

CHAPTER 8

**“It is Our Freedom that Makes Us Different”¹:
Freedom and Identity in Post-Civil War Indian Territory
and Oklahoma**

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INTRODUCTION

Decades after the Civil War, an 89-nine-year-old Lucinda Davis recalled her life as a slave in Indian Territory during the tumultuous 1860s. She had a Creek Indian owner and lived in the Creek Territory, located in the eastern portion of present-day Oklahoma. Her parents, also owned by Creeks, had different masters.² At the war’s end, and like many formerly enslaved people, Davis reunited with her parents. But unlike the majority of emancipated slaves, freedom for former Creek slaves like the Davis family meant full membership in the Creek Nation. Full membership provided exclusive rights to tribal land and participation in the nation’s political culture. For Lucinda Davis, full membership allowed her to marry, own property, build a home, raise children, and freely live within Creek tradition.

However, while the Davis family experienced full Creek citizenship most African Americans like A.G. Belton suffered from racial violence in the Deep South. In 1891, Belton proclaimed that “times are hard and getting harder every year we as a people

¹ Portions of this essay appear in Leroy Myers “Land of the Fair God: the Development of Black Towns in Oklahoma, 1870-1907” (MA Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2016). See “Interview with Miss Charles Emily Wilson, Black Seminole, Texas, 1992.” Quoted in Kenneth W. Porter [Alcione M. Amos and Thomas P. Senter, eds.] *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), xii.

² Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 13, Oklahoma, Adams-Young. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn130/>. (Accessed January 30, 2018.)

believe that Affrica [sic] is the place but to get from under bondage are thinking Oklahoma as this is our nearest place of safety."³ But just because the Davis family lived in a free society did not mean they wanted other freedmen to settle within Creek borders. Despite all the change Davis saw in her eighty-nine years of life, she complained that the new generation of Creeks lacked the "Old Creek way" as she reminisced on her upbringing during an interview in Tulsa—a town located in eastern present-day Oklahoma. Davis' desire to preserve the "Old Creek way" conflicted with emigrating freedmen like Belton and would set the stage for Oklahoma to become a racial battleground throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁴ Even later in 1992 Charles Emily Wilson, a Black member of the Seminole Nation extolled the virtues of Black Indians like Lucinda Davis when she proclaimed "In all our travels we have never lost an awareness of our identity and a pride in our freedom, because it is our freedom that makes us different."⁵

The stories of Lucinda Davis and A.G. Belton reflect varied views of freedom following the Civil War. During the **Reconstruction** Era, a period of social and legal change from 1863 to 1877, two distinct groups of freedmen emerged: one group, **African American freedmen**, consisted of former slaves from states like Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia; the second group, **Native American freedmen**, existed within five American Indian tribes: the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek (Muscogee), and Seminole. The relationships between both groups explain differences in Black identity, Black migration, and racial tensions during the Reconstruction Era. Motives and identity within both groups varied. Freedmen from the states, for example,

³ A.G. Belton to William Coppinger, 22 July 1891, American Colonization Society Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Quoted in Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 9.

⁴ "Lucinda Davis," *The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma), 107-17, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wpa/davis1.html>.

⁵ "Interview with Miss Charles Emily Wilson, Black Seminole, Texas, 1992." Quoted in Kenneth W. Porter [Alcione M. Amos and Thomas P. Senter, eds.] *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), xii.

moved to Indian Territory so they could purchase land, achieve economic stability, and escape racial violence in the Deep South. Native American freedmen, on the other hand, generally saw their African American counterparts as intruders in their homeland that infringed on their freedoms. The animosity of Native American freedmen, however, did not stop the spread of the freedmen's narrative that Indian Territory was a promised land for all African Americans.

Well before the Reconstruction Era, however, African slaves escaped their White owners to live with Indians who did not have conceptions of race prior to sustained European interaction by the eighteenth century.⁶ A byproduct of Indian interactions and alliances with European settlers from Spain, England, and France was some Native Nations incorporation of chattel slavery. This system of slavery would soon be adopted by the Five Tribes—the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole. Colonial American era interactions between the Five Tribes and African slaves varied. Some Indian tribes, for example, simultaneously harbored runaway slaves while at the same time aided in their return.⁷ Such diversity does not mean African and Native cultures did not share similarities—they certainly did. For example, kinship and tribalism played a prominent role in Native American and African social formation. This, in turn, discouraged conceptions of race, because new members had the ability to join a tribe through adoption. Nonetheless, some scholars argue that the similarities both Indians and Africans shared also encouraged closer interaction during the United States' colonial period. And, as with other peoples, slavery and captivity existed in both African and American Indian cultures. However, these societies did not originally hold captives based on race. Compared to chattel slavery, the point of captivity was not dehumanization. Nevertheless, many Indian nations found the system of chattel slavery appalling. Charles Eastman, a member of the Sioux Indian Nation, recalled his uncle's

⁶ Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: the Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 7.

⁷ Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974), 260.

account of White American culture in 1902. Eastman's, uncle proclaimed "They [White Americans] have made some of their people servants—yes slaves! We have never believed in keeping slaves, but it seems that these *Washichu* [the rich] do! It is our belief that they painted their servants Black a long time ago, to tell them from the rest, and now the slaves have children born to them of the same color!"⁸ This, in effect, enabled the possibility for some captives to obtain full membership. Furthermore, Europeans simultaneously enslaved Africans and Native Americans.⁹ These often involuntary bonds, particularly with the Five Tribes, continued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to their forced migration to Indian Territory in the 1830s.¹⁰

The Five Tribes perceived slavery and emancipation a hot-button issue before the Civil War. Compared to the Chickasaw, Choctaw, (and somewhat) Cherokee Nations, the Creek and Seminoles accepted their former slaves with ease following the Civil War. In other words, these tribal nations accepted their freedmen with little physical and political conflict compared to that of the Cherokee, Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations. Ambiguous relations, during the eighteenth century, between the Creek and Seminole Nations and African slaves may attribute to their immediate acceptance of former slaves following the Civil War. Early accounts of the Creek Nation, for example, claim that the tribe held and harbored slaves simultaneously. Benjamin Hawkins, the Thomas Jefferson appointed "Principal Agent for Indian Affairs"

⁸ Peter Nabokov ed., *Native American Testimony: a Chronicle of Indian White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-2000* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999 [revised edition]), 22.

⁹ For more on African and Native American enslavement see Peter Wood, "'The Changing Population of the Colonial South An Overview by Race and Region, 1685-1790" in A. Gregory, Peter Wood & Thomas Hatley eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 71.

¹⁰ Wood, *Black Majority*, 117. Quoted from Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1966), 5; Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 4 & 6.

documented several instances of Creek Indians taking slaves as captives.¹¹ Hawkins in 1797 noted a case regarding Creek Indians killing a husband and wife and abducting a two year old boy and a twelve year old "negro girl."¹² Although it is uncertain what happened to the Black girl and the unidentified boy, it is likely both remained in the Creek Nation as captives, but tribal adoption by a clan or military participation (like the Black Seminoles) would have relinquished their captive status.

The Black Seminoles best exemplify the importance of adoption to the social organization of Native American tribes. The Seminole Nation fought against settler expansion in three conflicts known as the Seminole Wars throughout the nineteenth century with the help of their Black population known as the Black Seminoles who had an ambiguous status due to their informal enslavement.¹³ Seminole slaves were practically tenant farmers who gave a portion of their crop yield to their owner. They lived in their own separate communities in Seminole Territory in present-day Florida.¹⁴

Black Seminoles carried significant influence on Seminole war and diplomacy between Colonial powers. The value of a Black Seminole increased if they were bilingual, due to their previous condition of servitude in French, Spanish or English colonies. It enabled Seminole leaders to negotiate with colonial officials and settlers with different language backgrounds. During the 1820s and 1830s, Florida's government claimed Black Seminoles manipulated Seminole leaders by protecting Black members accused of escaping from colonies like Georgia to the Seminole Nation. However, the nation and their Black interpreters protected runaway slaves for two reasons: First, their Black population served as a loyal base of tribal membership with the ability to provide protection, labor, and diplomacy; and second, Black Seminole

¹¹ Benjamin Hawkins, Thomas Foster, ed., *The Collected Works of Benjamin Hawkins* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2003), 1.

