

**Not as Supplicants, but as Citizens: Race, Party, and African American Politics, in
Boston, Massachusetts, 1864-1903**

by

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ABSTRACT

This project examines African American political culture in Boston, Massachusetts and the intersection of partisan and race-based urban politics from the beginning of Reconstruction in 1864 through the emergence of the Niagara Movement in the early twentieth century. From the 1870s through the 1890s, black Bostonians tested the limits of freedom and gained political ground by shifting support between the Republican and Democratic Parties, advocating independent black politics, and building alliances with Irish-Americans. Controversies surrounding ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment, federal protection of civil rights, public accommodations, and anti-lynching campaigns offer a lens through which to understand the shifting public political identity of African Americans in Boston. Emphasizing the relationship between racial and partisan politics reveals the importance of party affiliation in understanding black politics in Boston in the final decades of the twentieth century. It also highlights coalition-building between black and Irish Bostonians and the significant role of black women in electoral politics.

African Americans employed versatile and ambitious political strategies to press political parties to take a stand for racial equality. In public meetings and the press, they debated the worthiness of electoral candidates and organized broad constituencies, including Irish immigrants, to push for civil rights. In correspondence to local and national government officials, they condemned racial discrimination and pressed for governmental appointments for black leaders. In novels and periodicals, black women

advocated a politics that challenged black male leadership and prioritized racial solidarity over individual success and ambition. In petitions to local councils and state and national legislatures, black Bostonians advocated activist state intervention for the protection of civil rights and condemned inaction in the face of racial violence.

By the early twentieth century, though, black Bostonians rejected partisan affiliation and favored unity based on racial pride and solitary. Isolated politically from mainstream party politics, African Americans turned to race-based political organizations including the Niagara Movement and later the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for political action. As the concerns of mainstream party politics shifted away from the interests of African Americans, partisan identity was replaced by a stronger sense of racial nationalism.

Introduction

On January 15, 1901, hundreds of mourners were turned away as a multi-racial crowd of over 1,500 men and women packed to capacity the Charles St. AME church to commemorate the life of Edwin Garrison Walker. ‘Judge’ Walker, the son of noted and controversial anti-slavery activist David Walker, worked for decades as an attorney, elected official and political leader.¹ Walker’s body was carried to the church by members of the Robert Gould Shaw veteran’s association, which Walker, a Civil War recruiter, helped found. Among the honorary pallbearers were members of Boston’s black political community among whom Walker worked during his career. They included staunch political independent George T. Downing, Colored National League president I. D. Barnett, former state representative John J. Smith, and founding member of the Niagara Movement and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Clement G. Morgan. Also recognized was Irish lawyer Thomas Riley.²

Downing, in his eulogy, remembered Walker’s sacrifice to maintain an independent political position and called upon the next generation to dedicate themselves to the uplift of the race. Walker’s independent stance, according to Downing, “cost [him] more to stand up for his race than it did any other colored man in this country. What did

¹ Mentions of Walker often refer to him as ‘Judge’ due to his failed nomination to a Charlestown judgeship by Benjamin Butler in 1883.

² “Fearless Leader Sleeps,” *Boston Daily Globe*, January 17, 1901; “Loved His Race,” *Boston Daily Globe*, January 14, 1901; “Funeral Will Be Imposing,” *Boston Daily Globe*, January 15, 1901; “Active Life Ended,” *Boston Journal*, January 15, 1901; “Death of the Foremost Lawyer in New England,” *Colored American Magazine* (February 1901): 291. A later memorial was also held by the Colored National League on February 12, 1901, “Walker’s Worth,” *Boston Daily Globe*, February 13, 1901.

he care for political parties when the rights of his race were at stake? He made the sacrifice of money and honor for our people.” “Young people,” Downing continued, “only a few remain among us who fearlessly fight our battles. Look out for your rights, for at this moment there are those who are planning to take away from our race those rights which have been so nobly gained and given to us to keep.”³ Downing called upon the audience to continue working for racial justice and not be overtaken by selfish interest even if that meant severe personal sacrifice. As Walker himself remarked, “Faithfulness to the race will prove to most of us the graveyard of our hopes of aspirations...but with this knowledge I accept the alternative gladly. I will never cease fighting our false friends until death seals my lips eternally.”⁴

Edwin Walker, from his election to the Massachusetts General Court in 1866 until his death in 1901, was a central figure in African American politics in Boston and upon his death was regarded as one of the most prominent leaders of the era.⁵ Walker’s career embodies the challenges and complexities of black political activism in Boston during this period. He emerged from the Civil War optimistic about the future of African Americans in the nation, but these expectations were tempered by the realities of political compromise during Reconstruction. Although he criticized the Republican Party and the Fourteenth Amendment in 1867 while a representative to the General Court, Walker supported Republican Ulysses S. Grant for president in 1872. By the 1880s, however, he

³ “Fearless Leader Sleeps.”

⁴ Quoted in Pauline Hopkins, “Famous Men of the Negro Race: Edwin Garrison Walker,” *Colored American Magazine* (March 1901): 365.

⁵ Peter Thomas Stanford, *The Tragedy of the Negro in America: A Condensed History of the Enslavement, Sufferings, Emancipation, Present Condition and Progress of the Negro Race in the United States of America*, (Boston, 1897), 180; Hopkins, “Edwin Garrison Walker,” 358-366.

had rejected previous partisan loyalty and instead supported Democratic candidates at local, state, and national levels. During the 1890s he was a leader and major voice against lynching as member of the Colored National League. During his career he made significant alliances with Boston's Irish political leadership and drew parallels between the struggles for Irish independence and the plight of people of African descent in the United States. By the end of his life he was nominated to serve as a presidential candidate on the National Negro Party ticket. He died resolute in his rejection of African American affiliation with major political parties and committed to federal activism as the only protection of black citizenship rights, policies endorsed by twentieth century black leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois.⁶

Walker, however, was not alone in his activism, nor did his service remain in Boston or Massachusetts. The study of African American politics in Boston during the last half of the nineteenth century exposes the importance of the support of political parties as a display of electoral significance. The vehement debates and disagreements over partisan affiliation demonstrate the faith in the power of African American voters to sway the national political terrain and the firm resistance to abdicating a political voice to party leadership. From their organization and activism on the local level to their leadership in national fights for civil rights, African Americans in Boston were unwilling to accept anything less than full and unmediated citizenship and refused to subordinate themselves to the policies of the federal government or national political parties.

⁶ Although there is scant reference of Walker in historical scholarship there are several significant biographical sketches, see Clarence G Contee, "Edwin G. Walker, Black Leader: Generally Acknowledged Son of David Walker," *Negro History Bulletin*, 39 (March 1976): 556-59; Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 269-271.

New Geographies

This project explores the debates around political ideology and organizational politics within Boston, Massachusetts's African American community from the end of the Civil War until the beginning of the twentieth century. The existing literature on African American politics during the last half of the nineteenth century has generally focused on the actions of black men and women in the states of the former Confederacy.⁷ These studies emphasize the importance of subjects such as the political traditions of formerly enslaved men and women, rural networks of communication, and urban and rural community building. While these studies are significant to our understanding of black politics, the focus on southern communities has neglected the importance of northern urban black political communities. An analysis of African American political life in the urban north demonstrates the significance of urban political machinery in black uplift and the primacy of debates over partisan affiliation in political debates.

The focus on African American political life in the South is important to the history of black politics, but it offers an incomplete picture of the diversity of political thought, ideologies, and strategies of African Americans as they debated and defined ideas of American citizenship in the decades following emancipation. Rather than understanding African American politics as confined to a particular region or select group of leaders, historians should focus on a diasporic vision of political thought which sought to answer questions about the place of African Americans in the American body politic and searched for strategies best to achieve these goals. The differing local contexts which

⁷ For a discussion of the origins of African American politics as rooted in the southern United States see: Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 4-5.

produced these ideas should be understood as parts of a national African American political discourse which included the voices of African American men and women across the country.⁸

When historians have discussed the political life of African Americans in Northern cities, their roles are either marginalized or used to provide a perspective on Southern events. For example, Eric Foner, in his extensive study of Reconstruction declared that, “Black politicians in the North lacked the militancy of their Southern counterparts, and failed to develop a viable strategy for addressing the economic plight of their community.”⁹ In other cases historians position northern African Americans to make claims about political party structures and policies.¹⁰ Several biographies cover the lives of prominent northern African American reformers, but they focus on the actions of select individuals and do not fully engage with the context of their political community.¹¹

Recently historians have begun to explore the nuances of African American political life in their local contexts and recognize the vibrancy of activism which persisted in the North despite the numerical minority of their populations.¹² As historian

⁸ For an argument of moving the discussion of American race relations beyond the South, see Desmond S. King, and Stephen G. N. Tuck. “De-centering the South: America’s Nationwide White Supremacist Order After Reconstruction.” *Past & Present* 194 (2007): 213-254.

⁹ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics ed. (1988; repr., New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002), 472. Citations refer to the Perennial Classics edition.

¹⁰ Lawrence Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro: Northern and National Politics, 1868-92* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976)

¹¹ Dickson D. Bruce, *Archibald Grimké: Portrait of a Black independent* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Stephen R. Fox, *The Guardian of Boston: William Monroe Trotter* (Boston: Atheneum, 1970); Emma Lou Thornbrough, *T. Thomas Fortune: Militant Journalist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

¹² Lisa G. Materson, *For the Freedom of Her Race: Black Women and Electoral Politics in Illinois, 1877-1932* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Janette Thomas Greenwood, *First Fruits of Freedom: the Migration of Former Slaves and their Search for Equality in Worcester, Massachusetts*,

Leslie Schwalm notes, emancipation and its aftermath had significant consequences for African Americans in regions beyond the South which resulted not only in, “the hotly contested politics of black enfranchisement, but also an extensive and persistent series of collisions over segregation, civil rights, and the more informal politics of race.”¹³ As with Schwalm’s study of the upper Midwest, keeping African Americans in Boston at the center of this study provides not only a broader vision of nineteenth century African American history, but also a new perspective on local and national political transformations.

Boston’s African American population increased nearly fivefold from 1865 to 1900. In 1865, the city’s black population was 2,348 and made up 1.2 percent of the city population. By 1900, the population across the city had grown to 11,591 and made up over 2 percent of all city residents. The population of Boston proper was bolstered by a significant population in neighboring Cambridge and surrounding suburbs.¹⁴ Although Boston’s African American population was less than that of other northern cities, its proportion was greater than or equal to that of New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland.¹⁵

1862-1900 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Leslie A Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

¹³ Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 5

¹⁴ John Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace: A Study of the Boston Negroes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 461-462.

¹⁵ Stephan Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 178-179; See also Elizabeth Hafkin Pleck. *Black Migration and Poverty: Boston 1865-1900*. (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 20; Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace*, 458.

Although the population remained small, its ward level concentration made it a significant electoral interest in the city and African Americans elected black officials to city and state government office. Boston's black community was unusually concentrated, and according to scholars, Boston was one of the most racially divided cities in the United States.¹⁶ Boston's antebellum black community was based on the north side of Beacon Hill in the northwestern wards of the city and this trend generally continued until the end of the nineteenth century when the community migrated to southern wards.¹⁷ Nearly half of black residents lived in this area. In particular, over thirty percent of the city's black population lived in Ward Six, and later Ward Nine.¹⁸ Although in elections Republican candidates tended to win a plurality of votes in these wards, Democratic candidates received significant support and sometimes won particular precincts. For example, in the successful election of Democrat Benjamin Butler in 1882, he won over forty percent of the vote in Ward Nine.¹⁹

City officials redrew Boston's wards in 1875 and 1895. The 1895 redistricting divided the West End black community between Ward Eight and Ward Eleven. Most

¹⁶ In the late nineteenth century, only Utica, New York, and Chicago, Illinois were as segregated as Boston. Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*, 32. High home prices and racial discrimination likely contributed to this residential segregation. In 1890, for example, only 6% of black families owned their homes. Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*, 33.

¹⁷ James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North*, rev. ed. (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1999), 1-6. Citations refer to the revised edition. For further discussion of the antebellum community, see Adelaide M. Cromwell, "The Black Presence in the West End of Boston, 1800-1864: A Demographic Map," in *Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists in Boston*, ed. Donald M. Jacobs (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 155-168.

¹⁸ Richard Alan Ballou, "Even in 'Freedom's Birthplace'! The Development of Boston's Black Ghetto, 1900-1940," (PhD. Diss., University of Michigan, 1984), 32-48. With little change to the boundaries, Ward 6 became Ward 9 in 1875.

¹⁹ *Record of Votes by Precinct, 1882*, City of Boston Archives, Boston, MA.

significantly, it merged a large portion of black residents into the much larger Ward Eleven, which lessened their impact on ward level politics.²⁰ Further, government officials relocated the ward room, a major site of city politics, to a site further away from the concentration of black residents.²¹ By the end of the century, the population had migrated to southern wards which, coupled with redistricting, resulted in a dilution of urban black electoral strength.

While the political leadership of Boston tended to be of a more educated and professional class, most of Boston's black community had jobs in menial labor. Most black men were employed as laborers, porters, or household servants, while most women worked as laundresses and domestics.²² Despite their concentration at the low end of the city's economic spectrum, the literacy rates for black Bostonians and the percentages of African American children attending school tended to be higher than other cities.²³

Boston is an interesting and important vantage point from which to examine national black political movements. Prior to the Civil War the city was viewed by both northerners and southerners as one of the epicenters of anti-slavery activism. From within its boundaries emerged national publications like William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*. Further, antebellum Boston was home to one of the nation's most politically active African American communities. Men like Robert Morris and Lewis Hayden

²⁰ Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace*, 268-270; Adelaide M. Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins: Boston's Black Upper Class, 1750-1950* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 49.

²¹ *Reports of the Proceedings of the City Council of Boston*, 1896 (Boston, 1897), 583-585.

²² Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*, 125; Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace*, 333-334.

²³ Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*, 51-52, 140.

worked with women like Mariah Stewart to end the institution of slavery, protect fugitives, and work for full citizenship on local and national levels.²⁴

In particular, black Bostonians had a history of petitioning local and state government for civil rights redress. For example, in 1845 Benjamin Roberts, a local African American printer, brought suit against the city of Boston after his daughter Sarah was denied access to several white schools, even though they were closer to her home than the city funded black school. Roberts retained attorney Charles Sumner and black lawyer Robert Morris who argued not only that separate schools violated the Massachusetts state constitution, but that they would retard interracial progress. Although this initial attempt at integration failed, advocates found success with the Know-Nothing legislature in 1855 and in April of that year a bill was passed forbidding racially separate public schools.²⁵

Black Boston's traditions of politics in the post-war decades were connected to the antebellum period by more than just ideology. Many of the men and women who fought against slavery and for black Bostonian civil rights continued to be active after the Civil War. For example, Lewis Hayden, a vehement opponent of slavery and the fugitive slave law, became the grand master of the Prince Hall Masons and was elected to the Massachusetts legislature in 1873. Boston's traditions of political involvement also transcended generations. Edwin Garrison Walker, the son of outspoken antislavery activist David Walker, was a Boston attorney and also served in the State House in 1867.

²⁴ Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*; James Oliver Horton, *Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993). James Oliver Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁵ Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 78-81.

Newspaper editor William Monroe Trotter's father, James, served in the Massachusetts Fifty-Fifth regiment before returning to Boston to become an outspoken advocate of independent politics.²⁶

Although members of the antebellum community continued to be influential political activists, following the end of the Civil War, they were joined by returning veterans and former slaves from the South who arrived in Boston and made their homes along its streets. Between 1866 and 1868, 1,083 former enslaved men and women migrated from southern states to Boston and Cambridge with the assistance of the Freedmen's Bureau.²⁷ In the remaining decades of the nineteenth century southern migrants continued to arrive in the city. Most of these migrants came from Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, DC. These migrants tended to be from southern cities and had an unusually high rate of literacy.²⁸ According to historian Elizabeth Pleck, many of these men and women traveled to Boston upon steamships which sailed weekly from Norfolk, Richmond, and Baltimore. Although the bulk of the African American community continued to live in city wards in Boston's West End, these new arrivals were some of the first African Americans to settle in the South End and helped begin the African American migration to that area. Some of these southern migrants influenced Bostonian institutions and became leaders in the community. For example, Julius C. Chapelle, born in South Carolina, migrated to Boston in 1870. Chapelle was eventually elected to the Republican State Central Committee, the Boston City Council, and the

²⁶ Fox, *The Guardian of Boston*, 7.

²⁷ Pleck. *Black Migration and Poverty*, 25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

General Court in 1883 where he supported bills improving the economic and political conditions of black Bostonians.²⁹

Another major demographic force in Boston during the late nineteenth century was European, particularly Irish, immigrants. During the 1840s and 50s there was a massive influx of new Irish residents, but despite their numbers, the nativist and anti-Catholic climate of the city stunted their political aspirations. However, by the 1870s the Irish began to be a politically significant force in Bostonian politics and by the beginning of the twentieth century Bostonians elected several mayors of Irish descent.³⁰ During this period there was also some cooperation between Irish immigrants and the African American community. For example, attorney and statesman Edwin Garrison Walker often represented Irish clients and admired Irish resistance to British rule.³¹ In the 1880s Walker would join other black Bostonians in supporting Hugh O'Brien; Boston's first Irish-born mayor. Further, John Boyle O'Reilly, a former Irish revolutionary who became editor of the Boston *Pilot* following the Civil War, advocated African American civil rights and encouraged African Americans to use Irish nationalist movements as an organizational inspiration.

The general political climate of Massachusetts and the liberal access to the franchise influenced the potential political strategies of Boston's black citizens. Boston,

²⁹ Ibid., 84; State Library of Massachusetts. "Black Legislators in the Massachusetts General Court: 1867-Present" (Boston: State Library of Massachusetts, 2001)

³⁰ Handlin, Oscar. *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1880: A Study in Acculturation*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959); Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995); Dennis P. Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box: A Social History of the Boston Irish, 1845-1917*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989); Mark Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow, 1890-1920*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997).

³¹ Hopkins, "Edwin Garrison Walker;" Mark Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow*, 167-68.

unlike many other cities, both North and South, had few limits on African American suffrage.³² Literate African American men could vote in all elections and by the 1880s black women could cast ballots for local school board elections. African Americans in Boston, as in all of Massachusetts, had been guaranteed the right to vote by state law since the early decades of the nineteenth century; Massachusetts had no explicit laws disenfranchising citizens based on race. However, Massachusetts restricted voting to men over the age of twenty-one, required all voters to pay a poll tax, and, in response to increased foreign immigration, required all voters to be able to read the constitution and sign their name. Despite these regulations, as historian of Massachusetts politics Dale Baum argues, they made little impact on access to the polls.³³ Men and women in Boston had a tradition of active participation in electoral politics, making them fierce opponents to limitations on black voting in other parts of the country.³⁴

Boston's black voters came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. In 1864, Lawyer and activist George L. Ruffin collected the name of voters, their addresses and whether they paid their poll tax. Among the names was a cross section of Boston's black community from both skilled and unskilled occupations. For example, Ruffin's record lists carpenter John Austin, porter Wesley Bishop, and laborer William Elisha.

³² During the antebellum period African Americans faced a more difficulties voting. See Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 91-92.

³³ Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 10-13.

³⁴ Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 15; See also John M Dobson, *Politics in the Gilded Age; a New Perspective on Reform* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972); Michael E McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Mark Wahlgren Summers, *Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion: The Making of a President, 1884* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

While Boston's black political leadership tended to be relatively wealthy or work as attorneys, journalists, or statesmen, the majority of the city's black voters were laborers.³⁵

This electoral participation resulted in the election of African American representatives to the Massachusetts's State House. From 1867 until 1902, Bostonians elected fourteen black state representatives with large support from the African American community. The men elected were leaders in the community, serving in social and fraternal organizations and often as spokesmen before and after their official public service. Many of the men eventually elected to state level positions first gained experience serving as representatives to Boston's Common Council.³⁶ Despite praise for making a significant breakthrough in black political representation, African American representatives often found themselves under scrutiny by members of the black community, who felt that black legislators did not take a large enough role in uplifting the race or were pandering to the state and national leadership of the Republican Party.

In addition to elected office, African Americans actively sought appointed positions in city, state, and national government. These positions offered African Americans a gateway to official political offices that may have been inaccessible through electoral politics. An examination of the pursuit of these offices reframes discussions around patronage. Rather than merely a 'spoils system' of corruption and personal ambition, this project reframes patronage as a significant tool for black political power.

³⁵ George L. Ruffin, "Colored Voters, Boston-1864, First List After Emancipation, New and Old Voters," Ruffin Family Papers, Box 87-1 Folder 34, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC; *Boston Directory for the Year Commencing July 1, 1864*, (Boston: Adams, Sampson, and Co., 1865). It is difficult to get an exact number of black voters in Boston after 1867 when, after petitions from black Bostonians, the state removed all racial designations from the tax and voting rolls.

³⁶ Curtis M Hairston and Massachusetts Black Caucus, *Blacks on Beacon Hill: A History of Blacks in the Massachusetts Legislature* (Boston: The Caucus, 1983).

African Americans in appointed positions of government authority not only had access to professional power, but the appearance of a black official had important symbolic value and was a public display of black uplift, inclusion, and equality.³⁷

In other ways African American women gained experience working within the government. Pauline Hopkins, for example, worked for the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics. Through elected officials black Bostonians hoped to influence municipal and state politics from within the halls of government, rather than relying solely on outside agitation. However, there was often cooperation between internal and external elements. Working within the government provided experience that would inform political activities outside formal structures.

This public service helped African Americans lay claim to the local and national citizenship which would shape their activism in the twentieth century. Through social clubs like the Woman's Era Club and national organizations like the National Association of Women's Clubs these women influenced the larger discussion and through publications like the *Women's Era* and the *Colored American Magazine* they were a commanding force in the discourse of politics nationally.³⁸ Further black women like Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin were active in female suffrage organizations. Black Bostonians like Pauline Hopkins and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin took the stage alongside men and were outspoken advocates of a national racial consciousness and uplift ideology.

³⁷ For a discussion of the importance of "symbolic representation," see Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 92-111.

³⁸ Deborah G White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Martha S. Jones, *"All Bound Up Together": The "Woman Question" in African-American Public Culture, 1830-1900*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

African Americans in post-Civil War Boston were a significant force in urban politics. They effectively mobilized to increase black political strength in the city. In Boston, African Americans utilized black-led political organizations to campaign for local political officials. They expressed their political viewpoints in the pages of Boston's general press and established black-owned and edited partisan newspapers to wage battles over black support for local urban and national candidates. Success on the local level in Boston encouraged African Americans in the struggle for black uplift nationally. Support for racial equality and federal protection of constitutional rights often brought African Americans into conflict with policies of moderation advocated by the Republican Party, causing some to abandon Republicans for independent or Democratic candidates.

On both local and national levels, African Americans in Boston were deeply engaged in debates over partisan affiliation. A significant portion of the black electorate advocated political independence, marked most importantly by their support of Democratic candidates Hugh O' Brien for Mayor, Benjamin Butler for Massachusetts Governor, and Grover Cleveland for United States President. These independent voters originally hoped to divide and leverage black votes in order to provoke the major parties into supporting progressive racial policies. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, some independents rejected partisan affiliation entirely and favored unity based on racial pride and solidarity.

Boston's local newspapers contained significant coverage of black political activity. The city was home to several large presses, most of which had strong partisan affiliations. During the hotly contested political races of the late 1870s and early 1880s coverage of African American political events and opinions was common in the partisan

press. Coverage of black politics increased in the months prior to an election and tended to be divided along partisan lines, although there was often significant overlap. For example, the pro-independent and Democrat *Boston Daily Globe* featured significant coverage of events organized by African American supporters of Benjamin Butler and contained letters from Butler's black advocates. Alternatively, the *Boston Daily Advertiser* provided coverage of black Republican events and created a forum for denunciations of Butler by black Bostonians. The papers occasionally covered the same event in two different ways, each emphasizing an alternative partisan vision. As historians Michael McGerr and Mark Summers have argued, the partisan nature of nineteenth century newspapers served as an important vehicle for political discourse.³⁹ That the opinions of African Americans often appeared in the pages of the Boston press is further evidence of the important part played by black Bostonians in the political debates.

African Americans in Boston also owned and operated short-lived newspapers. In the 1880s, for example, African Americans founded the *Boston Advocate* and the *Boston Hub*. These papers took distinct sides in debates over partisan support and provided a widely distributed platform for this discussion. Although they were significant organs of black Bostonian opinion, both newspapers lasted less than a decade before closing due to a lack of funding. Despite their brief existence, these papers provided a significant forum

³⁹ See: Mark W. Summers, *The Press Gang: Newspapers And Politics, 1865-1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: the American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 14-22. For more on the African American press see: Patrick Scott Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006); Armistead Scott Pride and Clint C Wilson, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1997); I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (New York: Arno Press, 1969).

for black political debate and are a rich source for understanding the political discourse of the period.

Black Bostonians were also constant contributors to one of the largest African American newspapers of the era, the *New York Globe*. Founded by editor Timothy Thomas Fortune the *New York Globe*, later the *New York Freeman* and the *New York Age*, provided a forum for Bostonians to present their opinions and provide news of their activities to African American readers across the nation. Nearly every week from their founding in 1883 Fortune's newspaper offered coverage of black Boston's social and political gatherings, transcripts of significant speeches, and letters to the editor and editorials written by members of Boston's African American community. The *Globe* also provided space for Bostonian correspondents to hone their journalistic craft before founding their own papers. J. D. Powell, Jr., for instance, served as the original Boston correspondent to the *Globe* before leaving to found the *Boston Advocate*. Further, T. Thomas Fortune, as a supporter of African American independent politics often featured discussions of Massachusetts elections and issued endorsements for candidates like Benjamin Butler.⁴⁰ In this way, Boston and its black residents became featured topics and contributors in the national public sphere of black politics, transcending their seeming isolation in New England.

Besides the local and national press, African Americans in Boston used public meetings of political organizations to galvanize support for candidates and to debate crucial issues. These meetings were sometimes small conferences by invitation only, but

⁴⁰ T. Thomas Fortune, *T. Thomas Fortune, the Afro-American Agitator: A Collection of Writings, 1880-1928*, ed. Shawn Leigh Alexander (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008); Thornbrough, *T. Thomas Fortune*.

often they were large scale affairs coupled with a parade or dinner. Meetings took place in spaces like Faneuil Hall or in the sanctuaries of the city's African American churches. The accounts of the meetings present a diverse crowd of men, and sometimes women, engaged in discussions of the political identity of African Americans. Organizations like the Bay State League, Colored Butler Clubs, and the Sumner National Independent League were overtly political and not only contributed to the political literacy of Boston's black community, but were engaged in the development of an internal sphere of politics which was in conversation and occasional conflict with the external arena of electoral politics.⁴¹ Further, black Bostonians maintained a strong associational life in fraternal organizations and clubs which provided areas for increased political discourse.⁴² By organizing rallies, parades, speeches, etc., black Bostonians created public forums for debates over a political identity and definitions of American citizenship.

Finally, this is also a story of race relations. In 1954 Rayford W. Logan described the late nineteenth century as the 'Nadir' of American race relations and in the decades following his publication scholars have produced works chronicling the rise of the institutional structures of 'Jim Crow' racial segregation.⁴³ Most of these works, however,

⁴¹ For a larger discussion on the African American public sphere see: Elsa Barkley Brown. "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom." In *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book*. edited by the Black Public Sphere Collective (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 111-150.

⁴² Steve Kantrowitz, "'Intended for the Better Government of Man': The Political History of African American Freemasonry in the Era of Emancipation," *The Journal of American History* 96 no. 4 (March 2010): 1001-1026.

⁴³ Rayford W. Logan. *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (1954; repr., New York: Collier Books, 1965). For an overview of the literature on southern racial segregation see: Raymond Gavins. "Literature on Jim Crow" in *The Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* (January 2004): 13-16. See also C. Vann Woodward. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* 4th ed. (1955; New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) and Howard Rabinowitz *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

cite the “redeemed” southern states as the epicenter of racial violence and segregation. While Boston had less racially motivated violence than other parts of the country, the city was not without its legacy of racial discrimination and intolerance.⁴⁴ As W. E. B. Du Bois recognized, “In New York and Philadelphia the Negro is too largely hampered by race prejudice to make any headway, but he has made some. In Boston, the atmosphere has been more liberal, but by no means unbiased.”⁴⁵ This assertion is further echoed by historian Eric Foner when he writes that, “despite the rapid toppling of traditional racial barriers, the North’s racial reconstruction proved in many respects less far reaching than the South’s.”⁴⁶

While black Bostonians did make significant gains within the city and the state, they continued to confront racial prejudice despite laws to the contrary. For example businesses, although threatened with fines, continued to restrict black patronage, resulting in continued petitions to the state government. During the last decades of the nineteenth century the African American community did significant work to alleviate local financial and social pains caused by racial discrimination. This dissertation seeks to broaden the lens of late nineteenth century race relations and to propose a frame that moves beyond the blanket label of ‘Jim Crow’ and a focus on southern life, through accounting for the experience of racism across regions.

The place of party politics in African American political culture changed over the course of the late nineteenth century. As African Americans emerged from the Civil War,

⁴⁴ Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow*, 5.

⁴⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois. “The Black North: A Social Study, Boston” *The New York Times*, December 8, 1901.

⁴⁶ Eric Foner. *Reconstruction*, 471.

partisan affiliation was a central part of black Bostonians' public political identity. Claims for rights and calls for state action were often framed in terms of party membership. As it became clear by the 1870s that the Republican Party was moving away from the endorsement of black rights, black Bostonians mobilized to hold the party accountable to its ideological origins. They hoped that by declaring their political loyalties to other parties, the Republican Party would renew its early calls for universal citizenship and federally protected equality. Further, they hoped that support for Democrats would yield more moderate positions from that party. Through petitions for patronage at both local and national levels African Americans sought government positions as public displays of political inclusion. The goal of appointed offices went beyond self interest. Office holding was expected to give African Americans foothold in a government from which they might be less easily displaced. Participating in party networks of patronage was a powerful symbol of black political worth and inclusion in American democracy that could be mobilized to further the advancement of a civil rights agenda that transcended individual advancement

By the 1890s, hopes of returning the Republican Party to its ideological origins grounded in equal rights and federal intervention in race relations were met with increased obstacles. The entrenchment of white supremacy in the Democratic Party made it clear that black loyalty to the party was no longer a viable option. By the final decades of the nineteenth century black Bostonians were isolated politically. Leaders reached out to Irish immigrants and white women for allies, but their isolation only increased as these groups also distanced themselves from the cause of black equality. The redistricting of Boston in 1895 ended a decades-long tradition of African American representation in the

Massachusetts General Court. With this, the influence of black interests in state government came to an end.

By the end of the century, black Bostonians had reasons to reject affiliation with both the Republican and the Democratic parties. Whereas in the 1880s African American independents considered themselves Republicans who were merely voting Democratic, by the turn of the twentieth century partisan identity was replaced by a strong sense of racial nationalism. Calls for federal action to end lynching fell on deaf ears leading black Bostonians to look to themselves and not political parties for a remedy. With party politics a less viable strategy, black Bostonians turned to race-based associations like the Niagara Movement and later the NAACP for political action.

Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

This dissertation is a political history of African American Bostonians during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age. In American political history, the study of this period notably recognizes the transformation of the American political party system and the development of modern liberalism.⁴⁷ In this project I examine how black Bostonians, rather than being subjected to national political trends, interpreted and were informed by these political transformations. Further, black activists developed a politics that sought continued governmental involvement, even as white liberal leaders rejected the expansion of state interference in civil rights protections. This project is informed by important

⁴⁷ Dobson, *Politics in the Gilded Age*; McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955); Anthony Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1984); John G Sproat, *"The Best Men": Liberal Reformers in the Gilded Age: With a New Preface*, Phoenix ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

conceptualizations of American electoral politics and political history. J. Mills Thornton argues, in his study of southern municipal politics of the middle twentieth century, that an understanding of municipal politics is central to the analysis of African American urban activism. According to Thornton, the political climate of a city demonstrated to black residents the limits upon or opportunities for social change. “The community’s political culture created, for residents of both races,” asserts Thornton, “the limits in their minds of what seemed possible.”⁴⁸ Thornton argues that a historic moment of political transition was necessary to overcome the ‘psychological inertia’ generated by the assumption that the social and political situation of a community could not be changed. Cities where the political power structure seemed more vulnerable, argues Thornton, tended to produce greater large scale activism.

This understanding of the relationship between political power and place applies to nineteenth century Boston in ways that illuminate the role of municipal politics in African American political discourse and activism. For men and women in Boston, many major goals of African American activism had been achieved. African American men had received the right to vote, school segregation had been outlawed, and by the 1880s there were penalties for any state licensed business that discriminated based on race.

Thornton’s ideas help us to understand the powerful result of the successful petitions proposed by black Bostonians in the 1860s and 1870s. For these residents, the political successes gained on a local scale inspired and gave hope to a broad movement. In this way, the progress made within the boundaries of the city provided black Bostonians with

⁴⁸ J. Mills Thornton. *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2002), 12.

the psychological momentum to confront inequalities in other parts of the nation and helped to galvanize an uncompromising commitment to civil rights activism.

This dissertation also explores the interplay between the local and the national spheres of African American politics. Black Bostonians did much to shape the national discourse of racial politics and their observations of what was happening at the national level affected their decisions within Boston. By looking at the participation of black Bostonians in national debates this dissertation explains how black political culture not only traveled from the local to the national, but how there was significant interplay between these two spheres.

Further, this study demonstrates how Boston can be understood to fit into a network of northern cities which were in constant communication. Black men and women from Boston traveled back and forth to other cities and information traveled constantly via the black and mainstream press. From this network, black Bostonians were able to build support for their causes and coalesce their local organizations into national movements.

Another way that this project understands African American political culture is through the theoretical lens of the public sphere. The concept of the public sphere was introduced most notably by Jürgen Habermas in his 1964 study, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*.⁴⁹ Habermas is particularly concerned with the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere,

⁴⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Peter Hohendahl and Patricia Russian, "Jürgen Habermas: 'The Public Sphere' (1964)," *New German Critique*, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 45-48; Jürgen Habermas, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)," *New German Critique*, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 49-55.

which developed in the late eighteenth century coffee shops of newly capitalist industrial Europe. It was here that clubs of ‘private citizens’ met and developed a discourse in opposition to the ‘public’ authority of the state. “The bourgeois public sphere,” according to Habermas, “may be concerned above all as the sphere of private people coming together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves.”⁵⁰ The bourgeois public sphere, through the use of literary publications, such as newspapers, was united and attempted to regulate civil society. In particular, the public sphere exerted authority as the mediator between society and the state, in which, “a public body...as citizens transmit the needs of bourgeois society to the state, in order, ideally, to transform political into ‘rational’ authority within the medium of the public sphere.”⁵¹ For Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere manifested public opinion as a rational opposition to political authority.

Although Habermas’s original work helped conceptualize the contours of modern politics, recent scholars have pushed his ideas to expand our understanding. In particular, Nancy Fraser is critical of Habermas’s use of the liberal bourgeois public sphere as his model. “The problem,” Fraser explains, “is not only that Habermas idealizes the liberal public sphere, but also that he fails to examine other, nonliberal, non bourgeois, competing public spheres.”⁵² Fraser identifies the importance of *subaltern counterpublics*, which provide a collective voice for members of society excluded from the official public sphere. Within these counterpublics, members of a subordinate social

⁵⁰ Habermas. *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*, 27.

⁵¹ Habermas et al, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964),” 53.

⁵² Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” In *Habermas and the Public Sphere* ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 115.

group, although in part separated from mainstream society, circulate counterdiscourses and publicize their discourse to widening arenas. According to Fraser counterpublics have a dual character; “On one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment,” she explains, “on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.”⁵³ In this way subaltern counterpublics can partly offset the ‘participatory privileges’ enjoyed by members of dominant social groups.

Recently scholars have used Habermas’s theory of the public sphere to understand African American political culture. This recent work has been especially concerned with how, like Nancy Fraser, to apply Habermas’s model to groups beyond the liberal bourgeois public. In the 1995 collection of essays on the black public sphere, scholars like Thomas C. Holt and Elsa Barkley Brown contended with the dynamics of Habermas’s theory within the context of African American history.⁵⁴ As Holt argues, “Our appreciation for the black public sphere must begin with a recognition that separate institutional life, media, and discourse have long characterized African American experience.”⁵⁵ The components of the African American public sphere, such as churches, mutual aid societies, newspapers, and political rallies, Holt argues, “have always existed in an uneasy and complex relationship with the white majority and the democratic community.”⁵⁶ The struggles over the meanings and values of democratic ideology, Holt

⁵³ Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 124.

⁵⁴ The Black Public Sphere Collective, *The Black Public Sphere* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁵⁵ Thomas C. Holt. “Afterword: Mapping the Black Public Sphere.” In Black Public Sphere Collective. *The Black Public Sphere*, 326-27.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 327.

continues, helped form the separate black public sphere, even as they kept both spheres intrinsically bound.

Like Thomas Holt, Elsa Barkley Brown has persuasively applied Habermas's ideas to the context of late nineteenth century black politics. Brown's work on the African American public sphere is helpful for understanding not only the contours of black political discourse, but also the importance of the inclusion of women in black political culture. Working in the context of post-Civil War Richmond, Brown suggests that even formal versions of political concerns voiced by official spokespersons were, "the product of a fairly egalitarian discourse and, therefore, represented the conditions of ...differing classes, ages, and genders."⁵⁷ According to Brown, within the construction of the African American public sphere, the types of discourse are varied and often beyond the formal or traditional forms of political engagement. Therefore, Brown argues, "By the very nature of their participation...Afro-Richmonders challenged liberal bourgeois notions of rational discourse."⁵⁸ African Americans in Richmond operated what Brown refers to both as an internal arena, reflected in parades, rallies, mass meetings, etc., and an external arena, defined by participation in electoral politics.⁵⁹ Through the discourse generated between these two arenas, African Americans were able to generate and sustain a political opposition to the emerging exclusions of Jim Crow. This project keeps at the forefront the interaction between the formal and informal arenas of public culture and

⁵⁷ Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere," 114. For a recent history which incorporates the understanding of the black public sphere along with a gender analysis see: Jones, *All Bound Up Together*.

⁵⁸ Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere," 114.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

political discourse, and uses the concept of the public sphere to understand African American political culture in Boston.

Literature Review

This dissertation intersects and is in conversation with a variety of historical subfields. In particular, it engages with and responds to the concerns of US political history, the history of African American political culture, urban history, and the history of American race relations.

This dissertation speaks to the history of late nineteenth century northern politics and explores how African Americans reacted to and created their own definitions of national political trends. In 1988, Eric Foner attempted to synthesize and revise over a century of scholarship on the Reconstruction Era. In *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution: 1863-1877* he focuses on five major themes. First, Foner argues for the centrality of the African American experience in the history of Reconstruction. For Foner, black men and women were active agents of change in the social and political transformations of the era. Second, he traces the way that society as a whole was remade as he pays close attention to local variations. Third, he argues that the post-war period saw an evolution of race relations and the interconnections between race and class. Foner also recognizes that reconstruction is a national story which gave rise to an increasingly activist state with an expanded authority and a commitment to the ideals of national citizenship. Finally, he describes how the period brought about massive changes in the economy and class structure of northern states. Foner concludes his comprehensive

discussion by arguing that the period of reconstruction was the beginning of a long term adjustment to a society without the institution of enslaved labor.⁶⁰

In his broad study Eric Foner pays particular attention to the changes in politics in the northern states. He recognizes that this period brought about massive changes in the economic and political culture of the North. As he discusses the rise of the Republican party supremacy, he examines the attempts to improve the lives of the region's African American population. However, despite the end of many traditional racial barriers, Foner argues that in many ways racial reconstruction in the North was less penetrating than in the South and that, "the bulk of the North's black population remained trapped in urban poverty."⁶¹ Further he suggests that African American politicians in the North lacked the militancy of leaders in the south and thus failed to find a viable strategy for addressing the economic plight of their communities. The plight of northern African Americans was made worse, Foner argues, by the rise of liberal reformers. Foner argues that liberal reformers "insisted...that with the principle of equal rights secured, the [Republican] party should move onto the 'living issues' of the gilded age."⁶² In this way, liberal reformers saw the successes of Reconstruction to be limited and not a precedent for guaranteed protection from the federal government

Other historians have more directly confronted the changes in gilded age politics and the emergence of liberal reformers. These works continue to examine Foner's questions by looking at the relationship between the individual and the state and the

⁶⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, xvii-xxv.

⁶¹ Ibid., 472.

⁶² Ibid, 497.

transformation of postbellum politics.⁶³ In many ways these new works have also expanded the framework of Foner's work to look at multiple regions and have shown the changes that persisted past the 1870s. Indeed as Heather Cox Richardson describes, "What we now know as 'reconstruction' is being redefined as the Era of Citizenship, when Americans defined who would be citizens and what citizenship meant."⁶⁴

Richardson, in *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901*, examines the northern abandonment of Reconstruction and opposition to state intervention on behalf of African Americans. Rejecting an argument that the retreat from Reconstruction was grounded solely in racism, Richardson argues that a strict free labor ideology drove northern reformers to oppose any action which appeared to give unfair advantage to African Americans. As she argues, "northern anxiety about expanding government in the hands of those unwilling to work, who would enact welfare-type legislation to confiscate the property of the true workers in America, fed the northern obsession with strikers, the spoils system, the growing government, corruption, and communism."⁶⁵ Although Richardson primarily focuses on the effects of the retreat from Reconstruction on the South, as this project shows, black men and women in Boston were also vulnerable to these changes in political will and policy. Over the course of the late nineteenth century, black Bostonian calls for an expanded activist

⁶³ See: Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Dobson, *Politics in the Gilded Age*; McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*.

⁶⁴ Heather Cox Richardson. "North and West of Reconstruction: Studies in Political Economy," in *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States*, Thomas J. Brown, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 69.

⁶⁵ Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), xiv.

state and protection of civil rights were rebuffed with increasing intensity by both Democrats and former Republican allies.

Richardson acknowledges the willingness of some African Americans to abandon the Republican Party in favor of independent political positions. “So long as African-Americans were irrevocably in the Republican camp,” she explains, “southern Democrats had every reason to suppress their vote. If the black vote were split, though, both parties would work to attract the best elements of that population.”⁶⁶ This was the core hope of many black independents. By remaining a solid voting bloc for Republicans, African Americans lacked the electoral leverage to force either party to support legislation in their interest. While Richardson raises an important discussion of independent politics, she focuses most of her discussion, with the exception of a brief discussion of T. Thomas Fortune, on black voters in the South. Further, she does not fully discuss the local context out of which these ideas emerge; an important discussion to understand the commitment of black activists to partisan independence.

A significant site of the contestation over free labor ideology in the North was urban politics.⁶⁷ Recently, historians have reexamined the late nineteenth century in the context of the growth of urban, especially white ethnic, political machines.⁶⁸ Boston,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 197.

⁶⁷ For recent work that attempts to frame Reconstruction Era debates in urban spaces, see: Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle Over Equality in Washington, D.C* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); David Quigley, *Second Founding: New York City, Reconstruction and the Making of American Democracy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004). See also Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball, “Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond,” *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 3 (March 1995): 296.

⁶⁸ Two important review essays reappraise the historiography of machine and ethnic politics, see Thomas R. Pegram, “Who’s the Boss?: Revisiting the History of American Urban Rule,” *Journal of Urban History* 28 No. 6 (Sept. 2002): 821-835; David P. Thelen, “Urban Politics: Beyond Bosses and Reformers,” *Reviews in American History* 7, No. 3 (Sept. 1979): 406-412.

which saw an explosion of white ethnic political power in the late nineteenth century is a likely area of study. James Connolly, in *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston, 1900-1925*, challenges previous held assumptions of machine politics rooted in inter-ethnic antagonism.⁶⁹ He details the sophisticated ways in which the relationship between institutional change and public discourse shaped urban social relations.⁷⁰ As Connolly describes, “politics shaped society as much as society shaped politics.”⁷¹ Rather than directed from a top down ‘machine’ urban politics was shaped by the political action of participants on the ground level. In particular, Connolly shows the important interplay between city-wide and ward-based politics.

While Connolly does not focus on African Americans, his frame of analysis provides an important model. His focus on ward level politics and organizations help understand how African Americans, despite their small relative population could be a significant force in urban politics. Rather than seeking the benevolence of outside white political machines, Boston’s black community sought to wield its electoral strength to shape its own urban political destiny. By holding concentrated numerical strength in a particular ward black Bostonians could elect black members to the state legislature and city council. Further, they often organized precinct and ward committees outside of the

⁶⁹ James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston, 1900-1925* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). For other important studies of Boston politics during this period, see O’Connor, *The Boston Irish*; Geoffrey Blodgett, “Yankee Leadership in a Divided City, 1860-1910” in Ronald P Formisano and Constance K Burns, eds., *Boston, 1700-1980: The Evolution of Urban Politics* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1984), 87-110; Paul Kleppner, “From Party to Factions: The Dissolution of Boston’s Majority Party, 1876-1908,” in *Ibid.*, 111-132.

⁷⁰ Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, 2.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

official white political party institutions. By directing black voters at a ward level, African American political leaders could force recognition city wide.

In addition to his focus on ward level politics, Connolly's argument for the centrality of partisan politics in the late nineteenth century helps understand African American debates around party. Focusing on Irish residents, Connolly characterizes Boston in the late nineteenth century as a period when "Bostonians most often entered the public arena as partisans rather than ethnic antagonists...partisanship was a vocabulary of public identity in and of itself."⁷² Party affiliation allowed Irish voters to overcome divisions with non-Irish white voters and form important coalitions. As this study shows, this also applied to the formation of alliances between Irish and African American voters. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, as party loyalty eroded so too did perceptions of inter-ethnic harmony.⁷³ For African Americans too, the end of the nineteenth century saw a change in party identity. While in the 1870s and 1880s, some black Bostonians viewed party affiliation as their public political identity, by the end of the century, race replaced party. For black independents, racial progress became paramount and loyalty to party diminished in importance. By the turn of the twentieth century, they were proudly African Americans first and foremost.

Post-Civil War African American Politics

Recently historians have begun to look closely at the development and function of African American politics and political culture. Most of the important works in this area

⁷² Ibid., 16.

⁷³ Ibid, 38. This argument for the demise of party affiliation is supported by Michael E McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*.

are discussions in the context of the postbellum south. However, despite their regional specificity, they contain insights that are valuable to this project. One of the most influential of these recent works is Steven Hahn's *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration*.⁷⁴ Hahn argues that the making and remaking of a distinctive African American politics in the last decades of the nineteenth century influenced the origins of popular black nationalism and the civil rights movement of the twentieth century. Hahn's book is expansive in its scope. He discusses how nationalist black politics of the twentieth century was rooted in the experience of southern slavery and that traditions of black politics were forged while in bondage. "African Americans in the rural south," Hahn asserts, "contributed to the making of a new political nation while they made themselves into a new people."⁷⁵ Hahn privileges a rural and grassroots model in his discussion of the foundation of African American political culture. According to Hahn, "Radical Reconstruction did see remarkable political inversions on the local and state levels...but it also proved to be a very painful lesson in the nature and boundaries of American democracy."⁷⁶ With the growth of Jim Crow policies and violent counterattack, many African American southerners migrated northward as they "nourished the materials of African American popular politics." Another significant contribution of Hahn's work is his recognition that, "African Americans were overwhelmingly workers." This assertion recognizes that in

⁷⁴ Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 8.

addition to racial restrictions, African Americans were also subject to the pressures put upon laboring classes in the late nineteenth century.

This dissertation advocates a discussion of political culture which sees the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century as a period of national African American political awakening. This project complicates Hahn's vision by arguing for the importance of not only northern but also urban black politics. It explains that the political struggles of African American men and women during this period should be understood as happening across regions. African Americans in Boston were informed by and communicated with leaders in the southern states. In this way we can begin to see the end of the nineteenth century as a period of African American political development which rejects a specific regional epicenter.

Glenda Gilmore demonstrates expanded understandings of African American politics by using gender as a category of analysis. Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, serves as an important model for using gender as a central frame and maintaining national relevance within a history of a specific place.⁷⁷ Gilmore argues that the racial repression at the beginning of the twentieth century did not institutionalize prevailing trends, but rather totally reordered a society that was not predestined for Jim Crow. Additionally, she recognizes that African American opposition to white supremacy was more complex than traditionally thought. For Gilmore centering gender reveals, "a black political milieu

⁷⁷ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

infinitely more varied than the binary construction of black resistance around the oppositional poles of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B Du Bois.”⁷⁸

By using the lens of gender to understand power dynamics in North Carolina, Gilmore exposes the ways in which conceptions of race and gender, did not solely limit African American mobility, but may have opened up spaces for women to navigate politically. For example, Gilmore argues that following the disenfranchisement of black men, African American women became diplomats to the white community and built social service and civic structures that wrested some recognition and services from the progressive welfare state. “As long as they could vote,” Gilmore argues, “it was black men who most often brokered official state power and made interracial political contacts. After disenfranchisement, however, the political culture black women had created...furnished both an ideological basis and an organizational structure from which black women could take on those tasks.”⁷⁹ During this later period, African American women petitioned for and received assistance from the new progressive state and sometimes worked alongside white reformers in community improvement projects. Finally, with the arrival of the female franchise, black women surged to the polls and forced the white supremacist power structure to move beyond physical violence to limit black electoral access.

Glenda Gilmore’s understanding of the place of gender in an understanding of African American politics raises important questions about the role of women like Pauline Hopkins and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, and organizations like the Women’s Era

⁷⁸ Ibid., xx.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 147-48.

club in the formation of black Bostonian political culture. By demonstrating the connection between female black associational culture and electoral politics, Gilmore also serves as a model for understanding the potentially rich relationship between women's political life and the male dominated realm of electoral politics. Finally, Gilmore's text is an ideal example of a study which examines a local community in the context of a national discussion. Gilmore shows how, through connections to national associations and the press, black North Carolinians worked within a national context even as they defined unique local strategies. The narrative of this project is similar as it shows how local activism of black Bostonians inspired a political culture that extended beyond the borders of the city.

For the men and women in Glenda Gilmore's narrative, a politics of uplift and respectability was central to their activism. Kevin Gaines, in *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, explores the ideology of uplift in depth with the goal of gaining a better understanding of twentieth century racial liberalism.⁸⁰ Gaines focuses closely on self-help ideologies among African American elites and recognizes the tensions that they expose between definitions of race and class. "A sustained reflection on [black elites'] contradictory position as both an aspiring social class and a racially subordinate caste," Gaines suggests, "...offers a profound understanding of the historical nexus of race, class, national and sectional politics, and black leadership in our society."⁸¹ The complications raised by the intersection of these categories often caused bitter tensions and debate around the strategies of racial

⁸⁰ Kevin K. Gaines. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁸¹ Ibid., xiv.

advancement. One of the more contentious points of black uplift ideology was the recognized stratification of classes within the African American community. As Gaines explains, “Racial uplift ideals were offered as a form of cultural politics...elite blacks believed they were replacing the racist notion of fixed biological racial differences with an evolutionary view of cultural assimilation.”⁸² For elite African Americans, the construction of class strata within the black community would, they hoped, allow for racial integration along class lines.⁸³

African American men and women in Boston were strong believers in uplift ideology. Many of these citizens built on antebellum notions of respectability as they advocated a temperate, moral, and educated lifestyle. Understanding Kevin Gaines’s arguments about constructions of racial liberalism helps us understand why it was so important that black Bostonians advocate so strongly for the removal of racial designations from the tax and voting rolls, and for protections against discrimination in state licensed businesses. Further, ideas of racial uplift and respectability advocated by African American women’s associations expose layers of class distinction that were central to the motives and methods of black political activism.

⁸² Ibid., 3.

⁸³ For another key discussion of the politics of respectability and uplift in the twentieth century see: Victoria W Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Black Independent Politics

Historians like Steven Hahn have recognized the significance of looking at African American politics beyond the Republican Party.⁸⁴ Hahn's is one of several works which address African American support of political independence or third party affiliations. However, these works focus on southern communities and generally focus on black inclusion in white led efforts.⁸⁵ Despite the predominance of work on the South, some scholars, like Heather Cox Richardson, have examined black independent politics generally or in northern states. Work by others like Patricia Gurin, Shirley Hatchett, and James Jackson addresses the history of black expectations of political parties and the often crushing disappointments. As they argue in *Hope and Independence: Black Response to Electoral and Party Politics*, "hope and betrayal provide the persisting context in which black politics take place; perseverance and independence are the dominant characteristics."⁸⁶ Other historians have examined independent politics through the lives of significant advocates, such as T. Thomas Fortune and Archibald Grimké.⁸⁷ While the work of previous scholars has pushed our understandings of black independent

⁸⁴ Hahn, "Chapter 8: Of Ballots and Biracialism" in *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 364-411; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890*, 2nd ed. (1983, repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁸⁵ See Omar H. Ali, *In the Balance of Power: Independent Black Politics and Third-Party Movements in the United States* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008). The only chapter in Ali's book that focuses on the late nineteenth century discusses black populism. See also Jane Elizabeth Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: the Politics of Race in Post-emancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁸⁶ Patricia Gurin, Shirley Hatchett, and James S. Jackson, *Hope and Independence: Black's Response to Electoral and Party Politics*. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989), 7. Gurin et al. briefly mention independent politics in the post-Civil War North, see *Ibid.*, 22-30. See also Kathryn Flewellen, "The National Black Independent Political Party: Will History Repeat?" *Freedomways* (Second Quarter 1981): 93-105.

⁸⁷ Thornbrough, *T. Thomas Fortune*; Bruce, *Archibald Grimké*.

politics much work remains in understanding the local context of these movements and how they relate to larger trends in American politics.⁸⁸

Race Relations and the rise of Jim Crow

This dissertation contributes to the history of American race relations and shows how a history of Jim Crow segregation can be understood from the perspective of black Bostonians. One of the earliest works to look critically at the evolution of Jim Crow legislation was C. Vann Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*.⁸⁹ Woodward argues that Jim Crow segregation was a product of a specific series of events and was not inherent in southern history. Further, he argues that, "one of the strangest things about the career of Jim Crow was that the system was born in the North and reached an advanced age before moving to the South in force."⁹⁰ Inspired by Leon Litwack's *North of Slavery*, Woodward suggests that Jim Crow style segregation had its origins in the ways in which Northern cities, like Boston, limited the mobility of and economic opportunity for African Americans. Rather than the South's adopting a policy of Jim Crow immediately following the end of Reconstruction, Woodward argues that there were several alternatives proposed which, "rejected the doctrines of extreme racism and...were

⁸⁸ Recently several dissertations have begun to explore northern black independent politics in greater detail, see Thomas Alvarez, "The Place Between: The New York Independent Colored Movement and The Democratic Party, 1883-1905" (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 2007); Shawn Leigh Alexander, "'We All Know Our Rights and Have the Courage to Defend Them': The Spirit of Agitation in the Age of Accommodation, 1883-1909" (PhD Diss., University of Massachusetts, 2004). For an earlier discussion on independent politics in New York, see Michael Goldstein, "Preface to the Rise of Booker T. Washington: A View from New York City of the Demise of Independent Black Politics, 1889-1902." *Journal of Negro History* 62, no. 1 (January 1977): 81-99.

⁸⁹ Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

indigenously and thoroughly southern in origin.”⁹¹ The conservative, populist, and liberal alternatives, although not totally free from interracial conflict were considerably milder than the strict racial codes of the early twentieth century. Jim Crow segregation came to southern states, not as a sudden conversion to extreme racism, but rather, Woodward argues, as a result of a relaxation of opposition. It was only following the acquiescence of northern liberalism, the decline of southern conservatism, and the imperial treatment of people of color abroad that the fully formed version of Jim Crow became manifest.⁹²

Woodward’s understanding of Jim Crow segregation as both historically contingent and with roots in the northern states suggests the need for further exploration of race relations across regions during the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction eras. This dissertation demonstrates the prevalence of racial discrimination within Boston and shows how black Bostonians worked to protect their civil liberties. Understanding Jim Crow as a southern centered phenomenon does not recognize the national complexities of American racial oppression. The activism of black leaders in Boston, was not only a response to crises in southern states, but was also a claim for rights and citizenship in Massachusetts. The racial discrimination in Boston influenced African Americans’ models of uplift ideology and their political strategies both locally and nationally.

Several decades following the publication of *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, Howard Rabinowitz argued that segregation was a liberal response to the exclusion of African Americans from facilities and institutions.⁹³ In *Race Relations in the Urban*

⁹¹ Ibid., 45.

⁹² Ibid., 69.

⁹³ Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*.

South, 1865-1890, Rabinowitz argues that Republican reformers saw segregation as an improvement and that the ‘separate but equal’ policy became a more attainable goal for reformers than integration. Rabinowitz recognized that previous urban histories had neglected the South and that histories of Reconstruction had largely ignored urban areas in favor of discussions of grassroots politics in rural areas. He further argues that although Reconstruction witnessed the commonly acknowledged enfranchisement of African Americans, it was not characterized by integration. Rather, in seeking to discipline black citizens, white southerners resorted early on to piecemeal disenfranchisement in the political sphere and to de jure and de facto segregation in the social arena.⁹⁴

Unlike Woodward, who sees the rise of Jim Crow as a result of a decline in alternatives, Rabinowitz understands state mandated segregation as a reaction to the political activism of African American residents in the 1890s. Like Gaines and Gilmore, Rabinowitz recognizes the diversity within the southern urban black communities and suggests that at times internal conflict limited racial opposition to segregation.⁹⁵ He recognizes that a new generation of southern African Americans tested the boundaries of segregation, refused to abide by the old social codes, and increasingly looked towards violence as a means of self defense when necessary. In particular, Rabinowitz demonstrates how, though partially empowered by political offices, southern African American leaders were outspoken against the Republican Party on economic issues. “While the mass of blacks remained deeply committed to the Republican Party,”

⁹⁴ Ibid., xv.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 226.

Rabinowitz shows that, “on occasion even the most loyal party members considered the merits of endorsing Independent or even Democratic candidates.”⁹⁶

This recognition of political diversity complicates understandings of African Americans as wholly loyal to the Republican platform. It was in a battle between multiple parties for African American support that disenfranchisement was supported as a viable option. For many white political leaders the electoral power of the African American community was the primary problem. “Hence,” as Rabinowitz argues, “at the core was not the issue of how the Negroes voted but the fact that they could vote...as a disquieting force in Southern politics, whites believed blacks had to be disciplined.”⁹⁷ Based on this understanding, Jim Crow segregation is viewed as a regulation of southern race relations and a reaction to the increased political mobilization of African American communities.

Rabinowitz’s work provides an excellent model for how to research and write a history of urban race relations. Through his careful analysis of uses of urban space and institutions, he is able to show how city life shaped the political style of black residents. Further, by looking closely at the forces at play in municipal areas he is able to present a local vision of larger issues of Reconstruction’s history. This dissertation uses the social, cultural, and political life of Boston’s African American community to make larger claims about Gilded Age American politics. Additionally, Rabinowitz’s discussion of the political diversity and occasional opposition to the Republican Party provides inspiration for a way to discuss the sometimes divergent loyalties among black Bostonians. This dissertation explains that the partial dissatisfaction with the Republican Party and the

⁹⁶ Ibid., 282.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 328.

support of Democratic candidates like Benjamin Butler represents, not only the political autonomy of Boston's black residents, but also a cross regional recognition of the waning commitment of Republicans to the protection of African American civil and economic rights.

Post-Civil War Northern African American Life and Politics

Recently historians have expanded the study of African American political life outside of the South. Leslie Schwalm, Lisa Materson, Janette Greenwood, and Mark Schneider offer significant contributions to the growing.⁹⁸ Schwalm's study, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest*, focuses on the growth and development of black communities in Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Examining the consequences of the end of slavery on these areas, Schwalm examines how black men and women confronted obstacles to political inclusion and civil rights. Schwalm argues, "African Americans forced their white neighbors to consider the meaning of black freedom and its relationship to citizenship."⁹⁹ Schwalm briefly raises the discussion of black debates over partisan affiliation acknowledging that by the 1880s, "African Americans in the upper Midwest and black voters across the North more openly challenged their second-class status in the Republican Party."¹⁰⁰ While Schwalm raises

⁹⁸ Until recently the best work on black life in the post-war North was: Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., "The North and the Negro, 1865-1900: A Study in Race Discrimination" (Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 1954); see also two other articles by Fishel: Leslie H. Fishel, "Northern Prejudice and Negro Suffrage 1865-1870," *The Journal of Negro History* 39, no. 1 (January 1954): 8-26; Leslie Fishel, "The Negro in Northern Politics, 1870-1900," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42, no. 3 (December 1955): 466-489. For an earlier discussion on black life in Boston, see Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*.

⁹⁹ Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 175.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 190-193.

important ideas about black electoral participation, this is addressed more fully by Lisa Materson.

Materson, in *For the Freedom of Her Race: Black Women and Electoral Politics in Illinois, 1877-1932*, examines the influential role African American women played in elections at the end of the nineteenth century. Materson argues that black women, many who were recent migrants from the states of the former Confederacy, served as ‘proxy voters’ for disenfranchised southern voters.¹⁰¹ In particular, first in school elections and later as voters in general elections, women pressed the Republican Party to endorse platform protecting black civil rights. “In doing so,” Materson argues, “African American women kept alive a very distinct strain of Republican Party ideology that favored using federal power to protect black citizenship rights...[which] had fallen out of favor with most white supporters by the close of the nineteenth century.”¹⁰² While most of the women Materson focuses on endorsed the Republican Party, she does discuss calls for political independence by women like Fannie Barrier Williams.¹⁰³

Like Materson, Greenwood, focuses on the lives of southern migrants to the North. In *First Fruits of Freedom: The Migration of Former Slaves and Their Search for Equality in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1862-1900* Greenwood examines how southern black migrants built communities in the North, while retaining social and cultural connections to their southern enslaved past.¹⁰⁴ As Greenwood argues, her study “reveals not only the ways that southern migrants shaped and transformed New England but also

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰² Ibid., 8.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 50-52.

¹⁰⁴ Greenwood, *First Fruits of Freedom*, 8.

that the meaning of freedom in post-Civil War America proved to be highly contested, even in ‘free New England.’”¹⁰⁵ Greenwood discusses the debates over black partisanship in the 1890 and briefly mentions the impact of Bostonian independents on the Worcester community.¹⁰⁶

While Greenwood’s study of Worcester is the most recent study of black post-Civil War politics in Massachusetts, Mark Schneider’s *Boston Confronts Jim Crow, 1890-1920* examines the legacies of anti-slavery in the opposition to southern white supremacy by both black and white activists in the city. Beginning with a discussion of Bostonians’ reactions to the 1890 federal elections bill and concluding with a discussion of the place of Boston activists in the NAACP, Schneider argues the significance of Boston’s role in fighting racial oppression and the divisions among activists in the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. “Within this context,” Schneider explains, “various small and sometimes overlapping groups of activists, influenced by the earlier humanitarian traditions, fought a defensive battle to preserve the gains registered by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.”¹⁰⁷ Schneider’s study places Boston in the national debates over the rise of Jim Crow and shows the significance of its resident in fighting the oppression of African Americans. This project expands on Schneider’s work by showing the interplay between local politics and national activism and demonstrates how African American’s reactions to the rising tide of national racism manifested in their debates over party affiliation.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 156-169. Greenwood discusses the black opposition to McKinley and a 1900 visit of Clifford Plummer, “a black Democrat from Boston.” Ibid., 162.

¹⁰⁷ Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow: 1890-1920*, 22.

Chapter Descriptions

In chapter one, I describe how African Americans in Boston established themselves as a force in urban politics and reacted to the major policy decisions of Reconstruction. In particular, I focus on opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment by the first black members of the General Court and debates over political party loyalty in the 1872 presidential election. I argue that from the end of the Civil War, African Americans were far from universal Republican loyalists, and instead were sensitive to the changing political terrain and were often critics of policy decisions made for political expediency at the expense of African American civil rights.

The second chapter examines the debates over party politics among African Americans in Boston immediately following the end of Reconstruction. In particular, I focus on Benjamin Butler's campaign and eventual election as Massachusetts's first post-war Democratic governor in 1883. In this chapter, I argue that by rejecting the wholesale support of a particular political party, black independents declared their political destiny as standing apart from traditional political institutions. Black voters demanded the respect and recognition of political parties as prerequisites for their support and imagined themselves, not as guests or lesser members of a political system, but as fully qualified citizens endowed with the authority to shape ideas and policy according to their own notions of American politics.

In chapter three, I describe the formation of politically independent organizations during the campaign and eventual election of Grover Cleveland as President of the United States in 1884. I also examine the pursuit of presidential appointments by African Americans in Boston such as George T. Downing and James Monroe Trotter. This

chapter asserts the importance of patronage positions for African Americans. During the debates over Trotter's appointment to replace Frederick Douglass as Recorder of Deeds for Washington, D. C., Trotter and the Boston community were placed at the center of national political debates about race. African American politicians hoped that the political appointments of a few men would assist the uplift of the entire race. The failure and difficulty in gaining appointments, however, revealed that African American candidates were still hampered by the national conditions of race relations, despite local personal and community success in reputation or education.

In the fourth chapter, I discuss African American resistance to discrimination in Boston during the 1860s-1880s. In particular, I focus on the opposition to discrimination in places of public accommodation and leisure. By examining local struggles for civil rights, I argue that black Bostonians employed a strategy based upon calls for state intervention and grounded in a belief that only through state action would the civil and political rights of African Americans be protected. These calls for state protection and intervention had deep implications for how black Bostonians defined themselves in relation to the state and as citizens.

