

## THE POPULAR IDEOLOGY OF SEGREGATED SCHOOLING: ATTITUDES TOWARD THE EDUCATION OF BLACKS IN KANSAS, 1854-1900

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A NUMBER of recent books, monographs, and essays have explored the educational aspirations and experiences of black Americans. The vast majority of these studies focus on the education of blacks in either the northern urban areas or the South.<sup>1</sup> They have suggested that the extent to which black Americans could exercise their faith in schooling was to a significant extent determined by the attitudes of the white majority.

But what of the educational experience of blacks in other regions of the country? This

essay explores the grass-roots attitudes toward the schooling of black Americans in Kansas, a Great Plains state which throughout the 19th century prided itself as a political entity dedicated to the principles of freedom and justice.

The "race problem" and its inevitable manifestation in the educational enterprise was rather insignificant in areas where the number

Title-page photo: Rev. Charles M. Sheldon opened a kindergarten for black children in Topeka's "Tennessee Town" in 1893. The school, free library, and reading room were located in Union Hall as part of the Congregational church's mission efforts in the neighborhood. Most Kansans were satisfied with such privately financed charity or evening schools for what few blacks there were in the state in the early 1890's. But with the increase in the black population between the mid-1860's and early 1880's, there was a growing popular concern about race, particularly as it was focused in the public schools.

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1. Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South From 1619 to the Present* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1967); Roger A. Fischer, *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana, 1862-77* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1974); Vincent P. Franklin, "The Education of Minorities in Cities in the United States: Toward A Comparative Historical Perspective," paper presented at the History of Education Society meeting, October 16, 1977, Toronto, Canada; Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1958); Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 113-152; Stanley K. Schultz, *The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools, 1789-1860* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 157-206; Selwyn K. Troen, *The Public and the Schools: Shaping the St. Louis System, 1838-1920* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1975), pp. 79-98; David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 109-125; William Preston Vaughn, *Schools For All: The Blacks & Public Education in the South, 1865-1877* (Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 1974); Charles M. Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1975* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977).

of blacks was small. Such was the case in Kansas prior to the Civil War. Although there were blacks present in the territorial period, they were very few in number. In 1855 there were only 151 free blacks and 192 slaves. At the outbreak of intersectional strife free blacks numbered only 625 and there were two slaves.<sup>2</sup> The war, however, brought about a change in the size of the black community in the state. By the mid-1860's refugees from the South began to stream into Kansas, and in the 1870's immigration reached near flood proportions. Between 1860 and 1870 the state's black population jumped from 627 to 17,108. By 1880 the figure had grown to 43,107, and by 1890 to 49,710.<sup>3</sup>

Some type of schooling for black children was accepted as desirable by the vast majority of white Kansans throughout the 19th century. Only a handful of citizens voiced opposition to the idea of educating them. In the early 1860's most Kansans seemed satisfied with privately financed evening schools, freedmen's schools, or contraband schools as a means of educating what few blacks there were in the state. However, concomitant with the increase in the black population between the mid-1860's and the early 1880's was a growing popular concern with the problem of race, particularly as it was focused in the public schools. Charity schools simply could not bear the burden of the increasing number of black students. The public schools would have to assume the responsibility for educating them.

Together with religion in the schools, the most widely discussed issue in the history of education in 19th century Kansas was how blacks would benefit from the state's growing commitment to public education. As had been the case in other parts of the nation, educational opportunity for blacks in Kansas was determined by the convictions of the white majority. Despite the protestations of blacks and some whites, particularly in the 1870's, black children were usually assigned to separate and for the most part substandard educational facilities. In Kansas, a state characterized by the rhetoric of freedom and equality,

black students were seldom part of what historian David B. Tyack has called the "ideal of common learning under the common roof of the common school."<sup>4</sup> Though the belief that blacks should be educated in some fashion was widespread and the ideal of the common school advocated loudly, popular unwillingness to transcend racial distinctions limited black educational opportunities in Kansas. Race animus eventually contributed to black acceptance of segregated education, a circumstance which they naively hoped would be temporary.

Unlike some parts of the country, particularly in the South, Kansans gave scant attention to the question of whether or not blacks should be educated at all; most white Kansans believed they should receive some schooling.<sup>5</sup> The rationale for educating blacks was a familiar one. Viewing blacks as a potential hazard to the general welfare, some Kansans argued that schooling them would insure public safety. Others believed that education could elevate blacks to the dignity of manhood and mold them into good and useful citizens. In an editorial decrying "war on the Negro," William Blakely, editor of the *Smoky Hill and Republican Union*, emphasized this theme. "We want the School . . . thrown open to the Negro," he averred, "we want nothing forbidden him that will elevate him in the scale of humanity."<sup>6</sup> Writing to the Leavenworth *Conservative*, Lewis Overton also emphasized the need to "diffuse knowledge among the colored children" in order to lift them to a higher level of humanity.<sup>7</sup> In a letter to the *Wyandotte Gazette*, "C" offered a similar rationale for educating blacks. "We owe it to ourselves to give all aid and encouragement in our power to this work [education of black children]," he declared, "for in the proportion that blacks are enlightened will they become good and useful citizens."<sup>8</sup>

Arguments used frequently for compulsory schooling were also offered for the education

4. Tyack, *The One Best System*, p. 110.

5. Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (New York, Prentice-Hall, 1934), *passim*; Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South*, pp. 42-44, 74-76; R. Freeman Butts and Lawrence A. Cremin, *A History of Education in American Culture* (New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1953), pp. 358-360; Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*, pp. 3-44.

