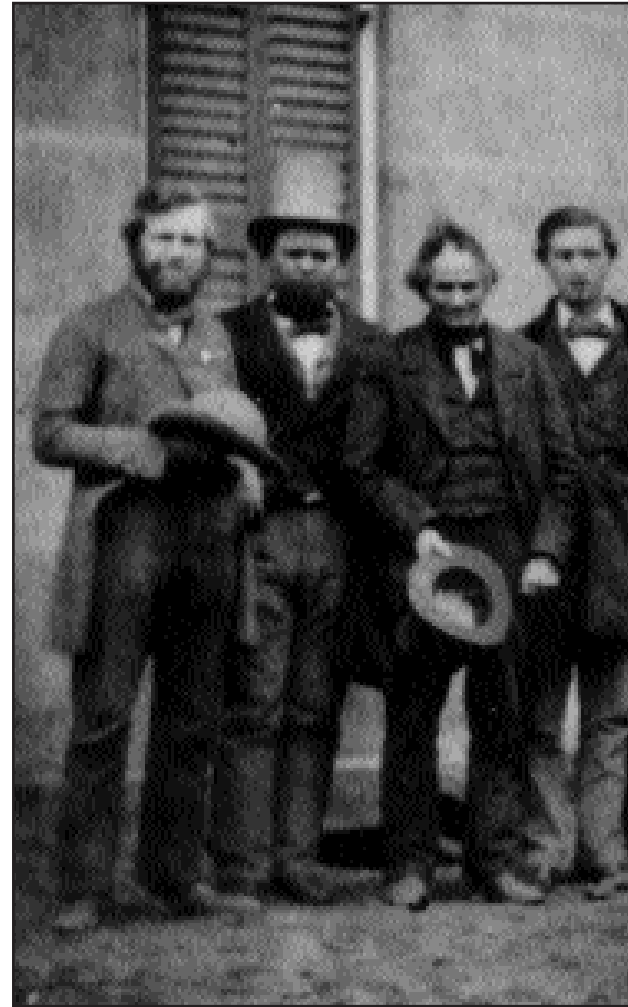

Charles Henry Langston and the African American Struggle in Kansas

by Richard B. Sheridan



Charles Henry Langston's career as an African American educator, civil rights leader, and politician has been neglected by comparison with the achievements of his younger brother, John Mercer Langston (1829–1899), and his grandson, Langston Hughes (1902–1967). The former, a graduate of Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, became a lawyer in 1855 and practiced in Ohio for fifteen years. His career was distinguished by his appointment as dean of the law school and later acting president of Howard University, president of Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute, minister resident to the Republic of Haiti, and representative from Virginia to the fifty-first U.S. Congress.¹ The grandson, of course, became perhaps America's most famous African American poet, playwright, novelist, and travel writer, the "Dean of Negro Writers in America" and the "Negro Poet Laureate." Although overshadowed by a brother and a grand-

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1. John Mercer Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol; The First and Only Negro Representative in Congress from the Old Dominion* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Co., 1894), 1, 12–14; William Cheek and Aimee Lee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829–65* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 1–18.



In what came to be known as the Oberlin–Wellington Rescue, the “rescuers” stand captured and held in the Cuyahoga County, Ohio, jail courtyard in April 1859. Among these brave men is Charles Henry Langston (ninth from the right, holding his hat across his chest).

son, Charles Langston’s was an exemplary life that seemingly confronted and tried to correct racial injustice at every turn. It is a life worthy of reconsideration.²

Born on a plantation in Louisa County, Virginia, in 1817, Charles Langston was the second son of Captain Ralph Quarles and Lucy Jane Langston, his part Native American, part African American slave whom he manu-

2. Langston Hughes’s mother was Caroline Mercer Langston Hughes, daughter of Mary S. Patterson Leary Langston and Charles H. Langston; his father was James Hughes. His parents separated soon after his birth, and young Langston was raised by his mother and grandmother. Until he was twelve years old, Langston lived chiefly in Lawrence, Kansas, with his grandmother and an aunt and uncle. In later life he recalled with a mixture of affection and anger his boyhood experiences in Lawrence. See Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945); Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*

mitted, or freed, along with her daughter Mary. A man of landed wealth and many slaves, Captain Quarles had peculiar and unusual views regarding slaves and their management. He believed that slavery should be abolished but that the mode of abolition should be by the voluntary action of the slaveowner. The couple’s three sons, Gideon Quarles, Charles Henry, and John Mercer Langston, were born free, and in his last will and testament of October 18, 1833, Ralph Quarles bequeathed to them the greater part of his real and personal property.³

(New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1940); Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Mark Scott, “Langston Hughes of Kansas,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 3 (Spring 1980): 1–18.

3. Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 1, 12–14.

John Mercer Langston wrote in his autobiography that his father was a “person of broad and varied education, with a love of learning and culture remarkable for his day.” Of his brother Charles, John wrote that the start his father gave him in study was of large service throughout his life. Charles was sixteen years old when his father died in April 1834. “He was not large nor apparently firm of body; but well endowed intellectually,” according to his brother John. “His disposition and temper though ordinarily well controlled, were not naturally of the easy and even sort. In his constitution, he was impetuous and aggressive; and under discipline and opposition, he was always restive, yet, he yielded with reasonable docility and obedience to the training to which his father, interested in his education, sought to subject him.” During his adult years he was said to have “far surpassed his brother” John as a debater and orator.⁴

In September 1834 the three Langston brothers were taken from the Virginia plantation to new lands beyond the Allegheny Mountains in the free state of Ohio. A primary motive for the migration was the increasing restrictiveness toward free blacks in Virginia, on the one hand, and, on the other, the opportunities for free blacks in Ohio to take advantage of higher education, land purchases, and wage employment. They settled near Chillicothe in south-central Ohio, where the Langston brothers lived on a farm that had been purchased by their guardian and old family friend Colonel William D. Gooch. By 1830 the black population of Chillicothe numbered about three hundred, one-tenth of the total. Most worked as farmhands, town laborers, on the river and canals, or as domestics.⁵

Approximately 150 miles northeast of Chillicothe is the residential town of Oberlin, Ohio, the seat of Oberlin College. The college was founded in 1833, and from the beginning it reflected radical views on all matters of reform, religion, education, and antislavery. John M. Langston wrote that “to Oberlin belongs the honor of being the first institution of learning in the world to give woman equal educational opportunities and advantages with man. To it, too, belongs the honor of being the first college of the United States to accept the negro student and give him equal educational opportunities and advantages with the white.” Not only was the college a racially inte-

grated institution, the town and surrounding countryside also had numerous black residents and stations on the underground railroad that aided fugitive slaves on their journey to freedom in Canada.⁶

Little time was lost after the Langstons arrived at Chillicothe before Gideon and Charles were sent to Oberlin and enrolled in the college’s preparatory school. Registering in the fall semester of 1835, they were the first African Americans enrolled in Oberlin. One of the trustees of the college wrote on February 10, 1836, that among the students were “two from Virginia of color & they are as well received & treated as others.” On March 6, 1836, both of the boys were baptized and received into membership of the Oberlin church. Charles reenrolled in the preparatory school in 1842–1843. At this point in his life, Charles Langston was said to be a young man “of sound English attainment, large reading, and general information gathered from contact as well as study.” He had been sent to Ohio to secure a liberal education, “the best furnished at that time by any school to one of his class.”⁷

Oberlin College authorities encouraged the students to teach in public or private schools in Ohio during the three-months’ vacation in the winter season. This policy enabled the students to earn some money and “make the most of themselves as scholars and useful members of society.” During one of the winter breaks, Charles was called upon by a committee of blacks from a settlement near Chillicothe “to advise with him as to the employment of a school-teacher for the settlement during the winter.” They offered to pay him ten dollars a month in cash and furnish board and room by living a week with each family patronizing the school. Charles, who had not reached his sixteenth birthday, agreed to teach the children of the all-black school, and it is recorded that “everything in the school moved on to the entire satisfaction of all interested.”⁸

The three Langston brothers were living in Ohio when they reached the age of twenty-one and received the legacies provided for in the will of Ralph Quarles. Sparse data

6. Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 97–103. Nat Brandt, *The Town That Started the Civil War* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), argued that the small college town of Oberlin, Ohio, represented the most advanced Northern attitudes toward the issue of slavery and states’ rights in the period before the Civil War.

7. Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 89, 82–83; Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 34–35, 84–85, 88–89, 97.

8. Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 82–85, 87–93.

4. *Ibid.*, 1, 11–12, 21–22.

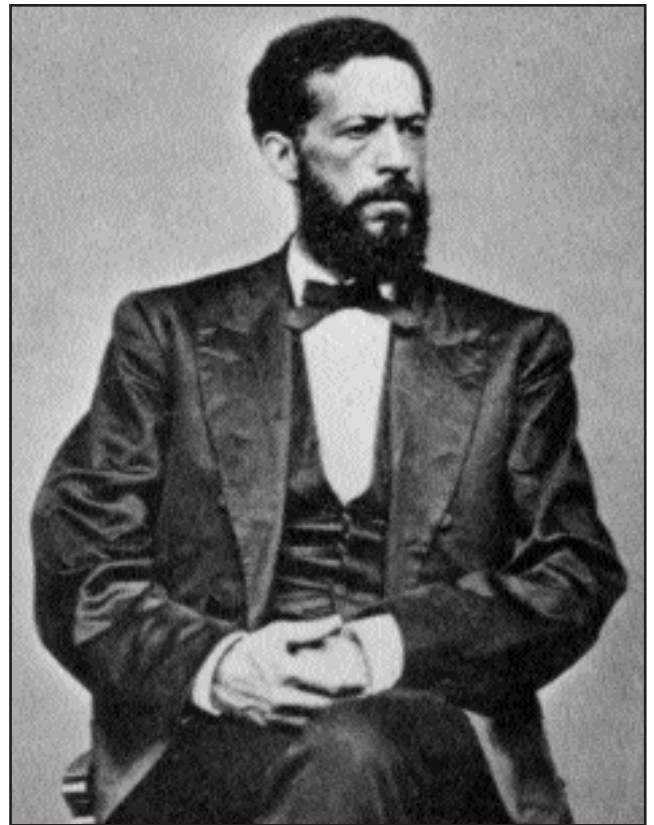
5. Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 19–47; Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 23–53.

has been found for Gideon Langston, who, after attending the preparatory school at Oberlin College in 1835–1836 and 1839, settled in Cincinnati and became the proprietor of a livery stable. Charles Henry Langston attended the preparatory school and Oberlin College in 1836, 1839, and 1842–1843, and lived in Chillicothe and Columbus where he was occupied as a part-time teacher and dentist. He owned an eleven-hundred-acre farm leased to a white tenant in Jackson County, Ohio. John Mercer Langston, who earned B.A. and M.A. degrees from Oberlin College and became a lawyer, owned properties valued for tax purposes at \$4,590 in Oberlin's Lorain County in 1851.⁹

Because of their inheritance the Langston brothers were able to devote considerable time and effort to reform activities. This was especially the case with Charles and John. They were not only members but also leaders of a number of reform organizations. After he was appointed western representative of the Sons of Temperance in 1848, Charles capitalized on his appointment to promote education and political rights as well as moderate habits. He served as president of the black state convention in 1849; in addition, both Langston brothers supported and Charles served on the three-man committee of correspondence for calling a black national convention to be held in Buffalo, New York, in September 1852. At the 1852 state convention, Charles proposed black emigration and colonization en masse from the United States to Central or South America where the emigrants might “unite with some Government there, and then make the demand upon the United States to liberate their brethren from their bonds.”¹⁰ A few years later Charles served as executive secretary of the Ohio State Anti-Slavery Society, of which John was president.

The liberation of John Price, the fugitive slave benefactor of what became known as the Oberlin–Wellington Rescue, was to have “far-ranging consequences,” according to John Langston’s biographers William and Aimee Lee Cheek: “It would inject new emotional fervor into the antislavery movement, reinvigorate the Ohio black movement, and critically affect the Republican party’s evolution and standing in Ohio—and, by extension, in the North. Charles Langston would emerge an antislavery hero; John

Langston would achieve new recognition as black leader and black Republican.”¹¹ Moreover, the rescue of John Price from his kidnappers represented a victory over the slave power that had pushed through the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which supplied slaveowners with legal and police powers hitherto not afforded against abolitionists and op-



More famous than Charles Langston was his younger brother John Mercer Langston, who had a long and distinguished career in education and politics.

erators of the underground railroad. John Price, who was a resident of Oberlin, was kidnapped by a group of federal marshals, deputy sheriffs, and slave catchers on September 13, 1858. He was taken to the neighboring town of Wellington, which had rail connections with several large cities in Ohio and Kentucky. John Langston wrote that about five hundred white and black residents of Oberlin, “acting under the impulse of their higher and better nature,” rescued Price. Returning with him to Oberlin, they were welcomed by “a vast concourse of true and patriotic

9. Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 139–40, 179.

10. *Ibid.*, 136, 147, 175–76, 192, 197, 215, 327, 366–68.

11. *Ibid.*, 320.

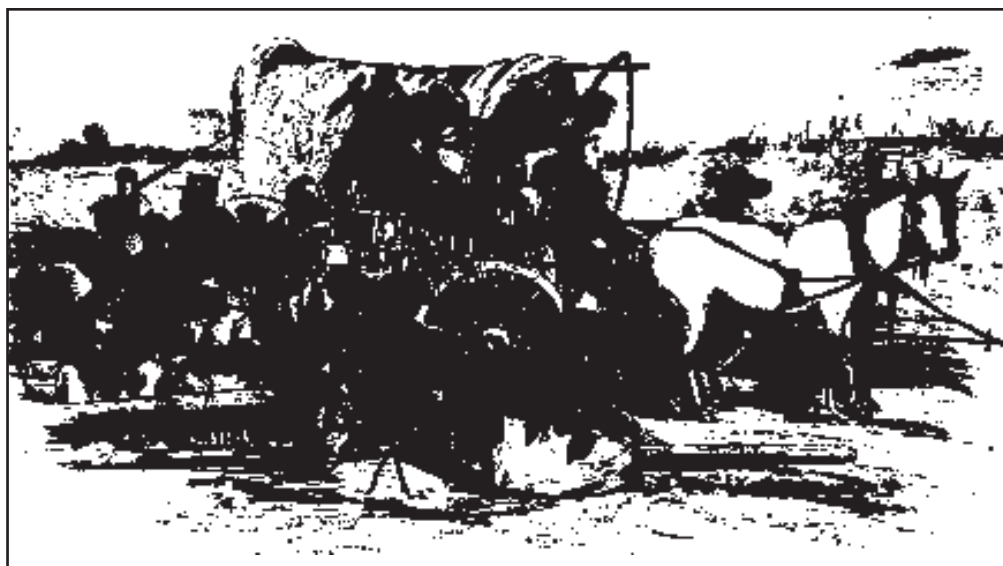
men and women . . . in such a meeting in favor of freedom and against slavery, as had never assembled within the limits of that consecrated town."¹²

Thirty-seven Oberlin and Wellington residents, both white and black, were indicted by the grand jury and charged with aiding and abetting in the rescue of John