¹² Hawkins, Foster, ed., *The Collected Works of Benjamin Hawkins*, 174-5.

¹³ Sylviane Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: the Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁴ George Klos, "Blacks and the Seminole Removal Debate, 1821-1835." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 68 (1989): 58.

interpreters were usually former slaves themselves and fought alongside their Native counterparts resisting Removal.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Black slaves and members of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Creek Nations did not often experience the same kind of freedom as the Black Seminole. However, some Creek slaves like Lucinda Davis experienced a less intense form of chattel slavery. According to Davis, Creek slaves like her parents had the freedom of mobility. Her parents lived in their own place and did not have to stay on their owner's plantation and work like "de White people and de Choctaw and Cherokee people say dey had to."¹⁶ Nonetheless, it is evident that each of the Five Tribes had contested relationships with former slaves and Black members of their tribe.¹⁷ As with any peoples, it is a complicated story with ambiguous answers. These complicated issues between the Five Tribes and slavery and race remained from the eighteenth century and shaped their lives during their forced migration to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma.

The forced migration of the Five Tribes from the Southeast to the Southwest, now known as **Indian Removal**, during the 1830s caused political divisions within each tribe. In the Cherokee Nation, more traditional and often religious tribal members urged for the emancipation of slaves for religious and political reasons. Given the complex and ambiguous relationship between African slaves and Indians, many White Americans throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century disliked the presence of

¹⁵ Klos, "Blacks and the Seminole Removal Debate," 66.

¹⁶ "Lucinda Davis," *The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma), 107-17, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wpa/davis1.html>.

¹⁷ Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 111; Barbara Krauthammer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 72; Daniel F. Littlefield Jr., and Mary Ann Littlefield, "The Beams Family: Free Blacks in Indian Territory." *Journal of Negro History* 61 (1976): 121-31; Daniel F. Littlefield Jr., *The Cherokee Freedmen: from Emancipation to American Citizenship* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 9.

Blacks among Native American populations in the Deep South.¹⁸ White southern slaveholders argued that the Black presence among Native nations encouraged fugitive slavery as in the case with slaves who fled from their masters to live among the Seminole Indians. The passing of the Indian Intercourse Act of 1834 under President Andrew Jackson led to the creation of Indian Territory. It was an attempt to avoid White intrusion on Native land, while expanding White dominance of fertile soil for the growth of cotton and other resource extraction. Justification for Indian Removal also included the false notion of American Indian extinction—a common belief among United States officials.¹⁹ Nonetheless, Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw slaves remained in their condition of servitude during Removal. They cleared paths and protected their Native masters throughout the ordeal with axes and guns. The journey from the Southeast to Indian Territory—present-day Oklahoma took nine months for the Cherokee Nation. An estimated 8,000 Cherokees—Blacks included—died on the “Trail of Tears” due to bouts of sickness and exposure to harsh weather conditions.²⁰ The number of slaves removed to Indian Territory varied throughout each tribe but most made it to Indian Territory. Nonetheless, each of the Five Tribes recovered from the horrors of Indian Removal and reestablished their governments throughout the 1830s and 1840s.²¹

The legacy of slavery made it difficult for soon-to-be freedmen following the Civil War. Freedmen in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, for example, fought for civil

¹⁸ Patrick Minges, “Beneath the Underdog: Race, Religion, and the Trail of Tears” *American Indian Quarterly* 25 (2001): 466.

¹⁹ Harry. L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: the Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006 [revised edition]), 53-4.

²⁰ Minges, “Beneath the Underdog: Race, Religion, and the Trail of Tears” *American Indian Quarterly* 25 (2001): 467.

²¹ Murray R. Wickett, *Contested Territory: Whites, Native Americans, and African Americans in Oklahoma 1865-1907* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 3-4; For more on the removal of the Five Civilized Tribes see, Edward Everett Dale & Gene Aldrich, *History of Oklahoma* (Edmond: Thompson Book & Supply Co., 1969) 79-90; Kaye M. Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma: a Resource Book* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971), 28-30.

rights well into the late nineteenth century but prior Choctaw and Chickasaw slave laws acted as a precedent for the lack of racial equality within both nations. In 1838, for example, the Choctaw Nation passed a law forbidding slaves to learn reading and writing without consent of a slave's owner. In 1857, the Chickasaw passed laws prohibiting slaves to own guns and knives "over four inches long."²² By 1866, agreements established between the Five Tribes and the federal government sparked a debate concerning who had the ability to settle in Indian Territory, as Indian Treaties extended tribal membership to former slaves of the Five Tribes left some Indian freedmen like the Chickasaw Freedmen in a state of legal limbo with many remaining with their former masters.²³ Meanwhile, African Americans from the racially violent Deep South looked elsewhere for prosperity, solace, and civil rights.²⁴

African Americans migrated to new states and territories throughout the 1870s. Thousands looked for refuge from southern racial violence and economic prosperity in Kansas, Texas, and Indian Territory— attracting thousands of African American settlers. The region's fluid social hierarchy stemmed from complex bonds the Five Tribes had with their own Black population before and following the Civil War.²⁵ In fact, the Five Tribes' legacy of race and tribal politics complicated the status and identity of their former slaves within their respective Tribal Nation. Most stayed with their tribe and maintained their cultural heritage as "Indian" while also coming to terms with their

²² Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., *The Chickasaw Freedmen: a People Without a Country* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 13.

²³ Littlefield, Jr., *The Chickasaw Freedmen*, 31-3.

²⁴ Murray R. Wickett, *Contested Territory*, 3-4; For more on the individuals removals of the Five Civilized Tribes see, Dale and Everett, *History of Oklahoma*, 79-90; Kaye M. Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, 19 & 28-30; United States Census Office. *Preliminary Report on the Eighth Census*, House of Representatives, 2nd Congress, 2nd Session. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1862), accessed March 20, 2015. <https://archive.org/details/preliminaryrepor00inunit.10-11>. Sigmund Sameth, "Creek Negroes: a Study of Race Relations" (MA Thesis University of Oklahoma, 1940), 22.

²⁵ For more on African American migration to Arkansas, see Lori Bogle, "On Our Way to the Promised Land: Black Migration from Arkansas to Oklahoma, 1889-1893" *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 72 (1994): 160-77. Bogle writes Arkansas' Black population increased by 200 percent between 1870 and 1900.

Black heritage which became a topic of discussion for African American settlers. Meanwhile, African Americans used migration to obtain freedom which at times came at the expense of Black Indians in Indian Territory. The Civil War made both groups of freedmen possible and shaped Indian Territory for years to come and well into Oklahoma statehood in the early twentieth century.

THE CIVIL WAR IN INDIAN TERRITORY, 1861-1865

Indian Territory's geographic proximity between the American South and West and status as an unorganized territory—spaces with territorial legislatures overseen by the federal government—rather than an official American state made it a strategic area of control during the Civil War. The Five Tribes struggled deciding the best way forward as sovereign nations independent of the United States government. For some, tribal independence depended on slavery and commerce. Others sought a traditional way of life. This mode of living embraced tribal language and religion rather than English and Christianity. Meanwhile, slaves of Native tribes, like Lucinda Davis' parents, used the war's cause of tribal instability as an opportunity to escape from their Native masters.

