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LEROY MYERS JR.
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LAND OF THE FAIR GOD: THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK TOWNS IN
OKLAHOMA, 1870-1907

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

Dr. R. Warren Metcalf, Chair

Dr. Sterling Evans

Dr. Ben Keppel

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In memory of Kenneth Fair.

The city is not ruinous, although great ruins of an unremembered past.

- James "B.V." Thompson, *City of Dreadful Night*

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Abstract

Oklahoma's All Black Town Movement is important to contextualize larger black migration patterns during the nineteenth century. Oklahoma was at the center of black migration from surrounding states. In addition, it played an important role in the development of the Back-to-Africa Movement. Although both movements within the state were not large scale, black movement in and out of Oklahoma attracted media attention. Within this narrative, Native American law influenced how the federal government defined blackness throughout Oklahoma and created a debate concerning the definition of the term "freedman" in the United States following the Civil War. Analyzing the many facets of Oklahoma's All Black Town Movement helps scholars understand race relations, economics, built environments, and nationalism.

Introduction

Black towns are an essential element of African American History. They developed in an era when African Americans attempted to carve out spaces for their culture to thrive and for safety from the racist mainstream culture. The concept of “black spaces” predate black towns through maroon societies and later freedman settlements. Spaces created by maroon societies and freedman settlements enabled blacks, enslaved and freed, to exercise their autonomy. Many shared a common identity, through region and circumstance. “Black spaces” became common throughout the United States during Reconstruction through the development of freedmen’s settlements. However, access to land was an issue for freedmen throughout the South. Therefore, some African Americans, like whites, looked to the West as an alternative resource for obtaining land, with Oklahoma their primary destination, and this rapid development of black towns in Oklahoma was the result of their movement. This study argues, therefore, that Oklahoma housed the most black towns in the United States because of its legacy of racial fluidity, vast amount of available land, the Exoduster movement to Kansas, and a steady black exodus from Texas in the nineteenth century.

In a broader sense, African American migration constitutes an important element of United States history. Analyzing the many facets of this migration helps scholars understand race relations, economics, the complexity of built environments, and nationalism. Scholars have traced black migration back to slave culture, even though it developed following the Civil War. The evolution of black settlement resulted in gradual attempts to obtain political power and economic gain through land and industry. Therefore, black migration to Oklahoma developed a particular ideology

followed by several of its black towns. Concerning the development and ideology of black towns, historian Arthur Lincoln Tolson writes:

the study of the development and growth of towns in the United States is a varied and complex one, and an understanding of them involves the contributions of many specialists...Closely connected with the inception of towns are its idealistic objectives, such as trying to create a healthy and agreeable environment, devising routes for the movement of people, and utilizing the resources of the town for the economic benefit of its inhabitants.¹

The variety and complexity of Oklahoma's black towns has resulted in a contested and relatively obscure historiography. Most works involve case studies of black towns. They focus on the importance of black towns as a refuge for African Americans fleeing the Jim Crow South and its social implications regarding industrialization. Meanwhile, the only exception within this historiography focuses on the business development of these towns. No matter the differences in approach, work within this field make valid points regarding Oklahoma's black towns. However, the scholarship is often narrow. Combining the best arguments on black towns has the potential to breathe new life into the historiography. The following paragraphs will aim to explain three key studies of black town scholarship.²

¹ Arthur Lincoln Tolson, "Langston, Oklahoma: 1890 to 1950," in Helen F. Holmes, ed., *Logan County Oklahoma Volume II: the County and its Communities*, (Topeka: Jostens/American Yearbook Company, 1980).

² Published scholarship on Oklahoma's black towns includes but is not limited to: Larrie Elahi, "A History of Boley, Oklahoma, to 1915" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1968); Mark Jeffrey Hardwick, "Homesteads and Bungalows: African American architecture in Langston, Oklahoma" (MA Thesis, University of Delaware, 1994); Norman L. Crockett, *The Black Towns*, (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979); Mozell C. Hill, "The All Negro Society in Oklahoma" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1946); Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth: Race and Agriculture in Oklahoma Territory* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Thomas Knight, "Black Towns in Oklahoma: their Development and Survival (PhD diss., Oklahoma State University, 1975); Hannibal B Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration: The All-Black Towns in Oklahoma* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002); Melissa Stuckey, "All Men Up: Race Rights and Power in the All-Black Town of Boley, Oklahoma, 1903-1939" (PhD diss., Yale University 2009); Arthur Lincoln Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans: A History. 1541-1972* (New Orleans: Edwards Printing Company, 1974); Rhonda Ragsdale, "A Place to Call Home: a Study of the Self-

The base of black town scholarship derives from sociologist Mozell Hill. In his 1946 dissertation entitled “The All-Negro Society in Oklahoma,” Hill argues “negroes who live in isolation from the direct influence of the dominant [white] culture, and who are thus relatively free from the dominant pressure of the white caste, exhibit different patterns of thought and behavior from those conditioned to living in racially mixed communities.” In other words, isolation of a particular group of people leads to distinct forms of bonding and nationalism. Isolated peoples may define race and class differently compared to the mainstream society. Moreover, the social formation of a closely bonded group breeds complexities regarding social and economic interactions with mainstream institutions. To support his theory, Hill utilizes the “natural history of social movements” developed by C.A. Dawson and W.E. Gettys. Hill uses this model to describe what he deems the “Great Black March,” (now known as the “All-Black Town Movement”) which refers to the mass development of black towns in Oklahoma from 1890 to 1910.³ Hill’s scholarship laid the foundation for historical work with a broader focus. His study centers on several black towns. However, it was unbalanced. “The All-Negro Society” lacks proper contextualization of important historical periods and how these periods contributed to the development and decline of Oklahoma’s black towns. Instead, Hill offers only a rather generalized overview of the Civil War and

Segregated Community of Tatum, Oklahoma, 1894-1970” (PhD diss., University of North Texas, 2005); Sarah Deutsch, “Being American in Boley, Oklahoma” in *Beyond Black & White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest*, ed. Stephanie Cole & Allison M. Parker (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004); Linda C. Gray, “Taft: Town on the Black Frontier,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 66 (1988); George O. Carney, “Historic Resources of Oklahoma’s All-Black Towns: a Preservation Profile,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 69 (1991).

³ Hill, “The All Negro Society in Oklahoma,” 2-3, 19, & 21; Hannibal Johnson characterized the “Great Back March” as the “All Black Town Movement” in *Acre of Aspiration*.

Reconstruction era. Decades later, historians published new work to contextualize periods Hill ignored.

Historian Norman Crockett contributed new ideas to the development of the “All Black Town Movement” in his 1979 work *The Black Towns*. Crockett’s work is a case study of several black towns throughout the American West. He realized a connection between black towns in the West and the ideology that led to their creation. Arguably, the most important analysis on black towns, Crockett focuses on Booker T. Washington’s influence on their development throughout the West and South. As Crockett puts it: “self-help, moral uplift, and racial solidarity, as those terms were employed by Booker T. Washington, comprised the formula, the isolated black town the laboratory.” Crockett’s work is the most balanced concerning social and business aspects of town inhabitants and leaders. *The Black Towns* focuses on black town founders’ backgrounds and sometimes shallow motivations. However, it is a broader study that does not focus exclusively on Oklahoma’s black towns. A more recent work followed Crockett’s case study approach, but came to a different conclusion regarding the significance of black towns in general.⁴

Kenneth Marvin Hamilton’s 1991 study, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915*, is the only work, which focuses on business motives within black towns. Hamilton argues that black towns were no different from predominantly white towns formed in the West. Black businessman started towns in order to acquire money and influence. Reacting to the historiography of black towns Hamilton writes:

⁴ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 51.

Racism is so pervasive in the United States that the African-American contribution to our culture generally has been either trivialized or exaggerated. The bulk of what historians have written about black towns in the Trans-Appalachian West is similarly biased...historians generally have regarded black towns as either insignificant oddities or ghettos isolated from the mainstream of America's westward expansion.⁵

Hamilton concludes that black businessmen wanted educated blacks with money to live in their towns. He admits this was not always the case. African Americans with little means migrated to black towns. Therefore, understanding their background is important to the historiography. It is arguably more crucial than analyzing the motivations of the men who founded these towns. Nonetheless, Hamilton's *Black Towns and Profit* brought new questions regarding founder's motivations. However, Hamilton, like Crockett, provides a case study of a few Oklahoma black towns rather than focusing on Oklahoma in its entirety.

The crux of Hamilton's work relies on the men and entities behind the founding of black towns. Business and economic gain came first for black town leaders. Founders exploited racial discrimination for monetary gain. Hamilton focuses on motivations of the town's founders and contextualizes Oklahoma's black town development within the general development of the American West. The lower status African Americans held during the nineteenth century is not taken into consideration in this effort to dismantle the proud legacy other historians associate with black towns throughout the United States.⁶

⁵ Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 1.

⁶ Hamilton's *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1917* is case study of several black towns throughout the West. The Oklahoma black towns of Langston and Boley are the only towns of focus concerning Oklahoma.

Proper analysis of black town migrants is essential to Oklahoma's black town legacy. Town leaders often had business-motives, but these motives do not always account for this type of migrant black towns attracted. Scholars generalize rhetoric circulated through pamphlets, newspapers, and hearsay. In other words, they perceive advertisements for black towns as being no different from advertisements for white towns in the west. This approach too greatly discredits conceptions of race within rhetoric and ideology in black towns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Historians like Hamilton fail to demonstrate the often proto-nationalist ideology town migrants subscribed to, and its evolution into the twentieth century.⁷

The goal of this study is to merge previously mentioned scholarship, because they contribute in positive ways to our thinking of black towns in Oklahoma. For example, Crockett contributes an analysis of black town ideology; Hamilton's work provides an analysis of leaders' motives. It is time to build on this scholarship. Studying Oklahoma's black towns and their development has the potential to bring forth new questions regarding race in the American West and black migration during the nineteenth century. Focusing on Oklahoma's black towns advances the historiography, because Oklahoma was the center of black migration from the South. In order to refresh our thoughts on this subject we need to reframe it. Case studies of towns within the West generalize black towns. They had similarities, but varied in certain ways. Historians must take into account the period in which each black town developed. The

⁷ Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, *America's First Black Town: Brooklyn, Illinois, 1830-1915* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 3; Cha-Jua defines proto-nationalism as "an ensemble of political attitudes that represent racial solidarity or a commitment to Black empowerment by organizing Blacks into autonomous organizations, institutions, and communities."

All-Black Town Movement unfolded from 1890 to 1910, the same period as Oklahoma's evolution toward statehood.

In order to clarify and refresh our understanding of how black towns developed, we need to reframe our consideration of it by giving greater emphasis to its location on Indian lands. The Organic Act of 1890 created Oklahoma Territory out of the western half of Indian Territory and the entire region achieved statehood in 1907. It was also an era of drought and agricultural devastation, as the boll weevil affected cotton, which influenced a larger scale of African-American migration. In addition, scholars ignore black towns that developed prior to the 1890, likely due to inadequate sources. Remaining information on previous black towns and settlements remain important to contextualize the founding of black towns during the All-Black Town Movement. Moreover, several black town historians agree that industrialization hindered the development of these towns, which had economies built upon agriculture.

Scholars have not focused on the impact of industrialization on black town rhetoric. Race is at the heart of the black town narrative. Several scholars see this as paramount. However, Oklahoma's racial legacy as a place set aside for American Indians influenced the development of black towns and settlements. Without question, Native American history intersects Oklahoma's black town development. A recognition of this fact enables historians to grapple with the complexities of African-Native American relations and its effect on black settlement patterns in the region. Native law played an important role in Oklahoma's black town history. Much of this controversy played out in Indian Territory through several Native treaties.

Scholars of black towns generally agree Oklahoma's black town movement was a part of Reconstruction. However, the All-Black Town Movement has the potential for further contextualization regarding general black movement and its impact on other racial groups. Black settlement in the United States did not happen in a vacuum. It steadily evolved over time. How does it fit into the pattern of black settlement overall? Moreover, how did black settlement in Oklahoma effect earlier black towns and settlements formed by black Indians?

New contributions contained in this study concern rhetoric, settlement patterns, and Oklahoma's involvement in other African American migration movements. These analyses lead to further questions regarding African American life in the nineteenth century. Some uncommonly used towns are a part of this study's analysis. Focusing on the aspects, which connects these towns, affords the opportunity to individualize each town and revise the narratives. Unfortunately, it is impossible to develop narratives for each black town in Oklahoma. However, even towns with few sources contain elements important to advance the historiography.

The primary focus of this study is the development of "state black" towns, a term coined by members of the Five Tribes, which applied to southern blacks migrating to Indian Territory. The tribes developed the term to differentiate "state blacks" from Native American freedman settled throughout Indian Territory. Native American freedman of the Five Tribes beginning in the 1870s created the earliest black towns in Oklahoma. Moreover, focusing on "state black" towns in Oklahoma reflects the trend of

African American migration in the nineteenth century and the effectiveness of rhetoric used in Oklahoma's black towns.⁸

The first chapter considers Oklahoma's black towns within the context of general black settlement patterns. It focuses on the evolution of black settlement patterns beginning in slave culture. The development of Oklahoma's earliest black settlements influenced additional settlement by "state blacks." In addition, chapter one analyzes the contribution of black settlement throughout Texas and migration to Kansas and Arkansas to the All-Black Town Movement. Oklahoma dealt with a significant amount of black migration within its own boundaries.

The second chapter argues that the Treaties of 1866 contributed to "state black" migration to Oklahoma. The treaties varied in its use of "freedman" and "people of African descent" for the Five Tribes. These terms were too vague and led to debate, by whites and blacks, regarding the legality of non-Indians settling on government lands in Indian Territory. These series of treaties moved black and white groups to claim the right to settle. In certain cases, white groups used freedmen affiliations to obtain legal sanction for their own settlements. Moreover, public debates between settlers and journalists regarding land generated various interpretations of Native treaties and other laws such as the Homestead Act of 1862.

The third chapter focuses on the All-Black Town Movement and the rhetoric of Oklahoma's black towns. It follows the evolution of black town rhetoric from the 1890s to the early nineteenth century. Rhetoric evolved from emphasizing agriculture and assimilation to a discourse linking militancy and industrialization. However, black town

⁸ Donald Grinde & Quintard Taylor. "Red vs Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post-Civil War Indian Territory, 1865-1907," *American Indian Quarterly* 8 (1984): 218.

rhetoric did not neatly complement events of the time. After all, black towns depended on agriculture too much in the midst of drought and the rise of organized labor. Town leaders later in the All-Black Town Movement attempted to diversify their economy. However, the schools they founded revolved around “industrial arts” instead of liberal arts. The majority of prospective inhabitants were from the rural south, a region deeply entrenched in agriculture.

This study concludes with an analysis of areas not yet explored in the historiography. Connections between Texas and Oklahoma raise additional questions concerning the All-Black Town Movement. The cattle trail system of the nineteenth century connected Texas and Oklahoma. Black Texans, living in the most racially violent state in the country during Reconstruction, used the trail system to travel to escape violence. Some black Texans worked as cowboys and traveled throughout Indian Territory moving cattle. This form of work forced cowboys, black and white, to interact with black Indians along trails who often charged a toll for passing through their area. Although a relatively small number of African Americans made the trek to Oklahoma, their experience forms an extension of larger forces at play. Migration was simply a reaction to racial violence and economic downturn. Attempting to understand and analyze Oklahoma’s Black Town Movement as a small event within a larger system, rather than isolated case studies, adds a new dimension to the historiography.

Chapter 1: Racial Fluidity in Indian Territory & Early Black Settlement, 1870-1880

The 1870s was a period of migration for African Americans in the Southwest. They attempted to find refuge from racial violence and obtain financial and agricultural prosperity. African American freedmen in the states were trying to find their role within the country's era of Reconstruction. Their interest in exercising their newfound freedom is evident in multiple migration patterns of the time. Kansas ("Kansas Fever" & the Exoduster Movement), Arkansas ("the black Trail of Tears"), Texas (hundreds of "freedom colonies) and Indian Territory (later home to "boomer agitation," and The All-Black Town Movement in the 1890s) were the main areas of interest to African American migrants. In the midst of black migration, Indian Territory was the most attractive for black settlement, due to its racial ambiguity, stemming from the distinct relations the Five Tribes had with their black population.⁹

As scholars, Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland write in their edited volume *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country*, blacks have perceived Indian Territory and later Oklahoma as a promised land of sorts more than any other space in the United States. Holland and Miles argue that not all black migrants to the Southwest traveled directly to Indian Territory; many migrated to Arkansas and Oklahoma Territory "where white settlers refused to share the most productive lands and organized violent attacks to prevent blacks from homesteading."

