In early October 1886, John J. Ingalls, U.S. senator from Kansas, spoke at a Republican rally in Wyandotte County, Kansas, about the state and congressional elections that would be held in November. Ingalls mocked Democrats for having just nominated an African American, William D. Kelley, for Kansas state auditor after black Republican Edward P. McCabe recently completed serving two terms in that position. Democratic efforts to woo black voters would fail, Ingalls predicted: blacks would not ignore the Republican Party’s role in ending slavery or Democrats’ ongoing suppression of black suffrage in the South. “A negro has no right to vote the Democratic ticket,” Ingalls declared, “and any colored man in the North who votes that ticket is a traitor to his race.”

Senator Ingalls’s vehemence was stimulated by a shift in the attitudes of African American voters in Kansas toward his party over the previous decade as black leaders had repeatedly been denied positions in Republican-dominated state and local administrations. By 1886, there was a growing tendency among black voters to support “any ticket having upon it a colored man for nominee,” in the words of one black leader. Black loyalty to the Republican Party was no longer a given.

A few days after Ingalls spoke, a response by black attorney Charles Henry James (C. H. J.) Taylor appeared in the Kansas City Times, a pro-Democratic newspaper in Kansas City, Missouri. Taylor was a recent arrival in Kansas, having been a lawyer, orator, and schoolteacher in Indiana and other states, including Missouri, where he had been principal of the black school in Palmyra and married a fellow teacher, Julia Shropshire. Born Elijah Carson in slavery in Alabama, he changed his name to the more portentous C. H. J. Taylor and throughout his career displayed a blithely self-confident demeanor that often irritated whites who expected blacks to be deferential. Taylor’s educational background may have

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1. “Senator Ingalls at Wyandotte,” Kansas City Journal, October 8, 1886. William D. Kelley’s name is often spelled “Kelly” in newspaper stories of the time.
2. “Mr. Jackson’s Acceptance,” Wyandotte Gazette, August 13, 1886.
included attendance at Oberlin College and the University of Michigan law school, but he probably graduated from neither. There is no doubt, however, that he was an accomplished orator whose reputation had preceded his arrival in Kansas just two years earlier.4

Taylor offered a counternarrative to Ingalls’s: it was not blacks who were disloyal, he wrote, but white Kansas Republicans. They had abandoned their party’s historical commitment to political equality, leaving blacks “out in the cold” by replacing McCabe, the only black on the state GOP ticket, with a candidate of Irish origin. Further, the blame for racist outrages in the South lay not with southern Democrats, Taylor argued, but with Republicans who had deliberately turned the white southern elite against blacks during Radical Reconstruction. Taylor’s argument reflected a more general change in attitudes toward the GOP among black leaders who had lived through the promises and failures of Reconstruction. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

concluded, by voting for the state Democratic ticket, not in support of Democratic Party policies but as a personal declaration of independence. “Be men,” he counseled black voters, “and all is well. Care nothing for party whip and party lash.”

Taylor’s response reflected a more general change in attitudes toward the GOP among many young black leaders across the country who had lived through the promise and failures of Reconstruction. For the first time since Emancipation, they were forced to develop strategies for empowerment that did not involve a primary reliance on the Republican Party. Over the ten years following the end of Reconstruction that are reviewed in this discussion, black leaders in Kansas experimented with strategies to secure office, all involving some variation on the theme of political “independence.”

As historian Bess Beatty has pointed out, “independence” had varying political meanings for black leaders. For some, it meant abandoning the GOP entirely and voting for Democrats or for a fringe party such as the Greenback Labor Party or Prohibition Party; for most, it meant trying to convince white Republicans of the value of the black vote by threatening to throw their support elsewhere. Yet beneath the various iterations of “independence” was a common thread: the pursuit of black agency in a political and social milieu in which white politicians, northern and southern, Republican and Democratic, were strongly averse to allowing rising black leaders into any position that might give them authority over whites.

Ultimately, Beatty affirmed, post-Reconstruction black leaders, many of whom pursued anumed independence strategy, proved “largely powerless” to direct their political future. Blacks in the South were systematically disenfranchised, while, according to historian Leslie Schwalm, those in the North exercised “little influence—let alone power—over regional politics.” Kansas, however, was a little-noted exception: an African American was elected by white and black voters to a high position in state government in 1882, and a black alliance with labor in 1886 placed African Americans in positions of influence in the newly created city of Kansas City, Kansas, and in the surrounding Wyandotte County.

The relative success of what one Kansas City newspaper described as a “colored rebellion” against the GOP establishment from 1877 to 1886 in Kansas and Wyandotte County resulted from some unique conditions that facilitated black agency. Chief among these was an increase in the black population of the state from fewer than 700 in 1860 to more than 40,000 in 1880. Most of this increase was concentrated in a few urban centers, especially Wyandotte County and the city of Wyandotte, where new industries—stockyards, packinghouses, railroads, and smelting works—opened, attracting European immigrant and African American labor.

Due partly to the arrival of thousands of blacks in 1879–1880 during the “Great Exodus” from the South, African Americans came by 1885 to make up over a quarter of the Wyandotte County population. They outnumbered whites in one of the city’s six electoral wards and had close to a majority in another. Since the white electorate was almost evenly split between Democrat and Republican, there was intense competition for the black vote among all political parties.

The value of the black vote was further increased by the mercurial rise of the Knights of Labor, a national labor organization that admitted African Americans as members. The Knights had begun running members for public office, their position strengthened by the success of an 1885 strike against the Missouri Pacific Railway that historian Alton Lee has described as “a huge triumph for organized labor—the greatest in the nineteenth century.”

The strike helped forge bonds between white and black laborers; the connection to organized labor would in turn provide a valuable avenue of contact between the small black elite of Wyandotte city and the black working class.