The year of the war, 1861, was full of political upheaval for each of the tribes. The Union withdrew officers and resources from Indian Territory and provided military protection for the Five Tribes. But, with the withdrawal of a centralized Union presence in Indian Territory, the Confederacy took the opportunity to occupy Indian Territory forts and negotiate with each of the Five Tribes to support the Confederate cause.²⁶ Each of the Five Tribes debated issues concerning aligning with either side, but the Choctaw and Chickasaw eventually joined the Confederate cause. Meanwhile, the Cherokee, Seminole, and Creek Nations remained divided on the issue throughout the Civil War with slaveholders supporting the Confederacy and non-slaveholders supporting the Union. But, without Union control of Indian Territory, the border it

²⁶ Celia E. Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: from Chattel to Citizens* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 133-34.

shared with Confederate Texas became troublesome.²⁷ During the war, Confederate Texans swore to rid Indian Territory of Union sympathizers and abolitionists.²⁸ When that was difficult to overcome, Indian slaveholders from the Five Tribes moved their family and property, including slaves, to Texas—a Confederate stronghold throughout much of the Civil War.

Indian Territory's checkered political dimensions affected its slave population as well. Phoebe Banks, a Creek Freedwoman, experienced the threat of going down to Texas. She reminisced that slaves from different plantations conspired and fled from their masters from Creek Territory "up north" to Cherokee Territory in northeast Indian Territory. Consequently, Creek slaves were afraid that their fate would be in Texas, which likely led to harsher treatment encouraging some slaves to flee toward Union lines in northeastern Indian Territory.²⁹ Banks' father fled the Creek Nation with a group of fugitive slaves, but Confederate soldiers halted their plans when they shot and killed several in the group and captured the remaining few on a "big creek" in Cherokee Territory.³⁰ Indian Territory's political divisions distressed Creek slaves like Mary Grayson living in a Confederate section of the Creek Nation. Creek members and slaves in Grayson's section attempted to travel to a Union-friendly part of the territory.³¹ Overall, the experience of Five Tribes slaves were similar to that of African American slaves, because both groups of freedmen suffered for different reasons, but by the

²⁷ *Annual report to the commissioner of Indian Affairs for the year 1861* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1861), <http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep61/reference/history.annrep61.i0005.pdf>, 46; Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, 54-5.

²⁸ *Annual report to the commissioner of Indian Affairs for the year 1861* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1861), <http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep61/reference/history.annrep61.i0005.pdf>, 47.

²⁹ Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, 73.

³⁰ Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, 73.

³¹ "Mary Grayson," Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 13, Oklahoma, Adams-Young. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn130/>. (Accessed February 15, 2018.)

same means.³² The eventual withdrawal of troops from Indian Territory and the Deep South, during the 1870s, encouraged Confederate sympathizers—both Indian and White—to keep former slaves of Whites and the Five Tribes in their place. This period, known as Reconstruction, tested the identity for both Native and African American freedmen as they utilized both flight and Indian law to exercise their newfound freedom as tribal citizens (for Native American freedmen) and as American citizens (for African American freedmen).

RECONSTRUCTION IN INDIAN TERRITORY & THE 1866 TREATIES, 1866-1870

The Treaties of 1866 restructured Indian Territory socially and politically. These agreements, made to make peace with the Five Tribes following the Civil War, required each tribe to adopt their former slaves as tribal members, providing equal rights and privileges, and land cessions to the federal government.³³ Land cessions from the 1866 treaties made an unorganized area located in the heart of present-day Oklahoma known as the **Unassigned Lands**; it became a destination for Blacks and Whites looking for cheap available land and, for Blacks, a refuge from racial violence during the 1880s.³⁴

Early Black migrants to Indian Territory based their right to settle on the “freedmen” clauses contained within four separate treaties the federal government made with the Five Tribes. The vague use of the term “freedmen” in the Treaties of

³² William Steele, Allan Ashcraft, ed., “A Civil War Letter of General William Steele, CSA” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 22 (1963): 280.

³³ Edward Everett Dale and Gene Aldrich, *History of Oklahoma* (Edmond: Thompson Book and Supply CO., 1969), 187-7.

³⁴ Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs Laws and Treaties Vol. I* (Washington D.C: G.P.O., 1904), 940. Oklahoma State University Electronic Publishing Center. <https://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/28108/rec/2>; Dale and Aldrich, *History of Oklahoma*, 184.

1866 led to a national debate regarding which group of freedmen had the right to settle in the area. Therefore, the Treaties of 1866 warped Black identity and definitions of “freedmen.”³⁵ The treaties abolished slavery within four of the Five Tribes—the Cherokees abolished slavery earlier in 1863. However, the treaties did not delineate between African American freedmen who were legally American citizens by 1868 and Native American freedmen who were not American citizens, but rather, members of their sovereign Native America nation. The 1866 Treaties uses vague terms to describe freedmen. Such terms include, but are not limited to, “persons of African descent,” “free people of color,” and “freedmen” are used interchangeably.³⁶ The conflation of both groups of freedmen would eventually spark interest from African American freedmen throughout the Deep South. But, while the government generally viewed Seminole, Creek, and Cherokee Freedmen relations with ease, they pondered the issue of violence against freedmen within the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations decades following the 1866 Treaties.³⁷

The Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations did not immediately give equal rights as tribal citizens to their former slaves. An 1866 government commission proclaimed that Choctaw and Chickasaw freedmen lacked rights, and “If they attempt to walk about the country [Indian Territory] they are shot down like dogs.”³⁸ Along with this fact and the plight of a freedwoman whipped nearly to death, the report concluded military

³⁵ Kappler, *Indian Affairs vol. 2* (Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1903), 911 & 933. <https://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/29743/rec/1>.

³⁶ Kappler, *Indian Affairs vol. 2*, 919. <https://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/29743/rec/1>.

³⁷ Kappler, *Indian Affairs vol. 2*, 911 & 933, <https://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/29743/rec/1>; *The Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory: the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole Nations* (Washington: United States Census Printing Office, 1894), 7 accessed February 1, 2016, https://books.google.com/books?id=OYETAAAAYAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

³⁸ John B. Sanborn to James Harlan, January 8, 1866, Report to the Secretary of Interior on condition of Affairs in Indian Territory, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the state of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869, National Archives M979 Roll 52.

occupation as the best solution.³⁹ With little progress on freedmen relations, an 1868 government report concluded that land should be set aside for the tribes' freedmen to settle.⁴⁰ However, similar instances of racial violence throughout the Deep South encouraged African American freedmen to migrate west.

BLACK MIGRATION WEST, 1870-1889

Blacks perceived Indian Territory and later Oklahoma as a promised land of sorts, but most westbound migrants did not travel to Indian Territory during the beginning of peak Black migration during the 1870s. Many went to Kansas, and later to Indian Territory with mixed results.⁴¹ By 1874 Indian Territory freedmen in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations were still without rights. The freedmen controversy remained a point of contention, which was a response to social changes following the legal emancipation of Native American slaves in 1866.⁴² Meanwhile, African American freedmen experienced extreme violence from Confederate sympathizers throughout rural Texas due to the state's lack of government oversight throughout the Reconstruction Era.

With freedom realized, Black Americans sought refuge from violence and institutional racism. African American freedmen understood their entitlement to United States citizenship. Black Texans, for example, expressed this sentiment through "**freedom colonies**"—unorganized rural settlements established by former slaves

³⁹ John B. Sanborn to James Harlan, January 8, 1866.

⁴⁰ Kappler, *Indian Affairs vol. 2*, 919; *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1869* (Washington: G.P.O, 1870), 399.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081679197&view=1up&seq=7>.

⁴¹ Sharon Holland & Tiya Miles, *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Duke University Press, 2008), 4-5.