In the spring of 1859, while these cases against the Oberlin rescuers were being adjudicated, abolitionist John Brown came to Ohio. He and his men had made a bold and dramatic expedition into Missouri from their base in southeastern Kansas Territory during the previous winter and had rescued eleven slaves and taken them some twenty-five hundred miles to Canada and freedom. After a sojourn in Canada, Brown and John Henry Kagi reached Cleveland on March 15, on their way to Harpers Ferry. The city was in a state of excitement over the approaching trials of the Oberlin-Wellington rescuers. "During Brown's nearly two-weeks stay he strolled daily past the marshal's office, paid a call on Charles Langston, and auctioned off his captured livestock. In a public lecture, Brown declared it the duty of every man to liberate slaves whenever he could do so successfully."¹⁴

Meanwhile, John Brown had visited his son John Brown Jr. at his home in West Andover, Ohio, and instructed him to recruit and direct young volunteers to the elder Brown's secret rendezvous point in Virginia. John Brown Jr. went to Oberlin and met John Langston, who suggested that Lewis Sheridan Leary and John Copeland Jr. might be persuaded to join the elder Brown. The young men were invited to meet John Brown Jr. and, after a lengthy discussion, agreed to join John Brown's raiding party. Both men were natives of North Carolina who had migrated to Oberlin and found employment there. Leary was a harnessmaker. Copeland was Leary's nephew, and both were involved with John Langston in the Oberlin Anti-Slavery Society.¹⁵

Leary, age twenty-four, was said to be a handsome man who wore his wide-brimmed hat at a rakish tilt. John Langston said that perhaps "no man of greater physical



During the Civil War, runaway slaves, or contrabands, found refuge in Union military camps and Northern towns, including Leavenworth, Kansas. Upon his arrival in Leavenworth in 1862, Charles Langston established a school for contraband children.

Price. Charles Langston, one of the party's leaders, was tried separately at the federal courthouse in Cleveland in late April and early May 1859. After his conviction, and upon the inquiry of the judge whether he or his attorney had anything to say regarding why the sentence of the law should not be pronounced upon him, he delivered a carefully prepared address challenging the racially based American system of justice. John Mercer Langston wrote that his brother spoke with "a powerful and matchless address, wonderful in the breadth of his views, masterly and unanswerable in his logic and law, and commanding and irresistible in its delivery and effects." Charles was sentenced to twenty days in jail and a fine of one hundred dollars and costs.¹³

12. Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 182-85.

13. *Ibid.*, 181-97; Brandt, *The Town That Started the Civil War*, 143-90; Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 320-48.

14. Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 352; Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 260-68.

15. Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 355-56; Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 190-97.

courage could be found than Leary. No one more fit to take his place by the side of Brown's lieutenant, Kagi, and in unflinching bravery demonstrate the strength and quality of his manhood." While trying to swim the rapids of the Shenandoah River at Harpers Ferry, Lewis Sheridan Leary was shot and died ten hours later. John Copeland Jr. was captured and hanged fourteen days after the execution of John Brown.¹⁶

On November 18, 1859, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* carried a letter from Charles Langston in which he praised John Brown and his men for their attack upon the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. To the question, "Did not Capt. Brown act in consonance with these Biblical principles and injunctions?" Langston replied:

He went into Virginia to aid the afflicted and the helpless, to assist the weak and to relieve the poor and needy. To undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, to do to others as he would have them to do to him. And above all to put to death, as the papers tell us, those who steal men and sell them, and in whose hands stolen men are found. His actions then are only the results of his faithfulness to the plain teaching of the word of God.¹⁷

On December 2, 1859, the day of John Brown's execution, black leaders, often together with whites, conducted ceremonies throughout Ohio. In Cleveland the ceremony was held in a black-draped hall with a gilt-framed picture of John Brown at center stage and flanked by three of his defense attorneys. Charles Langston was the featured speaker. He addressed some two thousand black and white mourners.¹⁸

Perhaps during his brief meeting with John Brown just before the fateful Harpers Ferry raid, Charles Langston received the firsthand knowledge of the happenings in Kansas that caused him to contemplate a move west. He most certainly would have been well aware of that territory's struggle for liberty and justice, and in April 1862, one year after the Civil War began, Charles

16. Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 193–94; Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 355–58. Lewis Sheridan Leary and his wife, Mary Patterson, had a six-month-old daughter; Mary would later marry Charles Langston.

17. Langston's letter to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 18, 1859, quoted in Benjamin Quarles, ed., *Blacks on John Brown* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 12.

18. Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 360.

Langston left Ohio for Leavenworth, Kansas—there to work among the contrabands.

During the Civil War, enslaved African Americans who ran away were welcomed into Union military camps in the Southern states and declared contraband of war. This declaration freed slaves, deprived the slaveowners of their human property, and weakened the ability of the South to carry on the war.

In Kansas contrabands concentrated in towns and adjacent rural districts in the eastern part of the state near the Missouri border. The African American population of Kansas increased from 627 in 1860 to 12,527 in 1865, which was 8.8 percent of the state's total population. In 1865 30 percent of the 12,527 contrabands, or 4,705, were living in the state's seven leading towns: Leavenworth, Lawrence, Atchison, Fort Scott, Mound City, Osawatomie, and Topeka. By far the greatest concentration of contrabands was in Leavenworth, where 2,455 blacks lived in 1865—nearly one-fifth of the blacks in the state.¹⁹ According to the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* of February 7, 1862, "The city is full of 'contrabands,' alias runaway negroes from Missouri; of whom it is said there are a thousand in the neighborhood. They are of all ages and characters."²⁰

An editorial in the July 8, 1862, edition of the same newspaper reported that thousands of Missouri slaves had "found their way into the Union lines—were protected, and brought by the gallant Union soldiery into the free State of Kansas. . . . Others still, crossed the Missouri [River] in search of liberty, on the bridge of ice which God in his providence had built over the river for their especial accommodation." The editor went on to estimate that

there were in and around this city last spring one thousand and five hundred contrabands. . . . These people, with scarcely a single exception, came among us wholly destitute of the means of living, and as they came in large numbers, and many of them in mid winter, suffering among them was inevitable. Their sufferings were partially relieved by the benevolence and charity of friends here and elsewhere.²¹

Soon after his arrival in Leavenworth, Langston learned that the lack of teachers and schools for the con-

19. Richard B. Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contrabands into Kansas, 1854–1865," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 12 (Spring 1989): 28–47.

20. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, February 7, 1862.

21. "Our Colored Population," *ibid.*, July 8, 1862.

trabands' children was a major concern to both the black and white communities. The July 8, 1862, editorial notes that in early May 1862 "A day school was organized among these people. Five of their more reliable men were elected trustees. The school was gotten up by the efforts of C. H. Langston, of Ohio, who deserves great credit for his exertion." The article supplies school statistics: "There are enrolled in the school one hundred and forty-seven pupils. There is a regular attendance of one hundred and twenty-four, with a daily average attendance of one hundred and four. The number of females is eighty-one, males sixty-six. The ages of the pupils are from six to twenty-three years." Langston had assured the editor that there was "manifested on the part of most of the larger scholars a remarkable anxiety to learn, with ordinary capacity for receiving instruction." The editor noted further that many of these African American children and youths were "unable to attend school for want of proper clothing, and many because their services were needed to aid their parents in obtaining a living." Although the school was then in "a prosperous condition" it had to "depend for its support mainly on the benevolence and liberality of the friends of the oppressed." Langston was engaged in teaching the contrabands for about three years. Lewis Overton, his fellow teacher, carried on the school. The editorialist concluded by stating: "Mr. Langston is a man of superior intelligence and education. He is devoting all his energies to the task he has undertaken, and deserves the fullest confidence of the public. We hope in the future that his earnest labors will receive something like an adequate compensation."²²

