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OTHER INDIANS AND FREEDMEN: THE LEGACY OF BLACK MIGRATION IN
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract.....	vi
Migrating West: Legacies of Black Movement in Indian Country	1
Chapter 1: The Plight of Black Freedom and Identity in Indian Territory during the 1840s and 1850s	15
Chapter 2: The Federal Government’s Evolving Definitions of Black Freedom and Native Sovereignty during the Civil War and Reconstruction	54
Chapter 3: Race & Land Hunger in Indian Territory and Kansas, 1870-1889.....	84
Chapter 4: Black Social Movements and the Transnational Nature of Black Oklahoma Settlement, 1890-1914.....	129
Chapter 5: Race, Politics, and Statehood in the Twin Territories, 1890-1907	181
Conclusion.....	218
Appendix: Black Communities, Towns, and Settlements of Oklahoma	225
Bibliography	243

Abstract

“Other Indians and Freedmen: The Legacy of Black Migration in Oklahoma, 1840-1910” analyzes African Americans’ westward migration from the Deep South and the development of predominately black towns throughout Indian Territory, Oklahoma Territory, and the state of Oklahoma during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My project poses deeper questions regarding the formation of Oklahoma’s black town movement by placing the movement and its participants within the larger context of Native law, American constitutional thought, and large scale black migration throughout the American South and West.

Migrating West: Legacies of Black Movement in Indian Country

“Other Indians and Freedmen: The Legacy of Black Migration in Oklahoma, 1840-1910” analyzes African Americans’ westward migration from the Deep South and the development of predominately black towns throughout Indian Territory, Oklahoma Territory, and the state of Oklahoma during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scholars of black Oklahoma history examining life in these black towns posit race-related reasons for their establishment. These reasons include, but are not limited to escape from the violent Jim Crow South, black freedom, black militarism and black uplift. Overall, these reasons contribute to our understanding of the historical significance of the black town movement, in general, but not to black towns in Oklahoma, in particular. My project poses deeper questions regarding the formation of Oklahoma’s black town movement by placing the movement and its participants within the larger context of Native law, American constitutional thought, and large scale black migration throughout the American South and West.

I argue that the All Black Town Movement, developed in Oklahoma from 1890 to 1910, reflected broader black movement from the Deep South; furthermore, this movement contributed to the conflation of the term “freedmen,”¹ causing strife between African American freedmen and Five Tribes freedmen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I aim to use the All Black Town Movement as a lens by which to

¹ The term “freedmen” was a term that applied to former slaves of the United States following the Civil War. However, the Civil War and Reconstruction in Indian Territory created five additional groups of freedmen within the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations. The treaties that made these additional freedmen groups, the treaties of 1866, did not delineate between the freedmen of the Five Tribes and freedmen of the United States.

view complex histories of race, identity, and migration, all of which are central to my inquiry. "Other Indians and Freedmen" details the struggles between second class American citizens and Five Tribes citizens. Following emancipation, African Americans struggled with systemic racial issues in the South. Consequences of these circumstances were anti-black violence from disgruntled whites wanting to maintain the social order of black subjugation. Seeking a place that would provide safety, economic freedom, and racial uplift, some black southerners organized within their local jurisdictions as they sought the federal government's attention to their plight throughout the 1860s and 1870s. As a result, these push factors found some black leaders looking to the West as a possible alternative to their situation. However, the African Americans who migrated to Kansas experienced economic and violent circumstances. Entering the West to Kansas, African Americans would soon express interest in the public lands of Indian Territory—a politically ambiguous space inhabited by Native American Nations. The Five Tribes, located in Indian Territory, experienced their own Reconstruction, which set the scene for a myriad of debates concerning race, Native identity, and black migration.

Indian Territory became a space of contested claims and ambiguous identities from its inception in the 1830s up to statehood in 1907. During this period, Indian Territory held a racially fluid social structure, as prior to the nineteenth century, the Five Tribes had a long history of racial mixing. The fluid nature of kinship allowed for the integration of African enslaved people into a higher social standing within their respective tribal nations. While each tribe had varied relations with their enslaved people, these strands of varied racial traditions made for an ambiguous space in Indian Territory. The federal government removed both free and enslaved black people to Indian Territory.

Upon their arrival, some contested their freedom at nearby Fort Gibson; others justified their claim to freedom because of their military service during the Seminole Wars. To be sure, this fragmented, and inconsistent mingling and clashing of race, kinship, and black enslavement bred factionalism among and within the Five Tribes.

Race was a key component in the development of black towns in Oklahoma. Black towns were then and still remain symbols of black solidarity. As expressions of this solidarity, and of an awareness that blacks anywhere in the United States constituted a “nation within a nation” these towns were an expression of nationalist ideology or nationalism.² Town founders created their respective communities to demonstrate that African Americans had the capacity to govern themselves following Emancipation. The towns were characterized by strong values of individualism, limited government, and an emerging racialized democracy—one where first class citizenship depended on racial status. Also, prior to the mid-nineteenth century, Indian Territory had a flexible social hierarchy. Free black communities existed throughout the region in several slaveholding Indian Nations: The Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations. These tribal nations developed central governments and practiced chattel slavery from the late eighteenth century into the 1860s. This space proved different from others as it was sparsely populated, and controlled by minorities regardless of their practice of chattel slavery.

Indianness, or the expression of an indigenous identity, played an essential role in the development of black towns in Oklahoma. Indian Territory’s population made it a

² John Ernest, *A Nation Within a Nation: Organizing African-American Communities Before the Civil War* (Ivan R. Dee: Chicago, 2011), 3-28.

haven for some fugitive slaves. The racialization of Native Americans popularized the idea that Native American chattel slavery was relaxed compared with its Anglo counterpart. These perceptions complicated racial issues amongst African Americans who made their way to Oklahoma in the 1890s. Black leaders such as Booker T. Washington attempted to understand the phenomena of black Indians because he, like white Americans, conflated Indianness with “savagery” and “barbarism.”³ Six groups of freedmen existed by 1866—millions of freedmen from the United States and thousands of freedmen from the Five Tribes: the African American, Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole Freedmen. Thus, Indian Territory became the center of these freedmen debates that involved conversations about blackness and Native American citizenship. Whites, blacks, and Indians debated the definition of “freedman.” Violent and economic push factors complicated race in Indian Territory, as by the 1880s freedmen from the eastern and southern United States increasingly looked west to Indian Territory as a place of refuge.

“Other Indians and Freedmen” views Indian Territory and Oklahoma within the context of migrations through and surrounding the region. It contributes to the history of Indian Territory by connecting it to black migration patterns. For the purposes of this study, migration means movement in and out of a particular state or territory. Texas, being one of the most racially violent states following the Civil War, contributed heavily to the Exoduster Movement of 1879—the first mass movement of African Americans following

³ Sarah Deutsch, “Being American in Boley” in Stephanie Cole and Allison Parker eds., *Beyond Black and White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the United States South and Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 97-122.

Reconstruction. Participants of this migration moved to Kansas due to its Republican affiliation and racial inclusivity on the part of Kansas governor, John P. St. John. The migrants were also motivated by the symbolic nature of the Jayhawk state's connections to staunch abolitionist, John Brown during Bleeding Kansas. Many Exodusters traveled through Indian Territory on their way to Kansas. Some eventually moved to Oklahoma following the failures of the Exoduster Movement in the 1880s and 1890s and sought prosperity in Oklahoma Territory—formed in 1890.

Although this study examines migration patterns in Arkansas, Texas, and Kansas, that is not this project's primary focus. Instead, "Other Indians and Freedmen" closely examines how these migrations impacted the people of Oklahoma and Indian Territories. This study encompasses six groups of former slaves, free blacks, white settlers, and Five American Indian tribes. As a result, the study of each individual Indian Nation is by no means comprehensive. Instead, I aim to make new connections between African-Native American relations as well as African American settlement in Indian Territory, Oklahoma Territory, and the American West at-large. This project demonstrates the importance of smaller African American movements which began following Emancipation. While small and largely unnoticed, the appeal of these small movements illuminates the amount of community organization black Americans achieved through shared circumstances and racial solidarity.

These movements may have been at times temporary but they played a role in larger migrations to come, which added attention to the African American cause. In fact, those earlier calls to move West from blacks occurred during a time when Indian Territory struggled with its own Reconstruction. The emancipation of Five Tribes slaves, although

morally correct, also proved politically expedient for a Republican-led federal government wanting to assert control over the Five Tribes. The complete emancipation of the slaves in Indian Territory factionalized each of the Tribes, as well as the land they inhabited. Federal acquisition of public land in Indian Territory drew land hungry white Americans and weary black settlers. The availability of allotted native land drew thousands of white and black settlers into present-day Oklahoma. The whites sought to stake their claim simply as American citizens; the blacks claimed land as “freedmen” in the 1880s. With statehood looming, by the dawn of the twentieth century, certain members of the Five Tribes turned politically inward, at times, to strategize and focus their energies to preserve and protect their sovereignty at all costs. The Cherokee Nation, for example, sought to squelch appropriations toward freedmen due to the uneven distribution of citizenship granted to Cherokee Freedmen, some of whom had no association with the Cherokee Nation. To be fair, the individuals against the acceptance of former slaves did not reflect the sentiment of every Cherokee citizen.

Understanding black history post-Reconstruction is also understanding Indian Territory, and its evolution as the state of Oklahoma in the early twentieth century. Several major historiographies inform my inquiry into Black Oklahoma and Native American history. First, is the ensuing migration of African Americans to the West during the late nineteenth century (particularly Oklahoma). Second, is the African-Native American relations in Indian Territory and Oklahoma. Third, is the examination of the complicated histories of race within the Five Tribes, which provides a deeper understanding of black American migration to the West during the nineteenth century.

Tiya Miles, David Chang, Barbara Krauthammer, Daniel Littlefield and others

have explored the specific histories of Five Tribes freedmen. Therefore, my project largely relies on the work of these scholars' main interest. In addition, "Other Indians and Freedmen" expands on more recent work in the growing field of African-Native American history, which analyzes the place and status of black people in Indian Territory and Oklahoma. The work of Kendra Field, Darnella Davis, and Alaina Roberts exemplify a new hybrid historical analysis that uses familial histories to analyze larger historical narrative. I look to place black Oklahoma into a larger story of black migration following the Civil War. My project demonstrates the legacy of movement within, throughout, and around present-day Oklahoma.⁴

⁴ Scholarly works during the 1970s and 1980s primarily focused on slavery and the freedmen of the Five Tribes. These works include: Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1866* (Knoxville: the University of Tennessee Press, 1979); R. Halliburton, Jr., *Red Over Black: Black Slavery Among the Cherokee Indians* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977); Daniel F. Littlefield is the most prolific during this 70s and 80s with *The Cherokee Freedmen: from Emancipation to American Citizenship* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), *The Chickasaw Freedmen: a People Without a Country* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), *Africans and Creeks: from the Colonial Period to the Civil War* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979), *Africans and Seminoles: from Removal to Emancipation* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977). Exceptions include, Daniel Littlefield & Lonnie Underhill, "Slave 'Revolt' in the Cherokee Nation, 1842" *American Indian Quarterly* 3 (1977); Quintard Taylor "Red vs. Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post Civil War Indian Territory, 1865-1907" *American Indian Quarterly* 8 (1984); Daniel F. Littlefield and Mary Ann Littlefield, "The Beams Family: Free Blacks in Indian Territory," *The Journal of Negro History* 61 (1976); For more on Five Tribes historiography before 1970, see R. Palmer Howard, *A Historiography of the Five Civilized Tribes: a Chronological Approach* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1969). Scholarly analysis concerning the Five Tribes began to focus more on free black populations and movement in Indian Territory during the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s which include: Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). David A. Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Barbara Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Katja May, *African Americans and Native Americans in the Creek and Cherokee Nations, 1830s to 1920s: Collision and Collusion* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996); Tiya Miles, *Ties that Bind: the Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Tiya Miles and Sharon P. Holland, eds. *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Fay Yarbrough *Race and the Cherokee Nation: Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Kevin Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen: a History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); Celia Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Linda Reese, *Trail Sisters: Freedwomen in Indian Territory, 1850-1890* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2013); Kenneth Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History*

The field of black Oklahoma history tends to focus more on the development of black towns. Monographs and dissertations usually examine specific microhistories of certain black towns. However, “Other Indians and Freedmen” also places Oklahoma’s black town development within the context of black southern migratory patterns dating back to the 1870s.⁵ It provides a broad overview of Oklahoma’s black town development and decline over time.

The current field of African-Native American history focuses on the intersections between black and indigenous people. It explores how these relations in Indian Territory demonstrate the complexities of citizenship in its changing spectrum throughout the nineteenth century. In this vein, “Other Indians and Freedmen” also analyzes the role of

of a Freedom Seeking People (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996); Gary Zellar, *African Creeks: Estelveste and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). The more recent historiography revolves around more intimate histories with the author’s heritage and familial archives serving as a window into nineteenth century Indian Territory. These more recent monographs include: Kendra Taira Field, *Growing up with the Country: Family, Race, and Nation after the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Alaina E. Roberts, *I’ve Been Here All the While: Black Freedom on Native Land* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021); Darnella Davis, *Untangling a Red, White, and Black Heritage: a Personal History of the Allotment Era* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018).

⁵ 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); Lynn-Sherow, Bonnie. *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); Johnson, Hannibal B. *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); Tolson, Arthur Lincoln. *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-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).

black migration around and within Indian Territory.

Indian Territory's status as an unrecognized territory gave the space an ambiguous status and a reputation as an area of lawlessness. These perceptions from outsiders lingered for most of Indian Territory's existence. Largely fueled by racial stereotypes about Native Americans, these impressions became justification for Indian Territory's white settlements. Desires to acquire land, graze cattle, and obtain railroad rights gave way to calls to "civilize" Indian Territory. While these calls largely came from white Americans, black Americans also viewed Indian Territory land as an opportunity to exercise their citizenship rights.

Early black movement during the 1870s reflected the South's racially violent landscape. Black leaders, often claiming to represent thousands of African Americans, cited racial violence, political persecution, and labor as reasons for black desires to settle elsewhere. Black migration received public attention from news outlets and Congressmen, which carried legal and social implications.

Federal government rhetoric and Republican politicians agitated for the development of local associations dedicated to black settlement. Calls for black colonization had existed prior to Indian Removal, but politicians soon expressed interest in the domestic colonization of African Americans to the American West. Consequently, the black movement of the 1870s influenced some Republicans to support black migration and black domestic colonization. Much of the migration of the 1870s stopped at Kansas, but by the 1880s had shifted to present-day Oklahoma.

The majority of black people who were a part of this movement to the West were poor, and largely exist in passive mentions in newspapers and eyewitnesses accounts

throughout the nineteenth century. It is in this vein that I contribute to the larger historiography of black migration to the West. Shirley Ann Wilson Moore best demonstrates the fluid nature of black western migration. In *Sweet Freedom's Plains: African Americans on the Overland Trails 1841-1869*, Moore argues that African Americans moved along the Overland Trails “for myriad personal, economic, social, and political reasons.”⁶ These factors did not change for the African American migrants between 1870 and 1910; however, the post-Civil War climate exacerbated racial tensions as white vigilante southerners used violence and intimidation to maintain the era’s standing racial order. Moore introduces the possibility that the few archival sources on black overland migration represented scores, if not hundreds, of black migrants. This project also examines black migration and community building as being fluid in nature.

The state of post-Civil War race relations warped and stretched the meaning of “home” and “place” just as much as subsequent black migratory movements conflated the definition of “freedmen” in legal debates surrounding Indian Territory settlement. As Moore states:

In contrast to whites, it appears that the journey for most African Americans became an open-minded proposition, consisting in many cases of a series of sojourns along, and detours from, the trails. Their decision to permanently settle somewhere depended on the prevailing racial climate of the region they entered.⁷

As this project demonstrates, black motivations to migrate changed over time. Indian Territory began with relaxed freedom of movement for Black Seminoles, the contested

⁶ Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *Sweet Freedom's Plains: African Americans on the Overland Trails 1841-1869* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 3.

⁷ Moore, *Sweet Freedom's Plains*, 8.

status of Black Indians (often within the Creek Nation), and the expanded ability of Arkansas' enslaved populations to travel throughout the region for labor and personal visits. These motivations transformed during the 1860s.

Indian Territory's enslaved inhabitants used the Civil War as an opportunity to escape their plight. Indian Territory slaveholders also fled the area with their enslaved population to Texas and Kansas. As a result of Reconstruction's failure to transform the country's racial order, African Americans experienced racial violence, political intimidation, and inadequate standards of living in the Deep South. Thus, safety remained a primary motive for black migration to Kansas, Arkansas, and Indian Territory from the 1870s to the early 1900s.

The discussions at conventions of black leaders reflected how African Americans gradually realized themselves as a distinct community of Americans with a shared heritage and history connected to enslavement.⁸ It is important to note that lower class African Americans participated in these movements throughout the nineteenth migratory century. In fact, many of the emigration leaders never lived in the areas or the black towns they promoted. While black leaders used Black Nationalist devices to encourage and justify migration, the majority of settlers often had economic motives that state localities realized. States such as North Carolina recognized their black population's economic value in the agricultural sector. Black politicians faced political loss if their black constituency went west or overseas.⁹ Overall, black migration experienced ebb and flows

⁸ August Meier, *Negro Thought in America 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002 [Ann Arbor Paperback Edition]), 52-54.

⁹ Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 62-63.

between the 1870s and 1900s. The largest peaks occurred between 1878 and 1881 (Kansas and Arkansas) and between 1888 and 1890 (mainly to Oklahoma Territory).¹⁰

Chapter one focuses on the legacy of racial ambiguity among the Five Tribes and how it influenced the cultural makeup of Indian Territory during its first decades of existence. Although each of the Five Tribes practiced chattel slavery, Indian Territory enabled the emergence of free black settlements. However, the Cherokee Slave Revolt, and rumors of additional slave uprisings, slowly changed the outlook of free black movement. The Cherokee Nation clamped down on outside influences from free blacks who were likely Seminole. In an effort to thwart the influence of slaveholding, and often, mixed-race tribal leaders, tribes such as the Cherokee Nation factionalized as the Keetoowah Society, a secret organization with Christian, Native traditionalist, and antislavery ideology that gained traction throughout Indian Territory. Meanwhile, the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations struggled with the constant issue of runaway slaves. Bordering Texas, both nations and Texas accused each other of harboring runaway slaves. In addition, the gray areas within Indian Territory's legal ambiguities may have attracted Texas slaves, thus keeping with the legacy of free blacks in Indian Territory. It also may have fueled the idea of Native America as a space of refuge within the black imagination.

Chapter two examines the legalities of Reconstruction in Indian Territory. Congressional debates of the period sparked discussions regarding freedmen and their colonization to places foreign or in the American West. Meanwhile, the Reconstruction treaties the federal government made with the Five Tribes in 1866 stirred debates on

¹⁰ Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 59; Lori Bogle, "On Our Way to the Promised Land: Black Migration from Arkansas to Oklahoma, 1889-1893" *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 72 (1994): 168.

whether Five Tribes freedmen or African American freedmen had the right to land in Indian Territory.

Chapter three examines black movement that developed around Indian Territory. Violence throughout the Deep South pushed blacks to migrate to areas throughout the Southwest. Many formed groups to build communities and towns socially isolated from the larger strains of American society. The first migration of blacks, known as the Exoduster Movement, played out in Indian Territory as thousands of blacks traveled through Indian Territory en route to Kansas. Meanwhile, Indian freedmen developed early black Indian towns and smaller communities, as many segregated themselves from their Native American members. Towns, such as the black Creek town of Tullahassee, developed as early as 1850.

The vague and often ambiguous writing of the 1866 treaties between the federal government and the Five Tribes conflated the term “freedmen” and led to what the Cherokee Nation and national news publications deemed the “Turner Movement.” The Turner Movement was a black American group led by John Milton Turner. It was dedicated to settling blacks from the United States in the Oklahoma District under their rights as freedmen of the United States. Meanwhile, whites such as David Payne, argued for the white settlement of the Oklahoma District, stating that American citizens had the right to settle on public lands. Although the Payne Movement was eventually successful with the Land Run of 1889, the freedmen in question played an important role. The traction of the Turner Movement caught the federal government’s attention and provided clarification regarding the definition of “freedmen” in the 1866 treaties. Even so, the Payne Movement made attempts to take advantage of the 1866 treaties by including

“freedmen” in their settlement groups to avoid rejection from the federal government to settle in the Oklahoma District.

Chapter four examines the creation of Oklahoma Territory in 1890 and the process of state building that followed. The All Black Town Movement began following the development of Oklahoma Territory. Edward McCabe, a black politician and former Exoduster used his experiences from Kansas in the 1870s and 1880s to take advantage of the 1889 Land Run. He founded the black town of Langston, which exists in present-day Logan County, Oklahoma. The founding of towns such as Langston, and McCabe’s attempt to make Oklahoma an all-black state exacerbated racial tensions throughout Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory.

Chapter five examines the first decade of the twentieth century. As statehood became a larger topic, African Americans, white Americans, and Native Americans defined “statehood” in different ways. These debates influenced not only the state’s race relations, but also its political shift by the early twentieth century. Consequently, the narratives and politics revolving around Oklahoma statehood and American Indian sovereignty remains fragmented. The political and racial nature of Oklahoma statehood led to contentious political debates among each of the three groups. However, Oklahoma’s statehood during 1907 catered to Oklahoma’s white populace. While other reformers paternally worried about what would happen to the new state’s native population, African Americans fought against the perils of Jim Crow as it seeped into the hearts, minds, and books of the Oklahoma state legislature.

Chapter 1: The Plight of Black Freedom and Identity in Indian Territory during the 1840s and 1850s

Black people inhabited Indian Territory (and later Oklahoma) from its inception. Scholar Kendra Field notes that “for at least three centuries, Indian country had served as a space of solace, exploitation, and opportunity for African descended peoples.”¹¹ Indian Territory meant different things to different groups of people. Lingering tensions from the eighteenth century remained for some tribes following Removal. Yet, in the midst of stark factionalism, above all, each of the Five Tribes wanted to maintain their sovereignty. Meanwhile, black people whether enslaved, free, or quasi-free used turmoil and geographical sparseness to their advantage by either achieving their freedom or fighting to maintain it. The varied status of blacks in Indian Territory contributed to black interest in land in coming years. In the meantime, the incompetence of the Bureau of Indian Affairs as well as environmental disaster contributed to the perception that Indian Territory was a haven for fugitive slaves. White Texans and white Arkansans wanted more of a federal influence due to the area’s racialized and stereotyped reputation of lawlessness and fugitive slavery. The narrative of Indian Territory (and Oklahoma for that matter) is one of political and social ambiguities. Connecting the eras of pre and post Removal opens a dialogue about the complicated heritage some black and indigenous people of the Five Tribes share and how varied interests throughout the region influenced outcomes in Indian Territory.

¹¹ Field, “Growing Up with the Country,” 11.

Early works of the twentieth century on the Five Tribes, with the exception of Annie Heloise Abel's, *The Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1915), akin to Angie Debo's *And Still the Waters Run: the Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes*, and Grant Foreman's *Indian Removal*, focus on the political structures of the Five Tribes. The Tribes' culture of chattel slavery is often overlooked and vaguely mentioned (if at all) in passing. The historiography during this period focused on the exceptionalism of the Five Tribes and the belief that they were able to achieve a form of "civilization" other Native American nations could not. It also questioned the Indianness of the Five Tribes, due to their degree of "civilization."

Since its inception, Indian Territory was a racially contested space due not only to the presence of enslaved and free Black Seminoles, but also due to surrounding territories with consistent black fugitivity throughout the 1840s and 1850s. Insurrection and warfare encouraged maroonage. Drought and flooding caused instability and starvation within each of the Five Tribes. The Seminole, for example, migrated to Indian Territory from Florida during a drought, which encouraged some to factionalize and to stay among the Cherokee Nation, thus exacerbating racial tension after a while. In fact, some fugitive slaves escaped from their Indian Territory masters during the year of some of the region's worst environmental disasters. These extreme conditions in two years affected Cherokee crops and led to the starvation of many to the point the federal government had to supply rations, but they were inadequate. With their agriculture centered in the more balanced southeastern climate, the tribes struggled to adapt to the region's growing cycles. However, these periods of instability likely became cycles of opportunity for slaves, if inclined, to flee elsewhere to more rugged and swampy grounds.

Since the nineteenth century African Americans and Native Americans sought both cooperation and distance from one another.¹² In other words, these relations experienced alternating periods of cooperation and violence. The emergence of the African Slave Trade in the 16th century exacerbated rising tensions between both groups. Prior to Removal, according to historian Christina Snyder, “many of those seeking freedom in Indian Country would be sorely disappointed, for Native people usually re-enslaved runaways.”¹³ Rather, the Native American form of chattel slavery had difficulty reconciling a hardened racial ideology with centuries old kinship practices and captivity.¹⁴ Connections between the two groups existed since the introduction of the African Slave Trade. While not a primary driver of black flight, African slaves often sought refuge with Native tribes throughout the Deep South. And with Indian Territory’s overlapping legal jurisdictions, the Native American practice of kinship conflated race and identity.¹⁵

In many cases, African Americans and Native Americans argued for their place in American society in similar yet different ways. Akin to members of the Five Tribes who simultaneously harbored and captured fugitive slaves, African Americans used

¹² Arika Easley-Houser, “The Indian Image in the Black Mind: Representing Native Americans in the Antebellum African American Public Culture” (PhD Diss., Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2014), 117-19.

¹³ Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 196.

¹⁴ Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 202

¹⁵ Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 119. Wood describes carryover traits in African slaves throughout South Carolina. He writes that, “it is clear that Negroes not only drew upon their associations with Indians but also brought to bear numerous aspects of their varied African experience.” The same conclusion can be made with Native Americans in Indian Territory.

Native American-centered rhetoric to position themselves above Native Americans, thereby, demonstrating their ability to civilize and advance not only their race but their country. John Marrant, a black eighteenth century preacher, wrote in a 1785 narrative on his life about converting a Cherokee king after he lived among them for a time. After returning home, Marrant wrote:

My dress was purely in the Indian stile; the skins of wild beasts composed my garments, my head was set out in the savage manner, with a long pendant down my back, a sash round my middle without breeches, and a tomahawk by my side.¹⁶

Nevertheless, African American leaders often aligned themselves with the plight of Native Americans to highlight more systemic issues of inequality.¹⁷

The physical environment is also a factor scholars should consider in regard to black settlement and movement. Flooding and drought may have affected fugitive slavery in Indian Territory during the 1840s and 1850s in Choctaw and Chickasaw Territory. Similar to the development of the majority all-black towns decades later, the emigration of most tribes happened during times of drought or after the growing season, making it difficult for the Five Tribes such as the Seminole Nation to flourish in their new space.

Seminole slavery stirred fear of insurrection throughout Indian Territory. To be sure, the Seminole Nation's Removal to Indian Territory, and its tributary form of slavery exacerbated political and racial tensions in Indian Territory. Much of the issue revolved around the status of the Black Seminoles' because of their acceptance of "Jesup's

¹⁶ John Marrant, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant* (London: Gilbert and Plummer, 1785 [fourth edition]), 28-29.

¹⁷ Kate Steinnagel Stutz, "Triangulating Race: The Native Presence in Early African American Literature," (PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2015), 4.

Proclamation.” Jesup’s Proclamation was an offer by U.S. Army General Thomas Jesup to provide Black Seminoles with freedom and to take them to Indian Territory in exchange for their surrender during the Second Seminole War of 1838. Jesup's offer of surrender in exchange for immigration to Indian Territory caused tensions between Black Seminoles and their nation at-large.¹⁸ Questioning the Black Seminoles’ decision to accept Jesup's offer, Historian Christina Snyder says they may have feared being sold into slavery in the United States if “their fight for Seminole autonomy failed.”¹⁹ Scholar Kevin Mulroy complicates this interpretation by explicitly arguing for a separate group identity. According to Mulroy “although the Indians and Maroons had joined in fierce resistance to American expansion during the Second Seminole War, they had different motives. The Seminoles wished to retain their homelands and property and remain separate from the Creeks. The Maroons however were battling re-enslavement and fighting for their freedom.”²⁰ Approximately 400 Black Seminoles emigrated to Indian Territory as a result of Jesup’s Proclamation.

Indian Territory’s reputation as a safe haven for black fugitive enslaved people contradicted its status as an unorganized slave territory. The constant discussion of fugitive slavery and insurrection by regional newspapers and in federal and tribal documents has encouraged research about the possibility of an Underground Railroad in Indian Territory. However, these mentions of a safe haven in Indian Territory were

¹⁸ Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 242-43.

¹⁹ Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 243.

²⁰ Kevin Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen*, 51.

unclear.²¹ Fugitive slaves moved on the margins throughout the sparse western landscapes in Indian Territory, Kansas, Texas, and Arkansas in search of refuge. Although different, each of these four states and territories experienced persistent black fugitive slave cultures due to the constant movement and settlement in the region from the 1830s up to the end of the Civil War. For example, an 1831 census of Creeks in the Southeast listed a black Creek woman named Polly, who, according to the document, had “a negro slave for a husband named John.”²² The phrasing regarding Polly’s status demonstrates the difficulty census takers had when categorizing the many kinds of people living among the Five Tribes. This was a common problem given the skewed lines of captivity and coerced intimate relations between Native American men and black and white female captives.²³

The Creek Nation was very distinctive to white visitors to Indian Territory. During his trip to Indian Territory during the Removal era, famed writer Washington Irving commented that the group of Creeks he encountered were “hunters, half breeds, creoles, [and] negroes of every hue...”²⁴ A little more than a decade later, Army officer James Abert remarked on his visit through Creek country that he “met several negroes on the

²¹ Diane Miller, “Frontier Freedom: Seeking the Underground Railroad in Indian Territory,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* (2009): 76-83.

²² Kaye Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma: a Resource Book* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971), 30.

²³ Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 205.

²⁴ Washington Irving, *A Tour on the Prairies* (Paris: A and W. Galignani and Co., 1835), <https://archive.org/details/atouronprairies00irvigooq>, 11.

road who were dressed in the picturesque costume of the Creek Indians.”²⁵ Once more, it is important to note that these connections existed before Removal. The black Creeks both travelers encountered reflected the entrenched nature of racial intermingling in the Creek Nation. Yet, prior to Removal relations between the Five Tribes and African Americans were often tumultuous.

Slaves in Indian Territory often fled to reconnect with families from a neighboring nation. The slave, Spencer, demonstrated this sentiment when he fled, to his owner’s dismay, from the Cherokee Nation to the Creek Nation. George Murrell, Spencer’s owner, wrote in a slave advertisement that Spencer, although purchased in New Orleans, lived with the Creek Nation for a time in Alabama and likely traveled to Creek Territory.²⁶ However, given the scores of free black settlements in the Creek Nation, it is possible that Spencer stayed in Indian Territory.

Although the Creek Nation had a less tumultuous relationship with their black communities, some Creek leaders developed certain racial ideologies to establish order in regard to racial status. For example, Creek leaders, Neamathla and Tukahabachee Micco disseminated racial ideologies and origin stories, which ultimately justified the complete subjugation of black people in the 1830s and 1842 respectively.²⁷

²⁵ John Galvin ed., *Through the Country of the Comanche Indians in the Fall of the Year 1845: The Journal of a U.S. Army Expedition of Led by Lieutenant James W. Abert of the Topographical Engineers* (San Francisco: John Howell, 1970), 64.

²⁶ Naylor, *African Cherokees*, 38-9.

²⁷ Daniel F. Littlefield, *Africans and Creeks*, 146-7. In an account attributed to Neamathla, Littlefield writes “the Great Spirit created three races and assigned duties to each, never intending the three to mingle. The Great Spirit took up some dust and blew it from His hand, and a white man stood up in front of Him. The Great Spirit was sorry, for the feeble and sickly man was not what He had intended to make. But the Great Spirit spared him. The Great Spirit tried again and this time created a black man. That grieved the Great Spirit for the man was black and ugly. On the third attempt, He created a red man,

Each of the five tribes carried these beliefs alongside their slaves to Indian Territory throughout the 1830s and 1840s. As with any relationship, black and Indian relations have a complex history. At times, some Native tribes harbored runaway slaves; at other times, they owned black slaves. This is not to say that the Five Tribes version of chattel slavery was less harsh compared to Anglo chattel slavery. There are accounts regarding friendly Indian owners as well as more brutal accounts. For example, George Fortman, a Choctaw slave, proudly asserted in his Works Progress Administration (WPA) interview, that his owner did not abuse those he held in servitude. He also noted that his mistress “allowed no slave to be sold” and described her as “a devoted friend to all.”²⁸ Though Seminole slavery was the least brutal, the fact remains that these are all forms of involuntary servitude. Political tensions often revolved around the status of race and slavery in Indian Territory. Most of what we know about racial issues and the slavery practices of the Five Tribes comes from tribal elites and often, government leaders. Therefore, the racial ideology demonstrated among tribal elites may not have always reflected the views of everyday tribal members. Racial ideology may have been unevenly distributed among the Five Tribes as much as the Territory’s enslaved black slave

at whom he smiled. The Great Spirit then gave each a choice from three boxes containing tools necessary for supporting themselves. Although the white man was not the Creator’s favorite, he was the first created and therefore got first choice. The white man looked into the boxes and chose the one containing ‘pens and ink and paper and all the things you white people use.’ The black man, although created second, did not get second choice; that went, instead, to the Great Spirit’s favorite. The red man chose the box containing ‘beaver traps, bows and arrows and all the kinds of things the Indians use.’ The black man was given a box containing ‘hoes and axes--plainly showing that the black man was made to labor for both the white and red man.’”

²⁸ “Interview with George Fortman” in Patrick Mingos, ed., *Black Indian Slave Narratives*, (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair Publishers, 2004) 6-7.

population's was unevenly distributed. Black slaves made up about ten percent of the Creek nation's population prior to the Civil War.²⁹

The Creek Nation often found itself at the heart of discussion concerning race, due to their disputes with the Seminole Nation's view of chattel slavery and the successful integration of black Creeks into Creek political life during Reconstruction.³⁰

The Creek Nation enacted additional slave codes shortly following Removal. These laws were a response to larger issues brewing throughout Indian Territory. The late 1830s and 1840s were a period of racial strife as the growing number of free blacks settled within tribal territory. The Cherokee Nation, for example, enacted codes regarding both free and enslaved black people.³¹ In addition, the Creek Nation felt threatened by the influx of free blacks into eastern Indian Territory. These free blacks often settled among the Seminole band located in Fort Gibson or at another Black Seminole settlement on Little River by the Arkansas border. The Treaty of 1845 further exacerbated tensions between Creek officials and free blacks because it legally merged the Creek Nation with the Seminole Nation. Disputes between these two entities remained up to the Civil War. Meanwhile, the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations faced similar issues in Southern Indian Territory.

Under Choctaw rule, due to a treaty in 1837, the Chickasaw Nation settled on Choctaw lands receiving rights as Choctaw citizens.³² Consequently, Chickasaw slave

²⁹ Littlefield, *Africans and Creeks*, 154.

³⁰ Zellar, *African Creeks*, xviii.

³¹ Littlefield, *African and Creeks*, 142-143.

³² Littlefield, *The Chickasaw Freedmen*, 4.

codes were the same as Choctaw slave codes. An 1855 treaty gave the Chickasaw the right to self-government, which enabled them to enforce slave laws better geared toward their needs. The Chickasaw had issues with Texan bandits and Indian raids, with Chickasaw slaves leaving with Native bands by force or free will, and at times being sold to the Comanche Nation.³³ The growing population of Texas and a steady flow of transients of all colors due to the formation of Fort Washita within the immediate region, made fugitive slavery perhaps more prevalent compared with the Creeks and Seminoles to the North.

By 1858 and 1859, the Chickasaw Nation directed free blacks to leave the territory and proposed an act forbidding trade between Chickasaw citizens and black people without proper privileges.³⁴ Meanwhile, the Creek and Seminole nations were at the forefront of this racial strife. However, in the case of the Creek and Seminole Nations, solvency and property also colored racial discussions. According to Littlefield:

Besides those captured by the Creek warriors were those who had surrendered under an agreement with General Thomas S. Jesup at Fort Dade on March 6th 1837; those were captured by or voluntarily surrendered to United States troops; those who remain with Alligator in his band in April 1838; those who were brought in by their owners and sent West with them; those who belong to White owners but who would not return to them before removal; and those who claim to be free by virtue of their partisan actions on behalf of the United States during the Seminole War.³⁵

³³ Littlefield, *The Chickasaw Freedmen*, 11.

³⁴ Littlefield, *The Chickasaw Freedmen*, 15.

³⁵ Littlefield, *African Creeks*, 159.

The Seminole Nation believed that joining the Creeks would threaten their sovereignty and identity. Roughly 2,000 Seminoles settled on Cherokee land by 1839 due to fear that Creek officials would confiscate their black members. In addition, both Creek and federal officials racialized this debate as both perceived the black presence among the Seminoles as a threat to the behavior of the Seminoles and the Indian Territory at-large. Federal officials such as Superintendent William Armstrong vaguely described the so-called black threat as an influence, which harkened back to general fears of insurrection.³⁶

Although property disputes remained an essential component, a sense of danger also influenced how the United States and the Creek Nation ultimately viewed the Seminole question. Prior to the Cherokee Slave Revolt of 1842, federal officials such as William Armstrong had expressed concern about the “Negro influence” among the Seminole Nation, writing, “it is to be regretted that they were ever permitted to bring a Negro with them; they experience an improper influence over them, and show a bad example to other slaves.”³⁷ However, Armstrong gradually expressed a relaxed tone by 1842 due to the agricultural production of the North Fork Seminole settlement, and the surplus produced by Seminole slaves.³⁸ These issues between both tribes moved federal officials to settle their disputes over property and sovereignty.

The Treaty of 1845 moved most of the Seminoles to Creek territory, which placed them under the Creek’s legal jurisdiction. Some Seminoles chose to remain in the

³⁶ Littlefield, *African Creeks*, 161.

³⁷ Littlefield, *African Creeks*, 161. Quoted from Armstrong to Crawford, October 1, 1840, Executive Document 2, p. 314.

³⁸ Littlefield, *African Creeks*, 166.

Cherokee Nation. Nevertheless, the treaty exacerbated tensions between both groups for the next several years, with more black people seeking refuge at Fort Gibson.³⁹ Federal officials believed that any significant settlement of free black people in Indian Territory would cause unrest among the Five Tribes because free blacks could threaten the institution of slavery.⁴⁰ Arkansans would also not welcome such a settlement as they feared fugitive slavery as much as the Texans to the South. Disturbed by the current situation in their territory, Creek leaders complained that the Cherokee Nation's decision to expel free blacks had sent them to Creek territory. According to Littlefield, by 1850 the Creek Nation had increased their slave hunting activities following the departure of Seminole leader and Black Seminole supporter, Wildcat. Wildcat had left the Nation to lead a group of "Indians and Blacks from Texas, the Indian Territory, and Arkansas" to Mexico.⁴¹ Many slaves captured by Creek slave catchers were often sold in Arkansas.⁴²

The emerging sectional crisis of the 1850s exacerbated divisions within Indian Territory. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 stirred tensions as the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nation grew disturbed by Bleeding Kansas.⁴³ Despite much debate between the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, their political discontent did not impact the state of slavery in southern Indian Territory. Instead, both governments became stronger. While the

³⁹ Littlefield, *African Creeks*, 179-182.

⁴⁰ Littlefield, *African Creeks*, 182-183.

⁴¹ Littlefield, *African Creeks*, 199.

⁴² Littlefield, *African Creeks*, 211.

⁴³ Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 9.

Chickasaw Nation regained full sovereignty after splitting with the Choctaws, the latter fortified their government through centralization.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, this did not stop fugitive slaves from entering Southern Indian Territory.⁴⁵

Even as issues of slavery and race evolved in Indian Territory, some African Americans, such as former slave and abolitionist, Henry Bibb, in his published narrative about his escape, insisted that Native American slavery was less harsh. One reason for this perspective was the slow and lopsided nature of race into the general framework of Native captivity practices.⁴⁶ Bibb's story demonstrates the generally positive image of Native America in the African American mind. It also raises the possibility of an underground railroad in Indian Territory. In 1815 Bibb was born enslaved in Shelby County, Kentucky. Through various transactions, he found himself in Indian Territory, eventually escaping in 1842—the same year as the Cherokee Slave Revolt. In Indian Territory, Bibb, at least according to his narrative, encountered a world he expected.⁴⁷ In his *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave Written by Himself*, Bibb described himself as a companion rather than a slave. He was happy to have a Cherokee slaveholder, because he believed that his new master, and the Native American form of slavery was less harsh. Writing about his Cherokee master Bibb wrote:

⁴⁴ Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 93-94.

⁴⁵ Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 96.

⁴⁶ Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 203.

⁴⁷ Fred Landon, "Henry Bibb, a Colonizer," *The Journal of Negro History* 5 (1920): 437-8; Roger W. White, "Voice of a Fugitive: Henry Bibb and Ante-Bellum Black Separatism" *Journal of Black Studies* 4 (1974): 272-273.

“he was the most reasonable and humane slaveholder that I ever belonged to. He was the last man that pretended to claim property in my person...”⁴⁸ Perhaps Bibb thought that he would find Natives to help in his quest. However, before his death, Bibb’s owner trusted Bibb with holding his money amongst other items. And although a slave owner entrusting a slave with money is not all that extraordinary, Bibb’s escape surely was. It took the death of his Cherokee master in order for Bibb to make his trek to Canada.⁴⁹

Bibb likely took advantage of Indian Territory’s complexity and its many black settlements. First, it was an unorganized territory with several sovereign entities and interests. By the time of Bibb’s escape, the Cherokee Nation likely had a little more than 1,000 slaves compared with the 10,000 Cherokee citizens in the region.⁵⁰ However, the majority of Indian tribal citizens of the Five Tribes did not own slaves. After fleeing his deceased master's plantation, Bibb received help from a Native American encampment that provided him food and shelter for a night. Although he was received in a friendly manner, Bibb admitted he was afraid he would be recognized as a fugitive slave. Bibb traveled further the following day and sought refuge at a public house owned by a Native American man, who engaged Bibb in friendly banter. Bibb dissembled for most of the conversation, telling the man that he was visiting from Ohio to purchase land in Indian Territory. Somehow both men discovered people they knew in common in Ohio. According to Bibb, the owner “was so much pleased that he came up and took me by the

⁴⁸ Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave Written by Himself* (New York: Henry Bibb), <https://archive.org/details/narrativeoflifea00bibb>, 152.

⁴⁹ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 150-1.

⁵⁰ Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, 30.

hand, and received me joyfully, after seeing that I was acquainted with those of his old friends.” Fearing detection, Bibb left the next morning due to the arrival of three white men. They had come seeking a room even though the Native owner had encouraged them to inquire about a white-owned public house down the way.⁵¹

Taverns and public houses were common during the period, including black-owned public houses in the region. During the same period, there existed a hotel owned by a black family in the Creek Nation. In 1938, Travis Carrol Ely, discussing his travels throughout the Creek Nation’s region during the 1880s, recalled a tavern owned by a black family, who welcomed him and his companions. However, they had refused to stay, preferring to be housed by a white owned establishment by Wewoka Creek.⁵² Bibb’s and Ely’s account regarding taverns and hotels in Indian Territory demonstrate that there was some kind of racial separation with regard to transients visiting and passing through Indian Territory.⁵³

In his account, Bibb is not clear on where exactly he traveled to escape from Indian Territory. However, the two white traders who sold him to the Cherokee man told him that Indian Territory was easy to escape from. They also told Bibb to escape east toward Arkansas and eventually north to Canada. This means that Bibb traveled through Creek and Seminole territory. Perhaps the racial makeup of both Nations made it easier

⁵¹ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 156-7.

⁵² “Travis Carrol Ely,” Indian Pioneer Papers, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma, <http://digital.libraries.ou.edu/cdm/ref/collection/indianpp/id/3871>, 5.