⁴² Grinde & Taylor, "Red vs. Black," 212-213; Barbara Krauthammer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 11.

following the Civil War.⁴³ The Lonestar state was home to hundreds of freedom colonies between 1870 and 1890. Most failed to become organized towns. One motivation of this fact could be the distrust of local authority within the African American community due to racial profiling and disinterest from Texas authorities who aimed to maintain the racial status quo of Black subservience.⁴⁴ Texas freedmen found it difficult to acquire fertile land legally. In fact, southern Black landownership reached a little over one percent by 1870.⁴⁵

A number of factors made racial violence possible throughout the Deep South. Texas, for example comprised Confederate sympathizers or White supremacists throughout the region, and the state's size made it difficult for underfunded federal officials to patrol throughout its sparsely populated rural areas.⁴⁶ As a result of such danger, thousands of freedmen in rural Texas fled to more urban areas like San Antonio, Waco, and Austin. Nonetheless, most Black Texans remained in Texas' rural areas. This made two ways in which Texas Blacks settled: in urban cities like Houston or rural areas forming "freedom colonies."⁴⁷ Nonetheless, employment was as important as land to Black Texans. The inability to find steady work drove many to Kansas in 1875.⁴⁸ By 1879, this eventual mass movement of African Americans from Texas alarmed Whites throughout the state. Texas news articles warned of the effects mass Black migration would have on the state's agricultural sector largely composed of

⁴³ Thad Sitton & James Conrad, *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 1.

⁴⁴ Sitton & Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 3; Nell Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction*, (New York: W.W. Norton 1976), 83.

⁴⁵ Sitton & Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 2-3.

⁴⁶ James Smallwood, Barry Crouch, and Larry Peacock, *Murder and Mayhem: The War of Reconstruction in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 3. Michelle M. Mears, *And Grace Will Lead Me Home: African American Freedmen Communities of Austin, Texas, 1865-1928* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2009), 10-11.

⁴⁷ Mears *And Grace*, 11 & 65.

⁴⁸ George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: a Composite Autobiography* vol. 4 (Texas Narratives Parts 1 & 2) (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1973), 2; Mears, *And Grace*, 64.

African American farmers. Overall, an estimated 12,000 Black Texans made the journey to Kansas. Many migrated from the state's east-central counties. Meanwhile, some Black Texans traveled by railroad through Denison and Sherman, Texas, on route to Parsons, Kansas. While cash strapped migrants made the trek by wagon through parts of Arkansas and Indian Territory.⁴⁹

The first mass migration of African Americans, known as the **Exoduster Movement**, occurred in 1879.⁵⁰ Henry Adams, a former slave from Georgia, helped propel this mass migration. During Reconstruction, Adams assisted with improving the status of Black southerners. He traveled to racially violent Louisiana parishes, encouraging Black voting and support of the Republican Party throughout the 1870s.⁵¹ In a testimony to the senate on the so-called "negro exodus," Adams proclaimed his ambitions for a new political order predicated on the civil rights of African Americans and the right to vote without fear of White intimidation.⁵² Adams' first experience with Black migration schemes began with the Colonization Council—a group of former Black soldiers dedicated to the interest of African American migration to Africa or a United States territory. His organization petitioned the federal government to assist with southern African Americans, by supporting "colonization" to an area other than the South away from racial violence and political oppression.

1877 marked a pivotal year for the Colonization Council. It sent a petition to newly elected President Rutherford B. Hayes demanding federal aid for Liberian

⁴⁹ Peggy Hardman, "Exodus of 1879," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed November 09, 2015, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ume02>; *Denison Daily News*, December 1879, accessed November 9, 2015, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph327414/>; Painter, *Exodusters*, 200; Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 135.

⁵⁰ *Report and Testimony of the Select Committee of the United States Senate to Investigate the Causes of the Removal of the Negroes From the Southern States to the Northern States*, 46th Cong. 693, pt. 1 (1880), ix.

⁵¹ Painter, *Exodusters*, 84-5.

⁵² *Select Comm. to Investigate the Causes*, 46th Cong. 693, pt. 1 (1880), x. Painter, *Exodusters* 76.

emigration or a United States Territory unless the federal government had their “lost rights restored.”⁵³ Later that year, Adams wrote a letter to the American Colonization Society—a predominately White organization dedicated to the emigration of African Americans to Liberia—expressing interest in emigration assistance. However, Adams left Louisiana for New Orleans in 1878 due to a government subpoena to testify to Congress on Black voter suppression in Louisiana. Returning to Louisiana would have likely caused Adams harm from White supremacist groups.⁵⁴ Adams continued working with the Colonization Council and American Colonization Society on the cause of Liberian emigration throughout his time in New Orleans, but also advocated for Black southern migration to Kansas as an alternative for the brief time it gained national traction in 1879. However, Adams’ awareness of Kansas migration occurred because of the efforts of men like Benjamin “Pap” Singleton who dedicated his life to the cause of Black migration to Kansas.⁵⁵

Like Henry Adams, “Pap” Singleton was another well-known figure of the Exoduster movement.⁵⁶ Singleton, of Tennessee, saw Black migration as the best path for Black prosperity. While Adams primarily focused on Black voting and political participation, Singleton emphasized Black landownership—a status cash-strapped Black Tennesseans found hard to attain. As a result, Kansas attracted Singleton during his first visit to the state in 1873. Kansans, according to Singleton, would be friendly toward the plight of prospective poor Black migrants due to much cheaper land and a Republican legislature which generally supported Black migration and civil rights.⁵⁷ From 1874 to 1875, rumors regarding free transportation to Kansas fueled early Black migration to Kansas from Tennessee and Kentucky through fliers and newspapers.⁵⁸ Singleton, during this period, participated in a popular convention predicated on

⁵³ Painter, *Exodusters*, 88.

⁵⁴ Painter, *Exodusters*, 96-100.

⁵⁵ Painter, *Exodusters*, 107.

⁵⁶ Painter, *Exodusters*, 108-110.

⁵⁷ Painter, *Exodusters*, 113.

⁵⁸ Painter, *Exodusters*, 146-7.

popularizing the notion of Kansas migration to a large audience in Tennessee. Black leaders collected money from Black families in preparation for Kansas migration. They often traveled by rail and steamboat from Tennessee. Overall, 9,500 Black migrants from Kentucky and Tennessee made their way to Kansas. Singleton's Dunlap Colony, and the Kansas Black town of Nicodemus were important destinations for Black migrants able to afford the lengthy trip.

In 1878, Benjamin Singleton and others founded the Edgefield Real Estate and Homestead Association in Dunlap Colony, located in eastern Kansas. The organization sponsored meetings and festivals in an effort to encourage migration to the settlement. With its mass support from some of the hundreds and even thousands of attendees to these events, the association continued their work of Kansas migration throughout the 1880s. However, Singleton's Dunlap Colony, with its mostly unfertile land, lacked Nicodemus' popularity. The town of Nicodemus began with thirty migrants from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi in 1877.⁵⁹ The town made national headlines and hearsay in Black communities throughout the North and South, influencing eventual Oklahoma Black town founder, Edward McCabe. In 1878, McCabe traveled to Kansas from Chicago as a result of good press regarding Nicodemus' initial prosperity in its early years.⁶⁰ Meeting with a friend from Chicago—who had originally traveled to Kansas to join with Benjamin Singleton's settlement—heard about the Black town through a conversation prompting him and McCabe to travel and settle in Nicodemus in 1878. He made it in time to see the influx of fellow African Americans during the "exodus" of 1879 and begin his political career, becoming state auditor of Kansas in 1882—the highest state political office held by an African American during the period.

