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## The black experience in selected Nebraska counties, 1854-1920

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THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN SELECTED  
NEBRASKA COUNTIES, 1854-1920

A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Department of History  
and the  
Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by  
James D. Bish  
December 1989

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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## Abstract

### THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN SELECTED NEBRASKA COUNTIES, 1854-1920

This work is a history of the black experience in the fifteen most densely black populated counties in Nebraska, excluding Douglas, from 1854 through 1920. Beginning with the formation of Nebraska Territory in 1854, the thesis studies the population, employment, and social status of blacks living in Nebraska throughout the frontier and post-frontier eras. Slavery and suffrage are critically examined throughout the territorial period. Following statehood, the impact of black migration into the state is studied, especially during the years 1879 and 1880. Massive migration of southern blacks into northern states occurred during those years, a result of the termination of military reconstruction in the South. The reactions of some Nebraska communities are analyzed as blacks began to migrate to their localities in the late 1870s.

During the 1880s Nebraskans witnessed a steady but minimal flow of blacks into the state, as they settled primarily in towns along railroads, on farms, and at military forts. The prosperity in Nebraska at that time allowed for a lessening of some social and political restraints upon blacks. However, the depression of the early 1890s curbed

those restraints as blacks were suffering severely from the worsening economic conditions. During that time blacks faced increased racism and declining social status, forcing some of them to leave the state. It was not until after the turn of the century that blacks again began to return to the state, searching to improve their economic condition. After 1900, blacks throughout Nebraska increasingly found employment as hotel porters, restaurant cooks and waiters, and general laborers. The black population within the state continued to increase gradually as larger percentages of blacks settled in Omaha and Lincoln, a trend similar to that of other Nebraskans who were moving away from the state's rural areas.

Among other things, this thesis provides a comprehensive bibliography for students of black history in Nebraska. In short, this thesis concludes that as blacks ventured to Nebraska from various locations and often of similar economic circumstances they usually found employment in occupations deemed suitable for their race. Black settlement often stimulated anxiety and prejudice among many of Nebraska's citizens. Although most Nebraskans during the period were never engaged in direct overt acts of discrimination, prejudices among some Nebraskans at times manifested violent acts by the white majority against the much smaller black population. As a result, blacks in Nebraska often faced social and political prejudices similar to those simultaneously experienced by other members of their race throughout the United States.

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## PREFACE

These past months of exploring the history of a particular ethnic group culminate years of speculation which began when I listened to my grandmother's stories about the youthful exploits of her mother, Maggie Patterson. Maggie lived close to and associated with black families who lived north of Overton, Nebraska during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Maggie's parents homesteaded fifteen miles north of Overton in 1880. Six years later, at the age of fifteen, Maggie began her teaching career after securing a position at Overton Public Schools. Because of the distance, she stayed in Overton during the week and traveled back to her parents' home each weekend. While enroute to her parents' home, she often stopped about halfway to visit, rest, and enjoy a meal at the homes of black settlers before continuing on to her destination.

As a young boy growing up in the same area, I was puzzled about what had happened to this black colony, as there were no blacks living in the area during the 1960s. It was not until graduate school, however, that my questions about that Overton black colony resurfaced.

In a graduate course on Nebraska history, Dr. Harl Dalstrom mentioned to the class that various groups of blacks had found their way to central and western areas of the state during the late nineteenth century. He mentioned the

existence of a black colony near Overton in central Nebraska. This immediately reminded me of the stories my grandmother had told me and I started to speculate about them once again. These questions eventually led to the development of this thesis concerning black settlement and other experiences of blacks in Nebraska.

A word about the framework of this thesis is in order. Research is confined to blacks who once lived in Nebraska. However, for the most part, it does not include the settlement or experiences of blacks within Douglas County and therefore, the city of Omaha. Because of Omaha's urban setting, which eventually attracted most of the state's blacks, I decided to study the more remote and unknown black settlements in the state. Omaha's black population deserves a comprehensive study of its own. There are many local resources available for use in researching Omaha's blacks, including black newspapers, church records, population censuses, and local studies. By 1890, sixty percent of the state's blacks lived in Omaha and this figure increased to seventy percent by 1920. In many ways, Omaha blacks, because of their more urban locale, experienced a different lifestyle than blacks elsewhere in the state. I hope a thorough study of the history of Omaha's black community is soon attempted.

The initial step in this study was to identify where black populations had existed in the state. To do this, I depended on printed U.S. population censuses. This gave me the black

population totals for each Nebraska county from 1860 to 1920. I then determined that a thorough search of each county where blacks had lived was not feasible. As a result, for each census year, research of black populations was conducted in the fifteen counties with the largest black populations, excluding Douglas County. For convenience, I labeled these fifteen counties, "outstate" counties. In each census year, the fifteen most heavily black populated counties in Nebraska usually changed somewhat, as blacks moved in and out of various counties in the state. This meant that the "outstate," those top fifteen heavily black populated counties excluding Douglas, changed for each census year from 1860 to 1920. After excluding blacks in Douglas County, I found that a large percentage of Nebraska's remaining blacks still lived in these fifteen counties. In 1860 and 1870, every outlying black lived within these fifteen "outstate" counties. During 1880, eighty-six percent of Nebraska's outlying blacks lived in these counties, and by 1910 the number decreased only slightly to seventy-four percent.

Lancaster County, which contains the city of Lincoln, is included in the study as one of the "outstate" counties. Lincoln was more of a blend of the smaller community and the urban setting. It never had the numbers of blacks that settled in Omaha. By 1920, Lincoln's black population stood at 1,012, compared to 10,341 in Omaha.

After establishing which county censuses I needed to search for each census year, I turned to the 1860 through 1910 federal manuscript census for each of the fifteen selected "outstate" counties, with the exception of the 1890 manuscript census which was destroyed by fire. In addition to the federal censuses, Nebraska performed a federally-approved census during 1885, which I also utilized. The manuscript census lists name, state of birth, and occupation among its most pertinent information. After learning individual names, I searched local records, newspapers, and histories for any mention of these blacks, as well as insights into the community's prevailing economic prospects and social traditions. State and regional sources were also utilized to obtain information about blacks. Occasionally, information on blacks from Douglas County was examined to discover some of the regional factors that influenced Nebraska's black population from 1854 to 1920.

The terminating date for this study is 1920, as by that date there had been a significant decline in the number of outstate blacks. Certain items, however, were carried over into the 1930s, especially those events that dramatically impacted the black experience in Nebraska, such as the killings in North Platte during 1929. As a followup on the subject, the 1920 and 1930 Nebraska black populations are given and some general statements are made, but lacking manuscript census data, detailed information is deficient.

During the course of this research, it became evident that a chapter about black farmers should be included. Farmers, including landowners, renters, and farm laborers, made up a significant portion of the black work force in Nebraska from 1880 to 1920. During this time, farming ranked consistently among the top three to five occupations of blacks. In addition, farming was the leading private enterprise in which outstate blacks were involved, and they established significant farming communities in at least six Nebraska counties during the years 1880 through 1920.

The purpose of this thesis is to supplement other literature regarding blacks in Nebraska by examining settlement, occupational, and racial experiences of blacks in the more remote areas throughout the state. Past literature on Nebraska blacks mainly falls into three categories: blacks living in Omaha and Lincoln, black homesteaders in the sand-hills counties, and blacks stationed at western Nebraska military forts. The most important works about blacks living in Lincoln and Omaha include the Works Progress Administration (1940), The Negroes of Nebraska; Eldora Hess' 1932 Master thesis, "The Negro in Nebraska"; and Mary Davies' and Genevieve Marshs' 1904 Master thesis, "A Study of the Negro in Lincoln." Important works on black homesteaders include Beryl Deckers, "The Lost Pioneers: Negro Homesteaders in Nebraska," Negro Digest (1963); Jean Williams, "Nebraska's Negro Homesteaders," Nebraskaland Magazine

(1969); and Forrest Stith, Sunrises and Sunsets for Freedom (1973). Frank Schubert has written a variety of works on black experiences at Nebraska's frontier military forts. Overall, Nebraska's pioneer black populations were never large, but those who did live there experienced a fascinating past; one that adds interesting insight into the history of the state.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to a number of people. I would like to thank the faculty of the University of Nebraska at Omaha for allowing me to serve as a graduate teaching assistant while I pursued my graduate degree. I wish to thank fellow graduate student Tim Shipman for encouraging me to apply for the graduate program, as well as friends and classmates Gail, Gwen, and Robin whose company I enjoyed. I am indebted to the Department of History and to my thesis committee, Dr. Harl Dalstrom, Dr. Michael Tate, Dr. JoAnn Carrigan, and Dr. Phillip Vogul. I especially want to offer my gratitude to Dr. Dalstrom and Dr. Tate for providing me with the needed direction throughout the entire project.

In addition, a thank you goes out to the staffs of the Black History Museum in Omaha, the Nebraska State Historical Society, and various county and local historical societies throughout the state. Without their assistance I would not have been able to locate many valuable materials pertinent to this work.

Most especially, I wish to thank my family for their constant support. A special and loving thank you goes to my wife Rebecca, to whose commitment and devotion this entire project is owed. Her sacrifice of hundreds of hours dedicated to typing and proof reading this work are efforts which I never fully appreciated and for which I owe a mountain of gratitude. Without the constant attention and encouragement which she contributed over the last four years and the extra motivation she gave me when my efforts repeatedly stalled, this project would not have been completed.

December 1989

James D. Bish



## CHAPTER I

### OPEN THE GATE: EMANCIPATION AND STATEHOOD, 1854-1875

On December 15, 1860, an article, written by an unidentified observer, titled "Nebraska and the Nigger," appeared in the Nebraska City News. The writer condemned the Republicans of Nebraska Territory for wishing to secure legislation which would end slavery in the territory. He asked, "Have either of you ever been injured by slavery in Nebraska?" and "Have any of you any fear that you will be injured from that source?" The obviously Democratic observer concluded, "Our Republican representatives have shown that the nigger is first in all of their thoughts. The substantial legislation so earnestly demanded by the people of Nebraska must wait until they have done their duty to their colored brethern. A white man in their estimation is almost, but not quite equal to the Nigger." <sup>1</sup> Like other mid-nineteenth century Americans, the people of Nebraska Territory were caught up in the question of slavery and the status of blacks. But the fate of slavery was particularly germane to the settlers along the west bank of the Missouri River, for an essential part of the 1854 statute which created Nebraska Territory enabled the citizens of the Territory to decide the slavery issue for themselves.

In fact, the problem of slavery had been a thorn in America's side for a long time. America's founding fathers

actively debated the slavery question, but set this matter aside because it threatened the establishment of the new Union. During the early Federal period most national legislators realized that an equal number of senators from northern and southern states must be maintained or our union of states would be threatened.

Northern states were more heavily populated and their representation in the House reflected this. To preserve a sectional balance, the South looked to its equal vote in the Senate. The Senate maintained political balance between slave and free states in the early nineteenth century by admitting northern and southern states alternately. In 1819, when Missouri's application for statehood raised the question of the legal status of slavery in the territories, particularly Louisiana Territory, twenty-two states belonged to the Union. Missouri was allowed to enter the Union as a slave state, while Maine, which also sought statehood, entered as a free state, thus maintaining the balance in the Senate. At that time, southerners compromised and allowed a limit on slavery in the Louisiana Territory, realizing that slavery was not as important in the area since it was not conducive to a plantation economy. Congress followed this Missouri Compromise for the next thirty years, allowing only free states to be created north of 36° 30'.<sup>2</sup>

Competition over a transcontinental railroad in the 1840s caused northerners to push for the organization of the

Nebraska Territory which would lie north of the Missouri Compromise line. Southern representatives, who wanted a railroad through the southern part of the country, blocked an attempt to organize the territory in 1844. Proposed northern routes would have to traverse unorganized country and therefore could not be considered until the territory was organized. Furthermore, southerners were not going to vote for the organization of any territory which, because of the existing Missouri Compromise, would have to forbid the institution of slavery.<sup>3</sup> In 1854, Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, deeply concerned about securing a northern transcontinental railroad route, applied the idea of "popular sovereignty" to the delicate issue of slavery in a new Nebraska bill. Douglas decided to split the proposed Nebraska Territory in two, forming the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. By leaving the fate of slavery to the people of these territories, a controversial issue seemingly would be resolved, but to do this, the Missouri Compromise ban upon slavery north of 36° 30' had to be repealed.

Conjecture held that both territories would probably join the Union at about the same time, with Kansas entering as a slave state and Nebraska as a free state, assuring that Senate representation would remain equal. Douglas's simple solution received enough southern support to pass. But "popular sovereignty" and the lifting of the ban upon slavery north of 36° 30' reinvigorated antagonism between the

North and South and contributed to a national turmoil that led to a four-year Civil War. <sup>4</sup>

Settlement in these newly-formed territories began immediately. With its close proximity to the slave state of Missouri, control of Kansas was desperately sought by the slave states. Upset over the nullification of the Missouri Compromise, many northerners were determined to dominate Kansas by outnumbering southern slave owners coming into the new territory. In the first territorial census of 1855, Kansas reported 193 slaves, and the following year's census recorded 400. Within the first year and one-half of territorial status, over fifty slaveholders settled in Kansas, hoping to win it over for slavery. Throughout the years 1856 to 1860 the slave population of Kansas remained between 400 and 500. <sup>5</sup>

It has been estimated that when the Nebraska Territory was opened for settlement in 1854, over 40,000 people lived within its borders. Of that total, only 2,000 were white. The majority were Indians who roamed the plains or lived in villages along the rivers. There is little evidence of blacks living in the territory prior to 1854, either as slaves or free men. When the first Nebraska census was completed in late November, 1854, over 2700 people, excluding Indians, lived in the territory. The census listed thirteen black slaves who lived in the counties of Pierce, Forney (later Nemaha), and Richardson in southeastern

Nebraska, but recorded no free blacks living in the territory. <sup>6</sup> By the completion of the second annual census in 1855, Nebraska's population had risen to 4,480, a sixty percent increase over the previous year. The 1855 census reported eleven blacks (all slaves) living within the territory. Five lived in Richardson County and six in Otoe County, which had been organized that year from the recently dissolved Pierce County. Otoe County's entire slave population resided in Nebraska City, its principal settlement. <sup>7</sup> In the 1856 census, Nebraska's population rose to 10,716. This represented a population almost two and one-half times larger than the previous year. Meanwhile the black population remained small. Census totals indicated that eleven black slaves lived in Nebraska, distributed among the counties of Otoe, Richardson, and Douglas. <sup>8</sup>

Although advocates of slavery and their foes actively struggled for control of Kansas, Nebraska received considerably less attention. Kansas's black population doubled to 400, while Nebraska's slave population of eleven remained the same from 1855 to 1856. Although slaves located at Fort Kearny in the interior of Nebraska Territory were not reported, and other slaves probably were not counted, the number of slaves in Nebraska remained negligible. <sup>9</sup>

The Kansas pro-slavery element called a convention in Lecompton in February of 1857, after realizing that they were losing in population growth compared to northern anti-

slavery settlers. The purpose of the convention was to write a constitution and apply for statehood without submitting the proposed constitution to territorial voters. Fraud ran rampant as pro-slavery forces in Kansas tried to secure the needed numbers for ratification. The anti-slavery people considered the Lecompton Constitution fraudulent and framed their own anti-slavery constitution. This issue further split members of Congress as northerners and southerners debated the legitimacy of the Lecompton Constitution.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, on November 1, 1858, Republican Samuel G. Daily from Nemaha County introduced a bill in Nebraska's territorial legislature "to abolish slavery in the territory of Nebraska."<sup>11</sup> Nebraskans had never voted on slavery, probably because of the destructive debate which followed the issue. Some felt there was no need to act since the territory had so few slaves. Only a few businessmen owned most of the handful of slaves living in the territory. Nebraska City merchant Stephen F. Nuckolls owned two female and two male slaves. Alexander Majors brought five black house servants from Missouri in 1857, when he set up the freighting firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell in Nebraska City. Also in Nebraska City, Charles Holly owned two slaves, and Robert Kirkim owned one female servant while in Nemaha County. Brownville's founder, Richard Brown, owned at least one slave and Land Office Registrar Col. G.H. Nixon

owned three slaves whom he had brought from Tennessee. The legislature referred Daily's bill to a special committee of five where it passed on a vote of three to two. They next referred it to the territorial house and there it remained when a motion tabled the bill. <sup>12</sup>

Anti-slavery legislators resumed their attempts the following year. During the sixth session of the legislature in 1859 the anti-slavery bill passed by a vote of seven to three in the Council and nineteen to seventeen in the House. Democratic Territorial Governor Samuel W. Black promptly vetoed the bill, stating that prohibiting slavery conflicted with stipulations of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase which protected the existing citizens' property rights, including their slave property. He also recognized the Dred Scott case as confirmation that the territorial legislature had no power to pass such legislation and he interpreted the decision to mean that slaves were merely property and as such were denied liberty and rights. <sup>13</sup> It appeared that Nebraska had enough pro-slavery sentiment to keep the territory from becoming free for another year, and to some it seemed that Nebraska was becoming a strong supporter of slaveholders. One such person who felt Nebraska had a strong pro-slavery element was John Todd, a minister from Tabor, Iowa. Todd was an abolitionist who helped to keep the Iowa underground railroad active during the 1850s. He maintained that slaveholders not only went to Kansas, but

"also went into Nebraska with their slaves and seemed quite willing to seize and hold that, too, for slavery." <sup>14</sup>

One incident recalled by Todd included Nebraska City merchant and slave owner, Stephen Nuckolls. During the late 1850s the underground railroad, operated primarily by abolitionists, was organized from points in Kansas through Nebraska, where it passed through the communities of Falls City, Little Nemaha, Camp Creek, and Nebraska City. While in Nebraska City, slaves were hidden in the now famous John Brown's Cave. There they remained hidden until they could get safe passage to Iowa and freedom further north. The railway operated through Nebraska because it was safer than going through the slave state of Missouri. Slaves crossed the river at Nebraska City, opposite the extreme southwest corner of Iowa, near Percival, continuing eastward to the anti-slavery Congregational community of Tabor, Iowa. <sup>15</sup>

Living near the underground railway caused many problems for Nebraska City slave owners. At least five Nebraska City slaves escaped on the railway. Three of Nuckolls's slaves, two women, one of whom was named Eliza, and a male slave named Shade, apparently escaped across the Missouri River with a mulatto named John Williamson in the late fall of 1858. Williamson was a river trader who dealt in butter, eggs, and trinkets with farmers on both sides of the Missouri River, and he knew all of the underground railroad agents. After the escape across the river, Nuckolls's form-



er slaves were escorted to Tabor, Iowa by Dr. Ira Blanchard, and from there they continued on to Chicago. <sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, in Nebraska City, Nuckolls notified his brother who lived in Glenwood, Iowa and his two brothers-in-law in Sidney, Iowa of his slaves' escape and asked them to listen for any news of the runaways. Nuckolls then set out with some of his friends through Percival, Sidney, and then to Tabor, Iowa in search of his slaves. After failing to locate any traces of the slaves in Tabor, the Nuckolls search party, which now included his brother from Sidney, returned to Percival, convinced that his slaves were hiding there. After reaching Percival, the Nuckolls party illegally broke into and searched some homes of known abolitionists. Local citizens strongly protested to the authorities and Nuckolls was arrested, but not before an anti-slavery advocate named Rueben Williams was injured by the Nuckolls mob. Nuckolls was released later that evening after promising to return for trial later in the week, and he immediately went back to Nebraska. Percival residents were alarmed by the release of Nuckolls and they organized a local militia to defend their homes, fearing he would retaliate. He did not, and was later sentenced by the Mills County Court to pay Rueben Williams over a thousand dollars for bodily damages that occurred during the searches. In the fall of 1860, Eliza, one of Nuckolls's slaves, was located in Chicago. Probably because of the financial losses in-

curred in his last search and the strong anti-slavery sympathies in the Chicago area, Nuckolls declined to pursue her. <sup>17</sup>

Elsewhere in Nebraska, pro-slavery sentiment in Brownville, a village south of Nebraska City, was strong enough that the underground railroad avoided the community. In the fall of 1857 an incident south of Brownville left a Missouri man mortally wounded when he tried to apprehend three runaway slaves. The incident alarmed many local citizens, and pro- and anti-slavery residents exchanged heated arguments over the incident. Richard Brown, one of the town's leading citizens and himself a slave owner, helped to calm the situation. Although many townspeople did not forget the incident, the influence of leading citizens who favored slavery, helped to keep the community pro-slave. The pro-slavery faction in Nebraska was strong enough to keep Governor Black's veto of anti-slavery legislation from being challenged through 1860, even though it appears that in most areas of the territory, anti-slavery sentiment prevailed. <sup>18</sup>

During the following legislative session, a new anti-slavery bill was passed. Again the bill awaited Governor Black's signature to become law. On January 1, 1861 he vetoed the bill, again referring to property rights and earlier legislation legalizing slavery. This time the legislature overrode his veto by votes of ten to three in the

Council and thirty-five to two in the House. After six years as a territory, Nebraska had finally made slavery illegal just before the Civil War settled the question on the national level. <sup>19</sup>

Public reaction to a slave auction at Nebraska City in November, 1860 probably contributed to the securing of enough legislative votes to override Black's veto. The sale resulted from a debt owned by Charles F. Holly, a Nebraska City man. During the summer of 1860, he borrowed \$338 from William B. Hail, also of Nebraska City. By October, Holly had not paid his debt and Hail took him to court to collect the money. A jury composed of eleven men found Holly liable for the debt, and Judge Joseph Miller ordered Holly to pay no later than November 6, 1860. When the date arrived, Holly was unable to pay. Sheriff William Birchfield put a lien on his property which included two slaves, a black man named Hercules and a black woman named Martha. <sup>20</sup>


The Nebraska City News published a sheriff's sale notice describing the slave property. The auction took place in front of the Otoe County courthouse on December 5, 1860. The sheriff offered Hercules for sale first and received no bids. He then offered Hercules and Martha together. This time bidding commenced, and Hail, the man to whom the debt was owed, bought the two for \$300. He reportedly took the slaves into Missouri, where he probably resold them at a higher price. Otoe County citizens disapproved of this

incident. Slavery in Nebraska was legal, but the reality of slaves as property to be bought and sold was embarrassing. Earlier that summer the Otoe County assessor had listed for taxation purposes a twelve year-old black girl living with a Nebraska City farm couple. The couple protested, but to no avail since the assessor considered her personal property. Public reaction to both of these events probably built up enough support to pass the anti-slavery law over Governor Black's veto, ending slavery in Nebraska. <sup>21</sup>

Another problem facing territorial legislators was fugitive slaves. Section Ten of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill declared that the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 applied to the territory. This act permitted a slave owner to pursue and capture his runaway slave in Nebraska Territory. Before the passage of the anti-slavery legislation in 1861, Nebraskans abided by the law, although they were not always helpful to the slave owner. Some Nebraska slave owners found the law beneficial in apprehending their runaway slaves. Escape attempts by slaves belonging to Stephen F. Nuckolls and Alexander Majors of Nebraska City were impeded by local residents for a time because of the law. However, on the other side of the river in Percival, Iowa these blacks could escape to freedom because Iowa had previously banned slavery, and as a result of the 1851 Iowa legal decision in the case of Webb vs. Griffith, the apprehension of blacks living in Iowa was also illegal. <sup>22</sup>

The passage of anti-slavery legislation in 1861 and the national secession crisis forced Nebraska legislators to reconsider the fugitive slave act clause in the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. The proximity to Missouri and Kansas made it easy for slave traders to capture, kidnap, or entice free blacks out of Nebraska Territory and sell them into slavery in their own regions. After Nebraska's anti-slavery law was enacted, all blacks in the territory were legally free, but because the Fugitive Slave Act was still in force, slave traders and owners could legally come into the state and practically take any blacks they wanted by claiming they were runaway slaves. Nebraska had a potentially major crisis on its hands. Realizing this, the Territorial Legislature promptly passed a law invalidating the Fugitive Slave Act clause. The new law, similar to that in Iowa, made the capture, kidnap, or seduction of any black a crime. Anyone who deceived, seduced, or enticed blacks to come with them could be found guilty of kidnapping. The act also applied to any black who was employed against his will. Punishment for the crime was a prison term, the length of which was left open to the presiding judge's discretion. Enforcement of the law was problematic since slave traders could be out of the territory before discovery of the crime, but the law might have acted as a deterrent. <sup>23</sup>

According to the 1860 census, the total population of Nebraska Territory stood at 28,841. The black population



was eighty-two, or less than one-half of one percent of the total population. In 1860, nine of thirty-five organized counties reported a black population. Eight of the nine counties were situated on the Missouri River. Kearney County, located in the south-central portion of the territory, was the only western county with a black population. Douglas, Otoe, and Dakota were the only counties with black populations of ten or more. Douglas County, in which Omaha was located, reported the largest number of blacks with twenty-one. Otoe County followed with a total of fourteen, while Dakota County, in the northeastern part of the territory, reported thirteen. <sup>24</sup>

Statistical information concerning such a small percentage of a population does not always offer a realistic picture of the broader population, but it reflects an accurate picture of the small black population which lived in Nebraska in 1860. In keeping within the parameters of this thesis, blacks reported living in Douglas County are omitted from this survey. This alone reduces the total black population to be studied by one-quarter. The entire black population in the remainder of the territory is included.