⁵³ Clarence W. Turner, "Events Among the Muskogee's During Sixty Years," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 10 (vol. 1) (March 1932): 327/

for Bibb to escape. In fact, he “laid by in the day and traveled by night for several days and nights, passing this way through several tribes of Indians.”⁵⁴ What Bibb’s story makes clear is that some blacks and whites generally thought Native American slavery was less harsh than its Anglo cousin. Moreover, the Native hotel owner allowed Bibb to stay while directing a white customer to a white-owned hotel down the way. The political landscape of Indian Territory bred tension massaged by cultural displacement. In short, the Five Tribes bred factionalism often between “full-bloods,” who were traditionalists more often than not, and “mixed-bloods,” who were assimilationists who supported slavery and practiced Christianity. Tribes such as the Cherokee and Creek experienced high tensions among their factions. By the 1850s, the Cherokee Nation saw the rise of the “Blue Lodges,” later known as the Knights of the Golden Circle, which sought to promote southern-rooted proslavery politics.

These societies were composed of mixed bloods and other Cherokees who sought to fully transform the Cherokee Nation into a slave society. As a result, traditionalist full-bloods formed organizations like the Keetoowah in an effort to mobilize “a well-informed, cohesive, and politically active force that could prevent the radical proslavery voters from controlling the electoral process and filling the Cherokee legislature with representatives committed to a proslavery, Southern Rights position.”⁵⁵ These motivations, historian Mcloughlin writes, inadvertently made the Keetoowah society abolitionist in an effort to combat foreign ideology they thought would hinder and destroy

⁵⁴ Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*, 155.

⁵⁵ Mcloughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 155.

Cherokee sovereignty. Many of these people were so called “laypersons” in that they were not the small upper echelon of the Cherokee Nation. Nevertheless, Bibb may have benefitted from the region’s overlapping legal boundaries.⁵⁶

Although the cultural makeup of the Creek and Seminole Nation likely played a part in Henry Bibb’s escape, both nations retained their reputation as indirect objectors to Indian Territory’s fragile and varied system of slavery. The Cherokee Slave Revolt of 1842, historian Celia Naylor argues, “Represents how their [African Cherokees] interactions with enslaved people of other Indian Nations might have engendered and reinforced new possibilities and dreams for a free life.”⁵⁷ Although the revolt began with Cherokee slaves, Cherokee officials argued that black “intruders” influenced it. Naylor makes clear that the incident was also a plot between Cherokee and Creek slaves. Other slave rebellions were rumored to have happened before the Cherokee Revolt of 1842. In 1841, the *St. Louis Argus*, an African American newspaper, reported a slave rebellion ignited by African Cherokees and Choctaws. According to the publication, “large numbers of Indian negroes and mongrels from Florida have been placed upon the borders of Arkansas and Missouri.”⁵⁸ Further, the *St. Louis Argus* reported that the group, comprising some six hundred people, also built a log fort along the Red River. It is possible that the discontent among some of the Five Tribes, and the likelihood of an

⁵⁶ Mcloughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 156.

⁵⁷ Naylor, *African Cherokees*, 47.

⁵⁸ Naylor, *African Cherokees*, 47.

Underground Railroad provided opportunities for Henry Bibb's escape from Indian Territory.

The landscape and environment Bibb encountered during his escape provides clues into how runaways managed Indian Territory's environment. Analyzing the environment within the context of slavery is usually saved for studies of maroonage in the Deep South. The knowledge of maroons often revolved around intelligence acquired from neighboring plantations, as they often lived on the outskirts of their former plantations. Maroons also resided in swampy areas slave catchers found difficult to navigate. Therefore, an analysis of Indian Territory's environment: rivers, topography, geographic regions, along with slave cultures in surrounding states and territories, reveals how blacks, free and fugitive, possibly navigated through a space of changing legalities and geography.

Although Henry Bibb sanitized his narrative, the fact that he escaped brings to mind the question of the frequency of black fugitivity. Of course, it is difficult to categorize the experience of a fugitive slave, however, if a Cherokee slave escaped across the Cherokee territory, he or she would have been in a geographic region geared toward sustenance. The Cherokee Nation was located in the Ozark Plateau—a fertile ground where a variety of crops could be grown. Moreover, even less fertile land had fostered large trees similar to the topography of Northeastern Oklahoma, which may have helped with stealth.⁵⁹ The physical environment of slaves, fugitive or otherwise, is particularly important with regard to Indian Territory, because “in such a region, where the

⁵⁹ John W. Morris, Charles R. Goins, and Edwin C. McReynolds, *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 3.

topography is rough and the soils are thin, the life of people is strongly influenced by their physical surroundings.”⁶⁰ The topographic area of the Cherokee Nation, for example, included rugged forest land of large trees that could have helped Bibb and other fugitives travel undetected. Because “the trees grow so close together that the first travelers and settlers, [like Washington Irving] in the region had much difficulty in getting through them...”⁶¹ The fertile prairie lands were also proper spaces for plantations to grow cash crops, among others, for sustenance.

Of his travels throughout Oklahoma, Charles Gould writes, “on account of the unusually large number of streams which cross the state, Oklahoma contains a larger proportion of rich alluvial soil than almost any other state.” His description is similar to the one Irving had given almost a century before.⁶² Irving’s description of the alluvial bottoms of waterways and extensive herbage alludes to Indian Territory’s environmental abundance during the 1830s. His narrative also describes ways in which traditional Native bands used the surrounding environment. One of Irving’s anecdotes describes a band of Osage peoples and the theft of a white settler’s horse. The story illustrates the lawlessness and sparse population of Indian Territory during the period. It echoes similar sentiments in reports to the Indian Commissioner regarding the sale of slaves back to their owners.

⁶⁰ Morris, et al, *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* 2nd ed., 10.

⁶¹ Morris, et al, *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* 2nd ed., 9.

⁶² Charles Gould, *Geography of Oklahoma* (Ardmore: Bunn Brothers, 1909), 114, <https://archive.org/stream/geographyofoklah00goul#page/n11/mode/2up>; Irving, *Prairies*, 36, 57, 68, 186, 202, & 207.

Traveling through the Creek Nation, Irving and his team came across a house inhabited by a “white settler or squatter.” The man accused a band of Osage Indians, “encamped in a neighboring swamp,” of stealing his horse. Although Irving used the story to address the notion of white anger as the reason for Native retaliation, his description of Creek country also details the layout of the area. Irving notes that his fellow travelers passed through water bottoms “overgrown with redundant vegetation and trees of an enormous size.”⁶³ Along the way, they saw Creek villages “sprinkled” throughout the area every few miles, which Irving described as places of relative comfort and abundance.

Creek territory is historically in the Sandstone Hill region of Indian Territory—a diverse region with sandy hilly areas with fertile regions in between. Therefore, if black fugitive slaves chose to remain in the region, the swampier areas in between the western hills could have been prime places for settlement. The varied nature, physically and racially, may not be the only reasons for Indian Territory being an attractive place for fugitive slaves and for free blacks to settle. Fort Gibson, the army controlled fort in the area, served as what Robert Krause describes as a “cultural buffer for Osage and newly-arrived Cherokee Indians against land-hungry whites in order to allow the various tribes of northeastern Oklahoma an opportunity to adjust gradually to the technology and culture of white society.”⁶⁴ This was a welcome intrusion for blacks on the fringes, who used Fort Gibson as a neutral space to contest their enslavement.

⁶³ Irving, *A Tour on the Prairie*, 19.

⁶⁴ Robert Edward Krause Jr., “An Environmental History of the Illinois River Basin in Eastern Oklahoma and Northwest Arkansas” (MA Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 2006), 21.

Letters sent to Fort Gibson demonstrate Indian Territory's racial fluidity as exemplified in the case of Tony, an enslaved black man. Tony's experience fighting for his freedom in Indian Territory demonstrates the complexities black people faced in the region. His status as a person considered both enslaved and free represents the differences in Creek and federal motivations regarding the maintenance of black chattel slavery. Also, his status illustrates how Native American enslavers utilized Native enforcement and federal enforcement to maintain their property. Tony's ambiguous status became an issue at Fort Gibson when a Creek citizen identified as "Mr. Barnett" notified federal officials of his intent to send an "agent" to the Seminole Nation to retrieve Tony as his property. However, Barnett's plan went awry when, Hardage, the agent, retrieved Tony and then sold him to a man identified as Humphrey. While Tony's status had remained in flux since 1842, federal officials do not mention Tony's sentiments in letters detailing the situation. Nevertheless, General Jesup's proclamation, giving Black Seminoles their freedom if they surrendered and removed to Indian Territory, obliged the War Department to protect Tony's assumed freedom. After much deliberation, the government concluded that Tony must return to Barnett due to the lack of evidence of Tony's assumed freedom. Overall, federal jurisdiction and Creek jurisdiction overlapped regarding Tony's status. To protect his property, Barnett used federal force to retrieve Tony from the Seminole Nation, as provided under Creek law. Soldiers at Fort Gibson had initially protected Tony under the auspices of the federal authority, which extralegally trumped

Barnett's right to act within the sovereignty of his own nation. Indian Territory's legal foundation experienced additional flux a year later in 1844.⁶⁵

Overall, Indian Territory remained an area of black transients who often claimed freedom for various reasons throughout much of Indian Territory's existence. Some black people succeeded in claiming their freedom, while others were not successful.

The ambiguities of black freedom in Indian Territory affected the workflow of Fort Gibson agents so much that a request was made the next year, in October of 1844, to convert the fort's guard house into a holding space for blacks. While the letter does not specifically mention slaves, the commanding officer admitted that he did not like to "confine negroes within the guardhouse with soldiers unless in cases of absolute necessity." He concluded that overusing the guardhouse as a space for black people "would be converting the guard house into a common jail for every refractory negro in the country."⁶⁶ It is not clear whether most of these confined blacks were in legal limbo. However, most of them were likely either free or in legal limbo, as the punishment of enslaved persons was the responsibility of the owner or their respective tribal government. This became a larger issue as free black Seminoles moved to Fort Gibson between 1845 and 1847. The military fortification protected the rights of black people across a wide spectrum of freedom and subjugation.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Headquarters Records of Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, October 18, 1843, Roll 1, page 163; Headquarters Records of Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, June 21, 1843, Roll 1, page 88.

⁶⁶ Headquarters Records of Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, October 18, 1843, Roll 1, page 163.

⁶⁷ Littlefield and Underhill, "Slave Revolt in the Cherokee Nation," *American Indian Quarterly* 3 (1977): 128.

The 1840s were a landmark period for the territory. The year 1842, in particular, culminated in the Cherokee Slave Revolt as well as marked the end of the Second Seminole War in Florida. These developments led to the influx of Seminoles into the territory. This internal intrusion revolved around the Seminole chiefs, Wild Cat, Alligator, Holatoochee, and their followers. They decided to settle on the land of what scholar Kenneth Porter describes as “friendly Cherokees.”⁶⁸ In other words, the uncertain position of the Seminoles in Indian Territory moved some of its members to seek federal protection at Fort Gibson, located on Cherokee land.

The Seminoles experienced tense debate following Removal to Indian Territory. The abrupt end of the Second Seminole War and the status of their black counterparts undermined Seminole stability. Although the Seminole Nation had a more relaxed form of slavery compared to southeastern Native nations, because of their difference, Black Seminoles distanced themselves from the larger Seminole community. Sovereignty and freedom had diverged during the Second Seminole War as both groups had different reasons to fight.⁶⁹ For the Seminoles, the objective to stay in Florida was of utmost importance. The Seminoles also felt threatened by the Creek Nation and wanted to remain politically independent from them. Meanwhile, the black population, according to Kevin Mulroy, fought for freedom in and of itself.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Kenneth Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom Seeking-People* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2013), 111.

⁶⁹ Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen* 51.

⁷⁰ Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen* 51.

The introduction of the Seminole into Indian Territory brought forth a particular dialogue of race fueled by internal intrusion. The legal limbo of Black Seminoles and the Seminole Nation as a whole, with regard to Creek control of the nation became a heated topic in Indian Territory in the 1830s and 1840s.⁷¹ Government officials, meanwhile, argued for several days over the legality of slavery in the Seminole Nation as well as the existence of Seminole slavery within the context of international law.⁷² The presence of intruders on Cherokee land was exacerbated by tribal councils led by mixed-bloods who were more or less assimilated to Eurocentric views of property. Some black Natives spoke English and the Native tongue of their tribes. Others, as in the case of the Seminole, originated as slaves in Georgia and South Carolina only to flee to the Seminole Nation in Florida. Meanwhile, some slaves had experience with several Native tribes due to the flux of slave ownership.

The Seminole Nation's activities prior to Removal illuminates the attributes of Indian Territory's free black population. Some government officials attributed the Seminole's rebellious nature to the black presence in the nation's leadership. Decades before Seminole Removal, Floridians had worried about the autonomous nature of the tribe's slaves. Scholar George Klos states that in practice, Seminole slaves were tenant farmers who gave a portion of their yield to their superiors and lived in their own communities near their Native brethren. Despite their sometimes murky status in the midst of a hostile slave society in surrounding states, Black Seminoles were valuable to

⁷¹ Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 111.

⁷² James Sefton, "Black Slaves, White Middlemen: A Congressional Debate of 1852" *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 51 (1972): 118.

the greater Seminole Nation. The longstanding relations between Seminoles and Creeks, and Seminoles and Black Seminoles contributed to the ever-changing relationship between Native and black residents in Indian Territory. In short, the Five Tribes came to Indian Territory with their ideologies developed from longstanding issues in the southeastern part of the country. Fugitive slavery existed in the South too, but Indian Territory's sparseness and remoteness would have appealed to fugitive slaves.⁷³

The value of Black Seminoles increased if they were bilingual because they could be used as interpreters. Seminole interpreters made sure their own interests were served when they were involved with tribal and international matters with different states, "but even a black of low status among the Seminoles felt it was an improvement over Anglo-American chattel slavery."⁷⁴ Florida's government claimed that Seminole leaders were constantly manipulated by their black population, citing the many runaway slaves claiming themselves as part of the Nation. However, the Seminole and their black interpreters protected the runaway slaves for two reasons. First, the Seminole's black population comprised a loyal citizen base of warriors, laborers, interpreters, and the like. Second, Black Seminole interpreters were usually former slaves themselves.⁷⁵ They fought alongside their Native counterparts resisting Removal, and they had a say in the negotiations. This legacy made its way into the bloodline of Indian Territory's culture. As in Florida, the Seminole were accused of inciting slave misbehavior during the early

⁷³ George Klos, "Blacks and the Seminole Removal Debate, 1821-1835." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 68 (1989): 58.

⁷⁴ Klos, "Blacks and the Seminole Removal Debate," 59.

⁷⁵ Klos, "Blacks and the Seminole Removal Debate," 66.

inception of Indian Territory. As a result, what came to be known as the Cherokee Slave Revolt of 1842 was the climax of this clash of Native nations.

Seminole slaves likely influenced rebellion among the few Cherokee slaves that participated in 1842.⁷⁶ The intruders, according to the Cherokee Nation, were likely Seminole. Nevertheless, the Cherokee Slave Revolt became a watershed moment as Indian Territory and surrounding states feared additional insurrection and black freedom. An Arkansas newspaper account fifty years following the incident, remembered the Cherokee Slave Revolt as a larger issue of fugitive slavery throughout the frontier. The black Mexican settlements to which black Cherokee and Creek revolutionaries aimed to flee, according to the account, were settled by fugitive slaves from the “Southwestern frontier” who had mixed with Mexican settlers in the country.⁷⁷ The account went on to claim that Arkansas slaves “were invited to join the procession, but did not organize for want of a leader and fear of discovery.”⁷⁸

Some Seminoles, following migration, settled on Cherokee land to be closer to Fort Gibson for government protection and supplies for subsistence. Despite the agricultural progress that some Seminole bands were making, the Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs of that year reported “they [Seminoles] seem to lose their greatness in the crowd of other Indians who are engaged in the cultivation of the soil.”

⁷⁶ Littlefield and Underhill, “Slave Revolt in the Cherokee Nation, 1842” *American Indian Quarterly* 3 (1977): 126.

⁷⁷ “The Negro Insurrection,” *Fort Smith Elevator* February 12, 1897 from Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, 39.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Likely alluding to the ambiguous nature of Seminole slavery, the report also illustrates the carryover effect of cultures they had in the Southeast.⁷⁹

The trouble federal officials had with confining black people demonstrates the Indian Territory's legal ambiguities. Many blacks contested their freedom due to the agreement federal officials made with Black Seminoles.⁸⁰ Runaway slavery was also an issue that federal officials helped mediate as a result of overlapping legalities stemming from pre-Removal agreements. The case of a black man named Joseph demonstrates the ambiguities blacks faced in Indian Territory.

A Fort Gibson letter from November 30, 1844, recounted an incident in which Joseph, a black man, requested freedom papers from federal officials. In an effort to justify his claim, Joseph told officials he formerly belonged to a white man, but Seminoles captured him in Florida. He ran away and gave himself to an American military general, becoming an interpreter. Two years later, the military removed Joseph and his Black Seminole counterparts to Indian Territory "unowned," "unclaimed," and needing "free papers" owed to him because he had helped the American military. Now, he needed the military's protection in Indian Territory. Unfortunately, Joseph's voice is only heard through the letters of military officers. Nevertheless, Joseph's story demonstrates the complicated nature of race and identity in Indian Territory and contributed to the contested nature of black freedom there.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Report Of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Accompanying the Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, for the Year 1842* (Washington: A.O.P. Nicholson), 444.

⁸⁰ Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen*, xxii.

⁸¹ Headquarters Records of Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, November 30, 1844, Roll 1, page 166.

As had Henry Bibb, Joseph realized the difficulty of movement in an area with ambiguous legalities. Joseph's transient and fluid experience as an African American was further complicated by his association with the Seminole Nation. Nonetheless, Joseph's ability to speak the Seminole language likely became an important tool in navigating Indian Territory's cultural terrain. In fact, Joseph's interest in remaining in Indian Territory demonstrates the region's fluid boundaries. He may have lived among the free Black Seminole population and demonstrated his comfort there by going to Fort Gibson to validate the freedom promised to him.

Henry Bibb agreed to be sold to a Cherokee slaveholder due to the arguably less brutal form of Native American chattel slavery compared with its Anglo counterpart. In contrast, Joseph leveraged his association with the Seminole Nation and his military service to both acquire and maintain his freedom in Indian Territory. The particular circumstances of each black person influenced their view of Indian Territory. Nevertheless, danger remained as the region was a transient space for black and white captives, black fugitive slaves, and quasi-free people such as Joseph. A question also arises about the region's erratic climate, and how it contributed to black flight in Indian Territory.⁸²

It appears that Indian Territory's climate played a central role in how people moved throughout the landscape. Climate also was a significant component in crop growth during certain periods, which would have likely been vital to a fugitive slave's success. Drought was (and is) a factor in how people settled in the region. Each tribal

⁸² Daniel F. Littlefield and Mary Ann Littlefield, "The Beams Family: Free Blacks in Indian Territory," *The Journal of Negro History* 61 (1976): 21.

nation experienced difficulties in their new region as drastic climatic shifts played an important role in the instability many faced. Historian Norman Graebner in his descriptive, yet problematic, “Pioneer Indian Agriculture in Oklahoma,” describes 1830s Indian Territory as a region of fertile river valleys, lush with grass and heavy timber. Its fertile soil was populated with plentiful wild crops and groves and small bodies of water perfect for livestock.⁸³

The 1830s and 1840s were, according to Graebner, trial and error agriculturally for each of the Five Tribes. The floods of 1844 destroyed much of what the Cherokee Nation had built. A drought in 1845 followed. Drought had the ability to motivate slaves from Texas to Indian Territory, especially if there were food shortages. Government assistance during this time was often not sufficient. Moreover, the tenets of communal farming within the Five Tribes changed. Property ownership became more important; previously, they had lived more or less communally. The importance of agriculture during the period exacerbated political tensions the Five Tribes were experiencing. With this in mind, a survey of agricultural hardship from the 1830s to the 1850s begs discussion.⁸⁴

Additional motives are also important to consider with regard to runaway slaves. Celia Naylor writes that slaves likely took advantage of the tumultuous period of factionalism within the Cherokee Nation. However, what role, if any, did drought play in influencing the motives of black slaves in Indian Territory? Drought, of course, is a

⁸³ Norman Arthur Graebner, “Pioneer Indian Agriculture in Oklahoma,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 23 (1945): 236-37.

⁸⁴ John Morris, Charles Goins, and Edwin McReynolds write “all of the large lakes in Oklahoma are man-made. They have been developed for such purposes as flood control, conservation, navigation, irrigation, recreation, power, and municipal water supply.” For more on Oklahoma’s lakes see *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma 2nd edition*, 6 and 82.

constant in the arid west. Dry conditions affected Indian Territory's inhabitants during certain periods. These factors may have hindered the progression of stability in each Nation.

Environmentalists Justin Sheffield and Eric Wood write that "the 19th century brought a series of major droughts that had significant consequences on the social and environmental fabric of the West and Midwest of the US."⁸⁵ Prior to Removal, government officials and Native American reformists argued for, and against, removing the Five Tribes west of the Mississippi due to the arid conditions that would make their agricultural life difficult. Historian Kevin Sweeney argues that this region, known at the time as the "Great American Desert," appealed to Indian reformists because "the location of the so-called desert immediately to the west of the proposed reservation would preclude any white settlement and prevent another encirclement of Native groups."⁸⁶

The Five Tribes experienced extreme weather conditions throughout the 1830s. The Choctaw Nation, for example, arrived in Indian Territory in 1833 during destructive floods that destroyed hundreds of fields. Some Choctaws saw success in their first year of growing, but many arrived too late for the growing season (between April and November), leaving many dependent on government rations.⁸⁷ The agriculturally successful Choctaws sold their surplus crops to the government in an effort to help the

⁸⁵ Sheffield and Wood, *Drought*, 90.

⁸⁶ Kevin Sweeney, *Prelude to the Dust Bowl: Drought in the Nineteenth Century Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 26. For more on the debate regarding Removal and "the Great American Desert" see Sweeney, 19-30.

⁸⁷ Morris, et al., *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma*, 8.

less fortunate, but this gesture did not completely end hunger throughout the region. Nonetheless, a drought in 1838 depleted surplus crops for the Choctaws.⁸⁸

The first group of Seminoles arrived too late in 1839 for the growing season, forcing many to depend on government aid. The same happened to another group of Seminoles in 1845, which moved the government to offer additional provisions lasting until the next growing season, but these provisions were often inadequate. The Five Tribes' issue with fraudulent contractors moved the federal government to appoint Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock to investigate tribal grievances against government contractors. Hitchcock visited each of the Five Nations and spoke with leaders regarding their grievances against the government and the financial and agricultural destitution each faced.

In short, Hitchcock's Indian Territory visit reveals how climate and geography affected the Five Tribes post-Removal. One can imagine how fugitives of all sorts might manage there. In his travels, Hitchcock visited the Seminole Nation in 1841 (the year before the Seminole influenced slave revolt) and spoke to Coocoochee with interpreter, Micco, and former slave and interpreter, Abram. During these talks, Abram alluded to Florida. He expressed Coocoochee's sentiment regarding the fact that the tribe did not receive supplies such as axes and kettles to begin their new life in the region.⁸⁹ Days later, Hitchcock visited the Cherokee capital, Tahlequah, and stayed with Chief John Ross.

⁸⁸ Graebner, "Pioneer Indian Agriculture in Oklahoma," 235.

⁸⁹ W.A. Croffut ed., Ethan A. Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in the Camp and Field* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1909). <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=VhJ-4yKyrhoC&rdid=book-VhJ-4yKyrhoC&rdot=1>, 138.

Although some of Hitchcock's descriptions are problematic, he notes the unequal distribution of wealth amongst members of the Cherokee Nation. Hitchcock alludes to the wealth inequality with his description of Ross's lavish lifestyle. In his report, Hitchcock also mentions "A good deal of poverty."⁹⁰ Such differences in circumstance reflected slavery's role in unequal wealth distribution, as well as the government corruption and environmental destruction that likely hindered the plight of less fortunate Cherokee members.

A year after Hitchcock's visit, Ross wrote in a letter to a Cherokee leader that the Seminole delegation under Chief Wild Cat had been living on "Cherokee lands around Fort Gibson and the adjacent country." He complained that the population of Seminoles had increased on Cherokee lands and that government officials had failed to provide food and supplies.⁹¹ During a week's stay, Hitchcock spoke to Ross about the Cherokee Nation receiving rotten blankets, spoiled beef, overpriced corn, and forged receipts. Years earlier, many Seminoles went hungry as a shipment of corn spoiled in rainy and snowy conditions while in transit. Consequently, many suffered from starvation, while some managed to survive on wild game and vegetables in the area.⁹²

The Choctaws suffered more from the region's climatic shifts than other tribes. The drought of the mid-1850s ravaged Choctaws, rich and poor. As a result, Natives in the southern parts of Indian Territory moved throughout the region searching for fertile

⁹⁰ Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in the Camp and Field*, 140.

⁹¹ John Ross to Pierce M. Butler, March 22, 1842, Gary E. Moulton ed., *The Papers of Chief John Ross vol. 2 1840-1866* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 115.

⁹² Graebner, "Pioneer Indian Agriculture in Oklahoma," 240.

land to till. However, an 1858 Indian Affairs report concluded that none of the Five Tribes achieved success in agriculture.⁹³ The Seminole, for example, suffered massive flooding at the beginning of the year only to suffer from dry conditions during the warmer months.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, drought and famine was only one of the many factors that motivated slaves to flee from their masters in Indian Territory.

In the 1840s Indian Territory experienced increasingly strict slave codes along with a growing black presence due to the Black Seminole population. During that time period it also struggled with black slaves taking advantage of the instability of the Cherokee Nation. The 1850s brought misfortune for each of the Five Tribes as a result of drought, famine, and bureaucratic entanglement.⁹⁵ In the midst of these incidents, attention on runaway slaves continued into the 1850s.

In 1850, the *Choctaw Intelligencer* republished an editorial from an Arkansas newspaper detailing a planned attack from a group of Cherokees and Creeks on a “negro town” in the Seminole nation. The Cherokee and Creek combatants aimed to take black inhabitants rumored to be Creek and Arkansan slaves captive and re-enslave them. The mission failed due to Seminoles protecting the town. The editorial pleaded for additional troops at Fort Smith to regulate black movement, because the “negro town” was a “den of runaway slaves where every negro who can make his escape from Louisiana and Arkansas, is harbored.”⁹⁶

⁹³ *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1858*, 126-7.

⁹⁴ *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1858*, 153.

⁹⁵ Littlefield and Underhill, “Slave Revolt in the Cherokee Nation, 1842,” 127.

⁹⁶ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, Thursday, July 25, 1850.

Historian Kelly Houston Jones asserts that “It is clear that runaways in Arkansas had a sense of place wider than their immediate neighborhoods and took opportunities to make connections in multiple locales as they were forced to move to and around the region.”⁹⁷ Although Seminole slaves experienced greater freedom, Arkansas slaves also experienced some freedom of movement. Their owners hired out their enslaved American blacks to others in the general vicinity. It should also be noted that Indian Territory was originally a part of the greater Arkansas Territory.⁹⁸ Arkansas slaves traveled hundreds of miles from their plantations for jobs, to visit friends and family, and to escape. This freedom of mobility may have also been a reason why some Arkansas residents subscribed to Indian Territory newspapers like the *Choctaw Intelligencer*. John Glass, an Arkansas resident placed an advertisement for the capture of two of his slaves, as he believed “their intention [is] to go among the wild Indians.”⁹⁹

Indian Territory’s status as an unrecognized territory complicated its legacy of slavery in tribal jurisdictions. Meanwhile, the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 may have motivated white residents in surrounding states, such as Arkansas and Texas, to inquire about havens for runaway slaves, fearing the potential sovereignty and reputation Indian Territory already had. During the Gold Rush, white residents from Texas and Arkansas traveled throughout the American West en route to California.

⁹⁷ Kelly Houston Jones, “Chattel, Pioneers, and Pilgrims for Freedom: Arkansas’s Bonded Travelers,” *The Arkansas Quarterly* 75 (2016): 329.

⁹⁸ Houston Jones, “Chattel, Pioneers, and Pilgrims for Freedom: Arkansas’s Bonded Travelers,” 319.

⁹⁹ *Choctaw Intelligencer* August 14, 1850.

In some cases, Arkansas slaves traveled with their masters to California. Moving west, many travelers stopped at outposts, such as Fort Washita and Camp Arbuckle, during the 1850s. Military forts in southern Indian Territory also housed runaway slaves throughout the 1850s.¹⁰⁰ In November 1850, the *Choctaw Intelligencer* noted nine fugitive slaves at Fort Washita and seventy at Camp Arbuckle.¹⁰¹

In 1852, George Folsom, Chief of the Pushmataha District of the Choctaw Nation complained about a group of free blacks and Indians who built a fort “upon the headwaters of Boggy.”¹⁰² Not much is said about the identity of the “negroes” and the “Indians.” Also, the year and place of the fort remains unknown. 1852 was a year of bureaucratic confusion for the Southern Superintendency—the bureau that oversaw that region of Indian Territory. The Chickasaws, most likely, did not have an agent that year due to the resignation of the previous agent, with the substitute, Andrew Smith, yet to arrive. Meanwhile, the Indian Agent for the Creek Nation was absent and unable to explicitly report on conditions in the region.

The most interesting part of this military dilemma, perhaps, is Indian Agent Marcellus Duval's absence to retrieve his fugitive slaves.¹⁰³ Moreover, the Indians that

¹⁰⁰ Jon D. May, “Fort Washita,” The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=FO046>; Jon D. May, “Camp Arbuckle,” The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CA021>.

¹⁰¹ *Choctaw Intelligencer* November 14, 1850.

¹⁰² William Wilson to John Drennen, February 9, 1852 from Abel Heloise, *The Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1915), <https://archive.org/details/americanindiasslav00abeliala>, 24; For more on Black and Native military relations in the Southeast see, Millet, *The Maroons of Prospect Bluff* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2013).

¹⁰³ *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1852*, 102-3.

were also a part of the fort were likely not from the Five Tribes. Based on the report to Indian Affairs in 1852, the tribe most likely to join in this militaristic endeavor would have been the Quapaw. By this time the Quapaw were destitute, as a result of their removal to Indian Territory. The report concluded that “a large majority of them, in all probability, will wander off among the wild Indians of the prairies...” If true, these Quapaws would have found refuge among a Nation that also contained fugitive slaves. Some would have been sold back to their former owners; others would have stayed within the tribe.¹⁰⁴

Indian Territory’s newspaper culture also reflected Indian Territory’s racialized landscape. Humor dialect became a prominent part of Indian Territory print culture. Prominent American Indian writers such as Creek humorist, Alex Posey, used a mixture of humor and personae to speak to the racial and political issues that permeated Indian Territory. These stereotypes spanned the political and racial spectrum to include: Five Tribes freedmen, white intruders, intermarried white Indian citizens, and African American Indian Territory emigrants.¹⁰⁵ Editorials regarding Indian Territory slaves also filled many Indian Territory news pages.

Choctaw Nation newspapers of the time contained editorials regarding black life and runaway slaves moving in and out of Indian Territory. In 1849 an editorial in the *Choctaw Telegraph* complained about the mostly unsupervised enslaved people in Doaksville. Making an argument for a patrol company, the editorial complained “the

¹⁰⁴ *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1852*, 105.

¹⁰⁵ Daniel F. Littlefield Jr. & Carol A. Petty Hunter, *Fus Fixico Letters: Alexander Posey, a Creek Humorist in Early Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 24-25.

owners have very little control over them, and let them do pretty much as they please.”¹⁰⁶ The Choctaws’ worry about the freedom their own slaves possessed, became complicated by a worry of runaway slavery within the territory and throughout the greater region. The Choctaw Nation, wanting to express their sovereignty, preferred to avoid the possibilities of a large black population in the territory. Although negative stereotypes about Indians disseminated by white Texans overshadowed the sentiment of the Choctaw, the Choctaw continued to express their views in editorials that circulated throughout the region.

Although the newspapers such as the *Choctaw Intelligencer* supported African emigration of former slaves in editorials supporting the African Colonization Society, the zeal of staunch abolitionists, and the issues of runaway slavery became a constant topic in Choctaw print culture.¹⁰⁷ These issues became a subject of debate between Choctaw and Texan news editors. In June 1850, the Texas-based *Northern Standard* expressed anti-abolitionist sentiments saying, “It is a well-known fact that all the runaway negroes from this part of Texas always fly to the Nation...and in truth it is with difficulty that a master can regain his slave after he has got among them.” The editorial, however, expressed support of missionary work within Indian Territory as long as it did not interfere with Texan slaveholders.¹⁰⁸ Later that month, the *Choctaw Intelligencer* defended the Choctaw Nation against these “rumors” sharply writing:

it is not true that all the negroes from the neighboring part of Texas fly to this nation....This people do not harbor runaway slaves, and I defy anyone

¹⁰⁶ *Choctaw Telegraph*, Thursday, November 22, 1849.

¹⁰⁷ *Choctaw Intelligencer* Thursday, June, 20, 1850.

¹⁰⁸ Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, 41.

to prove to the contrary. Runaway negroes are not such comfortable neighbors as to receive encouragement in lying out.¹⁰⁹

However, this debate continued when the *Northern Standard* published an editorial later in July, concerning a rumor that all of Indian Territory missionaries were nothing more than abolitionists and warned Texas citizens of their continued threat.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile, the *Choctaw Intelligencer* editorialized in “More Runaways” about an advertisement for the return of three Texas slaves. The editorial quickly dismissed the fact that the person accused of stealing them happened to be Choctaw. The suspect, according to the newspaper, was a product of missionaries and “trained at a grocery on the Texas side of the [Red] River and was allowed to have one of these women for a wife,” thus painting the thief as a product of “evil” missionaries and not the Choctaw Nation.¹¹¹

The freedom, although limited, of some slaves in Indian Territory, may have attracted slaves from Texas. For example, the Choctaw territory contained particular elements of black life such as the Archard Cemetery. Choctaw slaves founded the cemetery in 1856 for black burials. The graveyard remained exclusively for blacks until 1863 when a slain white cowboy was buried.¹¹²

To the dismay of Natives in the region, the issues the Five Tribes had with their freedmen, as well as the influx of “state blacks” or “watchina” soon became a threat to

¹⁰⁹ *Choctaw Intelligencer* June [Date Unknown] 1850 in Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, 41.

¹¹⁰ *The Northern Standard* July 6, 1850 in Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, 41.

¹¹¹ *Choctaw Intelligencer* Thursday, June, 20, 1850.

¹¹² “Archard Cemetery,” *WPA Historic Site Collection*, Box Eleven, Folder Ten (Marshall County), Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

Native American sovereignty in Indian Territory.¹¹³ The region became racially complex as freedmen of the Creek, Seminole, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw Nations faced additional marginalization at the hands of African Americans in the region. Following the nineteenth century, the Seminole Freedmen, for example, saw themselves as a distinct group. An early twentieth century anthropological study on the Seminole Freedmen concluded that:

many of them [Seminole Freedmen] know that a long time ago their ancestors lived somewhere in the southeast, that there was a possibility that at one time they were an enslaved people, and that formerly there was a close relationship with the Seminole Indians.¹¹⁴

These sentiments would build during the Civil War, which alarmed each of the Five Tribes as the issues of slavery and race bred additional factionalism.

¹¹³ Donald Grinde and Quintard Taylor, "Red vs. Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post-Civil War Indian Territory, 1865-1907" *American Indian Quarterly* 8 (1984): 211-29.

¹¹⁴ Art Gallagher, "A Survey of the Seminole Freedmen," (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1951) PhD Diss., 76

Chapter 2: The Federal Government's Evolving Definitions of Black Freedom and Native Sovereignty during the Civil War and Reconstruction

Reconstruction had a profound impact on Native law and sovereignty, black and Indian freedom, and subsequent black migration to the American West. Throughout much of Indian Territory's existence, blackness often carried ambiguous connotations due to the general practices of kinship and the contested status of enslaved Creeks and Seminoles. The Slave codes that each of the Five Tribes instituted throughout the nineteenth century controlled black movement and also placed additional distinctions between red and black people. However, because of the complexities of fugitive slavery and the legal limbo of Black Creeks and Seminoles, slave codes were unevenly applied and difficult to enforce. Prejudice permeated throughout each of the Five Tribes, but race's place in these societies remained complex. The institution of slavery did not necessarily reflect the views of the nations at-large as, in general, few tribal members owned slaves. Often, those slaves were a part of tribal leadership or influential members of their community. Moreover, tribal members also associated slavery with Eurocentric values not of their own culture. These issues exacerbated Indian Territory's racial and ideological tensions

The Reconstruction treaties between the Five Tribes and the federal government (the Treaties of 1866) hardened racial lines in Indian Territory, conflating blackness to a strictly racial rather than ethnic basis. The Treaties of 1866, while referring exclusively to indigenous members and freedmen of the Five Tribes, became an instrument of black

colonization, due to inconsistent use of racialized terms like “freedmen” and “African” and various definitions of freedom and race among the Five Tribes.

The year 1866 became a pivotal year for the Five Tribes. With their sovereignty of utmost importance, the Five Tribes’ slaves would soon be caught between their respective nations and a benevolent federal government dealing with a much larger freedmen issue of their own in the United States. In the words of scholar Claudio Saunt, the emancipation of Five Tribes slaves “came at the insistence of a foreign and colonial government, the United States.”¹¹⁵ Consequently, the Treaties of 1866 ignited an already uneasy institution carefully held in place by Five Tribes leaders and the federal government.

The federal government’s disinterested regulation of Indian Territory activities and slavery worked in favor of enslaved people as Fort Gibson became a space where black people in Indian Territory could contest their freedom. The transience of the area enabled enslaved people like Henry Bibb to escape practically undetected in the 1840s. Tribal officials feared slave rebellion and black fugitivity within their own tribal boundaries. Replicating American institutions of slavery, the Five Tribes experienced a paradox similar to that of the United States’ contradiction of slavery and freedom. Their sovereignty, and for that matter, political freedom and independence, became connected to their enslavement of black people. However, perceptions of Native sovereignty were as fluid as racial conceptions and black status were among the Five Tribes.

¹¹⁵ Claudio Saunt, “The Paradox of Freedom: Tribal Sovereignty and Emancipation during the Reconstruction of Indian Territory” *The Journal of Southern History* 70 (2004): 63.

This chapter analyzes how the 1866 Treaties conflated views of “blackness” among the Five Tribes and the federal government. Definitions of sovereignty and freedom also need analysis to better understand Reconstruction in Indian Territory. Although “Other Indians and Freedmen” focuses on black migration within, and to, present-day Oklahoma, the Freedmen clauses, particularly within the Creek and Seminole treaties, sparked discussion of migration and domestic colonization of what would become the Unassigned Lands. However, the differences within the Reconstruction treaties are best understood by examining each of the Tribes’ worldviews and their historical circumstances. It is important to realize how their worldviews and their history affected their respective governments. It is also important to understand how American constitutionalism changed during Reconstruction. This evolution is especially significant considering that it impacted the views Five Tribes leaders held concerning African Americans and the Republican Party during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Overall, this chapter provides an overview of American Indian and American constitutional thought within the context of the Civil War and Reconstruction, while leaving aside discussion of the Civil War in Indian Territory. Scholars have published excellent monographs on the Civil War and continue to develop the scholarship, with emerging intersections concerning race, law, and policy.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ This chapter focuses on various perceptions of blackness, sovereignty, and freedom throughout the Civil War and Reconstruction. Therefore, this chapter does not intend to focus on incidents during the Civil War. For more on the Civil War in Indian Territory see, Adam Arneson and Andrew Graybill, eds., *Civil War Wests: Testing the Limits of the United States* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Clarissa Confer, *The Cherokee Nation in the Civil War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); Christine Schultz White and Benton R. White, *Now the Wolf Has Come: The Creek Nation in the Civil War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996); Laurence M. Hauptman, *Between Two Fires: American Indians in the Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1995); Mary Jane Warde, *When the Wolf Came: The Civil War in Indian Territory* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2013).

Instead, this chapter explores the legal ideology and debates surrounding African Americans and Native Americans. The analysis of the legal rights of both groups provides context for the outcome of Reconstruction in Indian Territory. In the legal debates that various tribal factions had with the federal government, they expressed their disinterest in adopting their former slaves. They wanted to preserve their sovereignty and a distinct Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, or Seminole identity. The slavery practices among the Five Nations fell on a spectrum, that Claudio Saunt describes as ranging between slavery and kinship. However, fears of rebellion due to the Cherokee Slave Revolt of 1842, fluid mobility of Seminole slaves, abolitionist elements, and pressure from Texas and Arkansas moved some of the Five Tribes (e.g., the Cherokee), to enact additional slave laws, which further solidified the institution. Meanwhile, the federal government's inconsistency with Native law and various agreements complicated the status of Five Tribes freedmen. The expansion of citizenship to African Americans placed pressure on the tribes to adopt their former slaves. Also, the economic shifts of the 1860s made cotton a desirable crop to grow if one was able to obtain land. The difficulty of obtaining land in the Deep South moved black leaders to look to the federal government to provide land for African American settlement. This was a part of the effort to fulfill the Republican promise of equal citizenship.¹¹⁷

The federal government and the Five Tribes had different stances on their former slaves. The Five Tribes did have pro-slavery factions among their leadership. However,

¹¹⁷ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 597-601.

the pro-Union factions within the Creek, Seminole, and Cherokee Nations were triumphant in accepting their former slaves as tribal citizens. Their success obscured dissenting opinions within their talks with federal officials. The federal government's hypocritical views on slavery in Indian Territory often centered on the status of former slaves.¹¹⁸ Would former slaves acquire full tribal citizenship, including access to land and voting rights? An examination of the varied views on blackness from the federal as well as the Native perspective provides nuance when considering why Indian Territory attracted African Americans by the 1870s.

Black migration during Reconstruction followed similar patterns of enslaved people in the region during the 1840s and 1850s. The years immediately following the Civil War led to an increase in federal control over Indian Territory. The government's new treaties with the Five Tribes in 1866 pushed conflicting definitions of blackness into Native law in the name of the Reconstruction-era's focus on black social equality, while eroding tribal sovereignty. In fact, much of this conflation also came as a direct result of the changing constitutional laws colliding with the confusing and often biased Native laws. Thus, the 1866 Treaties reflect new concepts of centralized federal power and

¹¹⁸ Duane Champagne also makes an argument concerning the importance of political formations and kinship in the Five Tribes and mixed-blood planter class early during the eighteenth century, downplaying some of the ideological aspects and complications of race changed downplays the prevalence of slavery to the changing social structure of the Five Tribes. According to Champagne "There are obvious difficulties in an argument for political change and stability that is made primarily on the basis of class groups or mixed-blood elites, while the social and political organization of the majority of the society remains underanalyzed and is given in secondary accounting." In this sense, Champagne argues that the "nondifferentiated Chickasaw social order created strong barriers to increased political differentiation." See Duane Champagne, *Social Order and Political Change: Constitutional Governments Am Among the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) 281-2n46.

weakening of Indian sovereignty.¹¹⁹ While Reconstruction led to constitutional change and protections for individual rights of due process, voting and citizenship, these protections further damaged Indian sovereignty. Although slavery and freedom undergirded much of the Reconstruction Treaties, the sovereignty the Tribes practiced by having slave laws and ownership became legally invalid. It no longer reflected the goals of the federal government, which wanted to further nationalize the country for the sake of a stronger union, national defense, and expansion.¹²⁰ Political debates were essentially “between the executive and the legislative for supremacy.”¹²¹ Following the Civil War, debates throughout 1866 centered on white southern views of the federal government. Reporters and congressmen traveled the South in an effort to gauge the state of relations between southerners, as well as black and white southerners’ views on the federal government. Ideological leanings influenced some of these visitors to the South as they traversed the Deep South on the dime of newspaper publications and the federal government.¹²²

Reports like that of politician and journalist Carl Schurz, a Civil War army officer, became a weapon for Radical Republicans wanting stronger provisions for the South to

¹¹⁹ Stephen Kantrowitz, “White Supremacy, Settler Colonialism, and the Two Citizenships of the Fourteenth Amendment,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 10 (2020): 31.

