

new resources in american studies

black newspapers in kansas

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With this research note we continue an occasional series intended to point to new scholarly resources. As both authors and editors recognize, the resources described herein are not, strictly speaking, new, though they have been practically unknown: “. . . I think,” writes Mr. Tuttle, “they are new to most scholars.” To be picky would have required a new title—“Hidden Resources in American Studies?”—and we thought it best to use the old. Whether this is new wine in old bottles, or sort of old wine in a new bottle with a slightly inaccurate old label, isn’t entirely clear: the present label has to do with scholarly truth-in-packaging (see XI, 2, p. 5).

—SGL

“Living here [in Kansas],” mused one of the characters in Gordon Parks’ autobiographical novel *The Learning Tree*, “is like havin’ a good lay with a woman you don’t quite trust.” Kansas, with her image of abolitionism and free soil, stirred up “mixed feelings” among blacks who had sought to find in the Jayhawk State liberation from servitude and caste only to discover that racism was as much an attitude as a set of legal statutes. “Here, for the black man,” explained Parks, the black writer, photographer, and composer, and a native of Fort Scott, “freedom loosed one hand while custom restrained the other. The law books [in Fort Scott] stood for equal rights, but the law (a two-pistol-toting, tobacco-chewing, khaki-putteed, leather-leggined cop called Kirby) never bothered to enforce such laws in such books—‘mainly ’cause I can’t read,’ he often bragged.” Yet Kirby was not just being contrary, nor was he jeopardizing his job; generally reflecting the white community’s racial attitudes, he had a mandate to discriminate against black citizens and even, at times, to be brutal to them. Moreover, Kirby was but one deterrent to first-class citizenship. Historically, black Kansans, being relatively weak politically and deprived economically, have been vulnerable in

countless ways. Often in such towns as Fort Scott, for example, "there was no written law against a black man's eating in a white restaurant or drugstore, but," Parks has written, "there could be trouble, lots of it, if he tried. So seldom, if ever, did he try—especially if he wanted one of the odd jobs that meant his existence." What were black people to do? To whom could they complain? Even whites who were nominally their friends would usually offer only sympathy. "I know, Jack," a white man had told Parks' fictionalized father in *The Learning Tree*, "but you know my hands are tied.' 'And so's a black man's behind,' Jack had countered."¹

It is, in part, this conflict between the image of Kansas and the realities of race relations in the state which has not only generated tension and unrest, but has also produced a rich and exciting but largely unexplored history. Such neglect of the past is unfortunate; to know itself, a society cannot afford to ignore its heritage, and the knowledge of much of Kansas' Afro-American history is accessible—through the state's unparalleled abundance of black newspapers, many of which are on microfilm.

Two decades before black history had become the popular field it is today, the Committee on Negro Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies, with financial support from the General Education Board, sponsored a project to microfilm black newspapers in the United States. Salvaged and preserved as a result of this work were scores of newspapers that might otherwise have been destroyed or simply allowed to deteriorate; and for almost twenty years these microfilms have been accessible by purchase from the Library of Congress's Photoduplication Service. For sale, for example, are runs of five newspapers each from the states of Arkansas, California, Indiana, Maryland and North Carolina; six from Illinois and Ohio; seven from the District of Columbia, Missouri, Tennessee and Virginia; eight from Minnesota and New York; nine from South Carolina; eleven from Georgia and Texas; and fourteen from Louisiana. Yet it is in dealing with Kansas, the state that has the highest total of newspapers on microfilm, that one encounters a startling statistic: There are thirty-eight such Kansas black newspapers.²

This figure in itself is impressive; but, in addition, there are bound or loose runs of thirty-three other Kansas black newspapers at the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka. Totalling seventy-one, these newspapers are listed below. Papers marked with an asterisk are in bound or loose form at the Kansas State Historical Society. All others are on microfilm, and may be used at Watson Library, the University of Kansas; the Library of Congress; and the Kansas State Historical Society.