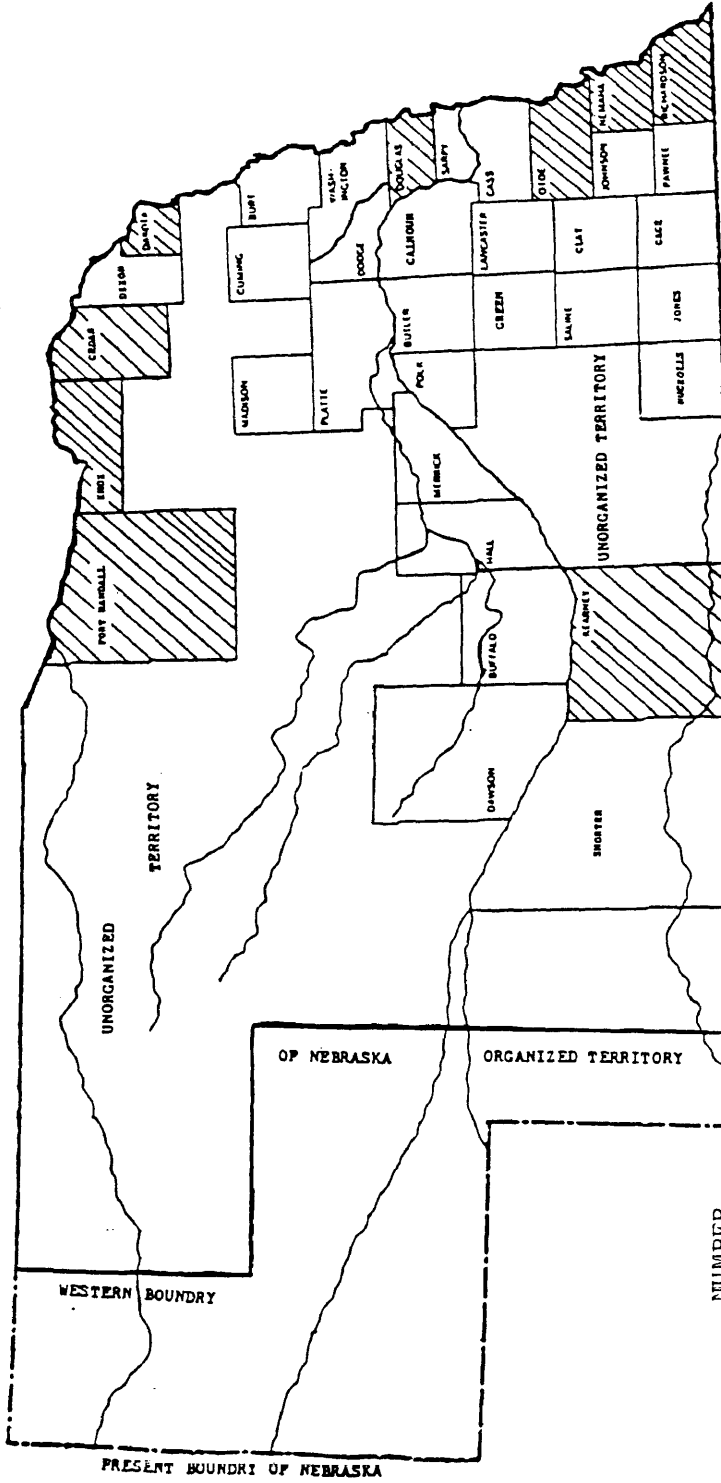
Nebraska blacks in 1860 were predominately natives of Missouri. Forty-four percent (22) of Nebraska's black population, reported Missouri as their native state followed by Kentucky, reported by twenty-two percent (11) of the blacks. Among blacks under twenty years of age, the percentage from

Missouri and Kentucky is even larger. Fifty percent of this group listed Missouri nativity, while another twenty-five percent listed Kentucky as the state of their birth. <sup>25</sup>

The proximity to Missouri best explains the large number of Missouri blacks migrating to Nebraska. Riverboats provided easy access from Missouri to Nebraska Territory. Another reason for the large migration from Missouri was that its black population was larger than most other western states because the Missouri Compromise of 1820 legalized slavery there. Therefore, Missouri had a large black population from which Nebraska drew. <sup>26</sup>

Both Nebraska and Canada were reported as the birthplace of eleven percent (6) of the blacks. All of the native Nebraska blacks were under twenty years of age and most of them were young children. Black natives of Canada included two female servants living in Otoe County and mulattos having either French-Canadian fathers or husbands. One French-Canadian farmer lived in Cedar County with his mulatto wife and two children. In neighboring Dakota County, two more white Canadians lived with their mulatto wives and families. One of these Canadians was a farmer with five children, and the other Canadian was a trapper with one child. Also in Dakota County was a white Kentucky fur trader with five mulatto children. The remaining twelve percent (6) of Nebraska's black population reported nativity distributed

NEBRASKA COUNTIES WITH BLACK POPULATIONS IN 1860



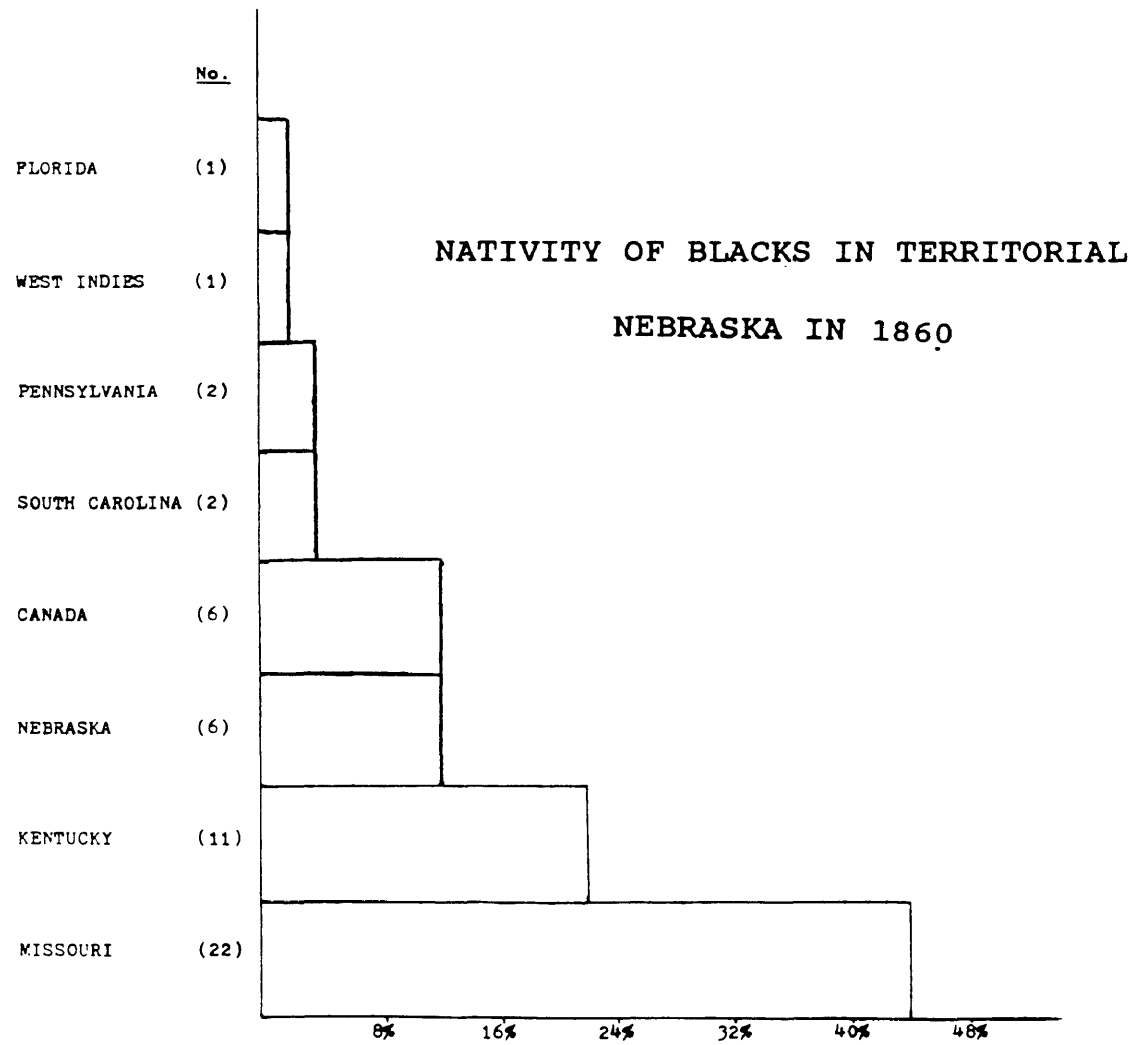
COUNTY	NUMBER OF BLACKS
CEDAR	3
DAKOTA	1
DOUGLAS	21
FORT RANDALL	2
KEARNEY	9
KNOX	14
NEMAHA	5
OTOE	14
RICHARDSON	1

COUNTIES REPORTING BLACK POPULATIONS -----

Source: 1860 U.S. Census

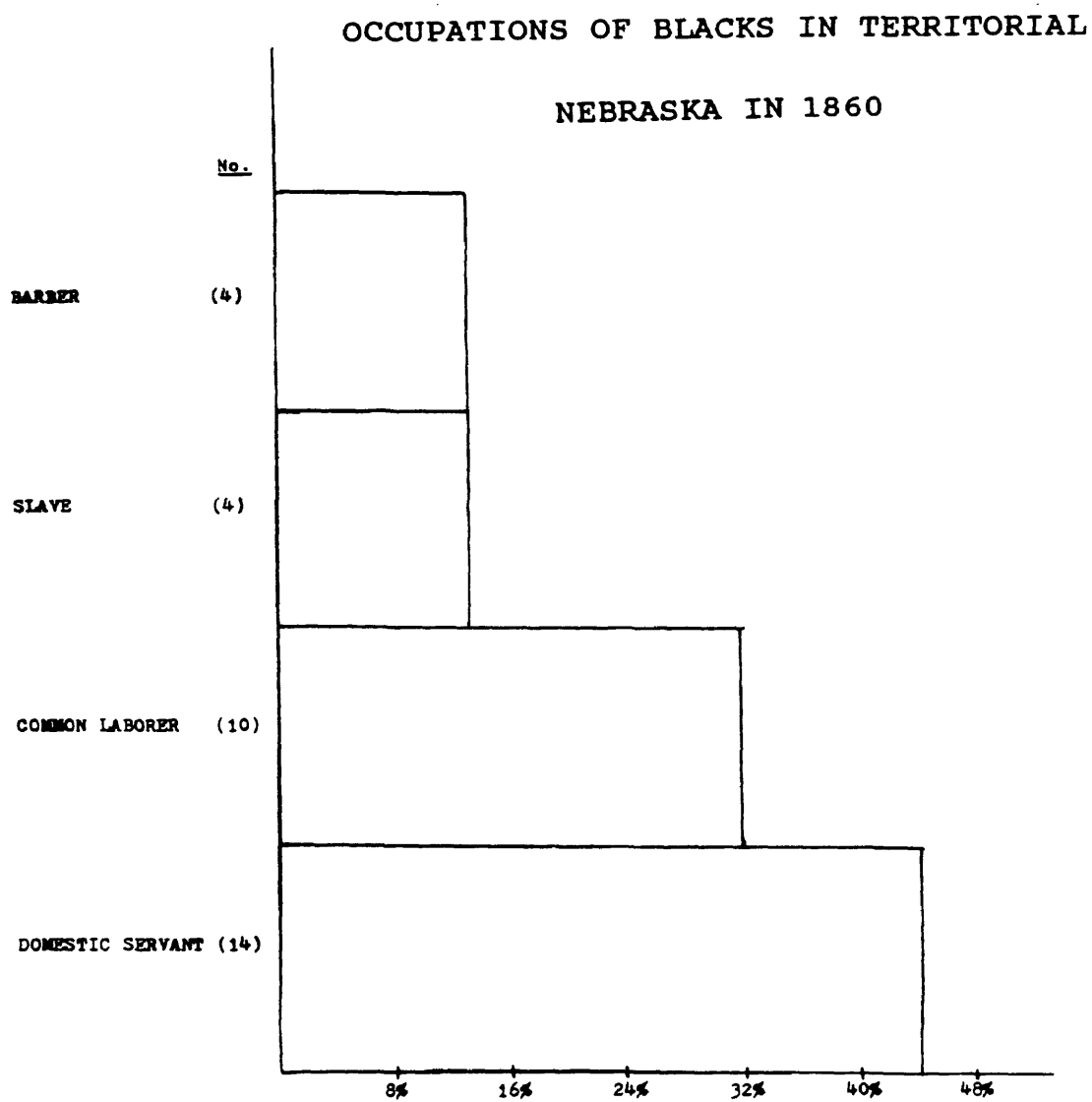
FIGURE 1.1





Source: 1860 U.S. Census

FIGURE 1.2



Source: 1860 U.S. Census

FIGURE 1.3

between Pennsylvania, Florida, South Carolina, and the West Indies. <sup>27</sup>

Prior to 1860, every territorial census of Nebraska reveals that all blacks living in the territory were slaves brought into the region. There were no free blacks. One possible reason for this was the prevailing attitude opposing black settlement. In neighboring Iowa, legislation passed in 1839 required all blacks to have a permit in order to settle in the state, and in 1851 legislation was passed prohibiting black settlement altogether. It is quite likely that this attitude of denying black settlement carried over into territorial Nebraska. However, by 1860 roughly two-thirds of the blacks over fourteen years of age living in the territory were not slaves. Most of these blacks worked as domestic servants. Overall forty-four percent (14) of Nebraska's black workers were servants and they lived in every Nebraska county reporting blacks. It appears that labor demands in territorial Nebraska were breaking down attitudes prohibiting black immigration and settlement by 1860. The remaining twenty-six percent (8) of Nebraska's black workers were listed as barbers and laborers. <sup>28</sup>

Thirty-one percent (10) of the Nebraska blacks listed as slaves in the 1860 census lived in Otoe, Fort Randall, and Kearny counties. All of the Otoe County slaves lived with businessmen and their families and performed mostly domestic duties. In Fort Randall and Kearny counties, officers on

the military reservations owned all the slaves. Commander Charles May of Fort Kearny owned two slaves and junior officers owned five more. Each of these slaves was listed under domestic categories such as housekeeping and cooking. Most of the officers who owned slaves were southern natives, although one slave-owning officer was from Pennsylvania. An equal number of male and female slaves lived in Nebraska. The oldest slave was thirty-one and the youngest only fourteen. A breakdown of the non-slave black population reveals that sixty-five percent lived within a nuclear family. Seven married couples had a total of fifteen children, and of these marriages, four were mixed. In every such instance a white man was married to a black woman. Overall fifty-six percent of the blacks in Nebraska were male. They were also quite young, the oldest only forty.<sup>29</sup>

Between 1855 and 1867, Nebraska's territorial legislature passed several laws concerning blacks. Although Nebraska legislators made slavery illegal in the territory in 1861, they did not support mixed marriages. As early as 1866 territorial legislators passed a law forbidding marriages when one party was white and the other party was one-quarter or more black. Perhaps this was inspired by the mixed marriages reported in the 1860 census, but in any event, it reflects prevailing social attitudes against such unions.<sup>30</sup>

Other territorial laws provided for free public school education. In 1855 territorial statutes required school

district secretaries ". . . to make out and file in the office of the county superintendent, a report of the affairs of the district, containing: First - the number of white persons between the ages of five and twenty-one years." <sup>31</sup>

During the 1858 territorial legislative term, an act was passed providing that "It shall be the duties of the directors . . . to take . . . an enumeration of all the unmarried white youths . . . between the ages of five and twenty-one years . . . for the purpose of affording the advantage of free education to all the white youth of this territory, the territorial common school fund shall hereafter consist of such sum as will be produced by the annual levy and assessment of two mills upon the dollar valuation on the grand list of the taxable property of the territory . . ." <sup>32</sup>

This law provided for the taxation of prospective black settlers for school purposes without giving them the benefits of being able to attend school. Legislators saw this injustice and the law was amended the following year to provide "for the purpose of affording the advantage of free education to all the white youth of the territory . . . provided, that all colored persons shall be exempted from taxation for school purposes." <sup>33</sup>

Instead of providing for the education of black youth in the amendment, the legislators evidently felt more comfortable excluding blacks from the educational realm. During the same year in neighboring Iowa, laws were enacted which

provided for separate black schools except in cases where white school patrons consented to the admission of blacks in their school. This superceded an 1851 statute which, like Nebraska's new public school law, had provided no educational opportunities for blacks.<sup>34</sup> The Nebraska school law of 1859 remained in effect until 1867 when a push was made to change it. A need for change was voiced by the Omaha Education Association in early 1867. During a January 9, 1867 meeting of the Association, a resolution was unanimously adopted calling for the amendment of Nebraska school laws "so as to provide for the education of colored children in this territory."<sup>35</sup> During the mid-1860's there were only two communities with a sizeable school-age black population: Omaha and Nebraska City. As early as 1865, blacks were enrolled in public schools at Omaha, and, at least by 1867, Nebraska City blacks were attending school alongside white youths. This undoubtedly was becoming a major problem for school officials in those locales.<sup>36</sup> Realizing this problem, a bill was introduced during late January in the Territorial Legislature calling for the removal of "all distinctions on account of race or color in our public schools."<sup>37</sup>

The bill passed the House twenty-five to ten and the Council by a ten to three vote in mid-February, 1867 and awaited territorial Governor Alvin Saunders signature for passage. He vetoed the bill, declaring that the legislation

did little more than guarantee "the enumeration of the colored youths and the taxation of colored persons in the territory for school purposes." <sup>38</sup> He noted that the bill failed to guarantee much else to blacks and that in many cases blacks would not be allowed to attend schools with white children because:

Much as we may regret it, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that a strong prejudice exists in the public mind against the intimate association of the youths of the two races in the same public schools, which no amount of legislation can eradicate. It can not be otherwise than that in the populous towns, contentions will arise between the two classes which must certainly retard the educational advancement of both. <sup>39</sup>

The legislature made no attempt to override the veto as the territory was now in the process of becoming a state. Statehood was granted to Nebraska on March 1, 1867 and shortly thereafter, the recently elected governor, David Butler, called for a special session of the new state legislature, in part to consider a "revision or amendment of the school law." <sup>40</sup>

During that special session a law was enacted to give "colored children" the right to attend public schools. However, the law did not state that the schools needed to be non-segregated. Probably most schools integrated in the small number of black children as it would have been too costly to maintain separate black schools in most communities.

# NEBRASKA COUNTIES WITH BLACK POPULATIONS IN 1870

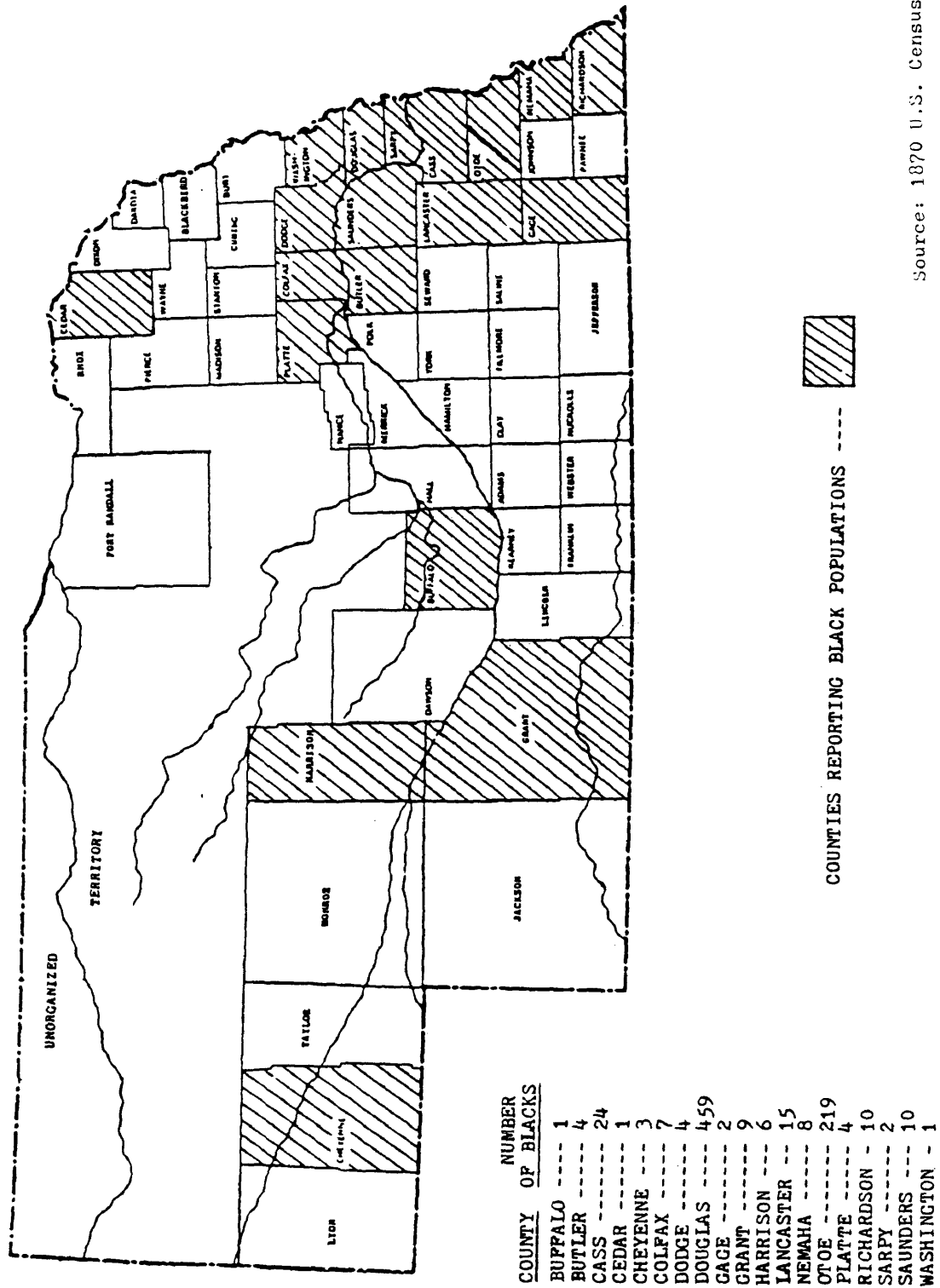


FIGURE 1.4



Black students in Omaha evidently continued to attend school with whites. In Crete, Nebraska during 1871, Joseph Carter, a young black boy, attended school regularly with white students.<sup>41</sup> However, in Nebraska City a separate school for blacks was set up and maintained until 1879 when the cost of keeping up the school became prohibitive. Even then, some citizens voiced loud protest against combining the black and white students, suggesting that the inferior building that the black pupils attended was suitable for their education. In spite of the protest, the schools were combined with no known problems.<sup>42</sup>

By 1866, the Civil War was over and the United States Congress was debating a civil rights bill designed to give black males suffrage. Nebraska, meanwhile, was trying to achieve statehood. Its residents had recently endorsed a constitution and sent it to Washington for approval as part of the process of admission to the Union. This constitution restricted suffrage to free white males. Predictably, Congress rejected the constitution and statehood until the document was amended to allow universal male suffrage, excluding Indians not taxed.<sup>43</sup>

In spite of widely publicized federal legislation concerning black suffrage, it was not an oversight when the territorial legislature denied blacks the vote. During the time the constitution was being voted on in the territorial legislature, an amendment designed to eliminate the restric-

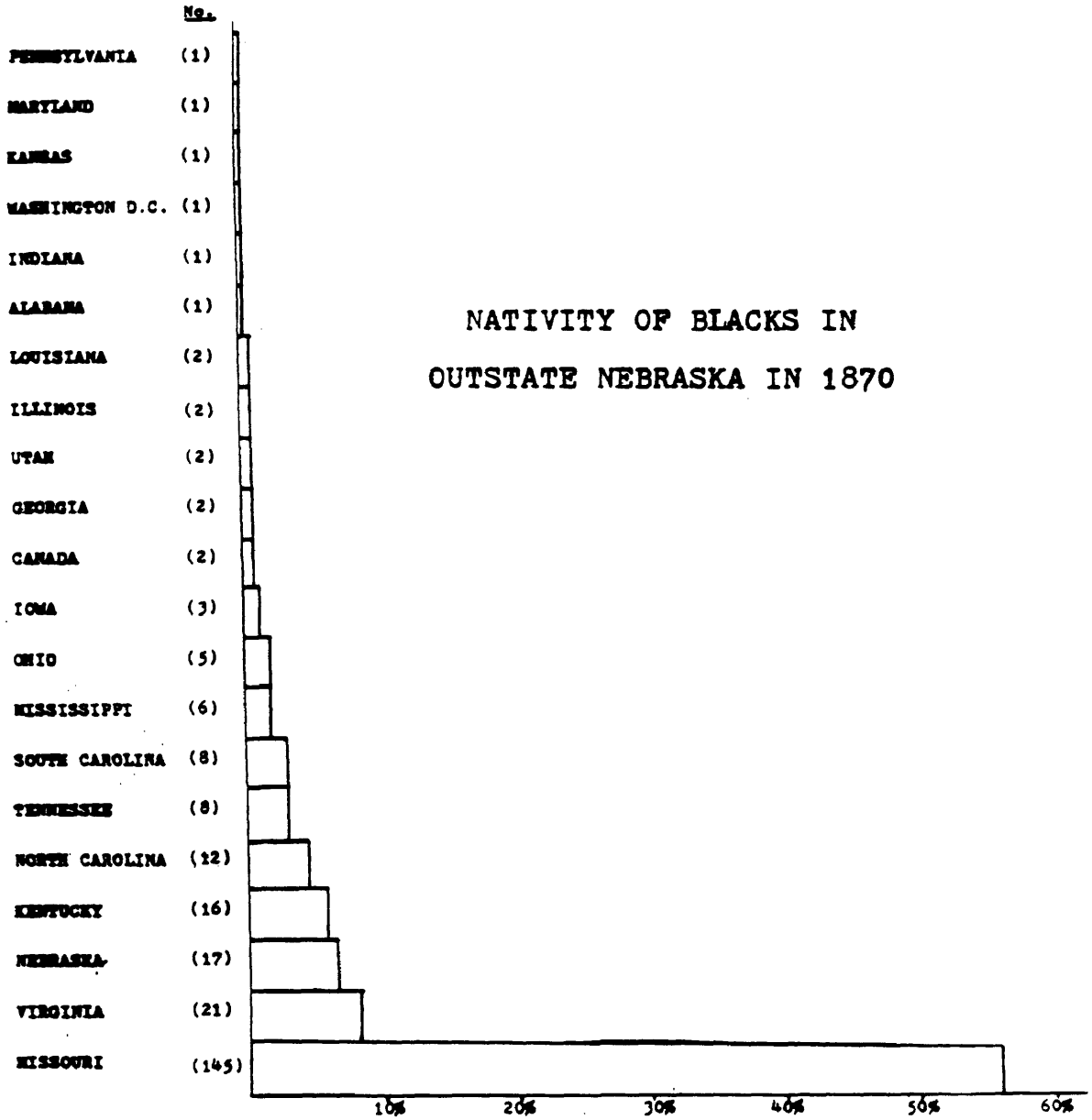
tion on suffrage was convincingly defeated by a thirty-six to two vote in the House. The attitude of Nebraska legislators was not unlike that of most northern states. In fact, during the years between 1857 and 1867, citizens of eight states had voted on suffrage issues and in every case the idea of restricting suffrage to whites was upheld. Even the states close to Nebraska - Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas and Illinois - soundly defeated black suffrage resolutions prior to 1868. Regardless of what the federal government was trying to accomplish, the states were willing to abolish slavery, even grant other rights, but black suffrage was more than most states were willing to bestow. <sup>44</sup> David Richardson, an Iowa newspaper editor from Davenport probably voiced the typical sentiment of the region when he proclaimed, "pass the suffrage act, and the next summer our white men will be invited to share the labors of the harvest field with negroes, to eat with, and to associate with them as equals." <sup>45</sup>

