"Citizens In The Making": Black Philadelphians, The Republican Party And Urban Reform, 1885-1913

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Abstract
“Citizens in the Making” broadens the scope of historical treatments of black politics at the end of the nineteenth century by shifting the focus of electoral battles away from the South, where states wrote disfranchisement into their constitutions. Philadelphia offers a municipal-level perspective on the relationship between African Americans, the Republican Party, and political and social reformers, but the implications of this study reach beyond one city to shed light on a nationwide effort to degrade and diminish black citizenship. I argue that black citizenship was constructed as alien and foreign in the urban North in the last decades of the nineteenth century and that this process operated in tension with and undermined the efforts of black Philadelphians to gain traction on their exercise of the franchise.

For black Philadelphians at the end of the nineteenth century, the franchise did not seem doomed or secure anywhere in the nation. Black Philadelphians pressed the Republican Party for the rights of citizenship as well as the spoils of partisanship, even as Republican enthusiasm for black rights waned and an energetic political reform movement defined black Philadelphians as unqualified for citizenship. “Citizens in the Making” shows how black participation and activism in municipal politics kept the local, state and, to some extent, the national Republican Party tethered to black constituencies and racial politics long after Reconstruction officially ended in 1877 with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South.

This study uses published and unpublished sources, including records from political and social reform organizations, the personal papers of white and black reformers, newspapers, court and church records. It reveals a consistent effort on the part of black Philadelphians to bring the rights of national citizenship to bear on the city’s politics. Philadelphia's disproportionately large and rapidly growing black population makes the city a useful starting point for demonstrating how the priorities of the Republican Party evolved after Reconstruction, rather than taking as a given the party’s disinterest in the fate of black citizens.

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“CITIZENS IN THE MAKING”:
BLACK PHILADELPHIANS, THE REPUBLICAN PARTY AND URBAN REFORM,
1885-1913
Julie Rebecca Davidow
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in
History
Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania
in
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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
2017

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“CITIZENS IN THE MAKING”: BLACK PHILADELPHIANS,
THE REPUBLICAN PARTY, AND URBAN REFORM, 1885-1913
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To Marcelo
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

By far the greatest joy of finishing my dissertation is the opportunity to thank the people who supported me throughout.

I entered graduate school for the first time in 1995 at the University of California, San Diego, intending to focus on the twentieth century. Instead, I encountered the work and teaching of Steve Hahn and Stephanie McCurry. They taught me new ways to think about the past and drew me into the nineteenth century. After an eight-year interlude as a newspaper reporter, I took up my graduate studies again at the University of Pennsylvania, this time to work directly with Steve and Stephanie.

Having Steve as my advisor was a great privilege. The big questions he asked never failed to enliven my work and broaden my ambitions. I am grateful for the years he stuck with me and my project despite numerous obstacles along the way.

I thank my committee. Stephanie brings fresh questions to well-worn topics and inspires and challenges her students to do the same. She sets the highest standard for discipline and rigor, which always pushed me to do more and aim higher. The research paper I wrote for her seminar evolved into one of my dissertation chapters in large part due to her close reading and incisive comments. My meetings with Tom Sugrue to discuss African American urban political history shaped my understanding of the literature and were crucial for helping me define where and how I wanted to intervene.
Along the way, I had the pleasure of working with Benjamin Nathans, Kathy Peiss, and Walter Licht, each of whom provided critical feedback in the early days of my project, when my unformed ideas needed it the most. Phoebe Kropp offered reassuring words and loaned me her office while I was studying for exams. As a teacher and scholar, Sheldon Hackney modeled intellectual rigor, generosity and good will. I am beyond grateful for the time I spent in a seminar on the South he co-taught with Steve and for the opportunity to work as his teaching assistant.

I am grateful for funding from the Mellon Foundation; the Center for the Study of the History of Nursing; the Hagley Center of Business, Technology and Society; the Doris G. Quinn Foundation; and the University of Pennsylvania. I was also fortunate to participate in several academic conferences, all of which challenged me to think about my project in new ways and greatly improved my dissertation. For these opportunities, I thank the George and Ann Richards Civil War Era Center at Pennsylvania State University, the Urban History Association, the American Historical Association, the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and the McNeil Center for Early American Studies of the University of Pennsylvania. I am especially grateful to the archivists, staff, faculty, and students at Penn’s Center for the Study of the History of Nursing, who warmly welcomed me into the fold as a researcher and provided an invaluable forum for presenting my work. Beyond Penn, Roger Lane generously loaned me his personal microfilm copies (and a microfilm reader!) of the William Dorsey scrapbook collection. Lisa G. Materson and Joe William Trotter, Jr.’s careful reading and comments helped transform a conference paper I presented at the AHA into a forthcoming journal article.
In the decade plus since I started at Penn, I moved across the country four times – Seattle to Philadelphia, Philadelphia to Oakland, Oakland to New York and New York back to Seattle. Each move felt at the time a little like a loss, but I realize now that I had to live all over the place to find the most amazing friends.

My “team,” Julia Gunn and Merlin Chowkwanyun, provided a priceless mix of friendship, humor and intellectual exchange in the final months of dissertation work when I wondered if I would ever finish. I consider our team text threads the secret sauce of my dissertation. Merlin read drafts and offered detailed, insightful comments. His feedback and practical tips for conquering academic milestones gave me the confidence and tools to power through. Julia’s fierce loyalty and readiness to jump in whenever needed have been a rare and vital source of comfort and support since the day we met during our first year at Penn.

For all the ways their friendship supported and delighted me at the University of Pennsylvania, I thank Dan Amsterdam, Heather Bennett, Erin Park Cohn, Jack Dwiggins, Elizabeth Della Zazzera, Richara Heyward, John Kenney, Will Kuby, Jessica Lautin, Andrew Lipman, Jaffa Panken, Yaroslav Prykhodko, and Chase Richards. Special thanks to the nineteenth century reading group, including Mark Brennan, Jo Cohen, Matt Karp, Sarah Manekin, Eric Mathisen, Sarah Rodriguez, and Nicole Myers Turner.

Julia Gunn, Reena Vaidya Krishna and Katrin Schreiter were my closest confidants and dearest friends throughout graduate school. We live on different continents and coasts now, but I still hold them close. Beyond Penn’s campus, Lisa, Louis, Layla and Max Miller are family. Spending an evening with Lisa Miller is like taking a master class in warmth, creativity, and strength. Tanalis Padilla and Robert Herr
offer humor, compassion, devoted friendship, and invaluable perspective from the other side of life in graduate school. I’ve relied on Leah Schmerl’s brilliant and hilarious commentary on everything from pop culture to politics since we met at UC San Diego.

In my experience, and contrary to current popular opinion, journalists are the funniest, smartest and most empathetic people around. Watching my son Marcelo become best friends with the kids of my former fellow reporters, mostly from the (now-defunct) Seattle Post-Intelligencer, is one of the happiest and most unexpected gifts I’ve received. For drinks, meals, conversation, and, yes, even camping, I am so grateful to know Deborah Bach, Athima Chansanchai, John Cook, Dan DeLong, Holly Firmin, Angela Galloway, Vanessa Ho, Lewis Kamb, Chris Landman, Jennifer Langston, Phuong Le, Mike Lewis, Andy Nicholls, Brent Roraback, Julia Sommerfeld, Lisa Stiffler, and Craig Welch.

The journalism gods and Seattle have been good to me: Gene Johnson, Rainee Allen Johnson, Liz Gillespie and Sean Gillespie are proof. Along with Sean and Liz, I met Mike Adamick and Dana Kromm while working at my first reporting job in Vacaville, California. I will not rest until they join us in Seattle. Returning to Seattle also happily meant moving back to Carlos Garcia and James Harris – those rare family members you would choose to spend time with even if you were not already related.

I hardly remember me before Karen Schreier. Her friendship has shaped me in innumerable ways and kept me going through graduate school and so many other challenges.

My brother Danny reminds me to take chances and try scary things. Every time Marcelo giggles uncontrollably, I think of Danny.
I owe the greatest debt and appreciation to my parents Maria and George Davidow, who set an unbeatable standard for grandparenting. They always say yes and they always show up. Marcelo now benefits from the same unflappable love and pride that continues to sustain me. Their support allowed me to work and – as a bonus – has enriched Marcelo’s life beyond measure.

Marcelo arrived during the summer between my third and fourth years in graduate school. He has spent his entire life – learning to walk, chasing pets and balls, planning trips to the park, and packing his soccer bag for practice – around his mother sitting at her desk. I hope he picked up a lesson or two about sticking with a challenging task.

Marcelo has also been a great cheerleader. He loaned me books from his own library and compiled a list of nineteenth century U.S. presidents to hang over my desk. Although it does not appear in my official bibliography, I kept his copy of *Horrible Histories: The USA* nearby for inspiration. Beyond all of this practical assistance, Marcelo’s deep dives into topics as diverse as New York’s subway system and the team rosters for obscure European football clubs provide a continual reminder about the joys of amassing knowledge. My grandmother Cecilia Brenes felt the same way. Marcelo never met her, but his affection for books and drive to learn brings my grandma to mind every day.

Victor Balta made this dissertation possible – from the moment he bought champagne to celebrate my acceptance at Penn even though it meant leaving friends and journalism behind in Seattle, to the weekend subway adventures he planned for Marcelo to give me time to write in our tiny New York City apartment, to the steady encouragement and total faith in me and my work. I am constantly in awe of his kindness,
patience, bravery, and the happiness he finds in small moments. Marcelo and I are lucky to have him. I can’t wait for the three of us to go on new adventures together.
ABSTRACT

“CITIZENS IN THE MAKING”: BLACK PHILADELPHIANS, THE REPUBLICAN PARTY AND URBAN REFORM, 1885-1913

Julie Rebecca Davidow

Steven Hahn

“Citizens in the Making” broadens the scope of historical treatments of black politics at the end of the nineteenth century by shifting the focus of electoral battles away from the South, where states wrote disfranchisement into their constitutions. Philadelphia offers a municipal-level perspective on the relationship between African Americans, the Republican Party, and political and social reformers, but the implications of this study reach beyond one city to shed light on a nationwide effort to degrade and diminish black citizenship. I argue that black citizenship was constructed as alien and foreign in the urban North in the last decades of the nineteenth century and that this process operated in tension with and undermined the efforts of black Philadelphians to gain traction on their exercise of the franchise.

For black Philadelphians at the end of the nineteenth century, the franchise did not seem doomed or secure anywhere in the nation. Black Philadelphians pressed the
Republican Party for the rights of citizenship as well as the spoils of partisanship, even as Republican enthusiasm for black rights waned and an energetic political reform movement defined black Philadelphians as unqualified for citizenship. “Citizens in the Making” shows how black participation and activism in municipal politics kept the local, state and, to some extent, the national Republican Party tethered to black constituencies and racial politics long after Reconstruction officially ended in 1877 with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South.

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<td>CSHN</td>
<td>Center for the Study of the History of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Penn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICY</td>
<td>Institute for Colored Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMHB</td>
<td><em>Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCR</td>
<td>Starr Centre Association Records, CSHN</td>
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<tr>
<td>WDC</td>
<td>William H. Dorsey Scrapbook Collection, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, Cheyney, Penn.</td>
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INTRODUCTION

In 1898, author Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, the wealthy descendant of two prominent Philadelphia banking families, published a collection of satirical essays featuring African American, German and Irish immigrant characters. Newspaper reviews praised Biddle’s *Shantytown Sketches*, “which prove him to be an appreciative observer of the lives of the foreign element of our population.” Reviewers especially noted Biddle’s use of dialect, which set the book’s “foreign” subjects apart from native Philadelphians.¹

The section of *Shantytown Sketches* which featured African American characters, entitled “Meetings of the Grand Watermelon-Patch Debating Society,” skewered black politics and black political meetings in particular. One sketch took place at “Conbersation Hall” (no doubt a mocking commentary on Liberty Hall²), the site of black political mass

---

² A group of black businessmen, including abolitionist and Underground Railroad leader William Still, purchased and renovated a building on Seventh and Lombard streets in the heart of Philadelphia’s Seventh Ward in 1866 to provide a gathering place for African American mass meetings on the upper floors and black-owned businesses on the ground floor. The original Liberty Hall stockholders invested a total of $23,000 and the building (which could seat 500 in its main hall) hosted everything from mass meetings calling for approval of the Fifteenth Amendment to meetings for the city’s first black baseball team. By 1912, most of the ground-floor shops were occupied by Jewish businesses, reflecting the neighborhood’s growing population of immigrants from southern and Eastern Europe. Roger Lane, *William Dorsey’s Philadelphia and Ours: On the Past and Future of the Black City in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11-12; and *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 16, 1912.
meetings in Philadelphia since 1866, and featured a character named “Mr. Speak Easy,” a reference to the city’s link between black saloonkeepers and Republican machine politics. In the accompanying illustration, the central figure, borrowing from the nineteenth century minstrelsy trope of a black urban dandy acting above his station, is a man dressed in a suit standing at a podium addressing an audience. The sign in the background reads: “Check Your Razzer.” Taken together, the sketch and illustration depict black political action as, in turn, absurd, volatile, and immoral – three common associations with black politics in Philadelphia that would have resonated with Biddle’s readers at the end of the nineteenth century. Biddle’s choice to include black characters in a book about “the foreign element” otherwise populated with European immigrants further suggests the ambiguity surrounding black citizenship as the twentieth century dawned – North and South.3

Biddle’s inheritance as the grandson of Anthony J. Drexel, founder of one of the largest investment banks of the Gilded Age which financed the expansion of railroads and other major industrial concerns, allowed him to indulge his own interests, including writing, boxing, and – during World War I – hand-to-hand combat.4 The combination of Biddle’s fortunate lineage and his caricature of black politics in the Shantytown Sketches speaks to one of “Citizens in the Making’s” primary objectives, that is to bridge the gap in the historical literature between the emergence of an elite Northern industrial class and

3 Biddle, Shantytown Sketches, 46.
the history of African American political culture and activism at the end of the nineteenth century. Putting these literatures in conversation reveals the national dimensions of black disfranchisement as the twentieth century dawned and demonstrates the contingent nature of black citizenship in the urban North. In addition to participation in electoral politics, black Philadelphians attempted to claim employment opportunities – both as a result of party patronage and an opening up of the industrial labor force – as an essential component of the rights of citizenship. Facing rhetorical, political, and physical assaults on their claims to citizenship, black Philadelphians in many ways – like the critics of their politics – considered themselves “citizens in the making.”

* * *

The historical literature on Reconstruction in the North and the Republican Party’s evolution in the post-Civil War decades has divided the approach to the 1880s and 1890s between North and South, allowing black disfranchisement to emerge as an almost exclusively Southern story. According to the dominant narrative, turmoil between

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5 This phrase ran as a caption under a photo of a group of European immigrant and black children sitting on a stoop near the Starr Centre settlement house, located in Philadelphia’s Seventh Ward. Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia, Annual Report, 1909, Box 4, Folder 41, Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia records (hereafter cited as SCR), Center for the Study of the History of Nursing, School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA (hereafter cited as CSHN). The Starr Centre used the same caption again in 1913. Starr Centre, Kindergarten and School Lunches pamphlet, 1913, Box 6, Folder 105, SCR, CSHN.

6 Much of the energy right now in the historiography on the post-bellum decades is coming from scholars of the West. This new literature urges a reorientation of our perspective on the Civil War Era to move away from seeing the nation divided between North and South. Instead, scholars, especially those noted here, are now considering the ways in which consolidation of the nation and defining the rights and boundaries of citizenship was a national project in which groups considered “alien,” including Native Americans, Chinese and Mexican immigrants and Mormons, were subjected to violence and coercion as part of the same project of nation building. See especially Steven Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and Its World In An Age of Civil Wars, 1830-1910* (New York: Viking, 2016); Joshua Paddison, “Race, Religion, and Naturalization: How the West Shaped Citizenship Debates in the Reconstruction Congress,” in *Civil War Wests*, eds. Adam Arenson and Andrew R. Graybill (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 181-201; and Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, eds., *The World the Civil War Made* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
capital and labor during the 1870s pushed economic elites in the North to see their interests closely aligned with Southern planters and manufacturers.\(^7\) W.E.B. Du Bois identified the Panic of 1873 as the turning point in Northern Republicans’ tolerance for federal involvement in the South – the beginning of what he called the “counter-revolution of property.”\(^8\) Industrial leaders and liberal reformers concerned about corruption now set the national Republican Party agenda. The Party embraced federal power to serve the priorities of industry, including protecting private property, reconciliation with the South, suppression of labor movements and workers, and securing new markets through foreign wars rather than marshaling federal power to guard the newly codified constitutional rights of blacks in the South.\(^9\)

Examining black engagement with electoral politics in a Northern city challenges the narrative of the Republican Party’s trajectory away from the party of emancipation and the pursuit of black citizenship rights during the post-Civil War era. From the perspective

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\(^9\) Beckert, *Monied Metropolis*, 301. In New York City, Beckert asserts, the bourgeoisie’s “particular strength lay in their broad agreement in doing two things that at first glance seemed contradictory: on the one hand, to limit the scale and scope of the state so as to preserve their power in civil society; on the other hand, to mobilize the state against threats to what they considered to be the proper economic, social, and political order of the United States.”
of black Philadelphians, the Republican Party remained deeply implicated in the politics of racial justice and equality throughout the Gilded Age.\textsuperscript{10} African Americans fought to define their place in the political culture of the urban North even as the national Republican Party’s agenda shifted away from racial equality and political reformers increasingly viewed African Americans as unqualified for citizenship.\textsuperscript{11}

In an era when machine politics ruled most of the nation’s urban centers, Philadelphia was run by one of the few Republican organizations. Strong support among European immigrants provided the backbone for Democratic organizations in New York, Boston, and Chicago, but Philadelphia in many ways was unique among Northern cities. Dubbed the “purest American community of all” by muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens, Philadelphia had the lowest proportion of foreign-born residents of any large city

\textsuperscript{10} Historian David W. Blight’s insistence on extending the timeline of Reconstruction beyond 1877 informs my thinking about how black Philadelphians pushed the Republican Party to contend with issues of racial justice and equality at least into the 1890s. According to Blight, African Americans continued to fight the battles of Reconstruction long after white Republicans and Democrats committed to a narrative of reconciliation and reunion between the white North and South. The reconciliation narrative Blight describes honored the soldiers of the Union and the Confederacy and remembered Reconstruction as a period of corruption and overreach of federal authority. The memory of slavery was central to this reconciliation as well, but not as an oppressive system that had been crushed by war. Instead, according to Blight, slavery was remembered as a time of peaceful relations between whites and blacks—a time before federal intervention upset the natural order and elevated blacks over whites. Blight argues that Northerners were complicit in this version of Civil War memory: “Indeed, many Northern papers ran increasingly derisive stories about blacks and Republican rule in the South, many of which served the creation of the tragic legend of Reconstruction.” Blight, \textit{Race and Reunion}, 131.

in the United States in 1900. The city’s black population increased rapidly throughout the closing decades of the nineteenth century, jumping by 59 percent – from 39,371 to 62,613 – between 1890 and 1900. By 1907, some 83,000 African Americans lived in Philadelphia, the fourth largest urban black population in the nation and the largest of any Northern city.

Philadelphia offers a municipal-level perspective on the relationship between African Americans, the Republican Party, and political reformers, but the implications of this study reach beyond one city to shed light on a nationwide effort to degrade and diminish black citizenship. By shifting the focus of electoral battles away from the South, where states wrote disfranchisement into their constitutions, “Citizens in the Making” broadens the scope of historical treatments of black politics at the end of the nineteenth century. This local analysis suggests a consistent effort to bring the rights of national citizenship to bear on the politics of Philadelphia, often in direct dialogue with Southern encroachments on voting rights. Attuned to the national implications of both their electoral

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15 Black men resumed voting in Pennsylvania in 1870 with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. They had lost the vote in 1838 when Pennsylvania approved a constitutional amendment extending voting rights to all white men and barring black men from the suffrage. Women, who could run for local school board seats in Philadelphia since 1874, could not vote in any election in Pennsylvania until the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920. Mrs. Talcott Williams, ed., *The Story of a Woman’s Municipal Campaign by the Civic Club for School Reform in the Seventh Ward of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1895), 9.
participation and the local attacks on their fitness for suffrage, black Philadelphians positioned themselves as partisan players in local as well as national political battles.\textsuperscript{16}

This study begins, in many ways, where Sven Beckert’s work on the consolidation of the New York bourgeoisie in the decades following the Civil War ends. In \textit{The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896}, Beckert concludes with an abrupt turn to the “college-educated daughters of wealthy bourgeois families” to explain the rise of Progressivism as a response to the excesses of the Gilded Age economy.\textsuperscript{17} Progressive Era activism, Beckert argues, strengthened the bourgeoisie’s hold on the state by ameliorating the worst abuses of industrialization.\textsuperscript{18} The Philadelphia story suggests a messier relationship between reformers and industry leaders, in large part due to the particular divisions within the Republican Party in the Quaker City but also as a result of the city’s relatively large, growing and politically active black population.\textsuperscript{19}

Philadelphia’s Republican machine, directed during the last two decades of the nineteenth century by state bosses based in Harrisburg and Washington, D.C., faced challenges from rebellious Philadelphia bosses, municipal reformers, and fusion efforts mounted by Democrats allied with reformers. The Republican machine’s leadership remained steadfast in its support for policies that would benefit Pennsylvania’s industrial leaders as well as domestic industrial producers in Philadelphia. Still, debates over the boundaries of black citizenship shaped Philadelphia’s political battles in ways that

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{16} Materson argues that black women in Illinois used electoral politics to “complete the unfinished goals of Reconstruction.” Materson, \textit{Freedom of Her Race}, 8.

\textsuperscript{17} Beckert, \textit{Monied Metropolis}, 328.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Historian Roger Lane also makes this point about the relative influence of black Philadelphians in a city controlled by the Republican Party. Lane, \textit{Roots of Violence}, 45.
\end{footnotesize}
ultimately informed the contours of the local and national Republican Party. Black participation and activism in municipal politics in Philadelphia kept the local, state and, to some extent, the national Republican Party tethered to black constituencies and racial politics long after Reconstruction officially ended in 1877 with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South. Black Philadelphians at times successfully used the Republican Party as a tool for pursuing concrete policy goals, political appointments or elected office. Less hopefully, a breakaway faction of municipal reformers from within Philadelphia’s Republican Party fixed on the boundaries of black citizenship, not as advocates but because they considered black support for machine politicians one of the root causes of corruption in their city.

Philadelphia’s black residents, whether native to the city or just arrived from the South, carried with them a reservoir of political activism, knowledge, and ideas about citizenship that arose from their experiences as black Americans. In the decades that followed the Civil War and Reconstruction, blacks in Philadelphia and throughout the nation embraced the new rights of citizenship defined in the Constitution by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and considered the franchise the expression of the community’s will – including women and children – rather than a privilege exclusive to men. By the 1890s, however, municipal reformers increasingly identified Philadelphia’s growing black population as an important underpinning of the city’s corrupt Republican political machine. African Americans, reformers contended, practiced an “alien” political

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20 Elsa Barkley Brown has argued that African American political culture in Richmond, Virginia, during and after Reconstruction was organized around the community’s participation in the franchise despite the exclusive legal right of men to cast the official ballot. Brown, “Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom,” Public Culture 7 (1994), 107-146.
culture shaped by slavery, Reconstruction, dependence, and corruption. Southern Democrats and white Northern reformers defined black politics in the context of an emerging consensus about the failures of Reconstruction. This study explores the ways in which black citizenship was constructed as alien and foreign in the Northern urban context in the last decades of the nineteenth century and how this process operated in tension with and undermined black Philadelphians’ efforts to get traction on their exercise of the franchise.\footnote{This study examines the process by which black citizenship was degraded in the urban North, in large part by inscribing foreignness through the lens of electoral politics in one Northern city. Here, I apply Bonnie Honig’s insight to ask about the role of “foreignness” in democracies – not “how should we solve the problem of foreignness?” but “what problems does foreignness solve for us?” Honig, Democracy and the Foreigner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12.}

\* \* \*

Scholars have expanded our understanding of the multiple realms of black politics and culture in the South before and after the Civil War.\footnote{Steven Hahn, A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Tera Hunter, To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Glenda Gilmore, Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).} Because black women could not vote in most places and black men were rapidly losing their access to the ballot box in the South, historians have looked beyond electoral politics to understand how power was contested in other arenas during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\footnote{See especially Hahn, Nation Under Our Feet; Hunter, To ‘Joy My Freedom; Kevin Gaines, Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); and Michele Mitchell, Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).} Disenfranchisement and political violence in the South did not mean the end of political activism for black men and women. Indeed, as historian Glenda Gilmore demonstrates,
North Carolina’s disfranchisement of black men opened up avenues of political influence for middle-class black women. Although the end of the nineteenth century is no longer considered the nadir of black political activity, there is too little attention paid to the politics of African Americans in the North during this period.24 “Citizens in the Making” builds on this literature about black political activism by examining black men and women’s engagement with electoral politics outside the South.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century are a curiously under-examined moment for black electoral politics in the North. Recent histories of black political activity in the North focus mostly on emancipation, Reconstruction and the Great Migration.25 An older literature does explore black politics and community building in the urban North during the 1880s and 1890s. Writing in the 1970s and 1980s, scholars of the so-called ghetto formation literature sought to explain the persistence of African American segregation and inequality in Northern cities despite the legal and political victories of the Civil Rights Movement.26 They argued that the violence and poverty


plaguing blacks in America’s cities could be traced to the crushing inequality imposed by the emergence of economically and politically segregated black communities at the end of the nineteenth century. For historian David Katzman, a “tragic sameness” afflicted black urban communities at both ends of the century. 27

“Citizens in the Making” is attentive to the structural challenges highlighted by the ghetto formation scholarship, while also suggesting a more dynamic interplay between black political activists, the Republican Party, municipal government, and reform organizations. 28 These interactions shaped city politics in ways the “ghetto formation” literature does not address. Most significantly, rather than seeking the roots of mid-twentieth century urban poverty and inequality, this study broadens our understanding of the national dimensions of disfranchisement at the end of the nineteenth century.

Attention to the political activity of black men and women and debates surrounding their role in the electoral process in the urban North at the turn of the twentieth century pushes beyond the familiar archetypes of reformers and bosses embedded in the political rhetoric of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era and enshrined by decades of scholarship. 29 Black Philadelphians, from leaders with national profiles to

27 Katzman, Before the Ghetto, 208.
28 Taking their cues from immigration historians’ attention to community building rather than assimilation, a later group of scholars writing on the Great Migration emphasized black agency in the strategies they employed to reconstitute their lives in Northern cities. These works also explore black migration from the South changed the culture and politics of the entire nation. According to Joe William Trotter, Jr., James R. Grossman writes about the “Great Migration to Chicago as a grassroots social movement” rather than a haphazard response to forces beyond the migrants’ control. Trotter, ed., The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class & Gender (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), xi.
29 As historians Alan Lessoff and James J. Connolly assert, “The contention that city politics during that period amounted to little more than an exchange of votes for services and benefits, interrupted occasionally by cranky, fulminating reformers, steered research away from thoughtful, imaginative treatment of the ideas and ethical concerns that coursed through big-city public life. But sharp challenges to functionalist
the average black voter, viewed municipal politics and local partisan disputes as
contested ground in the larger struggle to define, expand, and safeguard black citizenship.
Most studies of urban politics in the North during the Gilded Age and early Progressive
Era treat the presence of blacks in northern cities as ancillary. Digging into local
political contests and elections from the perspective of black men and women – educated
professionals and elites as well as laborers and domestics – sheds new light on “corrupt”
party politics. Local factions and disputes emerge not simply as internecine, parochial
power struggles but often, rather, as a measure for black Philadelphians of their efficacy
as citizens.

Black men and women’s partisan activities should be seen as a key avenue
through which they attempted to claim power and influence as citizens rather than simply
as capitulation to an all-powerful political machine. Examining how African Americans
practiced electoral politics, with whom they aligned and why reveals that these choices
were not static and reflected a wider range of possibilities than the conflict between
reform and corruption implies. For black Philadelphians at the end of the nineteenth
century, the utility of electoral politics as a realm for pursuing rights and power remained
in flux.

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analysis during the 1970s and 1980s, along with more recent work by labor historians, investigations of
women’s activism, and explorations of democratically oriented reformism have revealed an urban civic
order during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era that was flawed to be sure but generated an array of
critiques, analyses, insurgencies, and proposals.” Lessoff and Connolly, “From Political Insult to Political
Theory: The Boss, the Machine, and the Pluralist City,” Journal of Policy History 25 (November 2, 2013):
165. Kevin P. Murphy also offers a fresh perspective on Gilded Age urban politics by applying the lens of
gender to electoral contests. Murphy, Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, & the Politics of

30 Important exceptions include Garb, Freedom’s Ballot; and Masur, Example for All the Land.
The following chapters proceed roughly in chronological order, beginning with a survey of black electoral politics in Philadelphia during late 1870s and early 1880s in Chapter One and continuing through the 1890s and early 1900s. There is some overlap in chapters three, four, and five, which explore different aspects of Philadelphia’s political culture during the 1890s and early 1900s. Chapter Five briefly extends into the 1920s in order to describe how black reform activist and writer James Samuel Stemons’s relationship to the Republican Party evolved. This study does not provide a comprehensive survey of the Gilded Age and early Progressive Era in Philadelphia politics. Instead, I selected moments of activism and encounters that illuminate the significance of black politics and the ways in which local black political activism and participation shaped the political culture of Philadelphia in the decades after Reconstruction. I attempted to incorporate a wide range of black voices from Philadelphia at the end of the nineteenth century – some, like W.E.B. Du Bois, who are imminently familiar and others who are almost entirely unknown – including women, men, laborers and professionals, religious and political leaders, ward bosses and average voters.

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The first chapter begins in 1885 as Republican leaders in the state capital used a new city charter to consolidate power over Philadelphia’s local party bosses. With control of municipal government now firmly in the hands of the state boss, black activists who had been accustomed to playing party factions against each other or occasionally allying with Democrats found their ability to maneuver within the local political

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31 For more on the role of state Republican leaders in supporting the new city charter, called the Bullitt Bill, see Peter McCaffery, *When Bosses RULED Philadelphia: The Emergence of the Republican Machine, 1867-1933* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), esp. 70-75.
Chapter One explores the strategies black men and women – from within the Republican Party machine as well as outside its official ranks – employed to set and achieve their political goals.

In the meantime, a political reform movement largely led by businessmen, including Biddle’s grandfather Anthony J. Drexel, began their work amid the labor unrest and economic collapse of the 1870s. These liberal reformers critiqued the Republican Party’s commitment to Reconstruction, which they considered a prime example of the corruption wrought by mass democracy – in this case, led by former slaves. In Philadelphia, they sought to keep taxes low and to curtail municipal debt in a local government buoyed by working class constituents. Their disdain for and distance from electoral politics and the ephemeral nature of their organizations resulted in limited accomplishments but their critiques set the tone for elite unease with popular politics, a thread picked up – and examined in Chapter Four – by a new generation of challengers to the Republican political machine in the 1890s.

Chapter Two explores the difficulties faced by black workers in Philadelphia, where the local and state Republican Party was closely allied with industry. Shut out of unions, relegated to mostly unskilled labor when they could find jobs, black men and women in Philadelphia searched for alternatives beyond electoral politics and labor organizing to pursue economic opportunity. Chapter Two also considers the reaction of

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32 I part with Roger Lane, who also tells a declension narrative about black influence in Philadelphia politics during the 1880s, but attributes it almost entirely to what he describes as an abandonment of the “politics of race.” Lane, *Roots of Violence*, 46-47

black elites to the city’s growing number of Southern black migrants, many of whom searched in vain for work and became closely associated with machine politics. Their presence, black professionals and activists feared, contributed to mounting skepticism about the validity of black citizenship. African American efforts to tie employment to the rights of citizenship often relied on gender and class-based claims to middle-class respectability or drawing nativist distinctions between black Philadelphians and newly arrived European immigrants.

Chapters Three and Four delve into the evolving relationship between black Philadelphians and the Republican Party during the 1890s. Chapter Three considers the ways in which Northern reformers and moderate Southern Democrats shared ideas and concerns about the emerging “negro problem” in their respective parts of the country. These questions played out in both the North and the South, often with discourses, people, and organizations crossing regional borders.

Chapter Three also explores the overlap in ideas and practice between political and social reform work in black neighborhoods during the 1890s. Settlement workers, sociologists, education experts and members of elite white and Quaker families identified Philadelphia’s growing black population as an important underpinning of the machine’s power. In their accounts, African Americans emerge as a malleable voting block operating in a shadow world of political activity orchestrated by corrupt white politicians and ward bosses.

Chapter Four reintroduces many of the historical actors from Chapter One, this time in the context of the increasingly influential and aggressive political reform movement of the 1890s. The new reform organizations had a broader membership base
and a willingness to challenge the practice of popular politics more directly by sponsoring watchdog groups and offering their own candidates for local office.\textsuperscript{34} The rise of Philadelphia’s influential municipal and social reform movements combined with the Republican Party’s retreat from issues of racial justice and equality radically altered the city’s political culture, especially in relation to racial politics.

Chapter Four explores how black political activists and participants adapted to the impact of the new reform movement on the city’s political landscape. Whereas Chapter Three considers the intellectual exchange over the “negro problem,” between Northern reformers and Southern moderates, Chapter Four examines reformers’ multi-pronged effort to challenge the supremacy of the Republican machine on the ground with a broad assault on vice and corruption in primarily black and immigrant neighborhoods during the 1890s. The reform strategy, which involved “purging” lists of registered voters and reached beyond the ballot box to include saloons, prostitution, gambling, and loitering, represented an attempt to “purify” the electorate in neighborhoods where Republican candidates received large numbers of votes. Many black men and women living in the targeted neighborhoods understood the reform campaign as a challenge to their status as citizens of Philadelphia and the nation rather than simply a contest between machine politicians and reformers.

One theme that emerges from these pages, and is particularly apparent in Chapter Four, is the persistent violence aimed at and sometimes committed by black political actors. Although Gilded Age politics – especially on the local level – is commonly associated with violent encounters at the polls, “Citizens in the Making” suggests the

\textsuperscript{34} McCaffery, \textit{When Bosses Ruled}, 161-188.
ways in which the violence and terror black men and women experienced in the urban North is of a larger piece with the more familiar horrors associated with the imposition of Jim Crow and disfranchisement in the South.\textsuperscript{35} Breaching the analytical divide once again between North and South calls into question long-held assumptions about the framework for understanding the Reconstruction era as a missed opportunity to fulfill the liberal destiny of the United States.\textsuperscript{36}

As the twentieth century dawned, black Philadelphians grappled with an increasingly influential municipal reform narrative defined to a large extent by de jure efforts to disfranchise black citizens in the Southern states. This reality complicated the work of elite and middle-class black reformers who critiqued what they saw as the degraded condition of working-class black politics in Philadelphia but who also sought to avoid further undermining the foundations of black citizenship. Chapter Five explores this tension by looking at two leading black citizens in Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century: James Samuel Stemons and Fanny Jackson Coppin. Stemons arrived in Philadelphia in 1900 with dreams of becoming a race leader who could expand industrial labor opportunities for black men. His political project illustrates the morass Philadelphia politics had become for activist black men and women by the end of the twentieth century.


\textsuperscript{36} Downs and Masur provocatively raise this alternative to the orthodoxy of Reconstruction-era historiography: “By attempting to stand in the moment itself, instead of looking back with the knowledge of what happened later, we ask whether citizenship, individual rights, and federal authority actually defined the era, and we consider the extent to which Americans continued to experience a world shaped by intimate, personalized power and violence deep into the postwar years.” Downs and Masur, \textit{World Civil War Made}, 14.
century. Stemons proposed to track and report petty crimes (which mostly amounted to violations of middle-class standards of behavior) in order to rid the black community of vice and corruption, thereby encouraging employers to hire black men. His convoluted plan suggests the limits of black uplift strategies at the turn of the century for achieving economic and political equality in the urban North. Coppin, who was principal of the prestigious Institute for Colored Youth, serves as a counterpoint to Stemons’s brash approach. Like Stemons, her experience is also a cautionary tale about pursuing racial justice through respectability politics amid the animosity of Philadelphia’s turn-of-the-century political culture. Despite Coppin’s stellar reputation as an educator and wife of a leading black minister, she could not stop her school’s Quaker managers from insisting on a focus on industrial education for black students.