7. Beatty, A Revolution Gone Backward, xi; Leslie A. Schwalm, Emancipation’s Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009), 189; “Kansas City, Kas.,” Kansas City Journal, March 7, 1886. Kansas City, Kansas, came into existence on March 6, 1886, when Kansas governor John A. Martin issued a proclamation “consolidating the cities of Wyandotte, Armourdale and Kansas City into one city, to be called Kansas City, and calling the election to be held on the first Tuesday in April, the regular spring election.”
9. “Statistics of Wyandotte County, A.D. 1885,” Wyandott Herald, June 4, 1885. The editor and/or publisher chose this alternate spelling of “Wyandotte” for the official title of the newspaper.
Factional divisions within the Republican Party over prohibition, which was deeply unpopular in cities such as Wyandotte; over women’s suffrage; and over policy toward the widely despised railroad companies further threatened Republican dominance as some Republicans deserted the party for the Prohibition or Greenback Party. The unprecedented nomination and election of E. P. McCabe in 1882 must therefore be viewed as an effort to recapture black support in the face of unrelenting demands from black leaders for GOP recognition in the form of patronage jobs or nomination to electoral positions.

Achieving elective or appointive office was a compelling necessity for young, educated black men with no connections who were shut out from other means of achieving wealth and respect. They turned to politics. Frederick Douglass observed in 1883, “because they can find nothing else.”11 As historian William H. Chafe pointed out in his study of the relation of African Americans to Populism in Kansas, black Kansans sought “a secure place” in a community to which most had only recently come and where they were constantly reminded that they were second-class citizens. Five years after arriving in Wyandotte city, some “exoduster” refugees still felt so vulnerable that they armed themselves following the 1884 federal election, fearing that they would be reenslaved now that Democrats were in power.12

The McCabe election thus made Kansas appear a state in which the ambitions of a rising black middle class might be realized. The city of Wyandotte lacked many things that eastern cities took for granted, such as proper sewerage, but it also lacked the established black social elites of eastern cities that might stand in the way of advancement. C. H. J. Taylor praised Kansas as a place “where ‘society’ does not flourish and aristocracy is at a discount.”13 He and his ilk, men such as William D. Matthews and William B. Townsend of Leavenworth, John L. Waller and Thomas W. Henderson of Topeka, George A. Dudley of Wyandotte, and William L. Eagleson of Fort Scott and Topeka fitted readily into this environment.14

Born mostly in the closing years of slavery, these were outspoken and restless self-made men who, as historian Randall Woods wrote, achieved recognition not from “a light skin, free parents, or participation in the anti-slavery movement” but from their energy and talents.15 They typically combined varied, often unpaid careers as journalists, orators, political activists, and organizers with quotidian occupations as teachers, lawyers, entrepreneurs, and preachers. Taylor played all these roles at one time or another and was probably the most successful if eventual national reputation and accumulated wealth are measures.

Although conditions in post-Reconstruction Kansas, and particularly in the city and county of Wyandotte, offered attractive conditions for black agency, there were powerful and rising countercurrents of white prejudice to be navigated. The historian Eugene H. Berwanger, in his influential study The Frontier against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy (1967), argued that white settlers in territorial Kansas brought with them what he called the “anti-Negro prejudice” of their origins in “northwestern” states such as Illinois, leading them to oppose both slavery and black settlement in Kansas before statehood. Racism, from this perspective, was embedded in Kansas from the beginnings of white settlement. The historian James N. Leiker argued, however, that relations between blacks and whites in eastern Kansas were “relatively friendly” until 1879, when black exodusters began to arrive in numbers. Racial animosity increased over the following decade, Leiker wrote, “with at least two lynchings and with institutionalized discrimination becoming the norm.”16

Yet the racial prejudices of white Kansans continued to be constrained, in Leiker’s view, by belief in “their own myth of an egalitarian frontier,” which “required westerners to do more than mouth platitudes about equal opportunity and protection under the law. This allowed

14. Eagleson’s name is sometimes given as “Eagleston” in accounts of the time.
African Americans at least to enjoy high degrees of physical and economic autonomy.”17 Similarly, Woods wrote of growing antiblack discrimination after 1879 alongside a concurrent “commitment to racial advancement in the form of parallel development” among white Kansans. Influenced by the image of the frontier, the free-soil tradition, and American Protestantism, they were, Woods wrote, “willing to leave blacks alone, allowing them the right to vote, to own property, and to enjoy the benefits of a public education.”18

In several studies of the post-Reconstruction period in Kansas, historian Brent M. S. Campney has taken a more critical view of white attitudes and behaviors. Conceding that white Kansans may have believed themselves to be the antithesis of “Negro-hating” southerners, Campney treated this self-concept as a convenient fiction in view of the state’s “increasingly conservative racism” during the 1880s.19 In Campney’s view, support of lynching in rural areas and the imposition in cities of a “rigid, if de facto, system of Jim Crow practices that involved discrimination, exclusion, and segregation in housing, employment, schools, and public accommodations” increased steadily after 1879.20 In Wyandotte city, some neighborhoods were almost exclusively black and lacked adequate public services; as late as 1886, Leon Fink observed, the city’s predominantly black Third Ward was without a permanent schoolhouse. The only school for black children in Kansas City, Kansas, was described in an 1885 report as “old, dilapidated and without proper means of ventilation, and is so located that in wet weather the children have to wade through mud and water to get to it.”21

21. Fink, Workingman’s Democracy, 117; “Our Colored School,” Kansas Sun and Globe, March 26, 1885. The Kansas City, Kansas, of 1885 became known as “old Kansas City, Kansas” when it became a part of the new
condition, from this perspective, neither was “parallel”
or facilitated “development.”