6. *Smoky Hill and Republican Union*, Junction City, May 2, 1863.

7. *Leavenworth Conservative*, July 22, 1863.

8. *Wyandotte Gazette*, January 23, April 2, 1864.

2. Robert W. Richmond, *Kansas: A Land of Contrasts* (Saint Charles, Mo., Forum Press, 1974), pp. 162-166; William Frank Zornow, *Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), pp. 186-187.

3. For a detailed, though somewhat flawed, description of black migration to Kansas, see Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).

questions. Now I would like to see harmony in our school, and in order to have peace and harmony and a good school, I am in favor of letting the negro step aside and the school go on as it commenced.

I do not like the idea of having a heavy school tax to pay, and be virtually deprived of the benefits of the school; neither do I feel disposed to send my children to school with negroes. I may have inherited this feeling by being born in Virginia and principally raised in Missouri; be that as it may, I did not inherit any exalted opinion of the institution of slavery, and I am truly glad that we are rid of it. But I think I have seen enough of negroes to know that I cannot nor will not treat them as my equal, and I know it is unsafe for any community to elevate them too high. I am in favor of treating them well, but not as well or better than our own race. If I differ in this respect with my neighbors, I do not consider it sufficient cause for personal hard feelings, or unneighborly or ungentlemanly conduct toward them.

There will have to be a different arrangement in our school, in order to get another District School fund if I am not mistaken. Thats all.

Respectfully,

G. M. SIMCOCK.

A letter to the editor in 1865 expressed the concern of many Kansas taxpayers about a "heavy school tax." G. M. Simcock, writing to the Council Grove Press, September 22, 1865, said he approved freeing the slaves but he objected to sending his children to the same school with black students. In 1867 the legislature affirmed the public attitude and committed the state to the doctrine of separate but equal education.

of blacks. An unschooled person was often perceived as a potential threat to the public welfare. If he would not attend school voluntarily, then the state had the right and duty to compel attendance for its own self-protection. Considering the pervasive racism of the era, it is not surprising that uneducated blacks, more so than any other group, were believed to be a possible hazard to public safety. It was, therefore, imperative that they be "socialized" through schooling of some sort. D. W. Wilder,

editor of the Leavenworth *Conservative*, stated succinctly this case for educating blacks: "A community cannot afford to allow any of its members to grow to maturity without education, and as a consequence, liable to fall into the vices and crimes which ignorance generates. It is a measure of self-preservation to see that they [blacks] have opportunities for instruction."

In a similar fashion, Champion Vaughn of the Leavenworth *Times* argued that if blacks were allowed to "grow up in ignorance," then they would fill the "stationhouses and jails."<sup>10</sup> George T. Anthony shared Vaughn's sentiment. "There can be no honest disagreement as to the right of colored children to the spelling book and school instruction. There is no reason to question the duty and necessity of educating every child in the State, regardless of color or condition," he told his readers. "Public safety and State power depend too directly upon educated masses to allow any portion of a people to grow up in ignorance."<sup>11</sup> Echoing Anthony, Milton Reynolds, editor of the education-conscious *Kansas State Journal*, Lawrence, maintained that "the freedmen must be educated . . . the safety of society demands this much. . . ."<sup>12</sup>

Although most Kansans accepted, in some cases grudgingly, the principle that blacks should be educated in order to "civilize" them, a few citizens rejected the belief that they should receive any instruction in schools. This antagonism toward the education of blacks in any setting was expressed in several ways. In one instance, a teacher in Oskaloosa who started a "colored school" was threatened with bodily injury.<sup>13</sup> Writing to the *Brown County Sentinel*, Hiawatha, an anonymous woman conveyed the same feeling in a more polite manner when she claimed that "it won't hurt them [blacks] if they never go to school."<sup>14</sup> At times this antagonism toward educating blacks was demonstrated in a violent fashion. For example, a correspondent from Pleasant Ridge, a community which failed to live up to its name, reported that "the school house in-

9. Leavenworth *Conservative*, February 7, 1863.

10. Leavenworth *Times*, December 6, 1863.

11. Leavenworth *Conservative*, May 3, 1868.

12. *Kansas State Journal*, Lawrence, October 22, 1868.

13. *Independent*, Oskaloosa, November 23, 1866.

14. *Brown County Sentinel*, Hiawatha, March 25, 1869.



tended for the colored is burned down. . . . Dislike for the 'darkies' continues."<sup>15</sup>

DESPITE these occasional outbursts of hostility, black Kansans, like their counterparts elsewhere, zealously sought education. As one historian has noted, ". . . no other group in the United States had a greater faith in the equalizing power of schooling or a clearer understanding of the democratic promise of public education than did black Americans."<sup>16</sup> This unquestioning faith in the power of education was evident when the first State Mass Convention of the Colored People held at Leavenworth in 1869 resolved that "all adults, as well as children, use all means in their power to secure an education."<sup>17</sup>

To many blacks in Kansas education was the basis for their hopes and dreams. Schooling was touted frequently as a prerequisite for participating in the American dream. "Let no man or woman stand and fold his or her arms and dream of life, liberty and enjoyment, without tendering a helping hand towards educating their race . . ." stated a correspondent to the *Colored Citizen*, one of the early black papers in the state.<sup>18</sup> Speaking to the colored state convention of 1880, H. C. Bruce also argued that if blacks were to enjoy the fruits of the American experience, such as freedom and prosperity, then they needed to stress the education of the race. "No race of people can prosper in this country or any country who do not cherish and foster education," he asserted, "and no uneducated people have ever prospered permanently."<sup>19</sup>

