol. 2 (1857), 888-901, 904, 911-12.

¹⁵² *Debates of the Constitutional Convention*, vol. 2 (1857), 651, 663-70, 674, 680-86, 689-92, 685-717; Erbe, “Constitutional Provisions,” 189-93, 195, 201; Shambaugh, *The Constitutions of Iowa*, 240-42, 245; *Pioneer Law-Maker’s Association Reunion of 1898*, 35; Swisher, “Constitution Making in 1857,” 84.

¹⁵³ Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 87; *Debates of the Constitutional Convention*, vol. 2 (1857), 912-13, 915-17.

¹⁵⁴ *Debates of the Constitutional Convention*, vol. 2 (1857), 913; *Journal of the Constitutional Convention* (1857), 320-21; Erbe, “Constitutional Provisions,” 203.

Before he went home, Clarke made one last statement in favor of racial justice, declaring “I have stood up here battling for the rights of a small class, and asking that justice should be done them. If I knew that there was but one colored man in the state, and that not another one could come into it, I would argue and vote just as strongly against this word ‘white’ in the constitution, as I do now.”¹⁵⁵ Most people around the state, though, did not agree. Democrats made the referendum, black schools, and black court testimony the central issue of the 1857 statewide elections, where voters would decide whether or not to ratify the new constitution. Playing on racial fears to drum up opposition to both the constitution and the GOP, Democratic leaders like the editor of the *Dubuque Express and Herald* declared that the new constitution would encourage black migration and “establish an equality of position between the white and black races.” Ultimately, it was ratified by less than 3,000 votes, even though 69% of the voters had supported the convention in the first place; they wanted a new constitution, but without racial reforms.¹⁵⁶

These sentiments were also reflected in the spectacular failure of the suffrage referendum, which received 8,489 votes in favor but 49,387 against.¹⁵⁷ With many Republican leaders joining the Democrats in opposing black suffrage, it was rejected in both conservative strongholds and liberal centers, and only two counties – predominantly Scandinavian Mitchell in

¹⁵⁵ *Debates of the Constitutional Convention*, vol. 2 (1857), 1006-08, 1020, 1035, 1056-59.

¹⁵⁶ Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 1, 352; C.C. Nourse, “Iowa and the Centennial,” 7 September 1876 (Des Moines: Iowa State Register, 1876), 22; *Dubuque Express and Herald*, 15 July 1857, quoted in Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 340; (McGregor) *North Iowa Times*, 24 July 1857, quoted in Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 91; Erbe, “Constitutional Provisions,” 206. Voting took place along partisan lines; the same areas of the state that had remained loyal to the Democrats in the 1856 elections also strongly opposed the new constitution but were outnumbered by the Republicans. Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War*, 154-57, 161. James Cook argues that a narrow majority of voters could accept the black testimony provision on the grounds that it benefited whites too, although this does not explain the liberalization of the education system. Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 92-94.

¹⁵⁷ Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 314; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 93. In Pottawattamie County, for example, it failed 7 to 257. D.C. Bloomer, “Notes on the History of Pottawattamie County,” *Annals of Iowa* (No. 5),” *Annals of Iowa* 10 (July 1872): 182.

the far north and Quaker-dominated Cedar County in the southeast – supported it. The only positive sign came in the Fayette County town of West Union, where a Republican was elected county judge despite his claim that the Fayette mulattoes proved that African Americans were capable of becoming good citizens. Word of the defeat reached as far east as Massachusetts, where at a convention of black community leaders Charles Remond called for open slave rebellion, stating that the “treatment of the colored race in Iowa” was proof that the political system was a useless tool for reform.¹⁵⁸ Black Iowans themselves might have taken comfort in the words of white politician John Edwards, who during the convention had stated “The unfortunate colored man, who was stolen from his native land, and is now suffering under the yoke of oppression and bondage, will some day receive justice.”¹⁵⁹

Although Iowans overwhelmingly rejected civil rights for African Americans, they continued to grow more radical on the issue of slavery during the last four years of the antebellum period. In the aforementioned 1857 elections, growing anger over proslavery attacks in Kansas and the Fugitive Slave Act helped the Republicans gain even greater control of state politics, even with a national depression and electoral grumblings over the new constitution.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ *History of Johnson County* (1883), 192-93; *History of Polk County* (1880), 491; Harris, “A Frontier Community,” 473; Dykstra and Hahn, “Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage,” 7-8; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 88-93; “A Public Discussion of Insurrection, 1858,” State Convention of Massachusetts Negroes, in Marcus D. Pohlmann, ed., *African American Political Thought, Volume 1, Confrontation vs. Compromise: The Colonial Period to 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 152.

¹⁵⁹ *Debates of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Iowa*, vol. 2, 682.

¹⁶⁰ Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 172; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 316; Dykstra, “Know Nothings,” 23; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 1, 370; Carpenter, “Slavery and Freedom”; Emery, “Iowa Germans in the Election of 1860,” 424-25, 434-38, 441-44, 450-51; Lathrop, *Life and Times of Samuel J. Kirkwood*, 71; Pelzer, *Augustus Caesar Dodge*, 240-41; *Autobiography of James B. Weaver*, quoted in Clark, *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood*, 136, 143. Like the Democrats, the Republicans played on racial tensions to attack their opponents, charging Cass with being a “tool of the South” who wanted to reopen the slave trade while keeping Europeans out of the country. Pelzer, “History of Political Parties in Iowa, 1857-1860,” 196, quoted in Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War*, 165-68, 173, 182, 184-89, 191-93, 195-96.

Democratic leader Henry Clay Dean bemoaned the fact that in a free state with few blacks, “The negro question, with which we have legitimately nothing under the Heavens to do,” had cost his party so dearly.¹⁶¹ Republicans were still far too timid on racial issues to support any real change, but their dominance would lead to significant reforms during and after the Civil War.

Controversies over slavery and race during the 1850s helped create a political dynasty that was finally willing to support some measures of equal citizenship ten years later.

The 1859 John Brown controversy further shows this connection between slavery, race and politics, along with the continued activism of black Iowans even in the face of strong opposition. Brown enjoyed close ties to Iowa, which was near not only to the battlegrounds of Kansas and Nebraska but also the railway hub of Chicago.¹⁶² He frequently took refuge in the western village of Tabor, the eastern Quaker settlement of Springdale, and the central town of Grinnell. Although some residents disapproved of his violent methods, others stored weapons and allowed him to use their property as a training ground.¹⁶³ There were also four Iowans who chose to take the most direct role possible in Brown’s antislavery crusade: Jeremiah Anderson, Stewart Taylor, and Edwin and Barclay Coppoc, two adventurous brothers barely out of their teenage years who had been raised in the Quaker faith and shared its views on slavery but not on

¹⁶¹ Edward Younger, *John A. Kasson: Politics and Diplomacy from Lincoln to McKinley*, 79, quoted in Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War*, 31-33, 161, 178-79, 203, 206; Emery, “Iowa Germans in the Election of 1860,” 433, 446; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 317.

¹⁶² For examples of some of the more fantastic stories about John Brown in Iowa, see *History of Polk County* (1880), 523; Albert D. Richardson, “Free Missouri,” *Atlantic Monthly* 21 (April 1868): 498; *A Pictorial History of Southeast Polk County, Iowa: A Community of Communities* (Marceline, MO: Walsworth Publishing Co., 1981), 145.

¹⁶³ Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 1, 373-83; David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 246, 286-87; *Tipton Advertiser*, 1 July 1897, 3 June 1898, 8 March 1907; *History of Johnson County* (1883), 467; Berrier, “The Underground Railroad in Iowa,” *The Scene*, 55-56. A Des Moines newspaper article charged that Rev. Grinnell was personally responsible for “stealing” \$37,000 worth of slaves. “Bomb Shell among the Grinnellites – A Full and Complete History of Their Negro-Stealing Operations by a Citizen – How They Flourish at Home – How They Practically Illustrate the Doctrine of Negro-Equality,” (*Iowa City*) *Iowa State Journal*, 29 September 1860, quoted in Payne, *Josiah Bushnell Grinnell*, 113.

violence.¹⁶⁴ Taylor and Anderson were killed during the attack, Edwin Coppoc was taken prisoner with John Brown and later hanged, but Barclay escaped and made his way back to Springdale despite being hunted by federal agents and carrying a \$2,000 bounty on his head. With an armed guard constantly surrounding him and Governor Kirkwood refusing to extradite him to Virginia, he was never tried, but his days were still numbered; he died fighting with a Kansas regiment during the war.¹⁶⁵

After John Brown's execution, Davenport Germans lowered the American flag to half mast, while William Van Der Zee led an interracial prayer group of "friends of human liberty," which issued the following statement:

"WHEREAS, In the prosecution of a Godly enterprise, the noble, generous liberator John Brown, has fallen into the hands of the minions of a slave state.
Resolved, That we, the *citizens* of Davenport do heartily sympathize with the unfortunate victim.
Resolved, By the handing of Brown the cause of freedom has been aided, and a martyr for our principles obtained.
Resolved, That a copy of these resolutions be presented to the Republican party, and by them sent to the wife and *small* children of the condemned.
 Furthermore be it Resolved, That we request the mayor to hang the city hall in black, and appoint thirty days for fasting and prayer."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Reynolds, *John Brown*, 207, 212, 237, 239-47, 260-61, 274-79, 285-87, 303-04; Richard Acton, "An Iowan's Death at Harpers Ferry," *Palimpsest* 70 (1989): 186-87, 189; Richard Acton, "The Story of Ann Raley: Mother of the Coppoc Boys," *Palimpsest* 72 (1991): 21-23; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 195; Berrier, "The Underground Railroad in Iowa," *The Scene*, 54-56; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Underground Railroad* (Part 3), 118-19; *Tipton Advertiser*, 1 July 1897, 3 June 1898, 8 March 1907; *History of Johnson County* (1883), 467. Three other Iowans nearly thwarted Brown's attack before it even took place. As he trained near Harper's Ferry, three Springdale Quakers sent word of his plans to U.S. Secretary of War John B. Floyd; they had decided to betray their own friend, they said, to "protect [him] from the consequences of his own rashness." Floyd ignored the letter, though, because the idea of an interracial abolitionist army seemed ridiculous and because the writers mistakenly stated that Harper's Ferry was located in Maryland.

¹⁶⁵ Acton, "An Iowan's Death," 195; Richman, "Volcano in Eruption," *Palimpsest* 41 (1960), quoted in Reynolds, *John Brown*, 322, 327-28, 371-75, 377, 415; Acton, "The Story of Ann Raley," 23-28, 32; Harry E. Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County, Iowa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1910), 621-22.

¹⁶⁶ *History of Scott County, Iowa* (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing Co., 1882), 673; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 12, 15; "German Sympathy," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 3 December 1859; "A Colored Citizen," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 2 December 1859; "Brown Sympathy Meeting," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 3 December 1859; "Grand Brown Sympathy Meeting!," *Davenport Democrat and News*, 3 December 1859.

The *Davenport Democrat* derided the attendees and their martyr, calling John Brown a “horse thief, nigger stealer, traitor and murderer” and his mourners “sacrilegious fanatics” and also recording the words of all the black attendees in mocking dialect. Several weeks later, local black orator H. Ford Douglas gave a response of sorts with the speech “Our Present History, Or Old John Brown” before a racially mixed audience. The prayer meeting also led to the creation of a key black community institution, as Bethel AME Church was later founded by the attendees.¹⁶⁷

Many other white Iowans shared the views of Governor Kirkwood, who declared that “while the great mass of our northern people utterly condemn the act of John Brown, they feel and they express admiration and sympathy for the disinterestedness of purpose by which they believe he was governed, and for the unflinching courage and calm cheerfulness with which he met the consequences of his failure.” For this and for his refusal to hand over Coppoc, the governor of North Carolina called Kirkwood a “black Republican” who was pushing the country towards war, and when South Carolina seceded only a few months later, its list of grievances charged that Iowa had refused to “surrender to justice fugitives charged with murder, and with inciting servile insurrection.”¹⁶⁸ Twenty years earlier, Iowa’s political leaders had been praised by proslavery advocates for their support of the southern institution, but now they were considered among the main culprits in undermining it.

Few Iowa Republicans took the threat of secession seriously, believing that it was little more than sour grapes from a few extremists over the 1860 presidential election. Even after

¹⁶⁷ “Grand Brown Sympathy Meeting!”; “H. Ford Douglas, ‘Colored Orator,’” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 13 December 1859; “H. Ford Douglas, The ‘Colored Orator,’” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 15 December 1859; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 12.

¹⁶⁸ Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War*, 208; Arena, “Southern Sympathy in Iowa,” 510-14; Benjamin F. Gue, *The Civil War*, vol. 2 of *History of Iowa from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Century History Company, 1903), 16-17; *Pioneer Law-Makers Reunions of 1886 and 1890*, 24; John Willis Ellis, “Speech of Hon. John W. Ellis, Delivered before the Democratic State Convention, in Raleigh, March 9, 1860” (Raleigh: Standard Office Print, 1860); Acton, “The Story of Ann Raley,” 30-31.

South Carolina proved them wrong, many GOP newspaper editors predicted that pro-government sentiment would bring the state back without bloodshed.¹⁶⁹ The events of the next five years, though, not only proved them wholly wrong but also fundamentally changed the lives of black Iowans forever.

On the eve of the Civil War, the federal census recorded 1,069 African Americans, only 0.15% of the overall population. Although many others were likely not counted due to their transient existence, the refusal of census takers to include them, or their own desire to avoid the authorities, there is no doubt that black Iowans were few in number. Nearly two-thirds of this small group lived in Mississippi River towns, which made blacks quite distinct from white Iowans, who lived mainly in rural areas and worked in agriculture.¹⁷⁰ 53% of all black Iowans were classified as “Mulatto” rather than “Black,” which was typical of the Midwest, but Lee County and other parts of southern Iowa had a higher percentage of people listed as black than did Muscatine, Davenport or Fayette County. This suggests that the southern region was home to a larger number of fugitive slaves, while African Americans in other parts of the state had been born free or manumitted after birth by their white fathers. These conclusions should be taken with a grain of salt, though, since most counties had only a few dozen African Americans, while white census takers may not have known the people they were writing about or cared about making a careful distinction.

¹⁶⁹ Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War*, 211, 218-19, 222, 224-28; James Harlan, “Shall the Territories Be Africanized?,” speech delivered in the U.S. Senate, 4 January 1860, 4-5; Clark, *The Politics of Iowa*, 47, 52.

¹⁷⁰ Only six other states – Vermont, New Hampshire, Minnesota, Oregon, Nebraska, and Nevada – had fewer African American residents. Comparing the top ten counties for black population with the top ten overall shows only four – Dubuque, Lee, Scott, Des Moines, and Johnson – on both lists. 1860 Census.

Regardless of where they lived or what their specific ancestry was, the 1,000 African Americans who called Iowa their home shared many common characteristics. Most had come to escape from slavery, although some had come as slaves. They worked mostly at menial jobs in the Mississippi River towns or as farm laborers in more remote regions, with a handful of artisans, entrepreneurs and landowning farmers. In all cases, their presence was tolerated but not welcomed. Iowa was a young state, but there had been plenty of time to erect a framework of institutionalized racism, and it virtually defined itself by its desire to remain free of both slaves and free blacks. Even so, Iowa had been dragged into numerous controversies over slavery, race and civil rights because African Americans continued to migrate into the state and used the few political channels available to them to fight against racist laws and customs. Whites had limited citizenship to themselves, but blacks fought to bring about a more expansive definition. These efforts, though, were largely unsuccessful, and as the 1860s began African Americans had few more rights than what the first territorial legislature had recognized back in 1838. It would take a civil war, along with the efforts of community leaders, sympathetic white politicians, and one thousand armed black men, to finally bring about real change.

Chapter III

“We Have Done with Hoeing Cotton, We Have Done with Hoeing Corn”: Migration and Military Activity During the War

On January 8, 1861, a group in the southeastern village of Fairfield drafted a series of resolutions regarding the impending threat of civil war. Although they pledged full support for newly-elected President Abraham Lincoln and his right to preserve the Union by force, they also opposed interfering with southern slavery, saying that “the present Constitution of the United States, so long as it exists, ought to be respected by every citizen” and that “we are not the enemies of any section.”¹⁷¹ These sentiments were shared by many other white Iowans whose disapproval of slavery was far less important than their desire to avoid war and their disinterest in the civil rights of African Americans. And yet like millions of other white Americans, their views on these issues changed dramatically over the next four years. Although almost no fighting took place in Iowa, its race relations were fundamentally transformed by the war. When it was over, thousands of African Americans had migrated into the state, and hundreds of them had declared their right to equal citizenship through military service.

As soon as word of the attack on Fort Sumter reached the west, white Iowan men began enlisting by the thousands, while an emergency session of the state legislature passed a slew of laws to organize the war effort, including defense of the southern and western borders. More than 76,000 Iowans – 49 percent of the state’s military-eligible population, one of the highest percentages of any northern state – eventually served in the war, while women began sewing

¹⁷¹ Charles J. Fulton, “Jefferson County at the Beginning of the Civil War,” *Annals of Iowa* 11 (1913): 82-84.

uniforms and organizing auxiliary groups like Annie Wittmeyer's Soldier's Aid Society.¹⁷²

Many people saw the war as a chance for Iowa, which had been organized less than thirty years earlier, to make its mark on the national stage and define its very existence.

At the same time that thousands of young men left Iowa to go fight in the South, thousands more people began entering the state. Although most whites saw the war as a struggle simply to preserve the Union, African Americans had a much more expansive view; they wanted nothing less than the abolition of slavery and the creation of a racially egalitarian society. The first step in this was their movement out of the South and into northern states like Iowa. As Union officer Samuel Cooper wrote to his friend Leonard F. Parker, a professor at Grinnell College and fellow officer, "Slavery is melting away like wax. Human blood the solvent... When half a million free men shall sweep from the Ozark Mountains to the Reefs of Florida, where will Slavery be? Imagine it, then stand still and see the salvation of the Lord."¹⁷³

The largest number of "general strikers," in W.E.B. DuBois' words, came to Iowa from its neighbor to the south. Although the state had always been home to some fugitive slaves from Missouri, most had simply passed through on their way to somewhere else. Most of the black Iowans listed on the 1860 census were from the upper South or older Midwestern states, and less than 5% were Missouri natives. Although this statistic does not account for the fact that many Missouri slaves had been born in the East or that most fugitive slaves were not counted on the census at all, it would seem that Missourians were a minority within Iowa's antebellum black community. Only a few years later, though, Oliver Howard of the Freedmen's Bureau offered one of the war's great understatements when he reported that "it is probable that the freedmen

¹⁷² Clark, *The Politics of Iowa*, 91-92; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 196; Hawley, "Attitude of the Jasper Colony," 194-95.

¹⁷³ Parker, "Autobiography," Parker Papers, Box 5, Folder 13 – Autobiography of L.F. Parker, 29.

have left [Missouri] in large numbers for Kansas, Iowa, etc.”¹⁷⁴ This wave of migration, which began in 1861 and continued through the end of the decade, brought growth not only to established black communities but also to many places that heretofore had few African American residents: Davenport, Mount Pleasant and Keosauqua in the southeast, Des Moines in central Iowa, and the Nodaway Valley in the far southwest.

Much of the information about Iowa’s migrants was not written down until long after the war, and then by white journalists and local historians in obituaries or newspaper articles. These scribes often treated their subjects as local curiosities, making fanciful accounts about their age and personal experiences. On the other hand, the few narratives written by African Americans themselves focus on the more “respectable” aspects of the community, thus leaving part of the story untold; there is a wealth of information on black churches, for example, but very little about black saloons. These sources also privilege Iowa’s longtime black residents over those who only lived in the state briefly, creating what may be a somewhat misleading image of stability; a systematic study of censuses and city directories may be necessary in order to get a more complete understanding. It might be tempting to surmise that more privileged blacks were more likely to stay for long periods, but this is refuted by the many newspaper articles about janitors, maids and other low-income workers who remained in Iowa for many decades; perhaps access to stable work was the determining factor, regardless of what that work might have been. In any event, these accounts provide useful information about where the migrants came from, how they got to Iowa, their movement around the state (which partially answers questions on the

¹⁷⁴ W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: 1935); “Monthly Record of Current Events,” 399.

persistence of the communities) and the work and institutions that occupied their time once they arrived.

Although Muscatine was no longer the most important destination for blacks entering Iowa, a few migrants like Abe Seabrooks, who fled from slavery in Mississippi when the Union army approached and was not reunited with his family until 1878, did settle there.¹⁷⁵ Other towns in southeastern Iowa experienced more significant growth, creating a larger network of black communities connected through religious services, festivals, and kinship ties. One important hub in this network was Mount Pleasant, an ideal site for black settlement for several reasons. It was only thirty miles from both the Missouri state line and the Mississippi River, and it had a well-earned reputation for abolitionism and racial liberalism. Iowa Wesleyan University, one of the first schools in Iowa to admit blacks, was built in part by contractor and abolitionist preacher Benjamin Franklin Pearson, who ministered to former slaves in Arkansas during the war. Local resident and U.S. Senator James Harlan was not quite as liberal, but his family's close friendship with President Lincoln (his daughter married Robert Todd Lincoln after the war) may have held symbolic value for African Americans. Additionally, the federal government encouraged black migration by operating a program to relocate freed slaves, mostly women and children; so many came that the Freedman's Bureau eventually opened a branch office there. Finally, although the town was lacking in industrial employment, African Americans found jobs as laborers, cooks, and servants. The latter group was especially desired by social-climbing whites who saw "day

¹⁷⁵ *Muscatine Daily Journal*, 7 May 1878; Richman, *History of Muscatine County I* (1911), 325, 478. Muscatine County's population went from 112 to 167. 1860 U.S. Census; 1865 Iowa State Census.

help” as a status symbol, although the workers themselves exerted some independence by insisting on living in their own homes rather than in servants’ quarters.¹⁷⁶

Mount Pleasant proved so attractive to black migrants that some bypassed other towns to settle there. Douglass Miller and his mother left slavery in Missouri and traveled up the Mississippi to Fort Madison but then immediately went west to their final destination, where Miller attended school while working as a farm laborer.¹⁷⁷ The town also became home to the Virginia-born Mosley family, consisting of sixty year old Agnes; nephew Wilkerson Mason, who opened a barber shop; and son Moses Mosley, who as a stone mason helped construct many downtown buildings and eventually became an important political commentator, as did his daughter Susan. Overall, census records show that Henry County’s black population grew from 24 in 1860 to more than 400 in 1865, nearly all in Mount Pleasant itself. Since the town was home to only 4,000 people overall, African Americans eventually composed ten percent of the population, which was unprecedented in Iowa.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶Glenwood Tolson and Donald Young, interview by author, Mount Pleasant, Iowa, 28 July 2004; Donald E. Young, *From High Grass to High Henry: Henry County, Iowa* (Mt. Pleasant, IA: Donald E. Young, 1987), 72-73; “Record of a Carpetbagger of Decency,” *Annals of Iowa* 15 (1926): 543; “Riding Iowa’s Underground Railroad,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 23 February 2002; Jeff Hutton, “A Testament to Freedom: Iowa’s Underground Railroad,” *Ottumwa Courier*, 9 February 2002; Schwalm, “Slavery and Freedom in the Midwest: African American Women in the Civil War Era,” Women of the Midwest: History and Sources Conference, Madison, WI (14 June 1997), 6-7; Carolyn Noon, “Lee Town Grows from Black Refuge,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 20 February 2000; Mallams and Tonkinson, “Notes on History of Mount Pleasant and Center Township,” 128.

¹⁷⁷ Miller later became a bailiff at the Polk County courthouse, as well as head messenger and usher for several governors, all of which helped him become an expert on Iowa’s political history. “Negro, Born a Slave, Knew 14 Governors,” *Des Moines Morning Register*, 8 June 1941; “Governor’s Messenger 92 Today, and Will Be on Job” *Des Moines Register*, 6 July 1953.

¹⁷⁸ *Mount Pleasant Free Press*, 26 August 1886, 18 November 1886; “Moses Mosley Dead: Former Resident of This City Passed Away in Chicago,” *Mount Pleasant Free Press*, 13 May 1916; “A Mount Pleasant Author,” Newspaper clipping, date unknown, Mount Pleasant Public Library (hereafter cited as MPPL), Vertical Files: Lee Town; 1860 U.S. Census; 1865 Iowa State Census; Peter H. Jaynes, ed., *Highlights of Henry County, Iowa History, 1833-1976* (Burlington, IA: Doran & Ward Lithographing Co., 1976), 44; Young, “Tracing History of Lee Town,” *Mount Pleasant News*, 17 February 2000.

The center of this community was the Lee Town neighborhood, located within walking distance of Iowa Wesleyan and the homes of Mount Pleasant's wealthiest families, thus making it easier for the residents to find work in domestic service; it also had railroad tracks clearly separating it nearby elites.¹⁷⁹ Local tradition holds that a contractor named Alexander Lee (who was "deeply sympathetic" towards the former slaves) bought a tract of land, built dozens of two and three-bedroom homes, and rented or sold them to African Americans. Lee actually served in the army from 1861 until he died at Vicksburg in 1864, so perhaps he provided the financing and left the actual work to others.¹⁸⁰ In any event, the black community outgrew the original tract so quickly that by 1870 there was also a "Lee's Addition." Lee Town was also integrated, although white children who lived there were called "nigger lovers" and pelted with rocks by their peers; although the community leaders were progressive on issues of race, not all townspeople shared their views.¹⁸¹ The first permanent community institution appeared in 1863 when African Baptist Church was established in a building purchased from a white congregation. Two years later an AME church was founded, and the two joined forces with the school board to establish Freedman's School, which for reasons lost to history was more commonly known as the Frog Pond School.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Tolson and Young, interview; "Tracing History of Lee Town."

¹⁸⁰ Tolson and Young, interview; "Tracing History of Lee Town"; Noon, "Lee Town Grows from Black Refuge."

¹⁸¹ "Tracing History of Lee Town." It is thought that Lee Town's original houses were all destroyed by the year 2000, although several of them may have been greatly refurbished and are still in use. This author's short car ride through Lee Town with local historian Donald Young in July 2004 revealed three or four such houses, which were then all inhabited by whites. Jim Schenk, interview by Donald Young, 22 February 2000, MPPL, Vertical Files: Lee Town; "Last of Its Generation," UNC, Lynell Henry Collection, Aisle 1, Shelf 4-E, Box 1, AAHMCCI; Young, conversation with author, Mount Pleasant, Iowa, 28 July 2004; Tolson and Young, interview; Young, "Lee Town History" (unpublished manuscript, Mount Pleasant, IA), 31 January 2000, 4.

¹⁸² Noon, "Lee Town Grows from Black Refuge"; *History of Henry County* (1879), 526. African Baptist Church is the oldest black church building in the entire state; although other black congregations in Iowa have been around longer, none have occupied their structures as long. Hazel Smith, "The Negro Church in Iowa" (master's thesis, University of Iowa, 1926), 36; Tolson and Young, interview.

The black population of Keosauqua also grew rapidly during the war. As with Mount Pleasant, its proximity to Missouri (less than ten miles from the border) and location on the Des Moines River helped make it an ideal destination. The town's 200 to 450 black residents lived in a separate neighborhood, which hostile whites called "Nigger Hill." Most worked as domestic servants and general laborers (including employees of the ice and coal companies), but there were also artisans and musicians, and many were able to purchase homes. There was also a teacher named Grace Crawford, who taught at the newly created black school, and an AME church paid for in part through a fundraising campaign of donation solicitation and public debates; white businessmen judged teams of black men who vied over questions such as "Which is more educational, travel or reading?" and "Which is the more destructive, fire or water?"¹⁸³ These debates enabled Keosauqua blacks to subtly challenge racial stereotypes by displaying their knowledge and reasoning skills. In addition, there was a local singing quartet which performed at both black community festivals and at white gatherings.¹⁸⁴

This pattern of patronage ties between black institutions and the local white elite would be repeated in other communities around the state. Black churches were particularly dependent on financial support from white religious and commercial leaders; the black communities were still too small to generate the financial independence enjoyed by many southern churches, and their members usually depended on local whites for jobs and clients. Blacks and whites occupied separate cultural spheres, but they were still linked in important ways. This was also evident in Burlington, whose black community grew in part because of the efforts of advocates like Rev.

¹⁸³ Hazelle Lanman, "African Americans in Keosauqua," Historical Society, ed., *The Keosauqua Experience, Van Buren County* (WPA Writers Program, 1940), *Van Buren County* (1940), 25, 78, 80, 82; Donald W. Aldrich, letter to author, 26 July 2004.

¹⁸⁴ The churches also hosted the community's annual Thanksgiving dinner, although it was sometimes held in a private home. *Van Buren County* (1940), 25, 82.

William Salter. Friends and government officials wrote him throughout the war asking him to help fugitive slaves who were coming to his city. In 1864, a contact in St. Louis informed Salter that “a party of fifty contrabands” who wanted to “get a little house and take care of themselves” was coming north. St. Louis had actually become swollen with refugees, but there were opportunities for the “surplus labor” in Burlington; most migrants worked as general laborers or on local farms, while skilled workers found jobs as cooks, tailors, plasterers, carpenters, and bricklayers. The small but prominent black middle class also included a skating rink owner named Tom Walls; Ed Williams, owner of the colorfully named “Pantatorium” (dry cleaning business); Harry King, who ferried baggage from the train station to homes and hotels; and several barbers and saloon keepers.¹⁸⁵ Some of these settlers also attended literacy classes taught by Rev. Salter; Hattie Smith, who had come from Mississippi with white soldiers, later became a Sunday school teacher in Mount Pleasant.¹⁸⁶ Unlike in other southeastern cities, they were concentrated in certain areas but did not have a distinct, separate black neighborhood, possibly because Burlington was much larger than either Mount Pleasant or Keosauqua.¹⁸⁷

Burlington’s black churches were created through interracial cooperation and with assistance from the larger southeastern black community. Second Baptist Church was founded in 1866 with support from white Baptists and black church leaders in Mount Pleasant, while tiny St. John’s AME survived thanks to regular visits by black pastors from Keokuk and Fort Madison

¹⁸⁵ W.H. Hicks to William Salter, 18 July 1861, Burlington Public Library, Burlington, Iowa (hereafter cited as BPL), History – Underground Railway and Slavery, Underground Railroad – Iowa; Lucien Eaton to Salter, 19 October 1864, BPL, History – Underground Railway and Slavery, Slavery; Eaton to Salter, 22 October 1864, BPL, History – Underground Railway and Slavery, Slavery; Hawthorne, *African Americans in Iowa*, 9-10; Geraldine Brown, *African-Americans in Burlington History*, Frances Hawthorne Papers, Research Files, Box 1, Research Files, Burlington – Geraldine Brown; Martha Jordan Soland, “Geraldine Brown: Burlington’s Black History,” Frances Hawthorne Papers.

¹⁸⁶ In 1915, the 81 year old Smith was the oldest delegate at the Jubilee Convention of the Iowa Sunday School Association. Ruth Beitz, “Going Up to Glory Very Slow,” *Iowan* (1967): 50.

¹⁸⁷ Soland, “Geraldine Brown.”

until an influx of new members provided more energy and funds. Church members also solicited funds from white businessmen and from Rev. Salter's congregation, which gave a donation each Christmas. Some whites, though, were less happy about this growth in the black community. A help-wanted ad for an upscale hotel warned that "no niggers need apply," while one of Rev. Salter's friends in Missouri advised him that a fugitive heading to Burlington should hurry on to Canada before he was recaptured.¹⁸⁸ It is not clear if he was in danger from southerners, proslavery Burlington residents, or both, but clearly the liberty of African Americans in this river town was still uncertain.

African Americans migrants in Mount Pleasant, Keosauqua and Burlington had mixed experiences in their new homes. They had seized their freedom, found employment, and established churches and schools, but they were confined to the harshest and lowest paying jobs, their institutions depended on white patronage for survival, and they faced legal and customary racial discrimination. It was in Keokuk, however, that the joys and pains of life in Iowa were most evident. The already large black community exploded during the war, replacing Muscatine as the state's black political, economic and cultural center. The census lists 246 blacks in Lee County in 1860 but 1,365 five years later, nearly all in Keokuk, which had an overall population of roughly 15,000. Thus Keokuk blacks, like those in Mount Pleasant, had become nearly ten percent of the population, but in a much larger city.¹⁸⁹ At the same time, racial attitudes among

¹⁸⁸ "A Negro Juryman," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 22 November 1863; *History of Des Moines County*, 576, 578; Brown, *African-Americans in Burlington History*; Jerry Kneisel, "3 Residents Launched Plan for St. John's AME Church," *Burlington Hawk-Eye Gazette*, 19 June 1954; Hawthorne, *African Americans in Iowa*, 9-10; "St. John AME Centennial Banquet Saturday Night," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 1962, BPL, Pam Burl File: Minorities, Minority News and History; Brown, "History of St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church, Burlington, Iowa, 1867-1976," BPL, Minority News and History; Geraldine Brown, "Burlington Negroes," *Bicentennial History of Burlington* (1976); *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 5 May 1869; Hicks to William Salter.

¹⁸⁹ 1860 U.S. Census; 1865 Iowa State Census.

whites were far more conservative than in other cities, so Keokuk was home to both the largest black population and the harshest anti-black sentiment.

Although the Civil War severed Keokuk's business ties to the South, the new military hospitals, recruiting stations and training camps, along with increased rail and steamboat traffic created to service them, brought new jobs. The city's location in Iowa's "tail" (where the Des Moines River empties into the Mississippi), proximate to Missouri and Illinois, made it both strategically important to the military and an attractive destination for fugitive slaves. As in other southeastern Iowa towns, the migrants made their way there in different ways and for different reasons. George and Jane Motley Stevens settled there with their young family because it was the first free territory that they reached. Thanks to George's slave employment on a steamboat, they were able to purchase land and establish a financial base that in turn allowed their descendants to continue their education much longer than most African American youth. Daughter Matilda later married fellow wartime migrant Rufus Dandridge, who had been a slave in Kentucky until his master told him "Rufus, you are free," and sent him out on his own. The young man headed up the Mississippi River with no specific final destination in mind other than the north, so Keokuk must have seemed as good a place as any. He and Matilda eventually purchased their own farm and had twelve children, who Matilda governed with such fierce determination that they nicknamed her "Boss."¹⁹⁰

The military also helped bring African Americans to Keokuk. Austin Bland left southern Indiana during the war due to racial hostility and found work in the Gate City as a stretcher-

¹⁹⁰ *History of Lee County* (1879), 624; "Brief History of Keokuk," 372; Harris, "A Frontier Community," 360-61, 455-56; Barnes, *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, 29-31; "Interview with Lois Harper Eichacker, 28 May 2003," AAHMCCI, Iowa Bios "H"; "Harper Family of Keokuk" (date unknown), AAHMCCI, Towns – Keokuk.

bearer on hospital boats, saving enough money to send for his mother and three sisters.¹⁹¹ The local provost marshal was less enthusiastic about the army's relocation program for former slaves than his counterpart in Mount Pleasant, and he directed many of the newly arrived black women towards the most menial jobs; the Association for the Relief of the Poor, on the other hand, did not discriminate in its allocation of resources.¹⁹² Additional help came from white civilians like H.R. Jacobs and his wife, who hired former slaves to clear land and operated a religious school for them. This was both humanitarian and good business, since it provided much needed help for the migrants while simultaneously tapping into a cheap source of labor. Other African Americans found employment in a variety of areas. William Hampton, for example, initially worked as a teamster and sawyer but later became a bailiff and judge's messenger; this new opportunity may have come when his wife Sophia, who he met in Keokuk, taught him to read and write.¹⁹³

These migrants helped to establish two churches in 1864, although the leadership, like Boston-educated Rev. William Dove, came from a more privileged background.¹⁹⁴ Within a few years the community had grown so large that two more churches and two Masonic lodges were

¹⁹¹ Schwalm, "Slavery and Freedom in the Midwest," 7-8; Kathryn M. Neal, "Unsung Heroines: African-American Women in Iowa," in *Outside In*, 367; Jack Lufkin, "'Higher Expectations for Ourselves': African-Americans in Iowa's Business World," in *Outside In*, 194.

¹⁹² Schwalm, "Slavery and Freedom in the Midwest," 7-8; Neal, "Unsung Heroines," 367. In 1864, the Association asked for \$2,000 to aid 91 white families and 55 black ones. Harris, "A Frontier Community," 381.

¹⁹³ "Recalls First Dollar Earned as Free Man," UNC, KPL, Vertical Files: Negro in Iowa, Newspaper Clippings; Beitz, "Going Up to Glory Very Slow," 49; *Keokuk Gate City*, 6 June 1896; "Some Colored Keokukians," UNC, KPL, Vertical Files: Negro in Iowa, Newspaper Clippings; "Mrs. Bentham's Death Occurs on Wednesday," UNC, 27 November 1925, KPL, Vertical Files: Negro in Iowa, Newspaper Clippings.

¹⁹⁴ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Keokuk and Vicinity, 2-5; "Rev. Wm. A. Dove," UNC, KPL, Vertical Files: Negro in Iowa, Newspaper Clippings; Frances E. Hawthorne, "The Church," in *Outside In*, 389-90; Heinz, "WPA Survey of State and Local Historical Records: 1936, Iowa Historical Records Survey, Church Records Form, 1st African Baptist Church"; *History of Lee County* (1879), 670.

founded, while most black Iowan communities had only one of each.¹⁹⁵ The city proved such a strong draw that nearby Fort Madison, only twenty-five miles up the Mississippi, never received a large number of black migrants, and its own single black church survived only with the help of a minister from Keokuk. There were also a few dozen African Americans scattered in villages like Denmark and Montrose, including siblings Armstead and Hennie Weaver, who worked as farm laborers and clothes washers until they were able to buy farmland of their own.¹⁹⁶

Community life in this southeastern-most region was dominated by Keokuk, which by the end of the war was home to nearly one-fourth of all black Iowans.

At the same time, many Keokuk whites despised both the black presence and the war that had increased it. This may have been one of the only parts of the state before the war where public officials attempted to enforce the anti-black migration law. In 1857, the *Des Moines Valley Whig* protested that the city marshal had begun a “crusade of extermination against a half score or so of our colored population, who are seeking to earn an honest livelihood in our midst.” No specific details were given, and it does not seem that anyone was actually expelled, leading some townspeople to believe that the story was a hoax, although others thought that a few blacks had been targeted for operating “bawdy and gambling houses.” In any event, the *Whig* also described (perhaps unintentionally) how essential African Americans had become in Keokuk’s

¹⁹⁵ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Keokuk and Vicinity, SHSI-IC, 3-5; Heinz, “WPA Survey of State and Local Historical Records: 1936, Iowa Historical Records Survey, Church Records Form, Pilgrim’s Rest Baptist Church”; Britton, “History of the Colored Race of People Residing in Keokuk and Vicinity,” 6, 12-13. The fourth church, St. Mary the Virgin, was probably of Episcopalian or Anglican affiliation.

¹⁹⁶ *History of Lee County* (1879), 606-07; Barnes, *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, 21-22; “Black Residents,” *Fort Madison Daily Democrat*, 29 April 1888; “Eubanks,” *Fort Madison Daily Democrat*, 1912 (exact date unknown); “Colored Man, An Ex-Slave, Passes,” *Fort Madison Daily Democrat*, 11 January 1914; Betty Haas, “New Boston Cemetery: Charleston Twp., Section 35, Lee County, Iowa,” Cattermole Memorial Library, Fort Madison, Iowa (hereafter cited as CML); Haas, “Calvin Cemetery, Montrose Twp., Sec. 35, Lee Co.,” CML; Haas, “Denmark Cemetery,” CML; “Former Slave Dead: Funeral is Solemnized,” *Fort Madison Evening Democrat*, 14 December 1926; “Born a Slave, Aunt Hennie Weaver Is Now Land Owner,” *Burlington Gazette*, 6 November 1922.

economy, suggesting that if the marshal continued his crusade, whites would have to “black our own boots and patronize a French barber.”¹⁹⁷

This second-class but pivotal position grew even stronger during the war, but so did white opposition, in part because fighting in Missouri brought many racially conservative Unionist refugees into the city.¹⁹⁸ Although some of the stories about pro-southern behavior and attempted southern invasions of Keokuk during the war are implausible or downright absurd, it seems clear that the city was a hotbed of anti-black, anti-war sentiment, ameliorated only by the strong military presence.¹⁹⁹ Ironically, this atmosphere became political capital for white Republicans and African Americans in later years; those who had opposed civil rights or the war effort eventually found that their actions helped lead to even greater rights for the group that they hated so much.²⁰⁰ Before that happened, though, Keokuk blacks were forced to live in a state of

¹⁹⁷ “The Black Crusade,” (*Keokuk*) *Des Moines Valley Whig*, 10 June 1857; *Keokuk Gate City*, 6 June 1857.

¹⁹⁸ Joseph Allan Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of American Civil War Soldiers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 177; Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 15.

¹⁹⁹ For examples of these stories, see Orr Kelly and Mary Davies Kelly, *Dream’s End: Two Iowa Brothers in the Civil War* (New York: Kodansha International, 1998), 18-19; Harris, “A Frontier Community,” 495-99; Jaynes, *Highlights of Henry County History*, 38; *Van Buren County* (1940), 80; *Lee County History* (1942), 61-62; Arena, “Southern Sympathy in Iowa,” 465-66, 528; *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I* (hereafter cited as *War of the Rebellion*), *Volume XXII, Part II – Correspondence* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1888), 105; *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part IV – Correspondence, Etc.* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 124, 171, 197, 244-45, 260, 434; Lathrop, *Life and Times of Samuel J. Kirkwood*, 125; *War of the Rebellion, Series III - Volume I* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 86, 162, 185-86.

²⁰⁰ Most fears of southern invasion came from further west and were nothing more than hysteria, but nonetheless the fears of many Iowans (especially in the southern counties) encouraged Governor Kirkwood to strengthen the border guard system, arrest a number of suspected southern sympathizers, and even consider imposing martial law. For more information, see Arena, “Southern Sympathy in Iowa,” 515, 519, 523-24, 527, 529-31, 534; Rick Willard Sturdevant, “Girding for War: Conditions Underlying the Response of Iowa Counties to Troop Calls, 1861-1862” (master’s thesis, University of Northern Iowa, 1974), 76-78; Klement, “Rumors of Golden Circle Activity in Iowa during the Civil War Years,” *Annals of Iowa* 37 (1965): 524, 526, 528, 533; Johnson, *Warriors into Workers*, 125; Clark, *The Politics of Iowa*; J.M. Howell and Heman C. Smith, *History of Decatur County, Iowa and Its People I* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915), 54-55; *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume III* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), 412-13; *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part IV*, 396, 622-23; Alan M. Schroder, “William M. Stone: Iowa’s Other Civil War Governor,” *Palimpsest* 63 (1982): 112; J.M. Dixon, *Centennial History of Polk County, Iowa* (Des Moines: State Register, 1876), 301; Porter, *Annals of Polk County*

fear more profound than in other parts of Iowa despite having built the state's largest African American community.

More than eighty miles north of Missouri and twice as far from the Mississippi River, African Americans in Des Moines had much less to fear from southern invaders. This city's antebellum black community had been much smaller than Keokuk's. Des Moines was a fort until 1851 and despite being named state capital in 1857 was described at the beginning of the war as "a lot of log houses strung along the river." Most black residents were servants for legislators or fugitive slaves like Bluford, who fled from Missouri after killing his master (it was said that he could "read quite well...and had paid attention to the maps") and later enlisted in the Union Army.²⁰¹

The expansion of the state government during and after the war, though, led to massive growth. The population increased from 5,722 to 10,511 between 1865 and 1867, including many African Americans, who for the first time since Dubuque's early days were helping to establish a new city rather than settling in an existing one. As in other cities most of these settlers were Missourians, although many of them came up through central Iowa by foot or horse. Some of them received assistance from abolitionists along the way. Adeline Henderson's master took her and one hundred other slaves from Virginia to Missouri when the fighting began, probably reasoning that the greater distance from the war's main theater would make it more difficult for them to run away, but shortly after their arrival she and her family fled to Des Moines; in the

and Des Moines, 206; David L. Lendt, "Iowa and the Copperhead Movement," *Annals of Iowa* 40 (1970): 416; *History of Boone County, Iowa* (Des Moines: Union Historical Company, 1880), 301.

²⁰¹ Sarah Toubes, "Ex-Slave, 102, Recalls the Plantation Lashes and Her Escape to Des Moines," *Des Moines Register*, 18 March 1925; Porter, *Annals of Polk County and Des Moines* (1898), 904; Henry Clay Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-Nine Years a Slave, Twenty-Nine Years a Free Man* (York, PA: P. Anstadt, 1895), 35-36.

capital she worked as a domestic servant, the same job that she had performed as a slave.

Fugitives from western Missouri reached Des Moines by way of Tabor and other southwestern abolitionist communities, although some only stopped in the capital to rest before continuing on to Illinois. This assistance no doubt proved vital, since there also were proslavery people in Polk County eager to return runaways to their masters. Other fugitives got to Des Moines on their own. Jeff Logan led a group of thirteen slaves up from central Missouri on wagons and horses that they had stolen from their master. In Des Moines he did odd jobs before opening his own business, using financial acumen that he had learned from his father (as a slave, he had loaned out his money with the intention of using the interest to purchase his freedom), and also became a job broker for the black community by helping other migrants find work with the white elite.²⁰²

As in Keokuk, Des Moines blacks had to contend with racist opposition. In 1864 a “quiet, peaceable, colored man” remembered only as Brown was shot in the street by John McRoberts, a white private on furlough who had just finished a drunken argument with another man; perhaps he decided to vent his anger on a black man, assuming that this would go unpunished. As it turned out, he was right. He was arrested but then released and sent back to the army, while “the man he wantonly murdered had been long buried and forgotten.”²⁰³ Despite this reminder that black lives were valued less than white ones, African Americans kept coming. Most lived in a separate neighborhood on the west side of town near the railroad tracks. They established two Baptist churches, which were built in part with white contributions and also served as

²⁰² Porter, *Annals of Polk County and Des Moines* (1896), 382-84; Toubes, “Ex-Slave, 102”; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Underground Railroad* (Part 3), 107-09; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Negro in Des Moines and Polk County*, 338.

²⁰³ Porter, *Annals of Polk County and Des Moines* (1898), 524; *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers in the War of the Rebellion, Together with Historical Sketches of Volunteer Organizations, 1861-1866* (hereafter cited as *Roster and Record*), Vol. II: 9th-16th Regiments-Infantry (Des Moines: Emory H. English, 1908), 219.

community centers and schoolhouses. As in other towns most were unskilled laborers, but there also cooks, barbers, and Henry Bell, who had fled Alabama with his family after their master joined the rebel army and left him to look after the white people. He changed his family's surname to avoid recapture, found work on a farm, and was able to cultivate the same trust in Iowa whites that his former master had once placed in him; one remembered him as "the most genteel and the most loveable character I have ever known...a gentleman in all that the word implies."²⁰⁴ For Bell and others, the strategy of patronage apparently worked as well in the young capital as it did in the older eastern cities.

As in Keokuk, the military was the primary catalyst for growth in Davenport's black community, which grew from 25 in 1860 to 210 by 1870.²⁰⁵ The presence of thousands of soldiers at five camps, a hospital, an arsenal, and a Confederate prison helped bring in many civilian workers and also spurred growth in the city's "cheap entertainment" industry, as dozens of new saloons and whorehouses sprung up along the riverfront.²⁰⁶ Although most other black

²⁰⁴ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Underground Railroad* (Part 3), 108; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Negro in Des Moines and Polk County*, 339; Smith, "The Negro Church in Iowa," 36; Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa's Black Legacy*, 51, 54-57, 64; Eleanora Tate, "Black Churches in D.M. 'Thrive, Reflect Proud Heritage,'" *Des Moines Tribune*, 21 October 1972; *History of Polk County* (1880), 678; Dixon, *Centennial History of Polk County*, 222; Lufkin, "Black Des Moines: A Study of Select Negro Social Organizations in Des Moines, Iowa, 1890-1930" (master's thesis, Iowa State University, 1980), 75; "Aged Des Moines Negress Who is a Veteran of the Civil War," *Des Moines Tribune*, 11 September 1912; Beitz, "Going Up to Glory Very Slow," 45.

²⁰⁵ Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 3. The growth of Davenport helped ensure that the black community in the town of Clinton, only forty miles up river, remained small. The town's AME church, though, was later led by Rev. George W. Slater, whose son Fred "Duke" Slater became one of college football's first great black players. Wolfe, *Wolfe's History of Clinton County*, 121-25, 372-76; 1865 Iowa State Census; 1870 U.S. Census; *History of Clinton County* (1879), 517; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Box 1, Folder 17, Chapter 8: The Iowa Negro in War, 313-14; Youle, *History of Clinton County, Iowa* (1946), 57; Everett A. Streit, "Original Bethel AME Church Cost \$600: Congregation Dates Back to 1866," UNC, AAHMCCI, Vertical Files, Churches – AME: Clinton Bethel; "Duke Slater's Father Pastor Here," UNC, AAHMCCI, Churches – AME: Clinton Bethel.

²⁰⁶ Frederick I. Anderson, ed., *Quad Cities: Joined by a River* (Davenport: Lee Enterprises, 1982), 47, 118. One of Camp McClellan's most notorious prisoners during the war was a man of African American and Dakota ancestry who took part in the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 in southwestern Minnesota. Seth J. Temple, "Camp McClellan during the Civil War," *Annals of Iowa* (July 1937): 41-45.

Iowa communities were dominated by Missourians, the constant movement of troops through Davenport up and down the river helped create a more geographically diverse community. Some, like Charleston native Lucy Williams, traveled to Iowa with soldiers, while others made the trip north on their own. Henry and Lydia Applewhite came up from Keokuk, where Lydia had been illegally sold as a slave before the war, and worked as gardeners and servants for prominent whites, saving enough to purchase a home.²⁰⁷ Henry McGaw's wife had cooked for Grant's troops during the siege of Vicksburg and continued at this trade when they came to Davenport. Their young son Scotty had been separated from them in the chaos of war, but the family was eventually reunited with the help of a sympathetic local judge. Elderly Isaac Chateau, on the other hand, came from Louisiana on his own, and without any relatives to help care for him, he was eventually forced to go to the poor house.²⁰⁸ These three stories show not only the varied origins of the black community but also the importance of white patronage and especially kinship ties, which helped drive migration and brought stability to the lives of the migrants themselves.

Racial tensions were milder in Davenport than anywhere else in eastern Iowa, in large part because the prominent German-American community did not compete with African Americans for jobs and was generally more liberal than the southern or Irish migrants who

²⁰⁷ "The Third Missionary Baptist Church," *Scott County Churches* (Scott County, Iowa Genealogical Society, Vol. I), quoted in Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 52; "Obituary for Henry Applewhite," *Iowa Bystander*, 10 November 1899; "Woman, Born in Slavery and Later Freed by A. Lincoln, Celebrates 100th Birthday," *Davenport Democrat*, 13 March 1945; "Mrs. Lydia Applewhite Dies at Age of 100; Was Former Slave and One of Founders of 3rd Baptist Church," *Davenport Times*, 28 July 1945.

²⁰⁸ Roba, *The River and the Prairie*, 78; "County's Oldest Inhabitant Dies," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 31 July 1907; "The Williams Funeral," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 4 August 1907; "African Red Book of Davenport"; "Editor's Observations," *Iowa Bystander*, 23 August 1901; "Lil' Cullud Boy' Fifty Years Later Gives Dramatic Finish to Reminiscence of Two Davenport 'Blue Yankees' of His Youth," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 10 February 1929; "'Scotty' McGaw, Well Known Local Negro Character, Dies Today Following Long Illness," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 21 August 1929; Jack Martens, trans., *Der Demokrat*, 5 July 1883.

dominated other cities. One arrival who benefited from this atmosphere was Milton Howard, who had been born free in Muscatine before the war but kidnapped and sold into slavery in Alabama while he was still a small child. Ten years later, the teenager escaped and made his way to Davenport, perhaps seeking one of the jobs created by the wartime expansion or feeling that the military presence made this city safer than his birthplace. He was taken in by a German family who taught him to speak *Deutsch* and thus became perhaps the only trilingual black Iowan, since he had also learned French from his master in Alabama.²⁰⁹ The criminal justice system also seemed at least partially willing to protect the rights of African Americans. In 1865, a white veteran was arrested for entering the home of a married black woman and attempting to take “improper liberties” with her, although his only penalty was only a five dollar fine.²¹⁰

Most Davenport blacks lived in the Goose Hollow neighborhood, which had originally been a German enclave and was not far from the waterfront district. They also established two churches near the end of the war with help from the citywide Sunday School Union and the *Davenport Gazette*. As in other black communities during this period, the criteria for leadership was not education or wealth but personal qualities, connections to the white elite, and job stability; few church leaders could read or write, and one worked as a janitor, while another was a barber.²¹¹ Community leaders also teamed up with prominent whites to help support the black

²⁰⁹ “The Third Missionary Baptist Church”; “Milton Howard, Former Slave and Colored G.A.R. Veteran, Dies While Attending Church Services Sunday,” *Davenport Daily Times*, 19 March 1928; *Rock Island Daily Argus*, 8 August 1875; “African Red Book of Davenport.”

²¹⁰ The *Gazette* sarcastically asked if “that’s one of the soldiers the *Democrat* brags so much about as being opposed to negro suffrage.” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 9 August 1865.

²¹¹ Richter, “A True History of Scott County,” *Davenport Democrat*, 1 May 1921, quoted in Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 1, 23-24; Hortense Finch, “Old Gang of Mine,” *Quad City Times*, 2 February 1976; “Rock Island, Ill.” *Iowa Bystander*, 24 October 1913; Vernell Compton, *Scott County Heritage Society* (Davenport: Scott County Heritage Committee, 1991), 102-03; Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa’s Black Legacy*, 44; John Willard, “Bethel AME: Church of Ages,” UNC, Davenport Public Library; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 28 August 1865, 30 November 1865, 20 January 1866, 30 November 1871; Edward Russell, “City Sunday School Union – Annual Meeting – Reports of

migrants. A celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863 – organized by Albert Nuckolls with help from the attorney general, a judge’s wife, and others – raised thirty dollars for poor black families, and a week later the *Gazette* published Nuckolls’s letter of gratitude to those who had supported the event.²¹² These themes of interracial cooperation, emancipation, and community uplift would be repeated in the many Emancipation Days in Davenport and elsewhere around the state in the years to come.

Many of these ideas are also evident in the lives of Jake and Tom Busey. Their family fled from slavery in Kentucky to a Federal military camp, and after their father died of pneumonia while working as an army laborer, their mother Mathilda brought them to Davenport with only two dollars to her name. Jake cultivated a relationship with a former mayor, who sponsored his education at Davenport High School, but even a high school-educated black male had limited opportunities, and he eventually became a library janitor, while brother Tom worked as a servant and cook; their sister Pernecia became a prominent advocate for black women and girls in the early 20th century. Both brothers earned additional money and notoriety as singers and attendants at upper crust white social affairs, and when Jake died in 1913, the *Democrat* praised him for having “all the instinctive courtesy of the ante-bellum members of his race,” insinuating that the younger generation was not deferential enough. Even so, their race pride led them to collect newspaper clippings about black Iowans and publicly support the controversial

Old Officers and Election of New Ones,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 29 November 1871; “The African Church,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 15 December 1865; “Davenport Notes,” *Iowa Bystander*, 19 March 1915; *Davenport City Directory for 1868-69* (Davenport: Luse & Griggs, 1869), 65; *Root’s Davenport City Directory, 1867, First Edition* (Davenport: Luse & Griggs, 1866), 160.

²¹² *Davenport City Directory for 1863* (Davenport: Luse, Lane & Co., 1863), 106, and *Davenport City Directory for 1866* (Davenport: Luse & Griggs, 1866), 111, quoted in Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 26; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 1 January, 8 January 1866.

boxer Jack Johnson.²¹³ Even within the framework of patronage, there was room for African Americans to make subtle expressions of racial consciousness and independence.

Although white Union soldiers were only one of the factors that brought African Americans to Iowa's larger towns, in more isolated parts of the state they were often the primary factor.²¹⁴ Men serving down south either encouraged slaves to head for the soldiers' homes up north or brought them back themselves. As a result, rural areas that had few or no African Americans before the war became home to one or two black families or individuals who traded southern slavery for northern isolation far from other African Americans. The soldiers who encouraged this migration were often motivated by sympathy for the slaves but also by class consciousness and the desire for cheap labor. It was common for northern soldiers of modest income to send young blacks to the family farm because of the increased status that came with having an African American servant. Many Iowa farmers could never have afforded a white servant, but a black one gave the appearance of prosperity without the expense that came with it (because of the servants' race, it was considered acceptable to compensate them only with room and board), and the war provided the chance to acquire one since they were coming into contact with African Americans for the first time. Robert P. Speer of the 36th Iowa, for example, wrote

²¹³ "Two Colored Fight Fans Who Pick Johnson to Win," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 8 March 1908; "Death Summons Town Character – 'Gentleman Jake' Busey," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 4 December 1913; "Colored Clubs United," Richter Papers; "Editor's Observations," *Iowa Bystander*, 26 July 1912; "Davenport Notes," *Iowa Bystander*, 16 January 1914; "Davenport Notes," *Iowa Bystander*, 19 December 1913; "Miss Hazel L. Busey," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 21 September 1915; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #3, 39; "African Red Book of Davenport." This clippings collection later became part of the August Richter Papers and is now held at the State Historical Society in Iowa City. James H. Hill, "Migrations of Blacks to Iowa, 1820-1860," *Journal of Negro History* 66 (1981): 298.

²¹⁴ For some exceptions to this, see the stories of African Americans who went to rural Iowa without help from whites: Wilbur E. Jessup, "The Warren Family of Marshall County, Iowa," *Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society* 3 (1982): 117; "County's Oldest Resident Dies," *Dallas County News*, 29 November 1950; Charles Jacob Glattly, "Outline of Personal History of Chas. Glattly," Historical Department of Iowa (date unknown), SHSI-DM, Clippings File, Iowa: Afro-Americans.

his family that “If I should ever return to Cedar Falls I think I shall take a pair of Negroes and a pair of mules with me.” To Speer and others like him, both African Americans and draught animals were than assets to be cheaply acquired in the South and put to use back home.²¹⁵ At the same time, African Americans were more than just status symbols. The war created both a shortage of white male workers and a huge need for increased farm production in the Midwest, and black workers provided the solution to both problems.²¹⁶

Furthermore, the migrants themselves were not helpless pawns. Whites may have used them for social status and cheap labor, but they understood that going north was an opportunity to secure freedom, escape the war-torn South, and find gainful employment (even on unjust terms) in a peaceful, less overtly racist environment. Although some eventually grew weary of the racial isolation and rural life and headed for larger cities, others saved to purchase their own land; in either case, their visions of freedom were considerably different from those of their employers. Six year old John Henry of Alabama became the “mascot” of an Iowa regiment and accompanied them to Vinton in Linn County after their discharge, but he eventually away and attended school. Teenaged Frank James became the caretaker for a captain’s horse in the South and continued in this job in Waverly, Black Hawk County, until the captain’s death years later, then moved to nearby Independence, where there was “quite a colony of colored residents.” He

²¹⁵ David A. Cecere, “Carrying the Home Front to War: Soldiers, Race, and New England Culture during the Civil War,” in Cimbala and Miller, *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front*, 306-07; Kenneth L. Lyftogt, *From Blue Mills to Columbia: Cedar Falls and the Civil War* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993), 90-91. Compare Speer’s words with those of Missouri Unionist Nathaniel W. Watkins’ complaint that Iowa soldiers “Came and took the ballance [*sic*] of the Mules, & Horses, on the Place, together with a negro Boy ten years of age, my Watch and other things leaving me without a Horse or Saddle.” Nathaniel W. Watkins to Abraham Lincoln, 22 February 1863.

²¹⁶ Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 143-44.

worked as a sawyer and hauler, bought property, married twice and had six children, but by the 1910s he was the only African American left in town.²¹⁷

Like James, rural migrants had the same desire to create families as their counterparts in the larger cities, even if their opportunities to do so were much more limited. John Sweatt moved from Nashville to Allamakee County with white soldiers as a teenager, eventually purchased his own farm, and married a white woman; his neighbors apparently came to terms with this union, since his obituary stated that he was “well known and liked by everybody” and several of his adult children continued living in the area. Peter Rice also accompanied a regiment to rural Iowa, in this case the Marshall County town of Gilman. His neighbors respected him for his expertise in appraising stock but also insisted on calling him “Nigger Pete,” and he was the only black person in town until a black woman arrived in later years; they decided to get married, “as they were lonely.”²¹⁸ One final example comes from Samuel Maxfield, who moved to northeastern Iowa with a white captain but then decided to join the settlement in Fayette County, where he bought his own land and lived for over fifty years.²¹⁹ For both Maxfield and Rice, community was defined as every black person in the area, even when that group consisted of only one other person, while Sweatt dealt with racial isolation by building community across racial lines.

Although all three migrants responded to their situation in different ways, the importance of

²¹⁷ *Newton Journal*, 9 April 1884; “John Henry, A Well Known Resident, Dead,” *Davenport Democrat*, 22 February 1926; “Richardson Home Soon,” *Davenport Daily Times*, 14 March 1919; “Colored Men of World War Organize Post,” *Davenport Daily Times*, 21 April 1920; “Davenport Items,” *Iowa Bystander*, 7 November 1919; Jeremy J. Brigham and Robert Wright Sr., “Civil Rights Organizations in Iowa,” in *Outside In*, 314; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #3, 54; “Was Colored Slave before Civil War,” *Independence Bulletin Journal*, 16 March 1922.

²¹⁸ “Pioneer Negro Resident Dead: John Sweatt, Long Time Resident of Jefferson Township Passes On,” *Waukon Republican and Standard*, 17 September 1930; B.K. Wick, “Peter Rice,” *Palimpsest*: 203-04. James Loewen’s research shows that in small Midwestern towns with only one or two black residents, it was not uncommon for whites to refer to those residents by attaching the word “Nigger” to their first name. Loewen, *Sundown Towns*. No other blacks came to Gilman until the 1890s, when a young girl was adopted by a white family as part of the “orphan trains” which brought 8,000 children to Iowa over the course of the decade. “Orphan Trains Brought ‘Waifs’ Here in Earlier Times,” *Grinnell Herald-Register*, 1 August 1996.

²¹⁹ “Fayette County Has Oldest Living Slave,” (*West Union*) *Fayette County Union*, 28 December 1922.

family is evident in each of their stories; finding themselves in places without kinship ties, they created new ones.

The themes of kinship, personal autonomy, racial connections and interracial cooperation are also evident in one of the most extensive stories of wartime rural migration. George Boykin was born in North Carolina in 1851 and learned to read by eavesdropping on the white children's classes. After showing Federal soldiers where his master had hidden some prize horses, a captain took him to Rock Island. He was taken in by a white Waterloo couple that was looking for a black orphan to adopt. They treated him well, but he decided not to take their last name and instead changed his to George Reed Warren in honor of his father Warren Boykin; in doing so, he rejected his former master's surname while also holding on to old family connections in his new home. Shortly after the war, Warren and his adoptive parents moved west to a farm in Wright County. While in his early twenties, he made a trip to Waterloo and met a young woman named Sarah James Suter, a native of the northeastern town of McGregor; her father was a barber, while her free-born mother had been taken across the Ohio River to Cincinnati by her own white father to escape slave catchers. After a brief courtship George and Sarah married and purchased their own farm in Wright County, where they were the only black family in the county.²²⁰

Sarah also had a sister named Alice who lived in the central town of Marshalltown, and after the Warrens went for a visit, they decided to move there.²²¹ Sarah and the children went first in 1886, followed by George, who found work at the local packinghouse, and the family

²²⁰ Helen Johnson, interview by Neal, 26 August 1998, in "Giving Voice to Their Memories," 3-4; Lyftogt, *From Blue Mills to Columbia*, 102; Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa's Black Legacy*, 93-94, 122; Barnes, *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, 43-46, 97-98.

²²¹ Barnes, *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, 43-46, 97-98.

eventually bought a small farm that remained in their possession for decades.²²² Although the war and the flight from slavery had originally brought George Reed Warren and the Suters to Iowa, their desire to find work, independence and family motivated their movements after that. Their story also shows that for some migrants, the distinction between urban and rural life was not always clear. Warren spent his childhood on a plantation but moved then back and forth between industrial cities, farms and small towns, proving adept at both agricultural and factory work. The typical narrative of African Americans leaving the rural South for northern cities does not account for the fact that some went from urban living *back to* the farm, and without leaving the North.

Falling somewhere between the booming black communities of the larger southeastern cities and the isolated rural families, the mid-sized cities of central and eastern Iowa also became home to small groups of migrants. The towns of Albia and Ottumwa were far from the Mississippi River but much closer to Mount Pleasant, which helped connect them to the southeastern black communities; this and their proximity to Missouri helped draw a combined 140 African Americans. Ottumwa's black children initially attended a separate learning center created by the school board and a Sunday School class organized by a "white matron of most worthy motives," but after a few years the community established its own churches and school. The struggle to reestablish kinship ties was evident in the actions of one Charles Owens, who

²²² In the early twentieth century Helen Warren married Frank Johnson, also a longtime Marshalltown resident. Johnson's father had been born in Virginia and moved to Iowa to work in the coal mines, where he married a Montreal-born white woman who already had three white children from a previous marriage. The interracial family helped found Second Baptist Church, which sputtered at first but began to grow after more African Americans moved from Virginia and from failed coal mines in Mahaska and Monroe Counties. Barnes, *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, 43-46, 97-98; Johnson, interview.

like many other former slaves around the country took out newspaper ads in search of lost family members: in his case, a brother who had fled from bondage in 1859 and not been heard from since.²²³

Albia's black community was somewhat smaller, consisting partly of children who had been sent north. It is not clear who they lived with, but it may have been a man named William Welsh. This was unacceptable to one local farmer who saw two black children playing in Welsh's yard and began lecturing on how emancipation would lead to "the debasement and ultimate coalescence of the two races." His fears may have been motivated in part by the actions of an older migrant named Hugh McQueen, a handsome, light-skinned young man who had come to Albia with a Union soldier and became "something of a beau" with local women until they learned that he was black. There were also problems with white church leaders, who accepted blacks as members only on the condition that they sit in the back – this was justified by the claim that "the colored brethren were fond of running in and out during services" – but the black community's small numbers prevented it from creating its own stable church for many more years.²²⁴

²²³ Waterman, *History of Wapello County, Iowa I* (1914), 174, 178, 406; "History of Second Baptist Church," *Ottumwa Courier*, UNC, 1934, Ottumwa Public Library, Ottumwa, Iowa, Ottumwa Churches, Baptist (2nd); *History of Wapello County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1878), 505; "Information Wanted," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 15 January 1869.

²²⁴ The historical record does not say how or when McQueen's ancestry was discovered. It is worth noting, though, the local context in which his actions took place. One Monroe County resident later recalled that one of her favorite childhood games was "black-man," in which the "black-man" chased a group of other children and attempted to tag them. The unidentified writer stated that "it was a delicious experience to have one's school-mate sweetheart catch him; then the youth would struggle, seemingly to free himself, but really to necessitate the girl putting her arms around him to hold him, an expedient which she invariably found highly necessary. She, in turn, would seldom make much effort to escape her 'black-man' beau." Thus Monroe County's children were playing out dramas of interracial sex, consensual or otherwise. Just as blackface minstrelsy allowed whites to briefly become (or watch others become) that which they despised, "black-man" allowed children to act out the part of the sexually aggressive black man who chased after white females. Frank Hickenlooper, *An Illustrated History of Monroe County, Iowa* (Albia, IA: 1896), 183, 226, 243, 273-74; *History of Monroe County* (1878), 452.

There was not much more potential for permanent institutions in the towns of Iowa's eastern interior. Iowa City's small community doubled in size during the war, reaching eighty members, and established a church on the outskirts of town. The community included Eliza Brickle and her husband Billy, who later claimed that he had fought at Bull Run and executed his old overseer as revenge for years of cruelty and the Confederate atrocities at Fort Pillow. These claims are not supported by military records, but Billy did live out his final years at the Old Soldiers Home in Marshalltown, showing that he had in fact served in the military or else was a very good liar.²²⁵

The black population in the Cedar Rapids area also remained small. The first black resident may have been a fugitive slave named Criss, who briefly lived there in 1863. The first permanent residents, though, were part of a group of 100 former slaves sent from Missouri to the town of Tama (fifty miles to the west) by Union soldiers on a caravan of boxcars in 1865. Although some decided to stay in the Tama area, others decided that they preferred the urban life and went to Cedar Rapids. By 1870, though, there were only eleven black families. Only a few miles from Tama, fellow train rider Eliza Lewis settled in the village of Toledo because her sister had married a musician who lived nearby. She herself later married Thomas Marshall, a barber and war veteran, and the couple lived in the neighboring towns of Mount Vernon and Belle Plaine; later in life, with her husband dead and her younger relations moved away, Eliza became

²²⁵ 1860 U.S. Census; 1865 Iowa State Census; *History of Johnson County* (1883), 664; "Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church History: Celebrating 127 Years," AAHMCCI, Churches – AME: Iowa City Bethel; Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa's Black Legacy*, 74; "Slave Who Dies Here Had a Blood-Tinted Career in Long-Ago," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 24 March 1915; "Former Slave in the South Passes Away," UNC, 1911, AAHMCCI, Iowa Bios "B." No one named Billy (or William, Bill or Will) served in a black regiment, and there were no black troops at Bull Run.

the only African American in town and so moved to Des Moines, where she was not so “lonely for the company of her own race.”²²⁶

Several dozen African Americans moved to the town of Tipton with white soldiers and were welcomed by an abolitionist minister, although they eventually founded their own church. The town of Washington seventy miles to the south had even fewer black residents (less than a dozen by war’s end) but included two of eastern Iowa’s most prominent black individuals:

George Black, who will be discussed later in this chapter, and Samuel Hall, who became one of Iowa’s first published black writers with the 1912 release of his autobiography *47 Years a Slave: A Brief Story of His Life before and after Freedom Came to Him*. Hall was born in North Carolina in 1818, the son of an African. The husband of his first owner was lenient towards the slaves, but when he died his widow sold them away because “she was afraid of these Negroes who had been reared by her husband as free Negroes,” and Hall never saw his family again.²²⁷

The sense of assertiveness encouraged by his former master, who he remembered as a “dearly beloved brother,” made him useless to the man who bought him and took him to Tennessee. Hall recalled that he had threatened the man from the auction block and continued to fight with him for over a decade, stating on one occasion that “You can sell me to the devil, or

²²⁶ Dawn Ummel, “Linn Historical Museum Exhibit Honors Contributions of Blacks,” *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 25 February 1990; Rhonda K. Shouse Powell, “Pamela’s Work Brings New Life to Deceased,” *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 12 February 2003; “Death of Mrs. Ellen Taylor,” *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 31 July 1909; Randall Bennett Woods, *A Black Odyssey: John Lewis Waller and the Promise of American Life, 1878-1900* (Lawrence, KS: Regents Press of Kansas, 1981), 3-4, 6-8, 44-45, 200; “Summary of Neighborhood Research Project,” AAHMCCI (May 2002); “Eliza Marshall Born into Slavery on Missouri Plantation in 1849,” *Belle Plaine Union*, 18 July 1946.

²²⁷ Doug Schorpp, “White Towns, Black History: Although Tipton Has Few Minorities Today, That Wasn’t Always the Case,” (*Davenport*) *Quad City Times*, 26 February 1995; Grant White, “Tipton Negroes: Their History Makes Good Reading,” UNC, AAHMCCI, Vertical Files, Towns – Tipton; Kathy Fisher, *In the Beginning There Was Land: A History of Washington County, Iowa* (Washington, IA: Washington County Historical Society, 1978), 152; “Slave 94 Years Old Visiting in Iowa,” *Davenport Democrat*, 30 June 1912; Samuel Hall and Orville Elder, *Samuel Hall, 47 Years a Slave: A Brief Story of His Life Before and After Freedom Came to Him* (Washington, IA: Journal Print, 1912), 8, 11-15, 18; “Mose Hall, Born in Slavery, Dies Here at Age of Eighty,” *Washington Journal*, 7 August 1937; “Story of Samuel Hall,” *Washington Journal*, 29 October 1932.

any other place, but you can't whip me"; one battle left him with a permanent scar across the throat. When the war began he worked for the Confederate army and pretended to be a "good rebel" until he and his new family had the chance to run away. A Federal officer took them to Washington, where Hall worked as a farm laborer until he was able to purchase his own land, while his stepson learned the barber trade with George Black and Thomas Motts' son.²²⁸

Despite Hall's earlier acts of open resistance, in Washington he carefully built up goodwill among the white elite by avoiding the issue of social equality. The "little humiliations" he suffered paled in comparison to slavery and "spurred him to greater honorable effort in order that he might show the white men that there were some good Negroes."²²⁹ This strategy paid off on at least one occasion: when some whites objected to his children entering the local school, prominent citizens intervened and the school was integrated without further controversy. This perspective is also reflected in Hall's contrast of the cruelty of slavery (although he believed that it was God's plan that "brought my people from savagery and gave us the enlightenment of the American") with the innate fairness of Iowan society. He thus reconciled the overt resistance of his youth with his more accommodating attitude of later years, suggesting that southern race relations demanded direct action while whites in Iowa merited a more modest response to racism. In his closing comments to his neighbors, he wrote,

"I want the people... to know that I have always tried to live like a man among them and to be in my conduct as nearly like them as I could. I didn't want them to see anything different about me excepting my skin, and I have always claimed that if a man is black as coal, but behaves himself and tends to his own business and don't shove himself in where he ain't wanted, he'll get along all right and will be wanted more and more places as he grows older. You tell the people of

²²⁸ Hall and Elder, *Samuel Hall, 47 Years a Slave*, 11-13, 17, 21-23, 30-34, 41-42; "Story of Samuel Hall," *Washington Journal*, 29 October 1932; "Slave 94 Years Old Visiting in Iowa"; "Mose Hall, Born in Slavery, Dies Here at Age of Eighty"; Beitz, "Going Up to Glory Very Slow," 49. Samuel Hall's son eventually married Mott's grand-daughter. "Mahala Motts & Family," 17.

²²⁹ Hall and Elder, *Samuel Hall, 47 Years a Slave*, 42.

Washington county that they've always been good to me and my family and we all thank them for it. Iowa is the best state in the union toward the Negro and Iowa has always tried to help me and my people."²³⁰

Although Hall's work condoned private acts of racism and said nothing of political rights, it also offered an important counter-narrative to the national memory of slavery. At a time when white America chose to remember the antebellum past as a peaceful time filled with happy, loyal slaves, Hall's story presented a different depiction. Similar stories could be found at Emancipation Day celebrations or in newspaper interviews of elderly freedpersons, but Hall was one of the only Iowans able to get it published in his own words. The power of the printing press and public memory were thus evinced by one black settler in a small town in his own struggle for equal citizenship.

Although Iowa's black population grew dramatically during and after the war, it never approached the numbers in states like Illinois or Indiana or Kansas and Oklahoma in later years. There were two reasons for this. First, because the state was still largely rural and unindustrialized, it had fewer employment opportunities than other Midwestern states, which had cities much larger than any in Iowa. The same could be said, though, of more western states such as Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma, which did receive a much larger number of black migrants in the postbellum period. These states, however, offered something else unavailable in Iowa: open land. When the western territories were opened up for settlement after the war, many African Americans were able to purchase farm land, but Iowa was already largely settled by the beginning of the war. It may have been a predominantly an agrarian state with a low population density, but there were few acres available for sale by the time that former slaves came to buy

²³⁰ Ibid., 38, 43, 45.

them. Thus the Hawkeye State was in a unique position; it had neither industrial jobs nor land to entice black migrants, being the only state in the region that was fully settled but still overwhelmingly agrarian when the war ended.²³¹ Even after its legal system became the one of the most liberal in the country, it could not offer the employment opportunities found in more conservative states, and ultimately that proved more determinative of the black community's size than anything else.

In another sense, though, Iowa's racial dynamics were little different than those of other Midwestern states. The desire to keep the region all-white, long a motivating force in politics and custom, only increased among some whites as the war brought about massive change in Iowa society. Some feared that if slavery ended they would be overwhelmed by a large population of lazy, violent people or possibly even by racial intermarriage, while others worried that African Americans were actually capable and hardworking enough to claim an equal share of political and economic power. Although the resistance to black migration manifested by these fears was not as strong in Iowa as in some sections of Illinois and Indiana, there nevertheless was increased pressure on those migrants than ever before.²³²

Many conservatives saw opposition to black migration, the war, and the Republican Party as part of one massive struggle, using the specter of integration, white poverty, and miscegenation to drive home their point. These sentiments were especially strong in central and southern Iowa. Democrats held political rallies vowing to fight against "[filling] our schools and domestic circles with the African race" and "keep[ing] out negroes from this part of God's

²³¹ Iowa's proximity to and economic dependence on Chicago (the most rapidly growing city in the country) may have prevented it from ever developing a major metropolis. William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: Norton, 1991).

²³² Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 4, 88-89.

heritage,” by force if necessary. Although most of them opposed the war as a “wicked abolition crusade” and refused to cooperate with it, a Washington County group nevertheless became furious when a black man carried the American flag during a recruiting rally; the idea of African Americans claiming citizenship through patriotism was just as unacceptable as the war itself. Even children from Democratic families in Decatur County joined in the discourse, taunting their peers by yelling “a nigger is as good as you are.”²³³

There was also strong-anti-migration sentiment in the eastern interior and Mississippi River towns. Copperhead Silas Emory traveled throughout Johnson County “telling about the nigger coming here etc. and abusing the union men as abolitionist.” Burlington conservatives warned white laborers that if they did not vote Democratic, black men would soon have all their jobs. Judge Charles Mason, who had freed Ralph Montgomery more than twenty years earlier, now seemed a completely different man on racial issues. A pamphlet published in 1863 stated that abolition would cause Iowa to be “at once overrun with hordes of this black population, who as a class are indolent and vicious. These would not only crowd our poor-houses and prisons, but they would occupy the places which would otherwise be filled by white laborers.”²³⁴ Ironically, the old judge was using the same argument that conservatives had used against him to oppose his pioneering legal decision back in 1839; both now agreed that liberal policies would create a permanent black underclass in Iowa.

²³³ *Dubuque Herald*, 14 February, 4 March 1863, quoted in Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 89; *Daily City Gate*, 10 April 1863, quoted in Arena, “Southern Sympathy in Iowa,” 526-27; *History of Montgomery County, Iowa* (Des Moines: Iowa Historical and Biographical Co., 1881), 57-61; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Iowa Negro in War*, 312-13; Howell and Smith, *History of Decatur County* (1915), 78.

²³⁴ H.M. Remley to George A. Remley, 14 October 1863, in Holcomb, *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers*, 97; Arena, “Southern Sympathy in Iowa,” 531. Mason also declared that abolition would damage Iowa’s economy since local farmers would no longer be able to sell their crops to slaveholders, and he theorized that without interference by abolitionists slavery would have gradually and peacefully died out in the South as it once had in the north. Mason, “The Election in Iowa” (New York: Society for the Diffusion of Political Knowledge, 1863).

Equally forceful was Kentucky native Joseph M. Casey, editor of the *Fort Madison Plaindealer*. One of his editorials referred to Africans as “a miserable race of degraded beings possessing none of the characteristics which are to be found in the white race.” Just the same, he was offended when African Americans acted like citizens. After an unidentified black man made an Independence Day speech in Denmark, he declared it “extremely disgusting to the taste and olfactories of the large majority present, who attended on that occasion to celebrate a Nation’s birth-day, and not for the purpose of being familiarly introduced to Denmark ‘niggers’”; the speaker and all other African Americans, he concluded, should be barred from entering Iowa before they turned it into a crime-ridden welfare state. Casey also attacked the Republican administration, which he said was trying to create a military dictatorship policed by black troops and dominated by “nigger worshippers.” In spite of all this, he served two terms as mayor of Fort Madison’s mayor in the early 1870s and then represented the region as a state representative, senator, and district court judge; the attitudes that enabled this to happen may have been part of the reason why few African Americans settled there.²³⁵

Further up the river, Dennis Mahoney of the *Dubuque Herald* made similar arguments. Long an opponent of the Republican Party, Mahoney attacked the war as “waged by the Abolitionists...for the evident purpose of bringing the white and black races to a social, personal and political equality.” Turning his attention to more local issues, Mahoney’s editorial “Great Excitement at Niggerville” mocked the former slaves who had come to Iowa as lazy buffoons

²³⁵ “The Lovely Nigger – A Sketch,” *Ft. Madison Plain Dealer*, 25 April 1862; “The Fourth at Denmark,” *Ft. Madison Plain Dealer*, 11 June 1862; “Sorry to See It,” *Ft. Madison Plain Dealer*, 27 June 1862; “Turner’s Nigger,” *Ft. Madison Plain Dealer*, 1 August 1862; “Negroes Invited to Iowa,” *Ft. Madison Plain Dealer*, 19 September 1862; “Negro Immigration,” *Ft. Madison Plain Dealer*, 24 November 1862; “The Proclamation,” *Ft. Madison Plain Dealer*, 9 January 1863; “The Negro Our Only Hope,” *Fort Madison Plain Dealer*, 13 February 1863. In 1863 the owner of the *Plaindealer* sold it to William Caffrey on the condition that he retain its conservative leanings, but Caffrey immediately turned it into a GOP mouthpiece. *Portrait and Biographical Album of Lee County, Iowa* (1887), 182-83, 437-38, 613.

and white liberals as their worshippers. Like Joseph Casey, this rhetoric won him massive support in his home city. After he was arrested for his anti-government statements, Dubuque Democrats nominated him for Congress and he carried the city by a wide margin, though losing the election; after his release four months later, he was elected county sheriff.²³⁶ This was a firm reminder to African Americans that Dubuque remained one of the most racially conservative parts of the state. Many people shared Mahoney's assertion that emancipation would bring more African Americans to Iowa and compete with the immigrant community for jobs; one news report declared that a railroad company was bringing in 350 southern black strikebreakers, but this proved to be nothing more than rumors spread by Democratic newspapers. The city's reputation for conservatism was so widespread that newspapers in New York and Chicago called it a "sinkhole of secession" determined to resist the federal government. The already high levels of racial hostility were merely heightened by the war and the threat of black migration that it brought, and it is worth noting that like Fort Madison, Dubuque received few black migrants.²³⁷

The anti-black migration sentiment reached its peak in 1862, which was also the low point of northern war morale. State legislators from southern and central Iowa called for a constitutional amendment "to prevent the ingress of Negroes and mulattoes to this state," and although these proposals failed, the mere revival of an idea forgotten since the 1857

²³⁶ Lendt, "Iowa and the Copperhead Movement," 414, 419-20, 425-26; *Dubuque Herald*, 30 April 1862, 23 November 1860, quoted in Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 276-84, 288-91, 296, 298-301, 312, 304-05, 309, 313-14, 351, 356; "Great Excitement at Niggerville," *UNC*, 13 March 1863, AAHMCCI, Towns – Dubuque #2; Arena, "Southern Sympathy in Iowa," 525; *Des Moines Sunday Register*, 6 November 1860; Klement, "Rumors of Golden Circle Activity in Iowa," 527; *Cedar Falls Gazette*, 15 August 1862, quoted in Sturdevant, "Girding for War"; *Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery, Iowa Volume*, 786.

²³⁷ Lendt, "Iowa and the Copperhead Movement," 414; Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 273-74; H.T. Utley, *The History of Slavery and Emancipation: Speech Delivered before the Democratic Association, Dubuque, IA, 12 February 1863* (Philadelphia: John Campbell, 1863); "Negroes Coming North," *Council Bluffs Daily Bugle*, 27 September 1866; *Dubuque Daily Times*, 8 May 1862, quoted in Klement, "Rumors of Golden Circle Activity in Iowa," 526. Dubuque actually got its first black church, an AME congregation, in 1870. *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 615.

constitutional convention showed how much anti-black sentiment had been stirred up by the war.²³⁸ Black migration had become part of a larger discussion of the war and the meaning of citizenship itself. Outside the political arena, other whites decided to put their anti-black sentiments into action, especially in more isolated agricultural regions where blacks had found work as farm laborers. For the first time, there was a concerted effort in some parts to enforce the thirty-year old anti-migration law. One story holds that Copperhead mobs in southwestern Taylor County tried to expel black migrants, along with any whites who employed them.²³⁹ It was also said that Confederate raiders made plans to recapture all the fugitive slaves in Keosauqua and then burn the town to the ground, but no such attack ever occurred.²⁴⁰ One state legislator also charged that a number of migrants were being confined in jail in Des Moines.²⁴¹ No additional evidence of this has survived, but another migration controversy in central Iowa ultimately became the first wartime civil rights victory for African Americans.

In late 1862, conservative whites in Delaware Township, Polk County, discovered that a black migrant named Archie Webb was working for a wealthy white farmer. Webb had been born a slave in Arkansas and earned his freedom before coming to Iowa, but only a few months after his arrival, some of his white neighbors, who were “afraid of negro competition” for jobs,

²³⁸ *Journal of the Senate at the Extra Session of the Ninth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1862), 47.

²³⁹ The truthfulness of these stories is not beyond question, since Byers’ work is unabashedly favorable towards the Republicans and like many older historical works does not provide thorough citations. Byers, *Iowa in War Times*, 266-67.

²⁴⁰ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Underground Railroad* (Part 2), 78. For other stories about similar threats against abolitionist villages, see *Van Buren County* (1940), 26-27; Taylor, *Past and Present of Appanoose County I*, 256; *Lee County History* (1942), 54; “The Harvest Truly is Plenteous.” Shortly after the war, a group of “rowdies” near Davenport attacked the home of a local black family, breaking windows and yelling obscenities. “Dastardly,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 16 January 1866. A few months later, though, a drunk white man who attacked a young black man in Davenport found that he had bitten off more than he could chew after the black man “converted his head into a battering ram” and beat his opponent into submission. *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 15 May 1866.

²⁴¹ *Pioneer Law-Makers’ Association Reunion of 1894*, 40.

told Webb to leave the state immediately. Unlike other anti-migration activists, though, they decided to get the criminal justice system involved, perhaps fearing that only this would end the flow of blacks into the state. On January 8, 1863, the local constable served Webb with papers stating that “you are hereby notified and required to leave [the township] in three days from the Service of this notice or we will commence proceedings against you to compel your removal.”²⁴²

The former slave, though, had different ideas. He refused to leave and was thrown in jail, where he was to stay until he paid a fine; he would then be forced to leave the state. Instead Webb hired an attorney (it is not known how, but perhaps his employer made the arrangements), who on January 20 filed a writ of *habeas corpus*, claiming that he had committed no crime and was imprisoned without benefit of trial. An amendment to this brief filed several days later further stated that the 1851 anti-migration statute was “unconstitutional and void” since it violated the privileges and immunities clause of the U.S. Constitution; furthermore, it had never actually gone into effect because it had not been published as required by law. In response the sheriff’s attorney invoked *Dred Scott*, arguing that African Americans were not citizens due to their degraded state and that no state in the country afforded them the same rights as whites.²⁴³

Judge John H. Gray (who had recently chaired a public meeting in support of the Emancipation Proclamation), however, did not agree. He rejected Webb’s argument that the anti-migration law had not gone into effect, considering this a mere technicality and insufficient grounds for making such an important ruling, even though doing so would have allowed him to rule in Webb’s favor without being attacked as a moral crusader. The judge then rejected the

²⁴² *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 7 February 1863; *Des Moines Register*, 2 February 1863; Nathan E. Coffin, “The Case of Archie P. Webb, A Free Negro,” *Annals of Iowa* 3 (1913): 201-02, 204; Notice to Archie Webb, January 1863, SHSI-DM; Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 69-70, 121-22.

²⁴³ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 7 February 1863; *Des Moines Register*, 2 February 1863; Coffin, “The Case of Archie P. Webb,” 202-03; Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 70.

sheriff's argument, stating that blacks' condition was due to slavery rather than natural inferiority and that even though they did not enjoy full legal equality, they were still citizens under the Constitution. This argument distinguished between privileges such as voting or militia service, which the government could legitimately withhold from some people, and rights such as living in any state, which were guaranteed to all and could not be denied by the legislature.²⁴⁴

The next part of Gray's decision undoubtedly made conservative lawmakers wish that they had chosen their words more carefully when writing the state Bill of Rights. Article 1 stated that "all men are by nature free and independent, and have certain inalienable rights, among which are life and liberty – acquiring, possessing, and protecting property, and pursuing and obtaining safety and happiness," Gray noted, and black people could not enjoy those inalienable rights if they could not even enter the state. The anti-migration law also violated Iowans' freedom from unreasonable seizures and searches; if putting a man in jail simply for being black was not unreasonable, Gray stated, then nothing was. Finally, it violated the right to a trial by jury, since it held that blacks arrested for violating it would be tried before a justice or judge. For all these reasons, Gray decided that "the law under which the plaintiff was arrested is inoperative and void"; Archie Webb was free to go, and African Americans could no longer be restricted from entering the state.²⁴⁵

Praise for the decision immediately came from liberal newspaper editors around the state. The *Des Moines Register* proclaimed that Archie Webb had been treated like "a free man, enjoying the right to himself and the fruits of his own labor," and although it did not want to encourage black migration into Iowa, the few who did come should enjoy the same rights that

²⁴⁴ Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 70; Coffin, "The Case of Archie P. Webb," 200, 208-11, 213.

²⁴⁵ Coffin, "The Case of Archie P. Webb," 211-13. In Indiana, on the other hand, there were a number of successful prosecutions of the anti-black migration law. Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana*, 58-61, 70-73.

“God and the Constitution guarantee to all.” Thus this decision had ended “a wicked scheme of a gang of semi-traitors to inaugurate a general system of persecution against the free negroes in this State.” The *Burlington Hawk-Eye* was even more effusive, stating that “The people of Iowa will thank Judge Gray for vindicating the charter of their liberties and throwing the shield of the law over the weak and helpless, who have sought a refuge in our midst. When he decreed the freedom of Archie P. Webb, and snapped the meshes that had been so artfully thrown around an innocent and unoffending man, he gave a verdict that will be sustained by the highest legal tribunals of the Country and the chancery of Heaven.”²⁴⁶

The decision had an immediate legal impact. In 1864 several whites in Fayette tried to drive out a black man named Henry, who was working in the area, but a judge dismissed their complaint. Shortly thereafter, the state legislature wrote the decision into the state code by repealing the anti-migration act; the law was written by Samuel McNutt of Muscatine, a former Democrat who had changed parties when the South seceded and later stated that he was motivated by the reports of fugitive slaves being imprisoned in Des Moines.²⁴⁷ The assembly could have rejected Gray’s holding by writing a new statute or even by trying to create a constitutional amendment, but instead Iowa became the first Midwestern state to repeal its anti-migration laws, although every other state except Indiana followed suit shortly thereafter.