Studies such as Woods’s and Campney’s have done
much to reveal the contradictions in white racial views in
late-nineteenth-century Kansas. It is also valuable to
consider, however, the strategies evolved by black leaders
as they sought to counter increasingly indifferent, when
not outright hostile, white attitudes. Indeed, exploiting
contradictory views on race within and among white
groups, often aided by white Kansans’ desire to appear
more enlightened than white southerners, became a
central strategy of C. H. J. Taylor and his allies to create
space for black political agency.

For Taylor, pursuing agency required developing
strategies for action in a hostile racial environment. Of
necessity, he had to overwrite the white Republican
narrative that claimed sole credit for black freedom with
a counternarrative aimed at arousing in blacks—laborers
as well as the educated elite—an awareness of their
existential condition and potential influence. Though
patronage jobs benefited only a few directly, other blacks
viewed them as an index of place and security. On the one
hand, “if Negroes were given a large share of public jobs,”
Chafe observed of blacks in Kansas, “it meant they were
safe. If, on the other hand, their jobs were taken from them
and given to members of another racial or ethnic group, it
meant they were vulnerable—no longer important
enough to receive the symbolic recognition and protection
conferred on a group by the appointment of a
representative person to a public office.”

It was on this basis, under the motto of “independence,”
that Taylor was able to attract support from the
predominantly working-class black community in
Wyandotte for his efforts to gain office. “Independence”
was for Taylor a flexible device to divide the black vote by
reassuring lifelong black Republicans they were not truly
abandoning the party of Lincoln while also taking
advantage of competition among white polities seeking
the black vote by avoiding firm commitment to any one
party or policy.

For years before Taylor’s arrival in Kansas, black
leaders had demanded recognition from the Republican
Party in the form of patronage jobs or nominations to
elective posts. They threatened that the black vote would
go elsewhere if they did not obtain it, but they seldom
carried out the threat. Rutherford B. Hayes was barely
inaugurated in 1877 before William Eagleson complained
in the Fort Scott Monitor that Republicans were refusing to
reward black loyalty, even though blacks “have the power
to turn the city elections in favor of any man, and we
intend to give our support to those men who are willing
to help us as they do the German and Irishman.”

The next year, Eagleson, a barber by trade, founded
and edited the Colored Citizen, the first black-owned
newspaper in Kansas, whose primary mission was to
voice dissatisfaction with the GOP’s treatment of black
loyalists. After a few months, he moved the paper to
Topeka, where the black population was rapidly growing.
For all his efforts, Eagleson’s only patronage reward was
a position as first assistant doorkeeper in the state House
of Representatives, the very title suggesting how little
authority he was given. Another prominent black leader,
John A. Waller, a Topeka lawyer and journalist, was
rewarded for helping Republican John A. Martin become
governor of Kansas by an appointment as assistant
steward at the state prison.

In state politics, black Republican leaders made similar
entreaties and threats after two well-known and respected
black candidates for lieutenant governor, William B.
Townsend in 1878 and Charles H. Langston in 1880, were
passed over by the GOP. This rebuff occurred, according
to a group of black voters meeting in Lawrence after
Langston’s rejection, because of “an ignoble prejudice
which obtains in the party.” There was no question of
either man’s qualifications for the position. The historian
Richard B. Sheridan described Langston’s leadership in
“the underground railroad, slave emancipation,
education, welfare, politics, fraternal orders, journalism,
and other activities.” Townsend was a highly respected
Leavenworth teacher and journalist and a faithful
Republican.

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24. Dorothy Smith, “The Black Press and the Search for Hope and
Equality in Kansas, 1865–1985,” in The Black Press in the Middle West,
1865–1985, ed. Henry Lewis Suggs (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press,
Charlotte Hinger, NICODEMUS: Post-Reconstruction Politics and Racial
Justice in Western Kansas (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016),
81; Woods, A Black Odyssey, 85.
25. “Colored Men’s State Convention,” Lawrence Daily Journal,
September 21, 1880.
American Struggle in Kansas,” Kansas History: A Journal of the Central
Blacks were urged at the Lawrence meeting to nominate black candidates for any office and “to combine honorably with any set of men to secure his or their election,” regardless of party.27 In Leavenworth, another respected black Republican, William D. Matthews, was proposed by a black convention as a candidate for a seat in the Kansas legislature. In addition to his national stature as a leader in Prince Hall Freemasonry, Matthews had a notable record of service to Republican causes, having harbored slaves at his Leavenworth boarding-house before the Civil War and served with and recruited volunteers for the First Kansas Colored Regiment during the war.28 He was not nominated.

In 1881, George A. Dudley became the first to bolt from the GOP after he was “sat down upon,” as the Kansas City Times put it, at a Wyandotte County Republican convention while bidding to be nominated for register of deeds. Dudley, who had come to Kansas from Kentucky, was among the young, upward-bound blacks who would later ally with C. H. J. Taylor. He was listed in the 1880 U.S. Census as a “laborer” and by the next year was representing the black majority of the Third Ward of Wyandotte on the city council, an unpaid role that made the register of deeds position more attractive because the office holder reaped a portion of the office fees and could hire a staff.29 Rejected by the GOP, Dudley ran on the Greenback Labor Party ballot for the same position. He lost to a Republican opponent but significantly outpolled the victor in the Third Ward. By the time of the 1885 Kansas census, the ambitious Dudley was identifying himself as a real estate agent.30


William B. Townsend, a candidate for lieutenant governor in 1878, was twice more excluded by the GOP while running to be a delegate to the Republican national conventions of 1880 and 1884. He was selected as an “alternate” in 1880 but in 1884 indignantly dismissed the
honor as being no more than an “ordinary horse-holder.”^31 Kansas Republicans in 1884 sent no blacks as delegates to their party’s national convention, though blacks were by then casting 15 to 20 percent of the popular vote statewide.^^ Townsend remained a staunch Republican, however, and would become one of C. H. J. Taylor’s strongest critics, while Dudley, Matthews, and Eagleson would become Taylor allies.