A number of blacks also believed that education was one of the most important means of dealing with racial prejudice. Through schooling some blacks in Kansas, as well as elsewhere, hoped to break down the barriers of discrimination.<sup>20</sup> As the Freedmen's Aid Association of Dunlap declared, "Education of the heart, mind, and hand will remove prejudice."<sup>21</sup> In a letter to the *American Citizen*, Fred Scott, a citizen of Osage City, proclaimed

this belief in the power of education to reduce discrimination. "Education is the mightiest weapon you can use to fight your way through," he told his fellow blacks. "Nothing will free the colored race from all disabilities and cause their general recognition on an equal with whites so fast as education. . . ." <sup>22</sup> S. A. Havey agreed with Scott's pronouncement. In a letter to the same newspaper, he wrote that "the breaking down of prejudice is the great end to be attained; money, education, and morality are the means by which this end must be accomplished."<sup>23</sup>

Whether the goal was economic improvement or the dissolution of racial prejudice, many black Kansans believed that education was one of the most important means of attaining it. Without adequate schooling they saw little hope for achieving full participation in the American experience. S. O. Clayton of the *Parsons Blade* summed up the faith blacks had in education when he proclaimed that "we must educate or we must perish."<sup>24</sup>

IN THE early 1860's the opportunities for exercising this faith were rather limited. Most blacks who received any formal instruction at all attended privately supported freedmen's schools, evening schools, or contraband schools. Due to the small number of blacks in the state at that time and what appeared to many Kansans to be their "degraded" condition, these schools seemed sufficient to most Kansans and the possibility of educating them in the public common schools was seldom mentioned.<sup>25</sup>

Charity schools such as those in Lawrence, Leavenworth, Osawatomie, Topeka, Wyandotte, and other eastern Kansas towns were praised universally as beneficial to all concerned. According to Hovey E. Lowman of the *Kansas State Journal*, the founding of an evening school for the "benefit of the colored people in this city" was an "excellent idea."<sup>26</sup> John Speer, editor of the *Lawrence Republican*, shared Lowman's sentiment and called the contraband school one of the "most praise-

15. Leavenworth Times, April 24, 1873.

16. Tyack, *The One Best System*, p. 110.

17. *Times and Conservative*, Leavenworth, January 28, 1869.

18. *Colored Citizen*, Topeka, October 4, 1879.

19. *Herald of Kansas*, Topeka, May 14, 1880.

20. Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 141-159.

21. *Kansas State Journal*, Topeka, February 16, 1882.

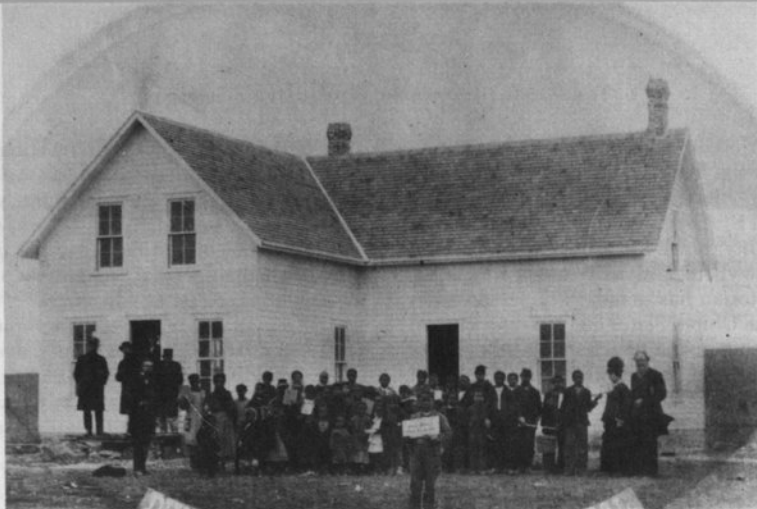
22. *American Citizen*, Topeka and Kansas City, June 28, 1889.

23. *Ibid.*, July 19, 1889.

24. *Parsons Blade*, August 25, 1893.

25. Although the first state legislature had provided for the establishment of separate schools for black children, most communities preferred to leave the education of blacks to charity schools.

26. *Kansas State Journal*, Lawrence, December 19, 1861.



About 300 black immigrants found homes in the Dunlap colony in Morris county in the late 1870's. Rev. John M. Snodgrass established a mission school there, and later the colony became the home of the Freedmen's Academy of Kansas. Kansas blacks saw education as a means for attaining economic improvement and the dissolution of racial prejudice. But there was general uneasiness with the concept of social equality of the races, and the weight of public sentiment in the state in the latter part of the 19th century supported separate schools for blacks.

worthy institutions" in the city.<sup>27</sup> Speaking of the contraband schools in Lawrence and Osawatomie, John Francis of the *Olathe Mirror* declared that "we doubt whether charity was ever more wisely bestowed than in these instances."<sup>28</sup> In a similar vein, D. W. Wilder of the widely circulated *Leavenworth Conservative* urged his readers to support the newly organized freedmen's school and defended the right of blacks to an education. "This movement is worthy of the encouragement and pecuniary aid of our citizens, and we believe it will receive it from all but traitors" he observed. "Education is the right of blacks as well as whites, and every effort they make in this direction should gain our most cordial co-operation."<sup>29</sup> R. B. Taylor of the *Wyandotte Gazette* also encouraged his readers to support the local school for black children, calling it a "step in the right direction."<sup>30</sup>