²⁴⁶ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 7 February 1863; *Des Moines Daily State Register*, 2 February 1863; Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 70, 121-22; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, UNC, quoted in Coffin, “The Case of Archie P. Webb,” 214.

²⁴⁷ N.N. Sykes to Col. Aaron Brown, 23 February 1864, Bright Radical Star Research Records (hereafter cited as BRS Records), SHSI-IC, Box 11, Folder 16: Chapter 10 – The General and Gentleman Johnny; *Pioneer Law-Makers’ Association Reunion of 1894*, 40-41, 137-38; *Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County* (1889), 213-14; Arena, “Southern Sympathy in Iowa,” 519; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Tenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1864), 86-87, 151, 184-85. Although Republican support for the repeal was almost unanimous in the final vote, eighteen Republicans had opposed it in a preliminary vote. Wubben, “The Uncertain Trumpet,” 411. McNutt’s law was only part of a wave of liberalism that swept over the legislature that year; it also rejected a proposed resolution calling for former slaves to be colonized “upon some portion of territory reclaimed from the rebels,” called on the federal government to give black and white soldiers the same pay, and passed a joint resolution stating that slavery was “incompatible with a republican government.” *Journal of the Senate of the Tenth General Assembly* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1864), 190-91, 352, 527, 570.

Although this victory was largely symbolic – blacks had been coming into the state for decades without significant interference – it represented the beginning of a liberal shift in racial dynamics.²⁴⁸ It also lifted a heavy psychological burden from the shoulders of black Iowans, who had always lived under the fear that they might be expelled from their homes. At the same time that the Webb decision was handed down, other changes in Iowa and elsewhere in the country enabled some of these black migrants to use a new strategy for fighting slavery and asserting their right to equal citizenship.

In August 1862, Alexander Clark sent a letter to Governor Kirkwood offering to raise companies of black troops to serve in one of Iowa's white regiments. Clark's proposal of an integrated unit was both ideological and pragmatic. Like many other African Americans, he saw the war as a struggle to end slavery and felt that black Iowans should do their part to help. Although committed to black institutions, he also knew that they received little government support and that even with the recent influx, there probably were not enough military-age black men in Iowa to fill a separate regiment; the most recent census listed fewer than 300, less than a third of the needed number. In any event, the offer was quickly rejected. Kirkwood's secretary answered Clark that "You know better than I the prejudices of our people for you have felt them more severely, and you know your color would not be tolerated in one of our regiments. However wrong this may be we cannot ignore the fact."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Michael Vorenberg, *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 166; Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 16.

²⁴⁹ Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 196; N.H. Brainerd to Alexander Clark, 8 August 1862, Governor's Letterbook, 1861-1863, Kirkwood Correspondence, quoted in Wubben, "The Uncertain Trumpet," 413. Although the governor's feelings about Clark's offer are not clear since he did not directly respond to it, in 1862 he was still a moderate on racial issues who said that "If the war were so prosecuted that on to-morrow the preservation of the Union were

Despite this defeat, African Americans and their allies kept pressing to join the war effort. The Republican newspapers *Davenport Gazette*, (*Des Moines*) *Iowa State Register* and *Burlington Hawk-Eye* were especially forceful, citing black military service in past wars and endorsing it in the present on humanitarian grounds but also as a pragmatic wartime measure. The latter argument ultimately proved compelling to moderates who cared little for African Americans but wanted to defeat the Confederacy.²⁵⁰ As the Emancipation Proclamation changed the nature of the war, the definition of citizenship – specifically, who shared its responsibilities and its privileges – changed too, including black men and excluding disloyal whites.²⁵¹

Political leaders also began to speak out in favor of black troops. In the summer of 1862, several Republican county conventions declared that “arming and equipping the colored man, and putting him in the field in defence of our country...[would be] the heaviest blow that has been struck at the heart of the rebellion.” The idea was supported by liberals like Josiah Grinnell, left-of-center politicians like James Grimes and James Wilson, and moderates.²⁵² Support from

effected and secured, I would not wage the war another day. I would not now spend further treasure or further life to effect the extinction of Slavery.” Clark, *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood*, 145, 150, 225.

²⁵⁰ For examples, see *Davenport Gazette*, 13 November 1861; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 16 January 1862, 12 May 1862, 17 May 1862, 24 July 1862, 25 July 1862, 9 September 1862, 11 November 1862, 12 November 1862, 21 November 1862, 24 December 1862, 24 January 1863; *Iowa State Register*, 18 February 1863, quoted in Clark, *The Politics of Iowa*. “While some of them also denounced slavery as a sin against God, humanity, morality, and natural rights, they carefully explained that these were subordinate issues, that their chief concern was the restoration of the sacred Union.” Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 16. By early 1863 Republican newspapers began suggesting that northern blacks also be recruited. The *Hawk-Eye* argued, for example, that their superior “intelligence and character” suited them to command southern blacks in segregated regiments, thus saving white troops from having to do so. Black soldiers shared the same patriotic interests as white Americans, the article continued, but were also motivated by the desire to destroy slavery. “The negro is in the war, for better or worse,” the author concluded, “and there is now no course for the government but to make the most of him.” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 31 January 1863.

²⁵¹ For example, the *Hawk-Eye* declared that “a black man who fights for my country, is better than any white man who fights against her” and that “the black is as much bound to defend the country as the white.” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 14 February 1863, 1 April 1863. In 1861 *Cedar Falls Gazette* editor Henry Perkins was a moderate Republican, but by early 1863 he declared “Let all loyal men, whether white or black, be accepted into the Union cause.” *Cedar Falls Gazette*, 18 July 1862, quoted in Lyftogt, *From Blue Mills to Columbia*, 66.

²⁵² Clark, *The Politics of Iowa*, 166; Payne, *Josiah Bushnell Grinnell*, 149-50, 161; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 15 April 1862; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 22 April 1862; Garrett Davis, “The War Not for Emancipation” (New York: E.D. Barker, 1862), 58; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 14 February 1863.

the latter two groups was usually based on how it would benefit whites; it was argued that enlisting southern blacks would keep them from moving to Iowa, while enlisting black Iowans would help fill the state troop quota, keep Iowa free of the draft, and save white lives, with Grimes going so far as to say that he “would see a negro shot down in battle rather than the son of a Dubuquer.”²⁵³

Finally, the positive example of black troops in other states (including the 1st Regiment Kansas Colored Infantry, whose Lieutenant Ransom Harris was a Cedar County Quaker and friend to the Coppoc brothers), had a strong impact on white Iowans’ racial attitudes, especially among soldiers.²⁵⁴ The Battle of Milliken’s Bend was particularly important since the Louisiana-based black troops who fought there were joined by the 23rd Iowa Infantry, the only white regiment at the battle; when it was over, Private Samuel H. Glasgow wrote his wife that “I just believe, that they would stand and Fight until the last man was Killed before they would retreat without orders.”²⁵⁵ Many white soldiers remained racist but were also willing to acknowledge

²⁵³ Johnson, “Volunteer While You May,” 42; *Dubuque Times*, 28 September 1862, quoted in Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 102; Johnson, *Warriors into Workers*, 77, 100; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 2 May 1863. Thanks in part to black soldiers, Iowa and every other Midwestern state except Wisconsin and Indiana actually did avoid the draft. Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet*, 52.

²⁵⁴ For examples, see *Pioneer Law-Makers’ Association Reunion of 1894*, 57 [Asbury B. Porter]; Leonard F. Parker Civil War Diary, 29 May, 20 July 1864, Parker Papers, Box 6 [Leonard F. Parker]; “Gen. James A. Williamson,” Major General G.M. Dodge, *Annals of Iowa* 6 (1903) [Lieutenant James A. Williamson]; Haines, “Seventy Years in Iowa,” 116-17 [James Harris]; “Benjamin F. Pearson’s War Diary,” *Annals of Iowa* 15 (1926): 90, 92-93, 109, 110, 112-13, 117, 126, 216, 287, 292-294, 299-301, 303-04, 377-78, 441, 444, 527-33, 543-45 [Benjamin Pearson]; Donald C. Elder III, ed., *Love Amid the Turmoil: The Civil War Letters of William and Mary Vermillion* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 1-7, 21-23, 44, 57, 69, 72-73, 128, 168-69, 184, 251, 286-87 [William Vermillion & Pearson].

²⁵⁵ Byers, *Iowa in War Times*, 470-471; Samuel H. Glasgow to Mrs. Glasgow, 11 June 1863, Miscellaneous Microfilm (306 Misc), Civil War Letters, Samuel H. Glassgow, Co. F, 23rd Iowa Inf., SHSI-DM. This man is often confused with Samuel L. Glasgow, who led the unit at Milliken’s Bend as a Lieutenant Colonel and was later promoted to a full colonelcy. *Roster and Record III: 17th-31st Regiments - Infantry* (Des Moines: Emory H. English, 1910). In addition to Milliken’s Bend, white Iowans would fight alongside USCT regiments at Poison Springs and Jenkins’ Ferry in Arkansas; at the Battle of Nashville; and at the capture of Fort Blakely near Mobile. Byers, *Iowa in War Times*, 289-300, 361-66, 410-15.

African Americans' military capabilities.²⁵⁶ The most striking example of this comes from John Mathews of the 13th Iowa Infantry. When the war began, he considered “darkies” little more than property. By 1863, though, he was a lieutenant with the 8th Louisiana Colored Infantry, and though still racist was able to praise black soldiers for their bravery.²⁵⁷ Mathews ultimately decided that the black soldier controversy had been much ado over nothing, writing: “The colored troops of this command have made a glorious name for themselves, they have proven themselves as brave as the bravest, perfectly at home in the drill, and far ahead of everything else in Military appearance in discipline. They have been complimented again and again by orders, their praise is in the mouth of everyone. You may think me an enthusiastic. But when you pass through what I have with them and seen what I have seen, you will better understand my feelings toward that unfortunate race, and the secret of that which seems to draw nearer to them, the minute they come in contact with them. There is a better day coming for these poor people.” Other whites made even more explicit links between martial worthiness and political rights.

Frederick Humphrey of the 12th Iowa Infantry, for example, wrote that “Infantry, cavalry and

²⁵⁶ For examples of this, see Lyftogt, *From Blue Mills to Columbia*, 92 [Robert Speer]; A.F. Sperry, *History of the 33^d Iowa Infantry Volunteer Regiment, 1863-6*, ed. Gregory J.W. Urwin & Cathy Kunzinger Urwin (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 41, 67-68, 158, 176-77, 182; Theodore M. Stuart, *Lucas and Wayne Counties, Iowa: A Record of Settlement, Organization, Progress and Achievement I* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1913), 240-42 [William Little]; Ellen Austin, ed., *Dear Companion: Civil War Letters to Anna Daily* (Rapid City, SD: Mockingbird Press, 1998), 61, 74-75, 128 [William B. Daily]; Mildred Throne, *The Civil War Diary of Cyrus F. Boyd, Fifteenth Iowa Infantry, 1862-1863* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1998); “Peter Wilson in the Civil War,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*; Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet*, 55 [Issashar Davis]; Barry Popchock, ed., *Soldier Boy: The Civil War Letters of Charles O. Musser, 29th Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1995), 15-16, 26, 58, 108, 150, 209; Julie Holcomb, ed., *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers: The Civil War Letters of the Remley Brothers, 22nd Iowa Infantry* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), xii-xiii, 57, 79, 93, 99 [George A. Remley]; Charles Randal Riggs Collection of Civil War Papers and Artifacts, SHSI-IC, Folder 1: 1861-1865 Personal Letters to brother and mother; Johnson Brigham, *Des Moines: The Pioneer of Municipal Progress and Reform of the Middle West, Together with the History of Polk County, Iowa I* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1911), 220 [Marcellus Crocker]; Elder, ed., *A Damned Iowa Greyhound: The Civil War Letters of William Henry Harrison Clayton* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998), 119, 126, 148, 173.

²⁵⁷ Abstract, John Mathews Letters, SHSI-IC; John Mathews to unidentified friend, 22 December 1861, Moreau Bridge, John Mathews Letters, Folder 3: 10 November-22 December 1861; John Mathews to father, 27 June 1862, Mathews Letters, Folder 6: 10 May-29 June 1862; Mathews to parents, 15 June 1863, Mathews Letters, Folder 9: 24 January-30 July 1863. Mathews to sister, 12 July 1863, Mathews Letters, Folder 9.

negroes, have all served their country faithfully – have fought like veterans, as they are, and are entitled to their country’s gratitude.”²⁵⁸

By the summer of 1863, two years of war had also transformed Governor Kirkwood’s attitudes into a combination of racist pragmatism, recognition of black bravery, and partisan politics. During one speech, he noted that every black death at Milliken’s Bend had saved the life of one white Iowan, but he also declared that “I can see no objections to their fighting for us if they want to... They themselves gave the answer at Milliken’s Bend, where the fortunes of the day turned on their heroic conduct.” The governor also contrasted this black sacrifice with Copperhead disloyalty, asking “Which is the most decent man, the white man who when called upon deserts and skulks away, or the negro who comes up bravely and fights? The man who fights, the man who does what he can to help crush the enemies of the country is the man with whom I would clasp hands always.” Even his most infamous statement on black troops – “When this war is over and we have summed up the entire loss of life it has imposed on the country, I shall not have any regrets if it is found that a part of the dead are *niggers* and that *all* are not white men” – was ultimately an endorsement of black military service, which he had rejected only a few years earlier, and proof that whites could endorse this change without fully transforming their racial views.²⁵⁹

This pressure and changing attitude culminated in direct action in the third spring of the war. On May 25, 1863, War Secretary Edwin M. Stanton authorized Brigadier General Lorenzo

²⁵⁸ Mathews to sister, 30 July 1863, Mathews Letters, Folder 9; Mathews to Mrs. Vaughan, 30 November 1864, Mathews Letters, Folder 11: 22 January-26 July 1864; Ted Genoways and Hugh H. Genoways, eds., *A Perfect Picture of Hell: Eyewitness Accounts by Civil War Prisoners from the 12th Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 225-29.

²⁵⁹ Lathrop, *Life and Times of Samuel J. Kirkwood*, 252, 257-59; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 196; Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie S. Rowland eds., *Freedom’s Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 86.

Thomas to begin organizing new regiments of former slaves in the Mississippi Valley. Thomas' subordinate Colonel William Pile, an ardent abolitionist, was appointed to carry out these orders in Missouri, but both he and Thomas realized that southern Iowa also had a number of potential soldiers and asked Kirkwood for permission to recruit there. The governor was not sure if there were enough black Iowans to fill an entire regiment, but he gave the project his blessing. War Department General Order No. 122 declared that "Whereas authority has been granted by the War Department to Colonel William A. Pile, to raise a regiment of men of African descent, and, whereas, the rendezvous of said regiment has been fixed at Keokuk, Iowa... The regiment will be known as the First Regiment of Iowa African Infantry."²⁶⁰

Black community leaders like Alexander Clark and George V. Black began recruiting for the new regiment. According to one story, Clark brought in fifty men by giving each of them two dollars. Black was named a sergeant while Clark was appointed sergeant major, the highest rank available to a noncommissioned officer, but he failed the army's physical exam due to an old leg injury.²⁶¹ Military recruiters also traveled throughout southern Iowa and even northern Missouri until Unionist slaveholders complained. The small number of black Iowans may have forced army recruiters to use unsavory methods. Former Missouri slave Henry Clay Bruce recalled that agents came to his home in Brunswick, over a hundred miles south of the state line, and that

²⁶⁰ *Roster and Record V: 32d-48th Regiments – Infantry, 1st Regiment African Infantry and 1st-4th Batteries Light Artillery* (Des Moines: Emory H. English, 1911), 1585. Although the 1st was technically a state regiment rather than a federal one, there was some confusion over who was in charge of organizing it until Stanton informed Iowa's Adjutant General N.B. Baker that the officers were commissioned by the president and had to be approved by a board of examiners; the governor could make recommendations but did not have the final word. Stanton to Baker, 9 October 1863, in *War of the Rebellion, Series III - Volume I*, 873.

²⁶¹ *Washington County Press*, 2 December 1863, quoted in WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Iowa Negro in War*, 311; Hawthorne, *African Americans in Iowa*, 9. In December the *Washington County Press* reported that Colonel Hudson had personally lauded Clark for his efforts; the *Press* joined this praise by lamenting the fact that Clark could not serve and asking "How many white men would do more?" WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Iowa Negro in War*, 311.

when some black men were unwilling to go, they used impressments to fill their quotas; Bruce was “greatly relieved when a company was filled out and left for some point in Iowa.”²⁶²

Although his recollections may have been colored by his generally critical attitudes about Union soldiers, similar problems occurred elsewhere. When Governor Kirkwood asked General J.M. Schofield to recruit in eastern Missouri, Schofield agreed that he could fill several companies in St. Louis but could not “permit officers to go through the State recruiting in the usual manner, because of the abuses which necessarily result and the consequent disturbance in the country.” There was also morally questionable recruiting in Iowa’s Black Hawk County. The local recruiting officer promised a black barber named George Butler that if he enlisted he would receive a \$200 volunteer bounty and could join any regiment he liked, but when Butler tried to sign up with the cavalry, he was sent to the 1st African. He complained about the trickery, but the *Cedar Falls Gazette* stated that “we are candid in the belief that [the recruiting officer] had no part in drawing the wool over the darkey’s eyes.”²⁶³

Although southern Iowa’s black population was much smaller than that of the other regions, a higher percentage was available for military service. Many black men in states closer to the fighting were employed as army laborers. The generals who employed them did not want to lose their workforce, and the workers themselves sometimes made more money than they would as soldiers. The ten dollars per month paid to black soldiers was also not enough for most landowning black farmers in the Midwest to hire replacement workers while they fought.²⁶⁴

²⁶² Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 197; William S. Morris, “Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation, 1863-1991,” in *Outside In*, 97; Bruce, *The New Man*, 107-08.

²⁶³ J.M. Schofield to Kirkwood, 4 November 1863, in *War of the Rebellion, Series III - Volume I*, 993; Lyftogt, *From Blue Mills to Columbia*, 113.

²⁶⁴ Berlin, Reidy and Rowland eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867, Series II: The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Versalle F. Washington, *Eagles on Their Buttons: A Black Infantry Regiment in the Civil War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 11, 39.

Neither of these concerns applied in Iowa, though, since most black men were employed by private citizens (who could not thwart army recruiters nearly as well as high-ranking officers) and did not own farms. These factors helped ensure that the state would be able to fill the new regiment with the required number of men.

Six companies were organized in the Hawkeye State and four more in St. Louis. As with all black regiments, the commissioned officers were white. The troops would be led by Colonel John G. Hudson, previously a captain with the 33rd Missouri. Information on Hudson is limited, but the 33rd's official record shows that he had spent most of the war in bloodless patrol duty, which actually prepared him well for his new position.²⁶⁵ Some of the county histories published during the late 19th century provide insight into the other white officers. For men like New York native Ralph Teller of Lee County and Gardiner Deane of Van Buren County, the 1st African provided promotion opportunities that were more limited in white regiments.²⁶⁶ Iram Sawyer of Fayette County, the descendant of five Revolutionary War veterans, got the chance to resume an active role in the military after a leg injury suffered early in the war forced him to spend nearly a year in a Keokuk hospital. Dr. Milton Collins of Keokuk may have been motivated by moral sentiments; he had helped recruit for the 1st African, and back in 1838 he had traveled to Chicago to help fight an epidemic in the Native American population and suffered an infection that may

²⁶⁵ Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959) (hereafter cited as *Dyer's Compendium*). Five members of his staff and many other officers (including most of the captains and lieutenants who directly supervised the ten companies) were Iowans, many from the southern abolitionist towns. Lieutenant Colonel Milton F. Collins, Major John L. Murphy, Adjutant Theodore W. Pratt, Quartermaster William McQueen, and Surgeon Freeman Knowles all listed Keokuk as their place of residence, and Assistant Surgeon Andrew Patten was from Newton. *Roster and Record V*.

²⁶⁶ Teller enlisted in the 2nd Iowa Infantry as a private in 1861, joined the 1st African as a first lieutenant, and left the service a captain two years later. *Portrait and Biographical Album of Lee County, Iowa* (1887), 341. Deane had fought with the 3rd Iowa at Pea Ridge and several skirmishes, and came to the 60th with several letters of recommendation describing him as "a young man possessing very fair abilities, with a moral character untarnished," "coolness and courage," and "sober" habits. Theo M. Cook, *Boys in Blue: Van Buren County in the Civil War, 1861-1865* (Bonaparte, IA: Record-Republican, 1963), 50; Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 42.

have eventually forced him to leave the service early.²⁶⁷ The black enlisted men selected from the ranks to serve as noncommissioned officers, like most around the country, probably lacked formal education but possessed intangible qualities that made them ideal leaders. George V. Black, for example, owned a barber shop in Washington, and his experience as a recruiter showed that he already had influence over his fellow enlisted men.²⁶⁸

Despite many reports to the contrary, it appears that nearly all of the 1st African's enlisted men were recent arrivals from Missouri and that most prewar black Iowans did not enlist.²⁶⁹ Not surprisingly, most of those who gave Iowa as their current place of residence lived in the southeast or the Mississippi River towns, including more than one hundred from Lee County and

²⁶⁷ Roberts and Moorhead, *Story of Lee County*, vol. 2 (1914), 20, 23, 152, 155. Curiously, Collins did not serve the 1st African as head or assistant surgeon; that post went to Freeman Knowles until he resigned in the summer of 1864 and then to Cyrus E. Rayburn of Montezuma. Parker, *History of Poweshiek County*, vol. 1 (1880), 131. For more information about other white Iowan officers in black regiments, see the following sources: John L. Matthews of the 8th Louisiana Colored Infantry - Abstract, John Mathews Letters, 1861-1869; A.J.P. Barnes of the 42nd U.S.C.I. and J.L. Welch of the 47th U.S.C.I. - *History of Marion County* (1881), 546, 616-17; George E. Warner, 10th U.S.C.I. - *History of Western Iowa* (Sioux City: Western Publishing Company, 1882), 257; Charles Randall Riggs, 62nd U.S.C.I. & 7th U.S. Colored Artillery - Charles Randall Riggs Collection of Civil War Papers and Artifacts, SHSI-IC; Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 42; Seth Wheaton and Jesse H. Darnell, 58th U.S.C.I. - Robert Cowden, *A Brief Sketch of the Organization and Services of the Fifty-Ninth Regiment of United States Colored Infantry, and Biographical Sketches* (Dayton: United Brethren Publishing House, 1883), 273, 279-80; Carl von Wedelstädt and Carl Epeneter - Martin W. Ofele, *German-Speaking Officers in the U.S. Colored Troops, 1863-1867* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004), 47, 59, 226; D.A. LaForce, 56th U.S.C.I. - William L. Alexander, *List of Ex-Soldiers, Sailors and Marines, Living in Iowa* (Des Moines: George E. Roberts, 1886), 759; John S. Agey, 56th U.S.C.I. - Roberts and Moorhead, *Story of Lee County I* (1914), 193.

²⁶⁸ Frances Hawthorne, *African Americans in Iowa*, 9. The *Roster and Record* states that Black enlisted as a First Sergeant," but National Park Service records list his rank in as Private. *Roster and Record V*, 1602; National Park Service, "Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System," <http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/soldiers.cfm>.

²⁶⁹ I searched through a computer database of soldiers from the USCT, using names of black Iowan males at least thirteen years old on the 1860 census. Only eight African Americans are found in both the 1860 census and the 1st African's roster. "Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System." The misconception that the 1st African included every able-bodied black male in Iowa may have started with some creative accounting by Governor Kirkwood, who claimed 903 black soldiers; the state quartermaster general eventually admitted that "many of the men enlisted in this regiment came from Missouri," though, and Iowa was credited with 440 black troops. Thomas M. Vincent to Samuel J. Kirkwood, 21 January 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series III, Volume III* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899), 41; *Report of the Adjutant General and Acting Quartermaster General of the State of Iowa (for 1863)* (Des Moines, 1864), iv-v. The first appearance of the misconception was an 1867 article in the *Davenport Gazette*, which said that the regiment contained "about every man of African descent in the state who was capable of performing military service." *Davenport Gazette*, 17 April 1867. Historian and veteran S.H.M. Byers wrote in 1888 that "and almost every single arms bearing black man in the state shouldered his musket and joined the regiment." Byers, *Iowa in War Times*. The otherwise accurate *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers* repeated the *Gazette* statement almost verbatim. *Roster and Record V*.

a dozen each from Keosauqua, Mount Pleasant, and Burlington. Davenport supplied the regiment with more than twenty members (as did Fort Snelling near the Twin Cities in Minnesota); it is likely that many of these soldiers had come up the Mississippi with white troops, thus reiterating Davenport's importance as a military base and refuge for former slaves. There were also sixteen volunteers from the Nodaway Valley, despite its distance in far southwestern Iowa, and many others from various rural regions around central Iowa and the eastern interior. There were, however, none from the Fayette settlement.²⁷⁰ In short, the same factors that shaped Iowa's black wartime migration also had a major impact on the creation of the state's black regiment.

Aside from basic data such as age and place of birth found in military records, most information about the enlisted men comes from a few postwar news reports, mostly from the town of Newton in central Iowa. Nevertheless, these records offer some helpful insights. Jason Green was born in Kentucky, made his way to Missouri in 1862 or 1863, and then headed to Newton with his friend Alexander Fine and his brothers Taylor, John and Lewis Mayes; all were free except Lewis, and Fine had been working as an overseer. Jason and Lewis worked for white families in Newton and attended the local school despite the objections of some parents, until all five men enlisted in 1863; Taylor was a musician and John was made a sergeant (and was also the only one of the five who did not survive the war), but the other three were privates. They were joined by fellow Newton residents Clem Miller, who had fled from slavery in Missouri eight years earlier, and by Walker Waldon, who had left Virginia in 1862. Another private described but not identified in newspaper records had been a slave in St. Louis until the members

²⁷⁰ John C. Culbertson, "Record of Veteran Enlistments in 1st African Iowa Regiment Known As 1st Iowa Regt. A.D. and Subsequently as 60th U.S. Inf. Showing Actual Residences by District, Counties, Townships, Cities and Wards," Adjutant General's Office, Davenport, 6 September 1864.

of his mother's white Episcopal church in Davenport paid \$900 for his freedom.²⁷¹ Another of Davenport's enlistees was young Milton Howard, the aforementioned German-speaking fugitive, who told the military that he was nineteen although he was probably much younger.²⁷²

The most extensive chronicle of any enlisted man appeared in a 1923 article in the *Annals of Iowa*, the state's leading historical journal. John Graves and his friends Alex Nichols, Anderson Hayes, and Henderson Hayes were all Kentucky slaves taken to northwestern Missouri before the war. When the fighting began they learned that their masters were planning to send them to Texas, so they made plans of their own, "borrowing" four horses and mules and heading for Canada, which they thought was relatively nearby. Despite having to travel at night and hide during the day they reached central Iowa in several days, but a band of proslavery men captured them in Winterset while they were waiting for their horses to be shod. The white men could not find any police officers to place their quarry in jail, so they formed a ring around them and "dared anyone to try to come inside"; some sympathetic townspeople accepted the challenge, broke through the barrier, and helped the fugitives escape. They were fed and given directions to Newton, where they all found work as farm laborers until they enlisted; Graves took his employer's last name and signed up as John Sherer. After the war he brought his parents up from Missouri, where they joined his three sisters. His father had changed his last name to Miller, so

²⁷¹ *Newton Journal*, 21-22 June 1899, December 1911; *Newton Daily News*, 11 October 1913, February 1914, 9 December 1919; Richter, "Davenport Purchased a Slave." Jason and Taylor's military records show that they were living in Mount Ayr, Iowa, which is more than 100 miles south of Newton; the family must have moved around periodically in search of work before enlisting. *Roster and Record V*.

²⁷² Robert Morris contends that Howard joined the 1st African as a drummer boy, but the *Roster and Record* lists his rank as Private. He later claimed that he was imprisoned at Ft. Gibson, Arkansas for six months (where he spent most of his time praying for a Union victory) and also suffered a bullet wound in the leg, which lingered until a Davenport surgeon removed it years later. "African Red Book of Davenport"; Morris, "Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation," 95; *Rock Island Daily Argus*, 8 August 1875.

his son did the same and became John Ross Miller, the name that he kept for the rest of his life.²⁷³

These stories show certain patterns in the way that Iowa's young, single black men enlisted. After fleeing slavery, they tried to make their way as low-paid laborers in unfamiliar, overwhelmingly white surroundings during a destructive war, but they used family and friends (both new and old) to create a familiar environment and then strengthened those ties by enlisting together, just as many white soldiers did. For other members of the 1st African, kinship ties went even deeper. Although the history of a Civil War regiment is by necessity male-dominated, women played an integral symbolic and economic role. In July, the wife of Sergeant Isaac N. Triplett (along with Alexander Clark) presented the 1st with its regimental banner, sewn by African-American women in Muscatine and Keokuk.²⁷⁴ Like their white counterparts, black women showed their own wartime dedication by providing the regiment with its most important physical symbol, even if their participation was couched in traditional domestic terms.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, while the army fed, housed and clothed the soldiers, black women became the family's primary breadwinners and were left to contend with white resistance and poverty on their own.²⁷⁶ Other black Iowans on the home front supported the war effort in various ways:

²⁷³ Berrier, "The Story of One 'Colored Infantryman,'" *Des Moines Sunday Register*, 19 May 2002; Morris, "Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation," 93-94; C.C. Stiles, "John Ross Miller," *Annals of Iowa* 19 (1934): 384-86.

²⁷⁴ Morris, "Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation," 97; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Iowa Negro in War*, 312.

²⁷⁵ This civilian support provided a great psychological boost to all soldiers but carried extra meaning for black troops, who were often under-provisioned; the flag that the black women sewed may have actually been better than the one they would have received from their quartermaster. Patricia L. Richard, *Busy Hands: Images of the Family in the Northern War Effort* (New York, 2003), 108.

²⁷⁶ Black Midwestern children also had to bear a heavy burden. Alex Roberts of Chillicothe, Ohio (and later Davenport), for example, was a promising student until he left school at the age of twelve to support his family, which had suffered financial reversals since his father joined the army. UNC, *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 9 January 1929; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #3, 84-85. Some black women took their families to the military camps, which saved money and helped recreate the family environment. Schwalm, "Slavery and Freedom in the Midwest," 8-9.

Clark opened a barber shop for soldiers at Muscatine's Camp Strong, while a Keokuk preacher prayed for what a visitor described as "the utter extinguishment of all rebels" and exclaimed "God Almighty, give 'em Hail Columby."²⁷⁷

The six Iowa companies of the 1st African were mustered into service in Keokuk on October 11, 1863 and met up with the other four companies in St. Louis a month later. After another month of drilling at nearby Benton Barracks, the entire regiment headed south to Arkansas on December 14.²⁷⁸ For the next two years the 1st would be stationed in or near Helena, a Mississippi River town that was part of the Trans-Mississippi Theater of operations and home to twenty thousand soldiers (including two Iowa regiments) and several thousand black refugees.²⁷⁹ Although Arkansas was largely out of the national war by 1863, guerilla fighting had caused great instability and destroyed what had been a growing antebellum economy. Thus the

²⁷⁷ Thomas Motts had opened his own shop only a few days earlier. Witmer, "Thomas C. Motts," 12; *Keokuk Gate City*, 2 May 1863.

²⁷⁸ Thirteen men died in Keokuk, and twenty-two more at Benton Barracks. Janet B. Hewett, ed., *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (hereafter cited as *Supplement to the Official Records*), Part II – *Record of Events, Volume 78, Serial No. 90* (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1998), 345-46, 357.

²⁷⁹ *Roster and Record V*, 1586. The Trans-Mississippi also included Missouri, Louisiana, Texas, and the Indian Territory. Thomas A. DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 35. Helena's Federal occupation began in the spring of 1862. DeBlack, "1863: 'We Must Stand or Fall Alone,'" in Mark K. Christ, ed., *Rugged and Sublime: The Civil War in Arkansas* (Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 75; Carl H. Moneyhon, "From Slave to Free Labor: The Federal Plantation Experiment in Arkansas," in Anne J. Bailey & Daniel E. Sutherland, eds., *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 178; *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. XXXIV, Part IV – Correspondence* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), 608. General Lorenzo Thomas' plan to employ former slaves as laborers on plantations rented to white Unionists (which if successful would have created a "loyal population" along the Mississippi River, helped the freedpersons transition to freedom, and restored the plantation economy) was a failure, in part because the landowners saw their workers as little different than slaves; one became the only person ever convicted of violating the Emancipation Proclamation. Black women were employed by the army to cook and do laundry while men became laborers or joined the military, but work was still scarce enough that by the autumn of 1863 Union commanders wanted to send the refugees north so that they would not starve. Howard C. Westwood, *Black Troops, White Commanders, and Freedmen during the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 167-79; Moneyhon, "The Federal Plantation Experiment in Arkansas," 178-80, 184-85, 189-90, 192-93; DeBlack, "We Must Stand or Fall Alone," 78; Charles G. Williams, "The Action at Wallace's Ferry, Big Creek, Arkansas, July 26, 1864," *Phillips County Historical Quarterly* 25 (1987): 46.

“military backwater” of Helena was calm but close to bands of Confederate bushwhackers roving the countryside. With constant temperature extremes, muddy streets, a lack of fresh food, and sanitation problems, the town was so unhealthy that Iowa soldiers nicknamed it “Hell-in-Arkansas,” while nurse Margaret E. Breckinridge wrote “You never saw so wretched a place.”²⁸⁰

These conditions were even worse for black soldiers, since the segregated black hospital was one of the worst in the country. Within a week of the 1st’s arrival, an officer reported that “the sick list is increasing daily.”²⁸¹ One of the first to die was George Butler, and eventually more than three hundred others would fall from disease.²⁸² One of the only advantages to life in Helena was its safety from rebel attacks, thanks to nearby hills and ravines, a semicircle of four batteries, the earthen works Fort Curtis on the western edge of town, and the heavily armed

²⁸⁰ William L. Shea, “1862: ‘A Continual Thunder,’” in Christ, *Rugged and Sublime*, 59; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 197; Robert R. Mackey, *The Uncivil War: Irregular Warfare in the Upper South, 1861-1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 25; DeBlack, “We Must Stand or Fall Alone,” 75; Sperry, *History of the 33^d Iowa*, 14; Popchock, *Soldier Boy*, 21. Several wartime photographs show flooding so severe that soldiers were forced to canoe around town. “Flooding, Helena, Phillips County, Arkansas, 1863-4,” “Flooding in Helena, Ark., with men in boats and atop buildings, 1865,” both at Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Arkansas, Vault 1. A strain of diarrhea nicknamed the “Tennessee Quick-Step” afflicted hundreds of soldiers and sent many to a “sad end [at] the lonely grave-yard on the bare Helena hills.” Kelly and Kelly, *Dream’s End*, 34-36, 49; Sperry, *History of the 33^d Iowa*, 26. Since no memoirs written by members of the 1st African have survived, we are dependent on those written by whites to learn what life was like in Helena.

²⁸¹ Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 194; Hewett, *Supplement to the Official Records, Volume 78*, 346. Disease killed ninety members of the 1st African between January and March of 1864.

²⁸² Lyftogt, *From Blue Mills to Columbia*, 91, 113; *Roster and Record V*, 1595. Although disease was the leading killer for soldiers of all races, black troops died in much higher percentages due to their harsher working conditions, inferior rations and supplies, and poor medical care. Many soldiers in Helena also suffered from tedium; with little fighting to do, most drilled constantly just to alleviate the boredom. Some white Iowa soldiers initially found the state’s rivers and rocky landscape beautiful or even familiar but then decided that it was “alien and undesirable” as the war dragged on. Shea, “A Semi-Savage State: The Image of Arkansas in the Civil War,” in Bailey and Sutherland, *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 86-87, 92, 94-95; Sperry, *History of the 33^d Iowa*, 31, 52. They undoubtedly noticed, though, that their lot was still better than that of the black civilians, who had even less shelter, clothing and food as well as vindictive, violent former masters. Kelly and Kelly, *Dream’s End*, 35; DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 87.

U.S.S. Tyler on the river bank; the soldiers and townspeople probably had far more to fear from mud and disease than from rebels.²⁸³

Little information about the relationship between the 1st African and Helena's other black soldiers (mainly refugees from Arkansas and Mississippi) or black civilians has survived. It is likely that they encouraged local African Americans to join the army, since the regiment mustered in more than a dozen new troops from Helena over the next two years.²⁸⁴ The 1st may also have borrowed as its anthem the "Marching Song of the First Arkansas," written to the tune of "John Brown's Body" and providing a striking, historically informed boast of racial pride and resistance:

"Oh, we're the bully soldiers of the 'First of Arkansas,
We are fighting for the Union, we are fighting for the law,
We can hit a Rebel further than a white man ever saw,
As we go marching on..."

We have done with hoeing cotton, we have done with hoeing corn,
We are colored Yankee soldiers, now, as sure as you are born;
When the masters hear us yelling, they'll think it's Gabriel's horn,
As we go marching on."²⁸⁵

Although the second to last line probably referred to the biblical Gabriel, it may have also been a subtle reference to the eponymous Virginia blacksmith who in 1800 had tried to take up arms against slavery, just as the black troops were doing now.²⁸⁶

²⁸³ DeBlack, "We Must Stand or Fall Alone," 78-79; Elder, *Love Amid the Turmoil*, 123; Byers, *Iowa in War Times*, 236-37.

²⁸⁴ Urwin, "Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in Civil War Arkansas," 220-21; *Roster and Record V*. One general reported after a skirmish involving another black regiment that "The blacks hailed with joy the appearance of the colored soldiers... 125 recruits were obtained." "Report of Maj. Gen. Benjamin M. Prentiss, U.S. Army, Headquarters District of Eastern Arkansas, Helena, Ark., May 27, 1863," in *War of the Rebellion, Series 1, Volume XXII, Part I – Reports* (1888), 339-40.

²⁸⁵ DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 87-88. Although there is no evidence that the Iowa troops sang this song, it would have been easy to change the first stanza to "Oh, we're the bully soldiers of the 'First of Iowa.'"

²⁸⁶ James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Military records fail to shed much light on the personal lives of the men of the 1st African, but they do show the regiment's official activities.²⁸⁷ During the first six months of 1864 the regiment mainly performed garrison duty and carried out fatigue duty, including the same dock labor that many of the soldiers undoubtedly had done as civilians in eastern Iowa.²⁸⁸ On January 29, for example, Companies A-D were in camp; Company E was protecting government wood choppers on Island No. 66; and Companies F-K had relieved a white regiment at garrison duty, engaged in artillery drill, and built and repaired batteries and rifle pits. Although Company K quickly became "very efficient in artillery drill," Company F was kept busy repairing entrenchments and unloading goods for the quartermaster. Company I passed inspection twice while in command of Battery F, while Company G garrisoned Battery C for nearly all of 1864, "[adding] greatly to the improvement" of its defenses. On January 27, the entire regiment served as part of an "African Guard." Many of the troops also went on scouting missions through the countryside and along the river, taking dozens of prisoners without suffering any casualties, and won praise from their superiors for their quick study of artillery and infantry tactics; one officer's report stated that Company D "made fair progress in the

²⁸⁷ Although most military records of the 1st African have been available for over a century via the *War of the Rebellion* series, a full examination of the regiment's activities has never before been undertaken. Reports and correspondence about each regiment are scattered through numerous volumes in a series that numbers in the hundreds, making it a Herculean task to search for information about just one, but the entire series is now available online in a searchable database. My own search of this database, using key-phrases such as "Iowa," "60th," and "Helena" turned up relevant records in nearly two dozen volumes. Robert Dykstra's examination of the 1st's battle record is based entirely on Charles G. Williams' 1987 article "The Action at Wallace's Ferry," which provides a good overview but has several mistakes in its citation of *War of the Rebellion*. The new database is complimented by Janet Hewett's 1998 series, which includes a wealth of new information on the daily activity of Civil War regiments; information on the 1st African is confined to Volume 78. Hewett, *Supplement to the Official Records, Part II, Volume 78*, iv, 345-69.

²⁸⁸ This was typical of black regiments in Arkansas. Moneyhon, "A State of Perfect Anarchy," 149.

acquisition of knowledge and exhibit a soldierly bearing and efficiency far exceeding the expectations of all experienced observers.”²⁸⁹

Like other black regiments, the 1st African was renamed in March 1864, becoming the 60th United States Colored Infantry.²⁹⁰ As spring turned into summer the soldiers still had not seen any combat, but the war still took a heavy toll on them and the entire state of Arkansas. Industry crawled to a halt, while inflation and guerilla attacks on supply lines made it impossible for civilians to buy basic products; some people resorted to making clothes from carpet.²⁹¹ Secessionist civilians swallowed their pride and did business with Federal troops, some of whom in turn traded guns for Confederate cotton.²⁹² Corn rotted on the stalk because no one was there to harvest it, and meat was in shortage after an outbreak of hog cholera.²⁹³ Disease took such a toll on the 60th that on any given day only half of the men were available for duty, and even the Mississippi River itself was treacherous; in the spring, two soldiers drowned.²⁹⁴ For the first time in months there was also a renewed threat from rebel forces. Confederate General Joseph Shelby and his subordinate Colonel A.S. Dobbins hatched a plan to seize supplies and disrupt Federal movements by raiding Unionist plantations, which would also help them prepare for an even larger invasion of Missouri.²⁹⁵ Rebel guerillas near Helena were already raiding boats, selling black civilians into slavery and forcing the army and civilians to build forts staffed by

²⁸⁹ Hewett, *Supplement to the Official Records, Volume 78*, 346-47, 349, 351-52, 356, 360-62, 364-68.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 346; *War of the Rebellion, Series III, Volume IV*, 164-65.

²⁹¹ Sutherland, “1864: ‘A Strange, Wild Time,’” in Christ, *Rugged and Sublime*, 127. Medicine, shoes, needles, writing paper, and ink were also in short supply. Michael B. Dougan, *Confederate Arkansas: The People and Policies of a Frontier State in Wartime* (University of Alabama Press, 1976), 106.

²⁹² Moneyhon, “A State of Perfect Anarchy,” 151.

²⁹³ There was also a shortage of acorns, which were fed to hogs. Dougan, *Confederate Arkansas*, 106.

²⁹⁴ N.B. Buford to W.D. Green, 6 May 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series III - Volume I*, 481-82; Buford to Green, Helena, 11 June 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. XXXIV, Part IV*, 310. By the end of June 1864, nearly two hundred members of the 60th had died of disease. *Roster and Record V*.

²⁹⁵ Williams, “The Action at Wallace’s Ferry,” 46.

convalescent troops.²⁹⁶ By the end of June, Union commander Napoleon Buford was worried that they would attack Helena itself, which by was now largely defended by black troops, whom he did not trust.²⁹⁷ He asked his superiors to send him more white troops before the town was sacked, but before long the 60th would show him that this request was unnecessary.²⁹⁸

In an effort to end the raids and “ascertain the force and design of the enemy,” Buford sent a reconnaissance force of 360 men down the Mississippi, including troops from Colonel William Brooks’ 56th USCI, Major Eagleton Carmichael’s 15th Illinois Cavalry, the 2nd U.S. Colored Light Artillery, and Companies C and F of the 60th, the latter two commanded by Captain Eli Ramsey.²⁹⁹ Brooks and Carmichael reached an area called Wallace’s Ferry (near the Big Creek River) at between 3 and 5am on July 26th with no sign of rebel troops. Carmichael then crossed the creek and headed west to the rural interior of Phillips County, where he found an empty rebel camp and captured several stragglers. Brooks also crossed the creek at Wallace’s Ferry but doubled back when his reconnaissance troops (who had gathered intelligence from local black residents) informed him that rebel troops had been there only the day before. Shortly after his return to the ferry around 6am, a band of 1,500 Confederates led by General Dobbin

²⁹⁶ Moneyhon, “The Federal Plantation Experiment in Arkansas,” 185; W.J. McArthur to Col. A.S. Dobbin, 6 July 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part II – Correspondence, Etc.* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 994; Sutherland, “Guerillas: The Real War in Arkansas,” in Bailey and Sutherland, *Civil War Arkansas*, 139.

²⁹⁷ “How well can it be expected,” Buford asked, “they will handle artillery, the two Government wharf-boats, and quartermaster’s and commissary stores of great value?” Buford to Green, Helena, 6 May 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. XXXIV, Part III*, 481.

²⁹⁸ Buford to Green, Helena, 6 May 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. XXXIV, Part III*, 481.

²⁹⁹ “Reports of Brig. Gen. Napoleon B. Buford, U.S. Army, Commanding District of Eastern Arkansas,” 26 July 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part I – Reports* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 16; “Report of Maj. Eagleton Carmichael, Fifteenth Illinois Cavalry,” 27 July 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part I*, 20; Hewett, *Supplement to the Official Records, Volume 78*, 347; Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 197; Williams, “The Action at Wallace’s Ferry,” 47. Brooks also had orders to acquire cattle or horses belonging to “disloyal persons,” to scout Big Creek for a suitable location for a fort and brigade, and to “capture any citizens who have been aiding in conscripting for or furnishing the rebel army,” including eight men listed by name in his orders. Buford to W.S. Brooks, 25 July 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part II*, 384.

emerged from the woods only 150 yards away.³⁰⁰ As Carmichael heard the sounds of battle and raced back towards the creek, Confederates guns killed Colonel Brooks, a captain, the surgeon (who was caring for Brooks when he was shot) and the 60th's Adjutant Theodore W. Pratt.³⁰¹ Major Moses Reed of the 56th assumed command and ordered the men to take cover behind a railroad embankment while the artillery (supported by sixteen men from the 60th) prevented the rebels from advancing further. Fortunately, the Iowans were armed with top-line .577 caliber Enfield rifled muskets rather than the outdated weapons usually issued to garrison troops. The Confederate advance turned into a stalemate, which was finally broken at 10am when Carmichael's cavalry arrived. Dobbin had brought up his reserve and was preparing to make another charge, but the cavalry disrupted his lines and forced them back.³⁰²

Although the attack had been stopped, the Federal troops were still greatly outnumbered, and another rebel force of four to six thousand men was only an hour away. Carmichael and Reed decided that their only viable option was retreat to Helena. They abandoned all but two of the heavy guns (with most of the horses dead or wounded, it would have been impossible to transport them anyway), broke through the Confederate lines, and headed back to town. With rebels harassing them on all sides they executed a "gallant and successful" retreat, alternating between skirmishing and marching while they carried the wounded and protected the remaining field guns. Eleven miles from the city the Confederates massed in front of the Federal troops and

³⁰⁰ "Reports of Brig. Gen. Napoleon B. Buford"; Williams, "The Action at Wallace's Ferry," 47-48; "Report of Lieut. Col. Moses Reed, Fifty-Sixth U.S. Colored Troops," Helena, AK, 27 July 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part I*, 19; "Report of Major General F. Steele, U.S. Army, Commanding the Department of Arkansas," 15 August 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part I*, 13; "Report of Lieut. Harmon T. Chappel."

³⁰¹ A lieutenant was also severely wounded. "Report of Lieut. Col. Moses Reed"; "Report of Maj. Eagleton Carmichael"; "Reports of Brig. Gen. Napoleon B. Buford."

³⁰² "Report of Lieut. Harmon T. Chappel"; Williams, "The Action at Wallace's Ferry," 48; William A. Gladstone, *United States Colored Troops, 1863-1867* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1990), 72-73, 104; "Report of Major General F. Steele"; "Report of Maj. Eagleton Carmichael."

engaged them again, but here the northerners won the advantage, killing seven rebels and driving the rest back. Finally the Confederates withdrew from the field and did not appear again, and the rest of the journey to Helena went without incident.³⁰³

The Battle of Wallace's Ferry ended with an estimated 150 Confederate casualties against Federal losses of twenty dead, forty wounded, and four missing, including one dead officer, three dead privates, and ten men wounded from the 60th.³⁰⁴ Three of the dead Federal troops had been too badly wounded to retreat from the battlefield and were executed by rebel soldiers, who would not take black men prisoner. This behavior was typical Confederate policy throughout the South, but it reached its heights in the Trans-Mississippi, where bloody guerilla fighting had been commonplace since the mid-1850s and where the higher level of diversity in the armies (in addition to white and black troops, there were Native Americans fighting on both sides), provided more opportunities for the violent expression of racial hostilities. Only a few months earlier, black soldiers and civilians had also been tortured, killed and mutilated at the battles of Marks' Mills and Poison Springs, described by historians Orr and Mary Davies Kelly as "marked descent of the Civil War to a new level of barbarity."³⁰⁵ In comparison to these events, the death of three injured men at Wallace's Ferry was inconsequential, but it nonetheless illustrates what

³⁰³ "Reports of Brig. Gen. Napoleon B. Buford"; "Report of Lieut. Col. Moses Reed"; Williams, "The Action at Wallace's Ferry," 49; "Report of Lieut. Harmon T. Chappel."

³⁰⁴ "Report of Major General F. Steele," 13. The Federals also took five prisoners, two mules and three horses. "Report of Maj. Eagleton Carmichael."

³⁰⁵ Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 197; Williams, "The Action at Wallace's Ferry," 48-50; DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 35; In response, the Second Kansas Colored Infantry vowed that "the regiment would take no prisoners so long as the Rebels continued to murder our men" and carried out that promise on April 30 at Jenkins' Ferry, where they killed and mutilated dozens of surrendering rebels, shouting "Poison Springs," until troops from the 29th Iowa intervened. Private Milton P. Chambers of the 29th later wrote that "the negroes want to kill every wounded reb they come to, and will do it if we did not watch them." Gregory J.W. Urwin, "'We Cannot Treat Negroes... As Prisoners of War': Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in Civil War Arkansas," in Bailey and Sutherland, *Civil War Arkansas*, 213-28; Kelly and Kelly, *Dream's End*, 147, 152-54, 172, 181; Hondon B. Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers in the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1988), 58-60; "Benjamin F. Pearson's War Diary," 441.

was at stake for the men of the 60th and explains how they maintained discipline during the battle despite their lack of combat experience.

The 60th's "skirmish" was relatively unimportant in comparison to bloodbaths like Antietam and Gettysburg, but it could have had turned out otherwise.³⁰⁶ Intelligence gathered from rebel prisoners showed that Dobbin's attacks on the plantations were meant to draw the troops out of Helena, giving the rebels a chance to attack it.³⁰⁷ Had Helena fallen, the Confederate forces roaming through the countryside would have won a base from which to invade Missouri, and a successful attack there would have diverted Federal troops from other areas and given the South the huge arsenal in St. Louis.³⁰⁸ It would be a wild exaggeration to suggest that three hundred black troops in eastern Arkansas changed the war forever, but there is no doubt that control of Helena and the greater Mississippi was an essential part of Federal military strategy in the west, and the victory at Wallace's Ferry helped to maintain that control.³⁰⁹

The high-ranking officers in Arkansas were quick to note the courage and skill of the 60th and the other troops at Wallace's Ferry, who had little combat experience up to that point. First Lieutenant Harmon T. Chappel of Battery E, for example, declared that

"During the whole fight the colored men stood up to their duty like veterans, and it was owing to their strong arms and cool heads, backed by fearless daring, alone that I was able to get away either of my guns. They marched eighteen miles at once, fought five hours, against three to one,

³⁰⁶ The battle was given this official classification in *Dyer's Compendium II*, p. 654.

³⁰⁷ General Buford himself declared that the Union victory had saved his garrison in Helena, writing that "except for this reconnaissance I would have had my hands full to-morrow morning." Buford to Maj. Gen. C.C. Washburn, 26 July 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part I*, 17.

³⁰⁸ DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 35-36. In the summer of 1864, some Confederate military leaders were convinced that "the people of Missouri are ready for a general uprising" and it would only take a strong rebel military invasion to inspire them. Sterling Price to T.C. Reynolds, 22 July 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part II*, 1020; Joseph O. Shelby to J.F. Belton, Camden, 27 July 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part II*, 1027-28. The previous Rebel attack on Helena had been intended in part to draw Ulysses Grant's huge army away from Vicksburg. Mackey, *The Uncivil War*, 177.

³⁰⁹ Control of Helena helped make it possible for the North to control other strategic points in Arkansas; gave it a base from which to attack Texas; and prevented the South from taking Missouri. Christ, *Rugged and Sublime*.

and were as eager at the end as at the beginning for the fight. Never did men, under such circumstances, show greater pluck or daring.”³¹⁰

General Buford echoed these sentiments, saying that “the colored troops fought like veterans, none flinched,” and that “eighty of the Sixtieth...have won great credit.” Adjutant General T.C. Meatyard’s report largely focused on the fallen white officers (calling Adjutant Pratt a “useful and faithful officer” who “proved his gallantry and devotion”), but he also stated that “we rejoice in the glory acquired on this well disputed field by our colored troops. Will they fight? Ask the enemy.”³¹¹

After the battle, the 60th returned to uneventful scouting, garrison and fatigue duty.³¹² In August eighty men went out to capture two deserters (from another regiment) and discovered several hundred rebels secretly planning to bring weapons across the Mississippi, but heavy rain and poor roads prevented them from intervening. Towards the end of the month Companies A, B, C and F were part of a successful 500-man near Wallace’s Ferry that resulted in the capture of five rebel soldiers and the burning of sixty-five cotton gins and other Confederate buildings. In

³¹⁰ “Report of Lieut. Harmon T. Chappel.”

³¹¹ “Reports of Brig. Gen. Napoleon B. Buford”; Buford to Washburn; T.C. Meatyard, General Orders No. 47, 31 July 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part I*, 18. One unidentified account of the battle offers a more flamboyant perspective: “Their ammunition was nearly exhausted; a few more rounds and their bayonet would be their only protection against a massacre. There was no time for the Phalanx to maneuver; they were in the jaws of death; it was indeed a dreadful moment.” Once the Illinois cavalry broke through and enabled the soldiers to make good their escape, the unknown poet continues, “gathering up their dead and wounded, the federal force now began a retreat, stubbornly yielding, inch by inch, each foot of ground, until night threw her mantle of darkness over the scene and the Confederates ceased their firing.” Morris, “Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation,” 98. For his part, Confederate General Shelby claimed that he “met, fought, and routed completely 1,250 white men and negroes” who were saved from “annihilation” only by the cavalry. Shelby to Belton, 31 July 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part I*, 27.

³¹² Despite insufficient rations and almost daily scouting, guard duty, fatigue work and drilling, many members of Company D learned to read and write and were praised for their “fine abilities as soldiers and a commendable ambition and proficiency in the acquirement of knowledge.” Hewett, *Supplement to the Official Records, Volume 78*, 347, 350, 352-53, 357-58, 360.

September they captured five more rebels at Alligator Bayou, including four who had fought at Wallace's Ferry. Another foray in late September resulted in the 60th's first combat since that battle; while foraging for cattle, they exchanged fire with six Confederates, killing two. Another expedition went out that winter to Harbert's Plantation near Helena to capture Harbert himself (a black deserter) and some stolen horses; they also hauled 200 bushels of his corn and returned to the fort with an interracial group of refugees. Despite their constant travels, by the end of the year some members of the regiment had become functionally literate, an accomplishment noted by Steven Hahn as one of the more "remarkable and consequential" educational achievements of black soldiers during the war. There may have been also some tension in the ranks, though; seven men deserted in January, and two white officers were court-martialed and dismissed.³¹³

In March 1865 the men of the 60th were reassigned to Little Rock, where several weeks later they learned that Robert E. Lee had surrendered in the east, although Confederate resistance in the broader Trans-Mississippi did not end for several more months.³¹⁴ The regiment, like most other black units, then became part of an occupation army, traveling around northern Arkansas

³¹³ "Report of Capt. Eli Ramsey, Sixtieth U.S. Colored Troops," 14 August 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part II*, 242-43; *Dyer's Compendium III*, 1733; "Report of Col. John G. Hudson, Sixtieth U.S. Colored Troops," 4 September 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part II*, 302-03; Hewett, *Supplement to the Official Records, Volume 78*, 347; "Report of Lieut. Alexander F. Rice, Sixtieth U.S. Colored Troops," 15 September 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part I*, 759; "Report of Lieut. Alexander F. Rice, Sixtieth U.S. Colored Troops," 29 September 1864, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLI, Part II*, 816; "Reports of Capt. Eli Ramsey, Sixtieth U.S. Colored Troops," 14 January 1865, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLVIII, Part I – Reports, Correspondence, Etc.* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 34; *Christian Recorder*, 31 December 1864, quoted in Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 98; Buford to J.J. Reynolds, 3 March 1865, in *War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume XLVIII, Part I*, 1067. All of the deserters had joined the regiment only a month earlier, and four from Company A deserted on the same day. The reason for the officers' dismissal has not been recorded. *Roster and Record V*.

³¹⁴ Hewett, *Supplement to the Official Records, Volume 78*, 348-49; *Dyer's Compendium*, 572; *Dyer's Compendium III*, 1733. Simon B. Buckner's surrender on June 2 largely ended the resistance in the Trans-Mississippi. Moneyhon, "A State of Perfect Anarchy," 158-61.

until it was mustered out at Duvall's Bluff on October 15.³¹⁵ The 709 surviving members received their enlistment bounties and headed up the Mississippi to Davenport, where they immediately became the subject of racially charged political bickering.³¹⁶ Republican plans to hold a public reception in their honor were canceled due to their early arrival, but the *Daily Gazette* nonetheless asked if "our copperhead friends [would] welcome these 'boys in blue' who helped them out of the draft." In response a Democratic newspaper charged that Republicans had chosen to celebrate with black troops at the expense of a returning white regiment. In a less politically partisan attack, two white men robbed one of the black veterans after ferrying him to Rock Island.³¹⁷

Information on the postwar lives of the enlisted men of the 60th is as sketchy as the documentation on what they did before the war, but some of the same obituaries and local histories that shed light on their earlier lives are also useful here. Because the regiment was discharged in Davenport, some Missourians with no previous Iowa connections now became residents of the Hawkeye State. Milton Howard worked at the Rock Island Arsenal for fifty years and earned notoriety for crawling over the thin ice of the Mississippi River to save a prominent white citizen. Later in life he began building an airplane, claimed that God had told him to "be prepared for the heavenly flight on judgment day." The deeply religious man never uttered a stronger oath than "God darn-it" and, it was said, could not strike another man with his hands,

³¹⁵ *Dyer's Compendium III*, 1733; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 2. The 60th continued its fatigue duty and literary training, but some troops also guarded the military prison or escorted prisoners to Ohio. Hewett, *Supplement to the Official Records, Volume 78*, 348, 355, 358, 361, 366, 368.

³¹⁶ *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 30 October 1865.

³¹⁷ "Signal Phrase Needs Work," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 4 November 1865; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 21 October 1865; "A Negro Soldier Robbed," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 8 November 1865.

which were “so destructive that they were lethal.” He was also active in the Masons and the G.A.R., both of which gave him full burial rites at his death in 1928. Private Lindsay Pitts left Iowa for parts unknown after his discharge but returned to Davenport in 1878, where his brothers already lived, and was said to have “made and lost a small fortune” in his saloons, billiard room and barber shop over the years until his death in 1913. John Ross Miller worked as a museum janitor in Des Moines but also bought property in Newton, where he probably maintained his friendship with Alexander Fine, who went back to Missouri and lived in Newton until his death in 1919.³¹⁸

Although several of the 60th's white officers went back to Arkansas after the war, most returned to Iowa, where like other white USCT veterans they had little postwar interaction with their black compatriots. One notable exception was Dr. Anderson Patton, who returned to his practice in the Story County town of Nevada and one day was visited by Private Oscar Blue, who needed the doctor's assistance to get a government pension for a war injury; although they had not seen each other in years, Patton immediately remembered the wound and signed an affidavit allowing the old veteran to get his pension. This general lack of interaction was probably also true of the dozens of white Iowans who served as officers in other USCT regiments, even though Iowa became home to many black veterans from other regiments after the war.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ “Milton Howard, Former Slave and Colored G.A.R. Veteran, Dies While Attending Church Services Sunday”; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Iowa Negro in War*, 314; “African Red Book of Davenport”; Hope D. Williams, “An Oral History of the Black Population of Davenport, Iowa” (Davenport: Palmer Junior College, 1979), Interview 4: 5-6; “Colored Political Leader Succumbs,” *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 31 December 1913; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #3, 83; C. Stiles, “John Ross Miller,” 384; *Newton Daily News*, 9 December 1919. Three members of the 60th U.S.C.T. were eventually laid to rest in Waterloo or nearby La Porte: William H. Jones, Rev. G.H. Burks, and the only antebellum resident, George W. Butler. *Our Heritage: An Introduction to 150 Years of African-American History in the Cedar Valley* (Cedar Falls, IA: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier, 2000), 10.

³¹⁹ *Portrait and Biographical Album of Lee County, Iowa* (1887), 341-42, 535-36; *Memorials of Deceased Companions of the Commandery of the State of Illinois, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, from January 1, 1912 to December 31, 1922* (Chicago, 1923), 300-01; Roberts and Moorhead, *Story of Lee County*,

Some of these African American former soldiers entered the state through Davenport and stayed in that area. During the war, Houston Smith had fled from the home of his master in Mississippi, who punished him sadistically but also taught him the chiropodist trade. He made his way to Chicago and found work as a waiter for a captain of a white regiment, then enlisted in the 29th U.S.C.I. He survived several campaigns in Virginia, developed a permanent rheumatic condition from exposure, and changed his first name to “General.” When the war was over Smith settled in Davenport, where he initially worked as a barber but then decided to put his training under slavery to good use and opened a chiropody practice, later saying that he had removed so many corns that “if they were seed corn they would be enough to sow several hundred acres of land.” He became known around town for his fancy clothes but also for murdering his father in law during the 1870s, for which he served time in prison; even so (or perhaps because of this), shortly before his death in 1910 one news article complimented him as “a most interesting person to talk to.” There were also about ten veterans or former army laborers in Fort Madison, including Oscar McClellan and his wife Hattie, who had knitted and mended soldiers’ uniforms during the war.³²⁰

Other black veterans lived elsewhere in Iowa. Ohioan Joseph Palmer survived being shot twice at Fort Wagner with the famous 54th Massachusetts, then moved to the Hawkeye State, joining the GAR and barbering in Tipton, Des Moines and Fort Dodge. Joseph Kinner of the 1st

vol. 2 (1914), 23-24, 155; Parker, *History of Poweshiek County I* (1880), 131; Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 262; *History of Franklin and Cerro Gordo Counties, Iowa* (Springfield, IL: Union Publishing Company, 1883), 181-82; Brigham, *Des Moines*, vol. 2, 473; *History of Linn County, Iowa* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1878), 787; *History of Marion County* (1881), 595; *Biographical History of Montgomery and Adams Counties, Iowa* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1892), 352; *History of Van Buren County* (1878), 517; Cowden, *Fifty-Ninth Regiment of United States Colored Infantry*, 235-37, 263; Ofele, *German-Speaking Officers in the U.S. Colored Troops*, 74, 213-14.

³²⁰ “Well Known City Types,” *Davenport Democrat*, 10 May 1908; “Obituary: McClellan, Col.,” *Fort Madison Daily Democrat*, 1914; “The Soldier Dead,” *Fort Madison Evening Democrat*, 29 May 1895.

USCI worked as a miner in Coalville, Webster County despite a shattered thigh from the Battle of Nashville and was also active in the GAR until his death in 1889. Anthony James had left upstate New York to serve with the Missouri-based 18th, then opened a barber shop in the central Iowa town of Boone. Iowa was also home to Congressional Medal of Honor winner James Daniel Gardiner of the 36th. At the Battle of New Market Heights near Richmond, his company was pinned down by Rebel fire until he charged the parapets, bayoneting a southern officer and enabling the rest of the Federal troops to break through. After his discharge he moved to Ottumwa, where he married, became a Catholic missionary, and died in 1905, 41 years to the day after his heroics at New Market Heights.³²¹ Michigan native Richard Gomer, a Cedar Rapids chef, was famous not for similar wartime heroics but because his daughter Nina married a young scholar named W.E.B. DuBois in 1896.³²² In cities, towns and villages around the state, African American veterans became a daily reminder of the race's service and loyalty during the war, a reminder that would ultimately translate into civil rights reform.

As black veterans from other parts of the country came to Iowa, a small group of Iowans came into contact with southern blacks for the first time by teaching in freedperson's schools. There was one African American teacher – 25 year old Dennis Thompson – but over a hundred

³²¹ Luis F. Emilio, *History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863-65* (Boston: Boston Book Company, 1894), 49, 386-87; "Memorial program for Sgt. Joseph A. Palmer & Pvt. Joseph Kinner," Oakland Cemetary, Fort Dodge, Iowa (5 June 1994); *Fort Dodge Daily Chronicle*, 11 June 1889; *History of Boone County* (1880), 554; Hickenlooper, *An Illustrated History of Monroe County* (1896), 183; National Park Service, "Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System," <http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/soldiers.cfm>. Official Site of the Medal of Honor, "USCT Medal of Honor Recipients at New Market Heights," <http://www.medalofhonor.com/NewMarketHeights.htm>; Morris, "Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation," 99-100. Gardiner was buried in an unmarked grave until the Medal of Honor Historical Society and several local historical associations built a monument in his honor in 1994. *Dyer's Compendium*; Debora Wiley, "Finding America's Heroes, Remembering Their Valor," *Des Moines Register*, 8 July 1994; George Clifford III, "Ceremony Marks Fallen Hero – Nearly 90 Years after His Death," *Des Moines Register*, 8 July 1994.

³²² Nosek, "Combat Zone: African Americans in the Civil War – Part 2," *Griot*, 4; Marriage Certificate of W.E.B. DuBois and Nina Gomer, 12 May 1896, Linn County Courthouse, Book 6, p, 45, #5825, transcription in AAHMCCI, Vertical Files, Counties - Linn; David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1993), 177-78.

others were white. Most were Congregationalists or Quakers; the latter may have felt that since their religious beliefs prevented them from fighting slavery through military service, education was their best opportunity to do some good. It is thus not surprising that a majority of them were also women like Alma Baker of Buchanan County, who declared that “My feelings and sympathies have ever been with the African race, and I believe they can be elevated intellectually, morally and religiously with any other people or nation.” Already the most racially liberal of white Iowans before the war even started, they contributed to the atmosphere of change that permeated the state in the late 1860s.³²³

One of the most prominent African Americans in Iowa did not live to see the end of the war. Thomas C. Motts, at one time the richest black person in the state, had suffered serious financial reversals in the late 1850s, probably because of the national depression. In February 1865 he unexpectedly died at the age of fifty-six, leaving behind his wife Mahala and four minor children; his funeral was held at the church that he had helped build.³²⁴ Several weeks later, an old friend wrote a letter to the *Muscatine Journal* entitled “An Old Settler,” stating that “Motts always had a sense of the truly respectable, and ever bore himself as a man. He looked over the petty views of those who would undervalue him because of his color. As a business man he took rank before many who considered themselves his better. He went steadily on accumulating property, and for several years was the absolute king of the wood and coal market

³²³ Butchard and Roller, “Iowa Teachers,” 1, 6-7, 10-14, 18-21, 23-24, 27. Quakers had been exempted from the draft by the state legislature thanks to the efforts of Governor Kirkwood. *Senate Journal, Ninth General Assembly (Extra Session)*, 9. For additional information on Iowans who taught at freedpersons’ schools, see *Portrait and Biographical Album of Henry County* (1888), 552; *History of Linn County* (1878), 684; “Reuben Taber Diary – His Experience in Teaching Freeman,” Ellen Strang Taber Papers, 1853-1925 (Ms31), Special Collections, SHSI-DM; National Park Service, “George B. Hitchcock House,” Aboard the Underground Railroad: A National Register Travel Itinerary, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/ia2.htm>; James Patrick Morgans, “A Report from Jim Morgans: Information Related to David Todd,” *Tabor Historical Society* 3 (June 2003): 4; Parker, *History of Poweshiek County I* (1880), 901.

³²⁴ Witmer, “Thomas C. Motts,” 13-14. He still held \$5000 in real estate, but this was actually a \$1000 decrease from his property value ten years earlier. 1860 U.S. Census; 1850 U.S. Census.

of this town or city. If any one still doubts whether the colored race are competent to take care of themselves, if we whites would give them a fair chance, I would refer to Thomas C. Motts as an instance going to disprove their theory.”³²⁵

Even Motts had not been able to bring about any significant progress in civil rights. On the day that he died he still could not vote, and his children attended segregated schools. Over the previous four years, he had seen thousands of African Americans flee southern slavery and created new communities in Iowa or swelled existing ones, using labor, culture and kinship networks to establish new lives as free people. The war had also enabled several hundred of them to assert their citizenship by serving in the military. Now that it was over, they would use the political meaning of the conflict between the states to continue the struggle for equal citizenship using the rhetoric of military service and loyalty. The Civil War not only brought unprecedented black population growth to Iowa, it transformed politics and race relations, enabling African Americans in the postwar era to win legal victories that antebellum blacks could only have dreamed of.

³²⁵ “An Old Settler,” *Muscatine Journal*, 1 March 1865, quoted in Witmer, “Thomas C. Motts,” 15.

Chapter IV

“He Who is Worthy to Be Trusted with the Musket Can and Ought to be Trusted with the Ballot”: The Postwar Political Insurgency

“I had never seen negro troops before and had always been prejudiced against arming the negro, but when I saw those stalwart fellows, dressed in immortal blue supporting the flag we all loved, I...gave up my prejudice against race and color and acknowledged the truth of the inspiration, ‘All men are created free and equal.’”³²⁶

- Captain William McBeth, 45th Iowa Infantry

In July 1865, Keokuk’s plans for the first peacetime Independence Day celebration in five years hit a serious snag when the city firemen refused to march in the parade because “negroes were permitted into the line.” Events at a victory parade in Cedar Falls only a few months earlier sent a similar message to that city’s tiny black community. A large float offered a synopsis of the war, with effigies of Jefferson Davis and General Lee, a child carrying a sign that read “Poor White Trash of the South,” and a black man known as Old Bunk wearing a sign that said “Contraband.” Although Old Bunk represented the only group that had remained loyal to the Union during the war, a group of young boys nonetheless yelled racial slurs at him.³²⁷ Even in celebrations of the northern victory, African Americans were symbolically reminded that Iowa was still far from an egalitarian society. They were barred from voting, segregated in under-funded schools, and generally confined to the lowest paying jobs; removal of the anti-migration law had been the only formal progress during the war. Yet the years between 1865 and 1868 would be the greatest period of civil rights reform in state history.

This change was ultimately brought about by two wartime factors: black migration and military service. Thousands of former slaves like Old Bunk had come to Iowa during and

³²⁶ Cook, *Boys in Blue*, 129.

³²⁷ “Editor’s Table,” *The Old Guard* 3 (1865): 382; Lyftogt, *From Blue Mills to Columbia*, 154-55.

immediately after the war, strengthening old black communities on the Mississippi and creating new ones further west. They became a vital part of the economy, and hundreds of them fought in the war as part of the 60th. This service enabled African Americans to use a discourse of military service and wartime loyalty as political capital when the fighting was over. In this young state that defined itself by its Civil War record, all residents were judged by whether they had been patriots or Copperheads, and although most black Iowans had not fought in any major battles, they could nevertheless point to their service as proof that they were worthy of equal citizenship.³²⁸

Many African Americans in other parts of the country made the same argument, but with much less success. Iowa was unique for several reasons. First, the political structure was completely dominated by the Republican Party, unlike other Midwestern states where the Democrats remained influential. Once Iowa Republicans decided to endorse black suffrage, it became a foregone conclusion. Second, the black population had grown enough to exert useful pressure on the political system, particularly in cities like Davenport and Mount Pleasant, but was still small enough to avoid raising old white fears of a black takeover. White politicians and voters supported suffrage reform because GOP leaders asked them to, because of the impact of black military service, and because they realized that with such a small black population, whites would still have the balance of political power. They would not have even considered the issue, though, without the activism of black Iowans themselves, who were the primary catalyst for change if not the primary factor in the process that brought it about.

³²⁸ The rhetorical power of black military service manifested in several ways. White Iowans spoke not only of black soldiers but also of slaves who had aided them at great personal risk; a staff sergeant in Arkansas, for example, declared that when Federal troops were looking for food and supplies, “[t]he only correct information we could possibly obtain was from the negroes.” *Keokuk Daily Gate City*, 28 July 1862, quoted in Shea, “A Semi-Savage State: The Image of Arkansas in the Civil War,” 95.

As has been previously discussed, African Americans shifted between a rights-based approach and a patronage-based approach to community uplift depending on the circumstances and the people involved. The effort to win the suffrage was based more on the rights-based approach than perhaps any other major undertaking during the nineteenth century, as it involved petitioning white political leaders and voters to change a specific legal policy. At the same time, however, patronage still played an important if more subdued role in this effort, since African Americans had no formal political power and had to appeal to those who did have it in order to bring about change. Alexander Clark and other black leaders used their positive relationships with political leaders and the goodwill that they had cultivated in their local communities to make this appeal. Furthermore, the suffrage effort carried with it the implicit understanding that since African Americans were so greatly outnumbered in Iowa, voting rights would not significantly change the political landscape and blacks would remain in a subservient electoral position; in other words, the client-patron relationship would persist. This was in fact part of the reason why whites were willing to change the law, having overwhelmingly rejected black suffrage only a decade earlier, but it was only one factor that bears further exploration here.

The rhetoric of black wartime loyalty makes sense only in the context of Iowans' feelings about the anti-war movement. Although Copperhead sentiment had been high in 1862, by the end of the war those who had opposed it were completely discredited in the eyes of most citizens. Not surprisingly, the harshest critics were soldiers like Charles Musser, who wrote that "It would have been better for them if they had went and hung themselves [to] a man."³²⁹ Some

³²⁹ Schroder, "William M. Stone," 114; Klement, "Rumors of Golden Circle Activity in Iowa," 529-30, 533; "The Slavery Status of the North," *The Old Guard* 2 (January 1863): 251-52; Musser to father, 22 September 1863, in

civilians also began to contrast Copperhead treachery with the loyalty of African Americans even before the war was over.³³⁰ In December 1863, the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* asked, “Isn’t the slave fighting for the preservation of a nation that has only given him stripes in times past, hoping to prove his manhood and secure his freedom in the future, a better and a braver man, than the craven, sneaking, double-dealing Butternut who is neither a Rebel nor a patriot, who has no God but ‘party’ and no aspirations but for office?”³³¹

Moderate politicians were able to make this comparison even while expressing racist views. While running for governor, William Stone declared that he would rather “*sleep with a nigger, than a copperhead.*”³³² The *Washington Press* echoed these sentiments, posing the following question to its readers after a black carried the American flag during a recruiting rally:

- “1. Which is the nobler of the two, the colored man who bravely volunteers in defense of the Union, or the weak sneak who ridicules and sneers at the example set by an ‘inferior race,’ which he lacks either patriotism or courage to emulate?
2. Which is most deserving of respect, the Union darkies or the light-skinned disloyalties?”
3. Who would not rather be a Congo nigger than a Copperhead?
4. Who would not prefer an ebony face to a black heart?”³³³

Even prejudiced comments like these were an opportunity for African Americans, since hatred for Copperheads made it possible for whites to be racist and yet still support civil rights. By the

Popchock, *Soldier Boy*, 86. See also *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 25 May 1863; Austin, *Dear Companion*, 75, 147-48; Elder, *A Damned Iowa Greyhound*, 131. There were also incidents of hostility and even open violence between Copperheads and their pro-Union neighbors dating back to the earliest days of the war. Some of the stories about this violence are less credible than others, but there is no doubt that tension between the two groups ran high during the war. See Arena, “Southern Sympathy in Iowa,” 530-36; Black, “Lynchings in Iowa,” 210, 215-16; Haines, “Seventy Years in Iowa,” 117.

³³⁰ Democrats also realized that blacks gained a powerful argument for civil rights once they enlisted. Chilton A. White of Ohio, for example, declared that “The question is one of political and social equality with the negro everywhere. If you make him the instrument by which your battles are fought, the means by which your victories are won, you must treat him as a victor is entitled to be treated, with all decent and becoming respect.” *Chicago Times*, 9 June 1863, quoted in Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 99.

³³¹ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 19 December 1863.

³³² Rutland, “The Copperheads of Iowa: A Re-Examination,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 52 (1954): 1-30, quoted in Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 124.

³³³ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Iowa Negro in War*, 312-13.

time that the war ended the discursive framework of loyal but disenfranchised blacks and traitorous Copperheads who could still vote was well established, but it remained for the black veterans and their allies to further clarify and put it to good use.

The first such opportunity came at the 1865 Republican state convention. It was clear to all that one of the major issues at this meeting would be whether or not the GOP would endorse a suffrage amendment. If the party won that fall's elections and retained control of the state legislature, a pro-amendment resolution would probably follow; thus the convention was the first step towards black voting rights. Although secession, war and black migration had caused Iowa to become a very different state than it had been when the voters rejected black suffrage in 1857, the outcome was far from certain. Support had already come earlier that year from liberal editors such as Edward Russell of the *Davenport Daily Gazette* and Frank Palmer of the Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, who asked "where shall be the line of limitations upon their privileges as soldiers and citizens? Might they not 'vote well' as they have behaved well and fought well in the national crisis?" In a portent of things to come, though, the more moderate *Burlington Hawk-Eye* called on the convention to stick to "well-defined principles," fearing that the suffrage issue would end GOP dominance and was relatively unimportant given the small number of African Americans in Iowa.³³⁴

The convention finally took place in Des Moines that June with 663 delegates, including a larger number from Scott and Henry counties. This was a promising sign for African

³³⁴ Friedrichs, *Covering Iowa*, 19; *Iowa State Daily Register*, 2 February 1865; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 18 March 1865; *Burlington Daily Hawk-Eye*, 23 May 1865.

Americans, since those were among the most liberal parts of the state.³³⁵ The delegates were divided into three camps on the suffrage issue: conservatives who opposed it, moderates who personally supported it but did not want to publicly endorse it, and liberals who believed that the GOP could support the reform without losing the election.³³⁶ Most of Iowa's top-ranking officials fell into the second two categories, although they were typically more moderate than liberal.³³⁷ More importantly, three of the members of the twelve-person committee charged with writing the GOP party platform were liberal supporters: Edward Russell, Frank Palmer, and Jacob Rich, one of the few white politicians who had endorsed black suffrage back in 1857.³³⁸

Although some committee members wanted a vaguely worded pro-suffrage plank that made no direct reference to race, Russell presented the full convention with an amended version stating that “we are in favor of amending the word *white* from the article on suffrage,” sparking a fierce discussion. Henry O'Connor supported the amendment on the basis of black wartime loyalty, conservative delegates from the southern counties opposed it, and Josiah Grinnell took the middle ground, agreeing that it was a just reward for the black soldiers in the South but also believing that in his own state “the Republican party had other work to do and should not jeopardize its ascendancy.” Finally, Hiram Price of Davenport decided that he had heard enough.

³³⁵ Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 160. There were also some counties who sent fewer delegates that they had been allotted, which made it more likely that a few strong voices could dominate the convention. Dykstra, “The Issue Squarely Met,” 437-38.

³³⁶ Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa – 1865-1868,” *Annals of Iowa* 39 (1963): 245.

³³⁷ Governor Stone and Lieutenant Governor Enoch W. Eastman supported black suffrage, while Secretary of State James Wright and Treasurer William H. Holmes had both done so in 1857. BRS Records, Box 12, Folder 4. From Washington D.C., U.S. Senator James Harlan argued that suffrage rights should be based on “intelligence and patriotism.” “Important Letter from Secretary Harlan,” (*Des Moines*) *Daily State Register*, 12 September 1865. Senator William B. Allison and Representative James F. Wilson supported voting rights in the South but were more apprehensive about the issue in Iowa. Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 137-39; *Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery, Iowa Volume*, 50, 780.

³³⁸ Dykstra, “Notes on 1865 GOP Convention,” BRS Records, Box 12, Folder 5: Chapter 11 – Black Legislators Amendment in the General Assembly; BRS Records, Box 12, Folder 4: Chapter 11 – Black Legislators Amendment in the General Assembly; Dykstra, “The Issue Squarely Met,” 439-40; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 161; *Davenport Gazette*, 17 May 1865.

A former Democrat turned Free Soiler, the evangelical Methodist was known for placing principles above politics, “prompted always by his convictions of right and wrong.”³³⁹ With words that historian and fellow delegate Benjamin Gue later described as “a torrent of righteous indignation that has seldom been surpassed,” Price spoke:

“The Republican party is strong enough to dare to do *right*, and cannot afford now, or at any other time, to shirk a duty. The colored men, North and South, were loyal and true to the government in the days of its great peril. There was not a rebel or traitor to be found among them. They ask the privilege of citizenship now that slavery has been forever banished from our country. Why should the great freedom-loving State of Iowa longer deny them this right? Not one reason can be given that has not been used to bolster up slavery for the past hundred years. The war just closed has swept that relic of barbarism from our land; let the Republican party have the courage to do justice. I have no fear of the result in a contest of this kind. We shall carry the election and have the satisfaction of wiping out the last vestige of the black code that has long been a disgrace to our State.”³⁴⁰

By highlighting all the major themes used to justify black suffrage – the wartime sacrifices of African Americans, the continuing spirit of abolitionism, and the assurance that Republicans could afford to take a stand – Price “shamed” the less liberal delegates into silence. The debate was effectively over, especially with support from advocates like Lieutenant Governor Enoch W. Eastman, who put the issue in national context by asking “How can you insist that loyal negroes shall vote in South Carolina when you refuse to allow the colored voters of your own Iowa colored regiment to vote here?” Russell’s resolution passed by a margin of over two to one; Gue called this “right [prevailing] over policy,” while Palmer considered wrote that the delegates were “unwilling to stand committed even in *appearance* against the principle

³³⁹ Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa,” 244-245; B.F. Gue, “The Public Services of Hiram Price,” *Annals of Iowa* 1 (1895): 587-91, 598, 601; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 42-43, 162; Dykstra, “The Issue Squarely Met,” 440-43. Grinnell’s biographer Charles Payne explains this contradiction by arguing that in the reverend’s mind, voting rights were essential for the survival of the former slaves and the Republican Party in the South, whereas in Iowa the GOP was already dominant and African Americans were not in such dire straits. Payne, *Josiah Bushnell Grinnell*, 183-84.

³⁴⁰ Gue, “The Public Services of Hiram Price,” 598; Dykstra, “The Issue Squarely Met,” 442-44.

of negro suffrage” and felt that “inasmuch as the issue must be squarely met, it might as well be met this year as next.”³⁴¹ The first steps had been taken, thanks largely to the rhetoric of black military service being skillfully employed by a few influential liberals.

Despite the official endorsement, statewide GOP opinion on black suffrage was split after the convention. Some Republican leaders and voters shared Grinnell’s views, feeling that (in the words of Captain William Vermillion) “I acknowledge the correctness of the principles but I think it inexpedient at this time. It is not always best to attempt to accomplish all that is right and just at once. The negro can better afford to remain in his present political status for a few years than the loyal people can afford to lose control of the state of Iowa, and perhaps that of the general Government.”³⁴² Others, especially in conservative western Iowa, did not even concede the correctness of the principle. The *Hamilton Freeman* of Webster City felt that neither Copperheads nor African Americans were qualified to vote, while the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* feared that the amendment would encourage more black Missourians to emigrate.³⁴³ A third group, though, offered full support, motivated by more abstract principles of fairness, equality and patriotism. Some were longtime civil rights advocates, while others had been transformed by the war. The *Dubuque Times*, for example, withdrew its previous opposition, while Samuel

³⁴¹ *Davenport Weekly Gazette*, 17 April 1867; Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa,” 243-44; Benjamin F. Gue, *From 1866 to 1903*, vol. 3 of *History of Iowa from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Century History Company, 1903), 1-3; Wubben, “The Uncertain Trumpet,” 444; Dykstra, “The Issue Squarely Met,” 446-47.

³⁴² William Vermillion to Mary Vermillion, 6 August 1865, quoted in Elder, *Love amid the Turmoil*, 324. James W. Grimes considered the amendment “uncalled for and impolitic,” while the *Iowa City Republican* even suggested that Republicans had no obligation to support the amendment simply because their state convention had done so. *Davenport Daily Democrat*, 25 September 1865; *Davenport Weekly Gazette*, 27 September 1865. Nathan H. Brainerd of the *Iowa City Republican* had supported black suffrage back in 1857 but now refused to on the grounds that it would cause the Republicans to lose the elections; in other words, he voted his conscience only when he knew that the issue would fail. *Iowa City Republican*, 9, 16 August 1865.

³⁴³ (*Webster City*) *Hamilton Freeman*, 3 June, 1 July 1865, quoted in Wubben, “The Uncertain Trumpet,” 412; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 17 June, 7 July 1865, quoted in Throne, *Cyrus Clay Carpenter and Iowa Politics, 1854-1898* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1974), 85. At the same time, the *Nonpareil* supported suffrage for southern blacks “in order to neutralize the disloyal element among former slaveholders.”

Kirkwood stated that “he would a thousand times rather put a ballot into the hands of a loyal black than into that of a Rebel white.”³⁴⁴ It remained to be seen which of these three camps would carry the day within the party and with the voters.

The Democrats were far less divided on the suffrage issue. Virtually powerless in statewide government and despised as traitorous Copperheads, party leaders decided that the only way to win votes was to tap into two of the strongest sentiments in the North: patriotism and racism. Many felt that the GOP’s endorsement of black suffrage had given them an opening and that the 40,000 returning white veterans would vote Democratic simply on this issue if the party shed its anti-war image. They thus created a new political organization called the Union Anti-Negro Suffrage Party (UASP), calling on “soldiers and other loyal citizens opposed to Negro suffrage” to support the “WHITE MAN’S TICKET.” Nominating General Thomas Benton for governor, the UASP sought to mobilize Democratic voters and woo conservative Republicans with the platform “We are opposed to negro suffrage and to striking the word white out of the article on suffrage in our State Constitution, and will support no candidate for office, either State or National, who is in favor of negro suffrage or of the equality of the white and black races.”³⁴⁵ The new party immediately began drumming up old racial fears. Various editorials declared that black suffrage would lead to mass migration, a loss of jobs for working-class whites, social

³⁴⁴ “Gov. Kirkwood’s Speech,” *Des Moines Daily Register*, 29 August 1865; Clark, *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood*, 315-17; *Davenport Gazette*, 8 August 1865; *Dubuque Daily Times*, 3 September 1865.

³⁴⁵ Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa,” 247-49; Wubben, “The Uncertain Trumpet,” 419; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 3, 1-3; Schroder, “William M. Stone,” 117; *Keokuk Gate City*, 29 July 1865.

equality, and racial intermarriage; one claimed that Keokuk was already “overrun” with blacks, while another said that voting rights would encourage them to “ravish white women.”³⁴⁶

The Republican response to these attacks was varied. One political cartoon in the *Daily State Register* mocked the UASP for resorting to racism by showing General Benton floating on a piece of wood that read “Anti Negro Suffrage” and saying “This is a mighty small plank to attempt to swim up Salt River on, but as it is all there is left of the Old Democratic ship, I think I must try it.” It was more common, though, for Republicans to use racism to their own advantage. Politicians like James Howell argued that black suffrage would not cause whites to actually lose any power since the black population was so small, inviting Democrats to collect “critters” from Keokuk so that everyone around the state could see them. James Harlan touched on the broader issues of the day, stating that although the black population had increased since before the war, it was still nothing like that of the South, reassuring voters who saw that blacks had already taken political power there.³⁴⁷ The fact that Iowa’s current black population remained small, however, did not address fears that suffrage rights would make it grow larger. Republicans thus also looked for reasons, both social and biological, why there would be no future mass migration. One common (and old) argument was that people of African descent were unsuited for Iowa’s cold Midwestern climate and had moved there only because they were oppressed in the South; now that slavery was over, black settlers would leave while others would not want to come. This

³⁴⁶ *Muscatine Courier*, 9 June 1865; *Iowa State Weekly Register*, 16 August 1865; *Muscatine Courier*, 14, 23 June 1865; *Davenport Daily Democrat*, 5, 30 August 1865; *Council Bluffs Bugle*, 24 August 1865; *Dubuque Herald*, 24 May 1865.

³⁴⁷ *Des Moines Daily State Register*, 19 September 1865; *Keokuk Daily Gate City*, 18 July 1865, 16 August 1865; *Muscatine Courier*, 14 July 1865; *Dubuque Times*, 11 August 1865; “Secretary Harlan’s Speech,” *Daily State Register*, 8 October 1865.

viewpoint was a combination of ignorance and wishful thinking, but it was also highly effective.³⁴⁸

Supporters of the amendment were also quick to deny that they supported social equality and interracial marriage. These horrors would not result from black suffrage, it was argued, for one of two reasons (or both): whites did not want them, and blacks were not capable of making them happen.³⁴⁹ Nathan Brainerd of Iowa City was apprehensive about the amendment until he decided to “risk competition with the black man...and rely on the superior endowments that God has given the white race to keep ahead.” During a debate with General Benton, Governor Stone reminded his audience that “there may be an equality of legal rights without an equality of social rights” but also that the members of the 60th had helped Iowa fill its military quota while Copperheads avoided military service. Although the governor was not greatly concerned with the “nigger question,” he did feel that “a loyal negro, who had fought for his country and imperiled his life for the flag was more entitled to the privilege than a white traitor who had done everything he could to destroy the country.”³⁵⁰

As the election drew near, Republican officials, editors and voters began repeating the theme of black loyalty and Copperhead treachery almost *ad nauseam*, and the UASP was not able to shake its anti-war image. In an open letter to Thomas Benton, Josiah Grinnell (who had

³⁴⁸ “Negro Suffrage – Letter from Judge Cole,” *Daily State Register*, 10 August 1865; “Address of Gov. Wm. M. Stone,” *Daily State Register*, 12 July 1865; Vorenberg, *Final Freedom*, 28; Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 21-22, 58. One popular story published in Republican newspapers told of five African Americans who returned to the South because Iowa was too cold; “thousands of liberated slaves now in the North,” the article cheerfully predicted, “will soon follow the example of this small party.” *Dubuque Times*, reprinted in *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 17 May 1865 and *Keokuk Gate City*, 24 May 1865, quoted in Wubben, “The Uncertain Trumpet,” 423.