In chapter five, I examine the relationship between African American and Irish political leaders during the 1880s. In their sympathy for the cause of Irish independence and their appeals for Irish support of African American civil rights struggles, black Bostonians united calls for local, state, and national civil rights protection with broader transnational independence movements. This chapter illustrates how black Bostonians were involved in the machine politics of the period and used the support for Irish and Democratic candidates as leverage against Republican leadership. The chapter concludes

with a discussion of black and Irish support of the construction of a monument to Crispus Attucks and the other victims of the 1770 Boston Massacre. In this way, both African Americans and Irish immigrants laid claim not only to a historic resistance to oppression, but also to participation in the founding events of the United States.

In chapter six, I discuss African American women's activism during the 1890s. In particular, I examine the activism of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, the Women's Era Club, and Pauline Hopkins's critique of political partisanship in her novel *Contending Forces*. I argue that black women in Boston combined a politics based on ideologies of respectability with a pointed critique of partisan affiliation. This chapter demonstrates that African American women relied upon and used print culture to reach a broad audience and made explicit arguments advocating racial solidarity over personal ambition and party loyalty.

The final chapter focuses on the political activity of the Colored National League in the 1890s. In particular, I analyze the organized resistance to southern lynching and the ways in which the League called for political independence as a strategy to influence the positions of national parties. I also discuss Southern reactions to Boston activism. As black Bostonians came into conflict with white activists, I argue in this chapter that they were staking out political terrain not only separate from partisan organizations but increasingly race based. By the turn of the century black independents increasingly put race over party affiliation as their public political identity. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Edwin Walker's nomination as candidate for the National Negro Party during the presidential election of 1900.

This project contributes to the historiography of African American, urban, and United States politics. By understanding the ways African Americans perceived, understood, and contributed to the political transformations of the last half of the nineteenth century, this project shows that black men and women in Boston played significant roles shaping notions of African American citizenship and laid the ground work for the civil rights struggles of the twentieth century.

On July 30, 1903 there was an inflammatory confrontation between Booker T. Washington and supporters of Boston *Guardian* editor William Monroe Trotter at a public meeting of the National Negro Business League in a Boston church. Central to this confrontation was the public criticism of Booker T. Washington and his supporters which resulted in the arrest, trial, and incarceration of Trotter. This event earned national attention and Boston appeared as a major site of radical civil rights activism as it became the geographic embodiment of opposition to Washington's strategy of black uplift.¹⁰⁸ In addition to the Boston events, 1903 was also the year of the national publication of W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*. In this text, Du Bois brought criticisms of Washington and the policy of gradual regaining of voting rights to a national and international audience.

Many of Du Bois's ideas were formed out of a discourse that included the voices of Bostonians like his Harvard colleague Trotter. In a letter immediately following the turmoil in Boston, Du Bois wrote, "As between [Trotter] and Mr. Washington...I

¹⁰⁸ Fox, *The Guardian of Boston*, 49-58.

unhesitantly believe Mr. Trotter to be far nearer the right.”¹⁰⁹ The publication of Du Bois’s seminal work and Trotter’s public display of defiance to Washington’s politics marked significant moments in the history of American civil rights struggles. “If the impact of *The Souls of Black Folk* on civil rights was like that of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* on slavery,” Du Bois biographer David Levering Lewis explains, “then Trotter’s Boston ‘Riot’ had its civil rights analogue in John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry.”¹¹⁰ When Trotter, the son of political independent James Monroe Trotter, attracted Du Bois through his violent proclamation of opposition to compromise on civil rights he displayed a political education grounded in the political culture of Boston’s African American community. Through Trotter’s action and Du Bois’s ability to bring his sentiment to a national and international audience, Boston became ‘the Hub’ of African American radical politics and its legacy would inform black political ideas into the twentieth century.

¹⁰⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois to George Foster Peabody, December 28, 1903 in *The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois: Volume I Selections, 1877-1934*, Herbert Aptheker, ed. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 66-69; David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: H. Holt, 1994), 303.

¹¹⁰ Lewis, *W. E. B. Dubois*, 301.

Chapter 1

“No Peace until the Suffrage Question is Settled”: The Politics of Reconstruction and the Birth of Political Independence, 1864-1872

On December 1, 1865, prominent African Americans from throughout New England joined by Frederick Douglass met in the Twelfth Baptist Church on Phillips Street in Boston’s West End “for the purpose of taking action on matters concerning the colored man and his status in the United States.”¹¹¹ The attendees made clear that they saw their political destiny as connected to the state of African Americans across the nation. George T. Downing from Rhode Island declared, “the colored people of the North could not be secure in the partial rights which they now possess, so long as the colored people were denied justice.”¹¹² One of the major topics discussed was the future of African American participation in American politics as voters.

For the members of the convention, African American suffrage should become the primary focus of Reconstruction and without it all other gains would be meaningless. Charles Remond, president of the convention, stated that he did not care about military gains, or even the surrender of the Confederacy. Rather he announced, “the nation would have no peace until the suffrage question was settled.” In the convention’s official statement the attendees affirmed the primacy of legal equality and voting rights as they sent a delegation to Washington to pressure the president and Congress to pass

¹¹¹ “Convention of Colored People of New England, Boston, December 1, 1865,” in *Proceedings of the Black National and State Conventions, 1865-1900, Vol. 1*, ed. Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 201.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 204.

legislation. “Until the colored man is made equal before the law,” they warned, “an earnest, unceasing agitation will be pressed, which will necessarily obstruct the wheels of progress in every avenue of material prosperity in the land, which will be unclogged only when justice is done in the matter.”¹¹³ For the delegates to the New England Convention, suffrage was central to their political agenda, and in the coming decades they would make good on their threats of agitation until their goals were achieved.

In the years following the Civil War, northern states underwent dramatic changes. As in the states of the former Confederacy, the end of the conflict brought economic, social, and political transformations. As northerners emerged from battle they, like their counterparts in the South, were faced to with the question of how to rebuild and reconcile a nation which had been so brutally divided by the bloodiest conflict in its history. In particular, the end of the war brought significant changes to northern political organizations. As historian Eric Foner describes in his landmark study of Reconstruction, “the North’s social structure, like the South’s, was altered in these years ... moreover, economic and social change produced new demands on the state and altered the terms of political debate and modes of party politics.”¹¹⁴ Members of political parties began to question the place of the state and the central government, not only in rebuilding the nation, but in defining and protecting the rights of the multitude of recently emancipated African American men and women. Enfranchising black men changed not only their political status but also their relationship to the state and the meaning of American

¹¹³ Ibid., 204-205

¹¹⁴ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 460.

citizenship.¹¹⁵ Tensions over these shifting definitions caused severe divides and factions in the Republican Party and the northern political system.

Historians such as Eric Foner and Xi Wang have explained political changes in the North following the Civil War. This chapter examines such changes as they affected the lives of African American men and women. Black Americans in Boston took an active role in these changes and sought to define and position themselves in the shifting political terrain. Black Bostonians were far from passive witnesses to these political changes. They were at every step influential commentators who in the press and in political conventions constructed their own vision of political inclusion and citizenship in the decades following emancipation.

A significant point of commentary was the shift of some Republicans from ideological politics to, what Eric Foner terms, professionally managed politics. “On both the state and national levels,” Foner explains, “the rise of organizational politics helped to eclipse the highly ideological issues associated with Reconstruction.”¹¹⁶ No longer was the party united by a hatred of slavery and the southern slave power. Many Republicans remained stalwart in their concern for African Americans, but with the end of the war and the beginning of Reconstruction, a significant faction of Republicans began to look toward a less activist central state and pulled away from federal enforcement of African American civil rights. Emerging in the late 1860s, these liberal reformers viewed politics in the early years of Reconstruction as rife with corruption and abuse. In their minds,

¹¹⁵ Xi Wang, *The Trial of Democracy: Black Suffrage and Northern Republicans, 1860-1910* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 14.

¹¹⁶ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 487. For a specific discussion of Massachusetts, see Richard H. Abbott, “Massachusetts: Maintaining Hegemony,” in *Radical Republicans in the North: State Politics During Reconstruction*, ed. James C. Mohr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 1-25.

without reform, American politics would continue to degenerate into notorious “rings” of patronage which threatened to undermine American democracy.¹¹⁷

One of the major points of contention between Radical Republican stalwarts and the emerging liberal Republicans was the role of the federal government in defining and protecting the political rights of African Americans. Some, who had once been strong advocates of activist state intervention against slavery and for black suffrage, began to seek ways to limit federal authority. Foner explains, “if all Radicals agreed the state should establish the principal of civil and political equality, liberals increasingly insisted it should do little else.”¹¹⁸ African Americans in Boston sharply disagreed. For them, the federal government was the strongest force in assuring that African Americans would enjoy equality in the face of rising opposition to black civil rights. If such decisions were left to the states, they argued, it would only be a matter of time before southern white former slaveholders took back control and disempowered African American citizens.

Liberal reformers feared that an expanded federal government would place limits on the free market by enforcing workers’ protections and that federal protection of African American civil liberties would provide them with an unfair advantage in the workplace and in the marketplace. “In the years after the Civil War,” historian Heather Cox Richardson argues, “fear of a black rejection of the free labor ideal, coupled with anxiety over labor unrest, made the self styled ‘better classes’ abandon the midcentury vision of an egalitarian free labor society.”¹¹⁹ As the liberal reform tract, the *Nation*,

¹¹⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 488.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 492.

¹¹⁹ Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, xiv.

explained in 1867, “The removal of white prejudice against the negro depends almost entirely on the negro himself.”¹²⁰ Liberals also argued that the political problems faced by the South, were the fault of inexperienced African American officials or corrupt northern carpetbaggers. Foner concludes, “Originating as a critique of social and political changes in the North, liberal reform had come to view Reconstruction as an expression of all the real and imagined evils of the gilded age.”¹²¹ While liberals argued for equality in the marketplace without government intervention, African Americans responded that it was through federal protection that true equality could be guaranteed. This was the tumultuous political world in which African Americans sought to organize themselves in the aftermath of the Civil War.

African Americans in Boston were quick to emerge as prominent figures in city and state politics in the early years of Reconstruction. In 1867, Black voters mobilized to elect the first two African American legislators to the General Court and mounted vibrant campaigns in support of local and national candidates. They embraced the ballot as a powerful tool for uplift and the right to suffrage became a central rallying point. African Americans also organized by canvassing for votes, managing precincts, and founding political organizations dedicated to the election of a party or candidate. These campaigns reflect varied interpretations of Reconstruction’s aims and they affected African American notions of party loyalty.

Soon after the conclusion of the war, African Americans in Boston and Charlestown elected the first African Americans to the Massachusetts General Court.

¹²⁰ “The Negro’s Claim to Office,” *The Nation*, August 1, 1867, 90; see also Foner, *Reconstruction*, 498.

¹²¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 499.

Edwin Garrison Walker and Charles L. Mitchell were the first African Americans elected to any state legislature in the nation. Once in office these men wasted little time before presenting the interests of their black constituency to the state. In particular, Walker expressed the view of many black residents as he opposed ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution in 1867. Through this opposition we begin to see the willingness of black citizens to question the motives of the national government and party structures. Walker and others were outraged by how those said to be Republican allies would compromise African American civil rights for the sake of political expediency. Even after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, black Bostonians remained hesitant to place complete trust in federal authority and national party leadership.

Questions about loyalty to the Republican Party continued during the 1872 presidential election when black Bostonians faced a choice between incumbent President Ulysses Grant and Liberal Republican and Democratic candidate Horace Greeley. Greeley lost the election, but Massachusetts gave him crucial support. Grant was the last Republican candidate who possessed both the experience and ideological grounding to gain nearly unanimous African American support. For many African Americans the election of 1872 was the death of Radical Reconstruction.¹²²

The seeds of political independence and disillusionment with the Republican Party were planted during the early years of Reconstruction. Over the next decade African Americans would go to great lengths to keep the radical flame alive, even if that meant supporting candidates outside the Republican Party. They organized at the city level to advance a national agenda. Federal protection of black voting rights was

¹²² Foner, *Reconstruction*, 510-511.

paramount. In Boston they fought for political recognition and held the Republican Party accountable for deserting its ideological origins. When the Republican Party fractured and began to deemphasize the importance of black equality in its platform, some black supporters sought an independent political destiny beyond party loyalty

Black Electoral Success

Almost immediately following the war, black Bostonians took advantage of their voting rights and began electing representatives to the Massachusetts General Court.¹²³ In 1867, residents of Boston's Ward Six and nearby Charlestown's Ward Three elected the first African American representatives to any state legislature in the nation. The majority African American Ward Six attempted to elect a representative for many years, but tended to divide the vote among several candidates. In 1866, Ward Six elected Charles L. Mitchell with little controversy. Mitchell was a printer and worked for several years in the office of the anti-slavery newspaper the *Liberator*. During the war Mitchell also served in the Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Regiment where he was one of the few black soldiers to be awarded the rank of lieutenant.¹²⁴ When Mitchell won election to the state legislature there was a huge celebration. A large gathering of black Bostonians, several with loud drums, paraded through the ward, "singing and hurrahing as they marched."¹²⁵ The festivities continued until after midnight.

¹²³ Christopher Malone, *Between Freedom and Bondage: Race, Party, and Voting Rights in the Antebellum North* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 154; Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 10-13. The Massachusetts Constitution granted African Americans the right to vote in 1780, although the state continued to impose restrictions based on age and literacy. It also levied a poll tax.

¹²⁴ "Election Day and Evening in and around Boston," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 7, 1866; "The Colored Members," *New York Times*, January 3, 1867.

¹²⁵ "Election Day and Evening in and around Boston."

While the election of Mitchell appeared to be without incident, in Charlestown the election of Edwin Garrison Walker was more contentious. Edwin Walker was born in 1831 in Boston, Massachusetts. His father David Walker was the author of the controversial pamphlet David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. Soon after David's sudden death Eliza Walker gave birth to Edwin.¹²⁶ Walker moved with his mother to Charlestown where he enrolled in the public schools. Following school Walker worked as a leather worker and in 1857 he opened his own business. Walker was active in the anti-slavery movement and, evidence suggests, may have taken part in the rescue of fugitive slave Shadrach Minkins in 1851. He spoke out against emigration at the African Civilization Society at a meeting of black men of New England in 1859. In the 1850s Walker studied the law and was admitted to the Suffolk County bar in 1861. In the years after the Civil War, Walker worked closely with other anti-slavery activists, especially Robert Morris and George T. Downing.¹²⁷

Walker received the nomination of the Republican Party in Charlestown. According to press reports, however, the Republicans did not make this nomination in good faith and on the day of the election the odds of election were stacked against the candidate. Despite early pessimism, by the time the polls closed at four o'clock in the afternoon, fifty registered Democrats had crossed party lines and voted for Walker.

¹²⁶ Although there is some controversy in the historical record over Walker's exact birthdate, press reports identified Edwin as David's son until his death in 1901, see Contee, "Edwin Garrison Walker," 556; Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 269-271.

¹²⁷ Contee, "Edwin Garrison Walker," 556-559; Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 61

According to a *New York Times* report, it was Walker's "warm interest in the Fenian cause last June," which helped him get Democratic votes.¹²⁸

By supporting the Irish nationalist Fenians, Walker attracted the support of Democratic Irish immigrants. "It is stated," the *Times* recorded, "that the [Democratic] party did as much toward his election as the Republicans, though he has always been identified with and [as an] exponent of the principles of that party."¹²⁹ Walker would not have won the General Court seat without Irish support and his sympathy for the cause of Irish independence would continue to inform his politics in the coming decades. It is likely too, that the lack of support by Republicans influenced Walker's skepticism for Republican Party loyalty to its African American supporters during his term as legislator.

Despite the controversy of Walker's election, the arrival of the two black legislators in the General Court provided the African American residents of Massachusetts the first representatives of their race in government. Through them they could directly communicate concerns to the chambers of government and become vocal and influential voices on policies of Reconstruction. For the first time, African Americans in a legislature would guide legislation affecting black men and women both in the state and nationally. It was not long after the election that Walker and Mitchell had to contend with one of the most significant pieces of Reconstruction policy, the Fourteenth Amendment.

¹²⁸ "The Colored Members." The Fenians were a militant group of Irish nationalists. The event referred to here is the June 1865 invasion by the Fenians into Canada.

¹²⁹ "The Colored Members."

Criticism of the Fourteenth Amendment

On June 13, 1866, the US Congress passed the Fourteenth Amendment and sent it to the states for ratification. During the drafting of the amendment in Congress, Radical Republicans, Moderate Republicans, and Democrats compromised on directly conferring African Americans the right to vote. Instead, they left the governance of voting up to the individual states, with a penalty of loss of representation for those states that denied black suffrage.¹³⁰ Although Republicans in the Senate, bound by a caucus decision, voted unanimously for its passage, they did not universally support the amendment. Radical Republicans, like Charles Sumner, criticized it for its lack of guarantee of black suffrage. Moderate Republicans, however, argued that an endorsement of equal black suffrage was a political liability and advocated forestalling the issue until a later date.¹³¹ The compromises drew the ire of many Massachusetts's Radical Republicans and those in the General Court adamantly called for a delay or the defeat of the amendment's ratification.

Prominent African Americans joined with white opponents in a critique of the amendment's second section because it left open the possibility of disfranchisement. They asked that Massachusetts reject the amendment in favor of a substitute that better protected African American suffrage and civil rights.¹³² Charles Mitchell presented a

¹³⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 251-261; Wang, *The Trial of Democracy*, 25-28.

¹³¹ James McPherson, *Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 351, 355.

¹³² "Remonstrance of Henry T. Cheeves, George F. Hoar, Ichabod Washburn, and One Hundred Others, Citizens of Worcester, Against the Adoption of the Constitutional Amendment"; "Petition of Christopher Bryant and Fifty-five Others, Citizens of Worcester; Against the adoption of the Constitutional Amendments"; "Petition of E. Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Others, Committee Am. Equal Rights Association, Relating to the Constitutional Amendment"; "Remonstrance of Richard T. Buck and Others, Citizens of Millbury, Against the Ratification of the Constitutional Amendment"; "Remonstrance of Rev. L. A. Grimes, and Others of Boston Against the Passage of the Constitutional Amendment"; "Remonstrance of Samuel A. Collins and Forty Others of Fitchburg Against the Ratification of the Const. Amendment"; "Memorial of Richard T. Buck and Others Against the Adoption of the Proposed

remonstrance decrying the amendment signed by prominent members and former anti-slavery activists from the Boston African American community, including Twelfth Baptist Church Minister Rev. Leonard Grimes, nationally known leader Charles Remond, former messenger to the Massachusetts Secretary of State Lewis Hayden, and prominent attorney Robert Morris.¹³³ “Our reason for this petition,” the preprinted form read, “is the danger to the liberties of the people from conceding to any State (which is done in the 2nd section of the proposed Amendment), the right or possibility of denying to any class of its loyal citizens the natural right of representation and the elective franchise.”¹³⁴ The same language was mirrored in four other petitions brought before the General Court.

Alongside petitions from African Americans, leaders of the American Equal Rights Association, advocates of Women’s Suffrage, also petitioned against the amendment. In addition to criticizing the lack of voter protection, the petition attacked the continued disenfranchisement of women. Signed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucy Stone, the petition opposed the amendment on the grounds both that it neither protected African Americans nor addressed the rights of women. “Its adoption,” the petition claimed, “would be an act of perfidy unparalleled in history. For it passes four millions of loyal negroes, our allies, disenfranchised and without adequate protection, under the heel of their enemies and ours.”¹³⁵ Further, the signers argued, the

Amendment to the Constitution of the United States,” 1867, Passed Resolves, SC1/Series 228, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 373.

¹³³ Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 43, 58-59, 60-61, 65-66.

¹³⁴“Remonstrance of Rev. L. A. Grimes, and Others.” Another petition with the same language was submitted by Edwin Garrison Walker on behalf of Worcester residents, see “Petition of Christopher Bryant and Fifty-five Others, Citizens of Worcester; Against the adoption of the Constitutional Amendments,” 1867, Passed Resolves, SC1/Series 228, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

¹³⁵ “Petition of E. Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Others.”

amendment “permits the disenfranchisement of the loyal mothers of a million soldiers without penalty—and by an act of retrogressive legislation introduces the word ‘male’ for the first time into the Federal Constitution.”¹³⁶ The members of the American Equal Rights Association argued that the Amendment was severely flawed and satisfied the opinions of no one. They called for Massachusetts to put the amendment before the voters of the state before proceeding with the ratification.

In addition to submitting petitions, Boston’s African American community was uniquely situated to contest ratification. As members of the General Court, Walker and Mitchell provided direct African American opposition and worked to shape the legislature’s opinion of the amendment. Walker was especially well positioned to provide his input. As a member of the House Committee on Federal Relations, Walker was among those responsible for issuing a report recommending the preferred course of action. Among those on the committee were influential radical Republicans, such as Francis Bird, who also opposed ratification.¹³⁷ Through participation in the authorship of the majority report opposing ratification Walker provided an influential voice to the proceedings and one was one of the few African Americans to participate directly in the amendment’s ratification.

The committee requested that the legislature recommend debate on the bill to the next General Court, in effect rejecting the amendment. Massachusetts was the last state in the Northeast and one of the last states in the former Union to vote on ratification and the

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 469. Francis Bird was part of an influential group of Radical Republicans, known as the ‘Bird Club,’ who controlled much of Massachusetts politics in the 1860s.

Federal Relations Committee cautioned the General Court to be patient.¹³⁸ The committee majority was not swayed by ratification by other states, but argued that Massachusetts “can afford to stand alone on her convictions, but cannot afford to ‘follow the multitude to do evil.’”¹³⁹

Taking the amendment section by section, the committee majority argued that the legislation extended too much protection to the states of the former Confederacy to determine voting qualifications. Congress had and should exercise the authority to set and regulate voting in those states once in rebellion. “Conquered rebels have forfeited every right,” the committee declared; “almost infinitely less has he the right to political power.” In particular, the committee took issue with the second section, deemed “one of the most objectionable features of the amendment,” which called for proportional representation of the total population and imposed penalties upon states that abridged voting rights.¹⁴⁰ The second section stipulated that if any state denied the right to vote to any male citizen over the age of twenty-one, its population on which representation was based would be reduced in proportion to the number of disenfranchised voters.¹⁴¹

The Federal Relations Committee, however, was unconvinced that southern whites would be deterred by the penalty and enfranchise black voters. “The madness of

¹³⁸ The Comm. on Federal Relations, Constitutional Amendment, H. R. Rep. No. 147, at 22 (1867). McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 374. At the time of the publication of the Majority Report from the committee on Federal Relations on February 27, 1867 twenty former union states had successfully ratified the amendment: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, Kansas, Oregon, Nevada, Tennessee, and West Virginia; every former Confederate state (except Tennessee), Delaware, and Kentucky rejected it; and Massachusetts, Iowa, California, and Maryland had not yet made a decision.

¹³⁹ H. R. Rep. No. 149, at 1 (1867).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, at 17 (1867). The amendment excluded “Indians and those not taxed,” from the population for proportional representation.

¹⁴¹ US Const. amend. XIV, § 2.

slavery and the providence of God has given to our government the golden opportunity to eliminate this oligarchical feature,” the report continued; “this second section relinquishes this great power, rehabilitates the Southern oligarchy, and gives new life to this fruitful source of our woes.”¹⁴² The majority argued that former Confederate politicians could not be trusted to protect the voting rights of African Americans, and that regardless of penalty, Congress was placing southern governance in the hands of former slaveholders and leaders of the rebellion.

The restoration of former Confederate leadership, the committee argued, would inevitably lead to African American voter disenfranchisement. Under the second section of the amendment, committee members argued, white southerners would be, “free to exclude from voting every colored citizen.” Although the amendment frowned upon excluding voters, it did not explicitly ban states from doing so. Rather, the amendment imposed a penalty in the form of loss of congressional representation. The majority argued that white southerners would not enfranchise African Americans regardless the penalty. The committee pointed to the so called “three-fifths compromise” in the original constitution as evidence. “For seventy-five years [the former Confederacy] acquiesced in the loss of representation for two-fifths of their slaves, rather than emancipate them,” the committee explained; “have we any right to assume that this same oligarchy will enfranchise their blacks.”¹⁴³ “This section,” the committee concluded, “confessedly

¹⁴² H. R. Rep. No. 149, at 6 (1867).

¹⁴³ Ibid., at 8 (1867).

permits the disenfranchisement of colored citizens, and obviously attaches no penalty adequate to the punishment or prevention of this crime.”¹⁴⁴

By focusing a majority of their report on section two, legislators expressed the primacy that they placed on suffrage as a right of citizenship. For Edwin Walker and the other members of the Federal Relations Committee, securing African American voting rights was a fundamental precondition to integrating black men as full participants in the body politic. Securing the black vote would almost guarantee the establishment of Republican control over southern legislatures and thus the continuance of in Congress. For those who cautioned against the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment without an initial guarantee of African American suffrage all other Reconstruction legislation was in jeopardy.

Black citizens had served honorably in the Civil War and therefore deserved constitutional protections that were absolute, the majority argued, “From the first shot upon Sumter, the negro held the fate of the Union in his hands.” African American service in the Union forces greatly contributed to the Northern victory and thus they deserved better than the Fourteenth Amendment offered. “What treatment is due to such allies?” the committee asked. “Disenfranchisement by the government they saved! Was this the entertainment to which Massachusetts invited the gallant recruits of her first black regiments?”¹⁴⁵

The majority report also advocated African American participation in the crafting of constitutional amendments for civil and political rights. As a committee member,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., at 9 (1867).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., at 18 (1867).

Walker was one of the few black men in the country who had the opportunity to formally weigh in ratification. The report recognized that white politicians dominated nearly all state ratification proceedings. “It is easy,” the report argued, “for white men, who practically wield the whole political power of the country, to regard with comparative indifference the rights of the long proscribed classes.”¹⁴⁶ However, with Walker on the committee, the Massachusetts legislators argued that they could “view this subject from the stand point of the disenfranchised race, and adopting the fundamental principle that ‘all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed,’ we owe it to ourselves to demand, that the rights of underrepresented classes shall not be betrayed.”¹⁴⁷ The report concluded that African Americans, like Walker, opposed the amendment and that no legislature should make a decision regarding its ratification without their consent. “It would be anti-republican and dangerous,” to ratify the amendment, “not only without their consent, but against their universal protest.”¹⁴⁸

Walker and the other authors of the report advised the General Court to delay ratifying the amendment until Congress had prepared another amendment that would explicitly prohibit discrimination. They feared that if the Fourteenth Amendment were ratified prematurely, the states of the former Confederacy would block future progress. The authors anticipated that it was only by securing the vote for African Americans that the Republican Reconstruction agenda could be protected. Disenfranchisement, they argued, would relegate the goals of Reconstruction, “to a far off and uncertain future.”

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., at 17 (1867).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

“If Reconstruction be initiated and organized on the basis of this amendment,” the report concluded, “it will inevitably be under rebel control, and as inevitably, the blacks will be excluded from all agency in the work.”¹⁴⁹ The committee recommended that the General Court refer the subject of the Fourteenth Amendment to the next session.

Through their petitions and representation in the General Court, African Americans expressed their criticism and participated directly in the ratification process. Through Walker’s co-authorship of the majority report black political participation transcended the petition process and was given a voice with which the rest of the legislature had to contend. Walker’s opposition to the amendment, however, was not limited to the majority report.

Walker’s opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment continued in a fiery speech on the House floor on March 12, 1867. While supporting the majority of the amendment, Walker explicitly attacked the second section which, “placed in the hands of the people of the rebel states the entire black population.”¹⁵⁰ Walker condemned the amendment as an act of compromise with the southern states which did little to protect the rights of African American voters. “The amendment,” Walker charged, “carefully guards everything else but the interests of millions of blacks in this country.”¹⁵¹ Walker continued to caricature the sentiment of the amendment’s authors and thereby sought to reveal the true effect of the legislation.

True, the action of adopting this amendment does not say, ‘if you wish, gentlemen of the South, you can exclude the negro from the right of

¹⁴⁹ H. R. Rep. No. 149, at 23-24 (1867).

¹⁵⁰ “Massachusetts Legislature,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, March 13, 1867.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

participating in making the laws by which you are governed,' but it does say, 'we used the blacks; we know they helped us greatly; but their interests are not great; we recommend, gentlemen that you use them respectfully, give them the right to vote, cease to abuse them; we leave the matter with you to settle...we leave a place in the Constitution large enough, and wide enough, for you to say that the black man shall take no part in legislation.'¹⁵²

For Walker, the amendment was another case of the federal government choosing political expediency over securing black rights.

Walker drew on the history of emancipation during the Civil War to show how tentative the federal government had been in freeing enslaved men and women. He recognized how members of the federal government had hesitated to pass legislation that benefited African Americans for the sake of preserving the Union. By extension, Walker explained, the Fourteenth Amendment was another case of the federal government's bowing to the interests of the former slave states for the sake of political expediency and rebuilding the Union. "While the slaveholders were fighting us, seeking to destroy the last vestige of liberty on this continent," Walker declared, "the people were declaring that if the government and slavery could be saved they would be saved, if one should die it should be slavery...that was another bow to slavery...the last bow to slavery comes in the shape of this second section."¹⁵³ Suspicion and criticism of the Republican Party and the federal government like this, would help build the foundation for more staunchly independent political positions by the end of the 1870s which expanded by the end of the century.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Walker concluded by declaring that support for the amendment was tantamount to yielding to the slave power and betrayed the reformist character of Massachusetts. “Massachusetts has always led the van in reform,” Walker concluded; “the passage of the amendment, with the second section in it, would not be doing justice to the true, manly sentiment of Massachusetts.”¹⁵⁴ Despite Walker’s opposition, the amendment was ratified by the legislature. Although an overwhelming majority of the House of Representatives supported ratification, both Edwin Walker and Charles Mitchell voted against the amendment’s adoption in favor of forwarding it to the next session of the General Court.¹⁵⁵ Despite the ratification of the amendment, in their opposition, and especially through Walker’s committee representation and public oratory, African Americans demonstrated that they were going to be active participants in the questions of Reconstruction and were willing to confront Republican leaders if necessary.¹⁵⁶

The opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment demonstrates the importance of suffrage as a fundamental component of Reconstruction and the reaction of men like Edwin Garrison Walker is an example of the uncompromising position black activists took against the potential of disenfranchisement. The right to vote was central to their definitions of citizenship and it was only through the use of the vote, along with federal protection, that African Americans could stand up to the persistent Southern commitment

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Walker and Mitchell also voted for an amendment to the resolve ratifying the amendment proposed by Francis Bird to request the Congress propose an amendment to the Constitution “prohibiting disenfranchisement of any citizen on account of color.” *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston 1867), 529-530, 202.

¹⁵⁶ Walker’s outspoken opposition to the amendment led to increased tensions between him and the Republic Party. Upon his death in 1901, eulogies celebrated his opposition, but noted that it has significant political costs. His public speech against the amendment, the *Boston Globe* reported, “caused him to be practically ostracized the party.” “Loved His Race,” *Boston Daily Globe*, January 14, 1901; see also Hopkins, “Edwin Garrison Walker.”

to white supremacy. For Walker and the other opponents, it would be better to have no amendment at all rather than one which did little to protect black suffrage.

Early Debates Over Partisan Loyalty

The fear of voter black disenfranchisement expressed by critics of the Fourteenth Amendment was assuaged with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870. Unlike the previous amendment which discouraged and penalized, but did not prohibit, voter disenfranchisement the Fifteenth Amendment explicitly stated that the right to vote “shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”¹⁵⁷ The amendment, however, did not universally guarantee the right to vote. While the amendment prohibited federal and state governments from disenfranchisement based on race, it did not affirm the right to hold office or prevent states from enacting other voting qualifications. Northern states, especially, were hesitant to enact sweeping legislation fearing the political power of foreign, poor, or illiterate white Democratic voters. These restrictions, Eric Foner argues, were not “a limited commitment to blacks’ rights, but the desire to retain other inequalities affecting whites.”¹⁵⁸ The limited restrictions created the opportunity for states to enact much of the legislation limiting black enfranchisement in later decades.

In the immediate passage of the amendment, however, African American communities celebrated its adoption with little attention to the possibility of future exclusion. When Massachusetts Governor William Claflin presented the amendment to the General Court in early March 1869, the earlier controversy that that had surrounded

¹⁵⁷ US Const. amend. XI, § 1.

¹⁵⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 447.

ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment was gone. The legislature ratified the amendment several days later with 192 supporting and 15 opposing. John J. Smith, who succeeded Mitchell and Walker in 1868 as the only African American representative in the General Court, voted in favor.¹⁵⁹

By the following year, the amendment was officially ratified and African American communities throughout the country celebrated. In Boston, there was a massive parade through the city that culminated in a grand ceremony and speeches at Faneuil Hall. The weather was clear and mild as John J. Smith, the lone black member of the General Court, and Charles L. Remond, the president of the celebration, led the march through the West End. The parade also included members of the Fifty-fourth and Fifty-fifth Massachusetts regiments and black fraternal lodges from Massachusetts and Rhode Island. At the conclusion, the throng packed Faneuil Hall. “The floor,” the *Boston Daily Advertiser* reported, “was occupied by the various societies, the galleries by ladies, and the space beneath galleries by everybody who could get standing room.”¹⁶⁰ The crowd heard speeches by prominent black and white former antislavery activists and political leaders including, William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, George L. Ruffin, Robert Morris, and Edwin Garrison Walker. Charles Remond declared that it was, “the colored people’s Fourth of July.”¹⁶¹ The speakers, though gathered for the same event, shared their diverse perspectives on the passage of the amendment and future strategies for black

¹⁵⁹ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston 1869), 224-227; Senate Doc. No. 98 (1869); Committee on Federal Relations, S. Doc. No. 105 (1869).

¹⁶⁰ “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 15, 1870.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

uplift. In these discussions early examples of future tensions, particularly around black support for political parties, were exposed.

George Ruffin, the first African American graduate of Harvard Law School and appointee to the Massachusetts bar, presented a series of resolutions commemorating the event, highlighting its importance, and making reference to the gratitude of African Americans to the Republican Party. Ruffin was born of free parents in Richmond, Virginia in 1834. After moving to Boston as a child he attended public school and worked as a barber. He eventually began legal studies and graduated from Harvard University Law School in 1869. Ruffin was elected from Ward Six, later Ward Nine, to the Massachusetts Legislature in 1870. He also served on Boston's Common Council in 1875 and 1876. He was an active participant in Republican politics, serving on both the ward and city committee. He was later made a consul for the Dominican Republic in 1883. Ruffin was married to Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, a national leader of African American club women, founder of the Women's Era Club, and, with her and Ruffin's daughter Florida, editor of the *Women's Era* newspaper.¹⁶² Ruffin declared, "We recognize the Republican Party, which has enacted the just wholesome laws of the past ten years and securely fixed in the Constitution of our country the beneficent provisions...we here offer the members of that party our heartfelt thanks."¹⁶³ Other speakers were more muted in their celebration and pointed out the continued hardships facing African Americans.

¹⁶² William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive, and Rising* (Cleveland: George M. Rewell and Co., 1887), 740-743; Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins*, 54.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

As Walker spoke, he addressed continued racial prejudice and the political obstacles black men faced in Boston and Massachusetts. Unlike later periods, the *Boston Daily Advertiser* reported, Walker avoided telling the audience to be “loyal to this party or that party, for such advice is unnecessary.”¹⁶⁴ He argued that while policies of Reconstruction attempted to enforce black voting equality in southern states, they neglected continued restrictions and prejudice in the North. Walker argued that, “with the death of slavery came another species of caste.”¹⁶⁵ He pointed out the racial discrimination African Americans faced in the state, which muted celebrations of coming racial equality. “There was not a town in Massachusetts,” Walker announced, “where a black man could be elected by popular vote...because of caste...He expected to see black men in the city council of Richmond before they would be in Boston.”¹⁶⁶

Walker seized the occasion to question why, as southern states were sending black men to Congress, the North did not do the same. By criticizing the state of electoral politics in Massachusetts, Walker exposed the hypocrisy of a Republican platform that sought to mandate black voting and office holding in the South, even while maintaining similar restrictions the North. Walker cautioned that although the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments was significant, discrimination persisted. Even in Massachusetts, most African Americans had little chance at a career in electoral politics.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. This article misidentifies Walker as “David Walker, from Charlestown.”

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. In the coverage of this speech Edwin Garrison Walker, is referred to as David Walker.

¹⁶⁷ These statements from Walker are interesting, especially as he had been elected to office only 3 years earlier. Perhaps the controversy over his election and his opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment influenced his sentiments.

Another speaker, Robert Morris was a mentor to Walker and similarly skeptical about racial progress following the Fifteenth Amendment. Morris was born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1823. Early in his life Morris went to Boston to work in the house of distinguished lawyer and abolitionist Ellis Gray Loring. With Loring's assistance Morris studies the Law and passed the Massachusetts bar in 1847. As an attorney Morris was closely involved in the struggles for civil rights in Boston. In 1845 he represented, along with Charles Sumner, Benjamin Roberts, whose daughter had been refused admission to a white public school. Although this suit failed, Morris's role increased his prominence in the black community. Morris also helped found Boston's Vigilance Committee which helped protect fugitive slaves in the city. As an attorney, Morris also represented many of Boston's Irish population. During the 1850s, Morris began a relationship as professional mentor and friend with Edwin Garrison Walker and it is likely that Morris's political activism and work with Boston's Irish community influenced Walker's politics.¹⁶⁸

Morris urged African Americans to rely less on white party leaders and take control of their own political destinies. He remarked that early in the Civil War when he had approached leaders in the State House regarding raising an African American regiment, he was rebuffed. Once the regiment was formed, Morris lamented, African Americans were not given leadership over the regiments. Morris recognized in contrast that although Irish regiments were raised, "Yankee officers were never put over them."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ William Leonard, "Black and Irish Relations in Nineteenth Century Boston: The Interesting Case of Lawyer Robert Morris," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 37 no. 1 (Spring 2009): 64-85; Pauline Hopkins, "Robert Morris," *Colored American Magazine* (Sept. 1901): 337-342; "Robert Morris," *New York Globe*, March 18, 1883.

¹⁶⁹ "The Fifteenth Amendment."

White political leadership was happy to use African Americans as soldier and as voters, but was resistant to yielding control to black leadership.

Morris declared that African Americans should now take control of their national fate. In the face of racial violence in Georgia, Morris proposed “to send two black regiments down there with a black brigadier in command. Then there would be no trouble, and they would soon have Georgia as peaceable as Massachusetts.”¹⁷⁰ Morris concluded that black voters should take control of the Republican Party: “The Republican Party had ridden into power on the Negro’s back, but now the blacks had mounted, and, having seized one party by the ears and the other by the tail, would ride the jack themselves.”¹⁷¹ Morris’s statements reflect growing independent political sentiment. African Americans, Morris argued, had the electoral power to drive party policy, but must be willing to exercise it.

White former abolitionist Wendell Phillips supported Morris’s comments by calling for African Americans to use the vote to defend themselves from those, even Republicans, who would undermine the progress of Reconstruction. Phillips, well known for his antebellum anti-slavery activism and oratory, continued to be an ardent supporter for African American equality and labor rights after the Civil War. In 1867 he joined with Walker and others to oppose the Fourteenth Amendment’s ratification and continued to press the government for federal protection and intervention on behalf of African Americans.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Foner, *Reconstruction*, 255, 448; James McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 373-374. Phillips was also nominated by the Labor Reform Party for Massachusetts Governor in 1869. African American lawyer George Ruffin was nominated for attorney general on the same ticket. For more on the Phillips and the

Phillips called on black voters to look beyond a candidate's party affiliation and judge him on his dedication to the advancement of black citizens. Phillips advocated a root principle: "the nation knows no distinction of race." In that regard, Phillips condemned any prejudice among African Americans towards Chinese or Irish immigrants. Further, he condemned any black support of candidates who upheld racial distinctions. "If I ever see a black man," Phillips proclaimed, "go to the ballot box to record a vote to lift into office a man that knows any distinction of race in the political arena, that man I shall regard as recreant to his own race...as poisoning the fountain out of which his own children are to be fed."¹⁷³ Like Morris, Phillips encouraged African Americans to exert electoral influence on Republicans and hold accountable those who marginalized black supporters.

Phillips called on black voters to be the primary defenders of their civil rights and to punish without forgiveness elected official who would perpetuate racial division. Phillips declared, "Never forgive at the ballot box."¹⁷⁴ For example, Phillips continued, "If you know a man who in yonder legislature ... has given a vote that is unjust to a black man, because he was black, no matter if the very next year he does as much for your race as Charles Sumner and Benjamin Butler...never forgive him."¹⁷⁵ He urged black Bostonians to monitor and keep track of the voting record of their representatives on issues of civil rights and be prepared to confront that person when they campaigned.

Labor Reform Party, see Foner, *Reconstruction*, 442-443 and Philip S. Foner, "A Labor Voice for Black Equality: The *Boston Daily Evening Voice*, 1864-1867," *Science and Society* Vol. 38, No. 3 (Fall 1974), 304-325.

¹⁷³ "The Fifteenth Amendment."

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Finally, Phillips charged African American women to play a role in the battle against racial prejudice in politics. “Mothers,” Phillips commanded, “never forget the name of the man in political life who has either ignorantly or maliciously given a vote against your race.” Phillips instructed black women to influence not only the votes of their husbands and sons, but to look toward the time when they too would vote. Phillips was a strong advocate of woman’s suffrage and he focused on women in the audience as potential models of independent voters. “When the laws give you the right to vote,” Phillips maintained, “go out also with a firm determination, no matter what his party or name may be, if he has voted against you strike his name from American politics and bury it as completely as if he was forty feet under the Rocky Mountains.”¹⁷⁶ Phillips urged black voters to stand firm on ideologies of racial uplift and equality regardless of a candidate’s party.

Walker, Morris, and Phillips urged African Americans, both voters and non-voters, to be skeptical of all politicians regardless of partisan affiliation. They advocated the support of candidates based upon their support for black political and civil rights, not based upon affiliation with the Republican Party. These arguments cut against the Republican Party’s objectives for the Fifteenth Amendment: to recruit and maintain the loyalty of black voters in both the South and the North. On this day, a day celebrating constitutionally guaranteed black male suffrage, African Americans in Boston were called upon to use their vote strategically, even if it meant defeat of Republican candidates. Here was the emerging divide between loyal Republicans like George Ruffin

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

and independents like Morris and Walker. These schisms would continue to coalesce during the fervor that accompanied the presidential election of 1872.

The ‘New Departure’ and the Election of 1872

While African Americans celebrated the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment, an increasing number of white Republicans sought to distance themselves from President Grant and the Republican Party. In Massachusetts, these so called Liberal Republicans, joined with Democratic minority to form the Liberal Democratic Party. As members of the ‘New Departure’ distanced themselves from the racist traditions of the Democratic Party, Liberal Democrats maintained calls for black civil rights. Indeed former Radical Republicans like Francis Bird joined the coalition.¹⁷⁷ Historians like Eric Foner and Heather Cox Richardson explain that the transition of former Radical Republicans to Liberal Democracy came more from a hostility toward perceived corruption in the Grant administration and a desire to preserve the free market economy, than from antipathy towards African Americans. “Freedom [to liberal reformers],” Foner explains, “meant not economic autonomy or the right to call upon the aid of the activist state, but the ability to compete in the market place and enjoy protection against an overbearing government.”¹⁷⁸ For Liberal Democrats, overreaching federal protections undermined fundamental ideas of free labor and equal opportunity.

Liberal Democrats were explicit in their opposition to extended federal interference in and control of the state-level elections. They acknowledged the Fourteenth

¹⁷⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 500.

¹⁷⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 498. Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, xii-xv.

and Fifteenth Amendments as the law of the land and trusted state governments to enforce the provisions.¹⁷⁹ They rejected calls for federal protection of the polls and more direct voters' rights protection. These they thought violated the rights of states to govern their own elections and decide their own voting qualifications. While the states could not explicitly discriminate based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude, under Liberal Democratic doctrine, other qualifications such as property ownership or literacy, were permissible and constitutional.¹⁸⁰

Massachusetts's Liberal Democratic Party influenced presidential politics. In 1872, it played key role in securing the nomination of New York newspaper editor and former radical abolitionist Horace Greeley as a candidate and winning the endorsements of prominent Radical Republicans¹⁸¹ Greeley's nomination signaled the demise of Republican ideological unity and generated debate among black Bostonians. A majority of African Americans supported President Grant for reelection, but this was complicated when Radical Republican, particularly Charles Sumner, supported Greeley.¹⁸²

Even African Americans, including activists Robert Morris and George Downing, supported Greeley. The Greeley campaign hoped it could secure the loyalty of black voters through the public endorsement of the former Republicans.¹⁸³ Both Republican leader Francis Bird and long-time Senator and supporter of black civil rights Charles

¹⁷⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 506.

¹⁸⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 447. This was partly due to northern interests protecting local restrictions on voting. For example, Massachusetts limited voting based on literacy.

¹⁸¹ Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 168-170.

¹⁸² Foner, *Reconstruction*, 506.

¹⁸³ Lawrence Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 36-37 and 40-41.

Sumner endorsed Greeley.¹⁸⁴ Black activists such as Downing hoped that black support for the Democratic Party would press Republicans to reaffirm their commitments to protecting black rights, rather than merely paying lip service ideas of equality.¹⁸⁵ Still there were barriers to broad African American support for the Liberal Democrats rooted in past support of slavery and opposition to the Reconstruction amendments.

This was a moment of heated discussion over African American partisan affiliation that reflects the importance African Americans placed on the election. As 1872 was the first election after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, many felt that the future of Reconstruction and the fate of African Americans would be determined by the contest between the former general and the newspaper editor. The election marked the first large scale African American mobilization in a presidential contest. Black Bostonians organized campaign committees, deliberated in meetings, and gathered in public rallies. They viewed themselves as a significant electoral force in the city and detailed reports of black organizing circulated in the city's press. Additionally, there began to be some discussion over black fidelity to the Republican Party. The year 1872 marked a significant point in a discussion of African American independent politics.

As the election approached, black leaders came together to discuss their endorsement of candidates and how best to approach the coming campaign. Although they were generally united around ideologies of racial equality and civil rights advocacy, they expressed divergent views about black partisan allegiance. While disagreements

¹⁸⁴ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 506-509. For more on Sumner's support of Greeley, see James McPherson, "Grant or Greeley? The Abolitionist Dilemma in the Election of 1872," *American Historical Review* 71 (October 1865): 43-61; and David Quigley, "Charles Sumner and the Political Cultures of Reconstruction in New England," in *Boston's Histories: Essays in Honor of Thomas H. O'Connor*, ed. James M. O'Toole and David Quigley (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 113-123.

¹⁸⁵ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 39.

over party affiliation were present in previous years, the election of 1872 gave the debates potential electoral consequences. For supporters of Grant, a Republican election meant continued racial progress, while Greeley's victory would mean the end of Reconstruction and the potential decline of black fortunes. Meanwhile, for supporters of Greeley, Grant's administration did not do enough to protect African American rights and property while it agitated anti-black sentiment.¹⁸⁶

Partisan affiliation was a significant subject of heated discussion and early divisions were on display during a March 1872 meeting of African American men from throughout the state at the Twelfth Baptist Church. Loyal Grant supporters proposed resolutions celebrating current racial progress, urging continued civil rights agitation, and praising the Republican Party: "We look upon the assemblage of any body of colored men at this time with solicitude and cheerfully commit to their hands our interests and the proper direction of our influence for the future."¹⁸⁷ The resolutions did not merely thank the Republican Party for its service, but pledged African American loyalty to its candidates. Speaking of the upcoming national Republican convention in Philadelphia the resolution committee agreed to endorse the chosen Republican candidate. The members affirmed "our duty as colored voters to reindorse the platform which has served as a basis for the settlement of the difficulties of Reconstruction...and as it has thus far led us toward the fruition of our hopes we again express our loyalty to the Republican Party."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 506-507.

¹⁸⁷ "Convention of Colored Men," *Boston Daily Globe*, March 29, 1872.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Support for Republicans, however, was not unequivocal and members expected continued progress on civil rights as a prerequisite for further loyalty. They urged the passage of aggressive civil rights legislation and declared that, “while our faith in the Republican Party is as firm as ever, and our confidence remains unshaken, nothing but a complete recognition of our rights and the breaking down of all barriers of color distinction will show us whether that confidence has been misplaced.”¹⁸⁹ Although most of the resolves were passed unanimously, some of the members took issue with declarations of loyalty to the Republican Party.

Robert Morris, in particular, opposed the offer of African American votes to whoever was chosen at the Republican convention in Philadelphia. While Morris previously advocated African American political independence, he put his current opinions in the current electoral context. Morris’s statements reflected a more general reluctance of Republicans to support Grant as charges of corrupt patronage drove many into the Liberal Democratic Party. Morris demanded that the convention endorse political independence and allow black voters to choose their own allegiances. He “was not yet ready to say that he was going to vote for the present incumbent...neither was he ready to take a jump into the dark.”¹⁹⁰ Echoing his earlier statements, Morris urged black voters to choose candidates who would support black quality without compromise or hesitation. “I want the man who is to be the presiding officer over this great nation, willing to say that every black man shall have the right to go from one end of this mighty country to the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

other, without let or hindrance, and to say that unequivocally.”¹⁹¹ While Morris was unsure of what allegiance to the Greeley would resolve, he was increasingly certain that the Grant administration was not the ally other African Americans supposed it to be. Morris was supported by another speaker who “was pledged to no party...and was in favor of accepting anyone who would do the most for them.”¹⁹²

George Ruffin had helped write the meeting’s resolutions and immediately responded to Morris, defending loyalty to the Republican Party. Although he stated that the resolution, “did not commit them to anything but principle,” Ruffin declared, “he was in favor of the committee expressing itself as being good Republicans as anybody, and was willing to abide by the action of the gentlemen who were to meet at Philadelphia.” Ruffin was supported by convention president Charles Remond, who declared, “those who start away for a new party take their chances on an uncertainty.”¹⁹³ Following a sometimes biting debate, the endorsement of Republicans was voted down by a vote of twenty-five to eighteen.¹⁹⁴ Despite the favorable support for Grant, the majority of meeting attendees were not willing to commit universal loyalty to the Republican Party.

Despite the disagreements, at the conclusion of the of the day’s meetings, the convention selected Edwin G. Walker, Charles Remond, and George L. Ruffin to represent Massachusetts at the national convention of African American leaders in New Orleans convention. It also formed a state central committee, made up of fifteen members, to organize African Americans across Massachusetts. While most of the

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

committee members were from Boston, there were representatives from black communities throughout Massachusetts.¹⁹⁵ In forming the state central committee, the members of the convention emulated the major political parties who used state central committees to unify political strategy across the state. The organizers hoped that through the central committee they could effectively communicate to black communities across Massachusetts in order to organize black voters as an effective political bloc.

While they generally supported the state Republican Party, the committee stood outside of the official Republican organization and was uniquely concerned with the interests of the black electorate. The primacy of racial interest sometimes brought members of the committee into conflict with the Republican Party and each other. Among the committee members were men like Morris and Ruffin who had very different ideas about African American participation in politics. Although these disagreements persisted, it did not stop them from serving as representatives to the same body. While political disagreements were muted for the time being for the sake of racial unity, as the election approached divisions over partisan affiliation would become starker.

In the months following the formation of the central committee, the debate over black allegiance to the Republican Party increased and black Bostonians mobilized around the Greeley and Grant election. As the election approached, African Americans chose candidates and tested black political unity. Black Bostonians formed Republican clubs and Grant and Wilson clubs to organize support. The summer and fall of 1872 were

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. Central State Committee: Robert Morris, George L. Ruffin, A. R. Lewis, Lewis Hayden, J. M. Mulligan Boston; Milton Clark, R. J. Fatall, Cambridgeport; Edwin G. Walker, Charlestown. William Brown, Worcester; W. R. Montague, Springfield; John Freedom, Andrew Bush, New Bedford; Samuel Bowman, Taunton; Joel W. Lewis, Chelsea; George W. Queen, Springfield; Ottway West, Lynn; Horace B. Proctor, Lowell.

marked by regular meetings and community debates. As the election approached, many of the public statements took on a more partisan valiance.

In July 1872, black Bostonian supporters of General Grant met at the Phillips St. Church to declare publically their support for the Republican Party. This event was publicized as a Republican Rally and the participants were explicit in their support for the Republicans and their denunciations of the Democratic Party. Lewis Hayden recognized the significance of the event and declared that, “the pending election was the most important to the colored men of any that had occurred since the election of Lincoln.”¹⁹⁶ Speaking about increasing divides within the Republican Party, Hayden explained that while in previous elections, “all their friends were all united and working for the common cause,” now some had joined their opponents and, “for this reason he adjured the colored men of the nation to stand firmly together.”¹⁹⁷ As white Republicans and some black voters defected from the Republican Party many like Hayden perceived the black electorate as a strong barrier between political power and the Democratic Party.

Continuing to emphasize the seriousness of the coming election, George Ruffin declared that the current campaign was “a continuance of the old anti-slavery struggle.” For Republicans like Ruffin, the election of Greeley meant the demise of post-war black progress and a rollback of federal Reconstruction policy. Less than a decade had passed since emancipation and black Republicans feared that a Democratic administration meant the return to power of slavery’s advocates. “The fruits of victory already gained,” Ruffin

¹⁹⁶ “Republican Rally,” *Boston Daily Globe*, July 24, 1872.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

warned, “were sought to be wrung from the colored men by treachery.”¹⁹⁸ Ruffin continued to emphasize the contributions that Grant had made to African American civil rights and decried Greeley despite his anti-slavery background.

The Democratic ‘New Departure’ by which Northern Democrats sought to distance themselves from white supremacy drew pointed criticism from Ruffin as a “death bed repentance.” The Democratic Party, for Ruffin, was the party of slaveholders and he urged black voters to judge the parties on their past records and current advocacy of Reconstruction. Ruffin praised Grant’s record and without Democratic support of concrete policies protecting African American rights his opposition was resolute. “Let the Democrats, if they have changed their views,” he declared, “bring forth fruit meet for repentance...let them show action to correspond in the States where they are in power.”¹⁹⁹ Ruffin rejected the moderation of northern Democrats, but rather tied their destiny to the plight of black citizens in the southern states. As long as black oppression continued in states controlled by the Democracy in the South, Ruffin argued, African Americans should oppose all Democratic candidates regardless of their past support of African American interests.

Another speaker, former abolitionist and author William Wells Brown, cautioned black voters against being swayed into supporting Democrats by Greeley’s past anti-slavery activism and Charles Sumner’s surprising support of the Liberal Democrats. Brown called for “unity of action,” and urged black Bostonians to travel to the South to

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. “Bring forth fruit meet for repentance,” is a reference to the biblical passage: “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance,” Matthew 3:8 (King James Version).

advise southern black voters against voting for Greeley.²⁰⁰ Brown looked to black Bostonians as potential national political leaders and called on them to organize beyond the borders of Boston or the Bay State. As an example of the relationship between black Bostonians and Southern black communities, John Oliver from Richmond, Virginia rose to speak and pledged the support of black Virginians for Grant as he affirmed fears that the Democratic Party in that state advocated school segregation and qualified suffrage.²⁰¹ The attendance of Oliver brought Bostonian attendees into conversation with residents of states most vulnerable to shifts in Reconstruction policy.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the members adopted a series of resolutions that declared their support for President Grant and Henry Wilson and attacked the Democratic Party as enemies of black civil rights. “We, the colored citizens of Boston,” the resolutions began, “declare our hostility to our common foe, the Democratic Party of the United States...its infamous record in causing a bloody war, with all its consequences, is not by us forgotten.” The resolutions declared the Republican Party as the chief defenders of black liberties and equality. Therefore, the black Bostonians in attendance announced, “we shall as a people cast our vote...for the nominees of the Republican Party.”²⁰² Although the convention agreed “as a people” to cast votes for Grant and Wilson, there were some in Boston who opposed universal allegiance to the president, but rather sided with the Liberal Democrats.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

Foreshadowing tensions that would be greater in the 1880s, Robert Morris and others supported Greeley, which drew the ire of many of Boston's black Republicans. At an August meeting of Boston's black Republicans Charles Remond issued a severe condemnation of Greeley's black supporters and considered them "traitors to the cause of the black men."²⁰³ When one of the Greeley supporters rose to rebut Remond's attacks, the meeting's organizers refused to grant him permission to speak, but rather urged him to schedule his own meeting at another time.²⁰⁴

Morris blamed Grant for continued black oppression. At a meeting of black and white Greeley supporters held in Ward Eleven on September 3rd, Morris explained his support and acknowledged his marginal partisan position among African Americans. Boston's black community, he explained, "had made it pretty warm for him lately," but he refused to back down from his independent position. "He had never been accustomed to having a whip cracked over his shoulders," the *Boston Globe* reported him saying, "but had been accustomed to do his own thinking and talking."²⁰⁵ Morris's declarations for Greeley came, however, more from dissatisfaction with the improvement of African American conditions under Grant than a specific endorsement of any Liberal Democratic policy.

Unlike black Republican supporters, who praised Grant's resistance to the Ku Klux Klan, Morris blamed the president for its existence and argued that he and other African Americans could do a superior job of suppressing Klan violence.²⁰⁶ "Give him a

²⁰³ "Politics in Ward VI," *Boston Daily Globe*, August 29, 1872.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ "The Greeley Club in Ward XI," *Boston Daily Globe*, September 4, 1872.

²⁰⁶ This is similar to Sumner's complaints about Grant, see Foner, *Reconstruction*, 506-507.

good black sheriff and a regiment of black men,” Morris said, “and he would suppress the Ku-Klux at once.”²⁰⁷ The *Boston Globe*’s report of Morris’s speech recorded more than just calls for African American resistance and protection, but added his calls for vengeance upon white supremacists. “When he got in sight of the place where the Ku-Klux were,” Morris proclaimed, “there would be none there. If he saw a black man whom they had hung to a tree, there would be a white man hanging beside him before the morning.”²⁰⁸ Morris’s calls for vengeance were prescient in their similarities to rhetoric used by other black independents in the 1890s in opposition to lynching.

Undeterred by dissenters, as the election approached, Boston’s black Republicans organized a grand convention of black voters from throughout Massachusetts and New England.²⁰⁹ The organizers, including George Ruffin, Charles Remond, and Lewis Hayden, called the convention to demonstrate the unity and commitment of African American voters in the region to Grant and the Republican Party. Unlike the previous meetings which were comprised of local and state audiences, this convention hoped to attract the attendees from around New England and the nation. In doing so, political leaders linked their debates to national questions of political inclusion. “Many of us,” the organizers exclaimed in the address announcing the convention, “will for the first time be called upon to exercise, in a national election, the highest right of freeman...a right secured by the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ “The Greeley Club in Ward XI.”

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ “Meeting of the Colored Republicans of Ward VI,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August, 15, 1872; “Address to the Colored Citizens,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 17, 1872.

²¹⁰ “Address to the Colored Citizens.”

The Republican Party, in their view, was responsible for the greatest advancements in African American civil rights, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, and therefore black voters had a responsibility to keep it in power and prevent Democratic ascendancy. “[The amendments] will only be continued to us by the Republican Party, which originated and adopted those amendments despite the utmost efforts of their opponents; the party now opposing us...would use every exertion to abridge or annul those rights, as the past history of the Democratic Party fully proves.”²¹¹ For Republican supporters, continued Republican dominance was all that would guarantee future African American progress and prevent the entrenchment of white supremacy.

When the meeting convened in September 1872 in Faneuil Hall, men from across New England joined with national leaders like Frederick Douglass and John Langston to express their unified support for Grant and Wilson. The speakers reiterated the sentiments in their call declaring that the Republican Party was the only protection for African American rights. Grant, George Ruffin argued as he opened the meeting, was a true and consistent ally of African Americans as compared to the “vacillations and inconsistencies of Greeley.”²¹² As Ruffin closed, he urged listeners to think of the legacy of the Civil War and look to the election of Grant as a continuation of those successes. “Vote,” Ruffin called upon the crowd, “that the work, begun under the immortal Lincoln, may be finished under Gen. Grant.”²¹³

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² “The Colored Convention,” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 6, 1872.

²¹³ Ibid.

Ruffin's support of Grant continued as national leaders like Frederick Douglass and John Langston spoke out against the Democratic Party. Frederick Douglass, in his first Faneuil Hall appearance since the Civil War, affirmed African American support of the Republican Party and called on black voters to look closely at the past record of the parties and not be swayed by promises and platforms for the future. "There was nothing in the antecedents of the Democratic Party," Douglass explained, "that gave the least hope or encouragement to the colored man that his rights would be maintained by that party."²¹⁴ The Republican Party he proclaimed had always been consistent in its maintenance of African American rights. John Langston, former inspector general for the Freedmen's Bureau and dean of Howard University Law School, echoed Douglass and urged the audience to "support the Republican and utterly demolish the Democratic Party."²¹⁵ For former anti-slavery activists like Douglass and Langston, support for Democrats was a betrayal of their victories and they vigorously condemned black endorsement of Greeley.²¹⁶

Among the officers of the convention were also those like George Downing, a wealthy caterer and hotel owner from Rhode Island, who advocated political independence. Although Downing was an associate of Douglass and lobbied in Washington, DC for African American equality, he advocated forcing both parties to support black interests by dividing the African American vote.²¹⁷ Downing would be a

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid. For more on John Langston, see William Cheek and Aimee Lee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829-65* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

²¹⁶ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 39.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 38-39.

major advocate for African Americans leaving the Republican Party in later decades. In 1872, however, he endorsed Grant and Wilson. Downing made his sentiments publically known in a letter published in the *New York Times*. “Hoping for the time when colored men may consistently divide among parties,” Downing wrote, “I shall not only cast my vote for the Republican nominees, but with my voice and pen endeavor to persuade me fellow countrymen...to do likewise.”²¹⁸ Downing’s support of the Republican ticket despite his advocacy of political independence is indicative of the general sentiment of most black leaders in Boston. Although some expressed disapproval and disappointment with the Grant administration, most were unwilling to cast their vote for the Democrat.²¹⁹ Republican loyalty, however, would diminish in the coming decades.

On Election Day, black voters filled the ward room on Pinckney Street and the Phillips School House to cast their ballots. Grant successfully won the election by a large majority with over sixty-nine percent of the vote.²²⁰ In Ward Six, over 1,300 of nearly 1,600 voters cast a ballot for the incumbent president.²²¹ The *Daily Globe* reported that black residents in the Sixth Ward “turned out in full force, and made a day of it.”²²² Despite Grant’s overwhelming victory, in Massachusetts over 10 percent of Republicans defected from the party to support Greeley, the largest percentage in the Northeast.²²³

²¹⁸ “George T. Downing Declares for Grant and Wilson,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1872.

²¹⁹ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 42-43.

²²⁰ “The Voting Today,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 5, 1872; “Ward Six,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 6, 1872; “The Election,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 6, 1872; *Guide to US Elections*, Vol. I, Fifth Ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2005), 686.

²²¹ “Vote of Boston,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 6, 1872.

²²² “Ward Six.”

²²³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 509; Baum, *Civil War Party System*, 172-173.

While Grant emerged victorious and most black Bostonians celebrated his election, the damage to the Republican Party had been done and the increasing shift away from the ideological support for black equality would have lasting influence on black Bostonian politics in the next decade.

This election exposed the conflicts within the black community. It demonstrated that some African Americans were willing to oppose the Republicans and Greeley's defeat did not quell the debate over party affiliations. Indeed, as historian Richard Abbott argues, "The Liberal Republican movements, if they achieved nothing else, did encourage voters to exercise more independence in casting their ballot."²²⁴ Further, the pronounced loyalty that some black Bostonians showed for Republicans in 1872 would increase the feeling of betrayal as Republicans began to draw away from a civil rights agenda in the late 1870s. Over the next decade, support of the Republican Party would come under increased fire and some tenuous Grant supporters, like Edwin Garrison Walker, would become some of the most critical opponents of the Republican Party by the end of the 1870s. By the end of the decade many of Grant's former supporters would abandon the Republican Party in favor of a man who in 1872 was an arch-enemy of Liberal Republicanism, Benjamin Butler.

African Americans fashioned their own brand of independent politics, one which sought loyalty to ideas of political equality and uplift of African American citizens. While reformers sought to reduce political patronage, African Americans often courted these positions as important entry points and footholds in local, state, and federal government. The shift towards organizational politics may have helped eclipse some of

²²⁴ Abbot, "Massachusetts: Maintaining Hegemony," 22.

the ideological underpinnings of Reconstruction for white Republicans, but for many of the party's African American members, the drift away from ideology was at the center of their criticisms and, for some, their departure from the party in the later 1870s and 1880s.

Chapter 2

“Colored Politicians are Getting Tricky”: The Growth of Independent Politics and the Election of Benjamin Butler, 1877-1883

On August 18, 1882, an editorial in the *Boston Daily Globe* declared that “the negro is the most pliant tool in the hands of the Republican Party. Ignorant and superstitious, a few paid leaders guide the flock with the ease that a shepherd dog guides a flock of sheep.”²²⁵ Although the *Globe* claimed to be making the comment about the relationship between African Americans and the Republican Party nationally, this statement provoked an immediate outcry from members of Boston’s African American community.²²⁶ Howard L. Smith countered the *Globe*’s “gross misrepresentation of our status” in a letter to the editor published two days later. Countering allegations of blind party loyalty and political ignorance, Smith replied, “That the Negro is a pliant tool is but one of the many misstatements made by factions inimical to the welfare of the Negro.” “We have lived long on promises,” Smith continued, “But that is past. We have awakened from our lethargy to a sense of our condition, and the annals of future history...will record for the colored race of today and futurity a brilliant record, that will be second to none of any nationality.”²²⁷

African Americans in Boston refused to be pliant tools of the major political parties, but rather engaged in heated debates over which candidates and over which party,

²²⁵ “The negro is the most pliant tool...,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 18, 1882.