¹²⁰ Though the Five Tribes owned slaves as property and extended the institution following Removal, the Five Tribes relations with the federal government were drenched in racist thoughts geared toward colonization. As Robert Williams argues in “law, regarded by the West as its most respected and cherished instrument of civilization, was also the West’s most vital and effective instrument of empire during its genocidal and colonization of the non-Western peoples of the New World, the American Indians. See Robert A. Williams, Jr., *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6.

¹²¹ Riddleberger, *1866: The Critical Year Revisited* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), xi-xii.

¹²² Riddleberger, *1866*, 13.

re-enter the Union. Schurz placed the southern population into four classes. The first class consisted of those who generally supported reunification. The second class consisted of restorationists, many of them being politicians. Confederate sympathizers comprised the third class. The remaining class of people (and the majority) were southerners with “no definite ideas about the circumstances under which they live and about the course they have to follow.”¹²³ While other leaders such as Ulysses Grant presented optimistic reports on the post-war South, Schurz detailed the complex feelings among the southern populace categorizing a variety of sentiments about emancipation and the federal government.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, war correspondent Benjamin C. Truman depicted a South that President Andrew Johnson wanted to believe in. Under Johnson’s Reconstruction policies, Truman argued that the South was more loyal. This newfound loyalty, according to Truman, came from the order found in Johnson’s moderate Reconstruction.¹²⁵

During this period U.S. congressional representative Thaddeus Stevens proclaimed that it would be “beneficial to exile 70,000 proud, bloated, and deficient Rebels thus to expropriate 4,000,000 of laborers, native to the soil and loyal to the government.”¹²⁶ While making allusions to the economic importance of black labor, Radical Republicans’ views of seeing the Confederacy as a “conquered province” also

¹²³ Riddleberger, 1866, 14.

¹²⁴ Riddleberger, 1866, 13-15. See Carl Schurz, *Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz*, ed. Frederic Bancroft, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), vol 1. 279-374.

¹²⁵ Riddleberger, 1866, 13.

¹²⁶ Riddleberger, 23. Quoted from Fawn M. Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, *Scourge of the South* (New York: Norton, 1953), 231-33; Richard N. Current, *Old Thaddeus Stevens: a Story of Ambition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1942), 214-17.

colored the federal government's treaty discussions with the Five Tribes. The constitutional changes occurring during 1866 affected thoughts on Native sovereignty and citizenship.

The very foundations of American Indian law are complex because "tribes existed before the United States of America, so there is a more mature sovereignty, predating the Constitution; in that sense, tribal sovereignty exists 'outside' the Constitution."¹²⁷ Yet, post-Civil War debates concerning these elements often revolved around the Constitution, which does not provide a definition of tribal sovereignty.¹²⁸ Congressional debates concerning Native American citizenship centered on the definitions of "jurisdiction" and "civilization."¹²⁹ According to David E. Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima, "one could argue that indeterminacy, or inconsistency, is a hallmark of the tribal-federal relationship."¹³⁰

Debates concerning Indian citizenship occurred as Congress debated the Civil Rights Bill of 1866. A discussion on the bill's first section led to an addition of "excluding Indians not taxed." Republican Senators agreed on not extending rights to Native Americans. According to scholar Patrick W. Riddleberger:

The pressure of the black within the bounds of American society, his importance to the economy, his impact on the American culture, and, above all perhaps, his participation in the war for his own liberation, placed him in an entirely different category from the Indian led, perforce,

¹²⁷ David E. Wilkins & K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *Uneven Ground: American Indian Sovereignty and Federal Law* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 4-9.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Stephen Kantrowitz, "Jurisdiction, Civilization, and the Ends of Native American Citizenship: the view from 1866" *The Western Historical Quarterly* 52 (Summer 2021): 191.

¹³⁰ Wilkins & Lomawaima, *Uneven Ground*, 10.

to a totally different approach in dealing with him. He shared with the American of European stock despite racial differences, the experience of being an immigrant to the New World. Thus the symbolic and mythological reaction to him was different from that to the Indian. Given the extent of racial prejudice, what is surprising is not so much the effect that was made in Congress to provide the black with a legal and constitutional basis for equality.¹³¹

The legacy of emancipation sparked debates around the federal government's responsibility to act as overseers of the freedmen population.¹³² Abolitionists and antislavery proponents ultimately believed that freedmen needed supervision.¹³³ A Boston publication noted that the federal government needed a bureau for freedmen and should provide services to them similar to what they provided to Native Americans. A report of the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission from 1863 concluded that the government should "organize freed blacks' labor on abandoned and confiscated plantations and ultimately allow them, if qualified, to lease or purchase land outright."¹³⁴ However, antislavery supporters argued that government supervision of freedmen "contradicted the principles of legal equality."¹³⁵ On the topic of foreign emigration, the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission also concluded that the freedmen expressed disinterest in emigrating to a foreign space, which according to the report proved "universal" among the freedmen population. Instead, "The chief object of ambition

¹³¹ Riddleberger, *1866*, 152.

¹³² Wilkins & Lomawaima, *Uneven Ground*, 255.

¹³³ Wilkins & Lomawaima, *Uneven Ground*, 24.

¹³⁴ Herman Belz, *A New Birth of Freedom: The Republican Party and Freedmen's Rights, 1861 to 1866*, 72.

¹³⁵ Belz, *A New Birth of Freedmen*, 73.

among the [black] refugees is to own property, especially to possess land, if it be only a few acres in their own State.”¹³⁶ Consequently, the contradictions of the federal government exacerbated the divergent views the Five Tribes had with their enslaved populations. The government’s push to have the Five Tribes adopt emancipation disturbed the Nations, as tribal sovereignty gave the Five Nations the right to make decisions concerning chattel slavery without consulting the federal government.

The Black experience within the Five Tribes varied by tribe. As discussed in chapter one, the Seminole and Creek Nations had a considerable population of free and quasi-free black people. The region’s Black Seminole population worried Five Tribes slave owners and the neighboring states of Arkansas and Texas due to the group’s alleged influence on the region’s enslaved populations. Sharing similar views regarding Native Americans, the federal government and Indian Territory’s neighbors ultimately sought control of the region. Although the tribes were perceived as “civilized” due to their racist practices of chattel slavery, the federal government found avenues to legally subjugate them. According to Robert Williams:

The question in Western colonizing theory (at least before the twentieth century) was rarely whether power ought to be exercised over savage tribes. Rather, debates almost always focused on which power center within the Western colonizing polities would control that power.¹³⁷

African Americans felt connections with the plight of Native people, but their interests certainly did not always align with them. Land, perhaps, best expresses

¹³⁶ *Report of the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission*, (New York: John F. Trow, 1863), 14.

¹³⁷ Robert A. Williams, Jr., *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8.

differences between former slaves of the United States and the Five Tribes. Native freedmen usually identified with their respective tribe, with communal land holding playing an important role. For them, tribal citizenship and remaining on their tribal land was of utmost importance. In contrast, African Americans aimed for equal participation in the fabric of American society. Their equal participation was predicated on the acquisition of land, individualism, and independence. African Americans believed this was important to sustain community and to provide protection in a racist society.¹³⁸ Nonetheless, Americans' perceptions of blackness obliterated the nuance needed to understand relations between African Americans and Freedmen of the Five Tribes. The reason for the federal government's ambivalence toward such differences becomes clear, considering that the government viewed the Five Tribes as subjugated nations. This attitude particularly impacted negotiations between the tribes and their former slaves on the issue of adoption.

While the majority of African Americans remained in the South, those who came to Indian Territory, and later to black towns during the nineteenth century, were in search of place and community. Their reasons for leaving the Deep South revolved around racial violence and social subjugation. For Five Tribes freedmen, the migration of African Americans into their tribal land was an intrusion. In other words, they defined community differently. As scholar Kendra Field observes, "part of what attracted African Americans to Indian Territory in the first place was its momentary status as a political and economic

¹³⁸ Edward Magdol, *A Right to the Land: Essays on the Freedmen's Community* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), 223.

space on the margins, if not beyond the bounds, of U.S. oversight.”¹³⁹ These tensions remained in the early twentieth century. An unidentified Creek Freedperson recounted how African American freedmen defrauded Creek Freedmen out of land by aligning with land hungry whites. The interviewee recounted that whites “would take a Watchina [African American] and dress him in a big car and have him start corresponding some Freedmen girl that had land they wanted. They would tell him who to go after.” The Freedperson spoke from experience explaining “The Watchina would sell out to the White man that hired him, that’s the way my sister was done.”¹⁴⁰ Following the Civil War, the influx of intruders into Indian Territory gradually increased, and military garrisons were needed to regulate such activity.

In fact, the development of military garrisons throughout Indian Territory assisted with the control of fugitive slaves and intruders (of all colors) illegally entering the area. Forts Gibson, Towson, Wayne, and Coffee regulated the eastern portion of Indian Territory from present-day Muskogee to the Arkansas border. Forts Arbuckle and Washita regulated intrusion in southern Indian Territory. The three forts in the East ceased operations prior to the Civil War.¹⁴¹

The closing of Indian Territory’s eastern forts made the region vulnerable to raids and caused a decrease in local economic activity. General stores and trading posts were often established next to military fortifications as transients from the region traded along

¹³⁹ Field, *Growing Up with the Country*, 5.

¹⁴⁰ Sameth, “Creek Negroes,” 54.

¹⁴¹ Mary Jane Warde, *When the Wolf Came: The Civil War in Indian Territory* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2013), 24-25.

the Texas Road en route to California and elsewhere. Neighboring tribes also visited these stores to exchange items and captives.¹⁴² According to Arell Gibson, the loss of these military posts did not stop Indian Territory from experiencing a golden age of economic activity. This description is rather gilded considering the class and racial tensions that existed beneath the surface. The territory's progressive, elite, and slaveholding people of the Five Tribes often settled in the lush river valleys throughout the territory and developed large plantations. The largest ones were located in Choctaw and Chickasaw territory, where the Red River Valley had soil conducive for growing cash crops and staples like cotton and corn. Meanwhile, the plantations of the Creek, Cherokee, and Seminole Nations often produced a large variety of produce and meat. Nearby military posts consumed supplies provided by local farmers. The growing factionalism within the United States during the 1850s also fanned the flames of factionalism among the Five Tribes. In addition, the United States' control of tribal annuities forged an uneasy relationship between the federal government and the Five Tribes. Meanwhile, Texan and Arkansan inhabitants, fearing abolition, expressed concerns about an Indian Territory under Union influence.¹⁴³

Discussions of colonization occurred for both Native and American Freedmen from the 1860s onward. The Civil War caused additional movement of Indian Territory's population due to violence and escape attempts by black slaves. The war caused some Natives to take up arms for both sides as others remained dedicated to neutrality. Native

¹⁴² Warde, *When the Wolf Came*, 27-28.

¹⁴³ Fischer, ed., *The Civil War in Indian Territory*, 20-21.

owners fled with their property south to Texas or north toward Kansas. Some slaves joined the Union cause, others in the States fled to Indian Territory, hiding in the hilly and mountainous areas throughout its southern portion. The fragmented landscape of the war remained as treaty negotiations in 1866 stirred the same tensions.

During the 1860s, politicians focused on moving blacks to their own territory in the American West. These calls for the colonization of African Americans demonstrates Republican disinterest in true black citizenship before, and after, the Emancipation Proclamation. As the Civil War ravaged Indian Territory, the Southwest became an area of interest for black colonization. According to scholar Nicholas Guyatt, “not for the first time in American history, the West became the canvas for multiplying visions of racial containment and separation.”¹⁴⁴

American interest in colonizing land did not happen in a vacuum. Rather, this also occurred in Europe where European countries “made a simultaneous turn inward to domestic colonies as a solution to virtually every social problem encountered in Europe's rapidly industrialized and urbanized societies.”¹⁴⁵ The foundation of the American republic revolved around racial exclusion. The Five Tribes, on the other hand, had a more fluid and nuanced understanding of inclusion.

Ultimately, the Treaties of 1866 rested on Republican notions of improvement and social equality. Domestic colonization undergirded how the federal government

¹⁴⁴ Nicholas Guyatt, “‘The Future of Our Freedmen’: Republican Colonization Schemes in Texas and Mexico, 1861-1865” in Adam Arneson and Andrew Graybill eds., *Civil War Wests: Testing the Limits of the United States* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 97.

¹⁴⁵ Barabara Arneil, *Domestic Colonies: the Turn Inward to Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

sought to deal with their “social problems.” The federal acquisition of Creek and Seminole land known as the Unassigned Lands partially rested on “the central thrust of a domestic colonial ideology via agrarian labor.”¹⁴⁶

Similar to the Five Tribes’ history of Removal and settler colonialism, the Choctaw Nation sought to colonize their former slaves rather than adopt them as citizens. Calls for the removal and colonization of the Choctaw Freeman, however, meant something other than the federal government’s interpretation. In the case of the Choctaw Nation, leaders saw “segregation as necessary to preserve their collective and often radically different way of life from assimilation into the broader society.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, they turned to segregation to protect their sovereignty.

Although Indian Territory may be viewed as a microcosm of the United States’ large-scale Reconstruction, the fact that black people participated in treaty negotiations differentiates it. In short, black people (although few in number) played a role by acting as interpreters—a sign of the complicated role black people played in tribal politics and tribal life. Their participation also demonstrates the influence of black people on tribal politics before and after the Civil War. Along with blackness, freedom and its definition is important considering the outcomes of Reconstruction for the Five Tribes and their former slaves.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Arneil, *Domestic Colonies*, 3n2.

¹⁴⁷ Arneil, *Domestic Colonies*, 5.

¹⁴⁸ Claudio Saunt, “The Paradox of Freedom,” 71.

Native perceptions of community, society, and government are also important to examine within the context of Reconstruction. The Five Tribes are an isolated case regarding Native American law because of their institutions of slavery. Duane Champagne argues that Native American social and political life, revolved around the goal to “preserve harmony and order within the cosmic community.”¹⁴⁹ These central components of Native society, community, and government differed from the national project that was Reconstruction. Both the Five Tribes and the federal government held views of government and sovereignty that were steeped in their specific histories and worldviews.

The era of Reconstruction was a new period in American constitutionalism.¹⁵⁰ Constitutional amendments forged a way for the national government to extend the rights of citizenship. In other words, the Reconstruction Amendments gave the federal government power to extend and protect the rights of citizens rather than leaving it to the states. Freedom and citizenship had varied language in the Five Tribes’ Reconstruction treaties. For the Five Tribes, “the spectrum of servitude in Indian Territory ranged from kinship to chattel slavery.”¹⁵¹

During this period, the United States supported the notion of self-help for the nation’s former slaves. Political leaders and journalists throughout the country supported

¹⁴⁹ Duane Champagne, *Social Change and Cultural Continuity among Native Nations* (New York: Altamira Press, 2007), 15.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Kaczorowski, “To Begin the Nation Anew: Congress, Citizenship, and Civil Rights after the Civil War” *American History Review* (1987): 47.

¹⁵¹ Claudio Saunt, “The Paradox of Freedom,” 67.

black self-help, because it was thought of as a good induction into the free labor economy.¹⁵² With no financial footing, the government looked for ways to help with the Freedmen's destitution. This was coupled with African American leaders like Booker T. Washington who extolled the importance of self-uplift and Christian morals as a weapon to help African Americans strive and prosper within a racially charged nation. African American leaders sought to understand and define their place in American society following Emancipation.¹⁵³ Writing on Reconstruction in Indian Territory, historian Christopher Bean writes:

Reconstruction was in fact a national process, used for both opportunistic means and the beneficial redress of long-standing problems. Such a dichotomy, some might say contradiction, existed in the government's Reconstruction policies with the various Indian nations located in Indian Territory.¹⁵⁴

Indian Territory was ravaged by political and environmental forces, both before and after the war. In an 1860 report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Indian agents

¹⁵² Heather Cox Richardson, *The Greatest Nation on Earth*, 228-9.

¹⁵³ See Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, reprint, 1992); Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Norman L. Crockett, *The Black Towns* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1979); August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, reprint, 1988); Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Sarah Deutsche, "Being American in Boley, Oklahoma," from Stephanie Cole & Alison M. Parker eds. *Beyond Black & White: Race Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest* (Texas A&M University Press College Station, 2004); Thad Sitton and James H. Conrad, *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, *America's First Black Town: Brooklyn, Illinois, 1830-1915* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Edwin Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); Edward Magdol, *A Right to the Land: Essays on the Freedmen's Community* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977).

¹⁵⁴ Christopher B. Bean, "Who Defines a Nation?: Reconstruction in Indian Territory" in Bradley R. Clampitt ed., *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Indian Territory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 110.

of the Five Tribes described conditions of destitution. A harsh winter and long drought greatly affected crop yields for each of the Five Tribes. According to the report, the Choctaw and Chickasaw suffered the most. A leader of a Choctaw seminary complained, “it is doubtful whether, on an average, there will be a fourth of a crop. The breadstuffs of last year’s growth is entirely exhausted. As a result, it was “now a question...how the poorer portion of the nation are to obtain a bare subsistence.” Corn remained an issue during a “disastrous” summer, making calls for distributing corn rations among the Choctaw and Chickasaw “absolutely necessary in order to avert the horrors of famine among them.”¹⁵⁵

Along with issues of class, political upheaval befell the Cherokee Nation, while also threatening the Choctaw and Chickasaw. Each tribe contained pro-Native traditionalists and assimilationists who supported slavery and Christianity. The Cherokee and Creek were at odds regarding their positions. As a result, traditionalist Cherokees, the Keetoowah, in an effort to mobilize “a well-informed, cohesive, and politically active force that could prevent the radical proslavery voters from controlling the electoral process and filling the Cherokee legislature with representatives committed to a proslavery, Southern Rights position.”¹⁵⁶

These motivations inadvertently made the Keetoowah society abolitionist in an effort to combat Eurocentric influences that they thought would hinder and destroy Cherokee sovereignty.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Douglass H. Cooper, Indian Agent for the Choctaw

¹⁵⁵ *Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year, 1860*, 129 & 136-137.

¹⁵⁶ McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 155.

¹⁵⁷ McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 156.

Nation asserted in 1860 that abolitionists from the North inhabited the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nation, but feared to make their ideological leanings public.¹⁵⁸ That same year, members of the prominent Pitchlynn family in the Choctaw Nation, complained of an influx of runaway slaves coming from Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Fueled by his observations of Congressmen during a trip in Washington, D.C Choctaw Nation Chief Peter Pitchlynn penned in a letter:

I see that the House of Representatives of the United States of America is not organized owing to several puerperal causes – most prominent of them seem to be Niggerism. If the “Buck Nigger” can not be well vomited out from the halls of Congress, let every politician who owes his election in some way or other to his good name acknowledge his power and suffer him to be a Speaker of the House, so long no other decent white folk can not reach the chair (on account of the Nigger who is so much in the way of everybody). Similar attitudes were common throughout the elite sections of Chickasaw and Cherokee society as well.¹⁵⁹

Abolitionist sentiment was not entirely absent in the southern portion of Indian Territory. American political leaders mistakenly believed that the entire territory was nothing more than a hub for abolitionist activity. In 1861, Henry Rector, the governor of Arkansas, sent a letter to Cherokee Chief John Ross regarding Indian Territory’s reputation within the United States. Rector wrote that it was “well established that the Indian Country west of Arkansas is looked to by the incoming administration of Mr. [Abraham] Lincoln as fruitful fields, ripe for the harvest of abolitionism, freesoilers, and

¹⁵⁸ *Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year, 1860*, 129-30.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Pitchlynn Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma. Quoted in Kristy Feldenhousen-Giles, “To Prove Who You Are: Freedmen Identities in Oklahoma” PhD Diss. University of Oklahoma, 2008. 12.

Northern mountebanks.”¹⁶⁰ This speaks to interests Lincoln had with further expansion west, as well as the assumed dissolution of Indian Territory. According to Naylor, “the moral, religious, and political beliefs of European American missionaries on slavery proved to be especially problematic in Indian Territory.”¹⁶¹ Overall, federal control of Indian Territory was the goal prior to 1866.

Each of the Treaties of 1866 between the federal government and the Five Tribes placed Indian Territory within a legal and social Reconstruction. While also changing tribal boundaries, the treaties also undermined their sovereignty by pushing Reconstruction policies of emancipation and citizenship. The 1866 Treaties do recognize the sovereignty of each tribe, however. In his text, *Political Principles & Indian Sovereignty*, Thurman Lee Hester details the rights of each of the Five Nations explicitly outlined in the 1866 Treaties

Each of the treaties recognizes the governments of each nation, but recognition of other rights vary by treaty. For example, Article seven of the 1866 Seminole Nation treaty recognizes “explicit recognition of Indian/nation and laws/regulations,” “explicit recognition of Indian nation government,” and “guarantees a perpetual right to self-government.”¹⁶² Articles four and seven of the Choctaw/Chickasaw treaty are the same as that of the Seminole, but they imply “explicit recognition of jurisdiction of an Indian

¹⁶⁰ Henry Rector to John Ross, January 29, 1861, in the U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser. 1, vol. 1: p. 683, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.49015000072687;view=1up;seq=694>.

¹⁶¹ Celia Naylor, *African Cherokees*, 126.

¹⁶² Kappler, *Indian Laws and Treaties*, 913; Thurman Lee Hester, Jr., *Political Principles & Tribal Sovereignty* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 120 & 127-8.

nation.”¹⁶³ Meanwhile, the Cherokee Reconstruction treaty is the only one that fails to outline the right to self-government.

The treaties also do not distinguish between former slaves of the Five Tribes and former slaves of the United States. For example, the third article of Creek and Seminole treaties does not make a distinction between Native and African American freedmen when discussing the use of the Unassigned Lands located in central Indian Territory. In fact, the only other time freedmen are mentioned in the treaties is with the phrase, “persons of African descent and blood.” Overall, the treaties gave Creek and Seminole Freedmen the right to use tribal land. Similarly vague definitions of “freedmen” also appear in the Choctaw/Chickasaw treaty. It uses “freedmen,” “negroes,” and “persons of African descent” interchangeably. By doing so, they identify “negroes” as a distinct group of people separate from their respective nations.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the joint treaty the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations signed with the federal government connected land with slavery. The federal government held land (and the core issue of Indian sovereignty) hostage for the sake of black emancipation and freedom.¹⁶⁵ Compared with the other three tribes, the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations had more strained relations with their enslaved population dating to before the Civil War.

Aside from the inconsistent language, the treaty “linked the issue of black people’s citizenship in these Indian nations to federal policies designed to undercut Indian

¹⁶³ Hester, Jr., *Political Principles*, 120 & 127-8.

¹⁶⁴ 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>

¹⁶⁵ *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 116-117.

landholdings and tribal sovereignty.”¹⁶⁶ The Choctaw/Chickasaw Treaty of 1866 also contained language similar to that of the Reconstruction Amendments. For example, the treaty abolished slavery and “involuntary servitude,” in both nations and provided equal protection under the law.¹⁶⁷ All in all, each of the 1866 Treaties laid out different methods for defining black freedom and citizenship for each of the Five Tribes. Although the treaties granted blacks citizenship with the Five Tribes in some form, the treaties follow in the Reconstructionist notion of federal legal extensions. This means that the treaties place a distinct delineation between the following terms: “native citizen” and “freedmen,” “person of African descent and Blood,” and “negro.” Nonetheless, the issue of sovereignty had stirred discussions of race in Indian Territory well before the Civil War, because Native sovereignty and slavery were now intertwined due to the federal government’s insistence on the Tribes’ social Reconstruction.¹⁶⁸

Final agreements to the 1866 treaties occurred in the midst of domestic colonization of black people to the American West, including Indian Territory. The Choctaws soon viewed black slaves from the United States as the primary threat to the institution more than white abolitionists residing in the territory.¹⁶⁹ During this time, the Choctaw Nation also experienced an influx of black people from Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas mostly caused by Joseph Dukes’s campaign for Principal Chief and his

¹⁶⁶ *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 113.

¹⁶⁷ *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 113.

¹⁶⁸ *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 99.

¹⁶⁹ *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 96.

abolitionist leanings. The absence of pro-Union factions allowed both nations to maintain political harmony.¹⁷⁰

Both the Chickasaw and Creek Nations used black interpreters during their discussions with federal officials.¹⁷¹ During preliminary treaty talks in 1866, Black Creeks acted as representatives, and an additional Black Creek acted as interpreter. They, along with their pro-Union loyalist counterparts, debated the Confederate Creeks over emancipation and citizenship for Black Creeks. Both sides disagreed on the topic of black citizenship. Daniel McIntosh and other Creek and Seminole leaders cited national laws as the reason for black subjugation. Pro-Union Creeks described black citizenship as something “sacred.” These discussions sparked rumors about black interpreters taking advantage of language barriers to trick non-English speaking Creeks into supporting black citizenship. Scholar David Chang argues that this was unlikely due to the number of English-speaking Creeks at the treaty negotiations.¹⁷² The Creek treaty placed more of an emphasis on land, which established that black Creeks had “equal interest in the soil.”¹⁷³

The Cherokee Nation, unlike the others, abolished slavery following the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation. The legislation included black slaves as well as “other slaves [likely Seminoles] within the limits of the Cherokee Nation.” This act preceded

¹⁷⁰ *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 96 & 107

¹⁷¹ *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 107.

¹⁷² Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 42.

¹⁷³ Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 43.

the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. Although arguably more straightforward compared to the other 1866 Treaties, the Cherokee Nation amended its Constitution by including some language from the 1866 treaty.¹⁷⁴

The Seminole Reconstruction treaty solidified the freedom that had been granted to some Black Seminoles years prior. Differences aside, federal officials argued that achieving equal footing for freedmen in the Seminole Nation was easy due to the interracial ties between both groups, well before Removal. Nevertheless, rumors of violence between Black Seminoles and Seminoles furthered tensions between Seminole freedmen, loyal Seminoles, and Confederate Seminoles. The northern Seminole faction expressed their interest in adopting their former slaves during preliminary treaty discussions and placed an emphasis on the proper wording of their intentions. Loyal Seminoles wanted the treaty to explicitly mention that “colored persons lately held in bondage by the Seminole people and free persons of color residing in the nation previous to the Rebellion ” would gain Seminole citizenship.”¹⁷⁵

The Confederate Seminole delegation initially did not agree with accepting former slaves as citizens. Going further than their loyal counterparts with regard to black rights, the Confederate Seminoles proclaimed during treaty talks at Fort Smith that the expectation to incorporate former slaves into the Seminole Nation with equal rights was much too fast. Believing in the “white man’s” conclusion of the “negro’s inferiority,” Confederate Seminoles argued that emancipation citizenship would destroy the freedmen

¹⁷⁴ Naylor, 152.

¹⁷⁵ Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen*, 195; Daniel Littlefield, *Africans and Seminoles*, 197.

and the nation at-large as “the emancipated black man must of necessity be suitably provided for.”¹⁷⁶

These observations of reported relations between both groups moved Major General John Sanborn to speak with a Seminole delegate regarding the matter.¹⁷⁷

To finalize treaty negotiations, a party of Seminole and Creek delegates traveled with the two federal agents for their respective tribes to Washington, D.C. The group also included two black interpreters. One of the black interpreters was Robert Johnson, a Creek, who had traveled to Indian Territory from Alabama during the Trail of Tears. He had risen to prominence as a Seminole interpreter. The other black interpreter was Harry Allen, a prominent interpreter in his own right.¹⁷⁸ As the train moved across borders and traveled into State boundaries, although the group members had differences concerning the state of citizenship, they experienced the same treatment. Despite traveling to Washington, D.C. to negotiate on behalf of two sovereign Nations, they were forced to travel in the second railroad class car for most of the trip.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the Seminole Nation swiftly agreed to the terms of their treaty becoming the first of the Five Tribes to do so.

The aftermath of the 1866 Treaties between the federal government and the Five Tribes stirred racial and social tensions throughout Indian Territory. The Chickasaw and

¹⁷⁶ Southern Seminole delegates to U.S. Commissioners, September 16, 1865, *Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, Quoted in Kevin Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen*, 196.

¹⁷⁷ Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen*, 194-199.

¹⁷⁸ Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen*, 147.

¹⁷⁹ Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen*, 199.

Choctaw freedmen had the most contested relationship with their tribal governments during the period. Akin to the language in the 1866 treaties, the report on the condition of the Native Freedmen, also conflated black identity. John Sanborn, the author of the report, expressed his views concerning Indian Territory and its freedmen, stating that there should be some form of colonization for them somewhere in the region. However, he ultimately saw the federal government as having ultimate sovereignty over the tribes. He believed Chickasaw and Choctaw freedmen to be the federal government's responsibility.

As a result, the "Commission for Regulating Relations between Freedmen of the Indian Territory and their Former Masters" (written before the signing of the Reconstruction Treaties) led by Sanborn investigated the plight of freedmen, particularly in the southern portion of Indian Territory. His investigation focused on violence and surveillance of black movement. During the mid-1860s, rumors of violence between both Indian nations and their freedmen spread throughout the territory. According to Daniel Littlefield, Jr., reports from the Chickasaw Nation claimed "that the bodies of five murdered had been seen piled together." Military officials also reported incidents of Choctaw and Chickasaw not allowing black people passage through their territory.¹⁸⁰

As a result of these occurrences and rumors, Sanborn distributed circulars throughout the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations in an attempt to place freedmen on equal

¹⁸⁰ Littlefield, Jr., *The Chickasaw Freedmen: a People Without a Country* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 30- 2.

footing with their Choctaw and Chickasaw counterparts.¹⁸¹ In the opening paragraph to Sanborn's 1866 report, he explicitly stated:

the Freedmen exercise no rights in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations. If they attempt to walk about the country they are shot down like dogs. The fresh skull of a negro is now hanging on a tree on the Boggy Depot and within sixty-five miles of this place, with a bullet hole through it.¹⁸²

Along with this fact and the plight of a freedwoman who suffered a whipping that brought her “nearly to death,” Sanborn suggested military occupation as the best solution to racial violence.¹⁸³

Describing the relations each of the tribes had with their freedmen, Sanborn concluded that the Choctaw and Chickasaw were most violent toward their former slaves. However, Sanborn put an interesting spin on racial constructs regarding blacks and Indians to drive his point for military intervention. He concluded that “the freedmen are the most industrious, economical, and in many respects the more intelligent parts of the Indian Territory.”¹⁸⁴

Sanborn’s emphasis on an Indian freedmen exceptionalism was likely an attempt to quickly install martial law throughout the Territory. On stating the importance of

¹⁸¹ Littlefield, Jr., *The Chickasaw Freedmen*, 32-5.

¹⁸² John B. Sanborn to James Harlan, January 8, 1866, Report to the Secretary of Interior on condition of Affairs in Indian Territory, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the state of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869, National Archives M979 Roll 52.

¹⁸³ John B. Sanborn to James Harlan, January 8, 1866.

¹⁸⁴ John B. Sanborn to James Harlan, January 8, 1866, Report to the Secretary of Interior on condition of Affairs in Indian Territory, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the state of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869, National Archives M979 Roll 52; for more on black relations with the Choctaw and Chickasaw see Donald A. Grinde, Jr. and Quintard Taylor, “Red vs. Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post-Civil War Indian Territory, 1865-1907” *American Indian Quarterly* 8 (1984): 213.

Indian Territory fortification, Sanborn concluded that the best direction concerning protection was to place troops throughout Boggy Depot and at Forts Arbuckle, Towson, and Washita. By doing so, Sanborn believed the Chickasaw and Choctaw Freedmen could live peacefully on a tract of land set aside for their exclusive settlement. With the goal of Indian Territory coming under military rule or territorial government, Sanborn perceived Indian Territory Freedmen as the responsibility of the federal government when writing:

The [Indian] Territory should either be organized into a Military District with martial law in full force and fully enforced, with a good executive commander who would supervise everything, or a Territorial Government should be organized to execute the laws. All the Indian tribes are unanimously opposed to a Territorial Government but such a Govt. or a Military Govt. is imperatively required by the situation. It cannot be expected that any Govt. would leave ten or twelve thousand of its citizens as the Freedmen of the Indian Territory now are, while within its own borders without any Govt., or without the full protection and benefits of its own laws and institutions. To hand them over to the laws and customs of the Indian tribes would be extraordinary & anomalous.¹⁸⁵

In many ways the formation of Indian freedmen towns demonstrates underlying issues in Indian Territory. Developed by the freedmen themselves, these towns served as spaces for their political activation and for their protection. The development of the earlier towns, Arkansas Colored, Canadian Colored, and North Fork Colored, encompassed several communities. The association with one of these towns gave Creek Freedmen representation in the Creek government.¹⁸⁶ Early Creek Freedmen towns would go on to

¹⁸⁵ John B. Sanborn to James Harlan, January 8, 1866, Report to the Secretary of Interior on condition of Affairs in Indian Territory, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the state of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869, National Archives M979 Roll 52.

¹⁸⁶ Kristy Feldenhousen-Giles, "To Prove Who You Are: Freedmen Identities in Oklahoma" PhD Diss. University of Oklahoma, 2008. 263n13.

become election districts governed by black political chiefs.¹⁸⁷ Additional Indian Territory town formations and African American migration would remain a topic of discussion well into the twentieth century, beginning in the next decade.

White and black Americans in the coming decades expressed interest in the Unassigned Lands, but for different reasons. White Americans viewed the Unassigned Lands as public land, upon which they had a right to settle, due to the Homestead Act of 1862. African Americans specifically cited the West and Unassigned Lands as their right as “freedmen” due to their status as former slaves. However, the conflation of freedmen in the 1866 Treaties demonstrates how racialized and “black” the status of enslavement became by the time of the Civil War. Consequently, this way of thinking from tribal officials and African American leaders also demonstrated the lack of consideration given to the distinct ethnicities of the Five Tribes freedmen.

While Chickasaw and Choctaw freedmen fought for their rights as citizens throughout the nineteenth century, African Americans in Texas began to look elsewhere for a better life following slavery. Some decided to move inward to freedom colonies scattered across the Texas landscape. A small group of individuals and families would soon decide to seek safety and community in West Africa, while others would seek economic opportunity through acquiring land as United States citizens. After a while, the interests of African Americans and former freedmen clashed as leading black men looked to the Unassigned Lands as a safe haven for black Americans. Citing their status as “freedmen,” demands for black colonization of the Unassigned Lands gradually grew

¹⁸⁷ Sigmund Sameth, “Creek Negroes,” 33.

throughout the 1870s and 1880s, while Kansas became a placeholder for some. Prominent black leaders like Edward McCabe would soon develop an interest in land and black community building in nearby Kansas. Drawing upon his experience as an Exoduster, McCabe, along with other African Americans, went West in search of opportunity and protection.

Chapter 3: Race & Land Hunger in Indian Territory and Kansas, 1870-1889

According to a letter from 1883, Benjamin “Pap” Singleton feared losing his scrapbook of news articles on himself and his migratory movement of southern African Americans to Kansas.¹⁸⁸ Singleton sought the attention of a particular journalist to write an article about him. Although Singleton's movement ultimately failed, he remained dedicated to the legacy of something he helped create.¹⁸⁹ The Exoduster Movement lasted for only about a year and involved a relatively small number of African American settlers. Nevertheless, emerging from small emigration organizations throughout the early 1870s, the event was an important reaction to the political and social inequality black southerners faced throughout much of the Deep South,

The 1870s marked a new period of black political mobilization. These smaller movements developing on the local level brought attention to race relations in the South. Expressions of racial solidarity emerged in the statements everyday black migrants made to news reporters as they arrived at their new destinations. “Leading colored men” such as Benjamin Singleton aroused a white viewership throughout the country with his musings on the black exodus occurring throughout the South. Overall, the leading men expressed interest in, and assumed responsibility for, everyday African Americans. This

¹⁸⁸ Portions of this essay appear in Leroy Myers “Land of the Fair God: the Development of Black Towns in Oklahoma, 1870-1907” (MA Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2016); Leroy Myers Jr., ““is Our Freedom that Makes Us Different”: Freedom and Identity in Post-Civil War Indian Territory and Oklahoma” *Slavery to Liberation: the American Experience* (Eastern Kentucky University Libraries, 2019).

¹⁸⁹ “Material Relating to Benjamin Singleton,” <https://www.kansasmemory.org/item/225712/page/65>, page 66, Kansas Historical Society, Kansas Memory, www.kansasmemory.org.

happened in different ways, which demonstrated the growing nationality among a certain black populace.

African Americans soon developed various forms of nationalism. Some African Americans looked to the American West as a place of refuge. Most black southerners remained in the South, but the thousands of African Americans who left the South and migrated to the West proved influential politically and economically. This form of nationalism had various levels and depended on their desired destination (foreign or domestic) and motivations. Land and community largely defined this form of black nationalism during this period, as violence and systemic marginalization remained prominent.

It is pertinent to understand the historical context of specific forms of nationalism, because the circumstances of historical actors influence the varied ideologies often associated with one large group of people.¹⁹⁰ The three million African American freedmen were no different. Land, for African Americans during the 1870s, had its general roots in American agrarian democracy, but it also had potential to provide a more immediate means of protection from violence. The lack of resources among the southern black populace moved most participants to consider several opportunities for either landownership or a safe space away from racial discrimination.

With varying degrees of success, African Americans found ways to carve out spaces for their own cultural practices, economics, and safety. From slave communities and maroon settlements of the antebellum period to freedom, African Americans

¹⁹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006 [revised edition]), 1-7.

consistently took advantage of spaces available to them within the limits of their bondage or their free status. This demonstrates the resilience of black southerners in a post-war climate riddled with heightened racial tensions. Kansas proved to be the most popular destination during Reconstruction. Seventeen thousand African Americans lived in Kansas by 1870—up from 627 black inhabitants in 1860. Texas had the largest black population of 253,000 by 1870—inflated by an influx of enslaved people during the Civil War.¹⁹¹

Although this study reveals how Oklahoma came to have the most black towns in the United States, it also examines black community development, which happens in myriad ways. Freedmen in Texas, for example, developed their own communities as a result of the racial clash that developed following the Civil War. This is not to say that African Americans expressed racial solidarity only during the Exoduster Movement. Instead, the Exoduster's Movement's significance stems from the amount of organization that occurred on the grassroots level.¹⁹² During this period of Reconstruction, the violent and marginalized circumstances in which African Americans found themselves, exacerbated calls for racial solidarity. News articles and government reports demonstrate the danger of being black in the Deep South. In fact, the Exoduster Movement marked a period of black agitation for settlements elsewhere, as the federal government failed to stop the anti-black terrorism throughout the Deep South. The Exoduster Movement's

¹⁹¹ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 104.

¹⁹² Sundiata Cha-Jua, *America's First Black Town*, 3. According to Cha Jua, proto-nationalism is “an ensemble of political attitudes that represent racial solidarity or a commitment to Black empowerment by organizing Blacks into autonomous organizations, institutions, and communities. The interaction between racial oppression and proto-nationalism generated the impulse to build black towns.”

millenarian overtones, in other words, a belief in profound social change, attracted thousands of African Americans from the Deep South. However, the activation on the ground that occurred by the likes of black leaders such as Henry Adams, demonstrates specific attitudes about a post-emancipation sense of racial solidarity.

Although the Exoduster Movement occurred in 1879, preliminary migratory events had occurred throughout much of the mid-1870s. African Americans, the majority of whom lived in the Deep South, found it difficult to participate in American society as full citizens. However, calls for colonization of African American freedmen from white politicians ultimately failed during the 1860s. Black leaders also sought ways to improve the plight of African American southerners. These “leading colored men” held conventions proclaiming the need for a black refuge in Liberia or in the American West. The 1870s became a period of large scale migration for African Americans to the American West. This migration movement spurred further waves of migrants into this general region, and eventually to Indian Territory in the coming decade. Both African Americans and white Americans expressed their right to the Unassigned Lands: “off-limits” public land that sat in the middle of Indian Territory. The Treaties of 1866 played an important role in how each group justified their right to settle on the Unassigned Lands by the 1880s.

Texas became the most important state in this overall migration movement from 1875 to the 1890s. Texas’s unrelenting racial violence moved African Americans out of the state to other areas to escape the violence and to find economic opportunity. Black Texans moved to nearby places such as Kansas and Arkansas, or they moved inward to small, exclusively black settlements known as freedom colonies. These small, close-knit

communities became spaces of refuge for African American Texans. The lack of federal protections against white vigilantism placed these communities in danger of destruction, however. The steady flow of black migrants from Texas and the Deep South soon stirred African American interest in Indian Territory. White settlers spurred most of the interest in the territory's land, while African Americans passed through Indian Territory via the trail system followed by Exodusters and cowboys en route to Kansas.

The contours of African American migration into the American West throughout the 1870s and 1880s occurred around or through Indian Territory. With intruders becoming more of an issue, Indian Territory citizens found ways to express their disregard for the influx of intruders throughout the 1880s. White and black Americans sought ways to justify their rights to the Unassigned Lands created from the 1866 Treaties. An analysis of the 1870s demonstrates how black and white settlers perceived Indian Territory during the 1880s. As black settlers traveled through the area enroute to Kansas, some black leaders discussed the possibility of Indian Territory as a space for African American Colonization.

The constitutional evolution that occurred during Reconstruction failed to properly address and protect black civil rights. Post-1866 Indian Territory remained fractured as the Choctaw and Chickasaw freedmen continued to fight for their rights as tribal citizens. Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole freedmen fared better compared with their Choctaw and Chickasaw counterparts, but the territory remained racialized. Even with these issues, the Five Tribes freedmen arguably had more rights and land access compared with African American freedmen during the 1870s.

The state of Texas became an epicenter of the internal and external black movement. The state's high frequency of racial violence, lack of adequate federal presence, and black refugee population spurred much of this migration. Slaveholders traveled to Texas with their property during the Civil War, contributing to a post-war black refugee population that ranged from 50,000 and 150,000.¹⁹³ The Confederate presence undermined the resource-stretched Freedmen's Bureau. The Lonestar State's immense racial violence, particularly in its northeastern corner, motivated two scholars of Texas history to describe this period as a "second Civil War," one that was spurred by vigilantism.¹⁹⁴

While Texas remained intricately connected to Indian Territory's outcome and society, the state's Northeast region fractured after the Civil War. The counties close to the Indian Territory border, experienced extensive violence fueled by Union supporters and Confederate sympathizers.

For example, Northeast Texas became a battleground between opponents of slavery and supporters of slavery. Clashes such as the Lee Peacock fight reflected a widespread physical and ideological battle between both groups. Although these struggles revolved around white Confederates and Unionists, African American freedmen were at

¹⁹³ Caleb McDaniel, "Remembering Henry: Refugee Slaves in Civil War Texas," <http://wcm1.web.rice.edu/refugeed-slaves-oah.html>.

¹⁹⁴ James Smallwood, Barry Crouch, and Larry Peacock, *Murder and Mayhem: The War of Reconstruction in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 3. East-Northeast Texas include the following counties: Cooke, Grayson, Fannin, Lamar, Red River, Bowie, Denton, Collin, Hunt, Hopkins, Titus, Cass, Hunt, Tarrant, Dallas, Kaufman, Ellis, Henderson, Van Zandt, Wood, Upshur, Marion, Harrison, Rusk, and Panola; see *Ibid.*, 2. *Ibid.*, 11 & 14-15; Michelle M. Mears, *And Grace Will Lead Me Home: African American Freedmen Communities of Austin, Texas, 1865-1928* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2009), 10-11.

its center. They experienced much violence from white Confederate vigilantes who were dedicated to maintaining the racial order of the South.

Although these Texan feuds are local histories, they had further implications for race relations, and the tragedy of Reconstruction throughout the region at large. When the Civil War began, Northeast Texas did not have a cohesive stance toward the war. The area's inhabitants differed on the topic of slavery, as the area's geography and demography greatly contributed to these mixed views.

Much of the Northeastern Corner Counties of Grayson, Fannin, Hunt, and Collin consisted of settlers from the Upper South states like Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, and Arkansas. Although slavery existed throughout the region, the predominant yeoman populace did not place emphasis on slave-based and resource intensive plantation culture, with over half of inhabitants in the Corners Counties coming from the Upper South.¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the area remained sparsely populated.