³⁴⁹ Similar statements were made by Benjamin Gue, Edward Russell, John Kasson, and most notoriously by Governor Stone. (*Fort Dodge*) *Iowa North West*, 12 September 1865, quoted in Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa,” 250; *Davenport Weekly Gazette*, 27 September 1865; *Daily State Register*, 17 August 1865.

³⁵⁰ *Iowa City State Press*, 22 November 1865; “Speech of Gov. W.M. Stone,” *Daily State Register*, 3 October 1865; Schroder, “William M. Stone,” 107, 117; “Address of Gov. Wm. M. Stone”; “Speech of Governor Stone,” *Daily State Register*, 15 September 1865; *Iowa State Weekly Register*, 11 October 1865.

come around on the suffrage issue) asked the politically moderate war hero why he had become the pawn of “the white, late disloyal people in the rebel States... whose only remaining hope of political responsibility and power is found in pandering to the lowest of prejudices.” GOP editors also published a letter supposedly written by Abraham Lincoln in 1864 calling for “universal suffrage on the basis of intelligence and military service”; although the authenticity of this letter has never been verified, it effectively silenced UASP assertions that the late president would not support black voting rights if he were still alive.³⁵¹

Some commentators focused on the issue in its national context – in other words, on southern blacks – but nonetheless felt that it applied in Iowa as much as it did in South Carolina or Alabama. The *Iowa City Republican* offered one of the lengthiest defenses of black suffrage, declaring that black wartime support “proves them safe depositories of the great prerogative of the Freeman, the ballot.”³⁵² In this and other similar statements, citizenship itself was being redefined. African Americans still were not equal to whites, many Iowans believed, but the war had shown them worthy to take part in the political process.³⁵³ Citizenship had already been expanded during the Jacksonian era, when poor white men won the right to vote even though elites still did not consider this group equal to themselves, and now it was moving not only beyond class but beyond race as well. Loyalty and sacrifice during the war, it was now thought, qualified one to vote.

³⁵¹ “Negro Suffrage – Letter from Judge Cole”; *Fort Dodge North West*, 30 May 1865; Lathrop, *Life and Times of Samuel J. Kirkwood*, 308, 316-19; *Des Moines Daily State Register*, 19, 27 September, 8 October 1865; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 30 September 1865; “General Benton’s Speech,” *Des Moines Daily State Register*, 7 October 1865; Arthur Zilversmit, “Lincoln and the Problem of Race: A Decade of Interpretations,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 2.1 (1980): 39-40.

³⁵² “Why We Shall Vote for the Constitutional Amendments,” *Iowa City Republican*, 28 October 1868.

³⁵³ “Although the Civil War had not worked a complete transformation in the racial attitudes of local whites, it had taught many of them to respect the patriotism of American blacks and, equally significantly, to despise the activities of disloyal Southerners and Copperheads.” Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 165.

It also helped that most veterans refused to support the ticket that bore their name. A UASP convention for “soldiers and those *opposed to negro equality*” in Louisa County was attended largely by soldiers who did not share its views, and the organizers were forced to admit that “the call did not mean exactly what it said in regard to soldiers being invited, but only meant that soldiers who were opposed to negro equality were invited”; their assumption that “soldier” and “anti-black” meant the same thing had been proven wrong.³⁵⁴ Even veterans who did not support the amendment could not bring themselves to vote for a party that had been so strongly anti-war only a few months earlier; they were not willing to forget five years of Copperhead obstructionism and change political parties based solely on the question of black suffrage.³⁵⁵ In the end, the Republicans easily won the statewide elections that October, albeit by a closer margin in 1864; the black suffrage issue had lost them some votes, but not enough to make a difference.³⁵⁶ Some liberals took this as a sign that the voters endorsed the amendment, but others felt that this was simply the consequence of GOP political dominance.³⁵⁷ In either case, national trends showed how much work was still to be done: suffrage amendments failed four other states that same year, including three in the Midwest.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ Additional embarrassment came from the fact that two of the men nominated for local offices on the UASP ticket were not even present and immediately refused the nominations. Arthur Springer, *History of Louisa County, Iowa, from Its Earliest Settlement to 1912*, vol. 1 (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1912), 121.

³⁵⁵ Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa,” 249.

³⁵⁶ The Democrats received 4,484 more votes than they had in 1864. Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa,” 254.

³⁵⁷ *Sioux City Journal*, 28 October 1865, and *Davenport Weekly Gazette*, 18, 25 October 1865 and 15 November 1865, quoted in Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa,” 254-55; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 14, 20, 26 October 1865; *Iowa City Republican*, 8, 15 November 1865; *Iowa State Weekly Register*, 18 October 1865; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 3, 2-3, 8.

³⁵⁸ Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa,” 256. Vernelle Washington writes that “When the African-American soldiers returned to Ohio, they found virtually the same conditions they had left. Despite their service and willingness to participate in the duties of citizens, the black citizens soon saw that their neighbors were little more willing to give them equal legal rights.” Washington, *Eagles on Their Buttons*, 78.

The 1865 GOP convention and statewide elections had taken place without much direct involvement from African Americans, in part because hundreds of them were still in the military. When they came home, though, they seized the initiative and gave the most emphatic endorsement of black suffrage yet seen. On October 31, the 700 recently decommissioned enlisted men of the 60th U.S.C.T. held a “Convention of Colored Iowa Soldiers” at Camp McClellan in Davenport. The chief vice president was Wisconsin native Sergeant Isaac N. Triplett (his wife had presented the regiment with its flag two years earlier, and two of his relatives served with him), and officers from eight of the ten companies were chosen as additional vice presidents, but the president was Alexander Clark.³⁵⁹ Despite not having served in the military, his organizational and oratory skills, civil rights expertise and ties to white elites made him the idea choice to speak on behalf of seven hundred veterans and help define black postwar political visions.

Clark himself seemed apologetic about leading the military heroes, saying “I would have been pleased had the honor you have conferred on me been bestowed on a member of the regiment, and were it not for the interest I felt and the position I occupied on the organization of the regiment, I should feel loath to occupy the position to which you have called me...It assures me that you have confidence in me, I and know that whilst you were in the field fighting in defence of your flag and mine, I, though at home, was giving aid and comfort to your noble effort.” Presenting the 60th with its regimental colors, he declared, had been the proudest moment of his life. He quickly turned his attention, though, to the reason for the occasion; “Now, my

³⁵⁹ *Roster and Record V*; “Convention of Colored Iowa Soldiers.” The meeting was described as “impromptu” by the press, although Clark’s presence meant that it could not have been completely spontaneous. “Our Colored Defenders,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 2 November 1865.

friends,” he announced, “we have a work to perform...A duty we owe to ourselves and to our race, in asking for those political rights of which we are now deprived.”³⁶⁰

After other speeches, three committees began preparing a list of resolutions, an “address to the people of Iowa,” and a petition that Clark would write and present to the next state assembly. All of these documents further reflected the political vision of the black soldiers. The first of the six resolutions drew a direct connection between military service and political rights, stating that “we, feeling conscious that we have discharged our duty as soldiers in the defence of our country, respectfully urge that it is the duty of Iowa to allow us the use of our votes at the polls, believing as we do and must, that he who is worthy to be trusted with the musket can and ought to be trusted with the ballot.” The second called on blacks to bring about this change through political action, while the third and fourth encouraged them to engage in “patient pursuit of education, industry and thrift” and refrain from drinking alcohol. The fifth expressed confidence that President Johnson would protect African American rights, and the last memorialized his predecessor, the “martyr President...great Emancipator and devoted friend of our race.” After these resolutions were read to the general body, the convention closed with three cheers for the soldiers and all the civilians who had aided them, including Hiram Price and both wartime governors.³⁶¹

Published less than a week later, the “Address of the Convention of Colored Soldiers to the People of Iowa” further elaborated on the ideas expressed in the resolutions. Addressed to the soldiers’ “FELLOW COUNTRYMEN” but qualified with the wistful statement “We wish we could truthfully address you as ‘fellow citizens,’” it also drew connections between military

³⁶⁰ “Convention of Colored Iowa Soldiers.”

³⁶¹ Colonel Hudson, Henry O’Connor, Jacob Butler, Alexander Clark, and the leaders of the convention were also mentioned. “Convention of Colored Iowa Soldiers.”

service and citizenship, asking “having established our claim to the proud title of American soldiers, and shared in the glories won by the deeds of the true men of our own color, will you not hear and heed our appeal?” Citizenship was also linked to masculinity, requesting of white Iowans recognition of “our claims to manhood by giving us that right without which we have no power to defend ourselves from unjust legislation, and no voice in the government we have endeavored to preserve.” Although black men had the ability to defend their country in battle, it was implied, they could not yet defend themselves in politics, but as men they deserved to engage in both of these aspects of manliness. “Being men,” the petition continued, “we claim to be of that number comprehended in the Declaration of Independence, and who are entitled, not only to life, but to equal rights in the pursuit and securing of happiness – in the choice of those who are to rule over us.” Using the language of the Declaration, this statement declared that being governed without a say in who did the governing was un-American, but it also drew additional gendered distinctions, since women apparently *could* be governed without having a say.³⁶² In this sense the soldiers were not really asking for new rights. “We ask no privilege,” the petition said, “we simply ask for our own rights”; in other words, their military service had proven that they were worthy of rights given them by the Declaration but denied them by society.

Clark also showed political savvy by offering forgiveness to white Iowans for their past racist policies, blaming these on “obedience to the political teachings and demands of a slave-holding public opinion.” This language was meant to strike a sympathetic chord with the many white Iowans who believed that slaveholders and their northern supporters had held the country

³⁶² “Convention of Colored Iowa Soldiers.” “Appealing to the principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, black Americans and their white allies forged an equalitarian constitutionalism and skillfully used it to reshape the Constitution itself and American society.” Nieman, *Promises to Keep*, viii.

hostage before the war, but it also put them on notice; they could not blame the South for any future lack of political progress.³⁶³ The address next mentioned the recent statewide elections, citing them as a sign that whites were ready to embrace racial equality. If they did not, though, it was “not because we do not deserve them and have not fairly earned them, but only because prejudice and wrong still triumph over Truth and Righteousness.” Iowans had proven their worth as soldiers and at the ballot box, but now they had to live up to true democratic principles through suffrage reform. “Seeing what our eyes have already beheld during the past four years,” Clark wrote, “we know that the day of full triumph is coming as surely as the Omnipotent reigneth. We patiently wait our time, desiring ever to prove faithful to God and our country, and hoping that suffering humanity, now contending for equal Rights and Justice, will, ere long, be made to rejoice in the hearty sympathy and aid of all good and true men every where.” As a reminder to white Iowans of their obligation, the petition closed with the sentence “Trusting that this our appeal will receive a candid consideration from the people of Iowa, we subscribe ourselves in behalf of our brethren and race.”³⁶⁴

Though hardly radical in its language, the petition was still much more forceful than the language of black state conventions held throughout the South around the same time, which

³⁶³ “Convention of Colored Iowa Soldiers.” In May 1856, for example, the *Davenport Gazette* wrote of the slaveholder, “The whole purpose of his public life is to bend men, States and institutions to an acknowledgment and support of the righteousness *per se*, of Slavery. It is not enough to promise to ‘ignore’ Slavery. It is not enough to agree to keep still about it. It is not even enough to ‘acquiesce’ in it. ‘Fall down and worship me’ is its demand incessantly made and incessantly repeated.” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 21 May 1856. James Wilson echoed these sentiments eight years later, declaring “No political power, whether found in republics or despotism, ever wielded so baneful an influence on the affairs of nations or men as the one to which we so passively submitted, and under whose shadow we so fearfully dwarfed.” James F. Wilson, “A Free Constitution,” House of Representatives, 19 March 1864, 2.

³⁶⁴ “Convention of Colored Iowa Soldiers.”

stressed “morality, economy and industry rather than politics and civil rights.”³⁶⁵ Although the Iowa petition also mentioned these themes, it never suggested that they could substitute for equal rights under the law.³⁶⁶ Governor Stone’s second inaugural address, delivered before the state legislature several months later in January 1866, shows that he had reached the same conclusion. Although he had declared a lack of interest in the suffrage issue during the election, he spent a great deal of time discussing it in this speech. This alone showed that public opinion was shifting, given Stone’s reputation for “gauging the political mood in a turbulent situation and placing himself in a position to benefit from it and to lead it.”³⁶⁷

The speech began with praise for the “dusky battalions” who had served and the southern slaves who had helped white soldiers during the war, saying that both groups had earned the right to “Universal Freedom and Political Equality” and could not protect their rights without it. Stone then laid out four justifications for suffrage reform: (1) the aforementioned black military service; (2) “true” republican principles; (3) the hypocrisy of supporting black suffrage in the South but not in the North; and (4) the connection between emancipation and enfranchisement. He began with a brief discussion of the history of civil rights in Iowa, followed by further praise

³⁶⁵ Southern black leaders may not have necessarily believed this, but they felt compelled to keep up a certain façade with their former masters. August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 5-6.

³⁶⁶ Midwestern meetings were also more forceful than southern ones, calling for education, voting rights and a repeal of anti-migration laws. Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 164-65. Despite the relative anonymity of the 60th in Civil War history, the Davenport suffrage convention has not gone unnoticed in the historiography. Benjamin Gue later recalled that this petition “received the earnest attention of the thoughtful and fair-minded citizens” and considered it directly responsible for the suffrage victory. Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 1, 366-67. Donald R. Shaffer writes calls it the “most vociferous” pro-suffrage protests of northern black veterans after the war. Shaffer, “I Would Rather Shake Hands with the Blackest Nigger in the Land”: Northern Black Civil War Veterans and the Grand Army of the Republic,” in Cimballa and Miller, *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front*, 450-51. Edwin Redkey includes it as the final document in his collection of black soldiers’ letters. Edwin S. Redkey, ed., *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letters from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 293-96. Joseph Glatthaar calls it one of two examples of veterans’ “unusual organizational and lobbying ability.” Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 249-50.

³⁶⁷ Schroder, “William M. Stone,” 117-118.

for the seven hundred black Iowans who had served in the 60th. Although the regiment had only seen brief action, Stone commended it for having “nobly earned to rights of manhood at the price of valor and blood” and called its battle flag “among the cherished mementoes of the war.” The ten thousand white Iowa soldiers killed during the war, he believed, would share his views were they still alive. The governor also informed the legislature that many members of the 60th were “quiet inhabitants” with family and property; in other words, they acted like citizens. Their behavior both in war and in civilian life thus proved that they deserved the support of their white neighbors on the amendment issue. Echoing language used at the recent GOP convention, he contended that “With proper safeguards to the purity of the ballot box, I can perceive no danger in making loyalty to the Constitution and the Union, the basis of suffrage.”³⁶⁸

Stone also used an argument made by Clark in the soldiers’ petition, claiming that black male suffrage had been intended by the framers and that enacting it now was nothing more than a return to the “only true foundation of the American Union.” This foray into constitutional history, though dubious, highlighted the notion that denying black suffrage was inconsistent with true republican government, and so the governor was asking his constituents not to create a radically new world but simply erase thirty years of mistakes. He then responded to southern charges that northern whites were hypocrites for demanding suffrage reform in the former Confederacy while rejecting it in their own states. In Stone’s eyes, emancipation and voting rights “are intimately related as concurrent rights, and we cannot consistently grant the one and withhold the other.” Having already accomplished the first task, Iowans now had to complete the second. Like his first two arguments, this was nothing that other Republicans had not said before, but now the soldiers’ convention in Davenport allowed him to cast the concept in new terms.

³⁶⁸ Stone, “Second Inaugural,” *Messages and Proclamations III*, 77, 84-85, 89.

Towards the end of his speech, the governor in fact made direct reference to the petition that they had presented to the legislature, implying that it was both a reminder of black loyalty but also another sign that they were capable of exercising the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. In this light, the impetus for black suffrage had begun with African Americans, and the governor was simply a sympathetic figure with the power to publicize and support their efforts.³⁶⁹ The petition had helped encourage the state's leading politician to lend his support at the crucial moment when the legislature convened. Now it remained to be seen if the rhetoric of loyalty, military service and citizenship would have the same impact on those who would actually have begin the official process of amending the constitution.

The Republican-dominated 1866 general assembly included many liberals already predisposed to black suffrage, including Samuel L. Glasgow and Howard Holden, who introduced a resolution in the House calling for black male suffrage on the grounds that “during the late civil war the colored residents of our State have voluntarily and generously contributed their efforts to the support of the Union cause, and have earned for themselves the right to an equal enjoyment of the liberties.”³⁷⁰ Although suffrage was the most important civil rights issue before the legislature, the tide of liberal sentiment went even further. Charles Ben Darwin of Burlington and Alonzo Abernethy of Fayette County introduced additional proposals calling for

³⁶⁹ Stone, “Second Inaugural,” 84-89; Dykstra and Hahn, “Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage,” 3. Stone also offered support for the Fourteenth Amendment, saying “We have felt bound to insist that those States should concede whatever guarantees are essential to the future safety of the Union. We cannot permit the truths established by the war to relapse into a state of doubt, nor the fruits of victory to be swallowed up in magnanimity which neglects its own salvation.” Joseph B. James, *The Ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment* (Mercer University Press, 1984), 231.

³⁷⁰ BRS Records, Box 12, Folder 9: Chapter 11 – General Assembly 1866; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Eleventh General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (hereafter cited as *House Journal, 11th G.A.*) (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1866), 57, 147-49. Some delegates wanted to abandon or at least modify their party's pro-suffrage stance in order to fall in line with President Johnson's conservative Reconstruction policies. Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 166-67.

amendments to the sections of the constitution barring blacks from being counted in the state census, considered in the division of congressional districts, or serving in the state militia or state House; in other words, every other clause containing the word “white.” These proposals were all combined into House File No. 138, which the Committee on Constitutional Amendments endorsed, stating that “a respectable number, if not indeed a large majority, of all the electors of the State [were] favorable to such changes.” As a further sign of the deliberate contrast between black loyalty and Copperhead treachery, the committee also endorsed an amendment that would ban draft dodgers or anyone convicted of treason from holding public office.³⁷¹

The final vote on House File 138 did not occur until nearly the end of the session. In the meantime, the legislators discussed other race-related national issues. One proposal opposed the readmission of the Confederate states until the rights of the former slaves were protected, to which a conservative legislator responded by endorsing Liberian colonization since “two distinct and separate races cannot harmoniously exist together: without one being enslaved or destroyed or, even worse, the two being amalgamated.” The first resolution was added to House File 138 while the resolution failed, but the Democrats were successful at delaying the vote on the suffrage question for a full week by introducing frivolous amendments. Strangely, Charles Ben Darwin himself proposed a more substantial change that would have limited suffrage rights to black men who had been honorably discharged, were literate in English, or paid a certain amount of money in property taxes.³⁷² This amendment might have had some chance of succeeding,

³⁷¹ (hereafter cited as *House Journal, 11th G.A.*), 186, 227, 322-24, 446-47; Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa,” 257; 1857 Iowa Constitution; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 168-69.

³⁷² *House Journal, 11th G.A.*, 165-66, 544-47, 643. According to later testimony, a third resolution (which failed) from a Dubuque Democrat stated that since secession was illegal, the southern states had never really left and thus there were no grounds to reduce them to “Territorial vassalage.” *Pioneer Law-Makers’ Association Reunion of 1894*, 67.

given that it was actually consistent with New York's antebellum black suffrage law and with a wartime proposal made by Abraham Lincoln himself, but the representatives rejected it and finally cast votes on the resolution with Darwin and Abernethy's original provisions intact.³⁷³ Each section of the resolution was considered separately, and each of them passed except Proposition 1, which would have given black men the right to serve in the House.³⁷⁴ A similar resolution then moved through the Senate far more quickly and with less controversy, probably because it was waiting to see what the House would do. Earlier predictions that GOP legislators would stay the party line after the 1865 convention proved correct, since nearly all of them voted for it, and their large majority in the general assembly made Democratic opposition irrelevant.³⁷⁵ The first of two necessary joint resolutions to force a suffrage referendum had been passed, although African Americans still would not be able to serve in the House even if the voters approved it.³⁷⁶

No further official action could be taken until the legislature met again in 1868, but African Americans and white liberals worked to keep the spotlight on the suffrage issue. Assistance came from no less a public figure than Frederick Douglass, who gave a speaking tour

³⁷³ Mark E. Neely Jr. *The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); *House Journal*, 11th G.A., 643-44.

³⁷⁴ The legislators also rejected a Proposition 7, which would have changed the words "citizens of the United States" to "person" in Article II, Sec. 1. *House Journal*, 11th G.A., 644-49.

³⁷⁵ Berrier, "The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa," 257. The legislature was in a generally liberal mood, also passing laws that protected married women from the creditors of deadbeat husbands, ratified the 13th Amendment (largely a symbolic gesture, since it had already become national law the previous January); criticized President Johnson's Reconstruction policies, and called for Jefferson Davis to be tried for high treason. *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Eleventh General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1866), 22, 163, 166, 173; Van Der Zee, "Amendments to the Constitution of the United States Proposed in the State Legislature of Iowa, 1846-1909," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 7 (1909): 381-82.

³⁷⁶ Several senators wanted to require that anyone who had never before "rightfully exercised the right of suffrage" be able to read the state constitution and write his own name if they wanted to vote now, unless they were a veteran or physically unable to write. *Senate Journal*, 11th G.A., 562, 573-74, 634-35; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 169; *Acts and Resolutions*, 11th G.A., 106.

throughout eastern Iowa in April 1866.³⁷⁷ The texts of most of his speeches have not survived, but some information was preserved by the *Davenport Daily Gazette*, which also advertised the event by stating that “We could wish that every “anti-negro suffrage” man in this vicinity might hear Mr. Douglass tonight, and then tell us, if possible, why color of the skin should longer be the test of fitness to use the ballot.” Before a standing room only crowd, Douglass echoed many of the sentiments espoused by the 60th a year earlier, declaring “The elective franchise should be extended to the negro because he is *a man*...because he has earned it.” The *Gazette* endorsed these statements, also lamenting that despite his talents he was denied the rights in Iowa enjoyed by naturalized citizens “in utter ignorance of American institutions.”³⁷⁸ Both Douglass and the *Gazette* thus defined citizenship not by race but by one’s knowledge of, participation in and defense of American institutions, although the gendered language was no more helpful to black women than the soldier’s petition had been.³⁷⁹ Neither the speaking tour nor the news reports on it offered any new arguments on the suffrage issue, but they did help keep it fresh in the minds of the voters.

The Republican Party rolled to another huge victory in the statewide elections of 1867, virtually ensuring that the suffrage amendment would pass at the next general assembly. This in

³⁷⁷ Douglass went to Muscatine, Davenport, Dubuque, Des Moines, and Cedar Rapids, receiving \$100 for each lecture, before heading back east. *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 25 April 1866.

³⁷⁸ *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 25 April 1866; “Fred Douglass on Suffrage,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 28 April 1866. The following year, fellow abolitionist Wendell Phillips made an even longer speaking tour through eastern Iowa but had nothing to say about civil rights for northern blacks – partly because many of his speeches were recycled and dated back as far as 1838 – although he did call for a continued military presence in the South and labeled President Johnson a “traitor.” Waldo W. Braden, “Iowa Reactions to Wendell Phillips, 1867,” *Iowa Journal of History* 50: 35-46 (1952).

³⁷⁹ “Fred Douglass on Suffrage.” Although it does not seem that Douglass ever directly referred to Iowa, the *Gazette* declared “Let us pray for and *work* for and “fight for the grand victory for Justice and Liberty when *all men* of every race and color shall enjoy that perfect equality before the law that is their just due. In Iowa, at least, the battle has been well begun. The victory is surely coming and cannot be delayed.” Over a month after Douglass’ visit, a rumor spread that he had come back after Albert Nuckolls was seen debating theological issues with “a well known gentleman.” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 9 May 1866. He actually did return in 1869, lecturing in Keokuk and Des Moines, *Keokuk Gate City*, 25 February 1869.

fact did happen. A joint resolution “relative to a submission of the constitution to the people for amendment in the clause, denying manhood suffrage to American citizens of African descent” passed by a wide margin in both chambers (one Democrat even voted for it) with little discussion, although the provision barring Confederate soldiers and draft dodgers from voting was left out; after three years of peace, the legislature apparently was no longer as eager to punish disloyal whites.³⁸⁰ It was now left to the electorate to decide that fall, when they would vote on a referendum held concurrently with the presidential election.³⁸¹ As they had in 1865, African American community leaders now reached out to those voters with another appeal for suffrage rights. Still denied direct political power, Iowa’s black community leaders again used alternative political channels to press white political leaders for legal reform.

In February 1868, an announcement circulated in black communities around the state reading:

“FELLOW CITIZENS: In the exercise of a liberty which we hope you will not deem unwarrantable, and which is given us by virtue of our connection and identify with you, as an oppressed and disenfranchised people, the undersigned do hereby, most earnestly and affectionately, invite you, *en masse*, or by your chosen representatives, to assemble in Convention, in the City of Des Moines...for the purpose of considering the question of our enfranchisement, which is now before the Legislature and will soon be submitted to the voters of Iowa for their votes. All in favor of equal rights, come! Strike for freedom whilst it is day! Let all our churches, literary and other societies, be represented.”³⁸²

³⁸⁰ The state senate also supported the 14th Amendment and rejected a Democratic proposal that would have limited the rights of naturalized citizens to white immigrants. Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa,” 257-58; Erbe, “Constitutional Provisions,” 210-11; *Journal of the Senate of the Twelfth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1868), 54-55, 122, 163, 264-65, 301, 384-85, 566.

³⁸¹ *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Twelfth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1868), 93-95, 290-91.

³⁸² Ruth A. Gallaher, “A Colored Convention,” *Palimpsest* 2 (1921): 178; *Proceedings of the Iowa State Colored Convention, Held in the City of Des Moines, Wednesday and Thursday, February 12th and 13th, 1868* (Muscatine: Daily Journal Book and Job Printing House, 1868), 2.

The 1865 veteran's petition had in fact stated "we wish we could truthfully address you as 'fellow citizens,'" but with the progress of the suffrage amendment, the imminent passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, and Alexander Clark's lawsuit against the segregated school system, there was a sense that things were changing for the better, the announcement used language only hoped at three years earlier. Thirty-one delegates from eastern and central Iowa (along with four white liberal supporters) met at Burns AME on February 12, a date chosen for its symbolic value as Abraham Lincoln's birthday.³⁸³ Nearly every significant black community was represented aside from distant Clarinda, disinterested Fayette County, and Mount Pleasant and Burlington, although it may be that the Keokuk delegate was there on behalf of all southeastern black Iowans.³⁸⁴ Most of the delegates were ministers, including convention president Rev. J.W. Malone of Keokuk, but Alexander Clark was named secretary and headed a committee to prepare a public address for the voters.³⁸⁵

The resolutions produced at the convention echoed many of the sentiments put forth in 1865, albeit with less of a marital focus. The first expressed faith in the Republican Party's continued support for civil rights, and the second praised the spirit of "enlarged freedom" that was leading to "universal suffrage and impartial justice at home and abroad." The third hailed African Americans' "manly conduct" and "fidelity to the Union and the Republican Party," while the fourth called on them to engage in "patient pursuit of education, industry and thrift." Finally, additional resolutions offered praise to their white allies and to Alexander Clark for his

³⁸³ "Convention of Colored Iowa Soldiers"; *Proceedings of the Iowa State Colored Convention, 1868*, 4-5.

³⁸⁴ Delegates came from Keokuk (1), Muscatine (2), Tipton (1), Davenport (1), Oskaloosa (4), Clinton (1), Toledo (2), Newton (3), Washington (1), Albia (1), Des Moines (14), Dubuque (1), and Iowa City (1). *Proceedings of the Iowa State Colored Convention, 1868*, 3-4.

³⁸⁵ Each delegate was taxed one dollar to cover expenses, with some from the larger cities donating the funds to their poorer colleagues. Gallaher, "A Colored Convention," 179.

“great and noble act in defending the rights of our children to be admitted into the public schools of the State, as the Constitution warrants.” Arrangements were made to have this list and other materials from the convention published in the *Daily State Register*, *Davenport Gazette*, *Muscatine Journal*, and several other newspapers; the delegates were fully aware that the liberal GOP press was the most effective way for them to reach voters. The delegates also created a permanent institutional framework (something less feasible back in 1865, given the greater instability in the lives of the just-recently decommissioned soldiers) by establishing a statewide executive committee that was chaired by Clark and included community leaders from Des Moines, Davenport, Oskaloosa and Keokuk. The gathering finally closed with a series of speeches and the singing of the old Methodist hymn “Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow!”³⁸⁶ The song choice was not an idle one. Written by abolitionist Charles Wesley, its lyrics were aptly suited to the current situation:

“Blow ye the trumpet, blow!
The gladly solemn sound
Let all the nations know,
To earth’s remotest bound:

The year of jubilee is come!
The year of jubilee is come!
Return, ye ransomed sinners, home.

Ye slaves of sin and hell,
Your liberty receive,
And safe in Jesus dwell,
And blest in Jesus live.”

Although the 1868 resolutions had less of a military focus than their 1865 counterparts, Clark’s keynote speech “Address of the Colored State Convention to the People of Iowa in Behalf of Their Enfranchisement” renewed the theme of black military service as political

³⁸⁶ *Proceedings of the Iowa State Colored Convention, 1868*, 6-9; Friedrichs, *Covering Iowa*, 20-21.

capital. Asking every “true, honest and liberty-loving citizen of Iowa” for “sympathy and aid in securing those rights and privileges which belong to us as freemen” and without which “we have no power to defend ourselves from unjust legislation, and no voice in the government we have endeavored to preserve.” African Americans were politically in the same position that they had been after the Revolution, with the same grievances, and the same change – legal rights – was necessary to redress those grievances.³⁸⁷

Clark further contended that despite claims to the contrary by “shallow demagogue[s],” African Americans were asking not asking for social equality, which had to be earned by each individual (like many black political leaders of the period, he felt compelled to explicitly or implicit assure that blacks were not interested in interracial marriage), but only for voting rights, which they deserved under the Declaration of Independence and by virtue of their military service:³⁸⁸

“We simply ask that the ‘two streams of loyal blood which it took to conquer one, mad with treason,’ shall not be separated at the ballot-box; that he who can be trusted with an army musket, which makes victory and protects the nation, shall also be intrusted [sic] with that boon of American liberty, the ballot, to express a preference for his rulers and his laws. We demand this as native born citizens of the United States, and who have never known other allegiance than to its authority and the laws of our State, and as those who have been true and loyal to our government from its foundation to the present time, and who have never deserted its interest whilst even in the midst of treason and under subjection to its most violent enemies. We ask, in the honored name of 200,000 colored troops, five hundred of whom from our own Iowa, who, with the first opportunity, enlisted under the flag of our country and the banner of our State, and bared their breasts to the remorseless storm of treason, and by hundreds went down to death in the conflict, whilst the franchised rebels and their cowardly friends, the now bitter enemies of our right to suffrage, remained in quiet at home, safe, and fattened on the fruits of our sacrifice, toil and blood.”³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷ *Proceedings of the Iowa State Colored Convention, 1868*, 7, 10, 12.

³⁸⁸ For example, James Henry Hall of the 54th Massachusetts declared that “If we fight to maintain a Republican Government, we want Republican privileges... We do not covet your wives nor your daughters... all we ask is the proper enjoyment of the rights of citizenship, and a free title and acknowledged share in our own noble birthplace.” Redkey, *A Grand Army of Black Men*, 205.

³⁸⁹ *Proceedings of the Iowa State Colored Convention, 1868*, 11; Richardson, *Death of Reconstruction*, 122-24.

He also reminded his audience, as many white politicians had, that with so few African Americans in Iowa, voting rights would not fundamentally affect the political structure. At the same time, it would help Iowa make a name for itself as the first state to “do full justice to the men of color” after the war. In conclusion, he again emphasized black loyalty and patriotism, proclaiming “In spite of all the wrongs which we have long and silently endured in this our native country, we would yet exclaim, with a full heart, ‘O, America! with all thy faults, we love thee still.’”³⁹⁰

Not surprisingly, the Democrats offered no direct response to Clark’s address. Instead of simply focusing on racial issues again, the party tried to mobilize its base constituency while simultaneously reaching out to conservative Republicans with a “cunning amalgamation of ‘populist’ economic rhetoric and appeals to race prejudices.” By linking civil rights to big business (in other words, the GOP), the Democrats implied that black suffrage would not only bring about social horrors but also increase the power of eastern corporations at the expense of working-class whites. One speech to a mostly immigrant crowd claimed that the Republicans had “fastened eternal white slavery upon yourselves and children by lowering and knuckling to the most absolute, despotic and exacting, intruding slave driver, that ever marked the poor man’s path...the monied monopolies of the country.”³⁹¹ Republican newspapers countered that working-class Democrats were “afraid that ‘the nigger’ will get the start on [them] in the race of

³⁹⁰ *Proceedings of the Iowa State Colored Convention, 1868*, 11-12.

³⁹¹ (*McGregor*) *North Iowa Times*, 30 September 1868, quoted in Dykstra and Hahn, “Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage,” 13-14.

life” and wanted to “hamper the colored man in the pursuit of an industrious livelihood.”³⁹² It was also made clear that “a vote for Grant...is not a true, honest, Republican, vote, unless it contain[s] the clause striking the word ‘White’ from the Constitution”; thus party loyalty was equated with support for black suffrage, although some leaders worried that moderate Republicans would give one but not the other.³⁹³

The GOP also continued to discuss the issue in light of black wartime loyalty. Governor Samuel Merrill, who had served as a colonel and succeeded William Stone in January 1868, agreed in his inaugural address that black Iowans (and other black soldiers around the country) had “demonstrated their manhood in the stern realities of war.” He also stated, as Clark recently had, that Iowa should lead the way in expanding the rights of citizenship. Even as other northern states moved slowly, his had allowed African Americans to fight for it and now should complete the process of allowed them “the enjoyment of those political privileges which have hitherto been denied.”³⁹⁴ Like Clark, Merrill also framed the issue within the principles of the Revolution, implying that Iowa’s antebellum racial policies had been a misreading of those principles and calling for a return to this supposed past. It no doubt also helped that they and other Republicans could blame Iowa’s Democrats for these old mistakes, since they had been the

³⁹² The *Western Soldier’s Friend* stated that “it is not the color of the skin you fear, it is the fear you have, that the negro will outstrip you in the race of life.” *Davenport Western Soldier’s Friend*, 24 October 1868, and *Marshalltown Times*, 26 September 1868, quoted in Dykstra and Hahn, “Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage,” 14.

³⁹³ *Davenport Western Soldier’s Friend*, 24 October 1868; James Harlan to William E. Chandler, 28 July 1868, in BRS Records, Box 12, Folder 13: Chapter 11 – Miscellaneous; Wubben, “The Uncertain Trumpet,” 424. John S. Runnels, secretary for the Republican Union State Central Committee, felt that the amendment would pass in part because German voters favored it and had not been alienated by temperance Republicans that year. John S. Runnels to Peter Melendy, 14 September 1868, in BRS Records, Box 12, Folder 13. General Grant himself expressed his hope that “the people of Iowa... would be the first State to carry impartial suffrage through unfalteringly.” *Iowa State Weekly Register*, 4 November 1868.

³⁹⁴ Merrill did not ignore the national context, though, noting that without voting rights freedom would be “an undefended fortress” for freedpersons in the South and arguing that sectional reconciliation could occur only when power was transferred from the former rebels to Unionists and blacks. *Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery, Iowa Volume*, 14; Samuel Merrill, “First Inaugural” (16 January 1868), *Messages and Proclamations III*, 247, 255-59.

dominant political power for most of the antebellum period, even though the GOP had done little for civil rights during the 1850s; reinventing the past was politically useful in the present.

The October elections proved to be a triumphant victory for African Americans and white Republicans. Ulysses Grant was elected with 62 percent of the Iowa vote, while the suffrage amendment received 56.6 percent of all votes cast, passing by nearly 25,000 votes. Although the amendment failed in twenty different counties, 91% of the townships that voted for Grant also supported black suffrage.³⁹⁵ Although conservative commentators were furious, African Americans and white liberals could not help but gloat.³⁹⁶ William Davis, a former slave and Union soldier who had opened a barbershop in Albia, spoke at a victory party for Monroe County Republicans, reflecting on his experiences in moving from slavery to freedom. The *Iowa State Daily Register* proclaimed “Color No Longer the King of the Ballot!” and predicted that “to the colored people of Iowa...the 3d day of November will henceforth be what the Fourth of July is to all Americans. On that day they achieved their independence, arrived at their manhood, acquired full citizenship.” Edward Russell was even more hyperbolic, declaring that “The world *has* moved, and God’s own truth has been the power compelling the onward march to victory.”³⁹⁷ Even a mockingly racist article in *Harper’s Magazine* recognized the sea change and its impact on African Americans:

“In a certain school district in Iowa reside a few ultra Democrats; likewise a colored man and wife who have several children. The young Democrats and the young Africans went to the same

³⁹⁵ Berrier, “The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa,” 258-60; Erbe, “Constitutional Provisions,” 211; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 3, 1-3; Wubben, “The Uncertain Trumpet,” 444; Dykstra and Hahn, “Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage,” 10.

³⁹⁶ The *Dubuque Herald*, for example, sarcastically commented that “Iowa has undoubtedly elected the nigger. It is triumph of which to be proud.” *Dubuque Herald*, 7 November 1868, quoted in Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 367. Former Chief Justice Charles Mason had vowed to leave the state if the suffrage amendment passed, although he ultimately decided to stay. Charles Mason to D.C. Lawrence, 4 November 1868.

³⁹⁷ Hickenlooper, *An Illustrated History of Monroe County* (1896), 183; *Iowa State Daily Register*, 4, 7 November 1868, quoted in Friedrichs, *Covering Iowa*, 21; *Davenport Weekly Gazette*, 16 December 1868.

school, at the opening of which it appeared that the former relucted at drinking from the same bucket with the latter. It so happened that on the following day the Constitutional Amendment was voted upon, and negroes were declared to be folks. Charged with the knowledge of this 'boon,' the young ebonies next day refused to bring water specially for themselves, but when wishing to slake, went boldly to the white boys' pail. "Drink out of your own pail!" angrily exclaimed a young pale-face; to which a young Sambo replied, 'Look-a-heah, boy, dar was 'lection in dis State yes'day, and I jes' tell you dat *dat two-bucket business is played out!*'"³⁹⁸

Overall, the larger southeastern and Mississippi River towns, which were also home to the largest number of African Americans, largely opposed black suffrage, while support was stronger in rural areas that had fewer black residents but greater support for the GOP.

Proportionally, the greatest support came from northern Iowa, the least populous part of the state and home to only a few dozen African Americans.³⁹⁹ The voters of Dubuque, Van Buren, Des Moines and especially Lee County, on the other hand, all rejected the amendment by wide margins. The only areas of the state that had large black populations and still voted positively on the amendment were Page County in the southwest and the old liberal strongholds of Davenport, Mount Pleasant and Des Moines.⁴⁰⁰ The latter three played a far more important role in the suffrage victory than the northern counties due to their large number of voters; Scott, Polk and Henry counties had the second, sixth and nineteenth largest populations in the state, and each carried the amendment by at least 59 percent. Even more impressive, though, is the fact that the

³⁹⁸ "Editor's Drawer," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 39 (June-November 1869): 618. *Harper's* published at least one other racist humor sketch involving black Iowans; specifically, a Dubuque roustabout being sworn onto the witness stand who explained the oath by "rolling up the whites of his eyes" and saying that if he lied, "I 'spect I'd be handled for dat" by the court and the Lord, and "boaf of 'em would make it might hot for dis chile; '*specially de las' way!*'" "Editor's Drawer," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 48 (December 1873-May 1874): 763.

³⁹⁹ Excluding Marshall, the thirteen counties where the referendum passed by 75% or more (Buena Vista, Cerro Gordo, Clay, Dickinson, Emmett, Franklin, Grundy, Kossuth, Mitchell, Pocahontas, Winnebago and Worth) had a combined population only slight more than Scott County alone; most of these counties cast less than total 200 votes. *Election Records*, Reel I, 355-57, 369-73, quoted in Berrier, "The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa," 258-60; 1860 U.S. Census; 1870 U.S. Census.

⁴⁰⁰ This analysis is supported by Dykstra and Hahn's research, which shows that the greatest support for black suffrage was in rural areas while the greatest opposition was in the cities. Scott, Henry and Polk counties had the fourth, second and third largest black populations and carried the amendment by 65.1, 62.6, and 59.4 percent. Dykstra and Hahn, "Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage," 11.

amendment passed at all when it had failed so miserably eleven years earlier. Poweshiek County (home to the abolitionist town of Grinnell), for example, rejected the 1857 amendment 56-601 but now endorsed it 653-221.⁴⁰¹

Iowa was now one of only a handful of states with universal male suffrage. Only Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New York (on a limited basis) had allowed African American males to vote before the war.⁴⁰² Many other northern states debated the issue after the war, including five in 1868 alone, but in the five years between Lee's surrender and the ratification of the 15th Amendment, it was rejected in fourteen northern states and the District of Columbia, mainly by referenda. The only victories were in Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota, and Wisconsin's took place through a court decision, while Minnesota's snuck in through the back door via a suffrage referendum that made no direct reference to race. Thus Iowa was, in Robert Dykstra's words, "the only straightforward victory for Negro suffrage."⁴⁰³

Scholars have offered different explanations as to why black suffrage succeeded in Iowa when it failed in so many other places. Jacque Voegeli's sweeping study of the Midwest argues that whites supported black suffrage because the corresponding liberalization of southern laws convinced them that most former slaves would stay in the South, although this does not explain why Iowa was different than other Midwestern states.⁴⁰⁴ Philip Swenson's more localized statistical study shows that Iowa's Democratic Party, unlike that of Illinois or Indiana, was too

⁴⁰¹ Parker, *History of Poweshiek County I* (1911).

⁴⁰² Dykstra and Hahn, "Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage," 2; Wubben, "The Uncertain Trumpet," 410.

⁴⁰³ The Minnesota referendum asked the voters to decide on "an amendment of section 1, article 7 of the constitution" without any direct reference to race or impartial suffrage. Dykstra and Hahn, "Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage," 2, 4-5; Wubben, "The Uncertain Trumpet," 410.

⁴⁰⁴ "Four years of war had tempered the racism of the Midwest but had not purged it." Voegeli, *Free but Not Equal*, 176-77, 182.

weak to exploit racism in Iowa; the same could be said, though, of Minnesota and Wisconsin, where support for black suffrage was much weaker.⁴⁰⁵ G. Galin Berrier shows that the GOP convention supported black suffrage thanks to the efforts of a few liberals and the voters followed along as a matter of party loyalty, believing that the small number of potential black voters would not change political dynamics.⁴⁰⁶ Robert Dykstra and Harlan Hahn's economic analysis contends that support for the amendment from rural farmers, who did not have to compete with blacks for jobs, overcame opposition in urban centers.⁴⁰⁷

Daniel J. Elazar offers a more ideological perspective, arguing that between 1857 and 1868 New Englanders and Scandinavians replaced lower Midwesterners, Germans and Irish as the dominant political subculture in the state.⁴⁰⁸ This intriguing argument does not address the fact, though, that during the same period many previously anti-suffrage Northerners and Norsemen actually changed their minds on the issue. A later work by Dykstra argues that GOP leaders defined support for the suffrage amendment as "a straightforward test of loyalty to the party and, indeed, to the Union itself," while Herbert Wubben cynically counters that the voters went along with the amendment mainly to avoid being identified with the Democrats.⁴⁰⁹ Both arguments still beg the question, though, of why the 1865 GOP convention supported black suffrage in the first place, especially since nearly every other Midwestern state did not.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁵ Philip David Swenson, "The Midwest and the Abandonment of Radical Reconstruction, 1864-1877" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1971).

⁴⁰⁶ Berrier, "The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa."

⁴⁰⁷ The seven townships that showed the least support for black suffrage were both the most strongly Democratic and at least 48 percent foreign-born. Dykstra and Hahn, "Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage," 10, 12-15, 17-19.

⁴⁰⁸ The third political subculture, traditionalistic, had little impact in Iowa. Elazar, "Political Culture and Negro Suffrage," 22-26.

⁴⁰⁹ Dykstra, "The Issue Squarely Met," 433; Wubben, "The Uncertain Trumpet," 409-13, 425-27; Dykstra, "Iowa: Bright Radical Star."

⁴¹⁰ Dykstra, "The Issue Squarely Met," 433, 436.

In response, Dykstra argues that the attitudes of most white Iowans, though racist, were flexible and lacking in “strong inner convictions or psychological needs,” and they could be led towards liberal policies by dedicated activists like Russell and Price.⁴¹¹ This line of analysis continues in his groundbreaking *Bright Radical Star*, the first book-length analysis of the suffrage issue. The concept of malleable racism is further developed through Dykstra’s socio-psychological analysis of GOP leaders, using demographic and biographical information.⁴¹² The book’s first chapter also offers one of the most complete studies of antebellum black Iowans ever written, but this group is largely reduced to spectator status in his analysis of the suffrage issue. Dykstra convincingly shows that racists could be induced to behave in non-racist ways, but he overlooks the fact that African Americans were one of the inducing factors. Finally, James Cook’s study of Iowa’s Republican Party during the nineteenth century offers something of a hybrid explanation, drawing on the arguments of earlier scholars while also noting the importance of black wartime sacrifices and postwar political activism on the voters, who “[bestowed] the franchise on local blacks as an act of justice.” His tight focus on Iowa, though, does not allow him to explore why suffrage reform did not occur in other Midwestern states with similar conditions.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ “No other behavioral conceptualization so satisfactorily explains how it was that a body of 663 men, most of whose ideas about blacks were undoubtedly negative on the morning of June 14, 1865, could by the evening of the same day have voted overwhelmingly to bestow the elective franchise on blacks.” Dykstra, “The Issue Squarely Met,” 433-36, 445-47, 449. In a short response, Wubben explicitly or implicitly concedes all of Dykstra’s points, praising his article for “better [informing him] as to the forces behind [Republicans’] civil rights victory.” Wubben, “Further Reflections,” *Annals of Iowa* 47 (1984): 544-45.

⁴¹² Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*.

⁴¹³ Cook acknowledges that party leaders in other states with large GOP majorities (Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Minnesota) also supported black suffrage in 1865, albeit without bringing about actual legal change. He also offers an alternative theory for the Iowa suffrage victory: at the 1865 convention, Russell, Price and O’Connor introduced the suffrage plank to support their ally James Harlan at the expense of the more moderate James Grimes. Cook himself, though, is suspicious of this “factional analysis” since Harlan was also apprehensive about black suffrage. Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 162-65.

Much of what earlier scholars have written is accurate and insightful. The Democrats were virtually impotent across the state by 1868, and opposition to black suffrage was closely associated with them. A few outspoken liberals led the way in shaping GOP policy on black suffrage. By 1868, Iowans outside of the major cities could see that racial liberalism had not created job competition. Although most Iowans remained racist, those of New England origin were generally more supportive of civil rights. And finally, the GOP victory in 1865 made it much easier for legislators and voters to support the amendment. When taken together, these ideas create a rich, multi-modal analysis that increases our understanding not only of the suffrage victory but also of nineteenth-century politics and racial attitudes. This purpose of this work is not to refute these scholars but rather to introduce and emphasize several other factors: (1) African Americans' effective use of loyalty rhetoric as political capital; (2) the political importance of Davenport; and (3) the "critical mass" theory. Many other African Americans around the country also used their military service as political capital, but with much less success, and Iowa's unique path was due not only to the factors discussed by other scholars but also to these additional issues.

As has been shown, the Civil War became a transformative rhetorical device in Iowa, and even those who once openly opposed black suffrage now pointed to black military contributions as the event that changed their worldview. The 1865 soldier's convention came at just the right time. Not only did it strengthen the resolve of liberals like Price and Russell, it (along with those liberals) forced Republican moderates like Governor Stone to get off the fence and take a stand at their own convention that same year. It seems clear that the suffrage amendment's passage was a foregone conclusion once the Republican delegation decided to support it, but that support

can also be directly linked to Alexander Clark and the black veterans using their service to force the issue. By equating wartime loyalty with citizenship, they contrasted their actions with those of Copperheads and gained a great advantage in a state where everyone was defined as a patriot or a traitor. The downside of this public relations strategy, though, was its gendered implications. Since wartime loyalty entitled one to the ballot and military service was the ultimate form of loyalty, black women – who of course had been barred from serving – were not extended suffrage rights.⁴¹⁴

The military rhetoric also connected with whites' self-perceptions in ways that they may not have realized. Given that only a few of the 60th's members were longtime Iowa natives, conservatives could have argued that black Iowans had actually done very little to earn voting rights, but no one actually did. Although many people believed that the regiment consisted of every able-bodied black man in the state, even those who knew the truth still accepted these Missouri migrants as Iowans. The war history *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, for example, declared that

“Its history – like that of several other Iowa military organizations in which men from other States enlisted – belongs as fully to the State as that of any of the regiments which were organized within her borders. The records of the First Regiment of Iowa African Infantry constitute a portion of the military archives of the State, and it is therefore given its distinctive place in this work as the only regiment of the Negro race which the State of Iowa sent into the field.”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ See also Diana Paton and Pamela Scully, “Introduction: Gender and Slave Emancipation in Comparative Perspective,” in Scully and Paton, eds. *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). In the years to come, some legislators would also take up the cause of women's suffrage, although the general assembly could not even pass a supporting resolution in two consecutive meetings. Iowa's women did not win the right to vote until the 19th Amendment gave it to all American women in 1920. *Journal of the Senate of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1870), 113, 285, 386, 388-89; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1870), 95, 254, 417; *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1870), 252; *Journal of the Senate of the Fourteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa*, 377-78, 421.

⁴¹⁵ *Roster and Record V*, 1586.

The fact that the black soldiers were from Missouri made them similar to most black Iowa civilians, thus rendering the distinction between the two groups irrelevant, but also gave them an identity similar to that of many white Iowans. Even at the end of the 1860s, most adult residents of the state, including many veterans, had been born somewhere else. Thus the soldiers who came north from Missouri, and the thousands of other former slaves who came with them, were only part of a larger, multiracial statewide migration story. White Iowans, though still racist, could relate to them as fellow pilgrims who had come to the state seeking freedom and helped give it its very identity through their wartime service.

Although most scholars have made at least passing reference to black military service, the other new factor to be considered – the importance of the Tri-Cities – has been largely overlooked. If one takes only a brief glance at Iowa's black history, it makes more sense to place the locus of black political activism in the much larger community of Keokuk or the established community of Muscatine, but Davenport enjoyed some of the qualities found in both places, with both a cadre of older, politically influential black community leaders and a rapidly growing population of former slaves during and after the war. As part of a network of black communities that connected east and central Iowa, the largest of the state's Mississippi River towns and the one with the greatest military presence, Davenport was also an important site of black political activity for people who actually lived elsewhere such as Alexander Clark and the members of the 60th.

Furthermore, Davenport was probably the second-most racially liberal part of the state, second only to Henry County but with a much larger and more urban population. While

conservative Irish and southern migrants dominated the other Mississippi River towns, Davenport's political climate was created largely by the German-American community, which included a prominent Jewish faction that had perhaps had even more incentive to support racially liberal ideas. In 1868, GOP state secretary John S. Runnels predicted that Davenport Germans would help make the difference in the elections since "they favor the suffrage amendment almost universally." This liberal tradition dated back for more than two decades. As far back as the 1840s, the voters of Davenport elected an openly antislavery Whig mayor and also frequently supported Whig candidates for other statewide and federal offices dating back to the 1840s. Although the Democrats also won key elections during the antebellum period, they still had to share power with the Whigs during a time when the latter could hardly win a single election anywhere else in the state.⁴¹⁶ The neighboring city of Moline, Illinois was also racially liberal, due in part to its large community of migrants from the northeastern U.S. Rock Island was much more conservative than the other Tri-Cities, but it was also the smallest and least economically important of the three; local racial attitudes were created largely by the people of Davenport and Moline.⁴¹⁷ Although Moline residents could not vote in Iowa elections, they nonetheless contributed to the liberal climate that helped lead politicians and voters in Davenport to support black suffrage, thus showing that political power cannot always be measured simply by counting votes. This racially progressive community was of course represented at the 1865 Republican convention by arch-liberals Edward Russell and Hiram Price, further showing the importance of Davenport in the suffrage victory. Although there is no record of direct interaction between these

⁴¹⁶ Mark William Friedberger, *Cornbelt and River City: Social Change in a Midwest Community, 1885-1930* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1973), 40; Runnels to Melendy. In 1854, for example, Whigs candidates carried Davenport in the races for governor, attorney general, Congress, the state senate, and local offices. *History of Scott County* (1882), 411-14; Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County, Iowa* (1910), 529.

⁴¹⁷ Anderson, *Quad Cities: Joined by a River*, 79, 95.

politicians and local blacks, it seems likely that the relationship was a positive one, given Russell's favorable news reports on black community affairs and Price's praise for the black veterans who had been discharged in his city. Both men of course had been racially liberal moral crusaders for years before the war, but black military service further informed their liberalism and gave them a new rhetorical device to express it, thus allowing them to make history at the convention.

Iowa's first black voters may actually have cast ballots in the election to determine if blacks could cast ballots. According to one story, two light-skinned men went to the Oskaloosa polls on election day 1868 and insisted that the racial restrictions did not apply to them because "they were more white than black." The election judge agreed, probably because they were supported by local elites. Iowa law had always defined second-class citizenship for blacks and mulattoes without actually defining who was black or mulatto (unlike in Ohio, where the "visible admixture" policy granted equal rights to people of predominantly white ancestry), but there was no further legal action to help clarify this issue, probably because the amendment succeeded. A story from further north tells of another man of mixed ancestry who voted in the same election in the town of Peosta near Dubuque; his exemption, though, was based on the fact that he voted the straight Democratic ticket, but as in Oskaloosa there probably would have been more opposition if local officials thought that the amendment was going to fail.⁴¹⁸

The first instance of African Americans voting legally occurred in a special city council election in the south central town of Chariton on December 19. Members of the tiny black

⁴¹⁸ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Box 1, Folder 15, Chapter 6: Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2 of 2), 240-41; Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston*; Middleton, *Black Laws in the Old Northwest*, 144-45; Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 367.

community (only eight in total) not only voted but also ran for several positions. The following year, the *Sioux City Daily Times* estimated that there were 1,500 black voters in the entire state, compared with 255,802 total voting-eligible Iowans listed on the 1870 census. Republican predictions that African Americans were too few in numbers to dramatically affect the electoral process had proven true. Suffrage rights also, however, made blacks eligible for jury duty for the first time. In 1869 a man remembered only as “Whistling Charlie” – a “negro as black as the ace of spades, and about the best dressed and one of the most intelligent looking men in the court room” – served as a jury foreman in Oskaloosa. The legal matter was eventually settled out of court, but it was said that Charlie “made a favorable impression on all who witnessed the trial.” Over the course of the next few decades, though, only a few blacks would serve on juries, usually community leaders with business ties to white elites.⁴¹⁹ Thus African Americans’ ability to sit on juries did not enable them to directly confront the racial bias that was deeply embedded in the state’s criminal justice system. Like their right to vote, it ultimately proved more symbolic than anything because their numbers remained too small for anything else to happen.

On the last day of 1868, the newly enfranchised black community leaders held another statewide meeting that reflected their understanding of the suffrage victory and their involvement in national affairs. Thirty-two delegates from eastern Iowa gathered at Bethel AME in Muscatine for the Iowa State Colored Convention. The first resolution stated “this Convention in behalf of colored citizens of Iowa tender their sincere thanks to the Republican Party for their noble and manly effort in behalf of Manhood Suffrage at the November election by which our

⁴¹⁹ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 241; “Census of Iowa,” *Legislative Documents Submitted to the Twelfth General Assembly* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1867), 39; 1870 U.S. Census; “Local and Miscellaneous,” *Sioux City Daily Times*, 16 April 1870; 1870 U.S. Census; “A Negro Juryman,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 24 February 1869; “State Brevities,” *Sioux City Daily Times*, 20 July 1870; “First Iowa Colored Man to Serve as Juror.”

enfranchisement was achieved.” New officers were selected for the state executive committee, plans were made for the creation of county branches of the Colored Convention so that “they may be better able to vote wisely and judiciously,” and Alexander Clark (who remained chair of the Executive Committee) was selected Iowa’s representative for the National Colored Convention in Washington D.C. the following month.⁴²⁰

While in the capitol, Clark wrote a letter to the *Muscatine Journal* reporting on the goings-on. Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, and John Mercer Langston were among the 140 delegates and 50 honorary delegates (including Samuel Merrill and James Harlan, who Clark introduced to the body to “great applause”) from 26 states. This assembled body of black leaders was a direct challenge to white supremacy, Clark declared, writing: “I think if some of our Western Democrats were here they would be struck dumb and blind to see those whom they call ‘niggers’ drawing up resolutions, makeing [sic] motions and debating the great question of the day – Suffrage [sic] – which is the natural God-given right of all men: and upon this great idea is founded a government of the people, by the people and for the people, and not the people for it.”⁴²¹ Despite coming from a western state with a small black population, Clark’s talents and unique experience made him an important participant. The convention’s main purpose was advocating for black voting rights, and as an Iowan, he had more firsthand knowledge of such a process than anyone else in attendance. He was named chairman of a committee to press Congress on the non-payment of enlistment bounties for black soldiers – thus the man who had not been able to serve was once again responsible for protecting the rights of veterans – and another committee that congratulated Ulysses S. Grant on his recent election. Before returning

⁴²⁰ “Alexander Clark, P.G.M.,” 63; “State Colored Convention,” *Muscatine Daily Journal*, 8 January 1869.

⁴²¹ Both Merrill and Harlan gave “able and eloquent speeches.” Alexander Clark, Sr., “National Convention of Colored Men,” *Muscatine Journal*, 22 January 1869.

home, Clark also met with several white Iowa politicians, reporting that they received him “with great respect and warm friendship.”⁴²² Having won the suffrage battle on a state level, Clark, his fellow community leaders, and the thousands of African Americans that they represented now fully engaged in the effort to do the same for other blacks around the country.

At the same time that Alexander Clark was shaking hands with Iowa’s white elite, other African Americans were engaged in less positive interracial contact. The waterfronts of Iowa’s Mississippi River towns were working-class racial battlegrounds where the hard men who worked on or near the steamboats competed with blacks for jobs and housing. The atmosphere of racial violence dated back to the 1840 Nathaniel Morgan lynching, and there were numerous other incidents over the years. In Fort Madison in 1857, for example, white shipmen tried to whip a black passenger until the justice of the peace intervened, then got into a gun and rock fight with abolitionist townspeople that resulted in one death. Even the vocational terminology of river folk expressed racial tension: the device used to tow rafts was called the “Clinton nigger,” and the process of changing the raft’s direction was known as “running the nigger.”⁴²³

Waterfront racial tensions only increased during the war due to white distaste for emancipation, the stagnation of southern trade, and especially the influx of thousands of African American migrants, and it continued when the conflict was over. One incident in July 1867 took the fight from the docks to the heart of Burlington. An Irish worker went into a black neighborhood and insulted a group of women, who ignored him until he placed his hands on one of them and was promptly knocked to the ground. The man gathered some friends and threw rocks at her house later that night, but even this was apparently not revenge enough. Five days

⁴²² “Alexander Clark, P.G.M.,” 63; Clark, “National Convention of Colored Men”; *Muscatine Journal*, 8 January 1869.

⁴²³ Black, “Lynchings in Iowa,” 191; Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County* (1910), 434.

later, they returned to the “negro quarter” and entered the Peoria Saloon, where an interracial group of friends was socializing. The mob used “most insulting epithets” against the friends and chased them into the street, where the black men were attacked with stones by the rest of the mob. They initially fought back (one Sam Jones fired five shots from his gun, but without hitting anyone) before retreating, and the mob then began throwing stones at a building that housed several black families. In the end, the riot resulted in several injuries and property damage, but no arrests were made, even though the mob leader’s identity was apparently well known. Many townspeople had watched the entire affair from elevated points further away from the river, but none intervened. The *Hawk-Eye*, however, defended the “quiet and inoffensive” black community that had been attacked, writing:

“No matter how unprovoked or how brutal the assault made upon unoffending colored persons, ‘the nigger ought to know his place’ is heard from well dressed people as well as from drunken brawlers. It is true, a ‘nigger’ as well as every other man should know and keep his place. And it is high time that those who ‘dom the nagur’ should be taught that their lawless and unprovoked assaults upon the negroes are wholly out of place and that the proper place for such scoundrels as those who began the riot on Sunday is the jail or penitentiary, and the sooner they are sent there the sooner will the demands of justice and good order in society be met.”⁴²⁴

Similar problems occurred in the Tri-Cities, where the liberal racial attitudes of the white elite contrasted sharply with race relations on the waterfront, which were more complicated and violent. In 1864, a group of “levee loungers” attacked black deck hands aboard the steamboat *Pembina* but were driven back by the ship’s officers and arrested. The following November, white cooks on the same boat refused to prepare food for the black deck hands and then tried to provoke them into fighting; they finally left the boat at Muscatine. When white employees on the

⁴²⁴ “A Riot,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 30 July 1867.

steamer *Iowa* protested their low wages and were replaced by blacks, they threatened to “clean out” the new crew.⁴²⁵

Even this did not compare, though, to the worst racial violence of the Reconstruction era. On the morning of July 29, 1869, the steamboat *Dubuque* left Davenport with more than 300 passengers. Some were first-class passengers on summer vacation, but most were lumbermen of Irish and Scandinavian descent who had spent the winter felling trees in the upper Midwest and were now looking for summer work as farm hands. Most of them also had spent the previous night in Davenport drinking heavily. The ship’s officers were white, but most of the thirty deck hands were African American. One of them, a giant man named Mose Davis, was trying to keep the third-class passengers on the lower deck until all tickets had been collected, but some did not appreciate being given orders by a black man. A “big red-haired, pock-marked Irishman” named Mike Lynch, who was already in a “quarrelsome mood,” gathered several dozen friends and began threatening Davis and was pushed back down the stairs when he refused to wait. His friends formed a boxing ring, but Lynch “refused to fight a negro on these terms,” and he and his friends instead began attacking every black person in sight.⁴²⁶

The captain ordered the workers to jump ship, hoping that this would save their lives and the boat. Sixteen of them managed to reach the shore despite being under fire from bullets and pieces of coal and wood, but the others were not so lucky. Three drowned in the river after being stabbed, beaten and shot. Another hid under a piece of canvas until the rioters discovered him; he then jumped into the river and nearly made it to shore, but the rioters pelted him until he too sank

⁴²⁵ Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 227; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 10 November 1865; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 20 April 1866.

⁴²⁶ Gallaher, “A Race Riot on the Mississippi,” *Palimpsest* 2 (1921): 369-71; “A Race Riot on the Mississippi River Near Here Fifty Years Ago,” *Davenport Democrat*, 12 December 1919; Anderson, *Quad Cities: Joined by a River*, 79.

below the surface. Mose Davis fought his way to the side of the boat with a knife and began swimming towards two would-be rescuers on a nearby skiff, but just before they got there he was hit by a missile from the steamer and sank, causing “fiendish shouts” from the rioters. The remaining workers took refuge in the rooms of white officers and first-class passengers. A minister and his wife bandaged the neck wound of one man, while another woman saved the barber’s life by tending to his severed leg artery and then telling the “savage-looking men” who followed his blood trail that he had jumped into the river. Frustrated, the rioters began firing shots into likely hiding places. The officers were unarmed and could do nothing to stop them. They had already threatened to kill the captain, whose family was also on board when he tried to steer for shore. One witness later recalled that “the mob was in complete control, and that unless the officers agreed to the terms demanded by the rioters, the boat would be fired and no earthly power could save us.” Although they were not targets of the mob, white passengers began hiding their belongings in their clothing in case their bodies needed to be identified.⁴²⁷

After twenty minutes of violence, the captain and the mob reached an agreement: the remaining African Americans would be allowed to leave, and the captain would not telegraph the police. The black crewmen walked a plank to dry land (by now the boat was near Clinton) while the rioters cheered, but some white passengers also left and telegraphed Rock Island for help. Lynch and a friend named Ted Butler (who had been stabbed by Davis during the riot) decided to leave and got off the boat just before the Rock Island sheriff arrived with a posse. The remaining rioters fled to a nearby warehouse when the ship was boarded, but the police and several hundred citizens surrounded the building and forced them out. As locals lined the shore to watch, the *Dubuque* headed back to Rock Island carrying the police, the captured prisoners,

⁴²⁷ “A Race Riot”; Gallaher, “A Race Riot on the Mississippi,” 371-73; *History of Clinton County* (1879), 657.

and the deck hands who had fled ashore. When it docked in the Tri Cities, curious crowds were kept back by ropes while the prisoners were marched at gunpoint between two lines of deck hands so that the guilty could be identified. More than forty white men were arrested on the word of twenty-four black deck hands, who stayed in town after the boat left so that they could give official statements.⁴²⁸

The trial was delayed for a week due to confusion over jurisdiction – the prisoners had committed their crimes on interstate waters, been arrested in Iowa by an Illinois sheriff, and were being held in Illinois by federal troops – but finally began in Rock Island after the defendants (including Ted Butler, who had been captured during the delay) won a change of venue, claiming that they could not get a fair trial in Davenport. The rioters were identified by the deck hands again and “were about as uneasy a set of mortals as ever occupied the prisoner’s box in Rock Island,” but only nine were held over for trial, and that for one count of manslaughter. They were also released on their own recognizance, and although it would have been easy for itinerate rivermen to escape, they actually stayed in town for the trial, which was inexplicably postponed numerous times until June 1870. Although the court records have not survived, contemporary accounts show that two defendants were acquitted while the other seven were given sentences ranging from one to three years. Michael Lynch was tried separately after his capture in Arkansas several months later (thanks to a \$500 reward offered by the steamboat company) and was sentenced to ten years for manslaughter.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁸ Gallaher, “A Race Riot on the Mississippi,” 373-74; “A Race Riot.” Jane Teagarden, the eyewitness who provides this account, had actually gone off the boat at Le Claire, so it is not clear how she knew of these events or how accurate her testimony is.

⁴²⁹ Gallaher, “A Race Riot on the Mississippi,” 375, 377-78; “A Race Riot.”

Needless to say, some were displeased with this turn of events. Newspapers in Dubuque, Clinton and other river towns condemned the violence and accused the Scott County criminal justice system of racism. The *Rock Island Argus* declared that “justice has been cheated of its prey,” while the *Muscatine Journal* linked the violence to political issues of the day, blaming the steamboat company for selling alcohol to “reckless and irresponsible men” and Democratic leaders for “persistently [teaching] their followers to hate the negro and look upon him as one having ‘no rights which a white man is bound to respect.’” Even the conservative *Davenport Democrat* agreed that “when a reckless crowd of rioters will murder negroes, drive them into the river, cut and shoot them down for no other offense than color, whether drunk or sober, they should be made to suffer the full penalty of the law... These men are the terror of river travel, and now let them learn well the lesson of obedience to the law, and of respecting the rights of others.”⁴³⁰ No comments from African Americans have survived, but it seems likely that they shared the views of the white editors.

By the time that Lynch was sent to prison, though, business on the Mississippi had returned to normal. The *Dubuque* resumed its travels until it burned in 1876, a “fitting end for a boat whose name is associated with the worst race riot on the upper Mississippi.” Most people eventually forgot about the riot, aside from the surviving workers, who showed passengers and new workers “the places on the boat from which the hunted negroes jumped into the river which on that occasion served as the executioner for the mob.”⁴³¹ In 1919, an eyewitness named Dr. Jane Teagarden decided to share her story after the race riots that took place around the country that summer stirred old memories; this is the best surviving account of the event. Racial violence

⁴³⁰ Gallaher, “A Race Riot on the Mississippi,” 375-77.

⁴³¹ “Steamboats Dubuque,” *Palimpsest* 10 (1929): 400; “A Race Riot.”

on the waterfront never reached these levels again, but the underlying tensions that had caused the steamboat riot were still there. For African Americans, the right to vote did not guarantee the right to work or live in peace; freedom was still a commodity to be bargained for and sometimes lost.

At the war decade came to a close, whites were still divided on the issue of equal citizenship. An editorial in the *Ottumwa Copperhead* declared that “There is not an instance on record where the whites became partners in government with the blacks, but that miscegenation, subject to frequent revolutions was the consequence.”⁴³² The *Anamosa Eureka* offered a different opinion, though, in an editorial entitled “The Negro in Iowa.” Tracing the history of the previous ten years, the *Eureka* declared that although the 1860s had begun with the “Slave Power firmly seated on its throne,” the war had transformed the country in ways previously unimaginable:

“The cost of the war was nine thousand million dollars and a half million lives, the penalty paid by North and South for outrage and oppression of four million blacks during two and a half centuries. We paid dearly but it was our salvation. Slavery is dead. From this time forward, our country marches onward, free from the curse, the stain, the stigma of holding fellow men in chains because of the color of the skin, the reason given, but in reality because of the lowest and most brutish avarice. Well may we take courage in view of the future, and when the coming decade closes may we have made equal or, if possible, greater progress in all that exalts a nation and brings universal good to all, and ourselves near to the universal Brotherhood of Men.”⁴³³

Both of these sentiments still had a pervasive effect on the lives of black Iowans.

Thousands of African Americans in Mississippi River towns, the southeast, the eastern interior, the far western Nodaway Valley, and smaller rural communities throughout the state had won the right to vote through a rhetoric of wartime loyalty that helped guide the white electorate towards civil rights, thus enabling Iowa to become the first northern state to grant this most basic right of

⁴³² *Ottumwa Copperhead*, 16 June 1870.

⁴³³ “The Negro in Iowa,” *Anamosa Eureka*, 30 December 1869.

equal citizenship. And yet they had not solved the problem of racial prejudice. Some white Iowans found innovative ways to support and justify liberal laws while remaining firmly racist, and others did not support it at all and expressed their discontent with violence. The elective franchise had not brought African Americans equal access to jobs, housing, or education, but the struggle over the last of these would be one of the most important civil rights victories of the Reconstruction era.

Chapter V

“The Equality of Right”: Desegregating Iowa’s Educational System, 1839-1896

Iowa’s first public school system, created in 1839, was another reminder to African Americans that their presence was tolerated but not welcomed.⁴³⁴ The law (made permanent by the constitution seven years later) stated that only “every class of white citizens between the ages of five and twenty-one years” were eligible to attend, thereby denying admission to the territory’s 114 school-aged black children.⁴³⁵ Even so, some of them managed to get an education. The 1850 federal census lists 118 who did not attend school but twelve boys and five girls who did. It is difficult to draw conclusions as to why black children attended school in some areas but not in others. Arnie Cooper has theorized that counties with only one or two black families were willing to take a more liberal posture on integrated education than those with larger black populations, but this theory is problematic for several reasons. First, every county had a tiny number of black children – with Muscatine topping the list at 26 in contrast to more than 2,100 school-eligible white children in 1850 – and all but one of the six counties where blacks attended school ranked near the top in terms of black population, so distinguishing on this basis does not provide a great deal of insight.⁴³⁶

The more likely explanation is that these seventeen black pupils did not attend public schools at all. Some abolitionist villages opened their schools to fugitive children passing

⁴³⁴ The first provisions for a public school system in Iowa were made with the organization of the Michigan Territory in 1834, but the white population was so small that the only schools were locally run private institutions. Swisher, “A Century of School Legislation in Iowa,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 44: 174 (1946).

⁴³⁵ Cooper, *A Stony Road*, 114-15, 118-19; *The Statute Laws of the Territory of Iowa, Enacted at the First Session of the Legislative Assembly of Said Territory, Held at Burlington, A.D. 1838-’39* (Dubuque: Russell & Reeves, 1839), 39-42, 129, 191-94; Iowa Constitution of 1844. These 114 African Americans were between the ages of 5 and 24; the 1840 census does not provide any means of determining how many were under the age of 21.

⁴³⁶ Cooper, *A Stony Road*, 120-21; 1850 United States Census.

through, while larger black communities operated their own. Charlotta Pyles' daughters were able to attend a Quaker school in Salem, possibly because their light complexion made them more sympathetic. In Tabor, on the other hand, the schoolhouse mysteriously burned down in 1850 shortly after Rev. James Todd welcomed a newly-arrived black family to attend. The resistance of some whites to integrate their schools, even in the most racially liberal sections of the state, contributed to the fact that very few black children were able to pursue an education. In Muscatine and Fayette County, on the other hand, the black communities were large and prosperous enough to open their own schools. Support from wealthy and working-class blacks alike provided funding for Muscatine's school, which was run out of Bethel AME and employed Kentucky native Sarah Davidson as the teacher, but only five of the county's twenty-six school-aged black children were able to attend.⁴³⁷

Although black children were banned from Iowa's public schools, black property owners were required to pay both a school tax and special tax on their property. When some complained, the state legislature passed a law in 1851 exempting them from the property tax rather than integrating the school system, but they still had to pay the school tax. A black woman in Iowa City refused to do so in 1855 on the grounds that "she was debarred from the benefit of said fund." The outcome of the matter is not known, but the public schools in Iowa City and elsewhere remained segregated. The following year, the state legislature commissioned noted educator Horace Mann to study the state's public school system and create a list of recommendations on how to improve it. Although most of Mann's ideas were well received, the

⁴³⁷ Mrs. Laurence C. Jones, "The Desire for Freedom," *Palimpsest* 8 (1927): 153-54, 160, 162; Connor, "The Antislavery Movement in Iowa," 368; Farwell, "Garner Family," Walter Farwell Papers, Folder 11; Hawthorne, *African Americans in Iowa*, 8; *Past and Present of Fayette County*, 131-32; Dykstra, "Dr. Emerson's Sam," 78; Cooper, *A Stony Road*, 121-22; 1850 U.S. Census; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 259.

legislature balked at adopting his report because it also called for an end to racial exclusion. Around the same time the high school in Tipton announced that indigent children would be exempted from paying tuition; even as the poorest whites in Iowa gained the opportunity for a secondary education, all black children were still completely barred.⁴³⁸

The first sign of progress came with the new constitution in 1857. Although his home of Jones County had only three black children, Albert Marvin proposed that “schools shall be free of charge and equally open to all.” George Gillaspay immediately raised the specter of miscegenation, declaring that although he might consider segregated schools for black children but opposed “anything that may...lead to the amalgamation of the black and white races of this country...I will not have [blacks] made equal with my children, and the children of my constituents, who are white and I thank God they are white.”⁴³⁹ In response, William Penn Clarke declared that

“[It] is our duty to provide for the education of all classes of people in the State...The negro population of this State is very small, it is true, but they are as much the constituents of the members of this convention, so far as their natural rights are concerned, so far as our duty in protecting them goes, and so far as our duty goes for providing every child in the State with an education.”⁴⁴⁰

In Clarke’s expansive view of citizenship, African Americans were considered part of the body politic and entitled to an education, which would help “make them good citizens, to enable them to know their rights, and which will promote their moral and intellectual welfare.” Marvin also endorsed this view, arguing that denying education to blacks would make them more prone

⁴³⁸ Cooper, *A Stony Road*, 120, 123-25; *Laws of Iowa, 1846-1853*, 380-90; Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 20; *Code of 1851*, ch. 71, sec. 1160, quoted in Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*; Aurner, *Leading Events in Johnson County I* (1912-1913), 252; Swisher, “A Century of School Legislation,” 178.

⁴³⁹ The fact that Ottumwa did not actually have any school-aged black children apparently did not matter. *Debates of the Constitutional Convention I* (1857), 825-26; Cooper, *A Stony Road*, 127; Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 88-89.

⁴⁴⁰ *Debates of the Constitutional Convention I* (1857), 826.

to crime, while schooling would help them learn citizenship, which would benefit them and others.⁴⁴¹ As with other issues, liberals supported civil rights reforms by showing how they actually benefited whites.⁴⁴² Nevertheless, they were less eager on the issue of integration, assuring their colleagues that the proposal did not require it and that they opposed integration and social equality. Rufus Clarke promised that black education would not interfere with white supremacy anymore than free white education had interfered with the class structure and that “we are not legislating or arguing for any equality so far as social, moral or intellectual nature is concerned. We are merely declaring what the political rights of all men are. We are declaring that this school system has its very soul and life in being open to all alike.”⁴⁴³

George Ells then offered a compromise clause which simply stated that “The board of education shall provide for the education of all the youth of the state through a system of common schools.” This language was far less suggestive of integration than Marvin’s proposal, but it was still rejected by conservatives who worried that white children would now grow up believing in racial equality and thus engage in race mixing. In response, John Edwards reminded the convention that even Indiana provided for segregated black schools, that blacks had fought in past American wars, and that there were only a few hundred African Americans in the state. Four years before the Civil War and ten years before the suffrage victory, both sides were already using some of the arguments made on both sides of that debate, although J.A. Parvin of

⁴⁴¹ “Every white man,” he said, “has a direct and substantial interest in the education of every child in the State; not for the purpose of placing the colored child upon an equality with themselves, not for the purpose of making them capable of becoming citizens, but a direct interest pecuniarily.” *Debates of the Constitutional Convention I* (1857), 826-27.

⁴⁴² James Wilson, for example, declared that “an intelligent negro is certainly preferable to an ignorant one.” *Debates of the Constitutional Convention I* (1857), 832.

⁴⁴³ *Debates of the Constitutional Convention I* (1857), 828-29; Shambaugh, *The Constitutions of Iowa*, 247-48; Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War*, 151-52; Silbey, “Proslavery Sentiment in Iowa,” 313-314; Dykstra, “1857 Votes on Schools Bill,” BRS Records, Box 12, Folder 7: Clark v. Board.

Muscatine also offered the somewhat unusual argument that people of mixed ancestry had as much a right to attend white schools as black ones. Marvin's proposal finally passed despite conservative opposition. Once the voters ratified the constitution, African Americans finally had the right to attend public schools in Iowa after two decades of total exclusion. They would do so, however, in a segregated system. The following year, the legislature implemented the new policy with a law that gave local school districts the option of establishing integrated schools only if every white parent consented.⁴⁴⁴

Not surprisingly, nearly all the school boards opted for segregation. The Johnson County board initially voted to create a separate school but then reconsidered and decided that black children should attend the schools of their respective districts until and unless white families objected.⁴⁴⁵ Most integrated schools, though, were located in rural areas where the black population was miniscule (usually just one or two families) and it seemed uneconomic to build a separate school for them. Henry Lucas, for example, had survived the Mexican War with his master, bought his and his family's freedom, left the South due to the hostile climate towards free blacks, and at the invitation of a white man that he met during the war migrated to Montezuma in central Iowa. His family was the only black one in the township but owned land worth \$6,000 dollars, and his children began attending the local school. The county superintendent ignored complaints from white parents (along with the law which stated that he

⁴⁴⁴ *Debates of the Constitutional Convention I* (1857), 681-83, 825, 830-37, 841; 1857 Iowa Constitution, Article 9.1, sec. 12; Shambaugh, *The Constitutions of Iowa*, 217-218, 244, 342; *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Seventh General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: J. Teesdale, 1858), 51. A proposed amendment that would have required only a majority vote failed. Several months later the education law was struck down by the Iowa Supreme Court on the grounds that the new constitution gave the state board of education, not the legislature, authority over public education. The state school board addressed this problem by enacting its own set of policies identical to those created by the legislature, and the segregation policy remained intact. Cooper, *A Stony Road*, 125-30.

⁴⁴⁵ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Box 2, Folder 3: Research Materials: Misc. Topics/Anecdotes, 1; Aurner, *Leading Events in Johnson County Iowa History* (1912), 253-54.

had to create a segregated school) and ordered the teacher to treat them no different than her other pupils, while the postmaster refused to deliver any of the hateful letters that were written to the Lucases.⁴⁴⁶ It would seem that at least in this case, Arne Cooper's theory that rural blacks used their personal relationships with whites to facilitate integration was borne out.

In the cities, on the other hand, segregated and under-funded black schools were the norm. Keokuk had seventeen different white schools separated by location and age, but all black children at the "African School" were crammed into a single room, taught by a young Indiana native of mixed ancestry named Sarah Gray. In 1859 the superintendent noted that the African School had no desks but refused to buy any, even as he purchased a new blackboard for one of the white schools and took other steps to keep its class size down. With these conditions and the fact that many black children had to work to support their families, it was no surprise that the African School had the city's worst attendance record, which no doubt confirmed conservative views on the futility of black education. Even so, those who could attend were doing well, scoring the city's highest marks in geography, reading and singing.⁴⁴⁷

The situation was even more chaotic in other cities. When five black children sought admission to their local school in 1858, white parents threatened to withdraw their own children and their school tax.⁴⁴⁸ The following December, the school board opened a black school; it was housed in the same building as the white school, but the children were kept secluded in their own

⁴⁴⁶ The family later moved away from Montezuma (a county history simply says "the prairie"), where despite cultivating a reputation for being "upright and honest" some still objected to the children attending school. Parker, *History of Poweshiek County I* (1911), 223-24; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 257; 1860 U.S. Census.

⁴⁴⁷ The school board also went out of its way to accommodate another minority group, even as it marginalized African Americans. After unsuccessfully pleading with Catholic parents to send their children to public school, the board finally compromised by creating a separate school for them in the basement of the local Catholic church. Keokuk Schools Superintendent's Records (1859-1860), School Records, SHSI-IC, Box 2, 3-4, 13-33, 74, 83-85, 116, 200-04; 1860 U.S. Census.

⁴⁴⁸ "Colored Children in School," Richter Papers; "Colored School," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 10 December 1859

room, thus providing a constant, bizarre reminder of their inferior status.⁴⁴⁹ After a few months they were transferred to a new school in a church basement, which like its predecessor received far less funding than the white school. The same was true in nearby LeClaire, where the board built a new school for white children and sent the black children to school in an old unpainted structure. Further to the west, two black children who tried to enroll at a new school in East Des Moines in 1858 ran into similar white resistance. The black parents sought assistance from Isaac Brandt, a prominent abolitionist and financial supporter of the school, but all that he could do (or would do) was convince the state government to increase funding for a separate black school.⁴⁵⁰ Even in some of the most racially liberal parts of Iowa, white parents were not willing to send their children to school with the handful of black children that sought an education.

The most heated battle over school integration, though, was in the abolitionist town of Grinnell, where some townspeople shared Rev. Grinnell's vision for a "temperance town with good schools, churches, and good wholesome surroundings" but not his views on race. The presence of Iowa College (which was later renamed Grinnell College and at that time also served as an elementary and high school) and other industries prevented Grinnell from remaining a homogenous religious village like Tabor or Salem. Although residents like schoolmaster Leonard Parker were radical on issues of race and gender, other townspeople were more motivated by the fear that "promiscuous interference" with slavery would lead to civil war. The town had a significant southern presence, and even some New England natives, one resident later recalled, "were idealists and friends of humanity when thinking of far-away China, Africa, or South

⁴⁴⁹ The *Daily Gazette* nevertheless believed that "this disposition of the matter will soothe the prejudices of many of the patrons and be a means of relieving the members of the School Board from much undeserved censure." "Colored School"; Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County*, vol. 1 (1910), 967.

⁴⁵⁰ Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County*, vol. 1 (1910), 389, 967; Unidentified clipping, Richter Papers; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 17 March 1860; Brigham, *Des Moines I*, 419-20.

Carolina, but their zeal in good works cooled when the actualities came into town and next door.”⁴⁵¹

These internal tensions in the outwardly liberal town began growing in 1858, when a sixteen-year-old fugitive slave from Missouri named Frances Overton came to live with a white family. Overton was so eager to learn that within three months she went from being illiterate to winning a Sunday school prize for reciting Bible verses, which caused “offence to some white competitors.” The following year, she enrolled in school with support from Grinnell and Parker (who had been at Oberlin College when it controversially integrated), but apparently without much controversy. Then in March 1860, four male fugitive slaves in their early to mid-twenties came to town with a Tabor Quaker. They began working but like Overton were also interested in getting an education; one wanted to learn to read the guideposts along country roads so that he could rescue his wife and children from slavery.⁴⁵² When they enrolled at the public school, the town’s conservative undercurrent finally exploded.

The opposition leaders were grocer Samuel “Scotch” Cooper and former sea captain Nathaniel Winslow Clark, who denounced abolitionism as “negro-stealing” and had recently written a letter to Overton’s master informing him where she was. The two men also had a total of seven daughters enrolled at the school.⁴⁵³ They headed a group of townspeople who saw Overton as harmless but were uncomfortable with the idea of adult black men sitting next to

⁴⁵¹ D.S. Morrison, “Early Reminiscences of Grinnell,” 2, read before the Fortnightly Club, 23 February 1914, Parker Papers, Box 1, Al Schroeder Research Materials – 1860 Riot; Haines, “Seventy Years in Iowa,” 107, 112-13, 115; Lucas, “Grinnell Anti-Abolitionist Riot,” 14; Parker, *History of Poweshiek Count, I* (1880), 429.

⁴⁵² Amos Bixby to Parker, 16 May 1887, Parker Papers, Box 1; Parker, “Autobiography,” Parker Papers, Box 5, Folder 13 – Autobiography of L.F. Parker, Book One, October 1, 1901; Parker, “Grinnell’s Incipient Mob” (1903), Leonard Parker Papers, Box 1; Morrison, “Early Reminiscences of Grinnell,” 3; Lucas, “Grinnell Anti-Abolitionist Riot,” 16; Sarah Parker to her mother, Grinnell, Iowa, 10 March 1860, Parker Papers, Box 1; Parker to unknown party, date unknown (1890s), Parker Papers, Box 1, Al Schroeder Research Materials – 1860 Riot, SHSI-IC

⁴⁵³ Lucas, “Grinnell Anti-Abolitionist Riot,” 14-17; Bixby to Parker. Both men, it was believed, were native New Englanders. Haines, “Seventy Years in Iowa,” 115.

white girls in class. At the annual school meeting on March 12, the “anti-abolitionists” proposed that only non-residents be barred from the school, feeling that a seemingly race-neutral policy would garner more sympathy than an openly racist one. This would also have required the expulsion of many tuition-paying white students, and most townspeople were unwilling to sacrifice this revenue for the sake of excluding a few blacks. Having failed in their attempt at subtlety, the conservatives decided to appeal to white solidarity instead, declaring “We didn’t say exactly what we wanted; we want to exclude the niggers.” This motion also failed, although by a much smaller margin. Cooper and Clark’s faction now grew even angrier and turned the meeting into a shouting match. One person screamed that the black men “shall never enter those doors unless over my dead body,” while others accused liberal women of secretly desiring to sleep with black men.⁴⁵⁴

The meeting eventually ended without further incident, but Cooper and Clark were not satisfied. The next morning, they went to the school to “put those niggers out.” They were met by Leonard Parker, who wielded a piece of hickory and told the intruders that “I shall defend every student who has a right to be here.” Word of the confrontation quickly spread, and two opposing groups gathered at the school house. The controversy had so thoroughly divided the town that the segregationist mob included some of Josiah Grinnell’s own parishioners (including Captain Clark himself), while the integrationist mob included the black men themselves, who carried guns and knives. “They had come north to be free,” one witness remembered them saying, “but if they could not be their own masters they would die there as soon as anywhere.”

⁴⁵⁴ Morrison, “Early Reminiscences of Grinnell,” 3; Parker, “Grinnell’s Incipient Mob”; Parker to unknown party, date unknown (1890s); Sarah Parker to her mother, 10 March 1860; Lucas, “Grinnell Anti-Abolitionist Riot,” 17-18.

Cooler heads on both sides convinced the ringleaders and the four black men to withdraw, although the latter group held onto their weapons and still intended to “fight for their rights.”⁴⁵⁵

This was not the first time that Rev. Grinnell’s city on a hill had been threatened by racial violence. After Clark wrote to Frances Overton’s master, Amos and Augusta Bixby hid her in a fortified room stocked with weapons from where “if the slave hunters came, and discovered her hiding place, she could keep them at bay until the Abolition town was aroused.” Ironically, Clark and Bixby had worked together on a previous occasion to prevent a stagecoach company from driving across private land.⁴⁵⁶ This incident, along with the other facts of the case, reveals several insights about the issue of school integration in Iowa. First, it was so important to whites that it drove apart even neighbors who fought together against outsiders. Second, some whites were ready to use violence against blacks or each other to settle the issue. Third, African Americans were not passive followers of white initiative; they were also willing to take up arms in pursuit of an education. And fourth, this issue was inextricably linked to the slavery controversy.

In the end, the segregationists carried the day. Less than a week later, the school board decided that students from outside the township and all students over the age of twenty-one had to apply to the board for admission and pay half of their tuition in advance. This effectively ended African Americans’ chances to attend the school without being overtly racist. Few if any could afford the initial tuition payment, and even if liberal whites sponsored them, the school board could reject their application without explanation or hope for appeal. When the school reopened, the four black men did not even attempt to reenroll, attending a private school run by

⁴⁵⁵ Parker, “Grinnell’s Incipient Mob”; Morrison, “Early Reminiscences of Grinnell,” 3; Parker to unknown party; Lucas, “Grinnell Anti-Abolitionist Riot,” 18; Sarah Parker to her mother; Payne, *Josiah Bushnell Grinnell*, 114-15. Over the course of the next week, conservatives ran through the streets “with insulting words ever on their lips.”