Early in the war Langston returned to Ohio for a time to recruit black soldiers for the Union army, and he also recruited men in Kansas for the state's first regiment of black soldiers. On September 4, 1862, the *Daily Conservative* published a letter from Langston that said, in part, "I want to see every able bodied colored man aiding to put down the slave holders rebellion. I therefore appeal to the loyal people of this district to provide for the necessities of their families while they are fighting the battles of their country."²³

An item in the September 21, 1865, Leavenworth newspaper announced a new Langston enterprise: "a new grocery store has been started by some colored men on the corner of 3rd and Potawatomie streets. The name of the firm is Langston & Co. Our people should patronize them for

they are deserving. All kinds of staple and fancy groceries, fruit, vegetables, fresh butter, &c. always kept on hand."²⁴

Compared with Lawrence and other leading Kansas towns, Leavenworth had more formal and extensive organizations to provide for the welfare of contrabands. At the time when more than two thousand such refugees had arrived in Leavenworth, chiefly from Missouri, community action was of critical importance to supply the newcomers with food, clothing, shelter, employment, and protection. On February 8, 1862, some of the town's white leaders met with their black counterparts, including Charles Langston, at the First Colored Baptist Church to "take into consideration measures for the amelioration of the condition of the colored people of Kansas." Journalist Richard J. Hinton presented a plan of organization for the interracial Kansas Emancipation League, which was approved. The object of the league was to "assist all efforts to destroy slavery, but more especially to take supervision and command of the contraband element so freely coming to our State." More specifically, the goal was to encourage industry, education, and morality among these new black residents and to find them employment. Since many of the black laboring men not only had large families but were unable to work as a result of sickness and exposure, league members appealed for assistance to the permanent residents of Leavenworth and also to the abolitionists in New England. The league also was concerned with the problem of providing for the protection of black refugees against kidnappers who sought to capture and sell them back into slavery in Missouri.²⁵

Other organizations for the aid and welfare of the contrabands were founded, of which Charles Langston became a local and state leader. His campaign for black suffrage began in 1863 and did not terminate until 1870 when the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution affirmed the right of U.S. citizens to vote without restrictions based on race, color, or previous conditions of servitude. According to Eugene H. Berwanger, "The first attempt to seek voting rights came out of a black sponsored convention in Leavenworth on January 1, 1863, a meeting at which Langston delivered a major address."²⁶

24. "Enterprising," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, September 21, 1865.

25. Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas," 41-43.

26. Eugene H. Berwanger, "Hardin and Langston: Western Black Spokesmen of the Reconstruction Era," *Journal of Negro History* 64 (Spring 1979): 105.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., September 4, 1862; Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 392-95.

At a meeting of the Colored State Central Committee that met at the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Leavenworth on January 14, 1864, it was resolved that two delegates be sent to the session of the Kansas legislature at Topeka to present memorials and other documents. "Candidates were balloted for and the chair declared Chas. H. Langston and Capt. W. E. [sic D.] Matthews said delegates." The Leavenworth Suffrage Club (also called the Leavenworth Franchise Club) was active on behalf of local African Americans. At a meeting that was reported on May 6, 1865, Charles Langston was elected president.²⁷

The Constitution of the State of Kansas, which was the product of the Wyandotte Convention of July 1859, barred African Americans from full citizenship by the limitation of the suffrage to "white" males.²⁸ Former Kansas governor Charles Robinson wrote a letter on this subject to Charles Langston and several other black leaders in Leavenworth in early January 1864. He asserted that a majority of Kansans favored equal rights to all and that the word "white" had been inserted in the constitution "more to conciliate favor at Washington than to conform to the wishes of the people of the State."²⁹ In contrast to the views of the former governor were those of John W. Wright, publisher and proprietor of the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*. His editorial of June 13, 1866, said, in part:

We do not think the negroes do, or should, lay any claim to social equality, nor do we believe that the masses of them are fitted at this time to be invested with all the political privileges accorded to the white people of this country. We do claim, however, that they should be protected in all their natural and civil rights, and should be allowed to enjoy them as fully and freely as we of a fairer complexion."³⁰

27. "City News," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, January 15, 1864; "The Suffrage Club," *ibid.*, May 6, 1865.

28. James W. Drury and Associates, *The Government of Kansas* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1961), 10–22.

29. Charles Robinson to Charles H. Langston and others, *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, January 5, 1864;

30. "The Rights of the Negro," *ibid.*, June 13, 1866.

Commenting on the attitude of Civil War Kansans toward African Americans, historian Albert Castel observed: "Only a few professional abolitionists were prepared to accord the Negro refugees equal rights and treatment. Most Kansans considered the Negro to be 'greatly inferior to the white man' and regarded him with a mixture of contemptuous amusement and distrustful fear."³¹



Charles Langston became a prominent and respected citizen of Leavenworth, where he resided from 1862 to 1868. This artist's rendition is of Leavenworth in 1866.

In early February 1864 the question of black suffrage was advocated by Matthews, Langston, and Hinton in speeches before the judiciary committee of the legislature. The *Daily Conservative* noted that

Captain Matthews spoke first, and made a favorable impression as to his ability, and presented several arguments in favor of the cause which he represented, with considerable force. He was followed by Mr. Langston, who delivered a very logical argument in favor of negro suffrage, and gave evidence that he was possessed of much more than ordinary talent as a public speaker. He seemed quite at home on the forum and would be a foeman worthy the steel of our best debaters on this his favorite subject.³²

31 Albert Castel, *A Frontier State at War: Kansas 1861–1865* (1958; reprint, Lawrence: Kansas Heritage Press, 1992), 210.

32. "Negro Suffrage," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, February 4, 1864.

After adjourning on February 8, the house of representatives gave Langston the opportunity to speak for about three quarters of an hour, followed by an informal debate with Representative Samuel Newitt Wood of Morris County. Wood advocated woman suffrage and opposed black suffrage. The correspondent for the *Daily Conservative* de-



In February 1864, during an informal debate in the Kansas House of Representatives, Charles Langston eloquently and skillfully defeated Samuel N. Wood (above), an opponent of black suffrage.

clared that Langston was the overwhelming victor. "Such a dissection of a man was never witnessed in the Hall before. The speaker in the coolest, most suave yet ironical manner, applied his scathing wit, shivering in twain the filmy sophistries with which Wood sought to bewilder the question. The audience were kept in a perfect roar of laughter by Mr. Langston's trenchant hits. Sam Wood was beaten, and that, too, so completely as to render escape impossible."³³

Failure by the legislature to act on the issue of the black franchise did not deter Langston and his colleagues from

33. "From the State Capital," *ibid.*, February 10, 1864. Samuel Wood was a colorful and controversial figure. He was a Kansas politician, railroad promoter, newspaper publisher, land agent, county organizer, and champion of woman suffrage in 1867.

further efforts to achieve their goal. On October 17, 1866, a Convention of Colored Citizens was held at Lawrence. Langston was appointed head of the executive committee of nine members. In his "Address to the Citizens of Kansas," Langston said, "By putting the word 'white' in the first section of the fifth article of the constitution, colored men are denied the use of the ballot, so our personal liberty, our civil rights, our property and legal protection, are all placed at the disposal of others. This is a sort of despotic class legislation of which we most bitterly complain." Furthermore, Langston pointed out that the constitution excluded blacks from the state militia; and, because they were denied the right to vote, they were excluded "from the jury box." This meant that when accused of crime, African Americans were not tried before a jury of their "political or legal equals." Langston continued:

In asking you to remove these disabilities, by which we are sorely and grievously oppressed, we approach you in the name of God, who has created of *one blood* all the nations of man. In the name of that impartial justice which, ignoring all distinctions of race or color, seeks only to establish among men, liberty, equality and fraternity. We appeal to you in the name of that immortal Declaration, which announces that all men are created equal, and that Constitution which was ordained to secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity. We ask at your hands no special privileges. We seek no favor. We do not desire social equality. But we do demand equality before the law. We seek complete emancipation—full and perfect enfranchisement—absolute legal equality. These are only the natural, inherent, and inalienable rights of man.³⁴

After Langston and his colleagues were rebuffed by the Kansas legislature, which concluded that the black franchise movement was premature, they turned to the state Republican Party convention in September 1866 and persuaded a majority of the delegates to include a black suffrage plank in the party's platform. Sidney Clarke and Samuel J. Crawford, Republican nominees for Congress and the governorship, urged caution, and the plank was removed for fear it would throw the election to the Democrats. However, Crawford promised that if he

34. *Proceedings of a Convention of Colored Citizens, Held in the City of Lawrence, October 17, 1866* (Leavenworth: Evening Bulletin Steam Power Printing House, 1866), 3–4.

were elected he would encourage the legislature to submit the suffrage issue to a popular vote.³⁵

Langston had a second quarrel with Sam Wood in 1867 when the suffrage issue was of paramount importance. The quarrel originated in the proceedings of the state legislature that adjourned March 3, 1867. Three amendments to the constitution were submitted to the people, one on Negro suffrage, one on woman suffrage, and another on whether to disfranchise certain soldiers. Langston wrote to Wood on February 10, 1867, charging him with responsibility "for all the *dodging*, all the frivolous amendments, and all the unnecessary and embarrassing motions which have been had in the senate in connection with the question of negro suffrage." Langston said he was not alone in this feeling, having talked with many, both white and black, who did not differ with him in opinions touching this matter. Furthermore, he wrote that the people who elected Governor Samuel J. Crawford and other officials spoke plainly in favor of the submission of the simple proposition to strike the word "white" from the state constitution.³⁶

In her fine study of the woman suffrage campaign of 1867, Jeanne McKenna wrote that about a month after the 1867 legislature adjourned, Wood launched an impartial suffrage campaign in Kansas. In early April of the same year, at a convention in Topeka, he was the leader in organizing the Kansas Impartial Suffrage Association. Quoting an 1869 circular, McKenna noted that the objective of the organization was to "circulate documents, hold meetings and adopt such other measures as may be necessary to present the question of Impartial Suffrage fully and fairly to the people of the State of Kansas." Several women who were pioneers in the woman's rights movement and were eloquent and successful lecturers came to Kansas from the eastern states to conduct lecture tours for the Impartial Suffrage Association. Numbered among them were Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Reverend Olympia Brown.³⁷

The Impartial Suffrage Meeting at Lawrence, Kansas, on September 5, 1867, was said to have drawn a much larger audience than expected because of the announcement that distinguished speakers from the East would address

the group. According to the report in the Lawrence *Kansas Daily Tribune*, "Miss Susan B. Anthony addressed the audience at length on the question of universal suffrage. Miss Anthony is a fluent, graceful speaker, and fully sustained her Eastern reputation as one of the ablest speakers of the day. Her address was a telling argument in favor of the cause for which she is laboring. At the close, Miss Anthony spoke briefly of the necessity of concert of action by the friends of the negro and female suffrage."³⁸

Writing to Sam Wood on April 7, 1867, Langston acknowledged the receipt of Wood's letter of April 4, 1867. He said he was glad to receive the letter "for I was anxious to know all about the Convention and its aims as well as the intended modes of operation." He regretted his absence from the convention because of faulty rail connections between Leavenworth and Topeka.³⁹

Langston went on to write that Wood had misrepresented him by intimating he thought that the friends of female suffrage were opposed to Negro suffrage. Langston declared that he had no such opinion. He believed that "to submit the two propositions jointly to the people would defeat the one for negro suffrage, and further I asserted that an attempt on the part of members of the legislature to thus unite female with impartial manhood suffrage was an effort to defeat the latter. Hence the enemies of negro enfranchisement without an exception united heartily with those Republican members who favored joint submission."⁴⁰

Langston wrote further that he hoped the cause of Negro suffrage would receive much help from the Impartial Suffrage Association. More specifically, he hoped that in canvassing the state Wood's organization would send out two sets of speakers to hold two series of meetings, one carrying the proposition for woman suffrage and the other that of black suffrage. He said that if he were living and well, he would "spend the two months you named in laboring for the good cause. As you may suppose, I shall bend all my energies to make negro enfranchisement a success. I have quit all business and am now giving all my time to this cause. I shall speak once or twice this week. When your meetings commence I think we had better hold meetings in connection with your speakers. You have plenty of money and we have none, so you must aid us until you commence your labors." At the close of the letter, Langston wrote that Kansas's black leaders were trying to

35. Berwanger, "Hardin and Langston," 105.

36. Charles H. Langston to Samuel N. Wood, February 10, 1867, box 3, Samuel N. Wood Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, hereafter cited as Wood Papers; Jeanne McKenna, "With the Help of God and Lucy Stone," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 36 (Spring 1970): 13–26.

37. McKenna, "With the Help of God and Lucy Stone," 14–15, 23.

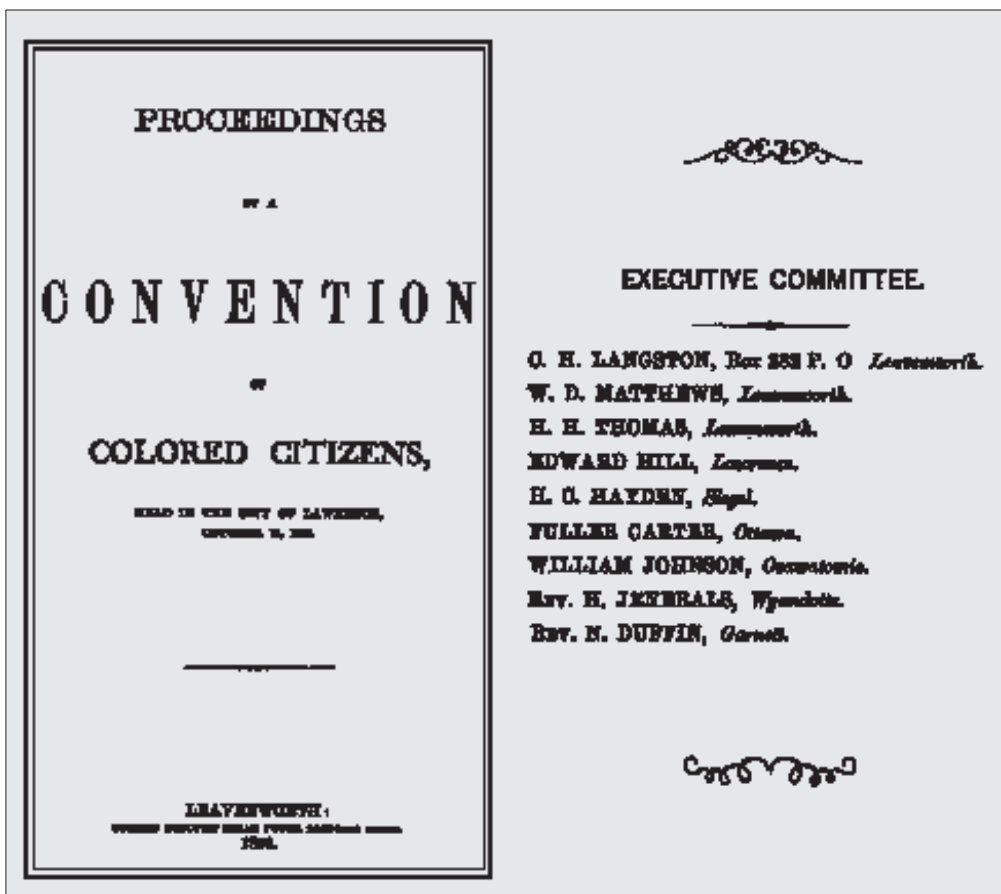
38. *Kansas Daily Tribune* (Lawrence), September 6, 1867.