Charity schools for blacks may have been a step in the right direction, but with the influx of freedmen in the mid-1860's their facilities were simply overwhelmed. Since privately supported and staffed schools would no longer suffice, the public schools would have to

shoulder the burden. Amidst racial animosity which seemed to grow as the black population in the state increased, Kansans voiced their opinions on how blacks should benefit from the state's growing commitment to public education.<sup>31</sup>

Public discourse relative to the explosive issue of race and the schools in the latter half of the 1860's suggested that while most Kansans accepted the principle that blacks should receive some form of instruction, many citizens wanted no part of what was often called "mixed education." Separate educational facilities would have to be provided for black students. The only major dissent from this belief came from the Kansas State Teachers Association. Meeting at Lawrence in July, 1866, the KSTA upheld the common school ideal and resolved that "we, as teachers, use our best endeavors to overcome the unreasonable prejudice existing in certain localities against the admission of colored children upon equal terms with white children."<sup>32</sup>

Most Kansans, however, did not agree with the teachers' advocacy of admitting blacks and whites to the same school. Their distaste for integrated education, a practice which to many

27. Lawrence *Republican*, January 2, 1862.

28. Olathe *Mirror*, January 16, 1862.

29. Leavenworth *Conservative*, May 7, 1862.

30. Wyandotte *Gazette*, June 6, 1863.

31. Zornow, *Kansas*, p. 123.

32. *Kansas Educational Journal*, Grasshopper Falls and Topeka, August, 1866.

people implied the social equality of the races, was expressed in several ways. During a public school meeting in Olathe, the board of directors was advised to "have a separate school provided for the colored children should any apply for admittance into the free schools."<sup>33</sup> At Junction City, a community plagued with racial discord throughout most of the 19th century, citizens at a public meeting resolved that "we are in favor of educating the white children at a school separate from negroes and that any attempt . . . to compel our white children to associate with and become equals of negroes . . . will result disastrously to the interests of the school in this place. . . ."<sup>34</sup>

If a separate school for black scholars could not be afforded, other strategies were employed to avoid "mixing" the races. For example, in response to public pressure, the school board in Burlingame designated one school term for blacks, the next for whites, and so on.<sup>35</sup> Stretching the race issue to an even more absurd length, the residents of Seneca instructed the school board to provide a separate room and teacher for the only two black students in the district!<sup>36</sup> Such practices prompted Peter McVicar, state superintendent of public instruction, to observe that "in some localities a very great prejudice against the co-education of the races still exists."<sup>37</sup>

Occasionally citizens revealed their attitudes toward integrated schooling in letters to local newspapers. In a lengthy letter to the *Council Grove Press*, G. M. Simcock, the owner of the local dry goods store and flour mill, objected to the possibility of having to send his children to the same school with black students. Conveying the feelings of many Kansans on the subject, he wrote:

Now I would like to see harmony in our school . . . [but do not] feel disposed to send my children to school with negroes. I may have inherited this feeling by being born in Virginia and principally raised in Missouri; be that as it may, I did not inherit an exalted opinion of the institution of slavery, and am truly glad that we are rid of it. But I think I have seen enough of negroes to know that I cannot nor will treat them as my equal, and I know it unsafe for any community to elevate them too

high. I am in favor of treating them well, but not as well or better than our own race."<sup>38</sup>

Employing less temperate language, "Sylvan Retreat," a citizen of Vienna, inveighed against "race mixing" in the schools and "social equality" in a letter to the *Kansas Valley*. Claiming that whites had descended from a "superior race," he warned that any policy which might result in a nation of "mongrels" or "hybrids" was as "loathsome to God as to mankind."<sup>39</sup>

These beliefs which Kansans voiced in the latter part of the 1860's were reflected in a state law passed in 1867. According to the statute, school districts were responsible for the "education of white and colored children, separately or otherwise, securing to them equal educational advantages." With the passage of this law the state legislature reaffirmed earlier commitments to the doctrine of separate but equal education.<sup>40</sup>

ALTHOUGH this doctrine had been practiced in most parts of the state prior to 1869 without substantial dissent, a significant minority of Kansans protested the practice in the 1870's. As is the case with most reform movements, reasons for the protest were varied. While some Kansans objected to separate schools on moral grounds, others based their complaints on economic considerations.

In an effort to eradicate separate schools for black children, a number of Kansans questioned the morality of the practice. They pointed out that racial prejudice was inimical to the American way and the common school ideal. L. B. Kellogg, editor of the *Kansas Educational Journal*, argued against what he termed "the last relic of the senseless prejudice against color which has disgraced the American people. Kansas has already taken the advanced position that colored children are entitled to as good educational advantages as white children," he maintained. "Let the State now say that they shall have the same educational advantages; that they shall be educated

33. Olathe *Mirror*, August 3, 1865.

34. Junction City *Union*, January 20, 1866.

35. *Osage Chronicle*, Burlingame, November 3, 1866.

36. *Leavenworth Conservative*, April 21, 1867.

37. *Times and Conservative*, Leavenworth, March 21, 1869.

38. *Council Grove Press*, September 22, 1865.

39. *Kansas Valley*, Wamego, December 9, 1869.