⁴⁵⁶ Bixby to Parker; Morrison, “Early Reminiscences of Grinnell,” 2.

the Bixby family until Captain Clark wrote letters to a Des Moines newspaper publicizing their location; at that point they left town, fearing that Missouri slave catchers were on the way. Frances Overton suffered the same fate and headed for a Quaker settlement, where it was said that things “had not turned out very well” for her, which only fueled the conservatives’ resolve. Both factions remained influential after the controversy was over. During the war, the people of Grinnell elected Josiah Grinnell to the U.S. House of Representatives but also chose Samuel Cooper for mayor. Around the same time, Democrats declared that “on account of the respect and affection we have for our wives, sisters, and daughters, we will resist all schemes, let them come from what source they may, to fill our schools and domestic circles with the African race.” The hidden meaning of statements like these was no doubt understood by liberals like Sarah Parker, who shortly after the controversy had written her mother that “its effects can never be effaced from our community. You know...that when the Sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord – Satan came also among them. So it has been here.”⁴⁵⁷

The same year of Grinnell’s near-riot, the federal census showed that Iowa’s new law had increased black school attendance elsewhere. 118 of the state’s 382 school-age African Americans attended school (31.2%), up from 17 of 129 (13.2%) in 1850, although this still did not compare with the two-thirds of white schoolchildren. Even as white Iowans and other Midwesterners benefited from structural improvements in the public education system, most blacks remained illiterate and uneducated.⁴⁵⁸ A combination of legally encouraged segregation, white resistance, under-funding of black schools, and poverty made access to education virtually

⁴⁵⁷ Parker to unknown party; Lucas, “Grinnell Anti-Abolitionist Riot,” 19-20; Bixby to Parker; Parker, “Grinnell’s Incipient Mob”; Parker, *History of Poweshiek County I* (1880), 529; Sarah Parker to her mother.

⁴⁵⁸ 1860 U.S. Census; 1850 U.S. Census; Cooper, *A Stony Road*, 132-33; Lawrence Cremin, *American Education; The National Experience. 1783-1876* (New York, 1980), 178-80.

meaningless for most; they had the right to attend school, but not the ability. On the eve of the Civil War, very little had changed for the better when it came to African Americans and education.

As with every other aspect of black life in Iowa, the war had a hugely transformative effect. The increased size of the black population and the rhetoric of wartime loyalty provided African Americans with opportunities to create their own schools and then to fight segregation through the legal system. In addition to the black schools that were created before the war, new ones were established in Clarinda, Mount Pleasant, Keosauqua, Albia, Ottumwa, Burlington, Oskaloosa, and Dubuque. Most were operated out of a local black church in conjunction with the school board and sometimes with assistance from a liberal white church or the Freedman's Bureau.⁴⁵⁹ Some of instructors were black, while others were whites, who saw an opportunity to teach former slaves without having to leave home.⁴⁶⁰ As before the war, black schools were understaffed; Keokuk's African School, for example, had three teachers for 160 students by 1865. Despite the segregated system, their presence was still controversial to some whites. After black parents in Dubuque created their own school in a basement rented from a Methodist congregation (having previously written a petition criticizing their children's exclusion from white schools), the *Dubuque Herald* complained that "niggers will flock here in swarms to get

⁴⁵⁹ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 261-62; *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 561; Waterman, *History of Wapello County, Iowa I* (1914), 174; *The History of Mahaska County, Iowa* (Des Moines: Union Historical Company, 1878), 476; Noon, "Lee Town Grows from Black Refuge."

⁴⁶⁰ Burlington's black school on Fourth Street had one teacher and 35 students in 1866. "Colored School," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 16 February 1866, quoted in WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 262. Clarinda's school was taught by J.B. Johnson (later a prominent lawyer), while Grace Crawford led classes in Keosauqua. *Van Buren County* (1940), 25.

‘larnin’, and the gas will have to be kept lighted all day to enable one to find his way through town.’⁴⁶¹

Blacks in rural areas also continued to attend integrated schools, albeit not without controversy. When Bessie Lemmon attempted to enter the white school in LeClaire in 1865 (she had previously attended the black school in nearby Davenport), a school board member tried to have her expelled “on the ground of color.” He was overruled by the other board members, but he pulled his own children out of school and expelled the teacher, who had been boarding with him, from his home. Two years later, the Jackson County superintendent overruled his board of directors and ordered that the schools be integrated, which no doubt pleased the parents of the lone black schoolchild in the county. After a black child in Washington County was expelled from school by the board, his white foster parents hired a lawyer and forced the county superintendent to reinstate him.⁴⁶² Like this latter event, the fiercest battles for integration would take place in the courts, but in the larger cities.

Shortly after the war, Iowa College had its first African American graduate. A former slave remembered only as James came to Grinnell with an army doctor from New Orleans and enrolled at the school. Leonard Parker responded to protests with the same threat that he had made in 1860, declaring that that “anyone who ventured to take the negro boy from the school must do it over his dead body.” Unlike in the previous case, though, the conservatives backed down, and James continued his education without interference. Parker opined that this dramatic

⁴⁶¹ *Keokuk Gate City*, 9 January 1865, quoted in Harris, “A Frontier Community,” 385; *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 561; Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 921, 971.

⁴⁶² Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 18-19; Richter, “A True History of Scott County”; Wubben, “The Uncertain Trumpet,” 415; “Negro Equality in Le Claire and Pleasant Valley Union School District,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 17 May 1865, 3; *Dubuque Weekly Herald*, 30 January 1867; 1870 U.S. Census; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 261. Several black children also attended an integrated school in tiny Eddyville, Mahaska County, apparently without controversy. *Heritage of Mahaska County, Iowa* (1999), 104.

change was a direct consequence of the fact that “colored men fought and died” during the war, thus “[solving] the negro question for Grinnell and for man a place besides.”⁴⁶³

The rhetoric of military service and citizenship also played a key role in another desegregation controversy of far greater significance. Ninety years before Susan Brown of Topeka used the U.S. Supreme Court to end legally mandated school segregation, another black girl did very much the same thing in eastern Iowa. Twelve-year-old Muscatine native Susan Clark, the daughter of Alexander and Catherine, had received her early education in the AME school and in private homes. In the fall of 1867, though, her parents decided to enroll her at the all-white Grammar School #2. They had several motivations for doing so. The Clark home was nearly a mile from the AME church on the outskirts of town but much closer to GS#2, a concern that was no doubt heightened during the frigid winter of 1867-68, when the temperature dropped to a record 32 degrees below zero. The white school was also superior to the AME school in other ways. In his legal brief and in a letter written to the *Muscatine Journal*, Alexander Clark explained that School #2 offered an English course and school supplies not available at the AME school, and its teachers were paid more than \$700 per year, compared with less than \$200 for the black school’s lone teacher.⁴⁶⁴ As a result, the latter’s graduates were so poorly educated that

⁴⁶³ Parker, “Grinnell’s Incipient Mob”; Parker to unknown party, date unknown (1890s); Leonard F. Parker, “Professor Parker Before and in Early Grinnell,” *Proceedings of the Old Settlers’ Association of Grinnell, Iowa, 1896-1901*, 15; Haines, “Seventy Years in Iowa,” 114-15. Around the same time, other white Iowans discussed education for former slaves in the South with the old themes of citizenship and race mixing. In December 1866, the *Cedar Valley Times* contended that schooling and voting rights was the best means for southern blacks to elevate themselves. (*Cedar Rapids*) *Cedar Valley Times*, 6 December 1866. The *Dubuque Herald* countered, though, that this would force white children to “sit with filthy negro children in all the public schools... and how much longer after that will we have to wait for the inauguration of the filthy practice of miscegenation?” *Dubuque Weekly Herald*, 26 December 1866.

⁴⁶⁴ *Muscatine Journal*, 31 October 1867; Susan Clark Holley Memoir (date unknown), Clark Collection, Musser Public Library, Muscatine, Iowa (hereafter cited as Clark Collection), Muscatine File #2. According to the county superintendent, Muscatine’s twenty-three teachers averaged \$347 in salary. D. Franklin Wells, “Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, to the General Assembly at its Twelfth Regular Session,” *Legislative*

they could not have passed the high school qualifying exams even if they had been allowed to try.⁴⁶⁵ These concerns would likely have been shared by any responsible white parent in the Clarks' situation, but they also had a fourth, unique motivation. Alexander was often heard to say that "When the (black) people become educated the (racial) problem will have been solved and equal rights before the law established."⁴⁶⁶ His actions, therefore, were taken not only on behalf of his own daughter but for all black children around the state.

On September 10, 1867, Susan and Alexander Clark were turned away from GS2. The next day, the principal sent them a letter stating, "I am authorized by the School Board of this city to refuse your children admittance," while the board itself offered to establish an English grammar class at the AME school. The Clarks might have accepted this offer if the curriculum was their only concern, but their "sights were set much higher," and in early October they filed suit against the school board in Muscatine's district court.⁴⁶⁷ The family's wealth and connections enabled them to hire prominent lawyers J. Scott Richman and James Carskaddan. Richman had argued before the state Supreme Court dozens of times since the 1830s but had no experience in civil rights cases, while younger partner James Carskaddan (whose surname is frequently misspelled in historical records) had unsuccessfully advocated in favor of black

Documents Submitted to the Twelfth General Assembly of the State of Iowa (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1868) 151, 252.

⁴⁶⁵ "School District's Brief in District Court Suit (15 October 1867)," Muscatine File #2; Susan Clark Holley Memoir; Richman, *History of Muscatine County I* (1911), 344-45; Jackson, "Alexander Clark," 46; "Alexander Clark's Petition in District Court Suit (3 October 1867)," Muscatine File #2; *Muscatine Journal*, 31 October 1867; *Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County* (1889), 616. The Clarks actually made this decision in 1865 but for unknown reasons did not act on it until 1867.

⁴⁶⁶ Jackson, "Alexander Clark," 45. Curiously, though, he had not taken similar action on behalf of his oldest child Rebecca, who presumably had been educated at the AME school before and during the war; perhaps he thought that the racial climate was still too harsh or that Rebecca was not as academically capable as Susan.

⁴⁶⁷ Susan Clark Holley Memoir; District Court Petition, Alexander Clark (3 October 1867), Muscatine File #2; Notice to Board of Directors, Muscatine File #2.

testimony in the *Motts v. Thayer* case and ultimately had a much longer working relationship with the Clark family; when Alexander died in 1891, he served as the estate's attorney.⁴⁶⁸

News of the suit quickly spread. Four days after Susan was turned away, the *Muscatine Daily Journal* published a polemical attack on the school board, labeling its actions "a high-handed act of despotism... unjustifiable by any principle of law or any sentiment of humanity... [and] founded in man's inhumanity to man," and suggesting that on Judgment Day they would be condemned to burn in hell. African American leaders at the 1868 Des Moines convention offered their support as well, but white Muscatine resident G.A. Garretson was heard to say "If Clark sends his children there, kick the damned niggers down the stairs and I'll pay the bill." County school superintendent R.H. McCampbell's biannual report made no direct mention of the suit, but it was clearly on his mind. While other superintendents' reports focused on the state of their schools, he did little more than complain about how difficult it had been to get the report in one time; the tone was that of a man under extreme pressure.⁴⁶⁹

The case of *Clark vs. The Board of Directors* got underway in mid-October. Clark's petition stated that Susan, the daughter of a property-owning taxpayer, had been unlawfully barred from GS2 in violation of board policy that placed school children at their neighborhood school. This matter-of-fact argument thus focused on residency, not race. Instead of trying to

⁴⁶⁸ Susan Clark Holley Memoir; *Clark v. Board of Directors*, 24 Iowa 266 (1868); *Muscatine Journal*, 14 September 1867; "Biographical Notes – Alexander G. Clark," Muscatine File #2; Jackson, "Alexander Clark," 46; 1840 U.S. Census; 1860 U.S. Census; *Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County* (1889), 165-66, 368-69, 600; *History of Muscatine County* (1879), 615; *State v. Gorley and Cloud*, 2 Iowa 52 (1855); *The Bench and Bar of Iowa* (Chicago: American Biographical Publishing Co., 1901), 118-19, 189; *Alger v. The Mississippi and Missouri Railroad Company*, 10 Iowa 268 (1859); *De Camp v. Mississippi and Missouri Railroad Company*, 12 Iowa 348 (1861); *Motts v. Usher & Thayer* 82; Alexander Clark Probate Records, MAC.

⁴⁶⁹ *Muscatine Daily Journal*, 14 September 1867; J.P. Walton, *Pioneer Papers* (Muscatine), 320-21; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 259. McCampbell also stated, though, that "the general theory of our law is to give to all the children and youth of the State equal educational facilities, regardless of rank, wealthy, color, or nativity." D. Franklin Wells, "Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, to the General Assembly at its Twelfth Regular Session," *Legislative Documents* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1868), 23, 98.

appeal to the court's conscience or sense of racial justice, Clark and his lawyers wanted it to rule in Susan's favor on procedural grounds, knowing that the judges would be influenced by social issues anyway. They may have also been aware of the 1849 *Roberts* case, in which another father unsuccessfully tried to integrate the Boston school system with a legal strategy based on principles of social justice. Although much had changed in America since then, precedent was still precedent, and Clark did not want to give the Court any excuse to reject his suit.⁴⁷⁰

The school board, on the other hand, was more than willing to bring up the issue of race. The AME school, it argued, was a "good and comfortable school building" with a "competent" teacher and smaller class sizes than GS2; although it lacked an English grammar course, since they had offered to create one Susan was in no way being deprived of her right to an education. Segregating black and white children, it concluded, was best for both races and also consistent with public opinion. Unlike Clark, the board openly sought a ruling based on the court's understanding of social issues. When the district court ruled that this constituted no defense to Clark's claim, the school board then appealed to the Iowa Supreme Court. Both parties agreed that the only relevant question was whether or not "the board of directors of a school-district has the right to require colored children to attend a separate school."⁴⁷¹

The case was decided in June 1868 by Justices Joseph M. Beck, Chester C. Cole, John F. Dillon, and George G. Wright. The majority opinion was written by Cole, a Harvard graduate who had helped to establish law schools at both the State University of Iowa (now the University of Iowa) and Drake University and left the Democratic Party during the war, saying "if men were

⁴⁷⁰ Plaintiff's District Court Petition, Alexander Clark; Nieman, *Promises to Keep*, 40; *Roberts v. City of Boston*, 59 Mass. 198 (1849).

⁴⁷¹ Defendant's District Court Petition, Board of Directors (15 October 1867), Muscatine File #2; *Clark v. Board of Directors*.

to be divided now into Abolitionists, or Secessionists, why then he knew which way to go”; he had also supported black enlistment and suffrage reform in recent years. In this case, he took the opportunity to break new civil rights ground in the realm of education. The yet-unratified 14th Amendment played no direct role in his decision, but Cole still found sufficient constitutional grounds to make his ruling. Disregarding public opinion on the issue as legally irrelevant, he began by exploring the legislative history. The school board, he found, did not and never had the discretion to create segregated schools, since the pre-1857 law banned black children entirely while the new constitution guaranteed “all the youths of the State” a public education without saying anything about racial segregation.⁴⁷²

They could place children based on age, place of residence, or grading qualifications, Cole continued, but not based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, or class; to do so would violate the “equality of right” enjoyed by all Iowa children. This was contrary to the very purpose of public education, which was supposed to unite America’s diverse ethnic and racial groups into one “harmonious *people*, with a common country and stimulated with the common purpose to perpetuate and spread our free institutions for the development, elevation and happiness of *mankind*.” To do otherwise, he warned, would “perpetuate the national differences” and possibly even lead to a race war. The educational system’s goal of teaching citizenship thus applied not only to whites of various backgrounds but also to African Americans. Iowa’s decade-old policy of school segregation was unconstitutional, Cole concluded, and Susan Clark could enroll at GS2 immediately.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 112-113; *Bench and Bar of Iowa*, 68-71; *Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery, Iowa Volume*, 13; Byers, *Iowa in War Times*, 259-60; Clark, *The Politics of Iowa*, 127-28; *Clark v. Board of Directors*, 266-273.

⁴⁷³ *Clark v. Board of Directors*, 274-277.

Justices Beck and Dillon signed on to this opinion, but George G. Wright issued a dissent. The fellow Republican and “living digest” of Iowa legal history based his minority opinion not on racist opposition but rather on the grounds for Cole’s opinion. The school board did have the discretion to separate children by race, he argued, and nothing in the constitution gave black children the right to attend integrated schools; if the majority opinion had been based on the principle that Susan was entitled to attend her neighborhood school, though, he would have signed his name to it.⁴⁷⁴ In some ways, this debate between the justices previewed the *Brown v. Board of Education* debates to come in ninety years. Wright believed that black children could receive an equal education in segregated schools, while Cole contended that the very act of segregation made this impossible. Like Justice Earl Warren, Cole also spoke to the intangible benefits of public education, which was meant not only to instruct on the various subjects but also to unify a multicultural nation through shared principles of citizenship, while racial segregation sustained both white supremacy and black discontent.⁴⁷⁵

As groundbreaking as it was for Iowa, *Clark* was virtually ignored as precedent in other states during a time of frequent litigation against segregated schools. More than half of the 45 desegregation cases took place in the Midwest, where the small black population and the dearth

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 277-281. Wright was later remembered for various acts of kindness towards African Americans. David Brodnax, Sr., “George Grover Wright,” *Yale Biographical Dictionary of American Law* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming); Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress, “Joseph Albert Wright,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=W000766> (last visited 29 April 2007); *Proceedings of the Pioneer Lawmaker’s Association of Iowa, Reunion of 1896* (Des Moines: F.R. Conaway, 1897), 59-60.

⁴⁷⁵ Warren would write that “education is...the very foundation of good citizenship,” a “principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values,” and that forcible segregation was mentally damaging to African American children. *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483, 493-495 (1954).

of black teachers made it much more difficult to create independent black schools.⁴⁷⁶ These demographic factors also increased the willingness of Midwestern blacks to bring suit, feeling greater hope for success and less fear of reprisals than their southern counterparts. The small number of black children meant that the consequences of integration were greatly lessened for whites. Despite the rhetoric about hordes of black youth lowering school standards and dating their children, all but the worst demagogues realized that in Muscatine, for example, integration would bring only a few dozen black children into schools with more than 2300 whites.⁴⁷⁷

Although the Clarks' lawsuit was part of a larger trend of legal activism, their success was somewhat unique. It was one of only eight legal victories against segregated schools between 1860 and 1879, compared with thirteen losses and three unknown outcomes.⁴⁷⁸ The first post-*Clark* case struck down segregated schools in Michigan without citing the Iowa case (although the parents' legal brief did), but in the four cases that followed, school segregation was upheld even though judges now had two cases and the 14th Amendment to rely on. Although African Americans in Norwich County, Ohio had no black school at all, the court ruled that school boards had the right to separate children by race.⁴⁷⁹ Further out west in Nevada, the court forced a similar school district to admit a black student, but it also declared that it would have

⁴⁷⁶ Charles A. Lofgren, *The Plessy Case: A Legal-Historical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 181; J. Morgan Kousser, *Dead End: The Development of Nineteenth-Century Litigation on Racial Discrimination in Schools* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 15-16, 60.

⁴⁷⁷ The 1865 Iowa State Census reports 2395 people between the ages of five and twenty-one (the group eligible to attend public school) living in Muscatine Township, comprising 31.2% of the total population. If one assumes that the age ratios were similar for blacks and whites, then there were 32 black children in Muscatine and 105 blacks overall.

⁴⁷⁸ The 45 Midwestern desegregation cases between 1860 and 1903 resulted in 28 victories, 12 losses and 5 of unknown outcome. Kousser, *Dead End*, 60. During the 1860s and 1870s, school segregation was outlawed by legislation or legal decision in Michigan, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Minnesota, Kansas, Colorado and Illinois. Nieman, *Promises to Keep*, 86.

⁴⁷⁹ Kousser, "Dead End," 18-19; *Workman v. The Board of Education of Detroit*, 18 Michigan 400 (1869); *Garnes v. McCann*, 21 Ohio St. 198 (1871).

ruled differently if a black school had been available.⁴⁸⁰ California's state supreme court agreed that the law (specifically the 13th and 14th Amendments) only required that both races be given an equal education, not that they be educated in the same schools. Segregated schools were created by and helped to perpetuate racial prejudice, it conceded, but this problem "is not created by law, and probably cannot be changed by law," and so it was not the court's responsibility to do anything about it.⁴⁸¹ This of course was precisely the opposite of what Chester Cole had stated, and it also ignored the symbiotic relationship between racism and the legal system that has always existed in American history.

The final decision, though, was also the harshest and the closest to Iowa. Although the Indiana state constitution required that public schools be open to all, African Americans were barred until the legislature in 1869 allowed local districts to create segregated schools or to use other methods to provide for black education in areas with only a few black children. When the administrators in a rural township near Indianapolis did neither, a black grandparent brought suit in 1874. The state supreme court, though, declared that the constitution was "made and adopted by and for the exclusive use and enjoyment of the white race" and that black children therefore had no expectation to attend school at all. Some previously integrated school boards around the state now expelled their black students, realizing that the state's highest court would not interfere. This was, in the words of one historian, "the most constitutionally extreme post-bellum

⁴⁸⁰ A dissenting opinion was far more conservative than Wright's in *Clark*, stating that God had made blacks "dissimilar" from whites and that any form of school integration would lead to miscegenation. *Stoutmeyer v. Duffy*, 7 Nev. 342 (1872).

⁴⁸¹ *Ward v. Flood*, 48 Cal. 36 (1874).

court decision against black rights” and the polar opposite of *Clark*, both ideologically and in its outcome.⁴⁸²

Why did Iowa’s supreme court make its unique decision, supporting desegregation while those in other states did not? One factor, though not terribly analytical, was nonetheless important: chance. It had taken dozens of lawmakers and thousands more voters to make black suffrage a reality, but it only took three to overturn school segregation, and Iowa could have gone the way of other states if Chester Cole was not Chief Justice or if the Court was full of Democrats. In some ways, therefore, explaining desegregation comes down to exploring the desires of these three justices.

It is possible that, just as in the suffrage victory, black military service played an important role. Although the war is not mentioned in the *Clark* documents, all four justices were Republicans who had staunchly supported it.⁴⁸³ The actions of these already-liberal men (Wright less so than the others) in other situations suggest that they were precisely the sort of people to view desegregation as a just reward for wartime loyalty, even if they never explicitly said so. A closer look at the rhetoric used in Clark’s legal argument sheds further light on possible motives for the unique ruling. One of the first lines in his appellate brief reads “the said Alexander Clark is [Susan’s] father and natural guardian, that he is a resident of the city of Muscatine...and a

⁴⁸² Kousser, “Dead End,” 21, 49. The court also cited the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision *Slaughterhouse Cases* (written by Iowan Samuel F. Miller) to argue that the 14th Amendment did not apply to the state education decision. *Cory v. Carter*, 48 Ind. 327 (1874); Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 197-98.

⁴⁸³ Justice Beck had worked against slavery in Kentucky during the 1840s when “the advocacy for liberty for the black man was extremely perilous” and helped organize Iowa’s Republican Party a decade later. *Portrait and Biographical Album of Lee County, Iowa* (1887), 520-21; James Grant, *Biographical History and Portrait Gallery of Scott County, Iowa* (Chicago: American Biographical Publishing Company, 1895), 106. During the war, Justice Wright made inspirational speeches and gave financial assistance to soldiers’ families. *Portrait and Biographical Album of Polk County, Iowa* (Chicago: Lake City Publishing Co., 1890), 191-92.

freeholder and taxpayer of said city...[Susan Clark] was born in said City, and has all her life lived therein.” This seemingly mundane language was actually a subtle response to white obsession with black migration. As a legal matter, these facts were irrelevant and she had no more rights than an impoverished orphan who had just arrived. By mentioning them, though, Clark made it clear that Susan was not the sort of African American who many whites had always feared would flood into the state. He thus implicitly soothed the justices’ larger social concerns and presented the sympathetic image of an Iowa-born child of a longtime resident and taxpayer. Although they were all liberals, the justices’ judgment might have been affected if they thought that they were being asked to let the child of poor Missouri freedpersons into a white school, even though their decision could and would in fact lead to that very situation.

This did not mean that Clark was suggesting that wealthy, free-born black children be treated differently. His own rise from humble beginnings, family roots in slavery, and advocacy on behalf of poor freedpersons like Jim White and the 60th show that class distinctions mattered little in his conception of equal citizenship. His many years of listening to idle chatter in his barbershop, though, had given him a profound understanding of the intersection between class and race in the mindset of white elites. There is perhaps no way to know how much of this strategy came from Clark and how much came from Richman and Carskaddan, but he certainly had a better understanding of how Midwestern racial dynamics affected African Americans than did two wealthy white men. In his lawsuit, he was able to subtly negotiate these dynamics and manipulate the court’s sentiments to his own needs while still remaining true to the notion of equal citizenship for all black Iowans.

Most of the other states that upheld segregation, though, also had black regiments and middle class black children who had lived there before the war. What further distinguished Iowa was the size of its black population. Indiana and Ohio had far larger black communities – Cincinnati’s alone was larger than the entire black population of the Hawkeye State – and even Keokuk was home to only a thousand African Americans, while other Iowa towns had far fewer. Although whites in larger Midwestern cities could legitimately conceive of their children being outnumbered in some neighborhood schools, during the 1860s and 1870s there were no such neighborhoods in Iowa. At the same time, this relatively small black population was still much larger than that of California or Nevada (and dispersed across a much smaller area), which put it in a better position to pressure the legal system. Events like the 1868 Colored Convention, which enabled black leaders from around the state to assist the Clarks, would have been much less feasible in either of these western states.⁴⁸⁴ Although racial dynamics in Iowa were typically Midwestern in many ways, the unique size of its black community, the rhetoric of wartime loyalty, and the liberalism of the judges created a favorable environment for school desegregation.

In 1871, Susan Clark became the first African American graduate of a public high school in Iowa. Her commencement address, “Nothing But Leaves” showed that she shared her father’s oratorical skills; the *Muscatine Journal* wrote that her speech “bore the stamp of originality and

⁴⁸⁴ California’s racial dynamics were actually similar to Iowa’s in some ways. The 1870 census shows 4,272 African American residents, of which 31% lived in San Francisco County, by far the state’s most populous county. In Iowa, 27% of the 5,762 black residents lived in Keokuk County, which was the third-most populous county overall. Thus in both states, a similarly large percentage of the small black population lived in one of the largest cities. 1870 Census.

though unpretending in style, contained many excellent thoughts.”⁴⁸⁵ Rebecca and Alexander Jr. followed her several years later; the title of Alexander’s own commencement speech “Man’s Inhumanity to Man” may have been inspired by the *Muscatine Journal* editorial published during his sister’s historic lawsuit.⁴⁸⁶ There were no further black graduates of Muscatine High School for over a decade, not because of racist exclusion but because most black parents could not afford such a luxury for their children.⁴⁸⁷

In other parts of the state, the lack of black graduates from white schools was caused by other factors. The Mount Pleasant school district immediately complied with *Clark*, closing down the Frog Pond School and sending black children to the white schools.⁴⁸⁸ The situation was somewhat different in Burlington and Des Moines. Although Burlington’s black school had no desks or textbooks, white teachers, and students who attended only sporadically because they also had to work, it was still an important community institution that educated as many as seventy children and adults at a time until it closed in 1877.⁴⁸⁹ The principle of Des Moines’ black school, which also closed in the mid-1870s, was the crusading reformer Leonard Brown, who had written a pamphlet entitled “Equal Rights of Blacks and Whites.”⁴⁹⁰ In both cases, the schools likely survived many years after *Clark* because people of both races wanted them to: whites were eager to keep black children out of their schools, while black parents were reluctant

⁴⁸⁵ *Muscatine Evening Journal*, 24 June 1871; Aldeen Davis, “Alexander Clark Memorial,” *New Iowa Bystander*, 17 May 1979, 15. One hundred and thirty years after she graduated, local resident Bob Page nominated her for the school’s Hall of Fame. “Muscatine High School Hall of Honor Nomination Form,” 29 May 2001, AAHMCCI, Vertical File.

⁴⁸⁶ Davis, “Alexander Clark Memorial”; Susan Clark Holley Memoir; *Muscatine Evening Journal*, June 1873, UNC, Muscatine File #2; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, 14 September 1867. An 1879 Muscatine County history lists Susan and Alexander but not Rebecca as graduates of Muscatine High School. *History of Muscatine County* (1879), 541.

⁴⁸⁷ *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, 13 July 1888.

⁴⁸⁸ The building was converted into a coal bin. Hawthorne, “The Church,” 390-391.

⁴⁸⁹ “The Colored School,” *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 8 March 1869; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 262-63.

⁴⁹⁰ Brigham, *Des Moines I*, 417; Brigham, *Des Moines*, vol. 2, 956. East Des Moines’ black school also lasted until at least 1874. *History of Polk County* (1880), 527.

to abandon a key community institution that provided a safe space for their children. One exception to this rule was Davenport, where the black elites' moderate posture, financial ability to sponsor their children's higher education, and patronage ties to liberal white leaders led to an uneventful integration of the high school. In 1873, Albert Nuckolls' daughter Eudora received not only her diploma but also a gold watch and chain, purchased by a group of fifty citizens and presented by the principal; the audience cheered loudly. Several other African Americans graduated during the 1880s, including Jacob Busey and a former slave who taught at a black school in the South after finishing his education.⁴⁹¹

The choice between pursuing integration or preserving black schools did not exist, however, in rural areas like Dutch Creek Township, Washington County. In December 1869, white parent John McMillan asked the school board to move his son Harris away from a black student named Moore, claiming that Moore's "odor" made the chronically ill child even sicker, and the teacher had refused to give him another seat. After lengthy discussions of the alleged illness and odor – during which board members insisted on referring to Moore as "the nigger" – it was decided that he would be placed in a front seat by himself and that no one could be forced to sit with him. Two board members "pleaded manfully for justice and equal school privileges," arguing that the new seat was too small and too close to the stove, but they were overruled by six others "whose conduct of the trial shows that they had pre-judged the case." One of these conservatives also accused liberal board member Thomas Beard of conspiring with schoolteacher Aggie Wright to "make Harris McMillan sit with that nigger," and although they denied the charges, Wright married Beard's son only two years later. Meanwhile, a group of

⁴⁹¹ "Eudora Nuckolls," Richter Papers; "More on First Colored Graduate," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 13 March 1908; Unidentified clipping, Richter Papers; "Colored Graduates from the High School," Richter Papers; "A Colored Man's Ambition," Richter Papers.

other Dutch Creek citizens wrote a petition accusing Harris of lying about his illness and stating that “colored children have rights equal with other children, which we are bound to respect.” It is not known if these actions led the board to reconsider its decision; the final outcome of the case is not known. This incident shows, though, that the black struggle for education did not end with desegregation but continued even in newly integrated schools.⁴⁹² Furthermore, although Dutch Creek blacks had little opportunity to create their own separate school, stories like these may have motivated black parents in larger cities to hold onto their own black schools, which may were under-funded but also devoid of children and parents like the McMillans.⁴⁹³

Some school administrators in larger cities, though, simply refused to desegregate. Black parents there also had mixed feelings about integration, but the officials they ultimately confronted displayed no such ambivalence, proving as stubborn as white southerners ninety years later, if less violent. In 1870, Dubuque blacks presented the school board with a second petition demanding desegregation. The school board initially granted this request, but after white residents expressed “emphatic opposition” it reneged, stating that “a mingling of the races must become an element of discord in the schools: and that “with the feeling manifested since the action of the Board upon the subject, [black children] could not attend the ward schools with any degree of comfort.” Segregation thus continued on the justification that it was for the black children’s own good. Monthly tuition and fees at the “Colored School” were also more than two

⁴⁹² Fisher, *History of Washington County* (1978), 381-82, 392. Another unlikely example of this comes from the state reform school in Mitchelville, Polk County, which opened in 1881 and boarded African Americans in a separate cottage. *Pictorial History of Southeast Polk County* (1981), 143.

⁴⁹³ At least one black graduate of a rural school had a more positive experience. Young Turner Bell of Adel (near Des Moines) decided to become a lawyer after his father successfully sued a group of white women whose horses had eaten his grain; he said that “I want to wear a long linen duster, roll up my sleeves and shake my fist at 12 white jurors and say ‘I dare you to do that to a black man!’” After being admitted to the Iowa bar in 1886, he became an activist judge in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where he represented inmates at the nearby federal prison, black soldiers who were jailed after a race riot in Houston, and a disabled war veteran, whose case he took all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. “County’s Oldest Resident Dies”; *Jackson v. U.S.*, 281 U.S. 344 (1930).

times greater than what some white children paid. Not surprisingly, attendance was low. Finally, later that same year several black children enrolled at white schools, and when they were asked to leave, the father of one Louise E. Howard threatened to sue. Nearly ten years after *Clark*, the black school was closed forever.⁴⁹⁴

The desegregation controversy reached even greater heights in Keokuk, where two further legal decisions were needed to make *Clark* a reality. In 1868, the all-black Concert Street School (which administrators usually referred to as “Colored School”) had 300 students taught by four teachers, while white schools of similar size had six to eleven teachers.⁴⁹⁵ A month after the state supreme court declared that segregated schools were unconstitutional, the Keokuk board built a new one. It is likely that the school was already under construction when *Clark* was announced, but instead of opening it in an integrated fashion, the board continued with old traditions. Within five years the school housed more than 160 students from first to twelfth grade.⁴⁹⁶ The board was apparently so unconcerned about defying *Clark* that its 1873 state report noted that it still operated segregated schools.⁴⁹⁷ This situation forced the black community to make a difficult choice. The segregated school provided not only a safe space for black children but also employment for educated blacks, none of whom would have been hired to teach at a

⁴⁹⁴ *Twentieth Annual Report of the Board of Education of Dubuque Iowa* (Dubuque: Herald Printing House, 1878), 10, 36, 74-75; Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 971; “The Color Question in the Schools Settled,” *Dubuque Daily Times*, 6 February 1874; *History of Dubuque County* (1880), 572; “Dubuque Community School District History, 1838-1953,” AAHMCCI, Towns – Dubuque #1.

⁴⁹⁵ In 1868, the teachers were Miss Anderson (the principal), G.W. Guy, Mrs. Caldwell, and Mrs. K. Fields. Guy was later promoted to principal. *Lee County Gazetteer* (Keokuk: Gate City Book and Job Rooms, 1868), 26. *Holland’s Keokuk City Directory, for 1871-72* (Chicago: Western Publishing Company, 1872), 7-8.

⁴⁹⁶ “Defendant’s Answer,” *Records and Briefs for Cases before the Supreme Court of Iowa*, June Term 1875 (Des Moines) (hereafter cited as *Records and Briefs* (June 1875), 8-9, 27, 36-37; *Keokuk General Directory for 1866-67* (Keokuk: Rees’ Book and Job Printing Office, 1867); “Negroes in School,” Richter Papers; “Keokuk Colored School,” *Keokuk Citizen*, 9 February 1973; *Keokuk City Directory for 1873-74*, 27.

⁴⁹⁷ *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, to the Fifteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: R.P. Clarkson, 1874), 118. The school board also operated a “German School.” Nearby Fort Madison also had its own much smaller black school, which survived until 1876. “Black Residents,” *Fort Madison Daily Democrat*, 29 April 1988.

white school. On the other hand, the four high school students were being treated in an especially inequitable manner. While white students at Keokuk High School had their own facility, George Adams, Geroid Smith, Octy Vance, and an unnamed youth sat in a room with 29 younger students. Community leaders thus decided on a partial integration strategy: the black school should remain open, but the older students should be admitted to Keokuk High. In September 1874, two lawyers appeared before the school board on their behalf, citing the state's desegregation laws. The board, though, rejected a proposal that black students be allowed to choose which school to attend, declaring that Keokuk blacks were "satisfied" with the situation.⁴⁹⁸

The desegregation battle was then taken to the legal system, with two children from prominent families used as test cases. Sixteen year old Geroid Smith was the grandson of abolitionist orator Charlotta Pyles and the nephew of Grace Morris Allen (formerly one of the aforementioned students at the Salem Quaker school), who later founded an interracial industrial school in Burlington and helped her husband Laurence Clifton Jones, the first African American to earn a Ph.D. at SUI, operate the prestigious black boarding school Piney Woods Life School in Mississippi.⁴⁹⁹ Piney Woods also employed Geroid's cousin Annie Elizabeth Baker, who later became a Sunday school superintendent at Bethel AME in Keokuk, and aunt Mary Ellen Pyles

⁴⁹⁸ *Records and Briefs* (June 1875), 37, 39, 45-46, 48.

⁴⁹⁹ Jones' industrial school closed in 1907 when the school board founded its own vocational training department. Jones, "The Desire for Freedom," 156, 159, 163; "Grace Morris Allen Jones," in Joseph J. Bons, ed., *A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Persons of Negro Descent in America* (New York: Who's Who in American Corp., 1927), 111; Lillian McLaughlin, "Brave Black Women in an Intrepid Family," *Des Moines Tribune*, 14 May 1975; "Dr. Laurence Clifton Jones, Founder, The Piney Woods Country Life School, November 21, 1882-July 13, 1976," *The Pine Torch* (July/August/September 1975); "The Status of African Americans at the Nation's Most Prestigious Boarding Schools," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 14 (Winter, 1996-1997): 26. Piney Woods School counted among its benefactors Colonel Dows of Cedar Rapids, Clara Louise Brandt of Davenport, and the Maytag family of Newton. Henry S. Enck, "Black Self-Help in the Progressive Era: The "Northern Campaigns" of Smaller Southern Black Industrial Schools, 1900-1915," *Journal of Negro History* 61 (1976): 78; "Miss Clara Brandt, Well Known Philanthropist, Is Summoned at Age of 76," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 13 October 1930.

Morris, the other Salem schoolgirl.⁵⁰⁰ In short, this was a family dedicated to both integrated education and black community institutions, and one with the means to pay for Geroid's higher education.⁵⁰¹ The other family was not nearly as famous but still counted among the black elite. Nine year old Missouri native Charles H. Dove was the adopted son of Rev. William A. and Mary Dove, who had founded Bethel AME and the local Masonic lodge and helped lead the 1868 suffrage convention. The Smiths had an additional motivation not shared by the Doves; Charles' poor health made it impossible for him to travel to the black school, which was eleven blocks from his home, while the all-white Torrence School was only two blocks away.⁵⁰²

Although the Smith and Dove families brought their lawsuits at virtually the same time, for the sake of clarity they will be discussed separately. In September 1874, Geroid Smith attended one class at Keokuk High before he was ordered him to leave. His father immediately filed suit against the school district, stating that the native Iowan and "youth of good morals and habits" had been excluded from school only because of race.⁵⁰³ Several weeks later, the black community held a fundraising rally to help the Smiths pay their legal bills, also passing a resolution stating that "We feel a great injustice has been done our children by the board" and reminding the public that school segregation was unconstitutional.⁵⁰⁴

Perhaps realizing this fact, the board attempted subterfuge in its response. Smith was academically qualified for Keokuk High, it conceded, but the classroom was already so

⁵⁰⁰ "Area Deaths: Annie Baker," *Keokuk Daily Gate City*, 6 November 1882; Jones, "The Desire for Freedom," 163; 26; "The Status of African Americans at the Nation's Most Prestigious Boarding Schools."

⁵⁰¹ His father H.H. Smith owned property valued at \$1,000. 1870 U.S. Census.

⁵⁰² *Records and Briefs* (June 1875), 123, 139; Britton, "History of the Colored Race of People Residing in Keokuk and Vicinity," 3, 13.

⁵⁰³ *Smith v. The Directors of the Independent School District of Keokuk*, 40 Iowa 518 (1875), 1-2; *Records and Briefs* (June 1875), 4-5, 43.

⁵⁰⁴ Frederic C. Smith, "One Hundred Ten Years of Public Education in Keokuk" (1961), 102; Schwalm, "Freedom Was All They Had: Civil Rights in the Age of Emancipation" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Missouri Valley History Conference, Omaha, March 2005).

overcrowded that adding even one more desk would create a fire hazard. The board also claimed that Smith's needs were being met at Concert Street School and that his parents had not objected to the segregation policy when he took the entrance exam. The administrators betrayed their hand, though, by contending that neither blacks nor whites wanted integration, which would "destroy the heretofore uniform harmony of the public schools of said city, and greatly impair their uniform prosperity and public usefulness."⁵⁰⁵ With the national mood on civil rights more conservative than it had been in 1868, the district may have hoped that if the court did not accept its policy argument, it might consider simply overturning *Clark*.

A second petition by Smith refuted the policy argument, claiming that he had seen twenty empty seats and that several white students had been admitted after he was turned away. The brief also used the old tactic of casting Smith in a light favorable to whites by mentioning his mixed ancestry. The board's answer offered contradictory explanations about whether or not there was room in the school, leading Smith's lawyers to demand that it stop being "evasive, indefinite and uncertain" and definitively answer the question of whether or not he would have been admitted if he were "of pure white blood."⁵⁰⁶ When the trial began in October, additional evidence shattered the façade of the policy argument. The superintendent still denied that Smith had been rejected because of his race, but he also admitted that given the larger class size at Colored School prevented Smith from receiving the same quality of education. A board member claimed that the Smiths and other "prominent colored people" (including the parents of the other high school students) all endorsed the segregated school, but Geroid's mother asserted that she had done no such thing. In the end, the court's terse ruling simply stated that Smith had been

⁵⁰⁵ *Records and Briefs* (June 1875), 5-14, 34.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 15, 16, 21-22, 24-26, 43-44.

unlawfully excluded for reasons of race and was to be admitted immediately; the board also had to pay his legal fees.⁵⁰⁷

The district immediately appealed to the Iowa Supreme Court, where they had even less success. School officials were forced to confirm what Keokuk blacks already knew: the high school students at the black school received little direct instruction; despite overcrowding at Keokuk High, no white student would ever have been sent to the black school; and the Smiths had never agreed to send Geroid there. They still insisted, though, that he had the “equality of right” (thus borrowing Cole’s language in *Clark*) with any white student in the city. The board then resorted to personal slander, stating that Geroid’s parents were “somewhat aristocratic and feel themselves above their colored brethren [and] desire their children to attend with the white children,” while other blacks did not feel the same way and would actually drop out of school if forced to integrate. It also maintained that if it was forced to admit the four black students to Keokuk High, four white students would be expelled to make space, thus playing on the old fear that civil rights reform would make blacks dominant over whites. Finally, the board made the bizarre argument that the legislature had actually enacted Wright’s dissent in *Clark*, not the majority opinion, into law.⁵⁰⁸

With case law and a lower court decision on their side, Smith’s attorneys contended that the factual evidence weighed so heavily in their favor that only a judge who “still [hoped] for the restoration of slavery, and with it the privilege to buy, sell, whip, scourge, and torture persons

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 2, 27-29, 33, 35-36, 47-49, 2.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 1-4, 7, 17-19, 29, 50.

born with African persons in their veins” could have ruled otherwise.⁵⁰⁹ More significantly, they did what Alexander Clark only implied six years earlier, citing the “hundred thousand colored soldiers who periled their lives for the Union during the late civil war.” Nearly a decade after the war, the rhetoric of wartime loyalty still proved useful, and a young man who had not even been old enough to serve as a drummer boy could benefit from the politicized nature of its memory. Justice Cole’s short opinion, which was issued in June 1875, made no mention of slavery or the war, simply citing *Clark* and ordering the board to admit Smith to Keokuk High.⁵¹⁰ The board’s prediction that integration would lead to racial tension were apparently unfounded, because he was “accepted as a matter of course by the white pupils” and graduated in 1878, along with Octy Vance, who later became a doctor. The fate of the other two black high school students is unknown.⁵¹¹

Only eight days after Smith had first appeared at Keokuk High, Charles Dove applied for admission to the third grade class at Torrence School but was rejected on the grounds that “the board had refused to admit persons of color into that school.” His family appeared at the same school board meeting where the fate of the high school students was discussed. The Doves were informed that the third grade classroom was also too crowded, and in response they filed suit, claiming that the board’s decision would subject him to “great inconvenience” not asked of white children, prevented him from attending school in bad weather, and was motivated by racism. Unlike Susan Clark and Geroid Smith, Dove could not claim lifelong residency in Iowa, but he

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-4. The school district mocked Smith for this grandiose language, stating “it is to be hoped that slavery will not be re-established, nor the patrician and plebian order be re-organized, but that the world will still continue to advance, and the Declaration of Independence and the Bible survive, though the counsel may lose this suit.”

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6-8, 10; *Smith v. Directors*, 518, 519-20.

⁵¹¹ Along with his classmates, Smith signed a petition asking the school board to allow them to purchase sheepskin diplomas rather than plain paper ones. Smith, “One Hundred Ten Years of Public Education in Keokuk,” 105-06; “Keokuk Colored School.”

did attempt to play on the court's sympathies by telling his story of orphanage and redemption through adoption, also mentioning his "mixed blood."⁵¹² There is no evidence that the Smith and Dove families worked together with a collective strategy, but this seems logical given that they both belonged to the black upper class and filed their cases at the same time with nearly identical legal arguments. The school board's response repeated its *Smith* policy argument and the contention that most blacks preferred segregated schools, but at trial it was again forced to admit that Dove had been excluded solely because of race, and the circuit court judge ruled in his favor. On appeal (which was heard six months after *Smith*), Justice William E. Miller affirmed the case law and the lower court's decision.⁵¹³ Charles Dove could begin attending classes at Torrence Street School immediately.⁵¹⁴

There were no more desegregation cases in Iowa after the *Dove* decision. Segregated schools disappeared from Keokuk, but so did black teachers. The 1876 city directory notes that the "Colored School" was staffed by Principal Peyton, Mrs. C.A. Lamb and Mary Adams, but the following year it was listed by its official name of Concert Street School and had a white principal. As of 1879, there were no black teachers living anywhere in Keokuk.⁵¹⁵ Like most Iowa towns, the Gate City was still decades away from hiring African Americans to teach white children. Desegregation had thus deprived three educated blacks of their livelihood and the black community of their presence. This was the dilemma that parents like the Clarks, the Smiths and the Doves faced. Their civil rights activism enabled their children to attend better funded schools

⁵¹² *Dove v. The Independent School District of Keokuk Et. Al.*, 41 Iowa 689 (1875); *Records and Briefs* (June 1875), 121-25, 130, 138-39, 143.

⁵¹³ *Records and Briefs* (June 1875), 127-29, 131-37, 140.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 148-53, 155-57; *Dove v. Independent School District*, 691-93.

⁵¹⁵ *Edwards' Keokuk City Directory for 1876* (Keokuk, IA: Richard Edwards, 1876), 69; *Edmonson & Co's Keokuk and Lee County Directory for 1877-78* (Keokuk, IA: Gate City Book and Job Department Print, 1877), 193; *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Keokuk for 1879-80* (Keokuk, IA: Gate City Book and Job Printing House, 1880), 9-10, 30.

closer to home and removed the stigma of forced separation, but it also meant the destruction of independent black institutions, the loss of teachers who served as role models and a source of racial pride, and placing their children in an unfamiliar, potentially hostile environment. Many black parents probably would have preferred integrated schools that hired black and fair-minded whites or black schools that had equal funding, but the first option would not be available for decades and the second one never existed at all. There was a real cost to winning the equality of right.

Although integration had a negative impact in some ways, it also provided the black community with real benefits. Now that African Americans were able to attend better funded schools, new opportunities for higher education became available. To be sure, most African Americans still had to leave school early to support their families, and racism often forced even those who completed high school to settle for jobs beneath their education. Even so, the select few whose wealth, connections and sheer determination enabled them to complete their education were no longer legally barred from doing so, and as one of the only Midwestern states with an integrated school system, Iowa began producing a disproportionately high number of black college graduates.⁵¹⁶

One source states that more than 200 African Americans earned degrees from the State University of Iowa between 1879 and 1928. There could have been even more if not for a minor technicality. The school provided tuition waivers to Civil War veterans and their children so long

⁵¹⁶ There were a disproportionate number of Iowans in the Tuskegee Airmen flying unit during World War II. One of them was Robert Williams, an Ottumwa native who co-wrote the screenplay for the 1995 HBO film "Tuskegee Airmen"; the lead character of Hannibal Lee is based on his story. Morris, "Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation," 120.

as they had served for at least three years, but members of most black regiments were ineligible since they had served only two.⁵¹⁷ The first African American in SUI's liberal arts program was English and history major James L. Dameron, who had moved from Missouri to Oskaloosa so that he could attend high school. Dameron later recalled that he had avoided racism by "never [forcing] myself where discrimination might occur," but he did join a literary and debate group before leaving without a degree for unknown reasons in 1891. He was employed as a bricklayer in Iowa City for several years before working as a schoolteacher in the lower Midwest.⁵¹⁸ The black students who followed Dameron also had to negotiate an often hostile climate that, in the tradition of Iowa race relations, tolerated but did not welcome them. They lived off-campus in black-owned homes and boarding houses since they were barred from the dorms, and most student organizations excluded them as well. Additional support no doubt came from Iowa City's Bethel AME; Rev. W.A. Searcy in fact worked as a minister while he attended school. This community institution helped SUI's black students negotiate the complicated racial dynamics in which the door to higher education was only partially opened.⁵¹⁹

These problems, though, were still better than what SUI's early student-athletes faced when they traveled to other states. Frank Holbrook became a high school football legend in his hometown of Tipton and then took his talents to Iowa City, where he was the first black member

⁵¹⁷ Thomas H. Benton, Jr., "An Address Delivered at the Annual Commencement of the State University of Iowa, June 21, 1867, by Thos. H. Benton, Jr." (Davenport: Gazette Co., 1877), 79-80. At least one black veteran's child – Keokuk resident Ella Drain – found the means to attend anyway. Britton, "Mr. John Drain: Last Surviving Civil War Veteran of Lee County, Iowa." 1-2; "Some Colored Keokukians."

⁵¹⁸ His daughter Helen followed him at the university, earning her degree in 1920. "At 88, He'll See Hawks with 'Old Grad Fervor,'" *Des Moines Tribune*, 12 November 1953.

⁵¹⁹ (*Des Moines*) *Iowa Baptist Standard*, 21 May 1897; Herbert Crawford Jenkins, *The Negro Student at the University of Iowa* (Master's thesis, University of Iowa, 1993). During the 1910s, the Iowa Association of Colored Women's Clubs opened the Federation Home to house black female students in Iowa City; it remained open until the university dorms integrated after World War II. Anne Beiser Allen, "Sowing Seeds of Kindness – And Change: A History of the Iowa Association of Colored Women's Clubs, *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* 83 (2002): 10-11.

of the team. When the Hawkeyes traveled south in 1896 to play the University of Missouri, though, he ran into violent opposition. Even before the game, townspeople were heard saying “the Tigers will kill the nigger,” and Holbrook was in fact attacked by numerous Mizzou players, while fans threw objects at him and his teammates when they left the field. In an era when college football was incredibly brutal, the violence was considered so extreme that the referees were forced to end the game early; Iowa won 12-0, thanks in part to a touchdown and several key tackles recorded by Holbrook. These problems, along with the exclusion that he faced on campus, may have proven too much for the star student-athlete. Holbrook eventually returned to Tipton without a degree and later moved to California.⁵²⁰ Other black players suffered similar abuse in later years.⁵²¹

The situation was somewhat different for Iowa’s most famous nineteenth-century black college student. Sometime during the 1880s, a young ex-slave from Missouri named George Washington Carver wandered into Winterset, Iowa and found work on a white farm as a housekeeper, cook and gardener while using his free time to study the natural world. Already rejected by a university in Kansas due to his race, Carver decided to enroll at Simpson College, a small Methodist school in nearby Indianola, on the suggestion of white friends. Towards the end of his life, he recalled, “I shudder when I think what might have happened if Simpson College

⁵²⁰ *Tipton Advertiser*, 24 December 1896; “Personal Items,” *Tipton Advertiser*, 3 December 1896; White, “Tipton Negroes”; “Missouri v. Iowa,” *Tipton Advertiser*, UNC, Walter Farwell Papers, Folder 11a – African-Americans in Cedar County, Iowa, 1890s.

⁵²¹ In 1910, the Hawkeyes traveled to Columbia only to find that Missouri refused to let their star black player Archie Alexander (the son of a Des Moines janitor) take the field because of his race. “Alexander the Great” earned a degree in engineering (even though one colleague told him that “a Negro could not hope to succeed” at that profession), started his own firm after whites in Des Moines refused to hire him, and eventually became governor of the Virgin Islands. “Discrimination Rebuked,” *Iowa Bystander*, 21 October 1910; Charles E. Wynes, “Alexander the Great, Bridge Builder,” *Palimpsest* 66 (1985): 78-79. In 1923, Iowa State’s Jack Trice died of injuries inflicted in a game against the University of Minnesota; the Cyclones’ stadium was renamed for him in 1997. Iowa State University Athletics, “Jack Trice Stadium,” http://www.cyclones.com/ViewArticle.dbml?DB_OEM_ID=10700&KEY=&ATCLID=541499&SPID=4653&SPSID=48394.

had closed its doors or failed to open them when I came, hungering and thirsting for an opportunity to develop as God gave me light and strength.” The school did, however, close the doors to its dormitories, and Carver lived a nomadic existence in a shack, a woodshed, a loft, and a dilapidated room near the railroad tracks at various turns, although his place of residence was always decorated with his paintings. Supporting his education by working as a janitor and by doing laundry for fellow students, Carver initially planned to study piano and painting but then switched to agriculture after he decided that he could not earn a decent living in the fine arts, and he earned near-perfect grades in his botany courses.⁵²²

In 1891, Carver transferred to Iowa State University in Ames, where the father of one of his Simpson art professors taught horticulture. At ISU, the young man nicknamed “Doctor” by his classmates worked in the greenhouse and as a trainer for the football team, kept a study room in the horticulture building (it is not clear if this motivated by a desire to give the talented student research space, segregate him from the white students, or both), joined the student cadet corps, and despite his famously shrill voice excelled in public speaking. Described by one professor as “one of his most brilliant students,” he stayed in Ames after graduation (he read the class poem at commencement) to complete a master’s degree and then joined the faculty as Iowa State’s first African American professor.⁵²³ His work in this regard and at the Iowa Agriculture and Home Economics Experiment Station caused him to draw national attention and led to a job offer from Booker T. Washington, principle of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, in 1896. Over the next half-

⁵²² *Des Moines Register*, 8 August 1988; “Tells of Friendship with Dr. G. Carver,” *Indianola Tribune*, 14 July 1953; Lulu Mae Coe, “I.S.C. and Simpson Knew George Washington Carver as a Struggling Student,” *Des Moines Register*, 17 January 1943.

⁵²³ Karol Crosbie, “The Budd House: A Tradition of Inspiration,” *The Iowa Stater* (November 1998): 1; Coe, “George Washington Carver”; Maury White, “George Washington Carver Became the Most Remarkable Cyclone of All,” *Des Moines Register*, 4 October 1992.

century, Carver became a national legend due to his scientific work and the myths that grew up around it, and both black and white journalists in Iowa followed his career until his death in 1943.⁵²⁴

Carver was one of only a handful of African Americans who attended one of Iowa's private universities and colleges, most of which catered to specific denominations and ethnic groups.⁵²⁵ Some of the schools with strong abolitionist legacies attracted not only black Iowans but also residents of other states. Texas native H.T. Kealing graduated from Tabor College in 1881 and later returned home to head a black college in Austin, while Missourian Louis Madison Fenwick graduated from Quaker-affiliated William Penn College in Oskaloosa before becoming a minister and a doctor in Chicago.⁵²⁶ Schools with a more professional slant also drew black students. One account states that members of the Fayette colony earned teaching degrees from nearby Upper Iowa University, although the first black graduate, Susan Angeline Collins, became a missionary in Africa. Davenport Business College counted among its graduates John Henry, who had come to Iowa as a young child after the war with a group of soldiers who had

⁵²⁴ For example, see *Iowa Bystander*, 29 May 1896; Donald Grant, "His 'Talks with God' Help the Humble Man," *Des Moines Register*, 2 June 1941 (Carver gave the commencement address at Simpson that year); "G.W. Carver, Noted Negro Scientist, Dies," *Des Moines Register*, 6 January 1943; "Up from a Slave," *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*, 8 January 1943. During the 1950s, Iowa banks printed commemorative coins with images of Carver and Washington on one side and the words "Freedom and Opportunity for All-Americanism" on the other. The proceeds went to the Booker T. Washington Birthplace Memorial, which was dedicated to increasing job opportunities for blacks, "thereby demonstrating to the underprivileged masses the sharp contrasts between America's advantages and communist propaganda." More than fifty years after his studies in Iowa, the quiet botanist had been enlisted in the Cold War. "Carver-Washington Commemorative Half Dollars on Sale at Bank Here," *Guthrie Center Times*, 2 October 1952.

⁵²⁵ One exception to this was John Warwick's son Gordon, who attended the now-defunct, Episcopal-run Griswold College. "African Red Book of Davenport."

⁵²⁶ Talbert, *The Sons of Allen*, 60, 124. Iowa returned the favor by sending some of its black students out of state to study at Western College, a black Baptist college in Missouri. G.F. Richings states that a professor of business at Wilberforce University in Ohio was a graduate of "Central Commercial College, Iowa," but this author was able to find no record of this school; Richings may have been thinking of a similarly named school in Kansas, Capital City Commercial College in Des Moines, or Central College in Pella. G.F. Richings, *Evidence of Progress among Colored People* (Philadelphia: Geo S. Ferguson, 1902), 41-43, 126.

adopted him as their “mascot,” then completed elementary and high school in Tipton and Wilton. Henry was not able to find employment in his chosen profession, though, and worked as a farm hand, carpenter and yard worker over the years, although his son Lewis became an officer in World War I and helped organize Davenport’s NAACP chapter when he came back.⁵²⁷

Ironically, although Iowa provided more educational opportunities for African Americans than some southern states, the small size of its black communities (and its overall population) and other racial dynamics encouraged some graduates to head elsewhere. John Drain fled from slavery in 1863 and enlisted in the 65th USCI. When the war was over, he returned to Missouri but then brought his family to Keokuk in 1888. It is not clear if he moved because of Iowa’s integrated schools, but his family certainly took advantage of them; his son Alonzo became a pharmacist, while his daughter Ella studied at Iowa State Teacher’s College (now the University of Northern Iowa). After graduating, though, there was little work for her in Iowa, so she returned to Missouri, where the segregated school system provided more jobs for black teachers.⁵²⁸

By the turn of the century, the seventy-year long struggle for access to education had enabled many African Americans to gain at least a basic education and produced a small number of high school and college graduates, but this struggle was also complicated by black ambivalence over the cost of desegregation and the knowledge that education did not save anyone from racism. As other scholars have shown, a rights-based approach to social change can

⁵²⁷ *Past and Present of Fayette County*, 132; Upper Iowa University, “Upper Iowa University History,” <http://www.uiu.edu/general/about/history.html>; “John Henry, A Well Known Resident, Dead”; “Richardson Home Soon”; “Colored Men of World War Organize Post”; “Davenport Items,” *Iowa Bystander*, 7 November 1919; Brigham and Wright, “Civil Rights Organizations in Iowa,” 314; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #3, 54.

⁵²⁸ Britton, “John Drain,” 1-3.

be problematic for several reasons. First, rights themselves are sometimes “indeterminate and incoherent”; in the present case, desegregation both benefited and harmed the black community. Second, this approach can become excessively individualistic, preventing communities from acting in a collective manner. Finally, winning rights in a court of law does not always result in actual social progress, as educated black Iowans often learned. The desegregation of Iowa’s public school system was certainly an important victory in the struggle for equal citizenship, but it also shows that citizenship itself was a moving target.⁵²⁹

These mixed sentiments are perhaps best summed up in the story of Susan Mosely. Born in Missouri, Susan moved to Mount Pleasant with her family as a young girl, went through the public education system, and then enrolled at Iowa Wesleyan College. Neither she nor her biographer tells if she was excluded from the dormitories like black students at other schools, but she may have chosen to live at home to save money or avoid humiliation. Mosely also joined the Ruthean Literary Society (which gave public debates and literary lectures), however, and became one of its most active members. In her sophomore year she debated against the proposition “Everyone the Architect of His Own Future” (her text has not survived, so one can only speculate if she raised racial issues), and in her senior year she served as president. She was also selected as the student commencement speaker, no doubt pleasing her father Moses, a published author and social commentator in his own right. Despite Mount Pleasant’s reputation as a liberal stronghold, though, Mosely was the only black student and still the only black graduate thirty-five years later. She reached another milestone in 1888 by becoming the first black woman in Iowa to earn a master’s degree, then married a minister and began traveling around the country

⁵²⁹ The Bridge, “Critical Theory: Critique of Rights,” <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/bridge/CriticalTheory/rights.htm>.

working for the Freedman's Aid and Southern Educational Society; she also spent her winters in Mount Pleasant, though, and finally retired there in later years.⁵³⁰

While visiting in 1896, Mosely wrote the editorial "What's the Use?" for two local newspapers, discussing the racial problems faced by young African Americans on the eve of the 20th century. She lamented their "pall of despondency," caused not because "they despise their own race; not that they desire to be white, but because to be a negro, means often to be restricted here, to be shut out yonder." This problem began when children saw the racist mistreatment of black adults and decided that there was little incentive to strive for success, feeling that such efforts would be in vain; "Very few," she argued, "will spend years training for a race they can not hope to run." The solution, therefore, was for white Americans to change their attitudes:

"Say to the Negro boy: The way is open from where you stand to the highest plane in the gift of the people. Its attainment is all in your hands. Win it by honest, manly effort and it is yours. Say to the Negro girl: The throne upon which sits the noblest and purest womanhood of this country is before you. Its broad steps are free from those who would cast you down or harm you. Go up with womanly virtue, go up with grace and comeliness, go up with divine aspirations to make humanity purer and sweeter. Go up with skilled hands, clear heads and clean hearts, and none shall bid you depart. Say to the race: Ye have been despised and rejected. Be men and women of honor always and under all circumstances. Be true to yourselves, be true to humanity, be true to God, and nothing, whether of error past, or crosses present, or fears to come, shall hinder your progress or lessen your development."⁵³¹

Mosely offered her own life as proof to talented young blacks that hard work would pay off so long as whites did not stand in the way; "Go up with skilled hands, clear heads and clean hearts," she concluded, and "none shall bid you depart."⁵³²

⁵³⁰ Helen Warren, "Vital Signs," 21 February 2001 (publication unknown), AAHMCCI, Iowa Bios "M." A 2000 news article claims that there were three black graduates by the year 1890, but only Susan Mosely is identified in the 1917 alumni directory. Carolyn Noon, "The People of Lee Town," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 20 February 2000; *Historical Sketch and Alumni Record of Iowa Wesleyan College* (Mount Pleasant, IA: Mount Pleasant News-Journal, 1917).

⁵³¹ Helen Warren, "Vital Signs"; "What's the Use," *Mount Pleasant News*, 21 May 1896.

⁵³² Helen Warren, "Vital Signs."

Mosely touched on many of the issues inherent to the struggle for equal access to education. The struggle for education was central to the African American experience in Iowa during the nineteenth century, but it came at a heavy cost and did not always provide substantial benefits. Education did not end racism but simply increased individuals' opportunities for coping with it, and they did so without the benefit of black schools, which had been one of the state's most important community institutions. In later years, though, there would be a new generation of teachers as Iowa's black communities continued to grow while new ones emerged. The struggle for equal citizenship would continue during the 1870s and 1880s through the court system, the legislature, the effort to find gainful employment, and the politics of memory and culture.

Chapter VI

“Steady and Onward with a Firm Step”: Activism and Community Growth, 1870-1890

John McKee was born the son of a French man and a slave woman, but during the war he and his wife Madeline and son John Carey escaped to Illinois. Because father and son were extremely light-skinned and Madeline was wearing a veil and gloves, no one recognized them as black. The family headed to Rhode Island, where John joined a heavy artillery regiment. Although he survived the war, John Carey did not, dying of pneumonia. When the fighting was over the McKees, who now had four more children, decided to purchase a farm in the Midwest and took a covered wagon to Dallas County, Iowa. They lived with Peter and Elizabeth Bell, the only other black family in the area, until they were able to save up to buy their own land. The McKee children later recalled an idyllic life on the family farm, and although classmates taunted them with the chant “nigger, nigger never die, black face and shiney eye,” the family was also active in a white Methodist church, veteran’s affairs, and other community affairs. After John and Madeline died around the turn of the century, their children sold the farm and moved to Des Moines. One grandchild, Gwendolyn Berry, later wrote a short history from which nearly all information about the family comes.⁵³³

Like the McKees, most black Iowans of the 1870s and 1880s were still dealing with the legacy of slavery while trying to move ahead as free people. This period saw the birth of a new generation with no direct memory of slavery or the war but with educational rights not available

⁵³³ Gwendolene Berry, “From a Log Cabin to the Atomic Age: A Biography of My Grandmother,” 1-3, 6-12, 15; Hawthorne, *African Americans in Iowa*, 10; Photograph, “Interior of Home,” Boxed 1999.25.14, SHSI-DM, McKee Family Collection (John & Madeline), Large Photographs. There are no extant photos of John Carey, but one surviving image of John Sr. shows that he could have passed for a white man. Photograph, “Portrait of John McKee,” Boxed 1999.25.1, McKee Family Collection, Small Photographs.

to its parents, but it also shared their same burden of racial discrimination. During the two decades between the radical progress of the late 1860s and the sea changes of the 1890s, African Americans continued migrating into Iowa in large numbers, helping to build new western cities and southern mining camps, but remained a small percentage of the state's overall population. They also continued to use the legal system, the political process and the court of public opinion to fight for equal citizenship, with mixed results. And they continued trying to rise above menial employment, which also brought successes and failures. All of this occurred as the national mood on race became more conservative and the state's earlier movement towards racial equality lost its momentum, forcing African Americans to find creative ways to contend. Because the 1870s and 1880s lacked a dominating historical theme such as slavery or war, there is much less of a centralized analytical focus here than in other chapters. Nevertheless, the chapter's discussion of community growth, legal activism, and other events during this twenty-year period sheds further light on the varying ways that African Americans continued to emerge from the shadow of slavery, and contented with racial, political and economic changes both in Iowa and around the country.

In August 1857, African Americans from around eastern Iowa gathered in Muscatine to commemorate the abolition of West Indian slavery. The celebration featured a procession from Bethel AME, speeches from Alexander Clark and Richard Cain, music from the African Brass Band, dinner, and an evening dance. This was an early example of Emancipation Day celebrations, which as a form of public testimony and black collective memory, as well as the

social highlight of the year, became one of the most important black cultural events in Iowa and around the country after the war.⁵³⁴

A closer look at the activities and speeches from Emancipation Days around the state reveals key insights about how African Americans celebrated, advocated for civil rights, mined the past for its political wealth, and interacted with whites. Most celebrations followed the same pattern as the 1857 Muscatine event and others around the country (although the West Indian emphasis was diminished after 1862), showing that black Iowans were part of a national African American culture. The procession began in a black church or government building and wound through the city streets, usually covering the entire black neighborhood and downtown area. The marchers and riders were led by brass bands dressed in military uniforms and playing martial songs. One young woman who had been selected as the “goddess” or “queen” of liberty, usually the unmarried daughter of a prominent black citizen, rode near the front in a wagon lavishly decorated with patriotic bunting and images of Lincoln, while other wagons were reserved for fraternal orders, schoolchildren, and dignitaries. These were followed by other black celebrants and then finally whites. Thus, at a time when African Americans were typically forced to march at the back of parades or banned from taking part at all, they retained visual primacy on Emancipation Day.⁵³⁵

Once the procession reached the fairgrounds, there was an opening prayer, and the festivities were officially called to order by a local politician. Other prominent white politicians and black community leaders offered speeches, personal testimonies, and recitations on the

⁵³⁴ Schwalm, “Emancipation Day Celebrations,” 297; Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003), 33-36.

⁵³⁵ “Colored People’s Day: Dr. Thomas Gordon Jones and Aug. 6, 1901,” UNC, August 1901, NVHM, Black Binder.

subjects of slavery, war, emancipation and postwar progress. Black speakers generally gave the credit for emancipation to God, Abraham Lincoln, the Union Army, the Republican Party, themselves, or a combination of the above.⁵³⁶ The speeches also helped attract white audiences who wanted to sample the exuberance of black oratory; one Tipton resident later recalled that the speakers at her local events, including war veteran LeRoy “Steve” Stevens, were “sensational to say the least.”⁵³⁷ The program also included patriotic songs and slave spirituals performed by local brass bands and vocalists, which further clarifies the political value of Emancipation Day and explains why whites attended in such large numbers. The patriotic songs reinforced African Americans’ claim to citizenship, while the spirituals provided a glimpse into antebellum slave culture (albeit a somewhat stereotyped one). The evening dinner of chicken, barbecue, mutton, corn bread, vegetables and sometimes possum served similar purposes as both an exotic southern delicacy for whites and a taste of home for blacks.⁵³⁸

Singing, cooking, and testifying were typically the only ways that women could take part in Emancipation Day. Their speaking parts were limited to testimonials from ex-slaves like Julia Wallace, who had fled from Tennessee, become an army cook during Sherman’s march through Georgia, and narrowly escaped being kidnapped by Confederate raiders, and to the reading of the Proclamation by the same young woman who had already served as goddess of liberty.⁵³⁹ Even this participation was forced into typical gender roles; at Tipton’s celebration in 1896, young Mary Allen read the Proclamation but was also voted “best looking girl.” Special events such as

⁵³⁶ In April 1866, for example, Davenport blacks observed the first anniversary of the president’s assassination. *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 17 April 1866; Schwalm, “Emancipation Day Celebrations,” 309, 312-13.

⁵³⁷ Carrie Dean Pruyin Papers, SHSI-IC, Folder 6, 16.

⁵³⁸ Schwalm, “Emancipation Day Celebrations,” 308.

⁵³⁹ *Iowa State Register*, 2 August 1866, quoted in Schwalm, “Emancipation Day Celebrations,” 312-14; “Aged Des Moines Negress Who is a Veteran of the Civil War.” On some occasions, the Proclamation was read by men. *Mount Pleasant Home Journal*, September 1867, AAHMCCI, Towns – Mount Pleasant & Lee Town; “The Day of Jubilee.”

an 1895 baseball game between two all-female teams were far and few between⁵⁴⁰ At the same time, cooking allowed black women to present an image of respectable domesticity, a “gesture on female accomplishment and black civilization,” that challenged the overly sexualized manner in which they were often depicted.⁵⁴¹

There were typically more speeches, songs and testimonials after supper, and then the event concluded with the evening entertainment, which over the years changed more than the other elements of Emancipation Day. In the early years it consisted primarily of a dance, but by the turn of the century there were also baseball games, cycling contests, and Ferris wheels. These events demonstrated black progress and citizenship through their mastery of technological innovations and their immersion in national culture, but they were also good entertainment, bringing a taste of larger Americana to people who lived far from the major cities in this state of farms and mid-sized towns.

These festivals were actually similar to Independence Day celebrations in their structure and their belief in an inexorable march towards progress, except that progress meant emancipation and civil rights, while the orators read not the Declaration of Independence but the Emancipation Proclamation; as one white commentator realized, “what the former document is to the whites of this country, the latter is to those of darker skin.” As a legal matter most black Iowans, being native Missourians, had not actually been freed by the document, but their collective racial identity with other African Americans meant that it was remembered with such importance that at the Des Moines Emancipation Day in 1876, when organizers realized that they

⁵⁴⁰ “Let My People Go!,” UNC, 1895, Black Binder.

⁵⁴¹ Schwalm, “Emancipation Day Celebrations,” 308-09; *Tipton Advertiser*, 21 January 1896.

had forgotten to bring a copy, the festivities were held up for two hours until they could find one.⁵⁴²

Emancipation Day also helped strengthen connections between African American communities around the state. Clarinda's annual gathering drew crowds from throughout southwestern Iowa and surrounding states. Southeastern blacks could attend separate observances in Burlington, Keokuk, Davenport and Mount Pleasant, the latter of which was the largest in the region (drawing 5,000 people from Iowa, Missouri and Illinois at its height) and noted for beginning with a twelve-gun salute at sunrise. These regional connections were so important that the 1875 Burlington festival ended in near disaster because a steamboat carrying 400 celebrants from Quincy, Illinois was delayed.⁵⁴³

Although Emancipation Day celebrations dated back to 1834 (when slavery ended in the British Caribbean) in the northeastern U.S., they did not reach Iowa for several decades because few black Iowans came from that part of the country. The few Iowa celebrations that took place before 1863 also focused on West Indian abolition, with a hopeful eye towards similar events to come in the United States. Davenport's 1860 festival recognized "one of the greatest and most righteous deeds that ever graced the annals of history" but also declared that African Americans wanted "nothing but freedom – the same freedom that the iron sons of '76 fought, bled, and died for." In 1862 and 1863, blacks in Mount Pleasant and Des Moines held several spontaneous

⁵⁴² Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 23, 40; "A Great Time," *Davenport Democrat*, 2 August 1891; "Editor's Table," 382; *Keokuk Constitution*, 4, 6 July 1865, quoted in Harris, "A Frontier Community," 389; "Colored Barbeque," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 29 June 1866. Rev. J. Carey of Keokuk took part in festivals in his home town, Mount Pleasant and Des Moines. *Iowa State Register*, 7 July 1864, 24 June 1865, 2 August 1866, and *Iowa State Register*, 2 August 1876, quoted in Schwalm, "Emancipation Day Celebrations," 303-04, 309, 312.

⁵⁴³ Noon, "Lee Town Grows from Black Refuge"; Jaynes, *Highlights of Henry County History*, 44; *Mount Pleasant Journal*, UNC, September 1867, MPPL, Lee Town; Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 118; "Anniversary Exercises," *Burlington Evening Gazette*, 2 August 1875.

festivals as they anticipated and then celebrated the Emancipation Proclamation becoming law.⁵⁴⁴

Later celebrations also mirrored black Iowans' civil rights efforts. Immediately after the war, speakers focused on the joys of freedom and the hope for equal citizenship, making it clear that they were not asking for social equality or desirous of interracial marriage; Keokuk barber James Yancey declared in 1866, for example, that "the colored people do not love the whites sufficiently to marry them."⁵⁴⁵ The recollections of former slaves initially served a collective testimonial purpose, or in the words of an 1868 Mount Pleasant news report, an "experience meeting."⁵⁴⁶ Although sharing these stories was no doubt painful for people who would rather forget that they had been brutalized and treated like property, it also enabled them to take control of their own history, challenge the lies and misconceptions about slavery, and explain to whites why they deserved equal citizenship. In later years, the speeches of the now-elderly freedpersons were more educational than commiserative since many blacks in the audience had no personal memory of slavery, but the need to properly document the past was even greater now that the southern version of slavery dominated the national consciousness. The presence of former slaves also became a way to pay tribute to community elders, who were now honored simply for having made it through slavery, an experience that younger blacks often could not fathom. The 1914

⁵⁴⁴ *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 3 August 1860; *Mount Pleasant Home Journal*, 3 January 1863, quoted in Schwalm, "Emancipation Day Celebrations," 300-03.

⁵⁴⁵ In Indiana, "such occasions as Emancipation Day celebrations and Thanksgiving Day sermons were used not only to express thanks for progress already made by their race but to urge further gains." Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana*, 232.

⁵⁴⁶ *Mount Pleasant Home Journal*, 25 September 1868, and *Henry County Free Press*, 16 September 1868, quoted in Schwalm, "Emancipation Day Celebrations," 316.

Des Moines gathering's promise that "former slaves... will be guests of honor" would have seemed bizarre in earlier years when nearly all African Americans fit into this category.⁵⁴⁷

Similar tributes were also paid to black veterans, who unlike former slaves were always a minority in Iowa communities. In early years, they often led the processions and gave speeches in full dress uniform; the chief marshal at Keokuk's 1865 gathering, for example, was former 65th USCI member Charles Davis, who bore the scars of a bullet wound on his face.⁵⁴⁸ By the turn of the century, though, the aged veterans played a more symbolic role, sitting in the background while younger blacks paid tribute to them, and when they were all gone the celebrants honored their memory. Recognizing black military service was thus always an important feature of Emancipation Day, although the way in which it was done changed dramatically over the years.

Broader social and political changes caused further evolution in Emancipation Days over the years. As the national optimism of the postwar era was replaced by increased racial hostility during the 1870s and 1880s, speakers expressed both a growing cynicism and a greater resolve to justify emancipation and civil rights by highlighting black postwar progress. Although the speeches from Davenport's 1880 celebration have not survived, the *Gazette* declared that the blacks in attendance were "thrifty," "well-to-do," and "living proof of the wisdom as well as right of the proclamation."⁵⁴⁹ It should also be noted that the event was organized by Albert Nuckolls, who like many Emancipation Day organizers espoused a moderate race philosophy

⁵⁴⁷ *Des Moines Register and Leader*, 27 December 1914, quoted in Schwalm, "Emancipation Day Celebrations," 316, 319.

⁵⁴⁸ *Muscatine Courier*, 3 January 1867, and *Mount Pleasant Home Journal*, 25 September 1868, quoted in Schwalm, "Emancipation Day Celebrations," 314; *Mount Pleasant Home Journal*, September 1867, unidentified clipping, AAHMCCI, Towns – Mount Pleasant & Lee Town; White, "Tipton Negroes."

⁵⁴⁹ *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 3 January 1880.

and patronage ties to the white elite. Since the festivals rarely made controversial statements on civil rights, they provided an opportunity for middle-class blacks like Nuckolls to reinforce their community authority and connections with white leaders.

Many of these themes were encapsulated in the 1880 Des Moines celebrations. After an opening procession featuring black veterans and the Boonsboro Cornet Band, Judge Josiah Given's opening speech praised the wartime loyalty of African Americans and noted the fifteen years of black progress, declaring "we congratulate ourselves upon our happy deliverance from this greatest curse of the age." Governor John Gear stated that Iowa's voting rights and educational opportunities meant that "it only remains for you to...raise yourself by hard work to a higher social position," while Justice Chester Cole admitted that "the shackles of prejudice" still existed but still advised blacks to "solve [social problems] good-naturedly" and "not be too ready to resent insults."⁵⁵⁰ All three white speakers thus offered a moderate perspective, recognizing black postwar accomplishments but also placing the responsibility for further progress primarily on black shoulders and supporting political equality far more than social equality.

Comments by Clara Ramey, the first black speaker, were far more politically charged. Describing her transformation from "a fugitive in search of freedom" to "daughter of liberty," she praised the Republicans for their help but urged Iowans not to sacrifice civil rights in the interest of sectional reconciliation:

"Shall we forget the solid South has broken up the Union? Shall we forget the many brave boys that have died on the field of battle? Shall we forget the half million widows and orphans now the pensioners, as the result of the late rebellion? Can we forget the corpse of the brother, husband or father that lauded mangled from the battle field?...Never! Never! May my right hand

⁵⁵⁰ "The Day of Jubilee."

be paralyzed and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, yet I will not, can not, shall not forget the past.”⁵⁵¹

These sentiments were echoed by the next speaker, a black visitor from Virginia named Priestley, who offered his endorsement for the upcoming presidential election by stating that “the Republican party gave us all the rights that we now enjoy as a people, and if we want to enjoy these rights as citizens we must vote with the party that gave them to us.” One of the final events featured the song “Let the Banner Proudly Wave,” written by Dr. J. McSimpson (who called himself “The Voice of Colored Americans”) in celebration of the black soldiers:

“We’ve fought like men and brethren,
And we defy the world
To say we ever faltered
Beneath this flag unfurled;
Our guns have broke our fetters,
And justice now demands
That we shall never more be slaves,
With muskets in our hands.”⁵⁵²

While the white speakers avoided specific political issues – even though two of them held public office – African Americans examined the past to help determine what political action the race should take in the present. The same was true of Davenport’s festival in 1891, when the oratory was even more politically driven than usual due to the recent death of Alexander Clark. The large crowd included African Americans from throughout eastern and central Iowa and nearly every black resident of Davenport itself. After a baseball game between two local black teams, former railroad porter turned lawyer John Jones paid tribute to Clark, cited the millions of dollars in black-owned property, and called for “the establishment of a new standard to which both the black man and the white man should be expected to conform – one of honesty and

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

intelligence.” When he was finished, Alex Roberts read a resolution from “the colored people of Davenport” to President Benjamin Harrison recommending that Jones be appointed Clark’s successor as ambassador to Liberia. Clark had long used the memory of black wartime loyalty to press for political power, and now others were using his memory to continue the work.⁵⁵³

As race relations grew even more problematic in the 1890s, speakers offered new perspectives on how to bring about racial progress. The keynote speaker at Des Moines in 1894 was Albion Tourgee, the noted politician who was representing Homer Plessy in his desegregation lawsuit. Perhaps with that matter in mind, he called on African Americans to regularly visit white churches and other organizations “in order that they may make friends and not be a curiosity, but rather a fixture. . . . Do not hesitate to go anywhere on account of color.” Thus while other white orators had discouraged blacks from seeking social equality, but Tourgee encouraged it. On the other hand, in Davenport the following year, white Populist speaker C.T. Lindley chided African Americans for their failures, saying that “a large percentage of the colored citizens are not making the most or the best of the liberty.”⁵⁵⁴ One solution was for black voters to divide along economic lines, with poorer blacks joining the Democratic Party while the elite stayed with the GOP. The local press scoffed at this, though, that stating that “the worthy doctor will have to produce more pressing reasons than those outlined if he is to induce the colored man to ‘break ranks’ and desert the party which made Emancipation Day celebrations a possibility.”⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵³ “A Great Time.”

⁵⁵⁴ *Iowa State Bystander*, 21 September 1894, quoted in Schwalm, “Emancipation Day Celebrations,” 324; “Colored Jubilation,” *Davenport Daily Times*, 2 August 1895; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 63.

⁵⁵⁵ “Colored Jubilation.”

In 1898, the featured speaker in Keokuk was John Lay Thompson, a rapidly rising community leader from Des Moines described as “one of the finest colored orators in the west.” In his historical survey, Thompson praised Toussaint Louverture as a “statesman, soldier and martyr”) and condemned slavery in North America, which was “where the devil laid his first egg.” Perhaps aware that most of his audience shared his lack of direct knowledge about slavery, he painted a vivid picture for them:

“Think of their condition getting worse as the years roll by, and their master more cruel; think of being compelled to live all your life with the man who is stealing the babes from your cradle and you dare not say one word; think of being compelled to associate with the despised and hated southerner who is constantly robbing you; think of being compelled to separate from your dear brother, loving sister, only father and mother, never to see them again. The agonizing groans of mothers when separated from their crying children were heart piercing. See the slave scarred veterans who are before me today and have witness to their once cruel and inhuman treatment. For 243 years the slave pen, the auction block and the whipping post were all perpetuated within the sunny south; for 243 years the blood hound was raised to trace women through tangled swamps and craggy mountains...Four million souls in fetters; 4,000,000 bodies in chains; all the sacred relations of wife, fathers and mothers trampled beneath the brutal feet of avarice and might, and yet, fellow citizens, all of this was done under our beautiful and so-called flag of the free.”⁵⁵⁶

Despite this harsh criticism, Thompson took a moderate stance on current issues, urging his audience to “act well our part in little things and the larger ones will be forced to open to us... We do not ask for social equality, but simply business and public equality.”⁵⁵⁷ It should also be noted, though, that nearly thirty-five years after the war, even African Americans who were personally removed from the peculiar institution that had necessitated Emancipation Day in the first place still rejected the white South’s collective memory of slavery and used their own as political capital.

⁵⁵⁶ John L. Thompson, “The Negro’s Progress,” UNC, 4 August 1898, KPL, Vertical Files, Ethnology Section, Folder: Negro in Iowa.

⁵⁵⁷ Thompson, “The Negro’s Progress.”

Within a few years, though, Emancipation Day began to diminish in importance. With most of the former slaves gone, the younger generation shifted its focus to newer issues; they did not want to forget slavery, only to move on from it. This was reflected in a Des Moines editorial's proposal that the black community shift its attention to education; "It is all right to celebrate emancipation from physical slavery," the writer stated, "but do not neglect the opportunity to be emancipated from intellectual and moral slavery, which are far more galling and disastrous...how to prepare for the duties of the future is of more importance than to celebrate the past." White entertainment interests also shifted as Chautauqua became more popular. Aside from a brief revival in 1913 on the 50th anniversary of the Proclamation, Emancipation Day ultimately faded away until it was revived in the late 20th century.⁵⁵⁸ For nearly half a century, though, it had been a vital element of black Iowan life, organized by the former slaves themselves as a social, political and educational tool.

This of course had also been a nationally celebrated event, but it took on a powerful local meaning as part of the collective war memory of white Iowans. Both races saw the Civil War as the moment that proved their worth; African Americans felt that they had earned equal rights through military service, while whites saw Iowa as a young state that had defined its very existence through its participation.⁵⁵⁹ This process began during the war with statements like that of the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, which in 1862 declared that Iowa "has begun a war history that

⁵⁵⁸ "The Opportunity of the Colored People," UNC, Black Binder; Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 253-54.

⁵⁵⁹ For example, in 1893 veteran H.H. Rood declared that since Iowa had not participated in any of the country's previous wars, this was its first chance to show how "intensely patriotic" it was. Rood, "Iowa's Record: A Sketch of Iowa's Record during the War for the Preservation of the Union, 1861-1865," in *War Sketches and Incidents As Related by the Companions of the Iowa Commandery, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, vol. 1 (Des Moines: Press of P.C. Kenyon, 1893), 370. A few years later, historian Joseph Wall wrote that "no other event...was to have so profound an impact upon the state as the Civil War. It was the great determinant of our political structure and in many important ways of our social attitudes for the next one hundred years." Wall, *Iowa: A Bicentennial History*, 107-08.

yields in splendor and honor to that of no State in the Union, and no country on the globe.”⁵⁶⁰

The politicized memory of black wartime involvement was also conveyed through numerous military histories written in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, nearly all of which discuss the 60th U.S.C.I. in a positive light, if not always accurately.⁵⁶¹

This praise was usually accompanied by lingering anger towards Confederates and Copperheads. Even after the biting rhetoric of the 1860s gave way to more conciliatory language, there were still some whites willing to wave the bloody shirt, which remained useful as “raw personal memory and partisan raw material...a means to establish war guilt and a method through which to express war-induced hatred.”⁵⁶² Like all war memory, this helped shape Iowa’s self-definition and was utilized skillfully by African Americans and liberal Republicans, who had little interest in the “‘sentimental ‘clasping of hands,’ which seemed to imply that both sides had been right in the Civil War.”⁵⁶³ This is evident in the speeches of Iowa’s postwar governors and even more so in the words of Congressman Jonathan Prentiss Dolliver, who had been only a child during the war but waved the bloody flag as enthusiastically as any veteran; one Decoration

⁵⁶⁰ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 1 May 1862. This theme took an unusual turn in 1864 when State Superintendent of Education Thomas H. Benton declared that “Iowa has acquired a name, in the present struggle for the maintenance of the Constitution and laws, that will occupy no secondary place on the pages of history...Were I asked to assign a reason for this superiority, my answer would be, *they have been educated in the public schools.*” “Report of Thomas H. Benton, Secretary, Board of Education,” 11, in *Legislative Documents Compiled by Order of the Tenth General Assembly* (Des Moines; F.W. Palmer, 1864).

⁵⁶¹ One exception is A.A. Stuart’s 1865 work. Captain A.A. Stuart, *Iowa Colonels and Regiments, Being a History of Iowa Regiments in the War of the Rebellion: And Containing a Description of the Battles in Which They Have Fought* (Des Moines: Mills & Company, 1865). Other works that do discuss the regiment, though, include: Lurton Dunham Ingersoll, *Iowa and the Rebellion* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1866), 706-08; Alexander, *List of Ex-Soldiers, Sailors and Marines*, , 456; Byers, *Iowa in War Times*, 568; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 2, 366-67; Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County* (1910), 649-50; *Roster and Record V*, 1586; *Report of the Battle Flag Committee Appointed by the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly to Provide Cases and Transfer the Iowa Battle Flags from the Arsenal to the State Capitol* (Des Moines: F.R. Conaway, 1896).

⁵⁶² David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 51.

⁵⁶³ This quote refers to an 1879 speech at Dubuque’s Memorial Day observances made by one Mr. Cooley, who asked that “the spirit of forgiveness...not be degraded to the spirit of apology.” *Dubuque Daily Times*, 30-31 May 1879, quoted in Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 56.

Day speech declared that “we do not fitly commemorate the Union dead unless we hold in mind the exact principles they defended and the truth which their blood sealed.”⁵⁶⁴ Dolliver was also so staunch a supporter of civil rights that community leader George Woodson later said “Everything of merit that tended to uplift and aid our oppressed people could count with confidence on Senator Dolliver’s aid and influence.”⁵⁶⁵

The connection between war memory and civil rights was also evident in black involvement in the Grand Army of the Republic, the country’s most important veterans’ institution. Although southern GAR posts were racially segregated, Midwestern black veterans were too few in number to form their own and thus sought admission to white ones by assuming a deferential posture.⁵⁶⁶ This was also true in Iowa, where the organization was held in such high regard that the state legislature made it illegal for non-members to wear its badge.⁵⁶⁷ The state had no black posts, and there is no evidence that African Americans ever held leadership positions in white ones. Des Moines’ Crocker Post and Kinsman Post No. 7, for example, had fifteen black members (including three members of the 60th) but more than six hundred white

⁵⁶⁴ Nearly all of this information comes from volumes III-VII of Benjamin F. Shambaugh’s *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa* series, published by the State Historical Society of Iowa in 1903.

⁵⁶⁵ Jonathan Prentiss Dolliver, “Hayes and Tilden,” James P. Dolliver Papers, SHSI-IC, Box 65, Folder 1 – Speeches 1874-77; Dolliver, speech before Des Moines Grant Club, 1886, Dolliver Papers, Box 66, Folder 1 – Speeches 1886; Dolliver, “Campaign Speech for Benjamin Harrison,” 1888, Dolliver Paper, Box 66, Folder 3 – Speeches 1888; Dolliver, “Decoration Day Observance,” 31 May 1897, Arlington, Dolliver Papers, Box 67, Folder 3 – Speeches 1897; Thomas Richard Ross, *Jonathan Prentiss Dolliver: A Study in Political Integrity and Independence* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1958), 99, 287.

⁵⁶⁶ Donald R. Shaffer, “Northern Black Civil War Veterans and the Grand Army of the Republic”; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 194; James G. Hollandsworth, Jr., *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience during the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 112-13. The other prominent veteran’s group of the period, the Commandery of the Loyal Legion, apparently had no black members (membership was limited to officers) and rarely mentioned black troops in its annual meetings, even though white USCT officers were among the members. The Old Soldier’s Home in Marshalltown was also integrated. White, “Tipton Negroes.”