39. Charles H. Langston to S. N. Wood, April 7, 1867, Wood Papers.

40. *Ibid.*

raise money enough to send one or two good speakers into every community in the state.⁴¹

Enclosed in Langston's letter was a printed handbill with the heading: "HEADQUARTERS STATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS." The text of the handbill reads:



His tireless and dedicated efforts to attain civil rights for his race placed Charles Langston at the October 1866 Convention for Colored Citizens, where he was appointed head of the executive committee.

We, the State Executive Committee of Colored Men, appeal to you as a friend of impartial suffrage, a friend of the oppressed, struggling for equality before the law. A proposition to strike the word "white" from the State Constitution is submitted to a vote of the people at the Fall election. We *must not* allow the proposition to be defeated; we cannot afford to lose *this chance* of getting the right to vote. Our State must

be canvassed—the people must be aroused. We cannot do this without MONEY, and we must earnestly appeal to you for assistance.

The members of the state executive committee are listed as: "C. H. Langston, Lieut. W. D. Matthews, Secretary; H. H. Thomas, Edward Hill, H. C. Hayden, Fuller Carter, Wm. Johnson, Sergt. Richard Johnson, T. J. Baskerville, Wm. C. Brooks, Rev. Woodson M. Twine, John Carter, Rev. Nathan Duffin."⁴²

Langston wrote in a third letter to Wood on June 20, 1867:

I will be ready to commence the canvass at the time you mention on this condition. I will give the principal part of my time and labor to the negro cause. I first of all want the word white out of the constitution for if that word remains in that instrument striking the word male out will do me nor my race any good. You will of course take such course as your judgment shall dictate. I will find no fault of your course, while you advocate suffrage without regard to color. When I think best I will speak for female Suffrage. I will never oppose it. Answer soon.

Since this letter, like the previous one, was either unanswered or unpreserved, we are left in the

dark regarding Langston's campaign activities. He or other African American speakers are not mentioned at the Impartial Suffrage meeting at Lawrence where Susan B. Anthony spoke on September 6, 1867, but it is possible that both groups were represented by exhorters for their cause at other meetings.⁴³

41. Ibid.

42. "Handbill of the State Executive Committee of Colored Men," in *ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*, June 20, 1867.

It was in an atmosphere of opposition that Charles Langston had to carry on his campaign for the black franchise. The proposition to extend the franchise to black men was rejected at the Kansas election on November 5, 1867, by 10,483 votes in favor, 19,421 against striking the word "white." An even greater loss was suffered by aspiring women voters, 9,070 for, 19,857 against striking the word "male." On a national scale the franchise was extended to black men by the Fifteenth Amendment, which was ratified March 30, 1870. The amendment states: "The right of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The right of suffrage was granted to Kansas women by an amendment to the state constitution in 1913.⁴⁴

Blacks merited the vote, Langston insisted, but also they must have access to the jury box. To dramatize this issue he told audiences of his having been tried, convicted, and jailed in Ohio for the part he played in the Oberlin-Wellington rescue of John Price. Since the jury had consisted entirely of white men and since Ohio law regarded them superior to blacks, Langston maintained that he was not tried by a jury of his peers. But as Eugene Berwanger pointed out, Langston's argument "fell on deaf ears and it was not until 1874 that blacks were permitted to serve on juries in Kansas."⁴⁵

A measure of Langston's standing in the Leavenworth community was the invitations he received to speak on the anniversaries of historic events as well as his appointments to leadership positions in local organizations. He presided at the Leavenworth Emancipation Jubilee of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation on New Year's Day in 1864. This event was said to have proceeded "in spirited style," the hall being "filled by the friends, white and colored."⁴⁶

An article in the November 27, 1864, *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* told of a meeting of blacks in Leavenworth on November 25 in honor of the emancipation of slaves in Maryland, which was one of the largest ever convened in the city. Hundreds of the best citizens were in attendance. "Charles H. Langston, Colonel J. C. Vaughan, Colonel D. R. Anthony and Captain R. J. Hinton all made excellent

speeches. The meeting was a jubilee for the colored people, and highly pleasing to the citizen attendants."⁴⁷

On May 6, 1865, the *Daily Conservative* stated that a large number of people had assembled at Turner's Hall "to pay the last tribute of respect to our late beloved President" Lincoln who had been assassinated on April 14. Among the town's leaders and visiting dignitaries who were called upon to make short remarks were Susan B. Anthony and Charles Langston.⁴⁸

The anniversary of the emancipation of the slaves in the British West Indies by an act of Parliament in 1834 was celebrated by the black and white citizens of Leavenworth on August 1, 1864. The *Daily Conservative* reported:

The celebration of the West Indian Emancipation yesterday surpassed in every respect any similar demonstration in this city.

The procession was headed by the Colored Battery of Capt. Wm. D. Matthews, followed by the Sabbath Schools, and the Suffrage Club. It was very long and made an impressive appearance.

At the Grove the time, until two o'clock, was consumed in social festivities, in which not less than two thousand people participated.

The public exercises consisted of singing by the schools, and speeches by Lewis Overton, John R. Brown, Chas. Langston, Wm. H. Burnham and Capt. Matthews. The celebration was characterized by the utmost good order and harmony.⁴⁹

The Freedmen's Bureau (officially the Bureau of Freedmen, Refugees and Abandoned Lands) was created in the U.S. War Department by an act of Congress on March 3, 1865. Its purposes were to prevent the reestablishment of slavery in the South, to provide relief to needy residents of the lately conquered Confederacy, and to take charge of lands confiscated in the South. The bureau distributed rations and medical supplies among black residents, established freedmen's schools, helped benevolent societies establish schools and churches, regulated labor and contracts, took charge of confiscated lands, and administered justice in cases in which African Americans were concerned.⁵⁰

In late August 1865 the local paper announced that Charles Langston had been appointed by the Northwest-

44. Berwanger, "Hardin and Langston," 105-7; Daniel W. Wilder, *Annals of Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1875), 467; Charles A. Beard, *The Republic: Conversations on Fundamentals* (New York: Viking Press, 1944), 363.

45. Berwanger, "Hardin and Langston," 107.

46. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, January 3, 1864.

47. "Emancipation," *ibid.*, November 27, 1864.

48. "Franchise Club Meets," *ibid.*, May 6, 1865.

49. "The First of August," *ibid.*, August 2, 1864.

50. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed., s.v. "Freedman's Bureau."