Kansas' Black Newspapers

Symbols used in the following list are: d. for daily newspaper; w. for weekly; s.m. for semi-monthly; and m. for monthly. Unless otherwise indicated, those newspapers marked with an asterisk are weeklies. When possible, the date of the first issue published is cited in brackets.

ARMOURDALE

**American Citizen* w.: 1889-1907, July 26-Aug. 2; 1904 plus scattered issues missing.

**Daily American Citizen* d.: 1898-1900, Dec. 15-Apr. 24, scattered issues.

ATCHISON

The Atchison Blade w. [July 16, 1892]: 1892-1894, July 23-Jan. 20, few issues missing.

BAXTER SPRINGS

The Southern Argus w. [June 18, 1891]:

(Note: Removed to Fort Scott, Kansas, with issue of Oct. 15, 1891) 1891, June 18-Oct. 8.

CHEROKEE

**Kansas Homestead*: 1899-1900, Dec. 23-Jan. 6.

COFFEYVILLE

Afro-American Advocate w. [Sept. 2, 1891]: 1891, Sept. 2, 9, Dec. 25; 1892, Jan. 1, 15-Apr. 15, 29-July 1, 15-Sept. 9, 22-Dec. 16; 1893, Jan. 13, 27-Feb. 24, Mar. 17-May 26, June 30, July 21-Sept. 1.

The American w. [Feb. 19, 1898]: 1898-1899, Apr. 23-Apr. 1, scattered issues missing.

FORT SCOTT

Colored Citizen w.: (Note: Removed to Topeka, Kansas, with the issue of July 26, 1878; not published July 12, 19, 1878) 1878, Apr. 19-July 5.

**Fair Play*: 1898-1899, Apr. 22-June 16.

The Southern Argus w.: (Note: Removed from Baxter Springs, Kansas, with the issue of Oct. 15, 1891) 1891-1892, Oct. 15-Feb. 4.

HUTCHINSON

**Blade*: July 27, 1918, and 1919-1922, Dec. 20-Apr. 1.

INDEPENDENCE

**People's Elevator*: 1928-1930, Jan. 5-July 24.

KANSAS CITY

**Advocate*: (Note: Originally published as *The Independent*: 1916, Feb. 12-Nov. 4) 1916-1926, Nov. 11-May 7.

The American Citizen w.: (Note: Removed from Topeka, Kansas, with the issue of July 26, 1889) 1889-1907, July 26-Aug. 2, many issues missing.

Daily American Citizen d. [Sept. 16, 1897]: 1898, Dec. 15; 1899, Feb. 2, 8, May 27, June 18, July 2, 9, Aug. 1, 2, 8-10, 12, 15, 17, 19, 20, 22-24, 26, 29-31; 1900, Jan. 31, Feb. 1, 3, 4, 6, 7-Apr. 24.

**National Review*: 1913, Apr. 26-Oct. 25.

**People's Elevator*: (Note: Established at Guthrie, Oklahoma, May 26, 1892) 1937-1938, Aug. 19-Dec. 29; 1940, scattered issues.

**Plaindealer*: (Note: Before 1932, *Plaindealer* was published in Topeka) 1932-Nov. 7, 1958.

**The Kansas Elevator*: 1916, Feb. 12-Nov. 4.
Western Christian Recorder w.: 1898, Feb. 26, Mar. 5, Aug. 27-Nov. 5, 19-Dec. 31; 1899, Jan. 7-Mar. 25, Apr. 8-22, May 7, 13-June 3, July 1-Aug. 19.

**Wyandotte Echo*: 1930-1937, Apr. 4-Dec. 24.

LAWRENCE

**Colored Radical*: (Note: Also published in Leavenworth) 1876, Aug. 24-Nov. 16.

The Historic Times w. [July 11, 1891]: 1891, July 11-Nov. 14.

**Western Recorder*: 1883-1884, Mar. 17-Nov. 6.

LEAVENWORTH

The Leavenworth Advocate w. [Aug. 11, 1888]: (Note: Ceased publication with the issue of Aug. 22, 1891; succeeded by *The Times-Observer*, Topeka, Kansas, with the issue of Sept. 4, 1891) 1888-1891, Aug. 18-Aug. 22, few issues missing.