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In 1898, the year when Biddle published his mocking portrayal of black politics, black Philadelphians confronted a mounting antipathy to black electoral participation nationwide. Black Philadelphians felt the weight of the imposition of disfranchisement in the South as they confronted an apathetic Republican machine and a municipal reform agenda hostile to and suspicious of black politics. “Citizens in the Making” explores the ways in which black men and women navigated and impacted the shifting terrain of municipal politics in a city where black men still had access to the ballot box, but where this fundamental right of citizenship remained contested and precarious. Black political activism in “corrupt and contented” Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century was
neither entirely corrupt nor sufficiently content.\textsuperscript{37} The stories that emerge from these pages often paint a dispiriting picture of choices selected from bad options, violence and defeat. Making political moves in this local, partisan environment required more complex calculations on the part of black political actors than much historical writing has recognized.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{38} Here, I take the warning of historian Jim Downs to resist depicting black historical actors as having “exhibited a certain indefatigable autonomy or political will – thereby making ‘agency’ a happy ending to an otherwise unfortunate and often inconclusive set of circumstances.” In this case, Downs was specifically writing about freedpeople, but his caution applies more broadly. Downs, \textit{Journal of the Civil War Era} 2, no. 1 (March 2012), online forum: “The Future of Civil War Era Studies: Race,” https://journalofthecivilwarera.org/forum-the-future-of-civil-war-era-studies/the-future-of-civil-war-era-studies-race/.
Philadelphia and Its Seventh Ward


Figure 3: A closer look at the same map shows Philadelphia’s Seventh Ward, bottom-left, its northern and southern edges along Spruce and South streets, bordered by the Schuylkill River to the west and Seventh Street to the east.
CHAPTER 1

Black Citizens and the Rise of an Urban Machine, 1885-1890

In December 1882, 75-year-old Benjamin Wilson died of a “broken heart.” In the weeks before his death, Wilson and scores of other black Philadelphians learned of a grave-robbing scheme perpetrated at Lebanon Cemetery, the city’s largest African American cemetery, where Wilson had buried a daughter and two other family members. Located in a swampy, secluded section of South Philadelphia, Lebanon was one of the city’s two privately run black cemeteries.39 After the scheme came to light, Wilson “labored under the impression that their bodies had been taken to the dissecting room.”40 Black Philadelphians buried at Lebanon had been unearthed for almost a decade to serve as cadavers for study at Jefferson Medical School, where students in the emerging field needed subjects to examine. A reporter from the Philadelphia Press uncovered the robberies, which appeared to have been orchestrated by the cemetery’s superintendent, a black man named Robert Chew. Chew paid his brother Levi Chew and two other men to dig up bodies and transport them to the medical school. Dr. William S. Forbes, the white

39 The (Philadelphia) Times, September 25, 1882; and “Seen and Heard in Many Places,” The (Philadelphia) Times, November 16, 1899.
head of the anatomy department at Jefferson claimed he did not know the source of the
cadavers used his students.\textsuperscript{41}

A morbid curiosity to most newspaper readers, the scandal enraged many black
Philadelphians who believed that black community leaders had failed to protect their
loved ones and that city officials could not be trusted to vigorously pursue justice. In
response, hundreds of black Philadelphians organized indignation meetings and protested
at the city magistrate’s office to insist on answers and accountability from the cemetery’s
management as well as the city of Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{42} Following in his family’s path,
Benjamin Wilson was buried at Lebanon on December 27.\textsuperscript{43}

The Lebanon families’ willingness to demand a response from city leaders
illustrates the extent to which black Philadelphians tested the boundaries of their political
influence during the early 1880s. They pushed for accountability from public officials
and protection as citizens even as national, state, and local Republican leaders’
commitment to racial equality wavered. The Lebanon scandal and the reaction to it – at
city hall, among black residents who owned plots and had buried loved ones and from
black politicians and cemetery managers – reveal the power dynamics within the city’s
black community and between black residents and the city’s judicial and municipal
institutions. By the mid-1880s, black Philadelphians faced new limitations in electoral
battles, as an emerging state Republican machine moved to consolidate power over city
government and to limit the influence of ward-level Republican politicians.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{The (Philadelphia) Times}, December 6, 1882.
\textsuperscript{43} Philadelphia Death Certificate Index, Benjamin Wilson, accessed via ancestry.com.
At the turn of the twentieth century, most black Philadelphians of all means lived in the city’s Seventh Ward (which stretched from Spruce to South streets and Seventh street to the Schuylkill River) along with an increasing number of Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe and Russia and Italian immigrants.\(^\text{44}\) Residential segregation by race did not take hold in Philadelphia until the onset of the Great Migration around 1915. Until then, the Seventh Ward was also home to some of the city’s wealthiest residents. Their elegant, expansive houses anchored the neighborhood’s wide streets in contrast to the stench of sewage and garbage that collected in the alleys where new migrants and immigrants lived in narrow, light-starved row houses.\(^\text{45}\)

Since the eighteenth century, Philadelphia had been an epicenter of free black life and a destination for escaped slaves. After the Revolutionary War and Pennsylvania’s emancipation statute in 1780, African Americans appeared to be gaining ground in Philadelphia.\(^\text{46}\) The first decades of the nineteenth century saw an explosion of black institution building in the city, including the first church in the nation founded by free blacks. Any initial optimism about black rights in the new republic waned, however, when the Pennsylvania legislature in 1838 amended the state constitution to bar black men from voting. In revoking the franchise, Pennsylvania joined other northern states that sought to restrict black citizenship during the 1830s and 1840s. Violent riots throughout the

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\(^{44}\) Lane, \textit{Roots of Violence}, 20-21.


antebellum decades, often led by Irish immigrants – themselves struggling with discrimination and poverty – terrorized black Philadelphians.  

Federal troops kept the peace in 1870 when black men resumed voting in Philadelphia during the first election following the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. The following year, however, the absence of federal oversight left black voters vulnerable. Their return to the polls set off a riot in which ten black residents were killed, including Octavius V. Catto, a 37-year-old teacher and black activist. Police officers dispatched by Democratic Mayor Daniel Fox did not stop – and, in some cases, contributed to – the bloodshed. Frank Kelly, an Irish man associated with the Democratic Party, shot and killed Catto near his home on South Street. Kelly and other Democratic operatives, under orders from Fourth Ward boss William McMullen, set out to threaten and harass the city’s newly enfranchised citizens, hoping to beat back the tide of black support for Republican candidates.

In the years preceding his fatal walk home on October 10, 1871, Catto had earned a reputation as one of Philadelphia’s leading advocates for African American rights. Catto’s father William Catto, an ordained minister, fled to Philadelphia with his family from Charleston, South Carolina in 1848. Octavius Catto was nine years old when his father abandoned plans to head a mission to Liberia and joined a community of antislavery activists in Philadelphia instead. As a member of the generation that followed such black abolitionist luminaries as Frederick Douglass, William Still, and Robert Purvis, Octavius

\footnote{For more on the experience of Irish immigrants in antebellum Philadelphia, see Harry C. Silcox, Philadelphia Politics from the Bottom Up: The Life of Irishman William McMullen, 1824-1901 (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1989).}
\footnote{Daniel R. Biddle and Murray Dubin, Tasting Freedom: Octavius Catto and the Battle for Equality in Civil War America (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 421-431.}
\footnote{Ibid., 434-435.}
Catto joined an elite group of young, educated black men and women in Philadelphia, including Jacob White Jr. and Fanny Jackson Coppin, in their efforts to expand educational opportunities for black children, secure voting rights and end discrimination on the city’s streetcars. At the time of his murder, Catto was the principal at the prestigious Institute for Colored Youth, from which he graduated as valedictorian in 1859. According to Daniel R. Biddle and Murray Dubin, the authors of the only book-length biography of the slain nineteenth-century leader, “Octavius Catto, his father, and his friends and allies fought a street battle for equal rights in Northern cities before, during and after the Civil War.” Catto’s murder unnerved black Republican activists in Philadelphia and contributed to a weakened resolve among the city’s white Republicans to pursue black rights.

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More than a decade after Catto’s assassination, protection was still on the minds of black voters. Shortly after his election in 1881, Mayor Samuel G. King, a Democrat running as an independent, desegregated Philadelphia’s police department. Black Philadelphians celebrated when the new mayor hired four black police officers, earning King the affection (although not always the votes) of black leaders for decades to come.

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51 Biddle and Dubin, Tasting Freedom, 199 and 524.

52 Ibid., 2.


54 Lane, Roots of Violence, 64. According to Lane, King’s appointments made Philadelphia the only large city in the North with black police officers.
Scholars of post-bellum Philadelphia have pinpointed the mayoral election of 1884, when King ran for re-election and lost, as a pivotal moment after which African Americans paid a high price for their electoral loyalty to the Republican Party. They argue that black Philadelphians ceded their potential power to machine politicians by voting for King’s Republican opponent, William B. Smith, rather than supporting the incumbent candidate who had desegregated the police force.\textsuperscript{55} Black support for Smith convinced Republican leaders that they no longer needed to aggressively pursue black voters, according to this interpretation, and set up a pattern of Republican apathy that lasted until at least the 1930s.\textsuperscript{56}

In Philadelphia during the 1880s, however, black coalitions and policy priorities were more fluid and interwoven than scholars have suggested. As blacks struggled to gain political traction in the post-Reconstruction North, they pursued a range of goals and allies. At a moment when elite, white “liberal reformers” defined political independence as a rejection of partisanship and a call to run the city’s government based on business principles, African Americans invoked independence to challenge the Republican Party on different grounds.\textsuperscript{57} For black activists, independence from party allegiance meant an opportunity to push politicians to support racial equality rather than necessarily a move to clean up government corruption.\textsuperscript{58} Political alliances and goals shifted, with some black

\textsuperscript{55} See especially Lane, \textit{Roots of Violence}; and Silcox, \textit{Philadelphia Politics}.

\textsuperscript{56} Lane, \textit{Roots of Violence}, 66-67.


\textsuperscript{58} For more on African Americans who shunned the Republican Party or rejected partisanship, see especially Bergeson-Lockwood, “Not As Supplicants”; and Shawn Leigh Alexander, \textit{An Army of Lions: The Civil Rights Struggle Before the NAACP} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). This dimension of African American engagement in Northern politics during the 1880s and 1890s is largely
leaders trying on independence only to later resume party loyalty. The uncertainty of post-Reconstruction party politics in Philadelphia and throughout the nation left African Americans without a true ideological or strategic compass to follow in the electoral realm.

A heated debate among African Americans over the wisdom of remaining loyal to the Party of Lincoln continued throughout the closing decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. African Americans nationwide shared black Philadelphians’ frustration with the Republican Party. As historian August Meier points out, “Suggestions of outright espousal of the Democrats, or of urging division of the Negro vote and ‘independence’ in politics, were heard in the late 1870s, and rose to a crescendo during the early 1880s” in northern cities. In 1883, former abolitionist leaders William Still and Robert Purvis founded the Colored Independent Party in Pennsylvania to offer an alternative to black support for Republicans. Still and Purvis, independently wealthy black men who did not look to the Republican machine for patronage and jobs, criticized black Philadelphians for allowing themselves to cater to party interests.

The observations of Democratic Party operative Al Fletcher, who worked for Pennsylvania congressman Samuel J. Randall during the 1880s, suggest black voters in Philadelphia might have assigned more weight to choosing candidates for state and national office than they did for local races. In 1893, Fletcher dismissed the notion that black residents made easy targets for those looking to buy votes for Democrats. In

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60 Randall represented the fourth Congressional District, which included Philadelphia, from 1863-1891. The powerful Congressman also served as Speaker of the House from 1875-1881.
response to the suggestion that Democrats could turn northern states in their favor by bribing black voters, Fletcher declared, “Pshaw!” He explained that while he had “bought negroes time and again” in local races, national races were another matter. “For Governor or President,” Fletcher continued, “I do not believe you can buy a negro in the land unless he has received an unusually big bribe. They vote and are counted, and that is all there is to it.”

Muddying the already murky partisan waters, by the end of the 1880s, black Philadelphians faced a newly restricted political landscape. In 1885, Republican leaders in the state capital of Harrisburg, most notably future U.S. Senator Matthew S. Quay and former U.S. Senator Simon Cameron, orchestrated the approval of a new city charter to consolidate power over Philadelphia’s ward bosses, a move that effectively quashed dissent from the leaders of the city’s largest black district. Independent challenges to Republican party rule allowed black ward leaders to wield influence during the first half of the 1880s that would become more difficult after state party leaders clamped down on ward-level activism. The 1885 city charter, in conjunction with other moves by state Republican leaders, allowed Quay’s wing of the Party to neutralize the potential for independent and Democratic fusion efforts in Philadelphia politics. While individual black politicians could still hold office and positions of power within the local and state party, their ability to pressure the Republican Party on racial justice waned locally as well as in national partisan politics.

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62 McCaffery, When Bosses Ruled, 70.
Established in 1849 as a final resting place for black Philadelphians, Lebanon Cemetery remained an important site of burial and remembrance throughout the post-war decades. Colored troop regiments annually honored the more than four hundred black Civil War veterans buried at Lebanon on Decoration Day and prominent black Philadelphians, including abolitionist James Forten and Octavius Catto were buried there as well.  

Although Lebanon was founded and run by one of Philadelphia’s most prosperous black families, many of those who purchased plots saved from small incomes to pay for burial of loved ones. Lebanon’s neglected location in a “lonely neighborhood” among vegetable farms made it vulnerable to natural disasters as well graveyard thefts. In September 1882, the Schuylkill River flooded the cemetery causing headstones to be “washed to the earth.”

For black Philadelphians, the failure of institutions to protect the bodies of their deceased loved ones animated the scandal as much as the malfeasance of individuals. In their demands for justice, the protesters expressed contempt and mistrust for the increasingly celebrated field of medical science, black leaders and Philadelphia’s justice system. Local newspaper accounts served up Chew and his accomplices as “graveyard ghouls” who snatched bodies under cover of night. Headlines across the country deployed similarly macabre phrases to frame the incident while black families and community members were still coming to terms with the crime. Although they reserved little sympathy for the “ghouls” who carried out the nighttime grave robberies, the

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63 Philadelphia Inquirer, May 25, 1874.
65 The (Philadelphia) Times, September 25, 1882 and November 16, 1899.
protestors considered Chew and the two other men arrested after the scandal came to light as pawns of more powerful forces. The scandal revealed deep partisan fissures within the city’s growing black community and hinted at the possibilities and shortcomings of electoral politics.

In 1882, black Philadelphians could wield some measure of local political clout in response to the cemetery scandal, although pressure from a culture increasingly committed to the supremacy of expertise and professional training ultimately exonerated the key player in the cemetery scandal. Mayor Samuel King’s record likely emboldened black family members in their demands following the Lebanon scandal. King aggressively pursued black votes during his 1881 campaign and followed through on his promises once in office. King’s election sent shock waves through Philadelphia’s Republican Party and animated a reform faction hoping to squelch the groundswell of popular support for King. Dominated by business leaders such as George Earle and Anthony J. Drexel and supported by the conservative Union League, the reformers favored a non-partisan municipal government run according to sound business practices in order to rid Philadelphia of the ward politics they associated with corruption and political favors. In their campaigns against ward politicians from both parties, they enlisted support from independent black leaders, such as Robert Purvis.

The presence of a large and armed crowd of black Philadelphians (some estimates put the crowd at six hundred people) at the magistrate’s office and “indignation

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66 Forbes, the head of Jefferson Medical School, was acquitted in 1883 after standing trial for the grave robberies though his accomplices were convicted. James R. Wright, Jr., “The Pennsylvania Anatomy Act of 1883: Weighing the Roles of Professor William Smith Forbes and Senator William James McKnight,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 71, no. 4 (October 2016): 422-446.
meetings” forced the city and black leaders to take note.⁶⁸ An urgent call for action drove family members and others to search for their own answers at the pillaged gravesites. In response, Mayor King sent police officers to guard the graves amid concerns about unearthing infectious diseases. Calls for vigilante violence to punish the cemetery trustees as well as the grave robbers and their accomplices at Jefferson Hospital rang out at the indignation meetings. Attendees brandished weapons – knives and a pistol – and one man suggested lynching the perpetrators if the courts failed to mete out justice. As reported by The Times, one protester shouted, “‘Yes, there are plenty of lamp-posts…and I am willing to help swing the trustees at once.’”⁶⁹ The protesters’ call for lynch law revealed their lack of faith in the judicial system to satisfactorily resolve crimes perpetrated against African Americans.

Other black citizens explicitly linked the grave-robbing scheme to their daily experience of discrimination and violence as residents of Philadelphia. One man at the indignation meeting accused Robert Chew, the African American man who carried out the robberies, of being a traitor to his race, “one of the kind of men who before the war betrayed the best friends of the colored people – the Abolitionists.”⁷⁰ The Rev. H.L. Philips of the Episcopal Church of the Crucifixion, according to The Times, said, “it was bad enough when a colored man was not able to go through the streets without some time being molested, but he considered it far worse not to allow the colored dead to rest in

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⁶⁹ The (Philadelphia) Times, December 8, 1882.
⁷⁰ Ibid.
their graves.”\footnote{Ibid. King had promised to appoint black policemen during a meeting with Philips and William Still before his election in 1881. Silcox, \textit{Philadelphia Politics}, 102.} Invoking the language of “rights” to express his outrage, another man called for decisive action. Two decades of neglected and despoiled graves at Lebanon convinced him that “the system” would continue to abuse the bodies of dead African Americans, “unless the colored people arise and assert their rights.”\footnote{\textit{The (Philadelphia) Times}, December 8, 1882.} In an effort to pressure the system that so often failed them, an association of lot holders at Lebanon Cemetery formed a committee of three to “wait upon the District Attorney and urge a speedy trial.”\footnote{\textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, March 1, 1883. A group of lot holders opted to form an association to select a new board of managers after learning about the grave robberies.}

The scandal also laid bare partisan divisions within Philadelphia’s black community. During the indignation meeting at Liberty Hall, angry members of the community demanded accountability from the black cemetery trustees for their neglect of Lebanon. H. Price Williams, a black journalist and politician, condemned the management and called for the trustees to be put “behind prison bars.” Williams claimed that in addition to the robberies, the trustees had for years over-sold plots, resulting in dozens of bodies buried on top of each other in the same graves.\footnote{\textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, December 8, 1882.}

Williams had a political score to settle with the mostly Republican trustees of the cemetery. In the 1881 mayoral election, Williams supported (along with an estimated 7,500 total black voters, he claimed) the Republican challenger to sitting mayor William Stokley. Stokley’s record on political appointments, especially his failure to hire black police officers, disappointed many black residents. Williams and other black Republican
leaders hoped the party would abandon Stokley and nominate another candidate who had spoken out in favor of public jobs for black residents. When the party disregarded their endorsement and selected Stokley instead, a number of black leaders broke with the majority of black Republicans to support King.  

The packed room at the Lebanon Cemetery indignation meeting quickly endorsed Williams’s outrage. “Shouts and hisses” aimed at the president of the board of trustees erupted as Williams finished his speech. Board president Guy Burton later told a reporter that the anger in the room reflected the “envy and jealousy of some who have not risen to prominence in the colored community.” Burton’s observation suggests a deep well of resentment among black Philadelphians over lack of adequate representation from black Republican leaders as well as city officials. The crowd’s allegiances did not divide neatly along partisan lines, revealing the complex relationship between black Philadelphians and the Republican Party. The political rivalry between Williams and Burton’s crew also suggests a certain leverage black Philadelphians enjoyed.

Unlike the Chew brothers, Dr. William Forbes, the accused ringleader of the grave-robbing plot, was acquitted and resumed his post at Jefferson Hospital. His job would soon be much easier. A state law approved in 1883 eliminated the need to pillage graves for subjects to study. The new law required officials to turn over indigent, unclaimed bodies to medical schools for dissections. Arguments on behalf of the 1883 law – which enshrined in statute access to black and poor bodies well into the twentieth century – rode a wave of disgust with grave robbing and endorsed an emerging

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confidence at the end of the nineteenth century in expertise, especially as it related to medical science and record keeping.\textsuperscript{77}

Several weeks after the grave robbery scheme came to light, the \textit{Christian Recorder} asserted that medical schools needed access to bodies and suggested a statute dedicating executed murderers and people who committed suicide to the cause. As the \textit{Christian Recorder} argued, the state had an obligation to ensure a supply of dead bodies to medical schools or face the inevitable consequence of grave robberies to meet the dissection demands. Asserting its allegiance to the precepts of modern science, the \textit{Recorder} declared, “A dead body is quite as necessary to modern students of medicine as any book of the most approved curriculum.”\textsuperscript{78} But the \textit{Recorder} did not stop at recognizing the necessity of bodies for study. Rather than blaming Lebanon’s negligent leadership or the demand for bodies at Jefferson Medical School, the editors more broadly rebuked “the colored people themselves” for the robberies given the “wretched condition” of black cemeteries. “They practically invite the ghouls to their work,” the \textit{Recorder} claimed. “When we as a class shall show the respect four (sic) our dead that others show, such outrages will measurably cease.”\textsuperscript{79} The \textit{Recorder}’s scolding tone reflected a call to black residents to conduct themselves and their institutions in a respectable manner that would ostensibly shield them from the kinds of “outrages” suffered at Lebanon.

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\textsuperscript{77} For more on the 1883 law, see Venetia M. Guerrasio, “Dissecting the Pennsylvania Anatomy Act: Laws, Bodies and Science, 1880-1960” (PhD diss., University of New Hampshire, 2007). Guerrasio argues that the press’s focus of negligent leadership at the African American-run cemetery kept public scrutiny away from Forbes, contributing to his ultimate acquittal.


\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
Matthew S. Quay had been trying to incorporate Philadelphia’s reform contingent back into the fold of the state Republican machine since independent Mayor Samuel King’s election in February 1881. The United Republican Association (URA), a group of city business leaders who were active in national Republican politics but avoided municipal battles and independent reform Republicans, met for the first time in 1883. Quay and his allies hoped to draw on the momentum of reform Republicans, who had helped convince suburban voters to oust Republican Mayor Stokley in favor of King. The URA, with support from Quay’s wing of the party, promoted William B. Smith to oppose King in the next mayoral election in 1884. Quay and his machine now had the opportunity to install a Republican mayor of their choice, which required maintaining a tight lid on Republican factions within the city, including the Seventh Ward’s African American stronghold.

Quay occasionally cast himself as a good government reformer throughout his career, especially when he needed to broaden his base of support or weaken his political opponents. Assuming a reform posture allowed Quay to stamp out intraparty opposition (although a new generation of reformers often clashed with Quay during the 1890s) and champion legislative initiatives that undermined dissent and further strengthened the machine’s control of federal and state patronage. In 1881, Quay undercut the most

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81 Ibid., 71.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 75. See also Chapter Four.
powerful Philadelphia Republican politicians, including Mayor Stokley, by supporting Samuel King for mayor. With Stokley gone, Quay could now control the city’s Republican party from Harrisburg, especially once a “loyal” Republican mayor took back the office from King in 1884.85

As Quay moved forward with his plan to return Republican independents to the fold and seat a loyal Republican mayor, black leaders in Philadelphia signaled their willingness to take an independent stand by supporting King’s re-election bid in February of 1884. Black leaders pressed the Republican mayoral candidate William B. Smith on public appointments for African Americans. Leading black Republican politicians, including Gilbert Ball, spoke favorably about King’s chances with black voters.86 Black support for King came from a variety of sources, including independents and Republican loyalists. Robert Purvis, a critic of the Republican Party and member of the reform group the Committee of One Hundred, wholeheartedly endorsed King’s reelection. Purvis called King “an honest man” whose “whole term of office stands out like a bright star amid the murky atmosphere of official corruption.” Purvis linked his assessment to his own status as a “citizen and a tax-payer,” echoing the reform movement’s commitment to clean municipal government run by the best citizens according to the principles of business.87 Nathan F. Mossell, a physician active in Seventh Ward Republican politics, credited King for creating a safer environment for black voters. “We can go to the polls and vote without running the risk of being locked up by a stalwart policeman if we vote

85 McCaffery, When Bosses Ruled, 78-95.
87 “Among the Colored Voters,” The (Philadelphia) Times, January 30, 1884.
against the dominant party."\textsuperscript{88} Even those who suggested they would still vote for the Republican candidate openly praised King. Ball, in a move that likely unnerved the Quay faction, said although he would vote for King’s Republican challenger, “I can not find fault with any man who desired King’s re-election.”\textsuperscript{89}

In speaking out about the benefits of King’s leadership, Philadelphia’s black leaders signaled a willingness to break with the state Republican party in local politics. Robert Jones, who would lead the effort along with Ball to nominate an independent candidate for the state legislature two years later in 1886, said, “We have at last a real tried and substantial friend in Mayor King and we will not forsake him for a new and untried man.”\textsuperscript{90} Black Philadelphians’ admiration for King, however, did not help him win a second term. William B. Smith defeated the incumbent mayor in February 1884, creating a direct line between the state Republican organization led by Quay and Philadelphia’s municipal government. Smith scored an easy victory in the predominantly black Seventh Ward, with 3,161 votes to King’s 1,829. Despite King’s record on behalf of African Americans, he received seventy-five fewer votes in 1884 than he had in 1881 in his race against Stokley.\textsuperscript{91} Still, King’s election in 1881 (he was the last Democratic mayor elected in Philadelphia until 1951) and the inclination of black leaders to speak publically on his behalf likely combined to convince Republican leaders to nominate a black candidate for the city’s Common Council. Jacob Purnell, the first black man to

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\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{91} Philadelphia Inquirer, February 20, 1884.
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serve on the Philadelphia Common Council, won a seat representing the Seventh Ward in 1884.92

Not all black Philadelphians exalted King’s record. In 1881, black Republican activist Isaiah Wears reminded a group assembled to celebrate King’s appointment of four black police officers that white leaders like King acted only after prodding from black citizens. Rather than focusing on their white political allies, Wears, who was active in post-Civil War black politics in Philadelphia, credited African Americans for advocating black representation on the city’s police force. “The white man needs to be taught on liberty and human rights,” Wears declared, “and the colored man has been teaching him.”93

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Philadelphia’s Seventh Ward bubbled with enthusiasm for the general election during the fall of 1884. The ward’s black Republican club hosted a “fine pyrotechnic display” in anticipation of November’s battle for state House and Congressional seats.94 The fireworks were consistent with the nineteenth century practice of uproarious public displays leading up to elections, including parades and revelries that often turned violent.95 But the festivities obscured the unrest between state and local factions within the Republican Party and the lingering resentment among black Republicans about the outcome of that feud.

92 Silcox, Philadelphia Politics, 111.
93 Philadelphia Inquirer, August 23, 1881. At the same meeting, independent black leader Robert Purvis received “faint applause” after advocating the vote for women. For more on Wears, see Silcox, “The Black ‘Better Class’ Political Dilemma.”
Several weeks earlier, the members of the Seventh Ward’s newly established Matthew S. Quay political club staged a protest against the Republican Party’s chosen candidates for the Pennsylvania state legislature. The Quay Club was founded in May 1884, perhaps not coincidentally as Quay and his allies sought to wield more influence over local politics in Philadelphia in anticipation of the November election. The dispute threatened to pull black votes away from Republican candidates in favor of two candidates for state legislature running as “Republican independents.” Quay and the state party organization endorsed the “Republican independents.”

Quay appeared to have enlisted the assistance of Gilbert Ball, a black Republican activist in Philadelphia for some sixteen years, to mount a challenge to the opposing Republican faction’s nominee for state legislature. Ball likely agreed to follow the Quay faction in return for the promise to support a black nominee to run with Alexander H. White for state legislature from the Seventh District, which elected two representatives.

As head of the new Quay Club, Ball held considerable clout among the ward’s 1,700 black voters who represented nearly half of the district’s Republican voters and a significant thirty percent of registered voters overall. The black presence at the ballot box could swing an election or least disrupt an easy Republican win, leading the Philadelphia Inquirer to speculate that the rift in the Seventh might split the Republican vote and cause the party to lose at least one representative in the legislature. In retaliation for Ball’s defection, the city’s Republican executive committee expelled Ball and several

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96 The (Philadelphia) Times, September 25, 1886.
97 “Gil Ball’s Followers,” Philadelphia Inquirer, October 4, 1884; Philadelphia Inquirer, October 2, 1884; and “Bolting the Ticket,” The (Philadelphia) Times, September 23, 1884.
98 The Quay Club grew from 50 members at its founding in 1884 to more than 200 by 1886. “Quay Club Anniversary,” The (Philadelphia) Times, November 16, 1886.
other Quay Club members for opposing the regular party nominees. The controversial expulsion divided the Republican City Committee as well. Chairman William R. Leeds (a Quay ally) denounced the vote that removed Ball as chairman of the group’s campaign committee, charging that only three members (rather than the necessary two-thirds) had voted against Ball.\(^9\)

Ball and his supporters considered their independent ticket strong enough that they did not need to pursue a fusion campaign with the ward’s Democrats.\(^1\) At a meeting of White’s supporters in anticipation of his nomination, White declared, “There will be no backing down in the case and I believe I will be elected over the other ticket by a handsome majority.”\(^2\) The *Inquirer* predicted “an active and bitter struggle,” reporting that representatives from twenty-three of the Seventh Ward’s twenty-five divisions attended a meeting to prepare to support the independent candidates.\(^3\)

Given the Seventh District’s (which encompassed the Seventh Ward) large black population, the Republican delegates’ choice to pair Francis A. Osborne, a hat manufacturer and political novice, with Alexander White for the state legislature outraged a contingent of African Americans who had assumed the ticket would include a black nominee. Major James Teagle, a Civil War veteran and black Republican activist, condemned the outcome of the Seventh District convention, where ten breakaway Republican delegates, including chairman Gilbert Ball, claimed that their ticket represented the “true choice” of the Republican party; the regular Republican ticket, they

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\(^9\) *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 2, 1884; “Gilbert Ball Vindicated,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 4, 1884.

\(^1\) *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 2, 1884.

\(^2\) *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 2, 1884.

\(^3\) Quoted in “Bolting the Ticket,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 23, 1884.
alleged, only won approval by buying off several delegates. Although the Inquirer reported great enthusiasm at the convention for White and Osborne, Teagle declared that, “The colored voters will not support the new ticket and they do not like the other ticket. The long and short of it is, we will have an independent ticket of our own and it will be the one the Democrats support.”

A group of six black delegates from the Seventh Ward nominated Teagle for the state legislature in response to the other two all-white tickets. “As one of the seventeen hundred colored voters of this ward,” declared a delegate who pledged support for Teagle, “I have long since felt our humiliating position in not having a colored man to represent us at Harrisburg in the halls of the Legislature.” When the handful of black men present at the convention voted to nominate Teagle, he “was visibly affected and his face was buried in his hands.” Facing opponents backed by the Republican Party’s powerful state and local leaders, Teagle tallied only six votes when the ballots were counted in November.

Quay’s electoral maneuvering worked to some extent in 1884. The state Republican machine secured a loyal mayor in Philadelphia’s William B. Smith in February, when the mayoral election was held. Still, their choice for the state legislative ticket did not win. The regular Republican candidates – attorney Henry K. Boyer and

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103 Quoted in The (Philadelphia) Times, September 25, 1884.
104 “Major Teagle nominated,” The (Philadelphia) Times, October 11, 1884; and Philadelphia Inquirer, October 11, 1884.
105 “Major Teagle nominated,” The (Philadelphia) Times, October 11, 1884.
106 As Roger Lane has noted, Teagle, who had been active in Philadelphia’s black political circles since the 1870s, was the frequent target of satire and ridicule in the mainstream press, who referred to him as “Majah” Teagle in an apparent mockery of African American dialect. The dismissive press coverage suggests contempt for black participation in politics as a pretentious status grab by black Philadelphians. Lane, William Dorsey’s, 117; and “Majah Teagle in the Field,” The (Philadelphia) Times, April 10, 1884.
merchant William Weild – easily won seats to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives in November. Boyer and Weild carried the Seventh state legislative district with 2,874 and 2,778 votes respectively. With the help of Gilbert A. Ball and the ward’s 1,700 black voters, the independent ticket picked up 1,505 votes for Alexander H. White and 1,353 votes for Osborne. Ball’s alliance with Quay, even once the independents opted not to nominate a black candidate for the state house, created tensions in the Seventh Ward that would resurface two years later, this time in a more consequential protest.

The national Republican Party’s defeat in the presidential election of 1884 with the help of Republicans who switched parties to vote for the Democrat Grover Cleveland, convinced Quay to secure more power at the state level. This move would allow Quay to manage party business from Pennsylvania rather than Washington, D.C. The Republicans who defected to the Democratic Party in favor of Cleveland, or “Mugwumps” as they were known, prioritized cleaning up government corruption over loyalty to the Republican Party and racial justice. With the well of federal patronage drying up under a new Democratic president and increased federal scrutiny, Quay built a centralized organization in Pennsylvania that could secure local and statewide electoral victories and, in turn, deliver legislative rewards to the business interests who “paid in dollars for Quay’s services.”

107 Although it is impossible to verify whether White’s tally was largely the result of black votes, it seems likely the case. The (Philadelphia) Times, November 5, 1884.
108 McCaffery, When Bosses Ruled, 79.
One of the centerpieces of Quay’s efforts to consolidate power over municipal politics in Philadelphia was a new city charter approved by the state legislature in 1885.\textsuperscript{111} The Bullitt Bill, which also had support from many of the city’s leading political reformers, centralized control of municipal government in the mayor’s office and reduced the number of city agencies from thirty-two to nine.\textsuperscript{112} The restructured city government undercut the power that ward bosses and councilmembers had wielded to challenge the party’s state leadership. In the wake of Quay’s successful efforts to recruit reform support, black Republican politicians now had even more difficulty gaining political traction, especially during the latter half of the 1880s.

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Black politicians in Philadelphia worked where they could to keep state and local officials and the Republican Party trained on the legacy of the Civil War and Reconstruction. At times, Quay’s organization nodded to their concerns. In May 1886, state Senator Boies Penrose represented Quay’s Republican organization at a meeting called by the Philadelphia chapter of the Afro-American League to denounce a massacre of black residents in Carrollton, Mississippi the previous March.\textsuperscript{113} Former Philadelphia Mayor Samuel King joined local and national black leaders including Stephen B. Gipson, Isaiah Wears, Nathan Mossell and T. Thomas Fortune and a “plentiful sprinkling of white

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\textsuperscript{111} Although often hailed as the crowning achievement of the reform movement led during the early 1880s by the Committee of One Hundred, historian Peter McCaffery argues that state party leaders Simon Cameron and Quay pushed for passage of the new charter “to extend their influence over Philadelphia City Council and the local Republican party organization.” McCaffery, \textit{When Bosses Ruled}, 70. The Bullitt Bill did not take effect until 1887.
\textsuperscript{112} For more on the reform charter movement in Northern cities during the 1880s, see Martin J. Schiesl, \textit{The Politics of Efficiency: Municipal Administration and Reform in America, 1880-1920} (Berkeley: University of California, 1977), esp. 46-67.
\textsuperscript{113} Lane, \textit{Roots of Violence}, 73.
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men and women” to express outrage over the killings.  

The variety of black activists and attendees, including Republican Party leaders and independents like Robert Purvis, indicated the fluidity of coalitions and goals pursued by black activists in partisan politics during the 1880s in Philadelphia.

Later that year, however, the state Republican Party organization rejected Stephen B. Gipson as a candidate for state legislature, prompting a defection of black Republicans from the regular ticket. Gipson, a Philadelphia native, moved to South Carolina during Reconstruction to work as a teacher for freed people and later served as a county Commissioner for Public Schools. Gipson represented a link to the Republican Party’s legacy of commitment to black freedom and equal rights during the 1870s.

In the two years since Gilbert Ball’s tussle with local party leaders, the relationship between the Pennsylvania Republican Party and Philadelphia’s Republican machine had changed significantly. Now, in 1886, with the state Party organization led by Quay, black Republicans in the Seventh Ward had little leverage when they voted for second time to “scratch” Pennsylvania House Representative Henry K. Boyer from the ticket in favor of Gipson. Boyer, embraced by Quay’s state machine in 1886, was in position to ascend to speaker of the state House of Representatives, giving Quay an advantage. By this point, with the Bullitt Bill passed (although it did not take effect until 1887), having secured support from state and local business leaders and locked in a

114 The (Philadelphia) Times, May 18, 1886.
reliable, if illegal, source of funding, Quay’s machine was operating relatively free from meaningful opposition either from within or outside the state Republican Party.

In the months preceding the election, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, a Republican newspaper, noted that despite other leading candidates in the race, including the incumbent Weild and former legislator Alexander H. White (and independent candidate in 1884), the time had come to “demonstrate the desire of the Republicans to practically recognize the claims of his race,” adding “the colored voters in the district want representation.”¹¹⁷ The *Times* also reported in August that Gipson would join Boyer on the Republican ticket. The *Inquirer* noted that the Republican Party’s willingness to nominate Gipson and “to give the colored man substantial recognition” would offset a third party’s efforts to win support for their ticket statewide by running an African American Methodist preacher from Allegheny County for the at-large Congressional seat.¹¹⁸ “S.B. Gipson, an intelligent and representative citizen of the Seventh ward,” the *Inquirer* noted, “is a candidate for the Legislature, and there seems to be no doubt that Colonels Quay and Cooper will secure his nomination, which in that district is equivalent to election.”¹¹⁹

Gipson offered his own robust call for more recognition from the Republican Party in a speech delivered at a meeting of the Quay Club in August 1886. He invoked the injuries he suffered during Reconstruction in South Carolina and called on Republicans to acknowledge the role of African Americans in the ongoing struggle: “We

¹¹⁷ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 28, 1886.
¹¹⁸ *The (Philadelphia) Times*, August 8, 1886; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 28, 1886. For more on Prohibition candidate John W. Palmer, see *The (Philadelphia) Times*, October 3, 1886.
¹¹⁹ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 28, 1886.
will not be discriminated against in carrying the honor which we helped to gain, but demand a fair and proportionate share,” declared Gipson.¹²⁰

The Republican Party’s ultimate refusal to support Gipson for state legislature signaled the local and state party’s disregard for the priorities and experiences of the city’s black Republicans and forced the hands’ of Philadelphia’s black party leaders. An estimated 500 black Republican activists met in September 1886 to consider launching an independent ticket in the wake of Gipson’s rejection by state Republicans.¹²¹ Gilbert Ball headed the committee to consider the break. Recalling the 1884 mayoral election, black physician and Republican activist Nathan F. Mossell told those gathered that the failure of the city’s new Republican leadership to nominate a black candidate confirmed his decision to vote for Democratic Mayor Samuel King for a second term.¹²² Speakers at the Seventh Ward meeting admonished Republican stalwarts for setting aside not only their moral commitment to African Americans, but also for dismissing a key source of their political fortunes. “The colored citizens…fidelity to the Republican party has saved it from numerous defeats in the city and the State,” read the resolution to consider an independent ticket among African Americans in the Seventh Ward.¹²³ Republicans would ignore the state’s 32,000 black voters at their own peril, the ward’s politicians argued before also voting to denounce Quay for his rude treatment of a “committee of reputable me sent by colored voters to wait upon him.”¹²⁴ Although cautious about the wisdom of abandoning the Republican Party, which would leave black politicians in Philadelphia

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¹²⁰ Quoted in “A Rousing Republican Rally,” Philadelphia Inquirer, August 23, 1886.
¹²² The (Philadelphia) Times, September 25, 1886.
¹²⁴ The (Philadelphia) Times, September 25, 1886.
“entirely without shelter,” Gipson acknowledged the importance of “driving bad men out of the Republican party.” Gipson and the other black Republicans who assembled that night believed “Spruce street gentlemen” uncomfortable with nominating a black man for state office orchestrated a surge in new voters – which they attributed to “bribery and corruption” – to participate in the primary to oppose Gipson.¹²⁵

The regular Republicans poured more salt on the still fresh wounds of Civil War-era racial politics by nominating a candidate for judge who had resigned his position on the city’s Common Council to protest the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Amos Briggs’ controversial nomination split the judicial convention. With Briggs’s supporters and foes shouting and threatening violence on the convention floor, the chairman (“after breaking his cane over the rostrum in a vain attempt to secure order”) called on police to protect Briggs’s delegates. One delegate attempted to shout down the vote on Briggs by reminding the convention about the judge’s positions during the Civil War. With the convention chair demanding that he sit down, the delegate persisted through interruptions from the chair and Briggs’ supporters. The delegate invoked the “godlike Lincoln” who “issued the emancipation proclamation”, while “yes, this man Briggs denounced that noble document.” He concluded with a biting observation of Briggs: “A d__d (sic) fine Republican he is.”¹²⁶

The controversy over Briggs was a local skirmish in the larger battle over the direction of the Republican Party during the 1880s. On the first ballot, Briggs led the other candidate by three votes. A second ballot, forced by the controversial nominee,

¹²⁵ Ibid.
¹²⁶ Ibid.
gave Briggs the nomination with a more solid, but still close vote. At the post-convention meeting of black voters in the Seventh Ward, J.W. Jones urged “every colored voter in the city to try to defeat” Amos Briggs. Gilbert Ball seconded Jones’ motion.127 With the state Republican Party leadership’s decision to elevate Briggs, despite his record of opposition to one of the milestones ending slavery, they signaled that fidelity to racial justice was not a priority for Republicans going forward. The intensity of the opposition to Briggs’ nomination however, suggests that black Republicans still had room to rally in support of racial justice among a portion of the state Republican Party.