Northeast Texas contains lush woody areas difficult to navigate, thus allowing for squatting and the likelihood of violent encounters. The Corners region became known for the inaccessible Wildcat Thicket "A soiled, thick mass of trees, bushes, thorns, vines, brambles, saplings, briar patches, and other plant growth made the thicket almost impossible to see through except in winter."¹⁹⁶ Texas freedmen, aware of the constant threats to their livelihood, carefully engaged in community-building efforts in the midst of the unstable social conditions in East Texas.

¹⁹⁵ Smallwood, *Murder and Mayhem*, 21.

¹⁹⁶ Smallwood, *Murder and Mayhem*, 18.

The *McKinney Messenger*, located in Collin County, reported the burning of an African American schoolhouse in June 1870. Located a half mile from the McKinney public road, the black community had strategically placed the school away from public view. The article notes the McKinney-based freedmen chose the school's location noting that the group "hope[d] that the unpretending structure would never offend the eye or ear of any who might feel unfriendly to their race or to its mental and moral improvement."¹⁹⁷ The school was a log house purchased by a group of African Americans with saved wages. Protecting the investment, the group dismantled the log house and moved it several miles to a semi-permanent and secluded site. Despite the group's stealth, a group of armed men burned the structure late at night destroying the group's investment. This case, according to the paper, raised the issue of a military presence "if this and other outrages of recent occurrence, are to go unrebuked, and their preparation unwhipped of justice." The article on the burning of the freedmen school in the *McKinney Messenger* was printed alongside editorials concerning law enforcement and safety, to which Collin County inhabitants had grown accustomed.

This early period of African American education varied compared with the "Hampton-Tuskegee philosophy" of marginalized industrial education based on agriculture, home making (with regard to women), and strong social mores. The famed ideology popularized by Booker T. Washington did not occur until the founding of the

¹⁹⁷ *McKinney Messenger*, June 18, 1870, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht179180/m1/2/zoom/?q=freedmen&resolution=1.5&lat=6436.514968291454&lon=1582.2042817677807>. Accessed May 6, 2021.

Tuskegee Institute in 1881. Prior to the Tuskegee's influence within black education, black-supported schools often served several functions for black communities.¹⁹⁸

The news article on the burning of a town freedmen school spoke to the larger issues of violence in Texas, at large. Schools established by the Freedmen's Bureau also fell prey to white vigilantes. Black school children were subjected to intimidation tactics from these groups while attending class or walking to and from school. Many of the tactics to deter black education in Texas stemmed from the economic motive of some white Texans. Landowners perceived black education as a distraction from black labor and the Texas cotton economy. Targeting freedmen schools also served as a way to intimidate local black populations due to overcrowding of some of these schools during the 1860s.¹⁹⁹ An uneducated black labor force enabled white landowners to take advantage of black cotton workers legally and economically. The destruction of black schools was a common occurrence in Harrison County. Meanwhile, other corner counties such as Collin also debated the issue of public safety in its local newspaper culture.

Collin County voted against secession with 948 inhabitants against the motion compared to the 405 citizens in favor. Collin McKinney, the Collin County and the town of McKinney, was a Unionist and carried much influence in the county. The *McKinney Messenger*, therefore, had a Republican-slant and remained dedicated to the Republican cause during Reconstruction. The amount of Union supporters existing prior to the Civil War made the Corners region of Texas ripe for violent skirmishes. The region's natural environment exacerbated matters.

¹⁹⁸ *Uplifting the Race*, 34.

¹⁹⁹ Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 108-109.

As previously stated, Northeast Texas's natural environment made trails dangerous for white Unionists and African American freedmen. The prevalence of thickets attracted Confederate deserters and marginalized Unionists fleeing persecution from their community.²⁰⁰ This was not only the case in Northeast Texas; violence was also prevalent further south in Central Texas. Joe Oliver, a freedman in Hill County recalled the difficulty of attending school as his fellow classmates watched guard for Indian and "stray" passersby. Likely, not being completely transparent to his white interviewer about the particulars of threatening groups, Oliver summed up "Reconstruction days" as a time when "no one could tell what might happen.. Nobody felt safe."²⁰¹

The physical dangers and the institutional marginalization motivated black Texans to forge their own colonies. Throughout the Reconstruction period, black Texans moved within the state to unincorporated communities, known as freedom colonies. A community of small landholders and squatters inhabited these rural communities. Pushed to the margins of society (and in the case of North Texans) and in between violence from Confederate sympathizers, black families utilized abandoned land for both social seclusion and protection.

Although many of these freedom colonies started as small squatter communities, in actuality, squatting was a popular practice pursued by whites and blacks. However, black Texans also settled in other ways, as sharecropper communities developed across the eastern half of Texas.

²⁰⁰ Murder and Mayhem, 18-19.

²⁰¹ Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 108.

The cotton conducive eastern points of Texas produced a new Cotton Kingdom of sorts. Cotton culture expanded, as black freedom receded under the throes of the unequal sharecropping system. Sharecropping farms sprang up across the state's eastern region, and they varied in size. Arguably, they spelled danger for black land tenants on white owned farms. Black tenants fared better on smaller farms. Larger farms segregated black and white sharecroppers. Black sharecroppers often lived in poor and unstable conditions. Beyond the bustle of the region's town centers, however, were the smaller independent freedom colonies of black Texans looking to withdraw from the greater Texan populace.²⁰²

Researchers of freedom colonies, Thad Sitton and Sitton Conrad, note that these (usually) squatter communities were practically hidden in plain sight, so much so that white passersby often did not realize that what they encountered during their travels were in fact purposeful settlements. The settlements were so discreet that travelers might not have noticed the existence of a settlement with borders. Depending on the settlement's size, the scattered population might have provided a level of secrecy needed to thrive in more dangerous areas of Texas. These communities usually had simple infrastructure for church, education, and mills to produce staples.²⁰³

Black Texans formed hundreds of freedom colonies, particularly in safer areas like Harrison County, Texas.²⁰⁴ Harrison County held a black majority with African

²⁰² Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 18-19.

²⁰³ Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 18-19.

²⁰⁴ Work Projects Administration, "Jerry Moore" in *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves: Volume XVI, Texas Narratives, Part 3*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35380/35380-h/35380-h.html>

Americans representing sixty percent of county's population from 1880 to 1930. Former slave owners used violent measures to deter black Texans "fleeing north to Harrison County and freedom."²⁰⁵

Freedom colonies provided solace for many Texas freedmen, but the scarcity of available land remained a constant struggle. Freedmen in Texas's corner counties may have found it easier to flee to Indian Territory for geographic reasons, especially those in border counties such as Cooke, Grayson, Fannin, and Lamar. 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. The first group of African Americans to leave Texas for Kansas would make the first wave of large scale migration of African Americans following the Civil War.²⁰⁶

The Exoduster Movement grew out of this steady the steady distress experienced by black southerners lacking political and civil rights. Positioned as a western state closest to the Old South, Kansas became a destination for hopeful black migrants. They were attracted by the availability of land for African Americans, and by its reputation as a Republican stronghold. Black Americans expressed interest in Kansas as a destination throughout much of the 1870, which "absorbed twenty-five thousand black emigrants during the 1870s and early 1880s."²⁰⁷ Much of this migration happened with the help of

²⁰⁵ Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 11.

²⁰⁶ Lawrence D. Rice, *The Negro in Texas 1874-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 198 & 204.

²⁰⁷ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 136-7.

emigration companies that pooled money to help prospective migrants to settle in a new area.

Although Texas played a large role in the Exoduster and later Oklahoma migrations, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee fueled most of the migrants to Kansas prior to 1879. In fact, black migrants to Kansas before 1879 exceeded the number of migrants during the Exodus of 1879.²⁰⁸ More than 9,000 African Americans migrated to Kansas prior to 1879. Fears of black migration aired by newspaper outlets throughout the South stirred additional attention to the steady migration that occurred in 1875.²⁰⁹ Kansas soon became an important destination during this period of black migratory movement, but black leaders also looked to other areas in the West. They considered several domestic and foreign possibilities. Black settler interest mirrored the calls of African American colonization during the 1860s. In many respects, the 1870s was a decade to put these notions into action, as black southerners looked to the federal government to fulfill the promise of black suffrage and opportunity.

Nell Painter describes these Kansas migration movements as the “Kansas Fever idea” and the “Kansas Exodus of 1879.” They occurred for different reasons. General expectations from African Americans fueled the Kansas Fever idea. The difficulties of land, labor issues, political suppression, and overall lack of citizenship rights caused many to expect “free government transportation, land, and supplies.”²¹⁰ These

²⁰⁸ Nell Painter, *Exodusters*, 146-147.

²⁰⁹ Painter, *Exodusters*, 159.

²¹⁰ Painter, *Exodusters*, 177-178

expectations, however, mirrored the realities of the day. Black southerners involved in this early Kansas migration had a specific set of beliefs and lofty expectations for the federal government. Many of these earlier settlers argued that the federal government had a responsibility to them in their quest for equal participation in American society. Thus, they wrote to Congress requesting aid to resettle in Kansas.²¹¹

Benjamin “Pap” Singleton took advantage of the constant calls for black migration to Kansas. Beginning his career as an emigrationist in 1869, Singleton remained dedicated to the Kansas cause throughout the 1870s. After forming migration companies such as the Tennessee Real Estate, the Homestead Association, and The Edgefield Real Association between 1869 and 1874, Singleton went on to become the best-known figure during the Exodus of 1879. He saw the movement as his calling and his rhetoric, which included calls for divine intervention, added distinctive racial overtones to this movement.

Although Benjamin Singleton looked to Kansas for its black political freedoms as a Republican stronghold, the state’s available Native land also attracted his attention. His idea of a Singleton Colony “promote[d] immigration and the encouragement of agriculture and the acquisition of homes for colored people.”²¹² During an 1879 meeting of Singleton’s organization, the availability of land from the Kansa Indian Reservation

²¹¹ Painter, *Exodusters*, 177-178; for more information regarding how Painter defines the “Kansas Fever idea,” see *Exodusters*, 177n5.

²¹² “Materials Relating to Benjamin Singleton,” Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. Kansas Memory, <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/225712/>, 1-3.

became a topic of discussion. In the vein of Kansas Fever ideology, the meeting's minutes mentioned a request of aid to purchase Kansa land. The group proclaimed:

contributions made on 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.²¹³

While boldly put forth, Singleton's group likely acted on faith and confidence from other incidents in the very beginning of 1879.

Minnesota Senator William Windom introduced a resolution in the Senate on January 16th, 1879 in support of black migration from the South to the West. According to Nell Painter, Windom "had no idea of the potent emigration movement already existing on the grassroots level in the South."²¹⁴ Black leaders throughout the South held meetings among one another supporting the resolution. Some southern black leaders such as J. Henri Burch had contact with leading black figures connected to Senator Windom. Through his connections, Burch was able to explain to Windom the idea for a territory exclusively for black people. Arizona and a portion of Indian Territory (likely the Unassigned Lands) were mentioned as possible areas for this black territory. The southern black leaders also argued for the proposed territorial legislature to comprise prominent black politicians. They assumed this would prove very attractive to the working black southern class. Windom soon came to realize that preparation for black migration to

²¹³ "Materials Relating to Benjamin Singleton," 46-47.

²¹⁴ Painter, *Exodusters*, 175.

Kansas existed prior to his resolution. For African American leaders, the Windom Resolution fortified black mobilization.²¹⁵

Henry Adams's efforts to mobilize African Americans best exemplifies the established organized efforts on the ground prior to Windom's resolution. Born enslaved in Georgia, he joined the military in 1866 for a time. A resident of Louisiana, he grew weary of constant southern racial oppression. As a result, he sought to collect information on the problems faced by African Americans. Adams and other former black servicemen collectively performed this task in secret throughout most of the 1870s.

At its peak between 1870 and 1874 five hundred men comprised the shadowy organization, known as The Committee. The Committee also advised black southerners on political issues and organized Republican clubs throughout the region. In the early 1870s, utilizing information gathered by Adams's covert organization, the group petitioned the federal government on southern racial discrimination, but to no avail. Adams attended a conference for black leaders in New Orleans in late 1875, which broadened the Committee's exposure to, and outlook on, race matters. He connected with other delegates from Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Georgia. Overall, the conference attendees collectively discussed finding a territory in the United States or Liberia as prospective places for southern African Americans.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Painter, *Exodusters*, 178-179.

²¹⁶ Painter, *Exodusters*, 82-84.

Two years later in 1877, Adams' comrades presented a petition at a meeting of the National Colored Colonization Society demanding protection and opportunity. 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 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...²¹⁷

A congressional resolution passed a few years later in December 1879, investigating the grievances of African Americans in the Deep South. The resolution for the investigation answered the calls of Adams and other "leading colored men" of the day by proclaiming:

Whereas large numbers of negroes from the Southern States are emigrating to the Northern States; and Whereas it is currently alleged that they are induced to do so by the unjust and cruel conduct of their white fellow-citizens towards them in the South, and by the denial or abridgment of their personal and political rights and privileges...²¹⁸

The "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" examined the mass migration of southern African Americans from Kansas, as well as a short lived migration to Indiana. The committee focused on most of this migration from North Carolina, because it "was undoubtedly induced in a great degree by Northern politicians, and by negro leaders in their employ, and in the employ

²¹⁷ Painter, *Exodusters*, 82-83, 86-87.

²¹⁸ *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 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), iii.

of railroad lines.”²¹⁹ Indiana Democrats expressed interest in the motives regarding black settlement in Indiana. They perceived the Indiana movement as a Republican scheme to gain political advantage by implanting potential black voters. Moreover, prominent Republicans used the months-old National Emigration Society, which assisted with black southern migration to the west, to transport African Americans from North Carolina to Indiana. The organization managed to send more than 2,000 black Americans to Indiana.²²⁰

The number of African Americans leaving Texas alarmed the white Texan populace. One local news publication argued it was best to sustain its black population due to Texas’s “farming interests.”²²¹ Addressing this newspaper’s concern of losing black labor, the importance of land was essential to black movement, African Americans like Texan S.A. Hackworth wrote to Kansas governor, John St. John:

Our old masters will ever regard us as legal property stolen and forcibly taken away from them, and if they can’t get our labor for nothing in one way, they will invent some other plan by which they can, for they make all the laws and own all the best lands....The longer we stay here the worse it will be because our old masters are raising their children to believe and act as they do. We have been free 14 years and still we are poor and ignorant, yet we make as much cotton and sugar as we did when we were slaves, and it does us as little good now as it did then.²²²

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Bryan M. Jack, *The St. Louis African American Community and the Exodusters* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 102; *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>.

²²¹ *Denison Daily News*, December 31, 1879, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph327414/>.

²²² S. A. Hackworth to Governor St. John., Brenhan, Texas, May 19, 1879, CRSF, St. John, box 10, KSHS; Quoted in Painter, *Exodusters*, 67.

An estimated 25,000 African Americans migrated to Kansas between the 1870s and early 1880s. African American Texans migrated from the east-central counties of Texas to Kansas. East Central Texas comprised a dense black population due to the area's amount of cotton plantations.²²³ Some Texan Exodusters traveled by railroad through Denison en route to Parsons, Kansas. Speaking to a news reporter in December 1879, Joseph Giddings from Washington County, in southeast central Texas explained why he and the sixty black Texans were boarding a train to Texas. Giddings mentioned the current drought and crop failures as one of the reasons for leaving the state. However, he also stated that "free schools is the main cause of the exodus, at least as far as the more intelligent of my race is concerned."²²⁴ Overall, Giddings' ability to travel by railroad demonstrates his fortunate circumstances compared to most of his counterparts. Less fortunate migrants traveled by wagon through parts of Arkansas and Indian Territory or walked, making the trip more dangerous.²²⁵ The Texas-based *Daily Banner* documented violence against Exodusters likely in an effort to deter black Texans from leaving the cotton worm ravaged counties:

Happiness does not always attend the Exoduster in Kansas. A few days ago near Topeka, two men dug a hole in the road and charged it with powder and put a plug of tobacco over the mine. Two negro boys came along and as one of them picked up the tobacco the mine exploded and both were

²²³ Steven Hahn, *a Nation Under Our Feet*, 219-20.

²²⁴ "An Exoduster Interviewed., " *Denison Daily News*, December 11, 1879, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht327399/m1/4/zoom/?q=exoduster&resolution=1.5&lat=46.88.787981681002&lon=3503.2207957278556>.

²²⁵ Peggy Hardman, "Exodus of 1879," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 09, 2015, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ume02>; Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 136; Painter, *Exodusters*, 200, east-central Texas contains the following counties: Washington, Burleson, Grimes, Nacogdoches, Walker, and Waller.

badly injured. The perpetrators no doubt thought they played a most excellent joke.²²⁶

Violence remained a constant for African American migrants to Kansas. Although a certain group of interested black migrants settled in Kansas, the state was also a place where racist violence occurred.

The existence of these cattle trails and its proximity to the Exoduster Movement demonstrates the region's transient nature. Prior to emancipation, African Americans worked as cowboys throughout the South. Free black range hands existed in eastern Texas during the 1850s. Texas's cattle population increased along with its enslaved population before, and during, the Civil War. Cowboy outfits were often composed of whites and blacks "working and living together."²²⁷ The trail system that connected Texas, Indian Territory, and Kansas eased travel for cowboys and settlers alike. During the 1879 Exodus, cowboys, black and white, shared the expansive trails with normal black migrants en route to Kansas. The first cattle drive from Texas on the Chisholm Trail experienced difficulties from "Creek and Negro mixed Indians who would stampede the herds..."²²⁸

²²⁶ *The Daily Banner*, September 25, 1879, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth478893/m1/2/zoom/?q=exoduster&resolution=4&lat=1609.5236941526973&lon=2238.353224808589>.

²²⁷ Philip Durham and Everett L. Jones, *The Negro Cowboys* (Dodd, Mead & Company: New York, 1965), 17, 21, 24, & 32; Deborah M. Liles, "Before Emancipation: Black Cowboys and the Livestock Industry" in Bruce A. Glasrud and Michael N. Searles, *Black Cowboys in the American West: On the Range, on the Stage, Behind the Badge* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 19; Jimmy M. Skaggs, "The Great Western Cattle Trail to Dodge City Kansas," MA Thesis Texas Technological College 1965, 8.

²²⁸ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 135; H.S. Tennant, "The Two Cattle Trails," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 14 (1936):113, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/v014/v014p084.html>.

Charlie Siringo, a cowboy, and later law officer, documented seeing blacks walking on the Chisholm Trail. Exodusters “lined” the trail “headed for Topeka and Emporia, Kansas, to get a free farm and a span of mules from the State Government...Some of these negroes were afoot, while others drove donkeys and oxen.”²²⁹ The Chisholm Trail was an important trail for cattle drives from 1867 to 1884. According to Wayne Gard, the Chisholm trail “was temporarily free from the blackmail of Indian and Negro settlements from the active hostility of Kansas homesteaders.” The Chisholm was unlike the Shawnee Trail, also known as the Texas Road. The latter traversed through the most populated portion of Indian Territory, where transients were forced by Native and black people along the way to pay a toll or tribute of money or food. Both white and black cowboys traveled together on the trail from Texas going through Indian Territory to Kansas. Some black cowboys did not return to Texas after reaching the final destination for driven cattle. However, it is unclear where most of them went afterwards.²³⁰

Texas was the first place of origin for Exodusters. Many of these Exodusters traveled through Indian Territory. For example, Turner Duncan, a freedman from Texas, traveled through Indian Territory en route to Kansas to participate in the Exoduster Movement. Duncan found his way to Muskogee and stayed there, becoming a popular

²²⁹ Charlie Siringo, *Riata and Spurs* (Boston: 1931), 70; Quoted from *The Negro Cowboys*, 62.

²³⁰ Wayne Gard, “Retracing the Chisholm Trail,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 60 (1956): 54, Durham and Jones, *The Negro Cowboys*, 32 & 34; Wayne Gard, “The Shawnee Trail,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* (1953): 360, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph101145/m1/431/?q=%22texas%20road%22>.

preacher to African Creeks in the area. He eventually left later in the same year and made his way to Kansas.²³¹

Although Duncan was only one of several thousand African Americans who participated in the exodus to Kansas, his route to Kansas was relatively common. Cowboys observed thousands of black southerners on the Chisholm Trail on their way to Kansas. Duncan may have traveled through the eastern portion of Indian Territory. Historically, the Texas Road (also known as the Shawnee Trail) served as a prominent road for cattle drivers. The Texas Road “led through the most populous part of the Indian Nations, through areas where Indian and Negro settlers demanded beef or money in toll or tribute.”²³² Not only would Duncan go through the most populous portion of Indian Territory, he would have seen an area full of black settlements. Nonetheless, the townspeople saw Duncan as an intruder. This in fact demonstrates the ambiguities of blackness in Indian Territory. Duncan’s status fluctuated according to whether he was perceived as a welcome settler or an intruder.²³³ Nevertheless, other forces in Indian Territory worked against the general sentiment of defending and protecting tribal sovereignty.

While African American freedmen experienced political and social persecution throughout most of the South, Five Tribes freedmen experienced persecution of their own. With lukewarm sentiment toward black citizenship in each of their nations, Five

²³¹ Gary Zellar, *African Creeks*, 122.

²³² Wayne Gard, “The Shawnee Trail,” 360.

²³³ Zellar, *African Creeks*, 122-25.

Tribes freedmen faced scrutiny following the Civil War. In fact, after the war, many had struggled to claim their citizenship. Although African Americans gained citizenship under the Thirteenth Amendment, Five Tribes freedmen (except for the Cherokee Nation, which ended slavery before 1866) gained citizenship via treaty law. The uprooting and the flight of Indian Territory citizens during the Civil War made for a complicated situation for freedmen outside of Indian Territory. Yearning for home, Cherokee Freedmen such as Sarah Wilson, recalled their experience traveling back to the Cherokee Nation from Texas following the Civil War. Forcibly moved to Texas by her owner, Sarah Wilson and her mother waited out the remainder of the Civil War there. Upon the war's end, their former owner offered to pay for the trip for these former slaves to "return home" to Indian Territory. Wilson's mother refused his offer. According to Naylor, independence, and the fact that her former master's son had fathered her daughter, likely influenced her refusal.

The difficult trip they experienced may have been similar to those taken by other Indian Territory freedpeople. Wilson and her mother traveled by ferry over the Red River into Arkansas and "rested for some time in refugee camps along the way and then headed for Fort Gibson."²³⁴ Five Tribes people and African American freedmen often encountered one another during this period of general migration. The formerly enslaved people traveled to return home or to find opportunity. Similar to the African American migrants, the places from which the Five Tribes freedmen traveled to reach Indian Territory, tells a larger story of their settlement patterns. For example, Cherokee

²³⁴ Naylor, *African Cherokees*, 158.

Freedmen, initially settled at Fort Gibson, if returning from Texas, southeastern Cherokee Territory in the Sequoyah District, if returning from Arkansas, and in the northwestern Cooweescoowee District, if returning from Kansas.

African Americans in the South looked to Kansas, Liberia, and (at times) Indian Territory as a space for black settlements. Prominent Cherokee Elias C. Boudinot promoted Indian Territory statehood as the best option for the Cherokee Nation throughout Reconstruction. Although some African Americans supported statehood by the 1890s, Boudinot definition of statehood centered on a white law-abiding populace. The offspring of prominent Cherokee leaders, Boudinot spent most of his adolescence in New England for education. His time as a businessman and as an Arkansas lawyer influenced his views on Indian Territory. Becoming one of the first, and most popular figures on the topic of Indian Territory statehood, Boudinot's views attracted a broad white audience. His lectures caught the attention of newspapers that also reprinted portions of these lectures. While white northerners and westerners appreciated his views, Boudinot remained unpopular among his own people in Indian Territory. His stance was against the tribal leaders' desires to protect and maintain sovereignty.²³⁵ In 1871, he gave a speech on the "Indian question" to an audience in Vinita, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory. He expressed confidence in the passage of legislation to make Indian Territory a state. Although he remained unpopular, Boudinot placed blame on the Cherokee Nation's white citizenry for not supporting statehood.

²³⁵ Thomas Burnell Colbert, "Elias Cornelius Boudinot, 'the Indian Orator and Lecturer'" *American Indian Quarterly* 13 (1989): 249-259.

Boudinot described white Cherokee citizens as “disreputable white men, who have been expelled from respectable society in the [United] States...”²³⁶ For clarification, he explained how he perceived white members of Cherokee society:

No one will deny that there are many good citizens of the Cherokee nation who are white men; some who would be an honor to any community; but it is also true that the worst Indians we have, the men who talk most nonsensically of the rights of “us Indians,” and the calumniators of private characters, are a low order of white men, who would not be tolerated in decent society anywhere.²³⁷

Boudinot added additional material to his argument for Indian Territory statehood in an interview later in 1872. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* published an in-depth interview with him on white settlement in Indian Territory in December of that year.²³⁸

The article opens with a statement from Cherokee Principal Chief, William P. Ross, concerning Indian Territorial statehood. Emphasizing the general disinterest among Indian Territory inhabitants, Ross described the statehood movement as one in the interest of the “railroads, squatters who perch around our borders, and aspirants who hope for the creation of new offices.”²³⁹ In response to Ross’s general sentiment concerning statehood supporters, Boudinot went in-depth on the nature of race in Indian Territory stating:

It is set down that there are 1,675 white men resident in the Indian country. We have, besides, 13,400 negroes. The whites amongst us must, in the nature of things, be of the rough and outlaw class. There are the men who inspire the Indian’s jealousy at any mention of civilization. The negroes

²³⁶ *Speech of Elias C. Boudinot, a Cherokee Indian, on the Indian question, delivered at Vinita, Cherokee Nation, the junction of the Atlantic and Pacific, and the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas railroads, September 21, 1871* (Washington City: M’Gill & Witherow, Printers and Stereotypers, 1872), <https://acdc.amherst.edu/view/asc:800230/asc:800231>, 4.

²³⁷ *Speech of Elias C. Boudinot*, 4.

²³⁸ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 19, 1872.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

among us are very often more influential than leading Indians. This is because the negro understands the white man's nature better than the Indian, and is more flexible in his faculties. But the colored people of the United States may as well understand that none of the Indians in the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations have any political or civil rights. They can neither vote nor own property, and it is no offence to commit any violence upon them.²⁴⁰

Describing the nature of race in the Cherokee Nation, Boudinot also explained the general state of Indian Territory. He argued that there were five thousand white intruders hiding from the law in Indian Territory. Boudinot demonstrated awareness of the status of Five Tribes freedmen, but also his disinterest in the settlement of African American settlers. In other words, Boudinot defined statehood as an explicitly white endeavor. He did not see Cherokee freedmen as a threat to statehood. However, he argued that intermarried white Cherokee citizens influenced anti-statehood sentiment, because they failed to succeed in the United States.

A congressional resolution supporting the passage of an "Oklahoma Territory" concerned a Cherokee and Creek delegation to Congress. In an 1873 petition, the Cherokee and Creek delegation expressed displeasure with the mere thought of an Oklahoma Territory, as it went against tribal sovereignty. The delegation disagreed with the report's argument that existing Indian treaties do not conflict with the conclusion to make an "Oklahoma Territory," stating:

there is scarcely one of these treaties it [the Congressional support that an ["Oklahoma Territory] does not break, or the spirit of which it does not violate.... Our treaties like the treaties of the other tribes, guarantee us the peaceable and unmolested occupation of our country, and the right to govern ourselves by a government and laws of our own.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ "Protest of the Creek and Cherokee Delegations" March 3, 1873.

Boudinot associated statehood with prosperity for Indian Territory and the country at large. On the other hand, the Cherokee and Creek delegation reduced statehood to business interests looking to expand their interests in the region.

While unpopular among many in the Native community, Boudinot spent much of his time in Washington D.C. where he made connections with congressmen and other influential men. He turned to lecturing to spread his views concerning Indian Territory. The money Boudinot made from his lectures funded his newspaper *The Indian Progress*, which closed a year later in 1876.²⁴²

The Creek Nation's black members influenced the Creek Nation's disinterest in housing the headquarters for a pro-statehood publication. Gary Zellar writes "race relations in the Cherokee Nation during the postwar period did not exhibit the fluidity and flexibility found in Creek Country."²⁴³ In other words, black Creek people participated in Creek society and politics. Muskogee's early reputation as a black space also went against Boudinot's desire to open Indian Territory to white settlement.

Muskogee began as a trader settlement and agency for the Creek Nation during the early nineteenth century. The Muskogee Baptist Church became a meeting area for blacks and Indians in the region throughout much of the nineteenth century and evolved into a predominantly black church later in the century.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Thomas Burnell Colbert, "Elias Cornelius Boudinot, 'the Indian Orator and Lecturer'" *American Indian Quarterly* 13 (1989): 249-255.

²⁴³ Gary Zellar, *African Creeks*, 124.

²⁴⁴ Grant Foreman, *Muskogee: the Biography of an Oklahoma Town* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), 11.

Muskogee's black heritage is also evident in the town's origins in the mid-1870s. Muskogee hosted various fairs and festivals during its early years. These events were multi-tribal in that they included members of the Cherokee, Creek, Arapaho, and Apache Nations. These groups included a "colored delegation" that marched along with several Native American Tribes. In addition, a group of "colored ladies" competed in equestrian games against Native American women during the fair.²⁴⁵ Freedmen also participated in Juneteenth celebrations in Muskogee and in the Cherokee capital of Tahlequah in 1875 and 1876.²⁴⁶ These celebrations, combined with this relative peace in the Cherokee and Creek Nations, differed from the reality in southern Indian Territory.

The Chickasaw Nation arguably experienced the greatest influx of blacks and whites from the United States. The nation had issues with intruders in their territory before the Civil War. Earlier instances of intrusion prior to the Civil War often involved runaway slaves from Texas. By the 1870s former black Union soldiers stayed in Indian Territory, some staying in the Chickasaw Nation, which concerned the latter.²⁴⁷ However, it is possible some of these black "intruders" in the Chickasaw Nation were, in fact, Chickasaw. In his autobiography, Buck Colbert Franklin writes that his grandfather, David Franklin, fled from his Chickasaw enslaver during the Civil War and joined the Union army at Fort Gibson.²⁴⁸ Overall, the black experience in Indian Territory was one

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 33.

²⁴⁶ Ruth M. Arrington, "Speech Activities in Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation, During the Seventies," (Ph. D Diss., Louisiana State University and Agricultural Mechanical College, 1971), 100.

²⁴⁷ Littlefield Jr., *The Chickasaw Freedmen*, 44-5.

²⁴⁸ John Hope Franklin and John Whittington Franklin eds., *My Life and an Era: the Autobiography of Buck Colbert Franklin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 1 n 2.

of uncertainty throughout the 1870s. Indian Territory experienced not only an influx of black transients and squatters, but also one of the more important threats to sovereignty from Elias Boudinot.

Boudinot popularized the notion of opening the Unassigned Lands in a letter to the *Chicago Times* in March 1879. He developed a map and a promotional letter for settlers interested in making a homestead in the Unassigned Lands. In the letter, Boudinot argued that white settlers had the right to settle in what was central Indian Territory and cited the Treaties of 1866 as legal justification.²⁴⁹ Boudinot's article became influential because it popularized the use of the Treaties of 1866 as justification for Indian Territory settlement. As had his lectures, Boudinot's *Chicago Times* editorial caught extensive interest in the public arena. The *New York Times* reported on early Indian Territory settlement in May 1879. Discussing the origins of these early settlement patterns, the news article noted:

One of the most prominent of these, urging settlers to stake out claims in the new El Dorado [the Unassigned Lands in Indian Territory] is one Col. E. C. Boudinot, a highly civilized Cherokee Indian, who claims to have made the discovery regarding the so-called public lands in the Territory which are open for settlement. What his motive is at present unknown, but he has been very persistent in urging this emigration, and claims that the Indians themselves are anxious to have the Territory thrown open to the whites.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Colbert, "Elias Cornelius Boudinot, 'the Indian Orator and Lecturer,'" 225.

²⁵⁰ "Indian Territory Settlers. Stories Denying and Affirming the Reports of Invasion by Whites," *New York Times* May 13, 1879.

Some of these settlers migrated from Arkansas and Kansas. Meanwhile, African Americans traveled from the Deep South to Kansas during the spring and summer of that same year.²⁵¹

The *Kansas City Times* published an in-depth interview between a news correspondent and Interior Department Officials in May 1879. The *Kansas City Times*’ argued for settler rights to the Unassigned Lands. A day earlier, the newspaper had published a lengthy interview with Interior Department officials on the legal right of the United States to keep settlers out of Indian Territory. In response to the correspondent’s question on the existence of public lands in Indian Territory, an Interior Department officer answered that the lands technically could not be considered “public.” He explained that the United States held the land in trust “for the purpose of settling other Indians and freedmen thereon.” The latter part of the interview discussed Indian treaty rights and the identity of Five Tribes freedmen:

Rep.[orter]--Inasmuch as from 5,000 to 25,000 whites have gone, and are going into this part of the Indian Territory, will the military result as did the attempt to keep settlers out of the Black Hills?

Com.[issioner of General Land Office]--No; we have lately discovered that Mr. [President Rutherford] Hayes has some “backbone,” and you may rely upon it that he will enforce his proclamation with the army.

Rep.[orter]--And “shoot to death” the honest yeomanry of the country who are trying to find homes for themselves and their families?

Com.[issioner of General Land Office]--The government must observe its treaties with the Indians.

Rep.[orter]--Has it always done so?

²⁵¹ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 143.

Com.[issioner of General Land Office]--That it has not done so in the past, does not justify a further disregard of its pledges.²⁵²

After a sharp discussion with the General Land Office representative, the reporter conducted an interview with a representative of the "Indian Bureau." The representative stressed the public lands in Indian Territory were held in trust, but added "All the [1866] treaties looked to this sole object; no one, not even a freedman, can go there unless sent by the government." The reporter shared his views on the definition of "freedmen" and the 1866 Treaties noting:

Those among the Creeks or Seminoles, Choctaws or Chickasaws, for the treaties ceding their lands made these negroes, formerly slaves, a part of the tribes in which they lived. To have placed them on reservations thus sold would be to place a portion of the tribe selling on the lands bought for "other Indians." Any other "freedmen" are no more than citizens of the United States, and the Government cannot discriminate in favor of them as against the whites in settling these 14,000,000 acres [of] unoccupied lands.²⁵³

The reporter's analysis of the information he received from his interviewees also suggest his awareness of the Exoduster Movement:

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.²⁵⁴

²⁵² "Washington Letter," *Kansas City Times* May 7, 1879, David Payne Collection, Box 1, Folder 16, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

The reporter, in the interest of Indian Territory statehood, feared black settlement of Indian Territory. He argued that former slaves of the United States were the only group of people considered “freedmen.” According to him, the tribal status of the Five Tribes’ formerly enslaved people voided their status as “freedmen.”

The Exoduster Movement gained a mixed reception, and soon became politicized as much as Boudinot’s argument for Indian Territory’s settlement by whites. The rapid influx of black settlers became an issue for the Kansas government, and most of the migrants needed support. Kansas Governor John St. John founded the Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association to provide relief for incoming Exodusters. However, the organization’s efforts proved ineffective. Poor land diminished the Exoduster’s prosperity. They often depended on outside work on other farms and ranches.²⁵⁵ The Exoduster Movement gained national attention and financial support from white religious and civic organizations, nevertheless, the stream of black migrants into Kansas ceased by early 1880.²⁵⁶ Along with white settlers, black settlers turned their attention to Indian Territory. In this period, known as the Boomer Era, settler organizations formed in the interest of colonizing Indian Territory during the 1880s.²⁵⁷

The best known black colonization society during “boomer agitation” was the Freedmen's Oklahoma Association. It soon gained attention after its founding

²⁵⁵ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 138-139.

²⁵⁶ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 138-143.

²⁵⁷ Tolson, “The Negro in Oklahoma Territory,” 1.

in March 1881. Hannibal C. Carter and James Milton Turner 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.²⁵⁸

Carter 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 issue in February 1882. C.W. Holcomb, the acting commissioner of the General Land Office, declared the purpose of their organization to be illegal. Holcomb admitted “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.” Defining “freedmen,” Holcomb added the following:

The freedmen referred to were former slaves of Indian tribes. The treaty stipulations, as uniformly understood and construed, have no application to any other freedmen than the persons freed from Indian bondage. They relate exclusively to friendly Indians and to Indian freedmen whom it was the desire of the United States...the main proposition set forth is that there are certain public lands in the Indian Territory, and the argument is that the rights of citizens to enter and settle upon the public lands must be the same in that Territory as elsewhere; and it is further asserted that colored people are especially protected in such rights as to these particular lands by the assumed purposes for which the lands were acquired by the United States.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Tolson, “The Negro in Oklahoma Territory,” 1., 2. From Articles of Incorporation, No. 2076, Office of the Secretary of State of Illinois, Springfield, Illinois, 1-3.

²⁵⁹ “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,

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.”²⁶⁰

The works of the Freedmen’s Oklahoma Association received notice in the *Missouri Republican* that same year. The paper covered the organization’s formation in St. Louis, and sent agents to southern states to agitate for a migration movement amongst the freedmen in the region. These agents promised every freedman 160 acres of land in Indian Territory based on the “1866 treaty.” The circular also included a letter from Elias C. Boudinot which said in part,

...professing to state the legal character of the lands to which emigration is invited, and affirming that the same are public lands of the United States; that the Indian title thereto has been extinguished; and that said lands were purchased by the United States for the use of freedmen as well as Indians.”²⁶¹

Overall, the Freedmen’s Oklahoma Association proved unsuccessful due to the Land Office’s decision in the matter, but the Boomer era of the 1880s constantly agitated for Indian Territory land throughout the 1880s.

Native American newspapers throughout Indian Territory were aware of the threat African Americans settlers posed to their sovereignty and land holdings. The *Indian Chieftain* was one of the most widely read newspapers of the time. Formed in 1882, the *Chieftain* was “devoted to the interests of the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws,

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

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

Seminoles, Creeks, and all other Indians of the Indian Territory.”²⁶² The publication preceded two attempts at establishing a Native American newspaper in Vinita. It followed a similar pattern as most Indian Territory newspapers (and later Oklahoma Territory newspapers). Many of these newspapers were short lived. They also had a collective of owners who were interested in growing the population of their towns and the surrounding area. The *Chieftain* also had a group of shadowy figures behind the scenes of the popular publication. The newspaper listed Gus Ivey, a Native American writer, as an editor, but Joseph Scroggs, a white man, was the actual editor. Scroggs assigned Ivey the task of writing three and a half local news columns. Scroggs had traveled to Indian Territory in 1879 from the east coast and established a school for Native students and white students in Vinita. Scroggs eventually would go on to become a prominent faculty member at Kingfisher College and the University of Oklahoma, but he remained as local editor of the *Chieftain* until 1884.²⁶³

The relationships Scroggs forged in the territory as a school founder, likely enabled him to establish crucial connections in Indian Territory, particularly in Cherokee Nation. So much so, that he worked under the *Chieftain's* shadowy discreet owner, George W. Green, a white Vinita merchant.²⁶⁴ Scroggs maintained his position with the *Chieftain* until Green's 1882 sale of the publication to M.E. Milford, a former editor of the *Daily Commonwealth* in Topeka, Kansas. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the

²⁶² Quoted in Carolyn Foreman, *Print Culture in Oklahoma* (The University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), 94.

²⁶³ Quoted in Foreman, *Print Culture*, 94.

²⁶⁴ Quoted in Foreman, *Print Culture*, 94.

Chieftain proclaimed itself as nonpartisan, but its interest gradually reflected that of the Cherokee Nation over time.²⁶⁵

The *Indian Chieftain* stereotyped African American settlers and Cherokee Freedmen in its columns. In 1887, the *Chieftain* published a satirical conversation between a geography teacher and a black Cherokee student. In the account, the student responded to rapid fire questions about the geography of the Cherokee Nation. When asked about the surrounding territory of the Cherokee Nation, the black Cherokee student responded (in a stereotyped black dialect): “She [the Cherokee Nation] am bounded on de norf by Kans-ass; on de eas’ by Arkans-ass; on de souf by Texass, and on de wes’ by Mex-ass.” After admitting the answer was correct, the teacher in this account asks, “what does that make us?” to which, the black Cherokee student responded: “A nation of asses, sah.”²⁶⁶ The editorial stereotypes black language, specifically among black Cherokees. Thus, this fictional exchange demonstrates the connections to nationhood the Five Tribes freedmen had within their respective Native nations. This is significant considering how the *Chieftain* portrayed African American intruders from “the States.”

The satirical editorial letter of the fictional Cyrus Leondus Blackburn best demonstrates this sentiment. The piece is a fictional letter from an African American settler inquiring about black migration to Indian Territory. The settler references the passing of a congressional bill by Mr. Jackdaw (likely targeting Senator Henry Dawes).

²⁶⁵ Foreman, *Print Culutre*, 94-96

²⁶⁶ *Indian Chieftain* June 2, 1887, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70970/m1/2/zoom/?q=colored&resolution=2&lat=1037.4034554915033&lon=886.3302792267284>.

In “Jubilee in Sight: A Colored Brother Sees a Prospect for his Peoply,” The fictional Blackburn wrote (using stereotyped black dialect):

I heard Brudder James Frederick Isreal say dat all de white men in de Injun Territory was gwine to be driv out and dat de colored people would den hab a chance to come in and settle up dat country. Brudder Isreal said dat Mr. Jackdaws’ done got a bill inter congress to drike all out and lef de darkey stay, and I done tole Brudder Isreal dat I’s gwine ter write to de CHIEFTAIN ter find out if dat am a fac. Brudder Isreal says dat old Jackdaws am de best frien de darkeys hab and dat dar am lots purty gals in de Injin nation, and dat de darkey can hab de farms dat de white man am driv from. Am dat a fac? I wants yer to write to me of dat am a fac. Brudder Isreal says dat Jackdaws says da de white man in de Injun nation am no good; dat he run off from de states kase he stole somethin’ and dat he’s gwine to bring him out ob dat and put him in de lock up and let de darkey go in dar and cibilize day kentry. I done tole my old woman dat if dat am a fac I’s gwine ter leabe her and go out dar in de missionary business. Please to write and let me hear from you if dat am a fac...²⁶⁷

The letter demonstrates the racialization of migration to Indian Territory. Black settlers, according to the letter, perceived Indian Territory as a space for explicit black settlement. The letter also depicts Blackburn, the fictional author of the letter, as a predator of Native women, whereby intruders used intermarriage to become citizens only to access land. The Blackburn editorial mirrors the mobilization of some African Americans in surrounding areas seeking land in the West. It also highlights the sentiment Native Americans and White Americans held toward black settlement.

Blackburn’s letter followed another satirical letter from an “Old Farmer.” The letter from the farmer is written from the perspective of a white man living in Indian Territory. Married to an Indian wife, “Old Farmer” writes about his concern for the Dawes

²⁶⁷ “Jubilee in Sight: A Colored Brother Sees a Prospect for his Peoply” *Indian Chieftain* January 26, 1888, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc71004/m1/2/zoom/?q=cyrus&resolution=1.5&lat=1279.3289826873852&lon=3091.4210798961326>.

Act. He fears it will lead to the removal of white settlers in the country. In the same vein as Boudinot's argument regarding white Cherokee citizens as failed American citizens, the "Old Farmer" explained:

The cross between the Cherokee and the white is good. Instead of this country being filled with renegades and refugees from justice, it is fast filling up with men whose minds were too large and who had too much pluck to settle down in the corner of their daddies' field in the states and be despised menials all their lives, and it is with a mingled feeling of pity and contempt that we see some of our brothers still holding to their mother's apron strings--not having courage enough to let loose.²⁶⁸

Meanwhile, these early developments of the organization unfolded during the emergence of Payne's Oklahoma Colony, an early intruder colony in Indian Territory led by David Payne. Payne began his settler colony in Indian Territory in 1880. By 1882 Payne's colony contained 400 to 500 settlers. It developed from a legacy of white migration from Kansas, as well as African American freedmen 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 but differed in their motivations. Although both groups wanted land, the Exodusters wanted land for not only safety but also as a vehicle to exercise citizenship not fully realized toward the end of Reconstruction. In contrast, the Boomer Movement used white citizenship as a tactic to gain access to "new" lands.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ "Hot Shot for the Massachusetts Senator and his Bill" *Indian Chieftain* January 26, 1888, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc71004/m1/2/zoom/?q=cyrus&resolution=1.5&lat=1279.3289826873852&lon=3091.4210798961326>.