Even though the feelings against black suffrage were strong, the feelings toward securing statehood were stronger. On February 20, 1867, Governor Alvin Saunders called a special session of the legislature to strike the word "white" from the constitution. Two days later it was amended to satisfy Congress and on March 1, 1867, President Andrew Johnson signed the proclamation admitting Nebraska to the Union as the thirty-seventh state. <sup>46</sup>

In 1870, the second federal census taken in Nebraska showed that the state's population had risen to 122,906. The black inhabitants numbered only 789, comprising less than one percent of the total population. Over fifty-eight percent, or 459, of the blacks lived in Douglas County. Otoe County claimed twenty-eight percent of the population with 219 blacks. Nineteen of the rest of the state's fifty-four counties reported black residents, dividing the remaining 110 blacks, fourteen percent of the black population in 1870. <sup>47</sup>

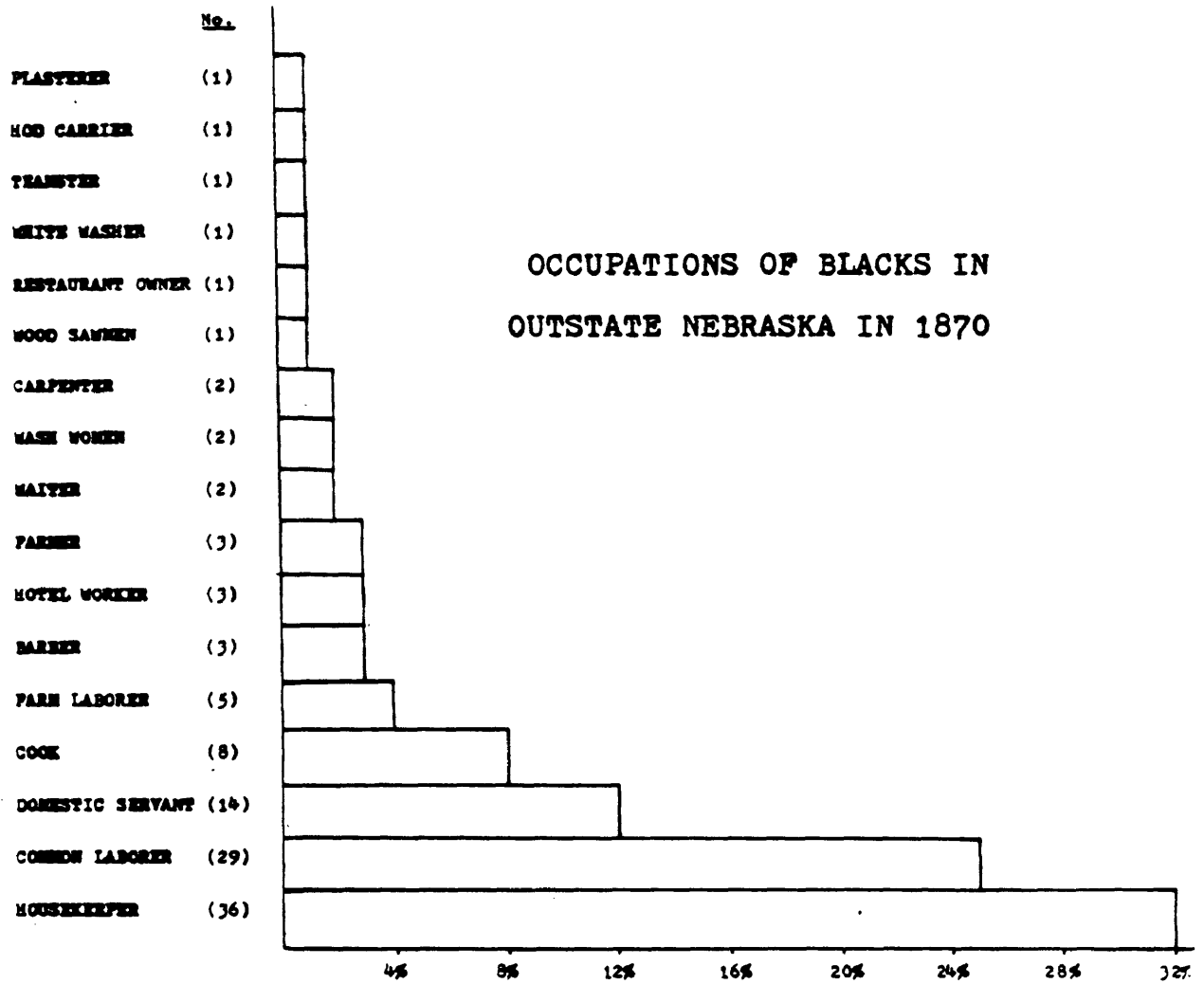
As in 1860, Missouri was the birthplace for most of Nebraska's blacks. In 1870, fifty-six percent (145) of outstate blacks reporting nativity identified Missouri as their place of birth. Virginia, Nebraska and Kentucky were each the birthplace for six to eight percent of the blacks. Over four percent (12) of the blacks were natives of North Carolina. Tennessee, South Carolina, Ohio, and Mississippi were each the birthplace for two to three percent. Eleven other states and Canada were each listed as the birthplace by fewer than one percent of Nebraska's blacks. <sup>48</sup>

Otoe County had strong ties to Missouri as over seventy-three percent of its blacks were born there. Richardson, Nemaha, and Cass counties showed significantly weaker ties to Missouri with fewer than twenty-five percent of their black populations born there even though they bordered either Otoe County or Missouri. The nativity of blacks in the



Source: 1870 U.S. Census

FIGURE 1.5



Source: 1870 U.S. Census

FIGURE 1.6

remainder of Nebraska counties was distributed among many states with none dominating. One explanation of the high incidence of Missouri blacks, other than close proximity, could have resulted from trade along the Missouri River. Nebraska City was a major port and trading center along the Missouri in the 1860's. Among the communities that Nebraska City traded directly with were the Missouri towns of St. Joseph and Kansas City. Some of the blacks worked on the Nebraska City docks and probably came up river from Missouri. <sup>49</sup>

Major black occupations in 1870 included housekeepers, common laborers, servants, and cooks. The most frequent occupation among blacks was housekeeping, reported by one-third (36) of the workers. All of those listing housekeeping as their regular occupation were women. The census does not give any indication of how many of these women worked outside their homes and how many kept their own homes. Common labor ranked second as a means of making a living. Although the exact type of work these laborers were doing is not known, evidence suggests that most were engaged in construction or transportation work. <sup>50</sup>

Because household and domestic servants were avidly sought in Nebraska, servants ranked third as an occupation. Approximately sixty percent of the reported servants were women. Women also performed jobs as cooks and laundry workers. Men dominated the occupations of laborer, farm hand,

hotel worker, hod carrier, waiter, and barber. Overall in the 1870 black work force, men comprised fifty-six percent of the workers. This figure closely relates to the gender makeup of Nebraska's black population which was fifty-four percent male.<sup>51</sup>

During the 1870s, blacks in Nebraska would discover the meaning of their newly acquired rights. During an 1871 speech, Nebraska Chief Justice Oliver P. Mason asserted the opinion that blacks could not sit as jurors in the state. He stated that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendment gave blacks certain rights, but imposed no duties on them. Mason maintained that jury service was a duty and privilege, and blacks could not participate.<sup>52</sup>

The question of excluding blacks from jury duty soon came before the Nebraska courts when, in 1872, John Brittle was charged with burglary. When the case came to court, the jury contained one black man, Howard W. Crossly. The defense challenged this on the grounds that blacks could not sit on a jury, but the court overruled the challenge and found Brittle guilty. Brittle then appealed the case on the grounds that he was found guilty by a jury which contained a black. Brittle claimed that as a territory, Nebraska had allowed only white male citizens to sit on a jury. In 1875, the Nebraska Supreme Court upheld the lower court's decision against Brittle by a two to one majority. Nebraska Supreme Court Justices George Lake and Lorenzo Crouse voted against

Chief Justice Mason, declaring that as a condition of statehood, Nebraska could not deny the election franchise or any other right to any male person for reason of race or color.<sup>53</sup>

Other new rights for blacks were also expressed at this time. In 1875 a new Constitution was drafted in Nebraska which included an article stating, "All persons within the state shall be entitled to a full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, restaurants, public conveyances, barber shops, theatres, and other places of amusement."<sup>54</sup> These new laws gave blacks even more legal rights than they had previously possessed.

Nebraska was very much involved in the nationwide struggle of expanding black rights between 1854 and 1878. During those years blacks witnessed considerable progress toward legal freedoms and rights. The legality and realization of those freedoms were continually tested in the courts to see how far the application of these rights extended to blacks. As blacks won each victory, a new battle ensued to maintain what had already been gained. In ever-increasing numbers blacks migrated to Nebraska during the territorial and early statehood periods. After Military Reconstruction disappeared in the South, a new wave of black migration to Nebraska and other northern states began. These newcomers



would carry on the hope and dream that Nebraska would offer them a chance to succeed.

- <sup>1</sup> Nebraska City News-Press, December 15, 1860, p. 2.
- <sup>2</sup> James C. Olson, History of Nebraska, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 67-77.
- <sup>3</sup> James M. McPherson, Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), p. 90; James C. Malin, "The Nebraska Question: A Ten Year Record, 1844-1854", Nebraska History, 35 (Spring, 1954) pp. 1-15.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> W. Sherman Savage, Blacks in the West (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), pp. 24-26.
- <sup>6</sup> Addison E. Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, 3 vols. (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), I: 238-249; Savage, Blacks in the West, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Olson, History of Nebraska, p. 88; Savage, Blacks in the West, pp. 23-25.
- <sup>9</sup> Savage, Blacks in the West, pp. 22-26.
- <sup>10</sup> McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, pp. 100-105.
- <sup>11</sup> Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, I: 287.
- <sup>12</sup> Nebraska City News-Press, December 23, 1954, p. 6-C; Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and The People, I: 307; A.T. Andreas, History of the State of Nebraska, 2 vols. (Chicago: The Western Publishing Co., 1882) I: 1139, 1200.
- <sup>13</sup> Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, I: 287-299.
- <sup>14</sup> Rev. John Todd, Early Settlement and Growth of Western Iowa (Des Moines: Republican Printing Co., 1906) p. 138.
- <sup>15</sup> Nebraska City News-Press, December 15, 1860, p. 2; Joseph Frazier Wall, Iowa: A Bicentennial History (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978) pp. 88-90; Nebraska City News-Press, December 23, 1954, p. 6-C.
- <sup>16</sup> Todd, Early Settlement and Growth of Western Iowa, pp. 138-140; Andreas, History of the State of Nebraska, I: 1200.

<sup>17</sup> Todd, Early Settlement and Growth of Western Iowa, pp. 139-145; Nebraska City News-Press, December 15, 1860, p. 2; Glenn Noble, John Brown and the Jim Lane Trail (Broken Bow, Nebraska: Purcells Inc., 1977) pp. 104-110.

<sup>18</sup> Noble, John Brown and the Jim Lane Trail, pp. 104-110; Andreas, History of the State of Nebraska, I: 1140.

<sup>19</sup> Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, I: 287-299.

<sup>20</sup> Omaha World-Herald, April 22, 1973, p. 23-B; Lillian Anthony-Welch, "Black People: The Nation Building Vision" in Paul Olson, ed., Broken Hoops and Plains People (Lincoln: Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, 1976) pp. 110-111; Nebraska City News-Press, December 23, 1954, p. 2; Otoe County Civil Court Docket for 1860, Otoe County Court House; Nebraska City News-Press, December 15, 1860, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Nebraska City News-Press, December 23, 1954, p. 6-C; Savage, Blacks in the West, pp. 5-6; Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, I: 241-242.

<sup>23</sup> The Revised Statutes of the Territory of Nebraska (Omaha: E.B. Taylor, Printer, 1866), pp. 600-601; Savage, Blacks in the West, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Compendium of the Tenth Census (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), pp. 361-362; The manuscript census reveals twelve fewer Blacks in the territory. In Dakota County twelve one-half white and one-half Indian children are listed as mulatto making the total seventy.

<sup>25</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Nebraska, Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives (copies in Nebraska State Historical Society).

<sup>26</sup> McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, pp. 75-95.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> James L. Hill, "Migration of Blacks to Iowa, 1820-1960", Journal of Negro History, 66 (Winter, 1981) pp. 290-293; Nebraska Manuscript Census of Population, 1860.

<sup>29</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1860.

- <sup>30</sup> Revised Statutes of the Territory of Nebraska, (1866) p. 254.
- <sup>31</sup> Complete Nebraska Session Laws, 1855 to 1865 (1866) p. 92.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 92
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 92.
- <sup>34</sup> Savage, Blacks in the West, pp. 177-182; James Lake and Richard Hanson, "Negro Segregation in Nebraska Schools 1860-1870", Nebraska Law Review, 33 (November, 1953), pp. 49-51.
- <sup>35</sup> Omaha Weekly Republican, January 18, 1867, p. 4.
- <sup>36</sup> Nebraska City News, August 26, 1867, p. 3; September 4, 1867, p. 3.
- <sup>37</sup> Nebraska, House Journal (12th Territorial Session, 1867), p. 71.
- <sup>38</sup> J. Sterling Morton, Illustrated History of Nebraska, 3 vols. (Lincoln: Western Publishing Co., 1911), II: 60.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 60.
- <sup>40</sup> Morton, History of Nebraska, II: 60; Nebraska, Complete Sessions of Laws 1867-1877 (1886), p. 351.
- <sup>41</sup> Saline County Union (Crete), January 31, 1878, p. 1.
- <sup>42</sup> Nebraska City News, July 12, 1879, p. 1; William Joseph Barnds, "Nebraska College, the Episcopal School at Nebraska City, 1868-1885", Nebraska History, 52 (Summer, 1971) p. 184.
- <sup>43</sup> Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, I: 357; Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 122-127.
- <sup>44</sup> Tom L. McLaughlin, "Grass Roots Attitudes toward Black Rights in Twelve Non-slaveholding States, 1846-1869", Mid-America, 56 (July, 1974), p. 176.
- <sup>45</sup> G. Galin Berrier, "The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa, 1865-1868," Annals of Iowa, 39 (Spring, 1968), pp. 250-252.
- <sup>46</sup> Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, I: 357; Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 122-127.
- <sup>47</sup> Compendium of the Tenth Census, pp. 361-362.

<sup>48</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1860.

<sup>49</sup> Charles W. Martin, "Omaha in 1861-1869: Selection from the Letters of Joseph Barker", Nebraska History, 59 (Winter, 1978), p. 510; Leland R. Johnson, "An Army Engineer on the Missouri in 1867", Nebraska History, 53 (Summer, 1972), p. 265.

<sup>50</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Nebraska, Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives (copies in Nebraska State Historical Society).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Omaha Daily Herald, April 8, 1871, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Brittle v. People, 2, Nebraska Sup. Ct., p. 199 (1873).

<sup>54</sup> Compiled Statutes of Nebraska 1929 (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1931), p. 529.

## CHAPTER II

### FEARS OF A FLOOD: EXODUSTERS AND NEBRASKA, 1879-1880

In May of 1879 a correspondent for the Lincoln Nebraska State Journal covered a story in Wyandotte, Kansas concerning a major movement of blacks into Kansas. He asked a few of these penniless and poorly clothed blacks for the reasons why they left the South. One young black man cried out, "When Massey Grant got to be president again he would buy a pocketful of powder and go down to Mississippi and kill the white rascal that shot his mother." When asked why his mother was shot, the man replied, "Kos she wouldn't tell where my father was." <sup>1</sup> Another black man responded to the same question, "We talk Publican and don't vote the Democratic ticket." <sup>2</sup> These were a few of the comments made by some of the several hundred blacks meandering along the Missouri River shores on that spring morning. These blacks, the first of many thousands who fled the economic and political injustices of their homeland, became known as Exodusters. <sup>3</sup>

Economically, southern blacks suffered under a sharecropping system that kept them in constant debt to the landowners. Politically, they feared the restoration of the power of those who governed before the Civil War. Radical Reconstruction ended in the South in 1877 and federal troops withdrew, only to have Southern "Redeemers" take control and

establish home rule. This caused blacks to become increasingly fearful that the absence of federal troops also meant the nullification of liberties granted to them since the Civil War. Most of all, blacks feared the reestablishment of slavery under the guise of freedom. <sup>4</sup>

During the 1878 Louisiana elections, blacks' fear of "Redeemer" home rule became a harsh reality. Mob violence broke out in Caddo and Tensas Parishes as whites threatened and shot freedmen. Many blacks fled into the neighboring woods or crossed into Mississippi. In spite of their efforts to escape the violence, it is estimated that as many as forty blacks perished during the 1878 election campaign. <sup>5</sup>

As a result of the 1878 election illegalities, Colorado Republican Senator Henry M. Teller headed a subcommittee to investigate the political misbehavior in Louisiana. When members of the subcommittee arrived in New Orleans in January of 1879, they summoned witnesses from the unruly parishes, hoping to get as much first-hand testimony as possible. When previous congressional committees had conducted similar hearings in the South during the Reconstruction period, the freedmen flocked to speak out. This time, blacks hesitated to tell their story to the predominantly Republican panel, since they would have no one to protect them after they revealed the wrongs. With the absence of federal military protection, blacks knew that talk-

ing to the committee would endanger their lives. Their fears were realized in mid-January when angry whites killed two blacks on their way to testify. <sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., Congressman William Windom of Minnesota sought to gain support for his resolution to give financial aid and supplies to blacks who traveled north and west to unsettled states and territories. The idea of obtaining a homestead in these areas quickly prompted many blacks to dream of migrating north. <sup>7</sup>

Economic conditions, even more than the political strife, turned the southern blacks toward the North. Freedmen remained in constant debt and they saw no end to the sharecropping system in which they were trapped. Practically every black tenant in the South borrowed heavily on his unplanted crop, and after harvest possessed at best only a few dollars. Most were further in debt than during the previous year. Credit was expensive for sharecroppers, who could expect to pay an extra thirty-five percent interest for it. <sup>8</sup>

Dishonest storekeepers added to the depressed condition of blacks. Many former slaves were illiterate, and modifications to the greenback made it hard for them to determine the value of certain bills. Greedy shopkeepers often took twenties for twos and tens for ones. The legal system, with its white supremacy roots, offered little recourse for these blacks. <sup>9</sup>



The news of Windom's resolution quickly traveled through the black-inhabited areas of the South. The benefits of the resolution became exaggerated as the news was passed along and this caused many blacks to expect more assistance than the resolution specified. The exaggerated version included free passage and a furnishing of farming supplies when the blacks reached their northern destination. The actual resolution called for some financial aid in travel cost and supplies, but did not closely approximate the actual cost of the move. <sup>10</sup>

In addition to the economic and political reasons, the added fear of yellow fever pushed the blacks to think about moving elsewhere. The epidemic in 1878 alone claimed over 13,000 lives in Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas. <sup>11</sup> Although blacks were not nearly as affected by yellow fever outbreaks as were the white inhabitants, the number of yellow fever cases did reach record levels within black communities in 1878, especially in those communities along the rivers. The only bright spot of the yellow fever epidemic of 1878 was the relaxation in election laws which allowed increased black participation. One black in Madison Parish explained, "We were allowed to vote as we pleased because the whites were afraid to come there on account of the yellow fever." <sup>12</sup>

In early spring of 1879 hundreds of blacks sold what little property they owned and prepared to head north with

their families. They possessed little money, education, or even a final destination. Most thought of Kansas as the promised land, since a black colony headed by Benjamin (Pap) Singleton met with some success there five years earlier. They also remembered John Brown's pre-Civil War efforts to end slavery in Kansas and make people aware of the inequities of the peculiar institution. Furthermore, Kansas was easily accessible from Louisiana by way of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Most of all, plenty of available land existed in Kansas on which to build a new life. <sup>13</sup>

Many blacks believed the government that gave them freedom would also help them get "forty acres and a mule." A black ex-slave and Union veteran named Henry Adams began to organize people for the move northward, and in February, 1879, 250 blacks from Madison Parish, Louisiana arrived in riverboats at St. Louis without sufficient food, money, or clothing to continue. By the beginning of March, 500 more blacks arrived there in similar destitution. <sup>14</sup>

By mid-March, the Exodus gained momentum as blacks by the hundreds traveled north to the promised land of Kansas. Dilapidated sharecropper wagons filled river roads in Louisiana and Mississippi. Blacks sold their few belongings at any price to move north. Simon Mitchell, a freedman from Vicksburg, sold his house and spring wagon, valued at \$440, for \$10.50. As they packed into the river towns and sought transportation north, the cost rose as the demand increased.

Boats that had charged rates from \$3.00 to \$5.00 for each adult, now charged from \$7.00 to \$10.00 to reach St. Louis. Children, who had previously traveled for free, were now charged \$4.00. Hundreds of blacks could be found in late March and early April stranded between St. Louis and Kansas City. It cost an additional \$3.00 for adults and \$1.50 for children to travel this stretch of the journey. Those unable to afford the passage headed out on foot. <sup>15</sup>

Private relief agencies formed to care for the refugees, as federal aid bogged down in congressional debate. Groups such as Turner's Colored Refugee Relief Board, the Western Sanitary Commission, and the Kansas Freedman's Relief Association organized to help supply food, clothing, and shelter for helpless travelers. By the end of April the Exodus peaked, as thousands of Louisiana and Mississippi blacks traveled up the river and entered Kansas. <sup>16</sup>

Kansas Governor John P. St. John welcomed the black refugees with open arms. St. John was born in Indiana and in 1860 began practicing law in Illinois. During the Civil War he fought with the Union and earned the rank of lieutenant colonel. He followed the ideals set forth by the Republican party and greatly admired President Abraham Lincoln's commitment to emancipate southern blacks during the war. After the war ended, he moved to Independence, Missouri to practice law, but by 1870 he moved again to the newly emerging state of Kansas. His Republican background and patriotic

wartime service helped him to be elected governor in 1878. A humanitarian and an ambitious member of the Republican party, St. John felt the party's duty was to help poor southern blacks acquire land in the frontier counties of Kansas. Unfortunately, the governor failed to comprehend the number of blacks coming into Kansas or he might have been a little more cautious before he unrolled the welcome mat. By mid-April blacks poured into Kansas, and the southern freedmen became a problem for the state since most needed food and a place to stay before they began to look for jobs or land. <sup>17</sup>

Kansas initially raised no objections to the new arrivals as long as they paid their way and did not ask for handouts. However, when the huge numbers of hungry and destitute blacks started to arrive in the eastern river towns, many Kansans became alarmed. Exodusters swamped Wyandotte, the entry point on the Kansas side of the Missouri River. Over a thousand landed in the town by the first of May. Most arrived hungry, reduced to going door to door to beg for bits of food. At best, a tent along the Missouri River bank sheltered them. Disease broke out among the new arrivals. Sickness infected over ten percent of the people, and already twenty-five had died. Wyandotte Mayor J.S. Stockton pleaded for help from Kansas Senator John J. Ingalls, explaining that municipal resources were exhausted. <sup>18</sup>

Windom's earlier resolution bogged down in committee, but now, with the Exodus in full swing, federal aid to help the distressed blacks became a major concern among Kansans. A new bill was introduced in the Senate that offered aid for the blacks. Henry Teller from Colorado, and black Mississippian Blanche K. Bruce were among the senators who joined Windom and Ingalls to gather support for the bill. James A. Garfield, a congressman from Ohio, sponsored a bill in the House which called for rations and tents to be provided for the refugees, and another \$75,000 to be set aside for future aid. However, Kansas Congressmen Dudley C. Haskell and William A. Phillips informed Governor St. John that neither the House nor the Senate bill had much chance of passing. <sup>19</sup>

Eastern Kansas residents pressured Governor St. John to correct the effects of his open arm policy. He knew that he had to get the blacks away from the eastern Kansas towns where job opportunities were few and resentment from earlier settlers was growing. He was convinced that enough open space to accommodate these people existed in the western part of the state. St. John conservatively estimated it would take at least \$300 of financial backing to get each family started on a homestead. Personal finances of \$700 was a more realistic estimate, but in either case, support from private and government sources was lacking. <sup>20</sup>

Another alternative open to St. John was to refuse to land the Exodusters and to send them up river toward the states of Nebraska and Iowa. He now believed that other states should share the burden of supporting the black refugees. Leaders from the eastern Kansas towns of Wyandotte, Leavenworth, and Atchison strongly agreed that sending the heavily laden riverboats north was the best alternative. <sup>21</sup>

Until this time, Nebraskans paid little attention to the flood of blacks up the Missouri River. Nebraska newspapers hardly mentioned the Exodus except to praise the efforts in St. Louis to help the refugees arrange passage to Kansas. The Omaha Bee, which ignored the possibility of southern blacks migrating into Nebraska while praising the arrival of two hundred "able and affluent" German immigrants, was typical. <sup>22</sup> Through the month of May, Nebraska papers continued to avoid mentioning the Exodus. An exception was the Lincoln Daily State Journal which explained the reasons why blacks left the South and the horrible conditions that they currently endured at Wyandotte. Although the article ended with a plea for economic aid, it made no mention of welcoming the Exodusters into Nebraska. <sup>23</sup>

The apparent disinterest of Nebraskans remained unchanged as spring gave way to summer. Even Nebraska's Republican Governor Albinus Nance did not comment upon the black migration. In mid-June the Omaha Bee printed a letter from an outraged Omaha black concerning police work. He was upset

because even with a reasonably large black population, Omaha employed not one black policeman. The letter pointed out that the towns of Topeka and Atchison, Kansas employed black policemen, but even though Omaha was as large, it did not. It also tried to persuade blacks to stay away from Omaha because of poor opportunities. <sup>24</sup>

As June ended, so too did the silence. Wyandotte and other Kansas towns refused to land riverboats filled with the southern refugees. The Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association in Topeka contacted a group of people in Lincoln who organized a Freedmen's Relief Association in that city under the leadership of William McNeil. On the evening of July 1, forty-two Louisiana and Mississippi refugees arrived in Lincoln on the railroad from Atchison and Topeka. <sup>25</sup>

Members of the Association, both black and white, met the newcomers at the depot and escorted them to a church in south Lincoln. There they ate a meal of meat, bread, butter, coffee, and tea and rested from their long journey. One Lincoln paper seemed impressed with the new residents, calling them "the cream of the negro exodus." <sup>26</sup> They had left their homes in Baton Rouge and New Orleans a month before finally landing in Lincoln. During that time they had lived mostly aboard riverboats and railroad cars. The day after their arrival, members of Lincoln's black community and members of the Freedman's Relief Association

built a shelter for these new Nebraska residents, the first of the southern Exodusters in the city. <sup>27</sup>

Nebraskans may have felt satisfied with their first group of black refugees, but questions remained: How many more refugees could be expected? What town would see the next group land? What type of southerners would comprise the next group? Most of all, would they be healthy and not carry the dreaded yellow fever?