In an abrupt turnabout, Gipson announced in early October that he would not run as an independent after all.128 His decision reflected the majority opinion of a committee appointed by the ward’s black Republicans to consider whether to run an independent candidate. It is unclear what part the state’s Republican leadership played in Gipson’s withdrawal from the race. The majority concluded that an independent challenge “was unwise, impolitic and inopportune” and “while the colored voters had a grievance against the Republican party,” the committee opposed any move that would give Democrats support.129 The announcement to abandon an independent challenge to the Republican leadership’s candidate prompted anger at the meeting. Although the effort to elect a black state legislator had progressed further than in 1884, the reaction of those at the meeting echoed Major James Teagle’s disappointment with the limitations of electoral politics for black Philadelphians during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Frustrated

128 “Gipson Declines: He Will Not Run as an Independent Candidate for the Legislature,” The (Philadelphia) Times, October 5, 1886.
129 Ibid.
attendees decried the lack of decisive action. The group opted to split their endorsements, backing Quay’s candidate for governor but selecting the black Prohibition Party candidate Rev. John M. Palmer from Allegheny County for Congressman-at-Large. They also approved a censure of the Republican’s nomination of Amos Briggs, the judicial candidate who resigned from the city’s common council in 1863 in protest over the Emancipation Proclamation.¹³⁰

Later that month, Quay, having brought the Seventh Ward’s black leadership back into the fold, made the rounds of newspapers in the region predicting an easy re-election win for Boyer and a twenty-five-seat state House majority for the Republicans. He told The Indiana Weekly Messenger, a Republican paper covering Western Pennsylvania as well as Indiana, that he was confident about Boyer’s re-election chances and expected him to be chosen speaker of the Pennsylvania State House of Representatives after his victory.¹³¹ More pointedly, during an interview from his hotel room in Atlantic City before he left for a fishing trip, Quay told a reporter from The Times, “I have heard no opposition to Henry K. Boyer, of the Seventh Ward, for Speaker.” His assertion ignored the recently resolved battle with Ball’s African American faction. “He is a young Republican of good character and will make a good Speaker,” Quay concluded before later demurring that he “would rather talk about the 2,000-pound devil fish.”¹³²

Less than two weeks after the 1886 election, Gilbert Ball and the now two hundred-member strong M.S. Quay Club welcomed white and African American

¹³⁰ Ibid.
¹³² “Quay Talks Politics,” The (Philadelphia) Times, October 17, 1886.
Republican office holders and activists to their headquarters in the Seventh Ward to celebrate the club’s second anniversary. Henry K. Boyer, the recently re-elected member of the Pennsylvania state legislature dined on lobster and drank wine along with Stephen B. Gipson, Boyer’s would-be colleague who lost the backing of state Republican leaders in the final days of the campaign. The festivities lasted until “an early hour in the morning,” with guests enjoying piano music that “revived memories of the old days in the South” while speeches and toasts paid tribute to the Club’s rise to distinction in such a short time. As *The Times* noted, the Quay Club earned a statewide reputation as the “only colored club that graced the convention that nominated Blaine for the Presidency.” The celebration appeared to welcome the Republican leaders of the Seventh Ward back into the fold with uncomplicated hopes for future victories. In truth, the final years of the 1880s would bring more conflict between the Quay Club and its patrons.

Because of the newly restructured Republican Party in Philadelphia, especially after the new charter took effect in 1887, African Americans found it difficult to gain traction within the Republican Party. For at least a decade after the charter took effect in 1887, the only significant opposition to the Republican regulars emerged during the 1890s as a reform challenge defined in large part by discrediting the legitimacy of black electoral participation and, ultimately, black citizenship.  

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Octavius V. Catto and his violent death became a kind of touchstone for local partisan and African American politics during the 1870s and 1880s, but as the city moved

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134 See Chapters Three and Four; and Kehl, *Boss Rule in the Gilded Age*, 71.
further away from the victories of the Civil War and the nation (and Republican Party) became disillusioned with the experience of black politics during Reconstruction and corruption in municipal politics, the link between black voting and bravery exemplified by Catto’s story lost some of its salience in the public imagination in Philadelphia. Black men continued to be targets of violence at the polls during the 1890s, but their experiences were increasingly framed in the popular political imagination as the byproduct of their own shady association with machine politicians rather than heroic stands for racial justice.

In 1886, as Stephen B. Gipson stepped aside from a chance to win a state legislative seat, other less prominent black men in Philadelphia joined the fray to pursue their own paths to electoral participation. A couple of months before the 1886 election, a group of black men entered a saloon in the city’s Fifth Ward, provoking a violent and ultimately deadly reaction from Police Lieutenant David B. Roche. Roche, who was drinking in the bar at the time, identified the men as supporters of Bruno Ernst, a candidate for the state legislature. “You hadn’t ought to vote, anyhow,” Roche shouted at the African American supporters of Ernst. Roche’s choice in the Republican primary battle, John R. Lloyd, a member of the Common Council who challenged incumbent Ernst in the Republican primary, was drinking with Roche and several other police officers. As the men attempted to escape, Roche fired his revolver, hitting William Powell in the neck. Powell’s companions carried him home to nearby Middle Alley, but a
group of Roche’s friends arrived and dragged the gravely injured man from his house into a taxi. The northbound taxi sped away, leaving little doubt about Powell’s fate.\footnote{135}{“Shot by Drunken Police: A Small Riot in the Streets of Philadelphia,” \textit{New York Times}, September 23, 1886; and \textit{The (Philadelphia) Times}, September 25, 1886.}

Roche ended the night passed out in a “drunken stupor” at the Pension Francaise, a nearby saloon. It is unclear whether Roche was ever prosecuted for his murderous rampage, although newspaper reports suggest a warrant was issued for his arrest. Roche, who had been promoted to lieutenant three years earlier, was a celebrated member of the Philadelphia police force. His investigation the year before of a local murder led to the arrest of a black man named Frank Lingo, who was sentenced to hang for the crime.\footnote{136}{\textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, December 19, 1897.}

Roche’s actions suggest the vulnerability of African Americans who participated in the electoral process. Although black men could legally vote in Philadelphia, their eligibility for full-fledged citizenship remained in doubt, as Roche’s comment suggests. During the closing decades of the nineteenth century, black men such as Powell who engaged in grassroots political activity became targets of violent feuds within the Republican Party as well as scapegoats among reformers unconvinced of the legitimacy of black votes.\footnote{137}{See Chapters Three and Five.}

African American voters and their political leaders continued to struggle with “fidelity” to the Republican Party throughout the 1880s (and really until the Great Depression and the New Deal realignment). Philadelphia’s black Republicans faced the challenge of navigating local power struggles while keeping their eyes trained on political developments at the national level. But black politicians like Gilbert Ball were not playing at the federal level. Instead, Ball and his fellow black Republicans in the Seventh
Ward worked to balance their own place within the local and state party while still pressuring party leaders’ to make gains toward equality. Often pegged as a self-interested loyalist to the Republican Party by historians of Philadelphia urban politics, Ball continually modulated his positions and alliances in pursuit of multiple goals – personal, local and more far-reaching. Ball used his influence as head of a Republican political club for African Americans in Philadelphia’s Seventh Ward to pressure the Republican Party to nominate black candidates for public office, show support for issues important to the ward’s residents, and confer jobs and other favors to its members.

A new generation of political and social reformers would sharpen the distinction in Philadelphia politics between individual power grabs indulged by corrupt politicians and policies pursued in the “public” interest in large part by associating black politics with the corruption they disdained. Their work, in turn, narrowed the space available for African Americans to engage with partisan politics and ironically left local and state Republican Party leaders – increasingly liberated from the politics of race locally and nationally – with more freedom to shape the party according to corporate interests. But this was a gradual and fitful process that played out during the 1880s and 1890s with ongoing controversy within the Republican ranks, among African American activists and among reformers.
CHAPTER 2

“There is No Politics About It. It Is Simply a Question of Work”: The Politics of Employment, Industry, and African American Migration at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

On July 8, 1892, in the midst one of the most violent battles between workers and industrial employers during the tumultuous last decade of the nineteenth century, a representative from Philadelphia’s Manufacturers’ Club said he believed the unfolding strike at Andrew Carnegie’s Homestead steel mill represented a failure of the state to protect business interests. The members of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, who had been locked out by Homestead since June 28, had repeatedly clashed with Pinkerton agents hired by the factory managers, resulting in deaths and injuries on both sides.138 One of the Progressive Era’s most pressing debates centered on how to define the state’s relationship to society.139 Referring to the striking workers at Homestead, James Pollock, a member of the Manufacturers’ Club, weighed in when he proclaimed, “The riot required the strong arm of the State to quell it, and who knows what trouble may yet ensue?” A group of industrial leaders in Philadelphia founded the

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139 See Beckert, *Monied Metropolis*, 293-322.
Manufacturers’ Club in 1887 to build fellowship and promote the political interests of the city’s business leaders. Pollock criticized Democratic Gov. Robert E. Pattison’s initial reluctance to dispatch the Pennsylvania militia to confront striking workers. According to Pollock, a partisan dispute over tariff policy drove the Democratic governor’s response to the strike. High tariffs, Pollock argued, were responsible for Carnegie’s profitable steel mill and the jobs it created. Pollock, a carpet manufacturer and active member of the local and state Republican Party, advocated a strong role for the government in putting down “lawless mobs” of workers, many of whom were newly arrived eastern European immigrants. He objected to laborers “taking the law into their own hands” and claimed that their actions “form the strongest argument for the inability of the people to rule themselves, and a powerful agency was needed to suppress them.” Pollock’s views reflected the opinion of the majority faction of the Pennsylvania (and national) Republican Party by the 1890s. The state’s obligation, men of wealth and capital claimed, was to protect business interests over the concerns of working men and women. As Pollock told a reporter from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, “It is about time in this nineteenth century that a man can conduct his business to suit himself, and not be interfered with by lawless mobs formed from labor organizations.”

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141 For more on Pollock, see his obituary, which was published in a textile trade magazine: William E. Clark, “Happenings in the Quaker City,” *Price’s Carpet and Rug News* (October 1917), 28-32.
142 *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 8, 1892.
143 Ibid.
Pollock and his fellow members at the Manufacturers’ Club played an important role in lobbying the Republican Party to maintain protective tariffs on goods imported from other countries during the 1880s and 1890s. In their efforts to ensure high profits for domestic producers of wool, carpets, and other textiles, Philadelphia’s industrial organizations, including the Manufacturers’ Club, the Iron and Steel Association and the Industrial League led the way in donations to the Republican Party during the 1888 presidential election. In return they expected and received strong support from Pennsylvania’s powerful Senator Matthew S. Quay, who vigorously backed the McKinley Tariff after President Benjamin Harrison’s election in 1888 and launched a fourteen-day filibuster to block a vote on a bill introduced in 1894 by a southern Congressman to reduce tariffs. Quay ultimately secured passage of the McKinley Tariff by holding up a vote on an elections bill that would have provided federal protection for black voters in the South.

Quay had consolidated the state Republican Party’s power over Philadelphia’s municipal government during the 1880s, effectively narrowing the space for black politicians to maneuver around Republican Party dictates. Quay’s alliance with

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144 According to Kehl, “The Keystone state proved itself to be the financial capital of the Republican Party (in 1888), contributing much more – perhaps five times more – than New York to the party’s coffers.” Boss Rule in the Gilded Age, 99.

145 The bill passed the House but Quay’s filibuster successfully prevented it from coming to a vote in the Senate. According to Kehl, “Quay was vitally concerned with the legislative progress of the tariff because so many of his promises to industrialists during the 1888 campaign…Thomas Dolan, president of the Philadelphia Manufacturers Club, which had contributed most generously on the assumption that higher rates would accompany a Republican victory, had no intention of permitting him to forget. He wrote to Quay, reminded him of their understanding, and predicted that foreign imports would flood the American market if the McKinley tariff were not enacted at once…Anyone who attacked them was denounced as an enemy of the tariff and debaser of American industry.” Kehl, Boss Rule in the Gilded Age, 129.

146 For more on the so-called force bill and Quay’s role in burying it, see Chapter Four and Kehl, Boss Rule in the Gilded Age, 128-136.

147 See Chapter One.
Republican industrialists in Philadelphia suggests the political challenge for black laborers who faced an ascendant wing of the GOP that was hostile to workers’ rights and political and social reformers intent on defining fitness for citizenship based on middle-class notions of propriety.

Southern black migrants left behind increasingly dangerous circumstances at the end of the nineteenth century, but the northern world they entered was in its own ways also fraught with social and political tensions. The “negro problem” was one of many interrelated social ills, including the labor problem and the immigrant problem, vexing Americans during the tumultuous closing decade of the nineteenth century. Philadelphia’s demographics – especially with regard to immigration - set it apart from other major northern cities at the turn of the twentieth century. “Despite her size and industrial importance, Philadelphia was not a major center of the new immigration,” according to historian Caroline Golab.  

Between 1870 and 1920, an average of one-quarter of the total population in Philadelphia was foreign-born. In contrast, in Chicago, a major destination for immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century, one-half of the city’s residents were born outside the United States in 1870.  

Meanwhile, fueled by a steady stream of Southern migrants throughout the post-Civil War decades, Philadelphia claimed the largest black population of any city outside the South in 1900. In 1898, black ministers from the Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church discussed the need for another school in Philadelphia for black children due to the “influx of emigration” and “the growth of the colored population and

148 Golab, “Immigrant and the City,” 203.
149 Ibid., 203-04.
the number of colored children who do not attend school.” Given its comparatively small foreign-born population, a limited number of industrial jobs and its proximity to the South, Philadelphia was perhaps poised to experience a more significant jolt from the large increase in its black population at the turn of the century than other northern cities.

As northern cities industrialized, their populations swelled with eastern and southern European immigrants, fueling anxiety among industrial capitalists and political leaders who attributed labor unrest to the growing ranks of foreign-born residents. Economic instability and labor conflict marked the 1880s and 1890s, during which the nation experienced a series of depressions accompanied by widespread labor strikes. Elites in the North responded to the turmoil with new suspicions about the wisdom and viability of democracy. In New York, members of the bourgeoisie saw their own battles with workers and concerns about increasing immigrant power reflected in the complaints of southern leaders who recalled what they considered the dark and corrupt days of African American political participation during Reconstruction. Northern elites’ reluctance to yield power to workers contributed to their support for federal withdrawal from the South in 1877 and continued to inform their attitudes about the dangers of workers – whether immigrant or black – gaining political power. Their sympathies thus aligned with southern white elites, members of the northern bourgeoisie were not inclined to concern themselves with the political and physical oppression of African Americans in the South.151

151 See Beckert, Monied Metropolis, 300.
Unlike New York and Chicago, where elites were consolidating their wealth based on mass production, Philadelphia remained a center of small-scale manufacturing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Philadelphia’s manufacturing industries offered higher-skilled positions than the jobs available in Chicago’s meatpacking plants or New England’s large textile mills, which meant that Philadelphia attracted a different immigrant base than other areas. Still, Philadelphia’s labor markets continued to be divided by race and ethnicity. The highest paying jobs in metalworking went to German immigrants, while Italians built roads and sidewalks and filled other manual labor construction jobs.¹⁵² Hotels and cafes replaced black workers with European immigrants and businesses began to advertise all white staffs.¹⁵³ A small number of black men found jobs working as stevedores on the docks of the Delaware River, but most were employed in service positions. Shut out from factory jobs, black men turned to low-paying work as day laborers, porters, and custodians. Connections with the Republican machine did lead to a limited number of government positions for black men. Municipal building projects, including construction on a water filtration plant and street paving, offered a handful of black men some of the few opportunities for steady work, but these were not avenues open to black women. The majority of black women, whether single or married, took jobs as laundresses, cooks, or performed other types of domestic labor.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Gross, Colored Amazons, 46-54; James Samuel Stemons, “Industrial Repression,” ca. 1910, Writings and Speeches, Box 4, Folder 1, James Samuel Stemons papers (hereafter cited as JSS), HSP.
Republican Party leaders framed any sympathy for the plight of workers during this period in terms of the tariff debate. High tariffs on foreign imports, according to the Republican argument, protected domestic labor by preserving the profitability of goods produced in the United States. Following the financial collapse of 1893, the Republican Philadelphia Inquirer devoted its coverage of the severe depression to the fight over repealing the tariff and the devastating impact that would have on manufacturers and their employees. The employees in question were all white workers in factories where black men and women could not get hired. Philadelphia manufacturers implored members of Congress not to repeal the protectionist McKinley Tariff. A lower tariff on wool would be particularly devastating, the manufacturers argued, due to competition from Europe, where labor was cheaper. Mill workers in the Philadelphia neighborhood of Kensington spoke out against lowering the tariff while the Inquirer reported mockingly about labor organizers’ efforts to reach out to workers and their families.\(^{155}\)

Meanwhile, African Americans of all ages struggled for a financial foothold in Philadelphia and the surrounding region. Although their stories went largely unreported in the city’s leading Republican newspaper, the records of the Philadelphia Society for Organizing Charity offer glimpses of black men, women, and children moving from southern to northern cities in search of work, suffering financially and physically, and taking enormous risks with themselves and family members to earn a living. In the spring of 1903, Mary Turner, a 16-year-old from Richmond, Virginia, was one of those new migrants struggling to find employment in Philadelphia. Turner found herself stranded

\(^{155}\)“Hold a Meeting, A Queer Mixture that Astonished the Residents of the Kensington Mill District, Speeches that Favor Free Trade and Tariff Reform,” Philadelphia Inquirer, September 12, 1893.
without work and unable to afford transportation to return home. Carl Christian (C.C.) Carstens, assistant secretary of the Philadelphia Society for Organizing Charity, wrote to Mary’s home church in Richmond and her former employer, a cigarette manufacturing company, requesting character and work references. It is unclear why Mary had trouble finding work. With the number of southern migrants increasing, employers perhaps had their pick of servant candidates and preferred an older woman with more experience. Carstens also wrote to Mary’s sister and her mother in Richmond asking if they could send money for Mary’s ticket back to Richmond and if they would be able to provide a home for the teenage girl once she returned to the South.156

The Republican Party remained largely silent about the lack of local employment opportunities for black men and women in Philadelphia. Leading white philanthropists and reformers focused on education and training rather than political and policy solutions to broaden the employment choices available for the city’s black residents. When reformers did note the lack of job opportunities for blacks, their preferred solution typically involved improving the character and education of black residents, thereby making them more attractive candidates to employers.

Because much of the work available to them involved service jobs, African Americans at the turn of the century were forced to weigh the potential indignities and dangers of proximity to a white employer against their need for work.157

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156 C.C. Carstens to Dr. Farrell, May 25, 1903; Carstens to “Minister 5th St. Baptist Church,” May 25, 1903; Carstens to “Allen & Ginnis, Cigarette Makers,” May 25, 1903; Carstens to Maria Turner, May 25, 1903; Carstens to Alma Lee, May 25, 1903, Box 16, Family Service of Philadelphia Records (hereafter cited as FSPR), HSP.
157 Although living with an employer offered relief from the decrepit housing options available in Philadelphia to low-paid black domestics, some preferred to work out of, or live in their own homes. The
confronted this problem in 1893 when his boss, a local Republican Party operative and veterinary surgeon, stabbed and killed a man at a polling place during the Republican primary in West Philadelphia. William Werntz and his friends at first tried to frame Scott, shouting “the coon did it” when police arrived.158 Scott worked as a coachman for Werntz and a police officer assured him that confessing would save his employer, who would then gratefully return the favor. With Scott and Werntz both in custody, Werntz’s attorney argued at a hearing that Scott stabbed the victim. Werntz loomed “head and shoulders over the colored man” while the two waited in the dock at the police station.159 A newspaper account described Werntz as a “large, powerful-looking man, over six feet tall, well dressed and with a florid countenance.” Scott later recanted his confession once he learned the victim would likely die as a result of his wounds.160

At Werntz’s trial, three men testified they saw the doctor pull a knife from his overcoat and plunge it into another man’s body during a fight over a disputed ballot. A jury convicted Werntz of manslaughter but, given their difficulty reaching a verdict, also asked the judge for leniency in sentencing. Scott testified in chains and was released only after the doctor’s conviction. As the Werntz case suggests, a black man’s presence at a polling place raised sufficient questions in the criminal justice system, from the moment the police arrived to the jury’s ultimate verdict, about who to blame for the crime. Werntz

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158 Commonwealth vs. William Werntz, Box 1, Trial Transcript in the Court of Quarter Sessions and Oyer and Terminer of Philadelphia County, February Sessions, 1893, Philadelphia City Archives, Philadelphia, PA.
159 The (Philadelphia) Times, January 6, 1893.
160 “Dr. Werntz Guilty of Manslaughter: The Verdict of the Jury Accompanied by a Recommendation to Mercy,” Philadelphia Inquirer, April 7, 1893.
and his defense team knew that implicating a black man could be the only way around the
direct testimony of three witnesses to the murder.

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Business leaders saw the state as an instrument to protect private property
interests, including their access to a ready supply of low cost, pliable labor. As such, they
tended not to favor restrictionist immigration policies at the end of the nineteenth century
and advocated for strong state action in the face of strikes and other labor disturbances.
At the same time, an emerging political and social reform movement, with members
sometimes drawn from industry, gave priority to civic virtue and addressing the challenge
newcomers presented to their clean-government goals.¹⁶¹ In Philadelphia, two Quaker
families, the Whartons and the Welshs, saw members of their class divided between those
who ran large businesses and those who devoted their time to social and political reform
movements.

In the 1890s, a group of black community leaders in Philadelphia addressed this
tension surrounding immigration, hoping to capitalize on the “Americanism” of native-
born black residents to secure a place in the industrial workforce. Five hundred African
American women carrying bags “with sewing materials and lunches” lined up outside a
new factory to apply for work in downtown Philadelphia in August 1890.¹⁶² They sought
to fill the demand created by striking Russian cloak makers. The job seekers hoped to
gain a toehold in the urban economy beyond domestic service, the only line of work open
to most African American woman at the turn of the twentieth century. Many of the

¹⁶¹ Matthew Frye Jacobson, Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home
¹⁶² “Colored Women Busy,” The (Philadelphia) Times, August 26, 1890.
applicants likely first heard about the job openings while sitting in church pews on Sunday, when pastors at black churches announced Rev. Benjamin F. Christian’s plan to open a factory where black women could take on sewing work from the cloak-making company Blum Brothers. The striking workers, mostly Russian Jewish immigrants, demanded the right to form a union and a wage increase.\textsuperscript{163}

Christian and Christopher Perry, editor of the black newspaper the \textit{Philadelphia Tribune}, met with the owner of Blum Brothers and convinced him that black women would be ready and willing to fill the jobs of striking Russian workers. Blum estimated between 1,500 and 1,600 black workers could be hired by the city’s clothing manufacturers to make clothes from home on a piecework basis.\textsuperscript{164} In a not-so-veiled threat to the striking workers, Blum told a reporter from the \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, “We cannot prevent them from forming a union, but we will not discharge a man or refuse to employ one because he is a non-union man.”\textsuperscript{165} The \textit{Inquirer} interpreted Blum’s statement, which laid bare his motivations in hiring African American labor to replace the striking cloak makers, as a declaration, “calculated to create a panic among strikers and surprise the general public.”\textsuperscript{166}

Perhaps as a way of acknowledging the difficulty of piecework labor or maybe as an attempt to make a public display of the women’s fitness as respectable, reliable industrial employees, Christian opened a factory in downtown Philadelphia for the newly minted cloak makers to do their jobs. Christian and his wife, who offered job seekers

\textsuperscript{163} “A Radical Change: Cloak Manufacturers to Employ Colored People Only, Dismay Among the Strikers,” \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, August 16, 1890.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
lessons in basic sewing skills, clearly considered image as well as skill in their recruitment and presentation of black workers. Given the challenges faced by African American domestic servants in Philadelphia, the opportunity to escape wealthy white households clearly appealed to those assembled to apply for work. Rev. Christian offered tours of the factory to reporters from white newspapers, touting the respectability and patriotic virtues on display. Approaching the worktables filled with busy employees, Christian asked, “‘Is not that a fine representation of the colored race?’”167 Christian indulged a paternalistic vision of pliable, neatly dressed black women eager to work and follow orders. The reporters, in turn, published approving accounts of the women’s dress and demeanor, describing the “tidy young colored women” with their earnest interest in securing jobs. One newspaper reporter observed that the applicants were “fairly and neatly dressed, showing that they belonged to the better class of the colored population.” After opening the doors to the eager applicants, Christian “raised an American flag from the roof” and led a chant of “three cheers for the equality of industrial labor.”168

Connecting the ultimate symbol of American patriotism to the status of African American laborers could be read as an attempt to exploit growing suspicion of the labor radicalism percolating among immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. The Evening Telegraph made the contrast between native workers and immigrants explicit, suggesting the gratitude and docility of African American workers compared to the trouble-making demands of immigrant labor: “The recent strikes in the cloak-making industry gave rise to the suggestion that the colored people might be glad to work, if they

167 “The Colored Workers: None Will Be Discharged to Make Room for Workers,” The (Philadelphia) Times, August 27, 1890.
168 “Colored Women Busy,” The (Philadelphia) Times, August 26, 1890.
could have the chance under the conditions which the haughty Huns, sensitive Russians, noble nihilists, distinguished dynamiters and other high-toned foreigners refuse to submit to.”

The editorial prefaced its claims by decrying the lack of employment opportunities for blacks in the North compared to the South, where “they have been excluded from political pursuits.” After the strike ended and many of the striking workers went back to their jobs, the owner of Blum Brothers commended the African American women on a job well done and suggested that other manufacturers in the city would join him in welcoming black women into the industrial labor force. Like the editorial writer, Blum distinguished between the political and economic spheres: “There is no politics about it. It is simply a question of work.”

While others drew a distinction between political and economic rights, the African American leaders who sought expanded job opportunities in Philadelphia saw the two as inextricably linked in their city.

Rev. Christian, joined by Perry, abolitionist leader Robert Purvis, and prominent attorney T.J. Minton, considered the women’s pursuit of the cloak-making jobs as an opportunity not just to broaden the employment options available to black Philadelphians, but also as a moment to highlight the Americanness and respectability of black laborers compared to newly arrived eastern European immigrants. With fitness for citizenship increasingly defined according to racialized categories applied to immigrants as well as African Americans during the 1890s, black leaders looked to differentiate the status of

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169 “The Fate of the Negro: Ostracism of Caste Everywhere – Industrial Ostracism in the North,” *The (Philadelphia) Times*, August 27, 1890. Unlike the broad anti-Semitic claims of the editorial writers, Blum, the owner of Blum Brothers, offered a version of the Jewish strikers as loyal workers who had been duped by the more radical Anarchists. “This so-called strike was forced by a lot of Anarchists. They are men of glib tongue and they persuaded these people to go out on strike.” “The Colored Workers,” *The (Philadelphia) Times*, August 27, 1890.

black men and women from that of European immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. At stake was both political and economic power for Philadelphia’s growing population of African Americans. As one man (described by a newspaper account as “eloquent”) noted, “Of the immense army of workmen who can be seen daily on its ways to and from its daily occupation, how very few in proportion to the number of inhabitants in this city, colored men, women, and children can be found in its ranks!” The man being interviewed by the newspaper blamed the underrepresentation of African American workers on discrimination in hiring and training. “(I)t is a burning reproach that so few (African Americans) are given a chance to advance themselves and their race.” Perry, editor of the black newspaper, The Weekly Tribune, and active in the local Republican Party, believed African American leaders (and presumably workers) should seize the opportunity presented by the strike to fight back against assumptions made about African American citizenship. Perry lamented that, “When a colored man is idle…he is looked upon as a lazy, good-for-nothing individual, unworthy of citizenship.” In this statement, Perry revealed the concern that African American citizenship was increasingly contingent, even in the urban North where many newly arrived migrants searched in vain for steady employment.

With a reliable source of low-wage labor, manufacturers could play experienced Russian cloak-makers against black laborers without risking much. In Philadelphia, where large-scale manufacturing never took off, employers relied primarily on skilled

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171 Jacobson, Barbarian Virtues, 218. Also see Chapter Five.
172 “Colored Cloak Makers,” The Item, 18 August 1890, in Roll 8, Scrapbook 73, microfilm record, William H. Dorsey Scrapbook collection, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, Cheyney, Penn. (hereafter cited as WDC).
173 “A Radical Change: Cloak Manufacturers to Employ Colored People Only, Dismay Among the Strikers,” Philadelphia Inquirer, August 16, 1890.
labor from Europe to keep the city’s workshops humming. This meant there was little room in the urban economy for African American migrants with agricultural backgrounds and even less opportunity once increased immigration from southern and eastern Europe created competition for the service jobs once held by black men and women. As the head of Blum Brothers declared when the striking workers returned, “We did not ask these people to come back. It makes no difference to us whether they come back or not. They are not needed.”174

In Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century, an increasing number of job-seeking and often destitute black newcomers fueled a growing concern that African Americans occupied a space in the urban landscape between citizen and alien, a kind of provisional citizenship that left them vulnerable to corruption and inclined to criminal activity.175 While educated, prosperous African Americans like Gertrude Mossell helped form national civil rights organizations independent of the Republican Party, working class men (and women, to a lesser extent) engaged in party politics at the local level.176 The activities and writings of elite and aspiring black Philadelphians suggest their own ambivalence about sharing urban space with the new arrivals. Philadelphia’s more successful African Americans heeded deteriorating conditions in the South, patrolled the boundaries of discrimination in their northern city, and watched as social and municipal reformers responded to the growing black population by ramping up discussions of the “negro problem.”

175 See Chapter Three.
176 Alexander, An Army of Lions, xv. Alexander argues that the Afro-American Council and the earlier Afro-American League had difficulty attracting membership and support from the “masses” due to the high cost of annual dues and the absence of an effective “mouthpiece or organ to publicize their activities and spell out their policies and organizational goals.”
In 1901, the editors of the *Christian Recorder* urged black southerners to stay put given the conditions awaiting them in northern cities. “Thousands come to the North every year and the vast majority locate in the large cities, and many hundreds are in destitution before many months have passed,” noted the popular journal. “There is scarcely any chance at the present time for colored mechanics and common laborers in the North.”

As historian Robert Gregg suggests, African American Methodist leaders in Philadelphia assisted impoverished residents of the city’s growing black neighborhoods but they were also subject to class prejudice, leading them to draw distinctions between “refugees” from southern political violence and “migrants” who moved North primarily in pursuit of work. Religious leaders did address the economic challenges facing migrants who arrived prior to World War I, which opened manufacturing jobs to black workers. In 1901, a group of ministers urged trade unions to grant membership to black men and offered to help the newcomers find jobs. “This society will try to furnish full information about the openings for employment to all who may write,” the ministers promised.

But they tended to steer newcomers away from Philadelphia and into the countryside instead.

Writing in 1921, Sadie Tanner Mossell pinpointed the years of the U.S. involvement in World War I as the moment when migration interrupted the steady “progress” of African Americans in Philadelphia. Elite and aspiring African Americans often described the Great Migration as a clash of cultures – one southern, one northern – that threatened to destabilize the hard-won gains of established urban black

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communities. “Certainly none of us can deny that the migration retarded the steady march of progress of the colored people in Philadelphia,” observed Sadie Tanner Mossell, in “The Standard of Living Among One Hundred Negro Migration Families in Philadelphia,” her doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Pennsylvania in 1921. For Mossell, a black woman from a prominent Philadelphia family, the move North held possibilities for newcomers while also portending at least a temporary slip in status for the city’s established black residents. “Only gradually,” Mossell predicted, “as the weights of ignorance, lack of culture and increased race prejudice, aroused by the white people against the whole Negro citizenry as a result of the tremendous increase in the size of the Negro population are removed, will the pendulum return to normal.” Although Sadie Tanner Mossell wrote from the perspective of the 1920s, aspiring African Americans in Philadelphia were already feeling the pressure of reform efforts to downgrade black citizenship rights – especially concerning access to the ballot – by the turn of the twentieth century.

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180 Sadie Tanner Mossell, “The Standard of Living Among One Hundred Negro Migrant Families in Philadelphia,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 98 (November 1921): 109-221. Born in 1898, Sadie Tanner Mossell was the first black woman to receive a Ph.D. in economics and the first to graduate from law school at the University of Pennsylvania.

181 Sadie Tanner Mossell’s aunt was Gertrude Mossell, black journalist and founding member of the Afro-American Council in Philadelphia. Her uncle Nathan F. Mossell was active in local Republican politics and founded the second black hospital in the country, the Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital and Training School.

In an article on black political participation in Philadelphia, W.E.B. Du Bois argued that migration from the south had degraded the political system in Philadelphia by contributing ignorant voters who fell easily under the influence of corrupt ward bosses and machine politics. He depicted the “typical Philadelphia colored man” as a lonely, lost “young immigrant from the South” who stumbles upon political clubs while looking for friends and recreation in the overwhelming city. Invoking a common narrative associated with Reconstruction by the 1890s, Du Bois compared Philadelphia’s newly arrived southern migrants with the African American voters who allowed themselves to be used for “the looting of the newly reconstructed southern states.” In Philadelphia, Du Bois wrote, the black Southern migrant “soon sees that he is in a network of intrigue, influence and bribery.”

Du Bois located the hope for honest black political participation in the “native Philadelphian of Negro descent” and the “better class of immigrants from the country districts of the state, Maryland and Virginia.” These “better classes” were dissuaded from participating in politics by black leaders – such as Booker T. Washington, although Du Bois does not mention him by name – who advocated abandoning political activity for African Americans as the route to race advancement. “Thus the result of the foolish campaign against the Negro in politics,” Du Bois asserted, “has been simply to drive out of political life the very class of Negroes needed most, and to deliver political life and activity into the hands of the political clubs and their ignorant and debased followers.”

184 Ibid., 39.
185 Ibid., 34.
Here again, the influence of the South on migrants is characterized as debasing, although Du Bois adds a twist. Although he has no faith in the migrant, he ends with a criticism aimed more at whites – North and South – than black migrants. The growing black migrant population offered, Du Bois argued, an opportunity for Philadelphia to “teach its citizens, white or black, the duties and rewards of good citizenship, to open its civil service on equal terms to all and to show the 25,000 Negro voters what government means.”

In Philadelphia, newspapers filled their pages with violent crimes connected to rootless, jobless African American men. In 1900, a murder committed by three homeless black men from the South captured the most fearsome prototype of the African American migrant as framed by social and political reformers at the turn of the twentieth century. It was this increasingly common depiction of black urban life from which Philadelphia’s elite and aspiring black residents hoped to differentiate themselves. Charles Perry arrived in Philadelphia from his rural Georgia home in 1900 looking for work as a laborer. He found trouble instead. In his month in Philadelphia, Perry’s urban experience took shape around his joblessness as well as his race. He fell in with two other African American drifters, wandered around on the margins of the city, and ultimately played a role in the murder of Roy Wilson White, a young law professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Perry, Henry Ivory and Amos Stirling arrived from the South with no property, prospects, or ties to the community. About a month before the murder, Ivory had

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186 Ibid., 39.
187 For more on the ways in which urban black residents were constructed as criminals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).
188 *New York Tribune*, May 27, 1900.
introduced Perry to Stirling as “a fellow who hoboes with me.”

The trio allegedly encountered White, a 27-year-old professor, on his way to catch a train in West Philadelphia around 10 p.m., bludgeoned him with an iron pipe and stole his pocket watch. All three were found guilty and hanged for taking the life of a promising, white professional.

During the initial manhunt, police rounded up dozens of homeless black men in West Philadelphia as possible suspects. A “tramp catcher” for the Pennsylvania Railroad found Amos Stirling, who was born in Somerset County, Maryland, and could only guess his own age as 26, sleeping on a car in Trenton, New Jersey, within several days of the murder.  

Although the Philadelphia police congratulated themselves on their quick work finding White’s murderers, hundreds of Trenton’s African American residents protested Stirling’s extradition to Philadelphia after he was captured in the New Jersey city thirty-four miles to the northeast. The indiscriminate rounding up of African American vagrants raised red flags for Trenton’s black residents, who believed Philadelphia police were likely to implicate the wrong man.  

A group of Trenton’s “leading” black residents sparked an early effort to defend Stirling, hiring a well-known attorney to fight the accused murderer’s transfer to Philadelphia police custody. The lawyer did not succeed in delaying extradition and it is unclear why Stirling’s benefactors did not pursue his case further. After the arrests, police arranged an encounter between Ivory and Stirling. In a prophetic moment,

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190 *The (Philadelphia) Times*, May 25, 1900; and “Amos Stirling, Aided By Others, Fights Requisition for Murder,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 26, 1900.  
191 *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 26, 1900.
Ivory told Stirling: “You know you did it. If you were in the South you would be lynched, but you are here, and you’ll hang for it.” Ivory’s comment suggests his understanding of the ways in which Stirling’s race would determine his fate perhaps as much as his guilt. The difference between the likely punishments in Philadelphia and the South, Ivory implied, was ultimately a matter of semantics.