40. *Leavenworth Conservative*, June 7, 1868; *The Laws of Kansas . . . 1867* (Leavenworth, 1867), p. 207. After the first state legislature provided for separate schools for blacks, subsequent legislatures limited the power to establish separate schools to first-class cities. In 1868, however, the legislature extended this power to second-class cities.—Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 371.



in the same school. . . . Let the public schools be public. . . ." <sup>41</sup>

Following the same line of argument as Kellogg, John A. Martin of the Atchison *Champion* asserted that separate schools were not equal schools and recommended that the schools should be truly common to all. "There is no just reason why the colored children should be compelled to attend separate schools. . . . Give the colored children equal school privileges with the whites, and a fair and equal chance in the battle of life," he told his readers. "Let the separate schools be abolished, and let us have one system, one school, for all children of the great human brotherhood." <sup>42</sup>

Jacob Winter, a state senator from Leavenworth, agreed that separate schools did not provide equal educational opportunity. Speaking in favor of the 1874 civil rights bill, a nearly unanimously supported statute which removed the word "white" from all Kansas laws but had little impact on educational policy, he charged that laws condoning separate educational facilities for blacks were designed to mollify those afflicted with "Negrophobia" and a distaste for the common school. "[These laws] are strictly class legislation by which the white population can always keep the colored population from rising in the scale of intelligence," he declared, "and eject the colored children from the common school edifices, and thrust them into dilapidated shanties." <sup>43</sup> Echoing Winter, Albert Griffin of Manhattan's *Nationalist* urged his readers to work against the "unreasoning prejudices" which prohibited "colored brethren and sisters" from obtaining an equal education. <sup>44</sup>

Some opponents of segregated schools employed economic arguments against the policy. Perhaps reacting to the economic crisis of the early 1870's, some Kansans asserted that maintaining separate schools for the races was an unjustifiable waste of money. F. P. Baker of the *Kansas State Record* believed that it was a "costly prejudice" which resulted in separate schools for white and black children. <sup>45</sup> Likewise, the editor of the Leavenworth *Commercial* maintained that it was simply "foolish" to

spend money to build schools to accommodate a few black students. <sup>46</sup> George W. Martin of the Junction City *Union* shared this belief. After elaborating upon the cost of maintaining a separate school for blacks, he asked his readers if their prejudice was not costing more than it was worth. <sup>47</sup>

ORGANIZED black public opinion also played a significant role in the protest against separate but equal educational policies. Though blacks never comprised more than five percent of the population of Kansas at any time in the 19th century, their ardent pursuit of educational opportunity and desire to participate in society more than made up for their lack of numbers. This growing zeal was apparent throughout the 1870's as black organizations condemned separate and frequently inferior educational facilities. Typical of the protests was that of the State Convention of Colored Men which met at Lawrence in 1872 and demanded that the state repeal all laws "making distinction of race, nationality or color among its citizens in regard to among other things education." <sup>48</sup>

Several individuals also expressed their anger over the manner in which black children were treated in the public school system. After several black students were refused admittance to an all-white school in Leavenworth, T. W. Henderson wrote a letter to the Leavenworth *Times* lamenting the oppression of blacks and asking when the white population would "throw aside their hatred of us black citizens, because of color, and give our children a chance." <sup>49</sup> In a letter to the *Colored Radical*, H. C. B., a citizen of Atchison, also expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which blacks were treated in the schools and identified one pernicious outcome of segregated schooling. "The effect of separate schools will be that the colored child must learn that the white child is either his superior or inferior," he stated, ". . . [and] that when they grow up to manhood they will not regard each other as men and fellow-citizens." <sup>50</sup>

The nascent black press joined the crusade

41. *Kansas Educational Journal*, Emporia, September, 1870.

42. *Atchison Champion*, August 9, 1873.

43. *Commonwealth*, Topeka, January 30, 1874.

44. *Nationalist*, Manhattan, February 12, 1875.

45. *Kansas State Record*, Topeka, September 13, 1871.

46. *Leavenworth Commercial*, January 20, 1876.

47. *Junction City Union*, March 25, 1876.

48. *Kansas State Record*, Topeka, March 27, 1872.

49. *Leavenworth Times*, February 7, 1876.

50. *Colored Radical*, Leavenworth, September 28, 1876.

against separate educational facilities for black students. Despite a constant struggle for survival in an environment that was sometimes less than friendly, black papers criticized the white majority for its insistence on segregated education. In a lengthy critique of education in Kansas, the editor of the *Colored Radical* noted that while there was a significant amount of discussion relative to "mixing the races" in the public schools, racial prejudice consigned most black children to separate and inferior schools. He maintained that the only way to vitiate such prejudice was to destroy the separate schools which perpetuated it.<sup>51</sup> In a later editorial, he urged his readers to petition the legislature to outlaw all "negro schools."<sup>52</sup> W. L. Eagleson, editor of the *Colored Citizen*, shared the sentiment of the editor of the *Radical*. He asserted that segregated schooling had to be abolished because "nothing now in existence in this State does help so much towards keeping up the low mean prejudice against the colored man as these separate schools. . . ." <sup>53</sup> "Race difficulties will always exist in this country while race barriers are allowed to exist," he proclaimed in a later commentary. "We say down with every race institution in the land, and the sooner we learn that we are all Americans, the better for all concerned."<sup>54</sup>