⁹ For more on African American migration to Arkansas, see Lori Bogle, "On Our Way to the Promised Land: Black Migration from Arkansas to Oklahoma, 1889-1893" *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 72 (1994): 160-77. Bogle writes Arkansas' black population increased by 200 percent between 1870 and 1900.

The varied racial makeup of Indian Territory to the east made the area more appealing. These lands comprised Creek and Seminole regions, where black Indians held positions of leadership and were involved in ownership.¹⁰

Slave culture also influenced the emergence of black settlement patterns in the late nineteenth century. The process of enslavement varied regionally and depended on how a slave master ran his plantation. However, enslaved Africans used the remnants of their cultural past to resist the rigors of enslavement by sharing historical memory and interests that enabled them develop spaces of autonomy to exercise their shared elements.¹¹ The plantation system of the Deep South created insular environments for slaves.¹² Historian John Blassingame notes that the daily life of slaves developed “...ethical rules and fostered cooperation, mutual assistance, and black solidarity.” The limited contact slaves had with whites fostered closeness within their slave

¹⁰ Sharon Holland & Tiya Miles, *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Duke University Press, 2008), 4-5.

¹¹ John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, (New York: Oxford University Press 1979), 31; David Joseph Organ, “The Historical Geography of African American Frontier Settlement” (PhD Diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1995), 78-9. In analyzing the history of African American settlement patterns in the United States, Organ breaks black settlement into “six stages of African American Frontier Settlement in the New World” these stages include: maroon colonies, antebellum utopian communes and freedom villages, “contraband camps, southern agrarian cooperatives and educational communities,” postbellum frontier homestead settlements, black worker towns/camps, and suburban enclaves. See pages 82-105.

¹² South Carolina was influential throughout the region from the implementation of its plantation system, to its development of slave codes following the Yamassee War in 1715. Furthermore, Charlestown (later changed to Charleston) was the epicenter of the African slave trade. Peter Wood explains that “...the colonial ancestors of present-day Afro-Americans are more likely to have first confronted North America at Charleston...it has been estimated that well over 40 per cent of the slaves reaching the British mainland colonies between 1700 and 1775 arrived in South Carolina...” see Wood, *Black Majority*, xiv. Barbara Krauthamer extends Wood’s argument further. She writes that approximately 40,000 Africans were imported to Charleston in the years before the ban on the transatlantic slave trade in 1808. See Barbara Krauthamer, *Black Slaves Indian Masters: Slavery Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 54.

communities. This existence transformed recreational activities into times of bonding along the tight spaces most slaves lived. The permission and encouragement of monogamous relations among slaves was perhaps most important to the cohesion of slave communities. Slave owners who encouraged monogamous relationships among their slaves, thought it helped curb the possibilities of rebellion and runaways.¹³

Nonetheless, runaway slaves were always a threat to slaveholders on large plantations. Slaves who managed to run away from plantation life triggered a new development in black settlement called Maroon colonies, communities developed by runaway slaves. Maroon colonies reflected black resistance to enslavement, which became a specific value shared between inhabitants. Historian Barbara Krasner-Khait writes “Between 1672 and 1864, about 50 maroon communities existed in the southern United States, including South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Louisiana, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama...” Maroons uprooted their respective slave cultures outside the boundaries of the plantation. In particular, maroon colonies in the south exhibited elements of Native American and African culture through ceremonial dance and religious practices. Overall, maroon societies were an “open invitation for escape and a monument to the weakness of the master class.” Therefore, African Americans would have to search for a new monument of refuge to escape racism, which culminated in black towns during Reconstruction.

While maroon societies developed for over two centuries, the Southeast in particular housed the largest maroon settlements. The popularity of these communities

¹³ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 105, 106, 149, and 155. Blassingame admits that slave families were broken. However, “...it was primarily responsible for the slave’s ability to survive on the plantation without becoming totally dependent on and submissive to his master.” See page 151.

in the Southeast was due to racial and cultural borders between Europeans-Spanish, British, and French, and Native Americans-Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Creek (Muskogee)-people who inhabited the region. Historian Nathaniel Millet writes, “the pan-Indian movement of the early nineteenth century [particularly demonstrated through the Creek War] represented one of the greatest and most conscious effronteries to white domination in American history. Slaves across the South absorbed the implications of this and, in many instances, joined the Natives in resisting white authority.”¹⁴

Relations between the Five Tribes and African Americans constitute a long and intricate history. Understanding the relationship helps contextualize forthcoming treaties concerning land and “freedmen” interpretations following the Civil War. The Five Tribes had contact with African slaves since the inception of African slavery in the Southeast. Historian Peter Wood details historic relations between African slaves and the Five Tribes. Wood writes, “Indians consistently played a major role, stealing some slaves away and helping others escape, but relations were always ambiguous.”¹⁵ Although the Five Tribes eventually acquired slaves and involuntarily moved to Indian Territory, African and Native culture were similar in certain respects, which likely attracted some freedman to settle within Indian Territory. Native and African societies

¹⁴ Barbara Krasner-Khait, “Escape to the South” *Footsteps* 5 (2003); Blassingame, *The Slave Community* 209, 210-211, and 215. The Seminole Nation is an offshoot of the Creek Nation, who moved to Spanish Florida in the early nineteenth century. Blassingame writes that “The closest relations between red and black people developed Florida. . . Some of the Seminoles owned black slaves who were almost indistinguishable from free men. These blacks were joined by groups of runaways from South Carolina and Georgia who accepted the Spanish invitation to desert their protestant masters;” Nathaniel Millet, “Defining Freedom in the Atlantic Borderlands of the Revolutionary Southeast” *Early American Studies* 5 (2007): 376 & 385.

¹⁵ Wood, *Black Majority*, 260.

are similar in religion and kinship practices. Both groups had a shared experience through enslavement. In addition, Wood notes that both groups had “extreme familiarity with their biological environment, the passionate attention...to it and...precise knowledge of it.” These relations, for better or worse, continued throughout the eighteenth century and slowly evolved with forced migration to Indian Territory in the early nineteenth century.¹⁶

The forced migration of the Five Tribes from the Southeast to the Southwest uprooted factionalized cultures to a new space. Slave management regarding slave codes and degree of punishment were topics of debate. The passing of the Indian Intercourse Act of 1834 under the presidency of Andrew Jackson led to the creation of Indian Territory. Murray Wickett writes the formation of the area came because “government officials felt it was unlikely that whites would ever settle along the western border of the Indian Territory, which meant further encroachment by whites upon Indian lands would be avoided.” Black slaves were very much a part of the Native journey to the territory, known as the Trail of Tears. Black Slaves cleared paths and protected their Native masters at night throughout the ordeal of forced migration. However, the number of slaves removed to Indian Territory varied throughout each tribe along with general racial views and treatment.¹⁷

¹⁶ Wood, *Black Majority*, 117. Quoted from Claude Lèvi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1966), 5.

¹⁷ Murray R. Wickett, *Contested Territory: Whites, Native Americans, and African Americans in Oklahoma 1865-1907* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 3-4; For more on the removal of the Five Civilized Tribes see, Edward Everett Dale & Gene Aldrich, *History of Oklahoma* (Edmond: Thompson Book & Supply Co., 1969) 79-90; Kaye M. Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma: a Resource Book* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971), 28-30.

The emergence of a distinct slave class within the Five Tribes bred factionalism. Nonetheless, each tribe successfully reestablished and improved their respective nations in Indian Territory, and installed fully functioning governments and highly advanced educational systems. Some historians consider the years up to the outbreak of the Civil War a period of peace and tranquility. Moreover, the War did much to fan the flames of the citizens and slaves within each nation. The eighth census of the United States demonstrates the minority of the powerful slaveholding class and its resemblance to the South. The report documented that "...the Choctaws held 2,297 Negro slaves, distributed among 385 owners; the Cherokees, 2,504, held by 384 owners; the Creeks, 1,651, owned by 267 Indians; and the Chickasaws, 917 to 118." This uneven distribution of slaves encouraged thoughts of possible slave insurrections throughout Indian Territory from the master class of each tribes other than the Seminole Nation, which had a relaxed form of chattel slavery and frequent intermarriage among slaves and citizens. Anthropologist, Sigmund Sameth argues that free blacks in the Seminole Nation possibly "...equaled if not exceeded the number of enslaved Negroes."¹⁸

The presence of free blacks in Indian Territory contributed to the region's legacy of racial ambiguity, and made it attractive to foreigners. Bondage and freedom clashed at times, due to the variance of chattel slavery among each tribe. The Cherokee Slave Revolt of 1842, for example, resulted in a clash of culture, bondage and freedom during Indian Territory's second decade. The Cherokee Nation passed legislation that limited

¹⁸ Murray R. Wickett, *Contested Territory*, 3-4; For more on the individuals removals of the Five Civilized Tribes see, Dale and Everett, *History of Oklahoma*, 79-90; Kaye M. Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, 19 & 28-30; United States Census Office. *Preliminary Report on the Eighth Census*, House of Representatives, 2nd Congress, 2nd Session. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1862), accessed March 20, 2015. <https://archive.org/details/preliminaryrepor00inunit.10-11>. Sigmund Sameth, "Creek Negroes: a Study of Race Relations" (MA Thesis University of Oklahoma, 1940), 22.

the rights of slaves and free blacks within their respective tribal nation. Historians Lonnie Underhill and Daniel Littlefield argue that the Cherokee Nation implemented firearm restrictions, in response to the presence of free blacks within the Nations and mulattoes “not of Cherokee blood.”¹⁹ The War factionalized each tribe; some tribal factions sided with the Union while others supported the Confederacy. Slaveholders, being upper-class tribal members, were generally comprised of Anglo American and Indian ancestry. These racial and cultural divisions further affected black and Native relations in Indian Territory.²⁰

Following the Civil War, federal officials punished tribal participation against the Union by confiscating land. These agreements, known as the Treaties of 1866, generally agreed for each tribe to adopt their former slaves as tribal citizens, reduced tribal lands, and provided rights of way to railways across the region. The Creek and Seminole agreed fully to their treaties, which included ceding lands to the federal government. The government deemed this space the Unassigned Lands—“the entire western half of the domain of the said Muscogee (or Creek) Nation...”²¹ The Unassigned Lands later became a destination for blacks and whites in the late 1880’s looking for cheap available land and, for blacks, a refuge from racial violence. Of the

¹⁹ Lonnie Underhill & Daniel Littlefield, “Slave ‘Revolt’ in the Cherokee Nation, 1842” *American Indian Quarterly* 3 (1977): 125.

²⁰ For more on Cherokee factionalism, see William G. McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears: The Cherokees’ Struggle for Sovereignty*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) 4-6; Michael F. Foran, “Negro Slaves of the Five Civilized Tribes,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 68 (1978): 337; Grinde and Taylor, “Red vs. Black,” 211.

²¹ Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs Laws and Treaties Vol. I* (Washington D.C: G.P.O., 1904), 940. Oklahoma State University Electronic Publishing Center. <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol1/Images/v1p0940.jpg>; Dale and Aldrich, *History of Oklahoma*, 184.

Five Tribes, the Choctaw, Cherokee, and Chickasaw did not fully agree to the terms of their treaties. Although the Cherokee Nation abolished slavery before the end of the Civil War, they were the most divided on the issue of admitting Freedmen. By 1874, Choctaw and Chickasaw freedmen were still without rights. Historian Barbara Krauthamer writes, “when considering their 1866 treaty and the prospect of extending citizenship to their former slaves, vocal Choctaw and Chickasaw leaders equated race (Indianness) and nation (political autonomy) to galvanize Native peoples’ sense of unity and purpose in opposing U.S. colonialism.” In other words, leaders of both nations perceived accepting black slaves as a distortion of their nationalistic ideals. The freedmen controversy remained a point of contention and was in resistance to change regarding labor and social status of Native slave masters lost.²²

A shortage of labor within the Five Tribes led to an influx of non-Indians, which in turn increased Indian Territory’s racial diversity. This issue induced the nations to fulfill their labor needs by employing whites from various states. The Cherokee Nation especially took advantage of alternative forms of labor. The 1870 *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* reported:

Besides mechanics, the Cherokees employ a great many citizens of the United States as farm hands, who have heretofore resided under permits from their own authorities. In this way numbers were introduced, of whom many remained in the country after the term of permits had expired, sometimes in employment and sometimes out...Application for these have increased with the stringent enforcement of the law against intrusion...

The *Annual Report* documents the matter of whites entering into Indian Territory stating, “These whites, once in the country, are seldom known to leave, and thus their

²² Grinde and Taylor, “Red vs. Black,” 212-213; Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 11.

numbers are rapidly increasing...” Moreover, the report goes on to say, “Rather than that the country should be filled with this class of emigrants, it would be for the better interests of these Indians to open it to white settlement in the ordinary way.”²³

Intruders became an issue within Indian Territory shortly following the 1866 treaties. Although most white intruders were not troublesome, some were. Angie Debo states, “the most troublesome of the intruder were those who had advanced some fantastic claim to citizenship, and who loudly demanded every privilege enjoyed by the Indians in spite of repeated denials of their claims by the tribal authorities.” While the Office of Indian Affairs wanted “industrious” whites to show Natives how properly to settle and take advantage land, African Americans often filled the need. With new freedom, military service, and a bond to their country by way of citizenship and Republican ties, they began to look for new opportunities within their respective states, Indian Territory, and Kansas.²⁴

The Civil War, too, was a time of complete change for African Americans residing in the United States. With newly, acquired freedom blacks attempted to find peace and refuge from racist prejudice in the wake of Jim Crow. Blacks understood their entitlement to citizenship from the sacrifices they made during the Civil War and their allegiance to the Union. The heritage blacks had of insular slave and maroon societies in the Deep South extended into their plight during Reconstruction through the development of black towns and “freedom colonies.” Historians Thad Sitton and James

²³ *Office of Indian Affairs Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1874* (Washington, D.C: GPO, 1874) 71. University of Wisconsin Digital Collections, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep74>.

²⁴ Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: the Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1940), 12.

Conrad define “freedom colonies,” otherwise known as Freedman’s settlements, as “independent rural communities of African American landowners (and land squatters) that formed in the South in the years after Emancipation.”²⁵

Freedmen's settlements were an advance upon maroon communities. Later black towns in what was to be Oklahoma were an extension of freedmen's settlements. Texas, because it shared a border with Indian Territory, enabled black Texans routinely to intrude within Indian Territory. Although Texas was home to hundreds of freedom colonies between 1870 and 1890, Sitton and Conrad proclaim that, “most of them never developed past the ‘settlement’ level of organization, remaining dispersed, poorly focused places where a passing stranger might not see a community at all, only scattered farmsteads with perhaps a remote church or school.”²⁶

Land was difficult to obtain during Reconstruction for Texas freedmen, while their Indian Territory counterparts experienced the opposite situation. Sitton and Conrad write that in 1866 “southern whites swiftly assimilated their former slaves into a pattern of cotton rent farming that maintained as many of the social controls of slavery as landowners, local officials, and state governments could devise.” A little over one percent of southern blacks owned land by 1870.²⁷ However, freedmen built settlements

²⁵ Thad Sitton and James Conrad, *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 1.

²⁶ Sitton & Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 3; Nell Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction*, (New York: W.W. Norton 1976), 83. Painter provides a proper definition for “colonization” in the nineteenth century. Painter writes, “In the late nineteenth century, leaving the South for another section of the United States was termed ‘emigration.’ Since it was envisioned that large members of blacks would go together and settle together, that process was termed ‘colonization.’ A large number of families, black or white, moving to a new area was called a ‘colony,’ without pejorative connotations. Thus, ‘colonization’ was synonymous with collective pioneering.”