Overall the "exodus" of 1879 consisted of an estimated 6,000 African Americans from Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana.⁶¹ The trip to Kansas consisted of hardship for many as White southerners aimed to halt the Exoduster Movement. For White planters

⁵⁹ Norman Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 6-8.

⁶⁰ Painter, *Exodusters*, 153.

⁶¹ Painter, *Exodusters*, 184.

especially, losing thousands of Blacks would likely drain the labor source of cheap agricultural services poor African Americans provided throughout the region. Newspapers published propaganda from railroad companies dispelling rumors of free transportation for Black migrants as well as letters from Black Exodusters in Kansas concerning their poor economic conditions. Meanwhile, riverboats—an important source of transportation for many Exodusters—failed to stop for Black passengers along the Mississippi River.⁶² In fact, White southerners accosted Kansas-bound African Americans along river banks. Reports from Exodusters, found in this predicament, include violent encounters from Whites wanting to deter Black movement to Kansas.⁶³ Nonetheless, Benjamin Singleton's dedication to Black migration led to Kansas reaching a total of 40,000 African Americans by 1880—the second largest Black population of any western state or territory aside from Texas.⁶⁴ However, land openings in Indian Territory and economic difficulty in Kansas led some Black Americans to seek relief in Indian Territory.

Economic factors affected Black settlement in Texas and Kansas. It proved difficult for freedmen to obtain employment and land. Most Exodusters were unable to find steady work. Nonetheless, the Exodusters set a precedent for additional Black migration to the American West with large numbers of Kansas migrants leaving for Nebraska and Oklahoma throughout the 1880s. Exodusters, like Edward McCabe eventually gained interest in the Unassigned Lands in central Indian Territory. Meanwhile, Benjamin Singleton continued to move groups of African Americans to Kansas throughout the 1880s. McCabe, along with other ambitious Black migrants,

⁶² Painter, *Exodusters*, 195.

⁶³ Painter, *Exodusters*, 196-7.

⁶⁴ Martin Dann, "From Sodom to the Promised Land: E. P. McCabe and the Movement for Oklahoma Colonization," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 3 (1974), accessed November 4, 2014, <http://www.kshs.org/p/kansas-historical-quarterly-from-sodom-to-the-promised-land/13246>; Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 135.

joined to form settlements in the Unassigned Lands.⁶⁵ But, the controversy surrounding Native American freedmen became a tug-of-war in Indian Territory's Unassigned Lands in the midst of disillusionment from some Exodusters looking for a safe and prosperous space.⁶⁶

FREEDMEN CONTROVERSY AND FATE OF THE UNASSIGNED LANDS, 1880-1889

Settler interest in the Unassigned Lands began in 1880 with mixed results due to its checkered history. The Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations requested that their freedmen settle in the Unassigned Lands; however, government officials did not come to a decision regarding the matter. This confusion led to a period of attempts to settle on the Unassigned Lands by a variety of Black and White settler organizations.⁶⁷ The most prominent Black settler society during the 1880s was the Freedmen's Oklahoma Association formed by Hannibal C. Carter and James Milton Turner in 1881. Carter and Turner created the organization, "To unite in bonds of fraternity aid and protection of all acceptable colored persons of good character...by securing to them lands and homes in the unoccupied Territories of the United States."⁶⁸

While we know little about Hannibal Carter's background, James Milton Turner supported Black migration from the Deep South for much of the late nineteenth century. Originally focusing his efforts on Black education as the best form of Black progress and uplift in the 1870s, Turner founded the Colored Emigration Aid Association to provide relief for Exodusters later in the decade, which soon introduced him to Indian

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

⁶⁶ Painter, *Exodusters*, 258-61.

⁶⁷ Arthur Lincoln Tolson, "The Negro in Oklahoma Territory," 1.

⁶⁸ Tolson, "The Negro in Oklahoma Territory," 2. From Articles of Incorporation, No. 2076, Office of the Secretary of State of Illinois, Springfield, Illinois, 1-3.

Territory and the Unassigned Lands. The Freedmen's Oklahoma Association only lasted a few months due to the federal government ruling all settlement in the Unassigned Lands illegal. Disputes between the Cherokee Nation and their former slaves became a focal point for his desire to help the Black community as he continued efforts to develop a settlement of former slaves of the Five Tribes. In addition, Turner's belief in Black progress influenced his prejudice of Native Americans.⁶⁹ In a letter in 1883 to a Congressman, Turner questioned the possibility of the Native American community withstanding "civilization," compared to Blacks who "show a desire for the text books..."⁷⁰ Overall, Turner's rhetorical goal echoed African American uplift ideology of the period—a mode Black intellectual thought dedicated to self-help and insular community building.⁷¹

Uplift ideology focused on social and financial mobility of the Black community. Building a self-sufficient Black town or community during the nineteenth century was not only practical for the purpose of protection and financial stability. It was also a political statement because the general American populace throughout the country's history questioned African Americans' capacity to govern themselves. Nevertheless, the tenets of racial uplift ideology had its limitations. First, class distinctions consumed racial uplift ideology. Thought and faith leaders of the Black community attached the notion of "progress" and "civilization" to the better-off and educated upper crust of the Black community in an effort to downplay connotations of Black inferiority.⁷²

In addition, Black leaders, bound to the ethos of racial uplift ideology, sought the help of the White elite. Prominent Black leaders like Booker T. Washington embodied the ethos of Black uplift ideology, by embracing Black independence through hard work,

⁶⁹ Gary R. Kremer, *James Milton Turner and the Promise of America: the Public Life of a Post-Civil War Black Leader* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 131-33.

⁷⁰ Turner to James H. McLean, June 2, 1883. Quoted in Kremer, *James Milton Turner*, 133.

⁷¹ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 3. For more on the development of Black racial uplift during the 1880s see pages 34-6.

⁷² Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, xiv.

perseverance and Christian morality. Washington, for example, made connections with White businessmen and donors to fund projects for his school—the Tuskegee Institute—and Black towns like Mound Bayou in Mississippi throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Tuskegee Institute maintained a large apparatus of agents, publications, and forms of musical entertainment to woo northern White philanthropists to support the “advancement of the Black race.”⁷³ Meanwhile, Charles Banks, a prominent leader of the Black town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, maintained a good relationship with Washington and his Tuskegee Institute which enabled Banks to network with wealthy philanthropists to invest in his town.

By 1880, Turner and other African Americans perceived the Unassigned Lands as an opportunity for African American social progress. They aimed for middle class Blacks who symbolized the ethos of Black self-help.⁷⁴ It caught the attention of news publications and the federal government thereafter. The Freedmen’s Oklahoma Association sent agents to southern states for recruits. They promised hopeful migrants 160 acres of land in Oklahoma based on the 1866 treaties.⁷⁵ However, a government official, in 1882, deemed the intrusion of African American freedmen as taking advantage of Native American tribes. That same official also said that the attempt to settle Black Americans in the Unassigned Lands would only “subject them [African Americans] to disappointment, hardship, and suffering.”⁷⁶ This, however, was the precursor to something larger.

⁷³ Henry S. Enck, “Tuskegee Institute and Northern White Philanthropy: A Case Study in Fundraising, 1900-1915” *The Journal of Negro History* 65 (1980): 337-38.

⁷⁴ Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 4.

⁷⁵ Tolson, “The Negro in Oklahoma Territory,” 2-3. From the *Missouri Republican*, April 23, 1881. For statistics of Negro population in Oklahoma following 1889 Land Run see page 21. Tolson writes, “...there were approximately 1,643 colored men and 1,365 colored women who had settled in the area within a year following the Run of 1889.”

⁷⁶ “Occupation by Settlers of Portion of Indian Territory”, in *The Executive Documents of the Senate of the United States for the First Session, Forty-Seventh Congress, 1881-82* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882,) 2 & 4, accessed May 25, 2015, <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=yBw2AQAAIAAJ&rdid=book-yBw2AQAAIAAJ&rdot=1>.