The areas hardest hit by the 1879 yellow fever outbreak lay along the Mississippi River from New Orleans to St. Louis. The epidemic was most severe in Memphis, and by mid-July the city was quarantined. Because of this, and the widespread knowledge that practically all of the black refugees traveled up the Mississippi River through the infected areas, Nebraska residents were concerned. Many northern papers carried daily stories of the epidemic. They usually appeared as front page news with large headlines such as "The Scourge" or "The Yellow Fever Panic." <sup>28</sup> One local paper reported that a Memphis doctor was very concerned about the number of infected southerners traveling up the Mississippi River. <sup>29</sup> The Nebraska City Daily News suggested placing all cargoes of blacks from the South under quarantine and cautioned, "If this Exodus is allowed to continue, as it has all summer, we may not be surprised to see even healthy Nebraska one vast charnel-house." <sup>30</sup>



On July 11, forty more refugees arrived in Lincoln on the train from Atchison. The Relief Association met them at the depot and took them to the shelter. This time the Lincoln Daily State Journal reported that Lincoln could use as many as twenty good house servants, but it appeared that few women of an appropriate age were among the immigrants. Instead, it reported, a large number of children had arrived. The main problem, however, was finding work for the Exodusters who had already arrived. On July 15, the Freedmen's Relief Association sponsored a meeting on Tenth Street in Lincoln to tell the black's story and promote them as good workers who needed a chance to prove themselves. Near the end of the meeting, the Association accepted food donations to help these people. The Association bought advertisements in the local newspapers, asking for work for these arrivals who were announcing "themselves ready and willing to perform any honest labor."<sup>31</sup>

Until mid-July, Lincoln was the only Nebraska community to face the southern refugee problem. All of the Exodusters had entered the state by railroad from Atchison. The Missouri River communities escaped their arrival until July 16, when over 160 refugees tried to land in the small southeastern Nebraska community of Plattsmouth. These blacks, refugees from Mississippi and Louisiana, came by riverboat to St. Louis, and from there the steamboats Durfree and Joe Kinney provided them with transportation to Kansas City.

Wyandotte refused them landing privileges, so Kansas City authorities dealt with the refugees. Kansas City banker A.W. Armour appointed the Reverend B.F. Watson of the First Colored Methodist Episcopal Church to care for and find accommodations for them. Watson reportedly heard that certain Nebraskans had expressed sympathy and would offer employment for the blacks. He decided to send 163 of the Exodusters by railroad through Iowa and try to land them in Plattsmouth. When notified of the blacks' imminent arrival, Plattsmouth officials refused to receive them. As a result, Burlington and Missouri Railroad officials declined to take them across the Missouri River into Nebraska. The small village of East Plattsmouth, Iowa became home for these southerners until arrangements could be made to send them elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, enraged Plattsmouth citizens made vague threats against any black allowed to cross the river. The local paper, the Nebraska Herald, tried to calm the situation by calling on the mayor, city council, and leading men to manage the predicament "honorably and satisfactorily" should any blacks cross into Plattsmouth.<sup>33</sup>

The Exodusters across the river from Plattsmouth caused excitement throughout Nebraska. Nebraska City, Lincoln, and Omaha papers responded to the Plattsmouth crisis. The Democratic Nebraska City Daily News responded to the problem of those taking "sun baths at East Plattsmouth" with the solution "to drown them in the Missouri River or let them starve

to death." <sup>34</sup> The next day the Daily News reported that Nebraska City had no room for them; Plattsmouth could not handle them; and Lincoln was already considering turning its Exodusters over to the county. In closing, the editors warned that if something was not done to end the Exoduster problem, ". . . We will have them on us to remain with the pertinacity of the lice in Egypt." <sup>35</sup> The Republican Nebraska City Press reported as harshly on the black migrants as its Democratic counterpart. The Press, asserting that it represented the views of the townspeople said, "We do not want them here." <sup>36</sup>

When the paper claimed the wandering blacks were "as helpless and ignorant of what will become of them, as so many dumb animals", a political newspaper war started over the issue. <sup>37</sup> The Democratic Omaha Herald could not hold back in telling how the true Republican spirit emerged from the article. The Herald boasted that the Republican party praised and glorified the black plantation worker, gave him the vote, and insisted he rule over the states of the South. However, now that these blacks headed north into their neighborhood, the Republicans referred to them as "helpless and ignorant as so many wild animals." The newspaper then explained what the Democrats would do for the black migrants:

We would be kind to those people. We would be generous to them. We would welcome them, and not refuse them opportunity to live in Nebraska as is their right in the enjoyment of equal liberty with

white men under equal laws in our country. But we would tell the truth about these people and expose the deviltry that gambles and makes political barter of their calamity. They are the helpless, and almost helpless victims of a race-destiny which no statesmanship can avert, as time will show. The trouble is not with the white man. It is with the Negro. He is here. His natural home is in the South. He will perish in the North . . . The ballot in the hands of these poor ignorant people has been an unmixed curse on them, as will be made more clear as time rolls on.<sup>38</sup>

Racial attitudes portrayed by Nebraska newspapers had, in fact, changed little from pre-Civil War years. In December, 1860 the Nebraska City News had criticized its Republican counterpart for devoting all its attention to the blacks while legislation concerning the majority of Nebraskans had been avoided. The News had asserted that "A white man in their [Republican] estimation is almost but not quite equal to the nigger."<sup>39</sup> Nineteen years later, Nebraska's Democratic newspapers called the Republicans "Negro lovers" and blamed them for the blacks' sorrowful condition.<sup>40</sup> Nationally, post-Reconstruction politics had changed little from Ante-Bellum days. In spite of the Civil War, Democrats and Republicans still fought over the black question; the change in reference from slave to freedman was all that was new.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, some of the East Plattsmouth refugees found their way across the river to Plattsmouth, but most were transported down river to Nebraska City in spite of protest. Around half of the 163 remained on the Iowa side of the river

and were cared for there. Those in Nebraska City were placed under the authority of the Reverend William H. Green, a black community leader, for settlement. Most found employment in a reasonable short period of time in and around Nebraska City. Some gained employment on farms across the river in Iowa. <sup>42</sup>

Lincoln papers, meanwhile, ridiculed the reaction toward the Exodusters of the capital city's eastern Nebraska neighbors. The Nebraska State Journal remarked that Plattsmouth residents had ". . . got a taste of the darkey Exodus, and knows how 'tis herself." <sup>43</sup> But the paper stopped short of condemning them for refusing the Negroes admittance into the city, since Lincolnites probably were somewhat embarrassed over the fact that in this same week their own community leaders discouraged a hundred black refugees from coming into the city. They informed the spokesman for the Exodusters that housing and food shortages already existed in Lincoln and that it was not a good idea for additional migrants to come there. <sup>44</sup>

The political war continued between the Democratic and Republican papers. The Republican Daily State Journal of Lincoln warned that Omaha was threatened with one or more loads of Exodusters. The Journal reminded Omahans that the blacks, politically aligned to the Great Emancipator's party, surely would threaten any Democratic controlled areas when it said, "The Herald is already figuring what the Republican majority in Douglas County will be this fall." <sup>45</sup>

The Omaha Republican printed what the Democratic newspapers said about the black issue whenever it suited its purposes. An editorial quoted from the pages of the Democratic Plymouth County, Iowa Sentinel boasted that the black "is too cowardly to vote his convictions, or too stupid to have convictions." The Sentinel continued, "There is more voting energy and party strength in a dozen raw Irishmen than in a thousand well-fed niggers." <sup>46</sup>

The Republican tried its best to capitalize on Democratic harshness toward blacks. It also brought out the issue of Irish immigration which was beginning to trouble Protestants in the area. The Irish were hard workers, but they also brought with them Roman Catholicism, which alarmed many Protestants. Some felt black migrant workers could aid in countering the Catholic invasion. The Republican also dreamed of gaining another Nebraska representative in Congress, and explained how little it cost to obtain these workers as compared to white immigrants. The Republican claimed that during the Exodus, Kansas extended aid through its Relief Association to over 4,000 blacks and found employment for them. This aid cost Kansans \$6000, or about \$1.50 for each Exoduster. This was a minimal cost for attracting "the best class of immigrants that Nebraska can draw from" asserted the Republican. <sup>47</sup>

The Omaha Herald lashed back at the Republican papers, especially the Lincoln Journal, for taking part in refusing

an invitation to the 100 additional Exodusters. The Herald accused the Republicans of "slamming the door in the face of the plantation people" and harshly attacked the Republicans who "enticed them from their homes in the South" but forbade those "helpless victims" from entering their towns.<sup>48</sup> The Herald further attacked the Nebraska City Press, calling it a "leading Republican newspaper" which told "the story for the rest of the stalwart states, and for the pretenders and frauds who howl themselves hoarse over the condition of the negroes in the south," but did not want the southern migrants here. The Herald charged the Omaha Republican with printing nothing but "pure and unadulterated swash" concerning the Negro problem.<sup>49</sup>

As July ended, the Nebraska papers continued to argue and cast blame over the Negro question. Not more than 300 Exodusters were able to enter the state, those arriving in the first two weeks of July. The last half of the month saw Nebraska communities increasingly refuse to allow more southern refugees into the state. The anxiety caused by the situation continued into August as the state's leading newspapers kept up the partisan argument. The Lincoln State Journal ran an article concerning the condition of the colored immigrant. It criticized the Democratic papers' portrayal of the hardships endured by Kansas and Nebraska because of the black migration. Nebraska needed the workers. The Journal proclaimed, "Five hundred or one thousand healthy and strong

women and girls can get situations in this state permanent places, if they show themselves, honest, and industrious." It maintained that the Exodusters in Lincoln had found work because there was a great demand in Nebraska for common laborers.<sup>50</sup>

The Journal condemned the Omaha Herald for using the poor southerner as a pawn in the political game, and for accusing the Journal of exciting the blacks to come north to gain needed Republican votes. The Journal replied that it already had a sufficient number of Republicans in the state and that more might harm the party.<sup>51</sup>

The Republican voice in Plattsmouth, The Nebraska Herald, agreed with the Journal on the need for laborers in Nebraska. The Herald said Nebraska needed good women for housework and men to work as laborers. However, it did not think Plattsmouth was a good place for them to settle. The editors claimed that the river towns, particularly Plattsmouth, were crowded with laborers. Yet elsewhere in the same issue, it proclaimed that Plattsmouth could absorb fifty laborers immediately. The Herald declared, "These colored people should be colonized on the prairie, and distributed along the railroad lines."<sup>52</sup> Responding to comments of area Democratic newspapers claiming that all Exodusters are Republicans, and therefore the Republicans should take care of them, the Herald proudly responded, "We can and we will."<sup>53</sup>



The Democratic Nebraska City News responded with stories about how the Republicans encouraged the Exodus to decrease the southern population, meaning fewer congressional seats for the South while increasing Republican numbers in the North. Former Alabama Congressman Jeremiah Haralson warned, "Not less than 15,000 will leave my district alone."<sup>54</sup> The News printed stories about discouraged Exodusters, many of whom allegedly wanted to return south. One refugee in Nebraska City was building a small boat to take him back to the South. When asked why he had come north, he responded, "It was Republican lies, and nothing else." The paper reported eight others also were considering traveling back to their native homeland.<sup>55</sup> Another refugee in the town said he was promised 100 acres of land and \$300 of supplies for the first year, and neither of these promises materialized. He wanted to go back to his home in the South, "The men that brought us here ought to be hung," he asserted.<sup>56</sup>

As autumn fell across Nebraska, the threat of Exodusters entering the state declined as did the number of related articles in Nebraska newspapers. Difficulties in travel and poor prospects for employment slowed black northern migration during the winter months of 1879-80. However, on February 6, 1880 the Omaha Herald printed an article warning of another Exodus during the approaching summer. It condemned southern leaders who encouraged the continuation of the Negro Exodus to the northern states.<sup>57</sup> A bit of excitement occurred in

May of 1880 when a small group of Exodusters arrived at Tecumseh, Nebraska, a small community southwest of Nebraska City. The Tecumseh Journal criticized the group for having so few able-bodied men among them; however, they quickly found work and no mention was subsequently made of them. <sup>58</sup>

Nationally, the Exodus was an embarrassment. In response to public demands for an investigation into it, the Senate established a special committee of five. The committee, which come to be known as the Voorhees Committee, was headed by Democratic Senators George H. Pendleton of Ohio and Zebulon B. Vance of North Carolina, and Republican Senators William Windom of Minnesota and Henry W. Blair of New Hampshire. They began hearing testimony on January 19, 1880, and by the time they adjourned on April 27, they had examined over 150 witnesses and amassed over 1700 pages of sworn testimony. Witnesses came from the southern states and the states receiving the Exodusters. <sup>59</sup>

The Democrats brought forth testimony that denied mistreatment of the southern black by white landowners. They accused Republicans of luring black voters to northern states where a Republican majority was fading, and at the same time trying to lessen populations in the South, thus shifting congressional seats to northern states. On the other hand, the Republican committee members tried to show how southern Democrats forced "intolerable hardships, injustices, and suffering" upon the blacks, causing them to migrate north. <sup>60</sup>

The committee made the determination that blacks "fled panic-stricken from their homes to seek shelter among strangers in a strange land." <sup>61</sup> Many citizens were aggravated by the committee's lack of a definite conclusion. The investigation produced no clear answers for the cause of the Exodus and the committee made no recommendations to help solve the sensitive issue. In retrospect, black educator Booker T. Washington expressed his anger in no uncertain terms:

Thus, with its usual recklessness, Congress appropriated thousands of dollars to find out what was already known to every intelligent person, and almost every schoolboy in the country, that the Negroes were leaving the South because of systematic robbery, and political cruelties. Thousands of dollars to ascertain the cause of the poor Negroes' distress, and not one cent to relieve it. <sup>62</sup>

Many of the most desperate and depressed blacks came north in 1879. In 1880 there was a decline in the number of northward-bound Exodusters. Although the Freedmen's Relief Association remained active in 1880 to care for late comers, the crisis situation of 1879 was not repeated. <sup>63</sup>

The reaction to the Exoduster crisis also subsided in Nebraska by the late summer of 1880 as the earlier predictions of a flood of blacks in the spring were never realized. To say the least, some Nebraskans overreacted to the situation. The total number of Exodusters who entered the state was minimal, probably less than 400 total, with a third of them locating in Lincoln. <sup>64</sup> Lincoln was accommodating to

the refugees and was not inconvenienced by their presence. It is estimated that before the Exodusters came to Lincoln in 1879, its black population totaled approximately 460, or almost four percent of the total population of the city. Although the estimated 140 Exodusters increased the capital's population by only one percent, the city's black population rose by one-third, bringing the total number of blacks in the city by 1880 to over 600. <sup>65</sup>

Plattsmouth received approximately twenty blacks from the South. This number, though small, doubled the town's black population. Even with the addition of the Exodusters, the black population in Plattsmouth comprised less than one percent of the population. The story in Nebraska City, where forty Exodusters settled, was not much different. Although its black population increased by over one-third, blacks now represented just over one percent of the community's residents. <sup>66</sup>

Nebraska's white population increased an average of over twenty-five percent a year during the 1870s, as large colonies of German and Irish immigrants quietly moved into the state. Interestingly, some blacks came into Nebraska at this time without generating much controversy. A colony of fifty from Canada settled in Dawson county, and a group of twenty from Indiana settled in Hamilton County in 1879 and 1880. Both groups seemed to cause little anxiety as they settled. <sup>67</sup> Some men from York and Sherman Counties wanted

Exodusters to be sent to their areas. A group of townspeople from York wrote to William McNeal, head of Lincoln's Freedmen's Aid Association, requesting any excess blacks be sent to them, and J.M. Snyder of Sherman county wrote Kansas Governor St. John asking for some blacks to be sent his way. <sup>68</sup> He claimed, "We can furnish them work, pay them, give them good quarters, and eat at the table with them if they will keep themselves in a tidy condition." <sup>69</sup> It appears the rising cost of labor in many areas of the state forced men to look for laborers wherever they could be found.

Nebraska was not alone in extending cautious invitations to Exodusters. Both Colorado and Iowa officials acted very cautiously toward Exodusters and these states did not receive many of the refugees either, even though governors from both states reluctantly offered to help relocate excess Exodusters in their locales. It appears that the Exodusters themselves did not want to settle anywhere but Kansas. They seemed to hold firm to their dreams of settling in old John Brown's country. <sup>70</sup>

The anxiety of Nebraskans towards the Exodusters resulted from events in Kansas heightened by local newspaper reports. It seems that many Nebraska newspapers played the leading role in keeping large numbers of Exodusters from entering the state. Their articles reporting the possible landing of a boat or railroad car excited many of the state's residents. These newspapers continued to build on this excitement and

fear, finally making a political issue of the poor southerners' situation. As the plight of the Exodusters became entangled in the staunchly partisan Nebraska press, racism, in both words and actions, surfaced more frequently in many of the state's communities. Just when Nebraska was preparing for a significant black migration to the state in 1880, the quick demise of the Exoduster movement ended any prospect of a mass black migration occurring at that time. The negative reaction towards the Exodusters by some of the state's communities may have hindered black migration into Nebraska for some years as black settlement in the state slowed considerably. However, by 1885 growing opportunities and increasing labor demands in the state faded memories of the Exodus and resulted in a better environment for black settlement.

- <sup>1</sup> Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln), May 9, 1879, p. 3.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> Howard Chudacoff, Paul Escott, David Katzman, Mary Beth Norton, Thomas Paterson, and William Tuttle, Jr., A People and a Nation; A History of the United States, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986), p. 446.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 472-474.
- <sup>5</sup> Morgan Peoples, "Kansas Fever in North Louisiana," Louisiana History, 11 (Spring, 1970), p. 125.
- <sup>6</sup> William Ivy Hair, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics 1877-1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), pp. 84-85.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 85.
- <sup>8</sup> Peoples, "Kansas Fever," p. 124.
- <sup>9</sup> Report and Testimony of the Select Committee of the United States to Investigate the Causes of the Removal of the Negroes from the Southern States to the Northern States, Senate Reports, no. 693, 46th cong., 2d session, 1880 (serials 1899 {pt. 1} and 1900 {pts. 2 and 3}), pt. 3, pp. 340-355. (Hereinafter cited as Senate Reports, no. 693.)
- <sup>10</sup> U.S. Congress, Congressional Record, 45th Congress, 3rd session, 1878, p. 483.
- <sup>11</sup> Peoples, "Kansas Fever," p. 126.
- <sup>12</sup> Senate Reports, no. 693, pt.3, p. 39.
- <sup>13</sup> Hair, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest, pp. 86-91.
- <sup>14</sup> John G. VanDeusen, "The Exodus of 1879," Journal of Negro History, 21 (April, 1936), p. 122.
- <sup>15</sup> Earl Howard Aiken, "Kansas Fever" (M.A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1939), p. 10; Robert G. Athearn, In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas 1879-80 (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), pp. 30-35.
- <sup>16</sup> Athearn, In Search of Canaan, pp. 30-34.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-55.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 79, 102, 133.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 132-140; Nell Irvin Painter, Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction (New York: Knopf, Inc., 1976), pp. 175-183.

<sup>20</sup> Athearn, In Search of Canaan, p. 62; Hair, Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest, p. 98.

<sup>21</sup> Athearn, In Search of Canaan, p. 156.

<sup>22</sup> Omaha Bee, April 3, 1879, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Nebraska State Journal, July 2, 1879, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Omaha Bee (evening edition), June 12, 1879, p. 4; No mention of the exodus is found in the correspondence of Albinus Nance from January through July, 1879, Albinus Nance folder, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>25</sup> Nebraska State Journal, July 2, 1879, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., July 3, 1879, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Nebraska State Journal, July 11, 15, 16, 20, 1879, p. 1; Kansas City Daily Times, July 8, 1879, p. 1; Nebraska Herald (Plattsmouth), July 10, 1879, p. 1; Nebraska City News, July 18, 1879, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Nebraska Herald, July 10, 1879, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Nebraska City Daily News, July 18, 1879, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Nebraska State Journal, July 16, 20, 1879, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Nebraska Herald, July 17, August 7, 1879, p. 2; Athearn, In Search of Canaan, pp. 157-160; Senate Reports, no. 693, pt.2, p. 338.

<sup>33</sup> Nebraska Herald, July 17, 1879, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Nebraska City Daily News, July 18, 1879, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., July 18, 1879, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Nebraska City Press, as cited in Omaha Weekly Herald, July 25, 1879, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 2.



- <sup>39</sup> Nebraska City News-Press, December 15, 1860, p. 2.
- <sup>40</sup> Nebraska Herald, July 24, 1879, p. 2; Omaha Weekly Herald, August 15, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>41</sup> Vincent P. Desantis, Republicans Face the Southern Question, 1877-1897 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), pp. 23-54.
- <sup>42</sup> Nebraska City Daily News, July 19, 1879, p. 4, July 26, 1879, p. 2; Nebraska Herald, July 24, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>43</sup> Nebraska State Journal, July 22, 1879, p. 4.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., July 18, 1879, p. 3.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., July 22, 1879, p. 4.
- <sup>46</sup> Omaha Weekly Republican, July 11, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>47</sup> Omaha Daily Republican, July 23, 1879, p. 1, August 22, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>48</sup> Omaha Weekly Herald, July 25, 1879, p. 2, August 1, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., July 25, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>50</sup> Nebraska State Journal, July 27, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., July 31, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>52</sup> Nebraska Herald, July 24, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 2.
- <sup>54</sup> Nebraska City News, August 2, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., August 30, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 2.
- <sup>57</sup> Omaha Weekly Herald, February 6, 1880, p. 9.
- <sup>58</sup> Tecumseh Journal, as cited in Hamilton County News (Aurora), May 15, 1880, p. 2.
- <sup>59</sup> Athearn, In Search of Canaan, pp. 208-210; Peoples, "Kansas Fever," pp. 122-123.
- <sup>60</sup> Senate Reports, no. 639, pt. 3, pp. 3-25.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-25.

<sup>62</sup> Booker T. Washington, A New Negro for a New Century (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1900), p. 290.

<sup>63</sup> Athearn, In Search of Canaan, pp. 259-270.

<sup>64</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Nebraska, Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives (copies in Nebraska State Historical Society).

<sup>65</sup> Compendium of the 10th Census (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), pp. 361-362; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880.

<sup>66</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880.

<sup>67</sup> Manuscript Census of Population; Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Nebraska, Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives (copies in Nebraska State Historical Society); Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880; Omaha Daily Bee, May 14, 1879, p. 1; Hamilton County News (Aurora), April 17, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Nebraska State Journal, July 24, 1879, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> Athearn, In Search of Canaan, p. 161.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 160-166.