²⁷ Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 2-3.

in Indian Territory decades before. This established way of life for Indian freedman enabled them to form towns much earlier than “state blacks,” or black migrants from other states most southern in the 1890s. The Creek Nation, for example, had three black towns that developed in the 1870s named Arkansas Town, Canadian Town, and North Fork Town. The 1870s in Indian Territory was a time of change in black sovereignty. While scholars generally consider early Creek settlements to be towns, Sigmund Sameth argues early Creek towns were actually election districts. In other words, they were crude townships compared to later towns in the 1880s. In addition, there were other unnamed Creek freedman settlements in the Nation that participated in electing representatives from the three Creek towns.²⁸

The settlement patterns of the Creek Nation in the 1870s served as precursors to the way later black towns emerged within the eastern portion of the region. The earliest element of town life in the Creek Nation began with Tullahassee. The town developed in 1850 around a Creek school for non-blacks. Over time, the Creek Indian population declined as the Creek freedman community increased. Tullahassee achieved incorporation in 1902. Arkansas town was the most populous of the three early predominately-black ‘towns’ in the Creek Nation. John H. Beadle documented in his travels through Arkansas ‘town’ and described it as “a continuous line of settlement and farms, or rather ‘patches,’ extend[ed] ten miles along the Arkansas, with a population of about a thousand negroes and perhaps a hundred Creeks.” In regard to Indian-black relations in the region Beadle wrote, “none but the poorest and lowest of the Creeks will

²⁸ Sigmund Sameth, “Creek Negroes,” 33.

live among these freedman...a thousand or two of these creatures live in dirt, ignorance and abject poverty, barely one remove from actual starvation.”²⁹

The Reconstruction-era spurred extensive southern black migration throughout the United States. Black Texans moved throughout the densely populated state in search of refuge from violence by former confederates and slaveholders. Historian Michelle Mears writes that thousands of freedmen in Central Texas moved to the towns of San Antonio, Waco, and Austin. However, Mears admits that freedmen were not free from violence. Migrating to urban communities would have been easier for freedman, because of the Texas Homestead Act, which barred African Americans from acquiring public land; however, but most chose an agricultural way of life following slavery. Like many African American communities, “freedom colonies” revolved around a church. It is not clear why Texas freedman chose to form mostly rural settlements. Edward Magdol argues that the development of settlements revolved around fictive kinship and a simple lifestyle reminiscent slave cabins and gardens. This fact led to two ways in which blacks moved: to urban areas like Houston or to rural areas to form “freedom colonies.”³⁰ Nonetheless, certain areas in Texas were “safe” places for freedman, Harrison County being one of them. In an interview in the 1930s, Jerry Moore explained that:

Durin' the Reconstruction the Negroes gathered in Harrison County. The Yankee sojers and 'Progoe' law made thousands of darkies flock here for protection. The Ku Klux wasn't as strong here and this place was headquarters for the 'Freedman'. What the 'Progoe' Marshal said was

²⁹ “Tulahassee Profile” Larry O’Dell Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans*, 97; John H. Beadle, *The Undeveloped West; or, Five Years In the Territories* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company 1873), 374.

³⁰ Mears *And Grace*, 11 & 65.

Gospel. They broke up all that business in Governor Hogg's time. They divided the county into precincts and the devilment was done in the precincts, just like it is now.

During this time, Harrison County contained a black majority; Blacks constituted more than 60 percent in the county from 1880 to 1930. Harrison historically held a black majority since the 1850s. It drew cotton-growing slaveholders throughout the South, due to its rich soil. The county soon became a center of agricultural production, which led to its main center, Marshall, coming under Union occupation in 1865. Harrison became one of the first Texas counties to contain a post for the Freedmen's Bureau.³¹ Therefore, the government protection provided to the overwhelmingly black majority the county contained moved former slave masters to punish freedman "fleeing north to Harrison County and freedom."³²

Even with the emergence of hundreds of "freedom colonies" in Texas, land was difficult to come by for freedman. Arguably, it would have been easier for freedman in the Corners counties to flee to Indian Territory for geographic reasons, especially blacks in counties that bordered Indian Territory, like Cooke, Grayson, Fannin, and Lamar. Indian Territory, with its racial ambiguity and stable black settlements, likely would have provided more freedom than could be found in southern states, especially Texas. Black Texas slaves were aware of the benefits Indian Territory offered well before the 1860s. The Territory was sparsely populated and practically independent from the United States. During the Civil War, slave patrols became more prevalent within the

³¹ Christopher Bean, "'A Most Singular and Interesting Attempt': The Freedmen's Bureau at Marshall, Texas" *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 110 (2007): 466; Randolph B. Campbell, "Population Persistence and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Texas: Harrison County, 1850- 1880" *The Journal of Southern History* 48 (1982):187.

³² Sitton & Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 11.

Territory to catch Texas runaway slaves in undisclosed settlements. T.D. Moore a Choctaw documented how his father worked as a slave patroller during the Civil War.

Moore recollected that his father:

caught the slaves who had run off from their masters in Texas and were hiding out in the Territory. One day he traced fourteen negroes to the limekiln....These negroes had their camping outfit and one young negro had gone out to kill game for food and Father waited at the entrance of the cave and when the negro came back with the young deer which he had killed Father ordered them all out of the cave and marched them back to Texas.³³

Almost a half century later Freedman in Central Texas also moved to Indian Territory. Jesse Norwood moved from Falls County to Indian Territory in 1900. On moving Norwood wrote: "We had dun so trifelen than no [one] wasnt going to rent us no land in Texas and we would starve tu death." Norwood also had a large number of black Texans who accompanied him to Indian Territory. His movement was a part of a steady stream of movement from black Texas.³⁴

Employment was as important as land to black Texans. The inability to find steady work drove black Texans to migrate in large numbers to Kansas, well before the Exodus of 1879. Black Texans migrated to Kansas in 1875, while others went to Indian Territory. John Baker, for example, lived in between Indian Territory and Texas following emancipation and worked for his ex-master for lackluster pay. Mears writes:

"While many slaves chose to leave the plantation where they had been enslaved immediately upon learning they were free, others remained on the plantation for a while. Perhaps they felt that it was better to stay in familiar surroundings for a while, doing work they

³³ Quoted from Celia Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 147.

³⁴ Lawrence D. Rice, *The Negro in Texas 1874-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 198 & 204.

knew how to do, until things settled down, especially if they were older people.”³⁵

However, by 1879 African American Texans moved in larger numbers, a mass movement that alarmed whites throughout the state. An 1879 article in the *Denison Daily News* warned of the effects the 1879 Exodus would have on labor and proclaimed, “Instead of saying let them go, we believe it is to the interest of the people of Texas to endeavor to keep them here...The question is, what will be the effect, temporarily and permanently, upon the farming interests of Texas, if the exodus becomes general next spring; and if injurious how the movement can be checked.” An estimated 12,000 black Texans made the journey to Kansas. According to Painter, black Texans migrated from the east-central counties of Texas to Kansas. Some Texan Exodusters traveled by railroad through Denison and Sherman, Texas, on route to Parsons, Kansas. While less fortunate migrants traveled by wagon through parts of Arkansas and Indian Territory.³⁶

The Exoduster Movement of 1879 was the first mass movement of African Americans. An array of public and secret societies dedicated to find an area proper for black prosperity and protection from racial violence propelled the movement. The Exodus even generated interest in the domestic colonization of African Americans, which remained a topic of discussion well into the 1890s. Some of these migrants later

³⁵ George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: a Composite Autobiography* vol. 4 (Texas Narratives Parts 1 & 2) (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1973), 2; Mears, *And Grace*, 64.

³⁶ Peggy Hardman, “Exodus of 1879,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 09, 2015, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ume02>; *Denison Daily News*, December 1879, accessed November 9, 2015, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth327414/>; Painter, *Exodusters*, 200, east-central Texas contains the following counties: Washington, Burleson, Grimes, Nacogdoches, Walker, and Waller.

carried their domestic colonization into Indian Territory and the Unassigned Lands. Black domestic colonization was a common topic before the Civil War. Andrew Johnson, a supporter of this solution to the “negro problem,” promoted the acceptance of Texas into the Union as a haven for newly freed blacks. Although this idea did not come to fruition, blacks migrated to the West and North. The earlier movements were not permanent and were simply a means of testing the limits of their freedom; “...many were unable to comprehend its meaning.” However, it did not take very long for African Americans to figure a way to push freedom beyond limits allowed within the boundaries of their discriminatory existence, by way of mass migration.³⁷

A Senate report in 1880 generated national interest in mass African American migration. The committee, derived from a congressional resolution in 1879, examined the mass migration of hundreds of black men, women, and children who moved to Indiana from North Carolina in December of the same year. However, “this movement, though utterly insignificant in comparison with the vastly greater numbers which were moving from other Southern States into Kansas, seemed to be considered of very much more importance, in certain quarters on account of its alleged political purposes and bearing.” Although the committee was nonpartisan, Daniel Voorhees chaired it, a Democrat from Indiana. Voorhees’ “fear and dislike for the negro was only equaled by his hatred of the abolitionist. Democrats like Voorhees feared that mass migration of

³⁷ Arthur Lincoln Tolson, “The Negro in Oklahoma Territory, 1889-1907: a Study in Discrimination” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma 1966) 10-11.

blacks into places such as Indiana and Kansas would increase political strength of the Republican Party, due to black affiliations with the party during the time.³⁸

Henry Adams, one of the leaders of the Exoduster Movement, was born a slave in 1843 in Georgia. He joined the Army in 1866 and remained for three years. Upon returning to his hometown following fighting for his country, Adams and a group of his army comrades decided to improve the state of their fellow blacks. In a testimony to the senate on the “negro exodus,” Adams testified his ambitions for a new political order to separate from discriminatory southern Democratic rule saying “a parcel of us got together and said we would organize ourselves into a committee and look into the affairs and see the true condition of our race, to see where whether it was possible we could stay under a people who held us in bondage or not.” Adams’ secret organization operated for several years.³⁹

Utilizing information gathered by Adams’ secret organization, the group petitioned the federal government concerning racial discrimination, but to no avail in the early 1870s. Adams later attended a New Orleans conference with a delegation of black ministers to discuss a possible black exodus out of the South. The conference also considered Liberia as an alternative for black migration. In 1877, Adams’ comrades presented a petition at a meeting of the National Colored Colonization Society. The petition consisted of the following demand:

If that protection cannot be given and our lost rights restored, we would respectfully ask that some Territory be assigned to us in which we can colonize our race; and if that cannot be done, to appropriate means so

³⁸ *Report and Testimony of the Select Committee of the United States Senate to Investigate the Causes of the Removal of the Negroes From the Southern States to the Northern States*, 46th Cong. 693, pt. 1 (1880), ix; Frank Smith Bogardus, “Daniel W. Voorhees,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 27, no. 2 (1931): 95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27786488>.

that we can colonize in Liberia or some other country, for we feel and know that unless full and ample protection is guaranteed to us we cannot live in the South, and will and must colonize under some other government...⁴⁰

Benjamin “Pap” Singleton was the other well-known figure of the Exoduster movement. However, Adams and Singleton did not know each other or work together in their lifetimes. These men had divergent views toward saving their race. Adams stressed the importance of politics and voting; Singleton stressed the importance of divine intervention. Painter argues that their age difference was the primary cause for their varied approaches to saving their race. While Adams was in his thirties during the 1870s, he was in Louisiana where there was a larger black population. “Singleton not only lived in a state where the Black masses played a less active political role, he was also of a generation that had matured well before Black emancipation and enfranchisement were given topics for discussion.”⁴¹

Singleton began his career in black emigration in 1869 with the formation of the Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association. Five years later, in 1874, Singleton, with eight others, helped form the Edgefield Real Association. Kansas emerged as the best option for blacks; Singleton along with others formed the Singleton Colony in 1879 within the Morris and Lyon Counties of the state. The purpose of this group was to “promote immigration and the encouragement of agriculture and the acquisition of

³⁹ *Select Comm. to Investigate the Causes*, 46th Cong. 693, pt. 1 (1880), x. Painter, *Exodusters* 76.

⁴⁰ Painter, *Exodusters*, 82-83, 86-87. Quoted from Henry Adams, *Senate Report 693*, II, 108.

⁴¹ Painter, *Exodusters*, 108-110.

homes for colored people.”⁴² In 1879, Singleton’s self-titled colony had a meeting concerning the acquisition of land from the Kansa Indian Reservation available. In addition to demanding special preference, the minutes of the meeting record a request of aid to purchase the lands and that “contributions made in behalf of our Colony may be given to Mr. Singleton with full confidence that they will be faithfully applied...Mr. Singleton will request that all monies contributed beyond what maybe needed to bear his necessary expenses shall be forwarded to Governor John P. St. John, Topeka, Kansas, to be applied to the object stated.”⁴³

Overall, Singleton’s dedication to black migration led to the recruitment of an estimated 40,000 African Americans to go to Kansas. Both Adams and Singleton influenced “...black migrations for a generation.” The early movements of migration from North Carolina to Indiana, and Tennessee to Kansas encouraged blacks of the next generation to obtain more rights than their ancestors. These newcomers did not share a history of enslavement. This younger generation participated in political involvement with African American leaders to prove to white America their ability to govern themselves. Southern blacks saw Kansas the best place in the country due to John Brown’s activities until the opening of Unassigned Lands in Indian Territory. However, the great land runs in Oklahoma created a new perception among blacks that Indian Territory was the best place for permanent settlement.⁴⁴

⁴² “Materials Relating to Benjamin Singleton,” Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. Kansas Memory accessed May 23, 2015, <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/225712/>, 1-3.

⁴³ “Materials Relating to Benjamin Singleton,” 46-47.

⁴⁴ Martin Dann, “From Sodom to the Promised Land: E. P. McCabe and the Movement for Oklahoma Colonization,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 3 (1974), accessed November 4, 2014, <http://www.kshs.org/p/kansas-historical-quarterly-from-sodom-to-the-promised-land/13246>.

While Singleton's movement caught the attention of the Democratic and Republican parties. Edward Preston McCabe, the eventual leader of the All-Black Town Movement in Oklahoma Territory, and his friend Abram T. Hall, noticed it as well. McCabe and Hall worked in Chicago for a time; McCabe ran a local Republican club and Abraham was a news reporter. Hall went to Leavenworth with the intention to join Singleton's colony in 1878 and McCabe eventually followed Hall later that year. However, both men decided to follow a group of emigrants to Graham County in Kansas to the town of Nicodemus, where politics eventually absorbed much of their time. With their heavy involvement in the townsite of Nicodemus in the midst of the Exoduster Movement, Hall and McCabe, along with others, petitioned John P. St. John, governor of Kansas. The petition asked to recognize Graham County an official county and Abram Hall as the census taker of the county in 1879. Hall eventually moved on to Pittsburg, while Governor St. John as Graham County Clerk appointed McCabe in 1880. Two years later, McCabe would go on to serve two terms as state auditor (the highest position held by a black man in the state during the time), before applying what he learned in Kansas to the Unassigned Lands opening in the settler-proclaimed Oklahoma District.⁴⁵

Economic factors, primarily, caused the failures of black settlements in Texas and Kansas. It proved difficult for blacks to obtain employment in Texas and acquire land. The Texans who traveled to Kansas during the Exoduster Movement remained impoverished. Although some Exodusters reported a better standard of living, Painter

⁴⁵ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 16; "Graham County Citizens Petitioning to Governor John P. St. John," October 11, 1879, Governors Records, St. John Correspondence Received, Box 8 Folder 4, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. Kansas Memory, accessed May 24, 2015, <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211976>; Painter, *Exodusters*, 153.

writes, "...several of the Exodusters reported difficulties in finding steady work, and this may explain the tremendous mobility of the Exodusters in the years immediately following 1879." However, a blueprint of domestic colonization emerged from the movement. If blacks were unsuccessful in one place, they migrated to another. The Exoduster Movement set a precedent for additional black migration in the American West. Settlers, including the young Edward McCabe, became interested in the fate of the Unassigned Lands during the twilight of the Exoduster Movement. Meanwhile, Benjamin Singleton continued to move groups of blacks to Kansas throughout the 1880s and 1890s. With his legacy cemented in the 1880s Singleton gave an interview in which he said that he was going to leave black migration "for the younger ones to do." In 1883, Singleton requested McCabe's attention to his scrapbook dedicated to black migration throughout the 1870s for the use of writing a news article to attract further national attention to black migration. McCabe, along with other ambitious black settlers, joined to form other organizations dedicated to the Unassigned Lands in the Western portion of Indian Territory.⁴⁶

Singleton's scrapbook represented a legacy of what African Americans fought for throughout the 1870s in Kansas and Texas. These movements caught the attention of news outlets throughout the country. Meanwhile, a sect of blacks and whites looked toward the restricted district Indian Territory for opportunity. Both groups incorporated the use of Native law to argue their right to settle. Western states like Kansas reported this new battle of legal language and exaggerated numbers throughout Indian Territory.