²²⁶ “The Negro and the Republican Party,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 20, 1882.

²²⁷ Ibid.

if any, deserved black votes. The exchange reached a fevered pitch following the presidential election of 1876 and the reemergence of Benjamin Butler as a candidate for governor, and culminated in his successful campaign in 1882. During this period African American voters challenged one another in the local and the national press, declaring their support for Butler while also denouncing the Republican Party's inaction and reversal on civil rights.

By the time of the tumultuous 1876 election of Rutherford B. Hayes, some African Americans in Boston doubted the place of civil rights on the Republican platform. Some openly rejected traditional allegiances to the party, instead seeking political power by shifting or dividing support between the two major parties. Several issues united Boston's African American independents. First, was opposition to any compromise on issues of African American civil rights. For these activists, attempts to roll back the reforms of radical Reconstruction or a refusal to act when civil rights were infringed upon was cause for mistrust. This was especially true when African American voting rights were not fully enforced.

Boston's black independents were also concerned about the lack political appointments for African Americans from local Republican administrations. They understood political appointments as a way to secure a foothold within state and local government and gain symbolic legitimacy for African American leaders. Black office holding, historian Richard Valelly explains, was a manifestation of "civic status" and, along with the access to voting, represented African Americans' full participation in the

democratic public sphere.²²⁸ For many it was a chance to demonstrate publically the education and political skills they had been cultivating for decades. The election or appointment of African Americans to public office would show both the wider public and up-coming generations of black citizens that African American officials were well qualified and could excel in such roles.

The politics of black independents functioned at two levels, local and national. Activists campaigned for the election of local candidates interested in institutional reform in Bostonian and Massachusetts. They also moved fluidly across party lines on the national level, hoping to increase the country's interest in the conditions of African Americans beyond the borders of the Bay State. By rejecting the support of any particular party, independents declared their destiny to be destiny standing apart from traditional political institutions. They demanded the respect and recognition of political parties as prerequisites for their support and imagined themselves, not as lesser members of the body politic, but as fully qualified citizens endowed with the authority to shape ideas and policy to their own views.

Post-Reconstruction Politics

The fluid nature of African American political positions during the last half of the 1870s is best understood in the context of national and Massachusetts state level party politics. The Republican Party was fractured into several major factions. Liberal Republicans, or Mugwumps, moved away from federal protection of African American

²²⁸ Richard M. Valelly, *The Two Reconstructions: The Struggle for Black Enfranchisement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 5-6. See also: Judith N. Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

rights, emphasizing instead tariff reduction, civil service reform, internal improvements, national education, and reform of the internal revenue service. In contrast, Stalwart Republicans continued to cling strongly to Civil War and Reconstruction-era principles. They were proud supporters of Ulysses S. Grant, opposed concessions to southern Democrats, and often secured their authority through political patronage. Another major faction was the so called “half-breeds” This group paid more attention to economic development as they advocated a strong central national government. Although they tended, like the stalwarts, to seek a tough federal policy towards the southern states, they opposed political patronage and were strongly opposed to Grant’s re-election for a third term in 1880.²²⁹

In Massachusetts, these divisions led to intraparty conflicts for control. The political climate of the state was such that merely invoking the principles of the Civil War and radical Reconstruction could not secure victory. Historian Dale Baum explains that, while questions about protecting African American civil rights persisted, they suddenly had competition. Other issues and concerns had become more pressing in the minds of Massachusetts voters.²³⁰ Such intraparty struggles, combined with the economic realities that followed the panic of 1873, made it difficult for voters to differentiate between the Republican and Democratic platforms by the end of the 1870s.

The Republican Party was fracturing in the Northern states. At the same time, Democrats began to temper their hard line stance against African American rights. In some areas they openly cultivated support from black communities. In northern states

²²⁹ Wang, *The Trial of Democracy*, 183-185.

²³⁰ Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 209-210.

like Massachusetts, the Democratic Party advocated support for the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, but opposed federal enforcement or protection of these rights. The federal government, they stated, lacked the requisite authority. The protection of African American rights in the South was the responsibility of state governments. Democrats ran successful campaigns in Massachusetts districts where they minimized the differences between themselves and opposing candidates on issues of African American rights. With this strategy, as Dale Baum explains, Democrats encouraged Massachusetts voters to defeat Republican candidates without rejecting the Republican Party's legacy of civil rights progress.²³¹

Simultaneous to this "New Departure," northern Democrats attached themselves to issues of progressive labor reform and positioned themselves as the party of immigrants and working people. The party leadership saw black voters as contributing political leverage and were therefore less likely to voice positions that might alienate this potentially valuable electorate. Despite the small number of African American voters in states like Massachusetts, their support could determine the outcome of state and local elections. The inclusion of former Republicans in the Democratic Party also brought traditional supporters of African American rights onto Democratic tickets.²³² The changes in the northern Democratic Party succeeded in attracting African Americans who were becoming increasingly skeptical of the Republican Party and sought a more independent political position. As Lawrence Grossman explains, while African Americans continued

²³¹ Ibid., 197-198.

²³² Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 99-103; Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 170. This unification of Republicans and Democrats was particularly evident, for example, in the 1872 Massachusetts gubernatorial election when the only two ballots offered in the state were the Liberal Republican/Democratic Ticket and the regular Republican ballot.

to oppose Democratic actions in the South and at the national level, they were much more likely to consider Democratic candidates for state or local offices.²³³

Black political independence had shared space with other issues in Boston's political discussions during the 1860s and early 1870s. Criticism of the Republican Party became considerably more pointed, however, following the so-called congressional 'compromise' in the disputed Hayes-Tilden election in 1877. This state of affairs was worsened by the consequent acceptance of the policy of redemption advocated by the Hayes administration. Such policies underscored the precarious political position of African American civil rights and echoed fears expressed in debates over the Fourteenth Amendment. As one critic explained, "The North is willing, for the sake of peace and commerce, to sacrifice the rights of the colored man, ... the church and state, the press and public men are silent and dare not lift up their voice against Hayes's policy."²³⁴ Grounded in a belief that absent specific federal protection for voting rights, there emerged a concern that political power in the South would revert back to white politicians and lead to the disenfranchisement and social and political oppression of African Americans nationwide.

The Growth of a Political Independent Movement

Rebellion from within the Republican Party erupted around the gubernatorial campaigns of Benjamin Butler during the late 1870s and early 1880s. For his African American supporters, Butler's service during the Civil War and his work on behalf of

²³³ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 60-61. For a brief discussion of the relationship between the Massachusetts Democratic Party and African Americans in Boston see: *Ibid.*, 77-79.

²³⁴ "Dissatisfied Colored Men," *Boston Daily Globe*, October 5, 1877.

African Americans afterwards more than made up for his antebellum support of Democratic candidates. As a member of the US House of Representatives, Butler was a key advocate of federally enforced civil rights laws and severe punishments for members of white supremacist vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan.²³⁵ Butler was admired for his work on the Civil Rights Bill while a member of Congress in 1875.

A letter inviting Butler to speak in Boston reflected a broad spectrum of black supporters. Republican George Ruffin and independents Robert Morris, James Trotter, and Edwin Garrison Walker, praised Butler's work, "to secure legal guarantee and efficient protection of our race and rights, and admitted the sagacity and rare foresight you have shown in watching the plots against us and the peace of the Union."²³⁶ There was general praise for Butler across party lines for his part in the passage of federal civil rights legislation. This changed when Butler began his campaign for governor in 1876, Black voters divided between those who would remain loyal to the party of Lincoln and those who would follow Butler out of the Republican fold.

In 1878, Butler's popularity among black supporters rose during his run for governor on the Democratic ticket against Republican Thomas Talbot.²³⁷ These meetings were led by a new group of black leaders who would be instrumental in giving voice to African American independent politics in the coming decades. For example, on October 1878 there was a rousing rally for Butler in the Ward Nine ward room. Sponsored by the

²³⁵ James M. Trotter, "The Late Contest in Massachusetts," letter to the editor, *New York Globe*, November 17, 1883; T. A. Bland, *Life of Benjamin F. Butler* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1879); Hans Louis Trefousse, *Ben Butler, the South Called Him Beast!* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1957); Richard Sedgewick West, *Lincoln's Scapegoat General; a Life of Benjamin F. Butler, 1818-1893* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965).

²³⁶ "General Butler and the Colored People," *Boston Daily Globe*, March 18, 1875.

²³⁷ West, *Lincoln's Scapegoat General*, 366-369.; Trefousse, *Ben Butler*, 240-242; Robert S Holzman, *Stormy Ben Butler*, 214.

African American and white Greenback Labor clubs, the meeting was led by men like John Ruffin and J. D. N. R. Powell. Reports noted that Greenback party members were drawn largely from Republicans and that in the coming election a large percentage of the ward's black voters intended to support their "old friend" Benjamin Butler.

In addition to holding well attended public rallies, political leaders reached out to the African American constituency through the pages of Boston's newspapers. George Patterson wrote several letters to the *Boston Globe* advocating African American support for Butler. Patterson focused on Butler's past support for black civil rights and condemned the blind support of Republicans by black leaders. Patterson declared, "since he has espoused the cause of the colored man [Butler] has been a consistent friend...[unlike] all the great army of Republicans who have used and abused the colored man...Benjamin Butler is one of the few who has not wavered."²³⁸

Patterson called on African American leaders to show political courage and support Butler, even if that meant alienation from Republicans. "The great trouble with the colored people," Patterson concluded, "is that they have too many men (leaders) on the fence ... they talk loud and long about their rights, but they seem to forget that it is only he who votes and speaks as his conscience dictates, without fear or favor who truly exercises the right of suffrage."²³⁹ Despite his criticism, Patterson remained optimistic. "Let the leaders waver as they may," he wrote, "I believe that the mass of colored voters

²³⁸ "Butler and the Colored Men," *Boston Daily Globe*, September 2, 1878.

²³⁹ Ibid. Patterson specifically targeted the Wendell Phillips Club, a prominent African American organization, and alleged that they had taken money from the Republican Party. The Wendell Phillips Club was founded in February, 1876 by a group of prominent African American men in Boston. The object of the organization was, "the moral, intellectual, and political advancement of the people and for the social intercourse and enjoyment of its members." *Boston Journal*, February 17, 1876, Wendell Phillips Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Ma.

will deposit their votes for Benjamin F. Butler.”²⁴⁰ Patterson’s comments demonstrate a political schism in the African American community and further show the conflicts around independent politics. While there were some who still remained hopeful about the progress that could be achieved within the apparatus of the Republican Party, there were those, like Patterson, who saw African Americans as destined for second class status within the party. The only way for black voters to receive recognition within the major political parties, they argued, would be to cast their ballots with discretion and force the parties to compete for their vote.

Patterson exposed racial discrimination in the Republican Party and criticized prominent African Americans for their support of segregated events. At an October 1878 rally for Republican candidates at Liberty Hall in New Bedford, for example, George Ruffin and Lewis Hayden addressed the crowd. However, during the speeches, ushers forbade African American women from taking seats in one of the galleries, explaining that those seats were reserved for white attendees.²⁴¹ Not only were attacks used to discredit the state Republican Party, but were circulated to shame leaders like Ruffin and Hayden.

Consequences of Independent Support

Benjamin Butler was defeated a second time in his quest for governor in 1878, despite the encouragement of an increasing number of black supporters. He carried

²⁴⁰ “Butler and the Colored Men.”

²⁴¹ “Facts for Colored Voters to Read,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 1, 1878.

Boston by 4,283 ballots case, but lost the state by over 25,000 votes.²⁴² In Ward Six, with its significant African American population, Butler received 35 percent of the 1,653 votes.²⁴³ This election showed the negative consequences African American voters faced if they voted against the Republican Party. Although support for Democrats was growing, the party continued to be a minority in the city. Republican business owners attempted to pressure their black employees into voting for Republican and black voters often faced termination if they refused. African American's, thus, faced severe personal and professional costs for choosing to go against the establishment.

Following his loss, Butler compared the intimidation of voters in Boston to that faced by African American's in the South. Butler contended that in the 1878 election the Boston poll was as badly 'bulldozed' as those in South Carolina, and that although it lacked the "shotgun style" intimidation of southern elections, it was equally as effective and "led to as important changes in the public expression of popular opinion as the use of an armed force would have done."²⁴⁴ While not resorting to violence, wealthy members of the Republican Party were able to use their influence over the employment and livelihood of voters to influence these voters' selection. For an African American electorate already facing a shrinking labor market, the potential of losing employment was a powerful inducement. This form of intimidation some alleged was just as, if not more, effective than violence.

²⁴² West, *Lincoln's Scapegoat General*, 369; "110,00 Men," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 6, 1878; *Guide to US Elections*, Vol. II, Fifth Ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2005), 1502.

²⁴³ *Record of Votes by Precinct, 1878*, City of Boston Archives, Boston, MA.

²⁴⁴ "Bulldozing at Home," *Boston Daily Globe*, January 6, 1879.

A display of “arrogant force” in the case of armed intimidation, newspapers argued, could have been met openly and directly opposed. Whereas the power exerted by employers was more insidious and more difficult to organize against. “The moneyed men of [Massachusetts],” the *Boston Daily Globe* suggested, “knew a better way of manipulating the voters of humbler standing, and acting upon their knowledge, they instituted a terrorism that from the quiet tone it was impossible to defy, and extremely difficult in most cases to meet openly.”²⁴⁵ These cases of voter intimidation were particularly effective against some African American voters who chose to defy Republican leadership.

One victim of voter intimidation in the 1878 election was Elijah McIntire, who had worked as assistant janitor at the Boston post office for five years. Several days before his termination, McIntire was working alongside his white supervisor who asked which candidate McIntire planned on voting for in the coming election. McIntire replied that he was planning on voting for Benjamin Butler. When asked why, McIntire explained that he thought he had, “a right to do so as General Butler has done more for the men of his color than any other man.” According to McIntire’s account, the supervisor ceased discussion, but his expression was “decidedly unpleasant.”²⁴⁶ Soon after this political discussion with Badger, Elijah McIntire was terminated from his job.

Other cases of African American voter intimidation were more direct. On Election Day in precinct three of Ward Nine, an African American man named Green came to the polls to vote and cast a ticket for Benjamin Butler. However, at the polls that day was R.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

M. Thompson, a prominent member of the “Young Republican” political club. According to affidavits from the precinct inspectors, he stood near the rail and marked off the name of each voter as he cast his ballot. Thompson was also Green’s employer and confronted him as he was leaving the polls. With an “upraised finger” Thompson informed Green that, “You need not work for me anymore.” The *Boston Daily Globe* argued that Thompson’s actions “could not fail to frighten off other voters, similarly situated.”²⁴⁷

The events surrounding the political choices of voters like Elijah McIntire and Mr. Green demonstrate that by choosing to vote for candidates other than Republican, black voters risked their jobs and reputations. To support Butler was a political decision that extended beyond the rhetorical arguments of prominent leaders, but that had very real consequences for African Americans who put independent politics into action. Despite threats and acts of retaliation, African American voters continued to support candidates outside the Republican Party in future elections. Many would suffer similar consequences for their political independence.

A Growing Independent Insurgency

In the face of political opposition, following Butler’s defeat in 1878, African American independents increased as a political force in the city and state. As their opposition to the Republican increased so too did the reactions from Republican loyalists. From 1878 through Butler’s successful election in 1883, independents and Republicans tested the limits of black political unity. While they came together to advocate for

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

increased civil rights, they were sharply divided over which political party would best help them achieve these goals.

Among the growing number of independents were new vocal opponents of the Republican Party. John Ruffin, for example, was among this new group of leaders. He was a proud advocate of Benjamin Butler and vehemently denounced those who chose to remain with the Republican Party. In late September 1879, a *Boston Daily Globe* reporter interviewed Ruffin about the political sentiment of African American voters in the West End. Ruffin praised the political judgment of African Americans who, Ruffin suggested, had great instincts when it came to choosing the best candidates. “[African American voters] have the welfare of the state and the nation at heart,” Ruffin explained, “and if any white man is in doubt...let him watch the black man and he will not go astray.”²⁴⁸ With this judgment, Ruffin told the reporters that black voters in the West End had chosen Benjamin Butler as their preferred candidate. “I tell you,” Ruffin declared, “you will find the colored voters on the Butler ship this fall, and under God’s guidance she will reach the harbor a long ways ahead of her competitors.”²⁴⁹

Ruffin openly targeted prominent African American leaders who, he argued, only supported Republicans to gain political positions and favors. Like independent advocates of earlier years, Ruffin suggested these leaders were too taken in by the Republican Party leadership to join the rising independent movement. He explained, “We don’t expect that the colored men in the state-house and custom house will vote for [Benjamin Butler], but I believe that if they could get away from the ring-rule that each and everyone of them

²⁴⁸ “The State Campaign: Interview with a Prominent Colored Man,” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 23, 1879.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

would support him at the polls.”²⁵⁰ Ruffin and other Butler supporters saw the Republican Party leadership in the state as only serving its own self-interests, whereas they trusted Benjamin Butler to look out for the interests of the people of the state.

While the growing independent insurgency declared their opposition in the pages of the press, community meetings increasingly became the site of battles over preferred party affiliation. For example, the September 1879 meeting of the Bay State League, the first large public meeting of the organization, was a site of contestation over which party and candidates the organization would advocate. Supporters of all candidates recognized the political influence and force of the league and each side publically declared that it spoke for the sentiments of a majority of the league’s members.

Newspaper coverage of the meeting also shows the political bias of the press and how the same event was reported in different ways. The *Boston Daily Advertiser*, as a supporter of Republican candidates, reported a mass meeting of “Colored Republicans.”²⁵¹ The *Advertiser*, in its coverage, made scant mention of the African American independents in the crowd, while the *Boston Daily Globe* highlighted the participation of “a large and respectable Butler element.”²⁵²

Among those who supported the Republican John Davis Long for governor were A. B. Lattimore, a former Republican representative to the General Court, and James W. Pope, the current candidate for the General Court. Speaking on behalf of the Republican cohort was famous Civil War commander Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson who,

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ “The Colored Republicans,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 1, 1879.

²⁵² “In the Ninth Ward,” *Boston Daily Globe* October 1, 1879.

while invoking the memory prominent anti-slavery figures, claimed, “that the nation had been saved by the moral sentiment and moral courage of the North, which was embodied in the Republican Party.”²⁵³ Higginson’s statement is representative of a common rhetorical tactic of Republican supporters, who used the memory of and public reverence for anti-slavery and the triumph of the Union in the Civil War to encourage African American voters to support Republican candidates. Higginson concluded his speech by declaring that by the end of the year all those who opposed the election of the Republican candidate would “see that they had made the most egregious blunder they had ever been guilty of.”²⁵⁴ Not all in the audience agreed.

The Republican speakers at the first Bay State League meeting were confronted by those who strongly opposed Long for governor and were dedicated to Benjamin Butler as a candidate. Although the *Boston Daily Globe* recognized that the rally had been advertised as “A Grand Republican Mass Meeting,” the reporter for the *Globe* highlighted the large number of Butler supporters at the gathering. The *Globe* reported that many Butler supporters in the crowd were taking notes of the speeches to use in later campaign events. Having records of the speeches from these rallies allowed African American politicians to craft rhetoric that either reinforced the party platform or targeted statements made by supporters of the other party.

Among the Butler supporters were those who were voting against the Republican Party for the first time and those who had a fundamental opposition to the party. As the *Globe* reported, an anonymous attendee of the meeting emphasized the political fluidity

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ “The Colored Republicans.”

of black Bostonians when he declared, “I am a Republican; but I’m going to vote for Benjamin Butler.” For others, the very founding principles of the League were based in political independence and support for the General. Henry W. Johnson, who had made an unsuccessful bid for the Common Council a year earlier, explained that the League was formed by a group of African American men from Ward Nine who were dissatisfied with the political situation of the area and had “come to the conclusion that the time had fully come for the breaking up of the ring which so long had ruled the ward.”²⁵⁵ Johnson sought to declare not just his own opposition to the Republican Party, but argued that the purpose of the Bay State League was the unseating of Republican leadership. Confrontation over partisan affiliation went beyond personal loyalties, but sought to define the political identity of the Boston black community at large.

As the 1883 election neared, independents shaped the campaign for Butler into an assault on the Republican Party and targeted its inaction on issues of civil rights. Across the city “Colored Butler Clubs” and black independents gathered to galvanize support and educate black voters about the candidate. In meeting halls and church sanctuaries, African American political leaders made rousing speeches decrying the Republican Party and openly advocating Butler as their choice. One critic explained the frustration with the Republican Party: “The great trouble with the Republican party is that they have treated the colored men as their chattels. They freed them from bodily slavery only to enthrall them in a political slavery ... but the colored men have determined to throw off this yoke and establish for themselves an independent party.”²⁵⁶ Others defended support for

²⁵⁵ “In the Ninth Ward.”

²⁵⁶ “Independent Colored Voters,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 27, 1882.

Benjamin Butler citing Butler's military service and move away from the Republican Party. In justifying Butler's recent party affiliation, they reminded the voters that Charles Sumner had distanced himself from the Republican Party towards the end of his life, and thus Butler was in good company.²⁵⁷ Sumner's former allies in the anti-slavery movement, however, were frustrated by the increase in black political independence.

Former abolitionists in Boston were adamant that voting for the Democratic candidate betrayed the movement's legacy. Others felt that African Americans owed their loyalty to the political party that fought to end slavery and afterwards promoted civil rights. Newspapers printed letters from prominent former abolitionists condemning support for Butler, urging that support for the Democratic candidate was political suicide.²⁵⁸ The *Boston Daily Advertiser* included letters from William Lloyd Garrison, Jr. and Maria Weston Chapman that vigorously denounced Butler for his support of the Democratic Party before the war. It was tantamount to a pro-slavery endorsement. While acknowledging Butler's service during the Civil War, Garrison wrote, "that the darkness of his background brought him into vivid distinction." "No personal excellence," Garrison continued, "could atone for bad principles."²⁵⁹ This contestation suggests how valuable Republicans thought black vote was and the significant inroad political independence had made into the black electorate.

Butler rewarded black voters for their support when he was finally elected in November 1882, winning by nearly 14,000 votes.²⁶⁰ Ward Nine was one of the few areas

²⁵⁷ "Independent Colored Voters;" see also Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 77-79.

²⁵⁸ "Butler and the Colored People," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 7, 1882.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ *Guide to US Elections*, Vol. 2, 1502.

of the city that went to the Republican candidate. With some black support, however, Butler won 42 percent of the 1,463 votes cast.²⁶¹ This was a significant gain from previous election. Butler advocated social reforms including woman suffrage, eliminating the poll tax, reforming the management of almshouses and penal institutions, limiting the hours of labor, and increasing workers' wages.²⁶² His victory increased the strength among African American independents and gave them the victory they awaited. Butler's victory gave increased credibility to the movement as a political force in local politics and black independents were optimistic that they could continue their prominence through Butler's reelection a year later. At a September 1883 meeting on Cambridge Street a gathering of black independents including John Ruffin and Edwin Garrison Walker renounced the Republican Party and declared their continued support for Butler. "The Republican Party of Massachusetts of today is not the Republican Party of the days of Sumner," the new organization declared, "but is drifting into coolness and indifference to our interests as colored men [;] we deem it wise to take a decided and independent stand...we believe in General Butler and will vote for him this fall, and also use our untiring zeal to persuade others to do the same."²⁶³

The victory for independents increased tensions between Butler's supporters and black Republicans. Even as they came together to advocate civil rights for all African Americans they bitterly fought over partisan loyalty. Loyal African American Republicans, many of whom had held government posts, advocated civil and political

²⁶¹ *Record of Votes by Precinct, 1882*, City of Boston Archives, Boston, MA; "Butler Elected," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 8, 1882.

²⁶² West, *Lincoln's Scapegoat General*, 372-374.

²⁶³ "Colored Independents," *Boston Daily Globe*, September 27, 1883; "Our Hub Letter," *New York Globe*, October 6, 1883.

rights as did black independents. But they saw the best opportunity for progress through continued allegiance to the Republican platform. They urged African American voters to stay with the Republican Party as they decried “the growing tendency of some of us to advocate the immediate and unconditional severance of our membership with the Republican Party.”²⁶⁴ The acknowledgement of this ‘growing tendency’ reflected a fear that black support for Democrats would increase the roll back of gains made since the Civil War.

Both groups were adamant in preserving the rights of African Americans nationally. Despite partisan divides, in community and statewide meetings both independents and Republicans could come together to advocate for issues like anti-discrimination and education. They observed a rapid increase in the African American population and hoped to form an organization that would protect their rights as citizens and “make our vote influential.”²⁶⁵ The internal divisions, however, erupted when they discussed which political party would receive the influential votes. For example, debates during a conference to unify African American voters from throughout Massachusetts held in Boston in September 1883 illuminated these tensions.

Organizers hoped to devise the best method for attaining black civil and political rights in the state and the nation. Men from throughout the state and of all political persuasions met in the parlor of Smith Brothers catering in Boston to discuss the future of racial progress. “Colored men of Massachusetts and the Country,” declared the opening address, “the time has come when a more perfect union of the colored people of this

²⁶⁴ “Black Republicans,” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 18, 1883.

²⁶⁵ “Our Hub Letter-Colored Men of Massachusetts in Council,” *New York Globe*, September 22, 1883; “The Colored Men,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, September 18, 1883.

commonwealth and country is of vital importance in maintaining the rights we now enjoy and in attaining those which, by prejudice, fraud or violence, we are now deprived.”²⁶⁶

The disenfranchisement of black voters in the South, obstructions to jury service, and the denial of civil rights across both the North and the South were the meetings foremost concerns. “We owe it to ourselves and to our manhood,” they continued, “to demand at all times and in every place our civil and political rights, and to be satisfied with nothing short of equality of rights which constitutes our place in this republic.”²⁶⁷ The conference connected local crises of discrimination with the increasingly violent efforts toward disenfranchisement across the South. They hoped that through networks of local associations and clubs dedicated to the uplift of their race, African Americans could organize nationally and together confront obstacles full equality.

Education for African Americans across the South was a major objective that all the attendees agreed on. Superior education, they argued, would help secure lasting positions of power, thereby increasing resistance to policies intended to limit civil and political rights. The education of black Southerners was a common subject of these types of meetings. The conditions of public education in Boston were quite good and the basic literacy of African Americans in Boston was generally high. The high level of basic education and the resources for learning in Massachusetts influenced calls for educational improvement nationally.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*, 93, 102-103.

Those in attendance in Boston were not satisfied to make issues of education solely a concern of southern communities. Rather, they sought a national interregional strategy whereby local activists and institutions would combine the resources of northern organizations with additional resources and security provided by the federal government to provide education to African Americans across the South. For these men in Massachusetts education, together with other issues of political and civil rights, transcended local circumstances and all were central to visions of citizenship that affected African Americans nationally.

Civil rights and education produced consensus, while the role of political parties exposed vicious divisions. Republicans argued that until African Americans became politically organized nationally the party provided them an effective platform from which to wage attacks on disenfranchisement and limits on civil rights. “To break away from the Republican Party before we are organized,” they argued, “would be an act of political suicide. We therefore say stick, until by new movement we are ready for the new departure.”²⁶⁹ The Democratic Party they argued would “absorb our power and leave us nothing but the carcass of empty promises and professions.”²⁷⁰ At the conclusion of the meeting Republicans George Ruffin and George Washington Williams, were selected as delegates the National Convention of Colored men in Louisville, Kentucky. The choice of staunch Republicans to represent Boston at the national convention outraged the independent attendees. Independents, emboldened by the election of Butler, argued that political independence was a viable national strategy and on that should be

²⁶⁹ “Our Hub Letter,” *New York Globe*, September 22, 1883; This sentiment was echoed in a letter to the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, see “Butler and the Colored Men,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 6, 1883.

²⁷⁰ “Our Hub Letter,” *New York Globe*, September 22, 1883.

advocated at the national convention. Ruffin and Williams, they argued, did not represent Boston's black political community and independents took to the pages of the press to express their disgust. Letters to the editor, published in the *Boston Herald* and the *New York Globe*, captured the "Discord in Massachusetts."²⁷¹ The *Globe*'s editors praised the dissension declaring that, "Colored politicians are getting tricky just like other people. They no longer think and act alike. This is an encouraging sign of liberal progress."²⁷²

James Monroe Trotter, who attended the meeting and served on the committee that crafted the address, was adamant that the conference did not speak for all African Americans in Massachusetts. "Let it be understood," declared Trotter, "that this conference (not delegated body) has no right to claim itself as representative of the 6000 colored voters of Massachusetts."²⁷³ He specifically targeted the organizers of the conference and declared that they had chosen mostly "'thick and thin' Republican partisans." The selection of the attendees, Trotter asserted, was made either by men who held offices under Republicans or, "by those who are desperately seeking small offices at the 'stingy' hands of white Republican masters."²⁷⁴ Black Republicans, Trotter argued, placed personal ambition of the welfare of the race.

Trotter was born enslaved to his white owner and enslaved mother in Mississippi in 1842. His mother, having either escaped or been freed, moved James and his siblings to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1854. While in Ohio, Trotter received an education and studied music and art. After graduating, he taught for a short time. Trotter joined the

²⁷¹ "Mr. Trotter's Statement," *New York Globe*, September 29, 1883.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

Massachusetts Fifty-Fifth Regiment during the Civil War where he achieved rank of second lieutenant and fought for the equal treatment of black soldiers. Following the Civil War he returned to Boston where Republican officials appointed him clerk and head of the registered letter division in the post office. After working as Frederick Douglass's replacement as recorder of deeds in Washington, DC, in 1889 he would start a successful real estate business to help African Americans purchase property in the Boston area's segregated housing market. Trotter's son, William Monroe Trotter, continued the real estate business and founded the *Boston Guardian* newspaper in 1901. The junior Trotter later would later become a radical ally of W. E. B. Du Bois and was a founding member of the Niagara Movement.²⁷⁵

For men like Trotter, African Americans did not need to wait for a later time to strike for their own political destiny. He called for a "new emancipation" of black voters from single party dominance and argued that political independence was central to African American declarations of freedom and full integration into the national body politic. "The question of where the emancipated colored voter is to go is now of only secondary importance," Trotter concluded. "The first work is to get him free... [so] that the color line in politics will be forever broken up."²⁷⁶ Trotter's sentiments were echoed in resolutions passed by the Boston independents led by John R. Ruffin, in a meeting a week later.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, 1-13; Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow*, 109-110; Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins*, 48; Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace*, 99.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ "Our Hub Letter," *New York Globe*, October 6, 1883.

In these arguments were major disagreements about party politics and how Boston's black leadership viewed itself in relation to the electorate. There were also divisions between those who were entrenched in the formal political culture, either as current or former elected officials, and those who moved in more informal spheres of organizational and community politics. Generally, African Americans in Boston who had either held political offices as Republicans, or hoped to do so, objected to calls for separation from the Republican Party. Those with little electoral political experience or who were candidates on failed tickets tended to support a more independent posture. Despite such general affiliations, there was some crossover that reflected views on a particular issue or candidate.

The Nomination of Edwin Walker

Both black independents and loyal Republicans again worked across differences to support Benjamin Butler's nomination of Edwin Garrison Walker to fill a seat left empty by the death of Judge and former mayor of Charlestown George Washington Warren on the Charlestown District Court.²⁷⁸ This appointment was a significant gain for African American advocates of increased appointments to civic positions and was celebrated widely. However, the eventual defeat of Walker's nomination by the Republican majority Executive Council hardened independents' opinion that the Republican Party did not serve African American interests. The defeat of Walker's nomination was a turning point in the development of independent politics in Boston and it hardened the political fluidity of earlier decades.

²⁷⁸ *Class memoir of George Washington Warren* (Boston 1886).

Edwin Walker was not Butler's first choice, but his eventual nomination confirmed black supporters that they supported the right candidate. In the months prior to his nomination of Walker, Butler had nominated two white men, James O'Brien and Joseph Cotton, for the position, but those choices were rejected by the Executive Council.²⁷⁹ African Americans criticized Butler for not nominating Walker sooner, and some threatened to abandon Butler as their preferred candidate.²⁸⁰ However, when the press circulated the names of Walker and George Ruffin as possible nominees, J. D. Powell, the Boston correspondent for the *New York Globe*, suggested, "a great political point would be gained in [Butler's] favor."²⁸¹ Boston's black independents had long agitated for political appointments like the Charlestown judgeship and they joined with Republicans in celebrating a significant milestone in racial progress in Massachusetts.

On September 13, 1883, Butler met with the State Executive Council and officially nominated Walker.²⁸² The nomination carried a wide range of endorsements from Boston's legal community, and was praised by black independent and Republican leaders. Some were suspicious, however, that Butler was using the nomination to court black voters.²⁸³ George Ruffin supported Walker's appointment, but confessed, "it will

²⁷⁹ George Washington Williams, "May it Please Your Honor," *New York Globe*, December 15, 1883.

²⁸⁰ "Our Hub Letter," *New York Globe*, August 11, 1883.

²⁸¹ "Our Hub Letter," *New York Globe*, August 25, 1883.

²⁸² Governor's Council, Executive Records, 1879-1883, Vol.92. Massachusetts Archives, Boston, Ma.

²⁸³ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 78; Charles E. Sweeny to Benjamin Butler, May 21, 1883; Joseph H. Carter to Benjamin Butler, May 23, 1883. Lula Mulliken to Benjamin Butler, May 22, 1883; George H. Murray to Benjamin Butler, August 3, 1883, September 13, 1883; Charles E. Abbot to Benjamin Butler, September, 1883; Solomon Bancroft to Benjamin Butler, September 3, 1883; Edward Hamilton to Benjamin Butler, September 3, 1883; John W. Mahan to Benjamin Butler, September 3, 1883; George W. Searle to Benjamin Butler, August 30, 1883; J. Edward Bates to Benjamin Butler, August 29, 1883; J. W. Converse to Benjamin Butler, August 29, 1883. Edward L. Jenkins to Benjamin Butler, August 22, 1883; Clarence B. Lord to Benjamin Butler, August 23, 1883; N. B. Bryant to Benjamin Butler,

have some political influence.” “Every word of Governor Butler is quoted and his deeds published all over the country,” Ruffin explained, “this act will tend to confirm [African Americans’] good opinion of him, and its influence will probably be felt more in distant parts of the country than here at home.”²⁸⁴ Lewis Hayden declared, “I do not think that there is a single colored resident in the state who would oppose the confirmation of Mr. Walker. I regard it as a very important step in the material progress of the race, and trust that the matter will not be viewed at all as a political question.” These statements of support were echoed by local black independent organizations as evidence of Butler’s fidelity to the race.²⁸⁵ Despite such support and calls for non-partisanship, Walker’s path to confirmation was not clear.

Butler’s supporters were mindful that Republicans sought to discourage black support of the governor and were skeptical that the Republican dominated state government would confirm his nomination. Continued Republican electoral dominance in the state meant that Butler was the Democratic head of a state government dominated by Republicans. Before Walker could successfully take his seat as judge, his nomination had to be confirmed by the governor’s Executive Council. Republicans controlled both houses of the legislature and the Executive Council; the Lieutenant Governor was also a Republican. Thus, the confirmation of Walker, who had opposed the Republican Party,

September 4, 1883; Charles E. Gibbs to Benjamin Butler, September 8, 1883; John Brown to Benjamin Butler, September 3, 1883. Executive Department Letters, vol. 246, District, Municipal, and Police Courts, G01/Series 567x, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

²⁸⁴ “The Silver-Tongued,” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 13, 1883.

²⁸⁵ “Our Hub Letter,” *New York Globe*, October 6, 1883.

could fail.²⁸⁶ The *Boston Globe* suggested that, however unlikely, “an attempt is being made among certain of the blue blood Republicans and the dudes in that party to bring about the rejection of Mr. Edwin Garrison Walker... [They] dislike exceedingly to have a Democratic governor secure the credit of being the first to honor a colored man by appointment to high position.”²⁸⁷ The Republican-dominated executive council delayed Walker’s confirmation. Independents viewed this as a strategy to prevent the confirmation until after the gubernatorial election had occurred. Perhaps, they supposed, the Republican aim was to avoid the African American support for Butler that would follow Walker’s appointment.²⁸⁸

Of further concern to Walker’s supporters were the personal attacks against the nominee’s character. Letters to the governor and in the press criticized Walker for poor personal character and questionable integrity. On October 13, 1883 the *Boston Evening Post* published an article declaring that Walker was arrested in Charlestown in 1875 for being drunk and disturbing the peace. The *Post* also attacked Walker’s supposed poor financial judgment, claiming that he had been forced to leave two downtown offices for failure to pay the rent. Walker’s supporters declared that these published reports were false and a further ploy on the part of the Republican Party to block Walker’s nomination.²⁸⁹ In response to these allegations Walker sued the *Post* for ten thousand

²⁸⁶ West, *Lincoln's Scapegoat General*, 374; Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 78; Holzman, *Stormy Ben Butler*, 217.

²⁸⁷ “Mr. Walker and the Committee,” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 16, 1883.

²⁸⁸ “State Political Topics,” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 29, 1883; “Mr. Walker’s Nomination,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 1, 1883, “Mr. Walker and the Council,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 2, 1883.

²⁸⁹ John Brown to Benjamin Butler, September 3, 1883; Charles E. Gibbs to Benjamin Butler, September 8, 1883, Executive Department Letters, vol. 246, District, Municipal, and Police Courts, G01/Series 567x, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.; “Our Hub Letter,” *New York Globe*, September 22, 1883.

dollars and, through the pages of the *Boston Daily Globe*, publically responded to the allegations.²⁹⁰ The attacks on Walker were further evidence of the costs to personal reputation that could follow opposition to Republicans and the lengths Butler's opposition would go to get elected.²⁹¹ Despite attempts to discredit him, the announcement of Walker as the first African American judge in the northern states was celebrated widely and his confirmation was generally expected to be easy. Observers believed that Republican Party would not risk the fallout that might come if it rejected Walker.

The optimism of supporters towards Walker's nomination continued to the final meeting of the Executive Council on October 5, 1883. Both Republican and independent black leaders made last minute speeches of endorsement.²⁹² Republicans like John J. Smith and independents like James Trotter addressed the council. They told the council that it had, "the power to make Massachusetts the first State which had ever dared to place a black man in a high and honorable position." The speakers further pushed the Republican council to use Walker's confirmation to demonstrate that the party was indeed looking after the interests of African Americans. Black citizens of the whole nation, they asserted were, "waiting to see whether [the council] would stand by the repeated assurances of Republicanism, or prove, in the hour of trial, that when they said

²⁹⁰ "Is it a Conspiracy!" *Boston Daily Globe*, October 14, 1883; "Boston Politics," *Boston Daily Globe*, October 14, 1883.

²⁹¹ "Simmons and Walker," *Boston Daily Globe*, October 23, 1883. George Downing expressed this sentiment in a letter to the *Boston Globe*, see George T. Downing, "A Leader in His Race," letter to the editor, *Boston Daily Globe*, October 23, 1883.

²⁹² "Our Hub Letter," *New York Globe*, September 22, 1883.

they were friends of the colored man they did not mean what they said.”²⁹³ Many awaiting the response of the council predicted that the result would have great influence on the future political support of African Americans for the Republican Party.

In spite of the last minute appeals and the general optimism of his supporters, the executive committee, on a tie vote, refused to confirm Edwin Garrison Walker as a judge.²⁹⁴ African American spokespeople immediately responded with harsh words about the committee and the Republican Party and some hardened their declarations of political independence. Lewis Hayden, a loyal Republican, said that he had done everything in his power to help Walker’s nomination and “felt keenly the slight put upon his race by the rejection.”²⁹⁵ The African American debate society and the Garrison Lyceum, issued resolutions against the actions of the committee and called all African Americans to “resent the insult to our race as it richly deserves.”²⁹⁶ Attention to the decision also came from outside the state. T. Thomas Fortune and the *New York Globe* expressed their frustration and condemned the council’s decision “made in their insane fear of Benjamin Butler.”²⁹⁷

While some levied condemnations against the Republican Party other statements declared that the Executive Council’s decision hardened opposition to the Republican Party. James T. Still, a graduate of Harvard Medical School exclaimed, “The Republican

²⁹³ “Mr. Walker Rejected,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 6, 1883; see also “Mr. Walker’s Rejection,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 6, 1883.

²⁹⁴ Governor’s Council, Executive Records, Vol.92. GC3/Series 327, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, Ma.

²⁹⁵ “The Blow at the Colored Men,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 7, 1883.

²⁹⁶ “Boston Politics”

²⁹⁷ “Our Hub Letter,” *The New York Globe*, October 13, 1883.

Party has been for years promising the colored voters recognition, but the moment an occasion occurs for a practical demonstration of their faithfulness to their promise they desert [it]...I sincerely look for a fitting rebuke by the colored voters of Massachusetts, and the exposure of Republican hypocrisy.”²⁹⁸ Howard L. Smith, a correspondent to the *Boston Daily Globe*, declared that the Republicans had finally shown their hand and, “as for myself, the rejection of Mr. Walker has made me an enthusiastic Butler man.”²⁹⁹ Joseph Stevenson, a Republican who said he had never supported a Democrat in his life, wrote to the *Globe* explaining that after the Walker rejection, “The colored men have a duty now to perform and that is to work for the reelection of Governor Butler...the action of the council does not affect solely one man, but all the colored people of the State.”³⁰⁰ Edwin Walker’s comments after his rejection affirmed the criticisms and asserted that the Republican Party had opposed his nomination “because they did not want to give [Butler] the credit of doing more in nine months than [the Republican Party] had done in twenty years of Republican rule.” Butler, Walker declared, was “the best friend the colored people had in this commonwealth.”³⁰¹

Walker’s rejection was an important moment in African American politics in Boston. For years previous, there had been African Americans who had alleged that the Republican Party was grounded on false promises and took the vote of African Americans for granted. With Walker’s rejection African American Republicans were

²⁹⁸ “Mr. Walker Rejected.”

²⁹⁹ Ibid.; “The Blow at Colored Men.”

³⁰⁰ John E. Stephenson, “A Colored Voter Speaks,” letter to the editor, *Boston Daily Globe*, October 8, 1883.

³⁰¹ “Colored Men Booming for Butler,” *The New York Globe*, November 3, 1883.

forced to question their loyalty and black independents finally had a specific and prominent example of the Republican Party's not acting on its rhetoric of civil and political uplift for African Americans.

The Independent Backlash Solidifies

The failure of Walker's nomination confirmed independent suspicions that the Republican Party was more interested in securing electoral victory than supporting African Americans. In the aftermath of Walker's nomination Boston's independent movement solidified in opposition to the Republican Party. Black independents believed Walker's rejection had given them a distinct advantage, but Republicans continued to urge Butler's political demise.

In particular, Colonel George Washington Williams, the renowned African American historian, strongly advocated the removal of Benjamin Butler and cautioned black voters against straying from the Republican ticket, explaining that they could exercise plenty of independence as a member of the Republican Party. In regard to the rejection of Edwin Garrison Walker as judge, Williams explained that he knew reasons for the rejection that had never been shared in public and challenged Walker to "meet him on any stump" and discuss the question.³⁰²

Attacks continued as the election neared and African Americans in Boston increased their public activity and hosted rallies over once a week. In October 1883, a large crowd filled Parker Memorial Hall to proclaim their political independence and show their support for Butler. A diverse crowd of both black and white supporters, as

³⁰² "Colored Republicans," *Boston Daily Globe*, October 30, 1883; "Our Hub Letter," *New York Globe*, November 3, 1883.

well as many women, was in attendance. Prominent speakers occupied the dais, including George T. Downing, and Edwin Garrison Walker. The speakers made connections to the Republican Party of the past, but declared that it had been transformed since its creation. “Between the past and present Republican Party,” they proclaimed, “there is a chasm so vast that the conscientious cannot span it.”³⁰³ The period of Republican commitment to ideologies of black equality, independents argued, had past.

Downing was born to former slaves in 1819 in New York and attended private school. While at school he built relationships with future black leaders like James McCune Smith and Henry Highland Garnet. Along with these men Downing joined the New York Anti-Slavery Society. In 1846 Downing moved to Rhode Island where he opened a successful restaurant, hotel, and catering business. While in Rhode Island Downing actively fought for the integration of the state’s public schools. After the Civil War Downing joined Frederick Douglass in lobbying for black rights in Washington, DC and became a close relation of Charles Sumner.³⁰⁴ Although Downing lived in Rhode Island he spent much of his time in Boston and was a central figure in the city’s black political life.

Downing reiterated the independent spirit of his affiliations as he expressed his dissatisfaction with the Republican Party and refused to declare his wholesale support for the Democrats. “I come here,” he said, “as a Republican, but one who has dared to criticize the party.”³⁰⁵ Downing responded to critics who declared that he had joined the

³⁰³ “Our Colored Citizens,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 31, 1883.

³⁰⁴ William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 1003-1006; Lawrence Grossman, “George T. Downing and Desegregation of Rhode Island Public Schools, 1855-1866,” 36 no. 4 (Nov. 1977): 99-105.

³⁰⁵ “Our Colored Citizens.

Democratic Party. “I doubt not that I shall be charged with going over to the Democratic Party,” he recognized. “If sustaining those measures which are best calculated to advance my race, and voting for men who advocate those measures is Democracy, then I am willing to admit I am a Democrat.”³⁰⁶ Downing criticized the history of the Republican Party’s loyalty to African Americans and invoked the memory of the Civil War in order to “see how much gratitude is due from us.” “When the North went to war it was to preserve the Union, not with any idea of setting the slaves free,” he explained. “Then after the war who but the blacks have held the balance of power so that the Republicans could maintain their control of the government...it seems to me the gratitude should be the other way.”³⁰⁷ Republicans owed African Americans for victory during the war and electoral triumph in its aftermath, therefore the Republican Party should be held accountable to those who preserved its power.

As George Downing concluded, Walker spoke in favor of political independence and responded to his critics. “We are to start,” he announced, “a new departure of the colored people from the Republican to a better party.” He spoke of his former loyalty to the Republican Party, but condemned attacks on Benjamin Butler. “I have heretofore acted with the Republican Party, for I believed it to be the best organization for the interests of the colored people, but that party now declares that the only issue...is how and in what manner we can best kill Benjamin Butler.” Walker concluded by specifically singling out George Washington Williams and his criticisms of Walker. Speaking of Butler’s work on the Civil Rights Act, Walker declared, “No man...has done so much for

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

its advancement of the black man in the last twenty years as General Butler. Take that to Williams.” Again addressing Williams’s criticisms Walker continued, “If there is anything about you or me that debars us from the society of respectable people, let it be declared openly and at once; but let no man go round the State hinting that he has something to tell. He who does not declare openly what he has to say about my character and yours is a scoundrel and a coward.”³⁰⁸

As the event closed Walker issued a final call to action. “The work of the next few days is most important. Go work in Boston...Take hold of this work and show on the 6th of November that you feel the insult offered to your race, and the attempt to back it up by fraud, lies, and perjury, and show that you are men enough to resent it.”³⁰⁹ Walker’s statements combined his personal disappointment at the way he was treated by the governor’s committee and black Republican leaders into an appeal for broad support of Benjamin Butler. For Downing, Walker, and the other speakers the Republican Party had once been a valuable ally, but perceived inaction on black advancement was cause for African Americans to place their political support elsewhere.

As Election Day approached, black independents were optimistic about Butler’s success. Regardless of the outcome, they celebrated the activism of African Americans in Boston and the evidence that the political parties had begun to value the black vote.³¹⁰ The enthusiasm of Butler’s supporters, however, was not matched by the results once the

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ “Our Hub Letter,” *New York Globe*, November 3, 1883.

polls had closed on Election Day. Butler lost by over 10,000 votes.³¹¹ In the predominantly African-American Ward Nine he did not prevail, losing by 458 votes.³¹²

In the weeks following the election, black independent leaders salvaged what they could from the past campaign. J. D. Powell Jr., announced in his *New York Globe* column, “That we are an important factor in politics is a fact that our prominent white politicians will admit.”³¹³ James Monroe Trotter, in a letter to the *New York Globe*, explained his encouragement and excitement about the organization of independent voters over the past year. “Although it cannot be fairly claimed that the color ‘break’ from the so-called Republican Party has been general,” Trotter acknowledged, “it has been of proportions so large as to occasion surprise and delight, and to be without parallel in any of the States.” Trotter and other black independents declared that the ranks of like-minded supporters would continue to grow and he remained committed to independent status in all coming political contests.³¹⁴

The commitment to political independence was affirmed when, prior to officially leaving office, Benjamin Butler successfully appointed George Ruffin to the judicial position in Charlestown which had previously been denied Edwin Garrison Walker.³¹⁵ Although celebrated by the black community generally, this nomination confirmed

³¹¹ *Guide to US Elections*, Vol. 2, 1502.

³¹² *Record of Votes by Precinct, 1883*, City of Boston Archives, Boston, MA; “Robinson Wins!” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 7, 1883.

³¹³ “Our Hub Letter,” *New York Globe*, November 17, 1883.

³¹⁴ James M. Trotter, “The Latest Contest in Massachusetts,” letter to the editor, *New York Globe*, November 17, 1883; Africanus, “The Colored Judge,” letter to the editor, *New York Globe*, December 8, 1883.

³¹⁵ “Our Hub Letter,” *New York Globe*, November 17, 1883, “The Executive Council,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 8, 1883; Governor’s Council, Executive Records, Vol.92. GC3/Series 327, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, Ma.

independent suspicions that the failure of Walker's nomination was highly partisan.

Ruffin, who had been outspoken in his support for the Republican ticket, seemed likely to be confirmed. Indeed, on the evening of Election Day, Ruffin had been received by the Republican state committee with rousing applause for his contributions to the campaign.³¹⁶ However, the records of the official letters to the governor do not include any letters endorsing Ruffin, as they do for Walker, and the timing of the nomination suggests it was done quickly. If indeed Walker was rejected because of his support of a Democratic candidate, then Ruffin's Republicanism likely accounts for his being approved easily. "Fortunately for Judge Ruffin," the *Boston Daily Globe* recognized, "he possesses not only ability and character, but, what is vastly more important to the gentlemen composing the present council is a member of the Republican Party."³¹⁷

Ruffin's appointment was greeted with great congratulations from all sides in the African American community, but especially among the Republican voters. On November 22, George Washington Williams organized a celebratory dinner at Young's Hotel. Many among Boston's prominent black leaders were in attendance, including Archibald Grimké, Charles L. Mitchell, William H. Dupree, John J. Smith, John H. Wolff, Julius C. Chappelle, George W. Lowther, and Lewis Hayden. "The appointment of Mr. Ruffin to the municipal bench was an important move on behalf of the colored people," Williams proclaimed. "It is not only an honor for one man but for the whole colored race."³¹⁸

³¹⁶ "Our Hub Letter," *New York Globe*, November 10, 1883.

³¹⁷ "Mr. Ruffin's Confirmation," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 20, 1883.

³¹⁸ "Judge Ruffin Dined," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 23, 1883; "Our Hub Letter," *New York Globe*, December 1, 1883.

Despite Williams's calls for unanimous celebration, noticeably absent from the dinner were Edwin Garrison Walker, George T. Downing, John L. Ruffin, and other black independents. Butler's supporters praised Butler's decision as proof of his dedication to African American progress and regarded it as further justification that they had supported the right candidate in the election.³¹⁹ Although proud of the first African American judge in Massachusetts, the state's black independents criticized Republican support of Ruffin's confirmation, arguing that if men like Ruffin were willing to accept the political favors of Butler, they should have voted for him.³²⁰ They continued to argue that the Republican Party of the state liked African Americans well enough as voters, but not enough to confer political positions upon them. They advocated African Americans' withholding votes from the Republican Party until that party had proven that it was going to serve the interest of African Americans and, like Butler, appoint them to significant positions.

Participation in the contentious debates surrounding the campaigns of Benjamin Butler for governor demonstrates how Boston's African American community did not stand outside state or national political transformations, but were important participants in the changes and deeply involved in shaping their own political identities within the shifting landscape. While issues of African American civil liberties assumed less importance among white politicians, for African American supporters these issues were pre-eminent and the preservation of their interests was a central contributing factor to their partisan allegiance. Moreover, for African American supporters of independent or

³¹⁹ "Our Hub Letter," *New York Globe*, December 8, 1883.

³²⁰ Editorial, *New York Globe*, February 16, 1884.

Democratic candidates, party politics was more than a remedy for local political alienation. Rather, they placed faith in the numerical strength of African Americans as voters in Northern states and they maintained the larger goal of influencing the Northern branch of the Democratic Party towards the support of civil rights across the country. Support for this national strategy would increase as northern Democrat Grover Cleveland became president in 1885 and local issues of civil rights became entangled with the hope for political opportunities at a national level.

Chapter 3

“A Recognized and Respected Part of the Body Politic”: Black Independents, Grover Cleveland, and the Pursuit of Federal Appointments

In February 1886, members of the Sumner National Independent League gathered at 27 Cornhill Street, the former headquarters of the antislavery newspaper the *Liberator*, to declare their support for the administration of President Grover Cleveland. At the conclusion of the meeting the attendees, led by League president Edwin Garrison Walker, penned a letter to the Democratic president. The letter, “respectful, and at the same time, manly and dignified,” explained why this group of black Bostonians supported the president and requested that they be rewarded for their dedication.³²¹ Their message expressed “the hope and further the belief that your administration will advance in the direction of properly acknowledging the colored people as a...recognized and respected part of the body politic.”³²²

Members of the Sumner Independent League, like other black independents, believed that the Republican Party took African American support for granted and refused to appoint black men to government offices, as it did for its white supporters. These offices not only provided a local political foothold, but were a wider symbol of African American advancement and a public manifestation of full citizenship and equality. The refusal to appoint African Americans to prominent government offices, the

³²¹ Edwin Garrison Walker to Grover Cleveland, February 1, 1886, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; “Street’s Boston Letter,” *New York Globe*, February 6, 1886

³²² Walker to Cleveland, February 1, 1886.

League explained to Cleveland, “deprives him of the advantages of enjoying the respect that goes along with recognition and the possession of respectful offices, [and] it keeps him from becoming practically educated in the management of the government.” Such appointments, the League argued, would influence more African Americans to embrace political independence and the support of Democratic candidates. Further, the League members declared that political appointments would go a long way toward increasing the status of African Americans nationally. “[Political appointments] would,” the league argued,” have a happy influence in reconciling the whites of all sections...regarding merit in the management of public affairs in preference to other nonessential distinctions.” “It would,” they concluded, “be a simple act of justice toward those who have been so unjustly treated.”³²³ For Butler’s supporters, political appointments would help African Americans gain access to government offices that were otherwise unattainable.

The pursuit of political appointments by Butler’s black supporters reframes patronage in the context of African American politics. Patronage was maligned by reformers in the 1880s as part of a corrupt ‘spoils system’ which unfairly rewarded political party loyalists with government positions.³²⁴ Reformers, historian Mark

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ For a discussion of criticisms of patronage, see Edward Miller, “They Only Vote for the Spoils: Massachusetts Reformers, Suffrage Restriction, and the 1884 Civil Service Law,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 8, no. 3 (July 2009): 341-363; Mark Summers, *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 233-237. Geoffrey Blodgett, “Ethno-Cultural Realities in Presidential Patronage: Grover Cleveland’s Choices,” *New York History* 81, no. 2 (April 2000): 189-210; Sproat, “*The Best Men*”: *Liberal Reformers in the Gilded Age: With a New Preface*, Phoenix ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 257-258. Citations refer to the Phoenix edition; Dobson, *Politics in the Gilded Age*, 54-61; Geoffrey Blodgett, *Gentle Reformers: Massachusetts Democrats in the Cleveland Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Ari A. Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils: A History of the Civil Service Reform Movement, 1865-1883*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 260-261.

Summers shows, argued that “spoilsmanship united personal and partisan advantage to create a system where the main purpose was winning office rather than doing anything with it.”³²⁵ For African Americans, however, political appointments had a deeper significance than just political reward. As black citizens became increasingly marginalized from elected office, political patronage allowed them to gain a foothold in government and demonstrate to their community and the general public that not only were black officials worthy of the office, but that they could thrive in such positions. Black independents also saw patronage, as a way to convince black Republicans of the benefit in supporting Democratic candidates. For their part, many Republicans who opposed Cleveland initially spoke out in favor of political independence or the Democratic Party and became more critical of Republican candidates and elected officials in Boston and Massachusetts.

A focus on presidential patronage shows the relationship between local and national politics. Black independents in Boston were emboldened by their successful organizing during the gubernatorial campaigns of Benjamin Butler and hoped to organize on a much broader scale in national campaigns. New organizations, the Sumner National Independent League especially, had a national focus and hoped to shape national public opinion through local activism. They hoped that by publically demonstrating support for the moderate Democrat Cleveland that African Americans in other regions would join in dividing the black vote. They hoped that as the northern branch of the party adopted a more progressive platform, in order to secure the votes of African Americans, the southern branch would either moderate their position on civil rights or split off from the

³²⁵ Summers, *Party Games*, 235.

national Democratic Party, thereby weakening their position nationally. For black independents, political activism at the state level in local campaigns was part of a strategy which sought to shift the dynamics of national party politics.³²⁶

The pursuit of federal appointments also brought a new national visibility to Boston's black independents. After a protracted and frustrating nomination process, which resulted in the rejection of Cleveland's first choice, New Yorker James Matthews, James Monroe Trotter was successfully appointed to replace Frederick Douglass as recorder of deeds for the District of Colombia. The controversy surrounding the nomination process placed African Americans at the center of heated debates over civil rights, patronage, and the power of a centralized federal government. The opposition of Republicans to Matthews's and Trotter's confirmation confirmed the fears of independent black Bostonians that indeed the Republican Party was willing to put its own interests before those of African Americans. In this way, they saw on a national level what they had witnessed in the failed appointments of black candidates to State and local offices.

While the period of large scale Democratic and African American cooperation declined by the 1890s. The period cannot be regarded as a total failure. This chapter shows how the shifting strategy of the Democratic Party created significant openings for strategies of African American politics apart from, and sometimes in opposition to the goals of the party leadership. Black pursuit of political appointments went beyond personal ambition. For African American politicians, the political appointments of a few men would assist the uplift of the entire race. However, the failure or difficulty in gaining appointments revealed that despite local personal and community success in reputation or

³²⁶ This strategy was best enunciated by George T. Downing, see "The Colored Man's Hour," *New York Globe*, February 9, 1884.

education, African American candidates were still hampered by national conditions of race relations. The experience of black independents seeking appointed office and the debates over party loyalties would have a direct effect on the strategies and political ideas espoused by civil rights organizations in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Boston's Independents Regroup

Disappointed following the defeat of Benjamin for reelection as governor, Boston's black independents hardened their resolve to defeat Republican candidates. In doing so they looked beyond the borders of the Bay State and sought to inspire a national movement. One of the central vehicles of this nationalization of the local movement was a new political organization, the Sumner National Independent League. Founded by Edwin Garrison Walker, The Sumner National Independent League, later the Sumner National Political League, advocated political independence and through its members had a direct influence on the civil rights organizations that would form at the end of the decade. In addition to Walker, other prominent men in the independent movement who led this organization included newspaper editor Howard L. Smith as recording secretary, George T. Downing as chairman of the executive committee, and William Wells Brown as corresponding secretary.³²⁷ The members of the League transcended the boundaries of local and state politics as they spoke of organizing a national movement.

In November 1883, the league met at 73 Cornhill Street for the first time and the *Boston Daily Globe* published its constitution a day later. The group outlined its main

³²⁷ "Our Hub Letter," *New York Globe*, December 8, 1883; "Colored Men Organizing: The Sumner National Independents—Their Officers and Objects," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 28, 1883; "The Sumner Independents," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 28, 1883. Penn, *The Afro-American Press*, 360.

purpose in its founding resolutions as, “to influence a healthier tone in political parties...that a broad and independent movement for the general good may emanate from the poor and humble of the land.”³²⁸ In particular, the new organization expressed its rejection of unwavering loyalty to the Republican Party. “The undersigned believe,” the address affirmed, “it is just and timely to affirm that it is their interest to no longer ally themselves with any political party that is manifestly disposed to not treat them with due consideration...our primary consideration is to have increased respect for our rights.”³²⁹ The members of the League affirmed their goal of expanding their cause beyond Massachusetts: “We create this independent political organization because we believe the great political parties have not been true...We believe that a broad and independent movement for the general good may emanate from the poor and humble of the land.”³³⁰ Rather than defining themselves simply as a Massachusetts or an African American institution, the Sumner National Independent League planned to reach an audience beyond the streets of Boston and to influence politics at the highest levels of government and in all regions of the nation.

In the pages of *Globe*, the Sumner National Independents explicitly announced their outrage at the Republican Party and declared their support for the Democrats. “The Republican Party has not been consistent and true to its colored ally,” they announced. “We believe that the Democratic Party, which antagonized us so bitterly from policy, is beginning to see that it is politic to change its course.”³³¹ The Sumner National

³²⁸ “Colored Men Organizing.”

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

Independents called for African Americans across the nation to organize and become a powerful independent bloc. “We desire,” they concluded, “a correspondence be commenced all through the land, to give force and efficacy to the determination to henceforth pursue a more independent policy as to political parties.”³³² It was hoped that by denying any party the permanent affiliation of black people, their vote would not be taken for granted and their interests would be attained and their rights respected.

The Sumner Independents enumerated the demands and expectations for the enforcement of equal protection laws and for the recognition of black political allegiance with appointed positions. These were central causes for black voters’ shifting loyalties in the late 1870s and early 1880s and would continue to influence black Republicans to support Democratic candidates. “We ask for nothing that is unreasonable,” the League explained; “we demand the protection of our civil or public rights under the laws protective of all citizens regardless of color, race, nativity, or faith.”³³³ Further the League declared, “we have the ambitions and aspirations of other true Americans...we are not willing to be passed by...because of our color, or in any manner discriminated against on that account when honors and offices are being bestowed.”³³⁴ The Sumner Independents acknowledged the importance of official positions as a symbol of progress. In their view, the lack of political positions depressed the conditions of African Americans as much as the harm caused by civil rights violations. The League asserted that governmental appointments would go a long way towards “creating respect for a

³³² Ibid.

³³³ “Colored Men Organizing.”

³³⁴ Ibid.

class despised and treated with contempt, which contempt depresses in many ways not thought of by those not thus situated.”³³⁵

The members of the League hoped that it could appeal to the sympathy of the Democratic Party toward American workers. “A better feeling is growing daily, between the colored man and the rest of the laboring class,” the Sumner Independents explained; “the Democratic Party, which had antagonized us...is beginning to see that it is politic to change its course, it will attract to it a further representation of the moral sentiment of the land through being just toward those who, though poor and of the laboring class are struggling to command respect.”³³⁶ The Sumner National Independents recognized that the Democratic Party was hoping to make further inroads into northern states and by claiming that it was “politic” to support African American interests, they hoped to tap into this new strategy. Further, its members, many who were active in independent politics during Benjamin Butler’s gubernatorial campaigns, turned their sights towards the coming presidential election and hoped to unite a national black independent coalition. “We issue this brief appeal to the colored people,” the League concluded, “with hope that others in other parts, like us, will organize and become a power in the coming presidential campaign and until our rights are recognized.”³³⁷ By unifying black voters across the nation the Sumner League hoped to demonstrate the power of the black electorate as a swing vote in national elections.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

President Cleveland and New Independents

In the pursuit of the presidency in 1884, the Democratic Party leadership attempted to downplay sectional differences and distance the party from its history of white supremacy and opposition to Reconstruction. The Democratic Party before the 1884 asserted in its platform, “the equality of all men before the law, we hold that it is the duty of the Government...to mete out equal and exact justice to all citizens of whatever nativity, race, color, or persuasion.”³³⁸ Equality before the law, however, did not mean aggressive federal enforcement of rights. The Democratic Party celebrated the end of federal military protection of polling places as “conclusive proof that a Democratic administration will preserve liberty with order.”³³⁹ While the Democratic Party affirmed a dedication to equal rights, it stopped short of calls for federal interference in policies of the states. As Grossman argues, “Cleveland’s Southern policy proved to be squarely within the new departure tradition of barring federal involvement, thus leaving the ruling Conservative white Democrats in control.”³⁴⁰ While the new platform alone may not have swayed black voters, the selection of Grover Cleveland supported an argument that the Democratic Party might bolster black rights.

Grover Cleveland was a likely presidential candidate to attract black independent voters. As governor of New York he signed legislation integrating the public schools in New York City, while preserving black governance of traditionally African American

³³⁸ “Democratic Platform,” *The Political Reformation of 1884: A Democratic Campaign Book* (New York 1884), 5; Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 108. See also Mark Wahlgren Summers, *Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion: The Making of a President, 1884* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

³³⁹ “Democratic Platform,” The platform also pointed out the overturn of Republican legislation, “to fix the status of colored citizens,” by a Republican Supreme Court. *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁴⁰ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 113.

schools.³⁴¹ Further, his support of civil service reform and the 1883 Pendleton Act which required examinations for federal jobs opened up federal employment for a growing number of African Americans.³⁴² Despite the indications of Cleveland's amiable stance on black rights, African Americans were wary following his election in 1884.