The election of E. P. McCabe, a Republican from Graham County, as auditor in 1882 was therefore unprecedented and unexpected, perhaps even by those who had nominated him at the state convention. It was thought by some that the nomination was a ploy by Governor John P. St. John to placate restive and resentful blacks after Alfred Fairfax, a southern exoduster and successful farmer, was not nominated for an at-large seat in Congress.^^ St. John, speculated the pro-Democratic Kansas City Times, “promised that the darkeys should be well taken care of, but he never intended that McCabe should receive the nomination.”^34 The Times predicted that white Republican voters, once they realized that despite his Irish surname, McCabe was black, would “scratch” him while voting for the rest of the Republican ticket. Indeed, McCabe ran well behind others on the Republican ballot but defeated his Democratic opponent statewide by some 20,000 votes, thanks in part to the sizable majority he received in Wyandotte county, where he won four of the six electoral wards and tied in the remaining two.^^ It was a triumph for black leadership: McCabe was the first African American elected with significant white voter support to a high position in state government in the northern states, a position that crossed the color line by giving him nominal authority over white officials.

It was during the 1884 election season, when McCabe was up for renomination as auditor, that C. H. J. Taylor arrived in Kansas and hung up his shingle in Wyandotte city. Initially he attached himself to the establishment wing of the Republican Party, sharing a law office with veteran state legislator and local party boss William B. “Billy” Buchan and joining the “Blaine-Logan club” that supported the election of Republicans James G. Blaine for president and John A. Logan for vice president.^^

Within months of arriving, however, Taylor began to show his dissatisfaction with the status quo by founding a campaign newspaper, the World, the only black newspaper in Wyandotte County at the time and one of only three in the state. Though the paper languished after a few issues, it showed that Taylor was introducing a critical voice at a time when Wyandotte County blacks were indignant over the refusal of Buchan Republicans to give them any representation on the 1884 county ticket. A white candidate for state representative had declined nomination, so blacks put forward one of their own, Dr. H. A. Lewin, to fill the vacancy. Lewin, an African Methodist Episcopal minister from Topeka, was a worthy candidate, but Buchanan’s committee instead refused to accept the original nominee’s withdrawal. Taylor’s World attacked Buchan, arguing that blacks could not trust him “because he sold out Dudley in convention and broke his pledges to the negro” in not having Lewin nominated for the legislature.^^

More dramatic than this attack on Buchan was Taylor’s decision to run as an independent for Wyandotte County attorney. The Kansas City Times dubbed him “the first independent,” and Taylor used the occasion to discredit the Republican narrative of black dependence on the party. It was the other way around, wrote Taylor in the World: without the black vote, “the republican party in this county could never smell an office in the county, and knowing this as we do, would answer at once that the republican party has as much need of the negroes as the world had for Christ.”^38

White Republicans pleaded with Taylor to withdraw, fearing his candidacy would further divide the Republican

33. Wyandotte Herald, July 6, 1882. Fairfax was elected to the Kansas Legislature, representing his home district of Chautauqua, in 1888. He was the first African American state legislator in Kansas.
34. “With a Whoop,” Kansas City Times, August 11, 1882.
37. Kansas Sun and Globe, October 2, 1884; “The Valley Cities,” Kansas City Times, October 26, 1884.
vote. Buchan told Taylor that he was putting McCabe’s reelection as auditor in jeopardy. This so enraged Taylor, according to a report in the *Kansas City Times*, that he left his office and went into the street, where Buchan, following him, told him “the course he was pursuing would defeat not only him (Buchan) but the whole republican ticket.” If Taylor would withdraw and campaign for Republicans, Buchan promised to make him deputy prosecuting attorney; if he refused, Buchan vowed to drive him out of the county and ruin his political future.

Perhaps feeling he had sufficiently demonstrated divisions within the GOP over the importance of the black vote, Taylor withdrew from the race, mouthing pious statements of loyalty. He was, he declared, “a staunch Republican from the fact that a colored man cannot be anything else.” He returned as a speechmaker for the campaign, which, though unsuccessful for Republicans nationally, was successful in Kansas. Cleveland won the national vote, but his Republican opponent, James G. Blaine, won Kansas as a whole, including Wyandotte County. Republican John A. Martin was elected governor, and E. P. McCabe was reelected as auditor.

Taylor campaigned vigorously for both men, but once elected, Martin refused Taylor’s requests for appointive office. In his study of Taylor’s career, Woods asserted that Taylor became “an avid Democrat” in 1884 partly in reaction to the rebuff, although Taylor himself would later claim that he had always been a Democrat, offering as an example his stumping in South Carolina in 1876 for former Confederate general Wade Hampton during Hampton’s successful gubernatorial campaign against Radical Republican governor Daniel Chamberlain. Taylor supported Hampton, he told an interviewer, “not so much because I admired Hampton as because I believed that Chamberlain, by pushing forward the ignorant negroes and keeping the more intelligent colored men in the back ground, was doing us incalculable harm.” In 1884, Taylor remained unwilling to publicly abandon his advocacy of “independence.” Until the 1886 elections, he was still counseling black voters to “be independent to vote with any party you may desire.”

Bolder than his brief foray as an independent was Taylor’s decision to challenge the Buchan political establishment in the 1885 Wyandotte city elections by forging an alliance with insurgent Republicans led by Thomas C. Foster, chair of the Republican Central

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41. “Political Potpourri,” *Kansas City Times*, November 25, 1884.
Committee and a former railway worker. Foster was supported by the Knights of Labor. The black-labor alliance, dubbed the “independent movement” by the Wyandotte Gazette, dominated the Republican nominating convention by sheer numbers. The slate, headed by Foster for mayor, included Taylor allies H. F. Brown for the party Central Committee and Isaac Parker for constable. Promises were doubtless made that patronage appointments would be forthcoming if the Foster slate were elected. The Republican press was outraged at the coup, accusing Foster and his associates of manipulating blacks, who were presumed to be passive rather than acting in their own interests. The Democratic Wyandott Herald called labor’s alliance with blacks “a menace to the ascendency of the white people in the rule of the city. It ought not to be tolerated.”