²⁶⁹ Roy Gittinger, *The Formation of the State of Oklahoma, 1803-1906* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1917), 107-110.

The *New York Times* ran an 1880 article entitled “Payne’s Invading Colonists,” which focused on the black members 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 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 promoted settling Exodusters in the Unassigned Lands, a matter handled by an African American lawyer, 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” clauses in 1866 treaties, 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?”²⁷⁰

Ultimately, Payne’s intrusion into Indian Territory led to judicial intervention. In 1881, *The United States v. Payne*, a Fort Smith district court decision 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.”²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ “Payne’s Invading Colonists.” *The New York Times*, December 29, 1880.

²⁷¹ 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; Tolson, “The Negro in Oklahoma,” 5.

However, these early movements to Indian Territory were not successful, because outsiders were not allowed to be in the territory without a permit to work. Also, they were unable to own property in Indian Territory. Secretary of Interior, Samuel J. Kirkwood. Secretary Kirkwood argued 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 intending to use the 1866 treaties to his advantage. To promote one of his many schemes to settle the Unassigned Lands, Payne traveled throughout the Southwest, mainly Kansas and Texas, to lecture about the Unassigned Lands.²⁷² Historian Carl Rister notes that Payne worked on developing a colonization society well before the Exoduster Movement of 1879. However, the 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.” However, a flood of newspaper articles revived interest in the Indian Territory colonization movement.²⁷³

Sources are scant on the freedmen associated with Payne’s settler group, but his interaction with black soldiers demonstrate his main intention to make the Oklahoma District available to white settlers. According to one of Payne’s followers:

²⁷² 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. Ill, 2.

²⁷³ Rister, *Land Hunger*, 41 & 97.

He met them at the door with a "45"—in each hand and said: "No damned nigger can arrest me. I will surrender to a white man, but if any of you niggers want to die just make a move in this direction " The captain's reputation as a dead shot was too widely known to disregard his threat and the negro sergeant in charge of the squad called a parley, with the result that word was sent to Lieutenant Day, in charge of the expedition, and he came personally and made the arrest.²⁷⁴

Payne justified his desire to form an Oklahoma Colony of 5,000 to 10,000 settlers using Boudinot's *Chicago Times* letter. 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 under the Treaties of 1866.²⁷⁵ Despite setbacks, Payne's famous attempt to colonize the Oklahoma District generated much black political activity. Black leaders met for a convention in Parsons, Kansas in April 1882. The meeting attendees agreed to send a message to Congress in support of having a portion of the Unassigned Lands set aside for southern African Americans.²⁷⁶

African American colonization received considerable attention throughout the 1880s. The Parsons convention caught the attention of Senator Henry Blair of New Hampshire. He sent a letter to the Secretary of Interior inquiring about the law on 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.²⁷⁷ The same year

²⁷⁴ Grant Harris, "Publishing a Newspaper in a 'Boomer Camp'" *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 5 (1927): 268.

²⁷⁵ Rister, *Land Hunger*, 52-54 & 92.

²⁷⁶ Tolson, "The Negro in Oklahoma Territory," 5; Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 99.

²⁷⁷ Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans*, 73; Gittinger, *The Formation of the State of Oklahoma*, 120.

the *Cherokee Advocate* monitored African American movement throughout the surrounding region. In an editorial, the *Advocate* editorialized: “Six hundred negroes have just emigrated in a body from Edgefield County, S. C., to Arkansas, under the lead of a negro preacher named Hammond. It is said that about as many more will follow them from the same locality.”²⁷⁸ Some months later, in June, the *Advocate* followed up on the blacks migration to Arkansas noting that speeches from unknown black leaders had excited black Arkansans regarding lack of government protection of their rights. The information, by way of the *St. Louis Republican*, led the editors of the *Advocate* to expect “a negro insurrection.”²⁷⁹

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. 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.

Cowboys also played a role in popularizing the Oklahoma District. Similar to the emergence of black towns, the popularity of the Oklahoma District was also due to a combination of several forces. Nonetheless, the year following, 1889, became known by the federal government as “the year before the great immigration” in the southern region of Indian Territory. Prior to the ending of the colonization era by the Organic Act of 1890, the entire region was, during another movement, dedicated to forming African American

²⁷⁸ *Cherokee Advocate* January 6, 1882.

²⁷⁹ *Cherokee Advocate* June 1882.

towns and industry. Following the white invasion of Oklahoma Territory, African Americans would only be able to obtain remaining land in small parcels.²⁸⁰

As African Americans migrated in states and territories surrounding Indian Territory, the Unassigned Lands became a target for white Americans. It also attracted some African Americans wanting to find a safe space to live. Black Americans such as Turner looked to the land as an opportunity for African American freedmen. Boomer agitation remained dominant throughout the 1880s. It caused strained relations between Five Tribes freedmen and white Boomers, with some freedmen defending their rights to land over that of white Boomers and intermarried white citizens.²⁸¹

Meanwhile, David Payne and other whites argued that the settlement of the Oklahoma District rested on their right as American citizens to settle on public land. Their stance differed from the sense of urgency on the part of Turner and other African Americans. Payne's Oklahoma Movement utilized Christian imagery—similar to religious imagery used by blacks in earlier migrations to Kansas during the 1870s.²⁸² However, the Payne Movement emphasized populism and a more general tone to engage prospective settlers concerning moving to Indian Territory.

²⁸⁰ *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=gbp_atb_hover&pg=GBS.PA54; “Oklahoma and the Cherokee Strip.”

²⁸¹ Littlefield Jr., *The Chickasaw Freedmen*, 81.

²⁸² John Truden, “Settler Colonialism on the Southern Plains: Squatters and the Construction of a Settler State in Indian Territory” (MA Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2018), 22.

Indian Territory became a settler's battleground during the late 1870s to 1889. Both white and black migrants utilized the Treaties of 1866 to justify their right to settle in the Unassigned Lands. Boudinot's influence resonated throughout the Boomer movement as black and white settlers utilized Boudinot's arguments to gain access to the Unassigned Lands. Although the Freedmen's Oklahoma Association used Boudinot's argument and included his writing in their organization's circular, Boudinot was only interested in white settlement. Boudinot's desire to open Indian Territory for settlement revolved around economic interests. White settlers wanted to exercise their rights as American citizens and obtain homesteads on available public land. African Americans wanted the same privilege, but the horrors of southern violence made their plight more urgent.

With the Unassigned Lands available for settlement, the Indian Territory experienced an array of migrations throughout the 1890s and stronger calls for statehood. White settlers quickly mobilized and believed they were destined for statehood. African American settlers approved of statehood but wanted a state for and by African Americans. The strategic placement of some black towns in conjunction with scheduled Land Runs exacerbated the racial tensions existing between black and white settlers in the region. The development of black towns would become larger than the Exoduster Movement of 1879. They would gain major attention with Edward McCabe, a former Exoduster, utilizing his Exoduster background and political connections to turn western Indian Territory into an all-black state. For a period, The Exoduster Movement and the Boomer Movement crossed paths and (at times) black and white racial lines to gain access to land.

Their efforts were at the expense of Native American sovereignty and land. With his legacy cemented in the 1880s, Benjamin “Pap” Singleton gave an interview in which he said that he was going to leave the next phase of black migration “for the younger ones to do.”²⁸³

²⁸³ “Materials Relating to Benjamin Singleton”, 65; Benjamin “Pap” Singleton Scrapbook, 17, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. Kansas Memory, <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/211642>; Painter, *Exodusters*, 257; Tolson, “The Negro in Oklahoma Territory,” 1-2.

Chapter 4: Black Social Movements and the Transnational Nature of Black Oklahoma Settlement, 1890-1914

Following the Kansas Exodus of the 1870s and the boomer agitation of the 1880s, the 1890s brought further formation of black towns throughout the Twin Territories. It seemed that Indian Territory towns afforded better opportunities for settlement. There was a legacy of black community in areas such as Muskogee and in other black communities that would later develop into black towns. Nevertheless, Edward McCabe, black businessman, politician, and Exoduster, and his supporters, desired a large black Republican voting bloc. There were hopes of governorship of an all-black Oklahoma Territory. Instead, this mass migration evoked fear from major media outlets. Similar to white boomers who agitated land openings, black town newspapers agitated for black access to land, while also expressing the centrality of black political power within the Republican Party. Through this tactic, McCabe and other black leaders issued a call to have 100,000 blacks from the Deep South come to Oklahoma Territory. While applying this strategy to a black Oklahoma, at the expense of Native American land and sovereignty, only 3000 blacks settled in Oklahoma Territory by 1890. Although McCabe failed to reach his lofty goal, it stirred racial and political tensions throughout the Twin Territories including agitating the often-volatile relationship between the Five Tribes and their freedmen populations. With several groups vying for control of the twin territories, this chapter's argument answers the following: Why in general did black towns fail? Did black towns in Indian Territory thrive compared to their Oklahoma Territory counterparts?

The motivations to settle black towns in Oklahoma by the 1890s, derived from a mixture of colonization societies from the Deep South during the Exoduster era and the emerging ideology stemming from the needs of the black community. These notions had foundations during the early nineteenth century. From these societies, larger networks of black groups developed. They were connected through an interest in social progress for the greater African American community.²⁸⁴ Nevertheless, there were challenges of connecting the strains of the greater African American community together. While some of these earlier groups exclusively associated within the interests of African Americans, black settlers discovered the need to associate with the larger black Indian Territory populace, which included Native Freedmen, particularly from the Creek Nation.

From the “leading men” of the 1860 and 1870s, usually former war veterans (such Henry Adams) to religious leaders who called out the responsibility and hypocrisy of the federal government to black plight (e.g., Benjamin Singleton, Henry Highland Garnet, and Edmund Kelly) came the dedication to leading the masses as “leading men” of their time in either a social or religious sense.²⁸⁵ Many of them, rooted in a black middle-class ideology perceived themselves as above the “ignorant” of the larger community. However, they also aimed to bring them together for the sake of their own betterment. The topic of black education among the black community had varied since the colonization period of the 1830s. As a result, the realization of the federal government’s disinterestedness in black rights led to the rise of new prominent black figures wanting to

²⁸⁴ John Ernest, *A Nation Within a Nation: Organizing African-American Communities Before the Civil War* (Ivan R. Dee: Chicago), 4-5 & 158-159.

²⁸⁵ Henry Highland Garnet, “Memorial Discourse,” (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1865), 86-88; Edmund Kelly, “The Great Colored Exodus” (Boston, 1870s).

take advantage of the opportunity to progress socially and economically.²⁸⁶ As I noted at the end of the preceding chapter, the political activism of Singleton, McCabe, Washington, and others needs to be appreciated as concrete advocacy of a policy of nationalism, as in the right to self-determination—the right to do considerably more than conjure up “imagined communities” but to actually build them on real land.

By the time of Oklahoma’s black town development during the 1890s, a long tradition of thought had developed which acquired mainstream attention as it pertained to calls for black domestic migration and foreign migration.²⁸⁷ To be sure, this domestic racial solidarity in the form of black towns, settlements, and communities and interest in African colonization ran parallel and converged at times with the interests and needs of black southerners. The economic destitution many black southerners faced prompted many to embrace emigration movements out of desperation, as the ideologies of Washington and DuBois largely gained resonance due to attention from white accommodationists and liberals. The critiques on black overdependence on black Christianity and from Martin Delany and David Walker in the 1830s and 1850s differed from the needs of the 1890s. If African Americans, according to Delany “require[d] very different means and measures to satisfy their [African Americans] wants and demands, and to effect their advancement” emigrationist leaders such as Bishop Henry McNeal

²⁸⁶ Peter P. Hinks, *David Walker’s Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 30-33.

²⁸⁷ Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 63; Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 189-190

Turner and Marcus Garvey became the rural and urban answer to the new demands of the 1890s and 1900s for the black masses not of the middle class.²⁸⁸

Black leaders like Washington and DuBois, and McCabe had specific views on what the greater African American community should do to improve socially. Although Washington supported black towns throughout the country, his ideal citizen happened to be of the middle-class. Their morals would prove to be a good example not only for the larger white American populace, but also to their “inferior” black counterparts, particularly in the Deep South. The greater black American farming populace, on the other hand, could not afford the opportunity to settle in these towns. They tried a variety of other opportunities to seek solace and to “test their freedom.”²⁸⁹ As late as 1914, W.E.B. DuBois commented on the prevalence of the African emigrationist Chief Sam Movement. He wrote, “The Oklahoma movement for migration to Africa is a poorly conceived idea...migration to-day is a serious matter and should be planned and financed on a large scale.” In other words, if migration to Africa was impractical and self-defeating, then migration to newly opened land in the United State made good sense. Frederick Douglass, representing the old guard of black leadership, echoed this general sentiment. In 1894 he commented that foreign colonization schemes went against the

²⁸⁸ Edwin Scott Redkey, *Black Exodus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970 [second printing]) 1-5; Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Negro People*, See “Preface” & “IV. Our Elevation in the United States.”

²⁸⁹ Field, *Growing Up With the Country*, 28-29 & 152.

possibility of African American social progress in the United States, and it encouraged prejudice from white Americans wanting black people to emigrate elsewhere.²⁹⁰

Present-day Oklahoma found itself as an important component intertwined in the “global age of mobility” (from 1850 to 1920) and the “global age of black nationalism” (from 1850 to 1930).²⁹¹ This period gave way to attention to black emigration, black town development, and the ascendance of additional black leaders on the national level. By the late nineteenth century, Booker T. Washington, Edward P. McCabe, and W.E.B. DuBois emerged as national leaders with different views on prospects for the black community. Although DuBois and Washington had differences on how to achieve black social equality, DuBois also expressed optimism about the prospects of black business and industry. In 1899, DuBois wrote in *The Negro in Business*, “it is hardly possible to place too great a stress on the deep significance of business adventures among American negroes. Physical emancipation came in 1863, but economic emancipation is still far off.” This economic component of DuBois’s argument concerning business would also expand on his groundbreaking analysis of the status of African Americans during Reconstruction.²⁹²

McCabe along with other eventual black town leaders, extolled the philosophy of racial uplift. Some took this approach and attached it to their ambitions in Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory. Although white settlers such as Payne generally claimed the

²⁹⁰ “Migration,: *Crisis*, February 1914, 190. Quoted in Field, *Growing Up With the Country*, 152; Waldo E. Martin Jr., *The Mind of Fredrick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 74.

²⁹¹ Field, *Growing Up With the Country*, 107.

²⁹² W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negro in Business*, 5; DuBois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company), 671.

land in the Twin Territories as their right as American citizens, it was under the veil of “social progress” that the federal government ultimately supported. Meanwhile, African American leaders, McCabe and Eagleson, and their allies, armored with Washington’s “Tuskegee spirit,” actively participated in the land runs created from Native land and sovereignty in Indian Territory.²⁹³

As stated earlier, the Creek Nation had a politically active African Creek populace. For example, African Creek leaders J.C. Johnson and W. A. Rentie became involved in territorial politics and aligned with the Republican Party during the 1890s and early 1900s. The interest in Republican activities led to a loose alliance between African Creek leaders and African American businessmen who settled in Muskogee and its surrounding area. The African Creek leaders such as A.G.W. Sango developed businesses throughout the bustling black Muskogee community. They also established schools and organizations modeled on Washington’s ideology surrounding education and business.

Washington’s ideology of black education and uplift that prevailed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries developed from his experience educating Native American students at Hampton in 1879. In his seminal text *Up From Slavery*, Washington credits his experience at Hampton with preparing him for the work that he would go on to do at Tuskegee. Detailing his experience with Hampton’s seventy-five “Indian youths” Washington noted that he “was the only person in the building not of their race.” His perspective on Natives colored his larger ideological views concerning uplift. Washington said Hampton “secured from the reservations in the Western states over one

²⁹³ Zellar, *African Creeks*, 232.

hundred wild and for the most part perfectly ignorant Indians, the greater proportion of whom were young men.” Not quite confident in his ability to succeed in the task, Washington writes he was aware that:

the average Indian felt himself above the white man, and of course, he felt himself far above the Negro, largely on account of the fact of the Negro having submitted to slavery—a thing which the Indian would never do. The Indians, in Indian Territory, owned a large number of slaves during the days of slavery. Aside from this, there was a general feeling that the attempt to educate and civilize the red men at Hampton would be a failure.²⁹⁴

Lacking context on the prevalence of Native American slavery in the Southeast, Washington gradually grew confident over time in the ability of Native students to achieve in academic and industrial education. Realizing “little difference between the coloured and Indian students” concerning scholarly success, Washington, indirectly credits the African American students’ ability to help in the task of “civilizing” Hampton’s Native student body. He boasted that “the Negro students gladly took the Indians as room-mates, in order that they might teach them to speak English and to acquire civilized habits.”²⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Washington’s emphasis on the industrial spirit is based on his experience. His observation that there is “something in human nature which always makes an individual recognize and reward merit, no matter under what colour of skin merit is found,” runs parallel to the exceptional nature he also attached to the dilemma of slavery in Indian Territory.²⁹⁶ Although he acknowledged the existence of Native enslavement,

²⁹⁴ William Andrews, ed., Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* [Critical Norton Edition], (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 47-48.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 71.

Washington reinforced his overall intention of black progress and superiority through crediting Hampton's black students with leading by example in educational pursuits. Overall, Booker T. Washington's experience and paternal fondness toward his Native American students likely influenced his endorsement of the Creek Council supported Industrial Institute in Muskogee. He also accepted the school's invitation to Washington to speak at the school's opening in 1904. As Black towns and communities developed, the industrial schools Washington supported occurred within the backdrop of increasing opposition to black education throughout the south toward the end of the nineteenth century.²⁹⁷

Indian Territory experienced immense changes as the influx of both black and white settlers encouraged discussion of statehood from both groups. In other words, both used Land Runs as political acts, which came at the expense of Native sovereignty and land. This chapter defines what is often known as the All Black Town Movement as a loose movement based in Oklahoma Territory. McCabe, the face of this movement, based his migratory strategy on land runs in Oklahoma Territory, not Indian Territory. Black towns developed differently in both territories due to the existence of black settlements and black culture since Indian Territory's inception. Also, the collective political power some black Indians wielded likely helped black town leaders, many of whom were of African and Native American descent. However, it is important to note that black

²⁹⁷ Zellar, *African Creeks*, 238; Fitzhugh Brundage, *Booker T. Washington and Black Progress: Up From Slavery 100 Years Later* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 65; George Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: the Debate on Afro American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 285.

settlements also occurred prior to the 1890s. In fact three black settlements existed in what would become Oklahoma Territory before 1890.

Similar to white settlers, some blacks attempted to squat on the Unassigned Lands. Known as the “Negro Sooner Colony,” the settlement consisted of five black families. George Ransom, from Chillicothe, Missouri was their leader. Established in the area following the Treaties of 1866, the settlement according to Sac and Fox agency documents and oral history, was well known to soldiers stationed at nearby Fort Reno.²⁹⁸ The settlement of five families practiced subsistence farming and sold surplus to soldiers stationed at Fort Reno. However, the colony moved to Texas in 1879 following a military expedition to remove a band of horse thieves located in the same area, according to an oral account.

The story of the “Negro Sooner Colony” demonstrates the motivation some blacks had to settle in the West, and their awareness of Indian law. Overall, the existence of this early Boomer settlement demonstrates that some African Americans expressed interest in Indian Territory during the Exoduster Movement. Meanwhile, the Land Run of 1889 became an event for both whites and African Americans. Each group vied for land in what would become Oklahoma Territory in 1890. According to Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, “African Americans acquired their land most often through land speculation, boosters and individuals who sold them abandoned or unworked parcels known as relinquishments.”²⁹⁹ This was the reality of the first black land run towns--Lincoln and Pleasant Valley.

²⁹⁸ “Negro Sooner Colony,” WPA Sites Collection, Box Sixteen, Folder One, Norman, Oklahoma.

²⁹⁹ Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth: Race and Agriculture in Oklahoma Territory* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 32.

Lincoln formed in August of 1889 with a founding population of three-hundred migrants. With the majority of its populace from Kansas, Lincoln's outskirts inflated the town's population to 2000 by 1890.³⁰⁰ Settlers divided the land into small farms mirroring the structural organization of later black towns throughout the Twin Territories. Known as satellite communities, they acted as unorganized settlements often associating with nearby black towns for political and economic reasons.³⁰¹ Unfortunately, the first black land run towns quickly vanished leaving behind few primary sources.

Marion Blair, a white speculator, sold land to a black colony in what Blair called Lincoln Town. Blair advertised the town as the "first African town ever started in a civilized country." However, the land was subpar and not suitable for the kind of crops black farmers likely wanted. Instead, Blair expected that the "settlers would sell the timber for cash, hunt wild game, and take up subsistence farming on 40-acre lots."³⁰² Pleasant Valley was also a black town formed during the land run. Founded in 1889, Pleasant Valley was also a part of Kingfisher County. Participants of the Land Run and black Civil War veterans settled the town.³⁰³ Following the fate of other black towns,

³⁰⁰ "Lincoln City Profile," WPA Historic Sites And Survey Collection, Box Four (Kingfisher County), Folder Two, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

³⁰¹ Karla Slocum, *Black Towns Black Futures: the Enduring Allure of a Black Place in the American West* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 15. Slocum notes that satellite communities of Oklahoma black towns remain today. On writing on the significance of these unincorporated communities Slocum writes "the count of existing black towns should be higher than thirteen when we consider these unincorporated settlements that surround incorporated black towns." In other words, the existence of black communities surrounding black towns demonstrates Slocum's argument of "thinking broadly and beyond the geographic boundaries that we often affix to place."

³⁰² Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 32-3.

³⁰³ *Acres of Aspiration*, 218.

Pleasant Valley ceased to exist. With inadequate farm land, these towns struggled to adapt to a changing economic culture. In Marion Blair's words we see the substance of nationalism: the pursuit of making an imagined community real.

The 1890s saw a shift in farming as farmers desired to extend their interests within an expanding market economy. With the introduction of railroads connecting the East and West, farmers wanted to participate in a "world market culture and a new 'progressive' model of farming based on profit, efficiency, and technological innovation in order to compete successfully with other sectors of American society."³⁰⁴ However, the story of many black settlers coming to Oklahoma Territory revolved around fraud.

Black settlers fell victim to both black and white land speculators. One white promoter took advantage of 200 black Kansans, by charging \$5.00 for land that did not exist. After paying their own train fare to Oklahoma Territory "they were instructed to make the run along with everyone else."³⁰⁵ Two black promoters from Memphis took advantage of a group of Tennessee blacks by taking money and not giving them land upon their arrival to Oklahoma Territory in 1889. Nonetheless, this represented a pattern among black settlers. Whereas, most whites staked claims African American settlers often purchased land and battled legally to maintain ownership.³⁰⁶ The fact that corruption and duplicity lay behind some of the efforts to settle black towns must not prevent scholars

³⁰⁴ Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 30.

³⁰⁵ Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 33

³⁰⁶ Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 36-7.

from seeing why these efforts succeeded: they exploited the idealistic drive to create homelands for African Americans within the United States.

Despite these patterns, black and white migrants abandoned Land Run towns shortly after arriving. This was the case for Lincoln. With the town folding in about 1891, Works Progress Administration records claim the community “moved to Wanamaker” -- Another Land Run town.³⁰⁷ In any case, the mention of Lincoln in the 1890 publication, *An Illustrated History of Oklahoma*, demonstrates the town’s prominence to the Territory’s larger populace. According to Works Progress Administration records, the town built a cotton gin. However, this enterprise failed as growing cotton proved difficult on rocky soil. The town’s connection to Wanamaker may have been prominent. One citizen banked in that town, likely using the bank to obtain credit.³⁰⁸ Perhaps the difficulties farmers faced led to the town’s demise. Reports also claim that most Lincolmites moved back to Kansas, thus demonstrating Kansas’s strong position in the African American migratory movement.³⁰⁹ McCabe, experienced in the Exoduster tradition, staked his future in Oklahoma Territory to likely quench the thirst of his political ambitions after an exceptional career for an African American man of the time. However, although this is not true of all black town owners and leaders, the notion of

³⁰⁷ “Lincoln City Profile,” WPA Historic Sites And Survey Collection, Box Four (Kingfisher County), Folder Two, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma; “Population of Oklahoma and Indian Territory,” 11, https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1907pop_OK-IndianTerritory.pdf; Diana Everett, “Lincoln City,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=LI005>.

³⁰⁸ “Lincoln City Profile,” WPA Historic Sites And Survey Collection, Box Four (Kingfisher County), Folder Two, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

³⁰⁹ Diana Everett, “Lincoln City,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=LI005>.

political ambition is important to consider with regard to black town leaders' ambition to become leaders of a nation within a nation.

Traveling to what would become Oklahoma Territory in 1889, McCabe became involved in Langston's development. Following the purchasing and surveying of the site, Charles W. Robbins, a white speculator, gave the land to McCabe and William L. Eagleson—a prominent black newspaperman. Several miles from Guthrie, the territorial capital, McCabe published the *Langston City Herald*, an important organ in both black Oklahoman and Republican politics. As did most black town publications, the *Herald* had agents throughout the Deep South to encourage settlement, by emphasizing the town's agricultural possibilities. Similar to the town of Lincoln, however, the environment also affected Langston's settlers, not only due to poor land, but also drought.

Oklahoma Territory's first residents settled during a bad drought, destroying the possibility of a first year crop. A source at a local Land Office in Kingfisher County reported:

It is very dry; vegetation is looking bad, and if it keeps on much longer the prairies will burn of 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.³¹⁰

With cash cropping a big factor in black town development, the dry conditions would have greatly affected towns relying on subsistence farming. Months later, in December 1890, an eyewitness reported immense crop failures and exuberant potato prices. In

³¹⁰ "Affairs at Oklahoma," *New York Times*, July 2, 1890.

addition, the eyewitness saw “large families of colored people...crowded together in one or two rooms with not one day’s provisions ahead.”³¹¹

Drought is frequent in Oklahoma. Windy conditions also eroded the soil. One researcher, in fact, concluded that dust storms became a factor from 1890 to 1896.³¹² This was not lost on the new territorial legislature of Oklahoma Territory. A governor’s report on the territory in 1891, concerned with drought, argued that settlers were not allowed to enter the territory in time for the growing season. However, the drought extended to southwestern Kansas and northwestern Texas pushing settlers into Oklahoma Territory.³¹³ While this proved difficult for town leaders like Langston to overcome, capital was also an issue. Nevertheless, other black leaders contributed to black Oklahoma’s growth during its troubling early years and had as much influence as McCabe.

Although Edward McCabe receives more attention than William Eagleson, prominent news publications during the period portrayed the latter as a prominent figure in the development of black Oklahoma. Following the start of his emigration company in Topeka, Kansas, he promoted Oklahoma Territory to black settlers willing to take the chance. Eagleson also proclaimed that he would have 100,000 African Americans in Oklahoma Territory, adding that “five hundred of the best colored citizens of Topeka

³¹¹ “Suffering in Oklahoma,” *New York Times*, December 10, 1890.

³¹² “Hydrologic Drought of Water Year 2011: A Historical Context,” (September 2012), Oklahoma Water Resources Board and 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.

³¹³ *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.

[Kansas] have gone there within the last month.”³¹⁴ It is important to note Eagleson’s significance to Oklahoma Territory’s black migration movement. In fact, scholars Daniel F. Littlefield Jr. and Lonnie Underhill argue “the greatest impetus for the idea of a black state came from Eagleson’s group, which had become the Oklahoma Immigration Association.”³¹⁵ Political development itself is essential to the story of black Oklahoma as the attempt for an all-black state proved short lived. Instead, McCabe secured prominent political positions as treasurer of Logan County, Oklahoma Territory while running a real estate office in Guthrie. He wanted to develop a large black voting bloc by exerting his political influence. However, black political participation proved difficult in Oklahoma Territory, moving McCabe to strategically use subsequent land runs to install black settlers in several counties throughout the territory.³¹⁶

Langston was as a “jumping off place” for African Americans to gain land from anticipated land openings from Native American land.³¹⁷ Although McCabe and Eagleson made a general start for black movement to Oklahoma Territory, they and other black leaders were well aware of the expense the settlement of southern blacks caused other groups. James L. Stevens, a leader in “College Heights Addition, Langston City,” promoted the area he owned in Langston writing “It is supposed that the colored people who live in Langston will get the Indian land near to it, which will be a little fortune to

³¹⁴ Littlefield and Underhill, “Black Dreams and Free Homes,” 342.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 38-9.

³¹⁷ Littlefield and Underhill, “Black Dreams and Free Homes,” 347.

any man because each farm will be worth from \$1600 to \$2000.”³¹⁸ Stevens had interest in black acquisition of the Iowa, Sac and Fox, and Potawatomi lands, which opened around the same period. In 1891, white settlers complained about “the large number of negroes to Guthrie and vicinity [likely the general vicinity of Langston].”³¹⁹ Furthermore, white news publications such as the *Norman Transcript* complained about poor black settlers and the lack of farmable land. Consequently, many white settlers assumed that African American settlers aimed to work as hired hands on white farms rather than engage in landownership.

Langston’s environmental layout was similar to that of Lincoln. The community had subpar land and substantial timber. However, that did not stop McCabe from promoting the town as a haven for the black middle class. In doing so, the *Langston City Herald* exaggerated details about the climate and land quality.³²⁰ Inadequate land coupled with drought proved detrimental for the migration movement. The town also experienced population spikes during land run years. For example, the Sac and Fox land run of 1891 brought the town population to about 2,000 due to migrants wanting to stake claims to Sac and Fox land. In other words, Langston, acted as a transitory town, where black settlers came with the goal to obtain land elsewhere.³²¹

³¹⁸ Littlefield and Underhill, “Black Dreams and Free Homes,” 346. Quoted from “College Heights Addition, Langston City, Oklahoma Territory, April 21, A.D. 1891 in Townsite of Langston City, Guthrie Land Office, Oklahoma, National Archives.

³¹⁹ *Norman Transcript*, March 7, 1891, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc136979/m1/1/> [Page 1].

³²⁰ Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 106.

³²¹ Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 37.

McCabe's use of black town development via land runs proved paradoxical. Land Runs enticed white and black settlers by promoting the opportunities "free land" could offer. However, Oklahoma's black towns thrived on a middle-class ethos and uplift ideology. Nonetheless, McCabe's role in the movement is essential to understand as he was responsible for the development of three black towns, including the town of Vernon in 1895.³²² Instead of rallying blacks to the town permanently, Langston often served as an entry point for African American settlers. McCabe's strategy mirrored border towns along the Missouri River--which were "the spots where people outfitted for the overland trip before 'jumping off' into lawless (at least initially) Indian Territory west of the Missouri River."³²³ According to Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, "jumping off towns" depended on emigrants for economic survival. The same can be said for some Oklahoma black towns. Town promoters such as McCabe and Eagleson may have used the availability of other towns as a way to prop up the possibilities of their towns. To be certain, areas throughout Oklahoma Territory were spaces of violence much like the jumping off places in areas like Kentucky.³²⁴ Moreover, the push of blacks from Kansas would have meant a good clientele for Langston businesspeople. In fact, Langston's location "was a natural gateway for immigration..."³²⁵ While McCabe started a newspaper and called for black emigration, he also aimed to transform Langston into a

³²² Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 164.

³²³ Moore, *Sweet Freedom's Plains*, 54.

³²⁴ Moore, *Sweet Freedom's Plains*, 58-9

³²⁵ Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 100.

profit-making venture. He ran the *Herald* from an office in Guthrie, the Territorial capital. Aware of the failures of the Exoduster Movement, “McCabe realized from his prior experience in Nicodemus that only blacks with capital could stimulate the growth of Langston, which would in turn provide the promoters with increased profits.”³²⁶ In fact, McCabe sold the *Herald* in 1892 to a group of black business men, but continued promoting the town along with the *Herald* and its editorial board.³²⁷

Black town news editors, like Langston’s, spoke with urgency to potential settlers. For town boosters like McCabe, “increased population and rising land values meant a spurt in economic prosperity for all and unlimited growth in the future.”³²⁸ Oftentimes, newspaper editors also claimed that coming to their respective town would be a settler’s last opportunity for affordable land and safety. Although black towns allowed prospective settlers to live amongst their own, black town leaders wanted to sell large amounts of land to expand boundaries of their respective towns.³²⁹

Nonetheless, McCabe, with the influence of the *Langston City Herald*, moved forward. He encouraged black settlement for the Sac and Fox land run in 1891. White settlers in the surrounding area disagreed with black settlement. Some of them looked to the land run’s legislative language, which asserted that only white settlers had access to federal land. However, the Secretary of the Interior retracted that portion of the

³²⁶ Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 104.

³²⁷ Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 110

³²⁸ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 44.

³²⁹ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 45.

proclamation stating that persons of color were not excluded from obtaining land. Overall, about one thousand blacks claimed land during the Sac and Fox Land Run.³³⁰

African American settlers and town leaders anticipated the Cheyenne-Arapaho and Cherokee Strip Land Runs of 1892 and 1893. African American organizations such as the Ethiopian Brotherhood had formed years prior in preparation for these land openings. The hilly and unfertile Cheyenne-Arapaho lands led to a lack of interest among white settlers and easier access for prospective black settlers. Meanwhile black leaders and newspapers called on President Benjamin Harrison to set aside the Cherokee Strip for the creation of an all-black state, with some blacks squatting on the land before its opening in 1891. Discussion of making the Cherokee Strip exclusively for black settlement occurred during Cherokee ownership of the land. Edward McCabe demonstrated his faith in the Cherokee Strip by his intent to develop two “jumping off points” for prospective black settlers. Scholars Daniel Littlefield and Lonnie Underhill argue that McCabe wanted to establish additional black towns “to serve in that run as Langston had served in the Sac and Fox opening.”³³¹ The only other black towns McCabe established were the towns of Liberty and possibly Vernon.

McCabe founded Liberty following the Land Run of 1893.³³² Around the time of Liberty’s founding, William Cary Renfrow, the Democratic territorial governor expressed

³³⁰ Littlefield and Underhill, “Black Dreams and Free Homes,” 348-49.

³³¹ Littlefield and Underhill, “Black Dreams and Free Homes,” 350.

³³² There is some dispute between scholars regarding Liberty’s founding. According to Hannibal Johnson, McCabe founded Liberty “early in 1893” with members of the African American Episcopal Church. Moreover, a report of the time claimed several hundred blacks from Mississippi were en route to the town. But the town slowly deteriorated by 1904 due to whites attempting to keep black settlers to populate the town located in north central Oklahoma. Meanwhile, Kenneth Marvin Hamilton argues that McCabe “must have overreached himself on this project since he left the state in 1908, too soon for

his awareness, and perhaps his worry, about black immigration to Oklahoma Territory. In a report, Renfrow claimed that black migration to the territory largely declined with many returning to the South.³³³ Although Liberty was short-lived due to issues of racism and the like, some of its population came from an exodus of blacks living in the Osage Nation located in northern Oklahoma.³³⁴ This exodus was a part of a pattern as whites used violence to chase African Americans out of Oklahoma Territory towns and counties throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³³⁵ Fighting against this narrative, an 1894 editorial in the *Langston City Herald* said that a news editor of a prominent Oklahoma black town proclaimed Langston as “the negro’s refuge from lynching, burning at the stake, and other lawlessness.”³³⁶ Yet, the blacks that remained became victims of Oklahoma Territory’s political tensions.

The business interests of McCabe and other black leaders likely encouraged the development of a varied form of black land tenure in the Twin Territories, but most settlers were poor. Some black leaders in the region had local Republican ties helping form black coalitions to defeat democrats for local office.³³⁷ In fact, one county elected a black man for the first Oklahoma Territorial Legislature. Kingfisher County voters

Liberty to become a success.” See Hannibal B. Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 214 & Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 118n42.

³³³ “Report of the Governor of Oklahoma Territory for the Year 1893,” 4 & 7, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, <https://digitalprairie.ok.gov/digital/collection/okresources/id/1494>.

³³⁴ Littlefield and Underhill, “Black Dreams and Free Homes,” 351-2.

³³⁵ Littlefield and Underhill, “Black Dreams and Free Homes,” 357.

³³⁶ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 43.

³³⁷ Wickett, *Contested Territory*, 175.

elected Green Currin to represent its fifth district. Noticing the amount of racial violence against African American settlers in the territory, Currin introduced the first civil rights bill in Oklahoma Territory, which failed.³³⁸ Nonetheless, the Republican Party ran several black candidates for local territorial office, which gave Oklahoma Territory's black leaders hope of black social and economic progress throughout the 1890s.³³⁹

The optimism of some black leaders did not always reflect the feelings of Oklahoma Territory's black community at large. In 1897, the *Herald* editorialized the coming of an unnamed black presidential candidate.³⁴⁰ Standing in stark contrast to the nation's issue with racism, the editorial did not acknowledge black dissatisfaction with the Republican Party. Consequently, populism became a useful tactic against racist legislation and social economy. According to Judith Stein, populism became the best way to fight against discrimination and racism in an effort to gain economic advantages.³⁴¹ To be sure, black dissatisfaction with Oklahoma Republicans was a reaction to the lack of support they received in return for party loyalty. Nonetheless, white Republicans were aware of the value blacks had for their political power and used black support only when necessary.

Oklahoma Territory leadership often viewed African American settlers as a politically expedient way to expand and consolidate Republican dominance in the region.

³³⁸ Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, 172-3.

³³⁹ Wickett, *Contested Territory*, 176.

³⁴⁰ *Langston City Herald* Saturday, February 6, 1897, [https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc69948/m1/1/zoom/?q="free homes"&resolution=2&lat=4200.807939332344&lon=1177.248830667483](https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc69948/m1/1/zoom/?q=).

³⁴¹ Judith Stein, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others": The Political Economy of Racism in the United States" *Science & Society* (1974/1975): 445.

Realizing the importance of African Americans to the Republican political base, Territorial governor George Washington Steele deterred a group of African Americans from leaving Oklahoma Territory for an opportunity to cultivate cotton in Texas. He coerced them into staying until the end of a territorial election by promising them money and “political action.”³⁴² Kansas Republicans popularized these tactics in the 1880s. For example, one observer explicitly proclaimed that the Republican Party would use the black vote only when needed.³⁴³ Perhaps Oklahoma Territory’s political issues, during the early 1890s, moved other black towns to take a stronger tone in its newspaper advertisements.

In 1893, the Douglas Townsite Company founded Douglas, located close to Oklahoma City, bordering the Kickapoo territory. The company purchased a large ad in the *Oklahoma-Times Journal* in 1893 regarding the town’s opening. While McCabe alluded to previous violence, new economic opportunity, and forthcoming land openings to woo African Americans to Langston, Douglas pleaded for black advancement and “civilization.” The Douglas Townsite Company offered town lots for African Americans to advance “in the arts of modern civilization and industry.”³⁴⁴ With 200 families coming from areas such as Louisiana, Douglas had a number of businesses. It also was prepared to set aside a number of acres for the forthcoming Territorial Colored Industrial Normal

³⁴² Littlefield and Underhill, “Black Dreams and Free Homes,” 354.

³⁴³ William H. Chafe, “The Negro and Populism: a Kansas Case Study,” *The Journal of Southern History* 34 (1968): 407.

³⁴⁴ *Oklahoma-Times Journal*, July 28, 1893, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc93346/m1/16/>.

School, which eventually went to Langston.³⁴⁵ The town failed to obtain a railroad, which went to a town a half mile away.³⁴⁶ Other Oklahoma Territory towns quickly perished in the same manner as Douglas, but black political development continued in spite of the struggles experienced by early black towns. Black newspapers and organizations fought against political difficulties through political participation and development during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Territorial politics had been in a state of flux since Oklahoma's beginning. Although the Republican Party dominated much of Oklahoma Territory's history, the migration of black settlers in the area complicated the political landscape. With Kansas, a beacon of populist thought, nearby, Oklahoma Territory became home to a fruitful third party base for disaffected settlers suffering from drought and financial ruin during the 1890s. The People's Party emerged as a threat to Republican dominance in Oklahoma Territory as it made inroads with black voters. Having previously ignored the plight of African Americans following Reconstruction, the Republican Party, especially in Logan County, realized the importance of fortifying their black coalition to sustain political control. The influx of southern African Americans made this tactic more prevalent as the People's Party aimed for the black vote. African Americans made up nearly thirty percent

³⁴⁵ "Douglas City," WPA Historic Sites Collection, Box Four, Folder Five (Lincoln County), Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

³⁴⁶ "Douglas City," WPA Historic Sites Collection, Box Twenty-Four (Ghost Towns), Folder Five (Lincoln County), Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

of Logan County's voting population--Langston being one of the prominent bastions of black voter participation.³⁴⁷

As early as 1890, white Republican newspapers had urged the strengthening of their black coalition. Meanwhile, black leaders in Guthrie renounced their dedication to the Republican Party pledging "individual support and nine of every ten colored voters to...the whole Republican ticket."³⁴⁸ Langston voted in favor of a third party candidate during the 1891 Logan County election.³⁴⁹ However, the ripples in territorial politics came at the expense of the black vote as both major parties made changes to voting through ballot manipulation to bolster their efforts.

The Republican Party implemented anti-fusion tactics to avoid the expansion of the People's Party. Republican leadership implemented the Australian Ballot in 1891 with the intent to downplay the visibility of Third Party candidates on the ballot, because People's Party's candidates (a fusion of populists and middling democrats), could not appear on the ballot more than once. This notion of candidates running on a fused ticket, where both Democrats and Populists supported the same candidate, would not have been popular with black Lincoln Republicans. Therefore, black voters in Langston voted Republican in the Logan County election of 1892.³⁵⁰ Democratic legislators, when in

³⁴⁷ Megan Benson, "Reform and Retaliation: Cora Diehl and the Logan County Election of 1891" *Oklahoma Politics* (1995): 28.

³⁴⁸ *Weekly Oklahoma State Capital*, January 24, 1890; quoted in Megan Benson, "Reform and Retaliation: Cora Diehl and the Logan County Election of 1891" *Oklahoma Politics* (1995): 29.

³⁴⁹ Benson, "Reform and Retaliation," 32.

³⁵⁰ Benson, "Reform and Retaliation," 35-6.

power, made laws to deter the black vote. For example, in 1897, Democrats initiated voter registration laws in black dominated urban areas. In this case, city clerks had the authority to place people on the registration lists thus making the process partisan.³⁵¹ This back and forth continued throughout the territorial period as voting proved difficult for African Americans following Oklahoma statehood.³⁵² Black settlers found ways to politically activate, using newspapers as both an organ for black towns and for politics. This strategy was demonstrated by the Western Negro Press Association formed a year before Oklahoma Territory voter restrictions.

In 1896, the Western Negro Press Association formed, charting the development of a strong black voice in western territorial politics. Continuing in the vein of the Exoduster legacy, the Western Negro Press Association evolved from the Missouri and Kansas Press Association of Negro Journalists. The organization aimed to be an organ for “all Negro Editors publishing papers in the territory lying west of the Mississippi.”³⁵³ Akin to the Colored Convention movement of the 1830s to 1860s, the organization sought to establish rhetorical devices to combat injustices against the African American community.³⁵⁴ By 1897, the Western Negro Press Association had representation from several black news editors in states and territories, including Oklahoma. To be sure, many states and territories in the West had at least one black newspaper by the 1890s.

³⁵¹ R. Darcy, “The Oklahoma Territorial Election System: 1890-1905,” *Oklahoma Politics* 12 (2003): 52.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁵³ Paul Emory Putz, “For Race and Region: a Brief History of the Western Negro Press Association, 1896-1920” *Great Plains Quarterly* 38 (2018): 175.

³⁵⁴ Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 18.