White was also a newcomer to Philadelphia. Born and raised in Indiana, he moved to Philadelphia in 1896 to attend law school at the University of Pennsylvania. In death and in life, White embodied the hope of Progressive reformers for a city built on dispassionate solutions to address the changing urban landscape. After his death, White served as the counterpoint to the African American trio accused of his murder. “He was all that a true man and a good citizen should be,” gushed White’s obituary in the American Law Registry. White’s assessment of the meaning of citizenship echoed a popular strain of Progressive-era reform, which advocated restricting immigration to the most “fit” candidates for citizenship. Representing the University of Pennsylvania in a debate in 1898, White argued for the use of literacy tests to exclude prospective immigrants who could not read and write. White’s policy proposals were mostly aimed at curbing foreign immigration, but press descriptions of Stirling after his arrest never failed to mention his illiteracy, suggesting the ways in which African American citizens were conflated with

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194 Ibid., 374.
newly arrived foreign immigrants. All three men were found guilty of the murder and hanged within two years.\textsuperscript{196}

Where White’s killers were itinerant, impulsive, and opportunistic, the men and women catalogued in \textit{The Philadelphia Colored} directories reflected the achievements of African American northerners who made careful and steady progress through hard work and commitment. The directories, compiled by Richard R. Wright, Jr., an African American sociologist who served as editor of \textit{The Christian Recorder} from 1909 through 1939, represented a self-conscious effort to present African Americans in Philadelphia as prosperous and productive citizens, in contrast to the narrative that emerged during White’s murder trial. The tightening of Jim Crow in the South and evidence of the color line in Philadelphia weighed on elite and aspiring African Americans as they struggled to maintain a hold on whatever status and respectability they had achieved.\textsuperscript{197} In 1908, the first edition of \textit{The Philadelphia Colored Directory} touted “the progress of our colored population” in the wake of the dramatic increase in the black population at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{198} As Richard R. Wright, Jr., who compiled the directory, noted, “The city has grown so large, and its population of color has grown so rapidly that it is not now possible for even a small minority of members of the race in question…to know what is being done by the Negroes of Philadelphia.” Wright continued, “The progress of our colored population in business, in home-owning, in their churches, and social life is such that it is difficult for even one who gives his whole time to the subject to keep his information up to

\textsuperscript{196} In 1902, six of the ten men legally hanged by the state of Pennsylvania were black. \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, January 1, 1903.
\textsuperscript{197} Victoria Wolcott argues that the Great Migration stirred middle-class anxiety over the loss of status and respectability for long-established black communities in Detroit. The same tensions are evident in Philadelphia during an earlier period. See Wolcott, \textit{Remaking Respectability}.
\textsuperscript{198} Wright, \textit{Philadelphia Colored Directory}, 1908, 3.
date.” To make the point, the directory included an extensive list of black property owners, taxpayers and reform organizations. A section on black-owned businesses included the proprietors’ names and addresses of eleven undertakers, twenty newspapers, three ice cream parlors, six contractors, thirty-three tobacco and cigar dealers, and three florists.

The second edition of the Colored Directory was printed in 1910 due to the “success” of the first. “This little book, like its predecessor, contains, chiefly, facts concerning the race in Philadelphia without comment… Nothing is so telling as facts without comment,” read the preface of the 1910 directory. Their contents act as a measure of accomplishment, to be sure, but the directories also read like a defensive maneuver to shore up the community’s legitimacy. As catalogues of black prosperity, they created a space between Philadelphia’s established African American community and the growing population of impoverished, southern newcomers.

Richard R. Wright, Jr. whose father was born a slave in Georgia, believed African Americans were on a path toward progress and that path most fruitfully led north. In a 1906 article written while he was a sociology student at the University of Pennsylvania, Wright argued that, “The North has taught the negroes the value of money; of economy; it has taught more sustained effort in work, punctuality and regularity; it has taught negroes even a greater race respect and race loyalty.” Leaving behind the oppression of

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199 Ibid.
200 Ibid., 51-81.
the South was not sufficient for African Americans. Wright believed they needed to learn new values and change their ways. Wright’s enthusiasm for migration illustrates the complexities of northern black attitudes toward migrants. Implicit in Wright’s endorsement of northern migration is a critique of southern blacks that shares many of the assumptions inherent to the emerging national consensus on race expressed North and South. He considered the move north a necessary step in the evolution toward useful and successful citizenship for African Americans. The South stifled development, Wright implied, while the freedoms of the North offered a more level playing field where migrants learned to do better. 203

The arrival of black women from the South created a special problem for black reformers. They worried that, left to roam the city streets on their own, southern black women’s unmonitored sexuality could degrade the entire black community. 204 Black and white reformers characterized migrant women as vulnerable country girls and quickly routed them into jobs as domestics in white households. The Philadelphia Association for the Protection of Colored Women was organized in 1905 “to protect” the “large numbers of friendless women and girls (who) are constantly arriving at the Delaware River docks


203 Gregg, Sparks from the Anvil, 98-104.
204 Michele Mitchell links control of black women’s sexuality to a project of race survival and success undertaken by the “aspiring classes” of African Americans after 1900. “Reform-minded black women and men proceeded to contend that race progress was contingent upon eradicating vice, increasing the number of ‘well-born’ children, and monitoring sexuality,” according to Mitchell. Mitchell, Righteous Propagation, 80.
Reformers’ reports told stories of women being led off by men who promised employment and assistance, never to be heard from again or, worse, to work as prostitutes. Destitute women arriving alone in Philadelphia, in particular, attracted a criminal element, which contributed to degeneracy in black neighborhoods, claimed Wright, when describing the origins of The Philadelphia Association for the Protection of Colored Women. As Wright explained, an investigation in 1905 revealed, “These girls… easily become victims of the unscrupulous men who lie in wait for them, and the bad employment agencies who send these girls to disorderly houses and dens of vice, both as servants and inmates. These methods keep many of these women from entering honest homes to work, and answer many questions about the Negro in our slums and congested sections, jails, almshouses and hospitals.”

The Association for the Protection of Colored Women did more than meet newcomers at the docks. S.W. Layten, who headed the Philadelphia branch, described the agency’s mission as providing a “home for (migrant women) where training can be given in order to fit them for conditions of service in the North, very different from the conditions in which they have lived and worked in the South.” From the Association’s perspective, then, the “protection” of black women meant guarding their sexuality and routing them into jobs as domestic workers in white households.

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205 Wright, *Philadelphia Colored Directory, 1908*, 43. The Philadelphia branch was part of a national organization founded by white reformer Frances Kellor to assist black migrants in their adjustment to northern cities.

206 Ibid., 43-44.

It was not unusual for Gilded Age reformers to emphasize the helplessness and vulnerability of white immigrants and African American migrant women. In the case of African Americans, however, the Association’s construction of southern migrant women ignored the realities of a population that had been on the move since the end of slavery, from farms to southern towns and cities. Du Bois attributed the growth of Farmville, Virginia’s African American population after 1880 to new residents leaving rural areas for jobs in the city’s tobacco and other industries. Women and girls arrived in Philadelphia “in a destitute condition, without friend or guide, with a lost or wrong address, and thus (became) easily victims of the unscrupulous men who lie in wait for them,” as Layten described. It is unlikely, however, that the 450 women met at the docks and assisted by the Association for the Protection of Colored Women between May and September in 1905 were without some experience or savvy settling in a new place.

Black men and women from the American South were not the only African Americans on the move at the turn of the century. In 1908, two Jamaican sisters arrived at the Delaware River docks in Philadelphia from Toronto. They told workers from the Traveller’s Aid Society, an interracial organization that also assisted new migrants, that they planned to send for their husbands in Toronto if they found work and liked living in Philadelphia. Unlike reformers’ depictions of helpless black migrants arriving without knowing anything about the city, these women quickly found a network of Jamaicans in Philadelphia through a clergyman they had known when they all lived in Toronto. The

210 Travellers’ Aid Society, Fourth Annual Report.
211 Ibid.
apparent confidence of these young women and the strength of their multi-city social
network was likely replicated, at least to some extent, among migrants from the southern
states. In Philadelphia, Progressive Era social reformers, including African American
men and women and white settlement house workers, constructed their outreach to
African American migrant women based on middle-class notions of respectability linked
to race and class. But region also played a role. African American reformers sought to
help newly arrived migrants in large part by containing any behaviors that would degrade
the image of respectable black Philadelphians.

In the Seventh Ward, the Starr Centre Settlement tailored its goals and programs
to the essential qualities of good citizenship considered to be lacking among the
neighborhood’s newly arrived impoverished African Americans, including thrift and
discipline. With a growing number of southern migrants moving to Philadelphia during
the 1890s and early 1900s, settlement workers tied their assessments of the new migrants
to a set of ideas about how the experience of slavery and Reconstruction degraded
African Americans’ fitness for citizenship.

Susan Parrish Wharton, a member of the wealthy Philadelphia Quaker family,
began her work in the Seventh Ward as a founder of the St. Mary Street Library in 1884.
Open to both black and white immigrant residents, the library spawned a kitchen and a
settlement house, where Du Bois lived with his wife while researching The Philadelphia
Negro. In large part due to Wharton’s vision, the Starr Centre Settlement focused much
of its work on African American families in the increasingly diverse Seventh Ward.212

212 See V.P. Franklin, “Operation Street Corner: The Wharton Centre and the Juvenile Gang Problem in
Wharton’s initiative was consistent with a tradition of Quaker support in Philadelphia for social services and education for African Americans.

Wharton, who had been studying the “negro problem” for some two decades and devoted her life to establishing services for the city’s black residents, likely considered herself qualified to wield settlement work in pursuit of a solution to the vexing question of African Americans in the urban North. Wharton’s scrapbook, which includes newspaper clippings on settlement work in England dating back to the 1880s, also contains dozens of clippings from both African American and white periodicals on the condition, contributions, and “progress” of African Americans in the post-Reconstruction era. The scrapbook reveals the boundaries of the social reform discussion Wharton was engaged in concerning race progress and the “negro problem” at the turn of the century. Common themes emerge, including an emphasis on industrial education, a conversation about reform efforts aimed at African Americans and an effort to identity certain flaws believed to be endemic to black migrants from the South.

In 1899, Wharton split with the College Settlement Association, which moved the Philadelphia settlement house a mile away to a neighborhood dominated mostly by Jewish and Italian immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. As the Starr Centre

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Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn considers Susan Wharton one of the “exceptional settlement workers who did not share the view that slavery had deprived blacks of fundamental social and cultural attributes, and instead called attention to the forces still at work to deprive and debilitate African Americans.” Lasch-Quinn, \textit{Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890-1945} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 33. Rather than focusing on Wharton’s time at the Starr Centre, Lasch-Quinn highlights her work after 1916 at the Whittier Center, a neighborhood house located in a largely African American neighborhood in North Philadelphia.

For example, one clipped article proclaimed, “Progress of the Negro Race: Freedom, Equality of Rights Opened New Paths…in the United States, The Negro’s loyalty shown in the capacity of Soldier and Citizen.” “Unknown newspaper, Chicago dateline, May 15, 1900,” Box 139, scrapbook signed by Susan P. Wharton (hereafter cited as Wharton scrapbook), FSPR, HSP.
Annual Report observed in 1904, “The resident and others during the past year have dealt with many Russians, Italians, Negroes, Poles, Austrians, Germans, Irish, Roumanians (sic), Americans and English, all of these nations being represented between Pine Street and Washington Avenue, Eighth Street and the Delaware River.”

After the move, Wharton expanded the Starr Centre to more explicitly address the issues raised by a growing black community but the programs and services offered by the settlement continued to be open to European immigrants as well as African American residents.

In 1901, twelve of the twenty-one students enrolled in the Starr Centre Kindergarten were black. Unlike most urban settlements, the Starr Centre opened its doors and services to the African American residents of the Seventh Ward. Despite their growing numbers at the turn of the century, African Americans rarely played a central role in white reformer visions of education, training, control and protection of their impoverished neighbors in the urban North. Other settlement homes worked almost exclusively with European immigrants. Those that did not explicitly exclude African Americans did not pursue them as clients, preferring to leave them to assistance from their own communities.

The Starr Centre’s commitment to African Americans is evident throughout the promotional pamphlets and annual reports of the organization, which took its name from Theodore Starr, a wealthy white Quaker philanthropist who founded the Progressive Men’s Colored Association in 1878. The Centre initially moved into a building that had sheltered runaway slaves during the Civil War, a fact highlighted in its printed materials.

214 Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia, Annual Report, 1904, Box, 4, Folder 41, SCR, CSHN.
216 Lasch-Quinn, Black Neighbors, 24; and Rose, A Mother’s Job, 20.
217 Lasch-Quinn, Black Neighbors, 24.
African American children and adults were commonly featured in photographs – both on their own and with their white neighbors – as beneficiaries of the settlement house’s many programs for the poor. Those services included a library, a visiting nurse, a health insurance savings plan, a cooperative to save on coal, and the Penny Lunch Program.

The Centre’s literature reflects a hopeful impulse, but it also reveals an assumption that while African Americans were capable of reform, they needed assistance to reach their full potential. The Centre’s 1909 annual report includes a photograph of a young African American boy – maybe five years old – holding a kitten in one arm. The caption reads, “What can we make of him?”218 The caption under another photograph of a group of African American and immigrant children sitting on a stoop reads, “Citizens in the Making.”219 Wharton and others at the Starr Centre often invoked the specific history of the neighborhood’s black residents and sometimes linked that history to character traits and behaviors. In 1896, in the First Annual Report of the College Settlement Kitchen and Coffee House (which was later absorbed by the Starr Centre), Wharton described the neighbors the settlement workers most hoped to reach: “There are women who work all day and have not the time, even if they had knowledge, to prepare the food of the family. Also who can say that the opportunity of getting really good food may not be the ounce of prevention to many who would otherwise go to the saloon? To the descendants of the contrabands – the colored people who swarm the alleys near the settlement, despite the

218 Starr Centre, Annual Report, 1909, Box 4, Folder 41, SCR, CSHN.
219 Starr Centre, The Kindergarten and School Lunches pamphlet, 1913, Box 6, Folder 105, SCR, CSHN.
influx of whites in the larger streets and thoroughfares – to them the Kitchen offers an opportunity.”

Another Starr Centre employee described her impressions of an African American woman she visited at home. “At another house the door is opened by a woman whose dusky face is wreathed in a blue checked bandana, at the sight of which, due to the typical negro features, visions of southern cotton fields, strains from the old banjo, and the murmur of Swanee River float for an instant before the mind,” the worker recorded in the 1900 Starr Centre annual report. The images conjured by her interaction with a black woman from the South reveal the settlement worker’s impressions of black southerners as coming from a distinct culture and background.

The members of two Starr Centre clubs – the Rainy Day Society and the Coal Club – were almost exclusively African American. Both sought to foster an ethic of saving, thrift, and forethought – all qualities the settlement workers considered lacking in African Americans due mostly to their experience during slavery. “Our hope is that we can use the large influence acquired through this Club for further constructive work for the Negro race,” noted the Centre’s annual report in 1909. The Rainy Day Club, an outgrowth of the Coal Club, collected weekly deposits from members to pay for unforeseen medical services. If by the end of the year they had no need to dip into the account, members would receive a refund. Without a system for saving, black residents were likely to fall prey to scams, concluded the Starr Centre’s reports. “The colored race is the special field for exploitation by ‘herb doctors,’ ‘magic healers,’ etc. and counter-

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220 College Settlement Kitchen and Coffee House, First Annual Report, Box 8, Folder 160, SCR, CSHN.
221 Starr Centre, Annual Report, 1909, Box 4, Folder 41, SCR, CSHN.
education has a constant and fertile field of work,” observed one Starr Centre worker in 1911.\footnote{Starr Centre, Annual Report, 1911, Box 4, Folder 42, SCR, CSHN.}

The Coal Club, the Centre’s most popular program for adults, encouraged a cooperative arrangement among members that allowed them to buy coal in bulk rather than purchasing the buckets individually at a higher cost. In 1911, the club counted 953 active members and collected $12,400.94. The monthly meetings, according to a 1911 pamphlet on the Coal Club, attracted several hundred attendees. The same pamphlet boasted, “With the opening of a new bank account, a man and his family have quietly passed into a new sphere of independent, responsible citizenship.”\footnote{Starr Centre, Coal Club Branch pamphlet, Box 6, Folder 100, SCR, CSHN.} The high level of interest in the two clubs indicates a lack of reliable institutions for blacks to save money or buy coal at reasonable prices. While Settlement House reformers considered their work a means of inculcating values, African Americans likely viewed the savings programs as a practical alternative.

Like many of their contemporaries, settlement workers believed the upkeep of the home and care of the children should fall to the mother. Accordingly, most of their work focused on mothers and children. If they could just get inside their neighbors’ doors, they believed they could identify the sources of poverty and begin to ameliorate them. Poverty, then, could be addressed at the level of mother and household, rather than public policy. Every program, from the Coal Club to the Kindergarten, was ultimately an effort to find a way into the homes and relationships of mothers and children. The settlement workers’ interest in the home extended to clothing, bathing, cooking, saving, and care for
the sick and aged. Workers visited 150 homes during the summer of 1904 to discuss the availability and benefits of pasteurized milk for children. The Starr Centre supplied 385 families, including Jews, Italians, African Americans, Germans, English, and Poles, with pasteurized milk between November 1903 and November 1904. The visitors took advantage of their presence in homes to assess the families’ living conditions. “In the majority of cases the general health of the family was good; the homes ranged from very clean to very dirty; the greater number being fairly clean. One of the stranger sights encountered was of a woman sitting on the floor taking her dinner of fried eggs and bread and eating the eggs from the frying pan,” observed a settlement worker in 1904. The settlement workers turned a middle-class sense of propriety on their neighbor’s homes, believing that even the smallest distinction between a “fairly” clean and a clean home gave them insight about the family and the root sources of poverty.

The settlement workers’ notions of a proper home life never quite meshed with the realities of the black women’s lives, in particular. Wives worked in 54 percent of African American families in Philadelphia, according to a government survey conducted in 1911, most commonly in domestic labor. While Starr Centre workers recognized that working women in the neighborhood needed assistance, their comments reveal a persistent discomfort with mothers’ employment outside the home.

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224 Starr Centre, Annual Report, 1904, Box 4, Folder 41, SCR, CSHN.
225 As Jacqueline Jones demonstrates, the majority of black women juggled the dual obligations of work and family in the decades after slavery ended without the option to pursue middle-class definitions of womanhood and motherhood. See Jones, Labor of Love, 3.
The Centre built programs around working women. At Mother’s Meetings neighborhood women discussed how to care for children and their homes and hear guest speakers on topics such as the origins of Kindergarten. These meetings were often sparsely attended “as many of the mothers are too busy to come, the Jewish mothers having stores to attend to and many of the colored mothers going out to work” observed a Centre report. Their reports often lamented the absence of a mother’s touch in the home. Kindergarten teacher Adelaide Illman described one little girl’s reaction to the red and green Christmas decorations at the settlement house: ‘‘‘Kindergarten is beautiful, houses ain’t beautiful, houses is ugly. Mothers can’t help it, they are too busy.’’ Looking round at the tired, patient mother faces one realized how truly the children had spoken.”

Settlement workers’ reports reveal the complexity of the encounters between Starr Centre employees and their African American clients in the Seventh Ward. One settlement worker said she found “the first policy slip I ever saw” at the home of a Coal Club member. “She seemed ashamed to have me see it.” Yet when asked if she had ever made any money gambling she replied enthusiastically, according to the visitor’s report, “Oh, yes! I have made $25.00 but not lately.” The woman said she still played, but only when “she has a lucky dream, or something to make her think she will have a lucky play.” The woman downplayed her interest but did not renounce gambling or pledge never to play again, as she must have known the settlement worker would have preferred. Her membership in the Coal Club indicates a willingness to participate in settlement

227 Starr Centre, Annual Report, 1904, Box 4, Folder 41, SCR, CSNH.
228 Starr Centre, Annual Reports, 1904 and 1909, Box 4, Folder 41, SCR, CSHN.
229 Starr Centre, Annual Report, 1904, Box 4, Folder 41, SCR, CSHN.
house activities to a limited extent with programs that offered a practical benefit, but her participation did not mean she accepted the reformers’ moral framework. Another African American woman, asked to join a club to save money for children’s shoes, told the settlement worker that she would like her daughter Beatrice “to join; not so much because she cannot manage the money for herself, but for the ‘uplift it will bring to the child.’”  

By defining the membership as a lesson for her child, not herself, and claiming her own authority as a parent to teach her child, the woman resisted the settlement worker’s suggestion that both mother and child needed guidance. The mother’s reaction suggests she saw some benefit to establishing a connection between her daughter and the white, middle-class reformers, but was unconvinced that she herself had anything to learn from the strangers at her door.

Black workers who lived in overcrowded, dark alleys within walking distance of their wealthy employers’ town houses on Spruce and Locust streets did not always respond to the Starr Centre’s often intrusive services without reservation. Many did not entirely reject the settlement, but appeared instead to have embraced what worked for them, while remaining reluctant to turn their lives and homes over to the inspection of an organization run by middle-class, white men and women. Many black women were already familiar with the surveillance of elite Philadelphians at their jobs. Employers often preferred domestic servants who could live in, which meant black mothers had a more difficult time finding and keeping jobs. Black women who worked as domestics used a variety of strategies to resist the low wages, isolation from their families and the double-duty of domestic work and childrearing. They accepted work outside the city in

230 Starr Centre, Annual Report, 1900, Box 4, Folder 40, SCR, CSHN.
wealthy white Philadelphians’ summer homes; they took table scraps and other food from their employers’ houses; and they feigned illness. According to historian Tera Hunter, “These everyday tactics of resistance brought moments of relief and satisfaction to domestic workers who had few other outlets for recourse.”

Using records about black female inmates from Eastern State Penitentiary, Kali N. Gross captures the experiences of black women convicted of crimes at the turn of the century in Philadelphia. Forty-three percent of the women who served time at Eastern State Penitentiary between 1880 and 1910 were migrants from the South. As Gross suggests, “this statistic represents the dislocation of southern migrants as much as it reveals shifting demographics within the city’s black community.” Black women often broke the law as a way of taking back a measure of autonomy lost due to social, economic and political disfranchisement. Many of the women worked as domestics and often committed their offenses – typically property crimes – on the job in retaliation for poor treatment by employers. Working black women with limited employment options, lacking the shield of middle-class respectability to claim mistreatment, and protection landed in prison.

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During the 1890s and early 1900s, Philadelphia’s urban reform community reinforced and was reinforced by the disfranchisement project typically associated with

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231 Tera W. Hunter, “‘The ‘Brotherly Love’ For Which This City is Proverbial Should Extend to All’ The Everyday Lives of Working-Class Black Women in Philadelphia and Atlanta in the 1890s,” in Joe William, Trotter, Jr., Earl Lewis and Hunter, eds., *African American Urban Experience* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 84-86.
233 Ibid.
234 Ibid.
southern states. Middle-class and professional African American reformers, including W.E.B. Du Bois and Richard R. Wright, Jr., pursued a strategy of uplift in their writing and advocacy based in large part on black men and woman performing respectability in order to earn their place as American citizens and avoid devaluing the hard-won accomplishments of native and more affluent black Philadelphians. In targeting the behavior of impoverished black men and women (and those who took advantage of them politically), the approach of black reformers often dovetailed with Quaker social reform activists such as Susan Wharton who sought to assist the city’s growing number of African American migrants in their transition to the urban North. With a Republican Party controlled by industry, African American workers in particular would find little space within formal politics to advocate for better employment options outside of the occasional opportunity to cross the picket line. Heeding the increasing pressure to police the boundaries of national citizenship and belonging throughout the United States, African American leaders in Philadelphia attempted to use their native-born status to win job opportunities for black women. Although successful in the short term, the most resonant narratives in Philadelphia politics continued to define African Americans as newcomers and outsiders, ready for neither urban employment nor valid political participation.

235 For more on the politics of uplift at the end of the nineteenth century, see especially Gaines, Uplifting the Race.
CHAPTER 3

“The Crusade Is Now Begun in Philadelphia”:
Northern Political Reformers, Southern Moderates and African American Politics

In March 1900, African-American journalist and activist Gertrude Mossell warned about the consequences of inviting southern moderates to speak in Philadelphia at a conference organized to address the “American Negro.” White settlement house leaders, municipal reformers, and academics planned the conference as a follow-up to the publication of W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Philadelphia Negro* in 1899. The social scientists, journalists, philanthropists, education experts, and settlement workers who planned the conference and related talks were part of a larger cross-regional conversation concerning the “negro problem.” Although most of the discussion revolved around the South, Philadelphia’s black political activists considered the implications of these conversations for the North as well. Conference organizers hoped the lectures would serve as “the second step in obtaining reliable data in order that any effort on behalf of this race may

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have intelligent direction.” But Mossell feared soliciting advice from southerners who might complain of their “suffering” with an “ignorant enfranchised Negro population.” For Mossell and other African-Americans in Philadelphia, black participation in the electorate was under siege – North and South.

Mossell believed that the white southern speakers, although not calling for violence to achieve their goals, intended to wrest power from black citizens by repealing or rendering impotent the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. After the conference, in a letter to the editor of The Colored American, she proclaimed, “These men…want to be placed in a position to rule without the disgrace of shooting the Negro.” Mossell found the mostly white conference audience’s silence especially troubling. She feared that the “moderate” southerners’ approach to racial politics appealed to white Philadelphia reformers in the audience. “Silence gives consent,” she wrote. As Mossell ominously concluded, “[T]he South is a unit to disfranchise us and the crusade is now begun in Philadelphia.”

At the dawn of the twentieth century, African Americans in both the North and the South increasingly occupied an intermediary space between citizen and alien. Many northern social and political reformers and moderate southern Democrats alike insisted

237 “The Philadelphia Negro lecture series program,” March 1900, Box 139, Wharton scrapbook, FSPR, HSP.
239 Ratified in 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment enfranchised black men by declaring unconstitutional any federal or state law denying the right to vote based on “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”
241 Ibid.
242 Ibid.
that black men undergo a period of education and training before they could be safely allowed access to the franchise and full citizenship rights. Moderate southern Democrats framed their pursuit of white supremacy in terms and strategies that were recognizable for political reformers in the urban North, including an emphasis on eradicating political corruption, promoting industrial education for black people, and a rejection of racial violence – all of which would, they argued, lead to improved “race relations.” Training, both groups insisted, would guard against the corruption and misdeeds that resulted when white Republican Party leaders used unqualified black voters to bolster their support at the polls.

In Philadelphia and across the nation, social and political reformers often discredited black participation in politics, thereby calling into question African Americans’ fitness for full citizenship. Scholars have established a continuity of black political engagement reaching back before the Civil War through Reconstruction and the Jim Crow decades. This literature on black political activism stands in contrast to political reformers’ – North and South – efforts to depict African Americans as nascent citizens in need of an undefined period of citizenship training. In Philadelphia, political reformers’ version of municipal politics denigrated the complexity of black engagement


across class and gender with partisan politics in the post-bellum period.\textsuperscript{245} By labeling black citizenship a project in the making, reformers disrupted a more historically accurate narrative of black residents actively engaged in politics, within and outside the electoral sphere. The notion of citizenship training denied the ways in which African Americans had been organizing politically for decades.

In their critique of the powerful Republican Party machine which ran local politics from Pennsylvania’s state capital, Philadelphia’s white political reformers wove a narrative linking black politics in their city at the turn of the twentieth century with the alleged chaos and corruption wrought during the unprecedented political power African Americans exercised in the South during Reconstruction. These reformers cultivated, in Chandan Reddy’s phrase, “an inheritance of the past as debt” among African Americans.\textsuperscript{246} The link to the “mistakes” of Reconstruction associated black citizens with

\textsuperscript{245} See Chapter One for more on partisan black politics in Philadelphia during the 1870s and 1880s.

\textsuperscript{246} Chandan Reddy, \textit{Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 89. In his reading of W.E.B. Du Bois’s \textit{The Souls of Black Folk} (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), in which Du Bois describes conditions in Georgia’s Black Belt at the turn of the twentieth century, Reddy notes Du Bois’s exploration of the ways in which racially organized systems of labor, such as debt peonage, convict labor, and tenant farming, contributed to the formation of the category of “racial alien,” assigning African Americans a status distinct from national citizenship. According to Reddy’s analysis of \textit{Souls}, black residents of Georgia’s Black Belt encountered the modern state as “racial aliens” indebted as rural agricultural workers tied to an emerging global market through debt peonage and tenant farming. Because the modern state itself is enacted and constituted through racialized violence, Reddy contends, any attempt to pursue freedom through increased access to citizenship (i.e., the Reconstruction Amendments) leads to further racialized indebtedness. In \textit{Souls}, Reddy argues, Du Bois attempted to define “what it might mean to speak of a politics of race.” According to Reddy, Du Bois concluded that race at the dawn of the twentieth century was, “the production of the bodily subject as an experience of both freedom and violence.” \textit{Freedom With Violence}, 58. Black citizens achieved freedom from enslavement, that is, but remained subject to the state’s imposition of “legitimate” violence through indenture, debt peonage and other forms of unfreedom. I find Reddy’s analysis useful, not to argue that African Americans alone were subject to state-sanctioned forms of unfreedom, but rather to suggest that black citizenship underwent a particular trajectory in the nineteenth century distinct from other immigrant and white workers – from slave, to freedom, to “racial alien” and that these experiences affected the ways northern reformers viewed with suspicion black political participation. They also shaped the strategies African Americans employed in response to attacks on their citizenship status. For more on the variety of restrictive labor practices imposed on working people after the Civil War, see especially Gunther Peck,
political naiveté at best and electoral deviance at worst. Philadelphia’s Progressive Era reformers cast African Americans as both unwilling subjects and master manipulators of a political system tainted, in either case, by their participation. Northern reformers’ claims about black misuse of the franchise held African Americans accountable for the sins of Republican machine politics in Philadelphia, marking black political participation as alien to the “legitimate” and uncorrupted operation of the political system.

Politically active, professional black Philadelphians attempting to define their politics in the midst of the rise of Jim Crow in the South and an increasingly hostile political culture in the North found the city’s network of political and social reformers engaged with similar issues and even shared assumptions about racial politics, if not always with the same goals in mind. As such, in Philadelphia, black men and women often worked in conjunction with or within interracial political and social reform organizations. W.E.B. Du Bois spoke at Philadelphia’s American Negro Lecture Series and Fanny Jackson Coppin, a black educator, helped organize the lecture series. At other times, a persistent focus on national citizenship put black political activists like Gertrude Mossell in direct opposition to the agenda of many Philadelphia political reformers, who stressed drawing a clear line in the management of city and state governments between questions of national importance and local matters.²⁴⁷

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²⁴⁷ As political scientist Peter McCaffery suggests in his study of the rise of Philadelphia’s Republican machine, nonpartisan reformers believed “the cleavages of national politics (on such issues as the tariff) were irrelevant to the concerns of municipal government and should not be permitted to cloud the enormous commonality of interests among the propertied classes in urban politics.” McCaffery, When Bosses Ruled, 177.
Articles published in the reform journal, *City and State*, depict the local context within which black residents of Philadelphia received the comments of their white southern visitors. Founded and edited by leading Philadelphia reformer Herbert Welsh and published between 1895 and 1904, *City and State* championed electoral reform in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania and targeted mainstream Republican leaders with reputations for corruption. *City and State* never enjoyed the circulation and popular success of larger newspapers such as the *Philadelphia Press* or the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, but its pages featured opinion pieces and letters to the editor from black and white religious and political leaders, activists, and reformers. The reform journal also regularly published articles characterizing African American political participation in Philadelphia as venal and black politicians as complicit in Republican Party corruption. The skepticism about black voting expressed in the pages of *City and State* in combination with those voices at the podium of the American Negro Lecture Series alarmed African Americans concerned that the franchise could be under assault nationwide.

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Some 200 Philadelphians assembled every Friday afternoon during March of 1900 for a series of five lectures on the “American negro” organized by an interracial group of political activists and social and political reformers and academics in Philadelphia. The large turnout surprised organizers and forced them to secure a more spacious lecture room at the College of Physicians. One account estimated that African Americans comprised about a third of the audience. Included among the speakers were

248 *City and State*, March 22, 1900.
249 Ibid.
three white southerners, a white northerner who had relocated to the South, and two of the most prominent black intellectuals of the era, Du Bois and Kelly Miller. The choice of speakers reflected the conference organizers’ interest in vocational education as a means of preparing African American men and women to be productive citizens as well as their preference for a more measured approach to the “negro problem” that included “training” rather than the violence and oppression unleashed on black southerners at the end of the nineteenth century. As the lecture series program noted, “The presence among us of so great a population of an alien race involves at once the question of their power to assimilate our civilization and to acquire the balanced judgment, steadiness and self-reliance necessary to citizens of a democracy.”

The Republican Party dominated electoral politics in Philadelphia from the 1880s until 1933. While the national Republican Party, steered to a large extent during the 1880s and 1890s by the powerful Pennsylvania delegation, paid less attention to questions of racial equality and justice, a breakaway faction of Republican reformers took up the cause of what had come to be known as the “negro problem.” Reformers in Philadelphia – often men and women from wealthy Quaker families who had identified with the Republican Party throughout the Civil War era – had grown weary of the machine politicians running the city and state. They claimed Republican officeholders operated a corrupt organization stretching from the halls of Congress and the

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250 “The Philadelphia Negro,” March 1900, Box 139, Wharton scrapbook, FSPR, HSP.
251 Economic instability and labor conflict marked the 1880s and 1890s, during which the nation experienced a series of depressions accompanied by widespread labor strikes. Elites in the North responded to the turmoil with new suspicions about the wisdom and viability of democracy. See Beckert, Monied Metropolis.
Pennsylvania statehouse to the crowded alleys and row homes of Philadelphia’s Seventh Ward.

Southern white moderates and many of the northern white political reformers they engaged saw the end of the nineteenth century as a moment to rein in what they identified as the excesses of black citizenship which, they claimed, led to social and political chaos. As increasing numbers of black men and women moved North reform-minded Philadelphians noted regional overlap in their conversations with white southern moderates about African American politics.\textsuperscript{252} Although white political and social reformers in Philadelphia continued to view the South as a region with unique challenges related to race relations, they recognized enough common ground to seek counsel from southern white moderates – an unsettling development for many black men and women in Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{253} When Welsh’s \textit{City and State} editorialized in 1900 that, “No set of negroes in the South have been more effectively disfranchised than are the Republican

\textsuperscript{252} Here I draw on the insights of David Blight, who sees the period from 1865 to 1912 as a protracted struggle between competing versions of Civil War memory. Blight, \textit{Race and Reunion}, 131. Rather than simply solidifying Jim Crow in the South, I argue that northern political reformers saw their own experience with partisan politics and African American voters at the end of the nineteenth century reflected in the “tragic legend” version of Reconstruction.

\textsuperscript{253} Ring argues that Progressive era reformers approached “The Problem South” as a region with distinct challenges in need of civilizing and reform, similar to colonial projects. Ring suggests that scholars of Progressivism have too aggressively emphasized continuities among reformers and efforts at sectional reconciliation. According to Ring, “The historical actors themselves not only set apart the South from the rest of the nation but also made comparisons with other foreign locales to highlight the region as a deviant geographical space.” Ring, \textit{The Problem South: Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State}, 1880-1930 (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 2012), 224. I contend that Philadelphia’s political reformers actually highlighted the similarities between what they characterized as their own disfranchisement due the corrupt machine-run system (bolstered by African Americans) and efforts to block African American voting in the South.
masses in this city by the Mayor and his accomplices,” he made clear his assessment about where the real crisis lay for American democracy.254

The Christian Recorder closely covered the American Negro Lecture Series in March 1900. Although the Recorder insisted that the white southern speakers would receive nothing more than obligatory “courtesy” from their hosts, white reformers in Philadelphia had for nearly a decade defined black male voters as a problem in municipal politics and governance. Unsurprisingly, white southerners and black speakers took different approaches to the “negro problem” at the Philadelphia lecture series. Kelly Miller, an African American professor at Howard University, delivered his talk, “The Negro as a Religious, Social and Political Factor,” first in Philadelphia and several months later at a gathering organized by the Afro-American Council to commemorate militant abolitionist John Brown’s 100th birthday.255 Miller helped organize and set the agenda for the non-partisan Afro-American Council, which historian Shawn Leigh Alexander describes as unique among black activist organizations at the turn of the twentieth century in its efforts to “fight not only racism in general, but to contest discrimination and mob violence working through the local, state, and federal courts and legislatures.”256 Miller’s decision to give his talk to such

254 City and State, September 20, 1900. The disfranchisement comparison assumed that the most qualified voters in Philadelphia (i.e. educated whites) were losing their electoral voice while at the same time suggesting that African Americans both North and South were not yet prepared for full citizenship. Disfranchisement itself did not seem to be the problem as much as diluting the franchise of the most qualified voters. In 1903, City and State reprinted portions of muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens’ article exposing municipal government corruption Philadelphia. Steffens made a similar argument comparing disfranchisement as a result of corruption in Philadelphia to Southern efforts to disfranchise black voters. Steffens, “Philadelphia: Corrupt and Contented,” 250-252.