⁴⁶ "Materials Relating to Benjamin Singleton", 65; Benjamin "Pap" Singleton Scrapbook, 17, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. Kansas Memory, accessed May 24, 2015, <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211642/>; Painter, *Exodusters*, 257; Tolson, "The Negro in Oklahoma Territory," 1-2.

Chapter 2: The 1866 Treaties and the Unassigned Lands, 1879-1890

With respect to Oklahoma's black town of movement of the 1890s, historians have overlooked the impact the role the 1866 treaties had in regard to their development and black migration overall. Settlers interested in the Unassigned Lands from the late 1870s to the 1890s interpreted and generalized conditions of the 1866 treaties in many respects. Early black migrants to the region based their right to settle in the Unassigned Lands on "freedmen" clauses contained within the four separate treaties the federal government made with the Choctaw and Chickasaw, Seminole, Creek, and Cherokee. The careless use of the term "freedmen" in the Treaties of 1866 led to a national debate regarding settlement of black and Indian Freedmen rights and whites on the Unassigned Lands throughout the 1880s. Analyzing how the Treaties of 1866 affected African Americans exemplifies how the African and Native diaspora intersects and complicates Native identity within the Five Tribes, and how white and black Americans perceived it.⁴⁷

The cessions of lands from the Seminole and Creek Nations constituted an important part of the 1866 Treaties, making the arrangements for these tribes unique from the other three tribes. Both treaties are similar in that each contains an article, "Article Three," that begins with: "In compliance with the desire of the United States to locate other Indians and freedmen thereon." In the case of these two treaties, the term "freedmen," is not specific. It does not delineate between Native freedman, former slaves of the Five Tribes and state freedman, former slaves from the Union. "Freedmen," in the Creek and Seminole treaties, is present only in the section

⁴⁷ Charles Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2 (Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1903), 911 & 933. <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/Toc.htm>

concerning the Unassigned Lands. In addition, “many persons of African descent and blood” is the only other term or phrase to describe the tribes’ black Indian sect. This phrase forces the reader to assume that “freedmen” and “people of African descent” are not related. The treaties provide African Creeks and Seminoles rights to tribal land, which muddles the intended use of the Unassigned Lands. The question arose, “Who has the right to settle on these lands?”⁴⁸

The freedman clause in the Creek Nation’s treaty does not specify the kind of freedmen eligible within the Nation. In other words, the Creek Nation’s 1866 Treaty is liberal in terms of what type of land eligible freedmen were able to acquire. Perhaps this was due to how the federal government perceived the relationship the Creek and Seminole had with their former slaves. Federal officials assumed that the legacy of racial intermixing evident in both the Creek and Seminole Nations led to a less tumultuous relationship. Liberal use of “freedman” in the Creek treaty likely influenced the concentration of most of Oklahoma’s black towns in the eastern half of the area (historically the Creek Nation).⁴⁹

The Choctaw and Chickasaw element of the 1866 treaties uses “freedmen,” “negroes,” and “persons of African descent” interchangeably. However, the treaty was direct regarding black Indians, likely not former slaves, within their respective tribes. The treaty specifies the rights of Choctaws and Chickasaws of African descent, while

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Kappler, *Indian Affairs vol. 2*, 911 & 933; “All Black Towns Map,” Oklahoma History Center, <http://www.okhistory.org/historycenter/blacktowns/allblacktownsmap.php>; *The Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory: the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations* (Washington: United States Census Printing Office, 1894), 7 accessed February 1, 2016, https://books.google.com/books?id=OYETAAAAYAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

displacing “persons of African descent” from their Choctaw and Chickasaw identity as shown in article 4 of the treaty:

The said nations further agree that all negroes, not otherwise disqualified or disabled, shall be competent witnesses in all civil and criminal suits and proceedings in the Choctaw and Chickasaw courts, any law to the contrary notwithstanding; and they fully recognize the right of the freedmen to a fair remuneration on reasonable and equitable contracts for their labor, which the law should aid them to enforce. And they agree, on the part of their respective nations, that all laws shall be equal in their operation upon Choctaws, Chickasaws, and negroes...⁵⁰

The interchanging of synonyms for tribal members of African descent within both nations reflects the ambiguous relationship both tribes had with their black membership. The Choctaw and Chickasaw did not adopt their freedman by the required time of the treaty. As a result the 1868 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs concluded that “...some arrangements be made with these tribes for a pro rata of lands and funds, upon and with which to colonize and support these colored people.” The same report admitted that the stipulations regarding freedman within the treaty “...is growing in the Indian mind, and sooner or later will manifest itself in acts of hostility toward the colored race.” The issue of colonization soon became a national issue with black and white Americans trying to shape the Unassigned Lands into a refuge of economic prosperity and racial flight.⁵¹

Interested settlers and politicians called The Unassigned Lands the “Oklahoma District” by the 1880s. It was a topic of discussion concerning the colonization of freedman throughout the Exoduster Movement, which occurred around the time of

⁵⁰ Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, 920.

⁵¹ Kappler, *Indian Affairs* vol. 2, 919; *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1869* (Washington: G.P.O, 1870), 399.
<http://babel.hathitrust.org.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081679197;view=1up;seq=7>

“Boomer agitation” in Indian Territory. With the marginalization freedman faced within their respective nations, the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations requested that freedman settle on The Unassigned Lands. Historian Arthur Lincoln Tolson writes that, “it was the government’s intent to use the Unassigned Lands as a settlement zone for freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes and Indian tribes from Kansas and other Western states and territories.” However, government officials made no decision to allow Native American freedman on the public lands. This ambiguity led to an era of attempts to colonize the Unassigned Lands by a variety of black and white organizations throughout the 1880s.⁵²

The best known of black colonization societies during “boomer agitation” was the Freedmen's Oklahoma Association formed by Hannibal C. Carter and James Milton Turner in March of 1881. They created the organization, “To unite in bonds of fraternity aid and protection of all acceptable colored persons of good character, steady habits and reputable calling to improve the condition of its membership materially by securing to them lands and homes in the unoccupied Territories of the United States,” a similar principle black towns in the region came to utilize a decade later. Furthermore, Carter and Milton aimed to colonize blacks in the Creek portion of the Unassigned Lands.⁵³

Carter and Turner’s rhetorical goal concerning their organization echoed African American uplift ideology of the period. Historian Kevin Gaines writes:

uplift, among its other connotations, also represented the struggle for a positive black identity in a deep racist society, turning the pejorative

⁵² Arthur Lincoln Tolson, “The Negro in Oklahoma Territory,” 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2. From Articles of Incorporation, No. 2076, Office of the Secretary of State of Illinois, Springfield, Illinois, 1-3.

designation of race into a source of dignity and self-affirmation through an ideology of class differentiation, self-help, and interdependence.⁵⁴

Thus, the Unassigned Lands were to become a model of progress for black Americans throughout the United States. However, the circular, which called for “acceptable colored persons of good character,” was reflective of class divisiveness within black leadership. In other words, it is clear that the Freedmen’s Oklahoma Association aimed for middle class blacks who symbolized “social purity, thrift, chastity, and the patriarchal family...”⁵⁵

Hannibal and Turner quickly produced circulars promoting their plans for the Oklahoma District. The handbill caught the attention of news publications and the federal government thereafter. The United States Senate ordered a resolution on the matter of blacks settling within the district in February of 1882. Regarding Turner’s and Carter’s circular, C.W. Holcomb, the acting commissioner of the General Land Office, declared that the purpose of the Freedmen’s Oklahoma Immigration Association was illegal. Holcomb added “for many years efforts have been made by designing persons to effect an ingress into the Indian Territory for the purpose of despoiling the Indians of the patrimony secured to them by the most solemn obligations of the United States.” Holcomb went on to write that the attempt to colonize blacks in Oklahoma would do nothing more than “to subject them to disappointment, hardship, and suffering.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 3. For more on the development of black racial uplift during the 1880s see pages 34-6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 4.

⁵⁶ “Occupation By Settlers of Portion of Indian Territory”, in *The Executive Documents of the Senate of the United States for the First Session, Forty-Seventh Congress, 1881-82* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882,) 2 & 4, accessed May 25, 2015.

The matter of the expansion of the Freedman's Oklahoma Association made its way into the *Missouri Republican* that same year. The paper covered the formation of the Association in St. Louis. From this area the association sent agents to southern states in an effort to start a migration movement amongst the freedman in the region, promising every freedman 160 acres of land in Oklahoma based on the "1866 treaty."⁵⁷ Meanwhile, these early developments in the organization unfolded during the emergence of Payne's Oklahoma Colony, an early white intruder colony in Indian Territory led by David Payne. Payne began his settler colony in Indian Territory in 1880. In only three years, Payne's colony boasted hundreds of settlers and developed from a legacy of white migration, from Kansas, as well as African American freedman from the South who trickled into the state during the Exoduster Movement and "Kansas Fever" a year prior. Both entities developed to take advantage of the freedmen clauses in the 1866 treaties.⁵⁸

The *New York Times* ran an 1880 article entitled "Payne's Invading Colonists," which focused on the "colored" aspect of the Payne's colony. The article, which opposed Payne's choices regarding colonization, contained the subtitle "Still Outside Indian Territory - Dragging Colored Men into the Movement." The article reported that Payne's colony corresponded with the "leading colored men of the country, and

<https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=yBw2AQAAIAAJ&rdid=book-yBw2AQAAIAAJ&rdot=1>.

⁵⁷ Tolson, "The Negro in Oklahoma Territory," 2-3. From the *Missouri Republican*, April 23, 1881. For statistics of Negro population in Oklahoma following 1889 Land Run see page 21. Tolson writes, "...there were approximately 1,643 colored men and 1,365 colored women who had settled in the area within a year following the Run of 1889."

⁵⁸ Roy Gittinger, *The Formation of the State of Oklahoma, 1803-1906* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1917), 107-110.

committees of the exodus [Exodusters] at St. Louis, Kansas City, Topeka, and elsewhere.” The meeting between both groups likely focused on the 500 freedmen members who were a part of Payne’s colony. Both groups met about settling Exodusters in the Unassigned Lands, a matter handled by an African American lawyer named Captain William D. Matthews from Leavenworth, Kansas. The article quoted a black Exoduster’s views on settling in the Oklahoma District. Clearly alluding to the “freedmen” aspect of the 1866 treaty, the interviewee commented: “we have been outraged and driven out of the South. I have been in Kansas nearly two years, and I do not like the climate and cannot make a living here. Now, why not let us go to these lands that were purchased for us?”⁵⁹

The St. Louis committee mentioned in the *The New York Times* was likely the Colored Relief Board, also known as the Committee of Twenty-Five. According to historian Nell Painter, the committee formed in March of 1879. It aimed to aid thousands of incoming Exodusters unable to pay for the rest of their way to Kansas by the time they arrived in Missouri. Nonetheless, “the black community of St. Louis bore the brunt of the burden of caring for the Exodusters. It sent them on to Kansas...” James Milton Turner disagreed with the Colored Relief Board regarding its approach to providing relief to Exodusters. He later formed a rival organization due to these disagreements.⁶⁰ Turner was experienced in both law and African American colonization. President Ulysses Grant had earlier appointed Turner minister and consul general to Liberia, in which he served from 1871 to 1878. He later organized the

⁵⁹ "Payne's Invading Colonists." *The New York Times*, December 29, 1880.

⁶⁰ Painter, *Exodusters*, 225-27.

Association of Cherokee freedmen, which he represented as an attorney. Moreover, the Exoduster movement diminished shortly thereafter around the founding of the Freedmen's Oklahoma Association, which led Turner to focus on the freedmen controversy in Indian Territory.⁶¹

Additional colonization societies emerged to take advantage of the 1866 treaties, claiming their right to settle in the Unassigned Lands based on homestead and preemption laws, which they claimed voided stipulations of the Creek and Seminole treaties. The *Kansas City Times*, a Kansas news publication that supported Oklahoma colonization contained the following in a May 8 1879 issue of its paper:

We have no apprehension that the government will proceed to any extreme measures in the effort to exclude immigrants from the ceded lands of the Indian Territory. Investigation has satisfied us that people clearly have a legal right to settle upon those lands under the Homestead and Pre-emption laws. When the government extinguished the Indian title the fee simple vested in the people of the United States. The proviso that freedmen or other tribes of Indians might be settled on the lands is now absolutely null and void. for congress has passed a law prohibiting any more wild tribes from settling in the Territory. The consequence is, that these lands are as open to homestead and pre-emption as any other public lands.⁶²

The Pre-emption law of 1841 and the Homestead Act of 1862 gave squatters the right to settle on public land, but in different ways. Both laws were reform legislation that emerged in what scholar, Vernon Ruttan defines as, "...the spirit of Jefferson's agrarian democracy..." Ruttan goes on to write that the Pre-emption Law "...legalized squatting on unsurveyed public domain with the right to purchase up to 160 acres at the minimum

⁶¹ Dilliard, Irving. "James Milton Turner: A Little Known Benefactor of His People." *The Journal of Negro History* 19 (1934): 380 & 406-8.

⁶² "The Oklahoma Raid," *Kansas City Times*, 1879, David Payne Collection, Western History Collections, Box 1, Folder 2, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

price after survey,” while the Homestead Act “conveyed free title to 160 acres of land after residing on and cultivating the tract for five years.”⁶³

The *Kansas City Times*’ conclusion regarding settler rights in the Unassigned Lands was a calculated maneuver in an attempt to promote colonization of the district. The newspaper had already published a lengthy interview of Interior Department officials a day earlier, based on the work of an unnamed reporter who interviewed three government officials about the legality of the United States keeping settlers off the Unassigned Lands. In response to the reporter’s questions, Mr. Brooks, officer of the Indian Bureau, answered that the purchase of the Unassigned Lands “...was a specific contract--a trust, by the terms of which the United States was to hold those lands for the purpose of settling other Indians and freedmen thereon. That trust binds the Government not to permit any other parties to enter upon them. All the treaties looked to this sole object; no one, not even a freedman, can go there unless sent by the Government.”

The *Kansas City Times* openly expressed support of opening the district and dedicated their reporting to proving the legal right of whites to settle on the land. The unnamed reporter, not being satisfied with so-called unproven statements of the “red-tape department,” wrote that placing freedmen of the Five Tribes in the district was illegal, because the federal government considered them members of the tribes that enslaved them. In other words, “to have placed them on the reservations thus sold would be to place a portion of the tribe selling on the lands bought for other Indians.

⁶³ Vernon Ruttan, “Equity and Productivity Issues in Modern Agrarian Reform Legislation” *Philippine Studies* 14 (1966): 54.

Any other ‘freedman’ are no more than citizens of the United States, and the Government cannot discriminate in favor of them as against the whites...”⁶⁴

The reporter’s analysis of the information he received from his interviewees also suggest his distaste of the Exoduster Movement happening during this time. He wrote:

I suppose if 5,000 of the ‘freedman’ now swarming into Kansas were to fall in with the throng of whites now pushing into the Territory, when they reached the cordon of United States soldiers, they would be permitted to enter upon these lands, on the theory that ‘the government held it in trust for (Indians and) freedmen...’ If black citizens can go there, white ones can and will.⁶⁵

The reporter's words concerning black Kansans influenced the decision of some whites to leave Kansas. As several thousand African American settlers flocked to Kansas, some traveling by way of Indian Territory, some white Kansans migrated to Indian Territory. Furthermore, the fact that the 1866 treaties specified the use of the land for “freedman” and “other Indians” perturbed whites, who followed Jefferson’s “agrarian democracy.” Regardless of what government officials said regarding persons whom had the right to occupy the Unassigned District, numerous colonization societies pushed onward to gain their right to settle for the next decade.