Foster lost decisively to the Democratic nominee for mayor, and Democrats won all the other top positions in the city administration. It was clear, as the Wyandott Herald pointed out, that many black voters did not support the Foster ticket, but the Foster rally against the business-oriented Republican establishment upset politics as usual and paved the way for the election of another antiestablishment administration the following year, when the newly created city of Kansas City, Kansas, held its first election.

Meanwhile, the national Democratic Party under Grover Cleveland was wooing the black vote. The Cleveland administration declared its intention to replace black Republican office holders from the previous administration not with whites, as might be expected, but with “colored Democrats who are worthy and capable,” according to the Wyandott Herald. One of the first such appointments was that of James C. Matthews, a black lawyer from Albany, New York, who was appointed by Cleveland in March 1885 as recorder of deeds for Washington, D.C., a position held previously by Frederick Douglass. Republicans in Congress refused to confirm Matthews’s appointment, putting Republicans in the position of denying appointive positions to African Americans and Democrats in the position of awarding them. One of the most outspoken in opposition to Matthews’s appointment was Senator Ingalls of Kansas.

The direction of Cleveland’s policy was not lost on ambitious men such as C. H. J. Taylor who were facing continued refusal by Kansas Republicans to select blacks for elective or appointive positions. At the Republican county convention in July 1885, George Dudley was again passed over for register of deeds, and no blacks were placed on the GOP ticket even though they made up a majority of the delegates at the convention. Following the convention, Taylor called a meeting that, while professing “abiding faith in the national Republican party,” proposed to nominate a black county ticket composed of what attendees called “the true and tried colored Republican voters of the county” to fill county offices.

It was another risky innovation, as Taylor and his allies further probed the party’s divisions by representing themselves as “true” Republicans, in contrast to the Buchan-Ingalls establishment. The convention, with Taylor as temporary chairman, created an entire black ticket aimed at splitting the Republican vote and thereby demonstrating the ability of black Republicans to influence election outcomes. Taylor himself ran for District 10 judge, writing to the Colored Republican Central Committee that he was running because the Republicans “are without a candidate representing the principles of their party.”

Taylor received far from enough votes to challenge the Republican winner of the judgeship but enough to demonstrate a divided black vote and earn him vituperative attacks from the Republican press: the Gazette referred to “a few dishonest and disreputable colored men who have no appreciation of the rights of citizenship,” a variation on Ingalls’s claim that black Democrats did not deserve their freedom. The alliance between white labor and insurgent blacks under Taylor’s forceful leadership presaged changes in power alignments that establishment Republicans feared just at the moment when Kansas City, Kansas, was coming into existence through the amalgamation of the city of Wyandotte with smaller adjacent communities. Who, the question was, would run the new city: the labor-black alliance or business interests?


46. “Local Intelligence,” Wyandott Herald, April 9, 1885.

47. Wyandott Herald, April 23, 1885.


The Republican delegate convention of March 18, 1886, resembled in many ways the Foster convention just the year before. It was marked, the *Times* noted, by “the absence of the old line of ward politicians, their places being filled by recruits from the laboring ranks,” including African Americans and Knights of Labor, Republicans and Democrats. The subsequent nominating convention was called to order by the new chair of the city Republican Central Committee, Thomas F. Hannan, a former Wyandotte city councilman, a stonemason, and a Knight. C. H. J. Taylor was elected secretary by acclamation, underlining the close relation between Taylor; his black allies, including H. F. Johnson and Russell Burdett; and the Knights. The convention nominated Hannan for mayor, with the delegates of all but two of the consolidated city’s ten wards voting in favor. All ten nominees for councilmen were Knights of Labor. Taylor was proposed for police judge but declined; his chances of being elected would be slight, while he was certain of obtaining an appointive position with Hannan as mayor.

Republican and Democratic papers alike disparaged the convention. The *Kansas City Journal* called it a “packed affair” and predicted that there was no chance of its nominees being elected. The *Kansas City Times* called the

52. “Primary Elections,” *Kansas City Times*, March 19, 1886.
Despite the dire predictions, the Hannan ticket did quite well. Hannan defeated the “citizens’ ticket” candidate for mayor by a slim margin, winning three Wyandotte wards, including the black-dominated Third Ward, and four of ten council seats were won by Hannan Republicans. Taylor was promptly appointed to the new city police force, and George S. Carroll, becoming the first African American to hold such a position in Kansas. Three of Taylor’s black allies were appointed to the new city police force, and George A. Dudley was appointed deputy marshal.

The Republican establishment wasted no time in setting out to discredit Hannan and fracture the coalition that had put him in office. First, it isolated Taylor, whose alliances with Foster and Hannan made him a pariah to mainstream Republicans. Taylor was among the delegates to a Wyandotte County convention on June 26, 1886, that elected delegates to the state convention in Topeka. The conventioneers were disposed, reported the Wyandotte Gazette, “to make an easy chair of him.” A resolution was adopted endorsing “the official record” of E. P. McCabe without supporting his renomination as auditor, and Taylor was not chosen as a delegate to the state convention.

Undeterred, he attempted to be recognized as a delegate at large, and when that failed, he wrote a letter to the convention, published in the Topeka Daily Capital, arguing for McCabe’s renomination for a third term. The 1886 state ticket should be the same as the 1884 ticket, Taylor argued, so as not to risk the loss of high offices to the “party of oppressors,” the Democrats. The convention refused to renominate McCabe, however, citing opposition to third terms as the reason. It instead nominated a candidate of Irish origin. With McCabe’s removal, no black candidates remained on the state Republican ticket, as Taylor had anticipated.