⁵⁶⁷ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 171-72; *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Twenty-Second General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: George E. Roberts, 1888), 139-40. It was also illegal to wear paraphernalia from the Loyal Legion unless a member.

members.⁵⁶⁸ Black veterans were even more outnumbered in other areas. Various documents report single black members at the posts in Mount Pleasant and Keokuk. John McKee was active in the Adel post, which took part in a tribute to him and his wife Madeline in nearby Van Meter. During an event similar to Emancipation Day (although the only African Americans in attendance were the McKees themselves), a choir performed spirituals and military songs, while the minister “held the audience, both young and old, spellbound” with an account of the McKee’s escape from slavery.⁵⁶⁹ It is not clear why local whites chose to honor them in this way, but family histories show that the couple cultivated respect through their quiet, non-confrontational demeanor; it may also be that this was an attempt to bring some of the flavor of Emancipation Day to this small village.

It does not seem that most black veterans were particularly concerned with their marginalization within the GAR. Membership was a badge of honor to which their service entitled them, but it was not their primary tool for socialization, activism or collective memory. Even so, they took part in the 1886 Negro Ex-Soldiers and Sailors’ National Reunion Association in Dayton, Ohio, which offered black veterans the opportunity to remember the war in their own way and to “strengthen and preserve... kind and fraternal feelings.”⁵⁷⁰ All of this

⁵⁶⁸ Porter, *Annals of Polk County and Des Moines* (1896), 327, 330, 332, 341-343, 346, 353-54; Beitz, “Going Up to Glory Very Slow,” 49; “Aged Negro Warrior Eagerly Awaits Reunion of Veterans,” *Des Moines Tribune*, 9 June 1918.

⁵⁶⁹ “Alfred Mason Passes Away: Aged Colored Man Dies at His Home in This City,” *Mount Pleasant Daily News*, 7 November 1910; “Pratt Post G.A.R.,” UNC, KPL, Vertical Files: Negro in Iowa, Newspaper Clippings; Berry, “From a Log Cabin to the Atomic Age,” 8-9.

⁵⁷⁰ *Cleveland Gazette*, 30 January 1886, quoted in Shaffer, “Northern Black Civil War Veterans and the Grand Army of the Republic,” 455-56.

was part of a national effort (albeit an ultimately unsuccessful one) to fight the growing tide of national amnesia about black military service, slavery, and racial issues in general.⁵⁷¹

The effort to press for civil rights through legal channels remained just as important for African Americans as the struggle to define the past. In 1870, the state legislature ratified the 15th Amendment, giving black men around the country the same voting rights that Iowans had enjoyed for two years; ironically, this may have helped keep the black population small, since black men could now vote freely in every northern state and thus had less incentive to move to an area with fewer industrial or farming opportunities. The general assembly also struck down old statute which allowed only white men to practice law was removed, while the House selected an interracial group of Des Moines clergymen to serve as chaplains. The first African American so chosen was one Rev. Wells, and eight years later a House washroom porter named Henry McCraven, who served as elder and later associate pastor at St. Paul's AME, began a fifty-seven year tradition of delivering the opening prayer for at least one day during each legislative session.⁵⁷² Although these acts affected only a few elites, they nonetheless indicated that the legislature remained one of the most progressive in the Midwest.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷¹ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 198-208, 366-74. "Although northern black soldiers were successful in helping to win freedom for the enslaved and later won a remarkable measure of acceptance in the Grand Army of the Republic, however ambiguous their ultimate status remained, they failed in their biggest battle to guarantee equality for their people in the post-war years." Shaffer, "Northern Black Civil War Veterans and the Grand Army of the Republic," 462.

⁵⁷² *House Journal, 13th G.A.*, 95-96; *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Thirteenth General Assembly* (Des Moines: F.M. Mills, 1870), 21, 570; Dykstra, "Legislative Career of H.F. 31," BRS Records, Box 12, Folder 4; "McCraven Dies, A Former Slave," *Des Moines Register*, 27 March 1942. By the 1890s, rabbis were also taking part in this ceremony. *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-First General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: Geo. E. Roberts, 1886), 134.

⁵⁷³ Swenson, "The Midwest and the Abandonment of Radical Reconstruction."

There was, however, one remaining racist blemish on the state constitution: Section 4 of Article III, which barred blacks from serving in the state House. The “lost amendment,” though, was far from the mind of many Iowans. The voters’ attention had shifted from civil rights to railroads and other economic issues, while some liberal activists now focused on prohibition and women’s rights, feeling that the race problem had been fully addressed.⁵⁷⁴ As a result, it would take a full decade before Section 4 was removed from the constitution. A joint resolution passed in 1870 but failed in 1872, and the same occurred in 1874 and 1876, until the resolution finally passed in 1878 and 1880.⁵⁷⁵ The legislators did not explain why this change occurred, but they may have been motivated by the death of Reconstruction in the South. Now the voting public, which (unlike in 1868) included black men, would be asked to eradicate the “last remnant of class prejudice.”⁵⁷⁶

Democratic opposition was a mere shadow of what the party had mounted in 1865 and 1868. Some looked to Indiana’s recent statewide elections, which conservatives claimed Republicans had won by importing thousands of blacks from Kentucky, and Democratic editors

⁵⁷⁴ Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 193-94.

⁵⁷⁵ *House Journal*, 13th G.A., 480-81; *Acts and Resolutions of the 13th G.A.*, 256; Dykstra, “Amendment to Allow Negroes to Serve in the Iowa Legislature,” BRS Records, Box 12, Folder 4; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Fourteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: G.W. Edwards, 1872), 253; *Journal of the Senate of the Fifteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: R.P. Clarkson, 1874), 339-40, 376; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Fifteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: R.P. Clarkson, 1874), 423-24, 430; *Private, Local, and Temporary Acts Passed at the Regular Session of the Fifteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: R.P. Clarkson, 1874), 85; *Journal of the Senate of the Sixteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: R.P. Clarkson, 1876), 35, 85; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Sixteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: R.P. Clarkson, 1876), 114, 125-26, 131, 134-35, 138, 174, 181, 222, 239-40, 279, 290, 296-98, 308, 386-87; *Journal of the Senate of the Seventeenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: R.P. Clarkson, 1878), 33, 116, 184, 283, 320, 323; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Seventeenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: R.P. Clarkson, 1878), 251, 260, 307, 383; *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Seventeenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: R. P. Clarkson, 1878), 178; *Journal of the Senate of the Eighteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.M. Mills, 1880), 74-75, 84, 86, 155, 172; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Eighteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.M. Mills, 1880), 125-26, 295, 430.

⁵⁷⁶ *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Eighteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.M. Mills, 1880), 214; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 3, 96, 99; *Iowa State Daily Register*, 11 March 1880.

attacked what they perceived as a similar “scheme to Africanize [Iowa] for political purposes.”⁵⁷⁷

A Des Moines “Democratic thunderer” named Mike Heenan, who was “boiling over with rage at the insult in Indiana,” took a less refined approach, ordering a black man named Peter Fletcher “Get off the side walk you God d----d nigger”; Fletcher responded by giving him a severe beating. For the most part, though, Democratic leaders barely mentioned the proposed amendment, which was seen as a foregone conclusion.⁵⁷⁸

The Republican Party was also largely silent on the issue. Some editors noted that the legislators’ restriction was inconsistent with Iowa’s other laws and with national policy, since black men could sit in southern legislatures. Other responses ranged from the cheerful racism of the *Walnut News*, which said “by all means let us give the free niggers an equal chance,” to the *Des Moines State Independent*’s declaration that “we can see no good reason, when a colored man is allowed to vote, why he should be prevented by constitutional enactment from being eligible to a seat in the General Assembly. If he can get votes enough let him have a chance.”⁵⁷⁹ Most party leaders, though, had little or nothing to say about the amendment. The 1880 state GOP convention did not mention it, even though the delegates included Resolutions Committee

⁵⁷⁷ *Walnut News*, 14 October 1880; “The October Elections,” *Independence Conservative*, 20 October 1880; *Waverly Democrat*, 29 October 1880; (*Marshalltown*) *Marshall Statesman*, 23 October 1880.

⁵⁷⁸ “The Indiana Frauds,” (*Iowa City*) *Iowa State Free Press*, 20 October 1880; “Indiana: An Address by the Democratic State Central Committee,” *Davenport Democrat*, 17 October 1880; *Iowa State Daily Register*, 17 October 1880; “Drunken Niggers,” *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, 22 October 1880; *Ottumwa Democrat and Times*, 21 October 1880.

⁵⁷⁹ *Walnut News*, 29 October 1880; Scott A. Johnson, “A Review of Iowa State Newspapers, Sept. 15-Nov. 15 1880, As Regards the Issue of Black Legislative Enfranchisement,” BRS Records, Box 14, Folder 4. The *Independent*, which was actually not a GOP newspaper, was also critical of Republican shortcomings on the issue, saying “Our Republican friends in this State, with all their boasted majorities, have not sent nay of their colored brethren to the capital to help make laws, and have been screening themselves behind this constitutional inhibition. Wipe it out, and they will no longer have this excuse.” *Des Moines State Independent*, 6 October 1880. Two weeks later, it contended that “there are many colored men in the state, who, we believe, would be a decided improvement in some of the republican legislatures that get together at Des Moines.” *Des Moines State Independent*, 27 October 1880.

chair Edward Russell and Alexander Clark. The same was true of speeches made by Governor Gear, Chester Cole and other liberals before a largely black audience a month later.⁵⁸⁰

Black Iowans could hardly complain, since they were equally indifferent. In August an organization called the Freedmen's Garfield and Arthur Club met in Des Moines to honor the black delegates to the GOP convention and organize support for James Garfield's presidential campaign. Speeches by George E. Gibson from the growing black community in Sioux City and by Alexander Clark discussed slavery, freedom, and presidential candidate James Garfield but made no reference to the amendment. The same was true of other black political and social events during the months leading up to the referendum.⁵⁸¹ African Americans were so focused on their relatively new role as voters and political organizers that they had little time for a matter whose outcome seemed much more certain than the presidential election.

This assessment proved correct, as Iowans ratified the amendment by a wide margin. More than forty years after racism had been passed into law at the first territorial constitutional convention, Iowa no longer placed any explicitly racist legal limitations on African Americans. Despite their small numbers, they played a symbolic role in this victory. The amendment did poorly in most of Des Moines County's rural townships, but it passed by a wide margin in the Burlington precincts with large black populations; the outcome was similar in Henry County.⁵⁸² Technically none of this mattered since the amendment's ratification depended on the number of votes that it got, not only the number of counties that it carried, and the statewide margin of

⁵⁸⁰ Dykstra, "Republican Newspaper Ballots – 1868," BRS Records, Box 12, Folder 14: Chapter 11 – Miscellaneous Notes 1880; Johnson, "A Review of Iowa State Newspapers," *Iowa State Daily Register*, 26 August 1880, 23 September 1880.

⁵⁸¹ "The Colored Republicans," *Des Moines Daily Register*, 20 August 1880; *Iowa State Daily Register*, 14- 15 October 1880.

⁵⁸² In Lee County, on the other hand, the large number of white conservatives caused the amendment to fail by less than 150 votes. Dykstra, "1880 Election Returns," BRS Records, Box 13, Folder 3: Chapter 11 – Referendum 1880.

victory was larger than the total number of black Iowans, so it would have passed even if every black voter had stayed home on Election Day. Nevertheless, this was a sign that African Americans could have an impact in more localized elections.

Around the same time, black disillusionment with the Republican Party was growing, both in Iowa and nationally. Many party leaders placed economic interests ahead of civil rights by supporting the Compromise of 1876 and taking a weak stance on southern violence and voting irregularities. It was believed that trade with the South was best served by having white Democrats in charge of the region, and those who protested were dismissed as bitter old men clinging to irrelevant issues. The rank and file also refused to support black politicians, as seen in 1880 when a black man remembered only as Bell ran for a clerkship in Pottawattamie County but lost when racist voters defected to the Democratic Party. Although Iowa was still comparatively liberal on racial issues, a conservative shift was clearly underway.⁵⁸³

Perhaps inspired by these events, a few Democrats began making overtures to African Americans. In 1885, the *Louisa County Times* called for “the best and most intelligent representatives of the negro race” to be appointed to federal offices in New England as Democrats.⁵⁸⁴ Statements such as these, though, were the exception rather than the rule for Iowa Democrats, and blacks remained loyal to the Republican Party, which was less liberal than in earlier years but still surpassed the Democrats. Other factors also played a role in this situation. Most black leaders were firmly committed to the temperance crusade; Alexander Clark Jr. and Sr. spoke before Muscatine’s Colored Temperance Aid Society in 1878 and then voted the

⁵⁸³ Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 233-34; Stanley P. Hirshon, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877-1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), 26, 29, 33, 36-37, 46, 57, 132, 156-58, 160, 162, 185-89, 205-06, 209-10; *Walnut News*, 11 November 1880.

⁵⁸⁴ “Democratic Duty,” (*Columbus Junction*) *Louisa County Times*, 17 February 1885.

straight Republican ticket, while an 1887 letter to Governor William Larrabee mentions that a Rev. G.W. Scott was heading south to “labor among the Colored people on the Prohibition question.” Even people like J.H. Warwick, who helped found the Colored Anti-Prohibition League of Iowa in 1884 (which may have simply been smart politics in a city with such a large German-American population), stayed in the Republican Party despite their opposition to a key plank in the GOP platform.⁵⁸⁵ For most community leaders, who were imbued with the same Victorian values as their white neighbors, temperance was a way of publicly proving their respectability, and it helped keep them in the GOP.

As closely tied as black leaders were to the temperance issue, they were equally distanced from the Democratic-affiliated labor and Grange movements. When Dubuque’s Knights of Labor chapter was organized in 1885, its leaders made overtures to black workers, but only a half dozen joined, none of whom held leadership positions, and most locals around the state were not even this open-minded. The Grange leadership featured a few white liberals like Samuel McNutt, but they were greatly outnumbered by prominent racists such as John P. Irish, and although the organization did not deliberately cultivate an image of racial hostility and Democratic support, they had one anyway. In any event, most black Iowans drew little attention from the Knights and Grange and had little reason to join since they worked as general laborers or personal servants, not as industrial laborers, artisans, or landowning farmers.⁵⁸⁶ All in all, despite their dissatisfaction with the Republican Party, African Americans had little political or economic

⁵⁸⁵ *Davenport Democrat*, 19 August 1891; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 65; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, 12 April 1878, 1 May 1878, 8 October 1878; Cyrus Clay Carpenter to William Larrabee, 8 July 1887, William Larrabee Papers, SHSI-IC. Eventually one black politician would break with the Republicans on the temperance issue, but not by joining the Democrats; in 1914, Charles Jacob Glattly of Mount Pleasant ran for state senator on the Prohibition ticket. “Outline of Personal History of Chas. Glattly.”

⁵⁸⁶ Ralph Scharnau, “Workers and Politics: The Knights of Labor in Dubuque, Iowa, 1885-1890,” *Annals of Iowa* 48 (1987): 359-60; *Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County* (1889), 214; Mildred Throne, “The Grange in Iowa, 1868-1875,” *Iowa Journal of History* 47 (1949): 304-05, 315.

incentive to leave it, and they did not want to risk their relationship with their GOP employers to join organizations whose civil rights record seemed even more suspect.

This guarded loyalty was best exemplified by the state's leading black activist. It is possible that Alexander Clark's youthful experiences in Cincinnati, where a strong Democratic Party had opposed the large middle-class black community at every turn, led him to believe that cooperating with it was useless. It was also said that he "appreciated fully the boon of emancipation and enfranchisement" granted under Republican leadership. Although he was not willing to simply follow the party line and allow it to stray away from civil rights issues, he nevertheless became highly useful to GOP leaders as a skilled orator and writer (his skills in this regard had improved greatly since his petition to the state legislature in the 1850s) who could deliver black votes.⁵⁸⁷ Although few of his speeches have survived, one biographical essay explains that

"As a political orator he is clear, prompt and strong... while he is uncompromising in his principles, yet he says things so straight, and in a manner so cautious as to excite no ill-will from anyone... His leading characteristic is a philosophic turn of mind, by which he analyzes everything claiming his attention with reference to its usefulness. If a matter will not contribute to his own good or the good of his fellow men he will have nothing to do with it."⁵⁸⁸

These speaking skills earned him the nickname "Colored Orator of the West" after the 1869 and 1870 Republican state conventions, at which he served as vice president and a member of the resolutions committee. He was also a delegate to the national convention in 1872, and after Ulysses S. Grant's reelection he was offered a diplomatic position in Aux Cayes, Haiti but declined, supposedly because it did not pay enough. In any event, he continued to serve as a

⁵⁸⁷ "Alexander Clark, P.G.M.," 63; Jackson, "Alexander Clark," 47-48.

⁵⁸⁸ "Alexander Clark, P.G.M.," 63.

delegate to statewide and national conventions while also traveling up and down the Mississippi to give speeches and debate GOP opponents.⁵⁸⁹

One of his longest surviving speeches was the “Centennial Address,” given at the Iowa State Convention of Colored Citizens in Oskaloosa in 1876. In it, he summed up many of the issues that faced African Americans as Reconstruction wound down in the country’s one hundredth year. Clark began with a history lesson, praising the “blood of the fathers of the revolution” while criticizing the hypocrisy of democratic nation that still allowed slavery, the “desecrator of God’s truths, the curse of humanity, the servant of woe and the companion of death,” until the Civil War finally brought it to an end.⁵⁹⁰ Although Clark had been born free and unable to serve in the military, he considered the war the central event both in his life and in American history in general. He gave full credit for these changes to the Republican Party, hoping “may it ever be said of the colored men of the republic that we will be found standing in the ranks of the Republican party in defense of these great measures of justice and right.”⁵⁹¹

Clark then turned his attention to the progress of the last hundred years. Territorial expansion, new inventions, the press, public education, and industry had all been greatly benefited the nation, but yet all was not well. Some Americans were still fighting the Civil War, and on the wrong side:

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 63; *History of Muscatine County* (1879), 598; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, 20 June 1878; *Muscatine Evening Journal*, 16 September, 24 September, 3 October 1878. Additional facts about the Haiti position are scarce, but Clark would not have been the only black politician who rejected a consulate job for this reason; John Mercer Langston, for example, resigned from a consulate position in Haiti in 1885 when President Grover Cleveland proposed a 30% salary reduction. Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston*. One report also says that Grant’s successor James Garfield was considering Clark for a patronage position appointment just before his assassination. Davis, “Alexander Clark Memorial.”

⁵⁹⁰ The *Muscatine Journal* reprinted Clark’s speech in its entirety. “Centennial Address,” *Muscatine Journal*, 22 January 1876.

⁵⁹¹ “Centennial Address,” *Muscatine Journal*, 22 January 1876.

“Now whilst the loyal heart and patriotism of this country meet annually and strew flowers upon the graves of her heroic dead, we look upon the other side and see men claiming to be American citizens, claiming to love their country, worshipping and parading through the country the man Davis, the traitor, the unpardoned traitor, doing homage to his treason under the pretense and in the name of the agricultural interests of the country...Again, I look and see the forty-fourth Congress, and think of its composition; sixty-one ex-confederates...My friends, these things rise up today before the American people decked in the somber habiliments of a hideous nightmare, presenting all the bloody horrors of the past, threatening destruction to the fondest hope for the future.”⁵⁹²

Like Frederick Douglass, Clark was horrified that sectional reconciliation had manifested in the honoring of Confederate dead and the restoration of full political, economic and discursive power (in other words, the right to define the war as they saw fit) at the expense of blacks. Instead of transferring power from disloyal whites to African Americans, the government had returned to a prewar state of affairs by conciliating the white South, reversing the modest gains of Radical Reconstruction in the process.⁵⁹³ Thus although his address up to this point discussed present-day issues, its focus was on the legacy of each political party.

Clark then turned his attention to specific policy suggestions. The government should help create a telegraph system, purchase patents from their holders so that all could benefit, allow women who had not been legally married when their spouses enlisted in the Civil War (in other words, most freedwomen) to receive their husbands’ enlistment bounties and pensions, and establish savings banks to transfer financial power from “rich monopolists” to average

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid. Only a few years earlier, Douglass had stated on Memorial Day festivities at Arlington National Cemetery: “We are sometimes asked in the name of patriotism to forget the merits of this fearful struggle, and to remember with equal admiration those who struck at the nation’s life, and those who struck to save it; those who fought for slavery and those who fought for liberty and justice. I am no minister of malice, I would not repel the repentant, but may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I forget the difference between the parties to that bloody conflict. I may say if this war is to be forgotten, I ask in the name of all things sacred what shall men remember?” Frederick Douglass, “Address at the Grave of the Unknown Dead,” 30 May 1871, quoted in Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory & the American Civil War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 96.

citizens.⁵⁹⁴ Unlike earlier portions of his speech, these ideas were a response to current problems within the Republican Party, now viewed by many as a haven of corruption and big business that cared nothing for civil rights. Although Clark affirmed his faith in the GOP, interstate commerce, and a strong federal government, his advocacy for working-class Americans was reminiscent of the Democrats and Grangers; even as he criticized the opposition party, he borrowed some of its ideas and distanced himself from the worst excesses of his own organization.

He also addressed the upcoming elections, declaring that any of the five Republicans running for the senate in Iowa would be “acceptable to the colored men of our state” and “a great triumph for freedom.” This could be interpreted as blind party loyalty, but it is more likely that the savvy politician simply wanted to delay his endorsement so that the eventual candidate would not feel disinclined toward Clark or the black community as a whole. Finally, he offered a tribute to Charles Sumner and other “heroes and brave soldiers and true statesman” who had recently passed away; “They have gone from labor to reward,” he concluded, “but their names we hold sacred in our memory, enshrining their virtues in our heart of hearts...may their graves be strewn and showered with the tear of gratitude we owe.”⁵⁹⁵

Like most of the Centennial Address, this passage focused on national or southern issues and had little to say about specifically Iowan concerns. Clark said nothing of the civil rights victories of the 1860s, even though he had personally played a key role in many of them and seen similar efforts reversed or frustrated in other parts of the country. His silence on local issues may be indicative of a broadening political consciousness, as he was positioning himself for a larger role in the national Republican Party, although he was also silent on women’s rights,

⁵⁹⁴ “Centennial Address,” *Muscatine Journal*, 22 January 1876.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

which he supported enthusiastically in the years to come. In any event, after the speech he served as Iowa's delegate to the all-black Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, convened for "the purpose of preparing statistics and gathering useful information for the colored race."⁵⁹⁶

Clark's increased political activity during this period was partly motivated by the fact that his family responsibilities were decreasing. In 1872 his daughter Rebecca married George W. Appleton, a former slave who had come north during the war and "established a character for uprightness and intelligence" during eight years of barbering for his future father in law. Five years later, younger sister Susan tied the knot with Rev. Richard Holley, formerly of Muscatine and now Champaign, Illinois. After the reception, Susan headed east with her new husband and became the first member of the family to leave Iowa.⁵⁹⁷ With Alexander Jr. also preparing to leave for law school, Clark now had much more time to focus on his political career.

Unfortunately, the family also suffered an unexpected turn of events. Shortly after midnight on July 1, 1878, the roof of their house suddenly caught fire. High winds caused the fire to spread rapidly, and the Clarks removed as many of their belongings as they could before running into the street. The cause was never determined, but some believed that a racist arsonist angry over young Alexander's impending law school enrollment was to blame; both he and their live-in housekeeper had seen people outside the house shortly before the fire. Within a few weeks the ruins had been removed and construction of a "handsome new" house was underway, but Catherine Clark never moved in. Smoke inhalation had severely damaged her health, and she

⁵⁹⁶ "Alexander Clark, P.G.M.," 63.

⁵⁹⁷ *Muscatine Evening Journal*, 11 October 1872, 6 December 1877.

died shortly thereafter.⁵⁹⁸ The matriarch of Iowa's most prominent black family thus never got to see her son make history as SUI's first graduate of color in the spring of 1879.⁵⁹⁹

Meanwhile, his father continued his involvement in civil rights and community affairs. In 1881 he was one of twelve American AME delegates (only of the few who lacked a formal education) to the Ecumenical Conference of Methodists in London, which included church leaders from six different continents.⁶⁰⁰ While in Europe, Clark also attended to other concerns. He met with fellow Masons in England, France and Switzerland, addressing the misconceptions that had been spread about them by white Americans. Clark also experienced a social equality that he had rarely known in his home country, accompanying French Masonic officials to the palace of Versailles and serving as the personal guest of the Lord Mayor of London's sister-in-law at a formal reception. A report given to Iowa's black Masons upon his return praised this "unselfish, noble sentiment" and included a letter from one of the European brethren declaring that "you have in France devoted friends, Masons, who place humanity above the ignoble rivalries of race...It remains for you to conquer [*sic*] the prejudices which array themselves against you in your own country. Be assured that all we can do to aid you will be done." These international experiences only helped Clark's notoriety increase over the next few years. In the hundreds of Iowa county histories published between 1878 and 1914, he was one of only two

⁵⁹⁸ Jackson, "Alexander Clark," 48; Richman, *History of Muscatine County I* (1911), 466; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, 22 July, 31 December 1878; "2 Grants Total Over \$20,000 to Rehabilitate Clark Home," *Muscatine Journal*, 21 November 1978; Sissel, interview.

⁵⁹⁹ Clark actually shared this honor with Burma native and law school colleague Edwin Moug. *Muscatine Evening Journal*, 8 October, 21 December 1878. At that time it only took one year to earn a J.D. *Announcement 1883-4*, 3, 6. During his 1880 Emancipation Day speech in Des Moines, Governor John Gear cited Clark's enrollment at SUI as proof that African Americans had equal opportunities in Iowa. "The Day of Jubilee." There was also a law student from Africa, but he (there were no women in this class) must have been of European descent, and the 1938 SUI alumni directory does not show any members of the class of 1878 living in Africa. *Muscatine Evening Journal*, 22 October 1878, quoting (*Iowa City*) *University Reporter*; University of Iowa, *Law Directory, 1866-1936* (Iowa City: State University of Iowa, 1938), 63-66.

⁶⁰⁰ "Alexander Clark, P.G.M.," 64.

African Americans given a biographical entry; he was also the only black in Iowa's edition of the 1878 *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent and Self-Made Men* and the only Iowan in the 1887 *Men of Mark*, a biographical index of prominent African American men.⁶⁰¹ All of these events of course benefited Clark personally, but they also enabled him to more effectively advocate on behalf of the race through both patronage ties to prominent whites and through a rights-based activism.

Five years after his son became SUI Law's first black graduate, Alexander Sr. became the second. He had contemplated entering law school for several years, initially rejecting the idea but ultimately deciding to do it "not to satisfy my ambition alone, but as an example to young men of my own race." The school had no formal requirements in terms of prior education, and the cost was sizable but certainly not beyond his means.⁶⁰² With his wife dead and his children out of the house, there was little to prevent him from spending a year at school in Iowa City.

Upon his arrival in the fall of 1883, Clark found that the law school had dramatically grown in size since his son's matriculation, particularly in the library and the student body. He and his classmates spent six days a week in lectures, recitation, and moot court exercises; their curriculum included current standards such as torts and criminal law, newer classes like the "The Law of Railroads," and a required course in elocution, which included readings of Shakespeare.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 64-65; *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Communication of the M.W. Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons for the State of Missouri and Its Jurisdiction, Held at Keokuk, Iowa, Commencing August 15th, A.D. 1882, A.L. 5882* (St. Louis: Smith & Owens, 1882) (hereafter cited as *1882 Missouri Communication*), 18; *Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery, Iowa Volume*, 536-41; *History of Muscatine County* (1879), 597-98; Richman, *History of Muscatine County I* (1911), 285-294-95; Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 1096-1100. I have examined ninety-seven Iowa county histories and have found one only other biography on an African American: Anthony James, a New York-born barber and former member of the 18th U.S.C.T. *History of Boone County* (1880), 554.

⁶⁰² Jackson, "Alexander Clark," 49; *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, 27 June 1884, quoted in Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 155; *Annual Announcement of the Law Department of the State University of Iowa, at Iowa City, Iowa, 1883-4* (Iowa City: State University of Iowa, 1883), 4-5.

One of his lecturers, ironically, was George Grover Wright.⁶⁰³ Regardless of their racial attitudes, the other students probably could not help but be impressed by their fifty-six year old classmate, probably the only student who had won a case before the Iowa Supreme Court and helped create a constitutional amendment. Clark was elected class treasurer on the first day of school, and the campus newspaper reported that his performance in moot court “captivated the members of the court by storm.”⁶⁰⁴ After final exams in the spring of 1884, he became SUI’s second black alumnus. The final step was the state bar exam, which was conducted orally by a judge; he passed easily and was admitted to the bar in June.⁶⁰⁵

At a celebration party, several of his old friends and now fellow barristers reflected on his past and present accomplishments. David Cloud remarked, “I first became acquainted with Mr. Clark over 30 years ago and he has always been an honest, upright man and full of ambition. I remember the time when the colored man had no rights which the white man was bound to respect, but this has changed.” Judge D.C. Richman, whose brother had worked on Susan Clark’s desegregation case, remembered his days as a client in Clark’s barbershop and declared that “I know he deserves success and will secure it.” Finally, the man of the hour stepped forward, saying that this gathering was more special to him than the reception in London several years

⁶⁰³ “Report to Board of Regents,” 13 June 1878, *Chancellor Hammond’s Record Book*, 441, 448; (*Iowa City University Reporter*, 15 November 1875; (*Iowa City University Reporter*, 15 June 1876; *Iowa City Vidette-Reporter*, 17 September 1881, 7 January 1882, 8 April 1882, 16 September 1882; *Announcement 1883-4*, 3-4, 6.

⁶⁰⁴ (*Iowa City Vidette-Reporter*, 20 October 1883, 5, quoted in Acton and Acton, *To Go Free*, 154-57. It does not seem, though, that he competed for the coveted prize thesis award. Most of the award-winning theses are still held at the Special Collections Room in the College of Law Library, and this author’s research did not turn up any written by Clark.

⁶⁰⁵ “1890 Iowa Law School Exams,” University of Iowa College of Law, Special Collections; *Law Directory, 1866-1936*, 77-79; UNC, *Muscatine Journal*, quoted in “Alexander Clark’s Admission,” *Annals of Iowa* 3 (1884): 89; Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches*, 398-400; Jackson, “Alexander Clark,” 48.

earlier and that passing the bar was one of his greatest accomplishments, save for his thirty years as superintendent of Bethel's Sunday school.⁶⁰⁶

As it turned out, he never actually practiced law in Iowa. Clark had always been interested in journalism as well, and although the Hawkeye State had been his home for over forty years, its small black community provided fewer opportunities than Chicago; a black man in Iowa could barber, invest in property, or even rise up in party politics, but he could not sell many newspapers. Furthermore, practicing law was an even riskier proposition anywhere in the North, as prejudice limited most black men to defending fellow blacks in criminal trials, some African Americans refused to hire them even for this (reasoning that a white lawyer would be treated more sympathetically by the criminal justice system), and others expected *pro bono* representation as a matter of racial solidarity.⁶⁰⁷ This would have been a new experience for Clark, since these same problems did not apply to black barbers. It may be that Clark had never intended to practice law in the first place, but the dim prospects for success may have helped him make his decision.

His journalistic plans had been set in motion even before he started law school. In 1882 he, his son and the prominent black Chicago attorney Ferdinand Barnett purchased the *Chicago Conservator* from a black Democrat named A.T. Bradley. Clark Sr. and Barnett were both accomplished writers with numerous political contacts, while Clark Jr. was the only member of the trio with actual newspaper experience, having worked at the *Muscatine Journal* for four years. He did not accompany his father, though, when Clark Sr. departed for Chicago in 1884.

⁶⁰⁶ Jackson, "Alexander Clark," 48-49.

⁶⁰⁷ J. Clay Smith's encyclopedic study of black lawyers says almost nothing about Clark. Smith, *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844-1944* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 4-13, 373, 377, 418.

The *Journal* bid him a fond farewell, predicting success for the *Conservator* and stating that “the colored people of the Northwest and indeed of the whole country owe him a debt of gratitude for his long, earnest and eloquent championship of their rights and interests, and for his personal example in an upright and well spent life, which years of grateful appreciation cannot repay.”⁶⁰⁸

The first issue of the new *Conservator* ran on December 16, 1885.⁶⁰⁹ Its former editor had advocated for civil rights from a Democratic standpoint, arguing that the Republicans no longer deserved black support, but Clark turned the *Conservator* into a staunchly Republican publication.⁶¹⁰ Like many black newspapers around the country, it featured national and global news, commentary on civil rights issues, and reports on elite black individuals and institutions. The local news section also had a distinctive Hawkeye flavor, mentioning visits to Chicago by black Iowans (and vice versa) and reprinting articles from the *Muscatine Journal*. The editors solicited subscriptions by appealing to racial pride, stating “We believe that Chicago colored people will help their own people first. We shall see.”⁶¹¹

These attempts were unsuccessful during the *Conservator's* first two years of uneven returns under new management until Clark Sr. bought out his partners, paid off all the debts, and ran the paper by himself from his downtown office. Over the next few years, his “fearless pen...dipped in acid and driven into an enemy to his race with remorseless vigor” spoke out on various issues such as civil rights protection, women’s suffrage, veterans’ rights, and savings banks, reflecting the concern with history, commerce, the legal system, and the war that had

⁶⁰⁸ “Alexander Clark, P.G.M.,” 65; *Chicago Conservator*, 23 December 1882.

⁶⁰⁹ *Chicago Conservator*, 23 December 1882.

⁶¹⁰ Bradley had also been critical of other people of color; one article called North African Muslims as “followers of the False Prophet,” while another referred to South American Natives as cannibalistic “savages” who lacked “even a semblance of civilization.” “Foreign,” *Chicago Conservator*, 18 November 1882; “Eaten by Savages,” *Chicago Conservator*, 18 November 1882.

⁶¹¹ *Chicago Conservator*, 23 December 1882.

always been prominent in Clark's philosophy.⁶¹² He continued to press for desegregation while also supporting black institutions and the very idea of black unity. The 1886 editorial "Why Colored Men Should Subscribe for a Paper Published by His Own Race," for example, stated:

“First – It shows a mark of intelligence, pride and a consternation of thought which may shape and guide us in the future and elevate our condition.

Secondly – Because the colored people are a separate race associating among themselves, and other papers as a rule do not publish their social and domestic affairs.

Third – Because when questions arise that divide us socially or politically from the white race we have a paper to speak upon our side of the question.

Fourth – Because it shows that we have the nerve and manhood to stand up and advocate through our own journals all privileges for our race that are enjoyed by the white citizens of this country.

Fifth – Because it is the only means by which we can teach and educate the minds of our people to become active, progressive and show to the world what we are doing to advance the interest of our race – a hundred other reasons too numerous to mention why we should take a colored paper we should take a white paper also as well and learn what they are doing to build up their race. Thousands of colored people complain that they do not have time to read – this cannot be so, for every man can find one-half an hour in every twenty-four no matter what his avocation may be.”⁶¹³

Within a few years, the paper's weekly circulation had increased to 1,200 copies and Clark had been elected an officer to the National Press Association; his keynote address at the national convention in Louisville, it was said, “enlisted the favorable criticism of the entire white and colored press.” This success was due to his business skills but also to his commentary on the social issues of the day. His 1886 article “Socialism,” published in the *AME Church Review* only a few months after the Haymarket Riots, showed considerable sympathy for the labor movement but still called on African Americans to reject the political theory in question. Although he strongly opposed anarchy, socialism was a legitimate response to labor problems caused by the anti-Christian and anti-democratic behavior of the elite; “It is not the logical sequence of

⁶¹² “Alexander Clark, P.G.M.,” 65; Jackson, “Alexander Clark,” 49; Davis, “Alexander Clark Memorial”; Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 1100.

⁶¹³ “Why Colored Men Should Subscribe for a Paper Published by His Own Race,” *Chicago Conservator*, 18 December 1886.

Calvary,” he wrote, “or of the Reformation, or of the Sermon of the Mount, or the Declaration of our Continental Congress, that the common people, whom Lincoln declared God loved most because He made more of them than of any other class, should be the hewers of wood and drawers of water to a plutocracy of wealth.”⁶¹⁴ The article also weighed in on other social issues, championing voting rights, savings banks, industrial education, and the eight hour work day while taking a stand against monopolies, corporate misconduct, racial and gender discrimination, and the “disproportionate accumulation of private wealth.” Despite these pro-working class positions, Clark ultimately decided that socialism was not the proper path for blacks, who he referred to by the newer term “Africo-Americans.”⁶¹⁵ Although it would allow them to “[revenge] themselves upon the cruelties of old systems,” they would remain committed to Christianity and democracy:

“We want nothing of socialism or the Commune, the strike or the boycott, the mob or the riot. For us be sufficient that we emulate the spirit and faith of Lincoln, Grant, Sumner and their noble peers, men devoted to liberty and justice, but equally the friends and champions of law and order as the benign agencies of man’s highest good. Let us be beguiled into following no flag of murky hues, or strange device, but stand, unbound by any complications, with free consciences, in the simple dignity and loyalty of American citizens, and giving our heart’s whole allegiance to God and country.”⁶¹⁶

Having won numerous civil rights victories by stressing black patriotism and allegiance to the Republican Party, Clark may have felt that a drastic change in tactics and allies was not prudent, especially since most Americans were not as willing to distinguish peaceful labor activists from violent anarchists. He may have also had his mind on Iowa, where the only blacks who worked in a profession where unions played a major role were coal miners, who had gotten

⁶¹⁴ “Alexander Clark, P.G.M.,” 65; Jackson, “Alexander Clark,” 49; Alexander Clark, Sr., “Socialism,” *A.M.E. Church Review* 3 (July 1886): 50-53.

⁶¹⁵ Clark, “Socialism,” 54.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

their jobs with the help of company executives and had little solidarity with white co-workers. It would have been a major risk for this group to alienate its capitalist allies by joining the labor movement or even for its most prominent advocate to suggest that they do so. Although Clark's moderate outlook was shaped in part by his financial success, he had not fully strayed from his working-class roots. He was wealthy, but he was also the son, husband and father in law of former slaves and a former barber who had never employed a large number of people; in some ways, he was more like the workers he defended than the capitalists that they worked for. All of this gave him a greater appreciation for socialism than many other prosperous African Americans of the age. "Socialism" showed not only his appreciation for the subtleties of public controversies but also his international consciousness and dedication to a broadly defined concept of social justice.⁶¹⁷

Clark sold the *Conservator* in 1887 and decided to live "the life of a gentleman, orator and political citizen," devoting his time to real estate and the Republican Party. He kept a foot in both Iowa and Chicago, representing Illinois at the 1888 AME national convention but remaining a registered voter in Muscatine and one of the county's largest property owners.⁶¹⁸ Although nearly sixty years old, he was as committed to politics, commerce and civil rights as when he had first stepped off the boat from Cincinnati back in 1842. Another stage of his life would begin two years later, taking him far from the Midwest but then back to Iowa one last time.

⁶¹⁷ "Alexander Clark, P.G.M.," 65. Praise came from the much larger *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, which called it "one of the ablest articles written on that subject" and "[defining] the attitude of the Africo-Americans on the great question with which all wage-workers are justly and unavoidably concerned." "A Colored Man on Socialism," *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, 14 July 1886.

⁶¹⁸ "Alexander Clark, P.G.M.," *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, 27 January 1888; *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, 9 March 1888, 23 March 1888, 25 May 1888, 1 August 1888, 5 August 1888; Jackson, "Alexander Clark," 48.

Like Alexander Clark's public career, Iowa's black communities and institutions continued to evolve during the 1870s and 1880s. Black churches, including many new ones founded around the state, retained or cultivated patronage connection to local white elites. The churches were also involved in broader regional and national affairs. Clinton hosted the annual meeting of the AME missionary program in 1874, various preachers and evangelists visited or pastored congregations around the state, and Burlington's St. John's AME showed an international awareness by hosting Haitian native Madame Louis' lecture "The Negro – His Past, Present and Future" in 1883. These larger ties also took a negative turn, though, when Rev. Baker Brown fled from Muscatine with fundraising donations and headed for Davenport with a Burlington woman, although he also had a wife near St. Louis.⁶¹⁹ Whether it was missionary work and lectures or marital infidelity and fraud, the church remained an essential means for African Americans throughout Iowa to strengthen their connections with each other.

Black migration into the Mississippi River towns continued, although not as explosively as during the 1860s. Fort Madison was home to restaurateurs George and Rhoda Dandridge Harper, whose children later became educated professionals and civil rights activists, and to A.H. Watkins, who studied law while running a barbershop and became the first African American

⁶¹⁹ Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa's Black Legacy*, 33-36; Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County* (1910), 616; Compton, *Scott County Heritage Society*, 102-03; *Davenport Gazette*, 12 March 1875; Melvin Gingerich, "Mennonites in Mount Pleasant," *Palimpsest* 23 (1942): 374-379; M.M.G. Dana et. al., "Report of the Committee," *American Missionary* 33 (December 1879): 390; A.W. Wayman, *My Recollections of A.M.E. Ministers, or Forty Years Experience in the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: AME Book Rooms, 1881), 198, 204; Smith, *History of the AME Church*, 108, 111, 202; Eliza Suggs, *Shadow and Sunshine* (Omaha, 1906), 13-33; *The Life Story of (Rev.) William Brown: As Told by Himself at the Age of Eighty-Three Years, Having Spent 20 Years, 11 Months and 29 Days in Slavery*; James Randall, "Slave Narrative Echoes in an Iowan's Life Story: Rev. William Brown," *The Iowa Griot* 3: 6-7; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 22 June 1883; "A Judas," *Burlington Daily Hawk-Eye*, 21 February 1883. Between 1863 and 1880, African Americans founded Baptist or AME churches in Mount Pleasant, Des Moines, Burlington, Keokuk, Clinton, Ottumwa, Washington, Council Bluffs, and Fort Madison. Smith, "The Negro Church in Iowa," 37.

admitted to the state bar in 1874.⁶²⁰ The much larger size of Keokuk's black community (around 1,500 by the mid-1880s) made it the location for another even more famous historic moment.⁶²¹ New York native Bud Fowler became one of the first professional black baseball players in the country when he debuted with a Massachusetts team in 1878, but he was driven away by fans, opposing players and teammates who did not want the still largely disorganized institution of professional baseball to be integrated; according to one story, the infielder/pitcher invented shin pads to protect his legs from his opponents' spikes. He gradually made his way west, and in 1885 he signed a contract with the Keokuk Westerns (referred to as the Keokuks or Hawkeyes in some records) of the Western League. The team owner brought Fowler in for two reasons: he could play, and he attracted fans from southeastern Iowa's large black population. The historical record suggests that white fans also accepted him, since none of the stories about his struggles with racism took place in Keokuk, but when the Western League folded he resumed his travels, eventually forming his own all-black team in the 1890s. He had been largely forgotten by most baseball fans when he died in 1913, but he was nonetheless an important predecessor for Jackie

⁶²⁰ "Harper Family of Keokuk"; Barnes, *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, 29-31; "Black Residents," *Fort Madison Daily Democrat*, 29 April 1888. Dandridge was followed almost immediately by Samuel J. Adams (also the first black admitted to argue before the Iowa Supreme Court) and John Lewis Waller in 1875. Smith, *Emancipation*, 451.

⁶²¹ Keokuk's black migrants during this period included Leon Bland, the son of a wartime hospital boat worker and of one of Chicago's first black female high school graduates; Leon followed his father onto the water, working as a surveyor, engineer, and at other jobs. There was also Willie "Midnight" Richardson, who was featured in *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* for refusing to sleep in a bed, taking his rest instead by leaning against buildings or steps "Cookhouse Talk": A Dialogue between William Talbot, President, Lee County, Iowa Historical Society and Leon Bland, Old Time Steamboat Hand and Chef Whose Experiences Extend Over a Sixty Year Span" (Keokuk, IA: Lee County Historical Society, 1963), 2-8; "Find Dead Body of George Bland," *Keokuk Gate City*, 11 July 1921; "In Bed Only 14 Hours Out of 60 Years," *Daily Gate City*, 3 February 1951; "'Midnight,' Who Never Slept in Bed, Is Hospital Patient Today," *Keokuk Gate City*, 2 February 1951; "'Midnight,' Contended Son of Tragedy," UNC, KPL, Vertical Files: Willie (Midnight) Richardson: Contented Son of Tragedy.

Robinson, who was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1946 for the same reasons that Fowler had come to Keokuk: his talents and his ability to draw black fans.⁶²²

The black community in Cedar Rapids remained much smaller, but with a disproportionate number of skilled workers, including barbers, a nurse, and New York native O.B. Claire, who was appointed to the police force by the mayor in the early 1880s, although most likely as a janitor or patrol driver rather than as a policeman.⁶²³ There was also at least one interracial couple: restaurateur Marshall Perkins and his white wife, whose name is lost to history. Generally speaking, race relations were milder here than in Keokuk, with fewer working-class whites competing with blacks for jobs and hardly any Democratic influences. Community uplift was largely based on patronage ties; the first black church, for example, was built on land donated by white philanthropists. One of its early pastors, Rev. Andrew Ford, was a former slave from who had been a teamster and then soldier during the war, lived in Michigan when his service was up, and in 1876 made his way to Cedar Rapids, where he was ordained a minister and later served as chaplain of the local GAR post.⁶²⁴

Cedar Rapids was also briefly home to one of the leading black politicians in postwar America. John Lewis Waller was born in Missouri during the early 1850s, the son of domestic slaves, and headed to Tama County in 1862 on the army boxcar caravan. They purchased a small farm, and John attended local schools before heading to Cornell College in Mount Vernon,

⁶²² David R. McMahon, "'Pride to All': African-Americans and Sports in Iowa," in *Outside In*, 468-69; Benjamin Hill, "Fowler: A 19th-Century Baseball Pioneer" (9 February 2006), "Minor League Baseball: News," http://www.minorleaguebaseball.com/app/news/article.jsp?ymd=20060208&content_id=41022&vkey=news_milb&fext=.jsp.

⁶²³ Dale Kueter, "Black History in Linn County: How They Fared in the Earlier Days," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 2 March 1986; "First and Only Negro Policeman Here Dies," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 1916, UNC, AAHMCCI, Iowa Bios "C." In recent years, Virgil Powell (who joined the force in 1924) has been recognized as the town's first black officer. Ummel, "Linn Historical Museum Exhibit Honors Contributions of Blacks."

⁶²⁴ *History of Linn County* (1878), 510; Nosek, "Combat Zone," 3; "Funeral for Andrew Ford to Be Thursday," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, 29 January 1934.

where he worked as a barber to pay his tuition until he left school in 1874 (possibly demoralized by the recent death of four siblings) and settled in Cedar Rapids. Here he continued barbering while also teaching Sunday School at a racially mixed church. With assistance from several white lawyers (one of whom, it has been suggested, helped Waller both for altruistic reasons and also to gain an ally in Cedar Rapids' black community), he passed the bar exam in 1877, but like Alexander Clark he would not make a legal career in Iowa. A year later he moved to Kansas, where he became a prominent leader in the Exoduster communities, and in 1891 he was named U.S. consul to Tamatave, Madagascar. Although his time in Iowa was relatively brief, the "the educational opportunities and biracial milieu he experienced...generated the self-esteem and to some extent the inner control that led him to aspire to a leadership role."⁶²⁵

Davenport's black leaders also continued their tradition of currying favor with powerful whites. Alex Roberts came from Ohio with his family in the early 1880s and worked as head porter at an upscale hotel, also running a luggage hauling service, but his real vocation was self-advancement through "politeness and obliging manners." Most of his eight sons were named after captains of the hotel industry, and in 1915 the *Democrat* asserted that "only his skin is black...his heart is white through and through." The self-described "life long-Democrat" was rewarded for his efforts in the early twentieth century with the political appointment of Davenport city scavenger; this became a patronage position that later passed to his brother and other African American men. Robert's use of clientage for political power may have been part of

⁶²⁵ Woods, *A Black Odyssey*, 3-8, 44-45, 200. Even after Waller was arrested by the French on dubious charges in 1894 while the U.S. government refused to intervene, Iowa journalists defended him. A Toledo newspaper, for example, reported that "there is much anxiety in that locality for his welfare," while editorials in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* declared that "this country will demand a fair trial for Waller." "Waller Lived at Toledo," UNC, AAHMCCI, Iowa Bios "Waller"; "Was a Rapids Man," UNC, AAHMCCI, Iowa Bios "Waller"; "John L. Waller: An Ottumwa Man Comes to the Ex-Consul's Defense," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 31 July 1895.

the reason why he retained good standing in the black community, taking a leadership role in both Emancipation Days and the AME church.⁶²⁶

One of Roberts' contemporaries took advantage of personal ties to white leaders in a different fashion. While working as a railroad porter and postal clerk, John Jones studied law with Ferdinand Barnett in Chicago and the city attorney general in Davenport until he was admitted to the Iowa bar in 1883 and the Illinois bar a year later; one of the witnesses at his swearing-in ceremony was his friend Alexander Clark, who traveled from Chicago for the occasion.⁶²⁷ He joined Barnett's firm as a criminal defense lawyer and practiced law in both states – one of his first cases was the unsuccessful defense of a black man accused of rape in the Davenport area – but after a few years, he focused his attention on the greater client base and political opportunities in Chicago.⁶²⁸ There were other inroads into the legal system. During the early and mid 1870s, J.H. Warwick, Albert Nuckolls, and a former slave overseer named Leedman Hart became the first African Americans to sit on Davenport juries, none in cases that involved African Americans. At a time when blacks were often kept off such juries, a few select

⁶²⁶ "African Red Book of Davenport"; "Roberts," *Davenport Democrat*, 21 February 1901; "Davenport Notes," *Iowa Bystander*, 18 February 1910; *Davenport City Directory 1900-1901* (Davenport: H. N. Stone & Co., 1901), 795; "John T. Mabry," *Iowa Bystander*, 10 June 1904; "Is Appointed City Scavenger," *Davenport Daily Times*, 3 May 1918; "Davenport Items," *Iowa Bystander*, 23 December 1904; "Davenport Notes," *Iowa Bystander*, 9 October 1909; "Davenport Notes," *Iowa Bystander*, 10 December 1909; "A Great Time"; *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 9 January 1929; Richter, "Colored Attorney," Richter Papers.

⁶²⁷ Robert L. McCaul, *The Black Struggle for Public Schooling in Nineteenth-Century Illinois* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 17-19; "Iowa's First Colored Lawyer," *Centerville Citizen*, 21 August 1895.

⁶²⁸ Smith, *Emancipation*, 373; "Colored Lawyer," Richter Papers; Richter, "Colored Attorney." Jones did not abandon his Iowa ties; in 1895, for example, he traveled to Centerville on business and was celebrated as a practitioner of "good success" by the local press, which also inaccurately described him as Iowa's first black lawyer. "Iowa's First Colored Lawyer."

members of Davenport's elite were honored by the white power structure with this privilege and responsibility, albeit in cases of minor importance.⁶²⁹

Despite their accommodating posture, black leaders also organized political groups such as the Young Colored Man Debating Society and the Colored Republican Club. L.H. Reynolds took an even more direct approach in 1886 by writing to Governor Larrabee, who it seemed had requested the letter during a previous meeting. He informed the governor that a group of black men had recently met in Des Moines to discuss racial uplift through literacy, temperance, and black migration into Iowa, although they had not reached a consensus on the last issue. Reynolds also declared that although unnamed parties had accused him of staging the convention to “produce disaffection towards the Republican Party,” African Americans were still loyal to the GOP. He concluded by asking the governor to appoint him to a political position, being “a very poor man who has ever striven to rise in honorable walks of life by honorable means, and whose fidelity to the party has never for an instant swerved to the right or life.”⁶³⁰ Although Larrabee received many requests for jobs or letters of recommendation, this was the only one written by an African American.⁶³¹ It shows that in the age of patronage spoils, black Iowan could play the same political games as everyone else, and that they continued to use the rhetoric of

⁶²⁹ “Davenport Report,” *Iowa Bystander*, 18 August 1899; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 52; “African Red Book of Davenport”; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #3, 28; *Davenport City Directory, 1900-1901* (Davenport: H.N. Stone & Co., 1901); “J.H. Warwick and Albert Nuckolls,” Richter Papers.

⁶³⁰ Unidentified clipping, Richter Papers; *Rock Island Daily Union*, 1 July 1876; *Rock Island Daily Union*, 26 October 1877; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #3, 400; L.H. Reynolds to Larrabee, Davenport, 11 March 1886, Larrabee Papers, Box 1, Folder 1 (Correspondence 1886, January-May).

⁶³¹ Only two letters written by African Americans can be found in the personal papers of Iowa's 19th-century governors at SHSI-IC. In February 1876, Willis Drummond wrote to then-senator Samuel Kirkwood to express his “sincere gratification” at the way that he had “led the Republican party of the State to such substantial and glorious victories, at a time when there was so much danger of continual dissensions, in the ranks; and when dark clouds were gathering on the political horizon of the nation.” Willis Drummond to Kirkwood, 21 February 1876, Samuel Kirkwood Papers, SHSI-IC, Box 1, Folder 9.

respectability and loyalty – both to the country and the Republican Party – to show that they were worthy of equal citizenship.

Davenport blacks also continued to cultivate positive ties with the German American community. One of Third Missionary Baptist church's most active members was a white woman named Taggie Pasch, who may have conversed in her family's native German with assistant pastor and co-founder Milton Howard.⁶³² During his thirty years as editor of the German-language newspaper *Der Demokrat*, Prussian native Dr. August Paul Richter offered liberal commentary on racial issues such as the civil rights victories of the 1860s and the accomplishments of black Davenporters.⁶³³ Even in this relatively liberal city, though, there were signs that racism remained a persistent problem. In 1875, Emmanuel Franklin's livery stable was destroyed by fire, with some suspecting "white jealousy" as the cause.⁶³⁴ The situation was even direr for Joseph Wilson, who was murdered by a white man named James Messenger in 1873 after speaking harshly to Messenger's female companion.⁶³⁵ Finally, although the local press often reported positively on black community activity, it also described black criminal behavior in a racist manner.⁶³⁶ These ever-present tensions finally flared up into open conflict in the

⁶³² "African Red Book of Davenport"; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #3, 28; *Davenport City Directory, 1900-1901*. At her death, Pasch was memorialized by both Third Baptist and Bethel AME. "Davenport Report," *Iowa Bystander*, 18 August 1899.

⁶³³ See generally, Richter Papers, Box 2. For example, an 1887 article mentions a 35-year-old black high school student who had fled slavery, Midwestern racism and southern racial violence before coming to Davenport, where he worked as a janitor while studying; he hoped to eventually teach at a black school in the South. Richter trans., "A Colored Man's Ambition," *Der Demokrat*, 5 December 1887, Richter Papers. Unfortunately, Richter's massive study of Davenport history was a financial failure since it was published during the height of anti-German hysteria in 1917. Anderson, *Quad Cities: Joined by a River*, 104.

⁶³⁴ "African Red Book of Davenport." His friends held a fundraiser to help get him back on his feet. Unidentified clipping, Richter Papers; *Rock Island Daily Union*, 18 January 1876.

⁶³⁵ The legal outcome of this case is not known. *History of Scott County* (1882), 702.

⁶³⁶ The press reported on a murder, several thefts from businesses and a fellow African American, an attempted shooting, and a knife attack on a white man. *Rock Island Daily Argus*, 12 April 1872, 16 May 1872, 3 August 1876, 11 September 1876; *Davenport Democrat*, 26, 27, 29 June 1875, 22 February 1877, 4 October 1884, 31 December 1890; *Davenport Gazette*, 7 July 1875.

summer of 1875, when African Americans were again reminded of their precarious status, the perils of the criminal justice system, and the danger of mob violence.

On July 23, the *Daily Gazette*'s headline declared "A Fiend's Crime: A Farmer's Wife Outraged by a Negro." The victim was the thirty-year-old farmwife (her first name was not given) of a German immigrant named George Mandel. It was reported that the previous afternoon, she was working in her field near East Davenport with her five-year-old daughter when a light-skinned black man in blue overalls approached and asked if she needed any hands. After she replied no, he suddenly knocked her to the ground and beat her until she was too weak to resist the sexual assault that followed. He threatened to kill her if she revealed what had happened, then fled into the cornfields when the family dog attacked him and a male neighbor approached. Mrs. Mandel was taken into the house and treated by a doctor, who found that she had two cracked ribs and was "blue in the face and insensible" for seven hours. When she finally gave the police her account, she stated that she had seen the man in Davenport before and that she wanted to die, as "she could never survive the shame of the horrible affair."⁶³⁷

This was, the newspapers stated, the first rape of a white woman by a black man ever committed in Scott County. A large posse began searching for the rapist, and a ferryman at nearby Pleasant Valley said that he had taken a man fitting the description (including an injured hand) across the Mississippi. The *Gazette* lamented that since the rapist had made it into Illinois, he would probably change clothes, get on a train, and vanish forever. The *Gazette* and the *Democrat* had always espoused different opinions on racial matters, but they were of one voice

⁶³⁷ "A Fiend's Crime," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 23 July 1875; "A Fiendish Crime," *Davenport Democrat*, 23 July 1875; "A Yellow Fiend," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 24 July 1875; "The Rape Case," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 27 July 1875;

in calling for the “black villain” and “yellow fiend” to be lynched, although the *Gazette* also stated that a white rapist should receive the same treatment.⁶³⁸

Over the next few weeks, the criminal justice system and civilian population waged a war on light-skinned black men. On July 25, a “yellow brute” named John William Gates was arrested in Clinton and brought back to Davenport (with special precautions to keep him from being lynched) to be identified by Mandel. His alibi offered a story similar to that of other black men, who often had to do the most dangerous, exhausting and low-paying work on a part-time basis. He claimed that on the day of the rape, he had sought work at a mill before taking a job on a steamboat, and he had never seen the Pleasant Valley ferryman before. The ferryman insisted that this was the man that he had taken across the river, but the police quickly realized that he was too dark to fit Mandel’s description, and her neighbor could not identify him.⁶³⁹ These facts were inconsequential, though, to other whites. Efforts to take Gates to the Mandel home for an identification were threatened by a lynch mob of more than 100 men, who came out of the woods shouting “where is that nigger!” and threatened “all sorts of calamities” against anyone who helped him. She stated that she was not sure if he was her attacker but did not clear or implicate him, and steamboat workers confirmed his story while another of Mandel’s neighbors said that he was shorter and darker than the rapist, but he was taken back to jail anyway. The police also arrested other men in Thompson, Illinois (north of Rock Island) and Monticello, Iowa (nearly seventy miles northeast of Davenport), but neither matched Mandel’s description and were

⁶³⁸ “A Fiend’s Crime”; “A Fiendish Crime”; “A Yellow Fiend”; “The Rape Case”; “Davenport Briefs,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 3 August 1875. Only a week earlier, the *Gazette* had shown more fair-mindedness towards a more famous person of mixed ancestry, writing in a report on Alexandre Dumas that “the French are without prejudice in the matter of race, and the eighth part of African blood which runs through the veins does not prevent him from enjoying any of the social privileges belonging to a pure-blooded Gaul.” “Portrait of Dumas,” *Davenport Gazette*, 18 July 1875.

⁶³⁹ “The Yellow Brute,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 25 July 1875; “The Rape Case”; “The Mandel Outrage,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 28 July 1875.

quickly released.⁶⁴⁰ The *Gazette* reported that the Monticello man was considering filing a lawsuit for false arrest and offered its own support for such action, criticizing Mandel's neighbors for letting the culprit slip through their fingers and saying that "the three colored men that have been taken are innocent as any white resident in Davenport."⁶⁴¹

Some townspeople, though, were still unconvinced. On the night of July 28, word spread that a lynch mob was heading to the jail, so city officials posted an armed posse of 40-50 armed men. The affair took on the appearance of an impending Civil War battle (which some of the guards had no doubt experienced firsthand), as the men discussed tactics, said goodbye to family members, and "silently uttered a prayer to the god of war for aid in the coming struggle." As the night went on and nothing happened, though, fear was slowly replaced by calm, and someone finally broke out cigars and beer, which they enjoyed until daybreak. The guards were not sure if they had frightened the mob away or been the victims of a cruel hoax, but all agreed that they had behaved bravely; "this country," the *Gazette* reported, "never did lack for defenders when its institutions were threatened with subversion."⁶⁴²

A fourth man was arrested in Illinois but quickly released when the mate on his steamboat vouched for him. A week later, the police finally took Gates back to Mandel's farm so that she could make a conclusive statement. They were greeted by twenty armed men, but the shift in public opinion must have calmed their mood; instead of attacking they decided to wait and see what she had to say, although this was little comfort to Gates himself, who was "fairly

⁶⁴⁰ "The Brutal Deed," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 29 July 1875; "The Rape Case"; "The Rape Case," *Davenport Democrat*, 27 July 1875; "The Mandel Outrage"; "Who Goes There?," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 30 July 1875.

⁶⁴¹ "The Mandel Outrage"; "The Brutal Deed."

⁶⁴² At midnight, word came that 300 men were approaching, so the men hid the sledgehammers used by prisoners to break stones, since these could also be used to tear down the jail cell and get to Gates more quickly. "An Eventful Night: The Three Hundred at Camp McClellan Deterred by the Forty in Davenport," *Davenport Democrat*, 29 July 1875; "The Brutal Deed"; "Who Goes There?"

pale with fright and trembled like a leaf.” After looking him over intently, Mandel announced that the man who had attacked her was much darker. The mob “looked ashamed and said not a word,” and Gates was finally set free. Some people now believed that her initial description had been inaccurate, and since the police had been looking for a lighter man, the real culprit had gotten away; now Mandel would never get justice, while Gates had suffered needlessly.⁶⁴³

It seemed that for African Americans in the Davenport area, the wheels of justice turned slowly and with violent undertones but eventually moved in the right direction.⁶⁴⁴ Mob violence was actually less prevalent in this part of Iowa thanks to its New England-based traditions of due process. The southwestern part of the state adhered to an imported southern mentality that “emphasized the moral imperatives of communally based retributive justice,” but hardly any African Americans actually lived there. This helps explain why there were no lynchings of blacks anywhere in Iowa during this period; the three white victims of mob violence in Audubon County between 1880 and 1890, for example, equaled the total number of black residents during those same years.⁶⁴⁵ The threat of violence that Gates had faced might have been more than a threat had he been arrested elsewhere in the state. This did not mean, though, that Davenport’s criminal justice system was fair and balanced. Four years later, the black community found itself under siege again during a rape investigation, and when two unlikely civil rights activists fought back, the police responded with immediate force.

⁶⁴³ “Davenport Briefs,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 3 August 1875; “Moline Items,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 5 August 1875; “Davenport Briefs,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 7 August 1875; “He Isn’t Dark Enough,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 8 August 1875.

⁶⁴⁴ A year later, a Clinton black man named Jacob Dozier was tried, and acquitted, for raping a woman named Kate Harmony. “Items in Brief,” *Davenport Democrat*, 14 June 1877.

⁶⁴⁵ Twenty-three whites and one Native American were lynched in Iowa during this period, mainly in the southwestern counties and for murder, rape, arson or theft. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*, 26-27, 94, 109-14, 122, 131, 156-57.

In June 1879, the *Gazette* reported that eleven year old Mary Witt had been raped by a black man. The *Democrat* claimed that she had engaged in consensual sex with a white youth, but the police began searching for the “black fiend” who had committed “the worse instance of the crime that ever occurred in this city.” One day later the police arrested twenty year old Ed Pash, a former hotel waiter. Although he gave contradictory accounts of his whereabouts, the *Democrat* opined that he was innocent and just “badly mixed up.” Nevertheless, several hundred townspeople gathered outside the jail and called for his hanging, including women who had run home to get clotheslines. Mary also gave a more extensive account of the incident. On her way home from a children’s festival, she was approached by a young man. He “spoke pleasantly,” and she did not mind until she realized that he was black; this suggested that like the original Mandel suspect, he was light-skinned. Although frightened, she kept walking along silently until they neared her house, where he forced her into a shed with a revolver and committed the sexual assault. Her physician confirmed that a rape had occurred, and two other girls who had attended the dance also told the police that a “strange colored man” had made “indecent proposals” on the street. When Pash was taken to the Witt home, though, Mary did not recognize his face or voice, and he was released; it was never said if this decision was influenced by the Mandel investigation, but he was undoubtedly glad that he did not languish in jail as long as John William Gates had.⁶⁴⁶ No further arrests were ever made.

Although the police had exercised more restraint this time, the abusive language that they used towards members of the black community during the investigation stirred controversy. This

⁶⁴⁶ “A Shocking Outrage,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 3 June 1879; “A Story of Outrage,” *Davenport Democrat*, 3 June 1879; “Arrested on Suspicion,” *Davenport Democrat*, 4 June 1879; “The Case of Outrage,” *Davenport Weekly Gazette*, 4 June 1879; “The Outrage,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 5 June 1879; “Davenport Briefs,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 6 June 1879.

latest in a long line of grievances with the criminal justice system led to direct action. Nine black citizens led by boarding house owners Lewis and Mary Philips brought a petition before the city council protesting the behavior of the police. The council's answer is unknown, but the police response was immediate. The following night, they went to the boarding house and arrested five people on charges of prostitution, including Mary Phillips, a sixteen year old white female, and her 45 year old black husband. They were all fined, and the interracial couple was also forced to leave town; the *Democrat* gleefully surmised "no wonder [Lewis] dislikes officers of the law." Less than a year later, the Phillips were arrested again on the same charge. Whether they were victims of police retaliation, actually running a house of prostitution, or both, it would seem that they were being made to pay for criticizing the criminal justice system. It is also worth noting that like Mary Witt, the arresting officer and the judge were of German descent.⁶⁴⁷ After these events, moderate community leaders refrained from direct confrontation of or even constructive engagement with the white power structure. As race relations grew even worse at the end of the century, the black elite would use different tactics to contend with both.

The public response to the Mandel and Witt rapes was only part of a larger pattern of racial violence on the Mississippi River, as tension between working class blacks and whites continued into the end of the Reconstruction era. In a Dubuque bar in 1876, where a black man remembered only as "The Bouncer" was serving drinks, a man Jerry Driscoll tried to fire his

⁶⁴⁷ *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 5 June 1879; "Police Points," *Davenport Democrat*, 6 June 1879; "Davenport Briefs," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 6 June 1879; "Davenport Briefs," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 7 June 1879; "Davenport Briefs," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 9 February 1880; "Davenport Briefs," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 23 March 1880. In 1900, John Lay Thompson reported that Davenport was "controlled by Germans," although he did not say if this was good or bad for African Americans. *Iowa Bystander*, 3 August 1900; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #2: "Editor's Observations," 121-22.

weapon, having said thirty minutes earlier that “if that nigger said anything to him, he would shoot him, or clean him out.” Three years later the second mate on the steamer *Peck* assaulted a black man and was made to pay damages. The most notorious incident, though, had far more legal significance and involved not working class folk but instead a privileged woman who refused to be restricted by whites in any way. On September 4, 1872, a 20 year old schoolteacher and piano instructor named Emma Coger boarded the steamer *S.S. Merrill* at Keokuk with her friend Mary Yancey, heading down river to their home of Quincy. When the clerk gave her a meal ticket with written instructions that she was to eat with the servants, she and Yancey then decided to leave until her friend George Caldwell spoke with the boat superintendent and then told her that she could board again; her new ticket, though, did not provide for any meal.⁶⁴⁸

Nevertheless, when dinner time came Coger gave the chambermaid exact change for a one-dollar, first-class dining ticket. She returned, however, with a second-class ticket that said “Colored girl.” After insisting that she “did not want that kind of a ticket,” Coger got a white man (who was either sympathetic to her cause or did not realize that she was black) to buy her the ticket that she wanted. When she tried to sit with white passengers in the dining room, the clerk pulled her chair away, declaring “You shall not eat here.” Coger later recalled that instead of “[asking] me as a gentleman should ask a lady,” addressed her “as if speaking to a dog”; if he had been more polite, she might have responded differently. She quickly sat in another chair and refused to leave, but three of the women at the table (including the captain’s wife) said “I will

⁶⁴⁸ *State v. Driscoll*, 44 Iowa 65, 66 (1876); *Records and Briefs for Cases before the Supreme Court of Iowa*, December Term 1876 (Des Moines), 551; Martens trans., (*Rock Island*) *Neue Volkszeitung*, 12 November 1879; *Records and Briefs for Cases before the Supreme Court of Iowa*, 33 June Term 1873 (Des Moines), 373-75, 381; Acton and Acton, “A Legal History of African-Americans: From the Iowa Territory to the State Sesquicentennial, 1838-1996,” in *Outside In*, 73.

not eat with a negro” and left. Two black workers, however, served her soup and refused to help remove her.⁶⁴⁹

Captain William Howard finally pulled her chair out from under her, and she accidentally pulled the tablecloth off while trying to regain her balance but still held on until he struck her on the knuckles and head, then dragged her away and hit her again. The battle to desegregate the first-class dining room had ended with a victory for the steamboat company, and Coger remained in her cabin for the rest of the trip. Assaults against black women on the Mississippi were common during this period, as chambermaids on southern steamboats were often attacked by their captains for “[resisting] exploitation and...[redefining] their liberty,” but those who sought legal recourse were usually rebuffed by judges who believed that “a steamboat master still had the right to discipline his servants.”⁶⁵⁰ These conflicts, though, were ultimately working-class struggles over labor, and it remained to be seen how an assault on a middle-class passenger in the North fit into the picture.

Five days later, Coger filed suit against the Northwestern Union Packet Company (NWUP) in Keokuk district court, seeking damages of five thousand dollars for assault and battery. Her papers (filed by a lawyer who had no experience in appellate civil rights cases) made no mention of race at all and focused solely on traditional tort law, while the NWUP chose the bizarre tactic of arguing that the incident had nothing to do with race while simultaneously defending its policy of racial segregation. Coger, its brief stated, was fully aware of “well established custom and regulation” and had verbally and physically assaulted the steamboat employees, calling the captain a “white-livered son of a bitch.” Her intent, the company

⁶⁴⁹ *Records and Briefs* (33 June 1873), 373-75, 379-80; Schwalm, “Freedom Was All They Had.”

⁶⁵⁰ *Records and Briefs* (33 June 1873), 374; Buchanan, *Black Life on the Mississippi*, 162-66, 168.

concluded, was to “make a disturbance to have revenge for some preconceived injury, and to get, if possible, some cause of action against defendant, by which to make some money.” To that end, it countersued her for forty dollars in damage to company property.⁶⁵¹

The trial began in February 1873 with an all-white, all-male jury hearing both sides’ account of the facts. Several steamboat employees testified that they had never seen any African Americans allowed at first or second-class tables, while Captain Howard repeated the claims made in the company’s brief. The ticket agent insisted that he had treated Coger “with every courtesy...as much so as I would treat any white lady” and suggested that she had been dishonest from the beginning since she was registered as “Emma Lane.” While protesting her second-class ticket, he continued, she had declared “I’m as white as you are, damn you,” to which he replied that he was “pretty dark” but still white, unlike her. These accounts were reiterated by eighteen other employees and passengers, who conceded that the captain struck her but considered it self-defense; only one used racist language, calling Coger a “nigger.”⁶⁵²

After the defense rested Emma Coger took the stand again, not to contest this version of the facts but to describe her personal background. This testimony, along with that of her friends, put her complicated racial identity on public display. Her parents were, she said, a mixed-race woman named Cynthia Coger and a white man named Lane, and who lived together in common-law marriage in Quincy.⁶⁵³ Coger also stated that as a person of only partial African ancestry,

⁶⁵¹ *Records and Briefs* (33 June 1873), 365, 367-68, 370-71; *Williams v. Triplett*, 3 Iowa 518 (1856). To this Coger simply responded that the property damage had been caused by the company’s own “wrong and uncivil conduct.”

⁶⁵² *Records and Briefs* (33 June 1873), 371, 375-89.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 389-90. The 1870 federal census (which was unavailable at the time) shows a 17 year old female named Emma Lane living with 59 year old Cynthia Coger and six other young people aged 25 to 4, all named Lane, Coger or Fountain. The household also included four white men working as baggage men, suggesting that Cynthia Coger was running a boarding house; none of the men are old enough to be Emma’s father. Cynthia Coger is listed as “mulatto,” while Emma Lane (and her young relations) appear to be listed as “white.” The 1880 census clearly lists Emma as “mulatto”; her father is again not included in the household. 1870 U.S. Census; 1880 U.S. Census.

some racial customs had never applied to her – she was, for example, the only student of color in her elite high school – but she also taught at an all-black school. She identified herself as a “colored woman,” no different than the “*colored school*” where she worked, but described her friend Mary Yancey as “[having] some *colored blood*” but not “a *colored woman*,” while George Caldwell was only “*partially colored*.” Cogger thus suggested that they belonged to a third racial group of people who had African ancestry but were not black, although she herself was. Two other friends (including George’s wife Sarah, who was also a schoolteacher), though, both of whom were also of mixed ancestry, testified that Cogger no longer associated with “what we called colored people” and that her mother could easily be mistaken for a white woman. None of this had been relevant to the defense witnesses, who identified all of these parties as “negro,” “yellow girl” or “mulatto girl”; Cogger and her friends made subtle racial distinctions based on their appearances and personal associations, but to others they were all black. It should also be noted that another of her witnesses, a steamboat employee, admitted knowledge of the racially exclusionary custom. It would seem that she was not trying to eradicate race-based restrictions but simply to avoid having them applied to her.⁶⁵⁴

The judge’s jury instructions declared that “all persons, unobjectionable in character and deportment, who observe all reasonable rules and regulations of the common carrier, who pay or offer to pay *first-class fare*, are entitled, *irrespective of race or color*, to receive upon the boats of the common carrier *first-class accommodations*” and that the jury could rule against her only if it believed that her removal had nothing to do with race. It did not, and she received \$250 in damages, only 5% of what she had requested. The NWUP then appealed to the Iowa Supreme

⁶⁵⁴ *Records and Briefs* (33 June 1873), 374, 376, 383-86, 389-91; *Cogger v. NWUPC*, 147. Cogger also conceded that she had been very angry during the incident but denied ever using foul language or making threats.

Court, arguing that steamboat companies were not required to grant blacks “the same rights and privileges as to white passengers” since this was a matter of custom, not law.⁶⁵⁵

Coger, on the other hand, used a radically different tactic that sought to make the racial question irrelevant. Her mixed ancestry, she argued, made her white under the law; thus the captain had actually expelled a white woman and could not use racial custom as a defense, while her angry refusal to leave could be justified by the fact that she was being treated like a black woman.⁶⁵⁶ She thus implied, as Homer Plessy would state more explicitly a quarter-century later, that she had been denied her property of whiteness. Just in case the Court decided that she was still black, though, Coger also offered an alternative argument. Although Iowa had no civil rights law, she argued,

“The idea...that a young lady of fine talents and good character, a teacher of music, and the head of one of the common schools in a city of the importance of Quincy, Illinois, should simply because she is one eighth colored; be made to eat in a pantry...is so repugnant to natural right, and the present moral sense of community, that we think the Judge of the District Court, could not have done less than he did do.”⁶⁵⁷

The Civil War Amendments left no doubt as to black citizenship and equal protection under the law, she continued, and the 14th Amendment in particular applied not only to not only to statutes but also to custom; if not, then “it will be found that there are many modes, aside from the enactment of positive statutes, by which these unfortunate people may continue to be persecuted by the dominant race.” She had entered the dining room simply because she was hungry, not because she wanted to force her companionship upon whites, and now she simply wanted the

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., 372, 391-97, 399-403.

⁶⁵⁶ Coger cited the old Ohio law that allowed people of predominantly white ancestry to vote, overlooking the fact that this law had been mooted by the 15th Amendment in 1870. Ibid., 405.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., 405-07.

Court to confirm that Iowa was “no respecter of persons on account of complexion.”⁶⁵⁸ Her argument thus offered little case precedent, statutory authority, or innovative legal thinking; having already won at the district court level, she was content to rest on that decision and appeal to the justices’ sense of fairness, hoping that they would be more sympathetic towards a woman who was either white or nearly white both physically and culturally.

As with previous civil rights cases, the court was in fact sympathetic. Although Chief Justice Joseph M. Beck (who had also once taught at a black school) conceded that the only legal issue at hand was whether or not common carriers could treat black passengers differently, his assessment of Cogger as different from other African Americans her still factored into his decision. Her “spirited resistance...defiant words...[and] pertinacity in demanding the recognition of her rights and in vindicating them,” he wrote, was “evidence of the Anglo-Saxon blood that flows in her veins,” and her “unwomanly courage” was a far cry from the “female delicacy and timidity so much praised.” In short, she had blurred both racial and gender lines in acting like a white man by using her body and mind to defend her rights. As was common in that era, Beck also erased her female identity by using masculine pronouns, writing “If the negro must submit to...accommodations inferior to those given to the white man, when transported by public carriers he is deprived of the benefits of this very principle of equality.”⁶⁵⁹ The law (including *Clark*), he concluded, guaranteed Cogger and other African Americans “every right arising in the affairs of life.” The lower court ruling was upheld, Iowa now had case law banning racial discrimination on common carriers two years before the Civil Rights Act of 1875 did the

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 408-10.

⁶⁵⁹ *Portrait and Biographical Album of Lee County, Iowa* (1887), 518-21; *Cogger v. NWUP*, 149, 152-54.

same across the country, and Emma Coger had won a major civil rights victory for a race that she hardly wanted to even be associated with.⁶⁶⁰

Coger v. NWUP proved to be one of the most progressive of the dozens of postwar state and federal cases regarding segregation on common carriers. Nearly every other court around the country refused to use it as precedent and instead used the “separate but equal” principle, ruling against black plaintiffs unless they had been provided with grossly inferior accommodations or barred entirely.⁶⁶¹ Although this uniqueness has earned it some notoriety in the scholarship, Coger has been depicted as a typical African American activist (albeit a more successful one) fighting for racial justice; this may be due to the fact that her claims to whiteness are mentioned only in the case’s supporting documents and not the actual holding.⁶⁶² The lack of additional primary sources makes it difficult to uncover her authentic sense of racial identity and determine if her contradictory statements and actions were, to quote Ian Haney Lopez, “recognition that racial dialogue must be framed in ways that pander to the mindset of those with power over one’s life” or “a partially real, rather than wholly calculated, subscription to the purity and superiority of Whites.”⁶⁶³ It is worth noting, though, that she taught at a black school in her hometown even though her appearance and proximity to the river provided an opportunity to pass for white someplace else. It should also be remembered that the black steamboat workers identified with her and expressed racial solidarity through their own quiet acts of resistance.

Furthermore, if the accounts of her colorful language were true, then she was in effect

⁶⁶⁰ *Coger v. NWUP*, 156-60.

⁶⁶¹ Lofgren, *The Plessy Case*, 116-47; Welke, *Recasting American Liberty*.

⁶⁶² Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 53-54; Lofgren, *The Plessy Case*, 116-47; Nieman, *Promises to Keep*, 52; Cook, *Baptism of Fire*, 196; Acton and Acton, “A Legal History of African Americans,” 73; Welke, *Recasting American Liberty*, 283-84; Michael I. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 475.

⁶⁶³ Ian F. Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 150.

challenging common notions of female respectability, arguing that she could call someone a “white-livered son of a bitch” and still be a lady. Even Coger herself may not have been able to discern where her real personal identity ended and her public performance of race and gender began.

Whether calculated or not, though, she was clearly trying to stretch the boundaries of whiteness, much as plaintiffs of Asian and Mexican descent did in other contemporary cases. While admitting that she was not wholly of European descent, Coger sought to show by her associations and ancestry that she was white enough to not be black anymore.⁶⁶⁴ Other civil rights plaintiffs in Iowa had also stressed their mixed ancestry, but Coger seems to be the only one attempting to create a new definition of whiteness. Like other privileged people, she also saw education as a way of distinguishing between different classes of blacks. As a learned woman, she felt herself entitled to better treatment, suggesting a social structure where people were classified by a combination of ancestry, education, class, and deportment.⁶⁶⁵ Ironically, though, Judge Beck had to reject this suggestion in order to rule in her Coger’s favor. There was little chance that he would declare her white and make the question of racial segregation legally moot, nor would he uphold segregation and grant her a special dispensation; either Coger could sit at a first-class table or no one of African descent could. Coger may have had less interest in advocating on behalf of the race than others who fought segregation on common carriers before or after her, but a decision in her favor nevertheless granted all African Americans the same right that she was fighting for. This unlikely soldier in the war against Jim Crow thus had to erase the

⁶⁶⁴ Haney Lopez, *White by Law*.

⁶⁶⁵ *Records and Briefs* (33 June 1873), 409-10.

racial and gender ambiguities that surrounded her and become a black woman in order to win her lawsuit.

The issue of segregation on common carriers reemerged a decade later, when black Iowans joined other African Americans in mass protest after the U.S. Supreme Court's 1883 *Civil Rights Cases* decision struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875. The *Conservator* offered a "scathing review" of the decision, while blacks in Cedar Rapids and Keokuk called on the Iowa legislature to restore their rights on a state level. This pressure had an immediate impact. At the next legislative session three lawmakers introduced civil rights bills, one of which became the 1884 Iowa Civil Rights Act, the first of twelve such laws passed by northern states. The new law declared that all people were entitled to the "full and equal enjoyment" of inns, public conveyances, barber shops, theaters and "other places of amusement"; in 1892 it was expanded to include bath houses and all businesses that served food or refreshments.⁶⁶⁶ When they received a telegraph stating that the bill had been ratified, Sioux City blacks held a massive public celebration that included the firing of a large gun.⁶⁶⁷

Efforts to test the strength of the new statute, though, quickly proved futile, showing that legislation-based civil rights efforts did not always reap results even when they seemingly succeeded. In April 1884, a Cedar Rapids barber named Joseph Bowlin was turned away from a

⁶⁶⁶ *Arkansas Mansion*, 3 November 1883, quoted in Marianne L. Engelman Lado, "A Question of Justice: African-American Legal Perspectives on the 1883 Civil Rights Cases," 70 *Chi.-Kent. L. Rev.* 1123 (1995): fn270; Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 71; Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 95; Kueter, "Black History in Linn County"; Davis, "Alexander Clark Memorial"; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twentieth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: Geo. E. Roberts, 1884), 41, 66, 338, 567; *Journal of the Senate of the Twentieth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: Geo. E. Roberts, 1884), 42, 246-47, 443; Harlan Hahn, "Civil Liberties in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 33 (1965): 77; *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Twentieth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: George E. Roberts, 1884), 107-08; *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: G.H. Ragsdale, 1892), 68. Massachusetts, New York and Kansas had passed similar laws during Reconstruction. Nieman, *Promises to Keep*, 86, 103.

⁶⁶⁷ *Sioux City Times*, 3 March 1875, quoted in Alan D. Ricks, "A History of Sioux City's Black Community to 1885" (1973), 12.

skating rink by the manager and immediately brought suit, seeking one thousand dollars in damages. Bowlin offered as evidence the rink's advertisement stating that it "would be open to all persons," but the circuit court ruled that he was not entitled to enter without the owner's consent.⁶⁶⁸ For the first time, an African American would go before the state Supreme Court on the losing side of a civil rights suit, and at a time when this issue was no longer a major concern for the Court. Bowlin's brief offered his own conception of the intangible benefits of equal citizenship, citing the 1884 Iowa Civil Rights Act and stating

"We are aware that this may seem a trifling case; in money it may be so, but citizenship, equal rights and good name are not measured by money. Equality before the law means more than the simple right to live. It means home, family and public respect. It means good order and self respect, as well as the respect that all ought to have from their fellow men when he conducts himself as a peaceable and law abiding citizens, and that he, so long as he remains such, shall be protected from annoying and selfish insults."⁶⁶⁹

The rink proprietors countered that their skating rink was private property and also pointed out that it was mostly patronized by young girls; this was ostensibly meant to show that it catered to a specific demographic, but it also subtly raised the fear of miscegenation with the image of an adult black male socially interacting with white girls. Although Justice Joseph Reed's ruling made no direct reference to this, he nonetheless agreed that the rink was private property and not a "place of public amusement" since it was not licensed by the state. In the end, he concluded, Bowlin's race was legally irrelevant even though it was the reason why he had been excluded in the first place.⁶⁷⁰ Thus the first interpretation of the state civil rights law was a very narrow one, granting the majority of Iowa's businesses a license to discriminate. Earlier civil rights cases had been decided by more liberal judges in more liberal times, but now Reed

⁶⁶⁸ "Summary of Neighborhood Research Project"; *Records and Briefs for Cases before the Supreme Court of Iowa*, December Term 1885 (Des Moines), 208-09.

⁶⁶⁹ *Records and Briefs* (December 1885), 210-11; *Bowlin v. Lyon*, 67 Iowa 536, 540 (1885).

⁶⁷⁰ *Records and Briefs* (December 1885), 212; *Bowlin v. Lyon*, 536-40.

helped move the Court in a more conservative direction. August Richter's *Demokrat* lamented this change, noting that an institution that had once been a key partner in civil rights efforts was now an impediment; if such a decision had come down in a southern state, he concluded, Iowans would "howl and swing the 'bloody shirt.'"⁶⁷¹

Bowlin was actually consistent with national trends, as many courts around the country ruled against black plaintiffs in similar cases by looking for any semantic loophole in the civil rights laws. In 1887, for example, an Oskaloosa barber was convicted after refusing to shave a black man, but the Iowa Supreme Court found insufficient proof that "the defendant was criminally guilty of discriminating."⁶⁷² Eighteen years later, a black man was forced to eat at a separate table in the boarding house where he and other members of a jury were sequestered, but when he sued, the Court ruled that the term "eating house" did not apply when meals were being served "in pursuance of a previous arrangement for particular individuals."⁶⁷³

Unlike the suffrage amendment and the *Clark* decision, the 1884 Civil Rights Act thus proved to be a paper tiger. One of the only examples of successful desegregation did not involve the statute at all. When a restaurant in the state capitol building refused to seat John Lay Thompson with white colleagues in 1894, a special legislative committee threatened to expel him from the building, and the restaurant was desegregated independently of the court system.⁶⁷⁴ This

⁶⁷¹ Stiles, *Recollection and Sketches*, 905; *Bench and Bar of Iowa*, 8; *Journal of the Senate of the Eleventh General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: F.W. Palmer, 1866), 636; *Senate Journal*, 12th G.A., 264; *Der Demokrat*, 18 December 1885.

⁶⁷² *State v. Hall*, 72 Iowa 525 (1887); Acton and Acton, "A Legal History of African-Americans," 74. Additional information about this case is difficult to find since there the supporting documents have not survived, unlike most of the other cases discussed in this chapter.

⁶⁷³ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 249. With the help of black attorney S. Joe Brown, the juror successfully appealed to the state Supreme Court. Smith, *Emancipation*, 454.

⁶⁷⁴ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Fifth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: G.H. Ragsdale, 1894), 431, 497.

atypical outcome, though, was driven by the obvious hypocrisy of lawmakers condoning inequality in their place of employment, and it was not repeated elsewhere. It became common practice for restaurants, movie theaters, and other businesses to segregate black customers, charge them higher prices, or deny them service altogether until change finally began to occur in the 1940s.⁶⁷⁵

Most African Americans simply decided “not to risk further insults.” The humiliation of being turned away, the cost and time involved in bringing suit, and the likelihood that they would lose anyway proved a strong deterrent.⁶⁷⁶ The few exceptions were affluent leaders who could afford to hire lawyers and felt a responsibility to advocate for the community (or a sense of entitlement to better treatment). In 1885, Henry Ridings of Sioux City publicly declared his intention “to determine what virtue there is in the civil rights bill” by suing barber shops that refused to serve African Americans, including those owned by fellow blacks.⁶⁷⁷ The following year, though, a restaurant in the same city refused to serve an interracial group, and the party all walked out together but failed to bring legal action. Most African Americans chose instead to patronize friendly businesses or to create their own, although their small numbers made the second option less feasible than in the South or large northern cities. When Burlington boarding houses refused to accept African Americans, for example, they protested in the *Hawk-Eye* but

⁶⁷⁵ These incidents included a Des Moines restaurant charging black customers double the regular price for pie; a Fort Madison theater forcing blacks to sit in the balcony; and Des Moines cemetery refusing to bury a black woman in the “white section” even after her sons had bought a lot there. Melinda Voss, “The ‘Fighting Press,’” *Des Moines Register*, 8 June 1993; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 249-50; “Black Residents,” *Fort Madison Daily Democrat*, 29 April 1988. Nearly thirty civil rights cases were filed during the late 1930s and early 1940s, but all were dismissed or ended with “not guilty” verdicts. The first sign of change came in 1948, when Edna Griffin successfully sued Katz Drug Store in Des Moines for refusing to serve her. Jason J. Clayworth, “Civil-Rights Trailblazer,” *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 18 June 1998.

⁶⁷⁶ Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 163.

⁶⁷⁷ It does not seem that Ridings followed through on his promise. *Sioux City Journal*, 23 January 1880, 5 May 1885, quoted in Ricks, “A History of Sioux City’s Black Community to 1885,” 13, 21.

then converted an old foundry into a dormitory and vocational school for young migrants.⁶⁷⁸ As in other parts of the country, the hardening of race relations caused black Iowans to turn away from the legal and political system for help and look inward instead.

Even as some doors were closed to black Iowans, others remained open. In March 1877 a Des Moines-based militia unit called the Looby Guards was admitted into the Iowa National Guard. Like all other companies, the forty-six members of Iowa's first all-black militia unit were provided guns by the state but had to pay for their armory space and uniforms, thus limiting membership to a relatively small number of people. Their first public appearance was an armory "inauguration" and evening gathering. That September, they marched at Ottumwa's Emancipation Day celebration, the first of many such appearances around the state, and the *Daily State Register* remarked that they "presented a very handsome appearance with their new uniforms and nicely kept arms."⁶⁷⁹

With border violence and local Native American wars in the past and Des Moines far from the mob violence of Iowa's frontier, the Looby Guards were called into action only once, protecting a prisoner at Polk County Jail from being attacked by a mob in 1885. Otherwise, they devoted their time to weekly drilling and appearances at black community events around the state. Like other black institutions, this service offered power and influence to people who otherwise lacked it in their daily lives. George H. Johnson worked as a common laborer but was

⁶⁷⁸ *Sioux City Journal*, 4 April 1885, quoted in Ricks, "A History of Sioux City's Black Community to 1885," 17; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 18 September 1910, quoted in WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 262, 265.