OKLAHOMA'S BLACK TOWNS, 1890-1910

The Unassigned Lands became an unorganized territory known as Oklahoma Territory which was located in western present-day Oklahoma from 1890 to 1907. Businessmen founded several Black towns throughout Indian and Oklahoma Territory during this period, which became known as the **All-Black Town Movement**.⁷⁷ With his Exoduster background, Edward McCabe garnered national attention, because he aimed to make Oklahoma Territory an all-Black state. To complete this task, he promoted his towns to suffering Black southern migrants. However, the failure of railroad acquisition dampened chances for Black towns to diversify their economy beyond agriculture.⁷⁸

African American migrants to Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory faced environmental and social challenges. For example, the *New York Times* reported crop failures during the movement's first year in 1890.⁷⁹ The Exoduster Movement came and went. Black southern farmers looked for other means of social and economic freedom. An increase in cotton production costs, following the Civil War, affected Black farmers attempting to make a decent living from cash cropping.⁸⁰ Edward McCabe sought to meet the needs of Black migrants in his town of Langston but failed.

McCabe moved from Kansas to Oklahoma Territory in early 1890 following unsuccessful bids for a third term as Kansas state auditor and for register of Kansas' treasury. And with the help of Charles Robbins, a White land speculator, and William Eagleson, a prominent Black Kansan founded Langston City in central present-day Oklahoma. Owning most of the town's vacant land lots, McCabe published the *Langston City Herald*, to promote migration from southern states like Texas, Arkansas, and

⁷⁷ "The All Black Towns in Oklahoma," last modified December 31, 2004, <http://www.hannibalbjohnson.com/the-all-Black-towns-in-oklahoma/>.

⁷⁸ Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 32 & 60-3.

⁷⁹ "Affairs at Oklahoma." *New York Times*, Jul 02, 1890, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/94817883?accountid=12964>.

⁸⁰ Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 7, 5, & 42.

Louisiana.⁸¹ The town made national headlines during its early years.⁸² However, Langston migrants suffered from poverty due to the region's droughty conditions during the 1890s. Several news publications of the day reported that Langston's hungry inhabitants lived in tents, and feared a race war in Oklahoma Territory.⁸³ McCabe's inflated population of Blacks in the area aroused racial tensions. *The New York Times*, for example, warned of an assassination attempt on McCabe if he were to be appointed governor of Oklahoma Territory.⁸⁴ A year later, in 1891, McCabe claimed to have 100,000 Blacks coming to Langston in two years.⁸⁵ While African Americans never achieved over ten percent of the territory's population in the decade, McCabe attempted to expand his influence by founding the town of Liberty in 1893.⁸⁶

McCabe's failure to obtain a railroad depots for his towns stunted their growth.⁸⁷ Later Black towns of the twentieth century that followed added to the All Black Town Movement's failures. They were shells of McCabe's political ambition. With issues surrounding Langston and other Black towns in Oklahoma, McCabe's political influence culminated in the development of the Colored Agricultural and Normal University in 1897—known today as Langston University. McCabe encouraged the Territorial Governor of Oklahoma Territory to establish a school for African Americans.⁸⁸ Langston University exuded tenets of Booker T. Washington's Black uplift ideology, but the school's first president, Inman E. Page attempted to introduce a balanced curriculum

⁸¹ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 144-46.

⁸² "To Make a Negro State: Westernizing Black Men in Oklahoma," *New York Times*, February 28, 1890, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archivefree/pdf?res=9E05E5DE153BE533A2575BC2A9649C94619ED7CF>.

⁸³ Crockett, *Black Towns*, 22.

⁸⁴ "To Make a Negro State," *New York Times*, February 28, 1890.

⁸⁵ "Oklahoma for the Blacks," *New York Times*, October 1891, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/94836820?accountid=12964>.

⁸⁶ Crockett, *Black Towns*, 26.

⁸⁷ Crockett, *Black Towns*, 25; Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 112-14.

⁸⁸ Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope: a History of Blacks in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 28-9.

with liberal arts along with industrial education—agriculture, carpentry, etc.⁸⁹ For Black conservative leaders like Washington, industrial education had practical purposes for the majority of Black Americans in the rural South compared to what Washington characterized as “abstract knowledge”—history, language, and literature. Writing on the importance of industrial education in 1903, Washington argued “by the side of industrial training should always go mental and moral training, but the pushing of mere abstract knowledge into the head means little.”⁹⁰ Nonetheless, Langston University experienced turmoil through much of the late nineteenth and twentieth century regarding the school’s academic focus: Industrial education or liberal arts education; perhaps, a reflection of the struggles many Langston inhabitants faced, which some Black leaders perceived as advantageous to their personal ambitions.⁹¹

Some twentieth century Black towns remain like Red Bird, which incorporated in 1904. It began as a settlement within the Creek Territory, and used Indian Territory’s Native heritage to contrast its progress and ambition with White townships. Testimonies from Red Bird’s inhabitants displayed strong connections to Blackness. Speaking on Red Bird’s social conditions, the wife of a Red Bird businessman wrote on the destruction of “the painted Indian on the war path, and the desperado, which has made way for civilization.”⁹² Later towns, like Boley, took a more militant stance. A prominent citizen of Boley told a reporter, in 1905, the town welcomed people of other races to visit the town although they have a sign that said “White man, read and run.”⁹³ Even if true, the town struggled to take advantage of its militant attitude. Approximately 1000 people

⁸⁹ Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope*, 68.

⁹⁰ Booker T. Washington, “Industrial Education for the Negro,” 1903, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/industrial-education-for-the-negro/>.

⁹¹ Zella J. Black Patterson, *Langston University: a History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1979), 26-39 & 265.

⁹² Red Bird Investment Company, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Ok, accessed May 3, 2015, <http://digitalprairie.ok.gov/cdm/ref/collection/culture/id/103>, 5.

⁹³ “The Town of Boley: a Community of Colored People” *Boley Progress* June 1905.

lived there by 1907—the same year of Oklahoma statehood.⁹⁴ Most Oklahoman Black towns failed to achieve substantial populations. Reasons varied but racism and a low number of migrants played a large role. Oklahoma's Democrat-dominated state legislature enacted racist policies which discouraged the Black vote and enforced segregation.⁹⁵ The Black population in the American West remained at two percent until World War II. Some towns likely dissolved and settled around more thriving ones to maintain some autonomy and social freedom.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, the twentieth century, a time of social and industrial change, encouraged other migrants to find new paths of opportunity as Black settlers experienced crop failures and falling prices for cash crops and produce.⁹⁷

THE LEGACY OF BLACK TOWNS AND “BLACK WALL STREET”

The development of Tulsa's Greenwood district reflects not only the more industrial and mechanized path of the country at the turn of the century, but also the legacy of self-sufficiency marked by men like Edward McCabe and James Milton Turner during the All Black Town Movement. Rather than rely on agriculture to earn a decent living, some Blacks thrived on a service economy sparked by the discovery of oil surrounding Tulsa. The connection of Greenwood to other sectors of Tulsa's economy provided Greenwood with prominence and stability. This, in fact, gave Greenwood an incredible amount of African American prosperity compared to Black towns that emerged decades before.

⁹⁴ *Population of Oklahoma and Indian Territory*, 32; Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 73-75.

⁹⁵ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 151.

⁹⁶ Booker T. Washington, “Boley: A Negro Town in the American West,” 1908, accessed November 24, 2015, http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/archive/resources/documents/ch19_05.htm.

⁹⁷ Melissa Stuckey, “All Men Up: Race, Rights, and Power in the All-Black Town of Boley, Oklahoma, 1903-1939” (PhD diss. Yale University, 2009), 34-6; Sarah Deutsch “Being American in Boley,” 117; Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 151.