Other interpretations of the Treaties of 1866 further complicated the issues of the settlement. Once more, the *Kansas City Times* editorialized on the issue,

“the President, without the authority of law, has from time to time placed on these public lands Indian tribes. Of these tribes thus located are the Sacs, Foxes, Wichita, Kiowa, Comanche, Arapahoe, and Pottawatomies. They have no other than a ‘squatter’s claim,’ and hardly that.”

⁶⁴ “Washington Letter,” *Kansas City Times* (1879), David Payne Collection, Box 1, Folder 16, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

The *Times* admitted various interpretations of the treaty by stating “with due respect to President Hayes and the members of his cabinet, the citizens of the frontier put a different construction on the law and treaties, and are ready to resist all interference with their rights.” However, the federal government was adamantly protected the settler-proclaimed Oklahoma District.⁶⁶

Payne’s intrusion in Indian Territory led to *The United States v. Payne* in 1881, which fortified the stipulation that “colored persons who were never held as slaves in the Indian Country, but who may have been slaves elsewhere, are like other citizens of the United States, and have no more rights in the Indian Country than other citizens of the United States.”⁶⁷ However, these early movements to Indian Territory were not successful, primarily due to the negative reception by the Secretary of Interior, Samuel J. Kirkwood. Secretary Kirkwood believed this movement was similar to other “illegal Oklahoma movements of recent years” (most likely from white settlers moving into the Cherokee Strip years before). The General Land Office concluded that “The 'freedmen of the United States' are not comprehended within the policy or intention of the treaty provisions, and said lands have accordingly not 'been purchased for the use and occupation' of the colored people of any of the States.” Payne thought otherwise, in an attempt to use the 1866 treaties to his advantage. On one of his many schemes to settle

⁶⁶ *Kansas City Times* (1879), David Payne Collection, Box 1, Folder 11, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

⁶⁷ Geo. W. M’CRary, *Cases Argued and Determined in the Circuit Courts of the United States for the Eighth Judicial Circuit, Vol. II* (Chicago: Callaghan and Company, Law Book Publishers, 1882), 289. For additional details on Payne’s intrusion in Indian Country see, 290-91.

the Unassigned Lands, Payne traveled throughout the Southwest, mainly Kansas and Texas, to lecture about the Unassigned Lands.⁶⁸

The 1866 Treaties gave African Americans and white settlers the power to mobilize and the hope of succeeding, which provided the foundation for a long-lasting movement. Historian Carl Rister notes that Payne worked on developing a colonization society well before the Exoduster Movement of 1879. However, plans of the Wichita-based society were stifled due to a mineral rush in Colorado, “and after one year’s existence the colonization society lapsed.” But a flood of newspaper articles revived interest in the Indian Territory colonization movement. Rister writes:

Cattle drovers passing up the Chisolm and Western trails had kept alive interest in the ‘forbidden land’ by their frequent accounts of its availability for ranching and farming...Movers on their way to Texas or traveling northward to Kansas, noticed, too that here was a virgin wilderness of prairie and timber lands as rich as could be found in the West. Western newspapers joined the chorus of praise and asked how long the government would retain the land as a home for indolent Indians.⁶⁹

In addition, Elias Boudinot, a prominent member of the Cherokee Nation, popularized the notion of colonizing the Unassigned Lands in an 1879 edition of the *Chicago Times*. Boudinot developed a map and an additional letter to settlers interested in making a homestead in the Unassigned Lands. Boudinot’s article and accounts from cowboys had resonance with interested settlers looking for available land. Accounts led to men like J.R. Boyd, former mayor of Baxter Springs, Kansas organizing “a large and well-organized body of men...” However, the description regarding the size of the colony

⁶⁸ Tolson, “The Negro in Oklahoma Territory,” 4. From Holcomb to S. J. Kirkwood, April 25, 1881, S. Ex. Docs. 47th Cong. 1 Sess., V No. III, 2.

⁶⁹ Rister, *Land Hunger*, 41 & 97.

itself was not true according to Rister's analysis. Domestic colonization societies of the day exaggerated their numbers throughout the 1880s in an attempt to bolster their membership and acquire more resources.⁷⁰

The tumultuous and often violent relationship between white and black settlers in Indian Territory during the 1890s reveals feelings of white flight. Payne promoted his Oklahoma Colony using Boudinot's article of over ten million acres and his intention "...to occupy the same with a colony of five or ten thousand people." Payne's dedication to his 1880 colony influenced many. At one of his speaking engagements in Coffeyville, a follower proposed a plan to take fifty African Americans and fifty Native Americans along to the Unassigned Lands to maintain their legal basis to colonize the area. Perhaps this explains Payne's contact with the Freedmen's Oklahoma Association later that year. Throughout his travels in North Texas, Payne offered money to the *Denison Tribune* in return for support of his Indian Territory exploits.⁷¹

Despite setbacks, Payne's famous attempt to colonize the Oklahoma District generated much black political activity. An all-black convention in Parsons, Kansas April of 1882 "...to send a memorial to Congress asking that every third section of land in the Oklahoma District be set aside for the occupancy of colored emigrants from the South. According to Arthur Lincoln Tolson, the Parsons convention consisted of forty-five delegates, who supposedly represented 60,000 African Americans throughout the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 40-41.

⁷¹ Ibid., 52-54 & 92.

country. Other states sent petitions to Congress regarding the same matter. However, the convention and petitioning had mixed results, at best.⁷²

Colonization of African Americans received a considerable amount of attention in the 1880s and 1890s. The Parsons convention caught the attention of Senator Henry Blair of New Hampshire, who sent a letter to the Secretary of Interior inquiring about the law regarding black settlement in the Unassigned Lands. Without waiting for a response, he introduced a bill in 1882, which would give blacks the right to settle on any public land. In 1889, Congressman Matthew C. Butler produced a Negro immigration bill. The bill was an attempt to distribute "...blacks among the states and territories of the northwest." It is evident African Americans paid attention to the status of the Unassigned Lands and, like their white counterparts, wanted to stake their claim on fertile grounds in the district.⁷³

One example of this activity from black colonization societies to settle in the Unassigned Lands led to intruder organizations such as the "Negro Sooner Colony," which attempted black settlement on the Unassigned Lands from 1886 to 1889. The settlement dispersed following notification of their settlement by Natives. However, their existence in the Oklahoma District suggests other colonies of black settlements living there, similar to Texas runaway slaves in the 1830s. The colony survived for three years -- longer than any other colony during this period. Little information exists about it, but the confusing interpretation regarding the status freedman in the Treaty of

⁷² Tolson, "The Negro in Oklahoma Territory," 5; Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 99.

⁷³ Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans*, 73; Gittinger, *The Formation of the State of Oklahoma*, 120.

1866 possibly enabled their long tenure. Nonetheless, this early colonization effort by blacks preceded the early all-black towns in what became Oklahoma Territory.⁷⁴

The founding of Lincoln, arguably the first known “state” black town founded in 1889, demonstrates the economic and social isolation African Americans experienced during the nineteenth century. Information on the town is scant; however, its formation shows difficulty its inhabitants faced. It was the only black town profiled in Marion Rock’s *An Illustrated History of Oklahoma*, a book profiling Territorial Oklahoma’s leadership and its overall success. Lincoln had an immediate population of 300, but it was located in the midst of a predominately-black area in Kingfisher County, which consisted of 2000 African Americans. Perhaps this large concentration of black farmers in Kingfisher is what attracted attention from white writers like Rock. Most African American settlers likely concentrated around the black town of Lincoln for safety and camaraderie.⁷⁵

The use of the term “freedmen” in the 1866 treaties is a reflection of the federal government’s difficulty with delineation between former Indian Territory slaves and former slaves from states a part of the Union. The federal government failed to understand the varied history of the Five Tribes. Each tribe had distinct relationships with their respective freedman populations. Moreover, issues concerning identifying the

⁷⁴ “Negro Sooner Colony,” WPA Historic Sites Survey (Ghost Towns), Box 24, Folder 6, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

⁷⁵ “Lincoln City Profile,” WPA Historic Sites And Survey Collection, Folder 2, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma. Lincoln was founded in 1889, but incorporated in 1890. For a proper description of “state negro” see, Donald Grinde and Quintard Taylor, “Red v. Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post-Civil War Indian Territory, 1865-1907,” *American Indian Quarterly* 8:3 (1984): 211-229; Marion T. Rock. *Illustrated History Of Oklahoma, Its Occupation By Spain And France - Its Sale To The United States - Its Opening To Settlement In 1889 - And The Meeting Of The First Territorial Legislature* (C.B Hamilton and Sons, 1890), 182.

ethnicities of several groups were too complicated with roots beginning well before their removal to Indian Territory in the 1830s. Soon other African Americans began to mobilize and have conventions in an effort to measure the social implications that moving to the Oklahoma District might have for them. Many were seeking safety from the Jim Crow South and suitable land for proper settlement. Others were trying to repair their circumstances following bad experiences moving to Kansas. However, colonization societies exaggerated their own popularity.

These issues continued following congressional passage of the Organic Act of 1890, which created the Unassigned Lands of Oklahoma Territory. That same year, other black Kansans had the confidence to hold a convention directly in Oklahoma Territory instead of outside of it. However, following a survey of the Territory, this convention failed. According to an 1890 article entitled “Oklahoma and the Cherokee Strip,” the convention members realized that reports they heard regarding the strength of the black population in Oklahoma Territory were false. The same article wrote that the African Americans arriving to the territory expected to be in the midst of 22,000 of their own, arguing that the highest concentrated black population was located in the black town of Lincoln, with a population of over 1,000. The Oklahoma Territory Census of 1890 concluded the territory had 2,973 blacks in the area, which exceeds the article’s initial estimate of 2,000. Exaggerating numbers became a powerful form of rhetoric for a number of reasons. African Americans interpreted the numbers as an opportunity for possible political control in the region, which implied safety. White settlers, on the other hand, interpreted exaggerated numbers as an opportunity to acquire

free land and economic prosperity, just as many saw opportunity in the mineral rush in Colorado, which ended interest in Oklahoma colonization in its early inception.⁷⁶

Colonization societies such as the Freedmen's Oklahoma Association and Payne's colonies used the 1866 Treaties as an additional form of rhetoric to obtain access to land and a certain livelihood envisioned. It is evident that African Americans played a key role in Payne's colonization schemes because he attempted to use the "freedmen," stipulation as proof of his colony's right to move on the Unassigned Lands. Both camps attempted to use the power of numbers that both groups contained to conquer the Unassigned Lands. Exaggerated numbers gave African Americans the impression that blacks made up one third of Oklahoma Territory's population and encouraged black interest in the region.

According to Rister, cowboys also played a role in popularizing the Oklahoma District. Like the emergence of black towns, the popularity of the Oklahoma District too was due to a combination of several forces. In hindsight, the racial threat of the Exoduster Movement had an indirect effect on white Kansans, as they did not welcome the massive numbers of African Americans migrating from the Deep South. Nonetheless, the year following 1889 came was deemed "the year before the great immigration" in the southern region of Indian Territory by the federal government. With the ending of the colonization era by the Organic Act of 1890, the entire region was in the midst of another movement dedicated to forming African American towns

⁷⁶ "Oklahoma and the Cherokee Strip," 1890, newspaper clipping, Frederick S. Barde Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Box 49, Folder 52. The population of Lincoln in this article most likely includes the outskirts of the city, and other unknown settlements; *Population of Oklahoma and Indian Territory* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 8, accessed February 1, 2016, http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1907pop_OK-IndianTerritory.pdf

and industry. However, following the white invasion of Oklahoma Territory, African Americans would only be able to obtain remaining land in small parcels.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ *The Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory: the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations* (Washington: G.P.O, 1894), 54, accessed February 1, 2016. https://books.google.com/books/reader?id=OYETAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&source=gbs_atb_hover&pg=GBS.PA54; “Oklahoma and the Cherokee Strip.”

Chapter 3: Early Oklahoman Black Towns & McCabe's Black State, 1890-1907

The Land Run of 1889 brought black and whites into the Unassigned Lands in the Oklahoma Territory created by the Organic Act of 1890. During this time, African American migrants founded black towns throughout Indian and Oklahoma Territory. Oklahoma Territory became the center of what Hannibal Johnson deems the “All-Black Town Movement,” a period of rapid development of predominately black towns from 1890 to 1910.⁷⁸ Edward McCabe was the leader of this movement, which pushed for the creation of an all-black state in Oklahoma Territory. McCabe, with his extensive political connections as a Republican leader and his prior experience as an Exoduster, used his talents to garner national attention to make the territory a safe haven for blacks, similar to what Benjamin “Pap” Singleton had sought roughly a decade earlier. McCabe and other black leaders throughout the Twin Territories (Indian and Oklahoma Territory) strategically promoted their towns to black southern migrants. Much of this boosterism formed in response to violence southern blacks faced throughout the late nineteenth century. Black town promotion focused on agriculture, which went against environmental disasters throughout the region in the 1890s. An examination, therefore, of the rhetoric of Oklahoma's black towns demonstrate their consistent, yet varied ideologies and how they changed over time in the early twentieth century.

Edward McCabe was the most known leader of this mass development of black towns in the region. His ambitions overshadow the majority of other black town boosters who were a part of this movement. Most black towns no longer exist, but the

⁷⁸ “The All Black Towns in Oklahoma,” last modified December 31, 2004, <http://www.hannibalbjohnson.com/the-all-black-towns-in-oklahoma/>.

towns that do exist are located in the eastern portion (former territories of the Creek and Seminole) of what is now Oklahoma. Sources on lesser-known towns are scarce, but their rhetoric remains within remnants of newspapers, and have the potential to explain their foundational ideology. Therefore, the rhetoric of black town promotion in Oklahoma demonstrates why black towns were not successful in flourishing as reliable spaces for their African American counterparts in the Deep South. This chapter attempts to integrate lesser-known black towns into the general conversation of Oklahoman black town historiography, by comparing and contrasting their ideology with well-known black towns like Langston and Boley. Focusing on rhetoric has the potential to individualize each town and revise the narratives of each town.

The rhetoric surrounding black towns in Oklahoma changed over time from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Earlier black towns focused on the assimilation of African Americans into mainstream society, while later twentieth century black towns focused on obtaining technological advances of the day, such as telephone lines, railroad connections, and similar evidences of modernization. Booker T. Washington's 1908 article, "Boley: A Negro Town in the American West," is a contemporary observation of black migration to the West beginning in the 1870s. Washington used Boley as an example for black progress at the turn of the nineteenth century. Within the article, Washington made the distinction between nineteenth century and twentieth century black settlers to Indian Territory. Washington wrote that Boley is:

striking evidence of the progress made in thirty years that the present northward and westward movement of the negro people has brought into these new lands, not a helpless and ignorant horde of black people--but land-seekers and home-builders, men who have come prepared to build

up the country.⁷⁹

Historian Sarah Deutsch uses Washington's article to contextualize black towns such as Boley within the framework of the industrialization and modernization of the American West. Deutsch's work is an important step to place race within the larger narrative of the North American West. In addition, Deutsch nicely documents how black towns in Oklahoma progressed over time.⁸⁰

Washington's description of "crude" African American migrants from the Deep South demonstrates the connection of Oklahoma's black towns to early migratory patterns to Arkansas and Kansas. A prominent black leader like Washington's attention to black domestic colonization influenced the making of Oklahoma's black towns and their social institutions. Washington's words represent an outsider's perspective of the Black Town Movement. In many ways, Washington's ideology of industrial education for African Americans sparked his interest in Oklahoma's black population. Oklahoma's Black Town Movement primarily focused on the importance of vocational education for black advancement. However, this primary focus had a negative effect on their stability in maintaining a stable agricultural economy.

Washington's inclusion of early black settlers beginning with the Exoduster Movement reflects his understanding of early African Americans migration to and within the West. However, he dismissed earlier migrants deeming them an "ignorant horde of black people." It is difficult to conclude that Washington was unaware of

⁷⁹ Booker T. Washington, "Boley: A Negro Town in the American West," 1908, accessed November 24, 2015, http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/archive/resources/documents/ch19_05.htm.

⁸⁰ Sarah Deutsch, "Being American in Boley," eds. Stephanie Cole and Alison Parker *Beyond Black & White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 102-5.