⁶⁷⁹ This was one of many all-black militia companies formed in more than twenty states between 1865 and 1914. Michael W. Vogt, "Black Guardsmen Were Pioneers in Iowa Military," *Des Moines Register*, 26 February 2004; Vogt, "Black Company Plays Role in History of Iowa Guard," *Iowa Militiaman* (Summer 2004); "The Day of Jubilee."

a captain in the Guards, and in 1878 he and two other officers were able to parlay their militia membership into jobs with the police department. Finally, like many other companies around the state, the Looby Guards were mustered out of service in 1887.⁶⁸⁰ For ten years, the organization had played an important role in the self-identity of African Americans, both for the members and for the much greater number of people who watched them.

The Looby Guards were not the only African Americans in the state with newfound military experience. George Woodson fought in the west against Native Americans before becoming a lawyer and activist in Oskaloosa, while Virginian John Heath moved to Des Moines after a leg injury forced him out of the service (perhaps at the suggestion of his commanding officer Edward Hatch, a native Iowan), where he married and had twelve children. The strangest story, though, belongs to John Hays, who was an itinerant laborer in the South until news of Custer's defeat at Little Big Horn inspired him to join the cavalry, not out of a sense of patriotism but simply because "the thought of life in the army attracted him." Despite having never ridden a horse before, he served with distinction, and when his service was over he and his mother settled in Albia, where he worked as a junk collector, learned to read, and defended the Klu Klux Klan because he shared its views on interracial marriage.⁶⁸¹ The service of these few men did not have the same political impact as that of the 60th twenty years earlier, but it still enabled African Americans to continue using the rhetoric of loyalty and military service to advocate for equal citizenship.

⁶⁸⁰ Vogt, "Black Company Plays Role in History of Iowa Guard"; Vogt, "Black Guardsmen Were Pioneers in Iowa Military."

⁶⁸¹ Morris, "Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation," 100-03; Dobak and Phillips, *The Black Regulars*; Dinty Moore, "John Hays, Negro Centenarian, Recites Slavery Experiences and Tells of Life," *Des Moines Tribune*, 21 December 1927.

This did not, however, save the capital's black community from the injustices of the legal system. When a young dressmaker named Ella Barrett was murdered in 1874, it was suspected that powerful whites had hired black men to keep her from disclosing sensitive information. After numerous arrests, three men were indicted. A "stout, surly negro man" named Henry Red, thought to be the ringleader, was sentenced to life in prison. Andy Smith, who had been through "several difficulties" in the past but had a better reputation than Red, was also convicted. The third man was Archie Brown, a porter at an upscale hotel; his powerful friends hired a lawyer who won an acquittal, and he continued living in Des Moines until his death. Less than a year after this case, a policeman shot and killed an unarmed black man but was cleared of all charges, although he was so distraught that he eventually went insane.⁶⁸² Overt racial conflict seemed less of a problem in the capital than in the Mississippi River towns, but it was clear that African Americans still had little reason to trust the criminal justice system. At the same time, the Barrett case also showed the continuing importance of white patronage, which for Archie Brown made the difference between freedom and prison.

Around the same time, an entirely new black community was rapidly emerging in northwestern Iowa. A few African Americans had lived in Sioux City since the 1850s, when it was nothing more than a frontier outpost. One was John Brazo, an old frontiersman who lived there briefly in the 1860s and became known for playing the violin at social functions. Most early migrants, though, came to Sioux City from the east and south, drawn by river work like others in eastern Iowa in earlier years. They lived in low-quality, multi-occupancy homes near the railroad tracks and worked as porters, laborers and rivermen. The labor was dangerous, and employers

⁶⁸² Porter, *Annals of Polk County and Des Moines* (1898), 524-25, 543-50.

placed little value on their workers' lives. Boat officers, for example, did not slow down to save anyone unfortunate enough to fall in the river; "they did not," one early settler later recalled, "value one negro's life very highly."⁶⁸³

Although the war did not spur much migration, by 1870 there were a few dozen African Americans, enough to create their own downtown neighborhood in the Second Ward and encourage two men named Weyman Boyd and William Boyer to run for constable positions. A year later, the *Sioux City Times* declared "An increase in our colored population is lately noticeable. This portion of our citizens fill some of the most important positions about the city, in the line of carrying goods and water, cleansing of garments, cropping of hair and scraping of beard. We welcome these new comers." Black workers in fact were instrumental in Sioux City's transformation into a major western railroad hub. Railroads, along with the beef industry and the 1875 gold rush in the Black Hills of South Dakota (many people passed through Sioux City on their way there) further encouraged the city's rapid expansion. Its population quintupled in a decade, reaching 38,000 by 1890, and modern amenities such as electric lights, gasworks, cable cars, and waterworks had been built. Much of this work was done by African Americans. Local whites later recalled (somewhat patronizingly) that the streets of the city were constantly filled with the sounds of black work songs, as laborers laid down boardwalks, asphalt and pipe. These workers were part of a community of more than 500 African Americans, nearly all of whom lived in the same downtown neighborhood.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸³ Hewitt, "So Few Undesirables," 160; Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa's Black Legacy*, 81, 84; *Woodbury County History, Iowa* (Iowa Writers' Program, 1942), 73, 110; Ricks, "A History of Sioux City's Black Community to 1885," 3-4.

⁶⁸⁴ "Troublesome," *Sioux City Daily Times*, 16 October 1870; *Sioux City Daily Times*, 20 April 1870; "Election Returns," *Sioux City Daily Times*, 13 October 1870; *Sioux City Times*, 6 May 1871, quoted in Ricks, "A History of Sioux City's Black Community to 1885," 5, 10-12, 15; Buchanan, *Black Life on the Mississippi*, 175-78; *History of the Counties of Woodbury and Plymouth, Iowa, Including an Extended Sketch of Sioux City* (Chicago: A. Warner &

A few migrants achieved greater success as entrepreneurs. Before the waterworks system was built, Cass Davis sold barrels of water that he had hauled from the Missouri River. Virginia native Caroline Woodin ran a laundry service and hosted possum suppers described in the press as an example of “the wonders of Negro cooking”; both businesses were invaluable to the many single men moving to the city. Nearly all of the barbers were black, including W.E. Gibson, a veteran who regularly spoke at Independence Day celebrations; when his razor was stolen, the *Times* lamented the crime, noting that “his shaving machine was an old-time friend during the war.” The press probably felt less positively about the city’s gambling dens and dance halls, but they also provided what many considered an essential service in the growing city.⁶⁸⁵

The most prosperous blacks, though, were G.C. “Papa” Carr and Henry Ridings, who both owned hotels that catered to the workers. Little is known about Carr aside from his reputation for a well-groomed appearance and penmanship, but Ridings’ eccentric behavior was well recorded. He had served in a Kansas regiment during the war, came to Sioux City with his wife Rhoda in 1869, and made so much money with his hotel that he eventually purchased most of the property in the Second Ward. According to one story, when Ridings discovered that a railroad was being built across his land, he drove the workers away with a shotgun and forced the company to pay him \$21,000 for a lien. His many businesses included the Burnt Cork Saloon, which drew customers with minstrel entertainers and a pet bear that he barbecued for his patrons when it died.⁶⁸⁶

Co., 1890-91), 122-30; *Woodbury County History* (1942), 120-21; S.E. Gilbert, “The History of the Negro in Sioux City from 1855 to 1900,” Blacks in Iowa Collection, SHSI-IC, quoted in Hewitt, “So Few Undesirables,” 161-62.

⁶⁸⁵ *Woodbury County History* (1942), 110; Gilbert, “The History of the Negro in Sioux City,” quoted in Hewitt, “So Few Undesirables,” 161-62; *Sioux City Times*, 10 July 1870, 15 January 1875, 7 May 1939, quoted in Ricks, “A History of Sioux City’s Black Community to 1885,” 7-9, 13.

⁶⁸⁶ *Woodbury County History* (1942), 111; *Sioux City Times*, 30 March 1870, quoted in Ricks, “A History of Sioux City’s Black Community to 1885,” 6; Hewitt, “So Few Undesirables,” 163, 168.

The bar was also known for its brawls, which were reported on by the *Times* in a derisive fashion that mocked black political activity by viewing it in light of black criminality. Ridings had his own answer for such attitudes; on one occasion he was heard to say, only half-jokingly, that “the Creator painted such of the first of mankind as were worth the blackening, and left only the cheap imperfect specimens uncolored.” He had more difficulty, though, dealing with political pressure. In 1884 he became the first person cited for violating a new ordinance that required all saloons to purchase a \$25 city license, although dozens of other saloons had also broken the law; this may have been why he declared to everyone, including the judge, that he would not pay the fine. The outcome of the case is not known, but the city made the issue irrelevant shortly thereafter by banning all saloons.⁶⁸⁷ Sioux City also became home to less controversial institutions. Both of its black churches and the black Masonic lodge sought close relations with white elites and survived in part with their support, although Malone AME, which had been paid for entirely by the members and their fundraisers, was somewhat more independent than many others around the state.⁶⁸⁸ Although this was a new city, the migrants created the same institutions and interracial connections that African Americans had long found useful, and their labor was perhaps even more essential to the economy.

Despite this, racial dynamics were far from egalitarian in Northwest Iowa, one of the most conservative parts of the state. Although whites rejected the violence of southern race relations – Rev. F.E. Day, for example, stated that he would rather dine with a black man than

⁶⁸⁷ *Sioux City Times*, 14 June 1870, and *Sioux City Journal*, 7 January 1885, 16 April 1885, 5 May 1885, 23 January 1880, quoted in Ricks, “A History of Sioux City’s Black Community to 1885,” 6-7, 13, 15-16, 21; *Woodbury County History* (1942), 121.

⁶⁸⁸ Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa’s Black Legacy*, 81, 84; Barnes, *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, 39, 41-42; *Sioux City Negro Year Book 1977-1978* (Ruffin, 1978); *Sioux City Journal*, 1-2 May 1885, quoted in Ricks, “A History of Sioux City’s Black Community to 1885,” 17-20.

with Senator Ben Tillman – they envisioned “continued accommodation with blacks” from a presumption of white supremacy.⁶⁸⁹ Local Democrats retained considerable power, and Republicans were far less progressive than their counterparts elsewhere. The *Daily Times* mixed its occasionally liberal sentiments with editorials suggesting that blacks did not deserve their newly won voting rights and should not be allowed to hire whites. Blackface minstrelsy was hugely popular for several reasons. As in other regions, it satisfied white fascination with southern black culture (which many residents had little firsthand experience with) and affirmed racial segregation by suggesting that blacks could never successfully enter white society, but it carried additional power in Sioux City. Whites there lived in a rapidly growing city during a time of great national unrest and change, and minstrelsy brought a sense of stability by reminding them that no matter what else changed, African Americans were still inferior.

Racial hostility was even stronger in other parts of the region, inducing one small black community to erase itself from existence. The few Exodusters who passed through Iowa on their way to Kansas and Oklahoma included a group that went to Loess Hill in rural Monona County, fifty miles south of Sioux City and on the outskirts of the tiny village of Moorhead.⁶⁹⁰ They lived in sod houses and worked for a farmer named Adam Miers, who according to local folklore was married to a black woman and encouraged this settlement to gain a source of cheap labor. Other residents petitioned the courts to have the migrants removed from what they now called “Nigger

⁶⁸⁹ *Sioux City Daily Times*, 21 April 1870, 24 November 1870; Hewitt, “Blackface in the White Mind,” 68-74, 79; *Sioux City Times*, 27 May 1875, quoted in Ricks, “A History of Sioux City’s Black Community to 1885,” 14. Minstrel shows and productions of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” were also popular elsewhere in Iowa – even in abolitionist villages like Mount Pleasant and Salem – until the 1960s. Jaynes, *Highlights of Henry County History*, 72-73, 75; Fisher, *History of Washington County* (1978), 409; Kenneth Norris, “The History Corner: Minstrel Shows Enjoyed Over the Years,” *Fremont Gazette*, 12 July 1990; Hewitt, “So Few Undesirables,” 159-60. See also Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 109.

⁶⁹⁰ For example, a band of black farmers briefly stopped in Allamakee County in the northeastern corner of the state before continuing on to Kansas. “Interview with DeEdwin White, Letter Carrier, 7 June 1978,” Transcript 37, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Oral History Interview Transcripts (Burlington), Iowa Federation of Labor/SHSI-IC.

Hollow,” and although this effort was unsuccessful, the colony disappeared anyway. By 1890 the county’s black population had significantly decreased, leaving only a few dozen fading tombstones at the “Black Cemetery.” One account states that the migrants kept heading west, but other stories hold that they married local whites. Efforts to trace this history have been thwarted by reluctant record keepers because “some current-day area residents might not want to have it known that their ancestors include black slaves,” but this has not stopped the community from spreading rumors about who might or might have black ancestry.⁶⁹¹ If these stories are true, then the descendants of the Loess Hill settlers helped to cover up the colony’s very existence in order to protect their own white privilege.

Another group of Exodusters went to Council Bluffs, a suburb of Omaha just across the Missouri River. The white response to their presence was similar to that in Monona County, but there was also an existing black community to aid them. When fifty people arrived in July 1879 and asked the mayor to help them find jobs, he responded that “[he] doesn’t object to the colored population, but is down on shipping southern negroes here by big squads” and that “Council Bluffs don’t want them and has no use for them.” Another group of 150, though, was treated more hospitably in nearby Plattsmouth, Nebraska. Some were political refugees who had left the South for fear of being murdered; their unofficial leader Richmond Lewis, who had been a sheriff in Louisiana, said that “it was only a question of time when a colored man who had any opinions of his own was killed.” Others had left simply because they wanted fair wages and an overall better quality of life. When a skeptical reporter from the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* asked

⁶⁹¹ Lee Jorgensen, “Charred Bricks Mark Iowa Site of Negro Colony in 1860s,” *Sioux City Sunday Journal*, 27 September 1964; Virginia Connelly, “‘Black Cemetery’ Serves as Landmark of Early Colony,” *Sioux City Journal*, 27 December 1986; Brett Hayworth, “One Last Reminder: Rural Cemetery Recalls First Black Settlers in Monona County,” *Sioux City Journal*, 16 May 2004; 1870 U.S. Census; 1880 U.S. Census.

“Did any one induce or coax you to come north by representing that you could live here easier and without work,” they responded “No: we came here to get peace...we want to earn a home, and are willing to work.”⁶⁹² This convinced the reporter that the migrants were “no more paupers than thousands of whites and foreigners, who come west with only their brawn and muscle and mother wit to make a living.”⁶⁹³

The *Nonpareil* generally offered guarded but nonetheless racist support to the “honest looking darkies” who had left the South to “make their true value as workers known and to free themselves from the menacing bands which have kept them down, almost as securely as slavery.” With help from Council Bluffs black preacher P.C. Phillips, many got jobs as wood choppers or farm laborers, while white residents raised money to help them buy food and improve their squalid living conditions. A resident of Denison (seventy miles to the northeast) also sent word that there was work for farm laborers and domestic servants in his town, but after a few months the migrants continued on to Kansas, leaving no permanent communities behind.⁶⁹⁴ The history of their brief residence in Iowa, though, echoed several of the themes found with blacks elsewhere in the state: the desire to leave racial hostility in the South and find employment and peace in the North; whites’ willingness to tolerate their presence in small numbers due to their value as workers; and solidarity within the black community.

African Americans and liberal whites mobilized to assist the struggling pilgrims. Aid came from the southwest and from the Tri-Cities, where the residents organized an Emigrant Aid Society at the AME church and sent over \$1,400 in food and clothing to Kansas. The Quaker-

⁶⁹² “The Colored Exodus,” *Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil*, 12 July 1879; “The Exodus Continues,” *Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil*, 20 July 1879.

⁶⁹³ “The Exodus Continues.”

⁶⁹⁴ “The Colored Exodus”; “The Exodus Continues”; “Rev. Phillips,” *Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil*, 20 July 1879; “African Arrivals,” *Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil*, 22 July 1879.

educated preacher John Smith traveled there to teach school, while editorials in the *Chicago Conservator* offered moral support.⁶⁹⁵ It would seem that the Exodusters' struggles reminded black Iowans of their own efforts to escape from southern racism and find freedom, work and equal citizenship in earlier years.

Although most of Iowa's own black postwar migrants (save those in Sioux City) had come from Missouri or nearby states and settled in well-established towns, another group of Exodusters in south central Iowa served as a major exception. Back in the early 1840s, a government surveyor traveled through Mahaska County and wrote what proved to be the local understatement of the century: "Coal will be found in quantities." There was in fact so much coal in Mahaska that the state geologist later estimated that it could cover the entire county in a layer five feet tall. Early white settlers collected it from along the Des Moines River and burned it for warmth, but by the 1870s the growth of railroads caused the coal industry to begin in earnest. In 1871 the Central Railroad of Iowa, a subsidiary of the Chicago and North Western Railway Company, connected Mahaska County with Chicago and the South by extension; five years later, the Consolidation Coal Company (CCC) was created as another subsidiary of the Chicago & North Western.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹⁵ Unidentified clipping, Richter Papers; "Davenport Briefs," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 22 March 1880; "Woman's Home Missionary Association: Monthly Report," *The American Missionary* 35 (January 1881): 118; Davis, "Alexander Clark Memorial"; "The Negro Exodus," *Davenport Democrat*, 26 May 1879; *Ames Intelligencer*, 25 April 1879.

⁶⁹⁶ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 280-81; *History of Mahaska County* (1878), 259, 520; H.E. Pride, "Iowa Coal," date unknown, 11, 21; Hubert L. Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa* (Des Moines: State of Iowa, 1965), 27; *The Heritage of Mahaska County, Iowa* (Walsworth Publishing Co., 1999), 73; David G. Smith, "From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines: A: Descendants and Neighbors of Catherine Foster," *Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society* 16 (1997): 113. By 1875, the Chicago & North Western was the second most prosperous railway in the state, with 355 miles of track and total assets of nearly \$3.7

The CCC's largest camp was known as Muchakinock or "Muchy" for short; this curious name came from, according to various stories, a shortened version of the phrase "(How) much can I knock" (referring to the huge yields) or a Native American word meaning "execrable," "bad crossing," or "place for children."⁶⁹⁷ This boom also caused the nearby county seat of Oskaloosa to grow rapidly, as merchants, saloon keepers, and other entrepreneurs moved in to do business with the workers. An 1874 news report declared Muchakinock the "neatest mining town we have seen," with well-kept homes and a post office. In 1879, though, the mostly European immigrant miners threatened to go on strike if their wages were not increased, leading the CCC to turn to a new group to solve its labor problem. A few strikebreaking Exodusters from Missouri had gone to nearby Albia only weeks earlier, and now labor agents went to north central Virginia to recruit more, promising fair treatment and equal wages that were nearly ten times their pay as tenant farmers. The decision to travel so far for strikebreakers when there was a large labor pool much closer in Missouri actually made sense in light of Iowa's racial attitudes. Recruiting strikebreakers from their southern neighbor was cheaper in the short term, but it could have encouraged other African Americans to make the trip, triggering old fears of a mass influx of Missourians. By recruiting Virginians, the company had a better chance of controlling the flow of migration and thus other racial factors as well.⁶⁹⁸

million. *Legislative Documents Submitted to the Sixteenth General Assembly of the State of Iowa II* (Des Moines: R.P. Clarkson, 1876), 411.

⁶⁹⁷ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 281; "Muchakinock Items," *Oskaloosa Weekly Herald*, 20 May 1875; *History of Mahaska County* (1878), 258, 519; Helen Hannan, "Muchakinock: Wild Coal Town Now a Dump," *Ottumwa Courier*, 5 March 1979. Some people also called it "The Hollow" for reasons that remain unclear. "In the Hollow," *Weekly Oskaloosa Herald*, 25 November 1886.

⁶⁹⁸ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 281-85; "Muchakinock Items"; *History of Mahaska County* (1878), 258, 519-521; Hannan, "Wild Coal Town Now a Dump"; Cheryl Powers, "Oskaloosa Rotarians Hear History of Enterprise, Muchakinock, Buxton," *Ottumwa Courier*, 12 July 1975; "Muchakinock," *Oskaloosa Weekly Herald*, 27 August 1874; Minnie London, *As I Remember* (Cedar Falls, IA: Explorations in Iowa History Project), 1; Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, 27, 55; *Heritage of Mahaska County, Iowa*

The first group of seventy arrived in March 1880, part of a larger movement that brought thousands of African Americans to mines in the Midwest and Upper South during this period. There was some concern over their safety, given the racial hostility of northern white miners. The Missouri strikebreakers already in Albia had already been shot at by the white workers they were replacing; they fired back, but no one was hit, and the state militia came in to prevent further violence.⁶⁹⁹ Meanwhile, thirty of the Virginians brought to Muchy turned back in fear of violence before they even started working, while others were moved to a camp at nearby What Cheer after riots broke out. When the strikers attacked them there and set fire to their belongings, the CCC decided that it had had enough and sent them back to Muchy with armed guards.⁷⁰⁰ Strikebreakers who were new to the profession were paired with more experienced workers, and the mines resumed production in spite of the opposition.⁷⁰¹

This situation was motivated in part by political concerns. Black migrants had recently helped the Republicans win elections in Indiana, and although the GOP easily controlled Mahaska County, the parties were much more closely matched in neighboring Monroe County.⁷⁰² With Muchakinock only a few miles away, Democratic leaders feared that the miners would spill over the county line and change the balance of power, so they attempted to

(1999), 73; Smith, "From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines," 113; Hickenlooper, *An Illustrated History of Monroe County* (1896), 187. H.W. McNeill would later use his experience with black strikebreakers in Muchy to deal with an even larger labor stoppage in Franklin County, Washington State in 1891. Ronald L. Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America: Race, Class, and Community Conflict, 1780-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 89.

⁶⁹⁹ Smith, "From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines," 113; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 284-85; Hickenlooper, *An Illustrated History of Monroe County* (1896), 187; Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, 55.

⁷⁰⁰ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 285.

⁷⁰¹ Hickenlooper, *An Illustrated History of Monroe County* (1896), 187; Hannan, "Wild Coal Town Now a Dump"; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 285.

⁷⁰² The Republicans won every federal, state and county race in Mahaska County in 1876, most by 2 votes to 1, but in Monroe County the Democrats won five extremely close races for local positions and nearly carried the presidential and gubernatorial vote as well. *History of Mahaska County* (1878), 342-44, 508.

disenfranchise the migrants on the grounds that they had not lived in Iowa long enough; some even warned them to leave town before the elections “lest they become paupers.” Republican leaders, though, quickly rallied around them. Governor Gear gave a speech to “thoroughly inform them as to their rights, so that they cannot be imposed on or deprived of franchise on such groundless quibbles,” while GOP newspapers vowed to bring charges against any electoral official who violated those rights.⁷⁰³ A few temporary laborers from Virginia had become the center of a statewide political controversy simply by living in a contested region and refusing to surrender their constitutional rights. In the end, though, the miners stayed in Mahaska, where their votes merely added to Republican dominance. It is possible that GOP leaders discouraged them from voting in Monroe since Indiana Republicans had lost credibility due to events there, or perhaps the migrants themselves did not realize their potential voting power; since their point of view was not recorded, it is difficult to do more than hypothesize.

This controversy was a sign that the workers, originally meant as a temporary solution to the company’s problem, had become a “permanent source of cheap labor in a sparsely settled region.”⁷⁰⁴ They moved out of barracks and into family homes, albeit in a segregated district.⁷⁰⁵ Hundreds more came in the fall of 1880, recruited by the CCC and by encouraging letters that the first group wrote home. Other African Americans who had been working as barbers, cooks

⁷⁰³ “Colored Colliers,” *Iowa State Daily Register*, date unknown, BRS Records, Box 12, Folder 14; *Boone Standard*, 25 September 1880. These concerns were raised six years later, albeit with less controversy; the *Oskaloosa Herald* reported that “during the election some of our Democratic friends were very much concerned about the mining labor in ‘The Hollow,’ where most of the labor is colored.” “In the Hollow.”

⁷⁰⁴ Hannan, “Wild Coal Town Now a Dump.”

⁷⁰⁵ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 285. Former miner Andy Swanson later recalled that “darkies” were banned from living in “Swede town,” whose Scandinavian residents had themselves been strikebreakers only a few years earlier. “Came Here Before the Railroads Arrived: Andy Swanson Tells Oskaloosa Local History,” *Oskaloosa Herald*, 16 April 1966.

and porters in Oskaloosa since the Civil War now joined the mining business.⁷⁰⁶ Muchakinock's black community was growing even more rapidly than Sioux City's; there had not been such a large migration wave in Iowa since the war. This did not go unnoticed by the *Oskaloosa Herald*, which declared:

“The hardworking and saving colored men who are working in the coal mines are respectable, quiet, temperate, saving and decent people. Their children attend school; the parents attend church; the Negro miners do not work three days a week and go on a drunk the other four; they do not have monthly riots...they do not ‘strike’ every sixty days because the company declines to permit them to manage its business; in short they conduct themselves in a perfectly orderly, manful, industrious and honest manner, just as honest and thrifty workmen every where do. In the less than a year they have been resident miners in Iowa, they have done more work per man by thirty per cent than any other class of miners ever found in the Iowa coal field, and at this hour have more savings on deposit than all the white predecessors have had during their years of service in the mines...The mining Negroes are notoriously good citizens, and are confessed the best miners ever employed in the state.”⁷⁰⁷

Only a few years earlier, the *Herald* had offered similar praise to the white miners that it now labeled as lazy, violent drunkards.⁷⁰⁸ The mines had brought such prosperity to Oskaloosa that its editors were probably happy to praise workers of any race so long as the economy kept growing, but the article nonetheless showed that at least some local whites, like others before them, were willing to challenge the old desire to keep the state white, if only for economic reasons, provided that they retained the balance of power.

Within a few years, increased production enabled Muchy to expand to nearly five thousand men, women and children.⁷⁰⁹ This unincorporated camp included Baxterville, Iowa's smallest incorporated town. After the CCC rejected entrepreneur Jack Baxter's proposal to open a saloon on his property in 1887 (not for moral reasons but because it did not want him cutting in

⁷⁰⁶ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 285-86; Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, 49.

⁷⁰⁷ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 286-87.

⁷⁰⁸ “Muchakinock,” *Oskaloosa Weekly Herald*, 27 August 1874.

⁷⁰⁹ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 287-88.

on its drugstore profits), he had the land platted and incorporated and held elections where black miners were elected to every position except mayor; the new government then granted him a liquor license.⁷¹⁰ Baxter was the only white resident of his town, but varying reports list the black percentage of Muchy's population at between fifty and ninety percent; either way, this was the highest percentage in Iowa. Most of the residents' individual stories are lost to history, but a few survived through later newspaper accounts. Joe Sanders was born a slave in Franklin County, Virginia in 1858. When he was five, his family fled the chaos of the Civil War and hid in the hills; he later recalled that his saddest childhood memory was watching his brother bury their mother, who had died of starvation, while Union cannons boomed nearby.⁷¹¹ The rest of the family farmed near their former plantation for several years after the war but then went to West Virginia to work in the mines, narrowly escaping a lynching at the hands of white men who caught them trying to sneak aboard a freight train. Sanders then moved to the coalfields of Indiana, Illinois, and finally southern Iowa, where he also worked in packing houses, got married, and raised eight children.⁷¹²

Muchy blacks created community institutions that made their home more than just a mining camp. Although most families lived in company-owned houses, the more productive workers could save enough to purchase farmland, while others at least bought a horse and a cow or two. Five different black-owned newspapers operated in the region at various times. The

⁷¹⁰ They also wanted to build a jail and pave the streets, but Baxter himself persuaded them that only the jail would be necessary. By 1900 Baxterville had a population of 41, having survived efforts to forcibly revoke its incorporation for having less than 25 voters and for illegally selling liquor. *Oskaloosa Daily Herald*, 30 January 1940; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 288; "One of Beacon's Busiest Corners 30 Years Ago," UNC, OPL, Mahaska County – Cities & Towns/Beacon (Enterprise); "Hit by Injunction: The Town of Baxter in Court Again, May Be Wiped Off Map," *Oskaloosa Saturday Herald*, 9 January 1897.

⁷¹¹ Dick Anderson, "Ex-Slave, 103, Attends First Movie in 40 Years," *Red Oak Sun*, 12 July 1951.

⁷¹² WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 288; "In the Hollow"; London, *As I Remember*, 2; C.B. Depuy, "Days of Slavery Recalled by Uncle Joe Sanders, 100," *Centerville Iowegian*, 16 January 1948; Anderson, "Ex Slave," 12 July 1951.

Muchakinock Cornet Band, an eleven-man group in dressed in steel-gray military uniforms and nicknamed the “Black Diamonds” (a reference to the musicians’ race, to a common nickname for coal, and to one of Muchy’s most productive mine shafts) was organized with financial support from the CCC and performed at festivals and funerals around Iowa, including an 1892 concert in the House of Representatives.⁷¹³ The CCC may have seen the band as a calming distraction for the miners, but for the musicians it was a vehicle for cultural expression, an opportunity to escape the work routine through travel, and a declaration that African Americans were capable of producing serious music.⁷¹⁴

The Masons and Odd Fellows provided additional social space and financial support for their members, with lodges of both orders becoming prominent in statewide organizational affairs, while the churches regularly baptized new members in the Des Moines River. In January 1884, fifty-two remaining members of the original seventy black miners celebrated the anniversary of their arrival with a “sumptuous dinner and reunion.” Black women created their own networks through church groups, literary circles, and Order Days, the first five days of each month when they placed orders at the company store; schoolteacher Minnie London later remembered this as “a great social gathering where they could get together and visit or learn the

⁷¹³ Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, 50; *Weekly Oskaloosa Herald*, 24 February 1887; Smith, “From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines,” fn61 (p. 132-33); “Biggest Run on Record: The Consolidation Coal Company Spreads Itself,” *Oskaloosa Weekly Herald*, 28 December 1876; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 288; “Muchakinock Items”; Powers, “Oskaloosa Rotarians.” The WPA source says that the band was organized in September 1880, but a newspaper article from January 1879 describes it in great detail. Since McNeill also sponsored a white band, it may be that the Black Diamonds started out with white membership but then became all-black, but one pre-migration news report shows that all of the band members had Anglo-Saxon names rather than those typically associated with European immigrants. “Muchakinock Cornet Band: Black Diamonds,” *Oskaloosa Weekly Herald*, 9 January 1879. After their performance in the capital, the House honored them with a unanimous resolution offering praise. *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: G.H. Ragsdale, 1892), 369.

⁷¹⁴ Their work may have inspired Muchakinock native and trumpet player Frank Shelton “Red” Perkins, who led a regionally popular jazz band called the Original Dixie Ramblers after World War I. Unidentified article, Hawthorne Papers, Box 1, Research Files: Black History in Iowa – Collected Materials, 1983-1996 and Undated.

latest news of the town.” There were also “surprise parties,” where friends gathered in homes and gave presents such as rocking chairs and shoes to the family that lived there.⁷¹⁵

The biggest social event, though, was the annual Muchakinock Fair. For four days each summer, hundreds of whites and African Americans from throughout the region came to enjoy horse races, music from the Black Diamonds, games of chance, and fried chicken and biscuits, washed down with beer and hard liquor that was served in the tall weeds behind the race track. Like other African Americans around the country, Muchy blacks also found cultural and political meaning in their Emancipation Day celebrations and took an active role in at least one Independence Day celebration as well; at the 1886 gathering, 2,200 people heard black performers and one unnamed speaker declare that his vision of civil rights was only “to be let alone, asking only plenty of work, and no special favors from any white man this side of the plains of Jericho.”⁷¹⁶

By 1887, Muchy blacks owned and operated grocery stores, two churches, two schools, a meat market, a cemetery, and two grocery stores; one of the grocers rented a room to a young lawyer named George Woodson, later to become a prominent community activist.⁷¹⁷ Equally important was the company-run Benevolent and Protection Burial Society, which provided medical care (and burial expenses in case of death) to miners and their families for a weekly fee.

⁷¹⁵ Clark, *History of Prince Hall Freemasonry*, 39, 88-90, 112, 121, 134-36, 277; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 288-91; London, *As I Remember*, 2.

⁷¹⁶ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 288-93; Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, 50.

⁷¹⁷ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 287-88, 291, 293; “In the Hollow”; London, *As I Remember*, 2; *Oskaloosa Daily Herald*, 30 January 1940; “One of Beacon’s Busiest Corners 30 Years Ago”; Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, 50; *Weekly Oskaloosa Herald*, 24 February 1887; Smith, “From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines,” fn61; Robert V. Morris, “The Black Media in Iowa, 1868-2000,” in *Outside In*, 287-88; “Biggest Run on Record”; *Oskaloosa Daily Herald*, 30 January 1940; Sally Finder-Koziol, “Mahaska County Strives to Preserve Pioneer Cemeteries,” *Oskaloosa Herald*, date unknown, OPL, Mahaska County – Cemeteries; “Old Cemetery for Blacks Forgotten, Neglected,” *Oskaloosa Herald*, 3 September 1979; *The (Muchakinock) Negro Solicitor*, 14 March 1896, quoted in Smith, “From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines,” 15-116.

The Society also collected fines for criminal offenses and legal disputes, tried in a “Negro Court” headed by local black businessmen; habitual criminals and those who refused to pay their fines were fired and forced to leave town. This reflected both the miners’ efforts to create community institutions and the company’s desire to maintain control over its workforce. Although African Americans wanted to be judged by their peers at a time when few served on juries, it is likely that members of the court were selected by the CCC, ensuring that criminals were dealt with on its terms. In any event, the low crime rate in Muchakinock (blamed largely on gamblers, prostitutes and bootleggers who came in after payday to “reap their gruesome harvest”) gave the Court little to do. In 1889, for example, the Society paid \$841 in sick benefits but collected only \$10 in fines, and that from two miners who had gotten into a fight.⁷¹⁸

Muchy’s residents were probably more concerned with the first figure, given the constant danger of their profession. Although most took trains to the workplace, some had to walk over a mile within the mine itself. They were under the constant threat of long falls, explosions, falling slabs of rock, eye-damaging fumes of dust and sulfur, machinery that mangled the limbs of any miner unlucky enough to get their clothes snagged, and the silent killer of carbon monoxide, which induced drowsiness and then finished off those who could not resist the temptation to sleep. A 1900 report stated that 2.32% of workers were killed each year, and this percentage had certainly been even higher in earlier years when safety measures were less advanced. The miners were making more money than they had on the plantations of Virginia, but the dangers of their work made medical and burial insurance absolutely necessary.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁸ Powers, “Oskaloosa Rotarians”; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 293-94; Smith, “From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines,” 116; Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, 49-50.

⁷¹⁹ Schwieder, *Black Diamonds*, 33-35, 45, 47-49; “Perils of Coal Mining,” *What Cheer Patriot*, 4 December 1900; Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, 49.

Like their labor conditions, the workers' relationship with the CCC was often ambivalent. These sentiments are best manifested in Hobe Armstrong, Muchy's most prominent African American. The Tennessee native started out as a mule driver and labor agent but eventually became the main power broker between the workers and the CCC. The company encouraged them to do most of their business with Armstrong, who owned rental homes, a bank, a butcher shop, and dozens of other enterprises and by his death in 1929 was the richest African American in Iowa, worth more than five hundred thousand dollars. He also organized the Muchakinock Fair (sometimes referred to as "Hobe's Fair"), headed the Society, and belonged to the local Masonic lodge. Most Muchy blacks respected him for his success but also saw him as a company man more loyal to the CCC than his race. His businesses prospered by extending credit to the miners, then charging interest that was deducted from their paychecks; when they complained, the company simply said that it considered him a "reliable gentleman in every respect." Armstrong also asserted that "the solution of the race problem could be accomplished by inter-marriage," and to that end he and most of his eleven children married whites, which "titillated" the miners but offended some civil rights activists.⁷²⁰ In short, like many post-Reconstruction black elites around the country, Armstrong had a complicated relationship with the black masses. He failed to be an effective community leader because his power came from the company rather than the community itself, with whom he shared racial ancestry but not its Virginia background, economic status, or views on social issues.

⁷²⁰ Smith, "From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines," 115; "One of Beacon's Busiest Corners 30 Years Ago"; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 290; "Biggest Run on Record"; Clark, *History of Prince Hall Freemasonry*, 35-39; "Oral History, Mahaska County, Iowa, Vignette No. 6: Interview of Frank P. Harper by Dorothy G. Clark, Oskaloosa, IA, 26 February 1977"; Lufkin, "Higher Expectations for Ourselves," 198; London, *As I Remember*, 4. John Lay Thompson in particular attacked Armstrong's advocacy of interracial marriage. *Iowa Baptist Standard*, 21 May 1897.

The success of Muchakinock encouraged mining companies to recruit black workers for other Mahaska County mining camps, each with their own mixed record of race relations. Cleveland's modern mine had telephones and electric lights and was the site of a particularly forceful example of black assertiveness: in 1885, a strikebreaker knocked his boss unconscious during an argument. Carver operated segregated schools in defiance of state law. The Welsh and Swedish miners at Givin eventually overcame their mutual distrust through intermarriage and cultural blending, but blacks remained in their own segregated neighborhood. Many of the impoverished blacks brought to Evans as strikebreakers died during their first winter in Iowa, in part because they were housed in poorly built shanties, and they were buried on a company-owned farm after townspeople barred them from the white cemeteries, even though some were veterans; even so, the black community continued to grow to nearly half the camp's population and opened its own church. The large black community in Excelsior's technologically advanced camp (105 black Virginians arrived on a single day in 1883) also had its own mutual aid society, band, and four armed black men who brought the payroll to town every two weeks. Similar events occurred in nearby Wapello, Appanoose and Lucas Counties, whose mines were nearly as productive as Mahaska's; Lucas alone was home to more than 800 African Americans between 1880 and 1885.⁷²¹

⁷²¹ Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, 32, 53; *National Labor Tribune*, 7 February 1885, quoted in Lewis, *Black Coal Miners in America*, 96; "Given Station," UNC, OPL, Mahaska County – Cities & Towns, Givin; Kathy Harter Higgins, "Givin's Last Landmark Soon to Be Gone," *Eddyville Tribune*, 30 March 1978; "Givin: Former Boom Coal Mining Town Becomes Skeleton of Self," *Oskaloosa Herald*, 1 September 1979; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 302-05; "Mahaska County Once Led State in Coal Mining Activities," *Oskaloosa Daily Herald*, 30 January 1940; "Evans Town," 3; Pearl Morgan, "History of Negro Cemeteries," *Oskaloosa Herald*, date unknown, OPL, Cities & Towns, Evans; *Heritage of Mahaska County, Iowa* (1999), 80; Keo-Mah Genealogical Society and the Mahaska County Historical Society, *The History of Mahaska County, Iowa* (Dallas: Curtis Media Co., 1984), 28; "Evans Town," unidentified document, 2, OPL, Cities & Towns, Evans; "Evans School," unidentified document, OPL, Cities & Towns, Evans; "Interview of Frank P. Harper";

Although the companies sought to control the flow of black migration, growth in the local economy encouraged black Missourians to head north too. Charles Adams found employment at an Oskaloosa candy company and was one of Iowa's last surviving ex-slaves before his death in 1948 at the age of 102. In Ottumwa the migrants worked at a bakery and meatpacking plant, whose workforce went from 0 to 13% black between 1880 and 1900. Other settlers worked on white farms, owned barber shops, ran boarding houses that provided temporary lodging for other migrants, and in the case of Robert "Balloon Jones" Harris was employed as a meatpacker, paper hanger, miner, hod-carrier, and what he described as "[flying] the balloons occasionally." These urban blacks were also able to create churches, lodges and other institutions that lasted far longer than their counterparts in the mining camps.⁷²²

Despite this influx, though, these black communities remained predominantly Virginian in origin. Like African Americans who moved north during the Great Migration forty years later, black settlers in south central Iowa transplanted their kinship networks, institutions, and cultural norms to their new environment. William and Fannie Shepherd, for example, lived in Ottumwa but owned a boarding house in Muchakinock and socialized with family and old friends in Oskaloosa and Knoxville Junction. On one occasion Fannie described the discomfort of being surrounded by whites without seeing any familiar black faces; although she had left Virginia six years earlier, such an occurrence was still rare for her.⁷²³ African Americans in other parts of the

Oskaloosa Daily Herald, 30 January 1940; Waterman, *History of Wapello County, Iowa I* (1914), 91; "King Coal," *Iowan* (January February 2003): 48, 51.

⁷²² "A Former Slave," *Oskaloosa Herald*, 17 January 1948; "Kato Johnson, Once a Slave, Is 88 Today," *Ottumwa Courier*, 25 March 1943; Warren, *Struggling with "Iowa's Pride"*, 20; Hannan, "Wild Coal Town Now a Dump"; "94-Year-Old Former Slave Dies Here," *Oskaloosa Herald*, 15 December 1948; "'Aunt Mary' Once Slave Is Called: Aged Colored Woman Had Lived in County for More Than 60 Years," *Centerville Iowegian*, 10 April 1943; *Records and Briefs for Cases before the Supreme Court of Iowa*, January Term 1889 (Des Moines), 474-76, 482; Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, 57; Taylor, *Past and Present of Appanoose County, I* (1913), 151, 338, 349.

⁷²³ *Records and Briefs* (January 1889), 469-71, 473-74.

state might not have enjoyed this feeling either, but they would have been used to it, given the overwhelming white majority even in areas with large black communities. African Americans in the southern mining towns, on the other hand, largely lived in a separate world and did not have to make as great a psychological adjustment. At the same time, though, they were able to leave some of the old rules of southern racial decorum behind; some addressed whites by their last names rather than with honorifics like “Master” or “Boss,” and when Evans miner John Lewis fatally stabbed a white co-worker in 1894, some people called for his lynching, but instead he was taken into custody.⁷²⁴

When forced out of their comfort zone by racial discrimination, African Americans found creative ways to fight back. In August 1886, the Shepards were riding the train from Knoxville Junction to Ottumwa but somehow became separated, and William got off while wife and child remained behind. Fannie did not notice that anything was wrong until the conductor informed her that she had missed her stop, declaring “G_d damn you, if you don’t get off I will kick you off” and “I am tired of you G_d damn niggers anyhow.” She began walking the three-mile journey back to Knoxville Junction in the intense summer heat with her infant child but collapsed on the road, where her husband eventually found her; she also experienced “mental anguish” from being “humiliated, insulted and greatly wronged” and remained incapacitated for a month. In January 1887, she filed suit against the railroad company.⁷²⁵

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 137; “Murder at Evans: Matt Smith, A White Laborer, Fatally Stabbed by John Lewis, a Colored Tough,” 27 September 1894, OPL, Cities & Towns, Evans.

⁷²⁵ *Shepard v. The Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railway Company*, 77 Iowa 54, 55-56 (1889); *Records and Briefs* (January 1889), 467-69, 471-76. This time off no doubt caused great financial hardship for her family, since like most mothers, “if she washed, ironed, sewed, cooked, and cleaned for her family, whatever a woman’s class status, her experience of injury mirrored a laboring man’s.” Welke, *Recasting American Freedom*, 62-63, 66, 195-202.

Such treatment of black women on trains was common, as were mental anguish lawsuits brought against railroad companies by women of all races, but Shepard's case was unique due to her legal tactics. Although the 1884 Civil Rights Act was applicable, she brought suit on grounds of simple assault and said nothing about race (or gender) except in describing the verbal abuse. The company and its employee contended that her injuries were caused by her own negligence and that she could not recover damages for lost work time since her livelihood was "simply the ordinary duties of a wife and mother," but the judge ordered the jurors simply to decide whether or not the conductor had forced Shepard to leave the train, also reminding them that "the law guards with as great care the rights of a colored lady as those of a white lady."⁷²⁶ Not surprisingly, it ruled in her favor, awarding her \$300 plus legal expenses.⁷²⁷

While the company's appeal to the state Supreme Court complained of the trial judge's "unnecessary declaration of civil rights," Shepard focused on the conductor's insults, hoping that the court would respond emotionally and rule based on its sense of justice and chivalry. Although Justice Gifford Robinson found her testimony somewhat inconsistent, he saw insufficient grounds to overrule the lower court's decision and upheld it without mentioning racial issues at all.⁷²⁸ The case might have been very different, though, had her suit had been organized differently. Like Emma Coger seventeen years earlier, she sued on tort grounds while subtly bringing in the issue of racial discrimination, but she also had an advantage over Joseph

⁷²⁶ *Records and Briefs* (January 1889), 477-81, 484, 487-91, 493-94. This argument was reinforced by Fannie's testimony suggesting that she had been on that route before and another witnesses' observation that the Ottumwa train depot had large signs reading "in riding these trains [passengers] must assume all risk of accident and injury in getting from and to and on or off." *Shepard v. Chicago, R.I. & P.R.*, 56.

⁷²⁷ *Records and Briefs* (January 1889), 494-98, 500; *Shepard v. C.R.I.P.R.C.*, 56.

⁷²⁸ *Records and Briefs* (January 1889), 500-14; *Shepard v. C.R.I.P.R.C.*, 56-60.

Bowlin, who had not lost wages or suffered physical pain.⁷²⁹ This civil rights case in disguise showed that south central Iowa's new residents were fully capable of asserting their right to fair treatment, economic empowerment, and family integrity even as local, regional and national racial attitudes were shifting.

Less successful, though, were black political efforts. In 1885, a black community group proposed Rev. L.H. Reynolds as a Republican candidate for the state House, feeling that this was just reward for "the large number of colored voters in the county who had been faithful in their allegiance to the party."⁷³⁰ The prominent Muchakinock pastor and Mason would have become the first elected black official in the state, but delegates at the Mahaska County GOP convention that September split over his nomination (although he won two informal ballots) until he finally withdrew his name from consideration, saying that further debate was not "productive of the best good" and promising to support whoever was nominated. His own supporters, he concluded, had refuted Democratic predictions that "a colored man would receive no consideration whatever in a Republican convention."⁷³¹ Several years later Clayton Foster, who has been described by genealogist David Smith as "the most outstanding social and political leader" in Muchakinock, also took part in GOP affairs while organizing a local chapter of the civil rights organization Afro-American League and heading a political group called the Muchakinock Colony.⁷³² Although the Reynolds affair proved the high point of direct political power for Muchakinock blacks, his near-nomination and Foster's activity serve as examples of the alternative political

⁷²⁹ Railroad companies, southern legislatures and indifferent or hostile judges did much the same to the federal 1875 Civil Rights Act. Welke, *Recasting American Liberty*, 339-41.

⁷³⁰ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 291-92; Clark, *History of Prince Hall Freemasonry*, 39.

⁷³¹ Reynolds eventually left Muchakinock and headed churches in Minneapolis and New Orleans. "Muchakinock Moving," *Oskaloosa Herald*, 30 April 1904.

⁷³² WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 292; Smith, "From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines," 116.

spheres formed by African Americans during this period, especially in unincorporated mining towns dominated by company officials.

South central Iowa was indisputably the center of the state's black mining activity, but the coal industry also brought African Americans to other areas where there had previously been few or none. By 1880, 100 of the 575 miners in Boone County were black. Legal records from Estherville, only eight miles south of the Minnesota border, show that nearly everyone involved in an 1889 murder trial was African American; like their counterparts to the south, these migrants on the northern frontier had created something of a separate black world, if with somewhat less positive results.⁷³³ Ninety miles below in north central Iowa, the Fort Dodge Coal Company brought one hundred black strikebreakers and their families from Tennessee in January 1881. They lived in houses previously occupied by the strikers, but these homes were so poor that they collectively suffered 251 cases of illness within two weeks of their arrival, although the company claimed that this was due to their laziness "out of pure cussedness." The white miners then made a rare proposal of interracial labor solidarity: if the blacks refused to work, the strikers would provide for their living expenses. Over the next few months, the black workers stayed home too while their white allies took up collections to support them, and they kept up morale and aided with fundraising by giving musical concerts. By spring, though, the money had run out and both groups went back to work; the mines of Webster County were peacefully integrated, if on terms that neither group wanted.⁷³⁴ Although most of the black miners eventually went home,

⁷³³ *History of Boone County* (1880), 457-58, 605; N.E. Goldthwait, ed., *History of Boone County, Iowa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Pioneer Publishing Co., 1914), 465, 470; *State v. Penney*, 113 Iowa 691, 693-94 (1900); *Records and Briefs for Cases before the Supreme Court of Iowa*, December Term 1900 (Des Moines).

⁷³⁴ *Sloan v. Webster County*, 61 Iowa 738-40, 743 (1883); *Records and Briefs for Cases before the Supreme Court of Iowa*, October Term 1883 (Des Moines), 650-52, 656, 658, 662, 700, 708; Schwieder, *Black Diamonds*, 151; "Nineteenth Century African American History in Fort Dodge, Iowa," 6. These mining families were probably the

enough stayed to establish a permanent black community in Fort Dodge, which included a church and a young man with the incredible name of Thomas Editamus Christopher Holmes Henry Cadwallader Peter C. Jones Epps.⁷³⁵ The high point of the year for this small enclave was the annual Cake Walk Ball, which gave African Americans the chance to dance, tell jokes, or show other skills before a panel of whites judges; the performers included 106 year old Cinda Bell, who danced and sang “John Brown’s Body.”⁷³⁶ Despite the dangerous and uncertain nature of their profession, like other black miners around the state, African Americans were creating stable institutions and community networks.

The coal that helped bring so many African Americans to Iowa was also part of the state’s plan for the 1884-85 World’s Industrial and Cotton Exposition in New Orleans. Iowa’s prize-winning exhibits at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia eight years earlier had created an increased national demand for its products, and political and economic leaders hoped to repeat this success in the Crescent City. African Americans no doubt agreed with this assessment, but they also had their own agenda for the Exposition. Working in conjunction with the Board of Management (which wanted the Exposition to be “in every sense a ‘World’s’”),

only African Americans in Pleasant Valley Township, since the contract providing for their medical care stated that “any colored persons” were eligible for medical care.

⁷³⁵ “Nineteenth Century African American History in Fort Dodge, Iowa,” 6; “Some Name,” *Fort Dodge Times*, 10 February 1871. Fort Dodge’s black community did not grow to a significant size until after World War I. Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa’s Black Legacy*, 69.

⁷³⁶ “Annual Cake Walking Tournament a Success,” *Fort Dodge Evening Messenger*, 8 March 1895; “A ‘New Woman’ at 106,” *Fort Dodge Weekly Chronicle*, 28 August 1895; “Nineteenth Century African American History in Fort Dodge, Iowa,” 6.

Alexander Clark, Sr. organized a “Colored Department” while Des Moines minister Henry McCraven traveled to New Orleans as Iowa’s only black representative.⁷³⁷

While Iowa’s white exhibits had a decidedly agricultural focus (including a twelve-foot tall, corn-gilded pagoda), the African American contributions offered a different perspective.⁷³⁸ Thirty black residents of Muscatine, Davenport, Des Moines, Oskaloosa, and other eastern and central cities donated items such as a wax cross, an oil painting, a calico quilt made by 80 year old Rachel Rogers of Davenport, two world maps, and a silk quilt. Nearly all of the exhibits had been made women; as with Emancipation Day, the Fair gave them an opportunity to combat stereotypes by showing their domestic refinement. Commissioner Fairall made no mention of these items in his “Iowa Day” address, but Director General (and southerner) E.A. Burke noted that the state was represented not only by whites but also “in another display that lay near and dear to the hearts of the management – that of making a representation of the industrial progress of the colored race.”⁷³⁹

The “Colored Department” also carried other political meaning for the men and women who created it. First, it subtly asserted their claim to citizenship, reminding whites that they had a contribution to make and a right to represent the state. It also challenged the notion that black Iowans did not exist at all. Finally, it challenged racist notions about black artistic achievement and urbanity. The enclaves of black landowners in Fayette County and the Nodaway Valley were

⁷³⁷ It is not known how the House chaplain and former slave felt about the appearance of Jefferson Davis at the fair, along with the crowd’s enthusiastic greeting with a rendition of “Dixie.” Bruce E. Mahan, “Iowa at the New Orleans Fair,” *Palimpsest* 6 (1925): 77, 84; “Davenport Briefs,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 7 October 1884; Herbert S. Fairall, “Iowa at the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial and the North, Central and South American Expositions, New Orleans, 1884-6” (Des Moines: Geo. E. Roberts, 1885), in *Legislative Documents Submitted to the Twenty-First General Assembly of the State of Iowa*, v. 5 (Des Moines: Geo. E. Roberts, 1886), 5, 86.

⁷³⁸ Fairall, “Iowa at the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial”; Mahan, “Iowa at the New Orleans Fair,” 87-92.

⁷³⁹ Mahan, “Iowa at the New Orleans Fair,” 92; Fairall, “Iowa at the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial,” 86, 94-101, 110-11.

both too far from eastern Iowa to take an active role in the Fair (whites from these regions were also largely uninvolved), but the fact that more proximate black farmers like the McKees were not involved suggests that the other organizers decided to create an urban presentation, which after all did accurately reflect most black community life. Rather than focusing on agriculture like other Iowans, African Americans donated items that many thought them incapable of producing. The exhibit thus implicitly stated that blacks could also be respectable, urban, middle class people; in the struggle for equal citizenship, even seemingly apolitical events and artifacts were politicized.⁷⁴⁰

Information on other black cultural activity in Iowa during the 1870s and 1880s is difficult to find, and most of what has survived comes from white newspapers, but it is nevertheless possible to explore the less overtly political ways that African Americans spent their social time. Like other African Americans around the country, black Iowans enjoyed performances by jubilee singers. The center of this activity was the Tri Cities, which had the best access to traveling groups due to its large size and location on the Mississippi. These performances gave whites a chance to sample what they perceived as authentic antebellum black culture, but they also raised funds for black churches, the Freedman's Aid Society, the temperance cause, and other charities. Other Mississippi River cities were also visited by traveling groups, and even the interior town of Washington enjoyed an 1880 concert by the nationally known, blind autistic pianist Thomas "Blind Tom" Wiggins. Eastern and central Iowa also had their own home-grown entertainers, including a Fairfield group known as Al G. Field's

⁷⁴⁰ Fairall, "Iowa at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial," 19-25, 30-31, 45-55, 61-62, 73-76, 83-84, 87-88; Sterling, *The Trouble They Seen*.

Colored Minstrels and the Slayton Jubilee Singers of Marshalltown; both toured throughout Iowa, even in places that had few or no African Americans.⁷⁴¹

Although there were many black minstrel performers, most black audiences were more inclined towards other forms of entertainment. The best documentation on this again comes from the Tri Cities, which were home to a “martial band”; the Colored String Band, which performed at black masquerade balls; the Davenport Glee Club, described as “the best colored talent in the city” by the *Gazette*, which sang spirituals, performed instrumental music and gave speeches such as “Lecture on Women’s Rights”; and spelling bees, “calico socials” and camp meetings at the churches. The city also enjoyed traveling performers such as the Zouave-influenced Callender Minstrel Company’s Brass Band from Burlington and Muscatine sharpshooter Harry Stewart, who came in 1878 and challenged all local shootists to take him on.⁷⁴² All of this strengthened the ties between eastern black communities, offered a counter-narrative to blackface culture that mocked notions of racial equality, and provided entertainment in this modestly populated Midwestern state where blacks were still greatly outnumbered.

Fraternal organizations such as the Odd Fellows, Household of Ruth and especially the Prince Hall Masons also became important black social institutions during this period.⁷⁴³ The first black Masonic lodges were founded in Keokuk and Muscatine in 1866 as part of the Grand Lodge of Missouri, including community leaders such as William Dove and Alexander Clark.

⁷⁴¹ “Free Minstrelsy,” *Davenport Democrat*, 9 June 1892; *Davenport Gazette*, 26 February 1875, 16 March, 4 April, 8 July, 11 July 1875; *Davenport Democrat*, 26 May 1879; *Lee County History*, 18; Fisher, *History of Washington County* (1978), 408; “Chicago Theatrical Notes,” (*Springfield*) *Illinois Record*, 20 November 1897.

⁷⁴² *Davenport Gazette*, 22 April, 6 June, 25 June, 19 June, 3 July, 20 July 1875; “Davenport Briefs,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 16 October 1884; *Rock Island Daily Union*, 22 July 1876; “Davenport Briefs,” *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 16 February 1880; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 29 August 1884; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, May 1878, UNC, MPL, Muscatine File; *Muscatine Evening Journal*, 13 September 1878.

⁷⁴³ Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County* (1910), 737; Britton, “History of the Colored Race of People Residing in Keokuk and Vicinity,” 14; Frances Hawthorne Papers, Box 1, Research Files – Notes, 1992 and Undated.

The organization (along with its sister group Order of the Eastern Star) grew over the next twenty years, with both prosperous groups like Des Moines' North Star Lodge No. 31, whose meeting place had walnut chair and chandeliers, and mining town lodges that lasted only as long as the coal. Iowa was part of the Missouri Grand Lodge, but it hosted the annual meeting on several occasions, and several Iowans served in high positions until the United Grand Lodge of Iowa was formed in 1887. More than 300 men belonged to 15-20 active lodges, mostly in eastern and central Iowa, and helped operate a relief organization, but like other fraternal orders around the country it went into decline in the late 1890s when other community groups surpassed it in influence and popularity.⁷⁴⁴

Even at their height, the Masons had a much less overtly political stance than other black organizations. Their official correspondence says very little about social concerns – even in speeches made by Clark or other activists – except for criticisms of bigotry among white Masons or fundraising campaigns for causes such as the 1880 yellow fever epidemic in the South.⁷⁴⁵ It would seem that the members left politics to other organizations, where most of them were active anyway, and made the lodges an apolitical sphere where they could focus on fellowship. In this regard, the organization did play an important role similar to that of the churches and the Looby Guards, enabling black men who had little education, worked at low-paying jobs, and were generally ignored or ridiculed by the larger society to gain a measure of prestige. The parades

⁷⁴⁴ Clark, *History of Prince Hall Freemasonry; History of Muscatine County* (1879), 598; “Alexander Clark, P.G.M.,” 63-64; Unidentified clipping, Richter Papers; *Rock Island Daily Union*, 24 January 1875; Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 137. The United Grand Lodge also had jurisdiction over Minnesota, Nebraska and Washington State.

⁷⁴⁵ *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Communication of the M.W. Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons for the State of Missouri and Its Jurisdiction Held in St. Joseph, Mo., Commencing August 21st, A.D. 1877, A.L. 5877* (St. Louis: C.R. Barns, 1877), 12; *Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Communication of the M.W. Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons for the State of Missouri and Its Jurisdiction Held at Hannibal, Missouri, Commencing August 17th, A.D. 1880, A.L. 5880* (St. Louis: Barker, Smith & Owens, 1880), 43.

that accompanied their annual meetings were particularly useful in this regard, as whites saw uniformed black men marching in a dignified fashion, representing an organization that they were also familiar with.⁷⁴⁶ Thus even an institution that seemingly avoided civil rights could be useful in the struggle to attain them.

Just as Susan Mosely would sum up many of the promises and difficulties of school desegregation in her 1896 editorial, her father Moses offered an equally powerful reflection on civil rights during the 1870s and 1880s. In 1884 the former slave, wartime migrant and stone mason wrote the twenty-page *The Colored Man of America as a Slave and a Citizen of the United States*, which was printed by his hometown *Mount Pleasant Journal*. Mosely offered a message that was simultaneously conservative and radical; it appealed to whites on a moral level, looked within the black community for change, and expressed a quiet militancy, but ultimately it proposed a compromise with racial conservatism. He began by exploring racist ideology in all its various forms (this discussion takes up a substantial portion of the essay), arguing that it was so pervasive that some antebellum free blacks had internalized it. He was highly critical of those who had feared “losing their position at the head of the colored columns to be succeeded by some raw slaves from the lower grades of the human family,” who curried favor with whites by joining the outcry against black migrants, and by disassociating themselves from the latter. This might have been a subtle jab at community leaders who took the doctrines of patronage and respectability too far for Mosely’s liking, although he himself was no radical.

⁷⁴⁶ The 1886 meeting in Oskaloosa, for example, went so well that the city government passed a resolution stating that “the colored people...are whole-souled and that when they undertake to do anything of this sort, they never fail to make it a success.” Clark, *History of Prince Hall Freemasonry*, 88-91.

Despite these challenges, he continued, the “benighted sons and daughters of African descent” had remained convinced that “a bright morning star” would one day come.⁷⁴⁷ Nearly two decades after the war, though, that hope still had not been fully realized. African Americans, though, were not responsible for this failure, since “freedom was all they had to begin with.” Although the former slaves had not been fully prepared for their new place as “intelligent free citizens” and their growth had been slowed by “the many disadvantages we have to labor under,” he admitted, “we hope it may be steady and onward with a firm step.”⁷⁴⁸ In a way, this was a metaphor for Mosely’s family and for black Iowans in general during this period. He had headed north from slavery with nothing but his own internal drive to succeed but risen to become a respected craftsman and community leader, and through the education that he had himself been denied, his daughter would help take the next generation even further.

Mosely also employed the theme of patriotic loyalty, writing that “The colored man’s devotion, his sympathy and love for country and freedom, are all in opposition to [slaveholders] and on the side with those who are in favor of the equality and justice of all men before the law.” He rejected the recently emerging overseas migration movement and by implication all forms of black nationalism, stating that African Americans were thoroughly Americanized and would not be driven out of their country by white mistreatment. Although “enemies of universal freedom” sought to challenge the “inter-race principle,” the race had to “push forward intelligently” while the government protected its rights.⁷⁴⁹ As Alexander Clark, Emancipation Day speakers and others had also shown, this rhetoric remained useful more than twenty years after the war. He

⁷⁴⁷ Moses Mosely, *The Colored Man of America As a Slave and a Citizen of the United States* (Mount Pleasant, IA: Journal Printers, 1884), 2-6.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-10.

echoed other uplift efforts by combining the patronage and rights-based approaches, although his conception of rights was largely based on labor and freedom from violence rather than political power, integration or community institutions.

This section also continued his theme of discussing current racial issues in light of the past, making the pamphlet a political treatise and history lesson rolled into one. As was common in testimonials of former slaves, he used vivid, visceral prose in describing slavery and how it had finally ended, writing “While the humble and degraded slaves were bowed down under the burdens of the master’s greedy and selfish will and their maddened and sorrowing hearts were open to the view of Him who knoweth the secrets of all hearts, and while the groans and screams were rending the air by reason of the sting of the lash lacerating [*sic*] their flesh, God was present to behold all that was going on.” It was God, he argued, who had guided the abolitionists, put Lincoln in the White House, and ended slavery through the service of loyal Americans from both regions and both races.⁷⁵⁰ Clark of course had made similar statements on numerous occasions, but they carried even more power as the personal account of someone who had personally escaped slavery and crossed the country in search of freedom during the war. Mosely also challenged the national amnesia about the war, calling on African Americans to remember the loyal whites who had sacrificed “for country and freedom.” This was part of his overall goal of reconciliation; even as he sought to redeem his race in the eyes of whites, he also wanted blacks to remember that not all whites were against them.

He then turned his attention to the current state of affairs in the South. The former rebels had turned to the “rule of shot-guns, rifles and revolvers” to retake power and prevent blacks from voting. Mosely saw this political violence not only as morally wrong but also unnecessary,

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., 9-11.

since the “sensible classes of colored people” realized that governance should be left to whites, desiring only to assist and to hold a few token positions “in some of the official places such as they are capable of honoring.” The testimonial had turned into a jeremiad, something often found in the words of postwar black activists: a spiritual lament about the state of society and a warning that those who challenged God’s will would be punished. At the same time, it was also a tacit acceptance of white supremacy.⁷⁵¹ Mosely was also less committed to the GOP than some other commentators, calling on blacks to “feel safe to mingle their ballots with men of all parties,” criticizing the administration for failing to protect black voters, and blaming southern political violence on only a few zealots rather than the Democratic Party as a whole. He called on those who “did the most of all others to cause [black] ignorance” to now do right by their former slaves, writing:

“They have a chance now to help them to be both wise, wealthy and happy by paying them fair wages for labor, not charge them too much for what they buy, give them a fair price for what they have to sell, not charge them too much for land rent, allow them to have good schools uninterrupted for their children, give them a free vote and a fair count, put down the rifle and shot-gun clubs, establish law and order in their midst and they will help you and be your best friends and you can be their officers in most places if you will. Treat them right and if any should then break the law let them have the penalty of it too – that’s fair, isn’t it?”⁷⁵²

Although vitriolic at times, *The Colored Man of America* was for the most part a compromise with the growing racial conservatism of the 1880s. The unavailability of other documents makes it impossible to determine if he had always been this moderate, but given the pamphlet’s occasionally defiant strains, it seems likely that he had tempered his views to contend with the mood of the age. Although he continued the bloody shirt waving and rhetoric of black wartime loyalty, he also made concessions to those who had fought the war to protect slavery.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., 11-13; David Howard-Pitney, *The Afro-American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

⁷⁵² Mosely, *The Colored Man of America*, 14-18.

His view of citizenship was thus more limited than the conceptions of Alexander Clark, most Emancipation Day speakers, Lewis and Mary Phillips, Joseph Bowlin, the Looby Guards, Henry Ridings, Fannie Shepard, L.H. Reynolds, or even Emma Coger. Black Iowans did not have the same concerns over disenfranchisement or racial violence as their southern counterparts, but they were still largely confined to the lowest jobs, denied access to public places despite the existence of desegregation laws, and lacking the numbers or the white support to effectively use their political rights in a society that no longer seemed to care what happened to them. Their efforts to make Iowa a more egalitarian state had been frustrated. They were still able to use their labor for limited leverage and to form patronage ties with white elites, but both tactics left them in a subordinate position not substantially different from where they had been when the massive civil rights victories of 1868 were achieved.

The years between 1870 and 1889 lacked the drama of the antebellum struggle against slavery, wartime migration and military service, or the overthrow of racist laws (excluding, of course, the legislators' amendment and the *Coger* case), but it did see the continued growth and development of Iowa's black communities. African Americans had begun exercising their hard-won voting rights at the beginning of the period, and although this political power did not culminate in the election of any black public officials, they found other ways to express their vision of citizenship. In the established eastern and central cities, the new mining towns of south central Iowa, rapidly growing Sioux City, and elsewhere, they worked, socialized, produced culture, served in the military, and fought for their rights in the courts and at the ballot box. Although new migrants continued to arrive, black Iowans remained so small a minority that part

of their struggle was reminding the world that they even existed. Yet they maintained nearly all of their legal rights even as these were destroyed in the South and neglected elsewhere in the Midwest. The nadir of the 1890s would bring even more challenges and changes as the antebellum and wartime leaders and communities finally gave way to a new generation.

Chapter VII

“The Way of Progress and Light”: The Nodaway Valley

Tracking down information on nineteenth-century black Iowans is in some ways a fool’s errand. The state’s black population was relatively small, often ignored by their white neighbors or in official documents, and usually did not leave behind its own artifacts for later generations. Writing this history is often not a matter of choosing which evidence to use but rather finding ways to use the limited evidence that does exist. There is, however, one exception. Although the black communities of southwestern Iowa’s Nodaway Valley also left few documents behind, the white press covered their achievements, mistakes, work, social activity and political ideas in a comprehensive fashion for nearly forty years. As a result, there is a rich body of evidence on this comparatively large black enclave in a comparatively unpopulated region, held largely at the Nodaway Valley Historical Museum (NVHM) in the town of Clarinda. This alone justifies a more extensive historical analysis, but the analysis itself is important for other reasons, as even a cursory glance at the evidence shows that the Valley has a story distinct from that of other black Iowa communities. Isolated in the distant southwest, Valley blacks created their own world, with their own responses to the challenges and opportunities of nineteenth-century black Midwestern life. Perhaps more than any other black Iowans, local leaders focused on patronage rather than a rights-based strategy of community uplift. This tactic strongly echoed the ideas espoused by Booker T. Washington, even before the Tuskegee principal reached national notoriety, and in many ways fit better in southwestern Iowa than it did in the South, given the essentiality of black labor and the lack of overt racial violence or disenfranchisement. For all these reasons, the story of their own vision of equal citizenship is worth telling.

The Nodaway Valley includes not only far southwestern Iowa but also parts of northwestern Missouri and southeastern Nebraska, but its economic and cultural center is the town of Clarinda in Page County. This region was settled by whites over a decade after eastern Iowa. The first permanent white settler did not arrive until 1840, and although the population increased from fewer than six hundred in 1850 to more than four thousand in 1860, it remained predominantly rural and sparsely settled; there were no church buildings until 1858 and no newspapers until the *Clarinda Herald* and *Page County Democrat* were founded in the 1860s. Most towns consisted of little more than a railroad depot, and the closest city of any real size was Council Bluffs, more than seventy miles from Clarinda.⁷⁵³

Given the Valley's location, though, it was inevitable that slavery would play a role in its early history. There were fewer slaves in northwestern Missouri than in the region bordering southeastern Iowa, but confusion was caused by the lack of a visibly marked state line equivalent to the Des Moines River in the east; one slaveholder lived with his bondspersons in southern Fremont County until he discovered that he was not in Missouri.⁷⁵⁴ Some slaves, though, did realize where they were and fled to freedom through the Valley, either by heading due north or west into Kansas, then north into Nebraska and back east into Iowa across the Missouri River. The region was a crossroads for many different kinds of travelers, including Midwestern settlers and pioneers either heading west or coming back from there, but the most noticeable and controversial group was the runaway slaves.

⁷⁵³ R.E. Cunningham, ed., *Southwest Iowa's Heritage: A History of Page and Fremont Counties* (Shenandoah, IA: World Publishing Company, 1973), A-88, A-94; 1850 U.S. Census; 1860 U.S. Census; *Andreas Historical Atlas of Iowa*; *Page County History* (Iowa Writers' Program, 1942), 35; *History of Montgomery County* (1881), 364-367; Homer H. Field & Joseph R. Reed, *History of Pottawattamie County, Iowa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: S.J. Clarke, 1907), 82; Bloomer, "Notes on the History of Pottawattamie County (No. 10)," *Annals of Iowa* 12 (October 1873): 623.

⁷⁵⁴ *Thumbprints in Time*, 16. The three counties bordering Page had a total of 150 slaves in 1850, compared with more than 2,000 in northeastern Missouri. 1850 U.S. Census.

As in eastern Iowa, there were also a few white settlers dedicated to helping these fugitives. The village of College Springs, only three miles from the state line, was known as “Stop and Start” to runaways who rested there before heading to Grinnell and then Chicago, although it was also home to more active abolitionists like Rev. Clark Smith, who once traveled sixty miles into Missouri to assist a group of fugitives. The other major hotbed of abolitionism was Tabor, led by Rev. John Todd, who nearly caused a steamboat riot on his journey to the Valley by proclaiming that “the slaves in our country had a much better reason for rising and fighting for their freedom than our fathers ever had.” Todd and other residents used their homes to hide not only fugitives but also ammunition for Free Soilers; one settler later boasted that “the entire population was in sympathy with the escaped fugitives.”⁷⁵⁵

This included S.H. “Deacon” Adams and his allies, who helped liberate five slaves belonging to a traveling Mormon family in 1854, but the most famous antislavery activist in the Nodaway Valley was Dr. Ira Blanchard.⁷⁵⁶ The doctor used his geographic knowledge gained in fifteen years as a missionary to aid fugitives, many of whom took refuge in the basement of his Fremont County home, which had a separate fireplace and enough space for twenty people. One story tells of a band of 150 proslavery men who came to Blanchard’s home to retrieve two girls who had fled from their master in Nebraska City, probably one S.F. Nuckolls. The doctor

⁷⁵⁵ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Underground Railroad* (Part 2), 89-90, 94; Cunningham, *Southwest Iowa’s Heritage*, A-95, 276; “Slave Station at Lewis,” UNC, 1938, Black Binder; “Underground Railway Center 4 Miles North of Clarinda,” UNC, Black Binder; Clark Smith, untitled memoir, 1859, p. 1-4, NVHM, Miscellaneous Box; John Todd, *Early Sentiment and Growth of Western Iowa* (Des Moines: Historical Department of Iowa, 1906), 55-56, quoted in Connor, “The Antislavery Movement in Iowa,” 362-63; Deacon Adams, “Tabor & Northern Excursion,” *Annals of Iowa* 33 (1955-57): 128; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Underground Railroad* (Part 3), 102; “First Underground Railway,” UNC, 21 July 1903, Black Binder; W.W. Merritt, Sr., *A History of the County of Montgomery from the Earliest Days to 1906* (Red Oak, IA: Express Publishing Co., 1906), 79.

⁷⁵⁶ Adams also recalled other instances when abolitionists in Tabor “stole” African Americans from traveling slaveholders, along with a story about ninety armed men who came from Nebraska in search of two slave girls. “First Underground Railway.”

peaceably agreed to let them search his home, partly because the fugitives had already left an hour earlier and partly because his friend Jim Lane, the Free Soil fighter who just happened to be visiting, warned them that anyone who got violent would suffer the consequences. The fugitives made their way to Chicago, where their master eventually caught up with one of them, but he was arrested for disturbing the peace and she fled to Canada. Nuckolls then returned to the town of Percival in southwestern Iowa with a posse and began forcibly entering private homes in search of the other fugitive, and when a townsman named Reuben Williams resisted, the mob attacked him, causing property damage and a permanent hearing loss. Nuckolls was arrested again and fined over \$10,000, and he never got his slaves back.⁷⁵⁷

Unlike some abolitionists, Ira Blanchard was also committed to the rights of free blacks. Missourians Joseph and Jane Garner and their five children had purchased their freedom in 1839 and in the early 1850s made their way to the Valley, where they lived with Blanchard before purchasing their own farm. The doctor and fellow abolitionist George Gaston posted their bond under the “Act to Regulate Blacks and Mulattoes,” while Garner presented his family’s freedom papers at the county courthouse. As in other parts of Iowa, most African Americans living in the Valley (two other families, actually) did not bother to comply with the “Act,” but Garner was an easy target for anyone who wanted to turn in him to the authorities and take his land.⁷⁵⁸

Life in the Valley was also a tricky proposition for other free blacks. For every Ira Blanchard or Deacon Adams, there were other whites equally determined to defend slavery, keep

⁷⁵⁷ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Underground Railroad (Part 2)*, 90-92; *Fremont County, Iowa, Clerk’s Office: Transcript Files 1853-1872*, quoted in Walter Farwell, “Reuben Williams”; *Fremont County, Fremont County Transcripts, 1862-63, County Clerk’s Office*, Walter Farwell Papers, Folder 11.

⁷⁵⁸ *Thumbprints in Time: Fremont County*, 76; *Fremont County Transcripts*, Walter Farwell Papers, Folder 11. This precaution turned out to be prudent; when he died in 1858, his property was divided amongst his heirs without controversy, with Blanchard serving as estate administrator. “Fremont County, Iowa, Estate #11 – Joseph Garner, 1858,” in Walter Farwell Papers, Folder 11.

blacks out, or make a financial profit through racism. The Valley was probably not much more racially hostile than Keokuk or Dubuque, but its frontier environment permitted a more open expression of that hostility than in the east, and its southwestern location meant that Free Soilers and proslavery fighters often passed through on their way to Kansas. A mob attacked a meeting of Fremont County's Anti-Slavery Friends with eggs in 1855, while four years later several whites kidnapped an "intelligent looking mulatto" in Clarinda and returned him to his master in Missouri. The Garner family, though, was an even more attractive target due to its economic success and visibility as some of the Valley's only permanent black residents.

This included John Williamson, who sold goods on both sides of the Missouri, ferried fugitive slaves to Blanchard's house, and was married to Betsy Ellen Garner (the ceremony was performed by Rev. Todd).⁷⁵⁹ In 1860, he was riding to Omaha with his wife's relations Henry and Maria Garner when a group of three "noted desperadoes" suddenly appeared; he escaped and "exultingly swung his hat...in view of his redemption from Thralldom," but the Garners were taken to St. Louis to be sold into slavery. Blanchard immediately traveled down to Missouri bring them back, and the jailer (who was an old friend of his) not only released them but had the kidnapers arrested, although they escaped before their day in court. News of the kidnapping reached as far as Des Moines, where the *Register* declared "[This] system of kidnapping citizens of Iowa by Missourians, constitutes as gross an assault on State rights and prerogatives as the inexcusable forays of abolitionists on Virginia...[Democrats] have no word of scorching rebuke

⁷⁵⁹ *Thumbprints in Time: Fremont County*, 75; "Return a Slave," UNC, 1938, Black Binder; Walter Farwell Papers, Folder 11; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Underground Railroad (Part 2)*, 90, 92-93.

for those prowling man hunters who have assailed our Constitutional rights, and dragged our free citizens away to slavery.”⁷⁶⁰

Thus although the editor rejected Blanchard’s brand of abolitionism, he also viewed Williamson and the Garners as “free citizens” with the same right to personal liberty as any white Iowan. This attitude did not, however, save Henry Garner from becoming a victim of mob violence that same year, when fifteen men led by the ubiquitous S.F. Nuckolls tied him to a tree and whipped him until “his back was bruised, cut and lacerated from his waist to his neck.” With Blanchard serving as legal counsel, he filed suit against them, seeking \$10,000 for their “most barbarous and inhuman” behavior. The violence continued even during the trial; in a heated exchange between Blanchard and the defense attorney, the latter man struck the doctor in the face. In the end, Garner and Nuckolls settled out of court for \$600, far less than what the plaintiff had sought and nowhere near the judgment given to Reuben Williams; although Williams’ injuries and property damage were greater, it probably also helped that he was white.⁷⁶¹

Several months later Henry and Green Garner, along with another black man named Thomas Reed, were subpoenaed to testify in a case against several prominent whites. It had only been two years since the new constitution recognized the right of blacks to testify against whites, and this was apparently their first opportunity to do so in Fremont County, a fact not appreciated by some whites. On the day of the trial a mob entered the courthouse and threatened violence if the black men took the stand, but the judge declared that “What was now transpiring was

⁷⁶⁰ *Iowa State Register*, 10 October 1860; “Kidnapping in Iowa,” *Iowa State Register*, 17 October 1860; Bloomer, “Notes on the History of Pottawattamie County,” *Annals of Iowa* 10 (October 1872): 281, 284-85; Bloomer, “Notes on the History of Pottawattamie County (No. 7),” *Annals of Iowa* 11 (January 1873): 340-41; “Kidnapping,” *Page County Herald*, 12 October 1860; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Underground Railroad* (Part 2), 92-93.

⁷⁶¹ Fremont County, IA, Clerk’s Office, Court Case No. 30, “Henry Garner vs. S.F. Nuchols, etc.,” March Term District Court 1859, in Walter Farwell Papers, African-American, Folder 11; *Page County Herald*, 3 June 1859; “Compromised,” *Page County Herald*, 22 June 1860.

something new, to be sure, but it was now the law” and “no man who loved the enforcement of the law would see it violated.” The three men testified without incident.⁷⁶² This did not, however, change the fact that fugitive slaves and free blacks alike lived under the constant threat of violence in this frontier region. The racial tensions that existed everywhere in Iowa manifested here in the form of pogroms against any African American who sought freedom from slavery, tried to exercise their legal rights, or simply made the mistake of being successful.

All of this changed when the Civil War began. Hundreds of white Valley men came into contact with African Americans for the first time through military service in the South (including one USCT officer and other soldiers who fought at Milliken’s Bend).⁷⁶³ There were some fears of a rebel invasion from across the state line, but the only Missourians who actually came to the Valley were black settlers fleeing slavery; the trickle that had begun a decade earlier now turned into a flood.⁷⁶⁴ According to one report, the first such wartime migrant was William H. Black, who came to Clarinda in 1861 with a soldier and found work with a local farmer; shortly thereafter he went to Bedford to meet a recently arrived black family and met his future wife, with whom he later raised a family of their own in College Springs.⁷⁶⁵ Like hundreds who followed him, Black was able to take advantage of the wartime shortage of farm laborers, which

⁷⁶² Cunningham, *Southwest Iowa’s Heritage*, A-70-71; *History of Taylor County, Iowa* (Des Moines: State Historical Co., 1881), 405-09.

⁷⁶³ *Biographical History of Montgomery and Adams Counties, Iowa* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1892), 352-53; E. Miller, *History of Page County, Iowa* (Clarinda, IA: Herald Book & Job Office, 1876), 44-49, 62-63.

⁷⁶⁴ For some examples of border conflict, both real and imagined, see Merritt, *A History of the County of Montgomery* (1906), 131; “History Lives in House, Antiques,” UNC, *Clarinda World-Herald*; Bruce E. Mahan, “Home Guards,” *Palimpsest* 5 (1924): 190-203, 212; H.H. Scott, “A Border War Episode,” in W.L. Kershaw, *History of Page County, Iowa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1909), 251-54; Sturdevant, “Girding for War,” 91-92; *History of Page County, Iowa* (Des Moines: Iowa Historical Company, 1880), 489; *Page County History* (Iowa Writers’ Program, 1942), 30; *Thumbprints in Time: Fremont County*, 39-40; Mahan, “Marching As to War,” *Palimpsest* 5 (1924): 226-29, 233; Schroder, “William M. Stone,” 112.

⁷⁶⁵ “David Black Dies Thursday Morning,” UNC, 1943, Black Binder; “The Black Girls,” UNC, 1906, Black Binder; “In Remembrance of Aunt Eliza Jones,” *Clarinda Herald-Journal*, 22 June 1944.

was felt throughout Iowa but even more pronounced in the Valley with its smaller population and economy based almost entirely on agriculture.⁷⁶⁶ So many white men were gone, in fact, that Amity College in College Springs temporarily closed down and its buildings were used as temporary housing for the black migrants.⁷⁶⁷

The need for farm workers encouraged African Americans to settle in or near small towns throughout the Nodaway Valley. Most hoped to eventually purchase their own land here in one of the last regions of Iowa where there were still substantial acres available for sale. Jack and Emily Howe and their seven children stole their master's horse in 1862 and fled from northwest Missouri to Bedford County, Iowa, where Jack worked on a white farm until enlisting in the army. After the war the Howes purchased a small farm and truck garden near Bedford, and his family remained in the Valley for decades. At his death in 1915, the *Bedford Free Press* wrote that "Uncle Jack, as he was familiarly known, though without educational advantages, was a persistent seeker after knowledge. He took keen interest in all public affairs and his knowledge of current events was far above the average." Other families were also able to purchase land in various parts of the Valley within a few years of their arrival. The black community in Montgomery County became somewhat more urbanized. By 1880, 107 of the county's 113 African Americans resided in the county seat of Red Oak; none owned farm land, but there were

⁷⁶⁶ Coal was discovered in the Valley around the same time, but the industry did not take off until the early 1870s. There is no evidence that African Americans worked in the mines in large numbers, probably because the industry remained smaller than in other areas and because farming and railroad work was far less dangerous and dirty. Patricia Cassat, "Clarinda's Old King Coal: A History of the Coal Mining Industry in the Nodaway Valley River Area" (Nodaway Valley Historical Society); Sarah J. Purcell, "'Republican Prospects Are Bright': The Political Culture of Page County, Iowa," 6.

⁷⁶⁷ "Underground Railway Center 4 Miles North of Clarinda."

many who worked on nearby white-owned farms, along with several cooks and barbers, a plasterer, a stone mason, and a restaurant owner.⁷⁶⁸

The largest urban population was in Clarinda. According to various reports, the city's black population reached between four and five hundred during the war, most living in a densely populated neighborhood on the outskirts of town near the train depot. Whites referred to it as "Africa," although there were still a few white families there, but it was also known as the Third Ward. This neighborhood included Henry Webb, who had been a slave cook in a Montgomery, Alabama hotel before the war, escaped in the midst of the fighting and became a cook for the Union army, then came to Clarinda with a white soldier in 1865. There he resumed his profession but also became a sort of roving barber, traveling around town with a basket of sartorial tools so that he could shave merchants in their places of business. Although living conditions in the Third Ward were better than Missouri slave plantations, they still left their inhabitants vulnerable to disease and exposure, and the death rate for blacks (especially children) was much higher than that for whites.⁷⁶⁹

Despite these problems, the black community continued to grow during and after Reconstruction, as newer migrants arrived while the children of the war settlers reached adulthood. Some members of this younger generation were able to rise above the menial labor positions of their elders. Joe Howe, for example, came as a small child during the war because

⁷⁶⁸ "Jack Howe," *Bedford Free Press*, 21 December 1915; *Des Moines Register and Leader*, 27 December 1915; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Iowa Negro in War*, 314; *Bedford Free Press*, 13 June 1901; *Bedford Free Press*, 2 May 1901; "Friendly Eye of Neighbors on Hattie, 76," UNC, 1956, Black Binder; W.E. Markle, "Good Neighbors Provide Christmas Gift," UNC, Blue Binder; UNC, 13 June 1903, Black Binder; 1880 U.S. Census.

⁷⁶⁹ Beitz, "Going Up to Glory Very Slow," 50; "Clarinda's Early Negro Population Had Outstanding Community Leaders," *Clarinda Herald-Journal*, 22 June 1958; UNC, 1918, Black Binder; Mabel H. Kenea, "Henry Webb, Born and Sold in Slavery, Lives in Clarinda," *Page County Democrat*, 26 July 1923. For example, when Mary Knight died in 1934 at the age of 75, she had survived all three of her children. "Mrs. Mary Knight," UNC, April 1934, Black Binder.

his father wanted him to receive an education and eventually became one of the Midwest's best racehorse trainers. There was also Henry Webb, head chef at an elite restaurant; restaurateur Thomas Dunn; barber J.W. Anderson; mail carriers D.M. Brown and Theodore Pemberton; A. Cartmill, the local sales agent for the black-owned *Indianapolis Freeman*; and Jasper Prince, who became so prosperous a businessman that he was referred to as "the colored merchant prince of Coin." Most new members of this black middle class shared the slave background and lack of education characteristic of earlier settlers. L.F. "Daddy" and Nancy "Sis" Montgomery were former Missouri slaves (during the war, Daddy's siblings had been sold to Texas and he had been hid beneath the house to keep them from being freed by Jayhawkers) who came to Clarinda in 1899 with their extended family, where Daddy worked as a garbage man, ran a hack service during public celebrations, and became financially successful despite never learning to read; his brother George was a farm laborer, chef and janitor so well thought of by white leaders that when his house burned down they raised funds to help him get back on his feet.⁷⁷⁰

Although most Valley blacks lived in Clarinda, their economic and social ties stretched throughout the region. Henry Webb worked not only there but also in Corning, Villisca, Council Bluffs, Omaha, and Blair, Nebraska at various times and was also part of the region's extensive kinship networks. Many Valley blacks had come from northwestern Missouri with their families

⁷⁷⁰ "Joe Howe," UNC, September 1938, Black Binder; "Joe Howe's Last Running Horse Will Now Run for Joe's Grandson," UNC, Black Binder; UNC, 14 January 1898, Black Binder; "Will Baker," UNC, February 1890, Blue Binder; UNC, 21 September 1895, Black Binder; "Mrs. James Wilson," UNC, November 1913, Black Binder; "A.P. Skeeled, Printer, Talks of Other Days," *Clarinda Journal*, 24 June 1926; "Veteran Negro of Long Residence Here is Buried Friday," UNC, 20 January 1937, Black Binder; UNC, July 1900, Black Binder; "D.M. Brown," UNC, 1887, Black Binder; UNC, March 1906, Black Binder; UNC, February 1896, Black Binder; "Notes," *Clarinda Journal*, 7 November 1893; "No School for Slave," UNC, Blue Binder; "L.F. Montgomerys Wedded 60 Years," UNC, 31 December 1931, Black Binder; "Clarinda's Early Negro Population Had Outstanding Community Leaders"; "Arthur H. Montgomery," *Clarinda Journal*, 15 February 1907; "Another Old-Time Resident is Gone," UNC, April 1934, Black Binder; "Daddy Montgomery Was Friend to All," UNC, Black Binder; Ruth Shambaugh Watkins, "Blessed Are the Meek," *The Christian Herald* (May 1947); "Mrs. Isabel Cook Montgomery," UNC, 9 August 1943, Black Binder.

intact and were able to reestablish familiar patterns in their new home, including marriage between prominent families such as the Launeers, the Casons, the Knights, and the Webbs. The leading black citizen in the Nodaway Valley, though, was Thomas Gordon Jones, a man who followed the philosophy that “ef Ah couldn’t be leader of the gang...Ah wouldn’t gallop with the flock.”⁷⁷¹ He was born in 1836, a slave on a Georgia cotton plantation, and headed north during the war, being captured by rebels and then rescued by Federal soldiers during the Battle of Chattanooga.⁷⁷² He continued north in the employ of a white lieutenant, eventually ending up in Clarinda in 1867, where he worked as a farm laborer and married a woman named Eliza Jane Saunders, with whom he bought his own farm a few years later. The tall, dark-skinned slender man with stylish sideburns was known as “Doctor” due to his training as a masseuse and chiropodist, but he also earned a living by working on his farm. His influence in the black community came from his financial success (he gave his son a wedding present of \$500 for “[being] attentive to his work and [behaving] himself”); his extensive kinship connections, which were aided by the marriages of his ten children; and his relationship with the white elite. He skillfully used all three as the solicitor of donations for Clarinda’s black churches and for

⁷⁷¹ UNC, Black Binder; “Mrs. Mary Knight”; “Obituaries: Carrie Louneer Roberts,” UNC, November 1944, Black Binder; UNC, October 1900, Black Binder; “Clarinda’s Early Negro Population Had Outstanding Community Leaders”; “Elizabeth Douglas Cason,” UNC, May 1953, Black Binder; UNC, 5 June 1897, Black Binder; “Mrs. Jane Funches Succums; Funeral Held at Glenwood,” UNC, April 1942, Black Binder; UNC, June 1909, Black Binder; Rev. J. Jones and J.F. Baker, “Notice to Whom It May Concern,” UNC, April 1895, Black Binder; “Colored People Celebrate August 5 in Clarinda,” UNC, 1902, Black Binder; J.G. McCormick, “Comparison of Celebrations,” UNC, August 1901, Black Binder; “Colored Folks Held Big August 4 Celebrations,” *Clarinda Centennial Book*, Black Binder.

⁷⁷² “Thomas Gordon Jones,” UNC, February 1912, Black Binder. This article states that Jones enlisted in the “First Colored Alabama regiment,” but there is no record of a Thomas Jones or Thomas Griggs in the 1st Alabama Infantry (African Descent), later renamed the 55th U.S.C.I. It is more likely that he enlisted in the 111th U.S.C.I., formerly the 3rd Alabama Colored Infantry, which served in Tennessee and lists a Thomas Jones in its roster, although it was not at Chattanooga.