255 Alexander, An Army of Lions, 143-144.

256 Ibid., 136. At the Council’s first meeting in Washington, D.C. in 1898, the members agreed to pursue a reduction in Congressional representation for states that disfranchised black voters and urged a national response to racial violence and segregation on railway cars. Alexander, An Army of Lions, 95.
diverse crowds – one assembled to better understand the “negro problem” and the other to celebrate the life of a white man executed in 1859 for leading a slave rebellion at Harpers Ferry in Virginia – illustrates the uncertainty and disagreement among African American leaders and between white and black progressives about how to define the “negro problem” at the turn of the century. Was the “problem” a deficiency within the black community or an external assault on black citizenship and freedom, or both? Miller’s talk suggests all three were true without committing to any particular solution.\(^{257}\) In his Philadelphia appearance, Miller blamed the Supreme Court’s separate-but-equal doctrine (established in the \textit{Plessy v. Ferguson} decision of 1896) for quashing African American progress and opportunity. “The civil, industrial and political disabilities under which the Negro labors are but the legitimate outcome of the social fiction which divides the races asunder,” Miller told the interracial audience of social workers, social scientists and settlement house workers. But he also argued that railing against the “prejudice” that produces inequality would not change anything. “The Negro belongs to a backward race and has wide scope for growth and expansion, even within the limits set by race prejudice,” Miller argued. “And if this prejudice should ever disappear it will be after, and not before such development.”\(^{258}\)

Miller’s speech rejected the premise of separate but equal, but urged working within the confines of the law to improve conditions for African Americans. “The problem of philanthropy is to remedy existing evils, rather than to speculate as to how they arose,” he told the Philadelphia audience. Miller’s talk aligns with historian August

\(^{257}\) It is unclear whether Miller changed his talk to suit a different audience in Washington, D.C.  
\(^{258}\) Kelly Miller, “The Negro as a Religious, Social and Political Factor,” ca. 1900, Box 139, Wharton scrapbook, FSPR, HSP.
Meier’s description of him as a “pragmatic harmonizer” during this stage of his career. Hoping to avoid more violence, Miller reacted to the riots in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898 by urging black voters to support moderate southerners and advocated a middle road between Du Bois’ talented tenth strategy and Washington’s industrial education plan. Miller’s statements in support of southern moderates likely made him an attractive candidate for the Philadelphia organizers of the American Negro Lecture Series. His talk also suggests the pressure felt by Afro-American Council members, including Gertrude Mossell, to “calibrate messages” for black and white audiences while struggling to raise enough money, usually from sympathetic white donors, to fund their work.

The American Negro Lecture Series, its organizers, and its participants reveal the web of local and national relationships and political principles at stake in interracial organizing for African American men and women in Philadelphia and beyond. Black activists working in Philadelphia did not oppose interracial cooperation – quite the opposite. Philadelphia’s community of political and social reformers included white and black men and women, clergy members, Quakers, academics affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania, journalists, and business leaders. Reform work often involved interracial cooperation, as when a group of white academic and settlement house workers invited Du Bois in 1896 to study Philadelphia’s African American residents in the primarily black


\[260\] Alexander, *An Army of Lions*, 136. Alexander refers to “daily grind of organizing” that accompanied the Council’s efforts to make an impact at the local, state and federal levels.
Seventh Ward.\textsuperscript{261} Similarly, Fanny Jackson Coppin, principal of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia who had been active in city politics since the 1880s, served on the interracial organizing committee for the American Negro Lecture Series and helped rally support for two white reform women running for school board in the Seventh Ward in 1895.\textsuperscript{262} One of the school board candidates, Sophia Wells Royce Williams, supported the University of Pennsylvania’s decision to hire Du Bois, and her husband, journalist Talcott Williams, served on the American Negro Lecture Series organizing committee. Mossell, in turn, likely intentionally selected the \textit{Colored American}, the major black newspaper based in Washington, D.C., as the forum to criticize southern white participants at the American Negro Lecture Series. Through the \textit{Colored American} she would reach a wider black audience, while hopefully minimizing offense to Philadelphia’s white reformers, including Susan Wharton, who funded and spearheaded local projects that benefited the Seventh Ward’s impoverished black residents.\textsuperscript{263} Like the Afro-American Council, Mossell’s goals ranged broadly. During the summer of 1899, she urged the national council to pursue research on tuberculosis and other health issues among African Americans and to compile statistics and information about crime to counter negative portrayals of black communities.

Mossell balanced criticism of political reformers who welcomed counsel from southern moderates while also nurturing an ongoing conversation with Philadelphia’s white political reform community. In her capacity as board member of the Philadelphia branch of the Afro-American Council, Mossell responded to a 1901 letter to the editor

\textsuperscript{262} Katz and Sugrue, \textit{W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and the City}, 15.
\textsuperscript{263} See Alexander, \textit{An Army of Lions}, 118.
published in City and State.\textsuperscript{264} The author of the original letter, G.S. Dickerman, an advocate for industrial education for African American and white southerners, wrote to share his enthusiasm for establishing a textile school for African Americans in the South.\textsuperscript{265} Dickerman credited Philadelphia businessman Henry C. Davis, grandson of abolitionist Lucretia Mott, wool wholesaler, and heir to a Kentucky mining fortune, for the idea. Davis, who helped organize the American Negro Lecture Series in Philadelphia the previous year, had deep roots in Philadelphia’s activist Quaker community and a history of advocating for African American rights and education. In 1862, Davis, along with nearly 400 prominent white Philadelphians, signed a petition demanding that streetcar companies allow African Americans to ride.\textsuperscript{266} Mossell wrote that she fondly recalled her conversations with Davis at the lecture series and took seriously any suggestions he offered to improve conditions for African Americans.\textsuperscript{267} She invited Dickerman to present his idea for educating black workers about textile manufacturing at the upcoming national Afro-American Council meeting in Philadelphia. More pointedly, however, she added that while funding could surely be raised to sponsor African Americans to attend northern textile schools, white factory owners would have to be willing to hire black graduates. “We might…at least support a few pupils in northern textile schools if, through the influence of our white friends, we could be assured they would be employed in factories run by whites.

\textsuperscript{264} City and State, March 28, 1901.
\textsuperscript{265} City and State, March 14, 1901.
\textsuperscript{266} William Still, Stephen Smith, Isaiah C. Wears, Jonathan C. Gibbs, “Petition for the Colored People of Philadelphia to Ride in the Cars,” 10 June 1862, Box 3A, Folder Oversize 73, Misc. Collection, HSP.
\textsuperscript{267} Davis died on January 30, 1901. “Death of Henry C. Davis,” Electrical Review 38 (February 9, 1901): 209. Several months later, in a letter to the editor of City and State, Mossell referred to Davis as “our deceased friend” and wrote appreciatively of his work: “This expression of his interest in their cause is greatly valued by the race in Philadelphia, and, coupled with his expressed intention to devote the remainder of his life to their uplifting, makes them feel deeply the loss they have sustained in his death…” City and State, March 28, 1901.
employing colored labor,” Mossell wrote. Because most factories in the North refused to hire black workers (except occasionally as strikebreakers), education for work in the textile industry would not necessarily do much to “uplift” African Americans or, as Dickerman proposed, “fit them to be captains of industry for their people in a future not far away.”

Here, Mossell was surely hinting at the limited understanding of white patrons who proposed to “help” African Americans without fully comprehending the structural barriers no amount of hard work could overcome.

Black men and women also wrote scathing critiques of African-American participation in partisan politics in Philadelphia. Du Bois criticized black Philadelphians for their allegiance to the Republican Party and especially their connections to the corrupt Republican machine. While Philadelphia’s white political and social reformers, such as Herbert Welsh and the organizers of the American Negro Lecture Series, worried about the deleterious effect on the body politic of black electoral participation, Du Bois sought to restore the reputation of black voters by calling out bad behavior among a minority in hopes of retaining African American access to the franchise. In his 1905 article, “The Black Vote of Philadelphia,” Du Bois portrayed newly arrived migrants from the South as lonely dupes susceptible to the warm welcome and fraternal bond of Republican political clubs. Du Bois was not alone among educated and more affluent African American observers of Philadelphia politics, who often contrasted the “better class” of black residents with the alleged rowdy and law-breaking newcomers from the South. However, as historian Adolph L. Reed argues, Du Bois did not simply fall in line behind the white reform agenda. Unlike

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268 City and State, March 28, 1901.
269 City and State, March 14, 1901.
the white Progressives, or “impatient liberals” who hired him, Du Bois attempted to identify “the ‘removable causes’ of those [undesirable] traits and to demonstrate that they were characteristic only to a certain segment of the population and by no means endemic to Philadelphia blacks as a whole.”

Du Bois also pointed to what he called the “paradox of reform.” Why would black Philadelphians support “these very reformers who want votes for specific reforms, (but) will not themselves work beside Negroes, or admit them to positions in their stores or offices, or lend them friendly aid in trouble,” he asked.

Gertrude Mossell took a different tack from Du Bois, aiming her frustration at black men for pursuing self-interested political goals. Mossell considered the franchise a community right and called on black men to protect their access to the ballot in the interest of preserving that right for African Americans. In her call to black men to practice a purer form of politics, however, Mossell failed to consider the economic imperative for many black Philadelphia residents of cooperating with the Republican machine (or making other partisan choices) in hopes of gaining political appointments, jobs, and other assistance.

The behavior of black men in partisan politics bolstered white reformers’ calls to curb black political participation and neglected the larger issues at stake, Mossell contended. “[I]f our colored men don’t get united and stop using all their energies in keeping somebody else from getting a political or ecclesiastical position and look after the race interests they will wake up some fine day and witness the repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment,” Mossell

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273 See Brown “Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere.”
warned in the pages of *The Colored American*. As a writer and activist, she implored black men to use their access to the ballot to protect voting rights. Not surprisingly, her primary goal in critiquing black politics diverged from white reformers’ rhetoric, which concentrated on identifying corruption. With white efforts mounting to push African Americans out of the electorate – whether through extra-legal violence and state constitutional amendments in the South or claims of black corruption in the North – Mossell called on black men to seize the moment to safeguard what she saw as an increasingly imperiled Constitutional right. Although women could not vote in Pennsylvania during the 1890s, black women such as Mossell and Coppin participated in public debates on a range of topics related to black politics and equality, including allegiance to the Republican Party, disfranchisement, social welfare, and lynchings.

Mossell and other members of Philadelphia’s black press bristled at the invitations extended to “these anti-Negro missionaries” from the South, and protested their advocacy of the South’s version of white supremacy. The *Christian Recorder* celebrated “the fair play of Philadelphia” for inviting African American leaders as well, but the *Recorder* and other black men and women in attendance met the southern white perspective on the “negro problem” with suspicion and contempt. African American audience members, including Mossell and black newspaper publisher Christopher Perry, peppered the southern orators with an “explosion of interrogatory and declaratory shells,” reported the *Christian Recorder*.

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275 Indeed, as historian Linda Gordon suggests, for black women reformers at the turn of the century, “the intersection of discrimination and poverty in the black experience meant that welfare claims seemed not so different from the right to vote or to ride public transportation systems.” Gordon, *Pitted But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 142.
276 *Christian Recorder*, March 15, 1900, Box 139, Wharton scrapbook, FSPR, HSP.
African American activists leery about the encroachment of Jim Crow noted with dread the rapt attention northern whites offered their southern guests. The black audience members, according to the Recorder, saw through the southern white speakers’ “barefaced” attempt to persuade white audiences of the North that voting and education should be local matters. “It is remarkable to note the beguiling methods employed by the South to make converts to its views and treatment of the Negro,” observed the Recorder.

According to the Recorder, “The first checkmate to confront these anti-Negro missionaries from Georgia, Alabama and North Carolina was the disappointing personnel of their audiences, both in complexion and character.” The Southern speakers’ “chief aim,” concluded the Recorder, was to convince their white northern audience that federal intervention in the South after the Civil War allowed black men to run amok, terrorizing white citizens and making a mockery of electoral politics. The speakers will “represent black men as demons and Southern whites as models of perfection for bearing with them for so long,” the Recorder noted.

Black observers at the conference likely worried that the Southern messengers would reinforce Northern white concerns about a growing black population in Philadelphia and its perceived connections to political corruption. As the Recorder asked, “Will the South succeed in converting the people of the North to its ways of thinking on the Negro question?”

Further amplifying the distressing tone noted by black activists, white reformers hosted another southern white perspective in Philadelphia that March. Edgar Gardner

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277 Ibid.
278 Ibid. Although the Christian Recorder was a national voice for the A.M.E. Church, the editors paid particularly close attention to the African American experience in Philadelphia.
279 Ibid.
280 Ibid.
Murphy, a white educational reformer and spokesman on racial politics in the South, accepted an offer to speak on the “Negro question at the South.” Although Murphy did not participate in the American Negro Lecture Series, his invitation came from some of the same academic, political, and social reform organizations that had sponsored Du Bois’s research on Philadelphia’s black community four years earlier and had helped plan the American Negro Lecture Series.\(^\text{281}\)

When Murphy took the stage at the Church of the Holy Trinity near Philadelphia’s affluent Rittenhouse Square neighborhood, he invoked Du Bois’s recently published, *The Philadelphia Negro*, to appeal to his largely white audience on the basis of “our common race problems.” “If the Negro in Philadelphia presents a problem which you have not solved in justice either to the Negro or to yourselves,” Murphy asked, “what would you do with him under conditions which should multiply by fifty fold his numbers in your midst, which should multiply by a hundred fold his illiteracy and his tendencies to indolence.”\(^\text{282}\) In a plea for sympathy among white residents across the sectional divide, Murphy argued that the North declared victory and emancipation at the end of the Civil War “without fitting [African Americans] for freedom,” and left the South crippled economically and socially while Reconstruction forced upon white southerners “antagonistic legislation from an alien but dominant party government.”\(^\text{283}\)

Murphy noted that while the South welcomed financial assistance from northern benefactors, only white southerners could usefully shape a response to the “Negro

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\(^\text{282}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^\text{283}\) Ibid., 8.
question” in the South. He urged local control of the franchise as the path to full citizenship for African Americans in the South. Murphy drew a distinction between himself, who proposed making the franchise a “local issue” and educating black men to eventually participate as voters, and other white southerners who championed disfranchisement for a cruder purpose. “There have been those who have advocated the reconsideration of the XVth (sic) Amendment in order to destroy forever the political opportunity of the Negro,” he explained. By contrast, Murphy continued, “I advocate its reconsideration as the only practicable means of opening to the Negro the ultimate possibilities of political privilege.”

284 Murphy implored his audience to “restore to the individual State at the South the right to deal directly with the Negro as a political factor and the local sense of the public welfare will secure him the ballot just as fast as he deserves it.”

285 The Fifteenth Amendment drove an artificial wedge between the southern states and their newly freed black citizens, Murphy argued. This federal course to enfranchisement, he continued, interfered with a more gradual, state-led preparation of African Americans for full citizenship. The Fifteenth Amendment, he contended, “made the cause of the Negro’s civic rights the cause of the federal authority, and has thus operated to weaken and in part destroy that sense of local responsibility which is, practically, and in the last analysis, the sole arbiter of his political fortunes.”

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But Murphy’s speech to his northern audience urged more than a “reconsideration” of the federal guarantee of voting rights for black men. It also provided testimony from a “moderate” white southerner about the negative impact on

284 Ibid., 33.
285 Ibid.
286 Ibid., 31.
the political system of granting black men access to the ballot. His speech, delivered to
an audience dedicated to clean city government, complemented the rhetoric of northern
white reformers in Philadelphia who often equated black participation in the electorate
with corruption in local politics. Murphy’s claims, while familiar to historians of the
Jim Crow South, take on a new resonance in the context of a northern city rife with
debates over the boundaries of citizenship and electoral participation.

Murphy’s good-government white hosts offered him a platform to denounce the
Fifteenth Amendment as a debilitating intrusion in southern affairs and to claim that
black men had proven themselves thus far unworthy of the vote. His words likely
resonated with white Philadelphia reformers’ own concerns about the relationship
between a growing black population and corruption in city government. Henry C.
Davis, a Quaker advocate for African American education and one of the group of
white Philadelphia political reformers and businessmen who invited Murphy to speak in
Philadelphia, agreed that the Fifteenth Amendment amounted to a failed political play
for power rather than a victory for African American equality. He argued that only force
would have preserved the promise of the Amendment for black men and, “the public
sentiment of the whole Country would not uphold force.”

Only education for
southern whites to overcome their “deep race prejudice” as well as training and
education for African Americans would ultimately result in peaceful relations in the
South, Davis contended. Shortly after Murphy appeared in Philadelphia, Davis wrote to
Booker T. Washington about Murphy’s upcoming race conference in Montgomery,

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Alabama. Despite concerns that some of the featured speakers would call for African American disfranchisement and repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment, Davis told Washington, “I do not see reasonable grounds for the withdrawal of any of us…I do not think it is wise for us to be the first to say, ‘we won’t play marbles.’”

Five years before Murphy’s speech in Philadelphia, Isaiah Wears, a leading advocate of African American suffrage and a Republican Party activist for three decades in the northern city, balked at a local white Baptist minister’s claim that the Fifteenth Amendment granted black men the right to vote. The Amendment “does not propose to give the suffrage to anybody,” declared Wears. “It is there recognized as an individual right, which no person has a right to interfere with, and which neither the State nor the United States has any right to abridge or impair.” By 1900, northern reformers’ attempts to link black voting to municipal corruption buoyed by white southern accounts of the disastrous results of black enfranchisement muddied the clarity of Wears’ powerful statement.

Scholars tend to classify Murphy as a moderate Southern voice in the midst of increasing violence and oppression in the Jim Crow South. His record was indeed mixed. He accepted the invitation to speak in Philadelphia as a precursor to a

288 Ibid., 453. Davis disinvited Booker T. Washington to a dinner he held in Murphy’s honor earlier that month at the Union League in Philadelphia, explaining. “After talking with Dr. Murphy, I am satisfied that it would be unwise for you to come over to the dinner I give him on Friday evening. It would be sure to get into the newspapers and be reported at the South & would give his opponents a handle to attack him.” Murphy likely worried that his more virulent southern white colleagues would object to him dining with a black man.
289 For more on Wears, see Silcox, “The Black ‘Better Class’ Political Dilemma” and Chapter One.
290 “Colored Men Give Their Views,” Philadelphia Press, December 2, 1895, Roll 8, Scrapbook 73, WDC.
291 See especially Alexander, An Army of Lions; Luker, Social Gospel; and Ring, Problem South. Louis R. Harlan, however, argues that, “It became evident despite Murphy’s earnest good will that he was a racist and a Southern sectionalist.” Harlan, Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901 (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 294.
conference on race relations he planned for May in Montgomery, Alabama. Murphy had intended to include African Americans at the conference but was overruled by his more conservative southern colleagues.145 Despite his attempts to position himself as a moderate on race, Murphy’s talk in Philadelphia triggered a strong reaction among African Americans, as did the speeches delivered by other southern whites at the American Negro Lecture Series during the same month.146 After attending talks given by several southern white participants at the lecture series Mossell concluded, “If there is not being an effort made inimical to our best interests I do not know what else is being done.”147 The Christian Recorder took aim at Murphy, as well as lecture series speaker G.R. Glenn for suggesting that any charitable dollars flowing from the North to the South for education be “placed in the hands of local whites.” Only “the blind,” wrote the Recorder, “may read (Murphy’s) purpose without effort.”148

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Black Philadelphians’ defensive response to the white southern speakers at the American Negro Lecture Series likely stemmed at least in part from their own experience with the inflammatory rhetoric surrounding African American voting and citizenship circulating among white reform circles at home. City and State, published in Philadelphia between 1895 and 1904, repeatedly linked African American voting to political corruption and other criminal activity. Like many white and black progressives at the turn of the century, including those who planned the American Negro Lecture Series, City and

292 Luker, Social Gospel, 145.
293 The Montgomery conference also became a source of controversy and criticism among African Americans for excluding black participants and promoting white supremacy. Alexander, An Army of Lions, 144-145.
294 “Mrs. Mossell Protests,” Colored American, March 24, 1900.
295 Christian Recorder, March 15, 1900.
State’s editor-in-chief Herbert Welsh believed industrial education would improve the condition and character of African Americans, preparing them to participate as full citizens at some unspecified time in the future. He committed himself to the cause, raising money to support industrial education for African Americans in the South and conducting fact-finding tours to southern states.\textsuperscript{296} City and State also often echoed the indictment of black voting articulated by southern speakers at the American Negro Lecture Series and many white Philadelphia reformers during the 1890s and 1900s.

By the 1890s, white Philadelphia reformers, including Welsh, questioned the virtue of African American political participation and public influence while simultaneously working to expand private charity and assistance to blacks in the North and South. Their approach reveals a deep anxiety surrounding African American access to the ballot in the North as well as the South. Not surprisingly, Philadelphia’s white reform community supported and worked closely with Booker T. Washington in their fundraising efforts for African American vocational education.\textsuperscript{297} Philadelphia reformers eagerly adopted his program of vocational education for African Americans and echoes of his encouragement to black men to back away from politics were evident among the public and private statements of the city’s leading reformers.


\textsuperscript{297} Henry C. Davis hosted Booker T. Washington at his Philadelphia home in 1899. More than 100 “representative men of the city”, including about a dozen Quaker businessmen, came to Davis’s house to meet Washington, who also attended a luncheon in his honor at the Union League. Washington spoke about Tuskegee Institute’s success in making its students “good citizens of the South,” prompting white Southerners to consider Tuskegee’s model “the best way to solve the negro problem,” reported The (Philadelphia) Times of Philadelphia. “His Life Work for the Negro,” The (Philadelphia) Times, February 6, 1899.
Welsh’s lineage as the son of prominent businessman and political independent John Welsh lent his journal credibility among Philadelphia’s white business and civic reform leaders, who had since at least the 1890s questioned black and immigrant participation in party politics. In 1891, Philadelphia machine manufacturer William Sellers wrote to Welsh complaining about the effect of universal suffrage on the management of the city. “(A city is) in fact a corporation, and under our present system, the property of the corporation is managed by parties who hold no stock in it,” Sellers wrote.\textsuperscript{298} Sellers and other Philadelphia manufacturers and business leaders established a network of institutions during the latter half of the nineteenth century to “support the goals of industrial capital.”\textsuperscript{299} The University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School designed its business education curriculum to complement the civic reform work of organizations such as the Philadelphia Social Science Association, which advocated ballot reform and other measures to control the influence of immigrant and African American-backed machine politicians. Importantly, the Wharton School also helped pay for Du Bois’s appointment to study the Seventh Ward.\textsuperscript{300}

The committee that invited Murphy to speak in Philadelphia further suggests a fusion of interest between business and reform leaders, especially in advocating vocational and industrial education over protecting African American voting rights. The American Academy of Political and Social Science, the American Society for the Extension of University Teaching and the Civic Club of Philadelphia sponsored

\textsuperscript{298} Sellers to Welsh, 6 July 1891, Herbert Welsh collection, HSP, quoted in Disbrow, “Herbert Welsh,” 64.
\textsuperscript{300} University of Pennsylvania, Trustee Minutes, vol. 13, October 1896, 385, quoted in Ibid.

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Murphy’s invitation. Henry C. Davis, who served as the committee’s chair, was also a trustee and “liberal patron” of Tuskegee University. University of Pennsylvania provost and sugar magnate C.C. Harrison, journalist and social reformer Talcott Williams, and the head of Baldwin Locomotive Works John H. Converse also served on the committee that invited Murphy to speak in Philadelphia.

When Welsh returned from Alabama in the spring of 1900, he recorded his impressions of the trip in a recurring series of articles published in City and State. Welsh toured Tuskegee with Booker T. Washington and spoke at Murphy’s race conference in Montgomery. In the months leading up to Welsh’s southern sojourn, with the assault on black voting rights mounting in southern states, the Montgomery conference itself became a site of contention among white and black activists. African American leaders in the North and South debated how best to address what appeared to be the momentum behind a call to repeal the Fifteenth Amendment. When Murphy and other white

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301 “Death of Henry C. Davis,” 209; and Murphy, White Man and the Negro, n.p.
302 Murphy, White Man and the Negro, n.p.
303 Luker, Social Gospel, 145. Welsh attended the conference in his role as leader of the Indian Rights Association. Many African American leaders in the North opposed the Montgomery conference for including white speakers who advocated repealing the Fifteenth Amendment. See Alexander, An Army of Lions, 144-145. Some moderate southerners as well expressed discomfort with what they considered the extreme positions that would be represented at the Montgomery conference. Walter Hines Page, a white journalist and industrial education advocate from North Carolina, spoke at the American Negro Lecture Series in Philadelphia and was originally scheduled to appear at Murphy’s Montgomery race conference. Page decided not to speak in Montgomery, however, after learning that another northern speaker intended to argue for repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment. In a letter to Murphy, Page wrote that adopting the Fifteenth Amendment had been a “grave mistake…but I should consider it a much graver mistake to repeal it now, even if it were possible to repeal it.” Harlan, Booker T. Washington Papers, 1899-1900, 442. Murphy attempted to head off concern by offering Booker T. Washington his choice of speakers to represent the more “moderate” white southern approach to voting, which urged limiting the votes of unprepared white and black citizens rather than repealing the Fifteenth Amendment. See Harlan, Booker T. Washington Papers, 1899-1900, 441 and 475.
304 Davis wrote privately to Murphy that reducing tension between the North and South was of utmost importance and “that the ‘franchise’ to the Negro was a monumental blunder of the Republican Party, that but few who were responsible for it cared one particle for the rights of the Negro and that is was a political move to try to retain political power for party purposes.” Harlan, Booker T. Washington Papers, 1899-
southern leaders suggested as much at the American Negro series, Philadelphia’s black leaders shot back. Clearly wounded, Murphy wrote to Booker T. Washington, “The bitter and relentless attacks that were made upon me in Philadelphia and in the public press by certain members of the Negro race made me feel keenly that in the North they are not yet ready for what I am trying to do.” Murphy insisted that his own position had been misrepresented, presumably by the critical reception to his speech from Gertrude Mossell and the Christian Recorder. While he did not support repealing the Fifteenth Amendment, he wrote to Washington, he did believe that it should be modified to “make the definite terms of the franchise a local issue in each state of the Union.” In reality, his distinction amounted to not much of a difference, as state after state passed laws denying black men’s access to the franchise for more than half a century.

Welsh identified industrial education for African American and poor white southerners as the surest way to begin correcting the so-called wrongs unleashed during Reconstruction. In the pages of City and State, Welsh suggested that Reconstruction wreaked havoc on the post-bellum southern economy by emphasizing the political rights of black men rather than training former slaves to adopt their role as free laborers. “The people of the South are no more to blame…for the depressed or the crude and undeveloped state of labor in South, and of the mechanical arts, than the North is,” Welsh concluded. Rather, he suggested, the North, “freed the slaves and gave him the suffrage

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1900, 480. By the end of the nineteenth century, Davis and other white social and political reformers in the North tended to foreground political corruption and conflate African American participation with electoral dysfunction.
when vast numbers of the negro race were little more than animals. This was a cruel and irrational thing to do.”

Welsh advocated black vocational education to develop what he considered the limited skills of African Americans, while providing a useful labor pool for industrial development in the South. After his trip, Welsh rejected prominent speaker and Georgia journalist John Temple Graves’s calls for the creation of a separate state for African Americans. Though critical of Graves’s separate state plan, Welsh, too, remained skeptical that the majority of African Americans were capable of full integration in American society. Instead, Welsh argued, government and privately funded education for poor whites and blacks would foster racial harmony while also supplying southern industry with skilled laborers. “The South can not afford to lose negro labor to-day,” Welsh observed. Directly contesting Graves, Welsh said, “[I]t may be that in a distant future he shall have developed higher qualities that will prove of value to the entire country. However that may be, his deportation or separation en masse of any kind is a fantasy that meets no acceptance with most serious-minded persons.”

Welsh told City and State’s readers he decided to travel South in 1900 primarily to visit Kowaliga, an industrial school founded by William Benson in 1896 to educate black children for industrial work and domestic service in and around the rural Alabama community. Welsh viewed the school and vocational education for African Americans

305 City and State, June 7, 1900 and June 21, 1900.
306 City and State, July 12, 1900.
307 Ibid.
more broadly as the model for improving race relations. To that end, he worked with Benson to raise money and awareness for Kowaliga among mostly northern white benefactors and led a campaign to solicit $100,000 for Washington and Lee University, a school for white students located in Virginia.\textsuperscript{309} Murphy’s race conference in Montgomery gave Welsh hope for the cooperation he sought between “the wisest heads, soundest hearts, and most active hands of the North and South” to address the “negro problem” in the South.\textsuperscript{310}

Welsh published frequent articles characterizing African American political participation in Philadelphia as corrupt, with \textit{City and State} regularly featuring examples of black residents’ “disastrous use” of the franchise, including black men acquitted of crimes or awarded public positions due to their cooperation with Republican machine politicians.\textsuperscript{311} In one case, Welsh’s journal reveled in the fate of a black politician sentenced to jail after years of running a “speak-easy in exchange for his influence among negro voters.” The accused Republican John Briscoe “will have his confidence in the machine lessened by the time he gets out of the hands of District Attorney Weaver,” \textit{City and State} gleefully reported.\textsuperscript{312}

Alongside depictions of black male voters as bumbling followers of Philadelphia’s Republican machine, \textit{City and State} characterized African American electoral participation in a far more menacing light. The reform journal portrayed black men as smug beneficiaries of the Republican machine’s largesse who considered

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\textsuperscript{309} \textit{City and State}, November 8, 1900.
\textsuperscript{310} \textit{City and State}, June 7, 1900.
\textsuperscript{311} \textit{City and State}, August 28, 1900 and July 3, 1902.
\textsuperscript{312} \textit{City and State}, July 3, 1902.
themselves above the law due to the protection of powerful white allies. In a July 1900 article describing the Seventh Ward, for example, *City and State* invoked a familiar trope— one with wide currency in the South— of the uncivilized black rapist who could not suppress his desire to attack white women.\(^{313}\) Feeling threatened during an encounter with a black male “political worker” who “had a big pull in the division,” a white woman bypassed her local police station, preferring to file her complaint with the city magistrate—a position out of reach of her attacker’s cronies and influence, *City and State* reported. “It has been shown time and again that the lowest and most degraded creatures in the Seventh Ward can have the backing of its most influential politicians,” *City and State* concluded.\(^{314}\) By depicting a sexually deviant black man who took cover under the scourge of political corruption in Philadelphia the reform journal gained traction for its mission to eradicate political corruption. In this telling, apathetic white Philadelphians were forced to contend with the racialized consequence of allowing their electoral system to be overtaken by corrupt politicians who allowed black men to attack white women with impunity.

In 1903, *City and State* suggested that allowing corrupt politicians to run the city would inevitably lead to mob rule. The journal began by condemning the lynching of George White, a black man accused of raping a white woman in Wilmington, Delaware. Angered by a delay in sentencing, White’s killers broke into the workhouse where he was


\(^{314}\) “Community of Dangerous Interests,” *City and State*, July 26, 1900.
being held and burned him alive at the site of the alleged rape.\textsuperscript{315} The incident received national media attention and \textit{City and State} maintained its record of denouncing mob-perpetrated lynchings, calling White’s murder “a savagery that shocked the whole country.”\textsuperscript{316} \textit{City and State} also, however, suggested that the “lawlessness” carried out by the lynch mob could be traced to a general disregard for law and order, especially common in Wilmington and Philadelphia among “vicious negroes” who violate election laws. “For years it has been notorious,” noted the reform journal, “that these negroes have been utilized in several cities, including our own as tools of unscrupulous politicians.” Aided and abetted by black residents, elected officials in Delaware and Philadelphia fomented contempt for judicious execution of the law, the journal argued. With their elected officials unwilling to enforce the citizens’ will, it suggested, a white mob’s inclination to pursue violent justice on its own was not altogether surprising. And Philadelphia could be next, according to \textit{City and State}, which ended the article with this ominous warning: “Delaware is not the only State in which the people seem disposed to the wind-sowing that makes possible, even if it invite not, the whirlwinds of dangerous public sentiment.”\textsuperscript{317} For black Philadelphians, whose churches organized indignation meetings in response to lynchings in the South, whose newspapers closely tracked extra-judicial murders of black Americans, and whose organizations invited speakers like Ida B. Wells to address the epidemic, \textit{City and State}’s warning would have seemed overdue.

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Philadelphia’s white reform rhetoric effectively neutralized debates over racial
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\textsuperscript{315} Yohuru Williams, “Permission to Hate: Delaware, Lynching, and the Culture of Violence in America,” \textit{Journal of Black Studies} 32, no. 1 (September 2001): 3.
\textsuperscript{316} “Toying with Whirlwinds,” \textit{City and State}, July 2, 1903.
\textsuperscript{317} Ibid. See also “Note and Comment,” \textit{City and State}, July 16, 1903.
and economic inequalities, which were the defining structural challenges for African American residents at the turn of the twentieth century. Reformers attacked political corruption in racialized and gendered terms that blamed black men for both acting as and supporting crooked politicians. White reformers further diminished the significance of race discrimination by dismissing the Republican Party and African Americans’ role in emancipation and securing the rights of citizenship during Reconstruction. Indeed, *City and State* embraced a narrative that wrote emancipation and race equality out of the Republican Party legacy. Breakaway Republicans from Pennsylvania had articulated the same notion a decade earlier. In an 1890 open letter published in *The New York Times*, a group of self-proclaimed white “Independent Republicans” established a lineage between their movement for clean government and the Civil War-era Republican Party by eliding any specific reference to slavery or race. By suggesting that independent Republicans’ pursuit of “public morality” – not ending slavery – was the legacy of the Civil War-era Republican Party, the letter writers implicitly endorsed the national party’s move away from the politics of freedom and racial equality.318

When defining the “negro problem” in Philadelphia at the turn of the century, *City and State* embraced a view of Reconstruction as a misguided effort to enfranchise black men that led to political as well as social upheaval in the South. In 1901, for example, *City and State* called its readers’ attention to a “very interesting and most enlightening” article published in the *Atlantic Monthly* written by D.H. Chamberlain, a white northerner

elected governor of South Carolina during Reconstruction. Chamberlain wrote of the “dreadful hurly-burly” during Reconstruction in which “the negro was simply used as a tool by heartless and conscienceless and largely mindless party leaders.” Chamberlain’s article and City and State’s commentary emphasized the chaos caused by the misplaced concern and “blind party greed” that outsiders imposed on the business of southern politics.

The article signaled a significant revision of Chamberlain’s assessment of Reconstruction politics. Twenty years earlier, in 1879, Chamberlain championed black voting rights and self-government and blamed the “deliberate refusal of the white race” to work in conjunction with African American officeholders for the perceived chaos of the Reconstruction era. Two decades later, Chamberlain identified a new culprit for the failure of Reconstruction. Republican Party corruption, he claimed, rather than Southern white intransigence and violence, sunk the experiment of black enfranchisement. In Chamberlain’s revised judgment, African Americans did not act as heroic strongholds of democracy during Reconstruction, but rather as tools of northern white politicians. City and State shared Chamberlain’s misgivings about Reconstruction, suggesting that readers heed the observations and insights of a man whose “views of everything connected with

319 “The Negro in the South,” City and State, April 18, 1901.
320 Ibid.
321 Ibid.
322 Chamberlain served as attorney general of South Carolina from 1868-1872 and governor from 1874-1877. He left South Carolina in 1877 (the same year President Rutherford B. Hayes ordered federal troops withdrawn from the Southern states) after losing a bid for a second term as governor to Wade Hampton, a former Confederate soldier. Chamberlain, “Reconstruction and the Negro,” North American Review 128 (February 1879): 166-67.
Reconstruction and the interests of those involved are … peculiarly worthy of being well weighed.”

Remembering Reconstruction as a failed experiment in black politics served the interests not just of southern proponents of disfranchisement but of Philadelphia’s white political reformers as well. *City and State* did not advocate repealing the Fifteenth Amendment, as some southern and northern white Democrats had proposed, but the journal did suggest in 1900 that, “The North made a terrible mistake in giving to the four millions of recently freed slaves the ballot, when the great majority of them, through lack of education and of moral and intellectual development, were totally unfit to make any but a disastrous use of it.”

In response to the reform journal’s assertions about black suffrage, John S. Durham, a black journalist and lawyer in Philadelphia who served as U.S. ambassador to Haiti from 1891 to 1893, wrote to Welsh to express his concern.

“Will you not kindly inform me privately on what issues you have expressed your opinion on this matter?” Durham asked the editor of *City and State*. “Every thoughtful colored man,” he wrote to Welsh, “must regard with alarm any change which you may make from the principle growing out of manhood rights under our institutions.”

Although the *City and State* editorial that caught Durham’s attention focused on black voting in the South, the journal more typically railed against political corruption in

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323 “The Negro in the South,” *City and State*, April 18, 1901.
324 *City and State*, October 18, 1900.
326 Durham to Welsh, 8 October 1900, Box 14, Herbert Welsh collection, HSP. Although Durham dated his letter “Oct 8, 1900,” he offers a detailed description of the page number and author of the letter-to-the-editor that prompted him to write to Welsh. That letter was published in the November 8, 1900 issue of *City and State* and makes reference to an editorial that ran in the October 18 issue. Given these discrepancies, it seems likely that Durham mistakenly dated his letter. It likely should have read “Nov. 8” rather than “Oct. 8.”
Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. Durham likely concluded that *City and State*’s positions indicated hostility to black voting outside the boundaries of the former Confederacy. If political reformers believed access to the ballot should be blocked for the descendants of slaves in the South, would their doubts also extend to Philadelphia’s growing black population? The following year, the editors of the *Christian Recorder* echoed Durham’s alarm. “If the whites of the South are allowed to set aside law in order to exclude from the polls voters whom they do not desire, then why may not the capitalists of the North likewise follow this example by excluding from the polls all who are not acceptable to them?”

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In Philadelphia, the political reform movement helped shape a mounting antipathy to black citizenship at the end of the nineteenth century. The city’s municipal and social reformers constructed a narrative that defined black male voters as central to one of the most pressing concerns of the Progressive Era – the question of who belonged in the nation. Reformers crafted their corruption narrative in dialogue with white southern moderates who characterized black electoral power during Reconstruction as a perversion of democracy. Political reformers and southern moderates both argued that black participation in civic life was a barrier to restoring good government and peaceful relations between the races, as well as between the North and South.

Gertrude Mossell and others did not fail to notice the mounting tension surrounding African American politics in Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth

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century. When northern white political reformers railed against black voters and invited Democratic southern perspectives on the “negro problem” they implicitly linked their own concerns in Philadelphia with areas where patrolling the boundaries of electoral politics often took an even bloodier and decisive turn. African Americans in Philadelphia could not help asking where the line would be drawn in the North.
CHAPTER 4

“Gimme That Ballot and Get Out Mighty Quick”:
African Americans, Partisan Politics, and Reform, 1890-1900

In the summer of 1890, several of Philadelphia’s black politicians noted a significant increase in their constituencies. Black migrants from the South were packing churches, schools, fraternal societies, and – most significantly for African American Republican ward leader Gilbert Ball – voting lists. Ball, who had been active in local politics since the 1880s, estimated the number of black voters in the Seventh Ward had increased from 900 to 2,600 in less than a decade.\(^{328}\) Black politicians were not the only observers of the growing African American population. In Philadelphia, black residents confronted breakaway Republican reformers intent on pinning a large portion of the blame for municipal corruption on black migrants and a new wave of southern and eastern European immigrants.\(^{329}\)

\(^{328}\) “The Colored Man’s Canaan: Drifting from the Southern States to Live in Philadelphia,” *Philadelphia Press*, July 1890, Roll 8, Scrapbook 75, WDC.