Cleveland won the national election with 49 percent of the popular vote. In Massachusetts, however, he lost to the Republican James G. Blaine's 48 percent plurality with forty percent of the votes.³⁴³ In Boston, Cleveland defeated Blaine by almost 18,000 votes.³⁴⁴ Notably in this election, Benjamin Butler had run as a Greenback Party candidate winning 8 percent of Massachusetts votes which likely siphoned some votes away from the Democratic candidate. Voters in Ward Nine went for the Democrat Cleveland by a slim margin over Blaine.³⁴⁵

In the aftermath of Cleveland's inauguration, some African Americans remained skeptical of the Democratic president. There was fear among African Americans that the rise of a Democratic president would usher in a new era of white supremacy. An anonymous "Cautious Democrat" from New York wrote Cleveland that "the impression prevails...among the Negroes that it is within your power and that you intend to make slaves of them again."³⁴⁶ Black fears also confronted white southerners who were anxious

³⁴¹ "An Act in Relation to Public Education in the City of New York," 1884 N. Y. Laws ch. 248.

³⁴² Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 127.

³⁴³ *Guide to US Elections*, Vol. 1, 689.

³⁴⁴ Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *A Manual or the use of the General Court, 1885* (Boston 1885), 275.

³⁴⁵ "Vote of the State by Districts," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 5, 1884.

³⁴⁶ 'Cautious Democrat' to Grover Cleveland, November 17, 1884, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. For other mentions of black anxiety, see: FJ Porter to D. S. Lamont, November 17, 1884; John Snead to D. S. Lamont, November 17, 1884; A. S. H. to Grover Cleveland, November 19, 1884; Arthur Hood to Grover Cleveland, November 19, 1884; Merritt E. Sawyer to Grover

that Cleveland's election would provoke violent resistance to Cleveland or the emigration of African Americans from the South.³⁴⁷

Cleveland's Boston supporters sought to quash concerns about Cleveland. In a letter to the *Boston Advocate*, William Bonaparte explained, "The colored people have at last seen that the election of Mr. Cleveland has in no way affected them either North or South...colored men are growing liberal and independent each day; and in no better time than now."³⁴⁸ The election of Grover Cleveland had a significant effect on convincing black Bostonians to support Democratic candidates. As Bonaparte explained, black voters had "some fear last year, that the election of a Democratic president would change their condition for the worse, but now they find that everything goes along just the same even with the head of the government Democratic, they see now that it will be best for them now to go to the Democratic Party."³⁴⁹ "This," Bonaparte concluded, "is unquestionably the mugwump year for the colored voters."³⁵⁰

While there was still some fear of the Democratic Party, due to the increasing oppression of African Americans in the South, the election of Cleveland, a northern moderate, convinced some that perhaps the animosity of Democrats towards black civil rights could be assuaged. This optimism encouraged others to join the independents in support for Cleveland.

Cleveland, November 19, 1884, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 109.

³⁴⁷ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 109-110.

³⁴⁸ "Think for Themselves," *Boston Daily Globe*, October 27, 1885.

³⁴⁹ "A New Freedom-Colored Men Shaking Off Party Shackles," *Boston Daily Globe*, October 26, 1885.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

The victory of independent politics at the national level coupled with perceived failure of local Republican leadership to attract former Republicans away from the party. Black residents of Ward Eleven, for example, formed the “Citizen’s Club of Ward Eleven” just previous to the presidential election to support the president. With a membership of approximately 200 the Citizen’s Club, the *Boston Daily Globe* explained, demonstrated the politics of a new generation of black Bostonians. “The young men of the race,” the *Globe* explained, “who have been educated in the public schools and are a thinking class, have followed the Republican party heretofore for the reason that they had been taught by the Republican leaders that it was for their interest so to do.”³⁵¹ This new generation was breaking away from their former political allegiances, recognizing “that the promises made to them have been made only to be broken, and although they helped to elect Republican candidates they received nothing in return.”³⁵²

William Bonaparte, a contributor to the *Boston Advocate*, affirmed the claims of the new political generation of black Bostonians and demonstrated that they looked towards the Democratic Party for better treatment. The *Boston Globe* identified the *Boston Advocate* as, “the only weekly paper in New England devoted to the wants and interests of the colored race.”³⁵³ The press also mentioned that until 1885 the *Advocate* had been a strong advocate of the Republican Party. Lending support to the shift in ideology, Bonaparte explained, “There has been a movement among the colored men, particularly among the younger and more intelligent class, to form independent clubs in

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid..

³⁵³ Ibid.

the interests of the colored race.”³⁵⁴ Bonaparte celebrated the formation of independent political clubs in the South and West Ends, as well as in Cambridge. The rise in the creation of independent organizations was evidence to Bonaparte of the declining confidence in the Republican candidates and in the support of that party as a strategy for black political progress.

Bonaparte made an effective advocate for independent politics given his former allegiance to the Republican Party. As he recalled, in 1883 on the eve of Butler’s failed reelection, he was offered the opportunity to lead a group of black voters from Ward Eleven in support of Butler. However, as Bonaparte explained, “I declined, as I was a believer in the Republican principles and party and although I thought that General Butler has been our friend it was un-Republican to support him as a Democrat and candidate of the Democracy of Massachusetts...since that time the whole thing has turned around.”³⁵⁵

Bonaparte, like other detractors of the Republicans, pointed to the public recognition African Americans had received under local and state level Democratic officials. For example, Bonaparte reminded readers of Frederick O. Prince, the current Democratic candidate for governor, who as mayor of Boston in 1875 appointed the African American Reverend Andrew Chamberlin to read the Declaration of Independence at a July 4th celebration before local and visiting dignitaries. “There has never been anything,” in Bonaparte’s opinion, “done by the Republicans to offset

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ “Think for Themselves,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October, 27, 1885.

this...Hon. F. O. Prince and His Honor Hugh O'Brien, have done more for colored voters than all the potentates who ever sat on Beacon Hill."³⁵⁶

Other prominent Bostonians like attorney James H. Wolff also expressed their frustrations with the Republican Party. Wolff had previously campaigned for Republican candidates including Governor Robinson. He explained that African Americans had been an important constituency in Robinson's campaign and that "the colored man had considerable to do with his election."³⁵⁷ However, as the next election approached, he explained Robinson's 'false promises.' Following Robinson's election, Wolff as part of a delegation of black Bostonians, visited the governor and requested that he appoint black men to fill several vacancies, among them master in chancery. Robinson, according to Wolff, "gave us to feel that there was not a man among the colored people that was adequate or capable of filling that position...things that he has done towards us and not done for us make the men almost to a unit against him...Robinson may be a man of brains, but he is not a man of heart."³⁵⁸ The failure of the Republican candidate to recognize black voters with patronage convinced Republicans like Wolff to follow independents out of the party.

The election of Cleveland, coupled with the perceived inaction on the part of Governor Robinson, was leading former Republican supporters to speak out against the Republican Party. An African American man, Holmes Hill, for example, who was described by the press as "one of the staunchest of the Republican Workers, heretofore,"

³⁵⁶ "A New Freedom."

³⁵⁷ "Brains But No Heart," *Boston Daily Globe*, October 28, 1885.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

declared his allegiance to Prince, the Democratic candidate. In particular, it was Prince's appointment of African American men to offices that convinced him to switch his support. "I am for Prince every time," Hill explained; "he has done...what the Republicans have failed to do for us, appointed to public office and to posts of honor colored men."³⁵⁹ Further, Holmes reiterated the sentiment that Republican leaders were taking African American votes for granted and felt no obligation to work on their behalf once elected. "[Republicans] think that we will come up to the polls at every election and vote the straight Republican ticket just because they say we must do so," Holmes continued; "they talk about the 'good they have done for us' and how the Democrats are our natural born enemies." Again reminding readers of the changes in African American politics Holmes explained, "This talk would do very well in years gone past, but now there are a different class of men growing up. They have been educated and they read the papers. They are able to think for themselves, and when they tell us what we know to be untrue we know it."³⁶⁰

The optimism surrounding the election of Grover Cleveland gave former Republicans the courage that the Democratic candidates could be trusted to support African American interests and that the election of such officials would not lead to an immediate restoration of white supremacist racist policies. As black Bostonians became convinced that Democratic support could be a viable political strategy, more former Republicans renounced their former allegiances and joined the independent cause. As an

³⁵⁹ "A New Freedom."

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

editorial in the *Boston Globe* recognized, “Republicans continue to desert the ship...the colored men are now breaking away.”³⁶¹

Despite their support of Democratic candidates, Bonaparte and other supporters of Prince were careful to explain that while they might cast their ballots occasionally for Democrats, they were not dedicated supporters of either party. “We have come here together,” Bonaparte said of the October 26th meeting, “not as a Democratic club...but as free and independent citizens to express (with open doors) our minds concerning the present contest.”³⁶² The Citizen’s Club of Ward Eleven endorsed similar statements with a resolution. “We no longer cling to the rotten hulk of the Republican craft, nor pledge allegiance to any other party, but intend to remain independent in politics until a better and more thorough understanding is had between the colored man as a voter and citizen and the different parties in the country.”³⁶³ Just as they rejected blind allegiance to the Republican Party, these black independents made sure that neither party could count on their vote.

Although the initial cause of black Bostonian independent support was the Massachusetts election, they understood themselves to be part of a broader national strategy in black politics to divide black voters between the parties and force the national platforms to make concessions to African American interests in order to garner black support. As Bonaparte explained, “The sun will shine on a brighter day when the colored

³⁶¹ “The Colored Men for Prince,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 27, 1885.

³⁶² “Think for Themselves.”

³⁶³ Ibid.

voter throughout this country will divide himself in politics and be an object of concern to all parties in the government of the United States.”³⁶⁴

The expansion of the independent ranks and calls for a national independent movement culminated with the formation of the Massachusetts Colored League. New and old supporters of Cleveland hoped to expand the local Boston independent mobilization into a national movement. In December 1885, members of the Sumner National League joined with other Cleveland supporters to form the new organization. The Massachusetts Colored League sought to unite independent voices from throughout, not only the state, but invited participants from all over the country.³⁶⁵ The League “having withdrawn from all party affiliations and determined to labor in the interest of the colored race of the State and Country,” declared that they were, “desirous of having the opinions of our ablest exponents of Negro Political Independence,” and had decided, “to endorse President Cleveland in his wise administration and fairness towards the Negro.”³⁶⁶

The League held its first meeting in December 1885 at Faneuil Hall. In attendance were some of the most prominent names in black independent politics throughout Massachusetts. In addition to these attendees, there were men present from Rhode Island and New York.³⁶⁷ John Boyle O’Reilly, the Irish poet and newspaper editor, also

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ “Independent Colored Voters,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 25, 1885; “Colored Men for O’Brien,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 27, 1885; “The Duties of Colored Citizens,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 5, 1885; “In Faneuil Hall for Colored Men,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 7, 1885.

³⁶⁶ John L. Ruffin to John F. Andrews, December 1, 1885, John F. Andrews Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

³⁶⁷ Editor of the New York Globe T. Thomas Fortune attended this meeting and was a vice president. It is interesting that Fortune would start an organization, “The Afro-American League” several years later which had very similar aims to this organization. This might help explain the relationship between the colored national league and the Afro-American league.

attended and served as a vice president of the organization.³⁶⁸ The League also invited Massachusetts Congressman John F. Andrews.³⁶⁹ The League supposed that the current Democratic Party had transcended its racist past and was becoming an ally of black civil rights. “We are gratified at noticing,” the League resolved, “[that] as contrasting with the past...the disposition on the part of the present Democracy is more equitable and just in its relation to the colored people at large.”³⁷⁰

Another central point of the League’s founding resolutions was the support of the Democratic Party and the Cleveland administration and the hope that this support would yield appointed positions. The League argued that such appointments would not only help African American political advancement, but would benefit the Democratic Party by encouraging more black supporters. “We entertain the hope,” the League declared, “that the Democratic administration now in power, with its resolute chief, Grover Cleveland, will accord the colored man through a fair and just recognition of his rights and merits, to be elevated generally in the esteem of his fellow citizens, which hope is fostered because it is plainly evident that it will not only be just, but politic to do so; it will surely be appreciated by the colored people of this country.”³⁷¹ In addition to these resolutions, and declarations at community, state, and national meetings, black Bostonians and their allies contacted Cleveland and other leaders in the Democratic Party in the hope of gaining

³⁶⁸ For more on the Irish relation to the league and John Boyle O’Reilly see Chapter Five in this dissertation on the political coalitions between African Americans and Irish immigrants.

³⁶⁹ John L. Ruffin to John F. Andrews, December 1, 1885.

³⁷⁰ “Rally of Colored Voters at Faneuil Hall,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 8, 1885.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

appointed offices. These attempts increased, especially following the conclusion of Frederick Douglass's tenure as recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia.

George T. Downing and the Pursuit of Patronage

In the immediate aftermath of Cleveland's election, his supporters urged him to appoint African Americans to prominent positions in the government. They argued that doing so would help the Democratic Party make important inroads among northern black communities and would help refute Republican allegations of racism. C.L. Smith, an African Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop from Bloomington, Illinois, wrote to the Cleveland Administration, "that it is highly advisable for the president to break up the 'color line' in office holding."³⁷² "The Republican Party in the North," he observed, "will not yield any portion of the colored vote without a struggle...as a matter of party concern the political managers of the administration should see that some colored men of political experience...is given a position where he can be of service in endeavoring to make friends for the administration among the colored people."³⁷³ Cleveland supporters like Smith argued that by securing large portions of the black vote in the North, the Democratic Party could swing state and local elections in its favor. "The colored vote," Smith concluded, "must be encouraged, watched and nursed, in the states where it is the most influential."³⁷⁴ Political patronage of African Americans would encourage support in the Northern state as it gave black citizens a foothold in the halls of government.

³⁷² C. L. Smith to John H. Oberly, March 24, 1885, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 121.

³⁷³ Smith to Oberly, March 24, 1885.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

Cleveland supporters in Boston urged the president to support prominent African Americans to office. In particular, they suggested George T. Downing as the preferred nominee. Since the late 1870s, Downing had become a vocal proponent of independent politics, a fact that the Sumner National Independent League brought to Cleveland's attention. A political appointment was due Downing, the League argued "because of his pioneership in the independent movement among the colored people, because of his long and favorable service in the cause of equity and his people and because he is capable, worthy, and a responsible member of his community."³⁷⁵ The appointment of Downing, a long time political independent, would send a message to the national black electorate that Cleveland recognized their support and they would be rewarded for their work and sacrifice.

The letters from supporters joined Downing's many requests to Cleveland offering his services.³⁷⁶ George T. Downing sent letters to the president searching for an appointment and hoping to use the electoral power of black independents to influence Cleveland's and the Democratic Party's position of racial equality and civil rights. His letters show the strength of the belief in strategies of independent politics and the faith in the Cleveland administration to advocate progressive racial policies. The correspondence also exposes the opposition that Downing faced and the personal sacrifice in his support of Cleveland. The failure of Cleveland to award Downing an appointment demonstrates

³⁷⁵ Walker to Cleveland, February 1, 1886.

³⁷⁶ While other African Americans petitioned Cleveland, Downing's correspondence is particular rich. For example, New York newspaper editor T. Thomas Fortune wrote letters to Cleveland seeking appointment for himself and other black independents, see T. Thomas Fortune to Patrick A. Collins, March 3, 1886, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

the misplaced optimism that a Cleveland presidency would bring with it a new black political ascendancy.

In his letters to Cleveland, Downing called upon the president to make decisions that would encourage African American voters to support Democrats and not the Republican Party. He took vocal exception to Cleveland's actions that he thought would damage calls for partisan independence and give fuel to Downing's Republican opposition. For example, in 1887 Downing wrote to Cleveland urging him to recall an order evicting African Americans from the "Arlington Reservation" on Fort Meyer just outside of Washington, DC in Virginia. Also known as "Freedman's Village" it was home to a large shanty town of African American residents who first moved there as refugees during the Civil War.³⁷⁷ Downing informed Cleveland that the eviction would be used by the Republican Party to undermine African American Democratic loyalty. "It will be used and I fear seriously by the enemy," Downing explained. "It will erase the efforts of such of us as are striving to destroy the colored man's 'blind' adhesion to the Republican Party."³⁷⁸ Although the direct impact of Downing's letter is unknown, the Secretary of War suspended the evictions on December 12, 1887.³⁷⁹

In another case Downing urged Cleveland not to remove the African American tax collector for the District of Colombia, John F. Cook. The removal, Downing argued, "will cause considerable comment among the colored people, especially by those who

³⁷⁷ "Freedman's Village Abolished," *Washington Post*, December 6, 1887, "Freedman's Village Evictions," *Washington Post*, December 13, 1887.

³⁷⁸ George T. Downing to D. S. Lamont, December 10, 1887, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³⁷⁹ "Freedman's Village Evictions."

oppose our movement for a division of the colored vote.”³⁸⁰ Downing urged Cleveland and his administration, regardless of motive, to be mindful of the way their decisions regarding African Americans would be perceived in the press and how those reports would be used to discourage African Americans from supporting Democratic candidates.

In addition to affecting direct presidential decisions, Cleveland’s supporters also sought to shape the platform of the Democratic Party in the hopes of dividing the African American vote and encouraging black support of Democrats. “Those colored men,” Downing wrote in a May, 1888 letter, “who are laboring to break the blind adhesion of the colored vote to the Republican Party, will in the presidential contest be greatly assisted by the National Democratic Convention.”³⁸¹ Downing proposed an addition to the Democratic platform. “The party” Downing proposed, “happily recognizes that involuntary servitude, except for crimes for which the party has been duly convicted, does not exist in the United States; that equality before the law for all American citizens is an affirmed principle; and that all citizens may, through merit, hope for equal consideration; it affirms in the line thereof, and in conformity with the democratic principles, its adhesion thereto.”³⁸² Adopting such a platform, Downing argued would generate confidence towards the Democratic Party among both black and white voters. Further, it would contradict attempts by the Republican Party to portray Democrats as against racial equality or African American civil rights.

³⁸⁰ George T. Downing to Grover Cleveland, April 30, 1888, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³⁸¹ George T. Downing to D. S. Lamont, May 14, 1888, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³⁸² Ibid.

Downing sought the opportunity to advise Cleveland about the state of African Americans and recommend the best tactics to secure them as Democratic voters. Following a short interview in February 1887, Downing hoped to secure a longer meeting to discuss “the enlightenment of colored men about the best policy as to political parties [and] how colored people may be reached and affected...and how [their ideas] may be brought into sympathy and cooperation with your conception of duty and right policy.”³⁸³ In another letter to Secretary of the Navy William C. Whitney, Downing explained his ideas about African American partisan loyalty and how to overcome it. “Their blind adhesion to one party,” Downing explained, “is much like the adhesion to faith or sect that is so observable in most cases; they adhere to their faith because it was their parents’ faith; reason has not much to do in the matter.”³⁸⁴

The appointment of a recognizable African American official to a prominent position, Downing argued, would make African American voters take notice and support the Democratic Party. “The attention of the colored vote [would] be arrested, as it would be by the appointment of a worthy colored man, one who is nationally known to some prominent Federal position of honor and trust away from Washington, in the North, say in the New England States. The sentiment of the section is ready for it, of this I am assured.”³⁸⁵ The appointment of such a candidate, Downing concluded, would “be favorable to the party...it would assist the hope we entertain of carrying four of the New

³⁸³ George T. Downing to Grover Cleveland, February 24, 1887, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³⁸⁴ George T. Downing to William C. Whitney, May 6, 1887, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³⁸⁵ Downing to Whitney, May 6, 1887.

England States in the presidential election.”³⁸⁶ Downing hoped to convince the Cleveland administration to address African American concerns in exchange for black votes at the polls.

In addition to calling on the Cleveland administration to transform the Democratic platform and make public attempts to court black voters, Downing looked to the president for government positions as recognition for his service in the campaign. Early in Cleveland’s first term, Downing wrote letters to the president requesting positions in the government for him and other African American supporters. “There are worthy aspiring colored men,” Downing wrote, “who would appreciate a position of honor and trust in the North; not only for personal reasons but that they might render a state good service, and because of its beneficial effect on their class, hitherto passed by in the section.”³⁸⁷

Downing’s sentiments echoed those of *Advocate* editor J. D. Powell who declared the importance of nominating an African American man to office in New England. Cleveland’s supporters argued they had sacrificed much by supporting the Democratic Party and therefore sought recognition. “The time has come,” Powell told Cleveland, “when you can do much for the class of men many of whom have stood up and been ostracized not only in social but political circles.”³⁸⁸ Powell argued that black independents were distinct from white voters who had left the Republican Party. “There are many things,” Powell explained, “to be considered in a colored man who is an independent voter that aren’t thought of when a white man leaves his party...the non-

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ George T. Downing to Grover Cleveland, January 18, 1886, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³⁸⁸ J. D. Powell to Cleveland, January 18, 1886, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

support of his people who think he is an enemy to his race if he becomes a Democrat. He becomes a martyr so to speak.”³⁸⁹ “If you have the interest of the colored people at heart,” Powell concluded, “we sincerely trust that...the colored men of New England may be recognized not by mere promises but by appointments.”³⁹⁰ Downing and Powell advocated positions in the government for African American men so that they would be public examples of black political acumen, contradicting allegations that they were unworthy or ill-suited for positions of prominence in the government.

Downing argued that if the president made African American appointments it would bolster black support for the Democratic Party in African American communities and could lead to significant Democratic gains in the North. “It is the interest of the party,” Downing wrote, “to encourage political independence among colored men.”³⁹¹ “It would be an act that would be attractive,” he continued, “to appoint...say two or three colored men to positions of honor and trust in the North...It would serve the party and probably benefit me.”³⁹² While Downing advocated appointing African Americans to office generally, he offered himself as a viable and attractive candidate.

Downing, with the support of northerners like the Sumner Independent League, sought a government position, both as personal recognition for his service for Cleveland and as a symbol of Cleveland’s support for African Americans.³⁹³ “A number of

³⁸⁹ Powell to Cleveland, January 18, 1886.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ George T. Downing to Patrick A. Collins, January 23, 1886, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³⁹² Downing to Collins, January 23, 1886.

³⁹³ Although Downing supported Cleveland and sought recognition, he cast his ballot for Benjamin Butler as a candidate of the Greenback Party. Downing asserted that although he could support Cleveland, he

gentlemen of standing,” Downing wrote to Cleveland, “have very kindly said to me that it would in their judgment be no more than my due, that it would be politic as well as in the line of justice for me to secure recognition.”³⁹⁴ Among those positions that Downing requested were “postmastership, collector of port...marshalships, commissionerships, and the like.”³⁹⁵

Downing sought a prominent appointment which he argued would lead directly to electoral gains and help secure the president’s reelection. Downing sought a position “in which my standing and dignity would not be compromised.”³⁹⁶ Such an appointment, he attempted to convince Cleveland, would “attract favorable attention and cause the colored people to grow in confidence and regard toward the [Democratic] Party; to hasten the day when being a colored citizen will not be regarded as decisive as to his selection of the political parties.”³⁹⁷ Downing also hoped his appointment would “have a happy reconciling effect on the more liberally disposed whites of the South.”³⁹⁸

Downing argued, since the Democratic Party would be able to gain easier access to offices in the South, that Cleveland’s appointment of an African American official would do more to convince Southerners of the worthiness of black men for offices than those from the Republican Party. “I am concerned,” Downing wrote to Cleveland, “to

could not support Hendricks as his vice-president, George T. Downing to Grover Cleveland, September 20, 1886, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³⁹⁴ George T. Downing to Grover Cleveland, February 23, 1886, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ George T. Downing to Grover Cleveland, March 24, 1887, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

have a Democratic administration with Grover Cleveland as its head, succeed itself, rather than have a Republican administration that might as good.” The Democratic Party needed the opportunity to demonstrate that it no longer was the party of white supremacy and slavery. Cleveland’s reelection, Downing argued, “would give the Democratic party the opportunity it should have to grow.” In particular, Downing argued that the Democratic appointment of black officials would help mollify southern antipathy against African American office holding. “It would ease contracted minds,” Downing argued, “that have been educated in the idea that one half of the people are not capable, and loyal as to hold office; it would exercise an influence in the South, no present Republican administration could.”³⁹⁹

Cleveland’s supporters, like Downing, argued that they were instrumental in leading black voters to vote Democratic and they sought recognition for this service. For example, in 1887, following the victory of Democrat John W. Davis as Governor of Rhode Island, Downing wrote to D. S. Lamont expressing the importance of black voters in Democratic success at the polls. “I am proud of the conspicuous part colored voters played in bringing about the result,” Downing exclaimed; “there is hope for Massachusetts in the same direction.”⁴⁰⁰ Future victories, Downing argued, could be secured by Cleveland’s appointment of Downing to a prominent position in Rhode Island. “The old aversion to the Democratic Party, naturally existing among the colored people will be overcome by kindness and recognition.”⁴⁰¹ Downing hoped to fill a

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ George T. Downing to D. S. Lamont, April 11, 1887, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

vacancy in the custom service at Providence, or “some position at Washington or elsewhere.”⁴⁰²

Downing attracted support from prominent northern white Democrats. For example, he received endorsements from the Democratic State Committee of Rhode Island as well as from the Democratic caucus in the city of Newport, where he was nominated for election to the General Assembly.⁴⁰³ Rhode Island Governor Davis, state officers, and officials from Newport signed a letter endorsing Downing and urging Cleveland to make the appointment. “It is a just appreciation of character,” the Rhode Islanders wrote, “and a recognition of patriotic efforts of a broad and liberal nature for us, as we do, to refer to George T. Downing...as being worthy to be recognized, and as being competent.”⁴⁰⁴ Further, they explained, “a recognition of the gentleman by his being appointed to some worthy national position of trust would be in several respects a politic move.”⁴⁰⁵ These recommendations, Downing told Cleveland, were “because I had worked to convince the colored people that it was their interest to look toward the Democratic Party with more hopeful feelings.”⁴⁰⁶ Although Downing garnered significant support among white Democrats and black independents, he faced resistance from Republican Party opposition.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ George T. Downing to Grover Cleveland, April 8, 1886, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Although nominated, Downing lost the election, as did the whole Democratic ticket.

⁴⁰⁴ Thomas G. Williams to Grover Cleveland, June 1887, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁴⁰⁵ Williams to Cleveland, June 1887. Downing is also recommended as candidate for office by Ohio governor, George Hoadly, See: George Hoadly to D. S. Lamont, March 28, 1885, Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁴⁰⁶ Downing to Cleveland, April 8, 1886.

In his letters to Cleveland, Downing often complained of the attacks he faced from black and white advocates of the Republican Party. There were African Americans, Downing argued, who opposed his advocacy of independent politics. “I am severely antagonized,” Downing wrote to Cleveland, “by the leading colored men because of my liberal policy. I am proud to say some of them are cutting the scales off their eyes.”⁴⁰⁷ Downing urged the president to reject this opposition. In a letter to D. S. Lamont, Cleveland’s personal secretary, Downing urged the president to ignore, “any adverse representation that may be made from jealousy, for personal ends, or through the lingering of the old prejudice.”⁴⁰⁸ Downing’s letters expose the personal damage that independents endured for their positions. These attacks were exacerbated by the failure of the Cleveland administration to reward black supporters for their sacrifice.

Black independent organizations wrote to Cleveland to defend Downing. In February 1886, the Sumner National Independent League wrote to Cleveland decrying attacks on Downing. “We hasten to assure [Cleveland],” the declared, “that in every state in the Union where our deputies have been [Downing] is held in high regard as a most worthy representative of the race among the foremost to encourage and indorse the independent position taken by the colored people.”⁴⁰⁹ The success of local independent politics was closely connected to the federal appointment of leader like Downing. Federal recognition, they argued, would expand the ranks of black independents, while rejection could push black voters firmly back into the Republican fold.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ George T. Downing to D. S. Lamont, November 2, 1886, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁴⁰⁹ Walker to Cleveland, February 1, 1886.

Despite Downing's many requests and letters of support, Cleveland did not appoint him to any desired position. "I feel some concern as to my relation to the Administration," Downing wrote to Lamont in June 1887.⁴¹⁰ Downing had faced much opposition and abuse for his allegiance to Cleveland and even as the president lost reelection, Downing continued to press for a position. "For advocating a policy that crossed the unenlightened convictions of the body of the colored people," Downing wrote to Cleveland, "I have encountered jeers, misrepresentation, yes, abuse...I ask that you give me some recognition...it would be an acknowledgement of services favorable to the party."⁴¹¹ African American supporters like Downing hoped that with the coming of the Cleveland administration their independent stance would be rewarded, but as Downing's attempts show, this optimism did not always transfer into physical benefits.⁴¹²

James M. Trotter and a Delayed Victory for Independent Politics

While Downing was unsuccessful at gaining an appointment, the Cleveland administration did not totally ignore its African American supporters. In the controversy over the appointment of a black replacement for Frederick Douglass as recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia black Boston's independents were placed at the center of a national discussion over black rights, political appointments, and federal authority. As

⁴¹⁰ George T. Downing to D. S. Lamont, June 13, 1887, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁴¹¹ George T. Downing to Grover Cleveland, November 21, 1888, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁴¹² Downing continued to support Cleveland and campaigned for his reelection, continued to request presidential appointments, and urge him to intervene in Southern States on behalf of African Americans see: George T. Downing to Grover Cleveland, November 4, 1891; George T. Downing to Grover Cleveland, July 12, 1892; George T. Downing to W. C. Whitney, July 15, 1892; Downing et al to Grover Cleveland, November 16, 1893; George T. Downing to Henry T. Thurber, September 7, 1894, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

historian Lawrence Grossman observes, “The fate of this appointment would transcend the bounds of mere patronage, becoming a focus of racial politics...it would demonstrate at the national level the divergent attitudes toward political recognition of [African Americans] held by Northern Democrats and many of their more prejudiced colleagues from Southern and Border States.”⁴¹³ The eventual selection of William Monroe Trotter demonstrated a significant victory for black independent politics. This success, however, contrasted the diminishing conditions of African Americans in the South and showed starkly the limits of independent mobilization.

Cleveland, like many of his predecessors, appointed African Americans to positions typically allotted for black officials. Among these were the recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia and Ministers to Liberia, Haiti, and Santo Domingo.⁴¹⁴ Although many African American federal employees lost their jobs following the change in department leadership, Cleveland’s administration attempted to preserve black members of the federal bureaucracy.⁴¹⁵ The position of recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia was particularly important. Having been held by Frederick Douglass and being in the nation’s capital, the position held great physical and symbolic meaning as an example of African American progress. While Downing did not receive the nomination, Cleveland sought to replace Douglass with another black candidate loyal to the Democratic Party.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 128.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 125-128.

⁴¹⁶ Downing applied for the position in March 1885, see: D. S. Lamont to George T. Downing, March 14, 1885, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

While most of Cleveland's appointments of African Americans caused little controversy among Southern members of the party who opposed black patronage, the choice to replace Frederick Douglass with another black man drew northern Democratic racial moderates into conflict with the southern arm of the party.⁴¹⁷ Black journalist William Bonaparte wrote to New York Senator William M. Evarts questioning the viability of such a nomination. "May we ask," Bonaparte wrote, "if in your judgment the President should nominate some colored man for Recorder of Deeds...would the Senate confirm him? And is a colored man objectionable because of his alliance with the Democratic Party?"⁴¹⁸ Cleveland's nomination of a black man to this office was a test of the influence of black independent politics.

Bonaparte's questions were at the center of much of the controversy. Cleveland's decision to nominate a black candidate enraged white Democrats in Washington who opposed black officials. This racism was disguised in discussions over local control of nominations and federal intervention. Opponents decried the president's black nominees as 'carpetbaggers' who infringed on the sovereignty of the city's white leadership.⁴¹⁹ It also forced the Republican Party to confront African American political independence and decide whether to allow Cleveland the credit for prominent African American appointments. Further, by eventually appointing James Monroe Trotter to the office, it placed black Bostonians at the center of a controversy about local rights and the place of African Americans in the Democratic Party.

⁴¹⁷ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 128.

⁴¹⁸ William H. Bonaparte to William M. Evarts, February 8, 1887, William Evarts Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁴¹⁹ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 129-130.

Douglass retired as Recorder of Deeds on January 5, 1886.⁴²⁰ Cleveland's first choice to replace Douglass was James C. Matthews, a black attorney and former campaign worker from Cleveland's home state of New York. Matthews endorsed dividing the African American vote and actively campaigned for Democratic candidates in New York. He had a long relationship with the New York Democratic Party, making him a likely candidate to replace Douglass.⁴²¹ Democrats in Washington, D. C., however, were angry that Cleveland would appoint an African American official and insisted that they maintain local control over the appointment. "The racial issue," Grossman argues, "was often veiled by the objection that Matthews, not a native of the District, was not qualified for local office."⁴²² As Matthews's nomination went before the Senate both parties had to weigh ideas and campaign promises against voters advocating white supremacy and local autonomy.

The appointment of an African American man to so prominent an office caused conflict within the two parties. In the Democratic Party, Matthews's supporters had to count on the endorsement of northern Democrats and hope that some representatives from southern states would support an African American nominee out of loyalty to the administration. For the Republican Party, members had to balance their legacy as the standard bearers of racial equality with the threat that Cleveland's appointment of a black recorder would convince more African Americans to leave the Republican Party. This

⁴²⁰ Grover Cleveland to Frederick Douglass, January 4, 1886; Frederick Douglass to Grover Cleveland, January 5, 1886, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁴²¹ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 129. Matthews was responsible for writing the New York legislation preserving black schools, and thus black teacher's jobs, in New York City as ward schools within the integrated school system. See Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 66-67, 129.

⁴²² Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 129.

was exactly the strategy Downing advocated in his letters to the president and the Republican reaction to Matthews shows that there was some basis for his faith in dividing the black vote.

Arguing on the grounds of Matthews's non-residency in the capital, twenty-nine Republican senators and eight Democrats voted to reject Matthews's nomination. All four northern Democrats, nine border and southern Democrats and one Republican supported Cleveland's decision. Although Cleveland used a recess appointment and made Matthews Recorder of Deeds in spite of the Senate's decision, the largely Republican rejection of Matthews further convinced black independents that their trust in the Republican Party was misplaced and that perhaps their future lay with Cleveland and Democrats.⁴²³ Calvin Chase, the editor of the African American owned *Washington Bee*, remarked, "The Republican Party doesn't realize it yet, but the action of the Senate...has alienated the negro from its ranks...there will be no more negroes who will vote the Republican ticket."⁴²⁴ Cleveland attempted to capitalize on this rising discord and renominated Matthews when the Senate reconvened. However, Matthews' nomination was again defeated seventeen to thirty-one.⁴²⁵

While prominent Democrats argued that Cleveland, having gained the advantage over Republicans, should drop the race issue and nominate a white recorder, Cleveland refused and at the urging of the *Boston Globe* and Massachusetts Independents, instead

⁴²³ "Outspoken Boston Views," *New York Freeman*, February 12, 1887; Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 133-134.

⁴²⁴ Quoted in "Negroes No Longer Republicans," *The Boston Daily Globe*, February 21, 1887.

⁴²⁵ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 136.

nominated James Monroe Trotter, from the Boston suburb of Hyde Park, to the office.⁴²⁶

As a Civil War veteran, prominent advocate of independent politics, and a supporter of Benjamin Butler for governor and Cleveland for president, the choice of Trotter would please northern democrats and again dare Republicans to reject the president's nomination of a black recorder and face further African American discontent. The reaction to Trotter's appointment, however, was different and although the Senate District of Colombia Committee rejected it, the Senate confirmed Trotter's appointment by a vote of thirty to eleven. In particular, George F. Hoar, the Republican Senator from Massachusetts, urged Trotter's confirmation due to the number of endorsements from constituents.⁴²⁷

African Americans in Boston of both parties praised the decision. In a letter to Cleveland, William Bonaparte, the editor of the *Boston Advocate* expressed the gratitude of African Americans in Boston. "Accept the grateful acknowledgements," Bonaparte wrote, "of the thousands of Massachusetts colored citizens irrespective of party ties for the just and fitting recognition."⁴²⁸ The *Boston Daily Globe* reported that Lewis Hayden, the famous anti-slavery advocate and Republican leader, conferred with Senator Hoar regarding Trotter's nomination. Following his confirmation, Hayden told the *Globe*, "for the sake of the race I am forced to rejoice that we still hold the lucrative office in which Mr. Trotter has just been confirmed."⁴²⁹ Julius C. Chappelle, a Republican and former

⁴²⁶ "Try Trotter," *Boston Daily Globe*, March 2, 1887; Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 137.

⁴²⁷ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 139.

⁴²⁸ William H. Bonaparte to Grover Cleveland, March 2, 1887, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁴²⁹ "Trotter and Cleveland," *Boston Daily Globe*, March 5, 1887.

representative to the General Court celebrated Trotter's appointment and recognized Cleveland's political strategy. "The President," Chappelle told a *Boston Globe* reporter, "couldn't have made a better selection among independent colored voters...of course, Mr. Trotter and myself differ on general political questions. I believe the appointment is a shrewd political one."⁴³⁰ William O. Armstrong, the African American member of the Massachusetts General Court, remarked that "while perhaps some of us would have preferred a Republican, still we are grateful to President Cleveland that he should have recognized the colored race by the appointment of a colored man, and we look upon it in that light rather than from the standpoint of Mr. Trotter's politics."⁴³¹ Trotter's independent supporters also agreed to put aside partisan differences and celebrate the victory for all African Americans.

At a reception hosted by Sumner Independent League and the Wendell Phillips Club, Edwin Garrison Walker, the chairman of the occasion, expressed the non-partisan gratitude for the appointment. "I congratulate you," Walker told the audience, "on the thought that in the future you will be able to say that you were among the first of the colored people of New England who met to do honor to the first colored American belonging to Massachusetts ever selected...to fill an honorable and responsible position at the capital."⁴³² Walker urged attendees to put aside partisan differences for the time being. "We are not here for the purpose of discussing politics or congratulating one another on the success or defeat of any political organization," Walker announced. "That

⁴³⁰ "Thinks it a Good Idea," *Boston Daily Globe*, March 6, 1887.

⁴³¹ "Trotter and Cleveland."

⁴³² "James Munroe Trotter," *Boston Daily Globe*, August 18, 1887.

is something we may deem proper to do on some other and different occasion.”⁴³³ While Walker agreed to set aside his opposition to the Republican Party, he did not declare an end to African American partisan independence.

Trotter, like Walker, hoped that his appointment would convince black voters to support, regardless of party, candidates who endorsed civil rights. “My hope is that the colored voter will grow into the feeling that now and hereafter the color question is no longer in politics,” Trotter told voters. “I shall be satisfied,” he continued, “if I can feel that the colored people are voting as their judgment dictates. I feel that they have got into a second slavery, and if they can shake off the shackles that bind them to a party they will be truly free.”⁴³⁴ Trotter, like other black independents, hoped that the contentious debate around his nomination would cause African American voters to recognize the utility of dividing black political allegiances.

Indeed, the controversy over the Matthews’s and Trotter appointments was evidence of the Republican Party’s increasing willingness to compromise African American advancement for the sake of political expediency and a sign of the potential success of partisan independence. As Howard Grossman concludes, “Trotter’s confirmation symbolized the black electorate’s potential power, when freed from the straitjacket of party, to further the interests of the race, a lesson that some Northern [African Americans] had already learned in state and local politics.”⁴³⁵ Trotter’s appointment demonstrated the result threats to support Democrats could have on Republican officials.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ “Mr. Trotter,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 6, 1887.

⁴³⁵ Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, 141.

While African Americans in Boston praised the appointment, however, Cleveland's administration failed to bring the expected groundswell of government positions. The Trotter and Matthews's affair encouraged black support of Democrats, but these successes did not mask the continued hardships and the deteriorating political status of African Americans in the South. With the exception of federal appointments, Cleveland continued the Democratic Party's position of southern state sovereignty and federal non-interference. Further, Cleveland's policy of non-intervention in southern affairs kept open the door to the rise in racial discrimination, disenfranchisement, and violence of the coming decade. Indeed, following attempts by the Harrison administration to protect African American rights, white supremacy and southern radicalism reemerged as the driving force behind the Democratic Party. African Americans in Boston, however, did not fully reject the Democratic Party and rush into the Republican fold. Cleveland's refusal to act in the face of rising incidents of Southern race-based violence and increased disenfranchisement contributed to the formation of new organizations, whose vision moved beyond party politics to address the plight of African Americans in the South. In the founding of the most vocal African American political organization in Boston in the 1890s, the Colored National League, they maintained partisan independence and continued to endorse a division of the black vote as a tactic to force federal intervention.

Chapter 4

Resisting the Right to Exclude: African Americans and the Regulation of Public Accommodations, 1857-1885

On March 13, 1885, Julius C. Chappelle, the sole African American member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, testified with other black Bostonians before the Committee on the Judiciary to defend a proposed bill outlawing racial discrimination in places of public amusements, conveyances, meetings, and inns. In particular, the speakers spoke out against the recent cases of discrimination in Boston's roller skating rinks. Chappelle explained the position of the protesters and summarized the spirit behind the opposition to discrimination in Boston during the final decades of the nineteenth century. "We do not care particularly about the skating rinks," Chappelle clarified, "but it is the principle that underlies the whole thing that we argue for. I tell you, if a notice should be put up over the gates of hell that colored men would not be admitted, we would try to enter, because we have a right to. It is on principles of rights that belong to us that we want this bill passed and public places thrown open."⁴³⁶

Boston's African American community refused to accept incidents of racial discrimination and they organized to confront the incidents. At large community meetings, in courtrooms, and in legislative chambers they demanded that the state enforce previous legislation or amend its current statutes. They made claims about the connections between anti-discrimination and expressions of rights as United States

⁴³⁶ "Even in Tophet," *Boston Daily Globe*, March 14, 1885.

citizens. Racial restrictions, they argued, were public displays of second-class citizenship and they could not be considered full and equal citizens unless discrimination in public accommodations was prohibited. By examining local struggles for civil rights, this chapter argues that black Bostonians employed a strategy based upon calls for state intervention and a belief that only through state action would the civil and political rights of African Americans be protected.

Writing in the aftermath of the modern civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, historians attempted to explain and understand the origins and evolution of racial discrimination and its relationship to government policy. Most notably C. Vann Woodward in his landmark work, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, argues that legally enforced racial discrimination did not become fully codified until the 1890s.⁴³⁷ “What the new status of the Negro would be was not at once apparent,” Woodward suggested, “nor were the Southern white people themselves so united on that subject at first as has been generally assumed.”⁴³⁸ Rather than emerging fully formed out of slavery, segregation, Woodward argues, “took place gradually under the influence of economic and political conflicts among divided white people.”⁴³⁹ Woodward based his conclusions on first hand accounts of witnesses who recorded occasions of racial equanimity rather than overt racial conflict. He concludes that the emergence of Jim Crow was due less to a

⁴³⁷ Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. Woodward’s text went through three important revisions each with important modifications. For more on the evolution of this book and Woodward’s ideas, see: Howard Rabinowitz, “More Than the Woodward Thesis: Assessing the Strange Career of Jim Crow,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (December, 1988), 842-856.

⁴³⁸ Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 6.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

conversion to a racist ideology, but rather, “a general weakening and discrediting of the numerous forces that had hitherto kept them in check.”⁴⁴⁰

In response to Woodward’s work, other historians argued that Jim Crow was more endemic to southern society than suggested. As Stephen Riegel argues, “The legal career of Jim Crow after the Civil War was more notable for its persistence rather than its changing fortunes and for its ascendancy rather than its competition with alternative racial doctrines.”⁴⁴¹ These scholars recovered evidence of significant segregation prior to the 1890s. For example, Howard Rabinowitz, in *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890*, argues that segregation and the creation of “separate-but-equal” spaces was a significant improvement over policies of racial exclusion which predated the rise of Jim Crow.⁴⁴² While Rabinowitz recorded incidents of protest against discrimination in areas of public accommodation, he concluded that, “equal access rather than integration was their chief aim.”⁴⁴³ Particularly interesting in Rabinowitz’s study is his argument that segregation, rather than a southern tactic, was brought into many jurisdictions by Northern representatives of the US Army, Freedman’s Bureau, or the Republican Party.⁴⁴⁴ Rabinowitz argues that for Republicans, “the professed policy of separate but

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 69. Woodward argues that the rise of Jim Crow was precipitated by relaxation of Northern liberal opposition and federal protection of African American rights coupled with “internal checks imposed by the prestige and influence of the Southern conservatives, as well as by the idealism and zeal of the Southern radicals.” Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 69.

⁴⁴¹ Stephen J. Riegel, “The Persistent Career of Jim Crow: Lower Federal Courts and the ‘Separate but Equal’ Doctrine, 1865-1896,” *The American Journal of Legal History* 28, no. 1 (January 1984): 40.

⁴⁴² Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 127; Rabinowitz, “From Exclusion to Segregation: Southern Race Relations, 1865-1890” *Journal of American History* 63 (September 1976), 325-350.

⁴⁴³ Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 127.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

equal had the benefit of minimizing white hostility while still presenting the blacks with a significant improvement over their treatment at the hands of earlier administrations.”⁴⁴⁵

In addition to expanding the understanding of the origins of widespread southern segregation, Rabinowitz closely examined racial policies in public accommodations.

Rabinowitz argued that unlike areas like education, race relations in public accommodations were considerably fluid. So called “de jure” segregation, he argues, was not widespread in this area until the 1890s, but customary, “de facto” segregation prevented African Americans from entering such spaces.⁴⁴⁶ “The separation of the races,” Rabinowitz argues, “was accomplished largely without the aid of statutes as long as both races accepted its existence.”⁴⁴⁷ This chapter complicates this argument by showing the involvement of the courts in preserving segregation decades earlier.

While scholars like Rabinowitz attempted to deconstruct southern race relations, there was until recently relatively little comparable work on the discrimination against African Americans in Northern cities.⁴⁴⁸ Historians have begun to fill this gap with important studies of the development of northern racial discrimination and African

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 182. Recently historians have questioned the usefulness of the categories ‘de jure’ and ‘de facto.’ See Matthew D. Lassiter, “Dejure/Defacto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth” in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, ed. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25-48.

⁴⁴⁷ Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 197.

⁴⁴⁸ Most of the earlier work on northern discrimination focused on antebellum race relations. See: Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961); The most comprehensive study of race relations in the North after the Civil War continues to be: Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., “The North and the Negro, 1865-1900: A Study in Race Discrimination” PhD diss., Harvard University, 1953. See also: Leslie H. Fishel, Jr., “Repercussions of Reconstruction: The Northern Negro, 1870-1883,” *Civil War History* 14 (December 1968): 325-345; Paul Finkelman, “Prelude to the Fourteenth Amendment: Black Legal Rights in the Antebellum North,” *Rutgers Law Journal* 17(1986): 415-482.

American challenges to racial exclusion.⁴⁴⁹ In particular, historians and legal scholars have begun to pay particular attention to racial exclusion in public accommodations. Public accommodation discrimination and exclusion embodies what legal scholars term the “right to exclude,” or the right of a business owner to decide who can and cannot have access to a space and under what circumstances a patron may be expelled.⁴⁵⁰ This chapter examines not only the prevalence of racial discrimination in Boston, but also the lengths to which Massachusetts law went to protect the right to exclude.

While recent studies deftly lay out the complicated history of the public accommodation jurisprudence, rarely do they focus on the intimate role that African Americans played in challenging and changing the meanings of these laws. Over several decades in the middle of the nineteenth century, the cases brought by black patrons

⁴⁴⁹ For recent work on racial discrimination and segregation in the North following the Civil War, see: Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 175-217; Andrew Diemer, “Reconstructing Philadelphia: African Americans and Politics in the Post-Civil War North,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 133, no. 1 (January 2009): 29-58; Davison M. Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Segregation, 1865-1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Elizabeth Dale, “‘Social Equality Does Not Exist Among Themselves, nor Among Us’: Baylies vs. Curry and Civil Rights in Chicago, 1888,” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (April 1997): 311-339. There have been several articles that have looked specifically at racial discrimination in Massachusetts, see: Kazuteru Omori, “Race-Neutral Individualism and the Resurgence of the Color Line: Massachusetts Civil Rights Legislation, 1855-1895,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* (Fall 2002): 32-58; Kazuteru Omori, “Burden of Blackness: Quest for ‘Equality’ among Black ‘Elites’ in Late-Nineteenth-Century Boston,” PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, 2001; Mark Schneider, “Confronting Jim Crow: Boston’s Anti-Slavery Tradition, 1890-1920,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 68-89; J. Morgan Kousser, “‘The Supremacy of Equal Rights’: The Struggle Against Racial Discrimination in Antebellum Massachusetts and the Foundations of the Fourteenth Amendment,” *Northwestern University Law Review* 82, no. 4 (1988): 941-1010.

⁴⁵⁰ A. K. Sandoval-Strausz, “Travelers, Strangers, and Jim Crow: Law, Public Accommodations, and Civil Rights in America,” *Law and History Review* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 53-94; Joseph William Singer, “No Right to Exclude: Public Accommodations and Private Property,” *Northwestern University Law Review* 90, no. 4 (1996): 1283-1497; Steven Sutherland, “Patron’s Right of Access to Premises Generally Open to the Public,” *University of Illinois Law Review* (1983): 533-552; Robert McKay, “Segregation and Public Recreation,” *Virginia Law Review* 40, no. 6 (October 1954): 697-731; Max W. Turner and Frank R. Kennedy, “Exclusion and Segregation of Theater Patrons,” *Iowa Law Review* 32, no. 4 (May 1947): 625-658. Two early works provide a comprehensive description of racial description nationally, see: Gilbert Thomas Stephenson, *Race Distinctions in American Law* (New York: Association Press, 1911) and Charles Staples Magnum, *The Legal Status of the Negro* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1939).

against white theater owners created the first body of case law on racial exclusion in places of entertainment in United States history.⁴⁵¹ In particular, these laws addressed discrimination in places of entertainment like theaters and lecture halls. As legal scholar Joseph Singer explains, “This adoption of the rule exempting places of entertainment from the duty to serve the public ... had the immediate effect—if not the purpose—of allowing theater owners to practice racial segregation and exclusion under the cover of law.”⁴⁵² African American challenges to these rulings, however, resulted in some the nation’s first laws outlawing public accommodation discrimination.⁴⁵³ The focus on discrimination in places of entertainment expands the literature on public accommodation discrimination which primarily explores inequality in inns and on common carriers, such as trains. This chapter argues that African Americans in Boston were part of a national remaking of ideas about equal access to public accommodations and that laws challenging the right to exclude in Massachusetts were a direct result of black activism.

A study of these early anti-discrimination campaigns lends new insight into the relationship between race and the law in the Northern states. The direct appeal in the early anti-discrimination petitions to state enforcement and police power in granting business licenses is particularly interesting. Prior to the opening of any performance, a theater was required to procure a license from the state. Massachusetts government officials had actively licensed and regulated these businesses and the conduct of their

⁴⁵¹ *McCrea v. Marsh*, 78 Mass. 211 (1858); *Burton v. Scherpf*, 83 Mass. 133 (1861); *Commonwealth v. Sylvester*, 95 Mass. 247 (1866). Singer, “No Right to Exclude,” 1339-1340, 1344, 1390-1392

⁴⁵² Singer, “No Right to Exclude,” 1391.

⁴⁵³ Turner and Kennedy, “Exclusion and Segregation of Theater Patrons,” 631-632; Stephenson, *Race Distinctions in American Law*, 112; Omori, “Race-Neutral Individualism and Resurgence of the Color Line,” 37.

patrons for decades, thus making the extension of these regulations to the prevention of discrimination well within the enforcement power of the state.

Historians have rarely looked to the regulation of business licenses as a strategy to combat racial restrictions during the late nineteenth century, a period which saw significant opposition to business regulation in other areas.⁴⁵⁴ African Americans' appeal to states' licensing power is an important part of our understanding of post-war civil rights activism. These calls for state protection and intervention had deep implications for how black Bostonians defined themselves in relation to the state and as citizens. As William Novak argues in his study of law and regulation in American life, "the storied history of liberty in the United States...was built directly upon a strong and consistent willingness to employ the full, coercive, and regulatory powers of law and government." Indeed, the story of African Americans' struggle for full citizenship is bound up with the problem of "the public conditions of private freedom."⁴⁵⁵

The prohibition of public accommodation discrimination legislation passed in Massachusetts was a protracted process and occurred only after decades of strong appeals by black citizens. Challenges to exclusion in the courts during the 1850s were followed by successful petitions for anti-discrimination legislation following the Civil War. During and after Reconstruction, African Americans in Boston challenged increased discrimination as the Supreme Court rolled back earlier gains. In the 1880s black activists successfully challenged exclusion in roller skating rinks resulting in comprehensive legislation, which severely restricted the right to exclude. In their challenges, African

⁴⁵⁴ William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Singer, "No Right to Exclude," 1392.

⁴⁵⁵ William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare*, 17.

Americans remade ideas about equal access to public accommodations. Black activists embraced visions of increased state activism as they constructed political strategies around a belief that only through community vigilance, coupled with state action, would the civil and political rights of African Americans be protected.

Early Challenges to the Right to Exclude

African Americans in Massachusetts played significant roles in transforming the meaning of public accommodations and challenging notions of who was and was not included in that public. During the middle of the nineteenth century access to public accommodations changed from a common law definition of a business's obligation to provide a service to one in which the property rights of a business owner protected a right to exclude undesirable patrons. The foundation of American public accommodation law is grounded in the common law protections of travelers who, according to Sandoval-Strausz, "were on a journey, away from their home communities and in unfamiliar surroundings, were particularly vulnerable and therefore deserved a special legal status."⁴⁵⁶ Innkeepers, for example, were compelled by state regulation to provide shelter to guests without discrimination. Ownership of a public accommodation, therefore, could not be defined as merely a business venture, but "as a public calling subject at all points to regulation by the community."⁴⁵⁷ The responsibility of public accommodations owners to receive and care for patrons did not preclude them from denying service to some, or excluding groups entirely. For example, some state codes permitted the exclusion of

⁴⁵⁶ Sandoval-Strausz, "Travelers, Strangers, and Jim Crow," 62-63.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 66.

indentured servants or slaves. Others placed specific restrictions on the use of inns by local residents not travelling.⁴⁵⁸ The state-enforced obligations of innkeepers and others to assist travelers did not mean that individuals had affirmative rights to occupy those spaces.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, judges and lawmakers refined ideas of access to public accommodations that transformed a business's community obligations into a person's right to access. Rather than merely protecting travelers, state courts and legislatures extended public accommodations regulations to the general public and redefined the protections as individual rights.⁴⁵⁹ This reform, as Sandoval-Strausz argues, had a severe impact on the terrain upon which civil rights struggles for access would be decided. "The transformation of this body of law," Sandoval-Strausz writes, "also created opportunities for innkeepers to evade their traditional responsibilities by claiming a right to property in their establishments."⁴⁶⁰ The reframing of the debate in terms of private property ownership placed the business owner as the arbitrator of access rather than the community.

While the right to access in inns and on common carriers became better defined on the eve of the Civil War, the relationship of these new regulations to spaces of entertainment and leisure continued to be unclear, resulting in African American challenges to exclusion in these businesses. Theaters and other places of entertainment, though distinct from inns and common carriers, were regulated in Massachusetts in part

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

by the state. On May 2, 1849 the Governor of Massachusetts signed into law an act permitting the officials of any city or town to license “all theatrical exhibitions, public shows, public amusements, and exhibitions of every description, to which admission is obtained upon payment of money.”⁴⁶¹ This direct government regulation of the conduct of entertainment spaces, African Americans argued, provided an opening for state protection of African Americans’ civil rights and in the 1850s the boundaries of the licensing law and protection of access were challenged.

The actions of the Massachusetts State Supreme Court played a significant role in clarifying and reshaping the boundaries of the right to exclude. A focus on early state court decisions adds complexity to a discussion of African American civil rights that primarily focuses on decisions at the U.S. Supreme Court. These state courts played a powerful role in shaping the rights of black men and women in Massachusetts. Speaking of federal courts, legal scholar Stephen Riegel argues, “courts from Reconstruction onward consistently and frequently decreed Jim Crow segregation to be constitutional and consistent with the laws of the land.”⁴⁶² Even prior to Reconstruction, however, lower courts in states like Massachusetts defined the boundaries of public access and protected business owners from challenges to racial exclusion.

Business owners challenged the boundaries of the 1849 licensing act in 1850 and actively sought to limit state intervention into these areas. In the initial case the defendants were indicted for setting up a dancing school without a license in violation of

⁴⁶¹ Acts and Resolves of the General Court, 1849, Chap. 23 p178.

⁴⁶² Stephen J. Riegel, “The Persistent Career of Jim Crow: Lower Federal Courts and the ‘Separate but Equal’ Doctrine, 1865-1896, *The American Journal of Legal History* 28, no. 1 (January 1984): 20.

the 1849 statute.⁴⁶³ Benjamin F. Butler, later governor, served as counsel for the defense.⁴⁶⁴ The defendants argued that a school for the instruction of dancing was not a public amusement and was therefore not covered by the bounds of the statutes. Although the Court of Common Pleas disagreed with this defense, upon appeal, Justice John Dewey of the Massachusetts State Supreme Court in Middlesex ruled that dance schools were exempt from the state licensing laws. “The court is of the opinion,” Dewey wrote, “that [the statute] does not embrace the case of setting up and maintaining a school for instruction of dancing. Such a case is not within the language of the statute, nor probably one of the evils sought to be remedied by it.”⁴⁶⁵ This decision set the precedent of certain businesses arguing that although they acted in some ways like a space of public amusement, they were private establishments and therefore immune from state intervention. This would be particularly true in the challenges to discrimination in roller skating rinks in the 1880s.

Black patrons directly challenged the private right to exclude customers from theaters. These challenges had the unintended consequence of pressing the Massachusetts Supreme Court formally to clarify and protect the business owner’s rights to discriminate based on race. On December 19, 1856, Julian B. McCrea purchased a ticket in the upper balcony, or “family circle,” for Robert G. Marsh’s *Juvenile Comedians* at Boston’s Howard Athenaeum. However, as he ascended the stairs to the upper level, he was stopped by a doorman, who, upon orders from Marsh, refused to admit him on account of

⁴⁶³ *Commonwealth v. Gee*, 60 Mass. 174.

⁴⁶⁴ Benjamin Butler will also serve as counsel challenging the right of theater owners to exclude African American patrons, see *Burton v. Scherpf*.

⁴⁶⁵ *Commonwealth v. Gee*.

his race. In response McCrea exclaimed, “You can’t prevent me, you will be at my feet if you undertake it.”⁴⁶⁶ In response to the threat, the doorman summoned the police and two officers soon arrived. Confronted with the officers, McCrea invoked the constitution in his defense. “I have a right to enter,” McCrea explained to the officers, “and the constitution and the bill of rights make no difference by my color.”⁴⁶⁷ McCrea did not persuade the officers, and they escorted him from the building.

The presence of the police in this case demonstrates the state complicity in excluding African Americans. When confronted by McCrea the police responded, “We are sorry to eject you, but we are ordered by the lessee to prevent you or any other colored man from entering the family circle.”⁴⁶⁸ In addition to showing state involvement in protecting the right to exclude, the statements by the police belie the assumption that the regulation of theaters was race neutral. By specifically targeting McCrea “or any other colored man,” in protecting the theater manager’s right to exclude, the police reveal the racially biased enforcement of the law.

In the case brought by McCrea against Marsh in Superior Court, McCrea contended that Marsh had, through the sale of the ticket, imparted to him a right to occupy a seat in the theater and watch the performance. Therefore, McCrea’s attorney John A. Andrew argued, “the assault...constituted an injury and an indignity, for which the defendant must respond in damages.”⁴⁶⁹ Andrew invoked the common law

⁴⁶⁶ “Plaintiff’s Exceptions,” *McCrea v. Marsh* (September 1, 1857), Suffolk County Superior Court, Judicial Archives, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ *McCrea v. Marsh*, 78 Mass. 211; John A. Andrew would go on to be the Governor of Massachusetts from 1861-1866 and was instrumental in the creation of the first African American military regiments from

governance of public accommodations arguing, “that the manager of a public exhibition for money has no right to discriminate between the different members of the public...he is bound to accommodate all reasonably.”⁴⁷⁰ Further, the plaintiff declared the importance of the theater’s license as a protection from discrimination. “Under his license,” Andrew argued, “he was to exhibit to the public and could not exclude any part of the public wishing to attend.”⁴⁷¹ By connecting the common law obligation of places of public amusement to serve all customers with the police power of the state through licensing, Andrew opened up a central line of further challenges to the right to exclude.

In his defense, Robert Marsh argued that his exclusion of African Americans from the family circle was not only within his rights, but was also common practice among theaters in Boston. For example, Marsh’s attorney presented the testimony of William B. English, the manager of the National Theater, during the trial. English explained, “it was an established uniform and certain usage in Boston, with all giving theatrical establishments that tickets [for the family circle] were never available for use in the hands of black persons...they were issued for and to be used by white persons only.”⁴⁷² Marsh’s defense argued that he was merely upholding the policies of the Howard Athenaeum. When Marsh took over the theater, the defense argued, he “found it to be the rule thereof

Massachusetts. He was highly regarded among African Americans for his work on their behalf. For more on Andrew, see Thomas H. O’Connor, *Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997) and Henry G. Pearson, *The Life of John A. Andrew: The Governor of Massachusetts, 1861-1865* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1904).

⁴⁷⁰ *McCrea v. Marsh*.

⁴⁷¹ “Plaintiff’s Exceptions.”

⁴⁷² *Ibid*.

and well known as such that colored people should be admitted only to the gallery.”⁴⁷³

The widespread discrimination in Boston’s theaters challenges assumptions of racial progressivism in Boston at a time when the city was a center of anti-slavery activism and had recently prohibited segregation in public schools.⁴⁷⁴

Despite McCrea’s proclamations of equality, the court ruled that he did not have a fundamental right to the seat he purchased and that the theater manager was within his rights as a business operator to exclude whomever he wished. “There was no provision of law,” the court ruled, “by which [Marsh] was prevented from making it a regulation of admission to his exhibition that no black persons should be admitted to certain portions of it.”⁴⁷⁵ Further, in addressing the licensing issue the court decided, “that the fact that the defendant had received a license...did not prevent his making the rules and regulations as to the admission of persons of different colors.”⁴⁷⁶ Finally, Judge Josiah Abbot of the Superior Court ruled that the theater ticket was an executory contract and therefore could be legally revoked by Marsh. Abbot explained that since the doorman had stopped Marsh before he had taken his seat in the theater, before the contract was executed, Marsh was justified in the use of necessary force in preventing McCrea from entering the theater and was thus not liable for the alleged assault.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷³ “Judgment,” *McCrea v. Marsh*, Suffolk County Superior Court (September 1, 1857), Judicial Archives, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

⁴⁷⁴ Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 78-81.

⁴⁷⁵ “Plaintiff’s Exceptions.”

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *McCrea v. Marsh*.

McCrea appealed the case to the Massachusetts State Supreme Court, but the higher court upheld the decision of the Superior Court. Justice Theron Metcalf dismissed McCrea's allegations of assault and held that the plaintiff could not recover damages for personal injury or humiliation. The court declared that "the plaintiff's attempts to enter were unwarranted, and the defendant rightfully used the force necessary to prevent his entry."⁴⁷⁸ Metcalf ruled that McCrea had the right to recover only the cost of the ticket and any legal damages he "sustained by the breach of the contract implied by the sale and delivery of the ticket."⁴⁷⁹ McCrea was not entitled to any compensation for the humiliation or physical injury he suffered during the forced removal. Metcalf went a step further in his opinion, declaring that even if McCrea had entered the theater and taken his seat, Marsh would have been able legally to demand that McCrea leave and upon refusal remove him with no unnecessary force.⁴⁸⁰

McCrea v. Marsh pioneered the exception of places of public amusement from the responsibility to serve the general public. Although the precedent nominally treated black and white patrons equally, the place of African Americans at the center of the challenges illuminates its racial motives. In part, the strength of the Massachusetts decision was in its racially neutral appearance. "This adoption of the rule exempting places of entertainment from the duty to serve the public," legal scholar William Singer argues, "had the immediate effect—and perhaps the purpose—of allowing theater owners

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ This ruling is based on an 1845 precedent from English Law; see *Wood v. Leadbitter*, 13 M. & W. 838 (1845).

to practice racial segregation and exclusion under the cover of law.”⁴⁸¹ By focusing on the rights of private property owners to remove undesirable patrons regardless of race, the court protected policies of racial exclusion without appearing culpable for the infractions. As Singer reiterates, “Although neutral in coverage, this new rule of law was not neutral in its application.”⁴⁸² Racial discrimination, although not legally mandated, was allowed to continue in Massachusetts under the guise of property rights protections, and businesses continued to exclude black patrons with apparent impunity.

The failure of these early challenges to public accommodation discrimination not only protected the rights of theater owners to exclude African American patrons, but also justified the use of physical force to remove customers who refused to leave the premises. For example, in Lowell, Massachusetts Alexander Burton, a local black barber, brought an action for assault against a theater owner for injuries he suffered while being removed from a theater. Burton purchased a fifty cent ticket for a concert at Huntington Hall. According to Superior Court briefs, the concert was advertised with no mention of restrictions. After giving his ticket to the doorman and collecting a program, Burton proceeded to his seat. As he neared his destination John C. Scherpf called him back announcing, “You cannot go in there: we don’t allow black men in here.” After further discussion and Burton’s refusal to exit the hall, Scherpf took hold of Burton and forcibly removed him in full view of the remaining audience. Outside, the ticket office refunded

⁴⁸¹ Singer, “No Right to Exclude,” 1339-1340.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 1340.