Days before the Democratic state convention was to meet, Taylor issued a circular, signed by himself and twenty-six other prominent black leaders, Democrats and Republicans, calling for a “Conference of Colored Men” in Kansas City, Kansas. Its proclaimed purpose was to discuss ways of improving the black condition in Kansas including, most importantly from Taylor’s standpoint, adopting “some plan by which 14,000 negro voters in the state may, when the emergency or exigency demands it, become united and walk together as one man to obtain some ‘certain result.’” McCabe’s defeat and the outcome of the Wyandotte City election may have convinced Taylor of the need to go beyond proposing individuals for elective or appointive office. It was necessary to organize African Americans in Kansas into a voting bloc that could better exploit the divisions among white political groups.

Among the names on the conference circular was that of John L. Waller, a staunch Republican, who objected that his name had been included without his permission. Waller wrote that he would not join Taylor’s effort “because I am a republican and I do not regard a ‘conference’ of the kind named in the call, as beneficial or of interest to the success of the party of my choice.” A writer to the pro-Republican Kansas City Journal claimed that other “prominent names” had also been placed on the circular without permission. Nevertheless, about a hundred men attended, including not only professed Democrats, such as W. D. Kelley of Leavenworth, but staunch Republicans. They were there, reported the Kansas City Times, to “break up the conference if possible before any state organization could be effected.”

The conference approved several nonpartisan resolutions, including a demand that the word “white” be removed from the Kansas constitution, before coming to the key proposal that Taylor, as chairman, “appoint a state central committee of one from each county represented in the meeting, with full power to act in drafting calls.” Taylor was to be the secretary of the new committee. Interestingly, Waller’s name appears among the signatories to the resolutions, lending credibility to the conference’s creation of a standing, “independent” black

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58. “Colored Conference,” Kansas City Times, August 1, 1886.
state political organization. For Taylor, the conference was a success.\(^{61}\)

His strategy was vindicated the next day at the Democratic state convention when his ally William D. Kelley was nominated for auditor. It was, on the surface at least, a revolution in Kansas Democratic Party politics and a vindication of Taylor’s strategy of turning white racial attitudes to political advantage. Kelley’s nomination was proposed by a prominent white attorney, Thomas P. Fenlon of Leavenworth, who told delegates it was time for Democrats “to look history in the face and accept the fact that because a man was black he was not deprived of brotherhood in the human race.”\(^{62}\) The Kansas City Times spoke of “spontaneous enthusiasm and genuine good will” toward Kelley among the delegates, although other accounts suggested the nomination caused much discomfort. Republican papers meanwhile poured scorn on Fenlon, Democrats in general, and Kelley in particular. One newspaper editor, Sol Miller of the Weekly Kansas Chief of Troy, Kansas, wrote that a black man who joins with Democrats “is an enemy to his race. He politically disgraces himself by the act.”\(^{63}\)

As the election campaign continued, Kelley mounted repeated attacks on the self-congratulatory Republican narrative that the party had fought the Civil War to free blacks. The war was fought, he argued, for the union, “not for the negro.” Only when the war was going badly for the North had Republicans accepted the aid of African Americans. After the war, he said, blacks received the franchise not as an act of justice, as Republicans liked to claim, but only to capture the black vote. Blacks had never been passive, nor were they now, Kelley claimed, sounding the theme of independence: “The ballot is ours, fortunately and when the colored man drops in his vote at the coming election, he should not use it to further any party’s interest but vote for self respect and protection to our race. It is our only salvation. I believe that our future welfare depends wholly on our own efforts.”\(^{64}\)

Fearing that Wyandotte County blacks were ready to desert their party en masse in favor of Democrats, establishment black Republicans united behind a longtime Taylor antagonist, John H. Jackson, as candidate for clerk of the District Court. Their hope was that the presence of a black candidate on the 1886 Republican county ticket would, as Jackson put it, “satisfy a large element which has heretofore regarded itself as practically without recognition in county affairs.”\(^{65}\) Jackson was passed over by the Republican county convention, however, and there were no blacks on any ballot, Democrat or Republican, in Wyandotte County.

The Wyandotte Gazette blamed Taylor and his allies for blocking Jackson’s nomination, claiming they had done so after Jackson had refused to join them “in their attempt to sell the party to the democrats.” As Taylor’s star rose and Republican supremacy in Wyandotte County declined, the rhetoric against him grew increasingly strident. He was described in the Gazette, for example, as “a man who has been a stench in the nostrils of honest people from the time he first opened his bellows in this city” and “a political mountebank, ‘on the make,’ and a disgrace to his race, three-fourths of whom are opposed to him and his methods.”\(^{66}\)

This was the climate when Senator Ingalls came to speak in Kansas City in October 1886 and when Taylor, now identifying himself as “Secretary of the Colored State Central Committee of Kansas,” made his response in the Times. The letter was not Taylor’s only critique of the Republican narrative at the time: he also published a preélection broadsheet titled “Every Colored Voter Should Read This Letter.” It was addressed, in Taylor’s words, “to every colored man that desires to see himself and his ‘people’ elevated, recognized, and given an equal show in the race for ‘that’ which makes individuals grand and great.”\(^{67}\)

The broadsheet was aimed at people like himself: educated, ambitious, striving black men living in a state that prided itself on not being like the South in its treatment of African Americans yet where they were increasingly subject to insults, exclusion, and discrimination. It was his strongest effort to date to undo the white Republican narrative that consigned African Americans to a passive, dependent role and overwrite it with a contrasting narrative of black activism and independence.

In the broadsheet, Taylor painted a very different picture of Kansas than the one white Kansans held dear.

\(^{61}\) “Kansas City, Kan.,” Kansas City Times, August 4, 1886.

\(^{62}\) “Completing the Ticket,” Kansas City Star, August 5, 1886.