### CHAPTER III

#### A TRICKLE TO A STREAM: BLACK POPULATION INCREASES, 1875-1885

While some Nebraska residents worked to restrict black immigration into Nebraska during the late 1870s, literally thousands of non-blacks came into the state. In 1870, Nebraska's population numbered 122,993, an increase of 95,000 from 1860. Most of this growth can be attributed to the attainment of statehood in 1867 and completion of the Union Pacific Railroad through the state in 1868. The population boom continued unabated through the early 1870s, and by 1874, an estimated 250,000 people lived in Nebraska. Immigration into the state fell dramatically in 1874 as a result of poor agricultural conditions and a national depression. By 1878, economic improvement opened the way for a revival of settlement and the population of the state rose to 452,402 in 1880, an increase of nearly 330,000 in ten years. <sup>1</sup>

Nebraska's black population likewise witnessed considerable growth in the 1870s. Although black immigration into the state almost halted during 1874 as a result of the national depression, it slowly picked up again in the final years of the decade. This late decade gain can be attributed mostly to the Exodus movement which brought the black population to over 2,385 by 1880. The largest black settlement with just over 800 people was located in Douglas

County. Lancaster County ranked second in number of blacks with 628, while Otoe County claimed the third largest black population in Nebraska with 181 persons. The remaining 765 blacks in the state were scattered throughout the forty-six other counties. Despite these increases in absolute numbers, blacks represented only one-half of one percent of Nebraska's rapidly growing population in 1880, down from three-quarters of one percent of the state's population in 1870. <sup>2</sup>

Lincoln, home to 603 of Lancaster County's blacks in 1880, had only fifteen blacks living there in 1870. Reflecting this increase, in 1870, blacks represented just one-quarter of one percent of Lincoln's total population, compared to four percent in 1880. Lancaster County experienced the largest influx of blacks of any county in the state during the 1870s. Although more blacks lived in Douglas County in 1880, its black population increased by only 350 people during the 1870s. Almost forty percent of all blacks who entered the state in the 1870s moved to Lancaster County. <sup>3</sup>

The Exodusters who arrived in 1879-80 accounted for a fourth of the capital's black population in 1880. Most of the increase can be attributed to very favorable employment opportunities available in the capital city during the 1870s. Southern Nebraska politicians won the state capital battle against Omaha in 1867, assuring Lincoln the business

growth that state offices would bring. The University of Nebraska was chartered at Lincoln in 1869, and during the following year the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad completed a much-needed rail connection from Plattsmouth to the capital. Also during the same time, legislators approved construction of a penitentiary and an insane asylum which continued to transform the small community along Salt Creek into a state capital city. By 1880 much of the potential for growth outlined in 1870 was realized, limited only by construction delays caused by labor shortages. The employment of Lancaster County blacks reflected the labor demands of this growing economy. In the 1880 census practically every black in Lincoln over eighteen years of age listed an occupation. Forty percent (58) of the county's black males reported "laborer" as their occupation. Seventeen percent (26) of the black males reported various types of construction work such as hod carriers, plasterers, brick masons, carpenters, and teamsters. Many of the blacks listed as laborers probably did some form of construction work. <sup>4</sup>

Blacks in Lincoln also worked as barbers, porters, and house servants. Barbering appears to have been considered a very respectable occupation. One out of every six males (22) in Lincoln reported barbering as his livelihood. Porters and servants were also in very high demand during that time in the capital city, and blacks filled many of these

openings. During the Exodus of 1879, city officials pointed out that many servants were needed throughout Lincoln and they hoped that the recent arrivals would help alleviate this shortage. It appears that many did step into these positions, as in 1880, house servants and porters together accounted for thirteen percent (18) of the male workers. Hostlers, blacksmiths, and farmers combined comprised seven percent (10) of the male workers, with the remaining eight percent (12) engaged as ministers, shoemakers, boot blacks, gardeners, tanners, fishermen, or cooks. <sup>5</sup>

Many of Lancaster County's black females were also members of the work force. They accounted for forty percent (96) of all the county's black laborers. Most of the women worked as laundresses and housekeepers, occupations reported by eight-two percent (79) of the county's black women. The remaining eighteen percent (17) of the female work force held occupations as house servants and cooks. Although a high percentage of black women worked, this was not uncommon as they had always worked during slavery. As early as the 1640s, Maryland and Virginia law declared black women eligible for most types of labor. By the conclusion of the Civil War, black women were thoroughly accustomed to working outside the home and were experienced in many types of labor. Nationally, in 1870, 40.5 percent of black women were employed, while only 16.5 percent of white women held jobs outside the home. By 1880 the percentage of black women in

the work force increased to 55.1, while the figure for white women increased only to 18.1. It appears that many black men worked at jobs that did not meet their family's economic needs, thus forcing black women into the work force to support the family's income. Apparently most black women were willing to do the jobs that many white women either could not perform due to lack of experience, or would not perform because they considered the work unsuitable. <sup>6</sup>

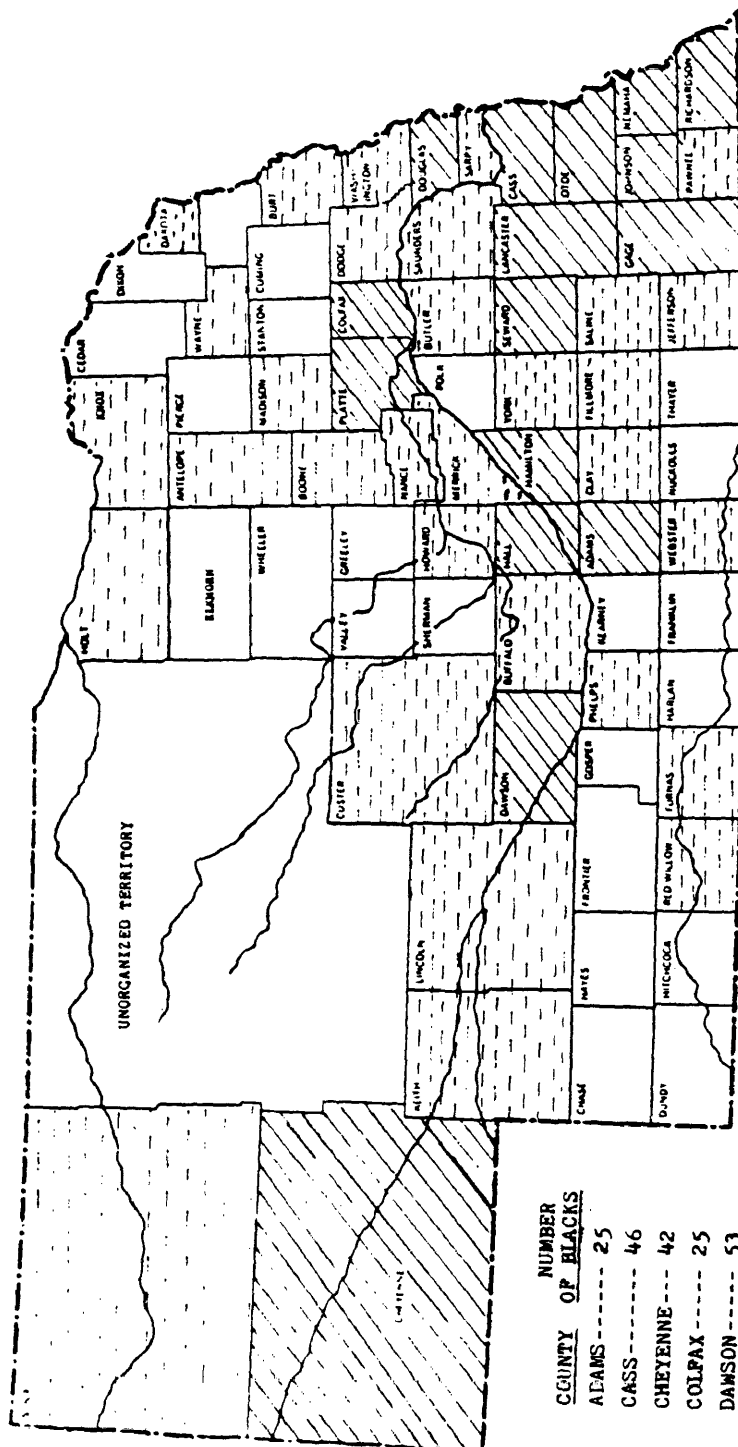
Blacks who arrived in Lincoln as a result of the Exodus were practically all from the states of Louisiana and Mississippi. Those who followed a more usual migratory pattern moved to Missouri before settling in Lincoln. As a result, twenty-one percent of the county's blacks claimed Missouri as their native state. It is not surprising that Missouri would take the leading role in furnishing Lancaster County with many of its first black settlers. Missouri had by far the largest black population of any state bordering Nebraska, mostly as a result of being a slave state from 1821 until after the Civil War. Transportation routes also helped make it a major source of blacks for Lancaster County. Missouri lay just sixty miles to the southeast of Lincoln and by the late 1870s, railroads connected the capital city to Missouri towns from both the east and the south. Missouri was followed by Louisiana and Kentucky as the most likely birthplace of Lancaster County blacks, with thirteen and eleven percent respectively. Practically all of the

Louisiana natives were Exodusters who arrived in 1879. Many of the Kentucky natives were older blacks, some of whom had previously started a family, quite often in Missouri, before moving to Nebraska. Blacks born in Nebraska ranked fourth in number, with nine percent of the black population. As might be expected in frontier settlement, all of the Nebraska natives were children, the oldest only eleven years of age. Virginia, Mississippi, and Alabama each were reported as home states by between five and seven percent of Lincoln's blacks. Many of the Virginia blacks had also lived in Missouri before moving to Nebraska. Mississippi natives most likely were Exodusters who arrived in 1879. The nativity of the remaining twenty-eight percent of the Lancaster County blacks was divided among twenty-two other states. <sup>7</sup>

Aside from Lancaster and Douglas, other counties reported significant numbers of blacks in 1880. Otoe County claimed 181 blacks, while Richardson, Nemaha, and Dawson all reported more than fifty. In examination of the sixteen most heavily black-populated counties in the state, it will be noticed that most of the blacks lived in two areas of the state. The first was the extreme southeast corner of Nebraska and the second extended across the state along the Platte River, following the normal migration pattern of settlers in Nebraska. The eight southeastern counties included Cass, Gage, Johnson, Lancaster, Nemaha, Otoe,



NEBRASKA COUNTIES WITH BLACK POPULATIONS IN 1880



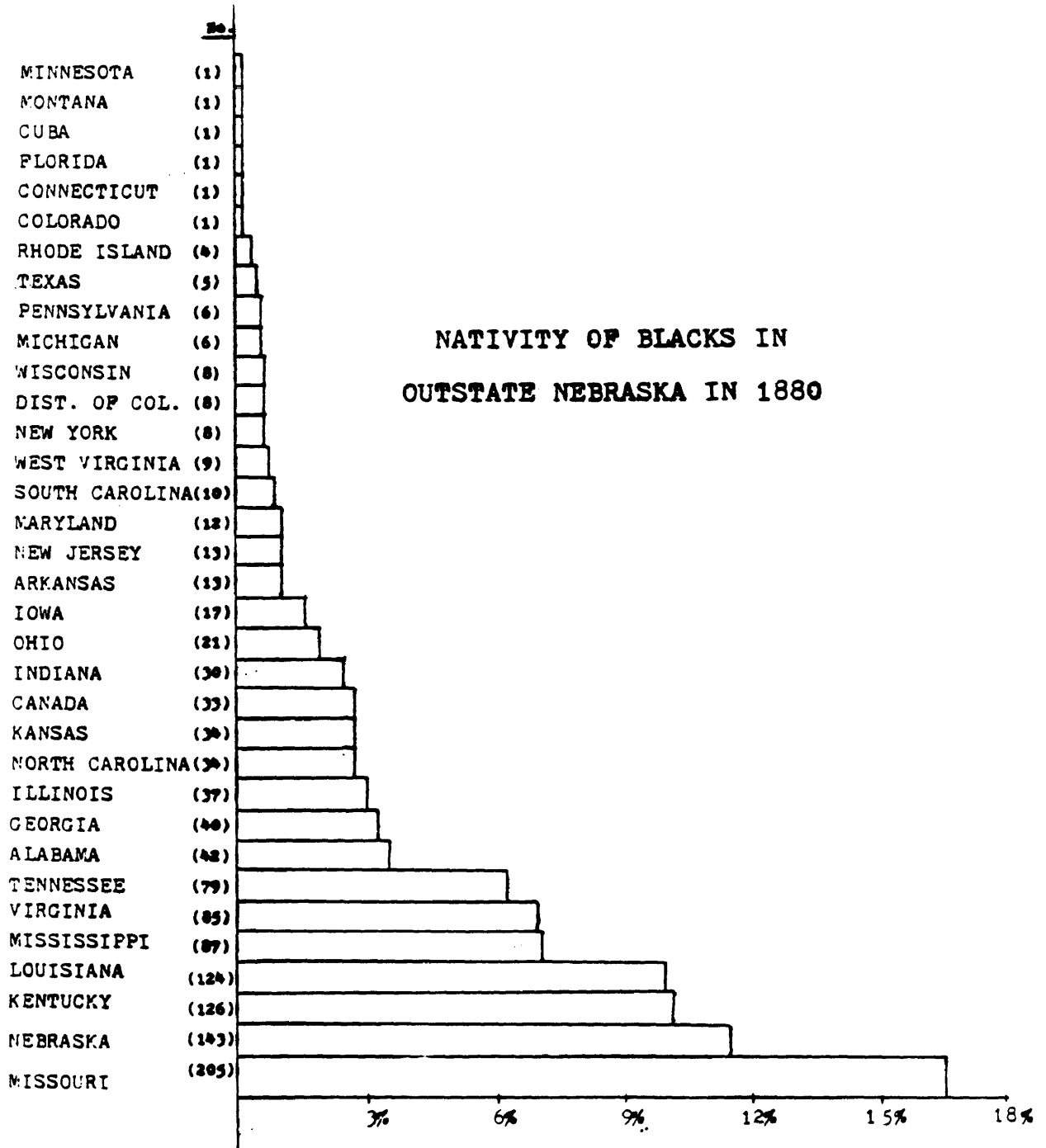
COUNTY	NUMBER OF BLACKS
ADAMS	25
CASS	46
CHEYENNE	42
COLPAX	25
DAWSON	53
DOUGLAS	811
GAGE	24
HALL	27
HAMILTON	29
JOHNSON	25
LANCASTER	628
NEMAHA	87
OTOE	181
PLATTE	24
RICHARDSON	91
SEWARD	37

BLACK POPULATION

24 or more --- [diagonal hatching] .  
 1 to 24 - - - - - [dashed lines]

Source: 1880 U.S. Census

FIGURE 3.1



Source: 1880 U.S. Census

FIGURE 3.2

NATIVITY OF OUTSTATE NEBRASKA BLACKS IN 1880

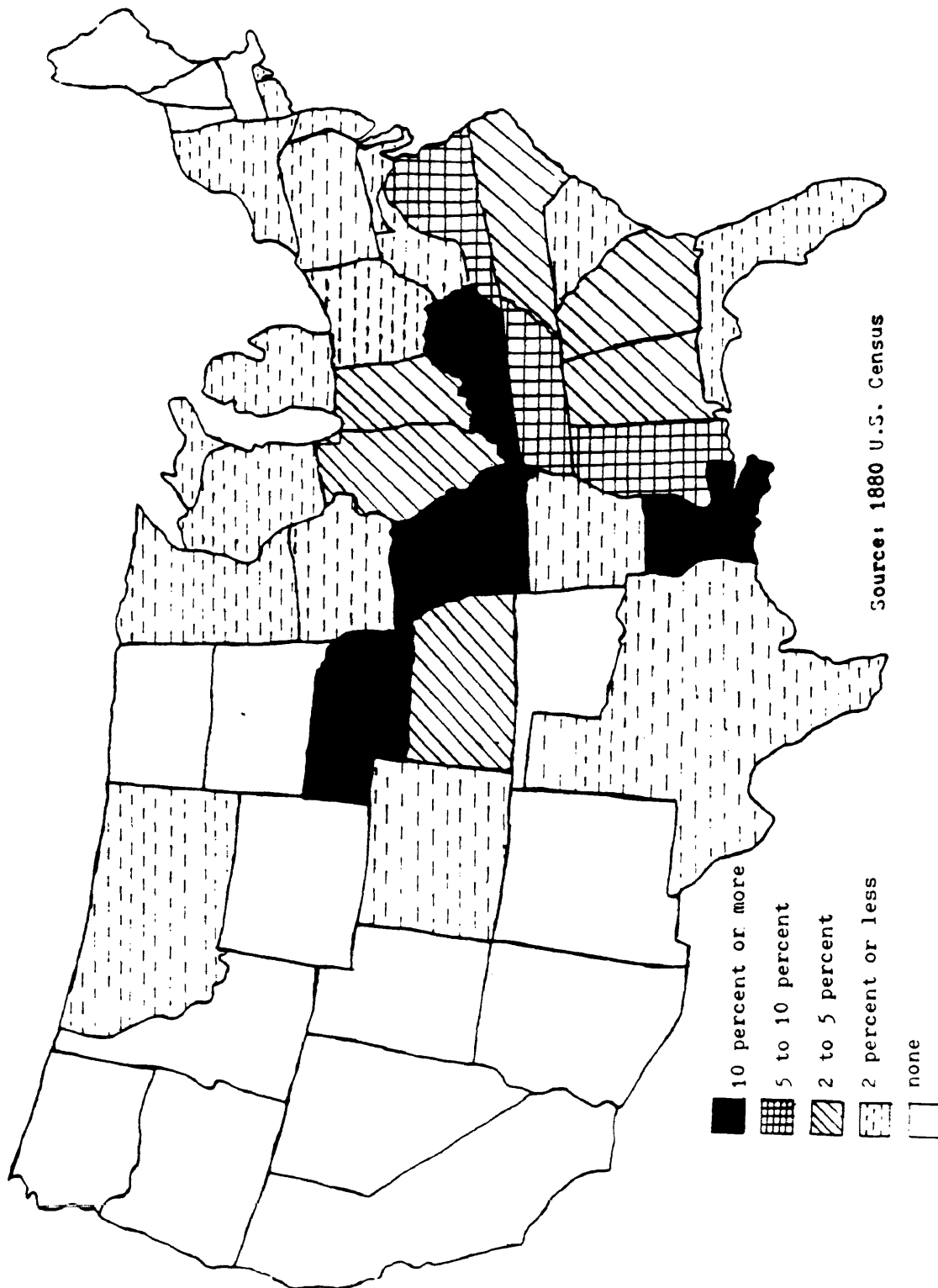
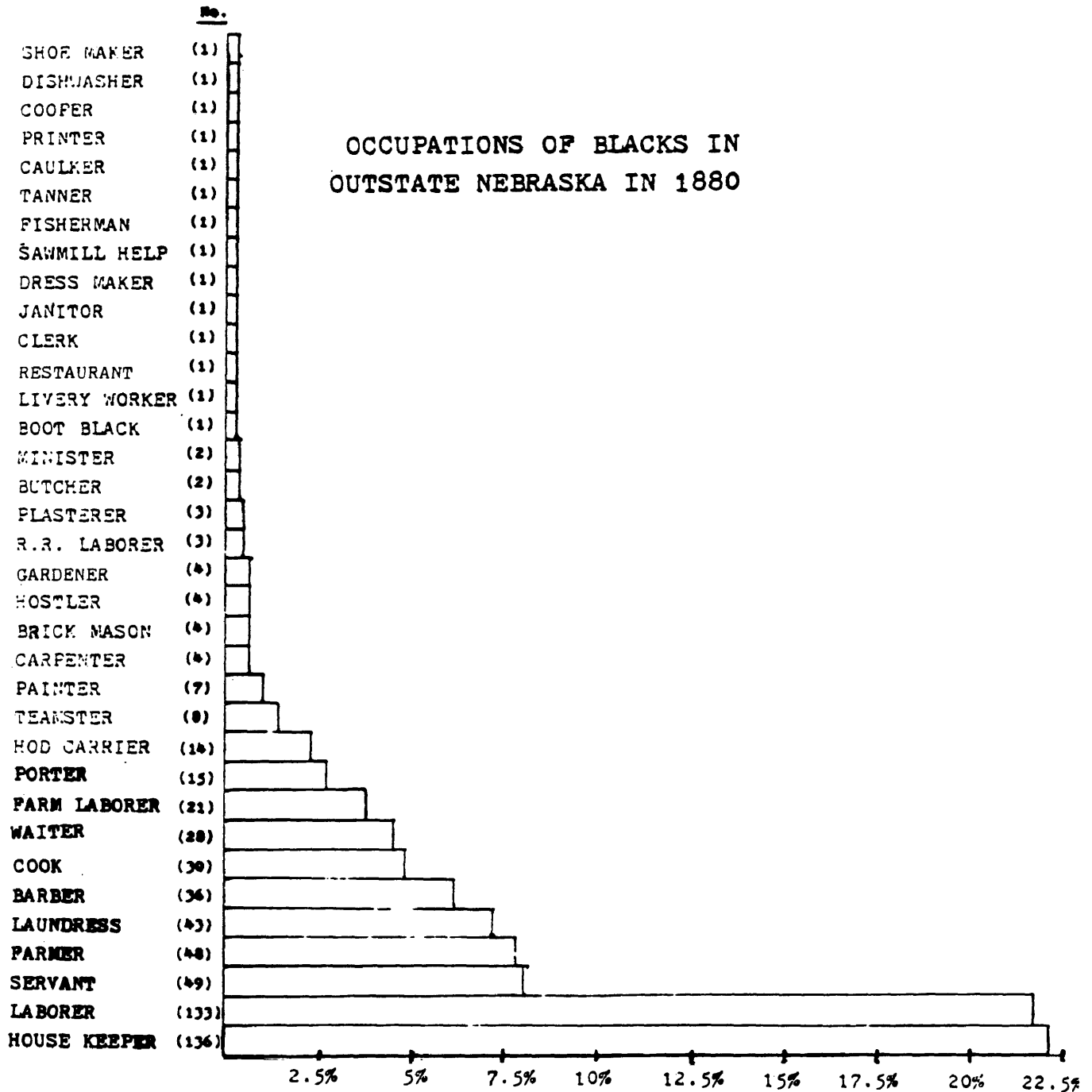


FIGURE 3.3



Source: 1880 U.S. Census

FIGURE 3.4

Richardson, and Seward. Those situated along the Platte River were Douglas, Colfax, Platte, Hamilton, Hall, Adams, Dawson and Cheyenne. Overall these sixteen counties were home to ninety-one percent of the state's black residents.<sup>8</sup>

It is not surprising that blacks moved into counties in southeastern Nebraska. All of these counties were within seventy miles of Missouri, the largest supplier of black settlers into the state. These counties were also the earliest settled in the state, providing job opportunities for blacks. The Missouri River provided an excellent transportation route from Missouri; in fact, five of the seven most densely black-populated counties in the state were located on the Missouri River.<sup>9</sup>

Otoe County was home to the third largest number of blacks in Nebraska. In spite of this, it remained unique among Nebraska counties since it was the only one which reported a decrease in its black population. It experienced a seventeen percent decline in the number of blacks from its 1870 total of 219. Probable reasons for this decrease include the decline of Nebraska City as a transportation and trading center and lingering prejudice against blacks. By 1880 Nebraska City's heyday had long passed. During the late 1850s and throughout most of the 1860s Nebraska City was a very important transportation center, evidenced by the headquarters of the freighting firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell. With the construction of the Union Pacific rail-

road in the state during the late 1860s, Nebraska City's prospects for becoming a major transportation center disappeared as Omaha secured the rail terminal. Although Nebraska City did see a leveling off of its economy in the 1870s, its overall population increased during the decade. <sup>10</sup>

In order to understand why the overall population increased while the black population declined, race prejudices must be considered. As noted earlier, blacks came into Otoe County soon after Nebraska became a territory. All of the first blacks in the county were slaves brought to Nebraska City by prosperous merchants such as Alexander Majors and Stephen Nuckolls. Many of the city's leading businessmen were pro-slavery men, which probably helped to sway public opinion. During the 1879 exodus of blacks from the South, editors from both Nebraska City newspapers, the Democratic Daily News and Republican Press, voiced some of the strongest anti-black immigration opinions that were heard in the state. Also during the 1870s, Nebraska City ran the only known segregated school district in the state. The decline of Otoe County's black population is not surprising, considering the prevailing racist attitude. <sup>11</sup>

While Otoe County's black population decreased during the period, its neighboring counties - Cass, Johnson, Nemaha, Richardson, and Gage - all experienced a considerable increase in black numbers, from a total of 44 blacks in 1870

to 273 in 1880. It appears that many of these blacks were in Nebraska as a direct result of the 1879 Exodus. Twenty-five percent (67) of the blacks were recent arrivals from Louisiana and Mississippi. In all probability, these blacks arrived without knowing their final destination or their long-term employment prospects. However, most of the blacks who settled in that area of the state probably did so reasonably certain of finding immediate employment. Black males were employed most often as laborers, and comprised thirty-six percent (26) of the group's work force. Most of the laborers were from Missouri and Kentucky, while more recent immigrants from Louisiana and Mississippi were more often found as servants, waiters, and cooks.<sup>12</sup> It appears that blacks were able to secure employment easier as servants and then later moved into laboring positions after having been in the area for awhile. Forty percent (10) of the twenty-three servants and waiters were women. A typical example was twenty-three year-old Kentucky native Leah Terry who lived with and worked for the Robert Thompson family on a farm near Falls City. Typically, workers engaged as servants or waiters were younger than those in other occupations, usually under the age of twenty-five.<sup>13</sup>

Blacks employed as farmers or farm laborers also constituted a significant portion of the black workers in southeastern Nebraska. Thirty-two percent (23) of the black male workers in the area reported farming as their livelihood.