Burton's money and although Scherpf alleged that he used minimal force, Burton left with his coat somewhat torn.⁴⁸³

Like McCrea, Burton sued not only for physical injury, but especially for the humiliation he suffered by being forcibly removed in full view of a crowded audience and near the ticket office. The public shame associated with expulsion was an explicit and public reminder that despite one's personal progress, access to full equality was still in the hands of business owners and theater managers. In 1860, Burton, represented by Benjamin Butler, brought an action against Scherpf for assault and battery.⁴⁸⁴ During the case Scherpf's attorney requested that the action in the case should only be for breach of contract and requested that the court rule that Burton could not recover for "the injury to his mind and feelings."⁴⁸⁵ Unlike the McCrea case, the superior court ruled in favor of Burton, ruling that "the jury might, in making up their verdict, take into consideration the injury to the plaintiff's mind and feelings in connection with the evidence of violence to his person, or injury to his property."⁴⁸⁶ The jury returned a verdict for Burton and fined Scherpf two-hundred dollars.

This victory was short lived, for upon review the Massachusetts Supreme Court reversed the decision. Echoing the ruling in *McCrea v. Marsh*, Justice Pliny Merrick

⁴⁸³ *Burton v. Scherpf*; "Defendant's Exceptions," September 11, 1860, *Alexander Burton vs. J. C. Scherpf*, Middlesex County Superior Court, Social Law Library, Boston, MA; "Was it Color?" *Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, April 23, 1857.

⁴⁸⁴ William Cooper Nell, the popular African American leader and journalist for *the Liberator*, recognized Butler's role in this case and they argued that although he had run for governor twice as a Democrat, in this case he, "hesitated not to rightfully apply the law." "Justice vs. Colorphobia," *The Liberator*, November 16, 1860. See also: William Cooper Nell, *William Cooper Nell: Nineteenth-Century African American Abolitionist, Historian, Integrationist: Selected Writings from 1832-1874*, ed. Dorothy Porter Wesley and Constance Porter Uzelac (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2002), 435.

⁴⁸⁵ "Defendant's Exceptions."

⁴⁸⁶ "Defendant's Exceptions"; "Superior Court," *Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, September 29, 1860.

declared that Scherpf had the right to revoke Burton's admission and that Burton, by refusing to leave, "became a trespasser; and the defendant had the right to remove him by the use of such degree of force as his resistance should render necessary for that purpose."⁴⁸⁷ Merrick concluded that while Burton might have a case for breach of contract, the court could not act on the charges of assault and battery, nor could it compel Scherpf to admit black patrons. On the eve of the Civil War, as Massachusetts mustered black regiments to fight to end slavery, those same soldiers were not protected from the humiliating exclusion from public accommodation.

Post-War Victories and New Challenges

In the aftermath of the Civil War, as rights were extended to African Americans nationally, courts increasingly endorsed a business owner's right to exclude. As Joseph Singer argues, "only after the Civil War, when civil rights were extended to African Americans for the first time, did the courts clearly state for the first time that most businesses had no common-law duties to serve the public."⁴⁸⁸ While historians have emphasized the end of the Civil War as the point of this legal redefinition, however, in Massachusetts judges had narrowed African Americans' rights to access years before.

Having failed to convince the courts to protect African American rights to access of public accommodation, in 1865 black Bostonians waged a successful campaign against discrimination, which resulted in new state laws prohibiting discrimination in places of public amusement and overturning the right of proprietors to exclude black patrons.

⁴⁸⁷ *Burton v. Scherpf*.

⁴⁸⁸ Singer, "No Right to Exclude," 1294.

Petitions from black residents of Boston explicitly demanded the prohibition of racial discrimination in any theatrical exhibition, public show, public amusement, or exhibition which was granted a license by the state.⁴⁸⁹ The petitioners demanded that “public justice and not private wrongs be the rule of action, given to all law abiding citizens of Massachusetts.”⁴⁹⁰

Early drafts of the legislation not only sought to reform, rights of access, but sought stiff penalties against content or behavior which degraded African Americans. Black petitioners supported a bill which prohibited the licensing of any exhibition or show which “shall bring, or be intended or calculated to bring, any person into ridicule or contempt on account of race or color.”⁴⁹¹ Another unpassed version of the final bill went even further to “prevent distinctions of persons on account of color.” In addition to forbidding all distinctions based on race, this early draft declared it a misdemeanor to exclude “from any conveyance, hotel, inn, or from any place of public or private assembly or resort, any person on account of his color or possession of African blood.”⁴⁹² This draft also explicitly outlawed racially insulting language or behavior, condemning “whoever shall willfully put or attempt to put any reproach, indignity, or insult upon any person, on account of his color...whether by word, gesture, sign, writing, representation,

⁴⁸⁹ “Petition of Samuel G. Howe and Others,” Chap. 227, 1865, Passed Acts, SC1/Series 229, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Senate Bill No. 242, Bill Relating to Theatrical Exhibitions and Other Public Amusements, May 5, 1885, Passed Acts, SC1/Series 229, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

⁴⁹² Draft of unpassed act to “Prevent distinctions of persons on account of color,” Undated, In House Bill 220, “Bill Relating to Theatrical Exhibitions and other Public Amusements,” April 11, 1865, Passed Acts, SC1/Series 229, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

or in any other manner whatever.”⁴⁹³ Despite attempts to make this legislation a comprehensive attack on all forms of racism and discrimination, the final bill, enacted on May 16, 1865, merely prohibited any “distinction or restriction on account of color or race...in any licensed inn, in any public place of amusement, public conveyance or public meeting.”⁴⁹⁴ As punishment, an offence included a maximum fine of fifty dollars.⁴⁹⁵ In their successful petition for the reform of Massachusetts law, African Americans in Boston were instrumental in the passage of the first civil rights law to prohibit discrimination based on race in places of public amusement.⁴⁹⁶

Despite the successful passage of anti-discrimination statutes, petitioners returned to the General Court a year later with accounts of the ineffectiveness of the current legislation. In the face of these new laws, theaters in the city continued to refuse African Americans entry. In April 1866, for example, Aaron Molyneux Hewlett, a physical education instructor and director of the gymnasium at Harvard University, and his daughter attempted to enter the parquet of the Boston Theater.⁴⁹⁷ Despite arriving early and holding the proper tickets, they were denied entry to the main seating area and were

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ “An Act Forbidding Unjust Discrimination on Account of Color or Race,” 1865 Mass. Acts 277. Senate Bill No. 242, “Bill Relating to Theatrical Exhibitions and Other Public Amusements,” S. No. 242 Passed Acts, SC1/Series 229, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA; Draft of act to “prevent distinctions of persons on account of color,” H. R. 220, 1865, Passed Acts, SC1/Series 229, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

⁴⁹⁵ “An Act Forbidding Unjust Discrimination on Account of Color or Race.”

⁴⁹⁶ Turner and Kennedy, “Exclusion, Ejection and Segregation of Theater Patrons,” 631-632.

⁴⁹⁷ Hewlett’s position as director of the gymnasium made him the first African American employee of Harvard University, see M. Sammy Miller, “Black Gentility and American Education: A Profile of Judge Robert H. Terrell in the Capital City, 1860-1900,” *Negro Educational Review*, 29:3/4 (July/Oct. 1978): 228-229; Gerald Gems et al., *Sports in American History: From Colonization to Globalization* (Champaign, Ill: Human Kinetics, 2008), 123.

instead sent to the gallery where the seats were “uncomfortable and inconvenient.”⁴⁹⁸

Two days later, Howard H. Williams and R. Carlyle Howard were refused entry to the same theater on account of their race. Based on their experience and reports from others William and Howard contended that “exclusion from Boston Theater is universal...in disregard of existing laws.” Hewlett echoed this sentiment when he declared “that the Boston Theatre has intentionally and systematically evaded said law, and disregarded the spirit and intent of the legislature in enacting it...the statutes as they now stand furnish no redress.”⁴⁹⁹ Another petition reported daily cases of discrimination in the Continental Theatre and the Howard Athenaeum. “[We] do not believe,” the petitioners contended, “that it was ever intended by the Commonwealth to license, and thereby legalize places of this kind.”⁵⁰⁰ The only remedy deemed sufficient was the revocation of the theater license for spaces which continued to discriminate against African American patrons. This would make the penalties for further operations much more severe than those imposed by the original legislation.

The legislature stopped short of the petitioners’ ambitions. Despite the petitions for revocation of a theater’s license, on May 23, 1866 the General Court approved new legislation “in relation to public places of amusement,” which explicitly made it illegal to exclude persons or restrict them, in any theater or place of public amusement licensed under the laws. The law also applied to public conveyances, public meetings, or licensed

⁴⁹⁸ “Petition of A. M. Hewlett and Others for Amendment of Law in Reference to Places of Amusement,” 252, 1866, Passed Acts, SC1/Series 229, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

⁴⁹⁹ “Petition of Howard H. Williams and R. Carlyle Howard,” 252, 1866, Passed Acts, SC1/Series 229, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

⁵⁰⁰ “Petition of William C. Nell and Others for Additional Legislation in Reference to Admission of Colored Persons to Theaters and Places of Amusement.” 252, 1866, Passed Acts, SC1/Series 229, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

inns, “except for good cause.” The General Court maintained the fifty dollar fine, but extended it to apply to each offence.⁵⁰¹

Stiffer penalties were needed, as theater owners had a history of flaunting government regulation. In the 1850s, for example, Boston’s police force lamented the ineffectiveness of anti-vice legislation imposed on theaters and dancehalls. Many of these businesses had already taken into account the cost of police fines and thus their enforcement was a mere aggravation and not a deterrent. The amount of money earned by these institutions far exceeded the penalties imposed by municipal authorities. “The keepers of these places,” City Marshal Francis Tuckey recognized in 1851, “can pay all the fines and costs imposed and make money besides.”⁵⁰² It is not surprising, therefore, that in the 1860s theaters would similarly reject this new regulation of their business. The petitioners in 1866 argued that without significant penalty and state enforcement, anti-discrimination laws would be ineffective and would place an undue burden upon black patrons to file expensive claims against the businesses before the state would intervene. The difficulties in anti-discrimination enforcement demonstrate how, despite nominal legal prohibitions against discrimination, businesses could continue to maintain a practice of racial exclusion.

The continued practice of racial discrimination was contested in 1866 in the first legal test of the new anti-discrimination statute. This case tested the boundaries of the new law and raised the significance of state licensing as a barrier to racial discrimination. In this case, David Sylvester was charged with violating the 1865 and 1866 statutes when

⁵⁰¹ “An Act in Relation to Public Places of Amusement.” 1866 Mass. Acts. 252.

⁵⁰² *City Marshall’s Annual Report on the Police Department of the City of Boston* (1851), 13.

he refused to admit Robert J. Stockton, a black patron, into his billiard hall. Sylvester freely admitted that Stockton was barred entry because of his race and argued that “patrons of his room objected to the allowance of people of color to play at billiards in said room, and that if they are allowed to play, that he could not maintain such a place.”⁵⁰³ Sylvester argued that since the billiard room was not licensed, it could not be considered a place of public amusement and was therefore exempt from the enforcement of anti-discrimination statutes. “It was not in the power of the Legislature to restrict individuals in their private rights and business,” Sylvester’s defense argued.⁵⁰⁴ At the Superior Court, a jury disagreed and found the billiard room owner guilty of violating the statute. However, Sylvester immediately appealed to the Massachusetts Supreme Court.⁵⁰⁵

The Supreme Court disagreed with the lower court and imposed specific boundaries on the state’s enforcement of the recent statute. Before the Court, Attorney General Chester I. Reed argued that the legislature intended to address all cases of discrimination, regardless of whether or not the business was licensed. “Whenever a business is of that character that the legislature think it proper that it should be the subject of a license,” Reed argued, “conditions and penalties may be annexed...whether a license is actually taken out or not.”⁵⁰⁶ However, in its opinion the State Supreme Court disagreed, choosing to interpret the anti-discrimination legislation much more narrowly.

⁵⁰³ “Exceptions,” *Commonwealth v. David Sylvester*, September 29, 1866, Bristol County Superior Court, Social Law Library, Boston, MA.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ *Commonwealth v. Sylvester*, 95 Mass. 247; Singer, “No Right to Exclude,” 1392. For more on the proceedings of the Supreme Judicial Court Case, see: “Brief for the Commonwealth” and “Defendant’s

The court declared that the 1866 law explicitly barred only licensed businesses from excluding patrons based on color. The court acknowledged the ambiguity of the 1865 law, but in light of clarifications made in the 1866 statute, the court concluded that the original was “intended to apply only to places so licensed.” The court continued to define narrowly the police power of the state. “It can not be supposed, in the absence of any explicit provision,” the court continued, “that it was the intent of the legislature to prescribe the manner in which persons should use their own premises, or permit others to use them.”⁵⁰⁷

This case further illuminates the intersection between state regulatory authority and the enforcement of anti-discrimination statutes. The court confirmed that state licensing authority included the power to prohibit and punish acts of discrimination and it showed the importance of licensing as way of extending police power. However, in effect, the court permitted business owners of establishments not explicitly licensed by the state to continue discriminating against black patrons and left the victims little legal recourse. Though the Massachusetts Supreme Court did not explicitly sanction or endorse discrimination, it declared the state powerless to interfere, thereby allowing such activities to continue with little fear of prosecution.

Like the challenges to public accommodation discrimination, African Americans in Boston targeted other aspects of state government that they viewed as public displays of black marginality or official recognition of inferiority. For example, for decades leading up to the Civil War Boston officials included a citation in the city’s voting and

Points and Argument,” *Commonwealth v. David Sylvester*, Bristol County Supreme Judicial Court (October Term, 1866), Social Law Library, Boston, MA.

⁵⁰⁷ *Commonwealth v. Sylvester*, 95 Mass. 247 (1866).

tax rolls identifying African American residents. In 1867, black Bostonians, who viewed these labels as a sign of a second class citizenship, petitioned the city government for the removal of all racial identifiers in the official tax and voting registers. In the previous decade, the publishers of the city directories stopped including racial identifiers and by removing these bureaucratic labels from the government records African American petitioners sought physical proof of equality in the eyes of the state.

On February 11, 1867 Benjamin F. Roberts and twenty-three others residents from Ward Three petitioned the Boston Common Council for the immediate omission of the descriptor “colored” from the city tax bills and voting lists. They had two major complaints about the city’s use of the label. First, they stated that “it is an unnecessary appendage and calculated to uphold an old spirit of caste, which is detrimental to the best interests of our community.” Next, the petitioners argued that racial labels were “an obstacle in the way of perfect equality in the distribution of municipal patronage.”⁵⁰⁸ By advocating the removal of racial designators Roberts and the other petitioners sought to make inequitable treatment at the state level more difficult and made it nearly impossible to identify African American voters.

Based on this petition, the common council agreed to omit terms or abbreviations identifying race from future tax bills and voting lists. The council lauded the previous accomplishments of the city and state in removing other barriers of distinction, such as segregated schools, military service, theater seating, etc. The Special Committee of the council declared in its official report that, “The prayer of the petitioners is in accordance

⁵⁰⁸ Petition of Benjamin F. Roberts and others that the designation of ‘Colored’ may be omitted on the City Tax Bills and Voting Lists. February 11, 1867, Board of Aldermen Docket Documents, City of Boston Archives, Boston, Ma.

with the spirit of the times; as well as in harmony with that republicanism which recognizes all citizens as standing upon the same equality before the law.” “In this era of liberal legislation towards the colored race,” the committee report continued, “surely our city does not wish to show a prejudice or deny a perfect equality.”⁵⁰⁹ In its report, the common council connected its progress on civil rights to the progressive reforms sweeping the nation as part of Reconstruction. While local governments were willing to support racial progress in their official records, they continued to be wary of regulating the actions of business owners who refused to serve black patrons. This debate over the tensions between private ownership and public rights was at the center of much of the national debate over civil rights legislation argued for especially loudly by Massachusetts representatives who had intimate connections to local struggles against discrimination.

The End of Reconstruction and the Persistence of Racial Exclusion

Following defeat in the courts, in 1866 African American advocates in the struggle against discrimination in the 1860s grew optimistic during Reconstruction with the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and the 1866 and 1875 Civil Rights Acts. In particular, the Civil Rights Act of 1875 explicitly prohibited discrimination in public accommodations, inns, public conveyances, theaters, and other places of public amusement. The debates over the Civil Rights Act reflected the sides of the debates present in the Massachusetts cases. Advocates of the Act endorsed activist intervention of government authorities in the protection of African American customers. Supporters of a business owner’s right to exclude, however, trumpeted the supremacy of private property

⁵⁰⁹ Report of the Special Committee of the Common Council of Boston, February 25, 1867, The Minutes of the Mayor and Aldermen, City of Boston Archives, Boston, Ma.

ownership and denounced any state interference.⁵¹⁰ As Sandoval-Strausz argues, “The benefit of laissez-faire arguments was precisely that they made it possible to defend discrimination with high-sounding theoretical language.”⁵¹¹ The reliance on the liberal rhetoric of private property protections allowed opponents of integration to cloak racism in a language of personal protection from unwarranted or malicious government intrusion.

One of the leading authors of the Civil Rights Act was Massachusetts Congressman Benjamin Butler. Butler had been the main counsel in an important early African American challenge to discrimination in Massachusetts. Benjamin Butler’s experience representing African Americans in Boston directly impacted legislation which secured liberties of African Americans nationally. Prior to the Civil War, Butler served as a Democrat in the Massachusetts House of Representatives and Senate. He went on to support the Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge against Abraham Lincoln in the 1860 presidential election. In the debates over the Civil Rights Act, Butler recalled his past support of states rights, but used it to advocate stronger federal protection of black civil rights. “From my teaching and from my belief I am an old States-rights democrat,” Butler explained to Congress, “yet States rights are one thing and State wrongs are another. State wrongs must yield to the Constitution of the United States.” Butler affirmed the right of African Americans to enter any place of public accommodation, echoing his arguments in the early cases. “Every man,” Butler argued, “has the right to go into a place of public amusement or entertainment for which a license by legal authority

⁵¹⁰ Sandoval-Strausz, “Travelers, Strangers, and Jim Crow,” 74.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

is required...he has a right of action now against every man who interferes with that right.”⁵¹² Following strong advocacy by Butler and Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, the US Congress finally passed the Civil Rights Act in 1875, which protected “the full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters, and other places of public amusement ... applicable alike to citizens of every race and color, regardless of any previous condition of servitude.”⁵¹³ In the aftermath of the act, black challenges to existing discrimination similar to that in Boston, spread nationwide.⁵¹⁴

Conflicts between African American patrons pushing for equal access and business owners claiming a private right to exclude culminated in a harsh setback in the 1883 Supreme Court decision, *Civil Rights Cases*. Bundled together were five challenges to the right to exclude, including two from customers excluded from theaters.⁵¹⁵ In its decision, the court directly clarified the boundaries between public right to access and the private right to exclude. Referring to the Fourteenth Amendment, Justice Joseph Bradley ruled that “individual invasion of individual rights is not the subject matter of the

⁵¹² 43 Cong. Rec. H340 (December 19, 1873); Sandoval-Strausz, “Travelers, Strangers, and Jim Crow,” 60; Alfred Avins, “The Civil Rights Act of 1875 and the Civil Rights Cases Revisited: State Action, the Fourteenth Amendment, and Housing,” *UCLA Law Review* 14 No. 1 (1966): 10-11.

⁵¹³ Civil Rights Act of 1875, 18 Stat. Part III, 335 (Mar. 1, 1875).

⁵¹⁴ Sandoval-Strausz, “Travelers, Strangers, and Jim Crow,” 76.

⁵¹⁵ *Civil Rights Cases*, 109 U.S. 3 (1883). The two lower court cases dealing with theater discrimination are *U.S. v. Ryan* and *U.S. v. Singleton*. According to the *Civil Rights Cases* Syllabus: “the information against Ryan being for refusing a colored person a seat in the dress circle of Maguire’s theater in San Francisco; and the indictment against Singleton being for denying to another person, whose color is not stated, the full enjoyment of the accommodations of the theater known as the Grand Opera House in New York, ‘said denial not being made for any reasons by law applicable to citizens of every race and color, and regardless of any previous condition of servitude,’” *Ibid*.

amendment...it does not authorize Congress to create a code of municipal law for the regulation of private rights.”⁵¹⁶

In his dissent Justice John Harlan specifically addressed the public interest in privately owned places of public amusement. He argued that “discrimination is a badge of servitude” involving feelings of shame and embarrassment felt by victims of discrimination. Further, Harlan, in particular, focused on the importance of licensing as a way to make public privately owned places of amusement. Harlan argued:

Places of public amusement are established and maintained under direct license of the law. The authority to establish and maintain them comes from the public. The colored race is part of that public... places of public amusement, conducted under the authority of the law, are clothed with a public interest, because used in a manner to make them of public consequence and to affect the community at large. The law may therefore regulate, to some extent, the mode in which they shall be conducted, and consequently the public have rights in respect of such places which may be vindicated by the law. It is consequently not a matter purely of private concern.

For Harlan, because a municipal authority granted a business a license to function as a place of public amusement, that business was obligated to serve all members of the public, African Americans included. Despite Harlan’s statements, the court’s decision had an immediate effect on civil rights in Boston.

Emboldened by the decision, businesses in Boston increasingly refused black patrons service. In this way, the Supreme Court’s 1883 decision can be seen to have had a national impact on civil rights, rather than just upon the post-Reconstruction South. “The annulling of the Civil Rights Act by the Supreme Court of the United States,” African American reporter J. Gordon Street explained in his *New York Freeman* column, “has led

⁵¹⁶ *Civil Rights Cases*, 109 U.S. 3 (1883). See also: Abraham L. Davis and Barbara Luck Graham, *The Supreme Court, Race, and Civil Rights* (Teller Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications, Inc. 1995) 13-19, 46-48.

a good many proprietors and managers of certain public places of amusement in [Boston] to think that they can refuse colored persons admittance with impunity.”⁵¹⁷ Street echoed many in the Boston black community who called for renewed opposition to discrimination and urged collective action. “Whenever such discriminations are made,” Street announced, “let the colored people speak out—‘set the town, the city, the state on fire.’”⁵¹⁸ The editors of the *Boston Globe* recognized the importance of African American challenges for defining the rights of black patrons. “The future personal and social rights of the colored people may depend largely on the final decision,” the *Globe* editors wrote. “Before the Supreme Court declared the civil rights bill unconstitutional,” the *Globe* affirmed, “there could have been no doubt. Now, there is in the minds of many, including some of the colored men, a great deal.”⁵¹⁹ In the face of increased hostility black residents mounted a campaign to challenge any business’s right to exclude.

Discrimination in roller skating rinks became particularly notorious following the 1883 decision. As a patron excluded from a Nantasket, Massachusetts rink, recalled in a letter to the African American newspaper the *Boston Hub*: “So you see, you need not go south to experience indignities...yea, almost under the shadow of ‘the Athens of America’ you are ejected on account of your color. The stigma attaching to that act will

⁵¹⁷ “Contending for the Right,” *New York Freeman*, January 31, 1885.

⁵¹⁸ “Contending for the Right”; Following the decision in the Civil Rights Cases, African Americans challenged discrimination in several areas beyond public accommodation. In particular, they fought discrimination in the New England Conservatory of Music and they were successful in helping pass legislation prohibiting life insurance companies from charging black clients higher rates and premiums than their white customers. *New York Freeman*, January 10 and 17, February 14, 1885; “Act to Prevent Discrimination by Life Insurance Companies Against Persons of Color,” 1884 Mass. Acts 235.

⁵¹⁹ “Colored Men vs. Skating Rinks,” *Boston Daily Globe*, July 28, 1884.

remain with me until the day of my death.”⁵²⁰ Exclusion from skating rinks continued in the coming years, prompting immediate response from black activists.

On Saturday, January 3, 1885, Richard S. Brown, a night inspector of customs, and his two grandchildren, Louisa and Richard Lewis, approached the ticket booth at the Boston skating rink owned by Frank E. Winslow. George Hawes, the rink’s ticket agent, immediately informed Brown that the rink was private and that African Americans were not welcome. Brown objected, arguing that the rink publically advertised, called for the patronage of the public, and was not, therefore, a private facility. Hawes was neither moved by Brown’s appeal nor his crying grandchildren and, upon his orders, two or three men grabbed Brown by the collar as he and his grandchildren were “violently thrust out of the building.” Brown was angered not only by the general insult from the skating rink owner, but that the incident took place in front of his grandchildren. As Brown explained in a petition to Boston’s City Council, his grandchildren had been born since the ending of the Civil War and “since the abolition of slavery had never till then known the extent of the prejudice which once existed against their race and color and which lingers among ill informed persons.”⁵²¹ Brown soon had a warrant for assault issued for Hawes and hoped that some redress could be achieved through the municipal court.

In another part of the city, several days later, on January 9th, George C. Freeman, who was born in Randolph, Mississippi and employed at Davenport’s furniture salesroom, and E. Everett Brown, a New Hampshire native and lawyer, were excluded

⁵²⁰ “No Colored Persons Allowed on the Surface,” *The Boston Hub*, August 811, 1883.

⁵²¹ “Petition of Richard S. Brown with Thomas Russell and Others,” February 2, 1885, Docket Documents, Mayor & Board of Aldermen, City of Boston Archives, Boston, MA.; “A Question of Civil Rights,” *Boston Daily Globe*, January 17, 1885; “Contending for the Right.”

from Highland skating rink in Roxbury. The ticket agent refused to provide the men with skate checks and referred them to David H. McKay, the rink manager, who supported the ticket agent's actions explaining, "You are colored, and your friend is colored; I allow no colored persons to skate on my floor."⁵²² Brown and Freeman responded with outrage and explained that McKay's actions were in violation of the law.⁵²³

In the aftermath of the forced exclusion, the African American community rallied around the victims and supported them in attaining legal representation. For example, on January 23rd, the Wendell Phillips Club voted to push all cases of discrimination to the fullest extent of the law and formed a committee to organize counsel for Freeman and Brown.⁵²⁴ The committee succeeded in gaining the services of former Massachusetts Attorney General Charles R. Train who, along with black attorney James. H. Wolff, represented the two complainants. Prominent African American lawyers Archibald Grimké and Butler R. Wilson represented Richard Brown.⁵²⁵ In the other complaints brought against McKay, Edward Everett Brown joined with Wolff to counsel the complainants.⁵²⁶

Although the circumstances of the two cases were similar, the initial legal outcomes were very different. In the case of Brown and Freeman, Justice Henry W. Fuller of the Roxbury Municipal Court agreed with the complainants. Citing the 1865 statute, he found David McKay guilty of discriminating against the two men and

⁵²² "Costly Discrimination," *Boston Daily Globe*, January 24, 1885.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ "Costly Discrimination"; "Contending for the Right."

⁵²⁶ "Contending for the Right."

sentenced him to a fine of one hundred dollars, fifty dollars for each man, and the costs in each case. McKay immediately appealed the case and was ordered to pay bail in the sum of two hundred dollars in each case for appearance in the Superior Court.⁵²⁷

In Richard Brown's case, because he had only gotten a warrant against Hawes for an assault, the court declared that the only decision was whether excessive force was used to remove Brown from the rink.⁵²⁸ In that regard, Judge William E. Parmenter found Hawes guilty of the assault and fined him fifteen dollars.⁵²⁹ However, due to the discussion of racial discrimination in the case, Judge Parmenter expanded his decision to include an examination of legislation on the subject. Based on the precedent set in *Commonwealth v. Sylvester*, he found that Winslow's rink had made no contract with the public regarding general admission and further that the rink was not licensed by the state, nor had its owner applied for one. Therefore the judge agreed that Winslow's was a private facility and therefore Brown technically could have been charged with trespassing for his refusal to leave. However, given Brown's age and his motives, the judge overlooked the potential trespassing and decided that Hawes and his colleagues had used excessive force in removing Brown.⁵³⁰ Hawes, like the defendants in the Freeman and Brown case, immediately appealed to the Superior Court.

While the complainants brought their case before the courts, the larger African American community organized to wage a broader attack on discrimination in the city and state. Soon after the judges in both cases handed down their initial rulings, a large

⁵²⁷ "Costly Discrimination"; "Contending for the Right."

⁵²⁸ "Our Bostonians Indignant," *New York Freeman*, February 7, 1885.

⁵²⁹ "The Winslow Assault Case," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, January 30, 1885.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

number of prominent black Bostonians called a meeting to present a series of resolutions and map out a course of action.⁵³¹ On January 28th a large group, not hindered by a bitterly cold and stormy night, met at the Twelfth Baptist Church on Phillips Street.⁵³² Significant leaders in Boston's African American political scene and civil rights struggles were present. Lewis Hayden served as president with Edwin G. Walker, Butler. R. Wilson, Julius C. Chappelle, John J. Smith, Charles L. Mitchell, and others serving as vice presidents. William. A. Hazel, James M. Trotter, James H. Wolff, and William H. Dupree made up the committee on resolutions. In addition to Walker, Archibald Grimké and Thomas Riley, a young Irish American lawyer, spoke out against the recent indignities.⁵³³

The recent cases of discrimination united the black community against a common enemy and demonstrate how strategies of political partisanship were secondary to the defense of black civil liberties. Lewis Hayden declared that for the moment issues of party politics, which still divided the community, were put aside. "We are here without politics," he announced, "as Massachusetts men."⁵³⁴ Although issues of partisanship could bitterly antagonize Boston's black political leadership, issues of discrimination and the infringement of rights united the community.

One of the particular frustrations expressed in the meeting's resolutions was the prevalence of discrimination in the face of racial uplift. The meeting's organizers believed "that people are esteemed in proportion to the virtues they display...that

⁵³¹ "Colored Citizens Indignant," *Boston Daily Globe*, January 27, 1885.

⁵³² "Our Bostonians Indignant," *New York Freeman*, February 7, 1885.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ "Emphatic Protest," *Boston Daily Globe*, January 29, 1885.

sobriety, morality, thrift, and reverence of the laws will in the end earn the respect.”⁵³⁵

However, despite reflecting the values of respectability and in spite of the laws, William A. Hazel admitted that “members of our race are singled out as subjects upon whom to heap indignities humiliating to the extreme.”⁵³⁶ These complaints reflected a broader disappointment that, regardless of attempts at uplift, black Bostonians were not immune to the realities of racism and discrimination.

Speakers declared that cases of discrimination were a betrayal of Massachusetts’ legacy as the site of the rhetoric of freedom and independence during the American Revolution and of anti-slavery activism. William A. Hazel, a black stained glass artist and architect, declared, “Events of recent occurrence in this city prove the error of supposing that the odious proscriptions growing out of race and color prejudices are among the things of the past, even in this old commonwealth whose name stands synonymous with liberty.”⁵³⁷ Leaders like Archibald Grimké invoked images of the anti-slavery movement. He appealed to the legacy of William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and the Bill of Rights of Massachusetts. Central to Grimké and the claims of other speakers was an appeal to the progressive past and spirit of Massachusetts citizens. By invoking the names of prominent abolitionists and the memory of triumph in the

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ *Boston Daily Globe*, January 29, 1885. Hazel would be at the center of an anti-discrimination case in Minnesota in 1887 when he successfully challenged his exclusion from a St. Paul hotel. See Dreck Spurlock Wilson, *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 273-277.

American Revolution, black Bostonians hoped to unite a broader coalition against incidents of racial oppression.⁵³⁸

The speakers rejected the passivity of supposed white allies. While the authors acknowledged the unlikelihood that most citizens of Boston and Massachusetts condoned the recent events, they nevertheless refused to “condone indifference to those wrongs, [and sought to]...hold the community to a strict moral accountability for the same.”⁵³⁹ The group resolved to use what political influence they had to condemn those who either supported discrimination or refused to speak out against it. “We regard as our enemies and will always oppose for places of preferment,” Hazel declared, “persons guilty of abridging our rights or obstructing the advancement of our race, either actively or otherwise.”⁵⁴⁰ Black activists also looked to forming coalitions with Boston’s Irish community to fight discrimination. As Archibald Grimké introduced Thomas Riley, a young Irish American lawyer, he declared, “The best of our Irish-American citizens are in favor of this movement.”⁵⁴¹

Thomas Riley’s active presence at this meeting is an example of the alliances black Bostonians successfully formed with member of the Irish immigrant community. Although incidents of animosity existed between African and Irish Americans in Boston, they were not universally at odds with one another, as is commonly suggested. Indeed, in cases of civil rights agitation some Irish immigrants drew parallels to their own fight

⁵³⁸ “Emphatic Protest.”

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid..

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

against the English in Ireland and sought common cause with black Bostonians.⁵⁴² Riley spoke directly to the incidents that occurred at the skating rinks. “What right,” Riley asked, “has anyone to say that a decent man or woman complying with all the requirements of the law and common courtesy shall be excluded from any place because his or her skin color happens to be black, brown, or yellow?...there ought to be a penalty of imprisonment for those who thus discriminate.”⁵⁴³ Riley joined with the other speakers in advocating stiffer penalties for racial discrimination.

The meeting’s resolutions urged stricter sanctions against discrimination and argued that current legislation offered little redress. The authors recognized that the current laws prohibiting discrimination were insufficient and declared “the penalties imposed in case of violators to be too trifling to afford reasonable protection or redress.”⁵⁴⁴ These complaints echoed those of previous decades and help demonstrate the ability of discrimination to function in municipalities with anti-discrimination laws. In order to overcome the problem of weak legislation, the authors of the resolutions advocated new laws that would prohibit discrimination through the expansion of state authority and an imposition of stricter penalties. Further, they pressed state and local authorities to revoke the licenses of any place of entertainment which continued to violate the new anti-discrimination statutes.

The organizers declared the commitment of the black community to support future legal struggles against discrimination. Declaring that “we will aid both morally and

⁵⁴² I go into this discussion in much more detail in Chapter 5.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ “Ibid.

financially, and by all legal means, those of our race who shall prosecute all such violations.”⁵⁴⁵ The mounting of civil cases against violators was costly and this commitment to financing and equipping attorneys to confront discrimination demonstrates a commitment to the use of the courts to enforce equal rights protections. As the meeting concluded, resolutions were enthusiastically adopted and the attendees continued to chart a strategy of how to approach the Boston Board of Aldermen and the State Legislature. As one observer noted in the *New York Freeman*, these resolutions have mad “officers of institutions in which the color-line is drawn, tremble and quake with fear.”⁵⁴⁶

Victory against the Right to Exclude

It was not long before resolutions turned into direct action. In this case, decisions made in community organization meetings transferred directly to the formal halls of government. In February 1885, African American legislator Julius Chappelle put forth a motion ordering the Committee on the Judiciary to consider the expediency of amending the Public Statutes relating to “offences against chastity, morality, decency, and good order, as to better protect the persons therein referred to.”⁵⁴⁷ The revised bill’s passage through the legislative process, however, would not be as smooth as it was in 1865.

In March 1885, advocates and opponents of the anti-discrimination statute entered the chamber of the Committee on the Judiciary, for a public hearing on the proposed draft

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid..

⁵⁴⁶ “Our Bostonians Indignant.”

⁵⁴⁷ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston 1885), 155; “Order, House of Representatives,” 1885, Passed Acts, SC1/Series 229, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA.

of the bill. Opponents of legislative action, like skating rink owner David McKay, sought to maintain rinks as private enterprises. McKay argued that he did not refuse admission to anyone but only restricted a portion of the interior surface for skating. Black customers, he declared, were welcome to watch the skating from the border, but could not enter the skating surface. McKay and his attorney also opposed a recent bill attempting to license all skating rinks.⁵⁴⁸ They contended, citing *Commonwealth vs. Gee*, that, like a dance school, a skating rink was not a place of public amusement and therefore should not be licensed by the state.⁵⁴⁹ They alleged that the passage of the anti-discrimination statute would set “a dangerous precedent, as its scope could from year to year be extended too far, including church fairs, etc.”⁵⁵⁰ For the African American citizens in the room, the expanding scope of the bill was what made the new legislation so necessary and attractive. “We represent the taxpayers, as citizens,” African American attorney Butler R. Wilson began; “[the law] has failed in this case, and the failure of an old law shows the necessity for a new one... We want the law to say what shall be done in the future.”⁵⁵¹

Butler R. Wilson refuted McKay’s defense that exclusions were made not based on race, but on character. “The trouble is,” Wilson explained, “the skating rink managers put all colored men in the same box; they treat the gentlemen the same as the rascals...we claim that the skating rink men have put a stigma upon colored persons, and ask the

⁵⁴⁸ “An Act Authorizing Cities and Towns to License Skating Rinks,” 1885 Mass. Acts 196.

⁵⁴⁹ This argument was based on Massachusetts Supreme Court decision, *Commonwealth v. Gee*, 60 Mass. 174 (1850). In this case the court affirmed that a dance school was not a place of public amusement and therefore was exempt from licensing laws.

⁵⁵⁰ “Even in Tophet.”

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

committee to give us our rights.”⁵⁵² Discrimination marked all black men and women, regardless of personal success or education, as second-class citizens.

As the hearing concluded, the committee chairman Prentice Cummings stated the central dilemma before the legislature. “Though the legislature,” he concluded, “has the right to govern public places of amusement, it cannot go a step farther and say how private establishments shall be run, or exactly define what is a public or a private place.”⁵⁵³ Based on this conclusion, after several months of consideration, Cummings joined four members of the committee in voting against the bill. Despite this opposition, the bill successfully passed out of the committee and proceeded to the floor of the House.

One of the major concerns of the bill’s opponents was the expansion of the scope of the new law to cover non-licensed establishments. Cummings, for example, succeeded in adding an amendment to the legislation restricting the coverage of the bill to businesses and facilities licensed by the state.⁵⁵⁴ However, Julius Chappelle put forth a motion to reconsider and successfully passed the bill in its original form.⁵⁵⁵ In this case African American participation in the legislative process was central to the passage of anti-discrimination legislation.

Following success at the House level, however, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary reported that the bill ought not to pass. This action prompted an immediate response from Boston’s black community and the day after the committee issued their

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston 1885), 676.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 680-81, 690. The breakdown of the vote was not recorded in the *Journal of the House of Representatives*.

report, petitions pressing for the bill's passage arrived at the Senate chamber. The petitioners reminded legislators of the successful service of African Americans in the Civil War and attempted to convey the hardship suffered without protective legislation. One petition was submitted by members of the Robert Gould Shaw Veterans Association, a group "composed largely of those who fought faithfully in the late war, for the union and for the liberty of the colored race."⁵⁵⁶ Among the 51 signers of this petition were Edwin G. Walker, James Monroe Trotter, J. D. Powell, Jr. and other prominent leaders.⁵⁵⁷

The petitions explained the financial burden African Americans faced in fighting discrimination. "We being the persons subjected to such discrimination," they stated, had found the existing law ineffective, "thus subjecting us to a pecuniary expense in the Courts to defend ourselves for the want of such a law, and therefore continuing the discrimination more or less in practice in this Commonwealth."⁵⁵⁸ Without state investigation and enforcement of the statutes, the black community depended on its own limited resources to fund prosecutions.

The difference in the names on each of the petitions roughly follows the partisan split in the community. The leaders among the Robert G. Shaw veterans were generally affiliated with Democratic or independent politics, while the names accompanying Lewis

⁵⁵⁶ "Petition of members of the Robert G. Shaw veteran association and others for the passage of House Bill No. 13 Providing for punishing persons who make discrimination in public places on account of race of color," May 30, 1885. Passed Legislation, 1885, chap. 316. Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA; *Journal of the Senate, 1885* (Boston, 1885) 475.

⁵⁵⁷ "Petition of members of the Robert G. Shaw veteran association and others for the passage of House Bill No. 131 providing for punishing persons who make discrimination in public places on account of race of color," 316, 1885, Passed Acts, SC1/Series 229, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA; *Journal of the Senate* (Boston 1885), 475.

⁵⁵⁸ "Petition of Lewis Hayden and Others that the Senate will pass the House Bill to punish persons making unjust discrimination in public places on account of race or color," 316, 1885, Passed Acts, SC1/Series 229, Massachusetts Archives, Boston, MA; *Journal of the Senate* (Boston 1885), 475.

Hayden's were the more prominent officeholders of black Boston who tended to support the Republican Party. In this way we can see how, although the community could unite to confront discrimination, partisan alignment may have continued in associational life.

Following the submissions of the petitions, the Senate chose not to respect the decision of the committee, and passed the legislation.⁵⁵⁹ The law was enacted by the General Court and approved by the Governor in June 1885. The bill specifically clarified questions raised in *Sylvester v. Commonwealth* and greatly broadened the police powers of the state in cases of anti-discrimination enforcement. The law punished, with a maximum one hundred dollar fine, anyone who “makes any distinction, discrimination, or restriction on account of color or race...except for good cause in respect to the admission of any person to or his treatment.”⁵⁶⁰ The new statute specifically addressed discrimination in any place of public amusement such as a theater, or skating rink, and any public conveyance, public meeting, or inn, ‘licensed or not, and whether it be required to be licensed or not.’⁵⁶¹ Despite the significant advances of this legislation, the inclusion of the “good cause” phrase left open the possibility of discrimination based on other criteria. This new legislation thus did not bring a total end to incidents of racial

⁵⁵⁹ The vote breakdown was not recorded in the *Journal of the Senate*.

⁵⁶⁰ “An Act to Punish Persons Making Discrimination in Public Places on Account of Race or Color.” 1885 Mass. Acts 316.

⁵⁶¹ “An Act to Punish Persons Making Discrimination in Public Places on Account of Race or Color.” In other states African Americans brought challenges to discrimination in skating rinks with less success. For example, in 1885 the Supreme Court of Iowa ruled that a skating rink did not have a duty to serve black patrons. This decision is particularly interesting in its invocation of the equal treatment of black and white patrons under the law. *Bowlin v. Lyon et al.* 67 Iowa 536 (1885); Singer, “No Right to Exclude,” 1391-1393

discrimination in Massachusetts, as property owners devised strategies to exclude black patrons within the boundaries of the new law.⁵⁶²

Skating rinks in particular adopted a unique way of maintaining racial restrictions while remaining in the boundaries of the law. By only accepting “respectable” members, skating rinks could argue that they were providing equal access, while preserving a largely segregated environment. The black community became particularly enraged when patrons were excluded despite their behaving appropriately. In New Bedford, for example, a group of African American citizens who opposed the licensing of the Adelphi skating rink on the grounds that the owners excluded black patrons, testified before the City Council committee on licensing. In one case, Daniel W. Howland testified that he sent his son to the rink, but that the child was refused entry. Upon confrontation the rink manager explained, “You’re a man of sense, and you can see that we can’t allow colored boys to skate.”⁵⁶³ This account was corroborated by a rink employee who testified that he had told Howland that African Americans were not allowed to skate. Emanuel Sullivan and Edwin A. Douglass, two black lawyers, spoke on behalf of the opposition. Douglass argued that to grant this rink its license, thus giving it state sanction, would be “to defy the fourteenth amendment and the bill of rights.”⁵⁶⁴ Again appealing to the

⁵⁶² In 1895 African Americans again returned to the State House to revise the anti-discrimination legislation. In a petition they advocated the removal the ‘good cause’ exception, the widening the protections to “all persons of every color and race whatsoever” and the increase of the penalty to include payment of damages to the plaintiff and an additional fine of up to three hundred dollars and or imprisonment up to one year. While the legislature adopted the other revisions, it refused to remove the ‘good cause’ language. 1895 Mass Acts 461. In 1896, Bishop Arnett, from Wilberforce University, was barred entry from a Boston hotel. This act was seen as so egregious that the City Council and State Legislature passed resolutions condemning the action. “Resolutions Relative to Discrimination on Account of Color,” Mass. Resolves (April 18, 1896).

⁵⁶³ “The Fourteenth Amendment,” *Boston Daily Globe*, February 14, 1885.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

progressive heritage of Massachusetts, William Henry Johnson asked the committee to oppose discrimination, “in the name of the Whig and the Republican parties.”⁵⁶⁵

In his defense the rink manager explained that in order to keep objectionable people from the skating floor, a club was established and that no one was allowed to skate unless they had signed the organization’s constitution. “In most instances,” an article in the *Boston Globe* explained, “this is a mere matter of form, but it is frequently enforced when it is desired to exclude undesirable patrons.”⁵⁶⁶ The manager Bancroft defended the creation of the private club, stating that it contained African American members and that “no distinction was made excepting in the case of people whose reputations were notoriously bad.”⁵⁶⁷ Although Bancroft alleged that no black patron had ever been rejected who applied for admission, only one had ever applied. Despite the objections of New Bedford’s African American citizens, at the conclusion of the hearing the committee granted Adelphi skating rink its license. The following week, a young black woman contacted Emanuel Sullivan, stating she had been refused admission into another local rink. Similar to the Adelphi rink, the manager defended the exclusion stating that the woman had not conducted herself in “a ladylike manner” and that he did not intend to allow anyone to skate who “could not conduct himself properly.”⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid. This charge of misbehavior was a common excuse for rejecting black patrons. For example, in the 1883 case of a man’s exclusion from a Nantasket Beach skating rink the owners charged that they had poor experiences with a group of black waiters who acted “very ungentlemanly.” Therefore, the rink owners explained that they could not permit any African American patrons to participate. *Boston Hub*, August 11, 1883.

In another case in Boston, Winslow's Skating Rink, which was at the center of the debate leading up to the new legislation, discouraged black attendance by providing inferior skating equipment for African American patrons. "The managers of the Winslow rink," a correspondent to the *New York Freeman* recognized, "are determined to have no colored people in their rink if possible." "They have secured," he explained, "a very inferior skate, such as are used by children on the streets, for the colored patrons and give them nothing but these, making all manners of excuses and falsehoods to hold their position."⁵⁶⁹ Although businesses could not explicitly bar the entry of African American patrons, the law did not prohibit skating rinks from providing separate rental equipment. The lengths to which businesses continued to go to exclude black customers is evidence of the persistent racism present in Boston despite the passage of prohibitory legislation.

In their fight against public accommodation discrimination black activists overcame significant opposition to challenge the right of property owners to exclude customers based on race. Examining how African Americans in Boston worked to break down obstacles to equality following the Civil War demonstrates both the national persistence of racism and discrimination and how black communities mobilized to defeat these challenges. From their first challenges in the 1850s, black plaintiffs and petitioners forced Massachusetts courts and legislatures to contend with persistent racial discrimination, even as the state attempted to cultivate a national reputation of racial progressivism. Further, the continued opposition to exclusion reinforced the belief among black activists that civil rights protections would only come through the enforcement of

⁵⁶⁹ "Mr. Hoyt's Boston Letter," *New York Freeman*, April 11, 1885.

the state. By advocating laws and endorsing licensing restrictions, African Americans recognized the importance of state regulatory authority as a method of protection.

The fight for equal access on a local level and the general success of the movement emboldened Boston's African American activists in their petitions to the federal government for increased intervention in the protection of the lives and rights of southern black men and women. It was by the enforcement power of the federal government, they argued, that the rights of African American citizens across the nation could be assured. This period of activism would do much to increase the confidence and expectations of Boston's black leaders as they positioned themselves as influential advocates for civil rights nationally. The optimism gained from local successes, however, was challenged as they confronted the rising tide of Jim Crow legislation in the 1890s.

Chapter 5

Irish Nationalists, 'Colored Obrienites,' and Crispus Attucks: African American and Irish Political Coalitions, 1881-1890

In 1888, a monument to Crispus Attucks became a symbol of unity between Irish and African American residents in Boston. On the bright but chilly morning of November 14, 1888, a grand procession moved towards the Boston Common.⁵⁷⁰ African American Civil War veterans and an armed drill squad in full uniform led the parade.⁵⁷¹ The procession included prominent leaders from both the Democratic and Republican parties and from Boston's Irish and African American leadership. As the crowd stopped in front of a veiled monolith, William H. Dupree, a black community leader and the chairman of the arrangement committee, opened the dedication. "In the occurrence which we commemorate," Dupree began, "the colored race has a profound interest, for one of that race was a principal figure in it."⁵⁷² Amid deafening cries and applause, Governor Oliver Ames joined nine-year-old Lillian Chappelle, the daughter of the General Court's only African American member Julius Chappelle, as they pulled the cord holding the cover to the monument to Crispus Attucks.⁵⁷³ Following brief statements from Governor Ames

⁵⁴⁴ "First Martyrs," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 15, 1888; "It is expected..." *Boston Pilot*, September 22, 1888; "Crispus Attucks," *Boston Pilot*, November 10, 1887; "Boston Honors the Negro Patriot," *Boston Pilot*, November 24, 1888; "Attucks and His Comrades," *New York Age*, November 17, 1888.

⁵⁷¹ "Honoring Crispus Attucks," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 13, 1888.

⁵⁷² "First Martyrs."

⁵⁷³ For a discussion of African American representatives in the Massachusetts General Court see: State Library of Massachusetts, *Black Legislators in the Massachusetts General Court, 1867-Present*, (Boston, 2001); Curtis M. Hairston, Jr. and the Massachusetts Black Caucus, *Blacks on Beacon Hill: A History of Blacks in the Massachusetts Legislature* (Boston: The Caucus, 1983).

and Mayor Hugh O'Brien, the procession reformed and made its way down State Street toward Faneuil Hall for continued celebration. Ex-Louisiana Lieutenant Governor P.B.S. Pinchback, who had traveled from Louisiana for the dedication, remarked about the interracial cooperation reflected in the event. "Would to God I could present this picture to the people of [Louisiana]" Pinchback declared; "no spectacle seems so grand as that I see before me, the ruler of the State here, of the city here, Anglo Saxons both, and your black chairman between them—perfect equality of the races."⁵⁷⁴

While Pinchback characterized the Governor and the Mayor as "Anglo Saxons both," he neglected to remark on Mayor O'Brien's Irish heritage. As O'Brien and Dupree stood to commemorate the victims of the Boston Massacre, they demonstrated over a decade of political coalition building between Boston's black and Irish immigrant populations. In Boston during the 1880s, black and Irish residents forged political alliances that combined ideas about citizenship rights with notions of ethnic nationalism. In their sympathy for the cause of Irish independence and their appeals for Irish support of African American civil rights struggles, members of Boston's black community united calls for local, state, and national civil rights protection with broader transnational independence movements. By examining African American involvement in the campaigns of Irish leaders for political office, this chapter shows how black politicians manipulated machine politics and used their support for Irish and Democratic candidates as leverage against Republican leadership.

This chapter examines successful coalitions between African Americans and Irish immigrants. First, in their support of Irish nationalist organizations including the Irish

⁵⁷⁴ "First Martyrs."

Land League and Charles Parnell's Home Rule movement, black journalists and spokespeople drew parallels between the plight of African Americans in the United States and the oppression of the Irish in the British Empire.⁵⁷⁵ By appealing to a shared history of oppression, black and Irish leaders argued that the two groups should be allies in struggles for independence and civil rights. Next, as some black voters rejected the Republican Party, they united with Irish supporters of Democratic candidates. In particular, they supported, like many Irish voters, Benjamin Butler for Governor and spoke out as advocates for Boston's first Irish born mayor, Hugh O'Brien. Finally, both electoral politics and shared sympathies came together in a successful proposal for the construction of a monument to Crispus Attucks and the other victims of the 1770 Boston Massacre. The figure of Crispus Attucks and the events of the Boston Massacre were given a meaning that appealed to African Americans as an example of involvement in the founding of the nation, and to Irish supporters as an example of resistance to British colonial rule. When leaders of Irish Boston, such as John Boyle O'Reilly and O'Brien, stood alongside black leaders in commemoration of the event, they presented a visible example of political cooperation and cultural sympathy.

The history of African American and Irish relations in the nineteenth century has privileged a narrative of conflict over cooperation. Historians' accounts of the relationships between African Americans and Irish immigrants generally focus on a brief period of cooperation in the 1830s and 1840s that quickly devolved into a relationship of economic competition, racial supremacy, and occasional violent confrontations by the

⁵⁷⁵ For more on the Home Rule movement, see: Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History: 1800-2000* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003).

Civil War.⁵⁷⁶ Historian David Roediger argues: “Instead of seeing their struggles as bound up with those of colonized and colored people around the world, [Irish Americans] came to see their struggles as against such people.”⁵⁷⁷ Further, studies of urban politics during this period describe an emerging Irish political machine challenging an older Protestant and Republican leadership.⁵⁷⁸ Even as historians have challenged this narrative of conflict between Irish and Yankees, the history of African American cooperation with Irish politicians has largely been neglected.⁵⁷⁹ Those who have discussed cooperation between Irish leaders and African Americans tend to focus on the sympathy for black civil rights by figures like O’Reilly, while neglecting the role African Americans played in supporting Irish nationalism and emerging Irish candidates.⁵⁸⁰ By placing African Americans at the center of the narrative, this chapter argues that they played an important role in the contested environment of urban politics. Black political leaders worked with Irish Democrats to organize the black vote aiming to shift the

⁵⁷⁶ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, (New York: Routledge, 2008); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007); David J. Hellwig, “Black Attitudes Toward Irish Immigrants,” *Mid-America* 49 (January 1977): 39-49; Dennis Clark, “Urban Blacks and Irishmen: Brothers in Prejudice,” in *Black Politics in Philadelphia*, ed. Miriam Ershkowitz and Joseph Zikmund, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 15-30.

⁵⁷⁷ Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 136-137.

⁵⁷⁸ O’Connor, *The Boston Irish*; Handlin, *Boston’s Immigrants*; Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, Co., 1966).

⁵⁷⁹ Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, 1-38; Blodgett, “Yankee Leadership in a Divided City,” 371-396.

⁵⁸⁰ William Leonard, “Black and Irish Relations in Nineteenth Century Boston: The Interesting Case of Lawyer Robert Morris,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 64-85; A. G. Evans, *Fanatic Heart: A Life of John Boyle O’Reilly, 1844-1890* (Nedlands, Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 1997), 215-216; Mark R. Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow, 1890-1920*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 161-184; Dennis P. Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box: A Social History of the Boston Irish, 1845-1917*, (East Brunswick, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1983), 130-137; Arnold Shankman, “Afro-American Editors on Irish Independence, 1840-1921,” *Phylon* 41, no. 3 (3rd Qtr. 1980): 284-299; John R. Betts, “The Negro and the New England Conscience in the Days of John Boyle O’Reilly,” *The Journal of Negro History* 51, no. 4 (October 1966): 246-261.

balance of political power away from the Republican party and over to new Irish Democratic municipal leaders. Boston's political culture in the 1880s opened spaces for significant cooperation, thereby forcing a rethinking of African American and Irish immigrant relations and the place of African Americans in the arena of late nineteenth-century urban politics.

The Beginning of a Coalition

Political coalitions between Irish and African Americans have their roots in the antebellum anti-slavery movement. For example, in 1840 Boston resident Charles Lennox Remond was selected to represent the American Anti-Slavery Society at the 1840 World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London along with William Lloyd Garrison and Lucretia Mott. Upon his return to the United States, Remond presented a "Great Irish Address," signed by 60,000 Irish citizens urging Irish Americans to support the cause of anti-slavery and equality for African Americans.⁵⁸¹ Famous Irish leader Daniel O'Connell sponsored the address.⁵⁸² O'Connell hoped that as members of a colonized people resisting British oppression, Irish Americans might recognize injustice and fight slavery. The message was well received by a crowd of 5,000 at Faneuil Hall, but in most cities Irish immigrants rejected calls for such an alliance.⁵⁸³ The breakdown of black-

⁵⁸¹ Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 65-66.

⁵⁸² O'Connell is considered to be one of the fathers of the Irish Home Rule movement. In the 1840s he led a massive movement to repeal the Acts of Union which abolished the Irish parliament and put the island fully under the parliament in Westminster. He was a powerful symbol and inspiration to advocates of Home Rule in the 1880s. See Thomas Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, 6-7; Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000*, 12-17.

⁵⁸³ Gilbert Osofsky, "Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants, and the Dilemmas of Romantic Nationalism.," *American Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (1975): 889-912.

Irish political coalitions prior to the war has been the subject of some debate.

Explanations include the competition between black and Irish workers for jobs, rejection of the emancipation policies of England, political manipulation by the Democratic Party, and a need to assert ‘whiteness.’⁵⁸⁴

Occasionally Irish resistance to anti-slavery turned violent in Boston. African American and Irish residents came to blows in 1859 following John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry. During a memorial service in Boston for the recently hanged Brown, a mob including Irish immigrants rushed the stage, assaulting Frederick Douglass.⁵⁸⁵

Although they were not nearly as violent as events in New York City, portions of Boston’s Irish community rioted against the draft in 1863.⁵⁸⁶ Alongside occasions of Irish and black conflict were moments of cooperation. For example during the 1860s and 1870s, Robert Morris, one of the nation’s first African American attorneys, drew a great portion of his clients from the Irish community.⁵⁸⁷

Following the end of the Civil War, both African American and Irish residents attempted to make a place for themselves in Boston’s political environment. As historian Mitchell Snay explains, “The Civil War was a modernizing and liberalizing experience that unintentionally raised the aspirations of groups who had recently been marginalized

⁵⁸⁴ David Rodiger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 133-156.

⁵⁸⁵ O’Connor, *Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 36-46.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 139-141. In New York City, from July 13-15, 1863, white American and Irish residents rioted in opposition to the draft and brutally murdered African Americans until the Union army suppressed the violence. See Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society And Politics In the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁵⁸⁷ Leonard, “Black and Irish Relations in Nineteenth Century Boston,” 83-84.

from the mainstream of American political power.”⁵⁸⁸ It was a moment when ethnic nationalism and calls for racial unity merged with developing awareness of each group’s loyalty to a transforming nation. “By focusing on questions of freedom, citizenship, and suffrage,” Snay argues, “Reconstruction ideology channeled nationalist impulses into civic terms of political enfranchisement.”⁵⁸⁹ For African Americans, this meant unifying as voters and advocates for civil rights. For the Irish community, political growth merged calls for Irish independence with claims for dominance over city politics.

As both groups sought to reconcile ethnic identity with civic engagement and responsibility, they formed points of contact and cooperation. For example, in 1867, voters from Ward 3 in Charlestown elected Edwin Garrison Walker, a black lawyer, to the Massachusetts Legislature. Walker was the son of anti-slavery activist David Walker.⁵⁹⁰ As a lawyer and protégé of Robert Morris, Edwin Garrison Walker represented many Irish clients and would go on to be a vocal supporter of Irish independence and the only black member of an Irish secret society.⁵⁹¹ Election Day newspapers reported that a number of Irish Democratic voters crossed party lines and supported Walker, the Republican candidate. Newspapers attributed the Irish vote to the support Walker had shown for the Fenian raid into Canada in June 1866 and declared that

⁵⁸⁸ Mitchell Snay, *Fenians, Freedmen, and Southern Whites: Race and Nationality in the Era of Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 175-176.

⁵⁸⁹ Snay, *Fenians, Freedmen, and Southern Whites*, 9. For more on the impact of the Civil War on Irish and African American ideas of citizenship, see: Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship during the Civil War Era* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁵⁹⁰ For more on Edwin Walker, see: Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 269-271.

⁵⁹¹ Hopkins, “Edwin Garrison Walker,” *Colored American Magazine* (Mar. 1901): 358-366.

these votes had made the difference in his election.⁵⁹² Here, the perceived support for Irish causes translated into votes on Election Day.

Supporting Irish Independence

While black and Irish residents were attempting to carve out a space for themselves in a New England city, in Ireland nationalists challenged British authority by forging independence and Home Rule movements. By the end of the 1870s, Ireland plunged into a food shortage reminiscent of the horrors of the famine of the 1840s. In response, men and women of Irish descent on both sides of the Atlantic organized Land Leagues to protect Ireland's peasant class and resist government policies that favored British land holders. As historian of Irish American Nationalism Thomas Brown explains, Irish nationalists used the Land League "to maintain the peasant on the land in the face of ruinous rents and evictions and, in conjunction with the Home Rule party, as a battering-ram to breakdown the centuries-old commitment of the British government to Anglo-Irish landlords."⁵⁹³ The Land Leagues used non-violent techniques including boycotts and rent strikes combined with occasional acts of violence.⁵⁹⁴ These overt acts of resistance bolstered the movement for Irish Home Rule championed by famed leader Charles Parnell. Demands for Home Rule moderated calls for full independence. According to the Home Rule plan, Ireland would have an independent legislature, which

⁵⁹² "The Colored Members," *New York Times*, January 3, 1867.

⁵⁹³ Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, 102. For more on the Land Leagues in America, see Eric Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism in the Gilded Age: The Land League and Irish America," in *Politics And Ideology In the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 150-200.

⁵⁹⁴ Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, 101-102.

would control all affairs not specifically reserved for the imperial parliament.⁵⁹⁵ In order to achieve these goals, Parnell depended on money from abroad to bolster the campaign coffers of parliamentary candidates.

Reports of Irish poverty and starvation engendered significant sympathy and financial support from Americans. American Land Leagues held meetings in cities across the nation and raised money for both famine relief and Land League activity in Ireland.⁵⁹⁶ African Americans in Boston joined their Irish neighbors in advocating Land League agitation. For example, in March 1881, at a rally at Monument Hall in Charlestown, Edwin Garrison Walker spoke in favor of the League. In his speech, he invoked the memory of Daniel O’Connell and used the history of African American resistance to slavery to inspire League members. Walker recalled reading of the anti-slavery activism of O’Connell and others in the pages of *The Liberator* as a boy and “often wished that there could be some colored man as strong intellectually as Daniel O’Connell, who could come out and strike such blows as he had done for the liberation of the Irish people.”⁵⁹⁷ Inspired by O’Connell’s activism, Walker drew parallels between the cause of Irish independence and the African American struggle for equality. As he concluded, Walker compared the liberation of African Americans from bondage to the emerging independence of Irish Americans: “Thirty years ago, and who would have believed that the colored race would be occupying the position it now occupies? The time,” Walker urged, “would surely come when the Irish nation would shake off the English yoke.”⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁵ Jackson, *Home Rule*, 57-59; Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, 159.

⁵⁹⁶ Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, 103.

⁵⁹⁷ “The Land League,” *Boston Daily Globe*, March 4, 1881.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

These hopes for an independent Ireland would continue and gain prominence among African Americans as Charles Parnell's Home Rule movement in Ireland increased in popularity.

African Americans in Boston were part of a national trend of black support for Irish independence. In 1883, delegates at the Colored National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky passed a resolution supporting Ireland.⁵⁹⁹ In the ninth declaration of the convention, the delegates expressed sympathy for the Irish struggles. Correspondents to the *Newport Daily News* commented on the resolution. "It is gratifying to notice the exhibition of this liberality on the part of the colored people," they recognized, "for certainly they have been the subjects of persecution at the hands of those towards whom they have magnanimously extended the olive branch of peace and good feeling." "We hope," they concluded, "that the result will be greater harmony, enlarged ideas, and a broader conception on all sides of what belongs to good citizenship."⁶⁰⁰ There was optimism among black advocates of Irish independence that cooperation between the two groups would overcome previous animosity and conflict. Many hoped that Irish Americans and those in Ireland would appreciate black support and endorse claims of African Americans for full equality. As the black correspondents in Newport suggested, the uniting of African American and Irish interests "will be a power that will be irresistible for the right."⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁹ "National Convention," *New York Globe*, September 29, 1883.

⁶⁰⁰ "The Colored Convention and the Irish," *New York Globe*, October 20, 1883.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

These sentiments echoed through the first meeting of the Massachusetts Colored League in December 1885. Black Bostonians who opposed unwavering allegiance to the Republican Party organized the League in order to push for “civil freedom for the black man.”⁶⁰² The League was led by prominent advocates of black independent politics including John L. Ruffin, William H. Bonaparte, J. D. Powell, Jr., and Edwin Garrison Walker. It also attracted leaders from outside of Massachusetts like T. Thomas Fortune and George T. Downing. The Irish editor of the *Boston Pilot*, John Boyle O’Reilly, joined the black leadership cadre as a vice president. In his opening statement, Ruffin, the chairman of the meeting, addressed the expanded scope of the organization. “The first object of this League was simply a State affair,” he explained, “but meeting with so much encouragement from abroad, we intend to make it a national one.”⁶⁰³

Although the central cause of the meeting was the expression of political independence, the League explicitly recognized support for Charles Parnell and Irish Home Rule. “The 8,000,000 of the colored Americans of the United States,” a resolution read, “who know what it is to be oppressed, send a hearty greeting to the Irish people in Ireland who are struggling to be free from the oppressive policy of the English government ... ‘Go on in your noble career that victory will surely attend your efforts.’”⁶⁰⁴ O’Reilly, who had escaped to Boston from an Australian penal colony, celebrated and declared his support for the cause of black political independence and civil rights. “When questions of right or wrong are concerned, of suffering, injustice,

⁶⁰² “Rally of Colored at Faneuil Hall,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 8, 1885.

⁶⁰³ “Rally of Colored at Faneuil Hall;” “The Massachusetts Colored League,” *New York Freeman*, December 12, 1885; Shankman, “Black on Green,” 291.

⁶⁰⁴ “*Rally of Colored Voters.*”

degradation, or exclusion,” he declared, “there ought to be and there are no races or classes.”⁶⁰⁵ In a letter to George Downing several days after the meeting, O’Reilly reaffirmed his views. “I felt only one thing in speaking to the colored men,” O’Reilly wrote; “surely that is one of the world’s great races- a blessing to America.”⁶⁰⁶ O’Reilly celebrated black achievements in the arts and he encouraged African Americans to look within themselves for uplift and reject modeling themselves after whites.