Emancipation Day celebrations, where he also served as emcee; one publicity flyer declared that “as a hustler in getting up celebrations of this kind, Thomas Gordon Jones has no equal.”⁷⁷³

Generally speaking, African Americans in the Valley were able to break down many of the racial barriers that hindered their progress in other parts of the country, and although most economic and political power remained in the hands of whites, blacks took a sizable share for themselves. Most worked as laborers, but some also found success in more elevated fields. Racial exclusion from transportation venues, hospitals, or public venues was the exception, not the rule.⁷⁷⁴ White entrepreneurs of course were not being entirely altruistic since they made a great deal of money from their black customers, but the same could have been true for others who did follow Jim Crow policies. Despite the fact that blacks in Clarinda made up a percentage of the population similar to that of Keokuk, the former never experienced the same kind of open racial hostility.

It is generally true that across the state whites were more open to positive racial dynamics so long as blacks remained a tiny minority, but the somewhat different climate in the Valley can be explained in part by its unique economic factors. This had been a sparsely populated region before the Civil War, and it needed migrants in order to grow. Farmers needed laborers (and urban markets in Omaha/Council Bluffs needed the goods that they produced); entrepreneurs

⁷⁷³ “Thomas Gordon Jones”; UNC, July 1895; “Colored Folks Held Big August 4 Celebrations”; UNC, July 1895, Black Binder; UNC, March 1902, Black Binder; “Memories of Glen King,” in Betty Ankeny and Barbara Hartman, *Pages from the Past*, Blue Binder; UNC, July 1895, Black Binder; UNC, April 1899, Black Binder; UNC, 29 June 1898, Black Binder; “Allen Jones,” UNC, September 1890, Black Binder; UNC, 13 June 1903, Black Binder; “In Remembrance of Aunt Eliza Jones”; UNC, April 1907, Blue Binder; UNC, August 1897, Black Binder; UNC, 25 October 1893; UNC, December 1891, Black Binder; “The Winning Speller,” UNC, 18 January 1892, Black Binder; UNC, 27 January 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 2 January 1900, Black Binder; “Clarinda’s Early Negro Population Had Outstanding Community Leaders”; UNC, Black Binder; UNC, August 1894, Black Binder; “Will Celebrate,” UNC, July 1891, Black Binder #2; “Here Are the Names of the Persons Who Will Have Charge of the Emancipation Celebration, August 3rd,” UNC, 1906, Black Binder; UNC, 27 July 1891, Black Binder.

⁷⁷⁴ For example, J.A. Anderson was being cared for at the county hospital when he died on July 19, 1900. UNC, 20 July 1900, Black Binder.

needed employees and customers; and upper and middle-class whites needed servants. While white immigration was slow, black migrants came in by the hundreds during the war and kept coming for decades. These new residents were precisely the kind of employees and consumers that local business leaders needed; prosperous enough to purchase goods and be productive while still in a clearly defined, inferior socioeconomic position. At the same time, though, whites did not want to alienate them; they had left slavery and Jim Crow in Missouri, and they could leave the Valley for larger cities or other rural areas further west just as easily. Desperate not to lose its labor and client base, the white elite was willing to make certain concessions, and Valley blacks were able to force the power structure to recognize at least some of their legal, political and social rights, provided that they remained in a subordinate position.

The presence of Talt “T.E.” Clark also played a factor in local race relations. The son of a minister who had fled Missouri during the war to escape persecution for his Union sympathies, Clark settled in Clarinda in 1866 and studied law while chopping wood to support himself, then ran a private practice until he was elected to the state senate in 1881, where he spent two decades as one of the most outspoken liberals.⁷⁷⁵ Although his worldview likely came in part from his family background, Clark may also have been motivated by a personal sympathy for blacks since he too had escaped southern oppression by coming to Iowa and then worked at menial labor to improve his lot in life. He was part of an overall GOP dominance in the Valley. White community institutions such as the GAR and fraternal lodges were firmly Republican, as were the region’s small European immigrant population (largely Swedish and Evangelical German), and the presence of a large, prosperous black community meant that “[whether] or not Page

⁷⁷⁵ *History of Page County* (1880), 728. Talt was later joined in his legal practice by his son, who ironically had the name Alexander Clark. Kershaw, *History of Page County II* (1909), 286; *Biographical History of Page County, Iowa* (Chicago: Lewis & Dunbar, 1890), 439-40; *Page County History* (1942), 66.

County Republicans believed in true equality of the races, Republican party positions on racial issues could not remain abstract for the voters.”⁷⁷⁶

Finally, the local press, especially the *Clarinda Herald* and *Page County Democrat*, was a further sign of positive race relations. Owned by Clark, former abolitionist J.W. Chaffin and others, the *Herald* reported on black community affairs, both negative and positive, with great thoroughness and often endorsed its events. Although the *Democrat* was less liberally minded, it underwent a significant evolution after the war. During the late 1860s it published “darky jokes” and other racist rhetoric, but by 1870 it supported the desegregation of local schools and juries, and on Decoration Day editor and veteran N.C. Ridenhour declared “No matter what color an Indian or an African sun may have burned upon his brow...the moment he touches American soil...he stands forth redeemed, regenerated, disenthralled by the irresistible genius of universal emancipation.”⁷⁷⁷ Even as the *Democrat* opposed the GOP and promoted a collective memory of the war in which both parties were equally patriotic and abolitionist, it largely avoided race baiting and joined the *Herald* in reporting on black community life without overt bias.⁷⁷⁸ Other Valley newspapers such as the Bedford-based *Taylor County Republican* and *Shenandoah Sentinel* were also fairly impartial in their racial commentary. Thus, although African Americans further to the northwest started the *Omaha Progress* (which included news reports from the Valley), Clarinda blacks never attempted to establish their own newspaper because their interests were being served by the white press; of course the fact that black newspapers were risky

⁷⁷⁶ *Biographical History of Page County* (1890), 274-75; *History of Taylor County, Iowa* (Des Moines: State Historical Co., 1881), 421-30; Purcell, “The Political Culture of Page County,” 6-20.

⁷⁷⁷ *History of Page County* (1880), 523, 537, 729; *Page County Democrat*, 5 July 1869, 7 August 1869, 8 January 1870, 16 April 1870.

⁷⁷⁸ Both newspapers were so similar in this regard that it is often difficult to determine which one published a particular article, as most clippings held at the NVHM are identified by date but not by publication.

ventures even in major cities, let alone a rural corner of southwestern Iowa with only a few hundred black residents, probably factored into this decision as well.⁷⁷⁹

This did not mean that the Valley was free of racial incidents. In 1874, a group of Shenandoah whites interrupted a black ballroom dance by sending a cow and a dog with cans tied to its body into the room. One newspaper sided with the black partygoers, calling their tormentors “white trash” and declaring that “Shenandoah should treat the colored people more respectably.”⁷⁸⁰ It is possible that the “trash” in question were unemployed young men who blamed the black migrants for their own poor quality of life but were not angry enough (or too frightened) to commit a more serious act of violence. Instead, they sought to restore a comfortably familiar conception of the world by exerting power over African Americans through this humiliation; even the use of farm animals may have been a subtle reminder to the dancers that until recently, many of them had been considered agricultural property. Incidents like these were isolated, though. The open racial violence of the antebellum period did not continue in the years that followed.

Not surprisingly, race relations seemed to harden the most around the issues of miscegenation and criminal justice. News reports throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century furiously criticized the handful of interracial couples in the region. In 1869, the *Page County Democrat* noted the marriage of a white man from Amity and a black woman in Maryville, Missouri (and their subsequent arrest by state authorities), presenting the incident as a cautionary tale for all decent folks:

⁷⁷⁹ Kershaw, *History of Page County I* (1909), 155; (*Bedford Taylor County Republican*, 2 October 1880; “Respect Shown to Colored Nurse,” *Shenandoah Sentinel*, 25 January 1910; Todd Vogel, ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

⁷⁸⁰ UNC, November 1874, Black Binder.

“We often hear of such things occurring at some distant, outlandish place where they have no respect for the laws of God nor man, but miscegenation is a reality at home, right among us. . . . Here we have a man who has disgraced . . . his whole family connections, the community in which he lives, his *party* and the whole race of white men in general and himself in particular, by marrying a *wench* that is superlatively black, ugly, disgusting and vicious.”⁷⁸¹

Most relationships between black women and white men were much more clandestine than this. In 1875, George Scott was arrested for having “stolen the virtue” of fellow African American Mary Lewis. Scott was forced to marry her, but he denied the charges and refused to live with her “at least until further developments decide the case.” It was soon discovered that a white man had paid to have Scott arrested. The evidence now suggested that Lewis had a sexual relationship with both men and that the white man tried to frame Scott for fathering a child so that he could avoid public embarrassment, while Scott in turn concluded that the birth of a light-skinned child would acquit him.⁷⁸² Further details about the case are not available, but the exasperated *Democrat* warned that “nice young white men who, at the dead hour of midnight, visit the negro quarters near the depot had better sail low in the future or their names will be given to the public, and read to the Sunday schools of the different churches.”⁷⁸³

The harshest criticism, though, was reserved for black men involved with white women. A 1901 news report about G.W. Hall, a “negro of the most pronounced type” in the Des Moines area who married a white woman, called for Iowa to bring back its anti-miscegenation laws and admitted that “While it may be true, and probably is, that the man in this case is every whit as good as the woman . . . their marriage is a crime against society.” This union was considered even

⁷⁸¹ “Miscegenation,” *Page County Democrat*, 19 June 1869.

⁷⁸² “Mary Lewis,” UNC, 1875, Black Binder. Scott was no saint himself, having multiple arrests for fighting and drunkenness on his record. “Henry Clay,” UNC, 1875, Black Binder; “George Scott,” UNC, 9 August 1893, Black Binder.

⁷⁸³ UNC, 1875, Black Binder.

worse than illicit interracial affairs because it had the sanction of the authorities and because the groom was in fact respectable. Hall could not be attacked on any grounds except race, and accepting his marriage would be implicit acceptance of other well-to-do black men marrying white women. Strangely, though, a *Journal* report on Tom Bagby noted that he was married a white woman without commenting on the interracial nature of the union, although it may be that the reporter felt sympathy for this singular black resident of College Springs.⁷⁸⁴ This omission aside, Valley whites, like many others throughout Iowa, supported at least some measure of political equality but remained firmly opposed to interracial marriage and social equality; for them, G.W. Hall's story only confirmed the link between the two.

While it was condemning miscegenation and maintaining its encyclopedic record of black church life and social activity, the local press also eagerly reported on black criminal activity, revealing insights about the perils of the criminal justice system for African Americans. The Third Ward gained a somewhat undeserved reputation for lawlessness and was actually referred to as "Guntown" by some townspeople. Most neighborhood crime involved robbery, drunkenness, gambling, and physical attacks (including spousal abuse) but rarely shootings, and most perpetrators and victims were black; with a few highly publicized exceptions, Clarinda's less law-abiding citizens rarely troubled whites.⁷⁸⁵ Sometimes violence had a political sheen, as when the chronically arrested George Scott, who apparently supported the Democratic Party, assaulted two white men at the Republican primary in Hawleyville in 1876; half a century later,

⁷⁸⁴ UNC, 11 May 1901, Black Binder; UNC, July 1901, Black Binder; "Mixing the Colors," UNC, 31 October 1900, Black Binder.

⁷⁸⁵ A few selected larceny cases from the 1890s and early 1900s involved the theft of a gold watch, cigars, and poultry. UNC, 6 August 1902, Black Binder; "After a Sly Coon," UNC, 27 November 1893, Black Binder; "Skipped Out," UNC, 30 July 1893, Black Binder; "Chicken Thieves," UNC, 1893, Black Binder; *Clarinda Journal*, 8 January 1894; UNC, Black Binder; "Clarinda Negro is Murdered," UNC, Black Binder; "Pete Brown and Negro Named Griffin Have Fight – Brown Badly Injured," UNC, 23 May 1906, Black Binder.

several unnamed parties returned the favor by attacking one Henry Webb in a barber shop for voting Democratic. The epicenter of crime seemed to be the train depot, where young men of both races gambled, fought, harassed travelers, and were arrested together, although the crime rate decreased after the railroad company agreed to work with the Clarinda police. Decades later, one white resident would recall that the trouble in the Third Ward was entirely “caused by some trashy whites,” but African Americans took the brunt of the blame.⁷⁸⁶

Although most criminal activity took place in the city, some culprits tried to flee via the Valley’s growing transportation networks. After being accused of robbing veteran George Whipkey of his military pension at knife point in 1896, for example, Joseph Howe fled into the countryside and did not return until he had secured several alibi witnesses. The practice of fleeing from one town to another was so common that when Herm Davis took the train to St. Joseph, Missouri after robbing a safe in Clarinda, the police were waiting for him; four years earlier he had committed a similar crime in St. Joseph but was caught in Clarinda. Some crimes, though, went unpunished because Third Ward residents were not willing to turn the accused over to the police. As one news editorial complained, most residents were decent people being judged unfairly by “a few scalawags...who think they are mimicking Jesse James,” but they made matters worse by not helping with criminal investigations. St. Jacob’s was particularly adamant about assuming jurisdiction over crimes that took place on its property and involved members. Community standing played a role in this; former Emancipation Day leader Oliver Johnson, for example, was judged by a church committee after he attacked the pastor, but others of less

⁷⁸⁶ “And the Colored Troops Fought,” UNC, 1876, Black Binder; “Intimidation,” 1899, UNC, Black Binder; “Crap Shooters,” UNC, February 1892, Black Binder; UNC, 15 October 1899, Black Binder; UNC, 2 September 1900, Black Binder; UNC, November 1900, Black Binder; Anna B. Clark, “Old Newspaper Brings Forth Pioneer Day Reminiscences,” *Clarinda Herald*, 3 August 1964.

prestige who committed similar crimes were not. Johnson may have wished that the authorities had handled his case, though, since the church fined him \$50 for assault and battery, far more than the typical city fine.⁷⁸⁷ African Americans were also more willing to turn over accused offenders suspected of more heinous crimes. In 1883, Henry Dyke's neighbors complained to the police that he and his wife were abusing their mentally challenged 13 year-old son. When the authorities came to investigate, they found five children "half-clothed" in rags and a baby sick from neglect.⁷⁸⁸ During a time of increased racial hostility around the country, Clarinda blacks attempted to solve some issues internally even to the point of shielding offenders from the police, but those whose crimes more seriously offended community morals or had less social status did not receive such treatment.

This attitude was informed not only by the guilty pleasure of seeing young blacks (who rarely committed anything more than petty crimes) escape the clutches of the police but even more so by a general distrust of the criminal justice system, which despite the relative peace of Valley race relations was rife with bias. Most people accused of petty crimes were tried by a local magistrate since Clarinda was too small to panel a jury for every case, but no African Americans sat on a Page County jury until 1900.⁷⁸⁹ When there was a jury trial, blacks rarely had benefit of counsel, although T.E. Clark (and in one case the mayor himself) occasionally

⁷⁸⁷ UNC, 1896, Black Binder; "A Burglary," UNC, 13 October 1896, Black Binder; "Richardson's Thief Caught," UNC, 14 July 1897, Black Binder; "Negro Resisted Arrest," UNC, 14 December 1900, Black Binder; "Arrested for Burglary," UNC, 31 March 1901, Black Binder; UNC, Black Binder; "Trial Before the Mayor," UNC, 6 May 1899, Black Binder; UNC, 16 July 1896, Black Binder; UNC, 24 July 1896, Black Binder; UNC, July 1896, Black Binder; "He Was Fined," UNC, September 1892, Black Binder. This tradition had also been common in other African American communities for decades. Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 149.

⁷⁸⁸ The authorities immediately made plans to take the 13 year old to the Glenwood home for mentally challenged Iowans, but it is not known what happened to the other children or their parents. "A Sad Case," UNC, January 1883, Black Binder.

⁷⁸⁹ "Fighting," UNC, 1875, Black Binder; UNC, 13 December 1900, Black Binder. There was a black juror in Maryville, Missouri in 1870. "The Festival," *Page County Democrat*, 16 April 1870.

represented them in serious cases. Blacks were given heavier penalties for committing crimes against whites than in cases where the victim was black, and they were often treated harsher than whites who had committed the same crime. In 1893, for example, two white youths and two black youths were arrested together for stealing fruit at the Clarinda train station, but the charges against the whites were dismissed while the blacks received three days in prison. Furthermore, law enforcement officers were not above using brutal force against African Americans – as two black men learned in 1892 when they were thrown headfirst down the stairs of the Clarinda opera house by an officer, who later claimed that he had acted “gently” – and attempts to seek justice in the legal system, like a 1901 lawsuit against city officials in Creston for unlawful arrest, were unsuccessful.⁷⁹⁰

Although Clarinda had a cohort of black men whose chronic arrests for assault, public drunkenness or larceny were often in the newspaper, even more prosperous blacks sometimes found themselves in trouble, thus blurring the line between “respectable” and “criminal” that they themselves tried to draw. Rafe Turner helped organize Emancipation Day celebrations, but he was also arrested for gambling, bootlegging and adultery on numerous occasions, although unlike many black defendants he was able to pay the fine rather than serve jail time. Other respected community members such as Joe Howe and Daddy Montgomery were arrested on various charges. Even Thomas Gordon Jones was accused of firing a shotgun at another community leader in 1895, but he retained T.E. Clark as counsel, presented alibi witnesses, and won an acquittal. A more serious case involving another member of the black elite, though,

⁷⁹⁰ “He Wanted the Defendant,” UNC, 1887, Black Binder; “Stole a Horse,” UNC, 1 July 1899, Black Binder; “That Stolen Horse,” UNC, July 1899, Black Binder; “An Expensive Luxury,” UNC, October 1899, Black Binder; “Accused of Serious Crime,” UNC, 18 March 1901, Black Binder; “Stop It,” UNC, 26 July 1893; “Richardson’s Thief Caught”; “Chicken Thieves”; *Clarinda Journal*, 8 January 1894; “Trial before the Mayor”; “Got Bounced,” UNC, 1892, Black Binder; UNC, 19 September 1901, Black Binder.

ended with a different outcome and served as a further reminder of the perils of the criminal justice system. In 1892 Hurley Lanier was accused of burglary with intent to commit rape; he had, the prosecution charged, stolen a horse and \$1.30 from the home of Amanda Stevenson and approached her window with the intention of raping her but left before doing so. The trial record is not available, but the evidence mentioned in the newspapers was all circumstantial: he had been seen around town the night of the burglary, his shoe matched a footprint near Stevenson's home, she said that she had heard his voice outside her home, and he had money when he was arrested. Defense counsel T.E. Clark brought several witnesses claiming that Lanier had been home at the time of the assault, but the jury found them unconvincing and returned a guilty verdict after deliberating for only a few minutes; he was then sentenced to fifteen years in prison.⁷⁹¹

Others, though, were unhappy with this outcome. Hundreds of people, including nearly every black person in Clarinda and many of the whites as well, came to the train station to see Lanier off to prison; one reporter called the scene reminiscent of a "a colored revival in the south." Some believed that the jury had been coerced into returning a guilty verdict, although no substantial proof of this ever emerged, and one editorial in the *Herald* declared that his conviction was an example of the "outrages committed on the colored race, both north and south, on account of their color." Only two years later, Thomas Gordon Jones' son John was given a much shorter sentence for the rape of a black woman. The judge in this case actually espoused a

⁷⁹¹ UNC, April 1896, Black Binder; "Laying It Out," UNC, January 1892, Black Binder; *Clarinda Journal*, 14 January 1894, Black Binder; "At the Courts," UNC, 5 March 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 29 May 1894, Black Binder; UNC, March 1895, Black Binder; UNC, 7 June 1895, Black Binder; UNC, July 1895, Black Binder; "Crap Shooters," UNC, 14 May 1893, Black Binder; UNC, 30 April 1898, Black Binder; UNC, 13 May 1901, Black Binder; "Joe Howe," UNC, 18 July 1893, Black Binder; UNC, 14 January 1901, Black Binder; "Not a Good Shot," UNC, 16 August 1895, Black Binder; "Charley Anderson Shot," UNC, 17 August 1895, Black Binder; "Guilty As Charged," UNC, 1892, Black Binder.

peculiar vision of affirmative action, arguing that Jones and other blacks had been affected by “the example that they had from their white masters”; the fact that he had never actually been a slave was not mentioned, but it was clear that black men from prominent families who raped black women could expect better treatment than black men accused of attempted rape of white women in the Valley’s criminal justice system.⁷⁹²

In spite of these problems, black community leaders espoused a moderate political philosophy, which further helped to create the overall positive mood of relations between the races. The largely uneducated elite could not easily distance itself from Valley blacks of lower standing, given the thin line between the two groups, but it could distinguish the Valley community as a whole from other African Americans. In 1894, for example, Rev. Richmond Taylor wrote a letter to the local newspapers asking for donations for the church, stating that “Unlike most towns,” he wrote, “the colored population of Clarinda is composed of the thinking class of the race... You are well aware of the relation churches sustain to the social and business life of a people, and in view of these facts can appreciate the importance of making our effort a success.”⁷⁹³ Thus Taylor’s argument was that Clarinda’s blacks had worked hard to raise themselves out of degradation, even as many other African Americans had failed, and if their white neighbors wanted to see this progress continue, they had better open their wallets; black moderation, black respectability, and white patronage had all been inextricably intertwined, but

⁷⁹² “And the Colored Troops Fought”; “Guilty As Charged”; UNC, December 1896, Black Binder; “John Jones,” UNC, 6 June 1899, Black Binder; UNC, 27 September 1901, Black Binder. Only a few years after his release from prison, Jones was back in jail for assault and battery against another black woman. UNC, 27 September 1901, Black Binder.

⁷⁹³ Richmond Taylor, “A.M.E. Parsonage,” 30 March 1894, Black Binder.

there was no mention of civil rights.⁷⁹⁴ This rhetoric was successful in defusing some of the worst forms of racial tension, even when national race relations were at their absolute worst. After an interracial brawl at a baseball game, an editorial dismissed talk among some angry whites of an impending race war, arguing that most Clarinda blacks were decent, self-respecting people and that both races had their share of immoral criminals. “As long as we continue to produce a type of white citizenship as bad as the worst black,” it concluded, “we had better refrain from including the whole black race in a sweeping and uncharitable concentration.”⁷⁹⁵

In some ways, Valley blacks applied Booker T. Washington’s uplift philosophy to their surroundings even before he had even fully articulated it himself. The idea of achieving racial progress not by fighting racism but by forging patronage ties with whites and by looking inward to improve the race through community institutions, property ownership and moral correctness perhaps made more sense in their lives than it did in Washington’s South.⁷⁹⁶ Like other black Iowans, they were not banned by custom or law from voting, attending certain schools, or working in certain professions. Racial violence was rare and lynching nonexistent. Although most blacks lived in one crowded neighborhood and had a lower standard of life than whites, this was not caused by overtly racist practices to the same degree that it was in the South. African Americans below the Mason-Dixon Line were told by Washington that the best response to *de jure* segregation, lynch law and disenfranchisement was hard work and respectability, but blacks

⁷⁹⁴ Nodaway Valley blacks also publicly identified with the prohibitionist movement; Rafe Stewart of Hawleyville tried to establish a temperance league, while noted prohibitionist activist Rev. G.W. Woody of Omaha spoke at Emancipation Day in 1894. “Rafe Stewart,” *Clarinda Herald*, 13 May 1871; UNC, 4 August 1894, Black Binder.

⁷⁹⁵ UNC, 19 May 1906, Black Binder; “Pete Brown and Negro Named Griffin Have Fight – Brown Badly Injured,”

⁷⁹⁶ Manning Marable, *Black Leadership* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 23-29, 31-33. As August Meier has shown, the roots of Washington’s ideas were so firmly entrenched before his rise to power that he “showed little or no originality in his program.” Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 82, 86, 97.

in the Nodaway Valley did not have to deal with such pronounced hypocrisy, and so this strategy actually seemed more feasible.⁷⁹⁷

Furthermore, the professional class which often strongly opposed Washington in other parts of the country did not exist in the Valley.⁷⁹⁸ Although African Americans did vote and occasionally run for office, their main focus – discursively, in their personal lives, and through community institutions – was hard work, respectability, and patronage ties with influential whites, rather than open agitation. This philosophy was further elaborated through a rigid sexual color line and a conciliatory collective memory of the 1860s in which both Republicans and Democrats in Iowa were praised for their patriotic and antislavery efforts, far different from public memory in other parts of Iowa. Thus we can see that Washington’s policies, although envisioned with the violent Jim Crow South in mind, were predated by and eventually found support within an existing ideological framework among some northern African Americans.

These factors can be further explained through an examination of the Nodaway Valley’s black institutions: schools, churches, and political organizations. Although more than a dozen Valley blacks enlisted in the 60th, for the most part the military played a lesser role here than in other parts of the state, either in terms of actual service or in the discourse over that service after the war. This was due in part to the region’s distance from southeastern Iowa and from other recruiting efforts in Missouri (Nebraska had no black regiments); thus the same factor that explained this community’s isolation from the rest of black Iowa over the next few decades

⁷⁹⁷ In 1898, for example, one local newspaper reprinted a speech by Washington calling on African Americans to abandon politics and liberal arts education for agricultural or industrial work and moral behavior, which would win the respect of whites; the editor concluded that Washington “continues to point out to his race the path of true progress.” “Advice from a Colored Man,” UNC, April 1898, Black Binder.

⁷⁹⁸ Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 244-47. By contrast, Omaha had several black professors, a postal clerk, real estate dealers, and a census enumerator. “The Afro-American League,” *Omaha Progress*, 21 June 1890.

prevented it from taking part in this effort as well. Economic issues also played a part. The demand for farm hands in the Valley was so high that black men could make more money in this manner than they could in the military, or as laborers in eastern Iowa.⁷⁹⁹

Schools were more important to the community, even when blacks were denied access to them. While white children attended Clarinda Independent School, the largest in the region, black children had no learning institution at all until 1867, when the one-room Clarinda Colored School was built on the outskirts of town. This was less of a burden to black students than in cities like Muscatine or Keokuk since Clarinda was so small that no two places were truly far apart, but it did provide a symbolic reminder to black children that they were literally outsiders and barred from the best education available in the Nodaway Valley simply because of their race. As in other areas, attendance at the Colored School was hindered by the children's need to support their families (the average attendance was only thirteen) and the most dedicated students were children from prominent families who did not have to work, but the parents were committed to the institution; the teacher noted that ten of them visited the classroom during the 1870-71 school year. No one seemed to take notice at the time that the school's very existence was unconstitutional, but this issue was addressed a few years later. When the new Clarinda School (later renamed Garfield School after the assassinated president) was built in the mid-1870s, both races attended together. Black children remained a noticeable minority at Garfield into the early twentieth century, but they were far less common in other Valley schools.⁸⁰⁰ Hattie Stewart and her siblings were the only black students at the country school near Hawleyville,

⁷⁹⁹ *Roster and Record V*; Cunningham, *Southwest Iowa's Heritage*, A-119.

⁸⁰⁰ Clarinda Independent School display, NVHM; *Page County History* (1942), 59; "Clarinda School," UNC (1871), Black Binder; UNC (1871), Black Binder; Clarinda School display, NVHM. Extant class photographs at the NVHM show two to five blacks and about thirty total students in nearly every class.

while Harriet Brown's large family was the entire black community of Blanchard, although she later recalled that the principal took steps to ensure that they were treated fairly.⁸⁰¹

Towards the end of the century, some African Americans began progressing beyond the basic education level. One news article from 1899 reflects a growing interest in Washington's favorite brand of education, describing a "Colored Industrial School" in Clarinda, which apparently was without an instructor at the time; no other information about the school is available. Much more is known about the first black high school graduates, whose speeches at commencement ceremonies further elaborated Washingtonian conservatism. Nellie Brown's 1891 address, "A Struggle against Many Odds," mused on the value of patience and personal improvement, seen not only in the colonists and founding fathers but also in the "sons of toil and the daughters of oppression," and black Civil War veterans, who had "nourished the tree of liberty with the precious blood that flowed from their loyal veins."⁸⁰² In conclusion, she echoed many of the established sentiments about black citizenship, declaring that

"The condition of the colored people of this country to-day is a living contradiction of the prophecies of those who have predicted that the two races could not live upon the same continent together upon terms of political equality. In spite of all these predictions we are here yet, clothed with the same rights, privileges, with complete political assimilations, loyal to the same government, true to the same flag, yielding obedience to the same flag, revering the same institutions, actuated by the same patriotic impulses, speaking the same language, professing the same religion and serving the same God!"⁸⁰³

Similar ideas were offered by other black graduates like Flora Bill Knight, whose 1899 address "The Need of Progress of the Afro-Americans," called on northern blacks to go South

⁸⁰¹ "Friendly Eye of Neighbors on Hattie, 76"; Nick Lamberto, "Harriet Newsome," *Des Moines Register*, 10 July 1960.

⁸⁰² UNC, September 1899, Black Binder; "The City Schools," UNC, March 1891; "Education Notes," NVHM; "Class of 1891," 1891, UNC, Black Binder; "Emmett Moss," UNC, 1908.

⁸⁰³ "Class of 1891."

and teach their southern brethren “the way of progress and light.” Talt Clark’s closing remarks that year included a poetic verse about Flora – “one lonely Knight, though dark in every line, gilds with intellectual lead the class of ‘99” – and encouraged more black males to complete their education. In fact none graduated from high school until 1908, a fact noted in a news editorial which complained that although young men of both races were leaving school with “no loftier ambition than to get plenty of whisky and a game of craps,” African Americans could ill afford to be so unmotivated.⁸⁰⁴ The reality, though, was that many black parents felt compelled to pull their sons out of school and put them to work as soon as they became functionally literate. Although Valley blacks placed a high value on education, the realities of life meant that few could afford the indulgence of high school; they had the opportunity to enter school but not always the opportunity to finish it.⁸⁰⁵ The overwhelmingly rural character of the Valley also meant that Washington’s ideas on industrial education did not fit well, evinced perhaps by the failure of the Colored Industrial School.

Even more so than schools, the church was the subject of intense focus by the local press, which spent more time discussing it than any other black institution except perhaps Emancipation Day. Some wartime migrants attended white churches or temporary black ones during and immediately after the war, but by the 1870s Clarinda blacks had established Second Baptist Church and St. Jacob’s AME Church.⁸⁰⁶ Although some rural churches, both black and

⁸⁰⁴ “Eighteen Graduates,” 1895, UNC, Black Binder; “Dux Femina Est: Eight Young Ladies Graduate from the Clarinda High School on Friday Eve,” UNC, May 1899, Blue Binder; “The Opportunity of the Colored People”; “The City Schools”; “Education Notes”; “Class of 1891”; “Emmett Moss.”

⁸⁰⁵ For example, see “Moline Gleanings,” *Iowa Bystander*, 28 July 1905.

⁸⁰⁶ UNC, 13 June 1903, Black Binder; “Memories of Glen King”; Photograph of Rev. Andrew and Susan Baker, NVHM; *Biographical History of Page County* (1890), 346; UNC, 16 April 1942, Black Binder;

white, were forced to rotate their services with a single itinerate preacher traveling to a different town each Sunday, the Nodaway Valley had enough black ministers for the churches in Clarinda and Red Oak to hold weekly services and even to find temporary replacements when necessary.⁸⁰⁷ The churches also coordinated activities such as picnics and guest lectures, even scheduling events on alternate weeks so that Valley residents would be able to attend as many as possible, although some who lived in towns without a black church chose to join a white one rather than make a long trek each Sunday morning. As in black churches throughout the country, women played a prominent role in these Valley institutions despite being denied formal leadership positions; two rare exceptions were Eliza Brown, one of Clarinda's only high school graduates and superintendent of St. Jacob's Sunday School, and Lulu Nash, who was "was noted among the colored people everywhere as an able speaker."⁸⁰⁸

Both churches depended on white support through fundraisers. At one Baptist rally in 1893, for example, \$27 of the \$30 in donations came from whites, while a 1900 editorial in the *Herald* called on Clarinda's white churches to help provide St. Jacob's pastor with a higher salary; it had become *expected* that prominent whites would assist in keeping the black churches open. The proceeds from these fundraisers typically went to the pastor's salary or building improvements, but they was also occasionally used for special concerns such as an 1894 clothing drive for poor black children. The most common events were possum dinners, often with ice cream and lemonade. They were held at the church itself unless the event was a cake walk, dance

⁸⁰⁷ In 1899, for example, both St. Jacob's AME and Second Baptist held services with guest preachers while their ministers attended conferences in Chicago. UNC, 1899, Black Binder; UNC, September 1899, Black Binder.

⁸⁰⁸ UNC, 21 July 1895, Black Binder; UNC, June 1900, Black Binder; UNC, August 1900, Black Binder; "Deceased," UNC, 10 May 1899, Black Binder; "Mrs. Isabel Cook Montgomery"; UNC, March 1928, Blue Binder; "Albert G. Stewart," UNC, September 1951, Black Binder; "Lecture," UNC, May 1891, Black Binder; "Mrs. Lulu Nash Honored Thursday on Her 100th Birthday, Passes Away Saturday," UNC, 9 December 1944, Black Binder; UNC, November 1900, Black Binder.

contest or concert, where songs like “I’ll Never Leave Old Dixie” and “Old Folks at Home” gave white attendees a glimpse of black southern culture and the imagined antebellum past.

Special events like a “tennis drill” in 1899 and a “wood sawing” contest in 1894 also brought interesting variety to this small town. Finally, they provided opportunities for gifted young African Americans to display and develop their talents in front of a supportive audience, for elite black families to further consolidate their community influence through the arts, and for community leaders to show the race’s postbellum progress in an apolitical, Washingtonian manner. Although these fundraisers usually went smoothly, the organizers also took precautions to prevent fraud, warning on one occasion that all donations should be left with the church treasurer since some unscrupulous people were collecting money in the name of the church and then keeping it for themselves.⁸⁰⁹ The patronage relationship also manifested in other ways. Second Baptist was the chief beneficiary, hosting guest sermons by prominent whites and receiving a gift of new bibles from “the citizens of Clarinda” in 1894.⁸¹⁰ African Americans, on

⁸⁰⁹ *Biographical History of Page County* (1890), 346; “Church to Become Home,” UNC, 27 January 1977, Black Binder; UNC, 16 April 1942, Black Binder; “Paid Off the Debt,” UNC, November 1892, Black Binder; “Remarkable Debt Lifter: Rev. Edward Wilson, Negro Pastor, Has a Wonderful Record,” *Sioux City Journal*, 5 May 1901; “A Good Work,” UNC, Black Binder; UNC, December 1890, Black Binder; UNC, 12 November 1893, Black Binder; “A.M.E. Church,” UNC, November 1891, Black Binder; “Church Notes,” UNC, May 1895, Black Binder; UNC, 11 May 1895, Black Binder; UNC, 17 November 1898, Black Binder; T.W. Johnson, “Rally Next Sunday at A.M.E. Church,” UNC, 5 November 1899, Black Binder; UNC, December 1899, Black Binder; UNC, January 1900, Black Binder; “Festival,” UNC, 1877, Black Binder; “Festival,” UNC, 1876, Black Binder; “Carve Dat Possum,” UNC, 18 January 1894, Black Binder; “A Card of Thanks,” UNC, 26 January 1894, Black Binder; UNC, February 1903, Black Binder; UNC, March 1894, Black Binder; “Card of Thanks,” UNC, April 1894, Black Binder; UNC, April 1894, Black Binder; “Fun! Funnier!! Funniest!!!,” UNC, 1897, Black Binder; UNC, 21 December 1894, Black Binder; “She Takes the Cake,” UNC, 1894 (long), Black Binder; UNC, April 1894, Black Binder; *Clarinda Journal*, 1 January 1894; UNC, 27 January 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 13 February 1894, Black Binder; UNC, September 1898, Black Binder; *Clarinda Journal*, 1 January 1894; UNC, 27 January 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 13 February 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 1899, Black Binder; UNC, 29 August 1897, Black Binder; UNC, May 1898, Black Binder; UNC, 10 May 1898, Black Binder; UNC, 20 May 1898, Black Binder. In 1899, Rev. Johnson of St. Jacob’s also became a member of the Minister’s Alliance, which voted to “indorse and approve” his efforts to build a parsonage and “[recommended] him to the liberality of the people of Clarinda.” UNC, March 1899, Black Binder.; UNC, April 1899, Black Binder.

⁸¹⁰ *Clarinda Journal*, January 1894, NVHM, Black Binder; UNC, 15 January 1894, Black Binder; UNC, March 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 7 March 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 19 August 1899, Black Binder.

the other hand, rarely spoke at white churches, with the exceptions being music performances or race-related events such as a 1901 celebration of the thirty-eighth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation at a Presbyterian church. This also served as a strong expression of Washingtonian black conservatism, with speeches by Clark, Mary Nash, and others on topics such as “Industry,” “Duties of the Colored Woman,” “Progress of the Negro,” and “The Negro Soldier.”⁸¹¹

Clarinda’s two black churches seemed to have an even greater political focus than other congregations around Iowa, perhaps because GOP dominance allowed them the space to discuss political issues with less fear of censure. Political candidates such as T.E. Clark were allowed to campaign during Sunday service. St. Jacob’s lent its support to William McKinley in his 1900 presidential campaign by hosting a “mass meeting of the colored voters” and by sending its pastor to give the keynote address at a biracial rally. Second Baptist allowed a political group called the Colored League to hold its meetings there, and although its public debates sometimes focused on relatively uncontroversial topics such as the question of “Which is of the Most Benefit to Man, a Mother or a Wife,” others discussed current events like the Philippine-American War or centered on questions such as “Africo-Americans ought to emigrate to Africa for the betterment of their conditions,” or “The negro has been treated worse than the Indian.” These debates gave uneducated men the chance to show their knowledge of politics and history, refuting the perception that African Americans could not be informed citizens. It no doubt also helped that regular participants like Daddy Montgomery and Thomas Gordon Jones often took the conservative position, further enduring themselves and the church to the power structure. The churches were also successful at mining the past for its present political value. Various services

⁸¹¹ UNC, June 1899, Black Binder; “T.W. Johnson,” UNC, January 1901, Black Binder.

near the turn of the century provided lectures on “What the Emancipation Proclamation Was Intended for and What Have Been Its Results” and celebrated the anniversaries of the births of Richard Allen and John Brown; the latter event featured lectures by leaders of both races and Civil War-era patriotic songs, including (naturally) “John Brown’s Body Lies Moldering in the Grave.”⁸¹²

These were not, though, the only site for political activity. As early as 1871, an unnamed black man (identified in the press as “the noted barber and high toned colored gentleman of the west side of the square”) sought the GOP nomination for sheriff. This effort was ultimately unsuccessful, as was Sam Stewart’s 1896 campaign for director of the Clarinda school counsel. One newspaper opposed him while carefully assuring its readers that “we do not wish to be misunderstood in this article, as seeing any impropriety in a colored man running for office,” but in the end it did not matter, as he lost by a wide margin. In fact no African Americans were elected to public office in the Valley, but their votes nonetheless had an impact on the political structure, particularly in races for councilman of the Third Ward. Thomas Gordon Jones spoke before a predominantly white Republican convention in 1893, and African Americans organized several GOP rallies of their own during the 1890s. Another black political group called the Clarinda’s Voters Club held public debates in 1900, contemplating the question of “Shall the Negro Support the Republican Party during the Campaign.” Even young blacks engaged in

⁸¹² UNC, February 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 1900, Black Binder; UNC, 3 November 1900, Black Binder; UNC, 5 February 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 14 July 1896, Black Binder; UNC, March 1892, Black Binder; UNC, March 1894, Black Binder; UNC, December 1890, Black Binder #2: Church; “Interesting (?)” UNC, December 1890, Black Binder; UNC, September 1901, Black Binder; UNC, 19 February 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 5 February 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 19 February 1894, Black Binder; *Clarinda Journal*, 1 January 1894; *Clarinda Journal*, 8 January 1894; UNC, December 1899, Black Binder; UNC, April 1898, Black Binder; UNC, August 1899, Black Binder; UNC, February 1900, Black Binder; UNC, 3 May 1900, Black Binder; “John Brown: The One Hundredth Anniversary of His Birth,” UNC, 9 May 1900, Black Binder; UNC, May 1900, Black Binder.

symbolic politics; in 1903, Harold Nash was named “mayor for a day” at an event remembered only as “boy election.”⁸¹³

There was also political activity outside of Clarinda. In 1891 a Colored Congress was held in Red Oak to “devise an organized effort for the solution of the great national question, the Race Problem.” Although attendance was low, those who did come out had an experience very similar to Emancipation Day. Accompanied by a marching band, the delegation marched to the Clarinda train station, briefly disembarked at Shenandoah (where the band played again), and then marched through the streets again when it reached Red Oak. One musician who wrote an account of the Congress for the newspapers took pride in the fact that “all the singers showed culture,” while lamenting that his own unpracticed group performed like minstrels; clearly he was concerned about presenting a refined image of the race to whites, even commenting “the white citizens [took] great interest.”⁸¹⁴ Nevertheless, the Congress and other examples of black political agency showed both the importance of community institutions in that agency and also the difficulty of gaining political power in a region where blacks were still greatly outnumbered. It should also be noted that while Valley blacks weighed in on political issues, with few exceptions they avoided running for office or advocating for civil rights, even though their numbers gave them a greater chance than African American politicians in other parts of the state.

During the 1890s, improved rail connections helped end the isolation of Valley blacks and bring them into a larger statewide and Midwestern community. Rev. T.W. Johnson of St.

⁸¹³ *Page County Democrat*, 22 July 1871; UNC, September 1896, Black Binder; UNC, 15 February 1896, Black Binder; *Clarinda Journal*, 7 November 1893; “Third Ward Rally,” UNC, 15 November 1898, Black Binder; “Colored Voters’ Club,” UNC, 17 April 1900, Black Binder; UNC, May 1903, Black Binder.

⁸¹⁴ The participants made plans to hold another Congress the following May, but there is no evidence that this happened. S.J. Wright, “The Colored Congress,” UNC, 1891, Black Binder.

Jacob's took greater advantage of this than any other Valley leader. Between 1899 and 1903 he attended conferences throughout the Midwest, brought guest evangelists from Chicago, and organized an "open air meeting" for all Midwestern African Americans in Clarinda. Several years after Johnson moved to Muscatine, the Iowa District of the AME Church held its annual meeting in Clarinda, while Second Baptist hosted the fourth annual meeting of the Nebraska and Iowa Border Baptist Association in 1894 and 1903. Increased regional connections also aided other black institutions. Blind Boone, a regionally popular piano player who was married to a Clarinda woman, performed there on several occasions.⁸¹⁵ In 1888 Thomas Gordon Jones and other black elites created the Clarinda Excelsior Band, which was conducted by the same scholar who led Clarinda's all-white cornet band and solicited public donations to help purchase its uniforms and instruments; thus like other groups, its success depended on a combination of black initiative and white patronage.

The Valley's greatest spectacle, though, combined entertainment and politics and displayed patronage connection to white elites better than any other institution in the region: Emancipation Day, the high social point of the year for both races from the 1860s to the early twentieth century. Like other such celebrations around Iowa, these gatherings were held during the first week of August, although the date had less to do with its connection to West Indian emancipation (although that historical event was often mentioned) than for its location in the late

⁸¹⁵ UNC, July 1899, Black Binder; UNC, August 1899, Black Binder; UNC, 4 July 1900, Black Binder; UNC, September 1900, Black Binder; UNC, 6 September 1900, Black Binder; *Clarinda Herald*, 16 September 1902; *Clarinda Herald*, 22 September 1902; UNC, July 1900, Black Binder; UNC, October 1903, Black Binder; *Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Session, A.M.E. Church Sunday School Convention, Iowa District* (28-29 June 1906), Black Binder; "Clarinda A.M.E. Church," UNC, June 1906, Black Binder; UNC, July 1906, Black Binder; "Nebraska and Iowa Baptists," UNC, August 1894, Black Binder; UNC, September 1903, Black Binder; UNC, June 1895, Black Binder; UNC, 1 August 1894, Black Binder; UNC, Black Binder; UNC, July 1895, Black Binder; UNC, Black Binder; "Colored Excelsior Band," UNC, 1888, Black Binder; "Rhythm Natural to Blind Boone," *Clarinda Journal*, 26 April 1923.

summer when farmers had already harvested their crops. The speeches and entertainment (often featuring the Excelsior Band) were also similar to other Emancipation Days, although as the years went by the slave spirituals were replaced by white religious hymns as performers and organizers sought to move away from the slave past and toward a more respectable, mainstream future. One key difference from other Iowan celebrations was the lack of a strong military presence, since the Valley had so few black veterans; news reports from the 1890s show only six, although others may have already died in earlier years. These veterans were treated with respect, but with few exceptions they did not take a leadership role. While other African Americans jointly celebrated the death of slavery and the sacrifice of black veterans, Valley blacks focused largely on the former, celebrating the transition from slavery to freedom and the progress made since 1865.⁸¹⁶

Emancipation Day may have been even more important in the Valley than in other parts of Iowa. Farm work provided few opportunities for regular entertainment, while even those who lived in Clarinda were comparatively isolated from the larger world. An 1899 news report describes a “tired looking mother with the bunch of youngsters, the youngest in her arms, who plodded along the street, working harder on this, her annual holiday, than she had worked on any of the days that she had put in extra time in order to be able to come away for this once.” For this unnamed mother and others, the event carried such cultural, social and political value that it was worth using her sole vacation day. It also helped bring out the black community’s less

⁸¹⁶ “Another Account: Dr. Thomas Gordon Jones,” UNC, August 1890, Black Binder; “Colored Celebration on the Fourth: About Three Thousand Whites and Five Hundred Negroes Rejoice,” UNC, 1876, Black Binder; “Let My People Go,” UNC, 5 August 1898, Black Binder; “Our Honored Dead,” UNC, 30 May 1898, Black Binder; “He Was Tickled,” UNC, 18 February 1891, Black Binder; UNC, June 1895, Black Binder; UNC, 7 July 1902, Black Binder; “C. Roberts Dies Early Wednesday,” UNC, 8 November 1944, Black Binder; “A Burglary”; Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 154-56; Schwalm, “Emancipation Day Celebrations,” 291-332; UNC, 1888, Black Binder; “Moses Carter,” UNC, 1890, Black Binder #2; UNC, 27 January 1895, Black Binder; UNC, 30 May 1900, Black Binder; “Moses Carter,” UNC, October 1911, Black Binder; UNC, July 1900, Black Binder.

respectable elements, described as “cheap sports...familiar with all the wily ways of this wicked world,” and in fact some people were arrested almost every year. Some of this behavior may have simply have been an effort to celebrate in a more boisterous manner than what reserved community leaders proposed, and in fact working and upper class whites around the country experienced similar struggles over Independence Day gatherings, but some local blacks were no doubt simply taking advantage of the occasion to act out their typical behavior on a grander stage.⁸¹⁷

These disruptions were mortifying for community leaders, given the large number of whites in attendance. As early as 1876, they were actually a majority at the festivities – that year’s event drew three thousand, compared with five hundred blacks – and by the turn of the century, the press admitted that “the Fourth of August, as a rule, takes the cake among Clarinda celebrations.” This patronage meant that Valley celebrations grew larger even as other Emancipation Days around the state began to decline. There were several reasons for this. As Leslie Schwalm has shown, the festival allowed whites to escape into a fictional past of plantations and happy slaves, even if that was not the intent of the black organizers. The evening ball, for example, started out as a black-only affair and eventually grew to include whites, but as spectators rather than participants, thus lending an informal air of minstrelsy to the occasion. This previously separate sphere had now become what one reporter called “a regular old plantation dance...laughable and hugely enjoyed by the people who had never seen it before.”⁸¹⁸

At the same time, other factors were at play. As modern amusements such as bicycles and

⁸¹⁷ “Emancipation Celebration,” UNC, 4 August 1899, Black Binder; Schwalm, “Emancipation Day Celebrations,” 306.

⁸¹⁸ UNC, July 1898, Black Binder; “Colored Celebration,” UNC, August 1899, Black Binder; “The Fourth of August: The Colored People Take the Cake for a Big Crowd,” UNC, August 1900, Black Binder; Schwalm, “Emancipation Day Celebrations,” 321-23; Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 146; “Emancipation Celebration.”

carnival rides became available, organizers sought to bring them to this sparsely populated rural area, thus shrewdly filling a major gap in the local entertainment market. Although white celebrants constructed their own ideas on the slave past, blacks did not have to intentionally put on a minstrel show to entertain them when they had Ferris wheels. Emancipation Day became a means to celebrate the past, to use collective memory as political power, to strengthen black community ties, but also to make money.

The financial benefits were in fact reaped by many different people. Local merchants made a fortune from the thousands of people who needed food and lodging each August. These entrepreneurs were primarily white, but black businesspeople like restaurateur Thomas Dunn, who sold his “famous sugar candy,” also reaped dividends. The employer of the aforementioned “tired looking mother” was no doubt willing to give her this day off not only as a way of maintaining the peace but also because her presence helped boost the economy. The railroad companies reaped similar profits and thus were eager to offer discounted rates for anyone traveling from other Valley towns, especially after these towns were directly connected in the 1880s.⁸¹⁹ Town promoters were able to espouse the benefits of Clarinda, and politicians got a free opportunity for self-promotion in front of huge crowds. Finally, black churches and other institutions usually received a cut of the proceeds. In short, everyone benefited from Emancipation Day, so much so that when Chautauqua also became popular in the 1890s, it was coordinated with the preexisting gathering.⁸²⁰ Remarkably, even with all the money at stake in

⁸¹⁹ “The Celebration,” UNC, 1890, Black Binder; “Emancipation Celebration”; “Veteran Negro of Long Residence Here is Buried Friday”; “Let My People Go”; “Hurrah for the Grand Celebration at Clarinda, Iowa, August Fourth,” UNC, 1882, Black Binder; “Let My People Go!,” UNC, 1895, Black Binder; “Fourth of August Celebration,” UNC, 1900, Black Binder; *History of Montgomery County* (1881), 356-57.

⁸²⁰ Second Baptist Church reciprocated in 1902 by canceling Sunday school during Chautauqua. UNC, August 1902, Black Binder.

Emancipation Day, planning remained in the hands of black community leaders, enabling men who lacked formal education and worked at mainly low-paying jobs to briefly become important decision makers for the entire region.⁸²¹

Although details about the first celebration in 1869 are not available, reports from subsequent events show a focus on personal uplift as the key to moving from a degraded slave past to a positive future. T.E. Clark argued that whites' higher position in society was due solely to their greater advantages, while various speeches by Thomas Gordon Jones reflected on "the troubles, trials, and afflictions, and an interesting history of the liberation of their poor, degraded race," including personal testimony on his own transition from slavery to freedom.⁸²² In an era when white Iowa Republican leaders routinely attacked Democrats as the party of slavery and the Confederacy, black Emancipation Day speakers in the Valley called for political reconciliation, as Booker T. Washington later would. Charles Grigsby of College Springs, for example, said in 1876 that "he cared not whether it was republican or democrat" who had freed the slaves, only that "they were freed under our glorious flag, and now that they had their liberty they must be good citizens under the law, and work out their own future happiness."⁸²³

Simon Willis of Maryville went even further the following year, saying that "some called him a democratic nigger, but he didn't care...though the republicans started to free the negroes they never would have done it if the democrats and negroes too had not helped." This single sentence contained multiple political messages. Willis took pride in the active role that African

⁸²¹ UNC, 6 July 1898, Black Binder. For example, an 1899 news flyer advised merchants to "see Rev. C.H. Mendenhall" if they wanted to set up a booth. "Colored Celebration,"

⁸²² "Celebration," *Page County Democrat*, 30 July 1870; "Colored People's Celebration," UNC, 5 August 1871, Black Binder #2: August 4th Celebrations.

⁸²³ The *Page County Democrat* also noted that when a white speaker called for three cheers for Rutherford B. Hayes, the "cool thinking portion of the colored people" condemned his "political speech." "Colored Celebration on the Fourth."

Americans had taken in ending slavery, but he also challenged the notion that Republicans alone had been on the right side of the issue. It is possible that his own personal journey to freedom had included assistance from Union soldiers or civilians who happened to be Democrats – both groups who insisted on being mentioned positively in remembrances of the war while retaining the right to oppose racial progress – but Willis may also have simply been playing to his crowd, which it was said included “thousands of white trash.”⁸²⁴ Like other African Americans, Valley blacks were determined to remember slavery and the war in a light positive to them, but they broke with other black Iowans by allowing the Democrats to receive praise generally reserved only for the GOP.

Stronger connections with the rest of the state near the end of the century helped bring speakers from Des Moines, Keokuk, and Oskaloosa. The advertisements also began featuring images such as a grinning black man sitting on a tree stump and clapping while the words “You ‘Heah Me” floated over his head. This appeal to racial stereotypes, along with a steady increase in Clarinda’s black population (which reached 600 by the 1890s), helped bring in record crowds of as many as ten thousand people. The main organizer, though, was still Thomas Gordon Jones. His lengthy 1890 speech reiterated themes from earlier years, including his journey into freedom, gratitude to both parties for their role in emancipation, and the need for continued internal improvements among blacks. Calling himself “just the same old coon always,” he concluded that “I’m so happy because we’ve behaved ourselves so well; you must bear in mind that we have many difficulties; we’re just getting the rough corners knocked off of us.” Thus Jones appealed

⁸²⁴ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 53; “The Fourth of August: How the Colored Folks Celebrated It,” UNC, 1877, Black Binder.

to whites to be patient with his people as they struggled with the lingering traits of slavery, not to combat racism or actively help to create a racially egalitarian society.⁸²⁵

These sentiments echoed a unique ideology found among many prominent blacks of this period, who lived “according to a strict standard of personal responsibility that was rooted in their identities as black men and women, as Americans, and as Christians.”⁸²⁶ Such ideas are found not only in Jones’ words but in a literary offering by poet Michael Carey, based on oral accounts of the 1890 festival, which also expresses the joy of the former slaves over emancipation and postwar progress:

“I thank
 God, or Mr. Lincoln,
 or the earth itself
 for the people of this town
 who hired us, who
 welcomed our whole families,
 paid us real wages, sold us
 real homes, taught us
 in real schools. Maybe
 we ain’t got all
 the white folks got,
 but they ain’t got everythin’,
 We got somethin’
 they never will
 comin’ like we did
 from slavery. We know
 what it means to be broken,
 broken up and down and out.
 And we know what it means
 to stay whole. Oh yes,

we have known hunger:
 the greed of men

⁸²⁵ “Grand Jubilee Celebration,” UNC, 1889, Black Binder; “You ‘Heah Me: Emancipation Celebration,” UNC, 1890, Black Binder; “Emancipation Celebration,” UNC, 4 August 1890, Black Binder; “Get Ready,” UNC, 1891, Black Binder; “Statement,” UNC, 7 August 1891, Black Binder; Clark, “Old Newspaper Brings Forth Pioneer Day Reminiscences”; “Another Account: Dr. Thomas Gordon Jones.”

⁸²⁶ Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 5.

who would own us,
 the barkin' in the belly,
 the achin' in our arms
 when those we loved
 were taken, we have
 all seen the darkness
 in the sky when God
 did not answer our cryin'.
 Ladies and gentlemen,
 he is a-listenin' now
 and there is food
 all around."⁸²⁷

At a time when younger African Americans found such issues less relevant to their own lives and even some older blacks considered it too painful to discuss, Jones was committed to “[partaking] of the flux of history, [commenting] upon its direction, and [indicating], in subtle ways, paths to follow,” using memory to serve the larger project of racial uplift.⁸²⁸

Although the 1894 celebration had lower attendance than usual due to an economic depression and damage to the railroads, 150 blacks and 4,000 whites heard Moses Carter lecture on his military experience, followed by Omaha preacher G.W. Woodbey’s address “A Lesson to be Drawn from Emancipation Celebrations.” Woodbey advocated for a number of social reforms, including prohibition, woman’s suffrage (“the negro should favor woman suffrage,” he argued, because “women favored the emancipation of the negro”), federal ownership of banks, and better treatment for wage laborers.⁸²⁹ Although he used the memory of slavery and black wartime loyalty to speak on present issues just as many other Valley speakers had, his framework had a much broader focus. The same was true of the 1897 festival, where five

⁸²⁷ Michael Carey, “Clarinda Emancipation Day 1890: Dr. Thomas Gordon Jones,” 2.

⁸²⁸ Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 149-51, 174; Fabre, “African-American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century,” in Fabre & Robert O’Meally, eds., *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 72.

⁸²⁹ “Colored People Celebrate: Emancipation of the Negroes Made a Day of Rejoicing in Clarinda,” UNC, August 1894, Blue Binder; UNC, 17 July 1894, Black Binder; UNC, 20 July 1894, Black Binder; Clark, “Old Newspaper Brings Forth Pioneer Day Reminiscences”; UNC, July 1894, Black Binder.

thousand people came to hear John Lewis Waller discuss various notions of “Liberty” as envisioned by historical figures such as Moses, Toussaint, and Lincoln, also lauding “the brave deeds and sacrifices and good behavior of the negro citizens and soldiers during the war, and their improvement and advancement since then.” Although many Emancipation Day festivals around the country avoided mentioning the Haitian Revolution and instead focused on abolition in the British West Indies, which was more peaceful and thus more palatable to white audiences, now that nearly a century had passed since the slaves of Saint-Domingue rose up against their masters, it had apparently become acceptable to include Toussaint’s name among famous, praiseworthy revolutionaries.⁸³⁰

The theme of black military service continued in 1898, where more than nine thousand people enjoyed the new sport of cycling (performed by two Villisca blacks) and a float featuring a huge model of a battleship with the phrase “Remember the Maine” on the side. The Spanish-American War in fact had special importance for Valley blacks, given that two of their own left home to serve. Henry Webb worked as an army cook, just as he had during the Civil War, and spent more than a year in the Philippines. Talton E. Ashford, a member of one of Clarinda’s most prominent black families, was not so fortunate, dying of typhoid fever while stationed in Kentucky. Clarinda’s press mourned the loss of their “industrious, honest and intelligent” local hero, and his commanding officer informed his mother that his burial in the U.S. Government Section at a local cemetery, making him the first African American so honored, was “a victory

⁸³⁰ UNC, August 1897, Black Binder; “The Fourth of August Celebration,” UNC, 1897, Black Binder; Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 57. Emancipation Day speakers “selected certain events, moments, heroes, and figures more appropriate to convey this black perspective and to inspire their historical imagination to invent and create their own future.” Fabre, “African-American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century,” 77.

for your race...that resting place cannot be disturbed by race prejudice or any hand that would do him ill...By his death and burial in this place [he] made a monument to himself.”⁸³¹

African Americans also began assuming a greater role in other Valley events, especially at the week-long Chautauqua meetings that were rapidly growing in popularity. In 1902, the Sunday evening gathering was conducted by Clarinda’s black churches, with a collection taken up for both congregations. For the most part, though, the black lecturers and performers at these events were nationally known celebrities such as Mary Church Terrell, George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington, and the Metropolitan Jubilee Singers. Ads for the latter group projected an image of respectability but also promised a glimpse into the slave past, with a photo of the musicians standing in repose before an American flag and the declaration that they were “not a company of colored shouters, but are refined, cultured musicians, of HIGH GRADE, and their music will be high grade, at the same time retaining some of the characteristics of the old slave songs.”⁸³² At this and similar events, though, African Americans had largely a token presence, and Emancipation Day thus retained its primary role as the community’s main vehicle for social, economic and political interaction.

⁸³¹ UNC, July 1898, Black Binder; UNC, 1898, Black Binder; “Let My People Go”; UNC, Black Binder; Morris, “Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation,” 104; UNC (1871), Black Binder; Roy Chamberlain, UNC, 12 August 1894, Black Binder; “Celebration,” *Page County Democrat*, 30 July 1870; “Colored People Celebrate: Emancipation of the Negroes Made a Day of Rejoicing in Clarinda”; UNC, Black Binder; “Talton Ashford Dead,” UNC, October 1898, Black Binder; *Iowa State Bystander*, 14, 21 October 1898, quoted in Michael W. Vogt, “Conquer We Must when Our Cause is Just’: Company M – 7th United States Volunteer Infantry Immunes, 1898-1899” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Missouri Valley History Conference, Omaha, March 2005), 11. Sophia Ashford began receiving a government pension and moved to Lincoln, Nebraska to live with her surviving son. UNC, 27 July 1900, Black Binder.

⁸³² “Music,” UNC, 1891, Black Binder; “4th of July,” UNC, 1891, Black Binder; “In Remembrance of Aunt Eliza Jones”; “Colored Meeting at the Chautauqua,” UNC, August 1902, Black Binder; UNC, 19 September 1902, Black Binder; “Mrs. Terrell,” UNC, June 1900, Black Binder; *Clarinda Chautauqua Assembly*, 9 August 1906; Photograph of George Washington Carver Chautauqua Speech, 1902 or 1903, NVHM; Marion L. Moore, “Woman’s Alliance Commission,” UNC, 9 August 1899, Black Binder; “Concerning Chautauqua Talent,” UNC, September 1900, Black Binder.

The holiday remained so popular that in the summer of 1900 there were two of them. The usual celebration took place in Clarinda in August, but three days earlier the hundreds of people headed twenty miles south to the Missouri town of Burlington Junction, which despite having only one black resident decided to hold its own celebration. Advertisements in Clarinda newspapers made it clear that “the celebration there will not affect the one here in August 4 in any way,” and in fact the two gatherings were nearly identical, aside from Chicago preacher Reverdy Cassius Ransom’s keynote address “The Race Problem.” There was even a third festival in January at Clarinda’s white Presbyterian church, where an interracial crowd heard speeches with the usual mixture of reflections on the slave past, postwar progress, and the need for self-responsibility, including an address by a local doctor on proper diet and cleanliness.⁸³³

Later that same year, though, the press reported that “All is not peace and harmony among the colored brethren in the matter of arrangements for the big affair.” Serious factions within the black community had manifested in conflicts over Emancipation Day. One faction was led by Thomas Gordon Jones, and the other by a newer arrival. Dr. William Gibson came from Missouri the previous year, opened a veterinary practice, and outperformed two white competitors who tried to run him out of town; when they insisted that he take a licensing test, he demanded that they take it as well and then earned the highest grade.⁸³⁴ He became the spokesperson for those who felt that Jones had become too powerful, while Jones himself declared that the planning was being ruined by “upstarts who have not been in the city long

⁸³³ UNC, July 1900, Black Binder; “Program for August Fourth,” UNC, 1900, Black Binder; “The Fourth of August: The Colored People Take the Cake for a Big Crowd,” UNC, August 1900, Black Binder; “Thirty-Eighth Year that Anniversary of Emancipation of Slaves Celebrated,” UNC, 29 January 1901, Black Binder.

⁸³⁴ “Emancipation Day Will Be Celebrated by Colored People: Dr. Thomas Gordon Jones Not Satisfied,” UNC, 1901, Black Binder; McCormick, “Comparison of Celebrations.” It was later rumored that Gibson was related to Bob Gibson, the Hall of Fame pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals. “Memories of Glen King.”

enough to become acquainted with its traditions.”⁸³⁵ Control of Emancipation Day meant control of prestige, patronage links, and financial rewards, but this was also a generational struggle between those who had come out of slavery and those who had grown up in freedom.

In the end, the two sides could not agree on the issue, with each arguing that the other did not represent “the regular organization of the colored folks,” and in the end there were two Emancipation Day celebrations in August 1901. The newspapers refused to play favorites, and the black community itself was so divided that even Jones’ Excelsior Band played at Gibson’s festival. In the end, though, Jones’ gathering was a greater success, with a larger crowd, remarks by a veteran of the Philippine-American War, and a demonstration of the emerging sport of football. His longer residence in the Valley gave him access to greater resources, and in subsequent years it was he who served as organizer and solicitor.⁸³⁶

Ultimately, though, this proved to be a pyrrhic victory. Gibson’s group never again controlled the planning for Emancipation Day, but their race consciousness supplanted that of the older generation. Younger African Americans around the country began to view the yearly festival as an unproductive relic of the past that failed to address current issues. In the first decade of the twentieth century, white control grew stronger and the crowds almost entirely white. Few African Americans were present to hear a 1902 tribute by Jones to the recently deceased T.E. Clark, remembered as “a faithful friend to the colored man,” but a gathering in his memory at Second Baptist four months earlier had been well attended by them. A year later

⁸³⁵ “Emancipation Day Will Be Celebrated by Colored People: Dr. Thomas Gordon Jones Not Satisfied”; McCormick, “Comparison of Celebrations.”

⁸³⁶ McCormick, “Comparison of Celebrations”; “City Dads in Session,” 2 July 1901, UNC, Black Binder; “Emancipation Day Celebration,” UNC, July 1901, Black Binder; “Now Come to the Big Celebration,” UNC, 1901, Black Binder; “August 1 Celebration,” UNC, July 1901, Black Binder; “Emancipation Day Will Be Celebrated by Colored People: Dr. Thomas Gordon Jones Not Satisfied”; “Colored People’s Day: Dr. Thomas Gordon Jones and Aug. 6, 1901”; J.G. McCormick; “To the Public: Statement of Receipts and Expenditures of Celebration of Aug. 6,” August 1901, Black Binder; UNC, 1901, Black Binder.

some of them proposed doing away with the festival altogether, and only fifty were present in a crowd of seven thousand whites to hear Des Moines lawyer S. Joe Brown call on his race to “be peaceable and law abiding, and to work in useful channels for advancement” Five days later, though, Second Baptist hosted its own “Emancipation program” at the fairgrounds. It seemed that Valley blacks were content to hand Emancipation Day over to whites and create their own separate events.⁸³⁷ By 1906, publicity flyers deemed it necessary to point out that Thomas Gordon Jones had been chosen as head organizer “upon request of both white and colored citizens,” whereas this fact would simply have been assumed in previous years. Eventually, whites also lost interest as Chautauqua, Independence Day and more modern amusements such as motion pictures and radio became more popular. Ironically, Emancipation Day then came back under black control, dominated for the first time by women. A news report from 1924 states that most of the speeches were made by women, who also comprised more than half of the planning committee, and that the tiny crowd was predominantly black with just a “sprinkling of whites.” The fact that there was any festival at all was remarkable given that by that time they were rare outside of the rural South. With most of the former slaves dead, interest in this institution that had been central to community life for over half a century was nearly gone.⁸³⁸

⁸³⁷ UNC, 1902, Black Binder; “Colored People Celebrate August 5 in Clarinda”; “From the Colored People,” 28 April 1902, Black Binder; *Clarinda Herald*, 29 June 1903; “Emancipation Celebration Again,” UNC, 1903, Black Binder; “Fourth of August Will be Celebrated in Court House Park,” UNC, 1903, Black Binder; “Back to Clarinda Fair Grounds,” UNC, 31 July 1903, Black Binder; “Big Celebration,” UNC, 4 August 1903, Black Binder; “Emancipation Celebration of Aug. 4,” *Page County Journal*, 4 August 1903; UNC, 4 August 1904, Black Binder; “Emancipation Celebration!,” UNC, 1903, Blue Binder; “Public Notice,” UNC, 9 August 1931, Black Binder.

⁸³⁸ “Here Are the Names of the Persons Who Will Have Charge of the Emancipation Celebration, August 3rd”; “August Four Celebrated in Good Old Way,” *Clarinda Journal*, 7 August 1924; Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 12-13.

This decline was symbolic of the Nodaway Valley's black community in general. In the years before and during World War I, many African Americans began moving away in search of opportunities not available in southwestern Iowa. Some went to the even larger communities in Des Moines, Waterloo or the south central mining camps, while others left the state entirely and settled in major urban centers like Chicago, Kansas City, and Omaha. New jobs were created by the introduction of modern amenities like electricity and telephones and by the opening of a poultry and dairy plant, but since the city remained small this did not create as many opportunities as in Sioux City or other boom towns. An examination of 20th-century obituaries helps to show just how much the black population had been dispersed. When Carrie Louneer died in 1942, for example, several family members were still in the Valley, but most were living in other Midwestern cities. Some who had moved away were buried in Clarinda after their death, but this only further highlighted what the black community had lost. One unnamed entrepreneur made plans in 1902 to purchase 200 acres of land in Mills County (just south of Council Bluffs) for a black settlement, envisioning that the residents would grow produce for the Omaha market and send their children to school in nearby Tabor, but this scheme quickly fell through.⁸³⁹ There would be no further black influxes.

The leading black citizen in southwest Iowa did not live to see his community go into decline. Thomas Gordon Jones began preparing for his retirement in 1908 by selling his livestock and produce, and four years later he was dead, survived by only three of his ten

⁸³⁹ UNC, 18 September 1907, Black Binder; "Mrs. Clara Baker," UNC, 9 February 1906, Black Binder; "Visitor from an Iowa Negro Town," UNC, *Clarinda Journal*, January 1904, Black Binder; "Adam Burton Johnson, Sr.," IWA, Gwendolyn Fowler Papers, Box 7 – "J: Obituaries and Funeral Programs"; "Iona Pemberton," UNC, May 1935, Black Binder; Cunningham, *Southwest Iowa's Heritage*, A-98; "Clarinda's Early Negro Population Had Outstanding Community Leaders"; *Page County History* (1942), 71-72; UNC, 18 January 1901, Black Binder; "Joe Howe," UNC, September 1938; "Obituaries: Carrie Louneer Roberts"; UNC, 24 June 1900, Black Binder; UNC, 9 November 1900, Black Binder; "Negro Colony at Tabor," UNC, 1902, Black Binder.

children. He joined in death his daughter Mary, who had read Lincoln's proclamation on Emancipation Day more often than anyone else, become one of the first black graduates of Garfield High, and enrolled at Lincoln University in Missouri with the intention of teaching in the South, only to be struck down by pneumonia in 1904 at the age of twenty-three. At her funeral, a youth group called the Intellectual Club read a resolution stating "She sleeps, she sleeps in the grave with the dead, that blessed sleep. Her voice is hushed in death, but in our memory she still lives."⁸⁴⁰

Eventually, the same could be said of the Nodaway Valley's black community as a whole. By 1930 the black population in Page County dropped to 125 while its churches, like Emancipation Day, had faded away.⁸⁴¹ Many areas of southwestern Iowa became "sundown towns" that barred blacks from living there; Clarinda was not among them, but the region's growing racial hostility may have helped discourage black migration and encourage longtime residents to leave.⁸⁴² Today, the Valley's black population exists primarily through the memories of the few families who remain, the work of scholars, and the records preserved at the NVHM. Most of the museum's visitors travel there because of Clarinda's claim to fame as the birthplace of bandleader Glenn Miller, not realizing that this small town was once home to one of Iowa's most distinctive black communities.

Coming to an isolated, sparsely populated region during the war, these African Americans overcame racial hostility through their labor, their patronage connections to elite

⁸⁴⁰ UNC, December 1908, Black Binder; "Public Sale," UNC, 1908, Black Binder; UNC, 1900, Black Binder; "Deceased," UNC, 7 May 1900, Black Binder; UNC, 7 May 1900, Black Binder; "Thomas Gordon Jones."

⁸⁴¹ 1920 U.S. Census; 1930 U.S. Census; "Baptists Give Jubilee Concert," UNC, 2 September 1930, Black Binder; "A.M.E. Pastor," UNC, 7 January 1937, Black Binder; UNC, February 1906, Black Binder; UNC, June 1906, Black Binder; "Clarinda A.M.E. Church"; "Church to Become Home." St. Jacob's did not actually close its doors until 1977.

⁸⁴² Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, 77, 446.

whites, and a moderate, Washingtonian political philosophy that was expressed through various community institutions. Blacks largely avoided direct political action, did not seek to use the legal system to press for their rights, openly accepted second-class citizenship, and placed the responsibility for racial uplift squarely on their own shoulders, asking whites only to help them become better workers and more morally upright. This strategy had some success in part because the postwar Valley, unlike the South, lacked racial violence, Jim Crow laws or voting irregularities. It also helped that black workers were so essential to the local economy, even more so than in many other parts of Iowa. All of these factors enabled the African Americans of the Nodaway Valley to rise up from Missouri slavery and etch out a place in the region's economic, political and cultural identity.

Chapter VIII

“The Negro Will Be Contented with His Own People”: The 1890s

Although Cedar Rapids had been home to a number of interracial couples over the years, one particularly vocal couple drew the ire of whites in June 1891. The press reported that a man named J.H. “Professor” Vester and his white fiancée, Bessie Shields, rode up and down First Avenue a half-dozen times “in an affectionate position, acting in a spirit of braggadocio,” in order to create a scene. Passersby gathered and shouted until the police finally arrested them for disturbing the peace. The couple insisted that they had “as much right on the street as anyone,” but a judge found them guilty of making an “exhibition of endearment that would arouse the rabble” and fined them \$10 each; intermarriage was legal in Iowa but still so disfavored that drawing attention to it was considered a public disturbance.⁸⁴³

Even so, Cedar Rapids whites were divided on the matter. Some declared that “a negro had a right to hug a white woman if she submitted to it and it was no one’s business.” Others felt that it was not a racial issue at all and that no one should engage in such displays of public affection, while yet a third group found this open intimacy even more “disgusting” when it involved an interracial couple. Vester himself probably objected the most to this last characterization simply because it identified him as black, since he considered himself a “half breed” and was said to have killed his own pet parrot after some boys trained it to call him “nigger.”⁸⁴⁴ Yet he undoubtedly knew that whatever he chose to call himself, society considered him African American and had responded to his carriage ride accordingly. He and Bessie Shields had chosen to confront public perceptions of race and respectability in an increasingly

⁸⁴³ “Hugging Not Allowed,” UNC, AAHMCCI, Topics – Interracial Families; “Black and White,” UNC, AAHMCCI, Vertical Files, Topics – Interracial Families.

⁸⁴⁴ “Hugging Not Allowed”; “Black and White.”

conservative era; this was not a reasoned, community-based civil rights endeavor but simply an effort to shock people. Other mixed couples had been tolerated because they stayed out of the public eye and maintained an appearance of respectability, but Vester and Shields behaved in such a way that no one in Cedar Rapids could forget that they were there. They knew exactly what they were doing, and even if they did not realize it, in their own way they were part of black Iowans' struggle for equal citizenship.

Around the same time, another black Iowan achieved notoriety in a wholly different fashion more consistent with traditional tactics. Robert N. Hyde had left Virginia for Des Moines in 1876, unable to read or write but driven by high aspirations and a restless, inquisitive mind. While working as a janitor in 1889, he developed a powerful new industrial soap but had no capital to produce or market it until entrepreneur T.W. Henry saw him using it to clean a badly stained carpet and immediately proposed a business partnership. H. and H. Cleaner Company quickly became one of the largest businesses of its kind and Hyde one of the most prominent black businessmen in the state. An 1891 advertisement for his Hyde Labor Co. promised quality "whitewashing...calcimining, house cleaning, carpet renewing, moth extermination, wall-paper cleaning, also cleaning and repairing of cisterns," and he continued to create new inventions for cleaning carpet and wallpaper. By 1907, he sold his shares in H. and H. and focused his attention on real estate, eventually owning more than two dozen properties. It was perhaps inevitable that Hyde would also become a community leader. Between the 1890s and the 1910s, he headed the Iowa State Afro-American League, Polk County Negro Republican Club, and the Des Moines NAACP while also serving as a delegate to state and national GOP conventions and as part of the group that greeted Teddy Roosevelt in the Iowa capital in 1905. In 1909 the state legislature

named him head janitor, an honorary position that brought him public recognition, although it is unlikely that the stylish businessman known for his top hat and cane ever performed any actual labor at this position. Hyde also encouraged intellectual growth in his three children by filling his home with newspapers, and in fact all of them attended college and went became important community leaders in their own right.⁸⁴⁵

Although he did not rise to prominence until the 1890s, Henry Hyde was one of Iowa's last community leaders from the antebellum generation, which largely faded away during the decade and was replaced by a younger generation of activists. Most old black communities on the Mississippi continued to decline, while those in Des Moines, Sioux City and the south central mining towns got even larger. Three key events – the death of Alexander Clark in 1891, the founding of the *Iowa Bystander* newspaper in 1894, and the creation of the Buxton mining town in 1900 – signaled this changing of the guard. The rise of Buxton in the early twentieth century, along with other changes, is of course closely tied to what happened before it, suggesting that this manuscript could be extended to the Great Migration or even the Great Depression. The events of the 1890s, however, had such a major impact on black community life in Iowa that they clearly brought an end to one era and helped to usher in a new one, albeit one with direct links to everything that happened before it. It should also be noted that there is a heavy emphasis on the black middle class during this period, partly because of the available sources but primarily because two of the three significant events that brought this era to an end centered around this group. The working class majority continued to play a significant role, but they did not drive the

⁸⁴⁵ Beitz, "Going Up to Glory Very Slow," 49; Sherry Ricchiardi, "A Memorable Page in Iowa's Black History," *Des Moines Sunday Register*, 20 November 1977; McLaughlin, "D.M.'s 'Phenomenal' Businessman Hyde," *Des Moines Register*, 17 April 1968; Lufkin, "Black Des Moines," 41-43; "Adah Frances Johnson," Gwendolyn Fowler Papers, Box 7 – "J: Obituaries and Funeral Programs."

history of this era in the same way that they did during the Civil War. The struggle for equal citizenship through politics, economics, community institutions and culture continued, but in new ways, in new locations, and through new people.

When the 1890s began, black male Iowans had been voting for more than two decades and eligible to serve in the state House for one, but none had yet been elected to public office. There was only one black majority anywhere in the state (in Muchakinock, which was unincorporated and thus unable to elect anyone to office), and white party leaders were unwilling to go out on a limb for a black candidate since the few black votes that it would generate were not worth the political risk. Even so, there had been several efforts to win public office. In addition to the aforementioned campaigns in Oskaloosa, Page County and Sioux City, there was C.H. Claggett's candidacy for Public Judge in Des Moines in 1888; he ultimately finished second.⁸⁴⁶ Other records also show that Charles Glattly, a thirty-five year old farmer from the northeastern village of Buck Creek, was either appointed or elected Road Supervisor in 1890.⁸⁴⁷

Little is known about this event, but more information is available about the political career of Benjamin Mathews, who ran for the municipal position of wharfmaster in 1888. He was considered as a candidate by both parties (the *Weekly Journal* charged that his name was being "used as football") but he ultimately ran as a Republican; despite support from his old friend Alexander Clark, though, he lost the election. A second campaign in 1891 was successful, though, and the elderly community leader – one of the last remaining links to the antebellum days of fugitive slaves and second-class citizenship under the law – became the state's second

⁸⁴⁶ W. Sherman Savage, "Negro in Politics in Kansas and Iowa," *Negro History Bulletin* 25 (1962): 111; Lufkin, "Black Des Moines," 95.

⁸⁴⁷ Glattly also held other political positions in Minnesota. "Outline of Personal History of Chas. Glattly."

elected black official. For unknown reasons he never actually occupied the position, and the city council appointed a successor. It may be that his election was simply a symbolic honor, although one study of Iowa's Mississippi River towns suggests that the wharfmaster office was economically significant.⁸⁴⁸ In any event, three decades after the Civil War, one of the last symbolic barriers to black political power had fallen, although black women still could not vote or hold office.

The man who had done more than anyone else to advance black political rights in Iowa, though, was not there to see this breakthrough. In August 1890, President Benjamin Harrison appointed Alexander Clark U.S. consul to Liberia.⁸⁴⁹ Although he was the first black Iowan to receive a diplomatic assignment, he continued a strong tradition of Muscatiners in the foreign corps.⁸⁵⁰ If it is true that he had turned down the Haiti post in 1873 because of the low salary, he surely could not have been disappointed now. The Liberian position paid \$4000 plus a stipend, which according to one record was more than the governor's salary. Clark's family and friends, though, worried about the middle-aged man's health in a climate that was not always suitable for Americans. In fact five other Liberian ambassadors died of fever within months of their arrival between 1866 and 1912, while others avoided the same fate by taking up residence in Paris and performing their diplomatic duties through long-distance correspondence.⁸⁵¹ "We believed,"

⁸⁴⁸ *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, 9 March 1888; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," Civil and Political Rights of the Negro in Iowa (Part 2), 246; Horton, "Town Planning, Growth, and Architecture," 305-06.

⁸⁴⁹ Aldeen Davis, "Alexander Clark Memorial."

⁸⁵⁰ Three other Muscatine residents served as diplomatic consuls between the 1860s and 1900s. Jackson, "Alexander Clark," 48; Richman, *History of Muscatine County I* (1911), 285-296. According to one story, Henry McCraven was asked to take a diplomatic post in Haiti during the early 20th century but declined, not wanting to leave home. He did, however, recommend his friend Herbert R. Wright, a Marshalltown native and 1901 SUI College of Law graduate who later served at diplomatic posts in Honduras and Venezuela. Beitz, "Going Up to Glory Very Slow," 44; Smith, *Emancipation*, 454.

⁸⁵¹ James A. Padgett, "Ministers to Liberia and Their Diplomacy," *Journal of Negro History* 22 (1937): 73, 74, 78, 90-91; Jackson, "Alexander Clark," 50.

Rev. J.W. Laws of Keokuk later recalled, “that it was unwise and unsafe for him to go among the deadly poisons that lurk on the shores of that far-off and desolate land... We saw at once that it would be but a day of pleasure, a few months of honor at best, and then death.” Clark, though, was loath to turn down any opportunity for a political position. He had applied for the job of District of Columbia Recorder of Deeds (another position traditionally given to African Americans) a year earlier but was rejected for unknown reasons. After this failure and his near-miss during the aborted Garfield administration, Clark may have felt that he should take the first offer that came along, since there might not be another. He also felt that with his wife dead and his children grown he could afford to make such a risky decision, telling Laws that “I will go; and if the fever takes hold on me, I will return” and writing no will before he left.⁸⁵²

Clark was sent off with a huge reception in Muscatine, stopped briefly in London (where he called on British consul Robert Todd Lincoln), and assumed his post in Liberia in early November.⁸⁵³ Less than a week after his arrival, the *New York Star* reported that he had taken ill.⁸⁵⁴ This information was reprinted in the *Muscatine Journal*, but no additional information was sent until his son in law George Appleton received a letter from one Henry D. Brown dated June 11, 1891, beginning: “It becomes my sad duty to inform you of the demise of my dear friend and brother, the Hon. Alexander Clark, late United States Minister of the American legation.” Clark, the letter continued, had fallen ill in late March, briefly recovered and was even

⁸⁵² *Muscatine Weekly Journal*, 15 October 1889; Jackson, “Alexander Clark,” 50; “List of Heirs and Description of Realty,” Estate of Alexander Clark, 13 July 1891; J.W. Laws, “Oration on the Life of Hon. Alexander Clark” (1891), Muscatine File #2. He did, however, write a note to friend Sarah A. Bassfield promising her \$400 in the event of his death. “Petition for Appointment of George W. Appleton, Administrator,” Estate of Alexander Clark, 4 July 1891, Muscatine District Court, No. 1652; Promissory Note from Alexander Clark to Sarah A. Bassfield, 20 September 1890.

⁸⁵³ Jackson, “Alexander Clark,” 50. He had also been honored at the Illinois Annual A.M.E. Conference in Galesburg that August, where every member stood and sang “God be with you till we meet again.” Laws, “Oration on the Life of Hon. Alexander Clark”; Davis, “Alexander Clark Memorial.”

⁸⁵⁴ “Not Encouraging Outlook for A.G. Clark,” *Muscatine Journal*, 4 November 1890.

able to resume his daily schedule, but then went into decline again in mid-May. He spent the last three days of his life in a semi-comatose state and finally on Sunday morning, May 31, he “[breathed] his last, with breathing as still and peaceful as those of a sleeping infant.”⁸⁵⁵

The man who had survived race riots, battles with slavecatchers, and arsonist attacks while leading his state through nearly five decades of civil rights struggles was dead at the age of sixty-five. Although he had received funeral services in Liberia, his body (and Masonic materials) was sent back across the ocean to be interred in Muscatine, where a second ceremony was conducted by Rev. Laws in February 1892 at Bethel AME, the church that he had helped to establish over forty years earlier. Laws’ eulogy, entitled “The Life, Labors and Death of the Hon. Alexander Clark, late United States Minister at Monrovia, Liberia,” began with an exploration of the eternal questions about life and death; “Good men and great men die as well as the poor and the unfortunate,” he philosophized, “and all are alike in the grave, and all must pay the debt. Knowing this to be true, we ought to make the best use of the time that God has given us in the world of action.”

Although some people born into privilege failed to accomplish anything meaningful, Laws continued, others like Clark rose above poor beginnings to become great: “He was the Toussaint L’Ouverture of the West. His battles were not of sword and bayonet and the shedding of blood, but the shot and shell of truth, and with it he could with case dislodge the enemy.” The preacher also compared Clark to the great American politicians of the age, equal to Thaddeus Stevens or Frederick Douglass, and a way maker for John Mercer Langston and other prominent blacks who followed him. Laws pointedly used martial and vocational language in his discussion of the former barber and would-be USCI sergeant, declaring that Clark had employed the “razor

⁸⁵⁵ Laws, “Oration on the Life of Hon. Alexander Clark.”

of logic” and the “sword of reason” to “[champion] the rights of his race in a bold and fearless manner...and [turn] the tide of battle into victory.”⁸⁵⁶

Laws also cited Clark’s law school graduation, philanthropic record, and school desegregation efforts, the latter of which showed how the activist “sought in a mild but forcible way to bring about a social equality between the varieties,” and his belief that “no matter who nor what was their condition or their color, [all] had an inalienable right given them by God.” Thus although many black community leaders, including Clark himself, had been apprehensive about discussing the issue of social equality, Laws had no such qualms about discussing the true meaning of this idea in Clark’s ideology: equal access to all American institutions. Drawing to a close, Laws read Henry Brown’s letter to the Clark family and reminisced on his own fears about Clark’s health when he departed for Liberia and his dismay that his friend had died so far from home. In conclusion, he mused, “to-day we march with muffled drums and measured tread to the silent hall of the dead, where we shall lay his remains at rest. Our father, our brother, our friend, to whose ashes we will say farewell till we meet again.”⁸⁵⁷

The dissolution of Clark’s estate was handled by George Appleton, Alexander Jr., and Jerome Carskaddan. It was not settled until 1893 due to several parties coming forward to claim a debt, including a woman named Sarah Bassfield, who carried a promissory note guaranteeing her \$400 for the “good will and intent I feel in her” (his children apparently knew more than was explained in the documents, which suggests a romantic relationship); Bethel AME also claimed that Clark had promised the church \$250, but it failed to get anything due to a technicality. His

⁸⁵⁶ Laws’ eulogy was later printed with an introduction by T.S. Parvin, and in 1958 a copy was given to the Musser Public Library by Clark’s daughter-in-law Adeline Moore Clark. Laws, “Oration on the Life of Hon. Alexander Clark.”

⁸⁵⁷ Laws, “Oration on the Life of Hon. Alexander Clark.”

private property included Bible, a shotgun, and over \$2,400 dollars, of which nearly one-third came from his diplomatic salary. In the end, his three children each received roughly four hundred dollars and shares in coal and railroad companies; Alexander Jr. was also given his father's barbering equipment.⁸⁵⁸ Although Clark had once been one of the richest African Americans in Iowa, by the time he died most of this money was gone to the frequent economic depressions of the late nineteenth century and the expense of running the *Conservator*.

The Clark children lived out their lives in relative tranquility not far from the city of their birth. The first to die was Rebecca in 1906, who was buried near her father in Greenwood Cemetery along with a daughter who had died two years earlier. Another daughter, Clara, lived in Chicago. Susan lived in various towns around Illinois and Iowa with her husband Richard until her death in 1925 and was also reunited with the family at Greenwood. The longest-lived was Alexander Jr., who never became a politician or activist of his father's magnitude but unlike his father actually practiced law, also rising high in fraternal ranks and writing a massive history of Iowa's black Masonry shortly before his death in 1939. His widow Adeline "Addie" Moore

⁸⁵⁸ "Estate of Alexander Clark, Deceased," Muscatine District Court, Probate No. 1652, Fee Book A, Page 556 (January Term, 1893); "Administrator's Bond," Estate of Alexander Clark (4 July 1891); George W. Appleton, "Notice of Administration" (7 July 1891); "Proof of Posting" (13 July 1891); Claim against the Clark Estate, Barry Manufacturing Company, 5 August 1887; "Claim of N. Barry Mfg. Co.," Estate of Alexander Clark (13 August 1891); "Claim of Journal Printing Co.," Estate of Alexander Clark (5 September 1891); "Claim of Sarah A. Bassfield," Estate of Alexander Clark (30 November 1891); Promissory Note from Clark to Bassfield; "Consent of Heirs to Claim" (28 December 1891); "Claim of AME Church," Estate of Alexander Clark (9 February 1892); "Report of Administrator," Estate of Alexander Clark (17 September 1892); "Application to Sell Personally," Estate of Alexander Clark, Muscatine District Court; "List of Heirs and Description of Realty"; A.G. Clark, "Received of Geo. M. Appleton, Administrator" (19 September 1892); Susan V. Holley, "Received of Geo. M. Appleton, Administrator" (19 September 1892); Rebecca J. Appleton, "Received of Geo. M. Appleton, Administrator" (19 September 1892); Estate of Alexander Clark (17 September 1892); A.G. Clark, "Received of Geo. M. Appleton, Administrator" (January 1893); Susan V. Holley, "Received of Geo. M. Appleton, Administrator" (January 1893); Rebecca J. Appleton, "Received of Geo. M. Appleton, Administrator" (January 1893); "Final Report of Administrator," Estate of Alexander Clark (10 January 1893); "Petition for Appointment of George W. Appleton, Administrator"; "Biographical Notes – Alexander G. Clark," Clark File, Muscatine Art Center, Muscatine (hereafter MAC).

Clark, one of the last direct links to Alexander Sr., survived into the late 1950s and was buried with her husband in Oskaloosa.⁸⁵⁹

Alexander Clark, Sr.'s death was more of a symbolic changing of the guard than anything else, given that he had not lived in Iowa for more than five years when he passed. Nevertheless, just as the death of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Compromise Speech signed a major transition in national black leadership, the passing of Alexander Clark and the rise of younger community leaders several years later did the same on a state level in Iowa. The man who had done more than anyone else to guide black Iowans through slavery, the war, and Reconstruction was now, like those moments in history, only a memory. To a certain extent, the same was true of Muscatine's black community. For twenty years, this small but dedicated group of African Americans on the Mississippi River had played a central role in the effort to win equal citizenship through abolition, military service, politics, education, and community institutions. After the mid 1870s, though, it was significant largely because Alexander Clark still lived there. When he left, its story was largely over.