Twenty of these farmers lived in Nemaha or Richardson County. Only six farmed land of their own, while the rest worked for another farmer. Will Sayers owned eighty acres of land in Richardson County's Muddy Precinct. He was a forty year-old Virginia native who moved as a young man to Missouri. It is not known if he was a slave, although he very well might have been, since he was born around 1840. After the Civil War ended, he married a Missouri girl and shortly thereafter moved to Nebraska. He started farming in the Muddy Precinct area around 1875, and that is where four of his five children were born. <sup>14</sup>

It is difficult to prove definitely why Otoe County witnessed a decline in its black population while all other southeastern Nebraska counties experienced a modest gain. The leveling off of economic activity and the negative racial attitudes have already been noted. However, this attitude was not confined solely to Otoe County. In July, 1879, it had been clear that Exodusters were not welcome in Plattsmouth, the largest town and seat of Cass County. Although reports in local newspapers were not as harsh towards the blacks as the Nebraska City press had been, they still left no doubt that a strong racial prejudice existed. This racial prejudice probably was shared by residents of neighboring counties. <sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, there were other differences between Otoe County and her neighbors. Otoe County was the only county



in southeastern Nebraska which maintained a reasonably significant black population of close to 200 throughout the 1870s. With the exception of Lancaster, the other counties in the area probably never had over fifty blacks. Otoe County residents realized the problems of having a larger black population. They were trying to maintain a separate school for their blacks, which they could hardly afford. Otoe County residents probably believed that if they allowed more blacks to settle in their county, it would create a situation which they would be unable to control. They probably felt that if they allowed many more blacks to settle they would have a large enough black population to work as a magnet, drawing blacks from other localities into their community. Certainly it seemed that blacks, as well as other ethnic groups, usually preferred to settle among their own. As a result, Otoe County maintained a hard line against future black settlement by 1880. Although prejudice existed in other counties in the area, their white citizens probably felt that a few blacks could be handled. They may have held an unspoken belief that a small black population could even be beneficial. Most of these communities had openings for servants and low-paying laborer positions for which blacks were considered especially suited. In addition, allowing a small black population might display their willingness as a community to be progressive and unprejudiced. However, it appears that when a significant

number of blacks, such as the 163 Exodusters in the Plattsmouth incident, wanted to settle, it was considered an uncontrollable situation for the community and to be avoided at all costs. <sup>16</sup>

In the counties of Colfax, Hamilton, and Dawson, the promising prospects of obtaining farms evidently lured blacks. <sup>17</sup> Seven families, with a total of twenty-five members, lived in Colfax County. Six of these families engaged in farming and one black worked as a laborer. Those who farmed were primarily natives of Kentucky and Michigan, and they probably were related. Fifty-three year-old Kentuckian Joseph White and his Michigan-born sons, John and Lewis, all farmed near Schuyler. In Grant Township, fifty year-old Kentucky native Henry Browning lived with his family of six, and in Colfax Township, Stephen Hill, a Michigan native, lived with his wife. Colfax County was fairly well settled by the early 1870s due mainly to the cattle shipping boom which occurred in Schuyler from 1869 to 1873. This short-lived boom brought many businesses and people to the area. It is not known if the blacks migrated to the area as a result of the cattle boom or the publicity which surrounded it, but it appears that these families had settled in the area by 1875. Henry Browning's eldest son, nine year-old George, was born in Nebraska, as was John White's five year-old son, Charles. <sup>18</sup>

Hamilton and Dawson Counties remained largely unsettled until 1880 when most of their black settlers arrived. During the spring of 1880, about forty blacks from Canada settled north of Overton, in Dawson County. Most of these blacks were American natives who had escaped slavery and fled to Canada before the Civil War. These Canadian blacks read accounts which proclaimed that thousands of acres of good land near Plum Creek were available in Dawson County, Nebraska. They still regarded the United States as their home, and now that slavery had ended, became excited about the prospect of obtaining land and returning to their native country. Upon arrival in Dawson County, they found that all of the land close to Plum Creek and the Platte River had been settled, so they homesteaded unsettled land about fifteen miles northeast of their original destination. <sup>19</sup>

During the spring of 1880, several black families, primarily from Indiana, rented farms north of Aurora in Hamilton County. These blacks, however, were not the first to live in the Aurora area. As early as 1870, David Patrick homesteaded northwest of Aurora. Patrick, an Illinois native, had lived for a time in Lucas County, Iowa before moving to Nebraska. During 1878 a black barber named Graves moved with his family to Aurora and began doing business. It is not known if the blacks already in Hamilton County knew the 1880 black arrivals prior to their settlement in the area. However, it appears that some of the black fam-

ilies who arrived in 1880 were related. For example, James and John Fears settled next to each other, and probably some of the other settlers were also related, or at least knew each other before heading out to Hamilton County. <sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere in Nebraska, blacks were attracted to Platte, Hall, Adams, and Cheyenne Counties because of jobs attributed to transportation. Columbus, Grand Island, and Hastings were the largest communities and they became the county seats of Platte, Hall, and Adams Counties respectively, primarily as a result of their location on the railroad lines. All three of these towns were connecting points between the Burlington and Union Pacific Railroads. The railroads helped to stimulate other types of business, especially hotels and restaurants to accommodate railroad passengers. As a result of the active transportation economy, blacks were employed as laborers, hotel cooks, servants, and waiters in all three communities. <sup>21</sup>

A recent black arrival in Hastings, Horace Newsome, operated both a barber shop and a newspaper for a time in 1876. The newspaper, The Western Post, concerned itself with the progress of blacks in the community. Although the paper was soon discontinued, it undoubtedly helped to solidify the Hastings black community. Another one of Hastings' blacks, Harry Smith, was one of the more interesting characters in the town's early history. He evidently came to Hastings in the mid-1870s and gained employment as a handyman and team-

ster for Curt Alexander, the owner of a local livery stable. Smith was reported to be an excellent shot with a pistol as well as a superb horseman. During the fall of 1878, the city requested his services. In frontier Adams County, a feud developed between Juniata residents and citizens of Hastings over the location of the county seat. At that time Juniata was the county seat, but it was becoming clear that Hastings would evolve into the largest and most important community in the county. Juniata refused to give up the county seat, so an election was ordered to decide the issue. On September 28, 1878, election results determined that Hastings was the new county seat, but the task of obtaining county records still remained. Local attorneys entrusted the responsibility of obtaining the records to Curt Alexander and his skilled employee, Harry Smith. They went to Juniata and brought the records to Hastings, despite protests from Juniata residents. Many Hastings residents felt that it would have been difficult to obtain the records without Harry Smith's help. <sup>22</sup>

In the western Nebraska county of Cheyenne, the village of Sidney, situated on the Union Pacific railroad, was the closest rail terminal to the Black Hills of Dakota Territory. It was the embarkation point for the Sidney-Black Hills Freighting and Stage Line. Ordinarily this junction would have been of little economic importance, but the discovery of gold in the Black Hills in 1874 transformed

Sidney into a major transportation and supply center. This activity lured a number of blacks into the town. Most of them found work in the many hotels established as a result of the increased traffic. Seventeen of the county's thirty-seven blacks with occupations listed in the census said they worked either as hotel cooks, servants, or waiters. Another four blacks were employed in laundries, while two worked for stage lines. It is evident that jobs created by transportation terminals lured many blacks to central and western Nebraska. <sup>23</sup>

Overall, it seems that racism against blacks in the central and western parts of the state was not as obvious as it appeared in Nebraska's eastern communities around 1880. When a black named Graves moved into Aurora with his family in 1878 to start a barbering business, the local newspaper wished him well. In 1880 the same newspaper welcomed the black families from Indiana when they settled north of town. The Dawson County newspaper did not even report the arrival of the nearly fifty Canadian blacks who settled north of Overton in the spring of 1879. At first this might seem racist in itself, but during the same period some eastern Nebraska newspapers were loudly protesting the arrival of as few as twenty blacks. <sup>24</sup>

If Nebraska's older communities held more prejudices in 1880 than did newer emerging ones, such attitudes may have been the result of their white residents being more con-

scious of the black element, and a desire to maintain established community values. Emerging towns had not yet formed identities and may have had more important tasks at hand than attacking blacks in their areas. It also appears that the early black settlers in an area faced less discrimination than late comers. Ellis Dustin, a white neighbor of the blacks who settled near Overton, recalled,

I couldn't remember any prejudices towards the black families by the whites. We treated each other as good neighbors. The black families were always here. They settled in the area before many of the white families, including my own. Since they were always here, they were respected in the area, even after they moved away.<sup>25</sup>

An analysis of the 1880 census reveals that in the fifteen counties with the most blacks, excluding Douglas, Missouri continued to be the leading supplier of blacks. However, the number of blacks native to Nebraska (143), mostly children, was quickly catching up to the number of those born in Missouri. The number of blacks native to Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia grew considerably during the decade and together accounted for twenty-three percent of the researched area's black population. Blacks from Mississippi and Louisiana, most of whom were Exodusters, made up seventeen percent (211) of Nebraska's outstate black population.<sup>26</sup>

Missouri's significance as a prior home for Nebraska's black residents is even greater than it first appears since many of the blacks from Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee

lived for awhile in Missouri before moving to Nebraska. It was common for a couple born in these states to have children born in Missouri. The John Simmons family of Cass County is a good example. John, a laborer, and his wife, Lisa, were born in Kentucky. Their oldest daughter, Mary, was born in Missouri. Many of the Exodusters arriving from Mississippi and Louisiana traveled through Missouri before arriving in Nebraska as the usual travel route included going up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, crossing the state on the Missouri River and then continuing by boat or rail to Nebraska. Missouri could be considered the gateway to Nebraska for the early black settlers. <sup>27</sup>

In 1880, the leading occupations of outstate Nebraska blacks were housekeeper, laborer, servant, laundress, farmer, barber, and cook. Housekeeping was the leading occupation with twenty-two percent (136) of the total black work force. Every black housekeeper was female. Seventy-two percent (339) of the black workers were employed as laborers (133), servants (49), laundresses (48), farmers (43), barbers (36), and cooks (30). Blacks who were married made up sixty-three percent (383) of the work force and were more often employed as laborers, barbers, farmers, housekeepers, and laundresses. By 1880, Nebraska needed young energetic workers and many blacks who settled in the state helped to fulfill that need. <sup>28</sup>



Between 1880 and 1885, Nebraska's population grew rapidly. Omaha's population alone grew from thirty thousand to over sixty thousand. Lincoln grew from thirteen thousand to over twenty thousand. Outstate Nebraska also was filling rapidly. The number of organized counties increased from sixty-three in 1880 to eighty-nine by 1885. However, according to the 1885 Nebraska state census, the number of blacks in the state had declined.<sup>29</sup>

It can be reasoned that a leveling off of black migration into the state occurred after 1880 because of the negative publicity that many black immigrants received during the 1879 Exodus. But that seems an unlikely explanation for a noticeable decline in population. Lancaster County reported a decline of 175 in the number of blacks from 1880 to 1885. Neighboring Otoe County's black population declined from 181 to 99. These decreases in population seem even more surprising when the 1890 census is considered. According to the census, Lancaster County's black population increased by nearly 800 over the 1880 total of 628, and Otoe County's increased for the first time in twenty years, from 181 to 278.<sup>30</sup>

It should be noted that the totals of the 1890 Nebraska census have been attacked by researchers who claim that most of the totals of the eastern cities in the state were over-reported. One such scholar, Edgar Palmer, claims that most of Nebraska's eastern cities overreported by as much as 30

to 125 percent. He estimates a fifty to sixty percent inflation of Lincoln and Nebraska City totals. If this is true, then the black population of those two communities in 1890 would be closer to 900 and 190 respectively. This would indicate a black population increase for Lincoln during the 1880s of sixty-five percent (272) and five percent (9) for Nebraska City. These totals seem more realistic than the official census results. Even in light of lower 1890 population totals, the 1885 black population seems underreported by as much as thirty percent in some areas. It appears that this occurred mostly in the larger eastern Nebraska towns, the same communities which appear to have inflated totals in the 1890 census. It seems, from comparing other resources, that Nebraska's central and western counties were more accurate in reporting their 1885 black population totals.<sup>31</sup>

In spite of a probable underreporting by the 1885 census, occupations, nativity, and other pertinent information can still be gleaned. Blacks lived primarily in the same areas in 1885 as in 1880. The sixteen heaviest black-populated counties were the same with one exception; Wheeler County surpassed Colfax County by 1885 and replaced it in the top sixteen. In fact, Wheeler County's black population of sixty was surpassed only by Douglas, Lancaster, Otoe, and Richardson Counties.<sup>32</sup>

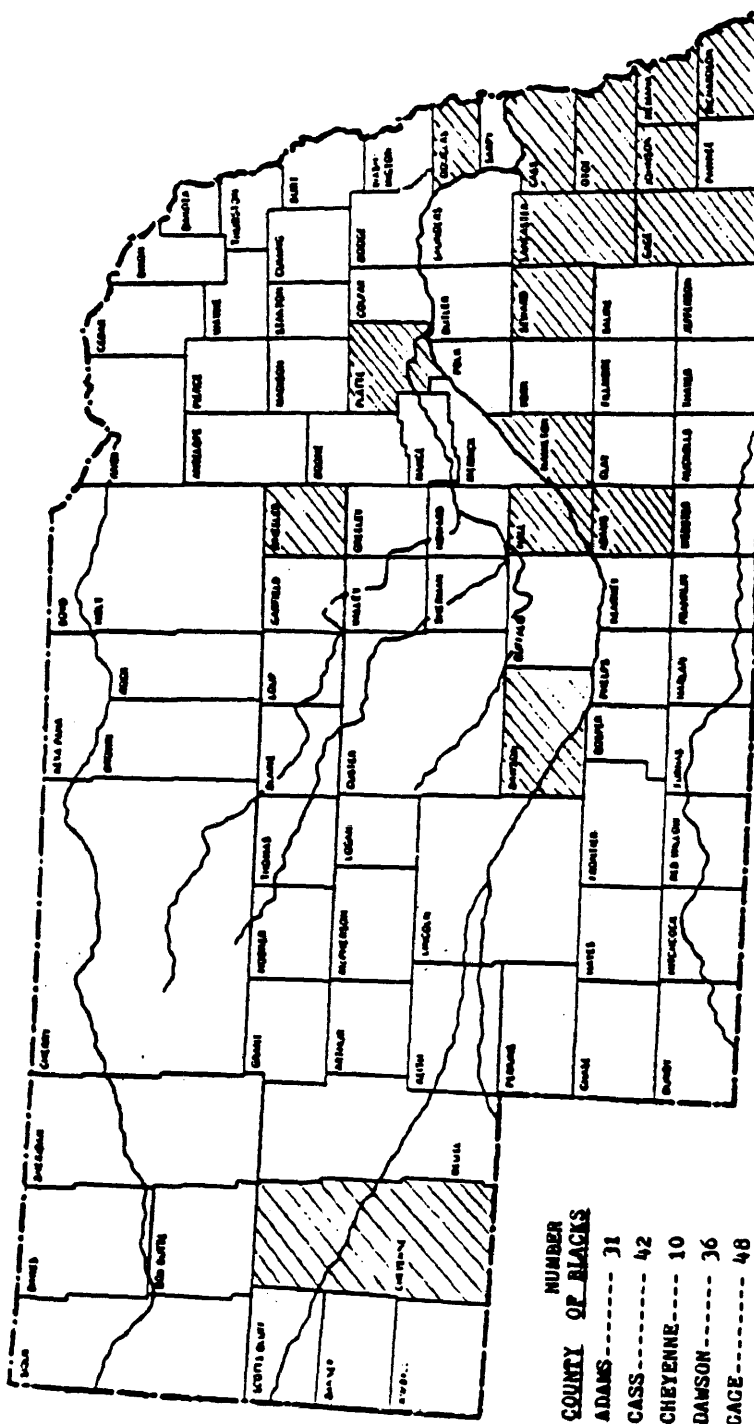
Wheeler County reported no blacks in 1880, but during 1882 and 1883 a colony of fourteen black families settled in Fremont Township in the northern portion of the county. A few families also settled across the county line in Holt County at the same time. Most of these families had lived in Iowa and Illinois before coming to Wheeler County. According to John Dixon, the only known living descendent of the blacks in the Wheeler and Holt County settlement, blacks in the settlement had previously worked in mines in the Appalachian region of the eastern United States. After the Civil War they moved into Illinois and Iowa mining areas along the Mississippi River, but found living conditions and future employment prospects poor. It was during the early 1880s, according to Dixon, that his parents and thirteen other black families were enticed into homesteading land in Nebraska. These blacks, mostly uneducated former slaves, were deceived by land promoters who claimed they were homesteading rich coal grounds. According to Dixon, these land promoters planted some coal in various sites on land near the Holt and Wheeler County borders before they showed the land to a few members of the settlement who went ahead to check it out. The blacks, excited about their claim, quickly paid a finder's fee to the land promoters and filed homestead claims on the properties. By the time these families learned of the deception, it was too late, because they had very little money to go elsewhere. Most of these blacks

found work on neighboring farms and ranches as they tried to prove on their homesteads. <sup>33</sup>

Elsewhere in the state, counties with a sizeable black population in 1880 maintained their proportion of black residents. However, the number of Nebraska's black settlers from Iowa, Kansas, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio increased significantly during the five-year period. The percentage of the total black population in 1885 from those states rose from twelve percent (141) in 1880, to nineteen percent (186). Nebraska, by 1885, had moved ahead of Missouri for the first time as the birthplace of most of the state's blacks, followed by Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Virginia. The largest decline was in the number of blacks from the southern states of Mississippi and Louisiana. In 1880 these two states accounted for seventeen percent (211) of Nebraska's reported black population, but only twelve percent (123) in 1885. From these numbers, it appears that some of the former Exodusters may have moved out of Nebraska and an increased number of blacks migrated into Nebraska from other central states. As demonstrated by the Wheeler County blacks who migrated from Iowa and Illinois and the apparent departure of some Exodusters, there appears to have been movements of blacks into and out of the state. <sup>34</sup>

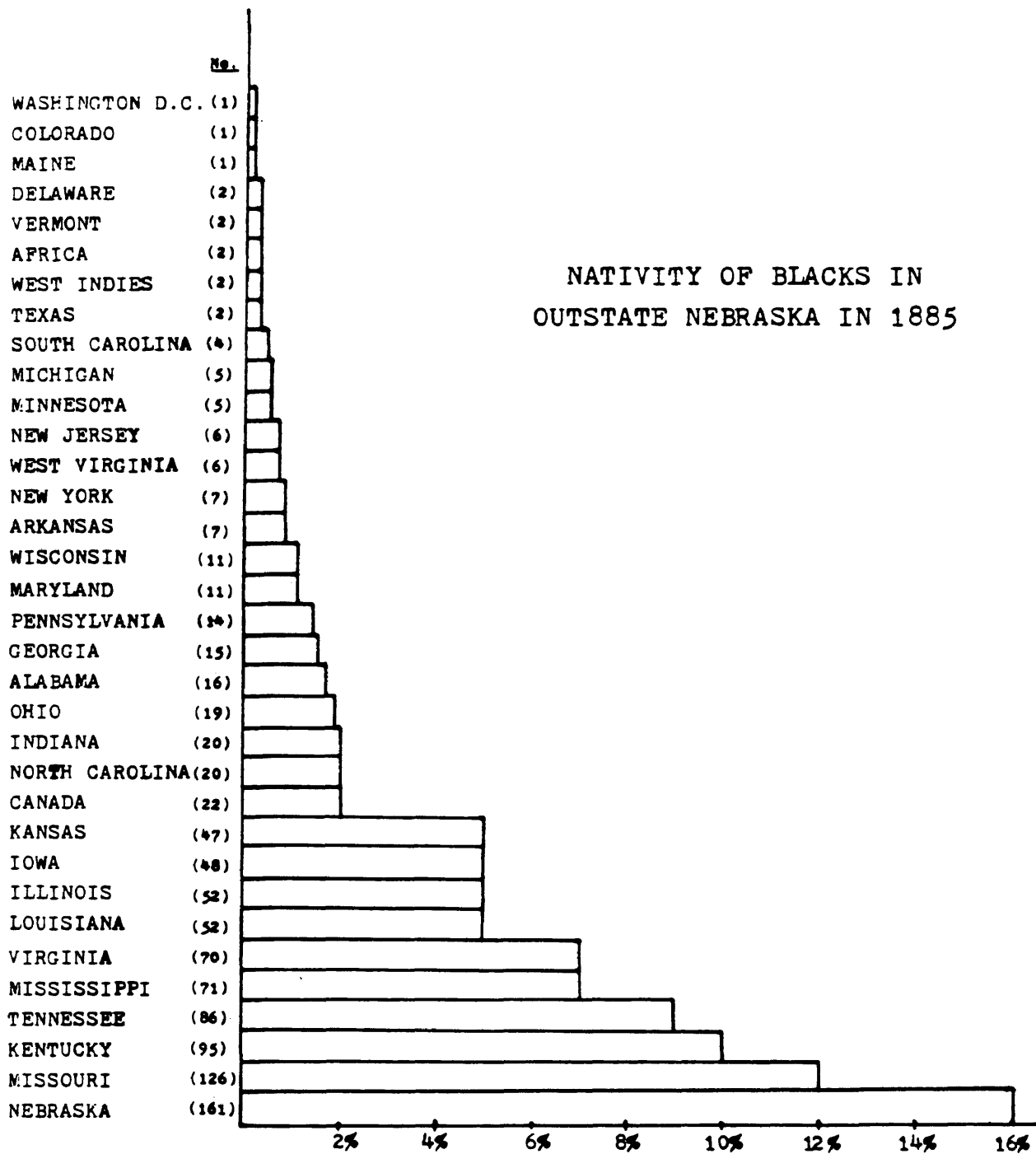
The black work force, in the selected outstate Nebraska counties, consisted of 507 workers. Similar to the 1880

OUTSTATE NEBRASKA COUNTIES WITH SIXTEEN LARGEST POPULATIONS IN 1885



Source: 1885 Nebraska Census

FIGURE 3.5



Source: 1885 Nebraska Census

FIGURE 3.6

**NATIVITY OF OUTSTATE NEBRASKA BLACKS IN 1885**

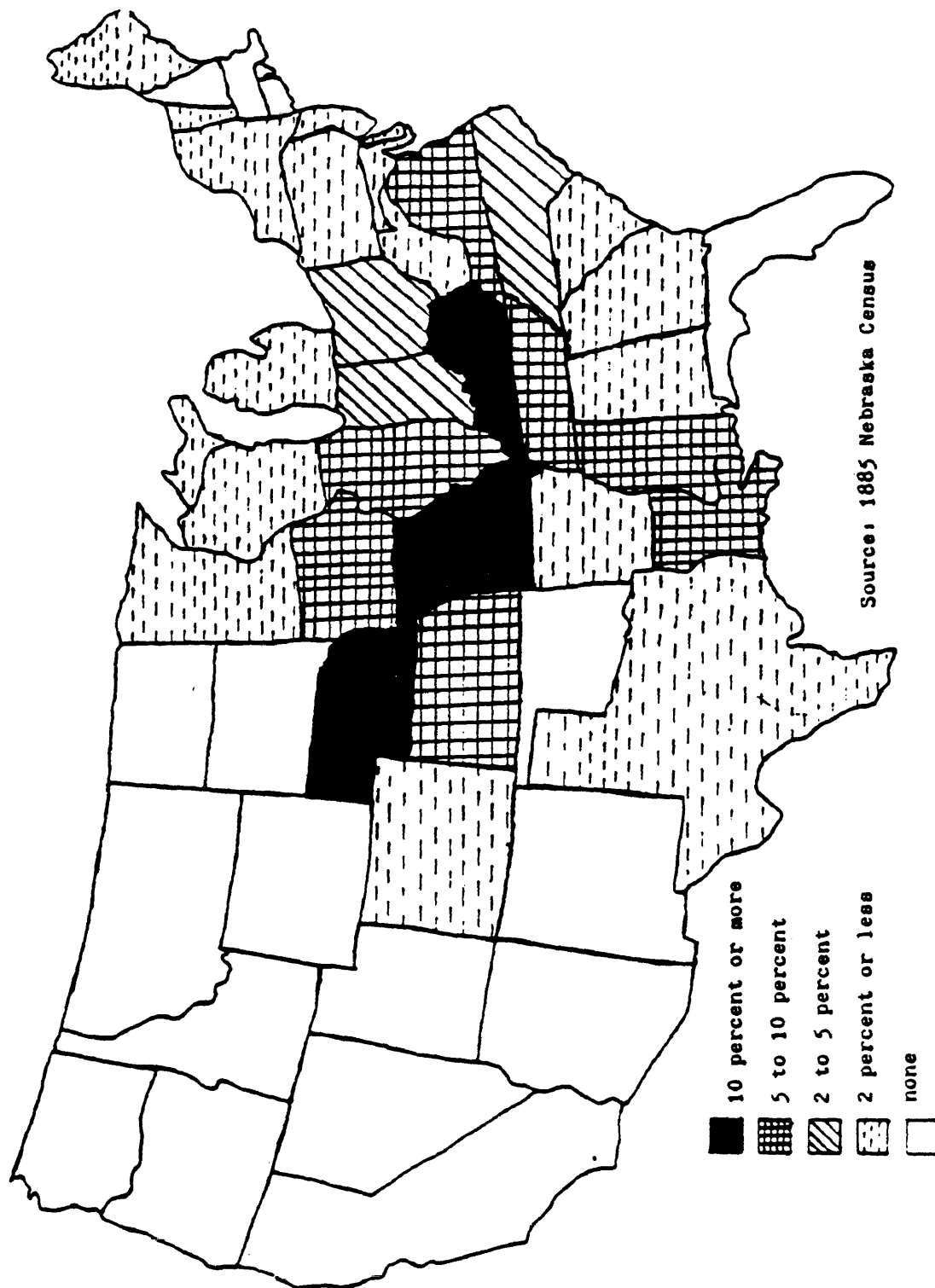
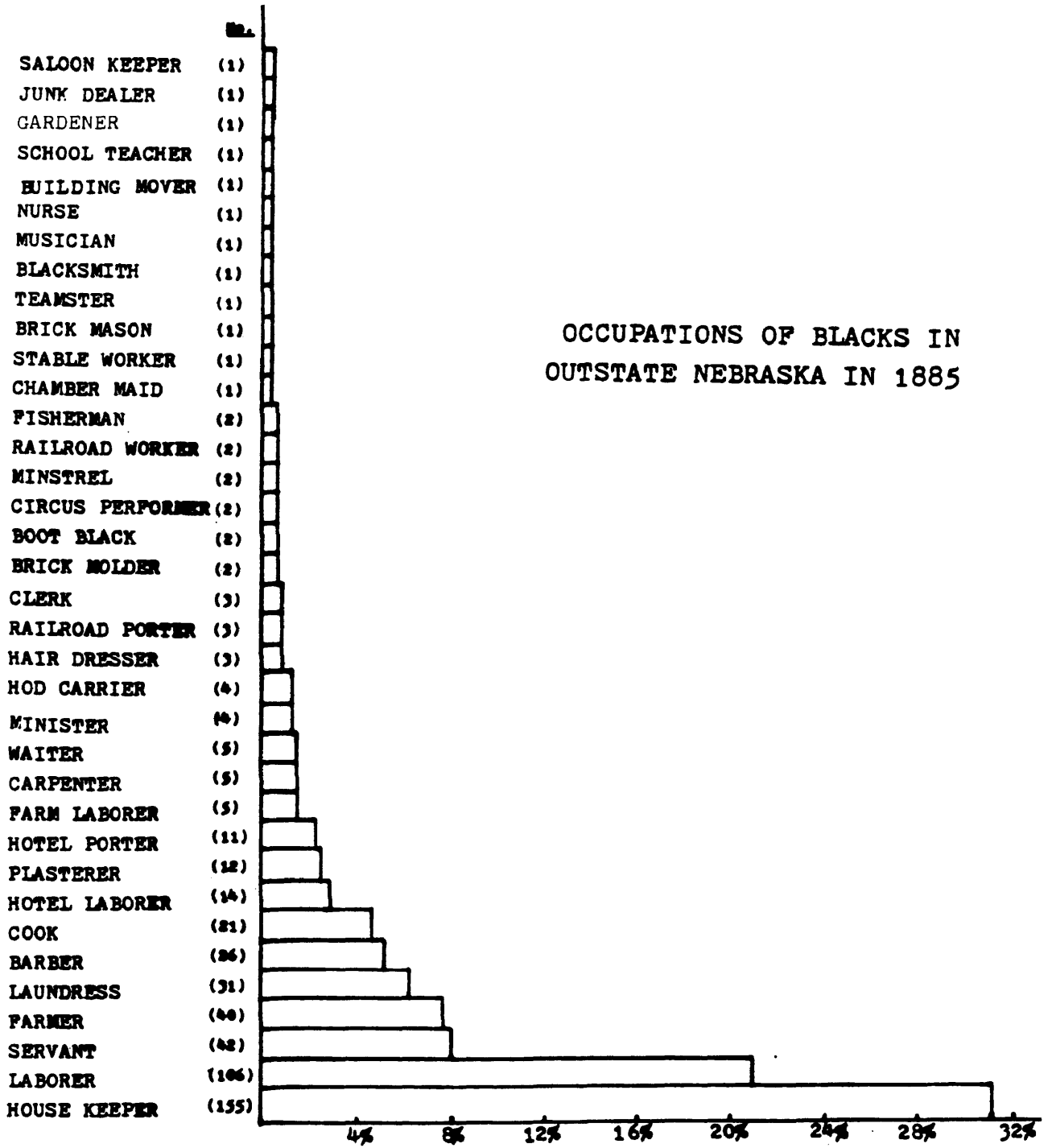


FIGURE 3.7



Source: 1885 Nebraska Census

FIGURE 3.8



figures, males accounted for fifty-six percent (284) of the workers and were employed mostly as laborers. In fact, the total occupational picture changed little from 1880. The top seven occupations - housekeeper, laborer, servant, farmer, laundress, barber, and cook - were identical to those in 1880. Overall, there were not many noticeable differences between the 1880 and 1885 census results as might be expected over a five-year time span.<sup>35</sup>

It seems that blacks sent increasing numbers of their children to school by 1885. Although few accurate records concerning black children's school attendance exist, the 1885 census reveals an increase in black students from 1880. Richard Ridgely of Holt County was the only black school teacher identified in the 1885 census and very well could have been the first black school teacher in outstate Nebraska. By 1885 black children attended school alongside white children in all known cases. The school for blacks in Nebraska City closed its doors in 1880 and sent the children to public schools with white children. In 1880, Harry Curry and Comfort Baker became the first blacks to graduate from Omaha High School, and probably the first black high school graduates within the state. Moses Ricketts graduated from the University of Nebraska College of Medicine with honors in 1884 and during the 1890s served in the Nebraska Legislature.<sup>36</sup>

Churches serving blacks also increased in number during the mid-1880s. Although black congregations organized in Omaha as early as 1860, it was not until 1867 that the first church was built by the African Methodist Episcopal assembly. In 1870, blacks of this faith organized a church in Lincoln. Their early pastors were the Reverend Charles H. Brown and the Reverend Thomas Wilson. Elsewhere, African Methodist Episcopal congregations were organized at Sidney in 1877 and at Nebraska City in 1879. Ministers John Jackson, Willie Carter, and Isaac Martin served the Nebraska City church through the mid-1880s. Where churches were constructed, blacks continued to make such locations their homes as they provided some stability for the community.<sup>37</sup>

Nebraska legislators did not pass any legislation directly aimed at blacks during the 1880s, nor did any court cases concerning race appear in Nebraska's higher courts. Blacks exercised their legal rights to education and religious freedom, and although segregation was not legally approved, undoubtedly it occurred in varying degrees throughout the state. The number of convicted blacks who served time in the state penitentiary was not extraordinarily high. In 1885, seven of the state's 325 prisoners in Lincoln were black. This represented two percent of the prisoners, which approximates the black percentage of the total population. Lesser criminal convictions were not examined and may have given other results. By 1885, many blacks had found a home

in Nebraska, and the anti-black sentiment which appeared in Nebraska's newspapers during the late 1870s had diminished. This apparent contentment among both whites and blacks laid the foundation for increased black immigration into the state throughout the final years of the 1880s.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Addison E. Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, 3 vols. (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1931) I: 566; James C. Olson, History of Nebraska, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Nebraska Manuscript Census of Population, Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, (copies in Nebraska State Historical Society); Omaha Evening Bee, August 12, 1876, p. 2; Compendium of the Tenth Census (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), pp. 361-362.