Black newspapers were responsible for black migration to Oklahoma and elsewhere during the nineteenth century. They also served as a forum, speaking against white newspapers that only covered black criminality and degradation.³⁵⁵ Black editors also gained leadership within the black community because of their respected professions and education. In many cases, news publications often reflected a town's wealth. Many black towns had several news publications throughout their life-span. Early Oklahoma black towns, such as Langston, had eleven news publications throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The final Oklahoma black town newspaper was established in 1926. Black town newspapers were victims of transient populations and lack of resources, whereas urban black newspapers proved more successful. Towns with large black populations—such as Guthrie and Muskogee--had the ability to operate daily news publications. Such urban centers with larger black populations gave editors a decent subscriber pool. Publications such as the *Oklahoma Safeguard* and the *Muskogee Cimeter* became prominent newspapers in Guthrie's and Muskogee's black urban centers in the Twin Territories.³⁵⁶ According to Paul Emory Putz, they "combined protest against social and political oppression with exhortation toward African American advancement."³⁵⁷

Active until the twentieth century, the Western Negro Press Association carried influence in Indian Territory. According to a schedule of the 1905 meeting of the organization, Principal Chief of the Creek Nation, Pleasant Porter, gave a "Welcome

³⁵⁵ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 152.

³⁵⁶ Nudie Williams, "The Black Press in Oklahoma: the Formative Years, 1889-1907" *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 310-315.

³⁵⁷ Putz, "For Race and Region," 177.

address on Behalf of the Territory.” Although it is not entirely clear what Porter said in his speech, his connections with prominent people in Muskogee may have helped convince him to speak to an audience of mostly black professionals within the Territory. However, Porter and other prominent Indian leaders were at odds with many of the black professionals Porter addressed on that day. First, the *Cimeter* and many black newspapermen leaned Republican. Second, the *Cimeter* often supported single statehood. In 1905, an editorial blurb within the *Cimeter* argued that “it might not be a bad idea for the laws of Oklahoma to be extended over the Indian Territory, pending statehood. There are many ways in which this would be advantageous.”³⁵⁸ William Henry Twine, editor of the *Cimeter*, also had connections with prominent African Creeks such as Warrior Rentie and A.G.W Sango.³⁵⁹ One of the most advertised black towns in the *Cimeter* was Rentiesville—founded by Rentie, a businessperson of African and Creek descent. Black towns like Rentiesville, especially during the twentieth century, often had black and Indian populations. However, Indian Territory’s black town development occurred differently than in Oklahoma Territory. Also, it occurred decades before the Black Town Movement.

The 1890s also proved to be a pivotal time as the Five Nations experienced an unwelcome influx of white and black intruders in their respective territories. Agitated by the steady stream of statehood conventions, and the Boomer era of the Payne and Turner Movements, the Five Tribes experienced further government intrusion as federal officials

³⁵⁸ *The Muskogee Cimeter*, December 28, 1905, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70020/m1/8/>. [Page 8].

³⁵⁹ Gary Zellar, *African Creeks*, 239.

concluded the dissolution of their tribal governments. An 1895 report of the Commission of the Five Tribes alluded to corruption within the Five Tribes, which had the capacity to slowly erode their governments along with federal assistance.³⁶⁰ In 1890, the federal government reported 64,000 intruders (black and white) within the limits of the territory of the Five Tribes.³⁶¹ These groups entered an area with a legacy of black Indian political participation and settlement.

However, Oklahoma's first black towns had existed in Indian Territory prior to the Land Run of 1889. The towns, Tullahassee, Marshalltown, North Fork Colored, Canadian Colored, and Arkansas Colored were inhabited by freedmen of the Five Tribes.³⁶² Tullahassee was one of the earliest black towns in Indian Territory. It was established in 1850 with a school at the center of the settlement. The Tullahassee Manual School began in the 1850s as a missionary-backed school for the instruction of Creek Indians. Over time, the areas surrounding the school became occupied with Creek Freedmen. The school experienced a brief transformation to a military barracks during the Civil War. It then reverted back to a school for Indian children. Shortly after, the school became an institution for Creek freedmen in 1885. Many black Creeks, such as Siegal McIntosh, studied agriculture at the institution. Although the school closed for a

³⁶⁰ The Purcell Register, Vol. 9, No. 2 "A Report of the Commission of the Five Civilized Tribes signed by Jefferson Gardner", Purcell, Chickasaw Nation, Indian Territory. Editor: W.H. Walker. Contents: self-explanatory. 3 copies: Dec. 6, 1895. Jefferson Gardner Collection, Packet 1, Folder 8, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

³⁶¹ *Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1890* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890), 89, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep90>.

³⁶² Larry O'Dell, "All-Black Towns," The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=AL009>.

period of time following the school's transition from a predominantly black school, McIntosh's experience reflected the opportunities black Creeks had in the Creek Nation.³⁶³

Siegal McIntosh's father, Yonah McIntosh, was born a slave in the Creek Nation. Yonah McIntosh escaped to Kansas and fought for the Union during the Civil War. He returned to Indian Territory becoming Town King (or Chief) of Arkansas Town with his son acting as his clerk. He had ascended to a respected status as a result of the further development of black communities in Indian Territory. In his oral history interview, Siegal McIntosh discussed how blacks developed wealth prior to the Emancipation. He stated that slave owners valued bilingual slaves as they had the ability to help conduct trade. Some owners compensated slaves for their work, with many slaves saving their money and purchasing their freedom. According to Siegel McIntosh, some slaves "were more thrifty than their owners for the reason that they had this reason for thrift while the owner just waited for the government to pay and take care of them."³⁶⁴ The emergence of railroads and boosterism from black town newspapers and railroad pamphlets contributed to this feeling by non-Indians in Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory. For example, white editors within the general vicinity argued that the federal government coddled American Indians.³⁶⁵ Other Creek Freedmen, some of whom were raised in black Creek

³⁶³ "Interview with Siegal McIntosh," *Indian Pioneer Papers*, <https://digital.libraries.ou.edu/cdm/ref/collection/indianpp/id/228>.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Daniel F. Littlefield, *Seminole Burning: a Story of Racial Vengeance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 16.

towns, expressed disappointment in early twentieth century interviews about the shifting social relations between blacks and Creeks in Indian Territory.

Simon McIntosh, a black Creek and an associate of Arkansas Town, proudly talked about his family's political heritage as a black family in the Creek Nation. McIntosh's uncles, Sugar George and Jesse Franklin were members of the Creek Council during the late nineteenth century. Leading a delegation in Washington D.C. to settle tribal affairs, McIntosh recounted that full-blood members of the delegation allowed George and Franklin to speak on the Creek Nation's behalf. Explaining further, McIntosh said:

the colored delegates were pushed forward to speak for the Indians. They seemed to be able to express the wishes of the Creek tribe than the Creeks themselves. The government officials called upon said 'we want to talk to the Indians. What are these colored men talking for?' The Creek delegates said, 'What's the matter? We want them to talk for us.' So the government officials saw that the Creeks thought of the negroes as being equal with themselves. That is all changed now.³⁶⁶

Writing about black Creeks, Gary Zellar argues they were "cultural brokers acting as go-betweens for culturally conservative Creeks in commercial activities, but they also made significant contributions to the growing market forces developing in their own right."³⁶⁷ Therefore, the use of Simon McIntosh's uncles may have been for practical purposes and language barriers. Although some black Indians enjoyed some political freedom, African American settlers of non-Indian descent became a problem for the Five Tribes.

³⁶⁶ "Interview with Simon McIntosh," *Indian Pioneer Papers*, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma, <https://digital.libraries.ou.edu/cdm/ref/collection/indianpp/id/247>.

³⁶⁷ Zellar, *African Creeks*, 173.

Buck Colbert Franklin was born in a racially diverse county in the Chickasaw Nation. Pickens County, located in south central present-day Oklahoma, contained a large population of noncitizens and intruders. According to an 1890 census of Indian Territory, more than ninety percent of Chickasaw Territory inhabitants were non-Native. Years later in 1897, Chickasaw officials documented a “multitude of colored people from the States, who have swarmed into the Chickasaw Nation, and now enjoy the gratuitous use of Chickasaw land.”³⁶⁸ Federal officials realized the complications that African American migration may have caused among the Five Nations. However, they often used blacks in what Barbara Krauthammer describes as “a gauge of Indians’ level of ‘civilization.’” Overall, the government consistently criticized the Five Tribes about the unequal treatment their black citizens received, which slowly made statehood more imminent.³⁶⁹

Similar to Oklahoma Territory, Indian Territory experienced sustained agitation from settlers throughout the 1890s and early twentieth century. By 1898, a government report noted the persistence of statehood advocates. Responding to the subject of statehood, the report concluded: “that the Five Tribes do not want statehood with Oklahoma at this time, and there are pertinent reasons why such a union should not be forced...”³⁷⁰ Going further, the document reported on the “influx of negroes” throughout the region. Since the Civil War’s end, large scale racial violence plagued Texas, pushing

³⁶⁸ Littlefield Jr., *The Chickasaw Freedmen: a People Without a Country* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 45.

³⁶⁹ Krauthammer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 144.

³⁷⁰ *Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1898*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), 156, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep98>.

African Americans out of the state. White organizations formed to drive blacks out of small towns in Texas, leading African Americans into larger cities. Larger Texas cities stopped this major influx by forming large committees themselves. Prominent cotton counties like Titus, Red River, Hopkins, and Cass experienced racial clashes between white caps, or white vigilante groups, forcing many African Americans to flee for Indian Territory.³⁷¹ As a result of this race conflict, the government stated that “refugee negroes are selling out their property in that State [Texas], and are getting on foot a hegira to invade the Five Tribes, believing that they can buy land here and find more hospitable surroundings among the Indians.”³⁷² Although the report admitted to not completely knowing the prevalence of African American Texans moving to Indian Territory, it stipulated “the Indian is not as friendly to the negro as is the white man.”³⁷³ The report emphasized that full blood Natives were the primary group expressing black prejudice. The author of the Indian Territory report used the Chickasaw Nation as the main example of such prejudice. It claimed that the Chickasaw resisted extending citizenship to former slaves because of their racial views. The report, however, conflated black Indians and African Americans as “negroes”—a consistent pattern in which both groups were viewed through a lens of blackness and their former slave status. Nevertheless, the conflation of both groups makes more sense considering that the author said that the “Indian

³⁷¹ *Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1898*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), 156, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep98>; for more on racial violence in late nineteenth century Texas, see Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 111-12 and Thad Sitton and James Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 13.

³⁷² *Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1898*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), 156, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep98>.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

department” had “jurisdiction over the Five Tribes,” which occurred through the passage of the Curtis Act in 1898.³⁷⁴

The steady influx of settlers from the United States drove Five Tribes members to respond with a migration of their own. In 1895 a Cherokee group formed a colony with hopes of emigration to Mexico or Colombia. This group, although Cherokee, envisioned developing a space for other members of the Five Tribes to settle in the midst of the steady influx through Indian Territory.³⁷⁵ To be sure, the intruder issue flamed concerns of morality and Native sovereignty as the population influx challenged tribal institutions.

“Moral depletion” became a growing concern in the Twin Territories due to a growing black population and the stigma of black Texans migrating to Indian Territory.³⁷⁶ In 1898, *The Daily Chieftain*, an Indian Territory newspaper mentioned a cocaine epidemic among blacks in the Cherokee capital of Tahlequah. The editorial complained about the number of “cocaine fiends,” in the capital, instigated by a “negro who told several of his race that it was fashionable down in Texas.” As a result, the concerned editorial declared that “some of our boys are curious enough to catch onto the darkey fashion down in Texas.”³⁷⁷ A year later in 1899, a smallpox case broke out in some parts

³⁷⁴ *Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1898*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), 156-7, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep98>; M. Kaye Tatro, “Curtis Act (1898),” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CU006>.

³⁷⁵ *Wagoner Record* -- May 30, 1895 "Editorial on C.J. Harris, C. Johnson Harris Collection, Western History Collections, B H-56, Folder 39, Norman, Oklahoma; "re: the meeting of a group of Cherokees at Tahlequah for the purpose of forming a colony in Mexico or Columbia.

³⁷⁶ Littlefield Jr., *Seminole Burning*, 5-8.

³⁷⁷ *The Daily Chieftain*, December 7, 1898, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc773570/m1/1/>.

of Indian Territory, complicating the presence of non-citizens. For example, the Choctaw Medical Board stated that “the [Choctaw] nation made an appropriation to take care of the citizens, but as a matter of course, made no provision for the non-citizens.” The board reported that most smallpox patients in South McAlester were African American intruders.³⁷⁸ Given South McAlester’s reputation as a cotton producer, it is not surprising that the town had an intruder population. Prior to the boll weevil infestation of the early twentieth century, each community in the town “had one or more cotton gins, and McAlester held three within the city limits, plus a cotton compress which could process as much as twelve hundred bales per day and forty thousand per year.”³⁷⁹ However, Indian Territory’s growing non-citizen population placed financial pressure on tribal entities. Regardless, African American settlers continued migrating to Indian Territory with many settling in black towns in the early 1900s, despite the racial turmoil throughout the region.³⁸⁰

Boley was Indian Territory’s most prominent black town. Founded in 1903, Boley exemplifies the focus of twentieth century black towns. Progressive-minded in the pursuit of business, Boley developed a more varied and industrialized economy compared with

³⁷⁸ *The Daily Chieftain* November 23, 1899,
<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc774134/m1/4/>.

³⁷⁹ Jeanne LeFlore, “McAlester History,” *McAlester News Capital* July 23, 2013,
https://www.mcalesternews.com/news/local_news/mcalester-history/article_a2d9fa09-923a-5a42-9c86-2f1a6176bb27.html.

³⁸⁰ For more on racial violence during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see, Quintard Taylor and Lonnie Underhill, “Red V. Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post-Civil War Indian Territory” *American Indian Quarterly* 8 (1984): 211-229.

nineteenth century black towns that focused mostly on farming.³⁸¹ Nonetheless, the town's economy revolved around cotton, with corn being a distant second. With agriculture being the dominant sector within Okfuskee County, Boley farmers experienced prejudice from their white counterparts in the surrounding area.³⁸² White farmers formed the Anti Negro Farmer's Association hoping to halt black farming and the overarching threat of "negro domination" through economic dominance in Okfuskee County. However, Boley gained political traction in Territorial politics. A pivot toward diversification due to the instability of the cotton economy and political participation, helped Boley survive within unwelcoming territory. Boley's first years had a simple political system geared toward the town's basic needs, which mostly centered on economics and population growth. The town experienced little partisanship. In fact, its leadership and political structure mirrored that of earlier towns, such as Langston. Its town founders often acted as businessmen and town politicians, making attempts to extend its political reach in county politics.³⁸³ This consistent political activity climaxed with white locals fearing "negro domination" of county politics in 1909.³⁸⁴

The town's first news publication, the *Boley Progress*, aimed to gain the attention of black women for town growth. Boley had several women's groups such as the Boley Ladies Industrial Club and the Boley Women's Club. These were two of many societies

³⁸¹ Larrie Elahi, "A History of Boley, Oklahoma, to 1915" M.A. Thesis The University of Chicago, 1968, 30.

³⁸² Elahi, "A History of Boley, Oklahoma, to 1915" M.A. Thesis The University of Chicago, 1968, 33.

³⁸³ Elahi, "A History of Boley," 46.

³⁸⁴ Elahi, "A History of Boley," 64.

women joined in black towns during the period.³⁸⁵ In fact, O.H. Bradley, editor of the *Boley Progress*, “saw the advantages of these women’s clubs and the potential for using them for town improvement projects.”³⁸⁶ Indeed, black female leaders drove the ideas of civilization that women promoted within the black community.³⁸⁷ This occurred during a period of national black women’s organizations during the nineteenth century.³⁸⁸

Despite its successes, the overdependence on cotton dealt a blow in the form of a depression of the crop from 1914 to 1915. After a fluctuating economy and political difficulties, many disillusioned Boleyites looked to Africa as a place of refuge. Chief Alfred Sam, a businessperson from the African Gold Coast, looked to Oklahoma for its black presence. He eventually made Boley the center of his emigration company.³⁸⁹ Unlike McCabe and other black town leaders, Sam timed the beginning of his venture perfectly. The publication supporting his project, *The African Pioneer*, began circulation in 1914--the same year as the cotton depression. In nearby Weleetka, Sam gradually acquired a supporting base. Initially, he was interested only in a trade relationship between his West African company and black Oklahoman communities. Forming a tent city dubbed, “South Gold Coast,” Sam’s followers pooled money together to support their emigration to the Gold Coast.³⁹⁰ Boley leaders, likely annoyed with the drain of black

³⁸⁵ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 147.

³⁸⁶ Linda Williams Reese, *Trail Sisters: Freedwomen in Indian Territory, 1850-1890* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2013), 136.

³⁸⁷ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 141.

³⁸⁸ Reese, *Trail Sisters*, 135.

³⁸⁹ Elahi, “A History of Boley,” 88.

³⁹⁰ Field, *Growing Up with the Country*, 142.

voters and labor from the region, consistently reported on the colony and its eventual failure. Overall, Boley, at its height during the early twentieth century, contained a number of businesses and a steady stream of visitors and potential settlers. One of the town's highlights also included a visit from Booker T. Washington. He gave the town a glowing review.

Washington's 1908 article, "Boley: a Negro Town in the American West" illustrates black elitist stereotypes regarding Native Americans and early African American migration following the Civil War. Using Boley as a beacon of twentieth century black progress, Washington compared these "industrious" blacks to their "crude" ancestors of the 1870s writing:

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.³⁹¹

Washington went on to speak about the "crude" group of African American settlers that came West from the Deep South.

Alluding to the region's American Indian presence, Washington offered a blunt summation of Boley. He stated that "although built on the railway [the town] is still on the edge of civilization." While mentioning hearsay regarding "shrill cries of the Indian dancer among the hills beyond the settlement," Washington expressed concern about black Indians remaining aligned with Native American customs. However, he remained confident about cooperation between black Indians and African American settlers.

³⁹¹ Booker T. Washington, "Boley: A Negro Town in the American West," (1908), http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/archive/resources/documents/ch19_05.htm.

Cooperation, Washington believed, would demonstrate black capacity for civilization.³⁹² However, he also mentioned skirmishes between neighboring black Creeks and Boley residents. Located in the Arkansas-Verdigris River Valley black belt, Boley residents found it difficult to coexist with surrounding black Creek communities developed before the Civil War. These issues culminated in black towns developing in the river valley region and African American conflating black Creeks as “natives,” and black Creeks deeming African American settlers “states negroes.”³⁹³ After a history of black settlement following the Civil War, the river bottom region became home to the most black towns in the territory. The towns, Rentiesville, Taft, Redbird, Wildcat, Grayson, Porter, Summit, Tullahassee, Lima, and Wybark developed from black Creek settlements. However, Boley, Clearview, and Bookertree were black towns developed distinctively as African American towns.³⁹⁴

In many respects, former slaves of the Five Tribes often enjoyed more privileges throughout Indian Territory. The Oklahoma Land Run of 1890 enabled African American settlers similar privileges in Oklahoma Territory. With the difficulties African Americans faced in Oklahoma Territory, they fared better than those who remained in the Deep South. Concentrated pockets of black inhabitants in areas such as Langston and Guthrie provided enough influence for the black vote to matter in the political battleground that was Oklahoma Territory.³⁹⁵ Republican Territorial governors understood the importance

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Zellar, *African Creeks*, 238-39; Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 159.

³⁹⁴ Zellar, *African Creeks*, 238.

³⁹⁵ Wickett, *Contested Territory*, 13.

the black population had for their political ambitions. Indian Territory's black influence became more entrenched following Reconstruction.

The Treaties of 1866 legally laid to rest the questioned status of Black Seminoles who had gained emancipation prior to removal from Florida. Former slaves of the Five Tribes quickly gained influence in the Creek and Cherokee Nations as a result of their access to land, and the seasoned black towns started by Creek and Cherokee freedmen. Bilingual black Indians also acquired additional prominence because of their ability to act as interpreters. The fact that black interpreters existed prior to the Civil War demonstrates the possibilities of black social mobility before Emancipation. Black participation in 1866 negotiations was a product of the often fluid race relations that existed among the Five Tribes. Freedmen in the Creek and Seminole Nations would go on to become prominent businessmen and, at times, align with African American business men. The uneasy relationship between black Indians and African Americans stemmed from similar racial and ethnic tensions throughout the nineteenth century in general. At times, both groups coexisted peacefully because of their connections as black people, and their shared legacy of enslavement. However, racially stereotyped perceptions of both groups canceled out these instances of "black alliance." Black freedmen often viewed African Americans as intruders into their homeland.. The African American middle-class saw Native land as an opportunity to obtain a status beyond that of second-class citizenship. Black leaders like Booker T. Washington viewed the black community as superior to Native Americans.

Although Washington generally supported the formation of black towns, Boley played an essential role in his political ambitions. Washington was able to take advantage of black town leaders due to their embracing the general tenets of his self-help ideology. Newspapers in early black towns such as Langston consistently followed Washington's activities with his Tuskegee Institute. Taking advantage of his stature, Washington wrote to black town leaders in an effort to recruit towns to join the National Negro Business League. In fact, the connections Boley and Clearview made with Washington and the Business League led to another Washington visit in 1914. Of course, Washington was also aware of other black towns, such as Taft, which also emerged during the period.³⁹⁶

Taft incorporated a year after Boley in 1904, although blacks had settled in the general area years before. Its promotional pamphlet best exhibits the town's culture and ambitions. The town boasted of its safety, and its strong industrial and agricultural sectors as attractive elements for prospective settlers. A predominately state-black town, the pamphlet proclaimed Taft was "bound to be an important trade center."³⁹⁷ The pamphlet also noted that no "race trouble" had ever occurred in Taft. This was a common tactic employed by black town promoters. They wanted to display an air of relative peace between black town inhabitants and neighboring white towns.³⁹⁸ This played into a common ideology of black town inhabitants as a racially superior subgroup of the African

³⁹⁶ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 134-36.

³⁹⁷ "Taft Promotional Brochure compliments of Reeves Realty Company in Muscogee, Oklahoma," Currie Ballard Collection, Box 4, Folder 14, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.

³⁹⁸ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 103.

American community.³⁹⁹ For example, white observers commented on the so-called character of inhabitants of Mound Bayou, Mississippi. In 1910, Thomas Arnold, a New Orleans journalist with whom Mound Bayou inhabitants were directly aligned, stated:

the real old-time African race into whose veins has crept no germ of shiftlessness, worthlessness, criminal tendencies, or self-importance that characterizes so many of the race who have grown to be such a fester upon the average city....That kind of blood has never found permanent lodgement in the citizenship of Mound Bayou, nor of the farming element of the 'colony.'⁴⁰⁰

Nonetheless, Taft also displayed the kind of modernity black towns needed to thrive at the turn of the century.

Red Bird was another town incorporated in Indian Territory, the same year as Taft. Similar to Taft, Red Bird exhibited the notions of modernity and superiority that black towns promoted in their literature during the early twentieth century. Through its promotional pamphlet, Red Bird demonstrated its superiority via several testimonials from respected town inhabitants. One, in particular, from Mrs. J. Orlando Mitchell, the wife of a man of “culture and refinement,” commented on Red Bird’s social conditions. Mitchell testified that “the painted Indian on the warpath, and the desperado...made way for civilization.”⁴⁰¹ Similar to Washington’s views of Natives in nearby Boley, Red Bird’s pamphlet demonstrates black elitism within black towns throughout the landscape. In the

³⁹⁹ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 102.

⁴⁰⁰ *New Orleans State*, June 7, 1910. Quoted in Norman Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 102.

⁴⁰¹ Red Bird Investment Company, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.” <http://digitalprairie.ok.gov/cdm/ref/collection/culture/id/103>., 5.

words of Tiya Miles and Sharron Holland: “the concept of a black Indian Territory transformed Indians into a vehicle for black identity formation and racial uplift.”⁴⁰²

Red Bird’s promotional pamphlet also supported Oklahoma statehood. However, because Indian Territory is mentioned at the very beginning of the pamphlet, it gets more attention than its counterpart. The pamphlet refers to it as “the great Indian Territory, the last *good country* of the great Southwest to be settled.”⁴⁰³ In effect, the pamphlet alludes to the feelings many ambitious black settlers had about Indian Territory.

Indian Territory had a stronger black heritage in its development of black towns, which thrived after the Civil War. Black Indians with political capital who collaborated with state black businessmen, forged additional black town development. Of course, this caused dissension between Native Freedmen and state blacks as in the case of Boley--a town with an ideology similar to that of Oklahoma Territory black towns.

Although it was founded on allotted land, Boley exhibited the black middle-class ethos of other state black towns. Although little is known about each and every black town and settlement, many of the black towns demonstrate the black middle-class ethos prevalent throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In effect, the Oklahoma Black Town Movement reflected broader debates within the black community as African Americans attempted to make their own path in a racist country. However, since its inception, the American West had come to be a complicated and contested landscape.

⁴⁰² Miles and Holland, *Crossing Waters*, 5.

⁴⁰³ Red Bird Investment Company, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.” <http://digitalprairie.ok.gov/cdm/ref/collection/culture/id/103>, 16.

Although the migration of blacks to the North prompted unprecedented violence and rioting, by the late nineteenth century the American West proved even more difficult and paradoxical in many respects. While the majority of African Americans remained in the South, the threat of “negro domination” agitated whites and white-dominated institutions to maintain the second-class status blacks held in American society. However, the West and its mythical status in the American mind made the threat of black dominance more imminent. Patricia Limerick correctly states that the definition of race “fluctuated, but racial feeling evidently guided white Americans in their choice of groups to persecute and exclude.”⁴⁰⁴

Overall, the 1910s proved difficult for black towns in Oklahoma. Their dependence on cotton greatly affected the economic outlook for most black towns. Decades prior, black town leaders were aware of the issue cotton would cause. As early as 1895, the *Langston City Herald* warned town farmers of the consequences of cotton dependence. The evolution in booster rhetoric concerning farming from the 1890s to the 1910s best demonstrates these consequences. During the 1890s, towns such as Langston proudly proclaimed that sharecropping was nonexistent in their respective towns. Thus, an industrious farmer could keep all the profits to himself. However, by 1911, the town of Clearview became transparent concerning the importance of credit to the farming sector. It encouraged prospective settlers to secure it in order to have prosperity in their black town.⁴⁰⁵ Clearview’s transparent comment concerning farming also coincided with

⁴⁰⁴ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest: the Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 280.

⁴⁰⁵ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 115-16.

leaders' hopes to industrialize their town and the overall economy. By the turn of the century, this had become a focal point. Surrounding towns such as Taft and Red Bird promoted oil prospects and railroad opportunities.⁴⁰⁶

Regardless of the opportunities afforded by twentieth century black towns, the fluid and transient nature of business greatly impacted the progression of these black towns. Most black town leaders also owned the many businesses and capital within their respective black towns. Although this fact may not have had a great impact on the town's overall progress, the disinterestedness of its business men likely did. Black towns needed capital, which some African Americans had the ability to offer. Businessmen and leaders of black towns often formed commercial clubs and trade organizations with the hopes of developing business to ensure profits. With banks of utmost importance due to settlers needing credit, black boosters quickly established them. In Boley, for example, several investors in its Turner's Farmers and Merchants Bank lived in nearby communities such as Okemah and Muskogee. In Oklahoma Territory, McCabe lived and worked in Guthrie, the Territorial capital. Therefore, the boom-and-bust nature of black town business life also discouraged settlers with likely little capital, and who were also looking for protection, making them prey for emigration proponents.⁴⁰⁷

The transnational, large-scale migration of African Americans complicated matters. Many settlers proved transient as some looked to areas in Africa, Canada, and Mexico. We also should consider that most black towns developed within the Territory,

⁴⁰⁶ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 122.

⁴⁰⁷ Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 123-24.

with overlapping Native American laws and sovereignty. This attracted some African American settlers looking to escape from the anti-black legalities in the United States. According to scholar Kendra Field, this general “separatist impulse took many forms following the demise of Reconstruction, including both ‘domestic’ town movement and ‘foreign’ emigration; the two explicitly converged in turn-of-the-century Indian Territory and Oklahoma, almost predictably on the literal edge of the U.S. nation-state.”⁴⁰⁸ These movements also impacted the political participation and development of black towns.

While African Americans sought Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory during the late nineteenth century, early black towns had to also compete with black settler interest in Arkansas. Following the Civil War, the promotion of the availability of cotton prompted black southerners to settle in Arkansas. (Some had initially intended to settle in Kansas as Exodusters.) However, rampant racism, poor land quality, and disenfranchisement motivated some newly arrived Arkansas blacks to search for a home elsewhere in Oklahoma Territory. From there, these settlers inquired about the American Colonization Society.⁴⁰⁹ According to Kenneth Barnes, “the [Arkansas] counties with the most competitive political environments in the late 1880s and early 1890s were most likely to have strong back-to-Africa movements.”⁴¹⁰ Regardless, the majority of Oklahoma’s black population came from Texas and Kansas, respectively.

⁴⁰⁸ Field, *Growing Up with the Country*, 163.

⁴⁰⁹ Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 109-113. For more on Arkansas’ Back-to-Africa Movement see, Kenneth C. Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004). For more on the African American nationalist influence on Africa nationalism see George Shepperson, “Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism,” *Journal of African History* 1 (1960): 299-312.

⁴¹⁰ Kenneth C. Barnes, *Journey of Hope*, 179.

The Oklahoman black migration movement encountered not only the region's political realities, but also physical and racial difficulties. While Republicans remained a dominant force in territorial politics, McCabe and other black town leaders failed to woo enough African Americans needed for a strong political force. Racism thwarted several opportunities for McCabe and other town leaders to acquire railroad depots for black transit not only to Langston, but to also to bring their produce to markets and participate in a changing industrial economy. Finally, the Twin Territory's droughty conditions placed a strain on poor black farmers looking for land. It forced some to rely on cash cropping cotton, which exhausted the lackluster land black settlers had acquired in land runs. Nonetheless, Indian Territory's black towns, arguably, prospered more compared with those in Oklahoma Territory. Black town leaders in Indian Territory often had more resources and connections with powerful brokers there. Also, they may have strategically placed their towns next to one another.

Overall, black towns proved largely unsuccessful in their pursuit of black political participation. For McCabe and other black town leaders, political participation of African Americans was the ultimate goal. In an era of second-class citizenship, some black settlers wanted the opportunity to achieve and to prosper. For them, the West was the best option as regions such as Indian Territory remained legally diverse with its several jurisdictions. By 1900, the Twin Territories only had a total of 55,684 African American residents. With Kansas being a popular destination for black settlement in the 1870s and 1880s, the 1890s and early 1900s proved to be the decade for Oklahoma's black population boom.⁴¹¹

⁴¹¹ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 135-6.

Nevertheless, larger forces hindered the movement's progress. Moreover, to understand this migration phenomena is to look at how it played out differently in the Twin Territories.

The Back-to-Africa Movement carried influence in Oklahoma and Indian Territory. Langston lost some of its early settlers to Africa in the 1890s. Meanwhile, African American settlers residing in Cherokee territory towns of Muldrow and Redland sent letters of inquiry to the American Colonization society about Liberian emigration. Many of the writers were congregants of a reverend connected with noted emigration Advocate, Bishop Henry Turner.⁴¹² From Muldrow and Redland in the Cherokee Nation to Muskogee in Indian Territory, "lower-class blacks, remote from middle-class status and pessimistic about gaining equality in middle-class America, formed the popular base of a black movement that advocated emigration to Africa."⁴¹³ As agents circulated papers such as the *Langston City Herald* throughout the region, American Colonization Society leaflets crisscrossed the terrain. As with organizations formed by the likes of Eagleson for Oklahoma settlement, special groups formed with interest in promoting emigration to Liberia throughout Indian Territory. The activities of Northeastern Oklahoma's Number One Club of Redland in the early 1890s spread to African Americans in the Choctaw Nation culminating in the formation of Club Number Two. Club Number Two's initial 1892 voyage to Liberia brought 200 black Oklahoma settlers.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹² Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 102-3.

⁴¹³ Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 5.

⁴¹⁴ Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 105-6.

Years later, Oklahoma statehood and Jim Crow legislation led black Oklahomans to settle in Canada during the 1910s.⁴¹⁵ They were interested in building an agricultural base in the western portion of the country. However, the Canadian government battled against its own female citizenry as the nation's Homestead Act did not extend to unmarried Canadian women. An infusion of black settlers also racialized homesteading in Canadian politics. Black settlement in Alberta and Saskatchewan alarmed women homestead activists who often "capitalized on fears of the 'foreigner' to connect themselves to issues of national and imperial importance to which they could offer solutions."⁴¹⁶ With political participation more important than ever during Oklahoma's Jim Crow Era, yet another stream of emigration likely affected black political influence in some areas as well as population decreases in black towns.

The transient nature of Oklahoma's black towns impacted its population and the satellite communities in the surrounding area. Whites, as well as some black town leaders, discouraged emigration to Africa. Many often realized the crucial position black farmers played within the dominant cotton economy. Local publications reported thousands of "vacant farms and houses" throughout Indian Territory; however, there were only hundreds of settlers involved in the Chief Sam Movement.⁴¹⁷ Nonetheless, Booker T.

⁴¹⁵ Barnes, *Journey of Hope*, 178-79.

⁴¹⁶ Sarah Carter, "'Daughters of British Blood' or 'Hordes of Men of Alien Race': the Homesteads-for-Women Campaign in Western Canada" *Great Plains Quarterly* 29 (2009): 277.

⁴¹⁷ Field, *Growing Up with the Country*, 137.

Washington spoke to black audiences in Boley arguing against the Chief Sam Movement during his 1914 visit.⁴¹⁸

The 1890s was a time in which black integration and nationalism gained a considerable amount of attention throughout the country. The African emigrationists hoped for a new space where the shared experiences of black people could be fully realized in the form of a proper nation. Oklahoma was a prime space for such activity. African American settlers expressed interest in former Indian land as a place to call their own during the late 1870s and 1880s. The help of conventions and organizations enabled black people to find ways to politically mobilize and to demonstrate their frustrations with the current racial order. The ancestors of the Exoduster Movement and the smaller migratory movements during the period did not embrace a nationalist agenda. Instead, they used their physical movement to not only find opportunity, but to truly realize their full citizenship. For these migrants, if the South failed to embrace and realize the economic importance of black farmers to the southern economy, finding land elsewhere was the best option. In other words, because of their circumstances as compared with their middle-class black brethren, they were not as optimistic about black social progress.⁴¹⁹

Although the early project of black Oklahomans to Liberia failed, interest remained, catching the attention of Chief Sam and his interest in black emigration to the Gold Coast. According to scholar Edwin Rekey, “Chief Sam reaped what Turner had

⁴¹⁸ Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 293.

⁴¹⁹ Abram Harris, *The Negro as Capitalist* (New York: Haskell Publishers, 1970), xi.

planted.”⁴²⁰ Sam had the advantage of likely being aware of Bishop Turner as the latter’s newspapers enjoyed an overseas audience in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Lagos.⁴²¹ Also, according to Kendra Field, “most of Sam’s participants had migrated two and three times into the southwest American borderlands before joining this back-to-Africa movement.”⁴²² To be sure, the overall black migratory movement had religious overtones, which complicated matters as different leaders took various socio-political positions. Turner and Sam both appealed to black southerners in different, religious ways.⁴²³ From Benjamin “Pap” Singleton to Chief Alfred Sam, African American leaders used hope and religion to help alleviate the discrimination black migrants faced. The thousands of black men and women involved in this large migratory movement, were often seasoned transients searching for safety and opportunity in a safe space. Nevertheless, black integration and nationalism also shared some elements.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 291.

⁴²² Field, *Growing Up with the Country*, 136.

⁴²³ Edward J. Robinson, *To Save My Race from Abuse: The Life of Samuel Robert Cassius* (Tuscaloosa: the University of Alabama Press, 2007), 4. In an effort to express the complexities of black thinking concerning religion and race, Robinson notes religious historians’ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya’s argument concerning “six polarities in the black religious community.” According to Robinson, “the first dialectic is between priestly and prophetic functions, the former stressing the spiritual life of black parishioners with the latter emphasizing the community involvement of its members. The second dialectic, that between otherworldly and this-worldly, focuses first on heavenly matters even while accentuating social and political involvement in the present [in this case, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries]. The third dialectic, universalism and particularism, acknowledges an all-encompassing Gospel which endorses ‘black consciousness’ while recognizing ‘particularistic racial views.’ The fourth dialectic underscores both the communal and privatistic. On the one hand, the black church seeks to address the economic, educational, social, and political concerns of its members even as it concentrates on religious and spiritual needs. The fifth dialectic manifests charismatic and bureaucratic emotional traits and characteristics in worship and produces organizational forms with financial and membership records. The final dialectic contrasts accommodation with resistance.” For more on these elements in black church life see C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 12-15.

Marcus Garvey's emergence as a major urban leader for the black masses developed from the influence of Washington's ideology of self-help. Garvey's style and appeal contributed to his popularity, but his audience was also important. The crowds of black urbanites Garvey wooed were often black southerners who had traveled north during the Great Migration.⁴²⁴ In a 1914 pamphlet Garvey expresses his views concerning the black educated elite, writing:

The prejudices of the educated and positioned Negro towards his own people have done much to create a marked indifference to the race among those of other races who would have been glad and willing to help the Negro to a brighter destiny.⁴²⁵

By the 1910s, some black religious leader participants in this transnational movement such as Reverend Will Hurt, went to Canada, because he wanted "to change government." Older men, such as Reddick Carruthers, participated in Canada migration "at the age of 70 aspiring after a free home."⁴²⁶ Although Garvey may not have approved of black emigration to non-black majority countries, he likely would have respected such actions. According to Garvey "It is indeed unfair to demand equality when one of himself has done nothing to establish the right to equality."⁴²⁷ The frustration of Carruthers and other black settlers, stemmed from a prolonged battle over the issue of Oklahoma statehood.

⁴²⁴ Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 294-295; Robert A. Hill, *Marcus Garvey Life and Lessons* (Chapel Hill: The University of California Press, 1987), xxii-xxiii.

⁴²⁵ Marcus Garvey, "A Talk With Afro-West Indians. The Negro Race and its Problems," in Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (University of California Press, 1983), 56.

⁴²⁶ Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *Of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 23-4.

⁴²⁷ Marcus Garvey, "A Talk With Afro-West Indians. The Negro Race and its Problems," in Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (University of California Press, 1983), 56.

African Americans, Native Americans, and white Americans debated the merging of the Twin Territories or the possibilities of separate statehood for both territories. These debates spread throughout newspapers, conventions, and pamphlets. They often boiled down to the amount of a group's political participation. With black politics more important than ever, the views of black leaders often diverged from one another as the Twin Territories faced different circumstances politically and racially.

Chapter 5: Race, Politics, and Statehood in the Twin Territories, 1890-1907

In 1893, G.E. Gage, a former Democratic mayor of Kingfisher, Oklahoma Territory, wrote a private letter to Leslie P. Ross, a prominent Oklahoma Territory Democrat. Gage's missive concerned men seeking political position who "ought not to be considered." Gage writes about an ambitious man named A.J. Jones. In a convention to elect the new Register of the Territorial Land Office, Jones worked to get the Republican nominee elected by gaining the black vote. Jones succeeded to the point that Gage, the Democratic nominee for Register at the time, claimed that "the republicans and negroes were massed against [him]."⁴²⁸ And:

when the result was known Jones got good and drunk and went off and jubileed with the negroes in 'log cabin' style. Mr. Jones got drunk in Elkins and had a regular street brawl; was arrested, taken before the police judge where he deposited \$10.00 for his appearance which he forfeited. He is a common drunkard, and a dangerous and unreliable man for a position of any kind.⁴²⁹

This story demonstrates the political struggle within Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory. The first decade of the twentieth century involved a political struggle between white Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans. Each group defined their own forms of citizenship through the prism of statehood in the Twin Territories. White Americans, regardless of party affiliation, aimed to make The Twin Territories a space exclusively white. African Americans viewed the Twin Territories

⁴²⁸ G.E. Gage to Leslie P. Ross, May 11, 1893, Leslie P. Ross Collection, Box R-9, Folder 4, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

and the eventual state of Oklahoma quite differently. They saw it as an exceptional space whereby African Americans could enjoy full citizenship within a country of failed social Reconstruction policies. Native Americans, specifically the Five Tribes, attempted to develop a Pan-Indian ideology. Their vision involved ideas of emigration, separate statehood, and rebuking the Republican Party for the sake of maintaining sovereignty eroded by the Dawes and Curtis Acts. Nevertheless, racial alliances existed among the three groups for one reason or another. Some Native American leaders aligned with white Democrat politicians. They did not like the Republican Party's promotion of land runs and black civil rights for both African Americans and black Indians throughout Indian Territory. African Americans often aligned with Republican leaders and organizations with Populist elements in the Twin Territories. However, white settlers generally disassociated with black settlers.

Social science and race evolved significantly as it pertains to Native Americans. Scholar Fredrick E. Hoxie notes that the policy of American Indian assimilation "had complex cultural and political origins."⁴³⁰ In other words, the changing policies that affected the Five Tribes came from the collective work of influential people, reform groups, and the "larger cultural and political discourse of the day."⁴³¹ However, it is important to keep in mind that Oklahoma is rather exceptional because of its complex history and what Hoxie identifies as the states' "limited significance for national

⁴³⁰ Hoxie, *A Final Promise: the Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001 [Bison Books edition]) x.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

policy.”⁴³² Nonetheless, it is still helpful to consider broader cultural influences, because the statehood issue of Oklahoma received national attention along with Oklahoma Territory’s McCabe-era. To be sure, the exceptional nature of Oklahoma was an element some African Americans realized. Perhaps that is why an African American newspaper described the Twin Territories as an “island surrounded by states.” This was not lost on hopeful African Americans during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As late as 1925, black leaders had high hopes for the American West. James Weldon Johnson, as NAACP national secretary, proclaimed:

Your West is giving the Negro a better deal than any other section of the country. I cannot attempt to analyze the reasons for this, but the fact remains that there is more opportunity for my race, and less prejudice against it in this section of the country than anywhere else in the United States.⁴³³

In fact, considering the racial ambiguity of Oklahoma and the West, in general, Quintard Taylor writes that different racial groups residing in the West “interacted both competitively and comparatively among themselves.”⁴³⁴ This is the case with blacks and Native Americans in the Twin Territories. However, African Americans wanted single statehood, whereas Native Americans aimed for separate statehood.

Several questions come to mind when considering the circumstances surrounding statehood in the Twin Territories: How did Republican and Democratic governors make a case for statehood to federal officials? What were Republican and

⁴³² Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, xxi.

⁴³³ *Denver Post*, June 24, 1925, Quoted in Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 17.

⁴³⁴ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 17.

Democratic Newspapers saying about African Americans? The aim of this chapter is to incorporate the voice of black Oklahoma into the discussion surrounding statehood.

Following the Land Run of 1889, white settlers came from all over the country in an effort to acquire land. Subsequent land runs followed throughout different portions of western Oklahoma throughout the 1890s. They further politicized the region and increased white settlement. Oklahoma Territory experienced four additional land runs in 1891 (Sac and Fox, Iowa, Shawnee, and Potawatomi Lands), 1892 (Cheyenne and Arapaho lands), 1893 (The Cherokee Outlet), and 1895 (Kickapoo lands). However, political tensions and violence that came along with these events led to land openings of the twentieth century becoming lotteries.⁴³⁵

Oklahoma Territory's Land-run era, though politicized by both primary parties, exuded general tenets of an American democratic ethos. Though initial operating costs of a farm were expensive for average Americans, idealism overshadowed the true reality of farming. According to Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, "farmers everywhere were in accord with the notion that the new territory was a sound economic investment."⁴³⁶ Many white settlers believed in the abundance of Oklahoma land, believing that the region was "untouched and unspoiled, created for their exclusive use by a wise and benevolent God."⁴³⁷ The realities of frontier life in Oklahoma Territory deterred some white settlers, but others found humor in their hardships and used the region's natural

⁴³⁵ H. Wayne & Anne Hodges Morgan, *Oklahoma: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 54-59.