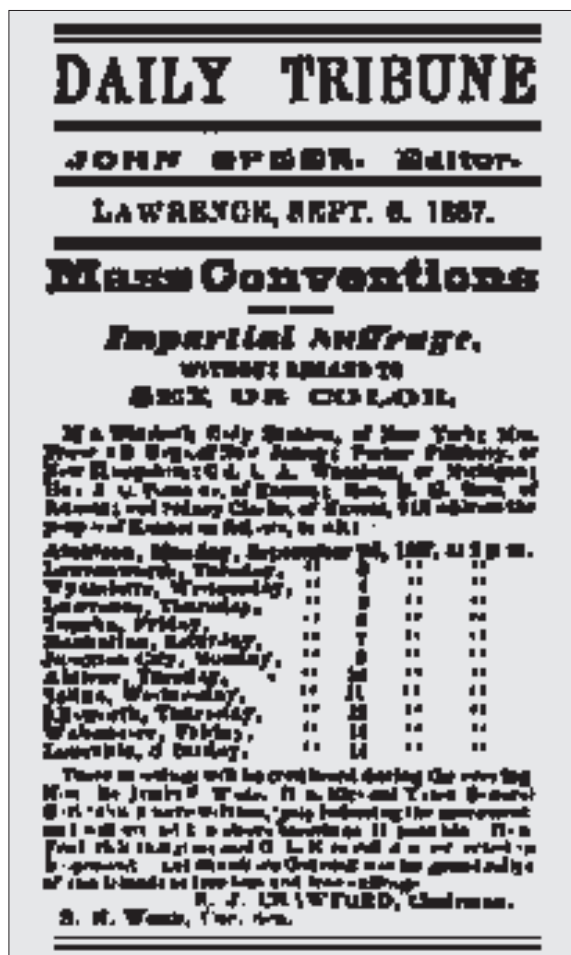
ern Freedmen's Aid Commission as agent for the states of Kansas and Missouri. The *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, in commenting upon this appointment, reported that "no better selection could have been made for the position of agent. He has a general supervision over the Freedmen of the two States—over their schools and also over their

and expenses of a general superintendent of refugees and freedmen for the State of Kansas. "At their request, Charles H. Langston is hereby appointed General Superintendent of Refugees and Freedmen for the State of Kansas subject to the approval of Maj. Gen. Howard, Commissioner." The local editor added: "Mr. Langston is an honest, upright and industrious colored man, well known to our citizens, and well qualified for the duties of the office."⁵¹

Langston used the *Daily Conservative* to request that all teachers of colored schools send him detailed accounts of their progress, the numbers of scholars, and how they were supported. Also, he wanted to hear from districts and counties where the freedmen had no opportunities for education and improvement.⁵²

After six very busy years in Leavenworth, Charles Langston removed to Douglas County, Kansas, in 1868, where he purchased a farm north of the city of Lawrence in the Lakeview district near the Kansas River. It was described in the early 1880s as "a good farm of 125 acres . . . all inclosed and all under cultivation except thirty acres of timber land." The farm had "a comfortable residence and good farm buildings" and "one of the finest apple orchards in the State, and plenty of small fruit on his farm."⁵³

On January 18, 1869, Charles Langston married Mary Patterson Leary, widow of Lewis Sheridan Leary, in Elyria, Lorain County, Ohio. The first child of this union was Nathaniel Turner Langston, born in 1870 and named for the famous black insurrectionist of Virginia. Three years later, Caroline Mercer Langston, the mother of Langston Hughes, was born. A foster son, Dessalines Langston, was named for the revolutionary general of Haiti, the first black republic in the world. The sixth member of the Langston family was Loise Leary, daughter of Mary Patterson and Lewis Sheridan Leary. In 1888, according to biographer Arnold Rampersad, Charles Langston "moved his family to Lawrence, giving up the farm for the house on 732 Alabama Street and part interest in a thriving grocery store on the main Lawrence thoroughfare, Massachusetts Street."⁵⁴



Faulty railroad connections caused Langston to miss the *Impartial Suffrage* Convention on September 5, 1867, in Lawrence. Later Langston believed Samuel Wood had misrepresented him at the convention by intimating Langston thought friends of woman suffrage were opposed to black suffrage. Langston declared that he had no such opinion.

moral and religious condition. Whatever of aid Mr. Langston may ask or need in this work we are quite confident will be cheerfully given." A later news item from an official circular of the Freedmen's Bureau, dated St. Louis, August 30, 1865, stated that the Northwestern Freedmen's Aid Commission generously had offered to pay the salary

51. "City and Country," *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, August 30, 1865; "City and Vicinity," *ibid.*, October 10, 1865.

52. "Freedom," *ibid.*, October 13, 1865.

53. William G. Cutler and Alfred T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 1: 350.

54. *Ibid.*; Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes*, 1: 6-7; Scott, "Langston Hughes of Kansas," 1-8.

Although the records do not reveal why Langston moved from Leavenworth to rural Douglas County, it may be surmised that “push” factors were more important considerations than “pull.” The opportunity to purchase a farm and start a family in Douglas County was appealing, but he seemed to be even more motivated by a desire to leave an increasingly hostile environment. At the anniversary meeting of Leavenworth blacks on January 4, 1865, Langston reportedly delivered a speech in which he advocated “the policy of admitting the negro to all of the political and social privileges enjoyed by the most favored of American citizens.” Newspaper publisher John W. Wright criticized Langston, pointing out that since he was a mulatto he could not fully comprehend the social wishes of either white or black people. “The pure black man can only feel the responsibilities which rest upon the wise and careful conduct of his people,” he wrote. Wright also criticized Langston for his “vindictive and ugly spirit which did not receive the favor or sympathy of the real negro population.” However demeaning, these criticisms did not deter Langston from waging a late campaign to achieve for African Americans political and social privileges that were equal to those of the most favored American citizens.⁵⁵

Compared with the influx of African Americans into Kansas during the Civil War, a much larger immigration of black freedmen occurred in postwar decades. From a black population of 17,108 in Kansas in 1870, the numbers increased to 43,107 in 1880 and 52,003 in 1900. The most amazing group of migrants was the exodusters—some six thousand blacks, chiefly from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas—who arrived in 1879–1880. These and other freedmen found greater freedom and economic opportunities in their new home state.⁵⁶ Historian Virgil W. Dean wrote that while Kansas was by no means free of racial prejudice and discrimination during the late nineteenth century,

its unique territorial and state history had left a civil libertarian element and legacy that exerted some influence. By 1880, with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) and the influx of several thousands of black immigrants, African Americans in

Kansas had become a force in state politics, casting fifteen to twenty percent of the popular vote statewide.⁵⁷

On April 12, 1880, the Convention of Colored Men met at Topeka, with Langston as president. The greater part of the convention was taken up with the problems of thousands of African Americans who had been and were “steadily emigrating to the State of Kansas, and other States, from southern sections of the Union under such circumstances as render them poverty stricken and fit objects of charity and compassion.” Contributions of money, clothing, merchandise, and lumber had been received from humane people throughout the length and breadth of the United States and Europe. It was resolved that the convention delegates “respectfully suggest that the Refugee Relief Board do use said moneys and contributions for settling said refugees on the public and school lands in this and other States, making first payment on the same and aid in supporting them until they shall have raised their first crop.”⁵⁸

E. H. White, editor and publisher of the *Topeka Tribune*, claimed that his newspaper was “the only Colored Journal Published in Kansas.” The newspaper was “Devoted to Republicanism, Temperance, Morality,” and its motto was “God Helps Those Who Help Themselves.” A notice in the issue of June 24, 1880, said that “Hon C. H. Langston of Lawrence, was in our city Monday last and paid this office a pleasant visit.” He was said to have been spoken of very prominently in connection with one of the offices of state. Nearly a month later on July 27, the *Topeka Tribune* reported, “Hon Chas. H. Langston called upon us last week. He is earnestly engaged in canvassing his chances for nomination for the position of Secretary of State. Mr. Langston is one of the oldest citizens, and has been preeminently known as active and useful to every enterprise of the State since his settlement here. He is certainly big enough to meet every demand of the office with credit to himself and honor to the State.” An article headed “Colored Citizens in Council” of August 5, 1880, reported that “Mr. Langston was tired of seeing the colored men led around by the Republicans, who, in making their political calculations, al-

55. “The Anniversary Meeting of the Colored People of Leavenworth,” *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, January 4, 1865.

56. William Frank Zornow, *Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 186–87; Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 184–201.

57. Virgil W. Dean, “‘Black Kansas’: African Americans in the Sunflower State, 1854–1889,” (manuscript, Publications Office, Kansas State Historical Society), 15–19.