\(^{63}\) “Correct You Are,” Weekly Kansas Chief, September 2, 1886; “Chosen to Win,” Kansas City Times, August 6, 1886; “Flotsam and Jetsam,” Leavenworth Times, August 6, 1886.

\(^{64}\) “Kelly,” Johnson County Democrat, September 30, 1886; “Political,” Wichita Beacon, September 18, 1886.

\(^{65}\) “Mr. Jackson’s Acceptance,” Wyandotte Gazette, August 13, 1886.

\(^{66}\) “Unnatural and Wrong,” Wyandotte Gazette, October 1, 1886; Wyandotte Gazette, October 15, 1886.

\(^{67}\) Taylor, “Every Colored Voter Should Read This Letter.”
He asked why “a decently dressed colored man is refused entertainment and respectable treatment in the majority of the hotels, inns, restaurants and other public places licensed to entertain the public” while others could freely enter. Recent immigrants could go into the most exclusive sections of opera houses, “while our most learned and refined black man is kept on the outside of the whole building, unless he is willing to go into the gallery or to some part of the building marked ‘nigger row.’”

Well-educated African Americans, Taylor continued, had difficulty finding jobs and were “never expected to be heard from as having views, opinions or convictions upon public questions that are so frequently discussed by the other nationalities in this country.” There was, he insisted, no difference between the political parties in this respect: there was “as much prejudice, bias and deep-rooted hatred of the negro in relation to and concerning the treatment of him in the ‘particulars’ specified in the Republican party as you will find among the most radical fire-eating Secessionist of the South, and I came near saying ‘more.’”

Taylor continued to direct most of his opprobrium at the GOP. The party had not freed blacks, he claimed, but “commenced scheming to enslave us” after Emancipation: “We were not allowed by them to think. One head for the more than 6,000,000 colored voters was sufficient, in their estimation, and that head must be regulated to endorse anything politically which the Republicans might dictate.” Taylor called on his readers to be independent and vote for whichever party served black interests but concluded by asking them to show Democrats that “you are willing to give them a trial.” A vote for Democrats, he argued, would show “how many free men there are of my race in the west.” As in his letter to the Kansas City Times, Taylor offered no defense of Democratic policies. Voting for Democratic candidates was instead presented as a demonstration by “free men” of their willingness to give Democrats a “trial” to see whether they would suitably reward black support.

For the rest of the election campaign, Taylor, often in company with William D. Matthews, traveled the state giving speeches supporting Kelley and the state Democratic ticket. The Republican press meanwhile rained epithets on him and his comrades and their speeches—among them “bombastic,” “a mass of rot,” “hirelings of the Democratic party,” “noisy dishonest blatherskite,” “demagogues,” and “renegade”—the vitriol of the denunciations revealing the Republican establishment’s fear of black defection after a generation of loyal support.

The election results in Wyandotte County were a surprise: almost the entire Democratic county ticket was elected, and Thomas Moonlight, Democratic gubernatorial candidate, won the county by a significant margin, although not the state. The Kansas Pionier blamed the Republican Party’s “ignominious defeat” in the county on its management by “tricksters, ringsters, demagogues, and cranks . . . who belong to the last century.”

While the prohibition issue surely played a major role in the Republican defeat, the black vote, under Taylor’s influence, was also a factor. W. D. Kelley lagged elsewhere in the state, running well behind the losing Democratic ticket, but won in Leavenworth and Wyandotte Counties, even though he received fewer votes in Wyandotte’s black-majority Third Ward than his Republican opponent.

The apparent shift in voter allegiance among Kansas blacks, at least in Wyandotte County, since Leavenworth County was reliably Democratic, brought Taylor to the attention of state and national Democratic leaders. A month after the election, he was in Washington, D.C., pursuing the vacant position of minister to Liberia, the previous minister having died in Liberia in August. He combined the trip with an announcement of his plan to organize a convention of the “educated colored people of the country.”

A mere two years after arriving in Kansas, Taylor had become a national figure by creating a nominally independent black voting bloc there. He now proposed to project onto the national stage the organizing strategies that had succeeded in Kansas. The Kansas City Journal called it “a gigantic scheme for a national convention of colored men, and the formation of a national committee and an executive committee, who shall have all the powers of the full convention.” The executive committee was to

68. Ibid.
69. “The Lesson in Our County,” Kansas Pionier, November 4, 1886; “The Democrats Victorious,” Wyandott Herald, November 4, 1886. The Pionier was a predominantly German-language newspaper that ran some articles in English. Republican in sympathies, it was critical of the Buchanan-Ingalls political machine.
70. “Official Vote of Wyandotte County, November 2, 1886,” Wyandott Herald, November 11, 1886. Randall Woods is incorrect in stating that Kelley carried only Leavenworth County (Woods, A Black Odyssey, 93).
have the “‘directing and marshaling of the colored votes in each state.’”

Taylor was continuing to uphold the banner of independence and agency. Refusing to describe his proposed national convention as pro-Democratic, he told the Washington Post that its goal was to “determine the numerical strength of the negroes who are willing to free themselves from the Republican party. No man will be allowed to have a seat in the convention who is not willing to announce himself as being no longer bound by Republican doctrines.” Asked whether Grover Cleveland had gained the confidence of blacks, Taylor said, “Mr. Cleveland is to the negroes as the second coming of Christ” in light of his firm support for James C. Matthews as recorder of deeds.73

About the same time that Taylor was in Washington, President Cleveland nominated Matthews for recorder of deeds for a second time, a further sign of his intention to woo black voters. The nomination would again be rejected by the Senate, with Senator Ingalls playing a prominent role.74 Cleveland would finally seat Matthews by means of a recess appointment.