<sup>3</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1870; Compendium of the Tenth Census, pp. 360-362.

<sup>4</sup> Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 142-153; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Lancaster County, Nebraska Manuscript Census of Population, Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, (copies in Nebraska State Historical Society).

<sup>5</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Lancaster County, Nebraska, 1880; Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln), July 12, 1879, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Lancaster County, Nebraska, 1880; William H. Harris, The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Richard C. Overton, Burlington Route: A History of the Burlington Lines (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 148-152; Manuscript Census of Population for Lancaster County, Nebraska, 1880; Robert G. Athearn, Union Pacific Country (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), pp. 231-233.

<sup>8</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1880; Compendium of the Tenth Census, 361-362.

<sup>9</sup> Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 154-169.

<sup>10</sup> Compendium of the Tenth Census, pp. 361-362; Nebraska City News, July 12, 1879, p. 1, July 17, 1879, p. 4, July 19, 1879, p. 4; Olson, History of Nebraska, p. 105-107; Norman A. Graebner, "Nebraska's Missouri River Frontier, 1854-1860," Nebraska History, 42 (December, 1961), pp. 223-227.

<sup>11</sup> Nebraska City News, July 19, 1879, p. 4; Omaha Weekly Herald, July 25, 1879, p. 2; A.T. Andreas, History of the State of Nebraska, I: 1200-1205.

- <sup>12</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1880.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Nebraska Herald (Plattsmouth), July 17, 1879, p. 2.
- <sup>16</sup> Andreas, History of the State of Nebraska, I: 1205; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1880.
- <sup>17</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1880.
- <sup>18</sup> Fred Wertz, Colfax County, The Best County in the Best State in the Union (Schuyler: Wertz Printing and Bindery, 1902), pp. 5-43; Manuscript Census for Colfax County, Nebraska, 1880; Athearn, Union Pacific Country, pp. 145; Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 186-187.
- <sup>19</sup> Manuscript Census for Dawson and Hamilton County, Nebraska, 1880; Forrest M. Stith, Sunrises and Sunsets for Freedom (New York: Vantage Press, 1973), pp. 19-31.
- <sup>20</sup> Hamilton County News (Aurora), April 17, 1880, p. 2; Manuscript Census for Dawson and Hamilton Counties, Nebraska, 1880.
- <sup>21</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Platte, Adams and Hall Counties, Nebraska, 1880; Overton, Burlington Route, pp. 167-169, 520-521; Athearn, Union Pacific Country, pp. 145, 229; Richard C. Overton, "Why did the C.B. and Q. Build to Denver?" Nebraska History, 40 (September, 1959), pp. 181-205; Judge William R. Burton and D.J. Lewis, Past and Present of Adams County, Nebraska (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1916), pp. 41-60; August F. Buehler and R.J. Barr, History of Hall County, Nebraska (Lincoln: Western Publishing Co., 1920), pp. 236-328.
- <sup>22</sup> Burton and Lewis, Past and Present of Adams County, pp. 41-60; Dorothy W. Creigh, Adams County: A Story of the Great Plains, 1872-1972 (Hastings: Hastings Centennial Comm., 1972), pp. 329-330; Works Progress Administration, The Negroes of Nebraska (Lincoln: Woodruff Printing Company, 1940), p. 44.
- <sup>23</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Cheyenne County, Nebraska, 1880; Athearn, Union Pacific Country, pp. 229-234; Norbert R. Manken, "The Sidney-Black Hills Trail," Nebraska History, 30 (September, 1949), pp. 203-205.

<sup>24</sup> Hamilton County News (Aurora), May 10, 1878, p. 2, April 17, 1880, p. 2; Omaha Bee, May 14, 1879; Stith, Sunrises and Sunsets for Freedom, pp. 25-28; A check in the Dawson County Pioneer (Lexington) from April-June, 1879 found no comments concerning blacks settling in the county.

<sup>25</sup> Ellis Dustin, interview held August 10, 1986. Dustin attended grade school with black students in Dawson County.

<sup>26</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1880.

<sup>27</sup> Robert G. Athearn, In Search of Canaan: Black Migration in Kansas 1879-80 (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), pp. 25-84; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1880.

<sup>28</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1880.

<sup>29</sup> Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 195-200; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1880; Manuscript Census of Population, 1885, Nebraska, Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, (copies in Nebraska State Historical Society).

<sup>30</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1880; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1885; Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, Population (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), I: 246.

<sup>31</sup> Edgar Z. Palmer, "The Correctness of the 1890 Census of Population for Nebraska Cities," Nebraska History, 32 (December, 1951), pp. 259-267; Compendium of the Tenth Census, 1880, pp. 360-362; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1885; Eleventh Census of the United State, 1890, Population, I: 246.

<sup>32</sup> Compendium of the Tenth Census, 1880, pp. 360-362; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1885.

<sup>33</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1885; Barbara Day, Wheeler County Story Book (n.p., 1977), pp. 3-18; Nellie Snyder Yost, Before Today, The History of Holt County, Nebraska (O'Neill, Nebraska: Miles Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 363-364.

<sup>34</sup> Compendium of the Tenth Census, 1880, pp. 360-362; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1885.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1885; Works Progress Administration, The Negroes of Nebraska, pp. 33-35; William Joseph Barnds, "Nebraska College, the Episcopal School at Nebraska City, 1868-1885," Nebraska History, 52 (Summer, 1971), pp. 183-184.

<sup>37</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1885; W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, pp. 37-38.

<sup>38</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1885.

## CHAPTER IV

### HIGH WATER MARK: POPULATION PEAK AND DECLINE, 1885-1900

By 1890, much of Nebraska was settled due to the large influx of immigrants throughout the previous decade. The 1890 census listed a population of 1,062,656 for the state, a considerable increase over the 1880 total of 452,402. It has previously been noted that a padding of the 1890 census probably occurred and that the larger southeastern Nebraska communities appear most affected by these inflated totals. It has been estimated that the population of Hastings was inflated by as much as 125 percent. Overreported counts of as much as 65 percent occurred at Beatrice, Omaha, Lincoln, Plattsmouth, and Nebraska City. When the inflated totals are lowered to more probable numbers, Nebraska's 1890 estimated population is 984,000, which still reflects remarkable growth and expanding business opportunities. Pioneers took advantage of these opportunities as they settled in villages and on farms throughout the state. <sup>1</sup>

Blacks and whites both came to Nebraska in record numbers during the 1880s. The black population which stood at 2,385 in 1880, mushroomed to 8,913 by 1890. Once again, however, the reliability of the 1890 census must be questioned. Every city in southeastern Nebraska which is thought to have a padded census total reported a black population. If, as it appears, the black totals were inflated also, a more



realistic estimate of the black population can be derived by subtracting the difference between the reported and more likely total in each city where totals appear to be inflated. The estimated total for Nebraska's 1890 black population is 6,715, almost 2,000 fewer persons than the official 1890 figure. <sup>2</sup>

Although the more probable black population is twenty-five percent less than the reported census total, the black population was still approximately three times larger than in 1880. Nebraska received more black immigrants than did any of the states bordering it during the 1880s. In fact, with the exception of California and Texas, Nebraska had the largest increase in black numbers during the decade of any state west of the Mississippi River. During this period, Nebraska's black population increased at an annual rate of 2.8 percent, while the total population of the state increased by only 2.2 percent. <sup>3</sup>

It is not surprising that Nebraska's white and black populations both increased so dramatically during the 1880s. During that decade, the largest growth and expansion in Nebraska's history occurred. Railroad mileage in the state nearly tripled, from 1,800 to over 5,100 miles of track, with settlement following in its path. Twenty-six new counties were organized. Virtually the only unsettled portion of the state remaining was the sandhills region. Although the population boom of the decade seems dramatic, Nebraska's

economic boom appears even more sensational. The total amount of capital in Nebraska banks increased from \$850,000 in 1880 to a staggering \$23,710,000 ten years later. Total farm value increased from \$154,000,000 in 1880 to over \$500,000,000 ten years later. The worth of the state's manufactured products increased from 12 million to 93 million dollars. It was undeniably the state's most outstanding decade of development. <sup>4</sup>

Black as well as white settlers were quick to recognize the opportunities in a state experiencing tremendous economic growth. Many blacks living in Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas especially were interested in the prospects in neighboring Nebraska. Because manuscript censuses for 1890 have been destroyed by fire, the exact number of migrants from those states cannot be accurately determined. But existing 1885 and 1900 censuses indicate a developing pattern of increased black migration into Nebraska from Iowa and Kansas. Opportunities for blacks must not have been as plentiful in these states. The black population in Iowa increased by less than ten percent (969), while Kansas's black population decreased by six percent (2,397) during the 1880s. <sup>5</sup>

Blacks lived in seventy-seven of Nebraska's counties during 1890. Eleven of the sixteen Nebraska counties with the largest black populations in 1880 and 1885 were still among the top sixteen in 1890. According to official figures, Douglas County, the home of fifty-two percent (4,665)

of the state's blacks, still maintained the largest black population. Lancaster County remained second with sixteen percent (1,419) of the state's total. Gage County reported a black population of 374, while Dawes, Adams, and Otoe Counties each reported black populations of over 200. Cherry and Cass Counties each claimed at least 100 blacks. <sup>6</sup>

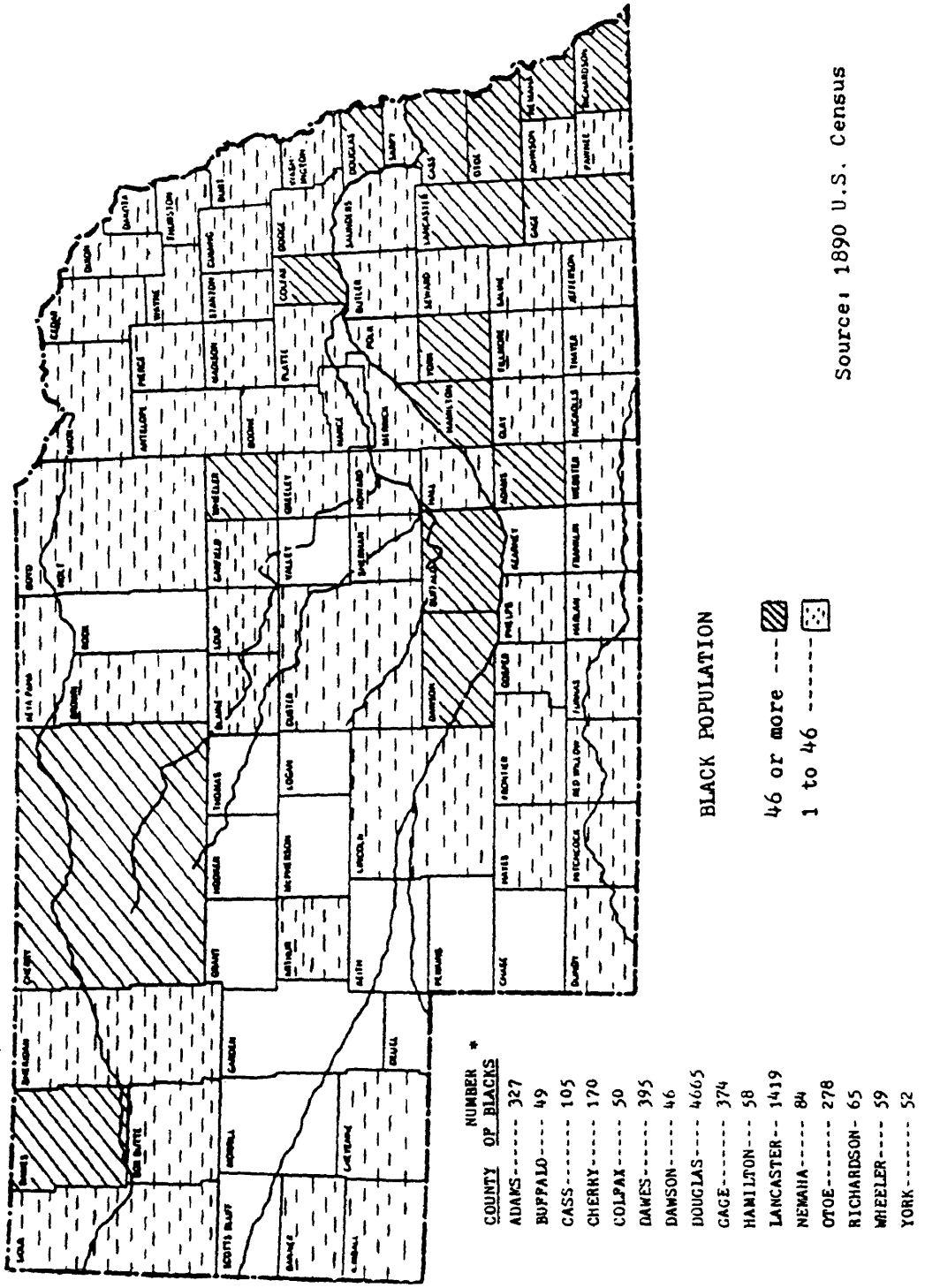
Eighty percent of Nebraska's blacks living outside the city of Omaha resided in the southeastern Nebraska counties of Richardson, Nemaha, Otoe, Cass, and Lancaster. Most lived in their county's largest city: Falls City, Auburn, Beatrice, Nebraska City, Plattsmouth, and Lincoln, respectively. The boom of the 1880s is certainly reflected in these communities. Both Lincoln and Beatrice had populations which were three and one-half times larger than in 1880, while the populations of Plattsmouth and Nebraska City nearly doubled. <sup>7</sup> Lincoln and Beatrice were on both the Missouri Pacific and Burlington Rail lines, which undoubtedly helped to stimulate their amazing growth. In 1885, Lincoln's population stood at 20,000, and by 1888 it had doubled. Construction must have seemed never ending, for during the decade an electric light plant, a water system, a new capital building, and a street railway system were built. Additionally, during 1883, a building for the college of medicine was completed and three years later Grant Memorial Hall was erected to house the university's military department. Local officials in Beatrice extended the city

limits and discussed proposals for a city railway system, designed to transport residents to the spreading subdivisions. Construction began in 1885 and continued throughout the decade on a state institute for feeble-minded youth in Beatrice. This growth prompted a number of blacks to move to these cities. <sup>8</sup>

Blacks were involved in many different occupations associated with the boom, including laborer, servant, and hotel cook and waiter. The construction increased labor demands, opening up job positions for blacks. Since Beatrice and Lincoln were each located on two rail lines, they needed more hotels to accommodate travelers. These provided additional jobs for blacks as waiters, cooks, and porters. Booming economic conditions probably also allowed more families to employ house servants. Blacks were generally considered excellent servants, and it appears that they filled many of these positions. <sup>9</sup>

Most of the communities in southeastern Nebraska enjoyed the economic successes of the period. Nebraska City reached its highest population total ever during 1890 and its black population also saw substantial gains. These blacks were employed in many of the same types of positions as those in Lincoln and Beatrice. It seems that Kansas played a major role in supplying blacks to the southeastern counties of Nebraska during those good years. Kansas's black population declined by almost three thousand during the 1880s, as some

NEBRASKA COUNTIES WITH BLACK POPULATIONS IN 1890



Source: 1890 U.S. Census

FIGURE 4.1

\* See above, pp. 104-105 for a discussion of these figures

blacks returned to their native homes in Louisiana and Mississippi. It appears that a number of them moved to Colorado and Nebraska to experience some of the opportunities there. <sup>10</sup>

Increasing numbers of blacks also moved to the central and western sections of the state. Eight of the sixteen counties with the largest black populations in the state in 1890 - Hamilton, Adams, Buffalo, Dawson, York, Wheeler, Cherry, and Dawes - were scattered throughout the western two-thirds of the state. One of the most surprising findings of the 1890 census was the existence of a sizeable number of blacks living in some of Nebraska's more remote areas in Dawes and Cherry Counties. During 1890, Cherry County had the seventh largest black population with 190 blacks. Only Douglas and Lancaster County recorded a larger black population than Dawes County, which reported 400 blacks. <sup>11</sup>

The organization of Cherry County on April 4, 1883 caught the interest of John Thomas, a black man from Blair, Nebraska. Like many pioneers, Thomas felt that a recently organized county would provide him better economic opportunities. During the last week of May, 1883 Thomas moved to Valentine, the county's largest community. He purchased a small building next to the Phoenix Saloon in downtown Valentine and opened a barber shop. The local newspaper proudly announced his arrival, saying, "Valentine can now boast of having a colored gentleman as one of its citizens in the

person of a barber from Blair. We judge he will have a good trade." <sup>12</sup>

Two weeks after his arrival, an advertisement for Thomas's OK Barber Shop appeared in the local paper, offering patrons a "clean shave, fashionable hair cut and a genuine shampoo." <sup>13</sup> The barber shop evidently did enough business to provide Thomas with extra income because he purchased two town lots in December, 1883. Thomas was a good conversationalist which undoubtedly aided his business. His abilities captured the attention of the local newspaper editor who reported on January 17, 1884:

John Thomas is the great American orator of African descent, and a tonsorial artist whose place has a bath room in connection. John can give the whitened locks of winter the glow of spring and at the same time talk the saddest countenance into a smile as bright as May sunshine. If the old Spaniards had had the benefits of John's art they would never have sailed across an unknown ocean in search of the fountain of eternal youth. <sup>14</sup>

In spite of his success, Thomas did not stay in the barbering business long. In April, 1884 Thomas sold his business to Joseph Ford and homesteaded 160 acres of land in Goose Creek Township southwest of Valentine. He received a patent on his homestead in August, 1891 and lived there until his death in 1909. <sup>15</sup>

Shortly after the arrival of Thomas in 1883, another black barber named Perry Lawson came to Valentine. Lawson, a former slave, supplemented his barbering business by carrying

mail between Valentine and Fort Niobrara, four miles northeast of town. In 1884, the local paper reported "[Perry Lawson] has recently purchased a new buggy, and is now prepared to carry passengers to and from the Post at reasonable figures." <sup>16</sup> Lawson also gained the respect of Valentine residents. The local paper occasionally commented on some of Lawson's virtues, especially his patriotism. In July, 1890 a Valentine newspaper reported the reaction of Lawson after he learned of the death of General John C. Fremont:

Upon hearing of the death of General John C. Fremont, Perry Lawson draped the front of his barber shop in mourning and lowered the stars and stripes at half mast. As the flag floated in the air, Perry answered the many questions regarding the same, saying that he keenly felt the loss of the best friend the colored people ever had. In those who have been slaves, as was Perry and his wife, the deepest sympathy was aroused and many of the scenes of by gone days were vividly brought to memory by the death of Gen. Fremont. <sup>17</sup>

Like most blacks in the nineteenth century, Lawson annually celebrated the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. This September holiday, known as Emancipation Day was celebrated in black communities with speeches, games, food, and other festivities. As there were usually few blacks in the Valentine area, Lawson celebrated by having a prominent local citizen give a speech in the city and afterwards treating guests to a dinner at his home. On Emancipation Day in 1898, the usual events occurred, with Judge J.W. Tucker giving the celebration address. The local Valentine Republican used the occasion for a commentary on their own Perry Lawson,



proclaiming, "Perry is a splendid example of his once down and trodden race, and we doubt if many caucasians in the town have as many friends as he." <sup>18</sup>

The Lawson and Thomas families remained the only black residents in the Valentine vicinity until November 1885 when black soldiers attached to Fort Niobrara arrived from Fort Reno in Indian Territory. The local paper reported their arrival with some excitement, commenting that the cavalry's "first experience was to walk four and a half miles in a snowstorm - quite an experience for apprentices in the cavalry." <sup>19</sup> The black soldiers of this detachment, consisting of Companies A, B, and G of the Ninth Cavalry Regiment, were far from apprentices. This regiment, along with the Tenth Cavalry, and 24th and 25th Infantries, were formed in 1866 from units organized during the Civil War. After their formation, the Army sent these entirely black regiments to western areas of the United States to help curb conflicts between Indians and pioneers. Here they acquired the name "Buffalo Soldiers" from the native Americans because their dark, thick, curly hair reminded the Indians of the fur of the sacred animal on which they so much depended. <sup>20</sup>

Companies A, B, and G of the Ninth Cavalry were later joined at the fort by Companies F, H, and I. They were stationed at Fort Niobrara from 1885 through 1892. In August of 1902, the Army stationed eight companies of black soldiers from the 25th Infantry at the fort and they remained until

October, 1906 when the fort was deactivated and turned over to the Quartermaster Department. Various reports of incidents concerning the black troops appeared in the local newspapers during their years at the fort. Less than six months after the black troops arrived at the fort, a shooting incident occurred which involved both white and black soldiers. In May of 1886, a black private of Company G was upset at a white corporal and shouted obscenities at him. The corporal responded that he would send for the Sergeant of the Guard and have the soldier put under arrest if he continued his actions. The private left, but later returned with a rifle and shot the corporal. After the shooting, the private fled the scene, but was tracked down by the Sergeant of the Guard, who shot the private, fatally wounding him. The Corporal recovered from his wounds and since the alleged instigator of the incident was dead, an investigation apparently did not occur. Newspaper coverage of the shooting ended after the initial report, which backed the sergeant in the killing of the private. Because of the lack of an investigation, it is not known whether the shooting was motivated by race prejudice. However, no other problems at the fort concerning privates and officers were known to exist. <sup>21</sup>

The following year, townspeople learned that more black troops from the 24th Infantry were destined to Fort Niobrara. What they regretted most about it was that the 8th Infantry, a white regiment, would be leaving Fort Niobrara for Fort

Douglas, Utah. Prior to this, black troops were stationed alongside white regiments at the fort. This would be the first time a totally black force ran the fort. The local paper stated its hope that a change in orders would come because, "This will make Fort Niobrara composed wholly of colored troops - the information received here we much regret and we trust the order not carried out - and the 8th be left at Fort Niobrara - as they - both men and officers are a set of gentlemen commanding not only respect but the esteem of all who come in contact with them." <sup>22</sup> It is not known if this plea helped to reverse the decision, but the 8th Infantry remained at the fort and the 24th Infantry remained in Missouri. <sup>23</sup>

If tensions existed between the black soldiers and the local townspeople, they probably involved the use of alcohol and the large number of brothels that appeared as a result of the fort. Houses of prostitution, gambling dens, and saloons were not unique to Valentine. Most large towns in the United States probably had their fair share of each, but, communities situated near military forts usually had a much larger share than average. These entertainments gave the frontier soldiers the gambling, wine, and women that they wanted. <sup>24</sup> However, many of Valentine's citizens who had to live near these places considered them to be a disgrace. Other nearby towns in the area felt the problems of these places as well. A Cody resident wrote to the editor of the Republican stat-

ing, "We the people here, consider Valentine's disgrace, our disgrace. To us Valentine is not only a small village, filled with whiskey shops and houses of ill-fame, a sort of suburb to Fort Niobrara." <sup>25</sup>

Although Valentine had laws against such places, enforcement did not help to decrease the number of brothels and gambling houses. In increasing numbers, both white and black prostitutes found their way to Valentine. On one occasion, a black woman named Delilah Cole and a white man named George Beer were charged with renting a house for prostitution purposes. They both pleaded not guilty, but were found guilty and together were fined eighty dollars. <sup>26</sup> In another incident, a brothel was raided and one black male and seven black women were arrested. Six were later found guilty of running a house of prostitution. This time the fines were more severe, as brothel owners Charles Green and May Johnson were sentenced to thirty days in jail, while four women were fined ten dollars each. The Valentine Republican declared that, "The officials are generally commended on this action, and while the people taken in chore are colored this paper is informed that such places will be prosecuted regardless of color." <sup>27</sup> One such incident, involving the killing of a Sixth Cavalry corporal by another cavalryman over an episode with a black prostitute, occurred at Fort Niobrara in late September, 1891. On the evening of September 29, Corporal John Carter was ordered by his superiors to clear all pros-

titutes from the fort because they felt their presence on the grounds was disgraceful. Carter proceeded to carry out his orders and while he was doing so, he confronted a black woman named Lillian Lewis. She refused to leave the fort, claiming that she was Clinton Dixon's girl. The argument heightened until finally Carter struck her. The next morning, Dixon, a trumpeter of the all-white Sixth Cavalry, decided to settle the matter with Carter. After Dixon found Carter in his quarters, he shot him. Carter died early the next morning. Meanwhile, Dixon was arrested and charged with murder. He was transferred to Omaha where he stood trial in the United States District Court. He was found guilty of first degree murder and was sentenced to hang by Judge Elmer Dundy. After several unsuccessful attempts to have his sentence commuted, Dixon was executed in Omaha on June 24, 1892.<sup>28</sup>

After the shooting, Lillian Lewis moved to Omaha and continued her occupation in one of the city's many brothels. On the date of Dixon's execution, the Omaha World-Herald carried an editorial which condemned Lewis and claimed she was responsible for the killing of Corporal Carter. In the article titled, "A Brazen Wretch," the editor attacked Lewis, calling her a ". . . queen among the colored denizens of the tough precinct of the third ward on account of the crime and her own toughness . . . She is indirectly sending [Dixon] to death. She is a coal-black negress and has about as much feeling, probably, for Dixon as one of the stone pillars in

the courthouse." One wonders if such a hateful article would have appeared had Lewis been white or had Dixon or Carter been black. One thing which is clear, however, is that prostitution was not as segregated as many other institutions of late nineteenth century society.<sup>29</sup> Although there are no other known instances of trouble because of the brothels and gambling saloons, the presence of these places certainly added to the tension between local residents and the soldiers of Fort Niobrara.