Advocates of a black-Irish alliance urged African Americans to support Irish independence regardless of Irish reciprocity. For example, soon after the Massachusetts Colored League meeting, T. Thomas Fortune addressed critics of the League who questioned what Charles Parnell and Irish Nationalists had done for African Americans to deserve their support. Fortune, who was invited to the meeting but could not attend, affirmed that the Massachusetts Colored League had done the right thing, even without initial support from Parnell. Fortune continued to express confidence in Parnell’s support and declared that regardless of that support, African Americans should stand up against injustice. “The colored people know what oppression is, for they have been, they are now, oppressed,” Fortune declared; “it is manifestly right and proper, therefore, that they should sympathize with oppressed people under whatever government such may be found.”⁶⁰⁷

Fortune echoed the sentiments of the Massachusetts Colored League organizers, who believed that African Americans should not place their faith in a particular political

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ John Boyle O’Reilly to George T. Downing, December 15, 1885, DeGrasse-Howard papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

⁶⁰⁷ “Shall We Help Ireland,” *New York Freeman*, January 2, 1886.

party, but rather exercise political independence and use their power as voters to transform the political agendas of the parties.⁶⁰⁸ He condemned what he perceived as political passivity on the part of black Republicans and insisted that they take inspiration from the radical political traditions of the Irish. “The difference between an Irishman and a colored man is this,” Fortune explained, “You strike an Irishman and he yells and strikes you back; you strike a colored man and he yells and runs like a deer ... and pins his hopes to some slimy, oily, tricky white man for leadership.”⁶⁰⁹

Black supporters of Irish independence argued that through political unity both groups could overcome political marginality and force issues of Irish nationalism and black civil rights to the forefront. George T. Downing, in a letter to *New York Freeman*, revealed himself as the author of the Massachusetts Colored League resolution supporting Irish Home Rule and rejected any criticism of the cause.⁶¹⁰ Downing, although living primarily in Newport, Rhode Island, was deeply involved in Boston’s political meetings and was often a featured speaker and committee member in meetings on black political independence and support for Ireland. Downing recalled the story of Daniel O’Connell and Irish support for the abolition of slavery. This support, Downing concluded, required that African Americans similarly assist, however they could, in the cause of Irish resistance to British oppression. Downing argued that it is “politic always for the despised black man of the United States to invariably make friends rather than

⁶⁰⁸ For more on Fortune’s support of Irish independence, see Alvarez, “The Place Between: The New York Independent Colored Movement and the Democratic Party, 1883-1905,” PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2007; and Alexander, “We Know Our Rights and Have the Courage to Defend Them: The Spirit of Agitation in the Age of Accommodation, 1883—1909,” PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2004; Thornbrough, *T. Thomas Fortune*, 106-107.

⁶⁰⁹ “Shall We Help Ireland.”

⁶¹⁰ “Mr. Downing On Ireland,” *New York Freeman*, January 9, 1886; “The Colored Man On Ireland,” *Boston Pilot*, January 23, 1886.

enemies.” During such a politically shifting and volatile period as the 1880s, Downing, like other black leaders, recognized that a political coalition between the two groups could be invaluable in furthering the interests of Irish independence and African American equality.

In their calls for unity, African American advocates accounted for the history of animosity and conflict between Irish immigrants and black residents. Rather than placing blame for this tension on the attitudes of Irish immigrants, Downing and other African American critics blamed native-born, white Americans for instilling feelings of hatred and bigotry among the new arrivals. “I remember,” Downing explained, “how [the Irish] generous nature became perverted by contact with America ... I remember that our fellow countrymen, the white native American ... set him the example ... he was even there taught to antagonize us as an obstacle to his success in his new field of labor; as crossing his pursuit of happiness; that the black man was a revolting, degraded being despised by all men.”⁶¹¹ In Downing’s statement, we see the perception that racism on the part of Irish immigrants was a learned behavior. Therefore, as Downing also argued, Irish Americans could unlearn these tendencies. “The Irishman in America,” Downing continued, “is breaking away from the teachings once taught him by Native Americans; is exhibiting a disposition to be friendly and to affiliate with those he was once taught to despise; he is beginning to realize that it is the duty of as well as the interest of the two oppressed classes to sustain harmonizing relations.”⁶¹² This opinion was supported by Boston’s African American newspaper, *The Advocate*.

⁶¹¹ “Mr. Downing On Ireland.”

⁶¹² Ibid.

The *Boston Advocate* was the significant organ for black support of Irish independence and Home Rule in the city. The editors, William Grandison, J. D. Powell, Jr., and William H. Bonaparte, central figures in the Massachusetts Colored League meeting that resolved to support Parnell and Irish Home Rule, refuted the idea that there was any inherent animosity between African Americans and Irish immigrants. Rather, they argued that any such conflict grew out of the lack of education of both the black and Irish lower classes. “There lies in the bosom of both races, among the lower, poorer, and unlearned part...a feeling of unfriendliness.” Like Downing, the editors of the *Advocate* pointed to native white Americans as the cause of such ill will. “The Irishman,” the editors explained, “knows no man by his color or religion until he is ‘collared’ by mean, selfish, white Americans whose first aim is to teach the Irishman that his color alone...entitles him to a superiority.”⁶¹³ The editors continued, “The Negro is persuaded, on the other hand, by designing politicians and unscrupulous Negroes to believe that an Irish man is inferior to him and should not claim an equal share or anything on this side of the water with him.”⁶¹⁴ The *Advocate* argued that the more educated African American and Irish classes recognized the similar path of both groups towards citizenship. “As education wends its way into the ranks of both races,” the editors hoped, “the clouds of prejudice and distinction must melt and dispel.”⁶¹⁵ For Downing and the editors of the *Advocate*, if African Americans and Irish immigrants could overcome their

⁶¹³ “Home Rule,” *Boston Advocate*, August 14, 1886.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

misconceptions of one another, they could form a powerful force against oppression and for Irish self-rule and African American equality.

Black supporters of Irish independence encouraged Irish nationalists to take inspiration from African American resistance to slavery. For example, Edwin Garrison Walker issued a similar statement before a crowd commemorating the 108th Anniversary of the death of Robert Emmet at Faneuil Hall.⁶¹⁶ In his speech, Walker compared the current situation of the Irish to the status of Irishmen and African Americans just before the Civil War. “Ireland is as near free today as the negro was when John Brown struck at Harper’s Ferry,” Walker declared. “The freedom of Ireland may tarry awhile longer, but it will come; peaceable, if possible, but it will come.”⁶¹⁷ Walker also invoked the language of the Land League, which advocated large scale rent strikes among Irish Farmers. “The Irish people have a firm hold of the hammer,” Walker announced, “and the word should be, Strike!, Strike!, Strike!”⁶¹⁸ Several days later, on March 9, 1886, the Sumner National Independent League reaffirmed support of Irish struggle saying that “they should not forget that ‘he who would be free must himself strike the blow.’”⁶¹⁹

In addition to advocating physical resistance, black supporters, including the editors of the *Boston Advocate*, organized to raise funds directly in support of Charles

⁶¹⁶ “The 108th Anniversary of the Death of Robert Emmet,” *Boston Advocate*, March 13, 1886.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ “Colored Men for Ireland,” *Boston Daily Globe*, March 10, 1886. Edwin Garrison Walker and other black supporters of Benjamin Butler formed the Sumner National League in the aftermath of Butler’s gubernatorial loss in 1883 and its members advocated political independence and separation from the Republican Party.

Parnell's Home Rule movement.⁶²⁰ In doing so, they joined with Boston's Irish leadership in a trans-Atlantic fundraising effort. In February 1886, Boston's Irish leadership organized a committee, led by recently elected Mayor Hugh O'Brien, to raise money to assist Parnell in his campaign for Irish Home Rule. "To the native and adopted citizen alike," the committee appealed, "that free New England's tribute to struggling old Ireland will be such that its example will be followed in other sections of the country."⁶²¹ Leaders of Boston's Irish nationalist movement valued African American support and invited them to take part in the movement.⁶²² The editors of the *Advocate* were confident in the cooperation of the leaders of Boston's Irish community such as Patrick Maguire, Hugh O'Brien, and John Boyle O'Reilly. "The *Boston Advocate* is ready in this noble cause to take the first step," the organizers declared; "if we do our part the distinguished sons of Ireland will be only too glad to meet us 'half-way' to carry the project to success."⁶²³

African Americans, who were fighting for civil rights protections in the United States, asserted the importance of equal participation in democracy for Irish citizens. They made explicit reference to the service of Irish soldiers on behalf of the Union in the Civil War and argued that African Americans should stand up for any group, "deprived of the rights of self-government." "The Irishmen fought side by side with the negro soldier for the Union and for freedom," the editors of the *Advocate* explained; "it is a

⁶²⁰ "Invitation Accepted," *Boston Advocate*, February 13, 1886.

⁶²¹ "The Five Dollar Subscription," *Boston Pilot*, February 27, 1886; "Five Dollar Irish Parliamentary Fund," March 1886, John F. Andrew papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

⁶²² "Invitation Accepted."

⁶²³ "For Ireland's Cause," *Boston Advocate*, February 27, 1886.

pleasant duty for us to perform whenever we can, for Ireland and the restoration of the proper rights of citizenship to Irishmen.”⁶²⁴

Black supporters of the fundraising effort held a large benefit concert in March 1886, not only to display the multitude of black cultural talent, but to demonstrate in a large-scale public way the interest of black Bostonians in the welfare of the Irish people. The organizers proposed that support should come from Boston “where the first sound of freedom was heard, and where there has ever been kind and feeling responses to aid the down trodden.”⁶²⁵ The *Boston Advocate* displayed a quarter page advertisement announcing, “For Ireland’s Cause. A Grand Concert Will Be Given by the Young Colored Citizens of Boston in Aid of the Five Dollar Parnell Parliamentary Fund.”⁶²⁶ On March 30, 1885, a large audience braved a cold and steady rain as they waited to fill Boston’s Tremont Temple.⁶²⁷ Tickets for the concert ranged from fifty to seventy five cents and among the invited attendees were leading members of Boston’s Irish community, as well as African American supporters of Irish independence.⁶²⁸ While formal committees made up of black Bostonians were selected to make the concert arrangements, an honorary committee was appointed which included sympathetic black leaders from New York City, Washington, DC, and Savannah, Georgia. The audience listened as black sopranos Marie Selika and Nellie Brown Mitchell sang popular Irish

⁶²⁴ “Invitation Accepted.”

⁶²⁵ “For Ireland’s Cause.”

⁶²⁶ “The Parliamentary Fund,” “The Young Colored Men of Boston...,” *Boston Pilot*, March 13, 1886, “Concert in Aid of Parliamentary Fund,” *Boston Pilot*, March 27, 1886.

⁶²⁷ “Streets Boston Letter,” *New York Freeman*, April 4, 1886

⁶²⁸ “Concert in Aid of Parliamentary Fund.”

ballads like “Kathleen Mavourneen” and “Come Back to Erin,” along with pieces like “Ave Maria,” “Echo Song,” “Home Sweet Home,” and an aria from “Il Trovatore.”⁶²⁹

The reviews of the concert were generally positive and after paying the artists and fees, the concert was able to raise one hundred and twenty-five dollars for Parnell’s Parliamentary fund.⁶³⁰ The editors of the *Boston Pilot* expressed their appreciation for African American support. “Good-will,” the editors explained, “cannot be bought with money, but money is often a token of good-will. We hail with pleasure the growing reciprocity between Irish Americans and Colored Americans.”⁶³¹ On April 15th, The Five Dollar Parliamentary Fund held a reception for the organizers where representatives from the black community presented John E. Fitzgerald with the proceeds.⁶³²

Black support of Irish Home Rule was not merely out of moral altruism, but was expected to have significant political outcomes. One of the central purposes of the concert was to build a broad trans-Atlantic coalition in opposition to British oppression and for the cause of African American equality. “We see a way at present for the uplifting of the two races,” the *Advocate* editors recognized, “and that is the Negro and Irish copartnership in the great struggle for equal rights and privileges before the laws of America and England...in this effort we hope to gain much by the way of assistance from our Irish American fellow citizens.”⁶³³ The organizers hoped that Irish Americans, upon

⁶²⁹ “Colored Men for Ireland,” *Boston Daily Globe*, March 31, 1886.

⁶³⁰ “Young Colored Men of Boston...”*Boston Pilot*, April 24, 1886

⁶³¹ “Colored Friends of the Movement,” *Boston Pilot*, April 24, 1886.

⁶³² “Colored Men Give \$125 for Parnell,” *Boston Daily Globe*, April 16, 1886; “Colored Friends of the Movement.”

⁶³³ “The Parliamentary Fund.”

seeing the black support for the cause of the Irish homeland, would in return support African Americans in their struggle for full equality. “Let us aid Ireland,” they concluded, “and when the fruits of our labors shall be seen, we, in common with the Irish, may rejoice at the sight of free flags waving over the heads of the Irish in Ireland, and the Negro in America.”⁶³⁴ African American supporters of Irish independence advocated interracial and inter-ethnic unity, which they anticipated would lead to greater political power in Boston for both Irish and black residents. Both African Americans and Irish Americans put this plan into action during the mayoral campaigns of Hugh O’Brien.

Hugh O’Brien for Mayor

In addition to calls for unity around Irish nationalism and African American civil rights, the mutual support for partisan independence was central to the proposed political cooperation between black Bostonians and Irish Americans. As the editors of the *Boston Advocate* recognized, “We can but hope for a reconciliation of the two races, and one thing that is doing the greatest part towards that end is the political independence to which the American Negro is now inclining.”⁶³⁵ While some of this politically independent spirit functioned at the statewide and national level, there was significant cooperation between black Bostonians and the emerging Irish Democratic political machine in Boston municipal politics.

Boston is a valuable site to look at this coalition due to the changing political landscape of the city. For decades, the city had been dominated by older Republican

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ “Home Rule,” *Boston Advocate*, August 14, 1886.

leadership. However, by the late 1870s and 1880s, an increasing number of voters, black and white, were drawn to the Democratic Party. In particular, the Irish nationalist political leadership found valuable allies in the party, which became a valuable advocate for working class rights. The strength of Irish Democracy in Boston during mid 1880s helps us understand the political differences between Boston and other major American cities. For example, in New York City, where Tammany Hall Democrats had dominated municipal politics, increasing numbers of Irish nationalists became Republican supporters. One of the reasons for this transition in New York was a feeling that the Democratic Party was taking the Irish vote for granted and not respecting the interests of its Irish constituency.⁶³⁶ This is very similar to the argument black independents made for leaving the Republican Party and choosing a more independent political path. In Boston, the Democratic Party was the party of the political insurgency pushing against the Republican establishment. In that way, Irish supporters joined with disillusioned African American Republicans in the support of Democratic candidates in city elections.

Spurred on by the increased strength of the Democratic Party around the gubernatorial election of Benjamin Butler in 1883, African Americans, disillusioned with the Republican Party, sought alliances with Irish supporters and candidates. Many of the most vocal boomers of support for Irish nationalism were also the most fervent advocates of the election of Irish Democratic candidates. During an 1883 rally, independent leader John L. Ruffin recognized the changes in the political environment. “We are now joining a new move,” he recognized, “and let us espouse the cause of the Irish, who are struggling to break the chains which hold them down, that they may in time aid us.” At

⁶³⁶ Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, 135.

this same rally, Patrick McGuire, the leader and chief strategist of Boston's Irish Democrats, delivered an address encouraging the union of Irish immigrants and African Americans and calling both groups to fight their cause politically.⁶³⁷ The attendance of McGuire at this meeting is significant. As the chief strategist of the Boston Democratic Party, he recognized the potential strength resulting from black support of Democratic candidates. Despite their small population, African Americans were a vital interest to Boston's emerging Irish political machine.

Following the defeat of Butler for reelection in 1884, African American independents continued their support for Democratic candidates for city office. This was particularly true in their support for Hugh O'Brien. O'Brien came to the United States from Ireland at age five and attended public school in Boston until he became an apprentice at the *Boston Courier*. O'Brien continued to be successful in business, and in 1875 he was elected to the city's Board of Alderman.⁶³⁸ After failing to win the mayoralty in 1883, O'Brien succeeded in being elected the following year with a 3,100 vote plurality.⁶³⁹ In addition to his success in city government, O'Brien also served as head of the executive committee of Boston's Five Dollar Parliamentary fund, which supported Charles Parnell's efforts to secure Home Rule for Ireland.⁶⁴⁰ In this way,

⁶³⁷ "A Colored Men's Rally," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 03, 1883; For more on Maguire's career, see: John T. Galvin, "Patrick J. Maguire: Boston's Last Democratic Boss," *New England Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (September 1982): 392; Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, 1-38; Blodgett, "Yankee Leadership in a Divided City," 371-396; Geoffrey Blodgett, *The Gentle Reformers: Massachusetts Democrats in the Cleveland Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).

⁶³⁸ O'Connor, *Boston Irish*, 118; State Street Trust, "Hugh O'Brien," in *Mayors of Boston: An Illustrated Epitome Of Who The Mayors Have Been And What They Have Done* (Boston: State Street Trust Company, 1914), 38-39.

⁶³⁹ "For Mayor and License," *Boston Daily Globe*, December 10, 1884. In Ward 9 O'Brien won 606 votes out of 1588 ballots cast, see *Record of Votes by Precinct, 1884*, City of Boston Archives, Boston, MA

⁶⁴⁰ "Five Dollar Irish Parliamentary Fund," March 1886, John F. Andrew Papers.

O'Brien gained African American support both as a popular Democratic candidate and as an active voice for Irish independence.

While the Irish vote was principally influential in O'Brien's ascent to power, he also garnered support from vocal black independents. One of O'Brien's central attractions was his appointment of African American men to positions within the city government. The lack of political patronage was a common complaint from black voters who were becoming disillusioned with the Republican Party. There was a feeling among these independents that while the Republican Party expected African Americans to vote for them, they did not reward the black constituency with significant political appointments. Patronage could be a valuable tool for encouraging political support, and black independents argued that the Democratic Party deserved their support because of its willingness to appoint African Americans to city positions. For example, as a member of the city's board of aldermen, Hugh O'Brien favored the appointment of black officers to the police and fire departments, which was then overruled by the board's Republican majority. O'Brien, as mayor, went on to secure appointments successfully for a black officer at police headquarters and in the Office of Weights and Measures.⁶⁴¹ George Downing, in an interview with the *Boston Daily Globe*, summarized the importance of patronage in encouraging black support for O'Brien. "I think the colored voters should cast their votes solidly for Mayor O'Brien," Downing declared. "He has acted more consistently in recognizing the colored man as a member of the body politic than any of his predecessors."⁶⁴²

⁶⁴¹ "Thankful Colored People," *Boston Daily Globe*, July 22, 1885, "Rally of Colored Voters at Faneuil Hall." O'Brien also demonstrated his interest in African American affairs when he was the only white city official to attend a banquet in honor of Frederick Douglass held by the Wendell Phillips Club.

In addition to celebrating O'Brien's successes, his black supporters argued that the Republican Party had made a significant political blunder when the Republican Governor George D. Robinson did not appoint an African American judge to replace George L. Ruffin, who died in 1886.⁶⁴³ This judgeship had represented victory for African Americans in Massachusetts when Democratic Governor Benjamin Butler appointed Ruffin in 1883. The failure of Governor Robinson to appoint an African American successor was seen by some African Americans, whose loyalty to the party was already wavering, as a serious betrayal. As one observer noted, "It looks as if [the Governor] did not wish to allow the question to be discussed of whether the colored people of the State...would have a decent recognition in the state."⁶⁴⁴ In contrast, John Boyle O'Reilly expressed his deep sympathy following Ruffin's death, and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin requested O'Reilly be a pallbearer at her husband's funeral.⁶⁴⁵

Voters reelected O'Brien in 1885 and 1886, but he again faced a tough Republican challenge 1887. Once again, his black supporters rallied to his side and condemned the lack of recognition from the Republican Party. According to J. Gordon Street, a vocal supporter of Irish Nationalism, Boston correspondent to the *New York Freeman*, and lead organizer of the West End O'Brien movement, there was a general feeling among the speakers that the Republican Party had used black voters as political 'steppingstones.' Once elected, Street argued, they did not feel obliged to appoint black

⁶⁴² "The Colored Vote," *Boston Daily Globe*, December 10, 1886.

⁶⁴³ "The Colored Vote"; "Last week there died...", *Boston Pilot*, November 27, 1886.

⁶⁴⁴ "The Colored Vote."

⁶⁴⁵ John Boyle O'Reilly to Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, November 23, 1886, Ruffin Family Papers, Box87-2 Folder 75, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

men to positions of significance. Street declared that African American citizens desired “places of dignity and worth,” such as clerkships. However, when they applied for such positions, state officials told them “they had men running elevators, washing windows, working in the restaurant, and in the barbershop, and this was all that is due them.”⁶⁴⁶ Black voters demanded legitimate and respected positions within state government and were determined to hold the lack of significant patronage against the Republican Party.

Complaints against the Republican Party on the state level had direct implications for black support of city election candidates. A meeting of black citizens in the South End resolved, “The colored citizens have been faithful and zealous in their support of the Republican Party in the past, but having received such cold and indifferent recognition after election ... we deem it our duty to look well to our interest in the coming city election.”⁶⁴⁷ This frustration increased the black support for Hugh O’Brien, and African American observers predicted a large number of Republicans would vote Democrat in the coming election.

The *Boston Daily Globe*, a leading advocate of independent and Democratic candidates, counted African American voters as one of the constituencies from which O’Brien had gained unexpected strength. The paper recognized an “independent O’Brien movement” in the West End.⁶⁴⁸ “According to several colored men,” the *Globe* reported, “it appears that the white Republicans, who are counting on a solid colored vote

⁶⁴⁶ “Colored Voters Want Recognition,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 27, 1887; “Claims of Colored Voters,” *New York Age*, December 3, 1887.

⁶⁴⁷ “Colored Citizens On Alert,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 28, 1887; “The Colored Voters,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 1, 1887.

⁶⁴⁸ “Discouraged,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 11, 1887.

for their candidate, will find that they are greatly mistaken.”⁶⁴⁹ J. Gordon Street affirmed the *Globe*’s observation. “The colored people,” Street attested, “will receive as much, if not more, recognition at the hands of Mr. O’Brien than they will from ... [any] Republican that may be elected Mayor of the city.” In wards across the city, according to Street, there were “many colored O’Brienites.”⁶⁵⁰

In addition to a lack of patronage, some black Republican voters claimed that they were not getting fair representation and participation at the Republican ward caucuses. For example, in Ward Eight, black voters decried the denial of the “right of suffrage and free speech in said caucus” by the ward’s white Republican leadership.⁶⁵¹ In light of these outrages, the ward’s black Republican voters held their own caucus meeting, nominated their own candidate for common council, and vowed to “use every effort to defeat the nominations ... of the Republican Party and pledge ourselves to secure the election of Hon. Hugh O’Brien, a gentleman whom we believe to be the friend of the colored people of Boston.”⁶⁵² African American voters organized and worked within the apparatus of urban machine politics to assert their strength as voters and force candidates to respect the interests of black Bostonians.

On the eve of the election, across the city raucous meetings shook meeting halls and ward rooms as supporters on both sides boomed for their candidates. For Boston’s black community it was no different. Black supporters of Hugh O’Brien held a meeting at the Phillips School house on the corner of Anderson and Pinckney streets. According to

⁶⁴⁹ “Politics Galore,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 5, 1887.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ “Ward Eight’s Colored Men,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 8, 1887.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

newspaper coverage, about 400 people attended, “including a mere sprinkling of white people.”⁶⁵³ The evening’s speakers recognized the diverse crowd and advocated unity between black and white working classes. For example, Stewart E. Hoyt and Joseph King spoke as “laboring men” and addressed the relationship between African Americans and white workers in the Democratic Party. “No men here are bankers; no men here are merchants,” Hoyt declared. “We are, all of us, allied with the workingmen.” Hoyt went on to compare the opposition to Irish candidates to the challenges black politicians faced. “Two-thirds of the opposition to Mayor O’Brien is because he is Irish and a Catholic,” Hoyt continued. “When you run for office you will be opposed because you are black.”⁶⁵⁴

J. Gordon Street, the chairman of the meeting, reminded the audience that although they remained Republicans, they endorsed O’Brien over the Republican candidates. He celebrated the loyalty O’Brien had shown to black Bostonians. Street reminded the audience about how O’Brien, in addition to appointing candidates, had fought segregated pews in Boston’s churches and was one of the few white city officials to attend the funeral of Judge George L. Ruffin. In closing, Street declared that O’Brien had supported African Americans’ struggles for rights out of an authentic spirit, “not, as they say now, to catch the colored vote.”⁶⁵⁵ Although Street denied the political motives of O’Brien in attending African American community events and standing up for black Bostonians, the discussion of his courting Boston’s black vote is evidence of the

⁶⁵³ “Colored Citizens Aroused,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 13, 1887.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

importance of black voters in municipal elections in spite of their small population citywide.

O'Brien won reelection in 1887 with barely a 1,500 vote majority and black support for the victory exposed the tensions over partisan affiliation in Boston's black community.⁶⁵⁶ The success of J. Gordon Street and the other so-called "colored O'Brienites" reportedly outraged the black Republican leadership in the West End. "The colored leaders at the West End," the *Daily Globe* reported, "swore vengeance on him for daring to divide the colored vote." These men charged Street and the other O'Brien supporters with merely supporting O'Brien in exchange for government offices. In response, Street opposed the hypocrisy of Republican African American leaders who, he argued, lamented the lack of political appointments in private, but then "come right out on the streets and in their own newspapers and deny that they ever entertained the idea of wanting offices."⁶⁵⁷

Street recognized that political patronage could be a valuable tool in securing a foothold in the urban political sphere, but argued that African Americans must be willing to fight for and defend these positions. "Black men are no different from white men," Street argued; "they do wish positions, but are not worthy of it unless they stand up and conscientiously avow the fact."⁶⁵⁸ Political patronage was a central part of urban politics and like other groups in the city African Americans wanted to be rewarded for their support. "The matter might just as well be stated plainly," Street told the *Boston Daily*

⁶⁵⁶ "O'Brien," *Boston Daily Globe*, December 14, 1887. In Ward Nine O'Brien received 433 out of 1,441 votes. *Record of Votes by Precinct, 1887*, City of Boston Archives, Boston, MA

⁶⁵⁷ "O'Brien's Colored Friends," *Boston Daily Globe*, December 18, 1887.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

Globe. “The colored voter wants to be an office holder as well as the men he assists to place in position of honor and emolument.”⁶⁵⁹ Despite these tensions, Street and the other ‘O’Brienites’ continued to be steadfast in their support. “The fact is just this,” Street explained; “in the future colored men will be guided by what a candidate has done for the colored race, whether or not he is in favor of giving the black man recognition, and treating him as he would any other political allies.”⁶⁶⁰ Black office-holding was a marker of ‘civic status’ and men like Street were willing to vote for whichever candidate moved them closer to that reality.⁶⁶¹

A Monument to Crispus Attucks

A result of years of political cooperation between black and Irish Bostonians was on public display on the Boston Common in November 1888 as representatives from both groups unveiled a grand monument to Crispus Attucks and the other victims of the 1770 Boston Massacre. Before the giant granite column stood the Citizens Committee who helped organize the event. The committee included African Americans William Dupree and Julius Chappelle, and Irish representatives, such as John Boyle O’Reilly.⁶⁶² During the planning and construction of the monument, both African Americans and Irish immigrants were forceful advocates for its creation and used the moment to assert the triumph of patriotism over ethnic and racial animosity. Attucks became more than an

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ Richard M. Valelly, *The Two Reconstructions*, 6.

⁶⁶² “First Martyrs.”

African American icon; he symbolically united the struggle for black equality with the Irish independence movement.

African Americans such as Lewis Hayden, Robert Morris, and William Cooper Nell had advocated the construction of a monument to Attucks since the 1850s. However, the Boston and Massachusetts governments did not make significant moves to erect a memorial until the 1880s.⁶⁶³ Petitioners sought two methods of remembrance and the requests went to two different legislative bodies. The first, which was sent to the Massachusetts General Court, was for the construction of headstones at the city's Granary Burial-ground where, according to the petitioners, "no stone marks their burial place."⁶⁶⁴ The second, sent to Boston's City Council, was for a larger monument to be placed on a central location in the city, near the site of the massacre, or in front of the former city hall building in Charlestown. Advocates of the larger monument requested that the cornerstone of the memorial be laid during the first week of August 1887 so that it could be laid by the veterans of the Fifty-Fourth and Fifty-Fifth Infantry regiments and the Fifth Massachusetts Cavalry volunteers who were going to be in the city for a

⁶⁶³ Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 128; For more on the meanings and issues surrounding the construction of the Crispus Attucks Monument, see: Stephen Kantrowitz, "A Place for 'Colored Patriots,'" *Massachusetts Historical Review* 11 (January 2009): 96-117; Mitch Kachun, "From Forgotten Founder to Indispensable Icon: Crispus Attucks, Black Citizenship, and Collective Memory, 1770-1865," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 249-286; Karsten Fitz, "Commemorating Crispus Attucks: Visual Memory and the Representations of the Boston Massacre, 1770-1857," *Amerikastudien* 50, no. 3 (2005): 463-484; Tavia Nyong'o, "The Black First: Crispus Attucks and William Cooper Nell," *Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings* 28 (2003): 141-152; Stephen H. Browne, "Remembering Crispus Attucks: Race, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Commemoration," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85, no. 2 (1999): 169-187; Dale H. Freeman, "The Crispus Attucks Monument Dedication," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 26, no. 2 (1997): 125-138; Dennis P. Ryan, "The Crispus Attucks Monument Controversy of 1887," *Negro History Bulletin* 40, no. 1 (1977): 656-657; Benjamin Quarles, "Crispus Attucks," *American History Illustrated* 5, no. 7 (1970): 38-42.

⁶⁶⁴ "Petition of Lewis Hayden and Others for the Erection of a Suitable Monument to the Memory of Crispus Attucks and other Early Patriots of the Revolution, January 21, 1887," 53, 1887, Passed Resolves, SC1/Series 228, Massachusetts Archives MA.

reunion. Mayor Hugh O'Brien later explicitly endorsed this request in a letter to Boston's Common Council and Board of Aldermen.⁶⁶⁵

In 1887, both Irish and black Bostonians sent petitions to the General Court for the construction of a monument. Among the signers of the petitions were leaders from Boston's black and Irish communities. In particular, John Boyle O'Reilly, Patrick Maguire, Patrick A. Collins, and Mayor Hugh O'Brien were prominent signatories. In addition to the sympathy toward Attucks, Irish support was drawn to the remembrance of Irishmen Patrick Carr and Jonas Caldwell who perished alongside him. Irish city councilmen explicitly outlined arguments for Irish support in debates over the allocation of funds for the dedication in Boston's City Council.

During the Common Council debate Councilman Thomas F. Keenan joined with the sole African American councilman, Andrew B. Lattimore, in outlining the historical significance of Attucks and his fallen comrades. "I might say here that had it not been for Crispus Attucks it is a question," Lattimore stated, "whether this would ever have been the republic of which we boast so much ... it is a disgrace that such a man's memory has not long since been properly commemorated." Further, Lattimore recognized that the resistance to the British during the Boston Massacre was likely to garner Irish support. "I know my friend from Ward Eight has such a great antipathy to England that he will vote for ... a monument to Crispus Attucks."⁶⁶⁶

Keenan, a councilman from Ward Eight, reiterated Lattimore's sentiment and also added that the commemoration of the massacre was a reminder of how both African

⁶⁶⁵ *Reports of Proceedings of the City Council of Boston* (Boston 1886), 395-396.

⁶⁶⁶ *Reports of Proceedings of the City Council of Boston* (Boston 1888), 800-802.

Americans and Irish immigrants stood up to British tyranny. “I desire to speak of the Irishman who stood by his friend Attucks when he went down,” Keenan announced, “but we make no social distinction with reference to honoring Crispus Attucks ... of all the Bostonians who have honored Boston in the last century, no man stands higher than Crispus Attucks, although his skin is not the color of mine.”⁶⁶⁷ For Keenan too, Attucks was a symbol of resistance to oppression and he invoked Attucks in order to condemn the Republican rule of the Massachusetts General Court. “I believe,” Keenan attested, “if we had a few more men like Crispus Attucks we would not be subjected to the persecution that even the majority in this city are at present undergoing at the hands of the minority through the State legislature ... if there were more of such men, and if their history were known, it would be better for the rising generation...as regards following in their father’s footsteps.”⁶⁶⁸ In this exchange we can see the overlapping meanings ascribed to Crispus Attucks and the Boston Massacre. For Lattimore, the Boston Massacre was evidence of the fundamental part that African Americans played in the founding of the nation. For Keenan the event was symbolic of the necessity of resistance to perceived unjust rule.

One area in the debate over the monument which provoked particular ire among Irish and black supporters of the memorial was the opposition to the monument among some of Boston’s older elites. Irish spokespeople branded these voices “Anglomaniacs” and the “Tory Element,” as they drew parallels between the opposition to the monument’s construction and the oppression by the British which caused the

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 801. The “persecution” Keenan refers to is likely the General Court’s attempts to control city services. For example in 1884 following O’Brien’s first election the General Court transferred control of Boston police department from the city to an executive appointed commission. See, Blodgett, “Yankee Leadership in a Divided City,” 375.

commemorated event in 1770. The resentment towards this opposition can be seen in Councilman Keenan's statements in the city council. "Some of the great men here tonight," Keenan recognized, "represent a great constituency on Beacon Hill, who have characterized Crispus Attucks as a rioter."⁶⁶⁹ Those who opposed the monument did so on the grounds that the men slain during the Boston Massacre were common street hooligans who should not be honored among Boston's more revered patriots.

The *Boston Advocate* joined with Irish commentators in condemning the opposition to the monument. Responding to an article opposing the Granary burial ground monument in the *Marlboro Times*, the editors of the *Advocate* accused the *Times* of opposing the monument based on Attucks' race. They argued that Attucks was no more a hooligan or criminal than those who participated in the Boston Tea Party. "Be consistent in one case as another," the editors demanded. "The government and state are one hundred years tardy in their proper duty, in not erecting a monument to Attucks, higher than the Statue of Liberty, considering how his race has been treated ever since...If the State, the government, and the Marlboro Times will not build one, let the colored race do it."⁶⁷⁰

The Massachusetts Historical Society, in particular, forcefully opposed the monument, which immediately made them a target of attack in the press. In May 1887, the Massachusetts Historical Society appointed a committee to present the Governor a resolution expressing regret at the action of the state legislature in voting to construct a monument to the victims of the Boston Massacre. Members of the committee contended

⁶⁶⁹ *Reports of Proceedings of the City Council of Boston* (Boston 1888), 800-802.

⁶⁷⁰ "A Monument to Crispus Attucks and the Colored Race," *Boston Advocate*, January 15, 1887; Ryan, "The Crispus Attucks Monument Controversy of 1887," 657.

that the victims of the Boston Massacre were rioters and hoodlums, not deserving of such recognition. “While greatly applauding the sentiment which erects memorials to the heroes and martyrs of our annals,” the committee resolved, “the members of the Society believe that nothing but misapprehension of the event ... can have led to classifying these persons with those entitled to grateful recognition at public expense.”⁶⁷¹ In response to these and other statements from the Historical Society, the *Boston Pilot* attacked the authors as British sympathizers and “foggy gentlemen” who “muddle up the history which live men have made.” “If you want to find American Tories today, search for them in local Historical Societies,” the editors of the *Boston Pilot* proclaimed. “The Tory never makes heroic history; but he keeps a dogged and secret hand on the records.”⁶⁷²

The *Pilot* editors argued that “the animus of the attack is evident in the gratuitous insults offered to two elements ... The Irish-American and the Negro-American—because both were honorably represented among the first martyrs to American Liberty.”⁶⁷³ The *Pilot* and other Boston newspapers further attacked an editorial written in the *Congregationalist* on behalf of the Historical Society which condemned the “absurd and mischievous proposition,” declaring, in reference to the supporters of the monuments, “there is always a sprinkling of ‘cranks’ hovering near ... all of which bear watching, and most which demand throttling, for the public good.”⁶⁷⁴ The *Congregationalist* also chided the black and Irish threats to withhold their votes for the

⁶⁷¹ Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical, Series 2, Vol. 3, 1886-1887* (Boston: The Society, 1888), 318.

⁶⁷² “Call a Meeting at Faneuil Hall,” *Boston Pilot*, May 21, 1887.

⁶⁷³ “Crispus Attucks,” *Boston Pilot*, May 28, 1887.

⁶⁷⁴ “The Attucks Apotheosis,” *Congregationalist*, May 19, 1887.

Governor if he did not endorse the monument. “We hear it openly threatened,” the article read, “that if the colored and the Irish vote be not ‘recognized’ by the executive endorsement of this bill, his Excellency, should he ever want those votes again, may have to whistle for them in vain.”⁶⁷⁵ *The Boston Evening Transcript* also went so far as to suggest that opposition to the monument was funded and organized by British operatives. As evidence, the *Transcript* pointed out that the opposition leadership was also the coordinator of arrangements for Boston’s British residents to honor British Queen Victoria’s jubilee.⁶⁷⁶ “It is too late,” supporters of the monument declared, “for the Massachusetts Historical Society to attempt at this late day to pervert the facts of history...The Queen’s jubilee will not be celebrated in Boston by the triumph of a conspiracy to blacken the names of the martyrs who died on its streets at the hands of English hirelings.”⁶⁷⁷

However, despite this opposition, the Republican Governor Oliver Ames signed the monument bill and soon the site was moved from Charlestown to the Boston Common.⁶⁷⁸ The memorial committee, made up of Irish, African American, and Yankee supporters, arranged for a grand dedication. The Commonwealth commissioned sculptor Robert Kraus to supervise the design and construction.⁶⁷⁹ A sub-committee of prominent black and white Bostonians were placed in charge of organizing the dedication

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ “Crispus Attucks.”

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.; “It is given out that the monument...,” *Boston Pilot*, September 17, 1887.

⁶⁷⁹ “It is given out that the monument...,” *Boston Pilot*, November 20, 1887; For more on the design of the memorial, see “Unveiling of the Crispus Attucks Monument,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 4, 1888

ceremony.⁶⁸⁰ In addition, John D. Powell, Jr. sent out an invitation to the Massachusetts divisions of the Sons of Veterans requesting their participation in the parade prior to the unveiling ceremony.⁶⁸¹

At the celebrations dedicating the monument, Irish and African American leaders publically proclaimed the unity of the supporters and declared that the memory of Attucks and the Boston Massacre transcended racial difference. Following the unveiling, a crowd filled Faneuil Hall. Invited dignitaries took their seat on the platform and Governor Ames spoke as presiding officer of the event. The first to be introduced was Mayor Hugh O'Brien. As he began, O'Brien specifically addressed the controversy over the monument's construction. "I am aware," O'Brien stated, "that the monument to Crispus Attucks and his martyr associates has been the subject of more or less adverse criticism and that by some they are looked upon as rioters who deserved their fate." O'Brien refuted these claims, declaring that it was the Boston Massacre that ignited the American Revolution and which prompted the writing of the Declaration of Independence. "I rejoice with you [Mr. Dupree]," O'Brien concluded, "that after a lapse of more than one hundred years the erection of the Attucks monument...ratifies the words of that declaration, that all men are free and equal, without regard to color, creed, or nationality."⁶⁸²

John Boyle O'Reilly, in a poem he wrote celebrating the life of Attucks, affirmed calls for racial unity and equality. O'Reilly's poem received warm praise from those who

⁶⁸⁰ "It is expected that the Crispus Attucks Monument..." *Boston Pilot*, September, 22, 1888. The sub-committee included: E. M. Chamberlin, William O. Armstrong, Dominic Toy, Archibald Grimke, and Julius C. Chappelle.

⁶⁸¹ "Honoring Crispus Attucks," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 13, 1888.

⁶⁸² "First Martyrs."

heard the reading and it was republished widely.⁶⁸³ “Where shall we seek for a hero, and where shall we find a story?” O’Reilly asked. “We come to the learning of Boston’s lesson today/ The moral that Crispus Attucks taught in the old heroic way/ God made mankind to be one in blood, and one in spirit and thought/ And so great a boon by a brave man’s death, is never dearly bought.”⁶⁸⁴

The optimism about racial equality continued following the day’s events at a banquet at Parker’s Restaurant hosted by the citizens’ committee. The *Boston Daily Globe* described the diversity of the attendees. “Not an assembly of men has gathered in Boston in many a day that contained more noble representatives of a race now becoming great than this,” the *Globe* reported. “There were men ranging all the way from an ex-governor to a depot porter.”⁶⁸⁵ Julius Chappelle presided over the celebration and speeches were given by Governor Ames and Mayor O’Brien. O’Brien attested to the cooperation between Irish and African American factions in organizing the monument’s construction and called for equality and fellowship between the races. Other guests expressed similar sentiment and declared that the events leading up to the erection of the monument demonstrated the ability of Bostonians to overcome partisan and racial divisions. An elderly Lewis Hayden, who had worked to get a monument to Attucks constructed in the 1850s, rose and declared, “There is not a man who has ever graced city

⁶⁸³ “Boston Honors the Negro Patriot.”

⁶⁸⁴ John Boyle O’Reilly, “Crispus Attucks” in James Jeffrey Roche and John Boyle O’Reilly. *Life of John Boyle O’Reilly ... Together With His Complete Poems and Speeches* (New York: Cassell, 1891), 414; *Boston Daily Globe*, November 15, 1888. Boston City Council, *A Memorial of Crispus Attucks, Samuel Maverick, James Caldwell, Samuel Gray, and Patrick Carr* (Boston: Printed by order of the City Council, 1889); O’Reilly also presented this poem at the AME Church on Charles St. on December 18th before a crowd of African American men and women. “O’Reilly’s Crispus Attucks,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 19, 1888.

⁶⁸⁵ “First Martyrs.”

hall who has a larger heart than Mayor O'Brien. Always he has been just, considerate, and painstaking with matters concerning our race...our Democratic mayor and our Republican Governor are men who are second to none.”⁶⁸⁶

However, not all of the advocates of the monument joined in accolades to the transcendence of race. While the official banquet was taking place, the Colored Knights of Pythias, an African American fraternal association, held a separate celebration at the Ebenezer Baptist Church. While the attendees at the official banquet were former or current elected officials and longtime loyal Republicans, the attendees at this celebration were some of the city's outspoken advocates of Irish nationalism and black political independence, like George T. Downing and Edwin G. Walker. Their speeches focused less on interracial unity, but rather celebrated the meaning that memorializing Attucks held for black Bostonians. The hall was filled with members of Knights of Pythias lodges from Worcester and Boston.⁶⁸⁷

Edwin Garrison Walker delivered the oration and placed Attucks in the context of African American history. “When the ancestors of the colored men of today were first brought to this country as slaves,” Walker began, “their captors little dreamed that this country would someday be indebted to the children of those slaves for entering a wedge which was to sunder America from the control of a kingly power.” “This fact,” Walker continued, “gives the world a lesson that as time wears on...the people whose rights are withheld become uneasy and will never rest until the privileges intended for them by the

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid. Lodges listed: U.S. Grant, No. 1, Worcester; Crispus Attucks, No. 2, William C. Nell, No. 3, Puritan, No. 4, George L. Ruffin, No. 5, and David Walker, No. 6, all of Boston. Among those seated on platform were, James Wolff, Edward E. Brown, Mark De Martie, John D. Powell, Rev. Peter Smith, Rev. Jesse Harrell, Rev. B. F. Combush, and H. H. Gilbert, founder of the colored Knights of Pythias in the Northern States.

Creator are possessed.” Walker continued to explain that Attucks was worthy of special honor among the victims of the Boston Massacre because “he himself was not in possession of the rights for which he gave his life in the interests of others.”⁶⁸⁸ Although black advocates from across the partisan divide came together to call publically for the construction of the monument, their political differences shaped the meaning of the monument. For Republicans and black elected officials the monument was further evidence of the achievement of racial equality. For black independents like Walker and Downing, the memory of Attucks was a reminder of the oppressed status of African Americans and an inspiration for continued agitation.

Walker, in particular, knew better than most that declarations of racial equality did not translate into political gains. In the months before the dedication, he learned that support for Boston’s Democrats and their Irish-born mayor could have severe consequences, making the decision to cross party lines risky.⁶⁸⁹ On June 13, 1888, following a 4 to 7 vote, the Board of Aldermen rejected Mayor O’Brien’s nomination of Edwin Garrison Walker for the Assessor of the City. Although their exact motives are not clear, Walker supposed it was his refusal to support the Republican Party that led to his defeat. However, Walker refused to declare himself loyal to the Democratic Party. Instead he rejected any partisan affiliation, declaring himself “a *Democrat* within the true meaning of the word.”⁶⁹⁰ Walker continued, “Intelligent colored people...are looking for something real and not visionary, and they are not to be frightened anymore by the cry of

⁶⁸⁸ “First Martyrs.”

⁶⁸⁹ In 1883 Walker was denied an appointment as judge in Charlestown after Benjamin Butler’s nomination was rejected by the Republican dominated Executive Committee. Walker alleged that it was his support of the Democrat Butler instead of the Republican that caused his rejection.

⁶⁹⁰ “Walker Not Confirmed,” *New York Age*. June 16, 1888.

‘Democrat,’ or be deceived by the enumeration of the word ‘Republican.’ We are thinking for ourselves; we are looking at men’s actions, and we are preparing to strike out with any man or men who offer us real, tangible things, instead of professions and promises that they are constantly breaking.”⁶⁹¹

The Republican defeat of Walker’s nomination was the part of a resurgence that would remove the Democrats from control of City Hall. In the late 1880s, a cross-section of Boston’s Protestant community united in opposition to Catholic parochial schools. The schools controversy, historian Geoffrey Blodgett argues, ignited religious and ethnic passions more than any cultural issue since the Civil War. The increase in Protestant mobilization cost O’Brien his reelection by roughly 2,700 votes in 1888.⁶⁹² With this, the Irish Democratic leadership was driven from City Hall and with it some of black Boston’s most influential Irish allies.

O’Brien was not the only Irish ally whom black Boston lost at the end of the 1880s. On September 2, 1890 a crowd filled Boston’s Tremont Temple to mourn the sudden death of John Boyle O’Reilly, who was only 46 years old. Accounts of the meeting recorded that members from both the city’s black and Irish immigrant communities were in attendance.⁶⁹³ Among those who were seated on the stage and who stood before the crowd to eulogize O’Reilly was Edwin Garrison Walker. As he spoke, he declared the sympathy of the black community. “I have talked to you today,” Walker stated, “from the standpoint of one who belongs to a race not yet delivered from the

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

⁶⁹² Blodgett, “Yankee Leadership in a Divided City,” 376. “Hart Elected,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 12, 1888. In Ward 9 O’Brien received 521 of 1687 votes. *Record of Votes by Precinct, 1888*, City of Boston Archives, Boston, MA

⁶⁹³ *A Memorial of John Boyle O’Reilly from the city of Boston* (1891).

clutch of the oppressor.” “Men that are oppressed or denied the enjoyment of any of the rights that belong to them, are apt to feel,” Walker explained, “the hand of the Almighty, when it falls on one who is not of their peculiar kind, if he was their friend and an outspoken defender of their rights.”⁶⁹⁴ Without O’Reilly as a powerful ally, African Americans in Boston struggled to make and maintain similar political coalitions into the 1890s.

Several other factors contributed to the breakdown in political cooperation during the 1890s. First, following Grover Cleveland’s first presidential term and the election of Benjamin Harrison, the Democratic Party renewed an overt policy of white supremacy which crushed already tenuous support from black Bostonians. Additionally, the death of Charles Parnell and the demise of the 1880s Home Rule movement made Irish Nationalism less of a pressing issue for Irish Bostonians during the 1890s.⁶⁹⁵ Finally, as the numbers of Irish-born Irish Americans decreased, local economic and political issues took on a more pressing relevance, and as Irish political strength increased in the city the need for black votes became less urgent.⁶⁹⁶

Despite the prevailing trend away from points of alliance, African Americans still supported Irish candidates occasionally.⁶⁹⁷ Upon Edwin Garrison Walker’s death in 1900, Archibald Grimké memorialized his cooperation with Irish Bostonians and urged black residents to continue his legacy. Grimké concluded his eulogy with a petition for

⁶⁹⁴ *A Memorial of John Boyle O’Reilly*, 50-54; Evans, *Fanatic Heart: A Life of John Boyle O’Reilly, 1844-1890*, 251-255.

⁶⁹⁵ Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, 178-182.

⁶⁹⁶ Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow*, 169-184.

⁶⁹⁷ For example, some black Bostonians continued to support Democratic candidates for local offices and Irish politician Patrick A. Collins for Mayor in 1901.

black voters in Boston to vote for Irish-born Democrat John F. Fitzgerald for mayor.

“This brave man was a friend of Edwin Garrison Walker, whose brave sympathy for the Irish race quickened in turn sympathy for us in the breasts of many a true man of Irish blood in Boston.”⁶⁹⁸

The alliance between Irish and African Americans in Boston during the 1880s grew out of a shared recognition of mutual oppression and a combined need to carve out a space in the American body politic. By uniting around the figure of Crispus Attucks, Irish and African Americans made important claims about resistance to tyranny, and in a column of stone, affirmed their place in the formation of the nation. However, they also formed this relationship out of political pragmatism and a need to usurp control from the city’s Republican leadership. It is in this area where their goals most sharply diverged. For African Americans, support for Democratic candidates concerned more than local power and was fused with a strategy to force recognition from the Republican party of the civil rights of African Americans. For Irish politicians, local elections became about gaining local power and a political foothold in the city. As the Irish population of the city continued to grow and the need for black votes lessened, so too did the opportunities for political coalition building. However, this period of coalition illustrated how organizing across ethnic lines could effectively transcend the structures of party politics and unite African Americans, not only in a national struggle for equality, but in a global struggle for independence.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁸ Archibald Grimke, “Edwin Garrison Walker,” Archibald Grimke Papers, Box 39-19 Folder 358, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

⁶⁹⁹ “New England Politics,” *New York Globe*, August 23, 1884.

Chapter 6

“A Woman’s Place is Where She is Needed”: African American Women and the Politics of Gender, Race, and Party

Pauline Hopkins’s goals for her 1900 publication, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, transcended mere romantic literary entertainment. “I am not actuated,” she proclaimed, “by a desire for notoriety or for profit, but to do all that I can in an humble way to raise the stigma of degradation from my race.”⁷⁰⁰ She argued for the power of fiction as an instrument to shape public opinion and unite supporters of African American rights throughout the nation and the globe. “It is the simple, homely tale, unassumingly told, which cements the bond of brotherhood among all classes and all complexions. Fiction is of great value...as a preserver of manners and customs—religious, political, and social.”⁷⁰¹ Through the form and wide circulation of her novel, Hopkins pressed for an end to racial violence and advocated a policy of political independence in favor of racial unity and autonomy.

Hopkins was not alone in her attempts to use the national circulation of print media to shape public opinion in support of African American citizenship. In 1893, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, the long time activist whom Hopkins joined as a member of the Woman’s Era Club and the Colored National League, published the *Woman’s Era* newspaper. A Boston native, Josephine Ruffin was born in 1842 to a mother from

⁷⁰⁰ Pauline Hopkins, “Dedication,” *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (Boston: The Colored Cooperative Publishing Company, 1900; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 13. Citations Refer to the Oxford University Edition.

⁷⁰¹ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 13.

Cornwell, England and a black father who was the son of French immigrants from Martinique. She began her education in public schools in Salem and Charlestown and later attended the Bowdoin School in Boston. In 1858 she married soon to be attorney and later state legislator and judge George L. Ruffin. During the Civil War, Ruffin worked as a recruiter for the Massachusetts black regiments and joined women's soldier and contraband relief associations. After the war, she was actively involved in Boston's club life and was a member of several women's rights organization like the Massachusetts School Suffrage Association. She was also an officer in the Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs in the 1890s and later helped found the Boston chapter of the NAACP.⁷⁰²

Ruffin's goal for the *Women's Era* was similar to Hopkins's. "The need of such a journal," editors of the press affirmed, "has long been felt as a medium of intercourse and sympathy between the women of all races and conditions...especially...of the educated and refined, among the colored women."⁷⁰³ Through its organ, the Boston's Woman's Era Club hoped to unite women in a global struggle, not just for racial progress, but for women's worldwide respect and advancement. "We the women of the Woman's Era Club enter the field to work hand in hand with women," club secretary Florida Ridley proclaimed. Like Hopkins they dedicated their work to "humanity and humanity's

⁷⁰² Roger A. Schuppert, "Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin," in *African American Lives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 735-737; Maude T. Jenkins, "She Issued the Call: Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, 1842-1924," *Sage* 5 no. 2 (Fall 1988): 74-76; Hallie Q. Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* (Xenia: Aldine Press, 1926; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 151-153. Citations refer to the Oxford University edition; Teresa Blue Holden, "'Earnest Women Can Do Anything': The Public Career of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, 1842-1904" (PhD Diss., Saint Louis University, 2005).

⁷⁰³ "Greeting," *The Woman's Era*, March 24, 1894.

interests.”⁷⁰⁴ By linking the struggle of African American women with a global struggle for women’s rights, black women attempted to garner support for their cause and emerge as national leaders.

Both Hopkins and the contributors to the *Woman’s Era* were also steeped in a rising tide of African American independent political thought. Through Hopkins’s novel and articles in the *Woman’s Era* African American women critiqued blind partisan loyalty and encouraged black men and women, where they could, to support candidates who championed African Americans’ political and civil advancement. While black women, like their male counterparts, continued generally to support Republican candidates, some like Hopkins and the columnists in the *Woman’s Era* expressed skepticism of partisan operatives and increasingly criticized partisan politics as a political strategy.

While these publications reached a national audience, they were very much the products of black women’s local political culture in Boston. Although prevented from serving in leadership positions in political organizations, such as the Colored National League, black women were permitted to be members of these groups, thereby enabling them to witness and observe heated debates over political strategy and partisan affiliation. Further, black women were important workers at polls during Boston’s elections and voted for members of the school board following their partial enfranchisement in 1879. Their experience in political debate and as voters shaped their stance on issues of African American partisan affiliation and political goals. Through the circulation of printed

⁷⁰⁴ “The Woman’s Era Club,” *The Woman’s Era*, March 24, 1894.

media, these women were able to transcend the local political environment and influence a national discussion of race and politics.

As black women's political autonomy increased and they attempted to position themselves as national leaders or spokespeople, they were confronted by disappointing arguments within the national black political movement, or by persistent racism within white dominated institutions. By the end of the century African American men and women found themselves working with national political parties and supposed equal rights organizations which distanced themselves from the cause of black equality and the protection of citizenship rights for the sake of political expediency. These endless frustrations contributed to and informed the politics of black spokeswomen, such as Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Pauline Hopkins, who by the turn of the century would be important figures in grappling with the grim realities of Jim Crow in the twentieth century. As historian Martha S. Jones asserts, "The fates of black women's public lives remained bound up with the optimism and despair, the triumphs and the disappointments of all African Americans."⁷⁰⁵

By the 1890s African American women in Boston envisioned themselves as leaders of a national black woman's political movement. One of the ways that this leadership manifested itself was in the publication of the first African American woman's newspaper, the *Woman's Era*. Founded by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin as an extension of Boston's Woman's Era club, the newspaper soon claimed that it was to be the official voice of African American women and the official organ of the formal national political organization that emerged in the mid-1890s. *The Woman's Era* and its founder Josephine

⁷⁰⁵ Jones, *All Bound Up Together*, 204.

Ruffin should be understood as part of an African American intelligentsia, which emerged in the decades following the Civil War. These men and women, many whom were well educated in Boston's public schools or universities, sought to influence national debates about race and gender through the use of published pamphlets and newspapers.

Although these newspapers, including the *Woman's Era*, never survived for more than a couple of years, they represent the important ways in which black men and women in Boston sought to expand their political discussions from the boundaries of the Bay State to the nation.⁷⁰⁶ Through speeches and printed articles, they sought to direct the national discussion of black civil rights and organize African Americans across the country into a united political bloc. Such was the purpose of Josephine Ruffin and the Woman's Era Club, when they founded their newspaper in 1893.⁷⁰⁷

Similarly, Pauline Hopkins sought to shape national black politics through the publication of her novel, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life in the North and South*. Hopkins, who was active in Boston's political community and a member of both the Woman's Era and the Colored National League, transformed her experience into a romantic narrative of black life in 1890s Boston. Historians and literary

⁷⁰⁶ Other significant, but short lived, African American Newspapers in Boston were: *The Boston Advocate* and the *Boston Hub*.

⁷⁰⁷ For more on African American women's intellectual and literary history during this period see: Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); P. Gabrielle Foreman, *Activist Sentiments: Reading Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); John Cullen Gruesser, Hanna Wallinger, and Collegium for African American Research, *Loopholes and Retreats: African American Writers and the Nineteenth Century* (LIT Verlag Münster, 2009); Shirley Wilson Logan, *We Are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse Of Nineteenth-Century Black Women* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999); Francesca Sawaya, *Modern Women, Modern Work: Domesticity, Professionalism, and American Writing, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

scholars have lauded Hopkins's contributions to American literature and a few have discussed the political debates embedded in the story. Richard Yarborough, in his introduction to the 1988 publication, observes that Hopkins incorporates "political commentary into her otherwise relatively conventional sentimental novel."⁷⁰⁸ Further, Lois Brown, in her recent biography of Hopkins, argues that "Hopkins wields her pen as a historian and uses it to craft a work of testimony...[She] uses the past, and specifically her own known past, to groom herself as a public thinker and to facilitate the novel's secondary focus on contemporary race relations in post-Reconstruction America."⁷⁰⁹ Hopkins holds a scholar's attention as one of the few African American women of her era who used fictional print media to advance an ideology of racial advancement.

While scholars of Hopkins recognize *Contending Forces* as "a potent manifesto for social justice, recompense, and human kindness," I argue that it is also an important commentary on African American political culture and party politics.⁷¹⁰ Hopkins spends several chapters discussing the activities of fictional African American politicians and the American Colored League. As a member of Boston's Colored National League, Hopkins likely based these chapters on her personal experiences. Indeed the debates that emerge concern not only the proper response to racial violence, but also African American commitment to the Republican Party.

⁷⁰⁸ Richard Yarborough, "Introduction," in Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, xxxvii.

⁷⁰⁹ Lois Brown, *Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins: Black Daughter of the Revolution*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) 251-252. See also Pauline Hopkins, *Daughter of the Revolution: The Major Nonfiction Works of Pauline E. Hopkins*, ed. Ira Dworkin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

⁷¹⁰ Brown, *Black Daughter of the Revolution*, 252.

In this way her fictional account reflects the discourse of African American politics taking place in her Boston reality. Critics like Yarborough have concluded that these chapters offer commentary on the national debates that emerged between W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. However, I argue that *Contending Forces*, written and published several years before Dubois's *Souls of Black Folk*, emerges out of a political and intellectual discourse that developed in Boston over the last half of the nineteenth century. In this way, they are not comments on national abstractions, but can be read as informed critiques of Bostonian political life. As Hopkins herself confesses in her preface, the sides of the political debate are modeled after the real "statements and accusations made against the Negro by the ex-Governor Northen of Georgia" and "a combination of the best points made by well-known public speakers in the United States."⁷¹¹

Contending Forces is more than a romantic novel infused with political commentary. Through her novel Hopkins advances a political agenda which supports an ideology of independent politics and racial solidarity. The successful protagonist of the novel, Will Smith, is an outspoken activist who rejects partisan affiliation. On the other hand John Langley, who becomes the novel's villain, is portrayed as an ambitious politician who compromises his early convictions against the Republican Party in exchange for a position from Boston's Republican leadership. *Contending Forces* is a commentary on Boston's political culture and a caution to those who would choose party organization over racial uplift ideology.

⁷¹¹ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 16. Hopkins based her character Herbert Clapp on Former Georgia Governor William J. Northen (served 1890-1894) and Will Smith as a conglomeration of black political leaders. She identifies Ex-Governor Northen's speech as occurring before the Congregational Club at Tremont Temple, Boston Mass., May 22, 1899.

Recently historians have begun to look more closely at the intersections between African American women's political lives, the public sphere, and partisan politics. Martha Jones shows how black women's politics of the era shifted from religious based organizations to the club movement as they redefined African American political culture. "Women," Jones explains, "emerged from the rancorous debates within churches into the club movement, creating new sites for autonomy and authority, and in turn reconfiguring African American public culture into a realm of deliberation and leadership shared by male and female activists."⁷¹² Jones identifies the ways in which black women claimed and cultivated respectability, "by donning authority in public culture."⁷¹³ Jones points to the importance of African American woman's use of print culture to disseminate their message. Through the use of pamphlets and newspapers, Jones argues, black activists could reach an audience far beyond their local spaces, thereby "bringing those who had not traveled to a particular gathering into the debates that had taken place there."⁷¹⁴ Both Ruffin, through the *Woman's Era*, and Pauline Hopkins, through her novels and newspaper articles, sought to include a national audience in local discussions and shape a national civil rights agenda.

Lisa Materson has expanded the vision of black women's political public sphere to include institutions of American party politics. In her study of African American women's activism in Illinois, *For the Freedom of Her Race: Black Women and Electoral Politics in Illinois, 1877-1932*, Materson argues that black women viewed voting as an

⁷¹² Jones, *All Bound Up Together*, 175.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

extension of a 'Woman's Era' philosophy of racial respectability and uplift. Black women, according to Materson, manifested what she refers to as "the 'outward' electoral face of this drive among African American women to help guide the race out of the profound problems that it faced during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."⁷¹⁵ As women sought to use their personal influence directly and indirectly to shape electoral politics, they advocated a strong federal government and an interventionist activist state. African American women, Materson argues, were proxy voters and canvassers for disenfranchised African Americans in the Southern states and as such, "kept alive a very distinct strain of Republican Party ideology that favored using federal power to protect black citizenship rights."⁷¹⁶ In that way, black women looked for any moment in political campaigns to increase awareness of the plight of southern black men and women. Even in local elections like those for school committees, black women "blended local political issues with a concern about black rights in the South."⁷¹⁷ The dedication to an ideology of state activism contributed to the increased disillusionment with the Republican Party by the end of the nineteenth century as federal leaders refused to use their authority to stop lynching and protect black civil rights across the country.

While marginalized in the male dominated political organizations, African American women formed their own groups based on definitions of political culture grounded in an emphasis on respectability combined with calls for civic and political

⁷¹⁵ Lisa G. Materson, *For the Freedom of Her Race*, 13. For another excellent study of African American women's role in electoral politics and public political life, see Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere."

⁷¹⁶ Materson, *For the Freedom of Her Race*, 8.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 11.

participation. They attempted to lead the nation's black women through the *Woman's Era* newspaper and as founders of the National Association of Colored Women. Indeed, the organizers of the *Woman's Era* sought to use the Boston club as a model for similar organizations throughout the country. Further, Pauline Hopkins sought to reach and influence a broader audience through her novels. Both women pioneered their own use of print media to reach a national audience and urged racial solidarity. Pauline Hopkins, in her literary critique of black political life, *Contending Forces*, proclaimed in her oft-quoted preface, "No one will do this for us; We must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inner most thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history."⁷¹⁸ By the turn of the twentieth century African American women, like their male counterparts, turned toward a politics and political organizations grounded in African American interests and racial solidarity

African American Woman's Activism in Boston

As historians like Stephanie Shaw have demonstrated, women's collective activism of the 1890s in Boston had roots in the decades preceding and immediately following the Civil War. As Shaw explains, rather than the beginning of an era of black women's activism, the organization of women in the 1890s "represents another step in an internal historical process of encouraging and supporting self-determination, self-improvement, and community development."⁷¹⁹ Prior to the war, Boston was home to some of the most prominent black female public speakers and activists, like Maria

⁷¹⁸ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 14.

⁷¹⁹ Stephanie Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women," *Journal of Women's History* 3, No. 2, (Fall 1991): 11.

Stewart and Eliza Gardner. During the Civil War, Boston's women organized to recruit soldiers for the black regiments as well as raise funds for the union forces. In the immediate aftermath of the war, women again came together to aid recently emancipated men and women, whether by raising funds for schools or traveling South as teachers.

Many of the most prominent and politically active women in the city were engaged in various societies. These organizations not only provided a forum for members to engage in vigorous discussions about current events, but also served as a political training ground where women perfected the art of public speech and debate. Further, some of these organizations provided instructions in parliamentary procedure, thereby creating a cadre of African American women highly literate in the intricacies of formal politics. These skills would be very important as Boston's black women founded formal political organizations which attempted to guide the national destiny of the race.