Oklahoma's earlier black towns. Washington knew of other black towns throughout Oklahoma. He had an interest in establishing National Negro Business League chapters throughout the region, and participated in the development of black towns like Mound Bayou, Mississippi.⁸¹ Nonetheless, Washington's analysis of black settler progress is an appropriate way to contextualize black town rhetoric in Oklahoma. Moreover, his article projected an ideal that black towns attempted to obtain years before Boley's founding. The variety of town ideals and their strategies exemplifies the complexities of town structures, especially with few sources available to examine.⁸²

Twentieth century Oklahoman blacks attempted to create modern towns. These towns include Clearview, Boley, and Red Bird, which promoted business and a variety of industries such as oil and coal within their promotional literature. Historian Bonnie Lynn-Sherow rightly contends that the demise of black towns came in response to the bad soil quality of the land they lived on. Promotional literature is also crucial to understanding what towns viewed as their key to becoming thriving towns: cotton and railroads. Lynn-Sherow mentions the sense of community and deep connection to land that African Americans brought with them to Oklahoma and Indian Territory. However, the inability of most black towns to obtain a railroad depot dampened chances for black towns to diversify their economy, leaving black towns during this period socially and economically isolated. Many leaders of black towns, regardless of their business interests, were determined to advance their towns, which represented their vision of the

⁸¹ Norman Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 35, 84, and 127. In addition to writing about Mound Bayou, Washington used Tuskegee Institute funds donated by white philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie and Julius Rosenwald to invest in black towns. For more see August Meier "Booker T. Washington and the Town of Mound Bayou," *Phylon* (1954): 396-401.

⁸² Washington, "Boley."

future of the blacks in America into an ideal of what a “civilized” African American should be during the period.⁸³

African American migrants to Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory faced both environmental and social challenges. Racism by whites and Native Americans constantly threatened blacks. The region’s climate did not maintain black farming practices. The initiation of the All Black Town Movement occurred in the midst of environmental turmoil caused by drought. The *New York Times* reported on conditions in Oklahoma Territory in July of 1890. According to a source in the Land Office in Kingfisher County:

it is very dry; vegetation is looking bad, and if this keeps on much longer the prairies will burn off by spontaneous combustion... The people are getting discouraged at the outlook already, and if the crops fail in this country this year the result will be not only irreparable damage, but will be succeeded by a great deal of suffering.⁸⁴

Suffering continued in Oklahoma Territory and made national headlines again in December of the same year. According to an eyewitness:

the settlers did not even raise a fair crop of vegetables, and if they were able to buy potatoes they would have to pay an enormous price for them... In what is known as the ‘Black Belt’ region, largely inhabited by negroes, I have seen such suffering and want as I did not believe could exist in any part of the country. Large families of colored people live in sod cabins and shanties, crowded together in one or two rooms with not one day’s provisions ahead.⁸⁵

The 1890s brought drought, which devastated the entire region at the same time blacks migrated into it. Drought, however, is a common occurrence in Oklahoma

⁸³ Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 32 & 60-3.

⁸⁴ "Affairs at Oklahoma." *New York Times*, Jul 02, 1890, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/94817883?accountid=12964>.

⁸⁵ "Suffering in Oklahoma," *New York Times*, December 10 1890, *New York Times*, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/94778003?accountid=129644>.

climate. Wind erosion contributed to the crops failures in western Oklahoma, a problem from the start of Oklahoma Territory's inception. According to soil conservationist Angus McDonald, wind erosion intensified during this drought. Dust storms consistently occurred from 1890 to 1896.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, the mass African American movement to Oklahoma and Indian Territories continued during the 1890s. The Exoduster Movement had come and gone. Migration from Arkansas dwindled. Poor black southern farmers looked to other alternatives to secure social and economic freedom. By 1890, it was difficult for farmers to make a decent living from growing cotton, because of the crop's increase in production following the Civil War. The economic issues African American farmers faced moved some to inquire about emigration to Liberia. Historian Edwin Redkey writes that the number of inquiries to the American Colonization Society increased, while cotton prices fell in the 1890s. Many blacks who moved to the West were unsuccessful in their quest for land and social equality. Instead of staying in Oklahoma and following the ideology of black leaders like Edward McCabe, men such as a Bishop Turner traveled throughout the region advocating black emigration to Liberia in Indian Territory. Nonetheless, a contingent of hopeful black settlers remained in Oklahoma and Indian Territory to be a part of insular towns away from the Territory's' mainstream society.⁸⁷

Trapped in the bowels of United States social hierarchy and geography,

⁸⁶ "Hydrologic Drought of Water Year 2011: A Historical Context," (September 2012) Oklahoma Water Resources Board & U.S. Geological Survey and Oklahoma Climatological Survey https://www.owrb.ok.gov/supply/drought/pdf_dro/DroughtFactSheet2011.pdf; Angus McDonald, *Erosion and its Control in Oklahoma Territory* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1938), 8.

⁸⁷ Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 7, 5, & 42.

black towns reaffirmed agricultural tradition. In particular, black towns attracted migrants who wanted to maintain an agricultural lifestyle and work for themselves. The rhetoric within each black town demonstrates how they acted as built environments of cultural expression, some of which came as a direct response to the opposition blacks faced during this time.⁸⁸

The founding of Lincoln, arguably the first known “state” black town founded in 1889, demonstrates the economic and social isolation African Americans had during the nineteenth century. The town developed from lots advertised by Marion Blair, a white businessman. Information on the town is scant; however, its formation shows the possible difficulty its inhabitants faced. The town is the only black town profiled in Marion Rock’s 1890 *An Illustrated History of Oklahoma*, a book profiling Territorial Oklahoma’s leadership and its overall success. Lincoln had a local population of 300, but it was in the midst of a predominately-black area in Kingfisher County, which consisted of 2000 African Americans. Perhaps this large concentration of black farmers in Kingfisher is what attracted attention from white writers like Rock.⁸⁹

Lincoln leaders expected citizens to be “industrious” and “enterprising” because they were “...keeping pace with the whites in civilization and in developing the measures of the country.” Shortly following its inception, the town moved to a different location, one that was equipped with a cotton mill. The process of relocating agitated

⁸⁸ Denise L. Lawrence and Setha M. Low, “The Built Environment and Spatial Form,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 466 & 478.

⁸⁹ “Lincoln City Profile,” WPA Historic Sites And Survey Collection, Folder 2, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma. Lincoln was founded in 1889, but incorporated in 1890; Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 23-3; For a proper description of “state negro” see, Donald Grinde and Quintard Taylor, “Red v. Black” 211-229; Marion T. Rock. *Illustrated History Of Oklahoma*, 182.

townspeople and led to its end.⁹⁰ It is clear that the residents of Lincoln based their livelihood on cotton production. Blair expected African American settlers to participate in subsistence farming, hunting, and selling timber (which caused soil erosion and insect infestation). Town inhabitants who moved closer to a cotton gin likely caused a rift in the town's social structure, because their relocation came during a time of drought and wind erosion. The decade's dry conditions likely affected subsistence crops, too. Cotton was the staple cash crop of the southwest. The prevalence of cash cropping overtook interests of soil conservation within the region leading to further erosion of the soil. African American farmers usually practiced communal farming, which also increased their sense of community and what Lynn-Sherow describes as an "intimate connection to agricultural production."⁹¹ However, this form of farming contributed to soil erosion. McDonald notes:

It was on the tenant farms that erosion appeared in its most critical state, because the interest of renters was focused on the crop rather than on the land. The agricultural system of the time in actuality placed a premium on soil destruction and a penalty on soil conservation. A program of soil conservation was not compatible with the greatest profits that could be derived from the land in a short period.⁹²

Edward McCabe had ambitions similar to Lincoln's inhabitants. He moved to Oklahoma Territory in early 1890, following a successful political career in Kansas and settled in Guthrie, the territory's capital. Out of his office, McCabe founded Langston and the *Langston City Herald*, to promote the town throughout the Deep South. The town and newspaper made national headlines during its early years, because it

⁹⁰ "Lincoln City Profile"

⁹¹ McDonald, *Erosion and its Control in Oklahoma Territory*, 7; Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 32 & 63.

⁹² McDonald, *Erosion and its Control in Oklahoma Territory*, 7

exemplified McCabe's ideology of self-governance, which later developed into a plan to make Oklahoma Territory an all-black state.⁹³ He carried considerable influence among Republicans and citizens of Oklahoma as evidenced in Rock's *An Illustrated History of Oklahoma* as well as his audacity to write to President Benjamin Harrison regarding making Oklahoma Territory an all-black state. Langston became a center of attention and "civilization" when it acquired the Colored Agricultural School, now known as Langston University, in 1897. Black towns like Douglas City lobbied to get the territory-funded school, by setting aside land for the school. However, McCabe's political connections increased Langston's chances. Governor Cassius Barnes, the territorial governor during the time, gave McCabe an appointment as assistant territorial auditor the same year.⁹⁴

McCabe capitalized on the Land Run of 1889 by acquiring cheap land to develop Langston, his acquisition coincided with a particularly dry period in the southwest. The 1891 Report of the Governor of Oklahoma Territory reported that:

The law, or proclamation of the President, enabling settlers to enter the Territory did not come in time to permit of their growing crops in 1889. The year 1890 being an unusually dry one, not only in Oklahoma... was fatal to the growing crops for that year, which, taken with the fact that a large portion of the population had been driven out of southwestern Kansas and northwestern Texas on account of drought... caused great destitution and suffering and forced us to make an appeal to Congress for assistance, which met with generous response, and which... enabled us to get along until the bountiful crop of garden and field products of the

⁹³ "To Make a Negro State: Westernizing Black Men in Oklahoma," *New York Times*, February 28, 1890, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archivefree/pdf?res=9E05E5DE153BE533A2575BC2A9649C94619ED7CF>.

⁹⁴ Rock, *Illustrated History Of Oklahoma*, 271-2; "Edward McCabe to Benjamin Harrison," December 6, 1889, The Benjamin Harrison Papers, Series 2: Reel 68, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 26.

present year were ready for use.⁹⁵

Langston was stricken with poverty due to the condition of the region and overall negative perception from McCabe's ambitions to make Oklahoma Territory a majority black state. Crockett writes that rumors spread throughout the country regarding the status of Langston's inhabitants in mid-1890. Several news publications of the day reported that Langston consisted of inhabitants living in tents and one general store. In addition, town leaders dedicated several acres of land to make a community garden for the town's hungry inhabitants. Overall, some of these instances in Langston's early stages are not far-fetched given the state of environmental and racial affairs in the region. Settlers of all races suffered crop failures.⁹⁶

Langston's development, coupled with McCabe's political ambitions, caused national newspapers to assume the coming of a race war. The inflated population of blacks in Oklahoma further aroused racial tensions between white and black settlers. A black majority meant political power for African Americans in a new region where whites protested the federal government to open since the 1880s. The *New York Times* reported in February of 1890, "...if President Harrison appoints McCabe Governor, the latter will be assassinated within a week after he enters the Territory. There is rapidly growing anti-negro sentiment caused by the aggressiveness of the blacks wherever they are strong." Writing in fear, the reporter alluded to additional black settlements throughout Oklahoma Territory, some of which likely became black towns years

⁹⁵ *Report of the Governor of Oklahoma for the year 1891*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891) <http://digitalprairie.ok.gov/cdm/ref/collection/okresources/id/617>, 2.

⁹⁶ Crockett, *Black Towns*, 22.

later.⁹⁷ A year later, the *New York Times* interviewed McCabe on his ambitious plans to which he said:

I expect to have a negro population of over 100,000 with two years, and we will not only have made substantial advancement for my people, but we will by that time secure control of political affairs... We do not wish to antagonize the whites. They are necessary in the development of a new country, but they owe my race homes and my race owes to itself a governmental control of those homes.⁹⁸

While African Americans never achieved over 10 percent of the Territory's population in the 1890s, McCabe continued to expand his leadership through creating another black town named Liberty, courting territory funds for a school, and courting railroad companies.⁹⁹

Despite McCabe's national influence, he failed to obtain a railroad depot for Langston. He established connections with the Santa Fe Railroad, during his political stint in Kansas, but was unable to capitalize on it in Langston. In 1892, McCabe and other Langston leaders courted the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad Company. In the end, these leaders were not fruitful in their endeavors and after an extended hiatus, the Railroad Company chose to place depots on town lots owned by white speculators, which was likely motivated by better financial opportunity. According to historian Kenneth Hamilton, Langston's failure to achieve a railroad depot "...was a permanent deterrence to the growth of Langston." McCabe failed to obtain a railroad depot a second time with the founding of Liberty in 1893. The town's demise resulted from a

⁹⁷ "To Make a Negro State," *New York Times*, February 28, 1890.

⁹⁸ "Oklahoma for the Blacks," *New York Times*, October 1891, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/94836820?accountid=12964>

⁹⁹ Crocket, *Black Towns*, 26.

culmination of racism from white residents in the area, an issue that many other black towns in the region faced, the Santa Fe Railroad not creating a depot in the town, and probably from McCabe's obligations in Langston and the territorial government. Nonetheless, McCabe had three things working for him: the aforementioned *Langston City Herald*, which circulated throughout the Deep South, Langston's geographic positioning being close to Guthrie, and the Colored Agricultural and Normal University (later renamed Langston University).¹⁰⁰

The founding and early history of Langston University is a reflection of the underlying agro-economic history of the town of Langston. The school gave the town a boost in the region. However, its focus on agriculture was ill-suited especially during the region's intensely dry conditions. In the early days the school struggled with whether or not to identify as an agricultural or a liberal arts institution, a pressing issue for several of the school's early presidents beginning with Isaac Berry McCutcheon, Langston University's second president. McCutcheon decided for Langston to focus on an agricultural curriculum, removing the liberal arts curriculum for the next several years. The failure to obtain a railroad depot moved town leaders to settle on agriculture and education. By 1898 Langston's new local publication *Western Age* fixated on their school's enrollment rate. According to Hamilton, "the *Western Age* was never used to seek new settlers, a fact indicating the businessman who owned the *Western Age* were well aware that Langston's potential for growth was cut off when the railroad bypassed their town."¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Crockett, *Black Towns*, 25; Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 112-14.

¹⁰¹ Zella Patterson & Lynette Wert, *Langston University: a History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 35; Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 114.

Langston University's struggle with education is a reflection of the racial categorization of labor. The school board consisted of five people, three territorial legislators, and two town leaders. The influence of a predominately-white territorial government surely influenced ideas of African American placement as laborers. In addition, African Americans of all classes respected Washington and DuBois, because of their white support.¹⁰² The decision to make Langston University agriculturally centered is a reflection of Washington's influence within the region. However, Historian Zella Patterson writes, "others, equally adamant, wanted to follow the teachings of W.E.B. Dubois, who sought political and social equality with the whites."¹⁰³

African American culture is particularly important to understanding the ideological struggles of Langston University. The town failed to achieve industrial goals such as obtaining a railroad depot. However, several black towns such as Taft did obtain railroad access, while maintaining varied amounts of black militancy and social isolation. Langston became complacent in its position as "the great metropolis of the negro population." Later black towns emerged in Oklahoma and Indian Territory with a stronger militant and modern focus in the same vein as McCabe's social experiment. Later Black towns and their newspapers exhibited stronger racial pride. Promotional pamphlets focused on the racial violence in their towns. However, later towns had help from white businessmen with proper railroad connections.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 3.

¹⁰³ Patterson & Wert, *Langston University*, 36.

¹⁰⁴ "The Gospel in the Cotton Fields," *New York Evangelist* (1896, Oct 22)
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/125304155?accountid=12964>

The Douglas Townsite Company founded the town of Douglas a few years after Langston and demonstrated a stronger form of militant rhetoric in its leadership. The town formed in the midst of great development throughout Oklahoma Territory and had the ghost of Langston's and McCabe's ambition to follow. The Governor report of the Territory during the year of its founding reported:

The growth of the Territory in the four years following the opening of the first lands has been in many respects wonderful...Fine cities with electric lights, waterworks, and all modern conveniences have been built up. He who deplors that the red man has been driven back and back until he is almost gone will find in these happy homes of Oklahoma much to console him and justify God's law of the survival of the fittest.¹⁰⁵

The leaders of Douglas attempted to capitalize on the Territory's immense growth in three years, and join the system of "civilization" within the region. An 1893 news article regarding Douglas wrote that the leaders of the Douglas Townsite Company wanted to secure an environment "such as to promote their best interests and advance them in the arts and civilization," a statement which reflects the general framework of Oklahoma's black towns. They formed to prove to white America that blacks had the capacity to govern themselves. The emphasis on advancement in specific areas displays the interest of the Douglas Townsite Company in making a hub for advancement, a space, which allowed African Americans to assimilate into mainstream American society at their own pace.¹⁰⁶

Douglas' leaders intended to develop a "Negro Metropolis," a concept which

¹⁰⁵ *Report of the Governor of Oklahoma Territory, 1893* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), 3, <http://digitalprairie.ok.gov/cdm/ref/collection/okresources/id/1498>.