58. Daniel W. Wilder, *Annals of Kansas: New Edition, 1541–1885* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1886), 871–72.

ways figure on the solid colored vote, as though they owned them."⁵⁹

A flurry of political activity occurred in September 1880, which, on the national level, led to the election of President James A. Garfield. On September 1 the Republican State Convention was held in Topeka. U.S. Congressman Sidney Clarke placed Langston's name in nomination for lieutenant governor. John L. Waller, an African American Republican leader from Lawrence, seconded the nomination. He said Kansas had twenty thousand black voters, who had always proved loyal to the Republican Party, who would feel honored by the nomination of Langston. Contrary to the laudatory nomination speeches, the predominately white convention rejected Langston. On the first ballot he ranked third and on the second fourth.⁶⁰

At the State Convention of Colored Men in Lawrence on September 20, 1880, William D. Matthews, permanent chairman, "strongly condemned the action of the Republican party for refusing to recognize the colored vote." The convention subsequently adopted the Committee on Resolutions's report that accused the party of rejecting black nominees "on account of an ignoble prejudice which obtains in the party, and that it would be unmanly and detrimental to the true interests of our race to further submit without a solemn protest." A "long and heated debate" ensued on the resolution proposing to nominate Langston for lieutenant governor, but his name finally was withdrawn.⁶¹

Having expressed his dissatisfaction with the leadership of the Republican Party of Kansas on numerous occasions, it came as no surprise when Charles Langston abandoned the GOP in the mid-1880s. He decided to join the Prohibition Party, which championed strict enforcement of the state's constitutional ban on the "manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors." At its Emporia convention on July 14 and 15, 1886, this party's delegates proceeded to nominate a slate of state officeholders. Langston was nominated for the office of auditor, but in the subsequent statewide election he was defeated.⁶²

The Colored Convention that met in Lawrence on June 1, 1888, was attended by about thirty delegates from Dou-

glas and its neighboring counties. After formal organization and some speechmaking, the convention adopted the report of the committee on resolutions that the *Lawrence Daily Journal* described as "a marvel of verbosity and ignorant misstatements of fact." The reporter continued to criticize the resolutions that

take occasion to denounce the Republican party in various sections of the state and especially call on all true negroes to defeat the Republican ticket in Atchison county "on account of the late utterances of the Peacock senator from that county to the United States senate, John J. Ingalls, who is to-day the worse [*sic*] enemy of the negro race living."

Near the close of the convention the president appointed the members of the State Central Committee, one of whom was Charles Langston.⁶³

It should not be thought that all of Langston's time and talent were taken up with politics. In addition to his statewide political leadership and earning an income to support his family, he was president of the Colored Benevolent Society, grand master of the Colored Masons, and founder of the Inter-state Library Association. He was associate editor of the local black paper *Historic Times*, which championed the cause of his race. Furthermore, he was appointed principal of Freedman's University at Quindaro, Kansas, in 1872. A political honor not previously mentioned was his nomination by the Republican Party of Kansas in 1872 as one of the four electors who cast their votes for President Ulysses S. Grant.⁶⁴

Charles Henry Langston died at his home on Alabama Street in Lawrence, Kansas, on November 21, 1892. His obituary was published in the *Lawrence Daily Journal*:

The funeral of C. H. Langston occurred at 2 o'clock this afternoon at the A[frican] M[ethodist] E[piscopal] church. The services were conducted by Rev. Wilson the presiding elder. They were in charge of the colored Masons of which Mr. Langston was a member. A large number of friends both white and colored attended these last services.

59. *Topeka Tribune*, June 24, July 22, August 5, 1880.

60. *Lawrence Daily Journal*, September 2, 1880; Randall B. Woods, "After the Exodus: John Lewis Waller and the Black Elite, 1878-1900," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 43 (Summer 1977): 172-92.

61. Wilder, *Annals of Kansas: New Edition*, 898-99.

62. Robert W. Richmond, *Kansas: A Land of Contrasts* (St. Charles, Mo.: Forum Press, 1974), 167-70; Kirke Mechem, ed., *Annals of Kansas, 1886-1925* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1927), 1: 11.

63. "Colored Convention," *Lawrence Daily Journal*, June 1, 1888.

64. Berwanger, "Hardin and Langston," 112; Wilder, *Annals of Kansas*, 526, 572, 688; Kaethe Schick, *The Lawrence Black Community, 1870-1915* (manuscript, University of Kansas Department of History); Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915: A Social History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 21-45, 166-96; Scott, "Langston Hughes of Kansas," 1-18.

The sickness that led to the death of the deceased was chronic stomach trouble. He was confined to his bed six weeks and his death was not wholly unexpected. He was 72 years of age.

Chas. H. Langston was born in Virginia in slavery [*sic* freedom] and was afterwards sent to school at Oberlin, Ohio. He came to Lawrence in 1870, and has lived here ever since. Four years ago he went into the grocery business on Massachusetts street with Richard Burns. Two weeks ago the partnership was dissolved as Mr. Langston knew he could not recover. He was past grand master of the colored Masons and was president of the colored benevolent society in this city and was quite a political figure until a few years ago. His brother was minister to Liberia [*sic* Haiti] and representative in Congress from Virginia in the last session.⁶⁵

Charles Langston used his time and talents to improve the lives of his fellow African Americans through his leadership in the underground railroad, slave emancipation, education, welfare, politics, fraternal orders, journalism, and other activities. For nearly three decades he had been a leader of the campaigns in Kansas for black suffrage and for blacks' rights to serve on juries and in the state militia. Moreover, he was a leader in seeking improved social and economic conditions for black citizens. His failure to be elected to state offices he sought may have been due, in part, to his lack of interest and effort to build a political base at the town and county level, as did Edward P. McCabe and other young leaders who benefited from exoduster support. Furthermore, his political fortunes were affected adversely by his ambivalence regarding the Republican Party and the negative appraisals of his persona and identity. Langston was well endowed intellectually and better educated than most black leaders, yet he was criticized for being impetuous, aggressive, and vindictive,

65. "Funeral of C. H. Langston," *Lawrence Daily Journal*, November 22, 1892; Oak Hill Cemetery Records, Oak Hill Cemetery, Lawrence, Kans.; Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes*, 1: 360–61. Charles Langston was buried in section five of Oak Hill Cemetery, Lawrence, Kansas. The marker on his grave reads, "Charles Langston, 1817–1892, Grandfather of Langston Hughes." The marker for Mary Sampson Patterson Leary Langston, widow of Charles, reads, "Mary Langston, 1836–1915, Grandmother of Langston Hughes." She was buried near her late husband. Their son Nathaniel Turner Langston was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery on May 1, 1897. Dessalines W. Langston, foster son of Charles Langston, was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery on October 30, 1931. Caroline "Carrie" Mercer Langston Hughes, mother of Langston Hughes, died in a hospital in Harlem, New York, on June 3, 1938, and was buried in a Brooklyn cemetery.

using his scathing wit to demolish his opponents in public debates. He was proud of his African American ancestry, as he was also of his Native American and Caucasian ancestry. But he came to resent the continual use of the adjective "colored," which he was called by many whites. Langston "stressed that he was a human being, not a black

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In addition to his political activities, throughout his lifetime Charles Langston played leading roles in local organizations, education, and businesses, such as the Historic Times, a black newspaper for which Langston was associate editor.

human being, and he was angered in particular during the suffrage campaign of 1867, when a number of Republicans began to call him in an ironic manner "the great colored apostle of Kansas." Notwithstanding these alleged and real limitations, Charles Henry Langston was an outstanding Kansan of African descent who carried on the work of the free-state founders and helped build the state.⁶⁶ 

66. Berwanger, "Hardin and Langston," 112.