African American women were also engaged in interracial organizations in the city. In particular, The Massachusetts Women's Suffrage Society provided some of their most important allies and political instruction. Part of the Suffrage Society included "The Boston Political Class," a forum which taught regular lessons in parliamentary politics and debated current political events. For example, in December 1890 Pauline Hopkins joined with the Political Class to discuss the proposed Federal Elections Bill.⁷²⁰

Boston's African American women were also witnesses to the contentious discourse surrounding African Americans' partisan affiliations. Although they were not

⁷²⁰ "The Federal Elections Bill," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, December 4, 1890. Cooperation with Boston's white women leaders also had beneficial financial outcomes. For example, Ruffin sought financial assistance from Edna Cheney to support the first convention of African American women in 1896, see Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin to Edna Cheney, May 19, 1896, Ms.A.10.1 No. 68; Ruffin to Cheney, March 24, 1896, Ms.A.10.1 no.87; Ruffin to Cheney, May 22, 1896, Ms.A.10.1 no.69, American Anti-Slavery Collection, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA.

prominent figures in the press reports of meetings and conventions, newspapers often made reference to women in the audience. Boston's black women were exposed to ideas of independent politics directly as members of the Colored National League. Although not leaders of the organization, women were present at the meetings and occasionally were given prominence in certain gatherings. In July 1888, the Colored National League celebrated a 'Ladies Night' dedicated to activity of African American women members. Led by the League's 'Committee of Ladies,' which included Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, these women affirmed the integration of the interests of African American women with the destiny of all African Americans.⁷²¹

African American women in Boston were in a unique position to access the public sphere of electoral politics. In 1879, after years of failed attempts, the Massachusetts General Court approved a law allowing women voters to cast ballots for local school committees. African American representatives to the General Court submitted petitions advocating woman suffrage and voted for its legalization. Despite this significant victory, both black and white women would continue to campaign for full electoral equality. Woman's suffrage faced significant obstacles in Massachusetts. In addition to confronting an active anti-suffrage society, many in the Republican majority of the state legislature opposed woman's suffrage for fear that these new voters would bolster the growing support of the Democratic Party in Massachusetts. In this way, women were caught in the middle of a male-dominated power struggle over partisan dominance.⁷²²

⁷²¹ "Boston National League," *New York Age*, July 7, 1888; Other women present also include: A. C. Sparrow, Ms. M. R. Demortie, J. H. Lewis, M. L. Baldwin, Lizzie Smith, Lillian Lewis, and Florida Ruffin.

⁷²² See James J. Kenneally, "Woman Suffrage and the Massachusetts "Referendum" of 1895.," *Historian* 30, no. 4 (Fall 1968): 617-633. For more on African American Woman's Suffrage in the nineteenth Century see: Dale Baum, "Woman Suffrage and the "Chinese Question": The Limits of Radical Republicanism in Massachusetts, 1865-1876," *The New England Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (March 1983): 60-77;

Despite these obstacles African American women actively participated in school committee elections. Black women in Boston, like their white counterparts, were free to vote in school elections after 1879 and some not only voted, but ran for seats on the committee. For example, black men and women across Boston descended on the voting booths on Election Day, December 11, 1888. Among the voters were a large number of women who were eager to cast a ballot in the school committee election. Woman voters were particularly agitated by the controversy surrounding city funding of Catholic parochial schools and women from both sides of the issue rushed to on the polls to defend their perspective.⁷²³

Women were involved in the election as more than just voters. According to press reports, they were valuable canvassers and were adept at recruiting last minute supporters. *The Boston Herald* reported that despite the weather, “the giddy girl is out...a very valuable adjunct to ward politics. She can get more converts in five minutes than the campaign orator can get in a whole season.”⁷²⁴ Woman canvassers stood in and outside the ward rooms or polling places and converged upon male and female voters in an attempt to sway their opinion toward a particular candidate. The correspondent to the *New York Age* commented on the activity of African American women at the polls. “The women are in earnest,” the reporter explained. “At every voting precinct there are women

Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Ellen Carol DuBois, *Woman Suffrage And Women's Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Ann D. Gordon and Bettye. Collier-Thomas, *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Rosalyn. Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

⁷²³ James J. Kenneally, “Catholicism and Woman Suffrage in Massachusetts,” *Catholic Historical Review* 53, no. 1 (April 1967): 43-57.

⁷²⁴ *The Boston Herald*, December 11, 1888, in *Election Scrapbook*, City of Boston Archives, Boston, Ma.

ballot distributors and in many cases they are more intelligent and present claims of their candidates in far more concise and convincing argument...their presence and influence in the polling places are in the interest of dignity and clean methods.”⁷²⁵ For witnesses to the election, the presence of women in and outside of the polling place was transforming the nature of urban electoral politics.⁷²⁶

The convergence of woman voters and canvassers at the polls sometimes led to confrontations as voters attempted to cast their ballot independent of influence. A *Boston Herald* reporter wrote of his experience at the Ward Nine and 11 ward rooms. As he sat in the corner of the ward room, he observed an African American woman surrounded by a group of white women all urging her to support their candidate. After several minutes of loud discussion, the woman exclaimed her conviction to vote for the “best man” regardless of race and swore that she would not be a “foolish puppet” for a particular party.⁷²⁷ As this anonymous example illustrates, as voters some African American women held fast to ideas of political independence and refused to back a party solely based on name or affiliation. The school committee elections, as Lisa Materson’s work attests, served as local sites for national political discussions. For example, in 1896 the Silver Democrats nominated Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin as their candidate for school committee, prompting a discussion rejecting affiliations with the Republican Party.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁵ “Boston City Election,” *The New York Age*, December 15, 1888.

⁷²⁶ For further discussion of the significance of women’s involvement in elections, see Brown, “Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere.”

⁷²⁷ *The Boston Herald*, December 11, 1888, in *Election Scrapbook*, City of Boston Archives, Boston, Ma.

⁷²⁸ “Silver Ticket,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 25, 1896; “They Are Indignant,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 2, 1896.

Issues surrounding woman's suffrage were significant points of commentary for Boston's African American women. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, in particular, was a prominent voice for suffrage advocacy. In 1894, she penned a signed column to the *Boston Globe*, explaining her position on woman's suffrage.⁷²⁹ While Ruffin observed that women lacked few other rights in Massachusetts, by excluding women from suffrage the state effectively limited women's rights in other areas. "I know of no rights denied to women by New England laws 'save the ballot,'" Ruffin explained, "but as that exception denies them, among other things, the right to be tried by a jury of their peers...a right to help strengthen by discreet laws their morally weak men folk."⁷³⁰ There are few rights, Ruffin concluded, "that the use of the ballot could not either directly or indirectly, affect."⁷³¹ Ruffin provided a vehicle for both her opinion and the thoughts of other African American women on issues like suffrage in her national paper, the *Woman's Era*.

The 'Woman's Era'

During the 1890s, black women's political organizing surged, prompting some commentators to term the decade the "woman's era." Indeed, during this period, black women became important spokespeople on both local and national issues of race and gender rights. Arguably the most important of these new organizations was the Boston based Woman's Era Club. Founded in 1892 by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and her daughter Florida Ruffin Ridley, it soon became one of the most vocal and respected

⁷²⁹ "Mrs. George L. Ruffin," *Boston Daily Globe*, March 4, 1894.

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ Ibid.

organizations among black women in the nation. Indeed the leaders of the Woman's Era Club envisioned themselves to be national leaders, hoping to unite disparate black women's organizations under one mantle.

One of the elements that contributed to the organization's prominence was its publication of *The Woman's Era* newspaper. This journal received national circulation and was read by women in similar political movements throughout the nation. The paper included not only instructions on proper housekeeping, health, and child care, but also significant commentary and advocacy on political issues. Correspondents to the newspaper provided news from communities of black women throughout the nation and the paper's editors offered important commentary regarding local and national events concerning women and African Americans. While the Woman's Era Club supported the independence of local clubs, its leaders hoped that the *Woman's Era* newspaper could unite the organizations. "The especial work of this paper," Florida Ruffin wrote in the first issue, "is the binding together of our women's clubs...and bring[ing] the colored women together in a great and powerful organization for the growth and progress of the race."⁷³²

The leaders of the Woman's Era Club encouraged African American women to become more active outside the home and to take interest in politics. This sentiment was expressed in a speech given to the Woman's Era Club by Laura Omiston Chant, a white supporter of the club from England. "A great deal of the advice given to women about their staying at home," Chant criticized, "is wrong altogether." Clubs were importance sites for education in not only domestic science and child raising, but also political

⁷³² "Greeting," *The Woman's Era*, March 24, 1894.

discussions. “Clubs,” Chant told the audience, “make women read and think in order that they may not sit like idiots when some bright paper is being read.”⁷³³ Further, Chant deemphasized the role of women as mothers, urging them to look towards independent lives outside the home. “Not all women are intended for mothers. Some of us have not the temperament for family life,” Chant declared. “Clubs will make women think seriously of their future lives, and not make girls think their only alternative is to marry.”⁷³⁴

The presence of white women as speakers at Woman’s Era events reinforced the sentiment of some in the club that the Woman’s Era should not just focus on issues affecting African American women, but should advocate the interests affecting all women regardless of race. “It is not our desire,” Florida Ruffin explained, “to narrow ourselves to race work, however necessary it is that such work should be done and particularly by colored women.” Rather, Ruffin and other members of the Woman’s Era club called African American women to unite their struggle with that of women throughout the world. “We the women of the Woman’s Era Club,” Ruffin proclaimed, “enter the field to work hand in hand with women, generally for humanity and humanity’s interests, not the Negro alone, but the Chinese, the Hawaiian, the Russian Jew, the oppressed everywhere as subjects for our consideration, not the needs of the colored women, but women everywhere are our interest.”⁷³⁵

⁷³³ “The Women’s Era Club,” *The Woman’s Era*, March 24, 1894; while Chant gained the support of members of the Woman’s Era, she was later criticized as an apologist for lynching, see: “Ida B. Wells,” *The Woman’s Era*, July 1894.

⁷³⁴ “The Woman’s Era Club,” *The Woman’s Era*, March 24, 1894.

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

Despite calls for interracial unity, Florida Ridley argued that African American women must take up the cause of black victims of lynching. While Ruffin endorsed the work of white women's clubs, she argued that they often neglected the plight of African American women. Indeed, this neglect required African American women to unite in their own organizations. "There are so many questions," Ruffin explained, "which in their application to the race, demand special treatment, so many questions which, as colored women, we are called upon to answer, more than this, there was so much danger that numbers of women would be over-looked unless some special appeal was made to them."⁷³⁶ While the organizers of the Woman's Era Club called upon African American women to work for the uplift of all women, they were concerned that without an organization specifically mobilized for the purpose of protecting black rights, these interests would be ignored.

Through public meetings and their paper, Boston's women were prominent organizers against lynching and helped shape the discourse of anti-lynching across the city and nation in the 1890s. Additionally, the Woman's Era Club was one of the few early organizations to support anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells. Wells, in letters to the *Woman's Era*, praised the organization and proclaimed that without their early and continued support, her travels abroad and throughout the nation would have been impossible.⁷³⁷

In addition to its advocacy of anti-lynching, the editors of the paper were very interested in the cause of black woman suffrage and discussed Bostonian suffrage

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ "Ida B. Wells," *The Woman's Era*, July 1894.

agitation alongside articles from editors writing from communities throughout the country. The editors of the paper refuted charges that voting would somehow diminish a woman's 'womanliness.'⁷³⁸ In particular, in late 1894 the *Woman's Era* publicized the voting activity of black women in Boston, Illinois, and Colorado. In response to an article in the *Virginia Baptist* which declared that a woman's participation in teaching or preaching in the Church or voting in elections was an act "contrary to divine authority," the editors of the *Woman's Era* declared, "It is according to law, gospel, history, and common sense that a woman's place is where she is needed and where she fits in...to say that the place will affect her womanliness is bosh."⁷³⁹ The paper urged readers not to take these criticisms seriously but rather, "treat them as the strong womanly woman treat all pin pricks."⁷⁴⁰ Although only able to vote in elections for school committee, the editors of the *Era* took that position seriously and lamented the difficulty in electing black candidates to the school committee.

Authors in the *Woman's Era* did not shy away from openly criticizing the Republican Party or male leadership. For example, following the failure of the Republican Party to accept the nomination of two black candidates, the editors of the *Era* wrote, "An able, wide-awake representative on the school board is our due and means more than appears at first blush."⁷⁴¹ Further, they argued that black male political leaders must take woman voters seriously. "In presenting a candidate," the editors of the *Era* urged, "colored men should not be indifferent to the women voters; they hold a

⁷³⁸ "Woman's Place," *The Woman's Era*, September 1894.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁴¹ Editorial. *The Woman's Era*, December 1894.

tremendous power over school matters.”⁷⁴² Sentiments of political independence from men as well as from party were bolstered by correspondents from other cities.

Francis Barrier Williams, in particular, who was a strong suffrage advocate in Chicago and for the paper’s Illinois department, was a vocal advocate of political independence.⁷⁴³ Williams urged that “the importance of suffrage, as a means to complete emancipation from the impositions of prejudice should be eagerly taught, and brought home to the conscience of our women everywhere.”⁷⁴⁴ Williams also echoed calls for political independence which permeated the rhetoric of black male leaders in Boston and she used these calls to condemn the perceived blind party loyalty of African American men. She warned that a new bloc of black woman voters would be “satisfactory to the most exacting ‘boss’” and be put “in the humiliating position of being loved only for the votes we have.”

Williams called black woman voters to use the franchise against candidates who supported the exclusion of black women from places of employment and “the enjoyment of civil privileges.” Failure to exert political independence, Williams warned, would result in “the same folly and neglect of self interest that have made colored men for the past twenty years vote persistently more for the special interests of white men than for the peculiar interests of the colored race.” “There is no good reason,” Williams concluded, “why our women should not be made to feel sufficiently independent not only to make their peculiar interests a motive in the exercise of the franchise, but to array themselves,

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ The paper also included correspondence from Elizabeth Piper Enslet on suffrage movements in Colorado, see ‘What has Woman’s Suffrage Done for Colorado,’ *The Woman’s Era*, November 1894.

⁷⁴⁴ Fannie Barrier Williams, “Woman in Politics,” *The Woman’s Era*, November 1894.

when possible, on the side of the best, whether that be inside or outside of party lines.”⁷⁴⁵

In this way, Williams called for women to embrace suffrage as a political strategy only if they were going to use it to hold politicians accountable and pursue African American uplift. Further, by advocating political independence, she was incorporating black women into an electoral discourse which placed the interests of race and ideologies of uplift above that of party loyalty.

Members of the Women’s Era Club acknowledged the power of mass media and print culture. Speaking on “Race Literature,” at the first national conference of African American women in 1895, New Yorker Victoria Matthews argued that women should circulate written work to educate African Americans and dispel myths of African American inferiority. “Woman’s part in race literature as in race building,” Matthews declared, “is the most important part...woman has done much to make lasting history by her stimulating influence, and there can be no greater responsibility than this.”⁷⁴⁶ “Race literature,” she argued is necessary “to dissipate the odium conjured up by the term ‘colored’...still used to express not only an inferior order, but to accentuate and call unfavorable attention to the most ineradicable differences between the races.”⁷⁴⁷ Matthews celebrated the success of journalists and called on black women to embrace their role as authors. “Our journalism has accomplished more than can now be estimated,” she told the meeting. Through the writing and circulation of ideas, African American women publicized their sophistication as authors as they expounded political ideas about strategies of racial progress.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ “Want a Vote,” *Boston Daily Globe*, July 31, 1895.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

Contending Race and Party

Like Matthews and black women writers before her, Pauline Hopkins sought to shape national public opinion through her writing and her involvement with Boston's Colored Cooperative Company, which helped give her voice a public forum and wide circulation. Born Pauline Allen in Maine in 1859, Hopkins was the proud descendent of a legacy of African American activists, including Nathaniel Paul and Thomas Paul, the first minister of the African Baptist Church of Boston. Additionally, through her mother's second marriage to William Hopkins, Pauline became linked to a southern history of slavery, emancipation, and Civil War service. As Lois Brown describes in her recent biography of Hopkins, "This blended genealogy made her an heir to substantial traditions of uncompromising race pride, political resistance, education excellence, and literary innovation."⁷⁴⁸ Embodied in Hopkins was a tradition of politics that tied her directly to an African American experience which combined traditions of antebellum abolitionism with a keen awareness of an enslaved past that broadened her scope of racial uplift.

Pauline Allen maintained her last name until 1875, when she became Pauline Hopkins as part of a theatrical troupe with her mother and stepfather. Soon after, she became a central vocalist in her cousin Elijah William Smith, Jr.'s "Progressive Musical Union" which used music to expand political awareness and promote racial uplift. Hopkins was closely tied to the arts as a form of politics and her dedication continued as she began to perform as part of an all African American production of *Pauline; or The*

⁷⁴⁸ Lois Brown, *Black Daughter of the Revolution*, 69. Until recently most of what was known of Hopkins's biography came from her own statements. Lois Brown argues that some of the irregularities in Hopkins's genealogy are based in her attempt to fashion a past that more closely tied her to abolitionism and antebellum activism. See also Alice Knox Eaton, "Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins," in *African American Lives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 411-412.

Belle of Saratoga. As part of an all black cast, Hopkins and her troupe transformed, according to Lois Brown, a story of the Mexican American War into, “a daring commentary on social and political disenfranchisement, an unmistakable meditation on the racial implications of American expansionism, and an emphatic rebuttal to white blackface minstrelsy.”⁷⁴⁹ Hopkins’s dedication to the use of the arts as a mode of racial uplift continued as she began to write her own work.

In 1879, Hopkins wrote and began to perform in *The Slaves Escape; or The Underground Railroad*. In this performance the audience was privy to Hopkins’s examination of African American life in the antebellum plantation south, the underground railroad, and life in Canada after the Civil War. “The play,” Brown describes, “implements an impressive array of social critiques and systematically explicates the myths and realities of enslavement, the nature of black domesticity, and the enduring value of the black female body in and beyond the slave holding south.”⁷⁵⁰ Soon after its first performance Hopkins embarked on a two year national tour. Along this journey through communities far from New England, Hopkins took her message of African American political consciousness and racial pride to a wide range of audiences and influenced a national discourse. Following her successful tour with *The Slave Escape* and then with the multitalented Hopkins’s Colored Troubadours, Hopkins returned to Boston and turned to prose as a way to further her aims of political and racial uplift.

⁷⁴⁹ Brown, *Black Daughter of the Revolution*, 89-91.

⁷⁵⁰ Brown, *Black Daughter of the Revolution*, 109.

In September 1900, the publishers of the new *Colored American Magazine* printed a “Prospectus...of the New Romance of Colored Life, ‘Contending Forces.’”⁷⁵¹ Written by Pauline Hopkins, “a woman of great versatility, deep thought, and wide scope of observation,” and published by the Colored Co-Operative Publishing Company, this “race-work” was dedicated, the advertisement read, “to the best interest of the Negro everywhere.”⁷⁵² “The book,” they argued, “will certainly create a sensation among a certain class of ‘whites’ at the South, as well as awaken a general interest among our race, not only of this country, but throughout the world.”⁷⁵³ Hopkins read selections from the work before the Woman’s Era Club with “instant success” and the publishers encouraged readers to invite Hopkins to give readings in woman’s clubs in towns and cities across the country. The publishers of the novel recruited clubwomen throughout the country to act as sales agents in order to assure wide distribution and prompt delivery. Their goal, the magazine read was, “to place a copy of this work in every household in the United States.”⁷⁵⁴

The *Colored American Magazine*, founded in 1900, became a forum for Hopkins to bring her political ideas to a national and global audience. The magazine was the main organ of the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company. “Recognizing the need of a Race Journal, otherwise than our current local periodicals,” the editors explained, “we have organized a Company.” The purpose of the publishing company and the magazine

⁷⁵¹ “Prospectus...,” *Colored American Magazine* (September 1900): 195.

⁷⁵² “Editorial and Publisher’s Announcement,” *Colored American Magazine* (October 1900): 333; “Prospectus...,” *Colored American Magazine* (September 1900): 195.

⁷⁵³ “Editorial and Publisher’s Announcement,” *Colored American Magazine* (September 1900): 262.

⁷⁵⁴ “Time of Publication,” *Colored American Magazine* (September 1900): 196.

was to provide an outlet for African American artists, writers, and thinkers. “The contributions shall be from the most learned writers, novelists, and scientists,” the editors announced in their inaugural issue. “All phases of fact, fiction, and tradition of the Negro shall be vividly depicted by cuts and photographs.”⁷⁵⁵ The editors of the magazine planned on a wide distribution and hoped to promote “the higher culture of Religion, Literature, Science, Music and Art of the Negro universally.”⁷⁵⁶ Hopkins was a major contributor to the magazine and, in addition to publishing her novel, the *Colored Cooperative* excerpted it in the pages of the press.

In its pages Hopkins also wrote articles celebrating prominent African American men and women while drawing focus on current racial issues and concerns. In her “Famous Men of the Negro Race” and “Famous Women of the Negro Race” series, Hopkins presented biographies of both living and historical African Americans. Some of them, like Frederick Douglass, Toussaint L’Ouverture, or Harriet Tubman were well known, while others, like Edwin Garrison Walker and Robert Morris gained their reputations in local political spheres.⁷⁵⁷ Hopkins, under the pseudonym “J. Shirley Shadrach,” also used the pages of the *Colored American Magazine* to address current issues facing the race through such articles as “The Growth of Social Evil Among All Classes and Races in America” and “Black or White—Which Should Be the Young

⁷⁵⁵ “Announcement,” *Colored American Magazine* (May 1900): 1.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁷ Hopkins, “Toussaint L’Ouverture,” *Colored American Magazine* (Nov. 1900): 9-24, Hopkins, “Hon. Frederick Douglass,” *Colored American Magazine* (Dec. 1900): 121-132; Hopkins, “Famous Men of the Negro Race, V.: Edwin Garrison Walker,” *Colored American Magazine* (Mar. 1901): 358-366; Hopkins, “Robert Morris,” *Colored American Magazine* (Sept. 1901): 337-342; See also Dworkin, *Daughter of the Revolution*, 9-198.

Afro-American's Choice in Marriage.”⁷⁵⁸ In her writings Hopkins celebrated African American history and sought to instill confidence in her black readers. These calls for racial pride and unity were rooted in her local political experiences and the culture of African American women's activism in Boston.

Writing in 1899, Pauline Hopkins challenged lynching and called for resistance through the pages of her novel *Contending Forces*. Further, in her text Hopkins, like Ruffin, advocated the primacy of African American activists in the move for black uplift. African Americans could not depend on white political organizations or parties for racial progress. When Hopkins wrote in her preface that “no one will do this for us,” she called on African Americans to refuse to wait for white benevolence, but rather force the change they wished to see.⁷⁵⁹

Hopkins, who had spent several decades traveling the nation as a playwright and actress, returned to Boston and became an active participant in political discussions. Spurred on by the reports of the horrors of southern lynching and the resistance to further black political gains in their home city, Hopkins, like many African American men and women, turned to the written word to collect and disseminate a call for political action. Prior to beginning her life as a full-time writer, Hopkins secured a civil service position as a stenographer in the Massachusetts state government, eventually passing the civil service examination and gaining a job as a stenographer in the census division of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, the first of its kind in the nation. By seeking

⁷⁵⁸ Shirley Shadrach, “The Growth of the Social Evil Among All Classes and Races in America,” *Colored American Magazine*, (Feb. 1903): 259-263, Shadrach, “Black or White—Which Should be the Young Afro-American's Choice in Marriage,” *Colored American Magazine* (Mar. 1903): 348-353; See also, Dworkin, *Daughter of the Revolution*, 199-214.

⁷⁵⁹ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 14.

and receiving a civil service position, Hopkins demonstrated not only the important role of black women in government, but also the variety of locations in which political actors could participate and how this role could shape politics outside of their occupation.

“Hopkins’s work for white Republicans,” Hopkins’s biographer recognizes, “not only provided her with the opportunities to see first hand the workings of state government, but it also gave her political credibility within the city’s vibrant black political milieu.”⁷⁶⁰

Hopkins built upon her new political credentials as she continued to be highly active in African American political circles, even as she worked full time in her civil service capacity.⁷⁶¹

One of Hopkins’s most significant contributions to African American political culture was her work as author of *Contending Forces* and as journalist of the *Colored American Magazine*, to which she contributed along with William Dupree and George Forbes. Through her novel and the articles, Hopkins critiqued African American political life and made calls for increased racial solidarity. While *Contending Forces* was marketed as a romantic novel of black urban life, it contains significant critiques of the black politics which had played out in previous decades. In particular, she deftly portrays the conflicts between loyal black Republicans and more radical leaders who refused to compromise on issues of civil rights. These debates were more than fiction; as a member of the Colored National League Pauline Hopkins would have seen these debates first hand and likely contributed herself.

⁷⁶⁰ Brown, *Black Daughter of the Revolution*, 167.

⁷⁶¹ Brown, *Black Daughter of the Revolution*, 163-164.

Pauline Hopkins secured a copyright for *Contending Forces* in August of 1899. This year was a particularly active one for Boston's political activists. That year there was a huge outcry from the Colored National League against white activist Lillian Jewett's organization of a movement to bring the family of a recent lynching victim to Boston.⁷⁶² Another significant event, which Hopkins acknowledged as influential on her novel was the public debate between former Georgia governor William J. Northen and AME bishop Benjamin Arnett.⁷⁶³ Arnett was no stranger to racial conflict in Boston. In 1895 he visited the city and was denied entrance to one of the city's hotels. Arnett's exclusion caused a huge uproar among Boston's black community, which led to the Massachusetts General Court's passing legislation to clarify the state's anti-discrimination law prohibiting racial discrimination in hotels.

In 1899, Boston's Congressional Club organized the speeches under the topic, "The present situation of Colored People in the South." Each man was charged respectively with presenting "The White Man's View" followed by "The Black Man's View." Northen declared that racial equality in the south was impossible and accused the northern press of condemning lynching while maintaining "an ominous and painful silence about the crimes that provoke them."⁷⁶⁴ In response, Bishop Arnett recounted the recent lynching of Samuel Wilkes, or Sam Hose. Although Arnett decried the lynching, he spoke of Hose as a member of a lower class who belonged "to the class that visit saloons." Arnett did not call for immediate intervention in the South, but urged

⁷⁶² Hux, "Lillian Clayton Jewett." Members of the Colored National League opposed Jewett's leadership on the grounds that she was taking control away from African American activists. Aid to lynching victims, the League argues, should be left in the hands of black organizations.

⁷⁶³ Brown, *Black Daughter of the Revolution*, 183-189

⁷⁶⁴ "Race Rights," *Boston Daily Globe*, May 23, 1899. Brown, *Black Daughter of the Revolution*, 185-186.

continued “religious and educational work.” He concluded by declaring that by continuing to preach against lynching, he and other members of the clergy “keep the fires of religion and patriotism burning so that peace between man and man will come into the world.”⁷⁶⁵ This exchange was fresh in Pauline Hopkins’s mind as she began to write her romantic tale of black life in New England. As Lois Brown contends, “Hopkins saw a precious opportunity both to serve and lead her race...to target her own immediate audience, to capitalize on community familiarity with explosive issues, and to satisfy the increasingly desperate desire to see political resolution and successful popular resistance to white violence and legislative complacency in the face of Southern racism.”⁷⁶⁶

Contending Forces focuses on southern migrant Sappho Clark and her encounters with various members of Boston’s black community. Through Sappho’s contact with these men and women Hopkins draws us into the homes, churches, and organizations of black Boston. While Hopkins takes her reader into places like Sappho’s boarding house, a woman’s club meeting, and a benefit fair, she also spends several chapters focusing on John Langley, a black politician and lawyer, and the activities of the American Colored League. Although Sappho is only peripheral to these chapters, Hopkins takes the time to lay out the conflicts and competing political strategies of Boston’s activists. John Langley, “the colored politician,” initially stands in fervent opposition to lynching and condemns Republican inaction. However, Langley moderates his position when offered a city office by Herbert Clapp, whose dialogue Hopkins modeled after William Northen’s Congregational Club speech. At the Colored American Club meeting, Langley endorses

⁷⁶⁵ “Race Rights,” *Boston Daily Globe*, May 23, 1899. Brown, *Black Daughter of the Revolution*, 188-189.

⁷⁶⁶ Brown, *Black Daughter of the Revolution*, 189.

Clapp's position and urges restraint in the campaign against lynching. This moderate position is countered by Will Smith, the novel's hero, who takes a more radical stance against lynching and against black Republican loyalty. By the end of the novel, John Langley dies alone and disgraced, while Will Smith, after a tumultuous search, is reunited with Sappho Clark and the novel concludes with the newly married couple and their family happily sailing to Europe. Through the triumph of Smith and the utter failure of Langley the reader also understands Hopkins's endorsement of Smith's political position and her condemnation of moderate and loyalist Republican politics.

Pauline Hopkins's account of John Langley's confrontation with Herbert Clapp allows her to voice criticisms of the Republican Party and argue for black political independence and solidarity. Hopkins frames this discussion as the aftermath of a horrific southern lynching, accounts of which were circulated in Boston and provided a catalyst for community mobilization. The community meeting begins with Langley's criticizing Republican leadership and declaring political independence.

Hopkins, through Langley, makes a pointed critique of the Republican government's inaction in preventing lynching. "Isn't it most time for the Administration to take it up?" Langley asks Clapp.⁷⁶⁷ Clapp responds that the government does not have the authority to stop lynching and that doing so would trample on the rights of Southern governments. Clapp urges African Americans to be calm and continue to support the Republican Party. "If the colored people are only patient for a while longer," Clapp explains, "this thing will be settled amicably." Hopkins, however, refuted calls for moderation and called on black voters to assert their power.

⁷⁶⁷ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 229.

Hopkins, through Langley, responds to calls for patience and continued Republican support by arguing that the Republican Party takes African American votes for granted and once elected will do little to ameliorate the condition of black men and women. “You say now you’ve got no power to stop lynching. If you haven’t the power before election, where will you get it after the votes are in?” Langley asks. “Its votes you want, and after you get them, all the subsidies, corporations, and trusts are riding easily on the front seat of the coach for another year...and robbing and killing the black man can go right on.”⁷⁶⁸ Langley, further denounced the nominal appointments of African Americans made by Republican officials. Hopkins writes, “You give us a bootblack stand in the corridor of the State House, and think we are placated.”⁷⁶⁹ Through her novel Hopkins calls for African American voters to hold the Republican Party accountable and in the face of inaction, unify in opposition.

These calls for electoral independence are explicitly discussed in Langley’s early denunciations of lynching and of Clapp’s refusal to endorse government action. “There are thirty-five thousand of us in this state alone,” Langley explains. “We can be organized if the work is done by the right ones and in the right way. We can help start a new party, if nothing more.”⁷⁷⁰ Through Langley’s language, Hopkins makes claims, not only for political independence, but for the need for qualified and committed leadership. Hopkins, through Langley, continues her attack on the Republican Party for its inaction in preventing lynching. “We expect to fight you one of these days, and knock the party clear

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 235.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., 231.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., 229.

over the ropes,” Langley declared to Clapp. “There would be some satisfaction in throwing you fellows out and putting others in, if a new party is the outcome of the issue.”⁷⁷¹ In her decision to have Langley so clearly condemn the Republican Party and to advocate, not just African American political independence but the formation of a new party Hopkins makes claims for the strength of black political organization and the power of black voters’ uniting under a banner of racial solidarity.

Hopkins uses the character of Langley, not only to advocate independent politics, but also to condemn black male leaders who temper their critiques and seek self-promotion and Republican patronage. Despite Langley’s earlier convictions against the party, after Clapp offers him a position as City Solicitor he agrees to support Clapp’s moderate position. In exchange Clapp asks that Langley “hold that meeting down among your people to a calm level. Don’t let your fire-eaters...throw dirt on the party.”⁷⁷² With eyes sparkling, Langley agrees to the deal and declares that the position “would suit me to a T.”⁷⁷³

By making Langley a member of the executive committee of the American Colored League, Hopkins is able to give detailed insight and pointed critique of the organization. Similar to Boston’s Colored National League, Hopkins’s American Colored League “was made up of leading colored men from all over New England.” As it was a part of “the great Nation League of American Colored Men,” Hopkins describes how men in Boston were in communication with communities throughout the country.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., 230.

⁷⁷² Ibid., 238.

⁷⁷³ Ibid.

Further, in her discussion of the American Colored League, Hopkins argues for Boston's supremacy in a national movement. "To the Boston branch of this society," Hopkins declares, "the people of all sections of the country look for aid and comfort." Hopkins explains that this elevation of Boston comes not from a sense of "acknowledged superiority," but "solely on account of the advantages which they are supposed to enjoy under the beneficent rulings of the grand old Commonwealth of Massachusetts."⁷⁷⁴

Hopkins, while acknowledging that "Massachusetts is noted for being willing to see fair play," writes also that it was not free from racial prejudice. Hopkins argued that racial prejudice in Massachusetts was fed by the in-migration of "fresh arrivals from the South," and "intermarriage between Southern women and the sons of Massachusetts." "[Massachusetts] hears the complaints of the Negro," Hopkins explains, "and listens with attention to the accusations of the Southern whites, weighs one against the other, and, naturally enough, the scales tip in favor of the white brother."⁷⁷⁵ African Americans in Boston, Hopkins argues, faced two camps: one which supported through rhetoric and fundraising the uplift of black men and women; and another, from whom "the Negro suffers in the state and is contemptuously flouted."⁷⁷⁶

At the meeting of the American Colored League Hopkins portrays the multiple sides of the debate over African American politics and anti-lynching strategy and she endorses policies of political independence and forceful agitation against appeals for moderation. One of the major targets whom Langley is called by Clapp to moderate is the

⁷⁷⁴ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 224.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid., 224-225.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., 225.

fictional Judge Watson, the president of the League. Likely based on Edwin Garrison Walker, who was president of the real Colored National League, Hopkins uses Watson in the novel to make calls for immediate agitation against lynching and in particular calls for the shaping of public opinion.

Through Watson, who recalls the success of notable abolitionists, Hopkins connects challenges to lynching to the legacies of abolition. “This new birth of the black race is a mighty agony,” Watson exclaims; “agitation and eternal vigilance in the formation of public opinion were the weapons which broke the power of the slaveholder and gave us emancipation. I recommend these methods to you today, knowing their value in the past.”⁷⁷⁷ Through Watson’s calling for “vigilance in the formation of public opinion,” Hopkins endorses not only strategies of mass publicity like that used by Ruffin, but also her own arguments about the use of serialized fiction and the eventual novel to educate people and shape public attitudes towards African American rights and against lynching.

In response to Watson’s calls for agitation, Hopkins uses the American Colored League meeting to address and rebut other visions of black politics of the period. In particular, statements from the fictional Dr. Arthur Lewis, who is likely based on Booker T. Washington, and John Langley allow her to confront and criticize black calls for political moderation. Dr. Lewis, who Hopkins describes as “the head of a large educational institution in the South devoted to the welfare of the Negroes,” decries Northern black agitation and calls for black activists to distance themselves from explicitly political spheres. Northern agitation and press reports of anti-lynching

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., 244-245.

meetings, Lewis explains, “do us at the South, who are working for the best lines that we know of for the elevation of the race, an injury, and often retard us greatly in the accomplishment of our designs.”⁷⁷⁸

According to Lewis, public northern anti-lynching activism inflamed white racism and provoked more violence. Lewis instead called for patience and resisted calls for political agitation and demands for an activist state. “Politics,” Lewis complains, “is the bane of our existence...let the matters of government take care of themselves, while we look out for our own individual or collective advancement.”⁷⁷⁹ Hopkins concludes Lewis’s speech with his final call for black political patience and industrial education: “Convince the South that we do not want social equality, neither do we wish to rule... We should strive to obtain the education of the industrial school, seeking there our level...leaving to the white man the superiority and brain of intellect which hundreds of years have developed.”⁷⁸⁰ Hopkins, through her narration, condemns Lewis’s rhetoric. “Was this what [the audience] came to hear,” Hopkins’s asks rhetorically, “an apology, almost a eulogy upon the course pursued by the South toward the Negro?”⁷⁸¹

Langley’s speech before the League echoes Lewis’s calls for moderation but also includes calls for Republican Party loyalty. “It is discretion to act coolly, calmly, and deliberately,” Langley urges, “I can see nothing to be gained, if, as we have been advised, we took up arms in defense of our rights of citizenship. Extermination would speedily follow.” Like Lewis, Langley warns against provoking negative white reactions. “Let us

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., 249.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 250.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., 251.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid.

not offend the class upon whom we depend for employment and assistance in times of emergencies...if we cannot have amity we can have peace.”⁷⁸² Langley also calls on African Americans to trust in the leaders of the Republican party to work for black uplift at a reasonable pace. “Let us await the issue of events with patience, trusting in the fealty of our party leaders, putting faith in their sagacity to push our claims and redress whatever grievances we may have, at a seasonable time.”⁷⁸³ Hopkins’s League audience responds to Langley with “suppressed murmurs of discontent.”⁷⁸⁴

In response to Lewis and Langley, Hopkins turns to rebuttals from Luke Sawyer and Will Smith. Through these speakers, Hopkins makes direct calls for racial unity and immediate agitation. Following Langley’s speech, Luke Sawyer, a delegate from Western Massachusetts and originally from Louisiana, helps Hopkins transition from the moderate position to more engaged calls for agitation. Through Sawyer Hopkins offers a pointed critique of the contemporary black political dilemma created by the conflict between racial unity and individual ambition. “I want to tell the men who have spoken here tonight,” Sawyer begins, “that conservatism, lack of brotherly affiliation, lack of energy for the right and the power of the almighty dollar which deadens men’s hearts to the sufferings of their brothers, and makes them feel that if only *they* can rise to the top of the ladder may God help the hindmost man, are the forces which are ruining the Negro in this country... *These are the contending forces that are dooming this race to despair.*”⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁸² Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 253.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁴ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 254.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., 255-256.

Through her emphasis in this statement Hopkins makes a direct criticism of black male political leaders who placed personal success and advancement over unified racial uplift.

Hopkins also uses Sawyer to press for agitation, even if that means resorting to physical resistance. Sawyer invokes the resistance of colonialists against Great Britain during the American Revolution and calls for African Americans to use their example of armed resistance to tyranny. “I ask you what you think the American Colonies would have done if they had suffered as we have suffered and are still suffering.”⁷⁸⁶ Through Sawyer, Hopkins rebukes calls for moderation and passivity. Rather, she makes clear her advocacy of justice at any cost. “Gentlemen call for peace, and I reply,” Sawyer proclaims, “Peace if possible, justice at any rate...contentment, amity...is impossible; justice alone remains to us.”⁷⁸⁷

Finally through the voice of one of her novel’s protagonists, William Smith, Hopkins summarizes her arguments. Through Smith Hopkins merges disillusionment with electoral politics with calls for direct action. Scholars like Yarborough and Brown argue that the character of William Smith is based on W. E. B. Du Bois. Like Du Bois, Smith worked as a bellman in a Boston hotel and was educated in Germany.⁷⁸⁸ Smith makes pointed critiques of proposed solutions to American race relations, such as miscegenation by law, emigration, and industrial education. He also refutes the notion that allegations of rape constitute a justification for lynching.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid., 262.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid., 262.

⁷⁸⁸ Yarborough, “Introduction,” in Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, xxxvii.

Through Smith, Hopkins comments on the successful use of urban politics by Irish immigrants to gain power in America. Smith discounts black political corruption by pointing out “the venality of a certain class of whites.”⁷⁸⁹ “Fifty years ago Pat was as little welcome at the North as the Negro at the South. What has changed the status of his citizenship?” Smith asks, “*Politics*. The Irishman dominates politics at the North, and there is no gift within the power of government that does not feel his influence.”⁷⁹⁰ The ability of Irish voters to engage so readily in electoral politics, Hopkins argues, is central to their advancement in American society. “The Irish vote,” Smith observes, “is massed at certain strategic points in the North, and its power is feared and respected. The result has been a rapid and dazzling advance all along the avenues of education and wealth in this country for that incisive race.”⁷⁹¹ African Americans, Hopkins argues, cannot gain similar success. “To the Negro alone,” Smith concludes, “politics shall bring no fruit.”⁷⁹²

Through Smith, Hopkins rejects calls for armed violence and rather endorses changing American public opinion. In Smith’s speech Hopkins draws on the collective memory of anti-slavery activism, arguing, “As the anti-slavery apostles went everywhere, preaching the word fifty years before emancipation, *so must we do today*.”⁷⁹³ Like Hopkins in her justification for writing the novel, Smith concludes, “It is going to take time to straighten out this problem; it will only be done by the formation of public

⁷⁸⁹ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 265. Hopkins writes a very similar piece in her memorial of Edwin Garrison Walker in 1901, see Hopkins, “Edwin Garrison Walker.”

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid.

⁷⁹² Ibid.

⁷⁹³ Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 272.

opinion. Brute force will not accomplish anything. We must *agitate*...Appeal for the justice of our cause to every civilized nation under the heavens...until 'Ethiopia shall indeed stretch forth her hand, and princes come out of Egypt.'"⁷⁹⁴ By connecting an abolitionist past with calls for mass agitation, Hopkins calls on African Americans to put aside their individual ambitions and press, united, towards the shared goal of protected African American citizenship.

In her novel Hopkins sought to shape public opinion about lynching and the dire state of American race relations. However, Hopkins also presented a vision for black politics and offered commentary on electoral politics as a political strategy. She maligned individual political ambition at the expense of the uplift of the race and she advocated immediate collective agitation. Through her novel and the *Colored American Magazine*, she sought to reach an audience perhaps out of the reach of the *Woman's Era*. As one of the editors of the *Colored American* explained about Hopkins, "Her ambition is to become a writer of fiction...in this way reaching those who never read history or biography."⁷⁹⁵ By infusing fiction with political instruction, Hopkins sought to reach a reading public in an entertaining and disarming way. As Hazel Carby explains, "The pedagogic role of the journal was considered by the staff as a significant aspect of its function."⁷⁹⁶ Like a majority of African Americans Hopkins was not a professional political organizer, like Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, yet she used her talents as novelist similarly to inspire readers to action.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁵ "The Story of Our Magazine," *Colored American Magazine* (May 1901), 47.

⁷⁹⁶ Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 127.

Although it is difficult to gauge the breadth of *Contending Forces*' circulation, the Colored American Cooperative attempted to make it accessible to a wide audience. The announcement in the *Colored American Magazine* noted that advance sales "have been enormous, considering this to be her first work published in book form."⁷⁹⁷ The Cooperative sold copies for \$1.50, and encouraged potential sales agents to purchase a fifty-cent 'Agent's Outfit' which included a copy of the novel.⁷⁹⁸ A letter from Alberta Moore Smith, president of the Colored Women's Business Club in Chicago, Illinois, to the *Colored American Magazine* praised the novel. "It is undoubtedly the book of the century," Smith wrote; "Ethiopia is stretching forth her arm in all branches of learning... This book should be classed as one of the standard works of the day."⁷⁹⁹ According to the *Colored American Magazine*, Hopkins' novel was a success and she continued to use literature to advocate racial pride and black political mobilization.

In March 1902, the *Colored American Magazine* published Hopkins's essay on the importance of African American women's literary work. Hopkins called on women to be outspoken on issues of racial inequality, and praised the work of writers like Phyllis Wheatly, Ida B. Wells, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. In her essay, Hopkins criticized the inaction of the federal government to stop lynching and called on black women to use their knowledge of American government and politics to agitate for racial improvement. "It was a criminal omission," Hopkins wrote, "on the part of those

⁷⁹⁷ "Editorial and Publisher's Announcement," *Colored American Magazine* (October 1900): 333

⁷⁹⁸ "Editorial and Publisher's Announcement," *Colored American Magazine* (October 1901): 479.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

statesmen, who, having the power vested in them to enact laws to protect an innocent, helpless people...yet shirked their responsibilities for a nauseous sentimentality.”⁸⁰⁰ Black women, Hopkins argued, should unhesitantly critique government policy and politicians through their writings and public agitation.

Hopkins pushed black women to speak out against lynching and racial oppression and publically engage in the political sphere. “We know it is not ‘popular’ for a woman to speak or write in plain terms against political brutalities,” Hopkins wrote, acknowledging opinions that women should confine their work to the home and church.⁸⁰¹ Instead Hopkins advocated black women’s obtaining and acting upon a rich knowledge of politics. “The colored woman,” she argued “must have an intimate knowledge of every question that agitates the councils of the world...the more clearly she understands the governing principles of the government under which she lives and rears her children, the surer will be an honorable future of the whole race.”⁸⁰² Hopkins declared that black women had a duty to study and circulate ideas and criticisms about the current conditions of African Americans in the United States. In Hopkins’ writing and in the pages of the *Woman’s Era* African American women in Boston directly questioned political leadership and advocated the use of the ballot and political independence to achieve goals of racial uplift.

African American women in Boston united legacies of abolitionism, organizational life, voting experience, and access to mass print media to influence black

⁸⁰⁰ Hopkins, “Famous Women of the Negro Race IV: Some Literary Workers,” *Colored American Magazine* (March 1902): 276

⁸⁰¹ Ibid, 277.

⁸⁰² Ibid.

women nationally. Women like Ruffin and Hopkins called on black women to engage publically in politics and used their publications to encourage women to unite for racial uplift. Their work was infused with ideas of independent politics. Either through articles in the *Woman's Era* or in the narrative of *Contending Forces*, these African American women urged black women and men to subordinate personal ambition and party affiliation for the good of the race. Ideas of independent politics had their roots in Boston's political culture and were closely related to the activities of the Colored National League and anti-lynching in the 1890s.

Chapter 7

“We of Massachusetts are Free, and Must and Shall Raise our Voice”: The Colored National League and Anti-lynching Politics, 1887-1901

On October 3, 1899, Boston attorney and *Boston Hub* editor Archibald H. Grimké, who had recently returned from his position as US consul in Santo Domingo, addressed the Colored National League. Grimké read aloud a letter to the president of the United States, written at the insistence of the executive committee of the League. “We address ourselves to you, sir,” Grimké wrote, “not as supplicants, but as of right, as American citizens, whose servant you are, and to whom you are bound to listen...and upon occasion to act.”⁸⁰³ This “Open Letter to President McKinley by the Colored People of Massachusetts” expressed outrage at the lynching of African Americans in southern states and even more indignation at the perceived inaction on the part of the federal government and the McKinley administration. “We have suffered, sir,—God knows how much we have suffered!—since your accession to office,” the League announced; “you have seen our sufferings, witnessed from your high place our awful wrongs and miseries, and yet you have at no time and on no occasion opened your lips on our behalf...is there no help in the federal arm for us?”⁸⁰⁴

The letter explained how southern violence had stifled southern black resistance and how Massachusetts residents felt especially well positioned to address the president.

⁸⁰³ “Negro’s Wrongs,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 4, 1899; Colored National League, “Open Letter to President McKinley by Colored People of Massachusetts,” October 3, 1899, 2.

⁸⁰⁴ “Open Letter to President McKinley.” 2-3.

“The silence of death reigns over our people and their leaders at the South,” the letter explained; “we of Massachusetts are free, and must and shall raise our voice to you and through you to the country, in solemn protest and warning against the fearful sin and peril of such social conditions.” The letter continued to address the contradictions in McKinley’s endorsement of United States intervention in Cuba and his refusal to use federal troops to protect black rights in southern states. As Grimké concluded, following an ovation from the audience, the letter was signed by prominent members of the League and adopted by the meeting with “significant unanimity.”⁸⁰⁵

By the time the Colored National League sent its formal letter denouncing President McKinley’s inaction in the face of southern atrocities, it had been embroiled in protests against lynching for nearly a decade. While black Bostonians had been outspoken in the face of racial violence since the end of the Civil War, these sentiments intensified towards the end of the 1890s. This was partly because of the marked increase in incidents, but also due to the focused attentions by local organizations like the Colored National League and the Massachusetts Racial Protective Association. These organizations lent an institutionalized structure to the outrage and were largely successful in unifying black Bostonian opposition to southern violence. However, within the League and in relation to other black activists, there were intense debates over strategy and control which related to the conflicts over party politics from the previous decades. Anti-lynching sentiment, although endorsed by all factions, could not be divorced from debates over political strategies, which were heavily colored by sentiments regarding party politics.

⁸⁰⁵ “Negro’s Wrongs,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 4, 1899; “Open Letter to President McKinley,” 1.

Independent politics was mobilized as a strategy to reinforce anti-lynching. African Americans were frustrated with the inaction of political parties and the refusal of both parties to include an anti-lynching plank in their party platform. Boston's anti-lynching campaign is a clear example of how black Bostonians, through the Colored National League, effectively mobilized independent politics as a political strategy to address national issues. However, the failure of independent politics to yield results contributed to a rejection of party politics and the increase in calls for a race-based party affiliation.

Most studies of the anti-lynching movements of the 1890s tend to focus on the actions of significant individuals, like Ida B. Wells, or broader national political organizations. In particular, historians of African American women have brought a new and sophisticated focus to women's anti-lynching activism. Other histories have focused on national organizations like the Afro-American League and the Afro-American Council.⁸⁰⁶

Although some black Bostonians were members of these organizations, Boston's most vocal civil rights organization, the Colored National League, remained independent and its goals often deviated from the platforms of the national groups. Further, rather than a history of several key individuals, the history of anti-lynching in Boston is one of a

⁸⁰⁶ Patricia Ann Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Trichita M. Chestnut, "Lynching: Ida B. Wells Barnett and the Outrage Over the Frazier Baker Murder," *Prologue* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 20-29; Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2003); Paula Giddings, *Ida: A sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching* (New York, N.Y.: Amistad, 2008); Jacquelyn Dowd. Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and The Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Roger K. Hux, "Lillian Clayton Jewett and the Rescue of the Baker Family, 1899-1900," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 19, no. 1 (April 1991): 13-23; Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Crystal Nicole Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009).

political community whose spokespeople were bolstered by the ideas of a greater number of often forgotten contributors. While Ida B. Wells emerged as the national figurehead of the anti-lynching movement in the 1890s, she depended on and was supported by urban black communities such as Boston. In their activism, African Americans in Boston effectively connected advocacy of political rights and representation on a local level with a movement to influence the federal government to protect the lives and rights of Southern black men and women.

Both the increase in lynching and the continued federal inaction inflamed the sentiments of black Boston's political community. Meetings of the Colored National League were significant sites of anti-lynching indignation and the League's members included some the city's most vocal opponents of extra-legal violence. Further, the League provided African Americans in Boston with an institutional base from which to communicate with anti-lynching movements in other parts of the country. League meetings were a forum within which Bostonians were addressed by speakers from all regions of the country and where they could hear first hand from witnesses of the horrors of lynching.

Although they were geographically isolated from Southern horrors, the realities of lynch law were brought to the halls and churches of Boston as speakers like Ida B. Wells addressed African American sponsored events. Public activists like Wells were supported by Boston, which was one of the few places at the time that questioned the guilt of lynching victims and supported Wells' fight. Further, the Colored National League was engaged directly with lynching in southern communities. For example, Texans responded to attacks from Boston following a lynching. That Texans were paying attention to what

was happening in Boston is evidence of the more ambitious network into which black Bostonians were connected.

Additionally, in 1899 following the tragic murder of South Carolinian postmaster Frazer Baker, black Bostonians were embroiled in a controversy over their own political autonomy within the broader anti-lynching reform movement. Indeed, the relocation of the Baker family to Boston brought the tragic victims of lynching face to face with its black Bostonian opponents. Conflicts with white reformers and debates within the black community demonstrate the tensions over renewed calls for racial solidarity and feelings that anti-lynching movements should be directed by African Americans. Black Bostonians drew upon political strategies which included calls for political independence, local political autonomy, and direct federal intervention in the states. While these strategies had been employed at local and state levels for decades, with the increase in racial violence and the rise of Jim Crow, the limits of African American loyalty to political parties was severely tested and by the end of the decade even once staunch Republican party loyalists began to question their commitment.

In the conflict with white anti-lynching activists we see the Colored National League staking out and defending its political terrain. The leaders of the Colored National League imagined themselves to be the official political organization of black Boston and they were not about to be marginalized by an outside force. In this conflict we can also see increased calls for race-based political organization. For Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, the Colored National League, as a black-run organization, was best equipped to protect African Americans. Like their growing disillusionment with the American party system, they were also wary of sudden white interference. Black Bostonians had placed their faith

in the support of white-dominated political organizations before, but had been repeatedly disappointed. Their feeling of mistrust of supposed allies was connected to their increasing mistrust of the American political system. Here we can see the transition from a stance of independent politics, which though doubtful, was still within the structure of two-party politics, to a race-based politics which rejected party affiliation and sought a separate public political identity

The Colored National League

When organizers in Boston founded the Colored National League in 1887 they resolved to use the organization to protect the civil and political rights of African Americans throughout the nation. Its object, read the constitution, was to “secure to all American citizens throughout the country the full and free enjoyment of the natural, essential, and inalienable rights guaranteed them.”⁸⁰⁷ Among these objects was the protection of suffrage, the protection of access to public institutions and transportation, free and impartial trials, and the freedom from insult and from proscription because of race or color.

From its founding the Colored National League was dedicated to partisan independence. The League was dedicated to “defeating wherever possible all candidates for public office, irrespective of party affiliations or political belief, who are not in active sympathy with and support this league.”⁸⁰⁸ The members of the League planned to use the United States’ political system to leverage their strength as voters in the service of

⁸⁰⁷ “Boston’s National League,” *The New York Age*, November 5, 1887.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid.

African American civil rights. However, by the middle 1890s, as Southern states began to disenfranchise black voters and as the support of Northern Democrats lessened the likelihood of dividing the African American electorate, the Colored National League modified their electoral policy with increased calls for federal intervention and more radical strategies, including violent resistance.

As accounts of southern lynching increased among the Bostonian community, the Colored National League increasingly became involved in the emerging anti-lynching movement. Journalist Ida B. Wells was an important ally who encouraged African Americans in Boston towards more explicit anti-lynching activism. Wells was particularly effective in bringing the horrors of Southern violence to audiences in the Northeast, and Boston was a significant recipient of her writings and became an early supporter of her cause. Wells had early trouble gaining support for her movement and depended on the political and financial support of black communities like Boston.⁸⁰⁹ In July 1894, the Colored National League passed resolutions endorsing the work of Wells and made plans to hold a public mass meeting against continued southern violence. The League clearly laid out the purposes of the meeting in the pages of press. The purpose of the meeting is, the League explained, “in conjunction with colored people all over the country to arouse public opinion against lynching; to sustain Miss Ida B. Wells, who has been in England; to endorse Senator Blair’s resolutions...asking that a report on the number of lynching during the past ten years be put in among the statistics of the US census reports, and to thank the English people for the formation of the anti-lynching

⁸⁰⁹ Schechter, *Ida B. Wells*, 106-110.

society.”⁸¹⁰ While the League hoped to have Wells attend the meeting, she was continuing a trip in England to gain international support for the protection of African Americans.⁸¹¹

On the stage and in the audience on August 29, 1894 in Faneuil Hall, long-time male and female advocates of African American rights joined with new, but vocal, activists. Some had been active for decades, like Edwin Garrison Walker and Archibald Grimké, while others, like Emory T. Morris and Edward E. Brown, were relatively new among black Boston’s political activists.⁸¹² The dais also included former and current black elected officials, like Julius C. Chappelle, Andrew Lattimore, and Robert T. Teamoh. As well as church leaders, like Bishop Benjamin Tanner and Rev. Dolphin A. Roberts, the meeting also included important African American spokeswomen like Eliza Gardiner and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper.⁸¹³

As the meeting began, the inaction of the federal government was of central concern. In his opening remarks, Edward E. Brown condemned the inaction on the part of the Cleveland administration. In particular, he criticized the use of federal troops to protect mail trains during the Pullman strike in Chicago while refusing to send federal enforcements to southern states to protect the rights and lives of black men and women. He noted that, “If President Cleveland could find that there was law enough in this

⁸¹⁰ “They Protest in Mass Meeting,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 30, 1894

⁸¹¹ “Miss Wells Indorsed,” *Boston Daily Globe*, July 18, 1894; “Colored National League,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 8, 1894; “Protest Against Lynching,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 29, 1894

⁸¹² Edward Brown was a plaintiff in the challenges to discrimination in roller skating rinks in 1884, see Chapter 4.

⁸¹³ “They Protest in Mass Meeting.”

country to protect freight cars at Chicago, there ought to be a law strong enough to protect American citizens.”⁸¹⁴

Brown also laid claim to the place of African Americans in Massachusetts as investigators of southern violence, and raised the specter of African American extralegal strategies over the proceedings. The Colored National League was dedicated to the protection of African Americans and if the government could not provide it, they declared that African Americans in the Bay State had both the resources and the intention to mount their own protective campaigns. “There is a movement now going on in this state looking towards a formation of an organization with \$10,000 behind it that will stretch out into every state,” Brown told listeners. Brown explained the purpose of this new movement as to provide protection and vindication for African Americans who were denied such by state or federal governments. “With this money,” Brown continued, “it is intended to search out the murderers of black men and women in the south and to see to it that they are brought to justice.”⁸¹⁵

Long-time activist Edwin Garrison Walker reiterated Brown’s claims and called for African Americans to take responsibility for mounting anti-lynching campaigns. “We would not be here at this time to hold up the hands of Miss Wells,” Walker declared, “if the pulpit of this country was doing its duty on this question of murdering innocent men, women, and children of the South.” Walker attacked the perceived silence and inaction on the part of African American communities. “It is high time,” Walker declared, “that

⁸¹⁴ Ibid.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

the black men of this country took a decided stand upon this question of lynching. As long as they remain quiet it will go on.”⁸¹⁶

Following the meeting, the Colored National League resumed its regular meetings with renewed calls for partisan political agitation. The League also called upon its members who were political officeholders to exert their influence within the major parties. They were appointed to go to the central committees of the Republican, Democratic, and Prohibition parties and ask that the platforms of each organization include explicit anti-lynching planks. In this way, the Colored National League hoped that partisan political power achieved at the local level, could have a direct influence on the policies of parties outside Boston and outside the state.⁸¹⁷

The Massachusetts Racial Protective Association

The Colored National League, though one of the most outspoken and consistent opponents of lynching, was not alone. The other significant political force against racial violence was the Massachusetts Racial Protective Association (MRPA). The MRPA, which gained particular notoriety in the early twentieth century under the leadership of William Monroe Trotter, was significant in the middle 1890s, along with the Colored National League, as a forum for radical opposition to lynching.⁸¹⁸ In 1895, the MRPA held a meeting at Faneuil Hall that attracted over two thousand attendees. Although largely dominated by African Americans, the attendees included a noticeable number of

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ “Colored National League,” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 5, 1894.

⁸¹⁸ Fox, *The Guardian of Boston*, 28-29.

working class white Bostonians. According to the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, “[The white attendees] took a hearty interest in the evening’s proceedings and stayed with the latest!”

⁸¹⁹ Along with members of Boston’s white working class were prominent white Bostonians like Mayor Edwin Curtis, Irish born Catholic priest Father Thomas Scully, and Captain Nathan Appleton.

The organizers of the meeting were explicit in their anti-lynching motives and they provided the audience with a clear symbol of their cause. Unlike other political meetings where the hall was festooned with banners and pictures of prominent leaders, the attendees at this meeting sat in a hall, “devoid of visible decorations.” The only ornament was a small American flag to which the organizers had attached illustrations of a recent lynching in Texas.⁸²⁰ By attaching images of racial violence to the American flag the organizers were providing a visual image of their rhetorical allegations. As Mayor Curtis declared, “This disregard of law and the right of all accused persons to a free trial is a dark blot on the fair name of this free country.” The audience faced an American flag that was literally corrupted and tainted by horrific images of torture and death.⁸²¹

The main subjects of the meeting were charges of the usurpation of the legal system by the lynch mob, the call for independent politics to force the parties to oppose lynching, and the use of armed resistance if other more moderate methods failed. Mayor

⁸¹⁹ It is likely that these working class white attendees were Irish American allies gained during the period of strong political cooperation in the 1880s.

⁸²⁰ It is likely that the account is referring to the notorious lynching of Henry Smith in 1893 in Paris Texas. This lynching was publicized by Ida B. Wells in 1895. See: Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *A Red Record. Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892 - 1893 - 1894 ...*, in *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*, ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 91-98.

⁸²¹ “Anti-Lynching,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 13, 1895.

Curtis invoked the Bostonian history of resistance to oppression as he celebrated the meeting at Faneuil Hall. “It is fitting,” the Mayor declared, “that the voice of the people of Boston, condemning these crimes, should be proclaimed from the Cradle of Liberty, where the spirit of resistance to English oppression was fostered and there the anti-slavery agitation was aroused.”⁸²² Further, for Curtis, acts of lynching transcended region or race. “As the disgrace of one member of a family brings shame to the household,” Curtis explained, “so the crime in any one state brings dishonor to the whole country.”⁸²³

Curtis confronted the defense of the perpetrators of lynching that they were merely “anticipating justice” by lynching. Many lynch mobs, acting on allegations of rape or murder, felt that their acts were justified in the defense of white womanhood or community protection. However, as Curtis recognized, “They often put innocent men to death.” In addition to lamenting the usurpation of judicial procedure, Curtis clearly pointed to the racial motivation of lynching, an allegation which would draw the ire of Texans in the pages of the press in the coming weeks. “Members of one race are especially picked out as victims,” Curtis explained. “Justice is represented as blind,” he continued, “but lynch justice in certain localities has an eye open and is ready to take vengeance whenever a colored man is even suspected of committing a crime...the bloodthirsty element in man’s nature is excited by race prejudice and what is called lynching would...be more properly named murder.”⁸²⁴

⁸²² Ibid.

⁸²³ Ibid.

⁸²⁴ Ibid.

Elijah A. Morse, a white Republican member of the US House of Representatives from Massachusetts and a corporal in the Union Army during the Civil War, recalled black service in the war in his denunciation of lynching. “The loyal North,” Morse declared, “owes a debt of gratitude to these black men of the South for their service during the war.” In particular, Morse focused on the sympathy and care that he and other soldiers received from black southerners during his service. “They succored our wounded and escaping prisoners...if it hadn’t been for food furnished me from the scanty store of a black man, when I was a prisoner in the hands of the enemy, I shouldn’t be here to enter this protest.” Morse continued by celebrating the military service of those who served for the Union and “bared their black bosoms to the enemy.”⁸²⁵ For Morse, African Americans had demonstrated their commitment to the United States on the field of battle and therefore the United States had an obligation to protect them from lynching.

While there was general agreement about the usurpation of judicial authority and the heinousness of the actions, there was some disagreement over the preferred strategy to combat lynching in the face of government inaction. Some, like Irish attorney Thomas Riley, urged political organization and the use of the vote, while others like Edwin Garrison Walker advocated more radical solutions. Riley repeated the argument made by black Bostonians in the 1880s that if African American voters could unite, they could use their electoral strength to sway the platforms of the major parties. If the voters could organize, Riley argued, “they would have both political parties waiting on them. They would have the strength to brain those who did not please them.”⁸²⁶ Riley was clear in

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

⁸²⁶ Ibid.

his opposition to force as a political strategy. While he supported “braining” opponents electorally, he did not support literally attacking perpetrators.

Unlike Riley, Walker and MRPA president Reverend W. H. Scott urged armed resistance when all other methods failed. “Black men cannot be murdered in the South with impunity,” Walker warned; “let the American people beware. If outrages continue the Negro will look around to form an alliance with some one who will aid in stopping the barbarous treatment.”⁸²⁷ Walker and the other advocates of self-defense looked to armed resistance movements in other countries for inspiration and proposed that African Americans unify with these movements in a global struggle. Rev. W. H. Scott advocated “something a little stronger than moral suasion.” “We are organizing,” he said, “and then we shall join with the Irish or the Germans or the Bulgarians and have it out.”⁸²⁸ Activists like Walker and Scott envisioned the African American struggle against political marginalization and racial violence as part of an international battle against oppression and envisioned a united transatlantic struggle.

George T. Downing, the long-time African American activist from Newport, Rhode Island, proposed a series of resolutions which the attendees of the meeting adopted unanimously. “We condemn without any reservation the lynching, the mutilating, and the roasting alive of American citizens now commonly practiced in parts of our country,” the resolutions began. The resolutions attacked perpetrators of lynching for using allegations of rape as excuses to oppress black political aspirations. Massachusetts, the resolutions declared, “takes no part in the falsehood that the negro race is more immoral than the

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

other races; that they are rapists...the charge is false...the real design being concealed, which is to crush the lawful growing aspirations manifesting themselves among black men.”⁸²⁹

The resolutions concluded with an appeal to the memory of both the moderate and the radical leaders of the anti-slavery movement to motivate listeners to action. “We invoke,” Downing declared, “the uncompromising spirit of Garrison, of Phillips, of Sumner, of Andrew and in their names...cry out: ‘Stop this brutality which darkens our nation’s fair name...if it can not be stopped the impetuous spirit of Crispus Attucks or John Brown, who is still marching on, will in its march haunt into action.”⁸³⁰ Downing’s resolutions, in particular, were the target of heated response from the readers of Southern newspapers, which printed a transcript of the proceedings.

Southern Reactions

The reaction to the Faneuil Hall meeting was swift as newspapers in regions throughout the country carried coverage of the event. While some northern newspapers praised the protest, newspapers in southern states decried the meeting as interfering with the affairs of southern states and threatening to reopen sectional tensions.⁸³¹ Mayor Curtis’s office received letters from outraged Texans who were infuriated at the allegations levied against them by the meeting’s speakers. In particular, the letter writers

⁸²⁹ “Protest From Massachusetts,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 13, 1885.

⁸³⁰ Ibid.

⁸³¹ “Lynching and Burning,” *The Commercial Appeal*, (Memphis, TN), November 13, 1895; “Boston People are Holding Mass Meetings...,” *The Commercial Advertiser* (Memphis, TN), November 14, 1885; “Protest Against Lynching,” *The North American* (Philadelphia, PA), November 13, 1895; “Protest from Massachusetts,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 13, 1885; “Lynching for Rape,” *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), November 14, 1895.

were outraged at the calls for the protection of men whom they viewed as criminals and perpetrators of crimes deserving of lynching. They accused Bostonians of being ignorant of the true nature of black southerners and scolded them for interfering in affairs where they were not welcome.