⁴³⁶ Lynn-Sherow, 70.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

resources to stay afloat while waiting for the growth of their first harvest. Meanwhile, white settlers in areas like Blaine County had varied views of African Americans and Indians in the area. Bonnie Lynn-Sherow writes, “Indians were a novel curiosity, and black farmers were tolerated for their limited usefulness.” She notes, “both groups were later displaced as the value of marginal lands increased and crops promised better returns.”⁴³⁸ In fact, an 1898 promotional pamphlet on the Twin Territories credited the growth of cotton in the region to African American settlers. The pamphlet declared that “the colored people, who had come from the South, and had spent their lives in raising the fleecy staple [cotton], persisted in planting it, however, and finally finding the variety best suited to this country, showed their incredulous white neighbors that cotton was a paying crop in this Territory.”⁴³⁹ Regardless, white settlers struggled with the same environmental and economic issues as black settlers.

Indeed, white Oklahoma’s cultural make-up varied as settlers from different states and regions occupied space. Kansan and Texan settlers dominated much of Oklahoma Territory, making the region a contested political landscape with populism, Republican, and Democratic politics converging throughout the area.⁴⁴⁰ While the Republican Party seemed dominant, the party struggled throughout the Territorial period to maintain control. Republican votes slowly declined throughout the Territorial

⁴³⁸ Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 74-5.

⁴³⁹ “Oklahoma and the Indian Territory” [revised edition, 1898]. Boomer Literature Collection, Box 1, Folder 4, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁴⁴⁰ H. Wayne Morgan & Anne Hodges Morgan, *Oklahoma: a History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 57-9.

period for two reasons. First, the migration of Democratic settlers, primarily from Texas, bolstered the Democratic votes. Second, settlers grew frustrated with hardships they believed were beyond their control.⁴⁴¹ Overall, the troubled political landscape of Oklahoma Territory overshadowed varied approaches to the matter of statehood.

Talk of statehood divided Republican leaders. Some believed single statehood had the potential to help secure Republican dominance. Others worried about the possibility of Democratic Party dominance in the state and the additional democratic representation in a waning Republican congress during the period.⁴⁴² To make matters worse for both major parties, the emerging People's (or Populist) Party made solid gains in northern Oklahoma Territory. The Oklahoma Boomer Movement had direct connections to Kansas politics and leaned toward Democratic Party principles. They slowly became more radical as David Payne and Samuel Crocker, and other Boomer leaders battled Indian Territory's powerful cattle industry. According to scholar Worth Robert Miller, the dominant cattle industry in Indian Territory "destroy[ed] advances in civilization that agrarians had achieved."⁴⁴³ In addition, the emerging Farmers Alliance Movement brewed in Kansas and protruded into Indian Territory as a significant number of Kansas settlers migrated to Oklahoma between 1888 and 1892.⁴⁴⁴ Both Republicans and Democrats used race as a wedge to gain power in the lead up to

⁴⁴¹ H. Wayne Morgan & Anne Hodges Morgan, *Oklahoma: a History*, 73-4.

⁴⁴² Morgan & Morgan, *Oklahoma: a History*, 76-7.

⁴⁴³ Worth Robert Miller, *Oklahoma Populism: a History of the People's Party in the Oklahoma Territory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 14-15.

⁴⁴⁴ Miller, *Oklahoma Populism*, 21.

Oklahoma statehood. An early 1900s Democrat flyer entitled “What Republicans Want,” territorial Democrats argued that Republicans intended to integrate education, which then would allegedly “endanger the schools of the Territory.”⁴⁴⁵ Settler pamphlets of the late nineteenth century also mentioned race and education.

Homeseeker guides of the day promoted newly available lands to whites with some editions proclaiming, “Eighteen Million Acres of Indian Lands for White Settlers.”⁴⁴⁶ Nevertheless, these claims did not discourage black settlement as some supported the Free Home League, a movement that promised affordable land for settlers. While nonpartisan, the Free Home League leaned Republican. Dick T. Morgan, a prominent Oklahoma Republican, led the movement during the early twentieth century.

In 1900 Morgan proudly announced the support of the Democrat, Republican, and Populist Parties. In support of the pending Free Home Bill in Congress, Morgan demanded justice for settlers proclaiming it unfair for settlers to pay additional fees on public land.⁴⁴⁷ The Free Home League used rhetoric similar to that of western town boosters but also used the plight of poor settlers, particularly veterans and their widows. However, Morgan argued further that the failure of settlers to secure “Free Homes” would destroy “educational institutions, retard the growth of our religious, moral and

⁴⁴⁵ “What Republicans Want” [early 1900s], Charles Ames Collection, Box A3, Folder 3, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁴⁴⁶ Boomer Literature Collection, Box 1, Folder 2, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁴⁴⁷ “Free Home Address of Hon. Dick T. Morgan,” 1900 Boomer Literature Collections, Box 1, Folder 19, page 6, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

charitable organizations, and check the onward march of society to a higher plane of culture, refinement and civilization.” Moreover, the policy of overcharging poor settlers for mid-quality land would “roll like a mountain-like burden upon agriculture, clog the wheels of commerce, and reduce the profits of every business and industry in the Territory.”⁴⁴⁸

Morgan’s use of morality and civilization was a common theme of the era, especially concerning western expansion. Reports of the Oklahoma Territorial Governor acted as propaganda devices for advancing such ideas. Territorial Governor William Cary Renfrow “discussed the [Oklahoma] Territory as having a healthy moral climate,” indicating Oklahoma’s preparation for statehood. But he privately wrote to a friend, who asked if he could obtain a government appointment, saying there were “too many temptations” of debauchery.⁴⁴⁹ To be clear, six of seven of Oklahoma Territory’s governors were Republican. This was because the Republican Party dominated federal politics throughout much of the late nineteenth century. Of course, Republican support had dwindled by Oklahoma statehood, which Murray Wickett blames on the “politics of race.”⁴⁵⁰ The Republican Party’s associations with African Americans impacted their resonance among Oklahoma Territory’s white populace. Voting black politicians into office proved unpopular across political lines.

⁴⁴⁸ “Free Home Address of Hon. Dick T. Morgan,” 1900 Boomer Literature Collections, Box 1, Folder 19, page 10, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁴⁴⁹ LeRoy Fischer, ed., *Oklahoma’s Governors, 1890-1907: Territorial Years* (Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, 1975), 54.

⁴⁵⁰ Wickett, *Contested Territory*, 175.

Blacks, whites, and Indians held their own statehood conventions throughout the Twin Territories. Meanwhile, Indian Territory experienced political strife as the Five Nations factionalized as a result of the Dawes and Curtis Acts of 1887 and 1898. With the protection of their sovereignty of utmost importance, the former slaves of the Five Tribes experienced a period of growing political opposition from within tribal nations. They also contended with a complicated racial landscape as African Americans from surrounding states like Arkansas, Kansas, and Texas migrated in search of safe spaces. These African American settlers contributed to Indian Territory's intruder population.

The federal government asserted in 1890 that the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations had experienced immense strife because of intruders living in their territory. The issue became more acute the following year due to a "steady increase" in the intruder population. Meanwhile, the federal government continued to play up the increase in the freedmen population throughout the Five Tribes. It proclaimed that freedmen "would practically control the election and administrative affairs" if they united to form a consistent political body.⁴⁵¹ An election held in 1891 in the Chickasaw Nation was met with protest from non-citizens recently ejected from the Nation. They were determined to exercise the voting rights they claimed to have within the nation's body politic. Meanwhile, the report described its freedmen population as "distressed" and gave reasons for the federal government to investigate the issues the freedmen had endured throughout the period.⁴⁵² Issues such as these were likely exacerbated by

⁴⁵¹ *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1890* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O.), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep91p1>, 240.

⁴⁵² *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1891* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O.), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep90>, 101.

growth in newspapers throughout the Territory, which were also partisan in their views toward the government and politics concerning noncitizens. Nonetheless, the Cherokee Nation faced similar concerns regarding intruders, as demonstrated in a meeting of the Cherokee Citizenship Association—a white organization dominated by farmers and cattlemen—in 1893.⁴⁵³ According to the *Purcell Register*, a white-owned newspaper, Cherokee citizens were “not disposed to give up their rights without a stubborn fight.”⁴⁵⁴ Fortunately, for the tribes’ people, the *Register’s* circulation of only 600 was the least read newspaper at the turn of the decade.⁴⁵⁵

The use of newspapers formed an important element of political information during the period. Tribes such as the Cherokee used newspapers to deter its citizenry from participating in the outer workings of the Republican and Democratic Parties. C.J. Harris, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, urged Cherokee citizens not to participate in statehood conventions in 1893. Harris asserted that conventions involving the Republican and Democratic parties would:

Prejudice the interest, welfare and peace of the Cherokee people; and as there is no law, either of the United States or Cherokee Nation, authorizing any such election, whatever plans for such election may be devised by any such convention, no election will be held in the Cherokee

⁴⁵³ *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1893* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O.), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep92>, 253.

⁴⁵⁴ *Purcell Register*, 1893, Pleasant Porter Collection, Box 1, Folder 6, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁴⁵⁵ For more on the circulation of Indian Territory newspapers see *Annual report of the commissioner of Indian affairs, for the year 1890* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O.), <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/History.AnnRep90>, 100.

Nation, by anybody, or for any purpose, without the authority of the National council.⁴⁵⁶

Harris wrote to the Cherokee National Council two years later, further expressing his views on the matter. He complained that these publications, inherently Republican and Democrat, were “misleading and unqualifiedly false.”⁴⁵⁷

Shortly after, however, the *Purcell Register* published a letter denouncing Harris’s views on Cherokee participation in American territorial politics. Robert Owens, the author of the letter stated:

The Cherokee people are largely Democrats, patriotic and true, honest men, democrats from principle and from the deep convictions of the heart. Men who hate the tariff tax that robs their labor and the force bill that threatens their liberties and lives, with a race war. Men who believe the election of Grover Cleveland would be a glorious victory for the interests of the west.⁴⁵⁸

Harris’s connections with additional members of his respective tribal nation made him subject to an editorial in 1895. *The Wagoner Record* reported on a group of Cherokees wanting to acquire territory in Mexico or Colombia. C.J. Harris’s brother, Bird Harris, was one of the venture’s primary promoters. Although the article claims that there was a large sect of Cherokee citizens for the colonization plan, Bird Harris argued that “nearly 100,000 Indians from several nations would be glad to go there and would carry with them about \$150,000,000 of wealth, and that Mexico would be glad to sell them the

⁴⁵⁶ “Protest of C.J. Harris,” *The Indian Chieftain*, 1892 C.J. Harris Collection, Western History Collections, Box H-55, Folder 6, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁴⁵⁷ “Memorial of C.J. Harris,” *The Indian Chieftain*, 1894 C.J. Harris Collection, Western History Collections, Box H-55, Folder 37, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁴⁵⁸ “Letter of R. L. Owens to C.J. Harris” *Purcell Register*, 1892, C.J. Harris Collection, Box H-55, Folder 7 Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

desired tract [of land] to have it occupied and developed, and to command such large wealth.”⁴⁵⁹ In addition, the article claims that the inquiry into Mexico and Colombia stemmed from the “demand of a number of full bloods who want to continue their present customs and government.”⁴⁶⁰ However, with the *Purcell Register* being a white-owned newspaper, the news of such an enterprise would have been beneficial for white non-citizens wanting traditionalist Cherokees out of the nation to accelerate statehood.

Nonetheless, “much of the energy behind a migration to Mexico [during the 1890s] came from the resistance to changes that the Dawes Act was forcing on Indian Territory.”⁴⁶¹ Creeks also advocated migration to Mexico. Creek Chief Isparhecher announced along with Cherokee and Choctaw leaders that “he would rather that his people emigrate than accept allotment.”⁴⁶² However, Five Tribes’ interest in Mexico remained during the twentieth century. Although the federal government successfully initiated their plan of allotment in the Creek Nation, factions of traditionalists under the leadership of Chitto Harjo announced interest in going to Mexico in 1901.⁴⁶³ In 1904, a Creek delegation traveled to Mexico in hopes of settling there. American Indians also took matters in their own hands by using the government as a means to get to Mexico.

⁴⁵⁹ “Editorial on C.J. Harris ” *Purcell Register*, 1895, C.J. Harris Collection, Box H-56, Folder 39. Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ David Chang, “Where will the Nation Be at Home? Race, Nationalism, and Emigration Movements in the Creek Nation” in Tiyla Miles & Sharon P. Holland eds., *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: the African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 86.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid..

An Oklahoma Territory court charged a Kiowa woman with perjury in two Oklahoman counties after she obtained an annuity payment and boarded the train for “Old Mexico” in 1904. Meanwhile, a member of the Choctaw Nation sent a petition to Congress demanding government support for emigration to Mexico in 1895.⁴⁶⁴ Indians were not alone in expressing a desire to leave. Freedmen of the Five Tribes also had interest in emigration to areas in Africa.⁴⁶⁵

Some Indian freedmen demonstrated their blackness by expressing interest in African emigration along with African Americans. Nonetheless, many Indian leaders blamed the Republican Party for the perils of allotment and Indian Territory’s increasing black population. As late as 1898, *The Daily Chieftain* published a message concerning racial issues in Texas and its impact on the black population in Indian Territory. Complaining about an “influx of negroes” into Indian Territory, the article mentions organizations of white vigilante groups driving African Americans out of smaller towns and into larger cities. However, “the cities revolt at this phase of the matter, and are organizing committees of safety for their own protection to drive the negroes elsewhere.”⁴⁶⁶ In fact, the author of the article feared:

⁴⁶⁴ *Muskogee Phoenix*, August, 25, 1904, 4.

⁴⁶⁵ According to Gary Zellar “There was indeed a significant immigration to Liberia during this period (the late 1880s and early 1890s) undertaken by blacks from the Cherokee and Creek Nations. However, close scrutiny of the ship manifests, citizenship records, and American Colonization Society correspondence show that those immigrating were almost entirely “permit men,” black noncitizen tenant farmers being squeezed out of the agricultural economy by the arrival of a host of white intruders.” Zellar, *African Creeks*, 294n58.

⁴⁶⁶ *The Daily Chieftain*, November 5, 1898, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc775668/m1/1/zoom/?q=negroes&resolution=2&lat=1710.7017273633983&lon=1491.417255411713>.

The negroes are coming here [Indian Territory], by hundreds, lots of them thinking they, too, like the Indian Freedmen, can get lands free for homes from the government. If the courts make the Indians give their freedmen the 40 acres each as stipulated in the Curtis Bill there is going to rocky times in the Territory for a few years.⁴⁶⁷

Although the twentieth century spawned a period of political tumult for the Twin Territories, the region also experienced emerging thoughts surrounding tenets of race and social morals. By this period, “Indians were viewed as a peculiarly ‘western’ problem in much the same way African Americans were viewed as a ‘southern’ responsibility.”⁴⁶⁸ And several Native leaders echoed the latter observation. The African American population remained small in Oklahoma Territory into the twentieth century. McCabe’s intention to make Oklahoma an all-black state did not come to fruition. He eventually returned to Kansas. Langston and a few other black towns remained in Oklahoma Territory with much of the black population scattered throughout the region. Black groups supported the Free Home Bill as well as Oklahoma statehood. They gave their support despite lynching and other racial obstacles that existed since the arrival of black African America settlers during the time of the land run. Nonetheless, in the midst of hardships, black leaders in Oklahoma Territory believed that the 1900 election would bring about a black candidate for president in Oklahoma.⁴⁶⁹ Most of Oklahoma’s

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, xi.

⁴⁶⁹ *Langston City Herald* Saturday, February 6, 1897, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc69948/m1/1/zoom/?resolution=2&lat=3558.5095096182254&lon=1254.688201952711>.

African American population came from Texas, with the fluctuations in the cotton industry as well as labor issues fueling the mass migration.

African Americans, pressured by notions of social and economic progression differed on how to improve the general status of their community. These differences often split across both class and religious lines. A small black elite dominated the narrative concerning the plight of the black community. With the development of a burgeoning middle class, the notion of this “better class” exemplified the progression of the black race.⁴⁷⁰ This, in turn, conflated black aspirations of equal citizenship as self-help ideology and culminated in a rallying cry for black elites unattached from the perils of poor African Americans. The ideology of elitism and uplift permeated through Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory black newspapers.

In fact, William Henry Twine, black editor of the *Muskogee Cimeter*, described Indian Territory and the eventual state of Oklahoma as an “island surrounded by land” in 1904—three years before statehood.⁴⁷¹ Similar to other interested black settlers, Twine came to Oklahoma by way of a land run. The son of an African-Native runaway slave and an African American woman, Twine settled in Oklahoma with his family on Sac and Fox land in 1891.⁴⁷² These African Americans, while relatively few compared with the southern black population, migrated to rapidly growing areas such as

⁴⁷⁰ Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, xiv.

⁴⁷¹ *Muskogee Cimeter* December 22, 1904, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc69979/m1/1/zoom/?q=sapulpa&resolution=2&lat=4091.7535687145696&lon=1235.3413358854007>.

⁴⁷² Jimmie L. White, Jr., "Twine, William Henry," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=TW006>.

Muskogee and Tulsa and twentieth century black towns like Boley, Red Bird, and Taft. However, boosterism from the likes of the *Cimeter* and the *Boley Progress* was not the only factor in black migration to the Twin Territories. The statehood movement played a central role in that African American leaders saw the possibility of suffrage and equal opportunity in the state of Oklahoma. However, black political mobilization expressed itself in different ways in Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory.

With Indian Territory arguably the most welcoming and racially mixed territory compared with its Oklahoma counterpart, black towns were more populous. Also, they were supported by a variety of newspapers such as the *Cimeter*. Consequently, the *Cimeter* frequently published editorials on the statehood movement. It argued that blacks should be equal participants in Oklahoma politics, making a large black voter base essential. Twine, however, argued that black agitation for statehood should be done carefully. Three years before Oklahoma statehood in 1904, the *Cimeter* proclaimed:

If the aspirations of some self-styled negroes were unleashed, it is quite likely there would be a number of grand-stand plays close upon the heels of the signal for the admission into statehood, and the subsequent stampede of office-seeking demagogues in the newly created political arena. There could [be] no good arise from such a course; in fact, any too loud clamoring for official recognition will have a serious deterrent effect and possibly give reason for an alignment of citizens of the territory upon racial rather than political lines.⁴⁷³

Although Twine and other black business leaders expressed similar conservative and accommodationist views, The Twin Territories always had an element of racial separation.

⁴⁷³ *Muskogee Cimeter* December 22, 1904, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc69979/m1/1/zoom/?q=sapulpa&resolution=2&lat=4091.7535687145696&lon=1235.3413358854007>.

Overall, the period 1900 to 1907 was a battle for political control in both Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory. Many whites and African Americans throughout the region wanted a “single statehood” in which the Twin Territories would merge into a single state. In contrast, the Five Nations and their former slaves desired a separate statehood, making Indian Territory a separate state. There had been calls for statehood for either all of Indian Territory or portions of the region from 1890 until 1905. By 1890, Indian Territory had a population of more than 60,000 whites compared to a little more than 2,000 African Americans.⁴⁷⁴ In Oklahoma Territory, Edward McCabe and other African Americans advocated for black separate statehood for Oklahoma Territory in 1890. However, as both white and black populations grew, whites came to make up 92 percent of Oklahoma Territory compared with only four percent of African Americans.⁴⁷⁵

The Five Tribes experienced immense political strife during the twentieth century. Each tribe had varied issues coupled with struggles to maintain their sovereignty. The Creek Nation experienced the Crazy Snake Rebellion from 1900 to 1901, which caused continued efforts to expel white intruders from Creek Territory.⁴⁷⁶ Meanwhile, the Chickasaw Nation expressed concerns about intruders throughout the 1900s as white intruders spiked to 150,000 and black intruders increased to 5,000.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁴ Amos D. Maxwell, "The Sequoyah Convention," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 28 (1950): 116.

⁴⁷⁵ “Population of Oklahoma and Indian Territory” Bureau of the Census Bulletin 89 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 8.

⁴⁷⁶ Jeffrey Burton, *Indian Territory and the United States, 1866-1906: Courts, Government, and the Movement for Oklahoma Statehood* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 250.

⁴⁷⁷ Littlefield, *The Chickasaw Freedmen*, 46.

The Seminole Nation faced similar issues as the other Five Tribes, but much of their displaced black citizenry made their way to Mexico, and founded their own settlements. There they found an escape from the perils of white encroachment and impending statehood. The Cherokee Nation remained in flux due to the freedmen controversy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The so-called “Nigger Steal” of the late nineteenth century agitated racial sentiment among Cherokee leaders. Confusion ensued within the Cherokee Nation and among Cherokee freedmen, which Daniel Littlefield describes as “rumours and false starts concerning enrollment of the freedmen,” which “left the blacks uninformed about their affairs.”⁴⁷⁸ However, the Dawes Commission delayed the enrollment of freedmen until Spring 1901.⁴⁷⁹ During this time, the Cherokee Nation appointed an attorney to confront the issue of freedmen citizenship, a necessity due to the numerous freedmen cases.

L.B. Bell, the Cherokee-appointed principal attorney, faced opposition by some Cherokee members due to allegations of his participation in the fraud concerning the freedmen rolls. Fearing the enrollment of state blacks in the Cherokee Nation, a newspaper wrote of fears that the controversy would allow additional blacks from Kansas to settle in Indian Territory.⁴⁸⁰ White Democrats and some Indian leaders held on to fears of a “negro domination” well into the twentieth century.

⁴⁷⁸ Littlefield, *The Cherokee Freedmen*, 226.

⁴⁷⁹ Littlefield, *The Cherokee Freedmen*, 227.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

With Cherokee freedmen enrollment beginning in 1901, the Cherokee Nation and Cherokee Press expressed concern regarding the enormous amount of witnesses participating in well over one hundred cases with more than 2,000 freedmen cases listed as doubtful.⁴⁸¹ Cherokee officials continued to criticize the work of the Dawes Commission due to the allegation that “blacks came by train from the states to testify concerning the residency of many of the freedmen who had resided outside the Nation since 1866.”⁴⁸² A year later in 1902, the Cherokee Full Blood Keetoowah Society held a convention intending to challenge the rights of freedmen and adopted whites to participate in allotments and tribal appropriations. “Full Bloods” dominated the Cherokee National Party and agitated the freedmen issue, calling for answers on issues of corruption in 1896.⁴⁸³ Nonetheless, as the issue of allotment remained a key issue in Cherokee politics, allotments to the Cherokee freedmen continued.

The appropriations act of 1904 declared the end of the Dawes Commission in 1905. This act also removed restrictions on allotted lands of non-Indian citizens.⁴⁸⁴ In effect, the appropriations act made 300,000 acres of Cherokee land for sale with freedmen able to sell their land as soon as they received the title to it.⁴⁸⁵ However, Cherokee freedmen were unprepared for issues that would arise concerning land speculation by outsiders. Cherokee officials continued to argue about the legitimacy of

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 229.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 230.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 235-236.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 236.

freedmen witnesses. Many freedmen did not know when or where they were born, but were sure they returned to the nation by 1866 to claim citizenship. These inaccuracies affected Cherokee officials so much that they falsely “charged that the freedmen had formed a secret organization through which they furnished witnesses for the Cherokees.”⁴⁸⁶ While it is not entirely clear what kind of organizations Cherokee officials deemed secret, scholars such as Howard Washington Odum, stereotyped African Americans as a group shrouded in secrecy. In other words, Cherokee concerns of black secrecy may have revolved around racist stereotypes.⁴⁸⁷ With functionalism and in-fighting, both the federal government and desperate black settlers took advantage of Indian politics and the opportunity of land runs in Oklahoma Territory.

The African American population of the Twin Territories failed to become the political power house as Black leaders and journalists had hoped. However, reasons for black migration to the Twin Territories during the late 1890s and early 1900s are more complicated. Black towns established in the region furnished roughly a few thousand African Americans, meaning most black migrants settled in the larger cities such as Muskogee and Guthrie. With most black migrants coming from Texas, it is important to consider the culture of rural life for African Americans in the Deep South during the early twentieth century.

⁴⁸⁶ Daniel F. Littlefield, *The Cherokee Freedmen*, 236.

⁴⁸⁷ For more on African American secrecy see, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, "Hidden in Plain Sight: African American Secret Societies and Black Freemasonry," *Journal of African American Studies* 16 (2012): 622-637; Howard Washington Odum, "Social and Mental Traits of the Negro" (PhD Diss., Columbia University, 1910), <https://archive.org/details/socialmental00odumrich/page/n8>. Odum, concerned of the “makeup” of African Americans, wrote “the fact is neglected that the Negro has a life and environment of his own which the whites do not see, which after all may be at the bottom of his actions.” See Odum, p. 13.

Land tenancy became more prevalent by the 1900s in the South. The entrenched nature of tenancy among southern black farmers, according to Stewart Tolnay, impacted economic and social patterns of black farmers. In fact, “the nature of the tenancy system itself helped perpetuate an unskilled, uneducated population, dependent on other people’s land, with little potential for nonagricultural employment.”⁴⁸⁸ This form of labor organization also perpetuated early marriage and higher birth rates among black tenant families in the South. Consequently, these earlier marriages and higher birth rates helped black farmers. They had more hands to produce and thus could remain solvent. However, a focus on family and community was also important among black landowners.

Black land ownership was low throughout much of the Deep South, especially in Texas, as land prices increased throughout the first decades of the twentieth century. Thad Sitton and James Conrad explained black landowning Texas communities in the following terms:

Within the original boundaries of each community, family lands were divided and subdivided across the generations, and each pioneer’s original farm became something of a family compound, with informal leadership residing with the oldest and most important landowners of each family. Because of this, by 1920 or so, freedmen’s settlements no longer so closely resembled white farming settlements. Freedmen’s communities had become defensive black islands in a rising tide of Jim Crow.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁸ Stewart Tolnay, “Black Family Formation and Tenancy in the Farm South, 1900” *American Journal of Sociology* 90 (1984): 308.

⁴⁸⁹ Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 142-3.

Similar to what some Cherokee leaders argued, Democrats in 1892 claimed that Republicans were “up to their old tricks of importing destitute negroes into Oklahoma for their votes at the November election.”⁴⁹⁰ Two years later in 1894, the *Guthrie Daily Leader* wrote:

This city is the Mecca of a lot of Kansas negroes. They were brought up in different Kansas cities on the Santa Fe road. They came in car lots during the week, and now the city is full of them. On every street corner, strange negro faces are seen. They are housed with the prominent negro populations and are to be palmed off as old residents of Guthrie. These negroes are the dependence of the Republicans to carry the election. Democrats watch the polls, and convince yourselves that every voter is a legal one.⁴⁹¹

This quote from the *Guthrie Daily Leader* demonstrates how Kansas blacks traveled to Oklahoma Territory, as well as the importance of the trail system to African American settlers during the late nineteenth century. The Texas Road and Chisholm Trail were important to black Texan migration to Exoduster-era Kansas, and possibly Indian Territory during the 1870s. The Santa Fe Trail played a similar and crucial role in black Kansan migration to Oklahoma Territory. The road also encouraged additional white interest in what would become Oklahoma Territory following the Civil War.⁴⁹²

Although it is difficult to know about the life of African Americans on western trails, they were in fact dangerous for all travelers, African Americans especially. According to Shirley Ann Moore, “some black travelers found relief from the rigors of

⁴⁹⁰ *Lexington Leader*, October, 8, 1892. Quoted from Wickett, *Contested Territory*, 177.

⁴⁹¹ *Guthrie Daily Leader*, August 23 1894. Quoted from Murray Wickett, *Contested Territory*, 177.

⁴⁹² Bobby D. Weaver, "Santa Fe Trail," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=SA020>.

the journey at the forts that had been established along the trails to provide protection for travelers.”⁴⁹³ However, the trek from Kansas to Oklahoma Territory may have been more difficult as there were no forts along the trail by the 1890s. The one outpost, Camp Nichols, was the only military post established in the Oklahoma region but proved to be short-lived. It lasted less than a year after its founding in 1865. Nonetheless, trail and frontier culture provided an opportunity for African American settlers “to work as cooks, laundresses, skilled artisans and laborers” in outposts and camps along the trails.”⁴⁹⁴ Finding such work may have been important for less fortunate Kansas settlers who traveled to Guthrie. Furthermore, news publications dedicated to black settlement in Oklahoma and Indian Territory materialized during the 1890s. Democrats kept up the rhetoric of connecting the Republican Party with the notion of “Negro domination” throughout the years leading up to Oklahoma statehood. Aware of Booker T. Washington’s visit to Boley in 1905, E.J. Giddings proclaimed that “Washington and other emigration agents had been going throughout the South telling African Americans that the best place for them was the new state of Oklahoma.”⁴⁹⁵

Booker T. Washington visited the state of Oklahoma in 1905 to much fanfare in the Twin Territory’s black community. He wrote both privately and publicly about his visit to the region. However, common stereotypes concerning Native Americans colored Washington’s private and public writings on the Twin Territories. Concerned with the

⁴⁹³ Moore, *Sweet Freedom’s Plains*, 127.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Wickett, 179-180, Taken from E.J. Giddings, “New State Negro Address” Frederick Barde Papers, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

plight of African Americans entering the region, Washington embraced the black middle-class ethos surrounding evolution of the black race, while considering Native Americans “frozen in time.” Washington considered the more refined black race in black towns such as Boley to be more advanced than the first generation of African Americans following Emancipation. In other words, African Americans brought forth modes of “civilization” to the West.⁴⁹⁶

Similar to African Americans, white Americans and Native Americans used racialized rhetoric within their conversations concerning Oklahoma settlement and statehood. Whites saw themselves as evoking the progress and civilization they claimed Indian Territory lacked since its existence. The federal government also used the freedmen issue as an excuse to justify dissolution of Indian sovereignty. As early as the 1890s, the Dawes Commission “regarded the tribal governments’ anti-black measures as further evidence of Indians’ backwardness and thus justification for U.S. intervention.”⁴⁹⁷ For example, white settlers like those in early Blaine County interpreted the failure of Cheyenne and Arapaho farming practices “as proof of their inability to become productive agriculturalists.”⁴⁹⁸ However, white settlers like those in Blaine County refused to take into account the environmental and economic issues they faced. Struggling settlers, as demonstrated in the Free Home League, expected the

⁴⁹⁶ Booker T. Washington, “Boley: A Negro Town in the West,” *The Outlook* (4 January 1908): 28–31. Gary Zellar, *African Creeks*, 243–44.

⁴⁹⁷ Krauthammer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 149.; Hannibal Johnson, *Apartheid in Indian Country?: Seeing Red Over Black Disenfranchisement* (Forth Worth: Eakin Press, 2012), 18–19.

⁴⁹⁸ Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 75.

federal government to relieve their plight often ignoring disinterested government actions toward Native American land.

Meanwhile, the Five Tribes perceived government aggression and ambivalence as a symptom of Republican corruption and black favoritism. However, relations between freedmen of the Five Tribes and African American newcomers to the Indian Territory varied. According to David Chang, black Five Tribespeople and African Americans shared interests in defeating Jim Crow and improving their economic difficulties.⁴⁹⁹ Chief Sam's emigration movement from Oklahoma to the Gold Coast stirred interest among African Natives and African Americans during the early 1910s.⁵⁰⁰ Meanwhile, Creek writer Alexander Posey, an influential tribal member, expressed his sentiments about the Republican Party through his Fus Fixico letters which appeared from 1902 to 1908.

Using his persona known as Fus Fixico, Posey discussed Creek National issues through the lens of a full-blood Creek perspective. Reporting on conversations among his friends Choela and Hotgun, Fus Fixico's "letters" expressed the sentiment of conservative Creeks on issues like "politics, allotment of Creek lands, fraud and graft by officials, the approaching [Oklahoma] statehood, and the difficulties for some Creeks in adjusting to the changes taking place in their affairs."⁵⁰¹ However, the Fus

⁴⁹⁹ Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 161.

⁵⁰⁰ Chang, "Where will the Nation be at Home?," 92-3.

⁵⁰¹ Daniel Littlefield Jr. & Carol A. Petty Hunter eds., *Fus Fixico Letters: a Creek Humorist in Indian Territory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002 [Red River Books Edition), 9.

Fixico Letters also demonstrate the racism some Native Americans such as Posey held during the early twentieth century.

Fus Fixico expressed his racial views as early as the third letter of his series in 1902, when writing:

I was raise about two wagons plum full of sofky corn too, and lots of bushels of sweet potatoes, like what te white mens call “nigger chokers” --they wont choke Injins though, ‘cause Injins don’t eat potatoes that was cooked dry like niggers.⁵⁰²

Although this portion of Fus Fixico’s third letter illustrates views on skin color, it also demonstrates the prevalence of the black population within the Creek Nation and changing conceptions of race in Creek Territory which began in the 1890s.

With allotment a divisive issue, Creeks such as Isparcheche, a resilient Creek traditionalist and small scale farmer, attempted to join Creeks together under the National Party when he accepted the nomination for Principal Chief of the Creek Nation in 1891. However, he eventually described Creeks and their black counterparts differently and made attempts to reduce the number of allotments given to Creek Freedmen. Although true, historians dispute Isparcheche’s sudden rigid racial views during the late 1890s. Nonetheless, Isparcheche’s views, regardless of race, were politically expedient as sovereignty became a key issue for the Five Tribes during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁵⁰³ Considering the struggles of Native law

⁵⁰² Littlefield Jr. & Hunter eds., *The Fus Fixico Letters*, 56.

⁵⁰³ Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 82. Chang notes that scholar Katja May concludes that Isparcheche remained a supporter of black Creeks. White newspapermen, according to May, fabricated changes in his racial views. Meanwhile, Chang notes that 1898 “mark[ed] a significant shift in Isparcheche’s thinking on race and Creek citizenship because they are consistent with the changing political context and the opinions voiced by other Creek conservatives at the time.” See Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 229n30; Katja May, *African Americans and Native Americans in the Creek and Cherokee Nations, 1830s to 1920s: Collision and Collusion* (New York: Garland, 1996), 112-13.

and Republican dominated Indian policy during this period, the legacy of American-Five Tribes relations had a long and checkered history by the late nineteenth century. American visions of “freedom” within the context of the Five Tribes often collided with the interests of Native sovereignty. By the late nineteenth century, much of this rhetoric came at the expense of Native sovereignty. Lawmakers were perceiving the extension of United States citizenship to both African Americans and Native Americans as moral and absolute. However, the extension of black freedom coincided with the national project of western expansion. Nonetheless, for many Native leaders, the Republican Party became a rhetorical device to express the plight of Native Americans.⁵⁰⁴

The Fus Fixico letters often referred to connections between the Republican Party and blacks. Posey often characterized Republicans and blacks as colluding together to thwart American Indian sovereignty. Posey was not alone. In fact, other Native leaders expressed similar views as the Democratic Party gained strength in the early 1900s.⁵⁰⁵

Democrats were also aware of Oklahoma’s close proximity to the Deep South.

In 1906, the *Purcell Register* wrote:

Just as sure as the Republicans gain control of Oklahoma and begin to preach the equality of the races, just that sure will the hoards of the belt pour in upon us. Whenever the negro population feels that any section will be liberal toward him, he immediately turns his eyes in that direction, and looks for fields in which he can aspire to political and social equality.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ Claudio Saunt, “The Paradox of Freedom,” 66.

⁵⁰⁵ Littlefield Jr. & Hunter eds., *The Fus Fixico Letters*, 157-58.

⁵⁰⁶ Wickett, 180. Quoted from the *Purcell Register*, September 13, 1906.

Some Native Americans supported the Democratic Party. However, this was mostly due to the notion that “many Indian leaders espoused the Democratic Party line to their tribesman, claiming the Republican Party was the party ‘of the Negro’.”⁵⁰⁷ In fact, Green McCurtain, Choctaw Chief, asserted in a pamphlet concerning Indian Democrats that “the Republican Party loves the negro better than it does the Indian.” Giving reasons for not supporting the Republican Party, McCurtain mentioned the Treaties of 1866, the loss of property rights, and the adoption of former slaves. McCurtain also argued that Indians had received unfair treatment when compared with the former Confederate States. McCurtain wrote “many southern states had seceded and taken arms against the United States, and such confiscations had not taken place in any of them.”⁵⁰⁸ For sure, McCurtain’s views and those of the pamphlet’s essayists, from Pleasant Porter to D.C. McCurtain, represents the complexities of slavery and freedom within the midst of six sovereign entities: the United States and the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations.

McCurtain’s analysis of Republican policy reflects one scholar’s view that Native Americans “had little choice but to assess the nation’s domestic issues within the larger context of the federal drive to erode sovereignty and claim indigenous people’s land for white American settlers and commercial ventures.”⁵⁰⁹ However, racism also

⁵⁰⁷ Wickett, *Contested Territory*, 180.

⁵⁰⁸ “Prominent Indians’ Views of the Political Parties of the Day,” Green McCurtain Papers, Box, 27, Folder, 10, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.
<https://digital.libraries.ou.edu/cdm/ref/collection/gmccurtain/id/457>.

⁵⁰⁹ Barbara Krauthammer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters*, 11.

colored the views of several Native American Democrats. James Sapulpa, “a full blood Muskogee,” argued “the negro is a negro and belongs in Africa.”⁵¹⁰ In one sense, issues of race in Indian Territory by Native leaders was a condemnation of the former slaves of their respective tribes. However, it was also a condemnation of the issues of the federal government, and its failed promises. Of course, the Republican rhetoric of freedom was not lost when it came to white boosters in Oklahoma Territory in the years leading up to statehood.

In 1900, Dick Morgan, the president of the Free Home League, alluded to the Homestead Act and Abraham Lincoln’s signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. He stated that “the signature of this great man to this act deserves to be placed alongside of his signature to that immortal document, the Emancipation Proclamation. One made *free men*; the other made *free homes*.”⁵¹¹ However, this was not exactly the case for *freedmen* located in Oklahoma Territory. Nonetheless, the African American population supported the Free Homes Bill, which restricted additional charges on public land. African American organizations such as the Colored Men’s Protective League supported the Free Home Movement.⁵¹² However, as early as 1898, members of the Protective League questioned the validity of the Twin Territories as a safe space for

⁵¹⁰ “Prominent Indians’ Views of the Political Parties of the Day,” Green McCurtain Papers, Box, 27, Folder, 10, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.
<https://digital.libraries.ou.edu/cdm/ref/collection/gmccurtain/id/457>.

⁵¹¹ “Free Home Address of Hon. Dick T. Morgan,” 1900 Boomer Literature Collections, Box 1, Folder 19, page 9, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁵¹² Mary Ann Blochowiak, “‘Justice is our Battle Cry’: The Territorial Free Home League,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 62 (1984): 27; Mary Ann Blochowiak, “Free Home League,” The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=FR014>.

African Americans. In a meeting of the Protective League during that year, the organization discussed better locations for African Americans to settle. It is not clear where the group thought about settling. However, an area in Africa may have likely been a topic of discussion given the amount of activity on African migration throughout the region. Also, a prior meeting, held in 1897, discussed the notion of emigration.⁵¹³ For example, Samuel Chapman of Muldrow in Indian Territory, published two books concerning Liberian emigration and swindled twenty-seven prospective African American families out of money.⁵¹⁴ In addition, the Protective League meeting also had an outward gaze toward possible effects of the Spanish-American War on the black community.⁵¹⁵ Nevertheless, the League buttressed the transnational possibilities of Africa and the Spanish-American War with rhetoric from William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech demonstrating the populist leanings of the group.⁵¹⁶

Of all towns, Muskogee remained the center of black thought concerning the Oklahoma statehood movement. A considerable black population existed in Muskogee and other areas that made up Oklahoma's "Black Belt" region and comprising many black businesses.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹³ *The Daily Oklahoma State Capital* July 16, 1897, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc122799/>, [Page 3].

⁵¹⁴ Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 250-51.

⁵¹⁵ *The Daily Ardmoreite*, August 10, 1898, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc613970/> [Page 2].

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁷ David Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 152-3. According to Chang, 30% of Muskogee's population was black by the 1910. See, Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 153; *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*, vol. 3, *Population 1910* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 466-78.

However, African Americans were likely a part of this influx as the *Holdenville Times* reported during the same period that “demonstrations” against African Americans “came to an end” in Sapulpa, a town located in the Creek Nation. To be specific, Sapulpa leaders aimed to remove black transients who did not own property. The issue occurred with announcements posted throughout Sapulpa from the citizens’ committee of the town. Although it is not clear what kind of black settlers came to Sapulpa, it is likely they were mostly farmers or general “laborers.” Sapulpa had a booming walnut tree and brick industry during the 1890s and 1900s. According to the *Negro Population of the United States*, blacks who classified themselves as laborers “might be farm laborers, railway laborers, factory laborers, or household laborers...”⁵¹⁸ More than sixty percent of African Americans in the South labeled themselves as “laborers,” “Agricultural laborers,” and “farmers, planters, overseers.” However, “agricultural labor” made up the largest percentage in the South with more than one million workers.⁵¹⁹ While Oklahoman and Indian Territory black boosterism likely fueled some of this movement, some places in Oklahoma Territory, for example, encouraged black sharecroppers from Texas to assist in the cotton industry.⁵²⁰ A likely boom to the Oklahoma cotton industry by a Japanese company in the early 1900s may have contributed to this migration pattern.

⁵¹⁸ *Negro Population of the United States*, 57.
<https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/03322287no8ch1.pdf>.

⁵¹⁹ *Negro Population of the United States*, 57.
<https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/03322287no8ch1.pdf>.

⁵²⁰ “Editorial on Pleasant Porter” August 16, 1901, Pleasant Porter Collection, Box 2, Folder 72, Western History Collections, Norman Oklahoma.

The Muskogee Cimeter reported in a 1904 issue on the establishment of a cotton depot by a Japanese firm. According to the *Cimeter*, “the House of Mitsul” intended “to buy the whole cotton product of Oklahoma and Indian Territory and ship it to Japan.” The firm wanted to build the Oklahoma City Depot as a distribution point for cotton throughout the American West.⁵²¹ Although the *Cimeter* spells the Japanese company “Mitsul,” the more accurate spelling is “Mitsui.” The House of Mitsui, during this period, was a part of the Zaibatsu (money-cliques). During the nineteenth century this group of companies gained favor with the Japanese government. This allowed them to acquire wealth and to gain control of lucrative industries within the Japanese economy. Playing an active role in the importation of silk and cotton during the nineteenth century, the company acquired special privileges and associations with prominent Japanese political figures.⁵²²

Aside from the role the House of Mitsui had in foreign purchases of raw materials, the Russo-Japanese War contributed to Japan’s interest in American cotton. The *New York Times* reported a rise in textile prices and in food prices due to the war. The article expected that domestic production of textiles within Russia and Japan would decrease as both countries needed soldiers for the war effort. This in effect, would “produce a shortage in the usual supplies, so that this will ultimately increase the demand for American goods.”⁵²³ In addition, *The Scientific American* reported that

⁵²¹ *The Muskogee Cimeter* October 27, 1904.
<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc69972/>

⁵²² G.C. Allen, “The Concentration of Economic Control in Japan,” *The Economic Journal* 47 (1937): 273.

⁵²³ “War Raises Prices of Food and Textiles,” *The New York Times*, May 1904.

American exports of raw cotton to Japan increased from \$85,000 in 1890 to \$9,000,000 in 1902.⁵²⁴

In 1904, the *Cimeter* also reported on the Texas Cotton Raisers' Association. It had asked the Texas commissioner of insurance and agriculture to pen "an open letter to the cotton raisers of Texas advising them to hold their cotton until the market pays at least ten cents per pound for the fleecy staple." This in fact illustrates the instability of the cotton market in areas surrounding Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory. The low prices of cotton may have pushed African Americans from surrounding areas into the Twin Territories more so than the boosterism of black towns, due to the availability of cotton labor jobs.⁵²⁵

Texas newspapers documented the movement of blacks from the state during the early twentieth century. *The Houston Post* reported that the largest migration of African Americans "in the history of the South" occurred from southern Texas. Two years later, the *Longdale Ledger* wrote about the attempts of Greer County, Oklahoma residents to drive away blacks who had come to work in the cotton industry there. According to the article, these black farmers had come from Texas to take advantage of the county's labor shortage in the cotton fields. The article said that Greer County residents attempted to remove the blacks from the area. White residents subjected these black

⁵²⁴ "Commercial Japan," *Scientific American* 90 (1904): 311. Prior to the Russo-Japanese War, the article claims, American cotton exports to Japan increased because "cotton from the United States is more satisfactory for use in manufacturing than that which Japan had been accustomed to obtaining from Indian and China, the staple in American cotton being longer, thus giving better results.