Far on the other end of the state, Sioux City's black community was moving in the opposite direction. Although more than ninety percent of Sioux City blacks were unskilled laborers and domestics, the city was also home to the largest black middle class in the state. The downtown neighborhood that had always been home to most African Americans now included a growing number of black-owned businesses. The barbershop and shoeshine business of Sam Beecham, George Pidgin and "Big Lou" Cloyd, for example, drew customers with the spectacularly worded advertisement "Pedal Teguments lubricated and artistically illuminated for

⁸⁵⁹ "Biographical Notes – Alexander G. Clark," Clark File.

the infinitesimal remuneration of 10 cents per operation.” Tom Wright and W.E. Gibson both owned successful barbershops – Wright’s employed both blacks and whites – and Gibson was also known as a gifted orator and community leader. There were also restaurateurs, a popcorn and peanut stand owner, and Charley Garret, whose “flourishing hand” enabled him to find work as a “penman.” A smaller group worked for the post office and police department, including a few black officers.⁸⁶⁰

There were also a number of ministers, servants and porters. The latter may have actually been more educated than many entrepreneurs since literacy was a prerequisite for employment, but their greatest skill was creating patronage ties with whites; one resident noted that nearly all of them “city bred and have a pretty comprehensive appreciation of the weaknesses of human nature,” which they used to coax good tips from passengers. The example of Edward Wilson further highlights how this manipulative skill was a prerequisite for entry into the black middle class. After working on the trains for several years, the former slave and veteran was ordained a Baptist minister in 1881 and served churches throughout the Midwest (working fundraising miracles to pay off church debts at each stop) before becoming pastor at Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Sioux City, where he decided to stay permanently because he “[liked] the disposition of the people.” Black men were also employed as waiters in fashionable restaurants and in Albert Martin’s case as sexton of First Presbyterian Church, where he operated the church bell and

⁸⁶⁰ Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa’s Black Legacy*, 81, 84; Hewitt, “So Few Undesirables,” 162-63; *Woodbury County History* (1942), 112-13. Black men in eastern towns also broke through the color barrier in city employment around this time. Burlington got its first two black police officers in 1894 and 1904, and Rock Island had a black postman for more than two decades during the late 19th and early 20th century. Union Baptist Church, “The History of Union Baptist Church,” AAHMCCI, Churches – Baptist: Burlington Union; “Deaths in 1916,” *Rock Island Dispatch*, 1 January 1917; *Iowa Bystander*, 3 August 1900; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #2, 121-22.

organ.⁸⁶¹ In this rapidly growing industrial city on what had only recently been the frontier, the presence of well-dressed black men in subservient positions was a soothing reminder of traditional racial dynamics and a journey into the antebellum past.

Whether entrepreneur or servant, nearly all middle-class blacks espoused a moderate racial philosophy of patronage, assuring whites that they were more respectable than fellow African Americans like Richard Baker, who was beaten to death in the streets in a drunken feud after a political rally in 1895.⁸⁶² This moderation was never more evident than in 1899, when thirty-five African Americans and several whites met at Malone AME to protest a recent national wave of lynchings. Although the group showed the influence of Ida B. Wells in condemning the “cowardly slanders...that lynchings occur only to protect womanhood,” it focused on the idea of using “business and godliness” to answer racism. The meeting was in fact so subdued, it was said, that only one black attendee seemed to “[display] much indignation.” This Washingtonian philosophy was of course meant primarily for southern use, but as it turned out it did not work in Sioux City either. In the early twentieth century, white political and economic leaders began forcing African Americans out of downtown in order to make room for “respectable business enterprises.” Black entrepreneurs tried to hold on to what was theirs, but they were helpless against the massive Pelletier Fire of Christmas Eve 1904, which destroyed downtown and provided the perfect opportunity to rebuild the city in a new, racially exclusionary image. The city government, police department, white business owners, and real estate developers all made a concerted effort to force African Americans to the west side of town, and within a year

⁸⁶¹ “They Size a Man Up As Soon As He Strikes the Car,” *Sioux City Journal*, 5 May 1901; “Remarkable Debt Lifter”; *Woodbury County History* (1942), 112-13.

⁸⁶² Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa’s Black Legacy*, 81, 84; *Woodbury County History* (1942), 113; *Records and Briefs for Cases before the Supreme Court of Iowa*, October Term 1897 (Des Moines), 392-93, 397; *State v. Jackson*, 103 Iowa 702, 705, 710 (1897).

downtown was restored with the black community almost completely gone.⁸⁶³ The old entrepreneurial spirit and the menial labor of African Americans continued, but in a more marginalized location far from the neighborhood that had been their home for decades. Appeasing the white power structure through a moderate uplift philosophy had failed, and Sioux City never regained its position as home to Iowa's most prosperous black middle class.

Meanwhile, the miners of south central Iowa had an entirely different set of problems to face. Their already troubled relationship with organized labor worsened in 1890 and 1891 when Iowa chapters of the new United Mine Workers union (Iowa was District 13) were founded without involvement from them. Even so, when white Mahaska County miners called a general strike in May 1891 to get an eight-hour work day, bi-monthly pay and lower prices at company stores, African Americans were asked to join, not out of a sense of solidarity but to keep them from undercutting the stoppage as strikebreakers. Not wanting to trouble their relationship with management for the sake of hostile white workers, African Americans at Muchakinock, Excelsior, and most other mines refused to join. Only a few at Carbonado agreed to stop working, and even some of them "quietly slipped into the mines and began to work" after a short while.⁸⁶⁴

In response, white strikers took drastic action. Three mysterious fires near Oskaloosa caused \$100,000 in damage. Shots were fired into the houses of black workers at Carbonado. Riots at Evans kept strikebreakers bottled up at the train depot for three days until the state

⁸⁶³ Hewitt, "Blackface in the White Mind," 74, 77; *Sioux City Journal*, 13 August 1905, quoted in Hewitt, "So Few Undesirables," 168-69; Sioux City History, "Pelletier Fire of 1904," http://www.siouxcityhistory.org/disasters/more4b7a.html?id=18_0_6_0_M

⁸⁶⁴ Schwieder, *Black Diamonds*, 126-37; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 294; UNC, OPL, Cities & Towns, Beacon (Enterprise); "Mahaska County Once Led State in Coal Mining Activities," OPL, Cities & Towns, Evans.

militia intervened. One group began marching towards Muchakinock with guns to “induce” the black miners to join their strike, but when the company got word of this (not a great feat of espionage, since the mob had stopped in Eddyville to drink and openly discussed their plans), it secured a company of militia to escort the strikebreakers to work for the duration of the strike. According to another account, the strikers had actually turned back when they reached a hill overlooking Muchy and saw the streets being patrolling by “Negroes carrying guns”; whether or not this is true, no violence occurred in the company’s most lucrative mine.⁸⁶⁵

The strike finally ended in early June when the CCC agreed to a shortened work day and a bimonthly pay system. A second stoppage began several weeks later when the company reneged on the first promise, but it did not last long.⁸⁶⁶ The companies retained the upper hand by exploiting the conflict between black and white miners.⁸⁶⁷ Although labor leaders such as District 13 president Walter Scott advocated equal treatment for all workers, after the 1891 strikebreaker controversy he declared that “I gave up the best [years] of my life to help free the slave in the South. Today that same black man is used by the money power of this land to make a slave of me and my fellow craftsmen.” Like many black activists, he was not above using the rhetoric of slavery and war to help drive home a political point decades after the war. Scott, though, did not blame the black workers or the intolerance of white miners but rather the companies, who “tested even the strongest commitments to racial integrations of the coal fields.” District 13 leaders also passed resolutions in 1894 and 1899 condemning racial discrimination in

⁸⁶⁵ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 294-95; UNC, OPL, *Cities & Towns, Beacon* (Enterprise); Conrad Wessercroft, “Evans: Once-Major Rail and Coal Mining Community is Spectre of Former Self,” *Oskaloosa Herald*, 8 September 1979; *Heritage of Mahaska County, Iowa* (1999), 73-74; Olin, *Coal Mining in Iowa*, 51.

⁸⁶⁶ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 294.

⁸⁶⁷ For example, bi-monthly pay did not become universal in Iowa until 1894. *Acts and Resolutions Passed at the Regular Session of the Twenty-Fifth General Assembly of the State of Iowa* (Des Moines: G.H. Ragsdale, 1894), 95.

hiring, but some locals still barred blacks from joining and even refused to honor the union cards of black members who had joined elsewhere. White resistance also ensured that many newer mining camps remained almost completely white despite their proximity to Muchakinock. Near the end of the century, though, some African Americans began joining locals, and when another strike broke out in 1899 both races stayed home, including some blacks who had worked during the 1891 stoppage.⁸⁶⁸ The union was slowly but surely moving towards a true policy of biracial cooperation.

The legal system, though, remained problematic. When W.H. Bates, a clerk at a Wapello County whorehouse, was called as a witness in the divorce proceedings of a white couple to testify that the husband was a regular client, the husband's lawyer attacked him as a "senegambian...brothel house pimp." On appeal the Supreme Court agreed, saying that since the wife's best evidence of spousal infidelity came from a "negro clerk of a house of ill-fame...ordinarily entitled to little credit," she was not entitled to a judgment in her favor. Whether Bates was discredited because he was black, worked in a whorehouse, or both is difficult to say, but the issue of miscegenation was most likely a factor; after all, he was working in close quarters with sexually active white women. Another case the previous year further showed the importance of race in the legal system. When William Tippet went on trial for murdering fellow white miner named Tom Scott in a saloon near the town of What Cheer, the state's chief witness was George Bolden, who was also a miner, an acquaintance of both men, and the only African American in the bar. Someone in the bar had actually tried to blame Bolden for the crime by yelling "the damned nigger has shot him," and he fled to a friend's house for

⁸⁶⁸ Schwieder, *Black Diamonds*, 118, 122-23, 152-53; Hickenlooper, *An Illustrated History of Monroe County* (1896), 317-19, 321; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 295.

protection, then found the sheriff to tell his story before other whites decided to blame him, especially since he had past legal troubles of his own.⁸⁶⁹

Despite the shout from the bar, the police never seriously considered Bolden as a suspect, partly because even Tippet himself admitted that “I don’t think the colored man shot him.” When the defense lawyer tried to impeach Bolden’s testimony by mentioning his past legal troubles, the state’s attorney claimed that this strategy was motivated by racism, but even his own remarks were not free of racial bias: “Every defendant that comes in here, man or women, it don’t make any difference who they are or what they do, you are told by these criminal lawyers that they are as pure and as white as snow. But every witness that comes in here and tells what they know, and every attorney that stands here and does his simple duty, they have got to be the blackest.” In the end, the jury believed Bolden and sent Tippet to prison.⁸⁷⁰ Despite being a black miner with a troubled past, he apparently had enough credibility to help convict a white man, albeit one who shared his profession and unfavorable reputation. At the same time, though, his own near escape from being framed as the killer, along with Bates’ own experiences, shows that while the large black communities in the mining towns provided a measure of security, those who chose to step outside that world and interact intimately with whites were in greater danger from a society that still seemed to barely tolerate their presence twenty years after they first arrived.

It was perhaps partly in response to problems like these that one black journalist proposed a different political strategy. George E. Taylor was a Wisconsin native, editor of one of Iowa’s

⁸⁶⁹ *Bizer v. Bizer*, 110 Iowa 248, 250 (1900); *Records and Briefs for Cases before the Supreme Court of Iowa*, October Term 1897 (Des Moines), 18, 33, 64, 71; *State v. Tippet*, 94 Iowa 646, 647 (1895); *Records and Briefs for Cases before the Supreme Court of Iowa*, May Term 1895 (Des Moines), 74-78, 81, 87, 103, 125. In 1895, on the other hand, two Fishville blacks received a fair trial after robbing a white farmer. *State v. Reasby*, 100 Iowa 231, 234 (1896); *Records and Briefs for Cases before the Supreme Court of Iowa*, December Term 1896 (Des Moines).

⁸⁷⁰ *Records and Briefs* (December 1896), 76, 94, 101, 104-05, 125, 130; *State v. Tippet*, 646.

first black newspapers – the Oskaloosa-based *Negro Solicitor*, which ran from 1893 to 1899 – and president of the Midwest-based National Colored Men’s Protective Association of America. In 1892 he published the pamphlet, *A National Appeal*, whose subtitle asked “may we be permitted to peacefully live as common citizens of the country that is as dear to us as life, or must we submit to the cruel, merciless judgment of Judge Lynch, the faggot, and the enemy’s bullet?” Like many other activists, he stressed the loyalty of African Americans, who had been “grafted into the fibres of the American government so firmly, that we have lost every vestige of our African ancestry, save the *color* of our skin, which hangs on as a barrier to our progress and happiness.” One example of this was black soldiers, who had helped save the Union, enabled blacks to replace their slave masters with a new master in the federal government, and earned “the right to claim...protection in the simple discharge of our rights and duties.” Despite this loyalty, the Republican government had forgotten its liberal roots and abandoned southern blacks to second-class citizenship and murder, and it was time for northern blacks to “strike at the root of the evil which threatens our existence and menaces our progress” by forming new political alliances with whoever supported them, regardless of party affiliation.⁸⁷¹ Thus Taylor echoed both the loyalist rhetoric of Frederick Douglass and the assimilationist doctrine that would soon reach its peak under Booker T. Washington, but he did not offer a concrete alternative to the Republican Party.

That would change four years later. On the eve of the 1896 presidential election, Taylor released his *National Appeal to the American Negro*, published by his new organization, the Colored People’s National Protective Association. Unlike his previous pamphlet, this one offered

⁸⁷¹ “To Run for President,” *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 21 July 1904; George E. Taylor, *A National Appeal: Addressed to the American Negro and the Friends of Human Liberty* (Oskaloosa, IA: National Colored Men’s Protective Association of America, 1892).

a specific solution to black political problems, but from a strongly populist perspective that focused more on labor conflicts than civil rights. Taylor called on African Americans to “Be Men” and “break tradition bands of partisanship” by allying with the Democrats, who for the first time were more sympathetic to the race than the GOP. One aspect of this was Republican support of the gold standard, which he argued was being used to oppress working men and was also a symbolic form of color prejudice that privileged gold over silver; “if it is unjust to discriminate between men on account of color,” he asked, “by what new rule shall we figure to draw the “color line” on money metals?” Since the Republicans were more concerned about “wealth and power” than equal rights, it was time for blacks to endorse the silver standard and William Jennings Bryan’s Democratic candidacy.⁸⁷²

Although Taylor saw the money issue and civil rights as part of the same larger problem, he also understood that he had to convince African Americans why they should care about the former. This was especially true in Iowa, where most blacks were not farmers and therefore less concerned with populist issues than in the South. One way to do this was through religion. “Gold has always been,” he wrote, “the greatest enemy that the cause of God has been compelled to combat with, according to the ‘good book.’” Taylor reiterated that supporters of the gold standard were anti-black, claiming that there had been no sympathetic federal laws or Supreme Court decisions since “gold legislation” began in the early 1870s. As far as he was concerned, northern Republican capitalists were little different from the despised southern producers of cotton and sugar. He thus repeated his call on African Americans to break their old alliance with the GOP and stand instead with “the common people, the farmer, the miner, the day laborer or

⁸⁷² Taylor, *National Appeal to the American Negro: Why We Should Favor the Chicago Platform* (Oskaloosa, IA: National Colored Men’s Protective Association of America, 1896).

mechanic”); in other words, the vocations held by most black Iowans. He addressed this group even more directly in his conclusion, reminding it of how its latent political power was being taken for granted:

“Like an untried massive engine, neither the Negroes of the United States nor the republican nor Democratic parties know or appreciate the political strength of the race... In Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, New York, Michigan, and a few other states our influence or political strength was in a measure felt [in the 1892 elections]... We are scattered through the doubtful states in large enough proportions to turn such states which ever way we may cast our votes... If we are in fact free men then let us exercise that freedom as our minds may dictate without feeling in any wise obligated by the history of thirty years ago.”⁸⁷³

Even the most fervent black Republicans would have found it difficult to disagree with these sentiments, but Taylor’s pamphlets nonetheless failed to have the desired effect, and blacks in southern Iowa stayed loyal to the GOP for several reasons. First, local Democrats offered them little reason to do otherwise. Second, one of their few remaining allies in the U.S. Senate, Jonathan Prentiss Dolliver, was an Iowa Republican. And third, these were native Virginians who remembered vividly how Democrats had driven them out of the South after Reconstruction.

Taylor himself eventually grew disillusioned with the Democrats and looked for other alternatives. In 1904 the National Liberty Party (sometimes referred to as the National Negro Liberty Party) nominated him for president, thus making him one of the first African Americans to run for the position.⁸⁷⁴ Although this small group was politically powerless, Taylor probably felt more at home there since its goals of racial equality, empowerment of working people against “class legislation,” reparations for former slaves, and independence for the Philippine

⁸⁷³ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁴ “What the Party Is,” *Ottumwa Courier*, 3 August 1904. Taylor was actually the second choice for the position; W.T. Scott of Belleville, Illinois had to step down after he was convicted of “keeping a disorderly house.” “To Run for President.”

islands were more similar to his own than those of either the Republicans or Democrats.⁸⁷⁵ These sweeping statements on race, international politics and economics were actually similar in focus to Alexander Clark's 1876 "Centennial Address," even though Clark had been a loyal Republican. Although thirty years had passed since that speech, black Iowans were still looking for political power in a two-party system where neither mainstream group seemed to have any real interest in them and where sympathetic alternative groups like Taylor's Liberty Party had no chance of winning.

Although black Iowans never abandoned political activism, its increasing ineffectiveness caused them and other African Americans around the country to adopt new strategies. Foremost among these was organization building. Churches, lodges and women's clubs enabled blacks to use their own resources for community uplift and social purposes, made it possible for black women to carve out their own social and political space, but also allowed the elite to distance itself from less prosperous blacks. The club movement reached its peak in two of Iowa's largest and most economically stable black enclaves: Davenport and Des Moines. The state's first black women's club, the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Club, was organized in Des Moines in 1890. Davenport followed several years later with the Silver Autumn Leaf Club, a group for affluent black women to discuss "domestic science, art, and issues of the day," and the Supreme Silver Star Lodge, which focused on temperance, morality, racial uplift, and "the performance of such works of charity and benevolence as will further these ends."⁸⁷⁶

⁸⁷⁵ "What the Party Is."

⁸⁷⁶ Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 91-92; Allen, "Sowing Seeds of Kindness," 4; "1893," Richter Papers.

Over the next few years similar groups were founded around the state, with names like Ottumwa's Ida B. Wells Reading Club, Tipton's Daughters of Tabernacle, and Davenport's Violet Reading Club (for "intellectual improvement and Bible study"). This movement did not escape notice by white Iowans. The *Tipton Advertiser* commended the "determination to relieve their own poor and to be independent and self supporting," while Mrs. A.J. Murray of Washington was chosen to represent the race at the otherwise all-white Mothers' Congress in Des Moines, where it was reported that she spoke with "rare refinement and intellectuality, in appearance, manner and voice." At the same time, there were still with a more overtly political focus like Cedar Rapids' Afro-American Club, Davenport's Heinz Colored Republican Club, and a 1900 statewide convention in Des Moines for the "educational, industrial, and social progress of the race." The names of the attendees are not known, but the *Davenport Daily Times* reported that they discussed questions such as "How Shall We as a Race Get Our Equal Rights," "Why Are We Republicans," "Is the Afro-American Justified in Affiliating with Organized Labor," and "Is there any Ground for Believing in the Ultimate Perfection and Universal Happiness of the Afro-American Race."⁸⁷⁷ Even as African Americans moved towards insular institutions, they continued to use them to grapple with the most important political questions of the day, although in a way that further marginalized poorer members of the community.

These organizations also helped black Iowans take part in regional and national events. In 1892 they joined other African Americans from the region in raising funds for Langston University, a new black college in Oklahoma. As national planning for the 1895 Atlanta Exposition got underway, a group of black commissioners traveled to Davenport to encourage

⁸⁷⁷ "1896," Richter Papers; Allen, "Sowing Seeds of Kindness," 4-5; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #3, 6; *Tipton Advertiser*, 20 February 1896; "The Afro Americans of Iowa – Will Meet in Des Moines to Organize Permanently," *Davenport Daily Times*, 5 April 1900; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 82.

local blacks to submit exhibits, which would “show progress and be a credit to the race as the fruits of thirty years of freedom.” After his speech at the Exposition catapulted him to national prominence, Booker T. Washington made several trips to Iowa, including Chautauqua lectures and fundraising tours during which he presented his brand of uplift philosophy to predominantly white audiences. There were likely more blacks in the audience when Ida B. Wells lectured on southern lynchings in the capital in 1894, although Washington’s ideas ultimately proved more influential.⁸⁷⁸

Older institutions also remained active. The 1891 *Minutes of the Iowa Baptist Convention* identified ten black Baptist churches with a total of 1,014 members around the state, while a 1904 study by W.E. B. DuBois found fifteen Masonic lodges and fourteen Odd Fellows lodges with a total of nearly 700 members and more than \$6000 in property; both groups had gone into decline in recent years but were still more prosperous than their counterparts in some New England and western states. In 1899 the Odd Fellows held their annual meeting in Davenport, opening with a “grand trolley party” and a parade described as “the grandest of any every offered and controlled by the colored race in the state of Iowa,” with music from the Muchakinock Black

⁸⁷⁸ Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 111; “Colored Commissioners,” *Davenport Democrat*, 8 September 1895; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 75; “Give the Negroes a Chance,” *Davenport Democrat*, 12 May 1895; “Colored Men,” *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, UNC, 1897; *Allerton Chautauqua Assembly*, 1904, 11-12, 18-19, 24; *Allerton Chautauqua Assembly*, 16-23 August 1900, p. 18, *Allerton Chautauqua Assembly, Eleventh Annual Assembly*, 25-18 August 1909; “A Heroine of the Race,” *The (Wichita) People’s Friend*, 28 September 1894. The Tuskegee principal had previous ties to the Hawkeye State, since Congressman John F. Lacey had helped procure land for the Institute three years earlier. “Booker Washington on Major Lacey,” *Wapello Herald*, 20 July 1905; *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 10 (New York: Charles Scriber’s Sons, 1933), 519-20.

Diamonds, white-owned buildings covered in flags and bunting, and the mayor presenting the officers with the keys to city and told to “take charge and have all the fun they wanted.”⁸⁷⁹

It was perhaps fitting that this event should take place in Davenport, given the continued growth and prosperity of that city’s black community. By 1900 there were nearly 500 African American residents, and a younger generation of community leaders was emerging. W.G. Mott had worked as an office assistant in a Keokuk law firm after high school, studied law at night, and opened a practice in the Tri-Cities after he passed the bar in 1892. Sharing an office with the chiropodist General Houston, Mott was active in community affairs and defended both blacks and whites in criminal trials; one client was his brother George, a Keokuk policeman accused of excessive force by a fellow African American in 1908. At the same time, the city that had once been Iowa’s liberal ground zero began developing a new racial and class consciousness. One example of the increasing racial conservatism was the growing interest in blackface minstrelsy among local whites, who had always enjoyed such performances by professionals but now began forming their own groups as well. This included troupes like the Carnival City Cullud Comedians and the Lady Minstrels, a group of white men who performed a “travesty on the New Woman” in evening clothes and with assistance from “fifty jolly ladies and a dozen ebony-faced pickaninnies.” Simultaneously mocking both black and white female aspirations of equality, the Lady Minstrels implied that neither group was fit to wear a rich white man’s clothes.⁸⁸⁰

⁸⁷⁹ Frederick I. Kuhns, “The Baptists in Iowa: Many Kinds of Baptists,” *Palimpsest* 36 (1955): 360; DuBois, *Economic Co-Operation among American Negroes* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1907), 109-110, 121-23; “Davenport Report,” *Iowa Bystander*, 29 July 1899; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 78.

⁸⁸⁰ Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 3, 71; “Colored Attorney Passed Away Today: W.G. Mott Succumbs to Nine Days Attack of Pneumonia,” *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 14 March 1913. George Adams of Keokuk also studied law but died in 1890 before gaining admission to the bar. “George Adams,” UNC, KPL, Vertical Files: Negro in Iowa, Newspaper Clippings; UNC, *Iowa Bystander*, 29 July 1910; “W.G. Mott Funeral Services Today,” *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 16 March 1913; “Davenport Notes,” *Iowa Bystander*, 21 March 1913; “An Emancipation Day Declaration,” *Davenport Democrat*, 3 September 1908; “Lay Cornerstone of a New Church,”

Of even greater consequence to African Americans was the city government's war on the waterfront. Davenport's economy had always depended on the revenue generated by the Mississippi, but with it came the leisure activities of dock and boat workers, which were seen as less savory. Furthermore, despite the waterfront's constant racial tension, it was also the most integrated part of the city, where working class blacks and whites labored, drank, fought and had sex together. Most of the saloons, gambling dens, and "bawdy houses" had employees and clients of both races, and it was relatively easy for upper class whites to condemn the area as an immoral den of African Americans and uncouth whites.⁸⁸¹ These sentiments were finally backed up with real pressure from political and religious leaders once railroad-generated revenue became increasingly important to the city's economy in the late 19th century. Beginning in the 1890s, the city council authorized the police department to eradicate gambling, prostitution, and drinking on the waterfront. This was aided by an 1894 state law that imposed a \$600 tax on saloons and by religious leaders like Rev. J.B. Donaldson, who decried the "thugs, and bullies, cutthroats and blacklegs [who] do as they please...low theatres which allure their victims...gamblers who cheat people with their slot machines...[and] vampires who fatten on human flesh and sleep not unless they have caused someone to fall"; it was up to honest citizens and the press, he concluded, to stop Davenport from becoming a second Sodom. The local media

Davenport Democrat, 19 July 1908; "Davenport Notes," *Iowa Bystander*, 1 April 1910; "Acquit Colored Police Officer," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 24 February 1908; "The Attorney's First Case: W.G. Mott, Colored Lawyer, Files His First District Court Papers," Richter Papers; "When the Black Face Talent Was Popular," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 30 June 1918; "Lady Minstrels," *Davenport Daily Times*, 10 April 1897. Unlike many other minstrel shows in the late nineteenth-century north, Davenport's minstrels refrained from stereotyped jokes about Irish and German immigrants, which was not surprising given the city's ethnic dynamics. Robert C. Toll, "Social Commentary in Late Nineteenth-Century White Minstrelsy," in Annemarie Bean and James V. Hatch and Brooks McNamara, eds., *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England), 88-98.

⁸⁸¹ For an example of a similar situation much further in the past, see David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

also played a part in the crusade by depicting the waterfront as a den of interracial sin. One 1892 article, for example, described a black-owned “low dive, where half bestial negroes and wretched, besotted and wholly unattractive men and women congregate.”⁸⁸²

This attitude was also reflected in the media’s overall posture on African Americans. The same newspapers that had once championed civil rights and community affairs now labeled suspected criminals as “bad niggers,” printed false reports about a “gang of negroes” violently taking over the far northwestern town of Spencer, and described southern lynchings with headlines like “At a Mob’s Hands – A Colored Brute Sent to Eternity by Lynchers” or “A Necktie Party – Given by Georgians to Three Negro Murderers.”⁸⁸³ One article entitled “Harvest at Hand” even responded to a Boston group that had called for black self-defense by saying that “[whenever] the negro gets ready to make war on white Americans for protecting of their homes and the honor of their women against his brutal crimes he has only to begin.”⁸⁸⁴ A few years before, the press had proclaimed the innocence of suspected black rapists (if belatedly), but by 1892 it praised their wholesale murder and called for race war if blacks resisted.

⁸⁸² UNC, *Davenport Democrat*, 8 February 1894; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 68, 77-78, 84; “A Midnight Raid: A Disreputable Coon Joint Pulled Last Night,” *Davenport Democrat*, 8 April 1892; Friedberger, *Cornbelt and River City*, 115-17; *Davenport Daily Times*, 27 April 1900; “A Big Problem,” *Davenport Democrat*, 24 April 1899; “Patience Tired Out,” *Davenport Democrat*, 13 September 1892.

⁸⁸³ “Davenport Report,” *Iowa Bystander*, 20 October 1899; “Davenport Report,” *Iowa Bystander*, 27 October 1899; “Police Points,” *Davenport Democrat*, 8 September 1892; “Race Riot in Iowa,” *Davenport Democrat*, 22 September 1892; “At a Mob’s Hands – A Colored Brute Sent to Eternity by Lynchers,” *Davenport Daily Times*, 3 June 1892; “A Necktie Party – Given by Georgians to Three Negro Murderers,” *Davenport Daily Times*, 18 May 1892. The newspapers did still occasionally report on positive events in the black community; one 1892 article, for example, advertised the upcoming speaking engagement of a black divinity student from Yale. *Davenport Daily Times*, 23 July 1892; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 66-67, 69-70. The Spencer incident is not mentioned in Paul Walton Black’s 1912 study of Iowa lynchings, Michael Pfeifer’s more recent work, or any of the earlier scholarship on black Iowans, and even the *Democrat* had nothing else to say after the initial report. It would seem that the newspaper had printed a false, unverified report and was too bashful to retract it afterwards. Black, “Lynchings in Iowa”; Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*.

⁸⁸⁴ “Harvest at Hand,” *Davenport Democrat*, 9 June 1892; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 66.

Although the crusade did not completely end undesirable activity on the waterfront, it did have a major impact. By 1905, the number of arrests for prostitution had dropped to 13, down from 590 twelve years earlier.⁸⁸⁵ It also further encouraged the black middle class to turn inward, handling intra-racial disputes through community structures rather than the legal system. An 1899 controversy involving A.D. Corbin provides a striking example of this. The former paper hanger and his wife had become two of Davenport's wealthiest black citizens through real estate investments and a laundry service. After an unspecified dispute with Rev. L.E. Christy, though, he had the pastor arrested for fraud and also spread the word that he had a "familiar intimacy with certain women." Although Corbin was an important lay leader in the church, he was expelled for "going to law with a brother." He unsuccessfully appealed to the state AME conference and called for a vote on Christy's removal with a local judge serving as election monitor, but he must have lost, because several years later the Corbins sold their extensive properties in Davenport and moved to the outskirts of town.⁸⁸⁶ The church had decided that regardless of what Rev. Christy may or may not have done, Corbin's act of bringing the media and criminal justice system into internal affairs was the worse crime.

At the same time that they turned inward, black community leaders also supported the moral crusade by distancing themselves from the waterfront's less "respectable" dock workers, barkeeps, madams and gamblers. Several years later, a news report declared that Davenport "has

⁸⁸⁵ In August of 1905, for example, there was a well-attended illegal prize fight even though the county sheriff and state militia were sent to stop it. UNC, *Davenport Democrat*, 20 August 1905; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 68.

⁸⁸⁶ 1900 U.S. Census; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #3, 43-44; *Davenport City Directory 1900-1901*; "Davenport Report," *Iowa Bystander*, 29 September 1899; "Editor's Observations," *Iowa Bystander*, 3 August 1906; "Editor's Observations," *Iowa Bystander*, 4 August 1911; "A Church Member Expelled – A.D. Corbin Tried by a Committee at Bethel A.M.E. Church," *Davenport Times*, June 20, 1900. By 1904, though, he had built several new properties in town and begun taking part in community affairs again. "Colored People Are Celebrating – Negro Home Being Opened at Tenth and Brown Streets Today," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 26 August 1904; "Davenport Items," *Iowa Bystander*, 2 September 1904.

cleaned out her den of vice, obeys the laws as do the other cities, and the colored citizens are not a bit behind her white brethren in this respect.” A speech made by D. Warwick at the height of the crusade in 1900 further helps to elaborate this point. Warwick was a member of one of Davenport’s most prominent black families, with business ties to the white elite, and her response to the citywide mood of racial conservatism offered an exploration of the very meaning of equality, greatly informed by class tensions within the black community. In her address to the Autumn Leaf Club, Warwick declared that decent African Americans wanted political and civil equality, not social equality or interracial marriage. “If we glance at the colored people assembled in church, school, or hall and observe the large percentage of white blood,” she noted, “we shall discover evidence in a double sense, that some one other than the negro has been the seeker.”⁸⁸⁷ This argument accurately invoked the memory of slavery, but it also subtly reminded her audience that many middle class blacks had mixed ancestry that distinguished them from other African Americans.

Prosperous blacks did not seek admission to fancy restaurants or first-class steamboat rooms because they wanted to be around white people, Warwick continued, but because they wanted quality service. This desire was in fact even greater among them than white elites because the segregated accommodations forced on them were so poor, filled with the “undesirable presence of foul men and vile women.” Affluent blacks thus did not want to be forced to socialize with their less refined brethren any more than wealthy whites wanted to be around poor whites. Although some people insisted on lumping the entire race together, Warwick contended that “there is no social equality among negroes... Culture, moral refinement,

⁸⁸⁷ “Editor’s Observations,” *Iowa Bystander*, 26 July 1912; *Davenport Democrat*, 19 August 1891; “Colored Anti-Prohibition League,” *Davenport Democrat*, 19 August 1892; “Outing of Autumn Leaf Club,” *Davenport Daily Times*, 21 July 1900; Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 65, 70.

and material possessions make a difference among colored people as they do among whites.” Black elites would not ask whites for social equality since they did not even practice it within their own race. Their greatest desire was rather to enjoy the privileges that came with wealth and refinement in their own company; “If left alone,” Warwick insisted, “the negro will be contented with his own people.” She thus suggested a bargain between upper class blacks and whites. They would carve out their own separate sphere within elite institutions and leave poorer African Americans out, so long as their legal rights were protected. “Social relations,” she concluded, “are sacred, true, but civil rights are sacred also. Hence social relations must not impose upon civil rights.”⁸⁸⁸

Although Warwick was not calling for the repeal of civil rights for poorer blacks, she was clearly attempting to distance her peer group from them. Rather than appealing to elite whites’ sense of racial justice, she spoke to them as a fellow member of the upper class, reminding them that she wanted the same things and avoided the same associations. Warwick did not invent this idea – other members of the black elite had often made similar arguments in other parts of the country – but its use here represented a shift from the more egalitarian civil rights strategies used in Iowa in previous years. It was also a response to three decades of growing racial conservatism. The promise of postwar equality after the Civil War were seemingly forgotten, replaced first by the hostility of the legal system and the threat of mob violence and now by a moral crusade against working-class people.

Race relations did not change as dramatically in Des Moines because the capital had never been quite as liberal as Davenport in the first place, but the black community continued to

⁸⁸⁸ “Outing of Autumn Leaf Club.”

grow in size and prominence. An 1895 study found that there were nearly two thousand in Des Moines, which now had the largest black population in the state, a position that it has never relinquished. African Americans were concentrated in a few neighborhoods, but there were no strict segregation policies and some had “some real nice, expensive homes, in some of the nicer areas.” In 1903, though, residents of the nearby village of Clive tried to drive out the few black families with arson, dynamite and letters declaring that “All negroes are warned to ‘git.’ They are not wanted in Clive, and any white men employing them are liable to have ‘something happen’ to them.”⁸⁸⁹

Various sources show that this black community featured cooks and barbers, municipal employees such as policemen and a mailman, artisans and entrepreneurs, including four women who owned boarding houses; and a tiny elite of ministers, lawyers, doctors, printers at the *Register and Leader*, and an engineer. Although most African Americans still worked as unskilled laborers, the capital’s highly visible, educated black elite was more prominent than that of other parts of the state where even the wealthiest blacks often lacked formal education. At the same time, semi-skilled laborers could also become community leaders. Harry McCraven later recalled the prominence of men who worked as headwaiters and porters at elite hotels and a mail carrier who later became an AME minister. The city also had five or six black churches (although some residents believed that this bred unnecessary competition and that the churches should be consolidated), black baseball teams, and a number of clubs, including the reading group Paul

⁸⁸⁹ Porter, *Annals of Polk County and Des Moines* (1898), 905. Unsigned letters were also sent to white residents who had hired African Americans. Many whites, though, were indignant over these events and helped uncover the “cowardly villains.” Hawthorne, “Harry McCraven”; “Clive Iowa the Scene of White Caps – Colored Citizens Are Ordered to Leave,” *Iowa Bystander*, 28 August 1903.

Lawrence Dunbar Society and the Iowa Afro-American League, which in keeping with the era's Washingtonian ideals organized a "colored industrial fair" in 1897.⁸⁹⁰

With such a large population and prosperous elite, Des Moines became the site of another important sea change in black Iowan history. As with elected political positions, the struggle to create an independent black newspaper had been fought for many years with little success. Iowa's first black newspaper was the (*Keokuk*) *Western Baptist Herald*, established by Mrs. Amos Johnson during the mid 1880s, although no copies have survived. The first fully documented black newspaper was the *Colored Advance*, started by C.S. Baker as a semi-monthly in the southwestern town of Corning in 1882. As was typical of black newspapers at the time, the *Advance* combined local and national reports, with a special focus on the South. Baker actually edited it while working full time at the white *Adams County Gazette* and leading a local concert band, and although he advertised the paper as the only one in the state "under the control of colored writers," he solicited subscriptions from whites who "desire to see the colored people progress." He also asked his readers to forgive him for the *Advance's* shortcomings, writing that "Under the disadvantages that we as a race labor under, it will be impossible for us to compete with other journals, but if we expect to rise to be a people in the future, we must make a start." This, however, did not happen. It is not clear when the *Advance* ceased publication, but given its location in an overwhelmingly white city, Baker's busy schedule, and the difficulties faced by all black newspapers, it does not seem to have lasted for long.⁸⁹¹

⁸⁹⁰ (*Des Moines*) *Iowa Baptist Standard*, 21 May 1897; Hawthorne, "Harry McCraven, 89, Was Paperboy for Bystander When It Began in 1894," *Iowa Bystander*, UNC, Blacks in Iowa Collection, SHSI-IC; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Underground Railroad* (Part 3), 108; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," *The Negro in Des Moines and Polk County*, 340, 342; Porter, *Annals of Polk County and Des Moines* (1898), 905; Lufkin, "Black Des Moines," 57-58, 75, 78-79, 84.

⁸⁹¹ Morris, "The Black Media in Iowa, 1868-2000," 286-87.

The next few newspapers had a greater potential subscription base but suffered the same fate as the *Advance*. Harry Graham's *Des Moines*-based *Rising Sun* lasted from 1883 to 1885. Five years later, another group in the capital announced that "in view of the fact that there is not a paper published in the state devoted to the interest of the colored people, a number of Des Moines' most promising young colored men have formed...the *Iowa State Freedman*." It was hoped that the *Freedman* would focus on local news while also including contributions from national leaders such as Frederick Douglass, Blanche K. Bruce, and Alexander Clark, but these ambitious plans did not come to fruition, and this paper failed too. The same was true of A.S. Barnett's *Weekly Avalanche* founded in 1889 and featuring as its byline the famous Lincoln quote "Equal Rights to All, Special Privileges to None." Barnett looked for innovative ways to keep the paper afloat, suggesting that Republican leaders should purchase copies for young African Americans who could not afford to buy one in order to discourage them from leaving the party. The GOP declined his offer, however, and although it eventually had as many as 2,300 subscribers, by 1894 it was gone. Further east in Oskaloosa, Rev. C.S. Jacobs and L.J. Phillips started the four-page monthly *Iowa District News* in 1890, but it lasted only a year. George Taylor's *Negro Solicitor* was more stable, with nearly 1,700 subscribers during its six year run (in part because of regular contributions by George Woodson) but it ultimately did not enjoy long term success either.⁸⁹²

There were few signs that the *Iowa Bystander* would be any different when it first went into print on June 8, 1894. Founded in Des Moines by owner William Coalson and editors Charles and Thaddeus Ruff, the publication was named in honor of the "Bystander Notes"

⁸⁹² Lufkin, "Black Des Moines," 18, 287; *Sioux City Journal*, 27 March 1888; *Iowa Baptist Standard*, 21 May 1897; "To the Republicans of Iowa," (*Des Moines*) *Weekly Avalanche*, 20 January 1893, 1; Morris, "The Black Media in Iowa, 1868-2000," 287.

written by Albion Tourgee. Its byline was “Fear God, tell the truth and make money,” but it failed to deliver on the latter until John Lay Thompson replaced the Ruffs in 1896. Born in Decatur County in 1869 and educated at a teaching college in Des Moines, Thompson was still less than thirty years old and a law student at Drake University when he became editor of the *Bystander*, but his leadership was one of the first signs that he would become Iowa’s most prominent black community activist, taking up a position that had lain dormant since Alexander Clark’s death. He encouraged the idea that support for the *Bystander* was a matter of race loyalty for African Americans like Frances Baker of Davenport, who bought a subscription in 1899 after deciding that “she was not showing all the race pride that she should,” and made it Iowa’s first financially stable black newspaper. It also provided revenue for children like Harry McCraven, who sold copies at a nickel each so that he could go to the movies.⁸⁹³

Like many similar publications, the *Bystander* combined national news in the “Race Echoes” section with the “Editor’s Observations,” which featured articles that Thompson himself collected from local reporters around the state during his annual subscription drives. These travels enabled him to increase his own influence and eventually become a prominent leader in the Midwest. He was also uniquely qualified to write an editorial that offered glowing praise for his home state, and although it was probably calculated to appeal to whites, it also seemed genuine: “Iowa, the brightest star under the blue dome of heaven; the first state to wipe the blacks laws from her statute books; our great common school system that is second to none; our vast rich and undulating prairies that lie within the heart of the Mississippi Valley with beautiful

⁸⁹³ Voss, “The ‘Fighting Press’”; Robert V. Morris, “Bystander Promoted Pride for Blacks,” *Des Moines Register*, 8 June 1993; Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa’s Black Legacy*, 51, 54-57, 64; Lufkin, “Black Des Moines,” 101; Porter, *Annals of Polk County and Des Moines* (1898), 878; “Davenport Report,” *Iowa Bystander*, 3 November 1899; “The Colored Newspaper,” *Iowa Bystander*, 16 October 1914; Hawthorne, “Harry McCraven, 89.”

clean rivers and prosperous towns.” This was indicative of the *Bystander’s* activist but generally moderate philosophy. Various editorials condemned lynching (but without calling for physical resistance); criticized media bias against African Americans; called on blacks to solve their own problems through moral fortitude; brought attention to Des Moines businesses who mistreated black customers while encouraging readers to patronize businesses that treated them fairly; praised liberal white politicians; and advocated for blacks in other countries as well as oppressed minorities such as Russian Jews and Japanese Americans. Thompson also opposed Hobe Armstrong’s philosophy that racial uplift should be accomplished through interracial marriage, but the *Bystander* still perpetuated the internal conflict originating in miscegenation – preferential treatment for blacks of mixed ancestry – by carrying advertisements for skin lighteners and hair straightening products.⁸⁹⁴

The *Bystander’s* success actually left little room for other black journalists in Iowa. Deaf-mute journalist John Howlett started the *Oskaloosa Gazette* in 1896 and quickly became so desperate for money that he threatened to expose the sexual improprieties of local AME leaders if they did not support him, but the gambit failed and the *Gazette* was gone in less than a year. The *Iowa Baptist Standard* began publication in Des Moines in 1897, declaring in its first issue that it would “always be found fighting for the upbuilding of the BAPTIST in GENERAL, and the RACE IN PARTICULAR.” Like Thompson’s newspaper, the *Standard* reported on national news; endorsed the uplift philosophy of African Americans freeing themselves from their own “ignorance, avarice and cupidity”; and like George Taylor opposed loyalty to the GOP based

⁸⁹⁴ Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #2, 121; Voss, “The ‘Fighting Press’”; Lufkin, “Black Des Moines,” 102-03; Morris, “The Black Media in Iowa, 1868-2000,” 287; “Where Are Our Young People Drifting?,” *Iowa Bystander*, 24 May 1901; “Our White Newspapers Should Be Fair,” *Iowa Bystander*, 25 March 1904; Hawthorne, “Harry McCraven”; Lufkin, “Higher Expectations for Ourselves,” 213.

solely on “ancient history” calling anyone who did so “a slave to party.” It had little to say, though, about civil rights issues in Iowa, and this along with its lack of advertising revenue and the fact that it received little attention outside the black Baptist community ultimately made it far less successful than the *Bystander*. The results were the same for G.C. Carr’s *Sioux City Searchlight* (which was politically independent and thus one of the few black newspapers not affiliated with the GOP), Rev. F. Lomack’s Des Moines-based *Iowa State Watchman*, and J. Edward White’s *Muchakinoock State*, which provided news on the mining committees.⁸⁹⁵

Overall, it seemed that there was only room for one black newspaper in the state. John Lay Thompson had the drive, connections and resources to go beyond local or denominational concerns and make his newspaper available and relevant to all black Iowans, most of whom could only afford to purchase one newspaper at a time. The success of the *Bystander* showed that after decades of fighting for fair treatment in the white press, African Americans had finally grown large enough in numbers and prosperity to support their own newspaper, which despite its shortcomings enabled them to tell their own story for the first time. Although the newspaper cultivated patronage ties just as other black institutions had before it, its very existence was a significant change, since for the first time African Americans could support and contribute to their own stable newspaper rather than fighting for fair and equal treatment in the white press. They did not cease asserting the right to be represented accurately in white newspapers, but the struggle took on a different complexion now that there was a viable alternative. Scholars seeking information about nineteenth-century black life are forced to search through white newspapers, but a great deal of research on twentieth-century events can be done primarily through the *Bystander*. For historians, and for the people who lived in that era, John Lay Thompson’s

⁸⁹⁵ *Iowa Baptist Standard*, 21 May 1897; Morris, “The Black Media in Iowa, 1868-2000,” 287-88.

newspaper replaced all white newspapers as the primary source of information about black Iowans.

During this same period, Des Moines became the center of black political activity. The black presence in Republican politics had rarely gone beyond the token presence of one or two representatives at party meetings and conventions, and even these symbolic efforts were not always successful. After years of seeking an appointment as House doorkeeper, A.S. Barnett finally moved to Chicago and found work as a police court clerk. The *Baptist Weekly Standard* complained that “there seems to be some unwritten law in Iowa that an Afro-American, no matter how great his ability, cannot rise above a servant in political appointment.” Only Robert Hyde and John Lay Thompson, who helped chose GOP candidates for judgeships and served on the Republican Polk County Central Committee in 1899, had any real power, and even they were unable to stop effectively pressure party leaders for racial change. When Mayor John MacVicar fired two municipal employees, Thompson and others still felt compelled to endorse him for reelection, stating that “while we may receive but little from Mr. MacVicar, we would perhaps receive less as a race from the other men.” Like other black voters, Des Moines blacks had to make the unpleasant choice between a Republican candidate who had done little for them and a Democrat who would probably do even less. Ironically, MacVicar’s opponent won the election and then reappointed the fired employees in an attempt to create his own base of black support.

The first black elected officials in the Des Moines area were actually two men in the nearby mining town of Saylor, who became city constable and justice of the peace in 1899. The capital proper finally reached this benchmark a year later, albeit in a typically unimportant position, when Frank Blagburn was elected market master, a position that involved supervising

merchants at the public markets. Although his election was part of a GOP sweep of all local offices, all the white candidates won by at least one thousand votes while he had a majority of only 183. Blagburn served two uneventful years and then chose not to seek reelection in 1902. It was hoped that another African American would take his place and that the market master post would become a permanent position of black patronage, but no other black entered the race, and when James did so in 1904, he lost. So did Thompson, S. Joe Brown and other prominent blacks who vied for various positions over the next decade. After Blagburn, no African Americans won an election in Des Moines for many years, largely because white voters rejected them, although Thompson himself noted that black voters did not always come out in great numbers. Black political power was again reduced to a few community leaders (usually the same people who ran for office) sitting on Republican and municipal committees, and even this was not always satisfactory, as white GOP leaders sometimes promised patronage spoils during campaign visits to black neighborhoods only to renege once elected.⁸⁹⁶ Blagburn's brief career as market master ended up being as historically insignificant as the position itself. Rather than helping to usher in a new era of black political power, it was an anomaly during a time of racial conservatism.

Des Moines had eclipsed the old Mississippi River towns in black economic and political influence, and the same was true in military affairs. The 60th had been organized in the southeast, but the first significant wartime activity since the Civil War took place in the capital. After the *U.S.S. Maine* exploded in February 1898, the *Bystander* joined other newspapers around the country in calling for military action, but for different reasons; “the reason why there are so

⁸⁹⁶ *Iowa Bystander*, 9 March 1900, 30 March 1900, 6 June 1901, 6 April 1906, quoted in Lufkin, “Black Des Moines,” 96-98, 107, 112-13; *Iowa Baptist Standard*, 21 May 1897.

many Negroes willing to enlist in a war with Spain is,” John Lay Thompson wrote, “they are used to being shot at.” Sarcasm aside, it was not clear that black Iowans would be able to serve at all. The War Department ordered that all recruits be placed in existing National Guard units and that no new ones be formed. Since the black Looby Guards were inactive and Iowa would not integrate its white units (though several other states did), black men were effectively banned from enlisting. After a few months, though, President McKinley authorized the creation of four “Immunes” regiments of black soldiers, who it was thought were biologically suited to the subtropical climate of the Caribbean and Philippines.⁸⁹⁷

Some white Iowans also supported black enlistment for various reasons. Perhaps seeing an opportunity to reduce the size of the local black population, the *Oskaloosa Herald* declared, “We have a large number of negros here and many are anxious to go... We believe it would be a good thing... in a political way to take some of them,” while Dr. F.N. Stiles argued that “it is a good scheme because of their ability to stand the heat.” African Americans themselves, though, took the lead in this effort. W.J. Scott of Ottumwa reminded Governor Leslie Shaw that “the colored men of Iowa recognize their obligation to the state and nation to come to its defense in time of war, and desire the opportunity to defend the principles of freedom secured to them by our free institutions,” and Civil War veteran Rev. J.W. Muse of Keokuk also informed Shaw that “we are as patriotic citizens as any other race and desire to share a part of the sufferings and sacrifices that are to be made by the soldiers for the flag and honor of our country and for humanity.”⁸⁹⁸ African Americans once again saw military service as a way to prove their right to equal citizenship, hoping to finish the work started by the Civil War. This mobilization also

⁸⁹⁷ Vogt, “Conquer We Must when Our Cause is Just,” 2, 4.

⁸⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

represented a generational changing of the guard. Thirty years earlier, young men like Muse had served in the Civil War after older leaders advocated for their right to do so, and now they were elderly men who took part in the organizational effort, but those who actually enlisted were part of a younger generation with no direct memory of the sectional conflict.

Just the same, knowledge of what had happened during the previous war – specifically, the government’s initial reluctance to enlist black troops – may have motivated community leaders to take action without waiting for official permission. On June 1, E.G. Willett informed the governor that “I have formed a company of Afro Americans, residents of Des Moines and vicinity...I respectfully request that our company have a place in one of the volunteer regiments, if there comes a call.” Willett and other Des Moines activists also appealed to Congressman John A.T. Hull, chair of the House Military Affairs Committee, who informed them that Company M of the 7th Regiment, Volunteer Infantry Immunes would be accepted into the volunteer army.⁸⁹⁹ Thus unlike the 60th USCI, Iowa’s black Spanish-American War troops were organized independently without any help from white military or civilian leaders.

On June 13 the men of Company M elected their officers. Several had previous military experience; Captain E.G. Willett had fought in the Native American wars, while Lieutenants E.G. McAfee and E.T. Banks had been captains in the Looby Guards. Several days later, though, the War Department informed them that they would need to have a white man for their captain. The most likely candidate was Amos Brandt, a politically connected Des Moines real estate agent and son of former abolitionist Isaac Brandt. He had already requested his own command, and political leaders agreed that giving him Company M would placate him and placating “black voters who had viewed the State government’s inaction in regard to organizing a black unit with

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., 5-6.

disapproval.” Although the government had initially supported the company’s desire for black leadership, it now warned that the soldiers might not be accepted into the army without a white captain; political expediency had won out over civil rights. They nearly disbanded at that point, but upon further reflection “desire for service overcame the resentment” and they acquiesced to being led by Brandt so long as his top-ranking subordinate officers were black, although Willett resigned from the unit for unknown reasons.⁹⁰⁰

Brandt then ran an ad in the *Daily Iowa Capital* calling for “All able-bodied colored male citizens of good character, between the ages of 18 and 45 years, who desire to enlist in the volunteer service of the United States” to enlist, although this was only a formality since the unit had already been organized without him and few African Americans read the *Capital* anyway. On July 17, Company M left for Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, carrying a flag that Isaac Brandt had presented them. Jefferson Barracks was not far from where the 60th had briefly camped thirty-five years earlier, and Company M’s initial duties were also similar to those of their predecessor: fatigue duty, drilling, reviews, inspections, and small arms practice, although they were also encouraged to play baseball in order to improve their fitness. With massive improvements in military medicine since the Civil War, disease was much less of a concern for Company M than it had been for the 60th, and the men suffered from little more than boredom; Private Wirt B. Early cheerfully wrote his father that “We have gained confidence among all the companies of the regiment,” while Sergeant John Railey informed the *Bystander* that although

⁹⁰⁰ Brigham, *Des Moines I*, 358; Vogt, “Prejudice Put Blacks in Special Unit,” *Des Moines Register*, 26 February 2003; Porter, *Annals of Polk County and Des Moines* (1898), 1020-21; Vogt, “Conquer We Must when Our Cause is Just,” 6-8.

his diet of bacon, beans and coffee was less than pleasant, “Captain Brandt makes a good officer and the boys all like him.”⁹⁰¹

Although the company gave a public review with the 900 other members of the 7th Regiment, it ultimately had little to do aside from eating beans and playing baseball. On the same day that Railey’s letter was published in the *Bystander*, Spain surrendered and the war ended. The soldiers now feared that instead of proving their worth in battle, they would be sent to the Caribbean as part of an army of occupation. Private Charles A. Tolliver wrote Governor Shaw on August 25 that “the duty that we were enlisted for is a failure. I do not feel like leaving my own country and friends to go over to Cuba to do garrison duty.” Weeks passed without incident, though, and when they did finally leave in September it was for Lexington, Kentucky. There they experienced one of their few moments of glory when they served as the 7th Regiment’s color guard during review before Secretary of War, but they also suffered their first of only two casualties when Talt E. Ashford died.⁹⁰²

Their next stop was more eventful and less pleasant. On November 7, the regiment left for Georgia, where it bivouacked at a camp in a cotton field, performed prison guard duty, was reviewed by President McKinley (making “a fine showing”), and prepared for occupation duty in Cuba. The racial oppression that these native Iowans faced in the Deep South, though, was much worse than what they had experienced at home or even in Missouri or Kentucky. White townspeople fought with members of the 7th Regiment, insulted them in public, refused them

⁹⁰¹ Vogt, “‘Conquer We Must when Our Cause is Just,’” 8-10; Gue, *History of Iowa*, vol. 3, 196; Brigham, *Des Moines I*, 727. Their farewell was far warmer than what another group of black soldiers had gotten several months earlier. When the white 2nd Regiment and the black 25th regiment passed through Dubuque on their way to the front, the white soldiers were met by a crowd of thousands, but the black troops were virtually ignored. Oldt and Quigley, *History of Dubuque County* (1911), 319.

⁹⁰² None of Iowa’s volunteers actually took part in any battles. Morris, “Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation,” 104; Vogt, “‘Conquer We Must when Our Cause is Just,’” 9-11.

service in businesses, and tried to force them to ride “Jim Crow trailers” attached to the back of the streetcars. The soldiers, though, refused to back down. They refused to accept segregated accommodations, cut down a lynching tree, and as Corporal C.W. Cordin wrote, “Most of the boys who have no gun or revolver borrow one whenever they get a pass to town. Therefore, the white people have learned that the boys are prepared for unwanted insults.” These conflicts only ended when the 7th Regiment, like most other units still in the U.S., was decommissioned and sent home in February 1899. Upon arrival back in the capital, Company M was greeted at the train depot and then marched to the capitol building, where the secretary of state officially welcomed them home. After an evening reception, the company formally disbanded, having experienced even less combat than the 60th three decades earlier.⁹⁰³

Although Company M never saw any action, several combat veterans from other units lived in Iowa during the early 20th century. Charles Mitchell served with the 9th U.S. Cavalry in Cuba, then became a miner in Monroe County and spent his later years in Des Moines.⁹⁰⁴ Their service and that of Company M showed that for black Iowans there was still a direct connection between military service and equal citizenship. And yet like other civil rights tactics used during the 1860s, it had nowhere near the same impact as it had in earlier years. This is largely due to the fact that the Spanish-American War had nowhere near the same impact as the Civil War. This conflict did not provide the same opportunities for social change, but nonetheless African Americans still tried to extract as much political value from it as they could.

⁹⁰³ Morris, “Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation,” 104; Vogt, “Prejudice Put Blacks in Special Unit”; Vogt, “Conquer We Must when Our Cause is Just,” 12-13.

⁹⁰⁴ *Iowa Bystander*, 6 June 1939, quoted in Morris, “Black Iowans in Defense of the Nation,” 104; *Atlantic News Telegraph*, 5 January 1928, p. 1, quoted in WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Box 2, Folder 1, Research Materials: Biographical Sketches of Black Iowans & Americans & Iowa Abolitionists, John Lewis of Atlantic and one of Bedford resident Jack Howe’s sons served with Pershing’s 10th Cavalry and assisted Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders on San Juan Hill, while four Davenport men saw action with the Eighth Illinois. Klein, *A Sourcebook*, Master File #1, 77.

Fate is rarely accommodating enough to place significant events in nicely rounded years, but this did in fact happen in 1900, when the beginning of a new century coincided with the beginning of a new era in black Iowa history. When the mines of Muchakinock played out, the CCC moved its train depot, homes, stores, and equipment a few miles away to Buxton, a new site just south of the Monroe county line. Many of the 4,000 residents were sad to leave their homes of two decades, but they were also excited at the potential benefits of their new home.⁹⁰⁵ As it turned out, Buxton expanded far beyond what many of them could have imagined. Since it was a “captive mine” that sold all of its coal to a specific railroad and operated all year round, the miners did not have to seek work elsewhere part of the year.⁹⁰⁶ This stability and the massive size of the coal veins enabled it to quickly become Iowa’s largest mining camp, largest unincorporated town, and largest black community, with nearly six thousand workers turning out 3,000 tons of coal each day and making a combined three million dollars in wages.⁹⁰⁷ This single camp was responsible for nearly half of the CCC’s total revenue; one shaft sent a record 1,300 tons of coal to the surface during one workday in October 1905. The town grew so quickly that by 1903 the company had to build nearly four hundred new homes with “modern comforts.” Buxton even had suburbs, which were all integrated (aside from two Swedish enclaves); one former resident who grew up there later recalled that she was best friends with a German girl

⁹⁰⁵ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 295-97; “Exodus from Muchakinock,” *What Cheer Patriot*, 23 November 1900; “No More,” *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 8 June 1901. Strangely, though, a new Masonic lodge was founded in Muchy in April 1900 with 42 new members. Clark, *History of Prince Hall Freemasonry*, 294.

⁹⁰⁶ Schwieder, *Black Diamonds*, 79; Warren, *Struggling with “Iowa’s Pride,”* 20.

⁹⁰⁷ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 297-98; Powers, “Oskaloosa Rotarians.” Some policymakers tried to force Buxton to incorporate – company officials believed this was orchestrated by liquor merchants who wanted to override their dry policies – but these efforts failed. “Should Incorporate,” *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 16 December 1905; *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 23 December 1905.

who lived next door and that she was shocked when she learned about harsh race relations elsewhere in the country.⁹⁰⁸

As with Muchakinock, determining the exact size and percentage of the black population is difficult. One record shows that Buxton's population was more than 54 percent black, but another places the percentage closer to ninety percent. This black community included not only the former Muchy residents but also people from other failed mining towns, other parts of Iowa, the South, and other Midwestern states. Regardless of the actual figures, it seems clear that African Americans had more control over community and political life in Buxton than in any other Iowan town at any point in history. The camp's size, prosperity, and large black population offered opportunities not found elsewhere in the state. James Baker, for example, had learned the journalism trade at the *Clarinda Journal*, but in Buxton he became a high-ranking employee for the *Buxton Gazette*, while former Muchy schoolteacher Minnie London, the first black graduate of SUI's education department, was selected principal of Buxton's school.⁹⁰⁹

Although violence was not unheard of in Buxton, many felt that the crime rate was much lower than in other comparably sized towns, partly because "the better element of colored people" cooperated in efforts to drive out drinking and other frowned-upon behavior.⁹¹⁰ The high

⁹⁰⁸ WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 298; *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 14 October 1905; "Buxton Booming," *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 11 April 1903; "The Story of Buxton," *Annals of Iowa* (1964); Susan Williams, interview by Eric A. Smith, 25 November 1997, SHSI-DM.

⁹⁰⁹ Schwieder, *Black Diamonds*, 78-79; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 298, 305-06; "Story of How Muchakinock Became Thriving, Happy Buxton," *Des Moines Register & Leader*, 20 February 1910; London, *As I Remember*, 3-4; Pamela J. Edwards, "Buxton, Iowa: The Black Man's Utopia," *Iowa Griot* 3: 6; Finder-Koziol, "Traces of Iowa's 'Athens of North' Remain: Racial Harmony Thrived in Coal Boom Town Buxton," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 2 March 2003; Higgins, "Givin's Last Landmark Soon to Be Gone"; *Oskaloosa Herald*, 14 April 1901; "Mrs. Clara Baker"; UNC, 18 September 1907, Black Binder; "Minnie London," *Goldfinch*, AAHMCCI, Iowa Bios "C."

⁹¹⁰ "Crime Near Buxton," *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 25 February 1905; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 298-99; "Story of How Muchakinock Became Thriving, Happy Buxton"; London, *As I Remember*, 4; "Buxton Saloons Raided," *Weekly Saturday Herald*, 2 February 1907; *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 23 December 1915; *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 4 February 1905.

standard of living no doubt also contributed to the low crime rate. One visitor noted that poverty was unheard of in this “strip of the black belt transplanted to Iowa,” and in fact miners’ wages were initially higher than the United Mine Workers pay scale, although that changed when the workers were organized into a UMW local. Most townspeople tried to improve the quality of their rented homes with gardens, livestock, and eventually telephones, while some also purchased farm land. Younger people often went into Albia on payday to spend their disposable income on tailor-made clothes, silk hats, and other finery, leading one visitor to note that “the bearing of the men and women is distinctly above that found among Negroes living in the restricted areas of Northern cities.” Additional stability came from the CCC’s medical insurance policy; when Susan Williams’ father broke his back while operating the turbines, he was hospitalized at company expense, and the Williamses were eventually able to purchase farmland and a boarding house in Iowa City for SUI students.⁹¹¹

Buxton also became home to Iowa’s largest and most prosperous black institutions. Most of the students, teachers and school board members were black, although there was no high school until 1910 and the most ambitious students had to travel to Albia or Oskaloosa to continue their education; some later went on to college at Tuskegee, SUI or other universities. Most other municipal employees, including policemen, justices of the peace and the board of governors who did the hiring, were also black. The town’s four churches included Mt. Zion Baptist, whose 1,700-pound bell could be heard for miles around. Athletic young men played not only for the

Imprisonment may not have been much of a deterrent for prisoners anyway since the jailhouse bricks were so loose that one was able to dig his way to freedom. “A Jail in Name Only,” *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 7 October 1915.

⁹¹¹ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 299-300; Schwieder, *Black Diamonds*, 79; “Exodus from Muchakinock”; *What Cheer Patriot*, 21 September 1900; Smith, “From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines,” 115; “The Rise and Fall of Buxton: Buxton Has Disappeared as a Town but Still Lives On in Its People,” *A Historical Sketch Book of Albia and Monroe County: One Hundred Anniversary 1859-1959*, 84; Williams, interview.

Buxton Wonders baseball team, which barnstormed around the Midwest and played against other mining teams in front of large crowds at home, but also at the new sport of basketball. The fifty-member Buxton Negro Concert Band was also hugely popular, playing at every notable event in town and other gatherings around the state, while the brass band followed the New Orleans tradition of leading funeral processions for deceased lodge members, although few Buxton residents were from Louisiana.⁹¹²

Aside from the mines, though, the largest community institution was the three-story YMCA, the first black chapter in Iowa and the second largest black chapter in the country. Paid for entirely by membership fees, it featured lodging for over 300 men and boys, adult education and vocational classes, a swimming pool, tennis courts, a skating ring, a library, a 1000-seat auditorium, a dance hall, a movie theater, a gymnasium, game rooms, and meeting rooms for the lodges and women's literary societies.⁹¹³ African Americans controlled Buxton's two lodges and three newspapers (which did not all run at the same time), and the opera house hosted visiting entertainers and speakers such as Booker T. Washington, who came in 1902 and advised his audience that "the way to solve your own problems is to control yourselves and your passions; do not be controlled by your lower nation, education is self control; control yourself, and your

⁹¹² *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 17 November 1904; "The Story of Buxton"; London, *As I Remember*, 4, 10; "Story of How Muchakinock Became Thriving, Happy Buxton"; WPA Papers, "The Negro in Iowa," The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry, 297-300, 305; Williams, interview; Schwieder, *Black Diamonds*, 80; "Buxton," *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 27 February 1904; Photo of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Buxton, AAHMCCI, Towns – Buxton #1; *Weekly Saturday Herald*, 24 June 1905; "Photograph of Buxton Basketball Team (1907)," in Cooperative Extension Service, "Remembering Buxton" (slide presentation, Ames, IA: Iowa State University, 1984). In 1906, Buxton hosted the Iowa Annual Conference of the A.M.E. Church. *Official Journal and Records of the Twenty-Third Session of the Iowa Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Held at Buxton, Iowa, September 5-9, 1906*.

⁹¹³ The prominence of this YMCA was also indicative of a change in black community life during the early 20th century, as this institution became second only to churches in its importance among African Americans. Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003), 102, 105.

family and your children.”⁹¹⁴ By the 1920s, Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association also had a presence there.

The town’s most prominent black entrepreneur was Hobe Armstrong, who owned several businesses and more land than any other private citizen in the area, but there were also dozens of educated professionals, skilled artisans, and other business owners.⁹¹⁵ George H. Woodson practiced law there for twenty years and was nominated by the GOP for the state House in 1912, Edward Albert Carter was the son of a Muchy miner and a graduate of SUI medical school who became chief surgeon for the CCC, and druggist B.F. Cooper was so well known that the Coopertown neighborhood was named in his honor. The town was also home to a young inventor named Jackson Brookings, who in 1915 created a new railroad signal light and sold it to the CCC for \$200,000. Encouraging this sort of initiative was part of the company’s “rather paternalistic” philosophy of control, which included banning “unsuitable” behavior but also giving each family a turkey at Christmas and offering prizes to residents with the best yards and gardens. The company encouraged the miners to socialize after hours at its Monroe Mercantile Store (which sold everything except handguns and patent medicine) so that they would stay away from saloons, although it also fined them if they used profane language in the store.⁹¹⁶ Overall, Buxton’s unincorporated status and the power of the company limited the potential power of the residents, but their numbers and prosperity still gave them a level of influence rarely seen elsewhere in Iowa.

⁹¹⁴ Williams, interview; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 297, 300, 305; Schwieder, *Black Diamonds*, 80; Photograph of Buxton Basketball Team (1907); “The Story of Buxton.”

⁹¹⁵ London, *As I Remember*, 4-5, 8-9; Smith, “From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines,” 115.

⁹¹⁶ London, *As I Remember*, 7, 11; “The Story of Buxton”; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 299-301; *Oskaloosa Weekly Saturday Herald*, 4 February 1905, 19 May 1917; “The Rise and Fall of Buxton,” 84; Sarah Hindman, “Buxton: Boom Town to Ghost Town,” *Monroe County News*, 1 September 1993.

The town reached its peak during the mid-1910s, but within a few years it began a slow decline as railroad companies began looking for cleaner burning fuel in other states. The mines were finally closed down in 1930, but unlike with Muchy thirty years earlier, there was no comparable new camp to take their place. The buildings were sold or torn down and the mining equipment was left to rust until 1944, when it was dynamited and “the last remains of what was Buxton seemed to settle into the earth with the dust.” The only physical reminders of what had once been there were markers that the former residents placed during a “Buxton Reunion” in 1930.⁹¹⁷

Some townspeople moved to mines in other states, while others who owned local businesses or wanted to take up farming either bought their houses or settled in neighboring towns. The vast majority, though, decided to seek new opportunities in Waterloo, Des Moines, or Davenport. The growth of Waterloo in particular is one of the most important elements of Iowa’s twentieth-century black history. The former Buxton residents were joined by thousands of southerners, particularly from Mississippi, who moved there during the Great Migration to work in factories and slaughterhouses; today this once lily-white town is nearly fifteen percent black, a higher percentage than any other city in the state. At the same time, black communities in Clarinda and the smaller Mississippi River towns continued to decline as younger, more educated African Americans moved to the larger cities in search of opportunities that were unavailable in their hometowns. According to the 2000 federal census, 58% of all black Iowans lived in Polk, Black Hawk or Scott counties, but less than 8% lived in the ten Mississippi River

⁹¹⁷ *Monroe County History, Iowa* (Iowa Writers’ Program, 1940), 64-65.

counties (not including Scott) that had once been home to virtually the entire black population.⁹¹⁸ Others, though, left Iowa altogether and went to larger Midwestern metropolises like Chicago or St. Louis. The migration of millions of southern blacks into northern cities during and after the two world wars has been well documented, but the story of African Americans who were already living in the north of and became part of these growing urban communities is not nearly as well known.

The migrants who decided to stay in Iowa, though, had a massive impact in their new homes. While all other black Iowans lived in areas where they had always been a minority, the “Buxton Diaspora” brought an assertive sense of racial identity that came from their unique experience of living and prospering in a place where African Americans were in charge. This included the core of Iowa’s early twentieth century black leaders; John Lay Thompson, George Woodson, S. Joe and Susan Brown, Gertrude Rush, Charles P. Howard and James Morris had all lived in Buxton or worked closely with those who had. Although these activists did not always agree on issues of civil rights and held views that ranged from moderate to radical socialist, they all owed a great debt to and shared a common link in the public memory and philosophical legacy of Buxton. So did new community organizations such as the Iowa Colored Bar Association, which eventually became the National Bar Association (five of its twelve founders were Iowans), the Iowa State Federation of Afro-American Women’s Clubs, and local chapters of the NAACP.⁹¹⁹ The rise of Buxton had changed Iowa’s black history forever, bringing to an

⁹¹⁸ “The Story of Buxton”; “King Coal,” 51; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” *The Place of the Negro in Iowa Industry*, 301, 306; Smith, “From Virginia Farms to Iowa Coal Mines,” 114; London, *As I Remember*, 11-12; *Monroe County History* (1940), 64; Williams, interview; 2000 U.S. Census.

⁹¹⁹ WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Biographical Sketches, 1-2; Millie K. Frese, “S. Joe Brown,” *Goldfinch*; Hawthorne, *African Americans in Iowa*, 10; Lufkin, “Black Des Moines,” 102, 105-07; Smith, *Emancipation*, 452-54, 556, 574; “Afro-American Happenings,” *Des Moines Register and Leader*, 5 October 1910; Robert V. Morris, “Ten Most Influential Black Iowans,” *Des Moines Sunday Register*, 13 February 2000; Barnes and Bumpers, *Iowa’s*

end a century that began with slavery and ended with black elected officials. A statewide community founded by fugitive slaves and struggling free blacks was now entering a new period, led by thousands of former miners, entrepreneurs and educated elites from the only black majority town in state history.⁹²⁰

In the last week of 1899, the *Bystander* noted that “the colored American birthday began on New Year’s day, 1863; nearly 4,000,000 slaves were declared free and a citizen, clothed with both civil and political rights... We as a race ought too [sic] feel proud of this day. Since our emancipation we have made good progress, considering the environments, disadvantage, racial [sic] hatred and color prejudice. It may be true that we could have done better, yet we have done better than any other race under similar conditions.”⁹²¹

The black struggle for equal citizenship in Iowa had in fact evolved considerably since this birthday and even more since it began in the 1830s. The first black residents were slaves, fugitive slaves, and free people who found that Iowa’s river towns offered them freedom but little else. Desiring to create a state without black people, the early white settlers quickly established a legal, social and economic framework of white supremacy largely inspired by the model of older Midwestern states. Although African Americans helped build Iowa’s towns and community institutions, by 1838 they found that they had few rights that a white person was bound to respect. Their citizenship was limited to property ownership and freedom from physical

Black Legacy, 51, 54-57, 64; “Mrs. Brown Dies – Rites Set Tuesday,” *Des Moines Tribune*, 29 November 1941; “End Comes to Nationally Known Leader and Wife of Veteran Iowa Attorney,” *Iowa Bystander*, 4 December 1941; WPA Papers, “The Negro in Iowa,” Box 2, Folder 16, Research Materials: Ephemera & Publications (1 of 2), 2; “N.A.A.C.P.,” *Iowa Bystander*, 4 February 1915; Allen, “Sowing Seeds of Kindness.”

⁹²⁰ For additional information on Buxton, see Schwieder, *Black Diamonds*; Schwieder and Joseph Hraba and Elmer Schwieder, *Buxton: Work and Racial Equality in a Coal Mining Community* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987); *Outside In*.

⁹²¹ *Iowa State Bystander*, 29 December 1899.

attacks, and as Nathaniel Morgan found out, even those rights were not always protected. During the three decades before the Civil War, their struggle for equal citizenship focused on supporting their families through labor, fighting against slavery, and overturning racist laws, using a combination of rights-based strategies and cultivating clientage relationships with powerful whites. These strategies often overlapped in significant ways, showing that a hard distinction between overt activism and what seems to be little more than currying favor is not always a useful one; even currying favor had its political usefulness, and strident assertions of rights also depended on patronage ties for success in a time and place where the majority group held nearly all power. The efforts of antebellum blacks reveal useful insights about the ways that significantly outnumbered minorities groups can engage in politics by other means and about how the concept of “politicization of everyday life” applies in such a demographic environment. The third aspect of the struggle, however, was largely unsuccessful. African Americans could find work and establish their own institutions, but few other doors were open to them. The hostile racial climate that rejected the presence of both slavery and free blacks had a chilling effect on Iowa’s first large black community in Dubuque, and although African Americans had somewhat more success in Muscatine, Davenport and the rural southeast, even in those places their freedom was a limited, constantly contested, and precious commodity.

The Civil War, though, brought new hope and new possibilities. Thousands of slaves fled Missouri and other southern states and settled in Iowa, which needed them to help solve its wartime labor shortage. Conservatives bemoaned this influx and used whatever legal or extralegal methods they could to fight it, but to no avail. Keokuk eclipsed Muscatine as the most important black community in the state, while communities in Davenport, Des Moines,

Burlington, Keosauqua and Mount Pleasant also rapidly expanded. Smaller enclaves were created in eastern interior towns, and even scattered rural communities around the state became home to a few farm workers. Iowa's black communities remained small due to the state's lack of industrial work and open farm land – most African Americans went to places where they could find jobs or acquire land, rather than simply migrating to the most politically liberal region they could find – but the tenfold increase that took place from 1860 to 1870 was nonetheless dramatic and transformative. The new settlers sought to recreate kinship networks and familiar institutions in the North, often with assistance from sympathetic white elites with whom they established patronage relationships. Although they were initially hindered by the same legal restrictions as their predecessors, they asserted their citizenship by using the same tactics, but in a wholly different social climate. The war itself helped to transform the attitudes of many whites, who remained racist but more willing to consider the possibility of expanded liberties. The first concrete sign of this came in 1862 when the three-decade old anti-migration law was struck down. Although this law had always been more symbolic than anything else, its removal was a sign of things to come. This story draws on the rich body of scholarship on black migration (both in war and peace) and applies it to a previously overlooked area, also further showing the connection between labor and the struggle for equal citizenship.

Shortly thereafter hundreds of black men, many of whom had only recently arrived in the state, enlisted in the 60th USCI. Drawing on the swelling southeastern communities, Iowa's only black regiment ultimately became the most powerful tool in the struggle for equal citizenship. The regiment saw only limited battle action, but its mere existence, along with the presence of black veterans from other states, enabled African Americans to espouse a rhetoric of wartime

service and loyalty that remained useful for decades. In a young state that defined itself by its Civil War record, blacks were able to contrast their own patriotism with the wartime activities of Copperheads, asking why the latter had full political rights while they did not. White Iowans ultimately had no good answer for this, and so the years immediately after the war saw a dramatic transformation of the state's legal policy, as the meaning of citizenship was greatly expanded to include not only the veterans but also the much greater number of civilians; the 60th's service had proved the civic worthiness of the entire race.

Various historians have searched for answers to the question of why Iowans voted in favor of universal male suffrage when so many other northerners did not, offering economic, political, cultural and ideological explanations. All of these analyses have greatly added to our understanding of Reconstruction-era politics in Iowa and the Midwest in general, but they have also overlooked the key role played by African Americans themselves, showing the importance of viewing legal change from a multitude of perspectives in order to gain a truly complete understanding of something so dramatic as a full reversal of one state's voting policies. The rhetoric of black wartime service struck a sympathetic chord with Republican officials and editors and ultimately with the voters themselves, with the black communities of Mount Pleasant and Davenport and the efforts of Alexander Clark playing a particularly important role. Citing this military record, the 1865 GOP convention took the remarkable first step of endorsing black suffrage, creating momentum that proved impossible to stop over the next three years, while African Americans themselves kept the issue fresh in the minds of politicians and voters through conventions, petitions and participation in patriotic events.

The critical mass of blacks was large enough to place pressure on the political system, but it remained small enough that whites realized that they could afford to support this racially egalitarian policy while retaining political power. For all these reasons, black suffrage was ultimately approved without much controversy in 1868 thanks to the hard work that had been done in previous years, and Iowa became the first state to grant voting rights to black men after the Civil War and before the 15th Amendment. The most sought-after aspect of equal citizenship had finally become a reality for thousands of African Americans. Their small numbers, though, meant that they still exercised little real political power and thus could not effectively use the ballot to fight against employment discrimination, poverty, or racial violence, all of which remained real concerns as the 1860s came to a close. And yet the suffrage victory shows that marginalized, disenfranchised groups can engage with the power structure using politics by other means, even when their numbers seem too insignificant to do so. This also highlights the fact that white Iowans were able to make certain civil rights concessions so long as their own dominance was not challenged; they were able to expand their understanding of citizenship, but they remained racist and in fact justified their expanding views in light of old ideas about white supremacy and keeping the number of blacks in Iowa to a minimum.

The struggle to gain full access to education was as old and as vital as the suffrage effort, and it was settled during the same period of postwar liberalism. African Americans were legally barred from public schools for nearly twenty years – faced with a hypocritical view of citizenship that imposing a school tax without extending the benefit of the schools that it paid for – although some managed to get an education at private schools, including a black-run institution in Muscatine. A near-riot in Grinnell on the eve of the Civil War shows how far some whites

were willing to go to keep blacks out of the schools, understanding that an educated black could not be denied certain rights. The creation of a segregated school system in 1857 only complicated this problem and led to two different views in the black community on the issue of desegregation. Although black schools were woefully under-funded, they also provided a nurturing environment for black children, employment for black teachers and a vitally important community institution for two decades. In some towns, black parents did little to fight against the segregated system, but ultimately the black elite led the charge towards integration, arguing that equal citizenship and unequal access to education were incompatible. Again employing the rhetoric of loyalty and subtly assuaging fears of a massive black influx, Alexander Clark and others convinced the already liberal Court to strike down the segregated system. Like Iowa's record on suffrage rights, this victory was unique in the Reconstruction North. It also meant that black teachers lost their jobs, though, and the handful of students who made their way to college or professional school after graduating from integrated high schools still found that race and class limited their opportunities. Overall, this aspect of the nineteenth century civil rights efforts was perhaps the most ambivalent, showing that equal citizenship was not always as clear-cut as it seemed and that defining community uplift in terms of rights had its drawbacks.

The liberal sentiments of the 1860s gave way to moderation and finally conservatism during the 1870s and 1880s. While many elements of legal equality had been achieved, African Americans still contended with customary racism and poverty and were thus compelled to find new ways to continue their struggle towards full equality. These activities took place in the established black population centers but also in new communities where African Americans were able to once again express their right to equal citizenship through labor. Blacks in the northwest

literally built Sioux City from the ground up and created a strong entrepreneurial spirit, while thousands of migrants in the mining camps, originally thought of as a temporary solution to a labor crisis, brought Virginia to the Hawkeye State and created a separate black world with its own institutions, social networks, and sense of assertiveness. In these and other places, participation in civil events also carried great political and social value. Through Emancipation Day, African Americans presented their own collective memory of slavery and the war, strengthened social ties with each other and patronage ties with whites, and made money. This was also true of the New Orleans Exposition, where a carefully crafted presentation offered a modern, industrial, and artistic image of black Iowa to the outside world. Both of these events show that equal citizenship could take on more intangible forms than direct legal or political action.

At the same time, however, African Americans did not abandon those tactics, even as they gradually became less effective. Racism and the demographic disadvantage meant that there were no black elected officials, but voting and seeking public office nonetheless made a strong symbolic statement. Meanwhile, black women fought against racial and gender discrimination in the legal system, using more subtle tactics rather than openly appealing to the courts' shrinking sense of racial justice. When the U.S. Supreme Court struck down civil rights for all African Americans, Iowa's activists encouraged the legislature to restore these rights on a local state level. The tactic of political agitation, used since the 1830s, took on an added component now that African Americans could vote. This victory ultimately proved less useful, though, in the face of judicial indifference or downright hostility, and ultimately most African Americans chose to focus on their own institutions rather than forcing their way into hostile

white ones. A series of high-profile criminal cases, all involving black men and white females, reminded them that statewide attitudes regarding race and sex had little changed and that the legal system, once something of an ally, could also be used as a weapon against them. The right to fair treatment on common carriers, in places of business and in the courtroom, fought for so earnestly in earlier years, now seemed to exist on paper but not in reality. By the end of the 1880s, black Iowans had redefined the struggle for equal citizenship, turning inward to improve their condition through their own institutions rather than appealing to the white power structure.

The story of the Nodaway Valley encapsulated many of these themes, albeit in ways different from what was seen elsewhere in the state. This black community thrived in isolation from other black Iowans for decades, coming to an inhospitable frontier and carving out its own space due to its essential farm labor, political moderation, and connections to white elites. Like Virginians in the mining towns, Valley blacks recreated familiar kinship networks and institutions by virtue of the fact that most of them came from the same place. Emancipation Day reached its heights there as a yearly opportunity to remember the war in a manner that was mutually acceptable to both races and political parties while also enjoying social opportunities that were otherwise unavailable to the residents of this distant southwestern region. These factors, along with community institutions, enabled African Americans in the Nodaway Valley to express their own moderate, politically neutral vision of equal citizenship, one that strongly echoed Booker T. Washington's racial uplift philosophy and in many ways made more sense there than it did in the South, although by the end of the era generational differences created serious internal rifts over these issues and over who would control the money and patronage ties created by Emancipation Day. In a sense, this is a more extreme application of the themes of

labor and patronage found elsewhere in the manuscript, highlighted here in this unique rural region. The Valley's black community finally went into decline not from worsening race relations but because there were greater job opportunities available elsewhere. Even so, the hundreds of African Americans who had lived there for more than five decades left an invaluable record of their lives through local news reports and other sources, allowing historians to piece together their unique story a century later.

The generational shift that took place in the Valley also had a major impact on black communities elsewhere in Iowa. During the 1890s, three major events brought this era in black Iowa history to a close and helped begin a new one. Alexander Clark's cohort was replaced by younger activists who had grown up in freedom, attended public schools, had little or no direct memory of slavery or war, and now faced a mood on race harsher than anything seen since the 1850s. The first elected politician in state history was one of the last members of the antebellum group, but the core of black politicians came from the younger generation, especially in Des Moines, which had replaced Keokuk as the center of black Iowa. This new group tried to use its demographic and economic power to vie for political office, even more so than the previous generation had, but with little success. And yet this group did achieve success in another area. After decades of struggling for fair treatment in the white media, African Americans were finally able to create a viable, independently run black newspaper, based in Des Moines but supported by and representative of black Iowans around the state. The concept of institution building, so important to African Americans for decades, had taken on an entirely new meaning. For the first time in thirty years, military service became a useful means to assert equal citizenship for the first time in thirty years, although the wartime record of Company M had much less of an impact

than the 60th had. Even with the continued use of this and other old tactics, though, worsening racial attitudes in the capital, in Sioux City, in Davenport, and elsewhere around the state compelled African Americans to focus inward and strive to solve the race's problems internally rather than by engaging the legal or political system. The *Iowa Bystander* was part of this effort, as was the club movement and the black elite's desire to provide moral correction to the lower class even as it distanced itself from this group when dealing with the white power structure. The economically egalitarian outlook of Alexander Clark and others seen in earlier years, like Clark himself, seemed to be gone by the time that the twentieth century began.

The most important event of this period was the creation of Buxton in 1900. The largest and most prosperous of all the mining towns, it briefly became the new center of black Iowa, as many African Americans left declining communities elsewhere in the state to live in this town where despite the mining company's paternalistic control they had larger and more autonomous institutions than anywhere else in the state. When the mines finally closed down during the 1920s, the thousands of people who had lived there brought to Des Moines, Davenport, and Waterloo a unique racial philosophy based on their singular experience of having lived in a prosperous black majority. In future years, this more assertive identity would help guide the struggle for equal citizenship, using the well established tactics of patriotism, political and legal activism, community institutions, and white patronage ties. As full equality continued to elude them black Iowans, still greatly outnumbered in this overwhelmingly white and rural Midwestern state, continued to work towards the day when they would truly breathe the freedom's air.

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Professional Teaching Experience

2005-Present Assistant Professor of History, Trinity Christian College
 2002-2005 Adjunct Lecturer, Northwestern University, Department of History

Education

2007 PhD. History, Northwestern University (pending)
 Dissertation: *“Breathing the Freedom’s Air”: The African American Struggle for Equal Citizenship in Iowa, 1830-1900*
 Committee: Steven Hahn (chair), Stephanie McCurry, Dylan Penningroth
 2000 M.A. History, Northwestern University
 1999 J.D. University of Iowa College of Law
 1996 B.A. History, Illinois Wesleyan University

Publications and Research

- Edited Philip Jenkins, *A History of the United States* (Palgrave Macmillan, third edition, 2008).
- “Bo Jackson,” “Ralph Montgomery,” and “Nathaniel Morgan,” articles in Henry Louis Gates and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (eds.), *African American National Biography* (Harvard University Press, 2008).
- “In Defense of These Great Measures of Justice and Right”: Alexander Clark and the African American Community of Muscatine, Iowa, 1840-1891, *The Black Freedom Struggle in the Midwest* (Ohio University Press, forthcoming).
- “Will They Fight? Ask the Enemy”: The Story of the 60th U.S. Colored Infantry, Iowa’s African American Civil War Regiment (*Annals of Iowa*, forthcoming)
- “Slave Communities and Culture” and “Slave Rebellions,” articles in *Colonial America: An Encyclopedia of Social, Political, Cultural, and Economic History* (East River Books, 2006).
- “George Grover Wright,” article in *Yale Biographical Dictionary of American Law* (Yale University Press, 2007).
- “Nat Turner Rebellion,” article in Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Black Studies* (Sage Publications, 2005).
- Scholars’ Committee, African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa, Cedar Rapids (April 2003-present).
- “Someone You Should Know About” (monthly black history biographies), published at Covenant United Church of Christ, South Holland, IL.
- “I Wouldn’t Even Want a Black Horse’: Afro-Colombians and Recent Changes in Colombian Law,” *Journal of Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems* (1999).
- “This Great and Sacred Trust”: Robert Russa Moton and the Legacy of Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee Institute, 1915-1935 (Senior Research Honors Paper, 1995)

Papers and Presentations

- Panel chair and commentator, Legislating Civil Rights: The Politics of Dismantling Racism in 1950s America. Great Lakes History Conference, Grand Rapids, MI (October 2007).

- “Not a Man Flinched”: Iowa’s 60th U.S. Colored Infantry. Northern Great Plains History Conference, Duluth, MN (October 2007).
- “A Mistaken Zeal”: Black Communities and White Resistance in Dubuque, Iowa, 1833-1840. Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting, Minneapolis (April 2007).
- “Civil Rights Are Sacred Also”: The African American Experience in Davenport, 1830-1900. St. Ambrose University, Davenport (March 2007).
- “Connected by Faith and Culture.” Chicago Christian High School, Chapel Presentation (January 2007)
- “The Creator Painted Such of the First of Mankind as Were Worth the Blackening”: African Americans in Sioux City, Iowa, 1860-1910. Northern Great Plains History Conference, Sioux Falls, SD (October 2006).
- “The Mob Was in Complete Control”: Racial Violence and the Law in Davenport, 1869-1905. Law and Society Annual Meeting, Baltimore (July 2006).
- “A Desperate Fight for His Liberty”: The African American Legacy in Burlington, 1830-1900. Southeastern Community College, West Burlington, IA (March 2006).
- “Notoriously Good Citizens”: African Americans in the Mining Towns of Southern Iowa, 1879-1930. Great Lakes History Conference, Grand Rapids, MI (October 2005).
- “You Shall Not Eat Here”: Race, Gender and Respectability in Emma Coger’s Battle against Segregation on the Upper Mississippi, 1872-1873. Law and Society Association Annual Meeting, Las Vegas (June 2005).
- “We Came Here to Get Peace”: African American Community and Political Life in the Nodaway Valley, 1840-1910. Missouri Valley History Conference, Omaha (March 2005).
- “The Equality of Right”: Alexander Clark, Sr. and the Desegregation of Iowa’s Public Schools, 1839-1875. Law and Society Association Annual Meeting, Chicago (May 2004).
- “Black Hawkeyes: African-Americans in the Making of Iowa, 1804-1900.” Musser Public Library, Muscatine, IA (February 2004).
- “Unless in the Presence of Five Respectable Slaveholders”: Black Preachers, White Control, and Alabama’s Legal Response to the 1831 Nat Turner Rebellion,” Law and Society Association Annual Meeting, Pittsburgh (June 2003).