An editorial in *The Dallas Morning News* condemned the resolutions passed by the meeting. *The Morning News* argued that while “in the heat of passion over the butchery of a defenseless woman by a black brute, some excuse may be found for burning the despoilers of our homes and the murderers of our women...what excuse may be found for the promulgation of such monstrous lies as those contained in the set of resolutions passed in Boston.”⁸³² The newspaper argued that, although brutal, lynching was an understandable response in the face of the alleged crimes. They professed that none of those executed was innocent and that “effete” Bostonians were committing “villainous lies” for stating the opposite. The attendees at the MRPA meeting “may never attend a ‘burning’ in this world,” the Dallas editors ridiculed, “but if they keep up this practice they are warned that they may expect a high temperature in the next.”⁸³³

Several other letters from southerners, addressed to Mayor Curtis and published in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, supported the claims of the *Dallas Morning News* editors that the perpetrators of mob violence were only carrying out a punishment for a heinous crime. Further the letters exposed the resentment and tension between regions. The letters accused the meeting’s organizers of inflaming “a sectional hatred of the South.” “You know absolutely nothing,” an anonymous writer from Fort Worth, Texas maintained,

⁸³² Editorial, *Dallas Morning News*, quoted in “Negro Lynching,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 20, 1895.

⁸³³ Ibid.

“about the negro and the relationship in which he stands to the white people of the South...the malignity of their prejudice and the density of their ignorance is apparently all the excuse 3000 Boston people have for making 3000 asses of themselves.”⁸³⁴

The letter writers suggested that while lynching should not replace the court system, in the case of alleged black-on-white rape or murder it was not only appropriate, but justified. “No intelligent Southern people advocate mob law as a general practice,” one writer explained, “but when it comes to dealing with negro rapists you are advised to come South...before you preside at any more meetings to arraign Southern people for protecting their families and homes from such in any way they think best and find most effectual.”⁸³⁵ W. C. Crawford from New Orleans explicitly explained that southern lynch mobs were forced to action in order to protect southern white womanhood. “Our women in our Southland are our most holy possession; their persons must be held sacred,” Crawford argued; “any brute who does violence to them shall suffer, and not...recline at ease in a well-kept jail...and we run the risk of having them break their prison bars and then escape to do their hellish work on more of our women...and all the vile croakings from Massachusetts cannot prevent us from protecting our wives, our mothers, our sisters, and our daughters.”⁸³⁶

An editorial in the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* refuted Bostonian allegations that the perpetrators of lynching used allegations of rape to cover up attacks on black uplift.

“The people who proclaim such doctrine,” the editors charged, “are worse than those who

⁸³⁴ Anonymous to Edwin U. Curtis, November 16, 1895, quoted in “Incendiary Letters,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 20, 1895.

⁸³⁵ Ibid.

⁸³⁶ W. C. Crawford to Edwin U. Curtis, November 15, 1895, quoted in “Incendiary Letters,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 20, 1895.

do the lynching, because they encourage the commission of the atrocious crimes which cause the outbreaks of popular violence.”⁸³⁷ Rather than condemn or show remorse at the use of violent retribution, the editors of the *Picayune* declared lynching to be not only justified, but required for men “who value the honor and purity of their women.”⁸³⁸ These men will “visit with condign violence the masculine outragers of that honor, and they will doubtless continue to do so, in every part of this country.”⁸³⁹ Rather than rely on the judicial system to judge the guilt of perpetrators, the editors argued that their method of justice was swifter and more reliable. “There is no punishment,” the editors explained, “too severe for any ravisher, whatever his color, race or condition, and the people will not submit to the tedious delays and obstructions which operate so often to cheat justice in such cases.”⁸⁴⁰

It is notable that these letter writers addressed Mayor Curtis rather than the Racial Protective Association. One of the reasons for this could be the potential to appeal to Curtis as a white man and therefore one more likely to sympathize with lynching. The letters published in the Boston press appealed to Curtis’s whiteness and accused him merely of not understanding their positions. If Curtis would just come to places like Texas, the authors argued, he would see that white southerners are not the villains portrayed by organizations like the Racial Protective Association and the Colored National League. “If you have a white man’s heart in your breast,” one writer asked, “then come South and see for yourself...you will know better how to teach the ‘cultured

⁸³⁷ “Lynching for Rape,” *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), November 14, 1895.

⁸³⁸ Ibid.

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

idiots' of Boston to attend to their own business, and will be willing to let John Brown's remains rest in the grave, where the just cinch of the hangman's long ago placed him."⁸⁴¹ By invoking John Brown, the author called on Curtis to reject the radical stance on civil rights and side with them as white men in defense of white womanhood.

Boston Responds

More than 1000 people crowded into Charles St. AME church for a Colored National League meeting held on November 19th in part to respond to the southern response and to celebrate the extent to which their local voices had reached national audiences. President of the League E. T. Morris told the crowd, "The Faneuil Hall meeting last week had thoroughly aroused the state of Texas...the iron is now hot, and now is the time for us to strike."⁸⁴² Edward E. Brown echoed these sentiments. "We have got the Texas bull by the horns and he is roaring," Brown proclaimed; "he will roar more before we are through with this matter." Reverend Walter Gay, a black Baptist minister from Haverhill, recalled that following the failure of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1870s, white southerners "have sought to reach the hearts of northern people by claiming that the colored people of the south were rapists and brutes of the worst kind." Gay's claims were substantiated by Captain Nathan Appleton, a member of a prominent white family, who relayed the southern attempts to find sympathy among white Bostonians. "The old southern bourbons, embittered by the results of the war," Appleton explained, "have been

⁸⁴¹ Anonymous to Edwin U. Curtis.

⁸⁴² "Apply Torch," *Boston Daily Globe*, November 20, 1895.

circulating and exaggerating everything that is bad about colored people in order to bring us of the north to the same way of thinking that they do.”⁸⁴³

While white southerners were a prominent target for the meeting’s ire, the League also placed blame for the atrocities on the inaction of the federal government. In particular, they focused on the hypocrisy of American foreign and domestic policy decisions. “We have witnessed the leaders of both political parties going up and down the state asking that our flag protect Armenians,” Edward Brown explained, “but not one of them, from governor down, had a word to say about the damnable lynchings of American citizens in the South.”⁸⁴⁴ Brown also criticized President Cleveland for using US troops to put down the Pullman strike in Chicago, “but not a single soldier could he send to protect the lives of the American citizens in the South.” Brown urged churches to “call your missionaries back from China and Turkey, and send them down south to convert those southerners to true American patriotism.”⁸⁴⁵ Other speakers, like Edwin Walker, suggested racist motivations behind the refusal of the government to act. “Do you believe that if, in that bloody South, one tenth of the number of white men had been murdered that there have been black men,” Walker asked, “the government would have allowed this cursed business to go on?”⁸⁴⁶

Like earlier discussions at the MRPA meeting, Colored National League members debated confronting lynching through political or legal means versus armed resistance.

⁸⁴³ Henry Fitz-Gilbert Waters and New England Historic Genealogical Society, *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1908), lvi-lvii.; “Apply Torch.”

⁸⁴⁴ “Apply Torch,”

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid.

Captain Appleton urged restraint and advocated raising money and making political appeals. “I advise you,” Appleton suggested, “to collect funds to make a test case...make an appeal to the President of the United States to call out the troops and bring the perpetrators to justice.” Despite calls for political mobilization, some in the crowd were interested in more radical means. Reverend Dolphin P. Roberts, the pastor of Charles Street AME church argued that by using the press and the churches African Americans could mobilize against lynching as they did against slavery. “Let the ministers and the press continue to educate,” Roberts urged, “for it is by the voice of the people that this must be stopped...peaceably if possible,--if not, otherwise.”⁸⁴⁷ Roberts continued that “if his race could not find redress in the law for outrages...then it would be time for revenge on those who were responsible for the murders.”⁸⁴⁸

Advocates of violent resistance argued that as long as African Americans remained passive and forgave white outrages, the atrocities would continue with impunity. “We have increased from 4,000,000 to 10,000,000,” Walker declared; “we are flooding this country with educated young men and women, who will not be cornered or exterminated without retaliation.” Reverend Gay argued that the time for moderation had passed. “We have preached to our people to desist from retaliation,” Gay began. “Now I say to my race, find revenge, if we have to use the torch; find revenge, if we have to cut the throats of those white southerners who rape our women. Retaliate, I say. Take life for

⁸⁴⁷ “Negro Lynching,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 20, 1895.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid.

life...There is a great duty devolving upon the young people of the north. You must learn to use your right hand in defense of your race.”⁸⁴⁹

In addition to arguing for direct action, the Colored National League targeted southern claims of black inferiority and the justified protection of white womanhood. James Logan Gordon argued that lynching was a manifestation of the barbarity and uncivilized nature of white southerners.⁸⁵⁰ Gordon declared, “What 1000 cool and calm citizens in Faneuil Hall think is worth more than what those people in Paris Texas think...if the Negroes in the south should be there 200 years they could not get so low as to burn a man at the stake for twenty minutes.” Gordon refuted assertions of the protection of white womanhood. “It is bosh,” Gordon proclaimed, “for any southerner to rise and talk about the purity of a white woman...the purity of a woman, white or colored, should be as much respected in one part of the country as another.”

Gordon concluded by attacking white southern morality and claims of racial superiority. “If there is anything wrong with the African in the south, it is 50 percent white wrong,” Gordon concluded; “this is due to the fact that they were too familiar with their ancestors.” Flipping the narrative of natural black inferiority, Gordon declared that it was the ‘white’ blood in southern blacks that should be blamed for any impurities. George T. Downing further pointed out the hypocrisy in claims of white virtue and combined it with calls for black self defense. “The black south,” Downing declared, “is as ready to protect the virtue of women as the white south is. Talk of respect for

⁸⁴⁹ “Apply Torch.”

⁸⁵⁰ “Negro Lynching.”

womanhood when white men will walk into the cabins of black men and ravish their wives and daughters before their eyes. We want a law that will protect all women.”⁸⁵¹

To Organize a “Colored Party”

In 1896 African Americans met, again under the auspices of the MRPA, to discuss organizing politically. In that year black Bostonians called for a national convention to organized African Americans across the country politically. Their goal was to unite African Americans around a particular candidate and demonstrate that through their numbers black voters could be a significant force in American politics. In an article discussing the organization of a “Colored Party,” a reporter for the *Boston Daily Advertiser* outlined the goals of the conference. “The colored voters of the United States,” the reporter explained, “are about to inaugurate a movement which...will cause the colored men to assume a very important position in national politics.”⁸⁵² One of the purposes of this convention was to bring together prominent African Americans from across the country and endorse candidates for the president, vice president and governor of each state. The convention organizers predicted over 1800 attendees and expected over 1200 from locations outside Massachusetts. The reporter for the *Daily Advertiser* argued that African Americans held the balance of electoral power in the southern border and central states and that “unless there should be a landslide, the ballots of the colored element could be used to turn the State for either of the two leading candidates.”⁸⁵³

⁸⁵¹ “Apply Torch.”

⁸⁵² “Colored Party,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, July 23, 1896.

⁸⁵³ Ibid.

While the promoters of the convention sought to engage in spirited debate over black political loyalty, they predicted that the convention would ultimately support the Republican William McKinley for president. “The movement,” Edward E. Brown, one of the Boston promoters, explained, “is of vital importance to the colored man. The convention will discuss the position our race should take politically and whether or not it is advisable to divide our vote or throw it solidly for one party.”⁸⁵⁴

The question of dividing the vote between Democrats and Republicans was easily answered by promoters like Brown, due to the involvement of South Carolina Democratic Governor Benjamin Tillman in Bryan’s campaign. Tillman had been instrumental in acts of violence against African Americans and endorsed changes to South Carolina’s state constitution limiting black men’s right to vote.⁸⁵⁵ “We are united,” Brown explained, “in the feeling that the success of the democratic ticket means the return of Tillman and the Southerners to power, and then the welfare of the black man will be given a bad rap. Anything that savors Tillmanism we want no part in.”⁸⁵⁶ The rise of leaders like Tillman was evidence of southern white supremacist political resurgence and the reversal of the gains of Reconstruction. “[Southerners] have never repented since the war and are now acting in a spirit of animosity and revenge.”⁸⁵⁷

Conference promoters predicted that the convention would endorse McKinley despite earlier tensions within the party over the prevention of lynching. “We have for

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁵ Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁸⁵⁶ “Colored Party.”

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid.

years been trying to get the Republican Party to take a stand on the lynching question,” Brown explained, “and now that they have come out frankly we feel very friendly toward them. We feel somewhat shaky about Bryan...but with McKinley we are perfectly satisfied.” McKinley’s supporters urged the endorsement of his candidacy due to McKinley’s sympathetic position on African American uplift and his appointment of black men to offices as governor of Ohio. “[McKinley] has always been solid on the race question from youth on up, and knows all about colored men,” Brown explained; “as matters look now I believe the delegates will declare for McKinley and the gold standard.”⁸⁵⁸ The organizers of the convention were hopeful that the convention would be large and make a significant impact on the national political stage. “The meeting,” Brown predicted optimistically, “is expected to unite the colored people of the country for the future advancement of the race.”⁸⁵⁹

As delegates descended on Boston for the August 10th convention, their hopes for unity confronted the reality of divergent opinions regarding political endorsement and partisan affiliation as a political strategy. While the convention was dominated by sixty delegates from Massachusetts, the crowd that filled Ebenezer Baptist Church was made up of delegates from Arkansas, Alabama, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, New Hampshire, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The organizers of the convention opened the proceedings with a summary of the dire state of African Americans in the United States and proposed that the convention organize black Americans nationally to confront the increasing obstacles

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid.

to uplift. “We have summoned you here,” Reverend W. H. Scott began, “because we regard this present time as one of the most momentous that has occurred in this country for thirty-six years.” “In many of the States of this Union laws have been passed to disenfranchise us. The Jim Crow car law has passed, and in all of the States great opposition has been shown to our progress.”⁸⁶⁰

Reverend Scott pointed to four areas which he felt contributed to a weakened state of African Americans and argued that African Americans could not rely on the support of white Americans. “It seems to me,” Scott opined, “that four elements are lacking with us, the lack of organization, racial pride, confidence, and capacity.” By pooling their resources, Scott argued, African Americans could educate black men and women in areas of business, ‘racial developments,’ racial pride, religion, morals and education, and industrial trades. Further, he hoped that by drawing on the legal acumen of the race, African Americans could mount broad legal challenges to prejudice. “If now organized,” Scott argued, “we would prosecute every violation of the constitution of the States and the United States against the colored man on account of his color; employ the best lawyers, always colored lawyers preferably, to prosecute these cases, taking appeal after appeal until we had reached the last resort, thus exposing this pernicious crime of prejudice to the best people in this country and the civilized world.”⁸⁶¹

Similar to his advocacy of the use of black lawyers, Scott also argued that African Americans could not rely on the support of white allies or political leadership; rather they must support African American leaders and organizations. “The negro has been

⁸⁶⁰ “Negro Convention,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, August 11, 1896; “For Their Race,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 11, 1896.

⁸⁶¹ “Negro Convention.”

unfortunate in one thing especially,” Scott explained; “he has looked outside of himself for help, which he has learned by bitter experience to be delusive. He must learn to be self-reliant and look within.”⁸⁶² Scott concluded with a call for national unity and the end to any north versus south dichotomy. “[African Americans have] been taught that all of his friends live north, all of his enemies live south, which has been a snare to him. The negro has at last awoke from his long sleep and sees that his worst enemy may, after all, prove to be himself.”⁸⁶³

The main speaker of the first day of the convention was Harvard Law School graduate, first African American college football player, and Harvard University football coach William H. Lewis. Lewis called on African Americans to unite behind the cause of civil and political liberty. Lewis drew comparisons between African American and immigrant groups in American cities. “The Irish race,” Smith argued, “with far less cause for grievance than we unite and rule the great metropolitan centers. The Germans, with practically no grievances at all, unite and control the destinies of the mighty states of the northwest. The negro unites today...simply to demand that he be made in reality what he is in name—an American citizen.”⁸⁶⁴

While speaking of racial unity generally, Lewis advocated African American voters’ uniting behind the political party which best supported black civil and political rights. “Whatever may be our party affiliation, whatever may be our political beliefs on other matters...The first question to ask of a political party is, what will you do to secure

⁸⁶² “For Their Race.”

⁸⁶³ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

me in the exercise of my rights as a man and a citizen?”⁸⁶⁵ While Lewis asked listeners to disregard party affiliation, he made it clear that he supported voting the Republican ticket. Lewis ridiculed the Democratic Party platform for supporting “free silver, but not one word about free men.”⁸⁶⁶ Further, he announced that the Democratic platform “is reeking with anarchy, seeking to overthrow existing institutions, the spirit of the mob, the spirit of lynch law, for lynch law is anarchy.”⁸⁶⁷ The Republican platform, however, according to Lewis, is “regnant with liberty, law, and order.” Lewis celebrated the Republican platform for condemning lynching and declared that in the Party, “we find not only the gold standard, but the gold standard of manhood.”⁸⁶⁸

While Lewis’s statements reflected the optimism that the convention would build a consensus around the Republican Party, not all delegates to the convention were so confident in McKinley’s candidacy and while the convention agreed on most issues, decorum broke down over partisan affiliation. On the second day of the convention most of the discussion was occupied by division over the formation of a committee on the political situation of the country. Reverend H. C. C. Astwood, a New York supporter of the Republican Party, moved the creation of the committee and in response Reverend L. Land of New Hampshire threatened that he would leave the convention. Reverend W. H. Scott also objected to the motion and questioned what the convention had to do with the

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid.

political situation of the county.⁸⁶⁹ Reverend D. P. Roberts spoke in favor of the motion, stating, “By all means have this committee. Our constituencies sent us here to politically speak for them on the great question of our citizenship as men, as citizens, and not as Negroes.”⁸⁷⁰ Edwin Garrison Walker declared that the delegates had met to discuss the condition of African Americans and should not use the forum for political endorsements. “I am glad we are getting to this place...The only question proper for us to consider is the negro...We don’t want any scheme fixed up here to deliver the colored people over to the party in a gathering like this.”⁸⁷¹

Following a meeting between the divergent sides, the convention established the committee. The report of the committee, however, refused to endorse a particular party. Rather, they recognized the political obstacles faced by African Americans and resolved to support whichever party best protected these rights. “We hold that the political party or parties responsible for this condition of affairs should be held strictly responsible for the outrageous proscriptions and be denounced by our people throughout the country.”⁸⁷² “It is the sense of this convention,” the committee concluded, “to insist upon equal rights, a free vote and an honest count, and that we will only stand by and support the individuals, the party or parties who will guarantee these rights.”⁸⁷³ The address was accepted without debate, the *Boston Daily Globe* reported, because “it was an understanding that

⁸⁶⁹ “Not Partisans,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 12, 1896; “A Day Lost,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, August 12, 1896.

⁸⁷⁰ “Not Partisans.”

⁸⁷¹ Ibid.

⁸⁷² Ibid.

⁸⁷³ Ibid.

the convention will not indorse any political party.”⁸⁷⁴ Despite this understanding, some delegates continued to attempt to have the convention endorse McKinley, but these efforts were ruled out of order.

Attempts to get the convention to endorse the Republican candidate continued on the final day and resulted in the convention’s adjourning in disorder. As the *Boston Globe* reported, “the row was over politics.”⁸⁷⁵ In the final hours of the convention Reverend H. C. C. Astwood moved that the convention endorse McKinley and Hobart. This, according to press reports, caused the convention to devolve into confusion before the president of the convention declared that the meeting was not a political convention and ruled the motion out of order. Delegates moved that the convention censure Astwood for repeatedly putting his motions before the convention, but the vote for censure was defeated. As Astwood’s allies celebrated the defeat, his opponents adjourned the convention.

The end of the convention, however, did not put an end to the emerging partisan rancor, with Astwood publically declaring that the defeat of his censure was an endorsement of his motion in favor of McKinley and his opponents asserting that they had prevented McKinley supporters from taking over the convention. “In their haste to close the convention and their refusal to censure me,” Astwood told a *Boston Globe* reporter, “they have tacitly indorsed the republican nominees...In refusing to censure me they admitted that I was right and had the proper remedy.”⁸⁷⁶ Astwood’s opponents

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁵ “In Disorder,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 13, 1896.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid.

argued that they had not endorsed McKinley, but rather prevented Astwood and his allies from turning the meeting into a Republican political rally. “We were afraid,” explained an anonymous minister, “that some of the local delegates would come in there tonight and sweep the convention clear for McKinley and Hobart...they were just getting ready to carry everything tonight at the close the convention with a grand political coup.”⁸⁷⁷ By preventing Astwood from passing his motion, his opponents maintained the political independence of the convention, but illuminated the divisions among African Americans in cases of political strategy. The delegates left Boston failing to achieve the political unity to which they aspired at the convention’s outset.

Despite divisions over the Republican endorsement, McKinley won the presidency in 1896 and African Americans were hopeful that the Republican president would enact policies to roll back the tide of white supremacy and violence that was rising in southern states. Any optimism, however, was soon shattered by the tragic and widely publicized lynching of a South Carolinian postmaster and his family.

The Baker Lynching and the Jewett Controversy

On February 22, 1898, following months of intense opposition to his appointment as postmaster of Lake City, South Carolina, postmaster Frazier Baker and his family were attacked as they attempted to flee their home, which vandals had set ablaze. Bullets flew through the burning structure as Frazier Baker and his wife, Lavinia, attempted to gather their five children. As Baker opened the front door he was immediately shot through the body and head. Lavinia, shielding her youngest child Julia in her arms, was shot through

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid.

the left arm. This bullet not only injured Mrs. Baker, but mortally wounded her child. Lavinia Baker and the rest of her children eventually fled to the home of a neighbor, leaving the bodies of Frazier and Julia Baker to smolder in the burning hulk. As the sun rose the next morning, her husband and youngest daughter were dead and three of her remaining children were wounded. According to a journalist for the *Charleston Weekly News and Courier*, who interviewed Lavinia Baker following the attack, “there is no clue whatever to the parties that did the shooting and the consensus of opinion seems to be that no one in the immediate community is in any way connected or responsible for it.”⁸⁷⁸ In response to the lynching, the federal government immediately suspended mail service to Lake City and commenced an investigation, and after a failed local inquest, a federal grand jury issued indictments in April, 1899.

News of the Baker lynching came to Boston quickly and the response from the Colored National League was almost immediate. On March 1, 1898 the League organized a meeting at Charles St. AME Church to denounce the recent murder of Postmaster Frazier and the maiming of his family in Lake City, South Carolina. Speakers protested the “Baker butchery” and appeal was made for funds to send a chosen delegation to Washington, DC to carry the protest of black Bostonians to President McKinley. Among those chosen were active anti-lynching spokespeople Rev. Dolphin Roberts, Edwin Garrison Walker, and William H. Lewis. The League passed a resolution demanding that President McKinley appoint another black man to replace Baker as postmaster, commending southern newspapers that condemning the murder, and insisted that the US

⁸⁷⁸ Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch*, 118-119; Chestnut, “Lynching: Ida B. Wells Barnett and the Outrage Over the Frazier Baker Murder”; Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 117. “A Negro Post Master Killed,” *Charleston Weekly News and Courier*, March 2, 1898.

government call out the military to protect African American appointees in the South.⁸⁷⁹

Despite this initial mobilization, the League met a month later to call attention to “the apparent lukewarm efforts of the government to apprehend perpetrators of the Baker murder.”⁸⁸⁰

The Baker lynching continued to occupy the agenda of the Colored National League over the following year. The members watched as the federal government brought charges against the alleged perpetrators, only to have the jury fail to render a guilty verdict. In addition to observing the trial, black Bostonians became increasingly concerned with the condition of Mrs. Baker and her children. One of the major conduits for aid to the Bakers was Rev. Dr. John L. Dart, the president of the Normal and Industrial Institute in Charleston, South Carolina. The Colored National League hosted Dart on his trips to Boston where he appealed for support of the Baker family.

Dart’s politics clashed with those of some black Bostonians, but the Colored National League nonetheless became an important ally in raising money and thinking of how best to care for the Bakers. One point that conflicted with Bostonian calls for immediate action was Dart’s plea for black men in the South to refrain from taking government positions. “I do not think it wise for colored men who remain in the south to jeopardize their lives by taking government positions in small localities,” he told a meeting of the Colored National League in July, 1899. Echoing the sentiment of southern spokespeople like Booker T. Washington, Dart advocated, “Instead of seeking these petty places [African Americans should] build themselves up in business, get money, get

⁸⁷⁹ “Colored People’s Protest,” *Boston Daily Globe*, March 2, 1898.

⁸⁸⁰ “Lively Discussion,” *Boston Daily Globe*, April 13, 1898.

property, gain a foothold in their community...show the white people that they can meet them upon the nondebateable grounds of mutual local interest...and establish good citizenship among ourselves.”⁸⁸¹

As the Colored National League debated how best to aid the Baker family, white activist Lillian Jewett mobilized a movement to relocate the Baker family to Boston. Jewett was relatively unknown by most Bostonians at the time, and the lack of knowledge of her background agitated, in part, the opposition to her leadership. Jewett was encouraged by Rev. Benjamin W. Farris, the minister of St. Paul’s Baptist Church, who arranged for her to speak on July 16, 1899. In much of the discussion surrounding Jewett, speakers drew comparisons with the anti-slavery movement. Ferris compared Jewett to Harriet Beecher Stowe, declaring that, “God has frequently touched the heart of a woman when he wanted a great work performed...He put the pen in the hand of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Now he is once more touching the heart of a woman.”⁸⁸²

This comparison to Stowe was one which Jewett heartily embraced and she declared that her mission was to bring the Baker family north, not only for their own well-being, but to draw publicity for the anti-lynching cause. Abolitionists often presented former enslaved black men and women to crowds during slavery and Jewett hoped to use similar strategies to raise sympathy and funds against lynching. “Something must be done to bring to our people a true picture of the conditions south,” Jewett told the crowd. “Bring the Baker family here to Boston. Let them see the helpless children, the

⁸⁸¹ Hux, “Lillian Clayton Jewett and the Rescue of the Baker Family, 1899-1900.,” 14-15; “Discussed Baker Tragedy,” *Boston Daily Globe*, July 12, 1899. See also: Chestnut, “Lynching: Ida B. Wells Barnett and the Outrage Over the Frazier Baker Murder.”

⁸⁸² *Boston Herald*, July 17, 1899, quoted in Hux, “Lillian Clayton Jewett and the Rescue of the Baker Family, 1899-1900.,” 17.

maimed and destitute mother, whose husband and little one were killed.”⁸⁸³ Jewett hoped to reignite Boston’s anti-slavery sentiment by exhibiting the living victims of lynching. As Stowe had done with slavery, Jewett hoped to show the damage lynching had done to Baker’s family and mobilize white sympathy in the North and South.

However, despite Lillian Jewett’s apparently altruistic motives, some of the members of the Colored National League were immediately skeptical of a relatively unknown white woman marshaling support for a cause they had urged for years. Jewett’s opponents were not opposed to white assistance; indeed they had worked actively with white allies for decades. For example, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, one of Jewett’s most vocal adversaries, worked with white women like Edna Cheney to organize the first conference of the National Association of Colored Women in 1895. The opposition to Jewett arose primarily from the fact that she seemed to be an outsider attempting to take credit away from the organization. For the members of the Colored National League, who were in a tenuous political position in Boston already, to cede control of one of their main causes to an unknown white woman would be a severe blow to their organization and racial pride.

Within a week of Jewett’s debut, the Colored National League convened a meeting to discuss Jewett’s emergence in Boston’s anti-lynching movement. As an article regarding the meeting in the *Boston Daily Globe* explained, “It is not that the colored people of Boston are adverse to having her go south...but the alleged attempt, as some members of the Colored National League declare, to snatch from them credit which

⁸⁸³ *Boston Herald*, July 17, 1899.

belongs to them on account of this Baker murder agitation.”⁸⁸⁴ As the League meeting began to address the recent controversy, President I. D. Barnett had the League secretary to read the correspondence between the League and Mrs. Baker. This correspondence, which covered over a year, along with the recognition of \$35 that the League had sent to the Bakers was proof, the League argued, that they should have priority in deciding the best strategy.

Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin addressed the crowd about her apprehension over the attention given to Jewett. Ruffin, the leader of Boston’s Woman’s Era Club, was a principal spokeswoman for the interests of African American women in Boston and the nation. Ruffin had shared the stage with Jewett at the prior meeting and was deeply concerned by her recent rise to prominence. Ruffin argued that black Boston had the strength in both resources and fortitude to bring the Baker family north if that was decided to be the best solution. “I have strong pride in New England colored people,” Ruffin declared; “the Colored National League...should take charge of this business of bringing Mrs. Baker and her family north to Boston...there are loyal, self sacrificing colored women, who can go south and bring that family up north.”⁸⁸⁵

Ruffin recognized the tenuous political position of African Americans and cautioned black Bostonians to be skeptical of any sudden emergence of white support. “We must not be governed by sentiment,” Ruffin cautioned. “We must be careful how we move, for the position of the race today is a critical one, and we should carefully analyze the efforts of those who are so anxious about our people. We should not fly up when

⁸⁸⁴ “Not All Agree,” *Boston Daily Globe*, July 26, 1899.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid.

some chit of a white girl rises and declares she will go south to bring up that family.”

Ruffin also confronted the comparisons between Jewett and Harriet Beecher Stowe. “I am not carried away by some person who springs up like a mushroom and is heralded all over the country as the new Harriet Beecher Stowe,” Ruffin announced. Stowe and other white women allies, Ruffin explained, “did not spring forth in one night.” Ruffin and the other opponents of Jewett were hesitant to throw their support behind anyone before the person’s true motives were understood and were not about to have their authority usurped by the ‘chit of a white girl.’ “Is this not a humiliation to this League,” Ruffin asked, “to have this thing happen, after it had devoted so much of its time in keeping up this agitation concerning the Baker family?...to the league alone belongs the credit for all that has been done for that family since the unfortunate happening in Lake City.”

Ruffin’s comments regarding Jewett caused quite a stir among the League members, among whom were some of Jewett’s supporters. Rev. Benjamin Ferris took exception to Ruffin’s referring to Jewett as a “chit of a white girl” and thought that Ruffin had misrepresented Jewett. Ferris declared that Jewett was wealthy and was willing to fund the relocation of the Bakers. Ruffin immediately countered that she knew nothing of Jewett’s being wealthy or having money to put towards the cause.⁸⁸⁶ Other Jewett supporters rose to counter Ruffin’s allegations. Isaac Allen, an elected official and proud supporters of the Republican Party, accused the League of accomplishing nothing and rather declared that the real political power of black Boston was among “those who go to colored churches and support them.” Other members of the League were hesitant to pick a side in the argument. J. S. Gaines argued against the League’s getting dragged into a

⁸⁸⁶ Ruffin’s sentiment is supported by records of Jewett’s filing for Bankruptcy in 1898, see Hux, “Lillian Clayton Jewett,” 16.

fight. Mark R. de Demortie, Boston boot maker and son-in-law to George T. Downing, declared that he wanted the Baker family to come to Boston.⁸⁸⁷ “I don’t care who brings her, so she is brought here,” Demortie told an inflamed audience. “We need not wrangle here over our shortcomings or those of others. We want to show Boston people how a Negro family suffers.” At the conclusion of the meeting, Ruffin’s motion and the protests of others were referred to the executive committee and the meeting was adjourned. Despite the controversy, Jewett made good on her promise to bring the Baker family to Boston in August 1899.⁸⁸⁸

The controversy over the Baker lynching placed Ruffin and the Colored National League at the center of the debates over the place of African Americans in Boston within the national anti-lynching movement. As a *Boston Globe* reporter observed, “The expressions of individual opinion ... seemed to indicate that a big gulf has been made among the colored population of [Boston] by the untactful manner in which this matter of the Baker case has been handled.”⁸⁸⁹ While some were willing to cede power to white spokespeople, the League saw itself and the Boston community as leaders in a larger movement and as such was highly critical of the attempts by others to usurp the authority of African American leadership. Through public action and the press, Ruffin and the League sought to provide an example to black women and men throughout the nation of the primacy African Americans should hold in their own uplift. Black men and women could not depend on the support of white leaders or the government, they felt, but must mobilize themselves behind racial and political unity.

⁸⁸⁷ Brown, *Black Daughter of the Revolution*, 56.

⁸⁸⁸ Hux, “Lillian Clayton Jewett,” 21.

The tragedy of the Baker family and the weak federal response contributed to the rising disillusionment with McKinley and the Republican Party in Boston's black community. Most significantly, in 1899, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the Colored National League mounted a public campaign denouncing the inaction of the McKinley administration and advocating the division of African American votes.

“There is always a way, and where there is no will there is no way”

Despite calls for united support for McKinley, by 1899 the president's inaction against lynching caused the Colored National League to make their most outspoken attack against the president and federal inaction. Led by Archibald Grimké, the Colored National League held meetings advocating dividing the African American vote and in a widely circulated pamphlet, condemned President McKinley and the hypocrisy of US imperial claims in the face of southern atrocities against African Americans.

Grimké was born enslaved in Colleton County, South Carolina in 1849. The son of Henry Grimké, a member of a prominent white Carolinian family, Grimké was a nephew of white abolitionist sisters Sarah and Angelina Grimké. Following Henry's death in 1852, Grimké moved with his mother to Charleston where he attended a school for black children. During the Civil War, Grimké escaped slavery and eventually enrolled at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania in 1867. In 1874, Grimké graduated from Harvard University Law School, which he attended with help from Angelina. In 1883, Grimké edited the *Boston Hub*, an African American Republican newspaper. Although originally a staunch Republican supporter, by the 1890s Grimké began to take a more independent stance politically. By the twentieth century, Grimké publically denounced African

American allegiance to the Republicans, eventually joining William M. Trotter in the Niagara Movement and NAACP.⁸⁹⁰

During a meeting of the League in September 1899 Grimké called upon African Americans to look to themselves for support rather than to churches or political parties. “Perhaps some put their whole trust in party action and look to the national government for aid, and mean to appeal to the American people to redress our wrongs. Well, I answer don’t. We have tried them all and in every hour of our direst need we have found them broken crutches for our arms, and extinguished lanterns for our feet.”⁸⁹¹ Grimké rejected what he termed the ‘voluntary effacement’ of some black leaders in the South. “Crush us with brute force, slaughter us, exterminate us, but never will we efface ourselves politically or otherwise for the sake of appeasing your hated race prejudice.”⁸⁹² For Grimké and other members of the Colored National League the federal government and the major political parties had failed to protect African Americans and provide assistance in uplift. Racial progress, the League argued, could only come by the race’s turning inward and uplifting itself. “Let our race get this saving strength,” Grimké urged, “unless it is to be doomed.”⁸⁹³

Only several months after the turmoil surrounding the Bakers, the Colored National League met to endorse and send the “Open Letter” to President McKinley. The letter was formally presented by the Colored National League on October 4, 1899. The

⁸⁹⁰ Dickson D. Bruce, “Archibald Henry Grimke,” in *African American Lives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 360-361; Bruce, *Portrait of a Black Independent*.

⁸⁹¹ “Not the Church or the State,” *Boston Daily Globe*, September 20, 1899.

⁸⁹² Ibid.

⁸⁹³ Ibid.

letter from the Colored National League was an explicit condemnation of the federal government and federal inaction on lynching. This letter marks a turning point in black politics and provides a point of departure for more radical political action. With this document its ratifiers codified the sentiment that no matter the administration, the rights of African Americans were not going to be protected by the federal government. In their address to McKinley, the League members affirmed their commitment to race and not party as their public political identity. This pamphlet was circulated widely and its author, Archibald Grimké received responses from prominent leaders in the United States and abroad.

In their “Open Letter to President McKinley by the People of Massachusetts” the Colored National League focused on several areas of complaint that were subjects of debate in League meetings. The members sought to expose the denial of constitutional rights and protections, the failure of the federal government to protect African Americans and stop lynching, and the hypocrisy of the United States’ invasion of Cuba, while arguing the unconstitutionality of federal interference in southern states.

The Colored National League argued that African Americans were entitled, as citizens, to all the rights and protections guaranteed them by the Constitution. “We ask,” the letter read, “for the free and full exercise of all the rights of American freemen, guaranteed to us by the Constitution and the Union...for what belongs to us by the high sanction of Constitution and law, and the Democratic genius of our institutions and civilization.”⁸⁹⁴ These rights, the author argued, were infringed upon in every southern

⁸⁹⁴ “Open Letter to President McKinley,” 2.

state “by mobs, by lawless legislatures, and nullifying conventions, combinations, and conspiracies.”⁸⁹⁵

What made these violations particularly egregious and what drew the League’s ire particularly toward McKinley, was the perceived neglect of his administration in the face of such degradations. “Rights are everywhere throughout the South denied to us...openly, defiantly, under your eyes, in your constructive and actual presence...under a government, which we are bound to defend in war, and which is equally bound to furnish us in peace protection, at home and abroad.”⁸⁹⁶ The federal government, the members of the League argued, had a constitutional obligation to protect African Americans from violence and the infringement on their rights. The refusal to do so amounted to the McKinley administration’s tacit consent to the violence.

The Colored National League was particularly outraged at the McKinley Administration’s defense that, due to Supreme Court decision, the President and the federal government had no authority to intervene in southern states.⁸⁹⁷ The League argued that the rulings on constitutionality were not fixed and permanent, but rather that the President had the obligation to challenge unjust rulings. Writing about government inaction following the race riot in Wilmington, North Carolina, the League argued that it was a failure of political will, not unconstitutionality, which prevented the government from acting. “We well understood at the time, sir,” the League explained, “not withstanding your plea of constitutional inability to cope with the rebellion in

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁷ See *United States v. Harris*, 160 US 629 (1883).

Wilmington, that where there is a will with constitutional lawyers and rulers there is always a way, and where there is no will there is no way. We well knew that you lacked the will, and, therefore, the way to meet that emergency.”⁸⁹⁸

The League found declarations of the constitutional limits on federal authority to stop racial violence hypocritical in the face of McKinley’s involvement in the Spanish American War and the eventual United States occupation of Cuba. The League argued that if the federal government had constitutional authority to intervene against the Spanish in Cuba, then it could intervene on behalf of African Americans in southern states. “[You], in your judgment, gave to the Cuban question a federal aspect, which provoked at last the armed interposition of our government in the affairs of that island, and this was ‘the chronic condition of disturbance in Cuba so injurious and menacing to our interests and tranquility, as well as shocking to our sentiments of humanity.’”⁸⁹⁹ The League asked, “Are crying national transgressions and injustices more ‘injurious and menacing’ to the Republic, as well as ‘shocking to the sentiments of humanity,’ when committed by a foreign state, in a foreign territory, against a foreign people, than when they are committed by a portion of our own people against a portion of our own people at home?”⁹⁰⁰

The League concluded that in order to garner southern support for his foreign policy, the president avoided confronting racial oppression and lynching. “We felt,” the

⁸⁹⁸ “Open Letter to President McKinley,” 5.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., 10. This quotation is from McKinley’s Second State of the Union Address, December 5, 1898. Grimke and the members of the Colored National League criticized this speech for neglecting to address incidents of racial violence in favor of focusing on the United States’ interventions in Cuba and the Philippines.

⁹⁰⁰ “Open Letter to President McKinley,” 10.

League wrote, “that the President of the United States, in order to win the support of the South to his policy of ‘criminal aggression’ in the far East, was ready and willing to shut his eyes, ears and lips to the ‘criminal aggression’ of that section of the Constitution and the laws of the land.”⁹⁰¹ The Colored National League argued that if the President and his cabinet could make the case for the federal intervention into foreign nations, then surely, if he desired, the President could use federal authority to suppress southern violence against African Americans. “If,” the League concluded their letter, “you have the disposition, as we know that you have the power, we are confident that you will be able to find a constitutional way to reach us in our extremity, and our enemies also, who are likewise enemies to great public interests and national tranquility.”⁹⁰²

The letter from the League caused a stir, and its author received immediate response from throughout the country. Booker T. Washington wrote to Grimké thanking him for sending the letter which he regarded as “straight forward and manly...I trust the President will be touched by the directness and of the appeal made.”⁹⁰³ George T. Downing, the Rhode Island African American leader and strong advocate of black political independence, celebrated the letter and criticized the lack of more vocal African American activism. “Would that we made such expressions and acted them out more

⁹⁰¹ Ibid., 7; The statement of “‘criminal aggression’ in the far East” is in reference to McKinley’s invasion of the Philippines.

⁹⁰² “Open Letter to President McKinley,” 11.

⁹⁰³ Booker T. Washington to Archibald Grimke. November 20, 1899 , Archibald Grimke Papers, Box 39-6 Folder 121, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

frequently,” he wrote.⁹⁰⁴ Another letter, from St. Mary’s Church in Philadelphia declared the Colored National League’s appeal, “a terrible arraignment of the National Administration’s neglect of duty to the Negro.” This letter argued that McKinley was willing to sacrifice the welfare of African Americans for the sake of political gain and reelection. Speaking of the League’s allegations of hypocrisy in McKinley’s foreign policy, the author of the letter declared, “I am constrained to regard this Government as the Pharisee among the nations, condemning others whilst neglecting itself, and President McKinley is the modern Pontius Pilate. He seems to make all things subservient to the selfish expediency that will secure a second term.”⁹⁰⁵

Katie V. Smith, from Cambridge, Massachusetts, wrote to Grimké to laud his letter to the president and also urged him and the Colored National League to continue their anti-lynching agitation. “I know not,” Smith praised, “who else could use the English language so magnificently or so irresistibly in the cause.”⁹⁰⁶ Smith called for the reemergence of a protest movement in the spirit of the anti-slavery movement. “Then must be repeated,” she announced, “the thirty years’ agitation and the terrible retribution which preceded emancipation.”⁹⁰⁷

Smith encouraged Grimké to look beyond critiques of the president, but rather shift his attacks to congress in the hopes of gaining legislative remedies for lynching. She

⁹⁰⁴ George T. Downing to Archibald Grimke, December 2, 1899, Archibald Grimke Papers, Box 39-4 Folder 91, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

⁹⁰⁵ James McDermott to Archibald Grimke, April 12, 1900, Archibald Grimke Papers, Box 39-7 Folder 129, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

⁹⁰⁶ Katie V. Smith to Archibald Grimke, November 23, 1899, Archibald Grimke Papers, Box 39-5 Folder 103, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

⁹⁰⁷ Smith to Grimke.

asked Grimké to investigate the possible solutions for ending racial violence and to spread these lessons throughout the country. “I beg, dear friend, that you who have started this fire of indignant rebuke, do not stop here. Educate the nation...that when the crisis comes, as it may soon, there will be knowledge how to act...There is a way. Show it to the blind, ask it of the wise. Let us state it so clearly that it must be taken.”⁹⁰⁸

Perhaps inspired by letters like that from Smith, Grimké did more than just rhetorically propose solutions to the constitutional dilemma; he sought advice and investigated judicial precedent that would make way for challenges to lynching. For example, on January 20, 1900 he received correspondence from US congressmen regarding “a possible measure for the prevention and punishment of lynching.”⁹⁰⁹ “A bill for the purpose might well provide for the use of the military power to preserve the peace of the United States in neighborhoods where lynchings have actually occurred...and must, of course, contain a most critical provision for the selection of the jury in proceedings in the Federal courts to punish lynching.”⁹¹⁰

The justification for federal intervention, George White argued in a letter to James Moody, was based on a recent Supreme Court decision in *Cunningham vs. Nagel*. In their opinion, the court decided that the Attorney General of the United States had the authority to appoint a US Marshal to protect Supreme Court Justices and thus the use of

⁹⁰⁸ Smith to Grimké.

⁹⁰⁹ Albert E. Pillsbury to Archibald Grimké, November 20, 1900, Archibald Grimké Papers, Box 39-5 Folder 101, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC. Pillsbury forwarded a letter to white Republican Congressman James Moody from African American Congressman George H. White discussing how to pass legislation stopping lynching. George White was one of the last black men to serve in the US Congress until the late twentieth century and introduced the first federal anti-lynching bill to congress.

⁹¹⁰ Pillsbury to Grimké.

force by that Marshal in his duty was protected. “We hold it to be an incontrovertible principle,” the court opined, “that the government of the United States may, by means of physical force, exercised through its official agents execute on every foot of American soil the powers and functions that belong to it. This necessarily involves the power to command obedience to its laws, and hence the power to keep the peace to that extent.”⁹¹¹ Congressman White argued that this decision gave the federal government power to protect African Americans from violence. “I see no constitutional reason against applying the same power of protection to a citizen, as to an officer, of the United States.”⁹¹² If the United States had the power to protect the lives and property of citizens outside of the country then, “Why has it not,” White asked, “the same power within the states?” While White affirmed that the general power of domestic regulation fell to the states, he did not believe that this prevented the federal government from acting within the states.

White concluded his argument by asserting that the Federal Government had the authority to prevent lynching based on the Fourteenth Amendment. “It is not a great stretch to hold that when a state suffers lynching, by not interfering or preventing it, it deprives the victim the equal protection of the laws...it also suffers him to be deprived of life without due process of law, in violation of the due process clause.”⁹¹³ White argued that while the Fourteenth Amendment prohibited states from making certain types of laws, it did not exclude the United States from exercising power within that state.

⁹¹¹ *Cunningham v. Nagle*, 135 US 1, 60.

⁹¹² *Pillsbury to Grimke*.

⁹¹³ *Pillsbury to Grimke*.

The impact of Grimké's letter reached beyond the borders of the United States. Through his contacts as American consul in the Dominican Republic, Grimké took messages of outrage fomented in Bostonian meetings to an international audience. James L. Drew, the interpreter for the mayor of Adjuntas, Puerto Rico, responded to Grimké praising the letter. "I must compliment you and other leaders of our oppressed race in those United States for the manly and fearless stand which you have made on the Negro Question of the South...The pen is mightier than the sword and men like you who know how to wield it ought so to do with the energy of your manhood in defense of an oppressed and long suffering people."⁹¹⁴

Despite the efforts of Grimké and the Colored National League, the government did not reform federal policy towards lynching. The continued inaction on the part of the Federal Government and the major political parties led Edwin Garrison Walker to accept the nomination from the National Negro Party in time for the 1900 presidential election. Chosen for the top of the ticket was Edwin Garrison Walker with former Louisiana Lieutenant-Governor P. B. S. Pinchback as his running mate. The platform for this new party focused on the preservation of the rights of all US citizens without regard to race, color, or condition; opposition to monopolies; and federal government control of all public conveyances, telegraph and telephone operations. When Walker received news of his potential nomination, he reiterated the independent ideology of the National Negro Party. "I believe one of the principles of the party was for colored men either to refrain

⁹¹⁴ James L. Drew to Archibald Grimke, January 14, 1900, Archibald Grimke Papers, Box 39-4 Folder 91, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

from voting or to vote for this new party,” Walker explained. “There is a pretty general feeling among the colored people against the Republican Party.”⁹¹⁵

Although the party was not successful in its campaign, the creation of the National Negro Party represented a rejection of the major political parties and a faith in the organization of African Americans based on racial unity. In 1900, at one of his final public appearances, Walker again condemned federal inaction against southern violence and charged a younger generation of African Americans to assert themselves against injustice. “It is a terrible thing,” Walker declared, “to contemplate the condition of the Negro race today, outraged and murdered by the people of the South, but the South is not alone to blame. Ninety percent of these murders could have been averted had the United States Government acted... You are citizens of the United States... assert your manhood, that is the remedy.”⁹¹⁶ By the end of his life Edwin Garrison Walker and others like him had moved from a distrust of Republican candidates to doubt about Democrats as well, and finally to a conclusion that the interests of African American civil rights were not being served by the United States Government and that the only solution was through political power grounded in race-based unity.

However, black Bostonians would fail to muster the sufficient influence to change the national agenda, an increased feeling of political isolation would lead to a nationally recognized moment of violence against Booker T. Washington in 1903. This moment of radical protest would lead leaders like W. E. B Du Bois to join with African Americans in Boston in protest against political moderation and in favor of racial autonomy and pride.

⁹¹⁵ “Negroes to Put Up A Ticket,” *The Baltimore Sun*, June 7, 1900.

⁹¹⁶ “Negroes Attack Roosevelt,” *New York Times*, August 17, 1900; “For the Negro,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 17, 1900.

Conclusion

“A Union Among Ourselves”

In 1901, Boston's *Colored American Magazine* published an article by Pauline Hopkins about the life of Edwin Garrison Walker. As part of her “Famous Men of the Negro Race” series, Hopkins acknowledged Walker as an influential force in African American history and politics. “The exploits, the sacrifices of these men,” Hopkins wrote, “were performed for the education and advancement of ages yet unborn, as well as for the present generation.”⁹¹⁷ In particular, Hopkins celebrated Walker's refusal to give his loyalty to either of the major political parties although it cost him personally. “Lawyer Walker could not brook the crack of the party whip when it commanded him to do violence to his own best promptings in the interest of his race...such things operated against his worldly advancement.”⁹¹⁸ Hopkins declared that Walker had embodied an ideology which placed racial uplift over personal ambition and partisan loyalty. In her memorial to Walker, Hopkins celebrated his legacy of independent politics and sought to inspire further generations to follow his model.

This project traces the evolution of black independent politics from the end of the Civil War through the turn of the twentieth century. From Edwin Garrison Walker's denunciation of the Fourteenth Amendment, through the black support he led for Benjamin Butler, Hugh O'Brien, and Grover Cleveland, African Americans held the

⁹¹⁷ Hopkins, “Edwin Garrison Walker,” 358.

⁹¹⁸ “Famous men of the Negro Race.”

political parties accountable for their position on civil rights. In the 1890s as racial violence and disenfranchisement increased across the South, African Americans in Boston solidified their independent position in their increased denunciation of Republican inaction.

In her memorial, Hopkins celebrated the service of Walker in the state legislature and his opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment. Through their outspoken critique of early Reconstruction policies, Boston's African Americans affirmed their support of black voting rights nationally. Black Bostonians could vote relatively freely under Massachusetts law, but saw their rights as bound up with those of African Americans in southern states. Indeed, in their debates over the support of Grant or Greeley in 1872, African Americans always had one eye on the condition of those in the South, even as they looked to conditions locally.

In addition to national elections, African Americans in Boston fought out their electoral destiny locally. They sought to repudiate the Republican Party through their support of Benjamin Butler. The success of Butler, they hoped, would send a message to national party leadership that Republicans, in Massachusetts at least, could not take black votes for granted. The challenges and personal frustrations faced in local elections helped solidify African American independent positions while creating divisions in black political leadership.

Despite the often heated political rhetoric, African American Republican loyalists and independents joined together to challenge racial inequality and discrimination locally. In their successful opposition to discrimination in public accommodations, they affirmed the need for state action to protect the rights of African Americans and showed

that unified protest could force the mobilization of state police power. These successes, however, also demonstrated the limits on African American freedom in Massachusetts. Despite African American access to many aspects of American freedom, the continued refusal of business owners to serve black patrons belied myths of black equality in Boston.

In her praise for Walker, Hopkins celebrated his cooperation with Boston's Irish community. During the 1880s black and Irish allies declared a mutual sympathy. Black Bostonians hoped to secure the support of Irish Americans through their support of the cause of Irish Home Rule and independence. Support for Irish nationalism combined with ideologies of independent politics in the successful election of Democrat Hugh O'Brien as Boston's first Irish-born mayor. Black support for O'Brien was on public display during the dedication of the monument to Crispus Attucks. This monument was a symbol both of African American's integral role in America's independence and of Irish resistance to British rule. It was a further example of the successes that could be achieved by political independence.

African Americans sought further rewards for independent politics following the successful election of Grover Cleveland. Cleveland's black supporters looked to the Democratic president for political office. While initially optimistic, independent supporters discovered the limits of their support. While some like Trotter received political appointments, the administration rebuffed petitions from Downing. Further, Trotter's protracted and controversial confirmation process showed the realities of American racial tensions and that support for Democratic candidates was not by any means welcomed by all party members.

As Hopkins's work demonstrates, African American women were informed participants in Boston's political culture and added another voice to discussions of black political affiliations. As voters in the city school committee elections, black women exercised their choice of political parties and were influential participants at the polls. Access to the vote informed commentary on black women's suffrage in the *Woman's Era* newspaper. Through the press Josephine Ruffin and other black women took their local experience to a national audience and sought to build a national black women's political movement in the image of Boston's. Like Ruffin, Hopkins hoped to reach a national audience with her novel, *Contending Forces*. Hopkins hoped to use fiction to shape the opinion of readers, who might not subscribe to a newspaper like the *Woman's Era*. Through the vehicle of a romantic novel, Hopkins leveled sharp critiques at black partisanship and condemned African Americans who chose personal ambition over racial solidarity.

In the formation of the Colored National League and the organized opposition to lynching, black Bostonians affirmed calls for racial solidarity. The Colored National League formalized collective dedication to independent politics. As an organization it looked at the inaction of the federal government in the South and grew increasingly disillusioned with support of either party, rather advocating racial solidarity and political autonomy. While during the 1880s black independents campaigned for Democratic candidates, after Cleveland's defeat in 1888 they increasingly positioned themselves as outside the two parties. Race, not party, they argued, should be the only unifying political factor. The public rebuke of McKinley affirmed this position and would lead to the open rejection of future Republican candidates Roosevelt and Taft.

The legacy of this history was embodied in the commemoration of the death of Boston's most prominent political independent. Edwin Garrison Walker died of pneumonia in January 1901 and in his memorial ceremony on February 12th the Colored National League used their memory of his work to affirm its stance against party affiliation and staunchly in favor of racial pride and political independence.⁹¹⁹ Archibald Grimké gave an extended eulogy lauding Walker's political independence and encouraging listeners to continue Walker's work. "[Walker] was among the first of the colored leaders of the country to perceive the folly of political solidarity for the race...to understand how little can be obtained from them by slavish devotion to either one or the other at the polls."⁹²⁰ "He urged," Grimké reminded the audience, "union among us, union among ourselves, the formation of an independent political organization of colored voters, strong enough in the North at least to dictate terms of either party and to inflict condign punishment upon it on occasion at the polls."⁹²¹ Grimké called on listeners to continue Walker's strategy of political independence. "Walker is dead, but his manly and uncompromising devotion to his race lives after him. May we imitate him in the single heartedness of his service and sympathy, and fall like him, when the time comes, sword in hand and with determined faces to the foe."⁹²² Among those who listened to Grimké's words were men who would be influential in the next generation of African American

⁹¹⁹ "Walker's Worth," *Boston Daily Globe*, February 13, 1901.

⁹²⁰ Archibald Grimké "Edwin Garrison Walker," Archibald Grimké Papers, Box 39-19 Folder 358, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.

⁹²¹ "Edwin Garrison Walker."

⁹²² "Edwin Garrison Walker."

politics in declaring that racial solidarity and not partisan authority drove the struggle for equality.

Epilogue

Commitments to traditions of black independent politics and the use of the ballot as a political tool were on violent display in July 1903. At a meeting of the National Negro Business League held at the Columbus Avenue AME Zion Church, a group of black activists including journalists William Monroe Trotter and George Forbes attacked Booker T. Washington and publically declared their opposition to his advocacy of political moderation. The protestors sprinkled cayenne pepper on the platform and hissed when Washington's name was announced. Former political independent turned Washington supporter T. Thomas Fortune, District Attorney William H. Lewis and lawyer Edward Everett Brown clashed with Washington's opponents in a scene that the press described as a riot. By the end of the night, at least one man was stabbed and Trotter's sister was alleged to have stabbed a police officer with a hat pin.⁹²³ Trotter and African American butler Granville Martin were arrested after police stormed the venue to disperse the crowd. "Surrounded by a struggling mass of angry people of his own race, in the confusion of fainting women and fighting men," the *Boston Daily Globe* explained, "Booker T. Washington met his first really hostile demonstration in Boston."⁹²⁴

One of the central catalysts of the objections to Washington was his public downplay of agitation for black voting and the embrace of Washington as the leader of

⁹²³ "Negroes Make a Riotous Scene," *Boston Daily Globe*, July 31, 1903; Fox, *The Guardian of Boston*, 49-58; Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 300-301.

⁹²⁴ "Negroes Make a Riotous Scene."

the race by Republican President Theodore Roosevelt.⁹²⁵ Washington embodied the compromise within the Republican Party that independents had denounced for decades and his prominence within the administration helped solidify independent opposition to the party and motivated the formation of new national organizations like the Niagara Movement.

As the room cleared and the dust settled following the ‘Boston Riot,’ William Monroe Trotter and African American butler Granville Martin were in jail facing charges of disturbing a public meeting; they would each receive a thirty-day sentence.⁹²⁶ Trotter was an outspoken opponent of Washington’s and through his newspaper the *Guardian*, circulated nationally critiques of Washington and his advocacy of industrial education in preference to political agitation. During the confrontation with Washington, Trotter attempted to read a series of questions he had prepared for the occasion. One in particular showed Trotter’s belief in the use of the ballot and showed his impression of Washington’s moderation. “In an interview with the Washington Post,” Trotter alleged, “you are quoted as saying... ‘I hold that no people in the same economic and educational condition as the masses of the black people of the south should make politics a matter of the first importance in connection with their development.’” “Do you not know,” Trotter asked Washington, “that the ballot is the only self-protection for any class of people in this country?”⁹²⁷ Trotter was the son of one of Boston’s early and most outspoken

⁹²⁵ Although denounced by opponents like Trotter for not advocating black suffrage, Washington did significant work behind the scenes and financed significant challenges to disenfranchisement. Much of this work has been obscured by scholars until recently, see Robert J. Norrell, *Up From History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009).

⁹²⁶ “Got Thirty Days Each,” *Boston Daily Globe*, August 8, 1903.

⁹²⁷ “Negroes Make a Riotous Scene;” Fox, *The Guardian of Boston*, 50.

political independents, James Monroe Trotter. Like his father, William refused to declare loyalty to any particular party and through his paper advocated African Americans' using their votes strategically to support only those candidates who would protect African American civil rights.⁹²⁸

Almost immediately after Trotter's arrest, Boston's black independents reacted by denouncing Washington and declaring their political non-partisanship. In August 1903, Archibald Grimké and others met at Trotter's home in Dorchester to form a Massachusetts branch of the Negro Suffrage League. "The start of the league," organizers declared, "is to consolidate the colored vote into an independent mass, to segregate the negro politically."⁹²⁹ In the aftermath of the 'Boston riot,' the League declared its opposition to Washington. "Booker Washington," the League organizers argued, "while pretending to be friend of the negro, has really traded with his power. He has declared for the disenfranchisement of negroes so that southerners might be pleased."⁹³⁰ The League chose Trotter to be secretary and elected Grimké as president of the Boston branch. "We mean to throw the negro vote," Grimké declared, "to the side which will give us the most of it."⁹³¹

The League celebrated Trotter's and Martin's release from jail in November 1903 and used the event to continue its condemnation of Washington its advocacy of political independence. Grimké declared, "If we voters in the North would protect the rights of the voters in the South we have got to be an independent party...our position must be like the

⁹²⁸ Schneider, *Boston Confronts Jim Crow*, 112-113.

⁹²⁹ "Anti-Washington," *Boston Daily Globe*, August 18, 1903.

⁹³⁰ Ibid.

⁹³¹ Ibid.

Irish party in the English parliament...let us get rid of the everlasting talk of gratitude to any party.”⁹³² Grimké advocated that, in light of the increased disenfranchisement of voters in the South, black voters in the North had a responsibility to make their presence felt at the polls in the interest of oppressed southern voters.

While Grimké and the Suffrage League attempted to galvanize political independence locally, the scene at the Negro Business League meeting and the subsequent incarcerations had a national impact and were significant in shaping the position of W. E. B. Du Bois in opposition to Washington. Du Bois was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts and was a classmate of Trotter’s at Harvard University. Unlike, his outspoken classmate, Du Bois had been moderate in his criticisms of Washington and worked closely with him while at Atlanta University and Tuskegee. In 1903, Du Bois became more critical of Washington. First, with his publication of *The Souls of Black Folk* including its essay “Of Booker T. Washington and Others,” Du Bois attacked Washington’s endorsement of industrial education over agitation for voting and civil rights. Following the ‘Boston riot,’ Du Bois became a more outspoken opponent of Washington.

The opposition of Trotter and others to Washington coupled with Trotter’s incarceration, had a profound effect on Du Bois. In a letter to Tuskegee Trustee George Peabody, Du Bois expressed his measured support for Trotter. “While I did then and do now condemn the disturbance, I nevertheless admire Mr. Trotter as a man and agree with him in his main contentions...As between him and Mr. Washington I unhesitantly believe

⁹³² “For His Rights,” *Boston Daily Globe*, November 8, 1903; see also “For a Black Man’s Party,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1903.

Mr. Trotter to be far nearer to the right.”⁹³³ Du Bois was more outspoken on the impact of the ‘Boston riot’ in his later recollections. In particular, in his posthumously published autobiography, he points to the incarceration of Trotter, by “Washington’s friends,” as a major catalyst. “I was not privy to this occurrence,” Du Bois recalled, “but the unfairness of the jail sentence helped lead me eventually to form the Niagara Movement, which later became the founding part of the NAACP.”⁹³⁴ For Du Bois, Trotter’s incarceration was proof of the extent to which Washington’s power reached and what was at stake for those who dared question or oppose him.

Du Bois and the Niagara Movement would take up the mantle of independent politics in the coming decades. Committed to racial pride and political autonomy, the Movement’s founders like Trotter, Du Bois, and Clement Morgan continued to reject Republican affiliation and urged black voters to guard the interests of the race over all other considerations. When, in its 1906 “Address to the Country,” the Niagara Movement spoke of “the failure of the Republican Party in Congress” in its “plain, deliberate, and premeditated breach of promise,” which “stamps that party as guilty of obtaining votes under false pretense,” he was tapping into a tradition of black political critique that had been fomenting in Boston for decades.⁹³⁵

⁹³³ W. E. B. Du Bois to George Foster Peabody.

⁹³⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing my Life from the Last Decade in its First Century* Oxford ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1968; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 87. Citations refer to Oxford edition. Du Bois’s later sentiments are supported by his recollections in his 1940 autobiography *Dusk of Dawn*. Du Bois recalled, “When Trotter went to jail, my indignation overflowed.” W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, Oxford ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 44. Citations refer to Oxford edition; See also Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 300-304.

⁹³⁵ The Niagara Movement, “The Niagara Movement: Address to the Country,” in *Pamphlets and Leaflets by W. E. B. Du Bois*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (White Plains, NY: Kraus-Thomson Org. Ltd., 1986), 64.

A year later, in 1907, the Niagara Movement held a convention in Boston's Faneuil Hall. One of the central concerns of this gathering was the denunciation of the campaign of Republican William Howard Taft for president. In his speech Du Bois declared, "We call on the 250,000 free black voters of the North: Use your ballot to defeat Theodore Roosevelt, William H. Taft, or any man named by the present political dictatorship. Better vote for avowed enemies than for false friends."⁹³⁶ Before a Boston crowd, Du Bois spoke a language of political independence which was not only familiar, but informed by the political traditions within Boston's black community. Du Bois echoed a tradition of black political thought that refused to be subsumed under loyalty to a political party, but rather was grounded in racial solidarity and commitment to equality and civil rights, regardless of personal cost.

The study of black politics in northern cities like Boston, therefore, from the end of the Civil War through the beginning of the progressive era not only opens up new perspectives on nineteenth-century black political life, but perhaps helps us connect this past to the political strategies and ideas of urban black communities in the twentieth century and today.

⁹³⁶ "Cheer Name of Foraker," *Boston Daily Globe*, August 29, 1907; "Third Annual Meeting of the Niagara Movement, August 26-29, 1907 at Parker Memorial Hall Boston, Mass," in *Pamphlets and Leaflets by W. E. B. Du Bois*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (White Plains, NY: Kraus-Thomson Org. Ltd., 1986), 76.

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Archibald Grimké Papers
George T. Downing Papers
Ruffin Family Papers

Newspapers And Periodicals

Baltimore, MD

The Baltimore Sun

Boston, MA

Boston Advocate

Boston Courant

Boston Daily Advertiser

Boston Daily Globe

Boston Evening Transcript

The Boston Guardian

The Boston Herald

The Boston Hub

Boston Investigator

Colored American Magazine

Congregationalist and Boston Recorder

Emancipator & Republican

The Liberator

The Women's Era

Charleston, SC

Charleston Weekly News and Courier

Dallas, TX

The Dallas Morning News

Memphis, TN

The Commercial Advertiser

The Commercial Appeal

New Orleans, LA

The Daily Picayune

New York, NY

The New York Age

The New York Freeman

The New York Globe

The New York Times

Philadelphia, PA

The North American

Washington, DC

The Washington Bee

The Washington Post

Court Cases

Bowlin v. Lyon et al. 67 Iowa 536 (1885).

Burton v. Scherpf, 83 Mass. 133 (1861)

Civil Rights Cases, 109 U.S. 3 (1883).

Commonwealth v. Gee, 60 Mass. 174 (1850)
Commonwealth v. Sylvester, 95 Mass. 247 (1866)
McCrea v. Marsh, 78 Mass. 211 (1858)
United States v. Harris, 160 US 629 (1883).
Wood v. Leadbitter, 13 M. & W. 838 (1845).

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