¹⁰⁶ "Douglas City Profile," WPA Historic Sites And Survey Collection, Box 24, Folder 5, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

invoked strong feelings of advancement. Ideally, the city is primarily a place and a sense of community felt for the “citizen,” because “...these larger associations cannot accommodate, and are not likely to encourage, widespread and meaningful political activity.” This was entirely true of African Americans, even in the context of a racist society in the nineteenth century. Memory of a shared experience of enslavement and prejudice played an important role, as well.¹⁰⁷

A town profile of Douglas by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s described the black town as “pretentious.” Although little information on Douglas exists, it is possible that other promotional texts on the town openly declared the townsite company's interest in the town's black nationalistic tendency. Dagger argues that the “city” has the potential to be “...the true home of citizenship, for many of our cities today discourage their residents from practicing the citizen’s vocation.”¹⁰⁸ Considering the extent of the position of African Americans during the nineteenth century, applying notions of “city” and citizenship become more literal. African Americans used black towns to gain a sense of citizenship. Bonnie Lynn-Sherow writes Oklahoma-bound black settlers “...came in fairly large groups made up of whole communities or in extended kinship networks in much the same fashion as earlier migrations to Kansas in 1879.” However, the task of properly establishing a thriving town with proper economic and agricultural sustenance with technological advancement proved difficult. Like Langston, Douglas failed to obtain a railroad and courted government funds for a school, which later became Langston University. Town leaders

¹⁰⁷ Richard Dagger, “Politics, Memory, and Citizenship,” *American Journal of Political Science* (1981): 715 & 720.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 715.

relied heavily on obtaining a school and railroad, but slowly lost its township. Like Douglas, other black towns and settlements failed to sustain a healthy population and capital in Oklahoma Territory. Most black farms were located on inadequate, often sandy, land more prone to soil erosion compared to pristine lands held by white farmers. Nonetheless, African American connection to land in both Oklahoma and Indian Territory proved influential throughout the droughty 1890s.

Taft is one of the twentieth century black towns that relied on rhetoric of business and industry. One of the few black towns still in existence in the eastern portion of Oklahoma, Taft is located in a region where black town projects proved more successful, especially compared to western Oklahoma. Blacks settled in Taft years before its incorporation in 1904. The Midland Townsite Company started the town, which belonged to a long trend of townsite companies attempting to profit from demand of black communities. Furthermore, most of these “townsite black towns” developed in the Creek Nation likely due to the area’s historic black population, which later produced an element of racial hybridity evident in other black town pamphlets of the day.¹⁰⁹

Taft’s promotional pamphlet exemplifies the turning point of black town rhetoric within the twentieth century. The language came to emphasize industrialization over agriculture. The pamphlet shows a constant struggle between agriculture and the modernity black towns hoped to achieve at the turn of the century and provided a glimpse of what the town could possibly become. The title page of the promotional pamphlet is an indicator of how the Reeves Realty Company, the pamphlet’s creator, wanted to sell the town to black settlers. Three sections of the town’s title page allude to

¹⁰⁹ Taft Bicentennial Pamphlet, Currie Ballard Collection, Box 4, Folder 15, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.

Taft's struggle with agriculture and modernization, dedication to racial issues, and its hopeful potential.¹¹⁰

The title page boasts in large letters “there has never been any Race Trouble at

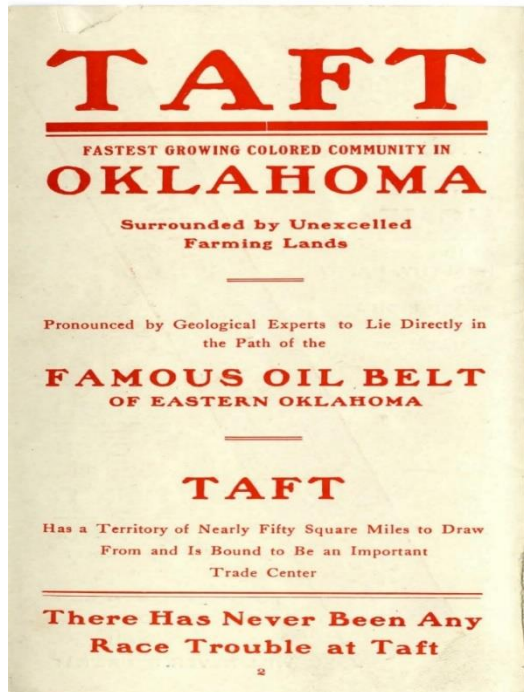


Figure 1. Title page of Taft pamphlet, Currie Ballard Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, (early 1900s)

Taft.” Compared to other towns Taft attempted to promote safety in an effort to woo migrants. The “race issue” was an important element of Taft; a 1910 map of the town shows the six small areas throughout Taft allotted to non-blacks. Gray writes that most of Taft’s inhabitants were “state blacks,” while the rest were Creek freedmen.¹¹¹ The non-black areas of the city

strategically spread throughout the city likely demonstrates an attempt by town leaders to

avoid the strengthening of non-black political power, which non-blacks had fought against since the 1880s with the Unassigned Lands. Nonetheless, pioneers of the town focused on Taft’s black political strength. One town pioneer said Taft, “...is a black man’s town and is growing rapidly. Pretty soon we will elect a mayor as the white ones

¹¹⁰ “Taft Promotional Brochure compliments of Reeves Realty Company in Muscogee, Oklahoma,” Currie Ballard Collection, Box 4, Folder 14 Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, 2;

¹¹¹ “Taft Promotional Brochure,” 2; Linda C. Gray, “Taft: Town on the Black Frontier,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 66 (1988): 432-434.

are so few in number we will elect a Negro, in fact, we shall elect all Negroes.”¹¹²

Perhaps due to the absence of racial tensions, Taft became the “fastest growing colored community in Oklahoma.” However, much of this sentiment merely reflected Taft’s potential. The pamphlet claimed that Taft was within the “famous oil belt of Eastern Oklahoma.” There are numerous photographs contained within the document that shows the emergence of infrastructure for oil extraction, the photographing of a “12,000,000 foot gas well” and an “oil lake,” about which the realty company writes that “some valuable and interesting oil developments...will soon be a fact.” However, promotion was misdirected. Oil developments were happening within the town of Muskogee, which was not a black town. Regarding modernization, the realty company argued that the town was bound to become an important trade center although the main business the town had was from the cotton gins it owned.¹¹³

Towns like Taft began to focus on the business prospects rather than their cultural aspects. However, cultural issues mattered, especially education. The pamphlet proudly highlighted its school, Halochee Institute, the “largest colored industrial college in Oklahoma. Founded on the principles of Booker T. Washington’s famous School at Tusk[e]gee,” Taft, like Langston, decided to provide industrial education. Industrial schools within this climate contradicted the strides Taft took to create a modern black town. Primarily educating citizens in agriculture provided a limited pool for what town citizens were able to contribute to their respective towns. Taft’s population gradually increased well into the twentieth century. A WPA profile of the town in the 1930s

¹¹² *The Muskogee Cimeter*, December 21, 1905, quoted from Gray, “Taft: Town on the Black Frontier,” 435.

¹¹³ “Taft promotional pamphlet.”

reported: “cotton, corn, and vegetables, are the chief farm products. Coal mines of the strip type are worked extensively during the winter months by local farmers. A cotton gin and a lumberyard are among the important business establishments.” The town’s gradual increase is likely due to the increase in cotton prices in 1903. However, other industries such as mining failed to reach a significant level for stable prosperity.¹¹⁴

The town of Red Bird incorporated in 1904. Like Taft, Red Bird began as a settlement within the Creek Nation and utilized the region’s perceived uncivilized Native element to contrast the town’s progress as Reverend L.E. Barber, a founding citizen of the town said that Red Bird consisted of “Gabbled houses dotted the town, which trembled several times a day when Katy Railroad trains came through, carrying freight and passengers into and out of the town.” The modernity of Red Bird encompassed during its early days is highly reflective within its promotional pamphlet. Like the one for Taft, Red Bird’s pamphlet focused on specific elements of its town to display its modernity. It used both race and industry to show their progressive natures against the backdrop of the slowly changing landscape of Indian Territory. Historians Tiya Miles and Sharon P. Holland have written, “many of the published representations of Indian Territory found in these sources were edited to project an especially positive view,” the Red Bird pamphlet being their primary example.¹¹⁵ It consists of testimonies

¹¹⁴ Larry O’Dell, “Taft,” Oklahoma Research Center, date accessed November 15, 2015, <http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=TA001>; “Taft Profile,” Larry O’Dell Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City; *Quantity of Cotton Ginned in the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=KjwoAAAAYAAJ&rdid=book-KjwoAAAAYAAJ&rdot=1>, 14.

¹¹⁵ “Old Timer recalls when Red Bird was in its heyday.” news clipping, Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City; Miles & Holland, *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds*, 5.

from Red Bird’s inhabitants, and unlike those of Boley and Langston, it displayed a stronger connection to Africa and black racial superiority. The brochure boasts black prosperity and superiority, especially compared with neighboring Native Americans. Speaking of Red Bird’s social conditions, Mrs. J. Orlando Mitchell, the wife of Red Bird businessman Orlando Mitchell “a man of culture and refinement,” wrote on the positive destruction of both “the painted Indian on the war path, and the desperado,

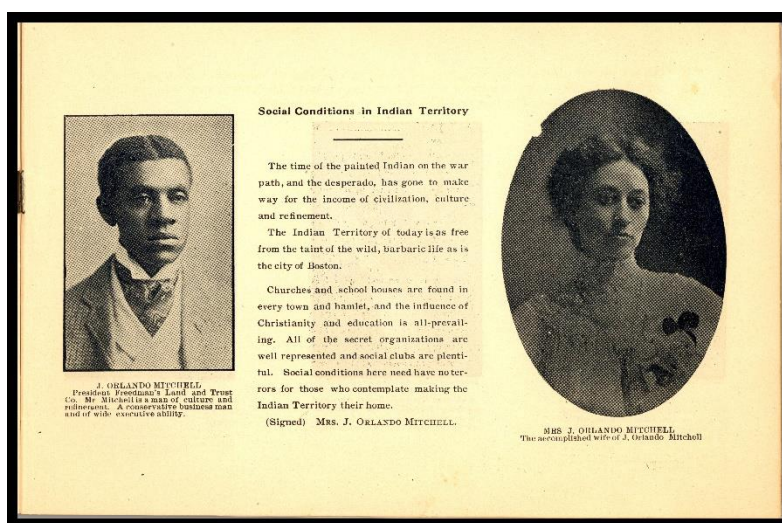


Figure 2. Red Bird Investment Company Pamphlet, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, (1905)

which has made way for civilization.”¹¹⁶

This phrase suggests the inferiority of both whites and Indians. While the dismissal of Native Americans is clear, the dismissal of whites is not. Therefore,

avoidance of directly mentioning whites reflected the sentiment of a Creek freedman concerning relations between Creek freedman and “state blacks,” who said, “state people come into this country before statehood...kneeling and scurrying down to the White folks. They ruined the country and made a lot of natives leave for the North.” Overall, Red Bird is an example of the blurred borders of black and Natives in Indian Territory from a legacy of interracial mixing and the influx of “state negroes” before Oklahoma’s statehood in 1907. For example, L.E. Barber, founder of Red Bird, traveled

¹¹⁶ Red Bird Investment Company, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Ok, accessed May 3, 2015, <http://digitalprairie.ok.gov/cdm/ref/collection/culture/id/103>, 5.

to Arkansas from Indian Territory in the 1890s and married a woman of Choctaw and Creek descent. In other cases, this legacy caused racial tensions and influenced rigid social structures between “state blacks,” “Native freedman,” and “black Indians.”¹¹⁷

Red Bird was moderately successful in its attempt to diversify its economy. The town doubtlessly capitalized on the increase in cotton prices in 1903. It followed a similar business strategy in attempting to become the educational and commercial hub for African Americans in the region. The town contained substantial deposits of coal, but it mainly invited black farmers from the south, which demonstrates Red Bird’s dedication to agriculture and lack of resources to extract coal. Cotton and wheat were the primary industries during the town’s peak. Even with a railroad, which eventually left, Red Bird focused too much on agriculture in an attempt to recruit farmers.

Booker T. Washington echoed Red Bird’s sentiments regarding black towns and modernity writing about Boley in 1908. He wrote, “Boley, although built on the railway, is still on the edge of civilization. You can still hear on summer nights, I am told, the wild notes of the Indian drums and the shrill cries of the Indian dancers among the hills beyond the settlement.”¹¹⁸ Holland and Miles write that Indian Territory was special to African Americans because of its Native American presence. They noted that, “similar to Frederick Jackson Turner’s concept of an American frontier in which an Indian *influence* makes white Americans distinct, but Indian *people* must give way to white progress, the concept of a black Indian Territory transformed Indians into a

¹¹⁷ *Muskogee Cimeter*, November 1905, Larry O’Dell Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City; Kristy Feldenhousen-Giles, “To Prove who you are: Freedmen Identities in Oklahoma” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2008), 29.

¹¹⁸ “Red Bird Investment Company,” 5; Sameth, “Creek Negroes,” 54; Washington, “Boley.”

vehicle for black identity formation and racial uplift.” This is a concept black settlers attempted to achieve in their migration to the American West. The “uncivilized” element of Indian and Oklahoma Territory gave African Americans a sense of place and refuge to develop spaces of citizenship for their kind.¹¹⁹

The Red Bird promotional pamphlet relied on photographs of the town more than testimonies from its prosperous residents. The twenty-eighth page of the pamphlet contains a picture of Red Bird. The caption under the photograph says, “A Bird’s Eye View of Red Bird, I.T., Looking South.” The view of the town “looking South” is arguably an advertisement specifically for Southern blacks. With the view of the town, the testimonies within the pamphlet depict the town of Red Bird as a black version of John Winthrop’s “city upon a hill.” Furthermore, Jim Crowism was spreading rapidly throughout the south and beyond by the early twentieth century. The Red Bird Investment Company’s promotional pamphlet was a rallying cry for more blacks to move into Oklahoma for political motives. This was in the midst of black leaders attempting to create a black delegation into the statehood convention of Oklahoma.¹²⁰

Boley arguably became the most business friendly black town in twentieth century Oklahoma. Founded in 1904, historian Norman Crockett writes that Boley may have emerged from an argument between two white men regarding African Americans’ capacity for self-government. The town developed for business purposes to enhance an area where the Fort Smith and Western Railroad were constructing railroad tracks. Railroad investment enhanced Boley’s business prospects. Crockett writes that the

¹¹⁹ Miles and Holland, *Crossing Waters*, 5.

¹²⁰ “Red Bird Investment Company,” 29; Tolson, *Black Oklahomans*, 130-31.

railroad provided "...a spur, [construction of] a \$1,350 depot employing a black station agent," and most importantly, approximately four trains passing through the town.¹²¹

These unusual financial investments did not taint Boley's authenticity as an all-black town. Boley was the most militant black town next to Langston, at least rhetorically. Much of the town's promotion derived from the several trains that passed through each day, which drew the attention of passersby and provided many opportunities for the town's leaders to speak on the town's behalf. A 1905 edition of *The Boley Progress* reprinted an article on the town from the *Fort Smith Times*, which documented the progress of the town and their dealings with whites. H. Taylor, a prominent citizen of Boley told a reporter, "the report has gone out that we have a sign 'White man, read and run,' but on the other hand we extend to them a hearty welcome to come here and see what we are doing."¹²²

Although it is unlikely Boley had a racist welcome sign, the town struggled with this stigma of black militancy for years to come; the 1907 census of Indian and Oklahoma Territory document approximately 824 people living in Boley. Each inhabitant identified African American. Editors of the *Boley Progress* constantly wrote editorials on racial pride. Crockett writes that editors stressed making good first impressions to the town's white visitors. However, this proved to be as much a struggle for Boley as modernity and agriculture were for Taft. In 1909 Ernest D. Lynwood, editor of *The Boley Progress* wrote "...whites are not our fellows and why should we encourage them to live among us...if a white man can make a 'lily white' town why

¹²¹ Crockett, *The Black Towns* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), 35-6.