The Leavenworth Herald w. [Feb. 17, 1894]: 1894-1898, Feb. 17-Apr. 23, scattered issues missing.

NICODEMUS

The Nicodemus Cyclone w.: (Note: Succeeds *The Western Cyclone* and *The Nicodemus Enterprise*, both of Nicodemus, Kansas) 1887-1888, Dec. 30-Sept. 7, few issues missing.

The Nicodemus Enterprise w. [Aug. 17, 1887]: (Note: Ceased publication with the issue of Dec. 23, 1887; succeeded by *The Nicodemus Cyclone*) 1887, Aug. 17-Dec. 23, few issues missing.

The Western Cyclone w. [May 13, 1886]: (Note: Ceased publication with the issue of Dec. 16, 1887; succeeded by *The Nicodemus Cyclone*) 1886-1887, May 13-Dec. 16.

PARSONS

Parsons Weekly Blade w. [Aug. 20, 1892]: 1892-1900, Sept. 24-Jan. 26, scattered issues missing.

PERU

**Freeman's Lance*: (Note: Originally published in Sedan, Kansas; removed to Peru, Sept. 4, 1891) 1891, Feb. 20-Dec. 25.

PITTSBURG

**Afro-American Review* m.: (Note: Removed from Salina with issue of Feb. 1915) 1915, Feb., May, June.

The Pittsburg Plain Dealer w. [May 20, 1899]: (Note: Succeeded by *The Wichita Searchlight*, Wichita, Kansas) 1899-1900, Aug. 5-May 12, scattered issues missing.

**The Uplift*: 1914, Dec. 5-12.

TOPEKA

The American Citizen w. [Feb. 23, 1888]: (Note: Removed to Kansas City, Kansas, with the issue of July 26, 1889) 1888-1903, Feb. 23-Dec. 25; 1905-1907, Jan. 27-Aug. 2.

The Baptist Headlight s.m., w. [Sept. 15, 1893]: 1893-1894, Sept. 15-Aug. 8, few issues missing.

The Benevolent Banner w. [May 21, 1887]: 1887, May 21-Oct. 22, few issues missing.

The Kansas Blackman w. [Apr. 20, 1894]: (Note: Removed to Coffeyville, Kansas) 1894, Apr. 20-June 29.