The model of many Oklahoma Black towns contained irony. While towns, like Langston, sold a dream of economic independence and removal of White influence and racism, they needed amenities like railroad depots to make their towns more attractive and to bring product like timber and crops to market. Railroad companies—controlled by White businessmen—often did not have interest in placing depots in Black towns. During this period, railroad companies promoted the scenic pleasures of using railway transit for travelers on their way to popular destinations. This notion, of course, did not include traveling through predominately Black towns in a country with emerging Jim Crow laws supporting segregation and banning miscegenation. All in all, the scenic elements of railroad boosterism coincided with the confinement of Native Americans on reservations, which opened up additional space for tracks and paths for riders' viewing pleasure. Some Black towns like Boley managed to acquire a railroad depot. However, White businessmen co-founded the town as an experiment surrounding the debates on the capability of Blacks to govern themselves. Indeed, the growth of Tulsa, Oklahoma emerged from the sprawl of urbanization during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the American West.⁹⁸

Tulsa incorporated in 1898. Originally a small city, its population exploded from 1,300 people in 1900 to 90,000 in the 1920s. The discovery of oil fueled Tulsa's population explosion as African American newcomers to the area soon developed the Greenwood District—popularly dubbed "Black Wallstreet"—to service a variety of needs for Tulsa's White majority. Greenwood also met the needs of a "Black" downtown, due to the culture of segregation existing since the town's founding. Greenwood consisted of a variety of shops, churches, and a hospital to service the ill of Tulsa's Black community. However, racial animosity and business interests caused the violent destruction of Tulsa's "Black Wallstreet" during the **Tulsa Race Riot** of 1921.⁹⁹ Tulsa's

⁹⁸ Carl Abbott, *How Cities Won the West: Four Centuries of Urban Change in Western North America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 164-5.

⁹⁹ Carl Abbott, *How Cities Won the West*, 196-7.

racial landscape reflected what a noted scholar described as “not one city, but two.”¹⁰⁰ The city shared a demography similar to the rest of Oklahoma in that most Black Tulsans hailed from the Deep South. Black Tulsa grew alongside the town’s White community. However, the Greenwood District developed years after Tulsa’s founding in 1905. Founded in Tulsa’s northeast section by a group of Blacks who purchased the strip, Greenwood boasted several Black-owned businesses by Oklahoma statehood in 1907. Overall, Greenwood’s businesses flourished until May of 1921. By that time, several Black establishments thrived in Greenwood: restaurants, theatres, and offices of Black lawyers and doctors.¹⁰¹

The Tulsa Race Riot occurred between May 31 and June 1, and involved an interaction between a White and Black teenager. Sarah Page—a White elevator operator in the Drexel building located in downtown Tulsa—accused Dick Rowland, a Black shoe shiner, of assaulting her in the Drexel building’s elevator. Once word spread throughout the town of the accusation—through an initial headline regarding the incident in a local newspaper—a mob of angry and armed White residents marched to the downtown jail. However, Black Greenwood residents met the angry protesters with guns in an effort to protect Rowland from lynching without due process.¹⁰²

The Tulsa Race Riot culminated from several elements in Tulsa and throughout the United States at-large. First, crime mired Tulsa; the city had corrupt law enforcement. In fact, a similar event happened a year earlier in May of 1920 when a White mob lynched a White teenager accused of murder. Second, the Tulsa Race Riot was one of the several violent race riots throughout the early twentieth century which took place in Charleston, South Carolina, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Illinois, Knoxville,

¹⁰⁰ Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 14.

¹⁰¹ Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land*, 14-16.

¹⁰² Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land*, 45-70.

Tennessee, and Omaha, Nebraska.¹⁰³ Third, White Tulsans carried a local racial animosity for the Greenwood district due to its good location for business opportunities. In fact, the mayor of Tulsa during the time of the race riot proclaimed that “a large portion of this [Greenwood] district is well suited for industrial purposes rather than residences.”¹⁰⁴

The Tulsa Race Riot was, arguably, the worst race riot in American history. An estimated 300 Tulsans died during the incident. It culminated in the destruction of 1,256 buildings—churches, businesses, etc.—throughout the Greenwood District.¹⁰⁵ Tulsan officials had much to do with Greenwood’s destruction. Police officials sought the help of 500 White Tulsans to subdue Black outrage over Dick Roland’s imprisonment. Testifying on the race incident, the Tulsa police department instructed, Laurel Buck, a White Tulsan to “get a gun, and get busy and try to get a nigger.”¹⁰⁶

Indeed, the Tulsa Race Riot reflected the unease of race in Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While African Americans, during Reconstruction, looked to present-day Oklahoma as a beacon of hope due to its status as an unorganized territory and not a state prior to 1907, the influx of White settlers and induction of Oklahoma as a state participated in the destruction of Black wealth and community in Tulsa. The race riot’s devastation lingers in North Tulsa where Greenwood once stood. As one writer eerily put it: “The scars of

¹⁰³ James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: America’s Worst Race Riot and its Legacy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 58; Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land*, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Carl Abbott, *How Cities Won the West: Four Centuries of Urban Change in Western North America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 197.

¹⁰⁵ *Tulsa Race Riot: a Report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (2001): <https://www.okhistory.org/research/forms/freport.pdf>, 12-3; James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: America’s Worst Race Riot and its Legacy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 6-7.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in *Tulsa Race Riot: a Report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (2001): <https://www.okhistory.org/research/forms/freport.pdf>, 159.

the riot were still visible in abandoned concrete driveways and ghostly sidewalks, the exposed foundations of long-gone houses and large expanses of empty space.”¹⁰⁷

CONCLUSION

Lucinda Davis and A.G. Belton struggled finding their place in America. They had different backgrounds and challenged the racialized vision of American society due to their identifying with social groups beyond the interests of the American social system during the late nineteenth century. They both refused a “Black” identity. Instead, Davis attached her Blackness to her Creek Indian heritage; Belton expanded his Black identity to include his African ancestry. Yet, when we think of Reconstruction Era America, the plight of African Americans in the Deep South drives the historical narrative. However, Oklahoma tells a more complicated story concerning freedom and identity. Oklahoma represented the hopes and dreams for some African Americans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Black leaders like Edward McCabe perceived Oklahoma as a space for Black protection from White resentment. Meanwhile, Black Indians sought government intervention to gain full membership into their respective tribes. For other African Americans, freedom during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century meant economic independence and full citizenship through land acquisition—a common American ideal held by White settlers dating back to the Colonial United States. For Black Indians of the Five Tribes, however, freedom meant the maintenance of their land and identity.

The Five Tribes attached sovereignty to their land, because it represented freedom from paternal government officials wanting to open lands in the West for settlement, by White Americans (with African American settlers often an afterthought). The dual identity of Blackness and Indianness for former slaves of the Five Tribes placed them in an ambiguous position between freedom and second-class citizenship.

¹⁰⁷ James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: America’s Worst Race Riot and its Legacy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 321.

The Black identity of African Creeks, Seminoles, Chickasaws, Cherokees and Choctaws marked these Black Indians as second class citizens within their respective nations in certain cases with regard to tribal land and political participation. Additionally, the plight of Indian sovereignty also impacted their Indian identity as they closely associated with the culture of their American Indian Nation. Of course, the plight of Black Native Americans in Indian Territory was lost among the African American community—many of whom desperate for a better life and to demonstrate a mode of Black progress following slavery and lack of opportunity as second-class citizens. Nevertheless, some instances of a common Black identity existed between some groups of Black Indians and African Americans in Indian Territory.