⁵²⁵ *The Muskogee Cimeter* October 27, 1904.
<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc69972/>.

newcomers to violence in an effort to drive them out.⁵²⁶ However, the obstacles these black cotton laborers faced, hardly reached the pages of black Oklahoma newspapers.

Black newspapers such as the *Muskogee Cimeter* encompassed a nationalistic tone in support of single statehood. In addition, the *Cimeter* proclaimed itself the newspaper of the B.I.T. (Beautiful Indian Territory). Aside from statehood, the publication also provided information for emerging black towns like Red Bird, Grayson, and Rentiesville. Overall, these towns were industrial in that they emphasized their natural resources compared with earlier black towns that had a strict agricultural focus. Nonetheless, the *Cimeter* was an important organ for state black movement and politics during the twentieth century following Edward McCabe's interest a decade before. The state's black population had become more organized by the twentieth century. This was likely due to the increase in the non-citizen black population in the Twin Territories. Langston depended on the *Herald* to disseminate information about its town throughout the Deep South, in addition to utilizing McCabe's Republican influence. In fact, black newspapers throughout the West formed an alliance with one another, an alliance that lasted throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century.

In 1905, the *Cimeter* reflected a period of immense optimism concerning statehood and the African American population. African American leader, Booker T. Washington visited Muskogee the same year. In November of 1905, the *Cimeter* proclaimed that "the new state of Oklahoma will contain 200,000 negroes, and they will

⁵²⁶ *The Houston Post*, May 25, 1904, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph603036/>; *Longdale Ledger*, August 3, 1906, <http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc406748/>.

play a very important part in shaping the destinies of the commonwealth.”⁵²⁷ However, by 1907, the black population of the state was only 112,000, which made African Americans less than eight percent of Oklahoma’s population by statehood.⁵²⁸ For example, a 1905 issue of the *Cimeter* contains a letter about Red Bird, a black town founded on Creek land. Frith and Waltoc, the writers of this promotional letter concluded, “Success to the Cimeter, you have caused us to work.”⁵²⁹ The same issue has a picture of James Coody Johnson whom, according to the *Cimeter*, was “one of the best known Negro leaders in the B.I.T. [Beautiful Indian Territory].”⁵³⁰ Johnson was among a new generation of prominent African Natives with prestige and business interests that made them influential among Indians and freed people alike, many of whom were black Republicans.⁵³¹

The same issue of the *Cimeter*, in 1905, also has an article entitled, “The Negro’s Last Chance.” The article detailed what some black travelers to Indian Territory encountered in regard to the lack of diversity among Indian Territory-bound migrants. The article proclaimed Indian Territory as “the Negro’s last chance to get

⁵²⁷ *Muskogee Cimeter*, December 16, 1905, [Booker T. Washington Special Edition] <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025060/1905-11-16/ed-1/seq-4/> [page 4].

⁵²⁸ “Population of Oklahoma and Indian Territory” Bureau of the Census Bulletin 89 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 8. https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1907pop_OK-IndianTerritory.pdf.

⁵²⁹ *Muskogee Cimeter*, December 28, 1905, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70020/m1/1/zoom/?resolution=4&lat=4893.874964768102&lon=1747.6694588376267>.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵³¹ Zellar, *African Creeks*, 239.

homes and increase wealth.”⁵³² To emphasize the point further, the author of the editorial used stereotypical racist language alluding to African Americans’ quasi-servitude in the Deep South. The *Cimeter* published this negative form of boosterism alongside articles regarding the developing black towns in Indian Territory. With the non-citizen population, both black and white, increasing in Indian Territory, a document containing the proceedings of the Indian Pharmaceutical Association proclaimed that Indian Territory is “a joke now.”⁵³³

By statehood in 1907, the race question was essentially settled with the constitutional convention and the place of blacks in the new state of Oklahoma. However, some black leaders held on to hope and proposed different ideas to increase black political power. In an editorial to the *Cimeter*, one author asserted:

The Negroes of the Territory, in my judgement, should take hold of the Indians and organize them for the political well-being and safety of both. The Negro and the Indian would make a strong party in this part of the country. There is no hope for the Negro nor for the Indian among the lily white Republicans.⁵³⁴

With the state of Oklahoma lost to Blacks—African American and black Native Americans—the call for a new political base reflected the population disparities between African Americans and whites. It also reflected the paternalistic view held by

⁵³² “The Negroes Last Chance,” *Muskogee Cimeter*, December 28, 1905, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70020/m1/1/zoom/?resolution=4&lat=4893.874964768102&lon=1747.6694588376267>.

⁵³³ “Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Indian Territory Pharmaceutical Association, South McAlester, May 16 and 17, 1905,” 8. <https://books.google.com/books?id=3fTqAAAAMAAJ&dq=indian%20territory&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁵³⁴ *Muskogee Cimeter*, August 23, 1907, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70081/>.

some African Americans concerning Native Americans. However, African American settlers in Indian Territory yearned for the status of black Indians. They too wanted the ability to freely participate in politics (in the case of the Seminole and Creek Nations) and to have a right to land. With regard to Creek Territory, for example, black settlers viewed black Creeks as “an obstacle to development.”⁵³⁵ Nevertheless, hostile sentiment between Native Americans remained volatile decades after Oklahoma achieved statehood.

⁵³⁵ Zellar, *African Creeks*, 232.

Conclusion

Oklahoma's history contains the essential components of America's historical arc: freedom, hope, opportunity, and dispossession. Indian Territory had a long and rich history prior to Removal. However, the Five Tribes' forced migration to present-day Oklahoma marks a period of dispossession and forced Removal for many Native American tribes throughout the country. The removal of the Five Tribes, however, also expanded slavery in the West.

The complexity of race and identity lie beneath Removal's general narrative. Each tribe carried a legacy of race along with them to Indian Territory. Removal's expansion of slavery also makes this narrative a black story. Similar to the general American populace, most Five Tribes citizens did not participate in chattel slavery. Most slaveholders, in fact, were of white and Indian ancestry. Over time, they developed anti-black views. These views existed prior to Removal and have much to do with the economy and social nature of the pre-Removal in the Southeast. The changing nature of the European-Indigenous alliances (including interracial marriage), the market economy, and the shift from the enslavement of Native Americans to the African slave trade influenced Native perceptions of black people.

Land remained the primary desire of African Americans in the West. African Americans found ways to realize their place in American society following Emancipation. The West, as a new space, functioned for African Americans in the same manner as for white Americans. Both groups received different treatment in the press. The white American press generally discounted black migration. The Exoduster

Movement, for example, stirred fear from the white public due to (often) exaggerated migrant numbers. The whites also feared the possibility of labor shortages coming from the movement. Meanwhile, Elias Boudinot received praise from the same press for his calls to bring “civilization” to Indian Territory. Boudinot defined this statehood movement as white. Yet, as a trained lawyer, his use of the 1866 Treaties opened public debate about the group of people who possessed legal claim to the Unassigned Lands.

The influx of African American intruders in south Indian Territory alarmed the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations because they feared becoming outnumbered in their own territory. Five Tribes publications viewed black settler groups as organs of the Republican Party. They believed the settlers instigated freedmen adoption and the loss of their land. By the 1890s, Edward McCabe and other African American leaders strategically took advantage of Land Runs. These land runs turned native lands over into the hands of the American public with the intent of creating a Republican majority.

Oklahoma’s black towns failed to reach the status their leaders had intended by the twentieth century. These towns’ economies often focused too much on erosive cash crops, such as cotton, to sustain stability. Immigrating to Africa, in many cases, served as an alternate plan for African Americans. It would allow them to maintain their agricultural lifestyles and to escape America’s damaging racial culture. During the height of McCabe’s popularity in the 1890s, Bishop Turner served as an advocate for emigration to Liberia. He offered an alternative solution for settlers disillusioned by black town rhetoric and by crop failures in towns, such as Langston.

Leaders of Oklahoma’s black towns espoused uplift ideology for their respective communities in newspapers and in advertisements. Some saw their towns as models of

black civilization. Much of this so-called uplift ideology encompassed Christian values and, as Kevin Gaines argues, racist overtones. Other period commentators including African American author, Sutton Griggs, expressed a militant approach to nation building. In *Imperium in Imperio*, his 1899 novel, Griggs traces the development of an independent black state based in Texas. Griggs, along with other nineteenth century black thinkers, saw Jim Crow as an immense issue preventing blacks from assimilating into the culture of the broader American populace. He also critiqued the roles of over-education and ambiguous “success” in creating additional problems for African Americans in the United States during the nineteenth century.⁵³⁶ In many ways, Griggs’s critique of middle-class black uplift ideology underscored issues at the heart of the development of black towns and violence that remained under Jim Crow law.

As blacks fled violence in unwelcoming places such as Texas and Louisiana, Griggs and others expressed possible solutions (and the difficulty of achieving them) through the medium of fiction. Chief Sam and Bishop Turner, and other black leaders, argued that Africa was the best place for former slaves of the United States. There they could live and thrive. Their African migration argument largely resulted from racial violence experienced by many southern freedmen following the Civil War. However, financial and logistical obstacles made relocation to Africa impossible. This made Kansas and Oklahoma Territory an attractive alternative. Supporters of African emigration attempted to take advantage of the unsuccessful black migration in Indian Territory, Oklahoma Territory, and nearby Arkansas. Rather than stay in those places,

⁵³⁶ Adendike Marie Davidson, “Double Leadership, Double Trouble: Critiquing Double Consciousness and Racial Uplift in Sutton Griggs’ *Imperium in Imperio*” *CLA Journal* 48 (2004): 134.

some black migrants moved, yet again, to Liberia in search of a better life.⁵³⁷ However, many migrants to Liberia faced economic hardship similar to the plight of blacks in Oklahoma and Arkansas. The two primary reasons for their difficulties in Liberia revolved around transportation and underdevelopment in Africa. Transportation was very expensive for destitute African Americans, also, much of West Africa remained underdeveloped. Thus, it was difficult to yield large amounts of crops to make their journey economically viable.⁵³⁸

Oklahoma's black population increased between 1900 and 1910. African Americans began migrating North in search of better economic opportunity. Historian Carter G. Woodson, writing on this transition of blacks from the South to the North, argued that the boll weevil invasion of the 1890s affected black farmers. Woodson notes:

The other disturbing factor in this situation was the boll weevil, an interloper from Mexico in 1892... This little animal, at first attacked the cotton crop in Texas. It was not thought that it would extend its work into the heart of the South so as to become of national consequence, but it has, at the rate of forty to one hundred sixty miles annually, invaded all of the cotton district except that of the Carolinas and Virginia. The damage it does, varies according to the rainfall and the harshness of the winter, increasing with the former and decreasing with the latter... The output of the South being thus cut off, the planter has less income to provide supplies for his black tenants and, the prospects for future production being dark, merchants accustomed to give them credit have to refuse. This, of course, means financial depression, for the South is a borrowing section and any limitation to credit there blocks the wheels of industry.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁷ Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 102-11.

⁵³⁸ Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 298-99.

⁵³⁹ Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (Washington: The Association for the study of Negro Life and History, 1918), 171-172.

The invasion began in Texas and over time negatively affected the entire cotton district, except for Virginia and the Carolinas. With the invasion affecting roughly fifty percent of cotton production, it eventually affected Oklahoma in 1906 when it passed the Oklahoma-Texas boundary line. Moreover, Woodson writes that the boll weevil's destruction came at a time of great demand for labor in the North. Oklahoma blacks also faced new Jim Crow laws by Oklahoma's statehood in 1907.⁵⁴⁰

In 1908 the *Oklahoma City Times* published "The Creek Negro, a Study in Criminology." The author wrote:

The Indian is naturally an offensive personIt is only when the negro blood became mixed with that of the Indian that the barbarity of both races showed up in its true colors....the most dangerous man on the American continent today...a combination of aboriginal cruelty and ferocity [that] can be found perhaps nowhere on earth except in the new state of Oklahoma.⁵⁴¹

However, three years after statehood, the issue of the Chickasaw and the Choctaw freedmen remained unsettled. Arguing the case for the freedmen in 1910 attorney Barry J. Caldwell argued the following:

Throughout this whole controversy the attempt has been made to compare this demand of the negro-Indian citizen to the demand of slaves in the south to the land of his former master. There is no parallel in the two cases

⁵⁴⁰ Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration*, 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 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.

⁵⁴¹ *Oklahoma City Times*, 1908; Quoted in Gary Zellar, *African Creeks*, 257; Rebecca Belle Bateman, "'We're Still Here: History Kinship, and Group Identity Among the Seminole Freedmen of Oklahoma.'" Ph.D. Diss., The Johns Hopkins University 1991, 177.

whatever, and it must be remembered that it is only in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations where this discrimination of the negro-Indian appears. The Creek freedmen has always been recognized as a citizen of the tribe and has been rewarded full and equal rights with the Creek Indian to the lands and money of the tribe; so with the Seminoles, and so eventually, after long litigation with the Cherokees. There is absolutely no distinction in the distinction in the distribution of the lands and moneys of the Cherokee Nation between the full blood Indian and the citizen of mixed negro and Indian blood, or the citizen of full negro blood. He who is born in the Cherokee tribe or Creek tribe, or Seminole tribe of a marriage [...] has not greater right than the bastard born to the allegiance of the tribe. The attempted analogy of the claim of the negro-Indian, does not exist.⁵⁴²

African Americans in eastern Oklahoma held the same yearning for a government-sponsored space for African American settlement, but this time it came from a black town. In 1911, James E. Thompson, a prominent wealthy former slave, sponsored the Farmer's Conference in the Oklahoma black town of Clearview. During his address to the small turnout, Thompson spoke about a plan to have the federal government make a territory for "the colonization of the Negroes..."⁵⁴³

An early twentieth century anthropological study on the Creek freedmen illustrates how the latter viewed African Americans in their homeland. Responding to a question about Creek Freedmen mixing with African Americans, one Creek freedperson responded: "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 sharing his thoughts on black Texans' effect on race relations in Indian Territory

⁵⁴² Barry J. Cantwell, "Brief and Argument of Barry J. Cantwell" (St. Louis, 1910), <https://archive.org/details/briefargumentofh00cant/page/8>, 8.

⁵⁴³ Norman Crockett, *The Black Towns* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1979), 26 & 27.

commented: “It was those state niggers from Texas that spoiled it for us, bowing and scraping and scratching the head.”⁵⁴⁴

The primary components of black town movement and black identity within the Five Tribes, discussed in this project, remain contested issues today. Eddie Jackson drew inspiration from his mother-in-law for his 2020 novel, *Oklausa: the Story of the Black State Movement in Oklahoma Territory*, because “she cared so little for state Negroes [a term for African American intruders in the nineteenth and early twentieth century].”⁵⁴⁵ African Americans, still perceived as second-class citizens, are still searching for a safe space in the 21st century. For example, the recent violent incidents between African Americans and police officers motivated a black collective in Georgia in August 2020 to pool their resources to purchase land in Georgia for a predominantly black town. As for the Five Tribes in the 21st century, courts have concluded that the state of Oklahoma does not have jurisdiction over criminal cases within Five Tribes territory. Such a landmark moment in Five Tribes sovereignty runs counter to the racial reckoning occurring throughout the United States and within their own tribal nations, as debates concerning black citizenship remain.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ Sameth, “Creek Negroes,” 56.

⁵⁴⁵ Eddie Jackson, *Oklausa: the Story of the Black State Movement in Oklahoma Territory* (Published by the Author, 2020), 309.

⁵⁴⁶ Ashley Scott, “Why 19 Black Families Purchased 96.71 Acres Of Land In The Midst Of Protests And A Pandemic”, August 14, 2020, <https://blavity.com/why-19-black-families-purchased-9671-acres-of-land-in-the-midst-of-protests-and-a-pandemic?category1=opinion&category2=news>; McGirt v. Oklahoma, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/18-9526_9okb.pdf; Jack Healy, “Black, Native American and Fighting for Recognition in Indian Country,” *New York Times*, September 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/08/us/enslaved-people-native-americans-oklahoma.html>.

Appendix: Black Communities, Towns, and Settlements of Oklahoma

This is an annotated list of black communities, towns, and settlements in Oklahoma. With 87 entries in total, this is not an exhaustive list. Instead, it builds on the Oklahoma black town appendices of other scholars. The following expands on the work of those scholars by also including other mentions of historic black communities. These entries come from research done by scholars at Oklahoma Historical Society, oral histories that mention communities of black people, and known satellite communities formed around black towns such as Boley.

The last appendix on black towns, as of this writing, resides in Hannibal Johnson's *Acres of Aspiration* (2002). Johnson published his extensive list of black towns shortly following the creation of the Oklahoma Historical Society's All-Black Town Project in 1998. The project, which builds on Arthur Lincoln Tolson's appendix in *The Negro in Oklahoma Territory* from 1966, "proposed to expand [Arthur Lincoln] Tolson's list by investigating the probability that there were many other self-governed African Americans settlements in Oklahoma at the turn of the century." The only other appendix on Oklahoma Black Towns resides in Kenneth Marvin Hamilton's *Black Towns and Profit*, which also depends on Tolson's list. This appendix reflects that probability and what scholars have done to expand our knowledge and awareness of lesser-known towns, communities, and settlements. As of now, documentaries, new histories, and an anthropological work on Oklahoma black spaces have now expanded not only our thinking about these places that no longer exist, but also to think of the function of an Oklahoma black "town" in the present-day.

Little evidence remains of the Oklahoma's black towns as the majority are no longer in existence. Nevertheless, this appendix broadens the discussion of black towns to include satellite communities and settlements mentioned in oral histories. Although sources for most of these towns are vague, the oral histories (often told by white settlers) that mention black settlements remain significant. The mere fact they were mentioned at all particularly by white settlers, demonstrate the visibility they once had with their white counterparts. Anthropologist Karla Slocum notes that satellite communities of Oklahoma black towns remain today. Writing about the significance of these unincorporated communities Slocum writes "the count of existing black towns should be higher than thirteen when we consider these unincorporated settlements that surround incorporated black towns." In other words, the existence of black communities surrounding black towns demonstrates Slocum's argument of "thinking broadly and beyond the geographic boundaries that we often affix to place."⁵⁴⁷

"Negro Hill" (Big Timbered Hill)

"Negro Hill" was a black community located in Craig County. A discreet community, the space was known for a large black community. Little is known about the community. Scant information exists in oral histories.⁵⁴⁸

"Negro Settlement"

"Negro Settlement" was a black settlement in southern Indian Territory. Located in present-day Cleveland County, the settlement appeared on Indian Territory maps as early as 1879. The community lasted for two decades and may have been an encampment for

⁵⁴⁷ Karla Slocum, *Black Towns Black Futures: the Enduring Allure of a Black Place in the American West* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 15.

⁵⁴⁸ "Notes from the Indian Pioneer Papers," Historic Oklahoma Collection, Vertical Files, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Black Cowboys as it resided near a cattle trail. Perhaps the “Negro Sooner Colony” has some relation to this settlement.⁵⁴⁹

“Negro Sooner Colony”

Similar to white settlers, some blacks attempted to squat on the Unassigned Lands. Known as the “Negro Sooner Colony,” the settlement consisted of five black families with George Ransom, from Chillicothe, Missouri as their leader. Coming to the area following the Treaties of 1866, the settlement according to Sac and Fox agency documents and oral history, was well known to soldiers stationed at nearby Fort Reno. The settlement of five families practiced subsistence farming and sold surplus to soldiers stationed at Fort Reno. However, the colony moved to Texas in 1879 following a military expedition to remove a band of horse thieves located in the same area according to an oral account.⁵⁵⁰

Arcadia (1890)

Settlers formed the community of Arcadia shortly following the Land Run of 1889 in 1890. The region’s rich land attracted both black and white cotton farmers. The town maintained a black majority up to the early twentieth century. After several failed attempts, Arcadia incorporated in 1987 following the possible annexation by the town of Edmond (historically a sundown town).⁵⁵¹

Arkansas Colored (1860s)

Arkansas Colored formed in the Creek Nation during the 1860s. The town thrived well into the 1890s with a formal Creek government structure with a leading King and Warriors.

Bailey (1892)

Located in Atoka County. J.J. Bailey, a Fort Sill wagon master, was the town’s namesake. Formed in 1892, Bailey formed from an early settlement of black (likely African

⁵⁴⁹ Angela Y. Walton-Raji, “Story of an Old Negro Settlement, on the Edge of Indian Territory,” August 8, 2010, *The African-Native American Genealogy Blog*, last accessed June 29, 2021, <http://african-nativeamerican.blogspot.com/2010/08/story-of-old-negro-settlement-on-edge.html>

⁵⁵⁰ “Negro Sooner Colony,” WPA Sites Collection, Box Sixteen, Folder One, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁵⁵¹ Hannibal Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 146; Dianna Everett, “Arcadia,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=AR005>; *The Oklahoman* <https://www.oklahoman.com/article/2933333/black-majorities-distinguish-townsbrtales-vary-on-origin-of-figures>; <https://sundown.tougaloo.edu/sundowntownsshow.php?id=1342>;

American) farmers. Based on the geography of the town, these freedmen were likely from Texas.⁵⁵²

Bald Hill (1896)

Little remains on this town located in Okmulgee County. According to Hannibal Johnson, the town had a post office from 1896-1908.⁵⁵³

Beaver Dam Settlement (Date Unknown)

Oral histories in the Indian Pioneer Papers suggest a settlement of black people twelve miles from Antlers.⁵⁵⁴

Black Jack (Date Unknown)

The town of Black Jack was located near Taft and was formerly known as the Pecan Creek Settlement.⁵⁵⁵

Bloomfield (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁵⁵⁶

Bluff (1901)

The town of Bluff developed in 1901 in Choctaw County. Freedmen populated the town. Bluff maintained a post office from 1901 to 1934.⁵⁵⁷

Boggy Bend (Date Unknown)

Boggy Bend, located in Atoka County, formed from a group of African American farmers. The date of the town's founding is unknown.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵² Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 205.

⁵⁵³ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 223.

⁵⁵⁴ "All Black Towns Booklet," Historic Oklahoma Collection, Vertical Files, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁵⁵⁵ Hannibal Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 223.

⁵⁵⁶ "All Black Towns of Oklahoma Booklet," Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, 6.

⁵⁵⁷ All Black Towns of Oklahoma Booklet, Historic Oklahoma Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

⁵⁵⁸ Hannibal Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 205.

Bookertree (Date Unknown)

Likely formed during the early twentieth century. It was named after Booker T. Washington, and the town reached its peak in 1920. Prominent African American journalist, Roscoe Dunjee edited the towns newspaper, the *Bookertree Searchlight*.⁵⁵⁹

Boley (1903)

Boley was Indian Territory's most prominent black town. Founded in 1903, on allotted Creek land, Boley incorporated in 1905 and came home to many towns and businesses in its early years. That same year, the town came home to *The Boley Progress* an influential newspaper throughout the Deep South. Promoting the town to prospective black migrants, *The Progress* successfully wooed migrants from Texas and elsewhere. Boley's prestige as a premier black town led to the formation of several satellite communities in its general vicinity. The Fort Smith and Western Railroad ran through town. The Boley Rodeo, with origins going back to the town's founding days, remains a popular annual event where surrounding black towns participate.⁵⁶⁰

Brooksville (1903)

Brooksville is one of the Oklahoma's remaining black towns. Founded in 1903, the town was originally named Sewell after a white landowner in the local area. The town changed to its current name after the first African American resident in the area. Brooksville's predominant black population derived from Reverend Jedson White a town religious leader and promoter of the town to black southerners.⁵⁶¹

Canadian Colored (1869)

Canadian Colored formed in 1869 near the town of Eufala. Known as a Creek Freedmen town, the town, over time, boasted a large freedmen population enabling the community to have black representation in Creek politics.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁹ Hannibal Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 205.

⁵⁶⁰ James Shaw, Sr. *Boley: Oklahoma's Famous Black Town*, 93; Larry O'Dell, "Boley," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=BO008>; Slocum, *Black Towns, Black Futures*, 109-120.

⁵⁶¹ Larry O'Dell, "Brooksville," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=BR023>.

⁵⁶² Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 206.

Carson (1912)

Founded in Hughes County in 1912, Carson maintained a post office until 1927.⁵⁶³

Chase/Beland (1900s)

Chase formed near Muskogee with land purchased by black lawyer, Cornelius J. Jones in 1906, who hoped to make an industrial School for African Americans. The town's name changed to Beland in 1908, existing until 1926.⁵⁶⁴

Chilesville (Stringtown) (1906)

Located north of Boley as a satellite community, Charles Chiles founded Chilesville in Okulgee County after purchasing land in the area. The loss of the town cotton gin contributed to the town's failure.⁵⁶⁵

Cimarron (early 1890s)

Settlers settled a mile away from the town of Kingfisher based on town lots and farms promised by a shady promoter what he deemed as a "black town." Abandoned after a few years, the town's promoter scammed many black promoters to come to the town.⁵⁶⁶

Clarksville (early twentieth century)

African Americans took over the town of Clarksville after the town's white inhabitants left to live in Porter due to town's acquisition of a railroad depot. Renaming the town to Clarksville, the black town existed until 1916.⁵⁶⁷

Clearview (1903)

J.A. Roper, Lemuel Jackson, and John Grayson founded Clearview. Promoting the town through the Lincoln Townsite Company, the founder acquired a post office a year later in 1904. The town was home to the *Clearview Patriarch* which helped promote the town

⁵⁶³ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 206.

⁵⁶⁴ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 205.

⁵⁶⁵ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 209.

⁵⁶⁶ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 209.

⁵⁶⁷ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 210.

and its businesses. The town gradually declined by the 1930s, but Clearview remains in existence.⁵⁶⁸

Columbia (1890)

Columbia existed in Kingfisher County from 1890 to 1913. Little is known of the town and its status as a predominately black town is disputed.⁵⁶⁹

Coody's Bluff (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁵⁷⁰

Douglas City (1894)

In 1893, the Douglas Townsite Company founded Douglas located close to Oklahoma City, bordering the Kickapoo territory. The company purchased a large ad in the *Oklahoma-Times Journal* in 1893 regarding the town's opening. The Douglas Townsite Company offered town lots for African Americans to advance "in the arts of modern civilization and industry."⁵⁷¹ With 200 families coming from areas like Louisiana, Douglas had a number of businesses and prepared to set aside a number of acres for the forthcoming Territorial Colored Industrial Normal School, which eventually went to Langston.⁵⁷² The town failed to obtain a railroad, which went to a town a half mile away.⁵⁷³

Dwight (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁶⁸ Larry O'Dell, "Clearview," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CL009>.

⁵⁶⁹ Hannibal Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 210.

⁵⁷⁰ "All Black Towns Booklet," (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

⁵⁷¹ *Oklahoma-Times Journal*, July 28, 1893, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc93346/m1/16/>.

⁵⁷² "Douglas City," WPA Historic Sites Collection, Box Four, Folder Five (Lincoln County), Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁵⁷³ "Douglas City," WPA Historic Sites Collection, Box Twenty-Four (Ghost Towns), Folder Five (Lincoln County), Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁵⁷⁴ "All Black Towns Booklet," (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

Earlsboro (Loftis) (1895)

Earlsboro was a (debated) black town in Pottawatomie County. Founded in 1890, little remains of the town.⁵⁷⁵

Elliot (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁵⁷⁶

Emanuel (1892)

Emmanuel materialized from the Cheyenne-Arapaho land run of 1892. Black settlers settled in Blaine County and slowly developed over time. The town had several businesses and had a post office from 1904 to 1906.⁵⁷⁷

Ferguson (Date Unknown)

Ferguson was founded in Blaine County. According to an advertisement in the nearby *Watonga News* Ferguson town leaders targeted prospective black settlers from Tennessee, Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana. Ferguson acquired a post office in 1901 which lasted until 1920.⁵⁷⁸

Foreman (1890)

Zack Foreman, an African American merchant founded the town in Sequoyah County. The town acquired a post office in 1890 which lasted until 1936.⁵⁷⁹

Gay (Lenton) (1900s)

Gay existed in Choctaw County. A freedmen community formed during the early twentieth century, Gay acquired a post office from 1908 to 1934.⁵⁸⁰

Gibson Station (1870s)

⁵⁷⁵ Hannibal Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 211.

⁵⁷⁶ "All Black Towns Booklet," (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

⁵⁷⁷ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 211.

⁵⁷⁸ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 211.

⁵⁷⁹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 212.

⁵⁸⁰ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 146.

The town of Gibson Station formed in the 1870s. Named after Fort Gibson, the town was known as a tent town and construction camp throughout its existence.⁵⁸¹

Grayson (Wild Cat) (1902)

Originally located in McIntosh County (now in Okmulgee due to a boundary change in 1918), Grayson developed near a railroad station. The town remains in existence and still holds a majority black population.⁵⁸²

Haney (1908)

Haney lasted from 1908 to 1916. Reverend Willie Haney, a Black Seminole, founded the town.⁵⁸³

Homer (prior to 1900)

A group of black settlers founded Homer before 1900. Buck Colbert Franklin, Tulsa Race Massacre victim and father of John Hope Franklin, was born near the town.⁵⁸⁴

Hopewell Community (1866)

The Hopewell Community in Wynnewood, Oklahoma developed from a community of Native American in 1866. Reverend Jokori Taylor has collected the story of Hopewell's development in the form of an exhibition at the Eskridge Museum in 2013 and in a documentary, "The Hope of Generations: The Story of Wynnewood's Rich Black History" in 2020.⁵⁸⁵

Huttonville (Nerotown)

Huttonville went through a name change going from Huttonville, after the town's first postmaster A.J. Hutton to Nerotown after an owner of a Creek allotment—Governor Nero. Huttonville/Nerotown was in McIntosh County.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸¹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 212.

⁵⁸² Lynn Marie Townsend, "Grayson," The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=GR012>.

⁵⁸³ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 212.

⁵⁸⁴ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 213.

⁵⁸⁵ The Hope of Generations: The Story of Wynnewood's Rich Black History; <https://kfor.com/news/great-state/great-state-settling-wynnewoods-black-history/>.

⁵⁸⁶ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 213.

Iconium (Date Unknown)

Iconium was in Logan County. Little is known of the town's founding, but the townsite owner named the town after his hometown in Iowa.⁵⁸⁷

IXL (1900)

IXL is in Okfuskee County. The general proximity of the town, near Boley, consisted of African American farmers by 1900. In fact, the term IXL was used to describe the fact that the community remained unorganized for quite some time, likely starting as squatter communities. The town became one of several satellite communities forming around the town of Boley proper. IXL incorporated in 2001.⁵⁸⁸

Jerusalem (1860s)

Jerusalem was a small black settlement near the town of Cole. Five Tribes freedmen founded the community on a five-acre allotment provided to them following Emancipation. Only one black resident remained in the area according to the 2000 census. Former residents of the town gather once a year to pay respects to loved ones buried in the cemetery (likely built in 1906).⁵⁸⁹

Katie (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁵⁹⁰

Langston (1890)

Langston is one of Oklahoma's surviving black towns and remains in existence. Traveling to what would become Oklahoma Territory in 1889, McCabe became involved in Langston's development. Following the purchasing and surveying of the site, Charles W. Robbins, a white speculator, gave the land to McCabe and William L. Eagleson—a prominent black newspaperman. Several miles from Guthrie, the territorial capital,

⁵⁸⁷ Interview with Clyde, Guthrie, Oklahoma p. 56,
<http://digital.libraries.ou.edu/cdm/ref/collection/indianpp/id/1619>.

⁵⁸⁸ Dianna Everett, "IXL," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=IX001>; "Boley's 'Satellite Communities' in James Shaw Sr., *Boley: Oklahoma's Famous Black Town* (Moore: YES Publishing Group, 2012), 76.

⁵⁸⁹ "Not Ready To Disappear: The people who once lived in Jerusalem aren't going let the town slip into history yet. Ghost town near Cole is a lively place once a year," August, 14, 2004,
<https://oklahoman.com/article/2862333/not-ready-to-disappear-the-people-who-once-lived-in-jerusalem-arent-going-let-the-town-slip-into-history-yet-ghost-town-near-cole-is-a-lively-place-once-a-year>.

⁵⁹⁰ "All Black Towns Booklet," (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

McCabe published the *Langston City Herald*, an important organ in both black Oklahoman and Republican politics. Like most black town publications, the *Herald* had agents throughout the Deep South to encourage settlement, by emphasizing the town's agricultural possibilities.

Lee (1890)

Black lawyer, David Lee (from Canadian Colored) founded the town of Lee in 1890. The town had a post office from 1890 through 1911.⁵⁹¹

Lewisville (1906)

Located in Haskell County, Lewisville had a post office from 1906 to 1915. Calvin Lewis, the town's namesake, was the town's first postmaster.⁵⁹²

Liberty (1893)

Liberty was a black town promoted by Edward McCabe in 1893. Although the town proved to be short-lived, Liberty maintained a post office from its founding in 1893 to 1904. White hostility and failure to secure a Santa Fe Railway Depot led to the town's closing.⁵⁹³

Lima (1900s)

Lima was a town dating back to a settlement of Seminole and Seminole Freedmen prior to its formation of a town in 1913. The town's post office dated back to 1907. The town is in Seminole County and remains in existence.⁵⁹⁴

Lincoln (1889)

Starting with a founding population of 300, Lincoln formed in August 1889. With much of its populace from Kansas, Lincoln's outskirts inflated the town's population to 2000 by 1890. Marion Blair, a white speculator, sold land to a black colony in what Blair called Lincoln Town. Blair advertised the town as the "first African town ever started in a civilized country."⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹¹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 213.

⁵⁹² Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 213.

⁵⁹³ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 214.

⁵⁹⁴ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 153; Larry O'Dell, "Lima," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=LI003>.

⁵⁹⁵ "Lincoln City Profile," WPA Historic Sites And Survey Collection, Box Four (Kingfisher County), Folder Two, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma.

Mabelle (Santown) (1800s)

Mabelle originated as a black Creek settlement in the Cherokee Nation during the nineteenth century. Santown kept a post office from 1907 to 1915 and eventually rebranded as Mabelle after the daughter of a leading black resident in the area.⁵⁹⁶

Macedonia (late 1800s)

Freedmen settled what would become Macedonia sometime during the nineteenth century. The town maintained some businesses, a church, a school as well as a close relationship with the neighboring black town of Boggy Bend.⁵⁹⁷

Mantee (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁵⁹⁸

Marshalltown (1870s)

Marshalltown was one of the earliest black towns in the country. An African Creek settlement, Marshalltown, according to one historian, “contributed significantly to the African Creek’s civil and cultural life.” The town became known for its criminal activity in the 1880s; however, a settlement named Sodom near Marshalltown became known for criminal activities.⁵⁹⁹

Maxwell (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁶⁰⁰

Melvin (1894)

Melvin hosted a post office from 1894 to 1904 and had a depot on the Frisco Railway.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁶ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 214.

⁵⁹⁷ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 215.

⁵⁹⁸ “All Black Towns Booklet,” (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

⁵⁹⁹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 215; Zellar, *African Creeks*, 124-5& 284n22.

⁶⁰⁰ “All Black Towns Booklet,” (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

⁶⁰¹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 215.

Nobleton (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁶⁰²

North Fork Colored (1850s)

North Fork Colored started as a Creek settlement prior to the Civil War. The community began with a collection of settlements of African Creeks located in the North Fork region of the Canadian River. Lee (another black town) became the town's political center later in its existence.⁶⁰³ The town existed into the early twentieth century.

Noxie (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁶⁰⁴

Old Vinita (1800s)

Old Vinita existed in the Cherokee Nation. Cherokee freedmen made up the town.

Oberlin (1904)

Oberlin emerged in 1897 in Bryan County and maintained a post office until 1937. The town had a population of 500 by 1904.⁶⁰⁵

Okra (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁶⁰⁶

Oktaha (1870s)

Formerly a town with a majority black population, Oktaha remains in existence. The town formed originally as an agricultural community on the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas

⁶⁰² "All Black Towns Booklet," (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

⁶⁰³ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 215.

⁶⁰⁴ "All Black Towns Booklet," (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

⁶⁰⁵ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 218.

⁶⁰⁶ "All Black Towns Booklet," (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

Railway. The community comprised a black, white, and Native American population. In 1907, blacks were 18 percent of Oktaha's population.⁶⁰⁷

Overton (Date Unknown)

The *Cleveland County Leader* mentioned the black town of Overton. The town had a population of 500 in 1900. Little remains known about the town.⁶⁰⁸

Pleasant Valley (1889)

Pleasant Valley was also a black town formed during the land run. Founded in 1889, Pleasant Valley was also a part of Kingfisher County. Participants of the Land Run and black Civil War veterans settled the town.⁶⁰⁹ Following the fate of other black towns, Pleasant Valley ceased to exist. With inadequate farmland, these towns struggled to adapt to a changing economic culture.⁶¹⁰

Redbird (1902)

Located in Wagoner County, Red Bird formed on Creek land with the help of E. L. Barber, a Baptist minister from Arkansas. Incorporated in 1902, Red Bird became a center of exchange for black farmers in the surrounding area at the town's height by the 1910s. The community consisted of African Americans and Creek Freedmen.⁶¹¹

Rentie (1904)

The town of Rentie developed from the allotments of Stephen and Luthis Rentie. The town held a post office from 1904 to 1909. The town founders were also relatives of the founders of the black town of Rentiesville.⁶¹²

Rentiesville (1903)

⁶⁰⁷ Wallace F. Waits, Jr., "Oktaha," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=OK095>; Hannibal Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 224.

⁶⁰⁸ Tolson, "The Negro in Oklahoma," 65-66.

⁶⁰⁹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 218.

⁶¹⁰ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 218.

⁶¹¹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 125-127.

⁶¹² Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 218.

The allotments of William Rentie and Phoebe McIntosh formed Rentiesville in 1903. Still in existence today, Buck Colbert Franklin, Tulsa Massacre Survivor and son of prominent historian, John Hope Franklin, served as the town's second postmaster in 1904.⁶¹³

Rusk (1905)

Rusk was a satellite community outside of Boley. The town developed beginning in 1905 with black inhabitants from Rusk, Texas leaving their town in Cherokee County, Texas to settle on land within Boley's vicinity. After waves of Rusk inhabitants settled in Oklahoma following the end of cotton season, they "reconstituted" their Texas community naming it after their former home. Rusk was largely a farming community, which is not surprising. Whites in Cherokee County allowed freedmen to settle in the bottoms of certain areas. Thus, these lands were not conducive for cash cropping. These Texas migrants may have wanted to settle in Boley for better farmland as they waited until the cotton-picking season ended in fall of 1905 to migrate. Rusk's importance to the Boley Satellite community network is cemented in a map titled "Boley's Satellite's Communities" made by the Sand Creek Reunion Committee in 2001.⁶¹⁴

Salt Creek (1850s)

Little is known of Salt Creek. It existed some miles away from Clearview. The town had a church which remains. It dates back to the 1850s.⁶¹⁵

Sanders (Date Unknown)

Sanders was a Cherokee Freedmen community in Nowata County. The town had a post office from 1909 to 1914.⁶¹⁶

Slick (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹³ Larry O'Dell, "Rentiesville," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=RE027>.

⁶¹⁴ Stuckey, "All Men Up," 34-36; "Boley's 'Satellite Communities'" in James Shaw Sr., *Boley: Oklahoma's Famous Black Town* (Moore: YES Publishing Group, 2012), 76; Sitton & Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 24-25.

⁶¹⁵ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 220.

⁶¹⁶ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 220.

⁶¹⁷ "All Black Towns Booklet," (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

Summit (1890s)

Summit had a post office dating back to 1896. The town still exists and was originally platted as South Muskogee in 1910. Summit incorporated in 1980.⁶¹⁸

Sweet Home (late 1800s)

Sweet Home, Garvin County, was founded on land donated by a freedmen. The community's place of worship, Sweet Home Freedmen Baptist Church, is still in existence.⁶¹⁹

Taft (1902)

Taft was originally known as Twine after resident William H. Twine—editor of the *Muskogee Cimeter*—but changed following his departure to Muskogee in 1904. The town quickly developed with several businesses and schools. The town remains in existence.⁶²⁰

Tatums (1895)

Lee and Mary Tatum founded the town of Tatums in 1895 when they applied for a post office. Tatums developed quickly with a general store, a cotton gin, and eventually oil wells by the 1920s. The town remains in existence.

Tulahassee (1850)

This was an early community of Creek Freedmen located in Wagoner County. The oldest of Oklahoma's black towns, Tulahassee was once a red Creek community, but a fire at the town's mission school forced the inhabitants out of the area. Creek Freedmen took over what remained in the area and established a robust community lasting into the present-day. The town incorporated in 1902.⁶²¹

Udora (Date Unknown)

⁶¹⁸ Larry O'Dell, "Summit," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=SU007>.

⁶¹⁹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 220.

⁶²⁰ Larry O'Dell, "Taft," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=TA001>.

⁶²¹ Larry O'Dell, "Tulahassee," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=TU002>; Hannibal Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 159-160.

Udora, located in Blaine County, acquired a post office in 1895, which lasted until 1911.⁶²²

Vernon (Date Unknown)

Vernon is a town that remains in existence. Located in McIntosh County, the town's founding happened between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁶²³

Virgil (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁶²⁴

Welcome (Alsuma)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁶²⁵

Wellston Colony (1900)

Wellston began in 1900 with a black community of 300 from Grimes County, Texas. The community purchased the land for cotton farming near the town of Wellston in Lincoln County.⁶²⁶

Wiley (1902)

Wiley was a community of Chickasaw and Choctaw Freedmen in Johnston County. Platted in 1902, the town's original inhabitants are buried in the town center still in existence.⁶²⁷

Woodford (Date Unknown)

A probable black settlement. More research is needed on this settlement.⁶²⁸

⁶²² Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 220.

⁶²³ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 164; Larry O'Dell, "Vernon," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=VE004>.

⁶²⁴ "All Black Towns Booklet," (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

⁶²⁵ "All Black Towns Booklet," (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

⁶²⁶ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 220.

⁶²⁷ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 221.

⁶²⁸ "All Black Towns Booklet," (Oklahoma Historical Society: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.), 6.

Wybark (1890)

Wybark established in 1890. The town maintained a post office from 1890 to 1940. Wybark was rumored to not allow white visitors after sunset.⁶²⁹

Yahola (1906)

Yahola was only three miles away from Taft in Muskogee County. E.L Barber, Red Bird pioneer, led a congregation in the town. Yahola had a post office from 1906 to 1940.⁶³⁰

Zion City (1891)

Located in Kingfisher County, Zion City held a post office from 1891 to 1906.⁶³¹

Weogufkee (Date Unknown)

Weogufkee was in Sequoyah County. Little is known of this community.

Wanamaker (1890s)

Wanamaker was a black town located in Kingfisher County. Little is known of the town, but it developed during the Oklahoma Land Run. Some inhabitants of the nearby black land run town of Lincoln abandoned the unsuccessful town of Lincoln to live in Wanamaker. (Taken from Works Progress Administration record) The town proved to be short lived but it managed to develop a bank and a cotton gin within a relatively short period of time.⁶³² Notable black merchant, Anthony Overton, served as one of Wanamaker's prominent citizens. A 1925 article claimed Overton established the town's "grocery store, sawmill, cotton gin and bank..." but portions of this narrative may be false; however, WPA records mention that a citizen from a nearby community banked at Wanamaker.⁶³³

⁶²⁹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 221.

⁶³⁰ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 221.

⁶³¹ Hannibal Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 221.

⁶³² "Lincoln City Profile," WPA Historic Sites And Survey Collection, Box Four (Kingfisher County), Folder Two, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma; "Population of Oklahoma and Indian Territory," 11, https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1907pop_OK-IndianTerritory.pdf; Diana Everett, "Lincoln City," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=LI005>.

⁶³³ "Lincoln City Profile," WPA Historic Sites And Survey Collection, Box Four (Kingfisher County), Folder Two, Western History Collections, Norman, Oklahoma; Robert E. Weems, Jr., *The Merchant Prince of Black Chicago: Anthony Overton and the Building of a Financial Empire* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020).

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