\(^{329}\) Although other newcomers to Philadelphia at the end of the nineteenth century faced discrimination, the experience of southern and eastern European immigrants was qualitatively different than that of African Americans. Thomas Guglielmo, for example, argues that, “challenges to Italian immigrants’ color status were never sustained or systematic and, therefore, Italians never occupied a social position ‘inbetween’ ‘colored’ and ‘white.’” Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10.
Unlike black southerners who faced legal impediments to voting, African American men continued to cast ballots and hold office in the North but they often exercised their politics under intense scrutiny, disdain and coercion in northern states. By the early 1890s, municipal reformers in Philadelphia increasingly identified the city’s growing black population as an important underpinning of the entrenched Republican political machine. Reformers commonly depicted working-class African Americans in particular as ready and willing to support the political projects of white Republican politicians in exchange for money, jobs, and sometimes liquor licenses.

Reformers sought to root out political corruption by purging voter lists and tracking down alleged cases of fraudulent voting. They worked primarily in black and immigrant neighborhoods with large Republican majorities. After elite, white New Yorkers failed to gain support for restricting the suffrage to men of property during the 1870s, enthusiasm for narrowing the franchise diminished in the North. In Philadelphia, however, political violence aimed at black men at the polls in combination with political reform campaigns to delegitimize and disempower black voters suggest a persistent project of disfranchisement.

Citizens committees formed during the final two decades of the nineteenth century to challenge one-party rule. One of the most active was the Citizens’ Municipal League – an organization dedicated to cleaning up local politics by combing through areas such as the Seventh Ward, where Republican regulars turned out consistently large numbers at the polls. Another reform organization, the Law & Order Society, dispatched operatives to find violators of an 1888 liquor license law that required saloon operators to

seek renewal of their licenses every year from the city. Although the law was not specifically aimed at African Americans, many black saloonkeepers saw their livelihoods threatened as a result of the new crackdown.\footnote{Lane, \textit{Roots of Violence}, 115.}

Black ward leader Gilbert Ball lost the locus of his political power as well as his business when the city’s License Court ordered his saloon shut down in 1890.\footnote{\textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, April 15, 1890. Ball died later that year of apparent heart failure. Lane, \textit{Roots of Violence}, 74.} Ball amassed considerable wealth and influence – $40,000, according to one estimate – as bar owner and president of the Matthew S. Quay Club in the Seventh Ward. The club’s headquarters were located in Ball’s Seventh Ward saloon.\footnote{\textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, July 17, 1884.} Because Senator Quay represented a key link between black Republican voters in Philadelphia and the national party at the end of the nineteenth century, the black Republican club established in 1884 bore his name. From his perch as head of the national Republican Party and later as a U.S. senator, Quay doled out patronage, managed presidential campaigns, and retained dominion over the political machines in Pennsylvania’s two urban centers – Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. A favorite with the state’s industrial manufacturers (and a perennial target of Philadelphia’s political reformers), Quay maintained steadfast support for the protective tariff throughout his tenure in national office.\footnote{Kehl, \textit{Boss Rule in the Gilded Age}, 129.} The \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer} called Ball the “Quay of Colored Politicians” – an affirmation of Ball’s influence if not his reputation for clean politics.\footnote{\textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, December 11, 1890.} But the relationship between Quay and Ball was not as seamless as the club’s name would suggest.
In 1889, in a symbolic gesture to the benefits of bipartisanship during the 1880s for African Americans in Philadelphia, Ball accepted a framed portrait of former Mayor Samuel King on behalf of the Quay Club at a ceremony. King had appointed the city’s first black police officers in 1881 and supported desegregation of local schools, theaters and the post office. Speakers at the ceremony acknowledged King’s actions, but could point to no such policy endorsed by Quay. One speaker chose the nebulous description of Quay as a politician who “knows no man because of the color of his skin.” Despite his club’s affiliation and namesake, Ball’s allegiance to the Republican Party waned more than once during his two-decade career in Philadelphia politics. In 1884 and 1886, Ball led a group of African American leaders who broke from Republican ranks to nominate their own candidates for local and state office.

After losing his liquor license in 1890, Ball lashed out at the license court judge, a Democrat he had assisted during a previous election. “If I was good enough to work for him before the election and stand up for him at the polls I think he should be fair to me,” Ball told a newspaper reporter. Ball claimed that his influence among black voters had helped the Democratic judge get within five hundred votes of winning the division – an unusual feat in the majority Republican ward. “But I do not think he remembers much of what the colored people did for him,” said Ball, who had been accused by the judge of running a “disreputable” saloon where dancing was allowed in conjunction with alcohol

336 “No Politics—No Race, Quay and King Coupled as Friends of the Colored Man,” Philadelphia Inquirer, February 7, 1889.
338 See Chapter One.
sales.\textsuperscript{339} One newspaper reported that shutting down Ball’s saloon was a move calculated by Republican bosses to reduce the political influence of black ward leaders. The article referred to “rumors” suggesting a plan to take away Ball’s license and grant it instead to his counterpart in the Seventh Ward. “The Republican leaders could not afford to throw over both Ball and (Alfred) Bettencourt, who virtually control a certain percentage of the colored voters in the ward,” the newspaper suggested.\textsuperscript{340} Although it is ultimately unclear whether Republican leaders orchestrated revoking Ball’s license, after 1890 black Republicans active in local politics faced new electoral challenges as the national Republican Party pulled away from issues involving race and Philadelphia reformers ramped up their efforts to challenge Quay’s machine.

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In 1895, the \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer} ran an article musing about Quay’s “quiet, if not persistent” belief that the solid South was rife with possibility for “Republican missionary work.” Based on a conversation between Quay, the junior Senator from Pennsylvania, and his political associates (the Senator rarely gave interviews), the \textit{Inquirer} suggested Quay knew that only the “negro question” stood in the way of seizing Southern states from the Democratic Party. The growth of manufacturing in the South, noted the \textit{Inquirer}, made its residents – manufacturers as well as workers -- natural allies of the Republican commitment to high tariffs on imported goods. “It is believed that Senator Quay thought of all these things and of the future of the Republican Party when he cast his vote against the

\textsuperscript{339} “Gil Ball on Judge Gordon,” \textit{The (Philadelphia) Times}, April 16, 1890.
\textsuperscript{340} “Gil Ball’s License,” unknown newspaper, March 30, 1890, Roll 8, Scrapbook 75, WDC. Alfred Bettencourt, another African American saloonkeeper in the Seventh Ward, was also active in the local Republican Party during the 1890s.
Lodge Federal Elections law, otherwise known as the ‘Force Bill.’” As the Inquirer suggested, Quay’s maneuverings around the elections bill pointed to the shifting political priorities of the Republican Party.\(^{342}\)

The Lodge Bill, introduced by Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge in 1890, was intended to provide federal elections oversight and protection for black voters in the South. The timing could not have been more critical. By the late 1880s and early 1890s, having taken control of state legislatures and pushed black voters to the margins, white Democrats throughout the South began enacting constitutional barriers to African American voting.\(^{343}\) Opponents of the Lodge bill called the proposed law an overreach of federal authority that harkened back to the days of Reconstruction and claimed it would exacerbate animosity between white and black Southerners. Some northern businessmen suggested the bill would “open old wounds” and interfere with their ventures in the South.\(^{344}\) After the bill won House approval, Quay effectively killed it by brokering a deal to delay a vote in the full Senate.\(^{345}\) In exchange for crushing the so-called Force Bill, southern legislators agreed to back a protective tariff favored by Quay’s industrialist supporters.

The election bill’s quiet death sparked outrage in the black press nationwide. The Washington Bee, a black newspaper in Washington, D.C., lashed out at Quay, blaming

\(^{341}\) “Col. Quay in the South Believes That with the Negro Question Eliminated it is Republican,” Philadelphia Inquirer, November 17, 1895.


\(^{343}\) Ibid., 42.

\(^{344}\) “A Force Bill Ultimatum,” Macon Telegraph, August 4, 1890.

\(^{345}\) Philadelphia Inquirer, August 16, 1890.
Republican losses in the 1890 midterm elections on the Senator’s unwillingness to shepherd the bill through the Senate and safeguard the African American vote. “The defeat of Senator Quay is no more than I expected and has received a just rebuke at the hands of the people of Pennsylvania,” a Bee editorial proclaimed, referring to the thrashing of Quay’s chosen candidate for governor of Pennsylvania. “I suppose he is convinced that his opposition to and defeat of the election bill did not rest well on the stomachs of the American people.”\textsuperscript{346} The Bee’s willingness to denounce Quay reflects the ongoing debate among African Americans over loyalty to the Republican Party as well as the paper’s distance from the powerful Quay machine in Pennsylvania.

In Philadelphia, where Quay had long been a key link between African American voters and the national Republican Party, the African American response was more ambiguous. Less than a week before the elections bill failed in January 1891 in the Senate, the Christian Recorder continued to give Quay and President Harrison the benefit of the doubt: “The President seems to stick to the bill, and Senator Quay says he is not opposed to the protection of voters.”\textsuperscript{347} This despite the Recorder’s position a year earlier, when the election bill was first languishing in the Senate, that the bill’s failure could lead to a mass exodus of black voters. In an appeal to the sacrifices particularly black men had made for the nation as soldiers, the Recorder proclaimed, “We do not forget that even in the North much greater consideration is shown the white man who attempted the dissolution of this

\textsuperscript{346} Washington Bee, November 8, 1890.
\textsuperscript{347} Christian Recorder, January 8, 1891.
government than to the black man who served it. The poetry of the ‘Blue and the Gray’ is much more acceptable than the song of the black and white.”

The Recorder’s later reluctance to take on Quay for his lack of advocacy and his lukewarm concern about African American voting suggests a political calculation. Perhaps the editors hoped for last-minute support from Quay. More likely, they wanted to avoid alienating the powerful Republican senator. Once the bill died for a second time, the journal’s editors lashed out, calling the Republican Party “cowardly” and proclaiming, “How the glory of this great party of reforms has faded!” The editors did not mention Quay.

After discussing the measure at a “well-attended” meeting, the African American membership of the M.S. Quay Club in Philadelphia’s Seventh Ward passed a resolution opposing the elections bill. Led by president Gilbert Ball, the club’s members unanimously agreed that the proposed legislation, “will not help the political condition of things at the South and that the same will always have a tendency to keep alive the results of the war.”

Reacting to the Quay Club’s vote, the Harrisburg Patriot opined, “Why it begins to look as if the black Republicans had better sense than a good many of the white ones.” The Patriot’s gleeful incredulity was well founded. African American reaction to the bill had been overwhelmingly supportive and its demise triggered widespread anger in

348 “Protection as Men, More Than As Voters, Is What We Want,” Christian Recorder, July 31, 1890.
349 Although the Christian Recorder was a national voice for the A.M.E. Church, the editors paid particularly close attention to the African American experience in Philadelphia, where Quay was a powerful force.
350 Christian Recorder, January 15, 1891.
352 “Quay Against the Force Bill,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, August 6, 1890.
353 Patriot, August 5, 1890.
the black press. Although it is unclear what led to the resolution, Ball, the club’s president for almost a decade, likely felt increased pressure to conform to Republican machine priorities in 1890. As the new decade dawned, Philadelphia’s municipal reformers had gained traction on a number of fronts. In 1890, a fusion coalition of Democrats and reformers mounted a successful challenge to Quay’s pick for governor.\footnote{Kehl, \textit{Boss Rule in the Gilded Age}, 149-154. Lea wrote an open letter to Pennsylvania Republicans, urging them to choose the Democratic nominee for governor rather than Delamater, Quay’s candidate. “Lea to the Republicans of Pennsylvania,” July 9, 1890, quoted in the \textit{New York Evening Post}, July 12, 1890 and quoted in Kehl, \textit{Boss Rule in the Gilded Age}, 150-151.} The re-election of former Gov. Robert Pattison, a Democrat, was a blow to Quay’s organization. In the meantime, reformers targeted African American and immigrant neighbors to restrict liquor sales – a move that struck Ball particularly hard, undermining his livelihood as well as his political status in the community. These circumstances heightened the pressure for conformity among regular Republican supporters including the Quay Club members and created uncertainty within the state’s party leadership.

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In 1895, five years before asking Herbert Welsh to explain \textit{City and State}’s position on black suffrage, John S. Durham argued that African Americans had an even “greater” stake in municipal reform than the average citizen of Philadelphia.\footnote{See Chapter Three. John S. Durham, “Our Pulpit and Reform,” \textit{Christian Recorder}, February 7, 1895.} Forced to pay higher rents for housing and barred from most skilled labor, African American residents were poised to benefit the most from civil service reform, lower taxes, and the curbing of corporate influence – the combination of which would ease their disproportionate financial burden, Durham insisted. Despite the potential benefits of municipal reform, however, Durham suggested the reform movement’s critique of African
American support for the Republican Party failed to acknowledge the national and local implications of voting otherwise. Hewing closely to the notion of a two-party choice, Durham argued that “state’s rights” and “state sovereignty” as touted and practiced by Democrats would never allow for “race advancement.” Turning to local politics, Durham suggested critics of Republican politics would not win points with black residents by criticizing party leaders, including Quay and Israel Durham, the white Seventh Ward boss (no relation to John S. Durham). While reformers attempted to frame African American support for Quay and his machine as a debasement of the rights of citizenship, John S. Durham countered, “[T]hese leaders have found for colored men clerkships in public offices and employment on our streets when our large commercial and industrial establishments are closed against us.”

In 1891, the Christian Recorder echoed John S. Durham’s positive assessment of Quay’s impact on African Americans in Philadelphia when the editors mentioned Quay among the Republican politicians and religious leaders who supported Rev. William H. Heard to head the Liberian colonization mission. Heard, an AME minister in Philadelphia, was well known for suing the Pullman Palace Car Company after a conductor refused to seat him in the first class car although he had purchased a ticket. “The race is indebted to Dr. Heard for his noble fight,” proclaimed the Christian Recorder. John S. Durham himself had benefited from Republican Party largesse. In May 1890, Republican President

356 Ibid.
Benjamin Harrison appointed him consul general to Santo Domingo and U.S. ambassador to Haiti the following year.\textsuperscript{358}

In a final challenge to empty reform promises, John S. Durham insisted, “It is not enough merely to criticise [sic] what exists: we may very properly ask that reformers define precisely what ought to exist.” Durham’s comments appeared in an article in \textit{The Christian Recorder} during a vigorous campaign led by a union of municipal reformers and Democrats to elect Governor Robert Pattison mayor of Philadelphia. Durham criticized Pattison’s failure to nominate black men to key statewide posts, suggesting the two-term governor had squandered potential black support. Durham claimed that if half of Philadelphia’s black voters cast their ballots for a Democratic candidate they could sway an election – an important consideration in the upcoming mayoral battle.\textsuperscript{359}

The fusion reform coalition appeared poised to heed Durham’s observation about the significance of black voters in a close election. In an effort to cleave African American support, reform journal editor and head of the Pattison campaign Herbert Welsh printed campaign literature addressed to black voters and hired seven black men to distribute the information in the Seventh Ward.\textsuperscript{360} The campaign also paid $12 for the services of six “colored workers” on Election Day.\textsuperscript{361} To further cement black support for Pattison, Welsh asked for Robert G. Still’s endorsement. Still, a black Democrat and son of abolitionist leader William Still, wrote to Welsh promising to “obtain the signatures of a few colored

\textsuperscript{358} Wynes, “John Stephens Durham,” 528.
\textsuperscript{360} Welsh, “Account of the disposition of $225,” Box 70, Folder T-2, 1895, Herbert Welsh collection, HSP.
\textsuperscript{361} Ibid.
men to your appeal.” Welsh compared the Pattison campaign in Philadelphia to Rev. Charles Parkhurst’s work in New York to defeat Tammany Hall, the notoriously corrupt Democratic machine. He solicited support for the campaign by suggesting, “an alliance of the reform elements in the majority party, with the minority party to elect a strong clean candidate offered by the latter.”

Yet another fusion challenge combined with a brewing feud in the Republican organization contributed to a mounting sense of foreboding within the Quay machine. After Philadelphia Republican boss David Martin refused to support Quay’s choice for mayor, Quay began to depict himself as the voice of reform and Martin as the corrupt leader of the so-called “hog combine.” Quay’s approach worked, but his Republican machine did not emerge unscathed. Although Pattison lost the mayor’s race to Republican candidate Charles Warwick, reform support helped Democrats pick up a number of magistrates and seats in Philadelphia’s Common Council. In addition, Quay’s embrace of reform rhetoric implicitly acknowledged the political currency reformers now claimed in Philadelphia – a currency built in part on invalidating the political participation of African Americans.

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363 Welsh to “My Dear Sir,” 31 January 1895, Box 70, Folder T-2, 1895, Herbert Welsh collection, HSP.
365 Although Welsh sought support among black voters for Pattison, *City and State* continued to publish articles depicting African American as dupes of the Republican machine.
In the meantime, after several failed attempts to win citywide elections, reformers continued pursuing other tactics to undermine the Republican machine’s power. One such strategy involved “purging” lists of registered voters compiled by assessors during house-to-house tallies of residents. An assessor from each election district was required to collect a list of qualified voters twice a year by visiting the dwellings in his district. Reformers often targeted poor neighborhoods, where most residents were either recently arrived immigrants from southern and eastern Europe or African Americans. Close scrutiny of assessors’ lists and calls for more stringent voter registration requirements in Philadelphia echoed a widespread trend in northern states at the end of the nineteenth century.

In 1894, the city of Philadelphia prosecuted John Briscoe, an African American assessor appointed by the Republican administration to canvass the Fifth Ward, a small, densely populated district on the city’s east end near the Delaware River. Briscoe was accused of padding voting lists with men who had moved from or never lived in the ward. His hearing drew a large crowd of politicians, policemen and other residents of the Fifth Ward to the small courtroom on Passyunk Avenue. A.S.L. Shields, an attorney frequently employed by members of the Republican Party to defend city officials and other politicians accused of corruption, represented Briscoe. The prosecution’s case against Briscoe rested on questioning the political participation of men who moved frequently in search of work. According to Pennsylvania state law, residents were required to live in

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their district for the two months before an election in order to vote. Most of the voters in question lived in lodging houses that catered to sailors, other itinerant workers, and single men who could not afford to rent on their own. John Palmer lived at a lodging house for sailors when Briscoe came to register voters. Palmer had since left for Cuba and later sent his landlord a letter asking that his trunks be shipped to Savannah. The testimony of a handful of immigrant residents who said Briscoe wrote down their names although they were not citizens suggests a tendency on the part of reformers to conflate the immigrants’ lack of legal citizenship with the working-class circumstances of black men’s living arrangements. Housing options in Philadelphia were especially limited for African Americans, who could rent in only a handful of neighborhoods with the most crowded conditions. In addition, black men were shut out of most occupations by the 1890s and often could only secure sporadic work as day laborers. This combination of crowded living arrangements and limited opportunities cast doubt on many African American men’s eligibility to vote in Philadelphia.

Witnesses called to testify in Briscoe’s case – white and black -- described a variety of living arrangements far outside the boundaries of middle-class respectability. A 20-year-old “youth” testified that he boarded in a house run by a woman where seventeen voters

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369 “Purging Lists Before a Judge,” The (Philadelphia) Times, November 1, 1894.
370 “Briscoe Held in Jail,” Philadelphia Inquirer, October 31, 1894. In 1891, the Christian Recorder objected to the Patriotic Sons of America’s decision to exclude African Americans from their fraternal organization based on a comparison with immigrants, who were also barred from membership: “These hypocrites attempt to explain away their cowardice by saying that there are many not Afro-Americans, who would like to join the fraternity, but who, because foreigner are prohibited from doing so; hence Negroes should not regard themselves treated badly. This is but adding insult to injury. Foreigners are debarred by the very constitutional and corporate title of the body; they do not expect to be fraternized by it. It is because the Negro is the Negro; that is, is black, that he is objected to. Christian Recorder, September 4, 1891.
had been registered. When pressed, he acknowledged the house had been run for “immoral purposes.” The young man confirmed that roughly a dozen men had lived at the house during the several years he rented there.\textsuperscript{371} The prosecuting attorney, Thomas R. Elcock, a former judge from a wealthy Philadelphia family, scrutinized one witness’ living arrangements particularly closely. Charles Bradley, a black man from Maryland, testified that he had lived in a tenement house in the Fifth Ward for five or six years with other renters. Many of those renters had appeared on Briscoe’s list of eligible voters and Elcock pursued their unorthodox living arrangement as proof that Briscoe had registered unqualified voters. Bradley lived in the house with a rotating crew of mostly African American stevedores and usually shared a room with two other men. “There is only one bedstead in my room, with three mattresses on it,” Bradley explained. “We take two off and put them on the floor.” The prosecuting attorney’s attempts to pin down the identity of the primary tenant and identify the valid voter resulted in more courtroom confusion. When asked about his occupation, Bradley described himself as a “gentleman” who received money from his family in Maryland and collected one dollar a week in rent from the other boarders in his room. “I am the boss of the room, sir,” Bradley told the prosecutor. “I don’t pay any rent.”\textsuperscript{372} Given his shared residence in a boarding house, Bradley’s self-appointed status as a gentleman perplexed both attorneys and the judge.

Frank Black, an African American lodger living at Bradley’s house, explained that he collected rent from four other men who worked with him on the construction of a municipal sewer system. Although low-paying and often dangerous, municipal projects

\textsuperscript{371} “Democrats Fail to Make Out a Case,” \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, November 2, 1894. 
\textsuperscript{372} Ibid.
doled out to favored contractors of the Republican administration, including the
construction of Torresdale Boulevard and a water filtration plant, offered one of the few
alternatives to service work for African American men in Philadelphia. All five of the men
were registered voters in the Fifth Ward, although one had since gone to jail. The
ubiquity of unorthodox living arrangements among African Americans virtually ensured
that those who searched would find “illegal” black voters. “A man could not sleep in a
room with five or six others at night, work at a dozen different occupations during the day,
eat anywhere and everywhere, and the next night sleep somewhere else, and then claim the
right of the franchise,” prosecuting attorney Elcock proclaimed during his closing
argument. Elcock’s reading of the law would exclude a significant number of black
Philadelphians from the franchise given the difficulty of finding steady employment and
housing. The trial concluded with thirty-four names being removed from the voter
registration list, although the presiding judge said it was possible many of the men had
indeed resided at the house.

Municipal League members pursued African Americans suspected of committing
election-related offenses on foot as well as in court, often with the thinnest of evidence to
make their claims. In 1900, Daniel Ward, a black resident of the Seventh Ward, was held
on $300 bail for allegedly trying to vote using a poll tax receipt made out to another man.
A judge opted to hold Ward in custody on the word of a League election watcher despite
the fact that no one could locate the tax receipt in question. In another case that year,

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373 Ibid.
374 Ibid.
375 “Weird Talk About Election Contest. Latest Effort to Keep the Municipal League Before the Public,”
Philadelphia Inquirer, March 1, 1900.
League election watchers swore an affidavit against Herbert Rolles, a black election judge in the Seventh Ward, for allowing voters who had not paid their poll tax to cast ballots. Rolles and four other African American election watchers were prosecuted as part of a larger ballot box stuffing scandal during the 1899 election. When League members combed the streets of a black neighborhood in search of those accused of committing election fraud, residents doused them with hot water and soot. The residents’ response can be understood as a protest against the scrutiny directed at their homes. It also suggests that Seventh Ward residents had some familiarity with the presence of political reformers intent on hunting down transgressors among the neighborhood’s impoverished residents.

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While southern political history in the late nineteenth century is defined by the systematic violence used to prevent African American participation in electoral politics, the literature on urban politics in the North focuses instead on the spread of reform initiatives to battle corrupt political machines. The scrutiny and violence African Americans endured when voting in Philadelphia, especially during the 1890s, was intended to have a chilling effect on the suffrage. Close attention to the language and behavior during encounters at the polls reveals how African Americans practiced politics in Philadelphia at the close of the nineteenth century. Black Philadelphians considered their electoral experience part of a larger struggle to maintain a foothold on the rights

376 The (Philadelphia) Times, March 15, 1900.
378 Lane, Roots of Violence, 75-76.
379 Here my conclusions challenge historian Roger Lane’s assessment that “at the same time racial violence in the South was a matter of growing concern, it was becoming impossible any longer to cast political violence in Philadelphia in terms of black and white.” Lane, William Dorsey’s, 205.
guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment as well as a fight for their share of the partisan spoils. The nineteenth century is notorious for the roughshod character of its urban electoral politics. Election Day featured knife fights, beatings, shootings, alcohol, and intimidation, which most certainly were not exclusively aimed at African Americans. Following black Philadelphians as they navigated the tumultuous waters of voting makes it possible to distinguish between violent politics and political violence aimed at African Americans.

The efforts of political reformers during the 1890s worked a strange alchemy on Philadelphia politics, encouraging unlikely candidates, including Republican boss Matthew S. Quay, to don the mantle of municipal reformer. In 1896, a feud in the local Republican Party led to the innovation of the “McKinley Citizens” ticket, which, like the Republican ticket, featured Ohio Gov. William McKinley as the choice for president while offering a different choice for sheriff down the ballot. Alexander Crow, Jr., was the McKinley-Citizens candidate for sheriff challenging the Republican nominee Samuel H. Ashbridge, the coroner who drew his support from Philadelphia’s Republican Party leader David Martin. McKinley-Citizens supporters campaigned as independents challenging machine rule, although their affiliation and backing from Senator Quay called into question their reform credentials. This tension within the Republican regular party created a moment

381 The (Philadelphia) Times, October 28, 1896.
of political possibility and peril for African American voters in Philadelphia. The ascendance of the Republican Party in Philadelphia during post-Civil War decades gave African Americans a platform – however shifting and unstable – from which to pursue participation in the electoral process. By adopting the rhetoric of reform, Quay succeeded in seizing the momentum from reformers and his rivals within the local Republican Party. The ensuing battle brought to the surface the expectations and concerns of African American voters and the frustration of Philadelphia’s Republican leaders and machine politicians who could not always orchestrate the black vote as they had anticipated. With the regular Republican Party in turmoil after 1895, black voters found themselves targets not just of municipal reformers, but also the Republican administration in Philadelphia. Their reactions during this moment of party upheaval suggest a commitment to maintaining African American access to the ballot as well as influence in the Republican Party.

In 1897, Leland Jackson and several other black witnesses testified before a Pennsylvania legislative sub-committee charted with investigating alleged election abuses in the third ward’s fourteenth district during the fall of 1896.384 Quay convened the legislative committee to challenge the power of political enemies.385 The third ward election judge Richard Powers used physical intimidation and threats of arrest to prevent African American men from voting. Jackson, who lived in the third ward and served as an elections observer for the McKinley-Citizens ticket, testified that an elderly African American man tried to vote but was overrun while in the voting booth by a “strange man”

385 McCaffery, When Bosses Ruled, 220 n20.
who “went in after him, reached over his shoulder and marked his ballot.” When the elderly man refused to vote a ballot he did not mark himself, the election judge “snatched it from his hands and placed it in the box.” Then the man “was shoved from the room,”\textsuperscript{386} Jackson told the committee. C.F. Benie, another African American man, told state investigators he had voted in the fourteenth district for three years but was refused a ballot during the 1896 general election. When Benie asked why he could not vote, Powers threatened to have him arrested.\textsuperscript{387} Election officials also thwarted Patrick H. Banks’ attempt to vote. Banks, who had intended to vote the McKinley-Citizens ticket, testified that he was turned away at the polls because Powers said another man had already voted using his name. Banks told investigators that Powers could not have made such a mistake because the two had known each other for years.\textsuperscript{388}

In an earlier hearing, Jackson described watching John L. Holmes being turned away from voting in November 1896. Holmes, an African American laborer, had “for some reason or other” been left off the assessor’s list of eligible voters in the third ward despite boarding at Jackson’s home for three years.\textsuperscript{389} After his initial rejection, Holmes donned an Ashbridge campaign button and was admitted to the polls by Powers. But when the election judge, at an imposing two hundred pounds, noticed Holmes marking his ballot for the McKinley-Citizens ticket (in effect, voting for Ashbridge’s opponent), he pulled

\textsuperscript{386}“Lively Tilts,” \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, March 14, 1897.
\textsuperscript{387}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{388}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{389}Ibid.
Holmes out of the voting booth. “Gimme that ballot and get out mighty quick,” Powers ordered. 390

State and local officials who conducted the election hearings never addressed the pattern of abuse and disfranchisement experienced by African Americans at the Philadelphia polls during the 1890s. Instead, the election fraud hearings settled scores between factions of the Republican Party and municipal reformers. When legislators identified problems with Philadelphia’s electoral system, they did so without acknowledging the ways in which black men were systematically barred from voting. 391

The black Philadelphians who testified, however, appeared to consider the election hearings an opportunity to address their own lack of access to the polls rather than simply partisan disputes. Black men who testified about election-day abuses understood their experiences in the context of Southern disfranchisement and electoral persecution of African Americans in the South as well as Philadelphia. Unable to cast his ballot, Holmes told another election watcher he regretted not “getting in a vote” for Republican presidential candidate William McKinley. 392 His comments suggest an electoral mission that transcended the local contests. Holmes identified his election-day goal as a vote for president.

Both factions of Philadelphia’s Republican Party favored McKinley for president. Their disagreements were down ballot. Holmes had apparently placed his highest priority at the top of the ticket with McKinley, an indication that his own interest in voting

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390 Ibid.
391 The Philadelphia Inquirer accused the Ashbridge campaign of widespread discrimination – without regard to race -- against Crow supporters at the polls. Philadelphia Inquirer, November 4, 1896.
transcended local partisan disputes. Leland Jackson, too, understood his testimony as part of a larger struggle against African American disfranchisement nationwide. “I’ve voted down South where they do things pretty rough,” Jackson, who was born in Virginia in 1850, told committee members during his testimony.393 “But I’d rather take my chances down there any time than in the Fourteenth division [in Philadelphia] any more.”394 By putting what he observed at the Philadelphia polls in the context of southern challenges to the black vote, Jackson turned the reform assessment of African American voters on its head. Where Municipal League members sought to root out bad actors and cleanse the electorate of corrupt Republican Party practices, Jackson linked electoral corruption in Philadelphia to the abuse and exclusion of African Americans at the ballot box in the South. Jackson’s allegiance to the Quay-led faction of the party clearly did not tell the whole story about his motivation for electoral participation.

By serving as an elections watcher, Jackson also placed himself at the center of the electoral process – a position denied to an increasing number of blacks in the South. He likely considered his Election Day participation not just an act of resistance to the tide of southern disfranchisement and northern disenchantment with black voting, but also as a bulwark against them. When Jackson spotted a man he did not recognize voting under the name of black laborer and third ward resident William Bailey, he “challenged” the impersonator, but Powers insisted the man’s vote be counted.395 “I know Bailey as well as I know anyone,” Jackson told the sub-committee, “He having lived in front of me for over

three years.” From his testimony, it is clear that Jackson saw himself as a conduit for African American men who sought a clear path to the voting booth.

In addition to battling election officials for access to the polls, African American men squared off with police during the 1896 election. At least half a dozen black voters told state investigators that police officers had prevented them from voting in the Seventh Ward. They appeared to have been targeted by police, who backed Ashbridge for sheriff, as likely Crow supporters. When the would-be voters refused to reveal which candidate they supported or to let police mark their ballots, they were beaten and ejected from the polls. William Scott said he returned to the polls fifty times after being thrown out by police officers during each attempt. Others testified that one officer forcibly marked ballots for African American voters and intimidated those who challenged unqualified voters. One officer clubbed and ordered the arrest of a black barber “because he had challenged a man who wanted to vote on the name of another person.” In 1896, a Pennsylvania Senate committee launched an investigation of the Philadelphia Police Department for interfering with elections.

The potential for violence continued long after the 1896 election. Incensed that John C. Foster, a black voter in the third ward, refused to remain home on Election Day, a

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398 A report issued by the state investigative committee noted that one of the contributing factors to police corruption, especially during elections, was the mayor’s power to appoint and instruct the department. In 1896, Mayor Charles Warwick was aligned with David Martin, the Philadelphia Republican boss who backed Ashbridge for sheriff. See also, “The Passing of Dave Martin,” Philadelphia Inquirer, November 9, 1896.


400 “Reforming Evils Which Now Exist,” Philadelphia Inquirer, February 24, 1897. The committee convened for a more general investigation of “affairs” in Philadelphia, including the need for civil service reform, corruption at election primaries and the responsibilities of magistrates.
prominent Philadelphia politician beat Foster at a saloon in February 1897.\textsuperscript{401} In turn, Foster took out a warrant for Assemblyman-elect R. Lincoln Roberts, who was arrested the next day. Roberts’s troubles did not begin or end with Foster, however.

On the night he attacked Foster, Roberts’s assembly seat was in jeopardy due to alleged election law violations. In this race, city controller Roberts ran as a Democrat against McKinley-Citizens ticket candidate Oscar P. Saunders. Roberts, who was initially proclaimed the winner, held office for several months before the Pennsylvania State Legislature voted to seat Saunders instead based on evidence of election fraud collected by a State Senate investigative committee. The Senate committee “concluded in certain divisions of the third ward … in which the returns show that [Roberts] received large majorities, the election was conducted under circumstances of such gross fraud, force and illegality that it is beyond human power to ascertain just what was the voice of the voters of these divisions.”\textsuperscript{402} Foster surely knew about the ongoing challenge to Roberts’s election.

The Republican Party feud likely gave Foster the confidence to file charges against a sitting Assemblyman. When Foster took out his warrant he would have weighed the consequence (perhaps another beating) of doing so against the probability of prosecution for a man already under suspicion for election abuses. Leland Jackson and John C. Foster’s electoral activities suggest the ways in which African American politics can be understood as more than a reflection of the priorities of white Republican Party leaders. The

\textsuperscript{401} “Warrant for Roberts; A Colored Man Brings Charges Against the Downtown Politician,” \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, February 11, 1897.

statements and electoral choices of black Philadelphians reveal a gulf between the orders given by Republican Party leaders and the electoral priorities of African American voters.

With the dispute over party leadership lingering after the 1896 elections, African American residents of the Seventh Ward found their neighborhood subject to frequent police raids. In December 1897, “a loyal colored Republican” wrote to the Philadelphia Inquirer to express outrage over the treatment of black men assembled at a Republican Club in the seventh ward. 403 Twelve men were arrested and one was seriously injured when a police officer shot into the club. A magistrate dismissed all charges the next day for lack of evidence. 404 The letter writer blamed Republican city leaders for dispatching police to intimidate African American voters. The raids “were made upon the most questionable evidence,” charged the letter writer, who called the shooting “cowardly.” The police who conducted the raid suspected gambling at the club. 405 The letter writer insisted the motive was political: “The people of the Seventh ward and particularly the colored Republicans have been loyal to Judge Durham from the beginning of the factional fight. For this reason they have been persistently persecuted by the Combiners to the shame of the administration.”

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During the 1890s, unlike the rhetoric of reformers or the assumptions of historians, African Americans did not routinely make reflexive choices at the polls. In Philadelphia, they rarely had that option. The Republican Party was too fractured and contested to simply follow blindly. In addition, increasingly aggressive legal and extra-

405 “Shot During a Raid,” Philadelphia Inquirer, December 19, 1897.
legal assaults on black suffrage – North and South – raised the stakes of partisan politics for black Philadelphians, many of whom had only recently migrated north. Playing the partisan game meant staying in the political conversation – a position not to be yielded lightly, especially given the battles over black voting in the South – but their activities amount to more than merely a reflection of the battles between reformers and urban bosses. From the perspective of black residents, urban northern politics at the turn of the twentieth century emerges as a landscape deeply invested in policing the boundaries of African American citizenship, rather than a sideshow to the Jim Crow South.

406 Michele Mitchell argues that many African Americans, especially those of the “aspiring” classes, did withdraw from electoral politics at the turn of the nineteenth century to focus internally on the politics of racial destiny. Steven Hahn also explores the antecedents of a rising tide of separatism (especially among rural African Americans), which took shape around exodus to Africa movements and later in support for Marcus Garvey. Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation* and Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet.*
CHAPTER 5
“To Stroke the Fur of the Political Cat in the Wrong Direction”:
Black Leaders and Reform Politics

James Samuel Stemons arrived in Philadelphia in 1900 an unemployed, aspiring journalist and race leader. The 28-year-old carried with him a reference letter written in 1894 from the clerk of the District Court in Graham County, Kansas, where his family had helped settle the black farming town of Nicodemus. The county clerk praised Stemons’s “honesty, industry and sobriety” in enduring his family’s persistent poverty and endorsed his “efforts to obtain equal industrial rights for the race which he so ably represents.” In pursuit of expanded labor opportunities for African American men, Stemons adopted the racialized rhetoric of Philadelphia’s political reform movement,

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408 The full reference letter read: “This is to certify that James S. Stemons has been a resident of the above named county from early childhood, having come here with his parents in 1878. His youthful career was one of almost unremitting toil and care – one long struggle against poverty – to support his aged and feeble parents and secure an education. Never faltering in his purpose, nor stooping to wrong, he has always borne an unparalleled reputation for honesty, industry, and sobriety. We note with pleasure and heartily endorse his efforts to obtain equal industrial rights for the race which he so ably represents. From his lifelong steadfastness of purpose, we believe that he will accomplish the work he has undertaken, if supported by the people.” Office of the District Court, Graham County, Hill City, Kansas, reference letter for Stemons, 10 October 1894, Box 1, Folder 1, JSS, HSP.
which linked Republican Party corruption with African American voters and effectively
defined black residents as disqualified to participate in the suffrage.  