News of Taylor’s pending appointment to Liberia was celebrated by many blacks in Kansas who regarded his appointment as a compliment to the “West.” Even J. Dallas Bowser’s pro-Republican Gate City Press in Kansas City, Missouri, which had once been sued by Taylor for slander, said that Taylor’s appointment was a just reward for “valiant service in behalf of the party of his adoption.”75

The white Republican press in Kansas and Missouri, meanwhile, was thrown into yet more vitriolic attacks, most finding more to object to in Taylor’s demeanor than in his politics. The Spectator of Palmyra, Missouri, said that while Taylor had lived there, he had “made himself obnoxious to the people by his impudence and assurance in attempting to push himself where he was not wanted.”76 Other papers called him “a boodler of the vilest type and a man of the loosest morals”; “a noisy, brassy, offensive, half-educated, underbred creature”; “fat, unctuous, black, with abundance of self-

74. Wyandott Herald, December 30, 1886; “Are They Still Slaves?” Wyandott Herald, February 3, 1887.
76. Palmyra (MO) Spectator, December 24, 1886.
and the *Baltimore Star* said he was “a whole souled kind of a man and will no doubt make a successful diplomat.” Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper commented that Taylor’s career illustrated “the remarkable progress which has been made by the colored race, under many and great disadvantages, since the abolition of slavery. Born a slave, Mr. Taylor has by his own exertions amassed a fortune of $40,000, advanced himself to a position of influence in public affairs, and now goes [to Liberia] as the representative of his country.”

Taylor’s appointment remained unconfirmed by the Senate as he left for Liberia in late April 1887, a month after appearing, unabashed, at a Republican city nominating convention in Kansas City, Kansas, to second Thomas Hannan’s renomination for mayor. The *Kansas Pionier* approved of the working-class and African American makeup of the convention, saying that delegates were “representative men from all parts of our consolidated city—the bone and sinew of all classes of its inhabitants[,] it came nearer representing our entire people than any convention that was ever before assembled in this city. . . . Tricksters, ringsters and demagogues found no seats in that convention.” The *Gazette* had a different view, of course, calling it “as inconsistent a body of men as ever assembled to misrepresent a party.”

By the time he sailed for Liberia, C. H. J. Taylor had become an influential figure. When President Cleveland visited Kansas City, Kansas, in October 1887, months after Taylor’s departure, the *Gazette* complained that the visit had been badly managed, suggesting sarcastically that Mayor Hannan and City Attorney W. S. Carroll depended too much on “their dear friend and political adviser, C. H. J. Taylor . . . [to] manage the politics of city and county.” Nevertheless, Hannan was reelected over a businessman heading the perennial “citizens’ ticket.”

Taylor spent only a few months in Liberia before returning to the United States, ostensibly on leave but with no intention of going back. He gave various reasons for abandoning the post, but the most influential was surely his desire to organize black voters ahead of the 1888 pres-

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78. Quoted in “The New Liberian Minister.”

79. “Charles H. J. Taylor,” Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, April 9, 1887.


82. Daily Gazette, November 5, 1887.
idential campaign. He attended the Democratic national convention in St. Louis in June as an alternate delegate from Kansas, where he almost certainly had a role in the creation of the National Negro Democratic League, although his name is not on the list of founding officers, perhaps in deference to his then official status as a diplomat. The league was, however, very much the instrument for “directing and marshaling of the colored vote in each state” that he had envisioned. It aimed to give adherents an inside track to patronage jobs in any constituency where Democrats were in power, while its leaders would potentially acquire influence over Democratic policies. In short, the league would be an African American political “machine” built on patronage.83

After attending the Democratic state convention in Leavenworth in July, Taylor traveled to Indianapolis for a national black conference called by J. Milton Turner of St. Louis. Turner advertised the meeting as “independent,” hoping to attract a cross-section of black leaders to gain political leverage as the election approached. Taylor was having none of it: he was ready to publicly discard the mantle of “independence,” having been shown to his satisfaction that Democrats, unlike Republicans, rewarded black supporters. “I am a Democrat,” he announced on arriving in Indianapolis, “and I come here, I want it plainly understood, for the purpose of preventing this convention from starting an independent movement. The colored man knows nothing about independence in politics. He must be either a Republican or a Democrat. I want them to say they are Democrats.”84 Taylor swiftly wrested control of the conference agenda from Turner by questioning his motives and credentials as a Democrat. Taylor was determined that the Indianapolis gathering should be perceived as a national gathering of black Democrats, thus putting its organizers in advantageous positions ahead of a hoped-for second Cleveland administration.

The coming of that administration was delayed by the Democrats’ election loss, leaving Taylor to bide his time in Atlanta and Kansas City until Grover Cleveland’s reelection in 1892 gave him a second chance at high office. By then, Taylor was president of the National Negro Democratic League. Soon after Cleveland’s inauguration, the league executive wrote President Cleveland to request acknowledgment of its services leading up to the Democratic victory. Black Democrats, the letter said, had faced “insults and injuries of every kind” after standing behind the party since 1888, and it was now time that “speedy recognition be given by the President to negro Democrats, and the places now held by negro Republicans be given to the league.”85

In September 1893, the desired recognition came for Taylor when he was nominated by President Cleveland as minister to Bolivia, an unprecedented breach of the color line since Bolivia was considered a “white” country. Confirmation was denied by the Senate, however, with the argument, as it was stated in the Atlanta Constitution, that “The whites of Bolivia would feel that we hold them in contempt if we should send a negro there in an official capacity which would entitle him to the highest social honors.” President Cleveland then nominated Taylor for recorder of deeds in Washington, D.C. This time, despite furious opposition from District Democrats who wanted the post for one of their own, he was confirmed by the Senate.86 John J. Ingalls was by then no longer a senator. Taylor remained recorder until early in the administration of William McKinley, leaving office in 1897. Two years later, C. H. J. Taylor, a tenacious champion of African American political agency and, according to one newspaper, “the best organizer in the West,” died of a heart attack in Atlanta at the age of forty-three.87

87. Indianapolis Freeman, September 3, 1888.