In 1898, a group of freedmen formed the Inter-national Afro-American League in an effort to protect the interests of African Americans. The organization, made up of Black Indians from the Five Tribes, fought against political currents during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: African American encroachment on tribal lands, lack of rights in their respective nations—particularly with the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, and the loss of the Five Tribes' sovereignty. Meanwhile, other Black Indians expressed interest in emigration to Liberia in the midst of Indian Territory's political turmoil during the late nineteenth century.¹⁰⁸ Accounts of Liberian emigration continued throughout this period as some leaders of the Five Tribes expressed interest in moving to Mexico to maintain their status as sovereign nations. While some Black Indians and African Americans found common ground in their quest for a place to call their own, Black towns like Boley—founded in 1903 in the Creek portion of eastern Indian Territory—often distanced itself from its Black, yet Indian counterparts.

Booker T. Washington, a famed African American leader of the time, wrote about Boley in 1908. He used the town as an example of Black progress and compared its Black

¹⁰⁸ David A.Y.O. Chang, "Where Will the Nation Be at Home?: Race, Nationalism, and Emigration Movements in the Creek Nation" in Tiya Miles and Sharon P. Holland, eds., *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 80-1.

settlers to earlier settlers of the 1870s. Washington argued that nineteenth century migrants were not industrious enough to thrive compared to twentieth century Black settlers. Towns like Boley, according to Washington, instilled morality and industriousness in its citizenry. However, he held complicated ideas regarding the dual identity of Indian Territory's Black Indian population; on the subject Washington proclaimed "There are still, I am told, among the 'natives' some negroes who cannot speak the English language, and who have been so thoroughly bred in the customs of the Indians that they have remained among the hills with the tribes by whom they were adopted."¹⁰⁹ Clearly, Washington demonstrated his skewed and commonly-helped perception regarding Indians who have "gone back"—or receded in the face of White settlement. Washington also expressed a notion of unity between Black Indians and the southern African American migrants he championed throughout his career when he wrote that Black Indians "do not shun the White man and his civilization, but, on the contrary, rather seek it, and enter, with the Negro immigrants, into competition with the White man for its benefits."¹¹⁰

Washington visited places other than Boley. In 1905, he gave a speech in Muskogee a prominent town located in Creek Territory—present-day eastern Oklahoma. Surprised with the mixed crowd of the 7000 attendees who were Black, White, and red, Washington gave a rousing speech to his attentive crowd on the issue of industrial education for African Americans.¹¹¹ Washington did not mention anything regarding the Territory's Indian or Black Indian populace whatsoever, which would have likely troubled some of his Indian audience. His speech reflected his desire for a "true" and

¹⁰⁹ Booker T. Washington, "Boley: a Negro Town in the American West," *The Outlook* (1908):
https://www.wnorton.com/college/history/archive/reader/trial/directory/1890_1914/04_ch19_05.htm.

¹¹⁰ Booker T. Washington, "Boley: a Negro Town in the American West," *The Outlook* (1908):
https://www.wnorton.com/college/history/archive/reader/trial/directory/1890_1914/04_ch19_05.htm.

¹¹¹ *The Muskogee Cimeter*, November 23, 1905,

"red" Indian, which for him disappeared in the throes of White (and Black) civilization. Booker T. Washington complained about this matter in his article on his visit to Boley writing: "when I inquired, as I frequently did, for the 'natives' it almost invariably happened that I was introduced, not to an Indian, but a Negro....I was introduced later to one or two other 'natives' who were not Negroes, but neither were they, as far as my observation went, Indians. They were, on the contrary, White men."¹¹²

Black Texans were the main source of citizens for Oklahoma's Black towns. Thousands were desperate to find refuge from Post-Civil War violence. This came at the expense of Native American freedmen who had a similar, but different plight. Many Native freedmen did not identify as African American. They were Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole. The migration of Texas freedmen fanned racial flames between Native freedmen and the Five Tribes. Consequently, relations between both groups of freedmen worsened during the twentieth century. A Creek freedmen, commenting on relations between both groups said that "it was those state niggers from Texas that spoiled it for us..."¹¹³ All in all, Oklahoma and the West in general did not become the promised land as many African Americans had hoped. African Americans like A.G. Belton found it difficult to prosper. Some stayed in Oklahoma. Others moved to northeastern cities. Lucinda Davis likely struggled navigating her freedom and identity being both Black and Creek. But, she settled in Tulsa, Oklahoma, located in the vicinity where she saw bloodshed over the debates concerning not only the freedom of African Americans, but also Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Seminoles slaves.

Lucinda Davis lived through several occurrences in Indian Territory and later: the Civil War of the 1860s, Reconstruction of the 1870s, the All Black Town Movement of the 1890s, Oklahoma Statehood in 1907, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. And while

¹¹² Gary Zellar, *African Creeks: Estelveste and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 243; *The Booker T. Washington Papers vol. 9: 1906-1908* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 431; David A.Y.O. Chang, "Where Will the Nation Be at Home?," 90-1.

¹¹³ Sameth, "Creek Negroes," 56.

her 1937 interview fails to mention the majority of these occurrences, she may have disagreed with African American settlement and the All Black Town Movement thereafter. Because, it is clear that she was fond of the so-called “Old Creek Way” instilled in her from an early age and aimed to maintain those connections. She may have yearned for the return of a fluid social order dominated by Native American sovereignty and ambiguous roles of Black Creeks within the Creek community. However, Davis’ understanding of racial classification with regard to her master naming his slaves “Istilutsi”—meaning “Black man” may have complicated her views on Blackness and therefore cause her to sense some allegiance to her African American counterparts.

Nevertheless, the plight of Black Tulsa—where she lived in her final years—would have had some kind of influence on her own perception of Black treatment in the United States. It is also possible Davis experienced some of the Tulsa Race Riot’s after effects as she, and many like her, maintained both Black and Indian identities in a city shrouded in institutionalized racial violence. In this sense, the confusion regarding the definition of “freedmen” also reflected the meaning of Blackness by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. And as Davis saw the erosion of the “Old Creek Way” in her later years during the early twentieth century due to “ill mannered” children, a summation of the “Creek Negro” appeared in a 1908 edition of the *Oklahoma City Times*. The scathing article concluded that the “Creek Negro” was “the most dangerous man on the American continent today...a combination of aboriginal cruelty and ferocity [that] can be found nowhere on earth except in the new state of Oklahoma.”¹¹⁴ A year prior to the article’s publication, the development of Oklahoma’s constitution declared that “colored” and “negro” applied to people of African descent, whereas “White” or

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Gary Zellar, *African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 257.

“White race” applied to Whites and Indians.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, the existence of thousands of Black Indians like Davis sharing their stories represents the fluid nature of race in Oklahoma’s territorial past. These elements of Blackness and Indianness not only colored Davis’ views of her Black and Indian heritage and views of Creek chattel slavery; it also complicated the notion of freedom for a Black Indian like Lucinda Davis. She existed between the gray areas of several identities: Black, Indian, and, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a “second-class” American citizen.

Discussion Questions

1. How did Black identity vary in Indian Territory and the United States before and after the Civil War?
2. What are differences and similarities between the plight of Native and African American freedmen during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century?
3. Relations between African Americans and Native Americans are complex. How does Native law reflect these relations?
4. Overall, a small amount of African Americans went West. However, did motives to migrate and settle in the West differ within the Black community?

¹¹⁵ David A. Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 161.

Writing Prompt

Freedom and Identity are complex; within the context of the American West, identify how African American and Native American freedmen perceived freedom in different ways. Black migration during the nineteenth century had a variety of elements which often contradicted one another. Explain the aims of some Black leaders of the period and the issues migrants faced on the ground in transit and following reaching their destinations. Using threads of Lucinda Davis' and A.G. Belton's story, identify how they represent the plight of African American freedmen and Native American freedmen during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.