Most white Kansans, however, did not subscribe to Eagleson's viewpoint. While they, like most white Americans, at least in the North, were willing to permit blacks a modicum of civil and political equality, social equality, an ideal inextricably intertwined with the American experience, was another matter.<sup>55</sup> Since integrated education smacked of the social equality of the races, the weight of public sentiment in the state during the 1870's, and for that matter throughout the remainder of the 19th century, supported separate schools for blacks and prohibited any widespread efforts

to integrate the schools.<sup>56</sup> As one editor observed, separate schools for "Smoked Americans" seldom upset those who were "nervous on the subject of social equality."<sup>57</sup>

Indicative of the public's uneasiness with the concept of the social equality of the races, which was apparently implied by "mixed education," was the volume of letters to the local press objecting to the idea of integrating the schools. Writing to the *Leavenworth Commercial*, "X" objected to the efforts of "demented white men" to legislate "social equality." He claimed that the majority of Kansans were against allowing their children to "mingle together in the common schools . . . [with] the aromatic African."<sup>58</sup> In a letter to the same paper, Fanny West warned of the possible consequences of "mixing the races" in order to achieve equality. She proclaimed that it would lead to the "horrid practice of amalgamation" which would degrade the white race.<sup>59</sup> Similar racial thinking was evident in a letter from a subscriber to the *Nationalist*. He, like West, lamented that if whites were compelled to associate with blacks in the schools, whites would be mongrelized and eventually enslaved.<sup>60</sup>

The press also disapproved of attempts to elevate blacks to a level of social equality with whites by abolishing separate schools and adhering to the common school ideal. While papers which advocated integrated education were always Republican, Democratic as well as some Republican papers opposed the policy.

Perhaps one of the most detailed and blunt rejections of integrated schooling and the concept of social equality came from the staunchly Republican *Wathena Reporter*. Condemning the possibility of educating blacks and whites in the same school, the editor of the *Reporter* posited:

This idea of social negro equality can never be engrafted in the American people. And why should it be? Has not the

51. *Ibid.*, August 24, 1876.

52. *Ibid.*, November 18, 1876.

53. *Colored Citizen*, Topeka, September 20, 1878.

54. *Ibid.*, December 14, 1878.

55. Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880's* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950), pp. 13-30; Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 70.

56. There were integrated schools in several communities throughout the 19th century. In cities such as Emporia and Ottawa, black and white students attended the same school without major difficulties. In some small towns there were integrated schools because the community simply could not afford a separate school. In these areas racial strife was common. The vast majority of blacks were, however, educated in separate facilities.

57. *Kansas State Record*, Topeka, January 5, 1870.

58. *Leavenworth Commercial*, February 1, 1870.

59. *Ibid.*, March 5, 1870.

60. *Nationalist*, Manhattan, February 26, 1875. For letters expressing similar attitudes, see *Olathe Mirror*, June 6, 1872; *Nationalist*, Manhattan, March 5, 1875.



Maker of the universe placed an unmistakable mark on the two races, the nature of which is to forbid social alliances, and consequently social contact. The negro may be the superior of the two races, but admitting that he is, does not justify his amalgamating with the white. We have fought for, and advocated equal rights for every human being under this government, but we are not yet ready to array ourselves in antagonism to the immutable laws of nature.<sup>61</sup>

Complaining about what he called "African subjugation," T. W. Peacock, editor of the *Kansas Democrat*, also deprecated efforts to promote racial integration in the schools and elsewhere. He went on to urge his readers to resist any attempt to force white children to associate with "depraved blacks."<sup>62</sup> Nelson Abbott of the militantly anti-black *Atchison Patriot*, the self-proclaimed "Democratic Organ of Kansas," shared this racist sentiment. He objected to any "indiscriminate comingling of the African and Caucasian" and warned his readers that some people would not be satisfied until everything was "speckled."<sup>63</sup> Likewise, Sol Miller of the *Kansas Chief*, a Republican paper in Doniphan county, claimed that it would be wrong to attempt to "crush out the natural prejudice of the races" by sending black and white students to the same school.<sup>64</sup> In a similar fashion, U. F. Sargent of the Democratic Fort Scott *Pioneer* asserted that attempts to mix the races in the schools would violate the will of the majority and degrade the educational enterprise. "We don't want social equality," he continued, "but we want decent schools."<sup>65</sup>

WHILE abhorrence of the notion of the social equality of the races served as the primary barrier to making the schools common to all, the concern that integration would damage, if not destroy, the public school also prohibited the achievement of the common school ideal. As was the case in other sections of the country throughout the 19th century, some Kansans based their opposition to integrated education on the assumption that if such a policy was followed, then the so-called better classes would withdraw from the public schools thus rendering them pauper-like institutions. To sacrifice the public schools for the

benefit of a small group that was often perceived as degraded and powerless seemed unwise. As George F. Prescott of the Leavenworth *Commercial* maintained, "by the enforcement of obnoxious measures [mixing the races in the schools] will our public school system become practically a failure, and the good of the many be sacrificed to the narrow prejudices and selfish purposes of the few."<sup>66</sup> The editor of the *Atchison Patriot* agreed with this assessment claiming that "if races are mixed, the better classes will withdraw."<sup>67</sup> J. Clarke Swayze, the outspoken, and later assassinated, editor of the *Topeka Blade*, also warned of the possible result of actions designed to integrate the schools. "If the legislature undertakes to mix the public schools," he asserted, "we shall not be disappointed to see the excellent system now in operation in Kansas left to the negroes . . . while independent institutions . . . will educate the whites."<sup>68</sup>

