As readers of *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* are well aware, the Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854 put territorial voters squarely in the middle of a great national debate. With proslavery forces controlling ports and towns on the Missouri River, freestaters realized they needed their own location to access steamboat traffic. Quindaro became that site. A coalition of Natives, whites, African Americans, real estate developers, abolitionists, and others with varied interests and diverse backgrounds purchased land from the Wyandot Indians and laid out the town. From 1857 to 1858, Quindaro boomed with businesses and a school, but its success was short-lived. By 1861, when Kansas entered the Union as a free state, the settlement’s population had shrunk from 1,200 to fewer than 700. No longer needed as a port town, Quindaro nonetheless attracted hundreds more residents in the decades to come, mostly blacks fleeing the South and seeking freedom in the state where John Brown had made his dramatic stand. In 1881, the African Methodist Episcopal Church acquired the school that became Western University, the first black college west of the Mississippi, which operated until 1943. By the mid-twentieth century, Quindaro had been submerged within Kansas City, Kansas, which in turn became part of the sprawling Kansas City metropolitan area. As with rural communities across the state, Quindaro’s history appeared lost in a wave of urbanization.

On April 20–21, 2018, a symposium at Memorial Hall in Kansas City, Kansas, explored this fascinating community’s past. Titled “Strength through Numbers: The Intersection of Abolitionist Politics, Freed Blacks, and a Flourishing Community in Quindaro,” the symposium assembled academics, civic leaders, artists, musicians, and community members for two days of presentations and discussions about Quindaro’s unique history and how to preserve it. The articles in this special issue began as presentations at that event. Over the past year we, as guest editors, have worked with contributors to revise their presentations for publication. We proudly submit this issue as a continuance of the work done by the symposium’s organizers and participants to preserve Quindaro’s past, elevate its present, and ensure its future.

On March 12, 2019, President Donald Trump signed legislation that designates Quindaro a National Commemorative Site and authorizes federal agencies to...
enter into financial agreements to subsidize preservation. Marvin Robinson, a local activist who has worked for decades to save “the Pompeii of Kansas,” called this step “a huge honor.” As the following essays testify, Quindaro lay at the intersections of Indian removal, slavery and freedom, Manifest Destiny, African American education, urban sprawl, arts and music, and middle-class flight—in other words, the major paths of American and Kansan history.