In 1911, Stemons established a partnership with the city of Philadelphia to
monitor black behavior in public space and electoral politics. Through this organization
he hoped to identify and remove offenders from the body politic and clear space for
“legitimate” black engagement with electoral politics. By supporting corrupt white
Republicans in the urban North, Stemons argued, black citizens had used their ballot “to
stroke the fur of the political cat in the wrong direction,” rather than to serve the best
interests of their communities. Stemons believed his plan would highlight the finest
qualities of black citizenship, thereby winning the respect of white employers who would
no longer be able to deny black men jobs in their factories and shops.

The success of the reform movement that had been challenging Philadelphia’s
Republican-led machine for more than a decade in large part shaped Stemons’s
politics. Understanding where Stemons situated himself in the city’s political
landscape and how he identified allies and enemies reveals the narrowed terrain available
for politically active black Philadelphians at the turn of the twentieth century. In his
attempt to carve out a space for himself and his political project, Stemons formed
alliances with black church leaders and white businessmen, acknowledging both the
church’s moral influence and strategic access to large numbers of black Philadelphians

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409 See Chapters Three and Four.
410 Public Ledger, November 22, 1910, Box 1, Folder 16, JSS, HSP; and Stemons, “The Negro in Politics,”
typed draft of speech, 22 April 1909, Box 4, Folder 6, JSS, HSP.
411 See Chapters Three and Four. As in the rest of the nation, Philadelphia’s Republican regulars had since
the 1880s largely dropped their fight for African American equality. Issues in Philadelphia politics were no
longer framed in terms of race, according to Roger Lane. According to Lane, “White politicians were not
indifferent to black votes, but they had learned to buy them without making concession to black issues or
even offering much in the way of patronage.” Lane, Roots of Violence, 77.
and the financial support of white reformers as integral to his movement. Stemons often struggled to make a living but considered himself a peer of other black intellectual leaders at the turn of the twentieth century and believed he offered an alternative path to W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington.

Like Stemons, Fanny Jackson Coppin, a prominent black educator in Philadelphia for three decades after the Civil War, prioritized expanding job opportunities for African Americans and sought allegiances with white social and political reformers to make progress on a variety of fronts for black Philadelphians. Coppin enjoyed more personal and professional acceptance and success than Stemons as principal of the respected Institute for Colored Youth, a Quaker school established in 1837 to educate black children. But in 1902 she resigned from the school, pushed out by the Quaker leaders’ new vision for African American education. According to historian Linda Perkins, “[Booker T.] Washington’s repeated visits to Philadelphia, in which he urged manual and agricultural training for blacks and denounced political aspirations of blacks, eventually succeeded in the final demise of the Institute.”

Stemons and Coppin’s politics at times aligned with Booker T. Washington and his followers in Philadelphia’s community of white social reformers. They shared a

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412 In 1912, Wright listed the accomplishments of Coppin’s thirty-four-year tenure as principal of ICY, during which “the chief work of the institution was literary and it attained a very creditable reputation throughout the North.” Wright, The Negro in Pennsylvania: A Study in Economic History (Philadelphia: A.M.E Book Concern, 1912), 135. Coppin hired black teachers from Oberlin, Yale, Lincoln, and Wilberforce University, and ICY produced hundreds of distinguished graduates who went on to varied careers as educators, doctors, lawyers, clergymen, and in several trades. Coppin also contributed literary children’s stories to the Christian Recorder as a means of educating a broader black audience, according to historian Linda Perkins. Perkins, “Fanny Jackson Coppin and The Institute for Colored Youth: A Model Of Nineteenth Century Black Female Educational and Community Leadership, 1837-1902” (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1978), 130. In 1878, Coppin began writing a “Women’s Department” column under a pen name for the Christian Recorder.

commitment to expanding job opportunities for black northerners, although Stemons expressed skepticism about the efficacy of industrial education when so few fields were open to black men in the North. Unlike Washington, Stemons and Coppin embraced black political activism in their efforts to achieve racial justice. Where some black reformers at the turn of the twentieth century focused on community and home rather than formal politics, Stemons explicitly identified electoral politics as the arena in which to repair the image of the dangerous, inept black voter, and to thereby expand labor and political opportunities for African Americans. In Philadelphia, however, with black politics continually linked to municipal corruption by opponents of the Republican machine, Stemons’s inflammatory rhetoric and tactics appeared to make some black elites uncomfortable, especially as they attempted to distinguish their own political and social legitimacy in the face of increasing migration from the South.

Stemons’s and Coppin’s experiences in Philadelphia illustrate the possibilities and limitations of black politics in the urban North at a moment of increasing suspicion about the validity of black citizenship. Stemons is an especially challenging character to assimilate into the narrative of black resistance to disfranchisement. His barbed, unrelenting criticism of what he saw as black complicity with corrupt Republican politics suggests a scold rather than a leader. Unlike a more nuanced thinker and talented writer such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Stemons hammered away at black participation in machine politics without critiquing the reform movement’s disregard for racial justice. The

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414 For intraracial reform, see Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*; and Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*. As Mitchell argues, many “aspiring” African Americans withdrew from electoral politics during the early 1900s to pursue a politics of racial destiny based on black families and homes. “The turn toward domesticity on the part of early-twentieth-century African Americans was, in many regards, a surrogate for electoral politics in their quest for self-determination.” *Righteous Propagation*, 136.
organization he founded in 1911 to monitor and report incidents of vice and corruption among black Philadelphians recalls the racial uplift projects of elite blacks in the North and South who attempted to control black behavior based on middle-class notions of class and gender propriety. The aspiring black men and women Mitchell identifies, “proceeded to contend that race progress was contingent upon eradicating vice, increasing the number of ‘well-born’ children, and monitoring sexuality.”

Stemons believed that control of black political behavior and other public displays of vice would translate to more economic opportunity in the form of industrial employment for black men.

Stemons’s politics, however, could at times seem contradictory, as in 1911, when he wrote a letter to the editor of the Philadelphia Record in the wake of a black man’s lynching in nearby Coatesville, Pennsylvania. In the letter, Stemons declared that white people alone bore the burden of commenting on and explaining the killing of Zachariah Walker, a black steel mill worker who was pulled from his hospital bed and burned alive after claiming he shot a white security guard in self-defense.

“It is the white man’s civilization that is on trial,” Stemons declared. He also excoriated the press for contributing to the degraded and violent image of black men in the popular imagination. “Had it not been for the readiness of the press,” Stemons argued, “to say those things that arouse passion against the Negro and to suppress or belittle those things which would inspire a feeling of respect and consideration for that race the demons at Coatesville

415 Ibid, 80.
417 “Stemons on Lynching: Coatesville Puts White Civilization on Trial, He Says,” Baltimore Afro-American, September 2, 1911.
would never have interpreted public sentiment against Negroes as being in favor of such an outrage as they committed.\(^{418}\)

Stemons’s and Coppin’s stories reveal the difficult decisions faced by black Philadelphians about how to proceed and with whom to ally in the electoral sphere. Coppin and Stemons shared a suspicion of the Republican Party’s commitment to black rights in Philadelphia, but the renowned black educator charted a different course than Stemons in pursuit of improving black lives – one that reflected her elite status in the African American community, her work for the Quaker benefactors of the Institute for Colored Youth, and her direct contact with her students’ struggle with poverty outside of school. In addition, Coppin’s career and activism reached their height in the two decades before Stemons arrived in Philadelphia, arguably a moment of greater possibility for African American political influence in the city’s partisan landscape.\(^{419}\)

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Like many African Americans and other working people in the North during the economic crises of the 1890s, Stemons spent much of the decade on the move in search of work. Stemons left his parents’ struggling Kansas farm in 1889 with little money and a grandiose plan. This move, as he recalled some twelve years later, “began the battle that started me on my life-mission, of trying to open the avenues of manual labor in the North, to colored as well as to white people.”\(^{420}\) Stemons’s parents were former slaves who left Clarksville, Tennessee, in 1878 (when Stemons was six years old) for the open plains of

\(^{418}\) Ibid.
\(^{419}\) See Chapter One.
\(^{420}\) Stemons, *A Cry From The Oppressed: A Plea for the Industrial Rights of the Colored Race in the Northern States* (Buffalo: Tent and Temple Co., 1897) found in Box 5, Folder 8, JSS, HSP.
Kansas. Their journey, a move chosen by thousands of black Southerners known as Exodusters, was one of many small- and large-scale migrations undertaken by African Americans to escape the increasingly oppressive South after the end of Reconstruction.  

As a young adult, Stemons made his own move, continuing a quest his parents began two decades before in search of economic security and a safe haven from race oppression.

Stemons traveled first to Colorado, where he received a “paltry sum of $1.25 a day” for laying track on the railroad. In Denver, he could only find work as a hod-carrier (carrying bricks at construction sites) or in the sewers and was turned town for a job in railroad construction in the mountains by a foreman who “told me plainly that his men did not care to work with colored men.” From there, Stemons made his way east to Boston, where he began writing and speaking on the subject of the African American “labor problem.” He bounced around between several East Coast cities before landing in Philadelphia in 1900.  

During his first year in Philadelphia, Stemons lived as a boarder with an African American widow, her two adult children, her granddaughter and another lodger on Naudain Street, a narrow corridor in the Seventh Ward. The widow worked as a dressmaker, her daughter as a laundress and her son as a cook (no occupation is recorded for Stemons). Many of the neighbors were also black migrants from the South. With the pressure of his family’s poverty weighing on him, Stemons discussed the prospects for his recently completed novel with his sister, Mary, who appeared to be counting on

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421 See Painter, *Exodusters.*
422 Stemons, *Cry From the Oppressed.*
423 U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900, accessed via ancestry.com. Stemons’s name is recorded incorrectly as “Stemmons.”
Stemons’s literary success to provide financial relief for the family he left behind in Kansas. In their letters, Stemons’s mother and sister often mentioned empty food cupboards and described their struggle to pay debts incurred on the farm. After the death of their father in 1901, Mary worked as a laundress, and mother and daughter took in lodgers. Mary explained in one letter that she would soon be forced to sell her horse and a cow because she could not afford to feed them. Stemons pieced together seasonal and regular employment, working summers at a restaurant on the New Jersey shore and as a janitor. In 1901, his mother wrote to ask if his clothes were too “shabby” to attend church.

Focusing entirely on Stemons’s reform initiatives would ignore a powerful parallel narrative. In addition to making prescriptions for race advancement, Stemons was also an ambitious black migrant, an individual struggling to establish a social, economic and political niche for himself in the urban North. In this way, Stemons made two moves during the years under examination: one to Philadelphia and a second to gain legitimacy and an audience as a political actor and race leader, which ultimately led him to the racialized politics of municipal reform in the urban North. Stemons’s tactics illustrate how deeply embedded the notion of African Americans as citizen outsiders was in the political culture of the urban North at the turn of the twentieth century and how he attempted to counter those assumptions by creating an interracial political reform alliance.

424 Mary and Mother to Stemons, 31 December 1901, Box 1, Folder 2, JSS, HSP.
425 Mother to Stemons, 14 February 1901, Box 1, Folder 1, JSS, HSP.
Barely a generation removed from the South and slavery, the letters Stemons wrote to his mother and sister during his first decade in Philadelphia reveal a man still deeply tied to his family and their ongoing struggle to make a stable and secure life in Kansas. In contrast to his public persona of professional ambition and comparisons to national race leaders, Stemons’s family letters lay bare his intellectual, financial, and emotional dependence on a woman struggling to care for her ailing parents on her own while working as a laundress and taking in boarders. Stemons often appealed to his sister Mary for sympathy, complaining of poor health, an ongoing struggle with his “nerves” and, in one letter, drawing her a picture of his broken toe. He poured out his insecurities about his status among African American leaders in Philadelphia, his anxieties about finding a publisher for his writings, his ambition to become a race leader, his financial troubles and the long hours he spent building support for his organization while working full-time as a postal clerk. In his private correspondence Stemons was often cranky, perpetually defensive and unfailingly self-aggrandizing, but also singularly devoted to a movement he believed would improve the lives of African Americans. His peevish demeanor sometimes made an appearance in his correspondence with others, but for the most part Stemons reserved his pen-lashings of politicians, African American leaders, publishers and ministers for his sister. The combination in his papers of public statements and personal reflections offers rare detail and insight into the life of a relatively obscure black migrant in the urban North at the turn of the century.\

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Stemons’s tepid success as a public intellectual and race leader, along with the nature of his political project – which adopted the racist language of political reformers to identify “undeserving” black residents – makes him a challenging character to assimilate into a narrative of black resistance to disfranchisement. Despite the richness of Stemons’s papers as a primary source, few scholars have written about him. The
Stemons’s life as a lodger fit the image of the degraded black migrant critiqued by reformers.\textsuperscript{427} Once in Philadelphia, however, Stemons recast his public image. Although he had written in \textit{A Cry From the Oppressed} about his trouble finding work after leaving home, his subsequent writings do not refer to personal struggles. During his first decade in Philadelphia, Stemons vigorously pursued a career as a published author, submitting manuscripts of a novel, a work of nonfiction, and multiple magazine articles to publishing houses and periodicals in New York and Philadelphia. More often than not, his writing was rejected. One rejection suggested his novel \textit{Jay Ess} read too much like Booker T. Washington’s, \textit{Up From Slavery}. A particularly piercing indictment of his work came from the New York publishing house, A.S. Barnes and Company: “We were interested in the question from the first, for it is conceivable that a well-written story of the negro side might attract sympathy and attention, but it is essential that such a story should be done by some one who can handle fiction, and in this respect your manuscript seems deficient.”\textsuperscript{428}

Stemons did find some success as a writer and editor. In 1898, the \textit{African American Methodist Church Review} published his article, “The Industrial Color Line in the North and the Remedy.” In a roundup of writings on race, the \textit{New York Times} incorrectly attributed the article to “James Samuel Stedmore,” but praised Stemons for

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exceptions include Timothy Golden, who wrote an undergraduate thesis at Haverford College in which he argues that Stemons was plagued by tensions between his background as a black laborer and his intellectual and reform aspirations; Brian Shott’s dissertation focuses on Stemons’s career as a journalist; and Khalil Gibran Muhammad writes about Stemons’s approach to monitoring black neighborhoods in his work on the criminalization of African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. Golden, “James Samuel Stemons: History of An Unknown Laborer and Intellectual, 1890-1922” (BA thesis, Haverford College, 2007); Shott, “Mediating America: Black and Irish Press and the Struggle for Citizenship, 1870-1914” (PhD diss., University of California Santa Cruz, 2015); and Muhammad, \textit{Condemnation of Blackness}.\textsuperscript{427} See Chapters Two and Three.
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\textsuperscript{428} Editor to Stemons, 5 March 1903, Box 1, Folder 3, JSS, HSP.
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calling attention to a “crying injustice.” Stemons also worked as editor of two black newspapers in Philadelphia, the Courant and the Pilot. The Pilot, which he started with financial help from a white businessman in 1907, folded after two years. In 1909, after passing the civil service exam, Stemons took a job as a postal clerk, a position which paid his bills, allowed him to send money every month to his sister and freed him financially to pursue his particular hybrid of municipal and labor reform.

Stemons identified two primary and related problems for African Americans in the North at the turn of the century. First, black men were shut out of industrial employment. With white businesses refusing to hire black men, no amount of the industrial education urged by Booker T. Washington and his followers, Stemons argued, would “relieve the every-day problems of the Negro.” Instead, he believed blacks needed to prove themselves in the political arena in order to attain the full rights of citizenship. Black men, Stemons asserted, undermined what he considered to be the natural link between citizenship and work through politically irresponsible behavior in northern cities. Stemons railed against what he called the, “rowdy, ruffianly, decency-defying, vote-selling, election-debauching element among” black Philadelphians.

Echoing a common rhetorical device used by critics of municipal political corruption at the turn of the twentieth century, Stemons employed slavery to describe the relationship between black Philadelphians and the Republican machine. In a letter to Abel P. Caldwell, the editor of the Courant in 1911, Stemons described black Philadelphians as

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430 Ibid., 192.
431 Ibid., 192.
432 Stemons to Dear Sir, ca. 1911, Box 2, Folder 26, JSS, HSP.
433 Ibid.
“political slaves” and declared that “there is no other one thing that would so break down the growing feeling of hostility and bitterness toward the Negro as would his universally coming out on the side of honesty and decency in politics.\textsuperscript{434}

To address this dual dilemma, Stemons proposed subjecting black people to a system of surveillance beginning in Philadelphia and eventually – he hoped – expanding to other northern cities. With the help of the Philadelphia’s mostly white reform coalition and black ministers from Philadelphia’s mainstream congregations, Stemons founded the Joint Organization of the Association for Equalizing Industrial Opportunities and the League of Civic and Political Reform in 1911. The organization asked “respectable” white and black citizens to report back to a grievance committee any evidence of electoral impropriety or suspect behavior on the part of African Americans. The committee would then turn over the complaints to city officials for follow-up. The organization enjoyed a brief period of support and enthusiasm in the wake of the election of the city’s first reform mayor Rudolph Blankenburg in 1911, but Stemons never won the unqualified assistance of the black leaders he sought. Black clergy and community leaders may have been reluctant to so publicly associate themselves with a political movement so critical of black politics at a moment when black political participation faced so much scrutiny from white reformers – North and South.

In Philadelphia, Stemons and Coppin argued that black residents had earned the rights of citizenship in contrast to newly arrived immigrants.\textsuperscript{435} Stemons considered
southern and eastern European immigrants competitors for jobs and contrasted the
legitimacy of black claims to citizenship with those who had just arrived in the United
States. Blacks in Philadelphia and throughout the nation often juxtaposed black citizens’
entitlement to employment and political and civil rights against immigrants. 436 Stemons,
who believed he had lost jobs to European immigrants himself, suggested that black men
especially could claim full citizenship rights based on their service to the nation. African
American men, Stemons argued, had earned good jobs in the nation’s industrial labor
force by spilling their blood to support American democracy, first during the American
Revolution and again during the Civil War. 437 Writing in 1897, in the midst of economic
turmoil, labor strife and the growing concern about the revolutionary impulses of
immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, Stemons claimed that African American
laborers were more closely linked to the traditions of American democracy than newly
arrived immigrants, who lacked an appreciation for American institutions born of
sacrifice and bloodshed. “To those who say that colored citizens should now give place in
the industrial world to the aliens who come here of their own volition, who never intend
to become Americanized and who are continually sowing the seeds of anarchy and

435 Political and social reformers’ contempt for the “alien” influence of Philadelphia’s growing black
population on municipal politics suggests the national dimensions of disfranchisement but attempts to set
the cultural and political boundaries of national belonging were not exclusively aimed at black citizens or
even immigrants. As Joshua Paddison and other historians have demonstrated recently, the struggle to
define national citizenship at the end of the nineteenth century played out all over the nation. In the West,
the battles were aimed at Chinese workers, Native Americans and Mormons. As Paddison argues,
“America’s long-standing restriction of full citizenship to white men had been broken at the height of
Radical Reconstruction but it had not been demolished; U.S. citizenship during Reconstruction still did not
extend to women or ‘heathen’ men. Not only Democrats but the majority of Republicans – especially in the
West – rejected citizenship and suffrage for Native Americans and Chinese immigrants.” Paddison, “Race,
436 Tera Hunter noted a similar tension during the same period in Atlanta between black washerwomen and
437 Stemons, Cry from the Oppressed, 19.
rebellion, I have no answer.” The South, he argued, offered a wider range of jobs to African Americans than the North, where black men were forced to compete with immigrants for work as barbers and hotel waiters.

Fanny Jackson Coppin appealed to a similar anti-immigrant sentiment in a speech to black independent voters at Liberty Hall in 1882. According to a reporter from the Philadelphia Inquirer, “Mrs. Coppin believed that an American colored boy should have all the rights accorded a European who came among us but yesterday.” Rather than rely on partisan allegiances defined during the Civil War era, Coppin suggested that black voters consider their choice in light of the contemporary increase in immigration from southern and eastern Europe and the competition for jobs it created. “It was the party that would be about this change that Mrs. Coppin thought the colored voters should hunt out and support,” the Inquirer reported.

Even as other black leaders in Philadelphia – men and women – spoke directly about the need to expand employment opportunities for black women, Stemons defined black success in gendered male terms that denied women’s place in the labor force. Stemons could hardly have been unaware of black women’s roles as workers in Philadelphia. In more than half of Philadelphia’s black families wives worked, according to a government survey conducted in 1911. Other black leaders in Philadelphia often discussed the extent to which black women were relegated to “menial labor.” In 1898, W.A. Lynch, pastor of the First African Presbyterian Church proclaimed, “One of the sad

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438 Ibid.
439 Philadelphia Inquirer, September 19, 1882.

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conditions of colored womanhood in this city is that they are debarred from avenues of industry that are generally opened to other classes of females. Nowhere in stores, shops, factories or like places do we find colored girls or women; neither do we find them as clerks or stenographers in the business marts of our great city.” In 1895, Rev. B.F. Christian teamed up with other black community leaders to advocate that black women fill the positions left open by striking Russian Jewish immigrant cloak-makers as a means of providing a long overdue entre into the industrial labor force.

Still, nowhere in his private or public papers does Stemons attempt to understand the labor problem for African Americans as anything other than an assault on manhood and a burden on men. By defining both the problem (industrial jobs for men) for African Americans and the solution (voting behavior) in terms that explicitly and implicitly ignored women, Stemons made clear the gendered dimensions of his program for African American citizenship. He reinforced the gendered boundaries of citizenship by linking claims to work to the sacrifices black male soldiers had made for the nation. Stemons’s failure to explicitly acknowledge the lack of opportunity for black women in the labor force suggests his commitment to a strain of racial uplift ideology at the turn of the twentieth century which defined respectability according to gender and class distinctions.

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441 “Sphere of Woman's Duties, The Subject Treated of in A Sermon to a Colored Women's Organization,” The (Philadelphia) Times, January 10, 1898.

442 See Chapter Two.

443 Scholars have suggested the ways in which the political strategies employed by African Americans at the turn of the century were inherently gendered. See Gilmore, Gender and Jim Crow; Wolcott, Remaking Respectability; Martin Summers, Manliness & Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class & the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Mitchell, Righteous Propagation.

within the black community. According to historian Victoria Wolcott, “in racial uplift ideology, clear divisions between classes and distinct social roles for men and women provided evidence of racial advancement,” for elite black men and women at the turn of the twentieth century in urban spaces.

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Fanny Jackson Coppin moved to Philadelphia the year the Civil War ended. Born a slave in Washington, D.C., Coppin’s aunt purchased her freedom as a child and sent her to live with family in Massachusetts and Newport, Rhode Island, where she proved to be a gifted student. After graduating from Oberlin College in 1865, Coppin secured a teaching position at the Quaker-run Institute for Colored Youth (ICY) in Philadelphia and became principal in 1868. At ICY, Coppin built a highly respected program designed to provide black students academic and vocational skills. By 1900, however, the ICY’s Quaker benefactors had come to favor Booker T. Washington’s focus on industrial education for African Americans rather than Coppin’s more varied course of study.

Like many politically active, middle class, black women in Philadelphia during the 1890s and at the turn of the twentieth century, Coppin worked closely with social and political reformers and white settlement house leaders to improve education and housing conditions for African Americans. She paid attention to the lives of her students, many of whom came from poor families and consistently incorporated the wider world her students faced outside the confines of the ICY, including the imperative that both boys’

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446 See Perkins, “Fanny Jackson Coppin.”
447 In 1879, for example, Coppin partnered with Theodore Starr and Anna Hallowell to establish an industrial education department at ICY. Starr founded the Starr Settlement House in the primarily black neighborhood of the Seventh Ward and Hallowell served on the school board. See Chapter Two.
and girls’ find work after graduation. Coppin’s experience as an educator and her status as an elite black woman in Philadelphia defined her politics.\footnote{Feminist scholars have expanded the definition of African American politics beyond the ballot box to include women’s activities and to incorporate gender as a lens through which black women’s history emerges as a distinct experience. Recent scholarship makes clear black women were at the forefront of electoral politics in the North. See, for example, Materson, \textit{For the Freedom of Her Race}. For a powerful argument in opposition to the tendency to privilege the male voice, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” \textit{Signs} 17 (Winter 1992): 251-274.}

Contrary to Washington’s prescription for avoiding politics and much to the Quaker managers’ chagrin, Coppin frequently spoke on behalf of African American rights and fought for equal access to industrial jobs. Possibly in response to the increasing hostility aimed at black politics by the city’s political reformers, her willingness to engage with partisan politics appeared to wane as the new century dawned. In 1882, as a speaker at a rally of African American supporters of independent challengers to Philadelphia’s Republican machine politicians, Coppin deviated from her script about the importance of trade education for black students. Coppin took the podium following Robert Purvis, a political leader and outspoken critic of African American allegiance to the Republican Party who claimed that the, “Republican Party of today had done nothing for the colored man.” In response, Coppin raised the ire of the independent crowd by insisting that she could not “sit still and listen” to Purvis’ comments “without asking if the Republican Party had not (done anything for African Americans), what party had?” Coppin insisted that opening up employment for the growing population of African American young people should be the goal of any party or politician who wanted black support.\footnote{“The Colored Vote and the Anxiety to Secure It,” \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, September 19, 1882.} Coppin’s willingness to align with some independent sentiments without entirely eschewing the Republican Party’s legacy of commitment to African American
rights and freedom reflects a moment of potential power for black voters, when Philadelphia’s Democrats and Republicans were still vying for their support. 450

During her three decades as principal at ICY, Coppin challenged the Quaker managers’ vision for the school’s role in African American education. In response to dire economic circumstances and limited job opportunities for Philadelphia’s growing African American population, Coppin lobbied the ICY’s Quaker managers to expand the school’s industrial education department, add a Kindergarten, and offer housing for students from the South who needed primary school training. In her 1913 autobiography, Coppin explained that the ICY’s founding mission in 1837 had been to demonstrate that black students could excel at a classical education to refute pro-slavery arguments based on the innate inferiority of African Americans. 451 After the Civil War, the bulk of Quaker educational efforts focused on training black students to serve as teachers in the South. By 1879, however, Coppin argued that the work of demonstrating black equality had been achieved, and in addition to training black teachers, ICY should offer an industrial department to prepare black students in the North. 452 As she explained to a group of educators in 1879, “the only places where a colored boy could learn a trade was in the House of Refuge of the Penitentiary.” 453

With the help of “white friends,” Coppin raised $3,000 for the new trades department, which included training in bricklaying, plastering, carpentry, shoemaking, printing and tailoring for the boys and dressmaking, millinery, typewriting and

450 See Chapter One.
451 Coppin, Reminiscences, 19.
452 Perkins, “Fanny Jackson Coppin,” 130.
453 Coppin, Reminiscences, 28.
stenography for the girls. Boys and girls alike took cooking classes. Coppin noted that domestic service should be considered a trade like any other, with special knowledge and training necessary to succeed. “There is, and always must be, a large number of people who must depend upon this class of employment for a living, and there is every reason, therefore, why they should be especially prepared for it,” Coppin explained. For example, “A housemaid should know enough about sanitation to appreciated the difference between well ventilated sleeping rooms and those where impure air prevails.” Unlike Booker T. Washington, Coppin did not recommend manual training for all black students. According to historian Linda Perkins, “Coppin’s industrial education program provided a choice to students to pursue their desired trade as well as the option of receiving a literary education.”

By the late 1890s, the school’s Quaker beneficiaries were “disheartened” by what they saw as the degraded condition of African Americans in the North. Evidence of crime, political corruption and vice among black residents convinced a new generation of leaders at the ICY that Washington’s suggested program of manual education, combined with pulling back from electoral politics, was the only “hopeful solution.” As Coppin faced mounting pressure to modify the program at the ICY, she likely noted the shifting dynamic among white reform-minded citizens interested in addressing “the negro problem” outside the ICY.

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454 Ibid., 25.
455 Ibid., 27.
458 As early as the 1870s, the ICY’s Quaker managers discouraged Coppin and other black teacher’s political activism and urged the faculty to instill spiritual rather than political values in their students. As early as the 1870s, the ICY’s Quaker managers discouraged Coppin and other black teacher’s political activism and urged the faculty to instill spiritual rather than political values in their students. As
In a city increasingly hostile to black politics, Coppin, rather than attending rallies to secure African American rights, opted in 1895 to help elect two white women to represent the Seventh Ward on the local school board. With reformers arguing that African American men had essentially been disfranchised in the urban North, Coppin’s end-run around Philadelphia’s Republican machine to support white female candidates illustrates an attempt to make an impact on local politics using her position as a woman and as head of an institution popular among African Americans in the Seventh Ward. As an elite member of Philadelphia’s black community with a record of commitment to education and as a woman, Coppin could lend credible backing to the Civic Club’s campaign.

The Civic Club campaign challenged the hegemony of white Republican machine leaders in the ward on two grounds: as women seeking elected office and as advocates of reform in municipal politics. Founded in 1894 by a group of wealthy white women in Philadelphia, the Civic Club worked closely with local and state governments on social and political reform. Club members drafted bills and advocated for stricter tenement building codes, equal pay for women teaching at high schools, sewer improvements and for creating a more streamlined, centralized system to oversee Philadelphia schools.\textsuperscript{459} Coppin’s embrace of a campaign launched by a white women’s club suggests the ways in which middle-class black and white women cooperated in political reform movements in

the urban North during the 1890s.\textsuperscript{460} Although the candidates – Sophia W.R. Williams and Eliza Kirkbride – lost their bid for the local school board, Civic Club president and founder Sarah Yorke Stevenson called the campaign to elect women to the local school board, “one of the most important efforts of the year.”\textsuperscript{461} The school board campaign served as a wedge, Stevenson claimed, to assert the notion that women should serve in elected office.

For several frigid weeks prior to the February 19 local school board election, the Civic Club candidates and their colleagues canvassed the Seventh Ward. Spurred by “civic zeal,” the women visited nearly every home on the assessors’ lists.\textsuperscript{462} Although the candidates appeared on both the Municipal League and Democratic tickets, they introduced themselves during the canvass as Municipal League candidates in order to avoid alienating voters in the heavily Republican district. The campaign also enlisted clergy from African American churches and held parlor meetings for voters in the district. Coppin spoke on behalf of the Civic Club candidates at churches and other large gatherings of black men and women.

The women of the Civic Club likely considered Coppin’s advocacy a coup for their effort. Given the ward’s large black population, the Club crafted a campaign

\textsuperscript{460} Glenda Gilmore found middle-class African American women working with white female reformers after disfranchisement in North Carolina. Gilmore argues that this step represented an option for African Americans to continue appealing to local governments for services after black men had been forced out of electoral politics. Gilmore, \textit{Gender and Jim Crow}. Michele Mitchell argues that class distinctions at the end of the nineteenth century among African Americans were not as sharply drawn because the majority of middle-class black men and women had a tenuous hold at best on employment and wealth. Still, the appeal to middle-class respectability was an option not available to most African American women in Philadelphia at the turn of the century. Mitchell, \textit{Righteous Propagation}.


\textsuperscript{462} Williams, \textit{Story of a Woman’s Municipal Campaign}, 42.
strategy designed to peel support from Republican candidates by appealing to African American mothers. One-fourth of the ward’s 5,000 school-age children were African American in the mid-1890s. In 1881, prompted by a black father’s challenge to the state’s 1854 school segregation law, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed a new law opening all public schools to children regardless of race. Although they were white and wealthy, the candidates hoped to appeal as women and mothers to the voters of the ward. African American families, who could not afford or were excluded from private schools, would be particularly interested in keeping the public schools safe and healthy, reasoned the candidates. Wives and mothers could then influence the male voters in their households, the candidates assumed. Campaign organizers instructed canvassers for Kirkbride and Williams, “Remember, your first object is to persuade the women whom you see.”

Many of the candidate’s methods, however, may have muddied their message and hurt their efforts to gain support from working class African American voters. As the candidates themselves observed, regular Republican politicians had deep roots in the Seventh Ward. A post-election report suggested several reasons why the Civic Club’s campaign ultimately failed: “The large part of the voters in the ward felt they had more confidence in the men who had taken the trouble to make their acquaintance before they

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463 Ibid., 36.
465 Williams, Story of a Woman’s Municipal Campaign, 77.
asked for their vote, than in the women whom they had not known until they asked for their vote,” the report read.\textsuperscript{466}

Using their visits as an opportunity to weed out illegal voters, the Civic Club campaigners compared their own observations of the households they visited with the assessors lists and reported inconsistencies to election watchers from reform organizations.\textsuperscript{467} Wealthy, educated white women “representing the best that life can give in education and refinement” entered black households asking for support while simultaneously measuring the residents against their own yardsticks for good citizenship. For Seventh Ward residents familiar with raids on homes and businesses in search of election violations, the dual nature of the candidates’ work surely did not escape notice.\textsuperscript{468}

The school board campaign literature also reveals obvious scorn for black voters deemed not respectable by Civic Club members, despite indications among those voters of interest in the campaign. The candidates’ post-election report describes the Seventh Ward as “home to some of Philadelphia’s most earnest and independent colored citizens, but they are far outnumbered by others whom the machine controls.” Again, the specter of an unattached and uneducated black population was invoked. “A large floating colored population drawn, each winter from the South, by false hope of employment, adds to the facilities for corruption.”\textsuperscript{469} When noting the political interests of black residents other than the clergy and “respectable” black women associated with Coppin, the report cited

\textsuperscript{466} Ibid., 37.  
\textsuperscript{467} Ibid., 29, 77.  
\textsuperscript{468} See Chapter Four.  
\textsuperscript{469} Williams, \textit{Story of a Woman’s Municipal Campaign}, 40.
examples to illustrate ignorance or corruption among black voters. For example, a black man attending the candidates’ forum offered to vote for the women despite his residence in another ward. The report used this interaction as an example of a lack of political intelligence among the city’s African American voters rather than the man’s genuine commitment to school reform.

The Civic Club’s campaign illustrates the political tightrope African Americans faced at the turn of the twentieth century in Philadelphia. With the Republican Party apathetic to African American concerns and reformers defining their movement in large part in opposition to black politics, activists such as Coppin and black residents of the Seventh Ward were forced to navigate an increasingly narrow electoral path.

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Stemons’s project often put him at odds with a contingent of black elites in Philadelphia who focused at the turn of the twentieth century on promoting African American progress. Perhaps due to his own experience as a struggling laborer, Stemons was particularly irked by the tendency of African American elites to measure race progress since the end of slavery by highlighting isolated success stories without acknowledging the ongoing plight of the masses. “I allude to the side which tells not of our advantages, but of our disadvantages; not of our achievements, but of our failures, not of our wealth but of our poverty, not of our gifted tens, but of our plodding thousands,” Stemons wrote in what was likely a draft of the speech he gave at a conference in
In contrast to Stemons, publications such as the Philadelphia Colored Directory emphasized business and professional achievements.

Although Stemons often framed his contribution to black politics as filling a void between the positions of W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, his experience highlights a more diverse terrain of black political activity in Philadelphia than can be summarized by a simple binary. In a fundraising letter for the Joint Organization of the Association for Equalizing Industrial Opportunities and The League of Civic and Political Reform, Stemons wrote: “Neither of these ‘schools’ takes into consideration and seeks to remove the basic causes which, despite the educational propaganda of the one and the condemnatory propaganda of the other, are antagonizing and estranging the races in an unprecedented manner of recent years…It is this intermediate and almost completely ignored ground which this movement seeks to cover.”

Stemons also bemoaned the tendency of black elites to shun politics. In an undated letter written to President Woodrow Wilson, Stemons complained, “In keeping with the feeling that everything having political significance is of necessity sordid and base, there is a wide-spread feeling that any movement which takes into consideration the political actions and affiliations of Negroes is, if not studiously vicious, at least pervasive (sic) of the best interests of the race.” Stemons harshly criticized several national and local African American leaders. He labeled Booker T. Washington a “monster” and called Nathan F. Mossell, head of the first black hospital in Philadelphia and Republican party activist, his most “consistent enemy.”

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470 Stemons, untitled, ca. 1910, Box 4, Folder 1, JSS, HSP.
471 Stemons to “Dear Sir,” 10 March 1913, Box 1, Folder 19, JSS, HSP.
472 Stemons to Gov. Woodrow Wilson, n.d, Box 2, Folder 26, JSS, HSP.
apparently wrote letters to newspapers criticizing his organization for calling attention to problems in Philadelphia’s black community. In response to Stemons’s letter explaining his plans for the Joint Organization in March 1910, Washington criticized Stemons for “going about matters in a negative way.” Washington wrote, “I do not think the impression ought to be given to the world that the Negro cannot find work…instead of having a number of people come together to advertise the fact that the Negro cannot get work, suppose you have people come together in Philadelphia who are employing the Negro.” Washington’s suggestion, however, failed to take into account how few jobs were open to black Philadelphians in 1910.