Integrated education was occasionally condemned on the grounds that blacks would make better progress in separate schools. For instance, the editor of the *Troy Republican* argued that putting the two classes together in school would cause the black children to suffer and "not half the good would be done than would be if left alone."<sup>69</sup> Writing to the *Saline County Journal*, D. B. Powers echoed this belief. He claimed that blacks were making the best progress in "separate schools, homogeneous in character, strict in discipline, and incensed by rivalry as a race, instead of individuals."<sup>70</sup>

THE EMOTIONAL and sometimes violent controversy concerning the education of blacks which raged throughout the 1870's resulted in only two significant legislative actions. In 1868 the state legislature had authorized school districts in first and second-class cities to maintain either separate or integrated educational facilities. Eight years later, for reasons not revealed in any public debates, the legislature recodified the Kansas school laws and omitted all references to separate schools. Separate schooling for blacks no longer en-

61. Cited in *Topeka Blade*, October 8, 1873.

62. *Kansas Democrat*, Independence, July 31, 1874.

63. *Atchison Patriot*, February 6, 1875.

64. *Kansas Chief*, Troy, March 9, 1876.

65. *Fort Scott Pioneer*, September 27, 1877.

66. *Leavenworth Commercial*, November 2, 1870.

67. *Atchison Patriot*, April 25, 1874.

68. *Topeka Blade*, December 7, 1876.

69. Cited in *ibid.*, September 24, 1873.

70. *Saline County Journal*, Salina, January 25, 1877.

# THE SCHOOLS AND THE COLORED PEOPLE.

Demagogism generally overreaches itself. It is as destitute of sagacity as of decency. For several months past the constitutional demagogues of the Democratic party in this city have been engaged in what they thought a very smart game. The Republican party had given the negroes freedom, civil rights, and the franchise, bitterly and viciously opposed by the Democracy at every step, and in every effort it made to promote the welfare of the colored people. But they were still excluded from the schools. Not by law, for a Republican Legislature had enacted, against the vote of every Democrat, a law which forbids any distinction of race or color in the schools. But custom had provided separate schools, and public sentiment had seemed to approve of the arrangement. In this fact the demagogues of the Democratic party thought they saw a chance for political capital. If they could stir up the colored people to demand admission for their children into the same schools with the whites, and the demand was refused, they could say: "See how these Republicans treat you! They pretend to be your friends, but they keep you out of the schools!" If the demand was granted they could turn round and say to all those Republicans whose prejudices against color had not yet been entirely outgrown: "See the effects of your doctrines! The niggers are to go to school with your children! D—n the niggers, add hurrah for the Democratic party!"

The colored people made a request for the admission of their children into the same schools with the whites. Pending action on the petition there was hardly a Democrat in the city who did not importune the School Board to deny the petition. That body, finding that public sentiment seemed to be against the request, denied it. And straightway the Democratic demagogues set up a howl against the Republicans, saying to the colored people: "Are these the friends you counted upon! See how they treat your requests!" If the action of the Board had been different they would have made the air

joyed legal sanction. In 1879, however, the legislature again gave segregated education legal status. Responding to public sentiment, the heavily Republican legislature passed a measure allowing school boards in first-class cities (those with populations of at least 15,000) to operate separate elementary schools for black children. Segregated secondary schools were prohibited.<sup>71</sup> In other areas school boards were not permitted, at least legally, to maintain separate schools for blacks and whites. Although the statute sanctioned segre-

71. Kluger notes that the 1879 statute "remained unchanged until 1905, when Kansas City was allowed to open a separate high school for Negroes."—Kluger, *Simple Justice*, pp. 371-372.



John A. Martin (1839-1889), editor of the *Atchison Champion*, asserted that separate schools were not equal and that public schools should be truly common to all. This article in his newspaper August 7, 1873, deplored the hypocrisy of politicians who straddled the emotional issue of "the schools and the colored people." Martin was ahead of his time though. It was not until the 1950's that separate and usually inferior schools in Kansas began to be legally abolished.

gation in first-class cities where the vast majority of blacks resided, it left the door open for integrated education in other areas. Most blacks living outside first-class cities remained, however, in segregated schools as a result of community pressure, violence, and, occasionally, choice.

Between the passage of this bill and the turn of the century, the issue of the education of blacks received markedly less attention among white Kansans than it did in either the 1860's or the 1870's. When opinions were expressed on the matter of educating blacks they differed little from those of the 1870's. A number of factors, both state and national in nature, contributed to the slackening of public discourse on the question of integrating the schools and therefore making them truly common. Without doubt, the 1879 statute lessened the anxiety of many white Kansans about the possibility of having to send their children to school with blacks and consequently reduced their concern with the issue. The slowdown of black migration to Kansas in the early 1880's also contrib-

uted to the decline of public debate on the subject of race and the schools as fears of being overrun by what some called "hordes of degraded blacks" were calmed. Furthermore, interest in other issues such as prohibition and agrarian unrest probably steered public attention away from the race issue.<sup>72</sup>

ON THE national level, the two decades following the end of Reconstruction were characterized by a steady hardening of racial prejudice which was aided and abetted by racist Social Darwinism and imperialist ideology. What allies the blacks had in their struggle for freedom and equality dwindled in the face of increasing racial intolerance not only in the South but in many areas of the North.<sup>73</sup> This national phenomenon diminished popular concern for assimilating blacks into the social order by way of integrated schooling. Lastly, the civil rights cases of 1883, the well-known *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case of 1896, and the *Cumming vs. Richmond County Board of Education* case of 1899 not only mirrored the white majority's attitude toward the place blacks should have in the social order by providing national legal sanction to racial segregation, but also reduced public debate on the issue of integrated education. As one editor said of one of the 1883 civil rights cases, "Doesn't it knock their case [for biracial schools] from under them, and leave them where they deserve to be [in segregated schools]?"<sup>74</sup>

Despite these obstacles, the black press in Kansas continued to campaign vigorously for the abolition of separate schools throughout the 1880's. As was the case in the 1870's, black editors believed that racially mixed schools would help breakdown the barriers of prejudice and result in equal educational opportunity.<sup>75</sup> By the 1890's, however, the crusade for

integration weakened and separation was increasingly accepted, and at times advocated, by influential blacks.