¹²² "The Town of Boley: a Community of Colored People" *Boley Progress* June 1905.

can't we make a little black settlement...?" Lynwood realized the emergence of stable white towns in the region following Oklahoma's statehood in 1907. His militant editorial was in response to the changing tide concerning the possibilities of African American power in Oklahoma.¹²³

Boley's militancy following extensive white railroad investment is ironic. Booker T. Washington wrote with pride stating "...no white man has ever let the sun go down upon him." Boley's militant tendencies partially attracted Washington to Boley. Crockett writes, "most black town residents were disciples of Booker T. Washington's philosophy, which at least overtly emphasized concentration on the economic and moral betterment of blacks at the expense of political and social demands."

While Oklahoma's black towns varied in their approach to race, the earliest "state black" towns like Lincoln and Douglas attempted to thrive without white settlement within their towns. All the "Negro Metropolis" leaders of Douglas wanted was black advancement in an effort to remove the stigma of helplessness and destitution, the same characteristics Washington attached to nineteenth century black settlers. Washington's distinction of nineteenth and twentieth century black settlers, suggest the effects of racial violence and the lack of resources and familial infrastructures on African Americans directly following enslavement. Crockett writes, "like the Booker T. Washington's philosophy, the black-town ideology contained an implicit assumption that at some time in the future the race would be accepted into the mainstream of American life. In the case of the black town that meant that ultimately it would cease to exist." Although black towns had similar goals regarding African

¹²³ *Population of Oklahoma and Indian Territory*, 32; Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 73-75

American progress, the rhetoric from town leaders demonstrates differences within their approach. Unfortunately, it is difficult to know the ideology of the other scores of black towns and settlements in Oklahoma.¹²⁴

Population tends to be a gauge of the popularity and power of a town, and ultimately most black towns failed to be successful. However, towns like Boley had concentrated black populations within their general vicinity. With this being the case, it is possible that some black ghost towns dissolved and settled within the vicinity of more thriving black towns that contained industry, political power, and state funding. The nearly insignificant number of African Americans who migrated to these towns brings into question the degree to which migrants agreed with the proto-nationalist and agro-industrial ideology of Oklahoma's black towns. It is vital to analyze the origin of the typical black town migrant and the circumstances within their place of origin that influenced their journey.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 51 & 81; Washington, "Boley: A Negro Town in the American West."

¹²⁵ Melissa Stuckey, "All Men Up: Race, Rights, and Power in the All-Black Town of Boley, Oklahoma, 1903-1939" (PhD diss. Yale University, 2009), 34-6. Rusk was a black settlement made from the black community of Rusk, Texas in the early twentieth century. The settlement formed within a short distance of the black town of Boley; Sarah Deutsch "Being American in Boley," 117. Deutsch writes that the African American population west of the Mississippi remained at two percent until 1942.

Conclusion: Texas-Oklahoma Connections

Oklahoma's black population increased between 1900 and 1910, but most of Oklahoma's black towns diminished to ghost towns in the early twentieth century. They failed to reach the self-sufficient status their leaders intended. The legacy of Edward McCabe and Benjamin "Pap" Singleton withered away. Their model of black settlement did not fit with modern elements of the period. These elements included the hallmarks of industrialization: railroads, oil, and coal. Black towns' agro-economic systems revolved around soil erosive cash crops such as cotton. The situation moved scores of inhabitants to find alternatives elsewhere. Most migrated North, while others moved abroad. African Americans throughout the United States began migrating North in the twentieth century. Equipped with hope, blacks searched for economic prosperity within the American mainstream economy. Historian Carter G. Woodson argued that the 1890s boll weevil infestation affected black farmers. The insect invasion began in Texas affecting the entire cotton district except for Virginia and the Carolinas, damaging 50 percent of cotton production in the United States. The boll weevil damaged Oklahoman farms in 1906. Woodson writes that the boll weevil's destruction came at a time of great demand for labor in the North. Oklahoma blacks traveled north in search of factory work, which caused the Great Migration. By this time, "landownership was no longer possible for most Americans, black or white. It had been effectively closed off by the rise of urban-and industrial-based monopoly capitalism."¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (Washington: The Association for the study of Negro Life and History, 1918), 165 & 171; Thomas Jesse Jones, "Negro Population in the United States," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 49 (1913): 8-9; G.A. Bierberdorf, "History of the Distribution of the Mexican Cotton Boll Weevil in Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 7 (1927): 31-2, http://digital.library.okstate.edu/oas/oas_pdf/v07/p29_34.pdf; Cha-Jua, *America's First Black Town*, 217; For an extensive analysis concerning southern blacks and the

In *A Century of Negro Migration*, Woodson writes about earlier black migration. In particular, he connects the Great Migration to the Exoduster and All Black Town Movement. However, Woodson's connections are vague. Nineteenth century migration patterns affected cotton fields in the South. White farmers lost skilled labor. Moreover, it encouraged white and black settlers to take advantage of the "freedmen clauses" in the 1866 Treaties to obtain access to the Unassigned Lands. The Great Migration of the twentieth century overshadows the twilight of the All Black Town Movement. Black migration was a major part of the nineteenth century as well. Waves of black migration in the nineteenth century were small, but stirred media outlets regardless of their failure to create stable independent black economies and improve race relations.¹²⁷

The 1890s "African fever" often served as an alternate plan for African Americans. Blacks sought to maintain their agricultural lifestyles while achieving economic prosperity, and saw relocating to Africa as a way to achieve this goal. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, served as an advocate, in Indian Territory, for emigration to Liberia. Turner's leadership came during Edward McCabe's height in the 1890s, and became one of the leading men for African colonization. His message resonated with settlers embittered from grandiose rhetoric and crop failures in towns such as Langston. Chief Alfred C. Sam traveled to Oklahoma in the 1910s. He advocated black emigration to Africa's Gold Coast. Sam, according to Edwin Redkey, "appealed to the residents of several all-black towns, remnants of E.P. McCabe's settlement projects...

boll weevil invasion see, James Geisen, "'The Truth About the Boll Weevil:' The Nature of Planter Power in the Mississippi Delta" *Environmental History* 14 (2009): 683-704.

¹²⁷ Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (Washington: The Association for the study of Negro Life and History, 1918), 165 & 171

Chief Sam reaped what Turner had planted.” However, Sam’s African colonization scheme stirred controversy from black towns and the federal government. Sam’s project amounted to one failed trip, of several hundred migrants.¹²⁸

The legacy of men like Turner and Sam reflects Oklahoma’s importance as a black migration hub. Redkey writes, “nationalism, moreover, already had a strong foothold in Oklahoma, as evidenced by its separate communities and attempt to build a black state in the territory in the 1890s.”¹²⁹ Nonetheless, the story of how blacks migrated to Oklahoma remains untold. Completing Oklahoma’s black town narrative reveals new questions about black migration.¹³⁰

Black migration to Oklahoma embodies elements less studied in the American West. First, it shows how perceptions of race evolved over time. "State blacks" hindered the status of freedmen in Indian Territory. It caused hostility between both groups. Second, migration to Oklahoma demonstrates instability in Texas' slave culture. Thousands of slaves were recent migrants to Texas with their masters during the Civil War, and as a result, they did not have a special connection to the region. Texas freedman migrated to other states. While Census data documents that most “state

¹²⁸ Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 288 & 292-3.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, *Black Exodus*, 293.

¹³⁰ Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua states three reasons for scholarly neglect in studying Black Towns. First, black and white race scholars have focused on the integration of African Americans in the mainstream society; in other words, Black Nationalism was not of historical interest before the late 1960s. Second, Marcus Garvey’s Back-to-Africa movement in the 1920s “...overshadowed expressions of territorial nationalism, and the Black Town Movement.” Third, Pan-African nationalism of the 1970s emphasized Garvey’s sentiments regarding African settlement. Moreover, “the study of black nationalism was tied to the dominant eras then under investigation in African American history;” see, Cha-Jua, *America’s First Black Town*, 6-7.

blacks” in Oklahoma came from Texas, little information on individuals and families exist.

Analyzing black movement within and away from Texas offers refreshing approaches to document black migration to Oklahoma. These sources include Texas newspapers, anthropological studies, census data, and slave narratives. *The Negro Population, 1790-1915* concludes that by 1910, the majority of Oklahoma’s African American population migrated from Texas. Therefore, scholars must backtrack to understand black Texans' place in black migration patterns between 1870 and 1910. Black Texans were among the earlier groups to join large-scale black migration patterns during Reconstruction.¹³¹

African Americans moved throughout Texas in search of opportunity and refuge from racial violence. Some formed intimate communities called “freedom colonies.” There were two issues with these communities. First, these settlements were on the outskirts of larger white towns and attracted racial prejudice. Second, most "freedom colonies" did not incorporate, unlike Oklahoma’s black towns, because of Texas’ Homestead Law and constant violence from white Texans. In other words, Oklahoma was attractive for black Texans looking for autonomy within a rural area.

Newspaper reports and first-hand accounts show that Oklahoma-bound migrants were poor; however, historians’ tendency to focus on founders of black towns has clouded this element of the All Black Town Movement. Focusing too much on land speculation makes the All Black Town movement a top-down history, painting the

¹³¹ Cummings, John. *Negro Population 1790-1915* (Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1918), 85. *The Negro Population of the United States, 1790-1915* states that the majority of Oklahoma’s out-of-state black population in 1910 came from Texas (35,397) and Arkansas (10,000).

picture from the view of the more wealthy minority, not taking into account the lives of the vast majority of migrants. Analyzing its leaders lends wasteful focus on the ideal society they attempted to create instead of the reality that actually manifested. It does not reveal important events during the era. Black town leaders sought financially stable migrants. Often, however, this stability is not what they found.

Black town leaders in Oklahoma took advantage of the plight of black Texans. The town of Denison experienced constant black migration from Texas to Oklahoma during the 1890s. The Denison-based *Sunday Gazetteer*, wrote in 1891 “there is another exodus of negroes to Oklahoma. Forty of them, comprising men, women and children, from Harrison County, Eastern Texas, passed through Fort Worth Wednesday en route to Guthrie, where they go to join others of their race.” The group was likely on their way to Langston, which is about ten miles from Guthrie. Edward McCabe welcomed black Texans to his town of Langston. The result of McCabe's interest came in 1904, when the Agricultural Census of Langston documented that most of its southern migrants came from Texas. In addition, McCabe founded another black town, Liberty, in 1893 using Texas’ African American demographic.¹³²

Black Texans moved to Oklahoma toward the end of the All Black Town Movement. A 1904 article in *The Houston Post*, published, read “One of the biggest exodus of negroes in the history of the South has been taking place from South Texas in the past week. Most of them have gone over the Southern Pacific to California, and those who did not go to that state have gone to other states...” Oklahoma was their

¹³² *The Sunday Gazetteer*, February 22, 1891, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph571570/>, accessed November 27, 2015; Mark Jeffrey Hardwick, “Homesteads and Bungalows: African American Architecture in Langston, Oklahoma,” (MA Thesis, University of Delaware, 1994), 41.

likely destination. At this time, Oklahoma Territory continued to have several land openings before its statehood in 1907. The growth of the Territory afforded opportunity to blacks through land and shared black autonomy. Law allowed African Americans to obtain land compared to states such as Texas.¹³³

Oklahoma intrigued black Texans of all classes in the early twentieth century. As stated before, labor was one of the main issues that African Americans faced in Texas. A 1906 article of the Longdale Ledger wrote about labor issues in Greer County, Oklahoma, a Texan county until 1896. The article said that Greer County residents attempted to remove blacks from the area. The influx of blacks came from a labor shortage in the cotton fields; therefore, “several carloads of Texas negroes were imported...” to remedy the issue. Resentment toward black Texan labor was strong. White residents attacked “...any farmer or other person in the county who hire[d] negro help.”¹³⁴

The steady migration of blacks to and throughout Oklahoma complicated racial lines. Black town inhabitants developed their own worlds away from white and Native culture. For black Texans, at least, developing satellite communities enabled a particular kind of autonomy. These were dependent villages formed around the autonomy of a black town. Satellite communities were a remnant of “freedom colonies” throughout the

¹³³ *The Houston Post*, May 25, 1904, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph603036/>, accessed November 27, 2015; *Magnum Sun-Monitor*, June 21, 1906, <http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc285191/>, accessed November 27, 2015; *Oklahoma State Capital*, September 27, 1893, Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

¹³⁴ *Longdale Ledger*, August 3, 1906, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc406748/>; for more on Greer County see, Jon T. Kilpinen, “Land Speculation and the Case of Greer County, Texas,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 109 (2005): 71-97.

Lonestar state. Creating similar communities like Rusk around a black town like Boley, had the ability to provide black Texans with a sense of freedom. Lack of land title and incorporation enabled black Texans to remain elusive from the government they distrusted. Moreover, they had the support of Boley's connections to trade centers.¹³⁵ Black towns were a haven for “state blacks,” away from Native freedman.¹³⁶ One Creek freedman, regarding mixing with state blacks, said “I was eating out of the same pot with the Indians, going anywhere in this country I wanted to, while they was still licking the master's boots in Texas.” Another Creek freedman sharing his thoughts on black Texans’ effect on race relations in Indian Territory commented: “It was those state niggers from Texas that spoiled it for us, bowing and scraping and scratching the head.” The fact that Creek freedman during the twentieth century associated “state blacks” with Texas shows the state’s importance in contributing to Oklahoma’s African American influx.¹³⁷

Texas had significant influence on the All Black Town Movement. Black Texans provided much of the population, brought black Texan culture and habits to Oklahoma (recreating the “freedom colony” concept as satellite communities), and impacted race relations in Oklahoma, however, it is difficult to gauge the full extent to

¹³⁵ Melissa Stuckey, “All Men Up,” 35-6. Stuckey notes it is unclear if people of “satellite communities” identified as citizens of the larger town it depended on.

¹³⁶ Although substantial information does not exist on black settlements and towns in Oklahoma, there were more than the original 28 towns and settlements originally argued. There is much debate on how to define a black town or settlement and how many existed. Many black town historians mainly focus on incorporated black towns in Oklahoma. This study aims to focus on black settlement throughout Oklahoma’s history. See, Hamilton *Black Towns and Profit*, Oklahoma Historical Society “Black Towns of Oklahoma Map,” Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans*. For a detailed analysis of Black town definitions see, Cha-Jua, *America’s First Black Town*, 223.

¹³⁷ Sameth, “Creek Negroes,” 56.

which black Texas migration contributed to the development of Oklahoma's All Black Town movement. Relevant sources do not provide full details of the All Black Town Movement's beginnings. Census data demonstrates the vast number of black Texans in Oklahoma, but does not expose the effect that Texas blacks had on social relations within black towns and the region at-large.

The fact that Oklahoma was geographically in the middle of black migration patterns from Arkansas, Kansas, and Texas demonstrates the importance and centrality of Oklahoma's black towns. Historian Sarah Deutsche writes that African American migrants constituted only two percent of Oklahoma's population well into the mid twentieth century, which raises questions about the role Oklahoma's black towns played as temporary spaces for a specific black demographic.¹³⁸ Regardless of Oklahoma's scanty black population, as Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua writes, "Black-town construction was a component of a more comprehensive nationalist element in African American ideology and praxis."¹³⁹ Settler interest in Oklahoma happened during a time when African Americans searched for new lands to call home. Primary sources on "state blacks" are few and slave narratives fail to provide clear details on how black Texans migrated to Oklahoma before and after statehood. Scholars must look closely at the importance of this subject, including a geospatial analysis of the Texas-Oklahoma trails, railroads, and ghost towns to help us understand how the invisible 30,000 blacks of Texas origin interacted within this space and settled in Oklahoma.

¹³⁸ Sarah Deutsche, "Being American in Boley, Oklahoma," 117.

¹³⁹ Cha-Jua, *America's First Black Town* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 5.

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