- **Capital Plaindealer*: 1936-1938, Sept. 30-Aug. 6.
- **Ebony Times*: 1972, Apr. 21+.
- The Evening Call* d.: 1893, June 13, 14, 19-27, 29, July 5, 7-8.
- The Weekly Call* w. [May 3, 1891]: (Note: Periodicity varies 1891-1898) 1891-1898, June 28-Oct. 29, many issues missing.
- The Colored Citizen* w.: (Note: Removed from Fort Scott with the issue of July 26, 1878) 1878-1879, July 26-Dec. 27.
- **Kansas Watchman*: 1905, May 25-Nov. 15.
- **Kansas Whip*: 1934, Nov. 2-Dec. 21; (Name changed to *Kansas Eagle*) 1935, April 18-Dec. 19; (Name changed to *Kansas American*) 1937-1938, July 30-Sept. 29; scattered issues, 1941-1942; 1947-1953, Dec. 12-Dec. 31; 1954-1955, April 16-Sept. 30.
- The Colored Citizen* w. [June 17, 1897]: (Suspended publication: Nov. 25, 1898-Feb. 18, 1899, and Mar. 4, 1899-June 8, 1900) 1897-1900, June 17-Nov. 16, few issues missing.
- The Colored Patriot* w. [Apr. 20, 1882]: 1882, Apr. 20-June 22.
- Herald of Kansas* w.: (Title varies: Jan. 30, 1880-Feb. 6, 1880, *Kansas Weekly Herald*) 1880, Feb. 6-June 11.
- **Messenger*: 1969, June 14+.
- **The National Watchman*: 1914, May 9, single issue.
- The Peoples Friend* w.: 1896, Dec. 11.
- The Plaindealer* w.: 1889-1931, June 6-Dec. 25.
- **Sentinel*: 1960, July 7-Nov. 26.
- The State Ledger* w. [July 22, 1892]: 1892-1906, July 22-June 16, many issues missing.
- The Times-Observer* w.: (Note: Succeeded *The Leavenworth Advocate*, Leavenworth, Kansas) 1891-1892, Sept. 4-Sept. 10, few issues missing.
- The Topeka Tribune* w. [June 24, 1880]: 1880, June 24-Dec. 25.
- WEIR CITY
- **Eagle*: 1900, Jan. 12, 19, 26, Feb. 2, 16, 23, Mar. 16, 23.
- WICHITA
- The Kansas Headlight* w.: 1894, Sept. 14.
- National Baptist World* w. [Aug. 19, 1894]: 1894, Aug. 31-Nov. 23.
- **Colored Citizen*: 1903-1904, Feb. 21-Feb. 6.
- **Midwest News Press*: 1959, Mar. 7 and Apr. 4.
- The National Reflector* w. [Dec. 8, 1895]: 1895-1897, Dec. 8-Dec. 25, scattered issues missing.
- **The Negro Star*: 1920-1952, May 7-Dec. 26.
- **The People's Elevator*: 1924-1927, Feb. 21-Dec. 29.
- The People's Friend* w.: 1894, May 24-Sept. 28.
- **Times*: 1972, Mar. 16+.
- **Wichita Factarian*: 1914, Feb. 26-Mar. 12, Apr. 2.
- **Wichita Post-Observer*: 1953-1954, Jan. 2-July 31.
- **Wichita Protest*: 1923, June 19-Oct. 19.³
- The Wichita Searchlight* w.: (Note: Successor to Pittsburg, Kansas, *Plaindealer*) 1902-1912, Apr. 5-Oct. 10, scattered issues missing.
- The Wichita Tribune* w. [July 16, 1898]: 1898, July 23-Dec. 31; 1899, Mar. 4, few issues missing.

By 1963, some 2,700 black newspapers had been established in the United States, of which 153 continued to publish. The figure four years later was 171, with a total circulation of close to two million. Thus, despite some predictions to the contrary in the early 1960's, both the numbers of black newspapers and their subscribers appear to be on the upswing.⁴ Obviously, one of the reasons for this is that the majority press along with the other media has not reported racial topics that black men and women consider worthy of attention. Then, too, much of the reporting that has been done has been unfair and biased. Often, the results of such journalism have been disastrous, as in the spreading of rumors that have inflamed whites to murder innocent blacks; and irresponsible reporting still persists. "We're dealing with one of the crucial domestic stories in American history," David Ginsburg, executive director of the Kerner Commission, warned the managing editors of the Associated Press in 1971. "If the press misses or misplays it, the wound in our society may not heal."⁵ Finally, blacks have viewed the black-owned and -operated newspaper as a primary apparatus in instilling race pride and consciousness, in furthering community development, and in demonstrating the competency of blacks to skeptical whites. Writing shortly after the Civil

War, Frederick Douglass observed: "A tolerably well conducted press in the hands of the despised [Negro] race, would by calling out and making them acquainted with their own latent powers, by enkindling their hope of a future and developing their moral power, prove most powerful means of removing prejudice and awakening an interest in them."⁶

Black Kansans, for similar reasons, have produced about eighty newspapers to date.⁷ The greater proportion of Kansas' black newspapers began operation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a troubled period of time for black people in the South and one that coincided with the mass migration of southern blacks into the state beginning in the 1870's. Prominent among the men who believed that Kansas held out a bright future for black people recently freed from slavery were two former slaves, Benjamin "Pap" Singleton of Nashville, Tennessee, and Henry Adams, a resident of Shreveport, Louisiana. Their efforts, along with those of other blacks, resulted in the settlement of the "exodusters," as they were called, in both Kansas' predominantly white towns and in all-black communities, the best known being Nicodemus. Although some of the newcomers were happy in their new homes, the majority of the settlers found honored few of the promises that Kansas had held out to them from afar. Dissatisfied settlers either moved to larger towns in the state where they hoped to find the task of earning a living less hazardous, or they returned to their former homes.⁸ Some people, such as those riding in a covered wagon that slowly made its way back to Louisiana from Topeka, left the state with bitterness. On the canvas top of their wagon was painted a sign:

For Louisiana
Farewell to Kansas,
Farewell Forever,
I may go to hell,
But back to Kansas, never.⁹

But many black people stayed and raised their families, and still others migrated to the state. Hewing trees and scrub and clearing the land, constructing rude houses on the frontier, planting wheat, potatoes and other crops, erecting churches and founding mutual aid societies, engaging in politics, and establishing businesses, newspapers, and banks, Kansas' black citizens made a life for themselves in the state. Moreover, numerous black native sons and one-time residents of Kansas achieved national and even world fame; among them were poets Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks and Claude McKay; politician Oscar De Priest, a Salina youth who moved to Chicago and, in 1928, became the first black elected to the United States House of Representatives in the twentieth century; college president Clement Richardson and Bishops John A. Gregg and W. T. Vernon; scientist George Washington Carver; painter Aaron Douglas; vaudeville star George "Nash" Walker; and many others.

Historians and other scholars and students have keys for unlocking the past. And among the keys to understanding and appreciating Kansas' rich but neglected black history are the equally rich but neglected products of the state's black press.

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footnotes

Especially helpful in compiling this list of Kansas' black newspapers have been Mr. Forrest R. Blackburn, chief of the newspaper and census division, the Kansas State Historical Society; Miss Judith A. Castle of the microforms department, Watson Library, the University of Kansas; John M. Robb, University of Chicago; Thomas W. Moore, Kansas Commission on Civil Rights; and the Kansas City Association of Trusts and Foundations, which generously made a grant for the purpose of assembling this information.

1. Gordon Parks, *The Learning Tree* (New York, 1963), 26.
2. Armistead Scott Pride, "Negro Newspaper Files and Their Microfilming," *Journalism Quarterly*, XXIV (June, 1947), 131-34; The Library of Congress, *Negro Newspapers on Microfilm: A Selected List* (Washington, 1953); Warren Brown, *Check List of Negro Newspapers in the United States: 1827-1946* (Jefferson City, Mo., 1946).
3. According to Brown, *Check List of Negro Newspapers*, 36, the Kansas State Historical Society has this short run of the *Wichita Protest*, but the staff of the Society has been unable to locate it.
4. Allan Morrison, "The Crusading Press," *Ebony*, XVIII (September, 1963), 204 ff.; "Newspapers Playing It Cool," *Time*, XC (July 28, 1967), 66; Elaine Kendall, "The Negro Press," *Holiday*, XLI (May, 1967), 82-84; "A Victim of Negro Progress," *Newsweek*, LXII (August 26, 1963), 50-51; John Cameron Sim, *The Grass Roots Press: America's Community Newspapers* (Ames, Iowa, 1969), 131-32.
5. Lawrence (Kansas) *Daily Journal-World*, October 23, 1971.
6. Quoted in Vera Chandler and Jessie P. Guzman, "The Negro Press," in Guzman (ed.), *The Negro Year Book, 1941-1946* (Tuskegee, Ala., 1947), 384.
7. See Rashey B. Moten, "The Negro Press in Kansas" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Kansas, 1938).
8. See the theses listed in Homer E. Socolofsky (comp.), *Kansas History in Graduate Study: A Bibliography of Theses and Dissertations* (Topeka, 1970), entry numbers 467-469, 905, 914-921; John G. Van Dusen, "The Exodus of 1879," *Journal of Negro History*, XXI (April, 1936), 111-29; Roy Garvin, "Benjamin, or 'Pap,' Singleton and His Followers," *Journal of Negro History*, XXXIII (January, 1948), 7-23; and three articles by Glen Schwendemann in *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, XXVI, 233-49; XXIX, 25-40; and XXXIV, 10-31.
9. Quoted in Morgan D. Peoples, "'Kansas Fever' in North Louisiana," *Louisiana History*, XI (Spring, 1970), 135.