Faced with increasing white intransigence on the matter of social equality in general and biracial education in particular, many blacks advocated a moderately separatist stance resembling that of Booker T. Washington, the most influential black leader of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They advocated self-reliance and racial pride and accepted separate schools.<sup>76</sup> O. S. Fox of the *Afro-American Advocate* summarized this position when he said, "As a race let us support race enterprises. Educate the young, get prosperity, be economical and in this way the Race Problem may be successfully solved."<sup>77</sup>

Separation was not considered an end but rather a means by which blacks hoped to demonstrate to white society that they were industrious, reliable, and worthy of assimilation into the mainstream of American life. Illustrative of this hope that the conditions imposed on blacks by the white majority might be used to demonstrate their value to the society was a lengthy editorial by C. H. J. Taylor of the widely circulated *American Citizen*. He wrote:

We have no confidence in the Negro, be he teacher, patron, or pupil who desires to always mix with white people. Let us not be misunderstood, we do not believe that . . . mixed schools would necessarily injure the races, but we do contend that a people who have been doing business for themselves for centuries can with plausible reason object to a people less than thirty years old mixing with them. Again we do not believe it good sense for us to cry about it. Instead of becoming angry and declaring that we will do nothing unless allowed to mingle with white folks, we ought to accept their decision, which denies us admission [to their schools], and go to work to prove to them, beyond question, that they are losing something of worth by not being with us. We can do this if we will.

Echoing Taylor, W. M. Pope of the *Call* argued that blacks should not force themselves into "places where they are not wanted and are constantly subjected to humiliation." Instead he urged his readers to make the schools for blacks as good as possible in order to win the

72. *Richmond, Kansas*, pp. 162-163, 169-181; *Zornow, Kansas*, pp. 190-208.

73. Ralph Henry Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought*, 2d ed. (New York, Ronald Press, 1956), pp. 141-144; John A. Garraty, *The New Commonwealth, 1877-1890* (New York, Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 5-6; Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York, the Dial Press, 1954), *passim*; August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor, the University of Michigan Press, 1963), pp. 19-25; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3d ed. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 67-103.

74. *Independence Star*, October 19, 1883.

75. For typical editorials on the matter, see *Herald of Kansas*, Topeka, April 9, 1880; *Leavenworth Advocate*, May 4, 1889.

76. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 3d ed. (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1967; Vintage Books, 1969), pp. 390-397; Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, pp. 55-56, 100-118.

77. *Afro-American Advocate*, Coffeyville, April 15, 1892.

78. *American Citizen*, Kansas City, May 15, 1891. See, also, *ibid.*, August 7, 1891.



respect of the white majority.<sup>79</sup> S. O. Clayton of the Parsons *Blade* shared this belief and maintained that most blacks in Kansas felt the same way.<sup>80</sup>

Like George A. Dudley of the *American Citizen*, an increasing number of blacks were rejecting the traditional belief that "the education of the races together obliterates prejudice and renders it more easy for colored persons to obtain employment."<sup>81</sup> By rejecting the notion that integrated education would erase prejudice and provide economic opportunity, many blacks were coming to grips with the unwillingness of the white majority to transcend race while pursuing the common school ideal. They did not, however, abandon their faith in formal education. Blacks were as zealous for schooling in the 1890's as they had been in the 1870's when they and a small number of white Kansans spurred by a momentary idealism sought to make the schools common to both races. But as allies in the white community dwindled and racial intolerance hardened, blacks in Kansas, like most of their brethren elsewhere, were left

with little choice but to accept separate educational facilities and second-class citizenship. Many believed that the situation would be temporary. By demonstrating self-reliance, industriousness, and success in the schools set aside for them, blacks hoped to be accepted not only into the same school with other Americans but also the mainstream of society.

For the majority of blacks in Kansas the situation was not temporary. It was not until the 1950's that large numbers of segregated schools began to be legally abolished.<sup>82</sup> Regardless of their efforts in the 19th century, and for that matter the first half of the 20th, blacks were unable to realize their aspirations because in historian Selwyn Troen's words, ". . . the schools, although promising openness and equality, in fact closely mirrored the prejudices and limitations of the society they served and represented."<sup>83</sup> The attitudes of the majority of Kansans indeed not only stifled the blacks' ardent quest for full participation in the promise of the common school, but also contributed to the development of an ideology of segregated schooling which remained influential well into the 20th century.

79. *Call*, Topeka, October 18, 1891. See, also, *ibid.*, August 3, 1893.

80. Parsons *Blade*, March 15, 1895.

81. *American Citizen*, Kansas City, August 2, 1895.

82. Franklin, *Up From Slavery*, pp. 549-557; Richmond, *Kansas*, pp. 297-298.

83. Troen, *The Public and the Schools*, p. 98.