As an outsider with few strong community ties, Stemons made sweeping claims about unworthy black Philadelphians that appeared to account for his difficulty establishing consistent working relationships with the city’s prominent black leaders. Stemons’s brash approach did not win many strong allies among black clergy who had deeper and broader roots in the city’s African American neighborhoods as well as among social and municipal reformers. During the 1890s, black ministers from Philadelphia’s more established churches appeared to prefer a less inflammatory, although not necessarily behind-the-scenes, approach to safeguarding racial equality in the city. In 1897, the preachers at Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church voted to have Rev. Levi Coppin

473 Stemons to Mary, 4 June 1911, Box 1, Folder 16, JSS, HSP.
write a letter to the editor to a local paper decrying separate seating for African Americans at a Christmas dinner for the newsboys at the Evening Bulletin.\textsuperscript{475}

Stemons’s tense relationship with Rev. Charles A. Tindley highlights some of the divisions among politically active African Americans in Philadelphia at the turn of the century. As a newcomer anxious to make his mark on racial politics in the city, Stemons sought an alliance with Tindley, pastor of one of Philadelphia’s largest churches, the Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church. Tindley was a lead player in Stemons’s ongoing reports to Mary about his attempts to break into Philadelphia’s respectable black circles. Tindley rebuffed his initial overtures and the popular church leader remained mercurial over the next decade as Stemons continued to pursue his support. Frustrated at one point with Tindley’s apparent unwillingness to help Stemons arrange a speaking engagement at the A.M.E. Preachers Meeting in Philadelphia in 1909, Stemons wrote to his sister that Tindley “has shown every evidence of jealousy so much exhibited by other ‘race leaders.’” Convinced that Tindley was trying to prevent him from speaking on the subject of an unpublished article Stemons had written, “The Influence Upon the Race Situation of the Venal and Vicious Element Among Negroes”, Stemons wrote:

This is the general subject of the meetings which Tindley is holding. Of course I do not know that my article will be published. I have so many such articles turned down. But I do know that I bring out thoughts in this article which have never before been expressed, and if published it will create a universal sensation and a general awakening along these lines. I say in this article just what Mr. Tindley has tried to keep me from saying, and if published I know it will make him feel “cheap.” But it is not published.\textsuperscript{476}

\textsuperscript{475} Preachers’ Association, Philadelphia conference minutes, 7 March 1898, Reel 9, microfilm record, Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church records, 1822-1972, HSP.
\textsuperscript{476} Stemons to Mary, 2 May 1909, Box 1, Folder 4, JSS, HSP.
Although the source of their disagreement is unclear, Tindley may have been uncomfortable with Stemons’s approach. Tindley’s public statements tended to promote the accomplishments of African Americans rather than their perceived deficiencies. A newspaper account of a 1910 conference on the “American Negro Question,” in which both Stemons and Tindley participated, quoted Stemons’s sharp rebuke of African American political activity:

Not only have they stubbornly antagonized the political sentiment of the masses of Southern people, on whose good favor their very existence largely depended, but they have doggedly followed this selfsame policy of running counter to the best sentiment and best interests of almost every Northern locality to which they have gone.477

Tindley, on the other hand, “took encouragement from the fact that many negroes have become excellent citizens…But he warned his hearers that the process of uplifting the race would require time.”478 Stemons’s harsh evaluations of African American politics might have contributed to his difficult relationship with Tindley.

Within that complex world of African American politics, Stemons remained ever on the alert for evidence that Philadelphia’s black leaders were either welcoming him into the fold or casting him aside as a trouble-making upstart. By early 1911, Stemons felt he was making progress toward building interest in his approach to race relations and improving his own position. Reverend Tindley had agreed to join Stemons in founding the Joint Organization of the Association for Equalizing Industrial Opportunities and the League of Civic and Political Reform. “Dr. Tindley, who is widely recognized as a leader, is one of the first to be manly enough to say that my ideas are more practical than

477 Public Ledger, November 22, 1910, enclosed with Stemons to Mary, 26 November 1910, Box 1, Folder 16, JSS, HSP.
478 Ibid.
his, and to join hands with me,” he wrote his sister earlier that year.\textsuperscript{479} When Mary challenged his standing among black ministers, suggesting that they had been stringing him along, he responded with his latest inroads among Philadelphia’s most respected black men:

You recently wrote … that you felt that our spirit friends were deceiving us by continually holding our hopes of a success which does not come. You do not thus fully appreciate the success that has already come…Some evidence of the manner in which those who opposed me have been humiliated was furnished me the other day when I was on my way home from work. I saw Dr. Wm. A. Sinclair, who was one of the foremost antagonists of the recent conference, on the opposite side of the street…Only last night, as I was returning home from work, after midnight, the Hon. George H. White, another man who was prevailed upon to bitterly oppose me, took a seat on the car in front of me…he raised his hat and spoke with marked respect and cordiality. When leaving the car he also turned to me, and raising his hat again bade me good night. He, like Dr. Sinclair, is very pompous, and prior to that Conference would have done little more than nodded, if that. All of this shows what a victory that meeting was over those who blindly oppose me.\textsuperscript{480}

Despite these reassuring social graces, Stemons complained in June that Rev. Tindley did not display sufficient interest in his manuscript. “He has seldom received me with such utter indifference,” he wrote to Mary.\textsuperscript{481} With his congregation swelling due to migration from the South, Rev. Tindley was likely reluctant to join Stemons in reinforcing the already degraded reputation many white and black reformers attributed to newly arrived black residents.

\textsuperscript{479} Stemons to Mary, 15 February 1911, Box 1, Folder 16, JSS, HSP.
\textsuperscript{480} George Henry White, who moved to Philadelphia in 1906, represented North Carolina in the U.S. Congress from 1897 to 1901. Stemons to Mary, 15 February 1911, Box 1, Folder 16, JSS, HSP.
\textsuperscript{481} Stemons to Mary, 18 June 1911, Box 1, Folder 16, JSS, HSP. Mary was more than a distant nurturing figure. An author herself, she offered her brother advice on his outreach to local black leaders, warning him to be particularly wary of church leaders: “Ministers with very few (underlined twice) exceptions are vile selfish creatures with no regard for the race only for applause (or) dollars,” she implored. “If they give you a good hearing I shall be agreeably surprised.” Mary to Stemons, 15 August 1909, Box 1, Folder 14, JSS, HSP.
The Joint Organization set up shop at 17th and South streets, in the heart of the Seventh Ward, and asked the residents of Philadelphia to report to this location any instances of bad behavior among African Americans. New members of the organization signed the following pledge:

I hereby promise to exert my influence to suppress political crookedness, rowdyism, and public indecency on the part of an element of colored people. To this end I pledge my support of the League of Civic and Political Reform in demanding of the constituted authorities of this city that they henceforth prosecute and penalize the dissolute and criminal elements among Negroes, and the dens and dives which breed them. As the most direct means of correcting these conditions I further pledge myself to oppose with my ballot any administration, of whatever party, and any individual of any administration, who ignores our just and reasonable demands for the suppression of either individuals or institutions that are manifestly hurtful to the morals or good name of the colored race or of the community; with the proviso that the influence and activities or this League shall ever be confined to the ends here specified and not used to advance the abstract political ambitions of any race, any party or any individual.\(^{482}\)

Black ministers circulated the pledge to members of their congregations. A handful of pastors and ministers expressed interest in the organization as long as they were not expected to contribute any of their own time to the cause. It is unclear how many Philadelphians committed themselves to the movement by signing the pledge. Although the organization was fronted by prominent members of the African American clergy, Stemons considered himself the true leader of a very personal movement: “These plans are the crystallization of the toils, struggles and thoughts and prayers and disappointments of an entire adult life, embracing nearly twenty years.”\(^{483}\)

With the upcoming November 1911 election promising to deliver Philadelphia’s first reform mayor to office, the members of the Joint Organization gathered in September at the Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church, where the pastor served as an officer of

\(^{482}\) “Appeal to Self-Respecting Colored Citizens,” ca. 1910, Box 3, Folder 3, JSS, HSP.

\(^{483}\) Stemons to “Dear Sir,” ca. 1911, Box 2, Folder 26, JSS, HSP.
the Stemons’s group. The meeting was well attended, with three-quarters of the seats including the gallery and the main auditorium full. “The cause is now established as never before, and the greatest victory is the real enthusiasm on the part of the officers,” Stemons proclaimed in a letter to his sister. Still, he was disappointed with the turnout among organizers. Tindley, listed as the presiding officer on the event’s program, did not show. In addition, Stemons questioned the choice to hold the meeting so close to the election, when “many persons were distracted by the political meetings and political excitements (and) while the newspapers are so overwhelmed with politics that they paid practically no attention to the meeting.”*484 Distractions aside, the meeting delivered the kind of public validation from leading African Americans that Stemons had been waiting for. “I feel that the movement is on a very high ground among the colored people of this city.”*485

With support shored up among African Americans, Stemons moved to solicit financial assistance from white donors. Philadelphia’s white reformers were arguably the most receptive audience for his condemnation of black political corruption. Their own organizations, including the Starr Centre Settlement House and the Wissahickon Boys Club, were founded in part to address the social ills they believed to be endemic among Philadelphia’s ever-growing African American population. Reformers linked the social ills of black households and neighborhoods to their support for the corrupt Republican machine.*486 By setting out to address those shortcomings, Stemons sought to restore the rights of African Americans as voters, workers and, ultimately, as citizens. The

*484 Stemons to Mary, 21 September 1911, Box 1, Folder 16, JSS, HSP.
*485 Ibid.
*486 See Chapters Two and Three.
fundraising letter described the Joint Organization’s mission as “based on the proposition that the two fundamental needs in adjusting relations between the races are the suppressing and repudiation of self-respecting Negroes of the rowdy, ruffianly, corner-lounging, dive-infesting, decency-defying, vote-selling, election-debauching elements among them to whose doors may be directly traced a preponderance of the hostile and repressive sentiment that has come to be a stalking terror to Negroes and the grim despair of their friends.” The Joint Organization’s second goal, stated more concisely and with less vitriol, was “a broadening of the opportunities of that race for honest employment.”

After reformer Rudolph Blankenburg was elected mayor, Stemons wasted no time presenting his plan for achieving racial harmony to the newly elected head of the city. Blankenburg squeaked into office by 4,000 votes due to a split in support for two opposing regular Republicans. With the machine out of office for the first time in decades, Stemons looked to push his agenda forward. He organized a delegation of white and black clergy members to meet with the new mayor on January 5, 1912, just days after his inauguration. “The very first step of our League…was to win the sympathy and cooperation of this city administration. This Mayor Blankenburg assured us.”

The next step, he explained to Mary, was to find employment for African Americans in the city and to “take steps toward suppressing the vicious elements among Negroes.”

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487 Stemons to “Dear Sir,” n.d., Box 2, Folder 26, JSS, HSP. Stemons’s writing features an abundance of adjective-laden rhetoric and he often repurposed favored phrases for different settings. “Rowdy,” “ruffianly,” and “corner-lounging” were among the words he used most to describe black behavior.

488 McCaffery, _When Bosses Ruled_, 82.

489 Stemons, “Members of the Delegation to the Mayor,” 1912, Box 1, Folder 16, JSS, HSP.

490 Stemons to unaddressed but likely Mary, ca. 1912, Box 4, Folder 6, JSS, HSP.

491 Stemons to Mary, 2 December 1911, Box 1, Folder 16, JSS, HSP.
With Mayor Blankenburg’s backing secured, Stemons sought the assistance of the *Public Ledger*, the city’s leading white reform newspaper, to raise money for his organization. The *Ledger* had a history of rallying support and collecting donations for black institutions in the city, including a recent effort, which raised $17,000 to keep the city’s first black hospital in business. Stemons and several white representatives from the Joint Association met with the *Ledger*’s editor, George W. Ochs, in March 1913. Tindley again failed to show up for the meeting. Ochs declined to raise money directly but he did offer to publish editorials written by Stemons’s organization, send reporters to interview the members, and include their plea for money in the articles. Soon after the meeting, Stemons drafted a list of possible editorial topics for the officers to submit to the *Ledger*, including “The Industrial Color Line,” “Increasing Race Antipathy,” and “Enforced Idleness and Crime.” In a “hastily sketched” article on “Race Adjustment” Stemons wrote, “While this entire program seems homely and simple, it is one that appeals to *The Ledger* with peculiar force, and we see in it the dawning of a new day for the Negro and the nation.”

492 At the same time that Stemons worked on fundraising through the * Ledger*, he also made appeals to President-elect Woodrow Wilson. In Wilson’s commitment to political “independence” and civic reform Stemons identified a potential ally for his movement and for African Americans in general. Although backing Wilson was, in many ways, an independent move for a black man in 1912, Stemons was not alone. Several prominent African Americans pledged their support for Wilson, who was considered a leader of the

492 Stemons to Mary, 27 March 1913, Box 1, Folder 19, JSS, HSP; and Stemons, “Race Adjustment,” ca. 1913, Box 3, Folder 3, JSS, HSP.
national reform impulse and a promising, though controversial, figure with regard to race. Black leaders were also disappointed with the Republican Party’s unwillingness to address racial violence, oppression and segregation in the South, and angered by Theodore Roosevelt’s pledge to head a “lily white” Progressive Party. A Southerner born in Virginia, Wilson opposed admitting black students to Princeton University when he served as president of the school. “It will be a sad day for Negroes,” Stemons wrote to Wilson, “if they permit party and sectional prejudice and short-sighted self-interest to deter them from heartily joining in the forward civic movement which has signaled you as its temporary exponent.”

W.E.B. Du Bois tentatively endorsed the new president in an “Open Letter to Woodrow Wilson,” published in the NAACP’s journal, The Crisis. “We black men by our vote helped put you in your high position,” Du Bois wrote. “It was not because we loved Democrats more, but Republicans less, that led to our action.” Du Bois chided Wilson for his refusal to support integration at Princeton, while urging him to enter the fray over the “negro problem”: “To the quiet walls of Princeton where no Negro student is admitted the noise of the fight and the reek of its blood may have penetrated but vaguely and dimly. But the fight is on, and you, sir, are this month stepping into its arena.” Other black leaders washed their hands of both Roosevelt and Wilson during the 1912 presidential contest.

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493 Stemons to Governor Woodrow Wilson, ca. 1912, Box 2, Folder 26, JSS, HSP.
495 Hubert Harrison, a New York City black radical who advocated for black workers’ rights above party allegiance and vociferously criticized the Republican Party’s record on racial justice, supported the
By critiquing the electoral choices and behavior of black Philadelphians, Stemons and his organization echoed the rhetoric and interests of the city’s reform movement. Reformers, borrowing from and contributing to the disfranchisement rhetoric in the South, already assumed that blacks could not engage as full citizens. While many white reformers agreed that black men were not yet ready for the responsibility of the vote, Stemons’s organization attempted to distinguish between respectable and vicious elements within the African American community, urging those who signed the pledge to use their vote proactively to encourage government reform. In its commitment to non-partisanship and by linking African American choices at the ballot box to uplift of the race and the city, Stemons’s organization appealed for equal access to jobs based on an assumption that black votes mattered to white reformers. But by using “race” to define eligibility for citizenship, the reform movement had effectively shut down the avenues of black political activity, exposing the limits of Stemons’s interracial reform coalition.

Again adopting the rhetoric of the reformers, Stemons sought to claim respectability for himself and his movement by identifying as a political independent. His support for Wilson, he believed, set him apart not just as a race leader, but also as a solid citizen who put the interests of the nation before those of any particular race. Any detractors, in his estimation, could be considered not only enemies of the race, but also enemies of good citizenship. As Stemons explained, “The mission of our Association is simply to focus this tremendous influence of the church and clergy of both races upon the

496 See Chapter Three.
specific task of curbing these conditions and tendencies which any thoughtful person can see are rapidly reducing Negroes to the position of industrial, civil and political aliens and outcasts in this country.” Emancipation and high rates of southern and eastern European immigration highlighted the question of citizenship and membership in the nation at the turn of the century. By making an implicit comparison between the status of African Americans and new immigrants, Stemons called for a path that would more securely anchor blacks to the full rights of citizenship and the nation, North and South.497

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In many ways, World War I ended Stemons’s long fight to open industrial job opportunities for African Americans, thereby deflating his nascent movement. With black migrants coming in larger numbers to Philadelphia for jobs that were now open to them due to increased wartime production and a decrease in European immigration, the priorities of reformers and city officials alike shifted to include health, housing, overcrowding and education. Republican regulars resumed their leadership of Philadelphia politics, continuing to dominate city government until the Great Depression.498 Many of the ministers Stemons recruited for the organization stepped up their churches’ relief and assistance work on behalf of black migrants. Tindley urged congregants to open their homes to newcomers, a temporary solution that failed to account for the scale of new migration but signaled a different direction for the popular

497 Stemons, untitled, Box 4, Folder 1, JSS, HSP.
pastor who had never seemed more than tentatively engaged with Stemons’s movement.\textsuperscript{499}

Despite some evidence of initial tension between migrants and upper and middle-class black Northerners, the stepped up pace of black migration from the South after 1915 was generally accompanied by intraracial cooperation and community building in the urban North.\textsuperscript{500} The growing black population did contribute to a different kind of tension, this time around housing. As middle-class African Americans began to move away from increasingly crowded downtown neighborhoods, they were often met with violence from their new white neighbors. A “riotous mob” attacked a black woman who had just purchased a house in West Philadelphia in July 1914, according to the black newspaper, the \textit{Philadelphia Tribune}. More than 1,000 “poor whites” destroyed Mary E. Montague’s new home using bricks, stones and firearms. “It really is a miracle that we were not killed,” Montague’s daughter told the \textit{Tribune} reporter.\textsuperscript{501}

As residential segregation became more pronounced, evidence of race-based organizing appeared more common. In 1916, a group of African American leaders organized a boycott of businesses on South Street to protest the removal of black police officers from patrolling the street at the request of white business owners. “If it is lawful for them to remove our policemen because of their color, it is just as lawful for us to find some other places to spend our money,” declared G. Grant Williams, chairman of the boycott committee. Williams spoke at a meeting “packed to the doors with over seven

\textsuperscript{499} Gregg, \textit{Sparks from the Anvil of Oppression}, 59.
\textsuperscript{501} \textit{Philadelphia Tribune}, November 7, 1914.
hundred on the pavement who could not get in” to O’Neils Hall on Broad and Lombard streets.502 Boycott organizers, including churches, fraternal and social organizations, argued that the city’s 100,000 black residents paid taxes and deserved more equal representation in city politics. “It is our duty to protect ourselves and resent this insult to the race,” Williams proclaimed. Organizers demanded to be taken seriously as taxpayers, a different claim from the one made by Stemons.

Two decades after arriving in Philadelphia, Stemons still found himself on the outside. This time, he was called to defend his support and association with politicians and reformers who had attacked Republican Party regulars. In 1920, the Philadelphia American, an ally of the Republican regulars, mocked Stemons for his recent return to the Republican Party. His allegiance with reformers was particularly suspect since, as the editors of the Philadelphia American claimed, the reform movement had done little to improve the situation of Philadelphia’s African American residents. Stemons defended his move toward independent politics and his reform allies in a heated exchange with the editors. “I do not pretend that all or any of these agencies in any way measure up to their professed principles,” he wrote in a letter to the editor.503 Still, he maintained that reformers made the only effort to repair African American politics and, as such, should be embraced as advocates for the race. “It would be fatuous…for us to assume that as a general class such forces are not immeasurably more friendly to our most vital interests than designing and self-seeking politicians…For weary years (the Negro) has stood for all that is base and venal in political life…Any latter-day deviations from this course have

503 Philadelphia American, November 20, 1920, Box 4, Folder 9, JSS, HSP.
been solely due to the earnest efforts of the ‘political reformers’ whom *The American*
seeks to discredit.  

Perhaps also indirectly addressing his prior support for Woodrow Wilson,
Stemons suggested that African Americans had the same interest in clean government as
other citizens, independent of any particular reform movement. “The Negro has not,
ever has had and never will have a solitary interest that is distinct from clean and
untrammeled civic and political life, no matter what the momentary attitude of the
transitory exponents of such principles toward him may chance to be,” Stemons
contended.  

* * *

Stemons and Coppin illustrate the challenges and limitations faced by politically
engaged African Americans in Philadelphia at the dawn of the twentieth century. After
resigning from the ICY, Coppin joined her husband Levi Coppin, a minister in the
A.M.E. Church, in his new role as bishop in South Africa. Her three decades of helping
define the challenges facing black Philadelphians had come to an end. By the turn of the
twentieth century, Coppin found herself caught between the working class black students
she hoped to reach and the goals of Philadelphia’s social and municipal reformers, who
increasingly saw African Americans as citizens in training not fit to carry the burden of
full citizenship rights and who adopted a one-track prescription for educating black
students. From his vantage point in Philadelphia during the first decade of the twentieth

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504 Ibid.
505 Ibid.
century, Stemons noted that African American voting behavior was being scrutinized in the North as well as the South. At stake in the black vote, he suggested, was more than access to the ballot box, but – even more crucially – access to economic equality in the form of good-paying industrial employment.

To legitimize his place in the political conversation, Stemons distanced himself, at first rhetorically and later, with the company he kept, from the prevalent image of the downtrodden black migrant. He transformed himself from the “the oppressed” to the commentator on oppression, from the “pitiful” to the critic of the degraded African American migrant, whose loyalty to the Republican regulars threatened both the city and race progress. His goal of independence from party politics led him to support Woodrow Wilson, a choice initially embraced by many leading African Americans, including W.E.B. Du Bois. Even after the politics of reform lost its resonance and other African Americans abandoned Wilson, Stemons clung tenaciously to the version of himself as a model of black political behavior, defending his choices in a debate with the editors of a Republican newspaper in Philadelphia.

Despite Stemons’s intentions with his surveillance organization, every case he documented would effectively prove the point that African Americans were not fit to be full members of the body politic. Reformers had succeeded in tying black politics in Philadelphia to a cross-regional view of Reconstruction as a failed experiment that granted too much power to African Americans as voters and newly minted citizens. Unlike Coppin and the African American clergy he pursued as allies, Stemons did not have longstanding ties to the black residents of Philadelphia’s poorest neighborhoods. His political approach suggests sympathy with working people’s economic struggles with
little regard for the disruptions and political limitations imposed on black communities by
the reform movement that coalesced during the 1890s around an attack on black politics.
Rather than appealing directly to working class voters, he chose a different approach.
Stemons’s plan for interracial cooperation took shape within a reform discourse that
defined black male voters as a problem. Just as in the South, black allegiance to the
Republican Party had been pathologized, and Stemons joined the attacks on black
politics. His tactics and Coppin’s retreat from local politics after three decades of
influence reflect the morass electoral politics had become for black citizens in the urban
North by the turn of the century.
CONCLUSION

In 1913, Harry W. Bass, the first black man elected to the Pennsylvania General Assembly, delivered a rousing speech on the floor of the statehouse denouncing a proposed bill to make interracial marriage illegal. Bass declared the bill – which would have banned white citizens from marrying anyone with one-eighth or more “colored blood” – an abomination that would “add to the burdens of an already discouraged people.”\(^\text{507}\) The bill was subsequently withdrawn and the *Philadelphia Tribune* attributed the victory to Bass’s powerful words.\(^\text{508}\) Within two years of Bass’s stand against the interracial marriage bill, Philadelphia’s trailblazing black officeholder would leave the state legislature in the wake of corruption accusations surrounding the city’s plans to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Bass, who was born and raised in neighboring West Chester, did not come up through the ranks of Philadelphia’s Republican machine. In 1896, while attending the University of Pennsylvania Law School, he ran on an independent ticket for a seat in Pennsylvania’s House of Representatives to represent a district which included Philadelphia’s Seventh Ward. But after a decisive loss, Bass switched to the Republican

\(^{508}\) Ibid.
Party for another bid for the statehouse in 1910. With the support of the Republican Party machine, Bass won the 1910 race and was re-elected in 1912.

The young lawyer’s outspoken stand against the interracial marriage bill was not the first time he took up racial justice issues. During his first term, Bass introduced legislation to strengthen the enforcement mechanism of Pennsylvania’s 1887 public accommodations anti-discrimination law. The bill, which would have added ice cream parlors and drugstores to the list of public accommodations where racial discrimination was illegal, failed to garner enough votes to clear a constitutionally required majority. Bass’s most high-profile turn as a state legislator, however, involved his efforts to organize the Philadelphia Emancipation Exposition. The legislature pledged $25,000 in 1911 to begin planning for the event and another $75,000 in 1913 as a result of Bass’s advocacy. In response, the Philadelphia Tribune enthused, “We have our very serious doubt as to whether, in the history of this country, there has ever been a Negro who has in a single term accomplished so much for his people.”

By the time the exposition opened on September 14, 1913, however, Bass was under fire on multiple fronts. Philadelphia’s crusading reform newspaper the North American accused him of channeling money to the Republican machine. Bass had also lost the support of some of the city’s prominent black leaders who railed against his work.

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510 Smith, “Asking for Justice and Fair Play,” 175.

511 Charlene Mires, “Race, Place, and the Pennsylvania Emancipation Exposition of 1913,” PMHB 128, no. 3 (July 2004): 262. Bass was one of seven members of a committee (and the only African American) appointed by Gov. John K. Tener to organize and plan the exposition, but he took the lead role.

512 Ibid.; and “Mr. Bass Won His Spurs at the Legislature,” Philadelphia Tribune, June 28, 1913.

on the exposition as a political calculation rather than a genuine effort to promote black progress.\textsuperscript{514}

Five thousand black Philadelphians attended the exposition’s opening day ceremony followed by a parade witnessed by tens of thousands of the city’s residents. “The theme of progress prevailed for the duration of the exposition,” but as historian Charlene Mires argues, Bass and the exposition were marked by “the taint of scandal and an element of disappointment.”\textsuperscript{515} Although the coverage in the local press was generally positive, the \textit{New York Age} pronounced Philadelphia’s exposition a “dismal, gloomy and disappointing failure,” and suggested that it serve as a cautionary note “to teach our race that in the future when we undertake anything that is to come before the public we should be very careful to see that everything is planned as to bring about success or failure.”\textsuperscript{516}

Bass’s discredited work on the emancipation exposition and its lackluster reception suggests the ways in which, after several decades of the Republican Party’s apathy and the reform movement’s scorn, black engagement with the electoral arena was increasingly fraught. With the state’s highest-ranking black elected official mired in controversy, the exposition’s theme of black progress highlighted not the emancipationist legacy of the Civil War, but rather the defensive posture of African Americans who remained citizens in the making.\textsuperscript{517} In the coming decade, as migration from the South exploded, black Philadelphians found new avenues to define and pursue the rights of citizenship or to claim power in different arenas altogether.

\textsuperscript{514} Smith, “Asking for Justice and Fair Play,” 176.
\textsuperscript{515} Mires, “Race, Place, and the Pennsylvania Emancipation Exposition,” 267 and 270.
\textsuperscript{516} Quoted in Ibid., 270.
\textsuperscript{517} Ibid., 258.
As the preceding pages demonstrate, after a period of relative efficacy during the 1880s, black political participation was increasingly contested during the 1890s as reformers campaigned to narrow the franchise by linking black voters to the corruption of the Republican machine. Examining black politics in a northern city dominated by the Republican Party reveals the persistent struggle of African Americans to maintain access to the ballot as well as a voice in electoral politics.

Black Philadelphians engaged with electoral politics to guard the rights of citizenship. As southern states, beginning with Mississippi in 1890, codified provisions that would effectively exclude black voters from the polls, Philadelphia’s black activists took note. Although in hindsight the march of de jure disfranchisement appears inevitable and inextricably linked to the South, black Philadelphians could not predict where the line would be drawn. The franchise appeared, to those considering it from the perspective of the 1880s and 1890s, neither doomed nor secure anywhere in the nation.

Black voters in Philadelphia continued to support the Republican Party by overwhelming majorities until the New Deal, but by 1900 a new generation of politically active African Americans – bolstered by a continuing influx of southern migrants – protested discrimination and pursued political rights using new strategies. By painting African Americans as inept and incompetent voters, the reform movements of the 1890s distanced blacks from the Republican Party in Philadelphia. Reform attacks on African Americans’ fitness for citizenship combined with the Republican Party’s retreat from racial justice pushed black Philadelphians to re-define their relationship to party bosses and pursue new avenues to claim the rights of citizenship.
By 1913, black Philadelphians increasingly sought a diverse range of alternatives to electoral politics for pursuing and defining the rights of citizenship. The NAACP established a chapter in Philadelphia in 1911. Its members included men and women from the city’s interracial social reform coalitions. Susan Wharton, a veteran of Philadelphia’s social settlement movement who had always challenged her colleagues to tailor their work to the needs of the city’s black residents, joined the newly founded organization along with Gertrude Mossell and her husband, Nathan F. Mossell, and Frances R. Bartholomew, who served as one of the head residents at a settlement house for black residents in the Eighth Ward.

Richard R. Wright, Jr. joined Bartholomew at the Eighth Ward Settlement as part of his fieldwork for a graduate degree in sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. Wright’s path from settlement house reform work with impoverished African Americans to membership in the Philadelphia chapter of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) during the 1920s suggests the pull of activism – especially in the wake of increased migration from the South and World War I – not to claim the rights of citizenship, but rather as an attempt to organize in the interest of black self-governance.

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518 Over the course of his diverse career, Wright worked as the editor of the Christian Recorder and was appointed bishop of Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in 1936. He also served as director of exhibits for the Philadelphia Emancipation Exposition after a failed attempt to secure funding for a national celebration. Along with his father, R.R. Wright, Sr. and W.E.B. Du Bois, Wright initially went to Washington, D.C. to request a Congressional outlay. “The Rights and Du Bois were praised by senators for their eloquence and knowledgeable testimony, but their request for $250,000 in federal funds died without a vote.” Mires, “Race, Place, and the Pennsylvania Emancipation Exposition,” 260-61.

519 Hahn, Nation Without Borders, 507. Hahn characterizes “Garvey’s vision (as), at once, nationalist and anticolonial.” In doing so, Hahn links the UNIA’s project with anticolonial movements around the globe at the turn of the twentieth century. According to Hahn, Garvey “called not so much (as is customarily thought) for African repatriation as for a movement to oust European colonizers and to establish a basis for black self-governance, a movement that would link ‘every member of the race in every part of the world’ who, wherever their residence, were ‘citizens of Africa.’”
Wright’s experience working with white reformers and philanthropists after he moved to Philadelphia in 1905 shaped his politics and illustrates a mounting tension within interracial organizations at the turn of the twentieth century. During his two years living at the Eighth Ward Settlement, Wright interviewed the neighborhood’s black residents about their economic circumstances. In 1908, he helped establish the Armstrong Association, an organization funded by white philanthropists designed to help black migrants find industrial employment in Philadelphia.\(^{520}\) White philanthropists and activists comfortable with devoting money and time to “improving” African Americans as individuals were not entirely at ease with proposals to help those same men and women gain economic and political equality. As Wright would later observe in his 1965 autobiography, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, Philadelphia’s white progressives did not see a conflict between pushing African Americans out of political participation while pledging to improve life for black Philadelphians in other areas, such as education and housing.\(^{521}\)

In the wake of police beatings and waves of violence aimed at black Philadelphians after rioting in 1918, Wright joined a group of other black clergymen to launch the Colored Protective Association.\(^{522}\) According to historian V.P. Franklin, the Colored Protective Association – through pressure on public officials to remove abusive police, legal assistance to riot victims and outreach to black residents – served as a bulwark against the kinds of hardships and discrimination not adequately addressed by Philadelphia’s new NAACP

\(^{520}\) Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Rare Book Company, 1965), 157-63. Like Wright, Stemons was also frustrated with the Armstrong Association. In a 1910 letter to Booker T. Washington, Stemons claimed the organization lacked the capacity and vision to improve the labor situation and had found work for only 300 of Philadelphia’s 100,000 black residents. Stemons to Washington, 7 April 1910, cited in Harlan, *Booker T. Washington Papers, 1909-1911*, 306.

\(^{521}\) Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 148-165.

chapter.\textsuperscript{523} As president of the association, Wright declared, “We shall represent the colored people – the common people – wherever they are oppressed by race prejudice.”\textsuperscript{524}

In 1921, Marcus Garvey’s visit to Philadelphia drew an estimated crowd of 5,000 people. G. Grant Williams, city editor of the \textit{Philadelphia Tribune} and organizer of the 1916 black boycott of South Street businesses to protest the removal of black police officers, praised Garvey, who by the end of his speech, “had a number of citizens of color thinking just as he thought.”\textsuperscript{525} Williams was particularly moved by Garvey’s emphasis on black self-improvement and independence. “There are 100,000,000 population in these United States of which we represent only one-tenth, and with the increasing spread of race prejudice there is no telling what the end will be,” Williams wrote. Williams was not alone among Philadelphia’s black professionals – especially its religious leaders – in his admiration for Garvey’s approach. Wright and several of his fellow clergymen from the Colored Protective Association, including the pastor of Zion Baptist Church William Henry Moses, joined the UNIA.\textsuperscript{526} The UNIA’s separatist impulse seemed a natural fit for Wright, who spearheaded a black self-defense organization after the riots of 1918.

Meanwhile, the black longshoremen who joined Philadelphia’s Local 8 – the only union open to black men in Philadelphia – of the Industrial Workers of the World in 1913

\begin{footnotes}
\item[525] “Marcus Garvey As We Saw Him,” \textit{Philadelphia Tribune}, October 22, 1921. The UNIA still has an active chapter in Philadelphia. For more information about Philadelphia’s current UNIA chapter, see http://www.cbpm.org/philadelphiadivision121.html.
\item[526] Randall K. Burkett, \textit{Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion} (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. and the American Theological Library Association, 1978), 185; and Ballard, \textit{One More}, 242. In addition to fellow clergy, Wright had multiple connections to the UNIA, including his father R.R. Wright, Sr. In the early 1920s, William H. Ferris, Wright’s assistant editor at the \textit{Christian Recorder} left to become an editor at the \textit{Negro World}, the UNIA’s newspaper. Wright, \textit{87 Years Behind the Black Curtain}, 689.
\end{footnotes}
explicitly rejected the state and electoral politics, organizing instead to form a workers’ collective challenging the prerogatives of employers. Before World War I opened up industrial jobs to Philadelphia’s black labor force, the busy docks of the Delaware River were one of the main sources of employment for black men. In 1910, black men made up the largest group of workers performing the dangerous labor of loading and unloading ships in Philadelphia. Historian Peter Cole examines the victories yielded from Local 8’s decade of unprecedented interracial organizing among longshoremen, including safer working conditions, higher wages, and shorter hours. Although a lockout ultimately broke the union in 1922, Cole attributes Local 8’s near decade-long success to its commitment to both interracial work gangs and leadership and the IWW’s “core socialist principle that all workers shared something in common – their separation from and animosity to their employers.”

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This study suggests the ways in which contemporary debates about black politics resonate with a long and durable American anxiety over the meaning and legitimacy of black citizenship. In perhaps the crudest manifestation of this ongoing conversation, in 2008, during President Barack Obama’s first term in office, the emergence of the so-called “birther movement” quite literally summoned more than a century of suspicion surrounding black citizenship. Championed by then-real estate developer and reality television star, now President Donald Trump, the birthers claimed that the nation’s first

527 Peter Cole, Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 51. In 1910, 45 percent of the 3,000 longshoremen working in Philadelphia were black; another 40 percent were either native-born or first-generation immigrants, including Irish-Americans, West Indian and Polish immigrants. Cole, Wobblies, 172.
528 Ibid., 173.
black commander-in-chief was not born in the United States. They insisted that Obama disclose his birth certificate to prove he was a native-born American citizen – a constitutional requirement to hold the office of the president. Conspiracy theories about President Obama’s birthplace dogged him throughout his presidency, despite the fact that Obama, whose father was Kenyan and his mother American, was born and raised in Hawaii. Trump’s leadership of the birther movement endeared him to Obama’s critics and helped propel him to the national political stage. During the presidential election of 2016, after years of encouraging doubts, Trump acknowledged that Obama was, in fact, a native-born citizen of the United States.529

Faced with a political culture so imbued with hostility to black citizenship and political participation, black activists today grapple with how best to challenge structural barriers to voting, state-sanctioned violence (in the form of police shootings and mass incarceration) and economic inequality tied to racial disparities.530 The late nineteenth century debate over the role of respectability and partisanship in electoral politics in many ways persists.531 Black Lives Matter and other grassroots groups led by young activists – in contrast to the more established, institutional work of iconic and long-

530 The effort to curtail black political engagement is apparent today in state laws that make it harder for African Americans and other poor minorities to cast ballots (including requiring voter identification) and in the Supreme Court’s 2013 Shelby County v. Holder decision, which declared unconstitutional key enforcement provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. For more on the battle over voting rights, see Ari Berman, Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America (New York: Picador, 2015).
Standing black advocacy organizations, such as the NAACP – are leading and defining the twenty-first century movement for racial and social justice.\footnote{As political scientist and media commentator Melissa Harris-Perry recently argued, “The N.A.A.C.P. carries the weight of history and the burden of bureaucracy. But it does not seem willing to shed blood, literally, or in terms of the uncomfortable work that characterizes effective activism.” Harris-Perry, “How to Save the N.A.A.C.P. from Irrelevance,” \textit{New York Times}, May 30, 2017.}

Shortly after the 2016 presidential election, the \textit{New York Times} went searching for answers to explain Trump’s victory. They found clues in an unexamined corner of the 2016 American electorate: a barbershop in a poor and predominately black neighborhood in Milwaukee. The article suggested that a drop in turnout in black neighborhoods contributed to Democratic candidate Hilary Clinton’s loss in Wisconsin, where Trump won the state by 27,000 votes.\footnote{Sabrina Tavernise, “Many in Milwaukee Neighborhood Didn’t Vote – and Don’t Regret It,” \textit{New York Times}, November 20, 2016.} Although Clinton received 82 percent of the black vote nationwide, the men interviewed in Milwaukee said the Democratic Party had failed to address the economic issues that concerned working-class African Americans.\footnote{Harry Enten, “Registered Voters Who Stayed Home Probably Cost Clinton the Election,” \textit{FiveThirtyEight}, January 5, 2017, https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/registered-voters-who-stayed-home-probably-cost-clinton-the-election/.} Some of the men interviewed bucked the dominant media narrative of black loyalty to the Democrats and opted not to vote rather than casting a ballot for Clinton.\footnote{The Clinton campaign’s support from black mothers who had lost children to police violence suggests the complex ways in which gender, race and class defined political allegiances in 2016. See “Black Mothers Get A Standing Ovation at the DNC,” \textit{Huffington Post}, July 26, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/black-mothers-dnc_us_57980493e4b0d3568f8517ca.} The men’s skepticism about Clinton\footnote{One of the men interviewed said “other countries probably wouldn’t have respected us because we had a woman running the country,” suggesting the ways in which gender and misogyny played a role in the voters’ assessment of the nation’s first woman to head the ticket of a major political party. Tavernise, “Many in Milwaukee.”} and disappointment with the Democratic Party echoed the working-class concerns that had been too easily assumed to be the exclusive purview of white, working-class voters who favored the economic populism of Senator Bernie...

This study has suggested the limitations of partisanship and, more broadly, electoral politics, for African Americans during the late nineteenth century. Perhaps Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II’s recent decision to step down from his position as head of the NAACP in North Carolina to pursue a political program based on economic justice (inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Poor People’s Campaign) points a way forward that combines the experience and legacy of black politics with a program that engages all working-class Americans.\footnote{Harris-Perry, \textit{New York Times}, May 30, 2017. For more on Barber’s politics, see Laurie Goodstein, “Liberals Fighting for Their Faith,” \textit{New York Times}, June 11, 2017.} In any case, the role of black activism in expanding the radical potential of electoral politics in the United States remains to be explored.
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