More harmonious relations usually existed between the soldiers at the fort and Valentine residents. On at least two separate occasions black privates were married in Valentine by the local county judge, and often the local townspeople were entertained by the Ninth Cavalry and 25th Infantry bands. In addition, the black soldiers participated in numerous sporting events with the locals. In May, 1906, a baseball game was played between Company B of the 25th Infantry and the local Valentine nine. The newspaper reported that the enthusiastic crowd which turned out for the event saw the Valentine team win by a score of twelve to eleven.<sup>30</sup>

For the most part the soldiers at the fort were respected within the community and served their command dutifully. Many of their duties at the fort centered around army drill and maintenance of the fort. However, during the Sioux Ghost Dance scare in December, 1890, Companies A and G of the Ninth Cavalry, along with an armament supply of one hotchkiss and

one gatling gun, were ordered to Rosebud Agency to exhibit a show of strength as an Indian uprising was feared. As a result, these troops were not involved in the massacre at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890. Some companies of the Ninth stationed at Fort Robinson in Dawes County were included in the burial duties after the massacre, but they were not involved in the actual fighting.<sup>31</sup>

Fort Robinson, located about 160 miles to the west of Fort Niobrara in Dawes County, and twenty miles southwest of Chadron, is where the remaining companies of the Ninth Cavalry were stationed in 1885. At the time of the arrival of the Ninth Cavalry, the fort was fairly isolated from civilian populations. However, when the Fremont, Elkhorn, and Missouri Valley Railway was completed to the fort in 1886, a tent city sprang up, which grew into a village named Crawford. In 1890, the entire black population of Dawes County, with the exception of one black farmer named Robert Smithson and his family, consisted of 387 soldiers of the Ninth Cavalry.<sup>32</sup>

If Valentine was seen as a "disgraced suburb" of Fort Niobrara, Crawford must have seemed even worse. It owed its existence almost entirely to the fort, and as a result, all types of entertainment for the troops became the major businesses. The town was crowded with saloons, open gambling dens, and houses of prostitution. It was not long before problems occurred between local citizens and black troop

members. In April, 1893, a dishonorably discharged cavalryman, James Diggs, formerly of the Ninth, was charged for a misdemeanor in Crawford. The incident surrounding the charges is not known, and the local police court apparently thought the charges lacked evidence, as they dropped all charges against Diggs. Some local townspeople evidently disagreed with the court and decided to take it upon themselves to see that Diggs was punished. These pursuers of Diggs, including the local marshall and three saloon owners, appeared ready to lynch him for his alleged crimes. Diggs was able to escape to the fort, aided by some of his friends in the Ninth. One of the friends who helped Diggs escape, later wrote that ". . . human ghouls and blood-fiends filled the night air with the cry of 'Nigger! Nigger! Let us lynch him.' and they would have doubtlessly duplicated the brutal horrors of Paris and Texarkana, Texas, and Fort Gaines, Georgia, if they had caught Diggs." <sup>33</sup> Some of the troops of the Ninth lashed back at the townspeople demanding ". . . you shall not outrage us and our people right here under the shadow of 'Old Glory' while we have shot and shell, and if you persist we will repeat the horrors of San Domingo - we will reduce your homes and firesides to ashes and send your guilty souls to hell." <sup>34</sup> The note was signed "500 Men with the Bullet or the Torch." The incident forced Lieutenant Colonel Rueben Bernard to place Crawford off limits to all of the troops. <sup>35</sup>



The Ninth Cavalry was sent to Chickamauga Park, Georgia in 1898, and there was a span of four years during which black troops were not at the fort. In 1902, however, the Tenth Cavalry was stationed at Fort Robinson, after returning from Cuba. The arrival of the Tenth seemed to again increase tensions between local townspeople and the fort's troops. An incident of major importance occurred in May, 1906, which involved the killing of the local sheriff, Art Moss, by a black Sergeant of the Tenth Cavalry, John Reid. On May 17, 1906, a group of black soldiers were enjoying a spring afternoon at Crawford, relaxing with a picnic. It appears that by late afternoon, the group was getting loud and some local citizens informed the sheriff that the group should be quieted or disbanded. The local sheriff arrived on the scene with his brother, J.H. Moss, and most of the soldiers left. However, a small group of soldiers, including Sergeant John Reid and Jordan Taylor, decided to stay. Moss informed those that remained that if they intended to stay, they must be orderly. Reid refused to listen to Moss and started yelling obscenities at him. About this time, Moss realized Reid had a gun. Moss drew his firearm and, fearing the possibility of some shooting, J.H. Moss grabbed Reid's arm. Taylor reacted by hitting J.H. with a stick, and the shooting erupted. Art Moss was killed by Reid in the excitement, after which Reid and Taylor fled to a local black woman's house. The house was quickly surrounded by local authorities. Taylor was

killed while trying to escape and Reid was captured. <sup>36</sup>

It was decided that the jail in Crawford was not secure enough for this prisoner, since legal authorities feared both a riot or lynching attempt by townspeople and a rescue attempt by black troops from the fort. Colonel Jacob Auger, commanding officer at the fort, realizing the peril the local authorities were under, offered them his assistance. However, it was decided that Reid should be moved to the higher security jail at Chadron. Later evidence revealed that disagreements between Sergeant Reid and Sheriff Moss had occurred before. During a local horse race in 1905 in which both participated, Reid grabbed the bridle of Moss's horse and tried to hold him back. Evidently Moss beat his hand off and won the race. Afterwards, it seems these men never got along very well. Resentment against soldiers of the Tenth Cavalry remained strong among Crawford residents for some time after the killing. <sup>37</sup>

It appears that before the killings Crawford residents generally got along with both the black and white troops stationed at the fort. Beginning in 1903, the Tenth Cavalry band gave annual concerts at the fort for the enjoyment of Crawford's residents, and on various occasions both baseball and football games were played between local residents and the black troops. <sup>38</sup>

The impact of the black troops as well as the forts upon their respective communities must be taken into account. The

economic well being of both Valentine and Crawford was tied directly to the forts. Crawford, a smaller community at the time, was more affected by conditions at Fort Robinson, than Valentine was with Fort Niobrara. As a result, Crawford merchants catered more to the soldiers' and their families' needs. When mostly black troops were placed at the fort, this meant that Crawford residents would have to supply the needs of the black soldiers in order to enjoy economic success and the troops had to have free access to the town's businesses. Crawford's townspeople had control over what type of business establishments would be allowed in the town and the types of access the troops would be allowed to these business establishments. It appears the townspeople made little effort to curb any business activity, including places of gambling, prostitution, and alcohol. As a result of the lack of restrictions, these types of business flourished, eventually leading to other problems.<sup>39</sup>

Houses of prostitution eventually brought trouble to the area, ironically not to the townspeople, but to the soldiers. The problem was venereal disease. During seven months in 1902, venereal disease at the fort cost the Army 2,963 days of work, while alcoholism and other injuries during the same period cost the Army only 321 days of duty. The next year, fifty-six cases of gonorrhoea, syphilis, and chancroids were reported. Upon the recommendation of Surgeon Peter Field, Captain Charles Greerson warned Crawford officials that if

action was not taken to clean up the brothels, Crawford would be placed off limits to the men of the fort. This was a potential disaster for Crawford. The town council realized that they could not allow the unclean brothels from hampering other profitable businesses in the town. An easy solution would be to close down the prostitution houses, but this was not considered since over one-half of the town's revenue came from taxes on saloons and brothels. Town leaders decided to appoint the first village physician whose primary purpose was to test the village prostitutes for disease. The cost of these examinations was passed on to the prostitution houses, and diseased prostitutes were expelled from town. The City Marshall inspected these houses on a semi-monthly basis to make sure only healthy whores were working. These inspections evidently cleared the village and the garrison of venereal disease. In January of 1904 Surgeon Field declared the fort free of incurable gonorrhoea and all but one case of syphilis. Thus, Crawford had found a way to keep prostitution with its tax revenue and the soldiers' business intact. <sup>40</sup>

The presence of black troops at Fort Robinson helped to draw over forty black civilian residents into the area. Other than the local prostitutes, blacks in Crawford worked as carpenters, teamsters, cooks, laborers, servants, mail carriers, and nurses. At least twenty-five black soldiers' families lived and worked at the fort. Many of the soldiers'

wives performed the everyday tasks of cleaning, laundering, sewing, and nursing that were needed at the fort. In addition, many black soldiers who retired while stationed at the fort stayed in the area. Between the years 1886 and 1907, as many as twenty-six black soldiers remained in northwestern Nebraska after retirement from the service. Some stayed for a few years before moving elsewhere, while others remained in the vicinity the rest of their lives. After retiring, most of these veterans continued to work to supplement their small pensions. <sup>41</sup>

Most of the veterans continued to work at the post. Five men worked at the post exchange. Retired Sergeant Alfred Bradden worked in the exchange billiard room, while former Sergeant Simon Franklin was an attendant there. Sergeant William Howard worked as a laborer, while Lewis Towiver and John Denny worked as a cook and in the canteen, respectively. Most of these men earned a meager pay of between \$5 and \$25 per month, but it must have been a welcome supplement to their pensions. Former post engineer Preston Brooks continued to hold well-paying responsible positions at the fort after retirement. He managed the waterworks and sawmill at the post, earning \$60 a month, well above the average income. Three black veterans worked for James Cook on the nearby O-4 Ranch, performing various duties. Black retiree Sandy Townage worked for a livery stable in Crawford and James Williams owned an eating place for a short time in Crawford.

The most successful of all the black veterans in northwestern Nebraska appears to have been Charles Price, a retiree of the Ninth Cavalry. He ran a saloon and gambling den in Crawford which was profitable enough for him to accumulate property worth \$1,000, at a time when most black retirees had little taxable property. <sup>42</sup>

The black community in Crawford remained close even after black troops were removed from the post. There were obvious signs of racism in the Crawford area, which probably reflected prevalent attitudes of the time period. For the most part, few of the opportunities available to the whites were available to blacks. No blacks ever held public office in Crawford and they were usually excluded from most fraternal organizations in the town. In spite of this, the Crawford black community seemed to remain stronger than the black community in the Valentine area. This is evident from an examination of the black population of both villages in 1900, a time when no black soldiers were stationed at either fort. During this time, forty-nine blacks lived in the Crawford area, while the number of blacks in the Valentine area dropped to nineteen. Most of the blacks in Valentine, specifically the John Thomas and Perry Lawson families, had settled there before the arrival of the black troops. As previously noted, both communities witnessed violent incidents which were surrounded by racial tensions. <sup>43</sup>

It appears that Valentine maintained a stronger sentiment

against the black community. It has already been noted how the Valentine Republican praised the efforts of its black citizens, John Thomas and Perry Lawson. However, by 1900 an increasing number of racist comments appeared in the local opposition newspaper, the Valentine Democrat. In 1906, the editor of the Valentine Democrat stated that "Negroes are a menace to the white race of the country and we see no encouragement for the future as long as the idea prevails that a negro is as good as a white man if he behaves himself." <sup>44</sup>

In addition, Valentine officials never really allowed businesses catering to soldiers at the fort to control the town as completely as Crawford leaders did. As a result, it appears that Valentine leaders resisted certain types of black business more than Crawford. One such business was prostitution. Although prostitution could easily be found in Valentine, the town did have laws on its books making it illegal, and occasionally it did enforce these laws. However, it appears that when officials chose to enforce these laws, they usually cracked down on the black brothels in town. Crawford, meanwhile, seemed to welcome all types of businesses that would please the troops. These lenient laws probably drew more blacks to Crawford, thus helping to build a stronger black community even during the absence of black troops at the fort. <sup>45</sup>

Valentine was not entirely an anti-black community. Townspeople there probably were less racist than in many

other nearby areas. In Sturgis, South Dakota, a village 150 miles northwest of Valentine, local residents declared that they would not allow any blacks to remain in their town after dark. Residents of Belle Fourche and Hot Springs, South Dakota insisted that they would resist any attempt by blacks to settle among them. This strong attitude was not evidenced in Valentine, partially because of the favorable impression made upon local residents by Perry Lawson and John Thomas. It seems that one or two families can help to form a favorable impression on local citizens which may help to break down the racist attitudes of a community. <sup>46</sup>

In the meantime, in Adams County, Nebraska, the black population increased from twenty-five in 1880 to 327 in 1890, aided primarily by economic growth which can be attributed to the railway terminal in Hastings. It appears that most of the blacks in Hastings worked as servants and cooks in the local hotels which were established as a result of the increased business brought by the railroad. However, during the early 1880s some blacks established private businesses. By 1885, J.S. Craig, a former slave from Tennessee, opened the first steam laundry in Hastings and later established the first billboard poster service in the Adams County area. Other Hastings blacks of note prior to 1900 include Jeff Teemer, Henry Gates, Clara Briley, and Horace G. Newsome. Teemer was a well-known coachman employed by Captain A.D. Yocum. Newsome, one of the original blacks who settled in



Hastings, owned a barber shop. Henry Gates farmed eighty acres of his own land on the north edge of Hastings. Clara Briley, a black woman who was born into slavery near Richmond, Virginia, settled in Hastings around 1885. She became a familiar sight among Hastings residents who referred to her as "Grandma Briley" for a very good reason. She lived in Hastings for thirty-three years until she was 117 years-old when she moved to Wichita, Kansas to live with her daughter for the rest of her life. Her last years in Hastings were spent living with her son "Doc" and her grandson.<sup>47</sup>

The black community appeared to be very closely-knit in those early years. A Masonic Lodge was organized for blacks and it appears that many social activities occurred there over the years. Numerous balls were held during the 1890s, and a picnic at Hastings Coles's Park in September, 1892, which attracted many blacks from Lincoln and Omaha, celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Reduced railroad rates were offered to blacks in many areas throughout the state so that they could attend the picnic. Blacks in Hastings also established three churches before 1900: The Second Baptist; Hamilton Avenue Methodist; and the Shiloh Temple. They also organized a black glee club and a baseball team called the "Black Diamonds" which competed at least through 1903. From the segregated appearance of the organizations, it seems evident that racism existed in Hastings. Blacks had their own

Masonic and church organizations, as well as their own social organizations, singing groups, and sports teams. However, the schools appear to have always been integrated and no problems are known to have existed as a result. <sup>48</sup>

The black population in Buffalo and York County increased enough that by 1890 these counties were among the fifteen most heavily populated black counties in the state. York County's black population increased from only eight in 1880 to fifty-two by 1890. Again, this population increase can be best be explained by the expansion in the county which resulted from the extension of the Burlington Railroad to York in 1877 and the building of branch rail lines both north and south from York in 1884. At least nine black families lived in the vicinity of York by 1890. <sup>49</sup>

One of these families was that of John Taylor, a barber. He moved to Seward, Nebraska with his family around 1880. He and his family moved again in 1885 a few miles farther up the rail line to York, where he established a barber business. Taylor had a son named Robert, who gained quite a bit of respect among the local citizens. Robert, an athletically built young man, excelled in sports activities and academics. He became a leading player for both the York High School basketball and football teams during the early 1900s. He graduated from York High School in 1905 and went on to attend the University of Nebraska where he lettered in football. After completing his schooling at the University, he went to

Creighton University Medical School and graduated with an M.D. in 1912.<sup>50</sup>

Buffalo County experienced a black population increase similar to that in York during the 1880s. The county's black population rose from only twelve in 1880 to forty-nine by 1890. Most of the blacks lived in the towns of Ravenna and Kearney. As in other counties, most of the blacks who lived and worked in Buffalo County worked as hotel porters, cooks, and waiters. However, James Callaway worked as a pullman conductor for the Union Pacific Railroad at this time, while his wife, Eliza, worked as a laundress. Many of the blacks in the county lived in the State Industrial School for Boys, a state-established home for delinquent boys. Fifteen boys, almost thirty percent of the county's black population, lived there.<sup>51</sup>

Sizeable black populations remained in the central Nebraska counties of Dawson, Hamilton, and Wheeler. Practically all of these blacks were engaged in farming operations. In Hamilton County, most of the black farmers who settled north of Aurora during the 1870s and 1880s remained in 1890. One of the initial black settlers in the area, David Patrick, had lived in the county for twenty years by 1890. During that time he seemed to acquire an admirable reputation. He attended the Hampton Christian Church, which had a primarily white congregation, and served as an elder for a time. Upon

his death in 1903, the local paper recalled Patrick as "a man of high moral character and unspotted integrity." <sup>52</sup>

In the north-central Nebraska county of Wheeler, twelve black farming families remained in Fremont Township in 1890. These families, consisting of sixty people, had lived in the county for nearly ten years. During this time they acquired 1,000 acres of land and rented another 1,000 acres. By 1890, this appears to have been a very stable black community which extended into southern Holt County. The families in the settlement included the Freeman, Dixon, Patterson, Blair, Newman, Reeve, Lyndsay, Barret, Jones, Jackson, Thrice, Logan, Price and Stewart families. Most of these families worked their own farms and ranches, although some worked on neighboring places. Some found other types of work in the area. Black homesteader Jerry Freeman carried mail between Ewing and Bliss, Nebraska for a number of years, while Hector Dixon gathered cream for the Amelia Creamery. <sup>53</sup>

The black farm settlement north of Overton also appeared quite strong through 1890. At least seven blacks had proven their homesteads and they continually increased the amount of improved tillable ground on their land. Most of these blacks worked and associated frequently with their white neighbors in the community. All of their children attended a country school which was about evenly divided between white and black students. Every year, citizens in the community chose a director to organize and hire teachers for their local

school. William Walker, a black homesteader, directed this country school during 1889 and 1890, indicating the respect area residents had for him.<sup>54</sup>

All of the black farm communities appeared very stable throughout the 1880s. Overall, the 1880s were good years for Nebraska farmers and they steadily increased their crop acreage and total grain production. Although grain production increased, grain prices continued downward throughout the decade. Corn prices declined eight cents a bushel during the decade. Wheat prices dropped twenty-three cents and oats dropped eleven cents a bushel. As a result, farmers cultivated increasingly greater acreages to make up for lower prices. Crops produced high yields in the 1880s because Nebraska was blessed with abundant rainfall. Thousands of pioneers who migrated to the state during this time thought that sufficient rain for the crops would always come. Many believed that cultivating the land helped bring rainfall. Settlers heard stories of drier days in Nebraska, but ever since large numbers of pioneers had settled in the state, sufficient rain had fallen.<sup>55</sup>

Credit, likewise, was taken for granted in the 1880s. Farmers who did not produce enough crops to pay expenses simply borrowed money to cover their debts. Small Nebraska towns also envisioned themselves as future urban centers, if only they could obtain the needed loans. Eastern investors overwhelmed Nebraska banks and investment companies with the

needed cash. Mortgages were so desired that many sent money drafts to lending companies in hopes of receiving a farm mortgage. As a result of this speculation, land prices rose, making the debts appear smaller in comparison and adding to Nebraska's optimism. Many believed Nebraska was a land of unending prosperity.<sup>56</sup>

The boom could not last, and the bubble inevitably burst. First, the rains diminished. In 1890, 1893, 1894, and 1895 the average rainfall was 16.5 inches. This compares with an average of slightly over twenty-four inches for the 1880s. As a result, grain production fell, while crop prices still remained low. In 1890, 1893, and 1894 the drought almost totally destroyed crops. Investors quit loaning money and started calling in loans just when farmers needed to borrow the most. The small amount of grain that farmers raised was not even enough to feed their livestock. Many farmers shipped in grain to save their animals and those that could not afford to do this, sold their livestock. Because of the overabundance on the market and the lack of feed, livestock prices plummeted.<sup>57</sup> Land prices, which had risen steadily throughout the 1880s, fell sharply. Farmers could not pay their mortgages and lost their land when their loans were foreclosed. By 1894, available money to borrow became so scarce, that even the cheap land could not be bought.<sup>58</sup>

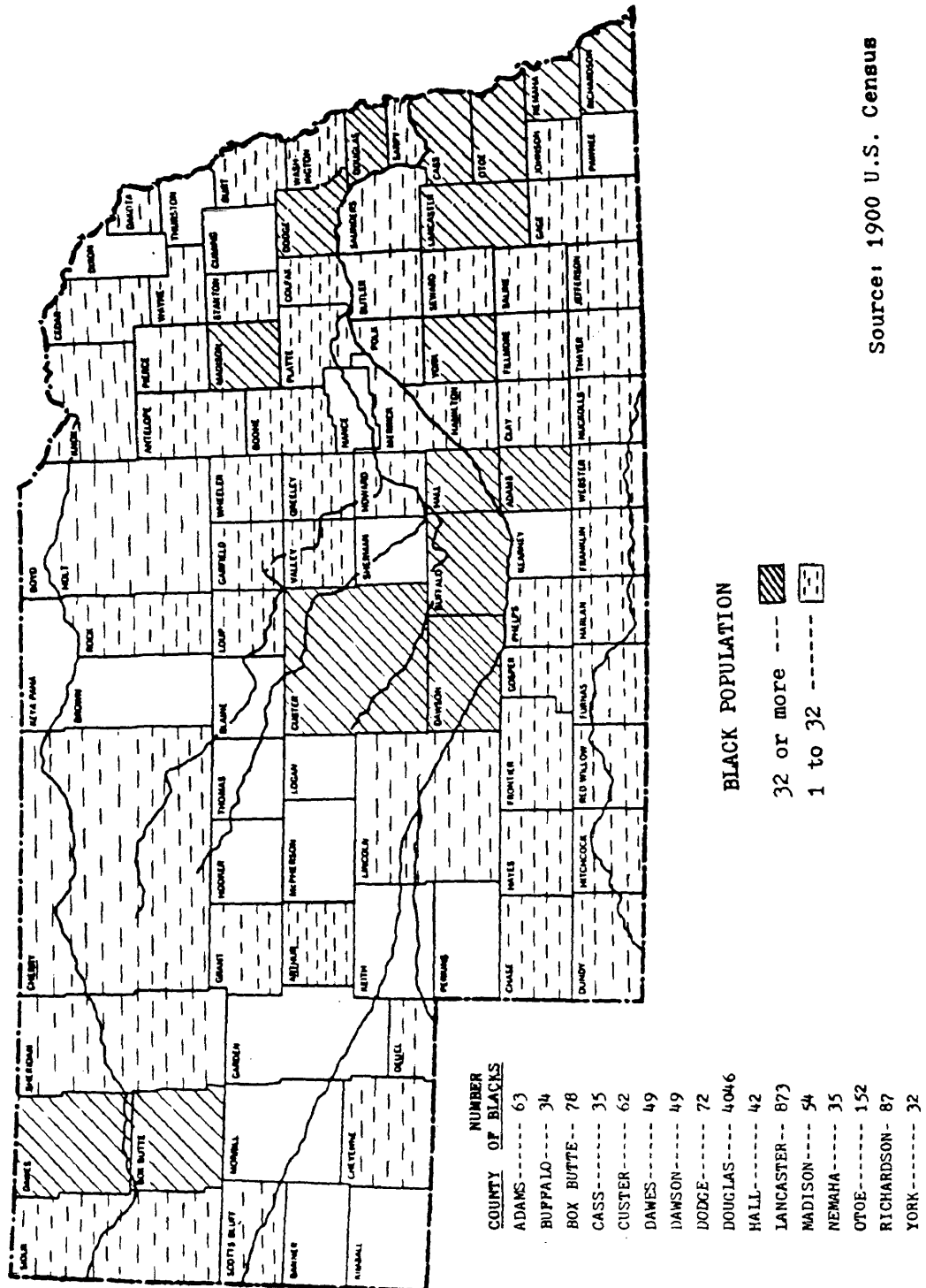
In addition to the agricultural crisis disabling the state, a financial panic struck the United States in 1893.

Prices on the New York Stock Exchange dropped to half their former levels. Nebraska's lending institutions, already stretched to their limits, could not handle this added pressure. During the year, twenty-one banks in the state failed and many neared collapse. City businesses and industries were now in as depressed a situation as the farmers.

Unemployment numbers rose to high proportions. Farmers came to the cities and towns in hope of finding work at the same time that industries and businesses were laying off their workers. <sup>59</sup>

Because of the continued depression, people left the state destitute and without much hope. As a result, thirty-five counties, forty percent of the state's total, suffered a decline in population during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Most of the other counties in the state only maintained their population. It appears from census totals that blacks in Nebraska were among those groups hardest hit by the depression. Blacks came in record numbers to Nebraska during the 1880s, mostly as a result of the economic opportunities afforded by a growing state. Those opportunities ended as a result of the 1890s depression which resulted in a movement of blacks out of the state. A record number of blacks left Nebraska during the 1890s. According to the official census tallies, 2,654 fewer blacks, a staggering thirty percent, lived in Nebraska during 1900 than in 1890. Although the 1890 census is questionable, it seems reasonable

# NEBRASKA COUNTIES WITH BLACK POPULATIONS IN 1900

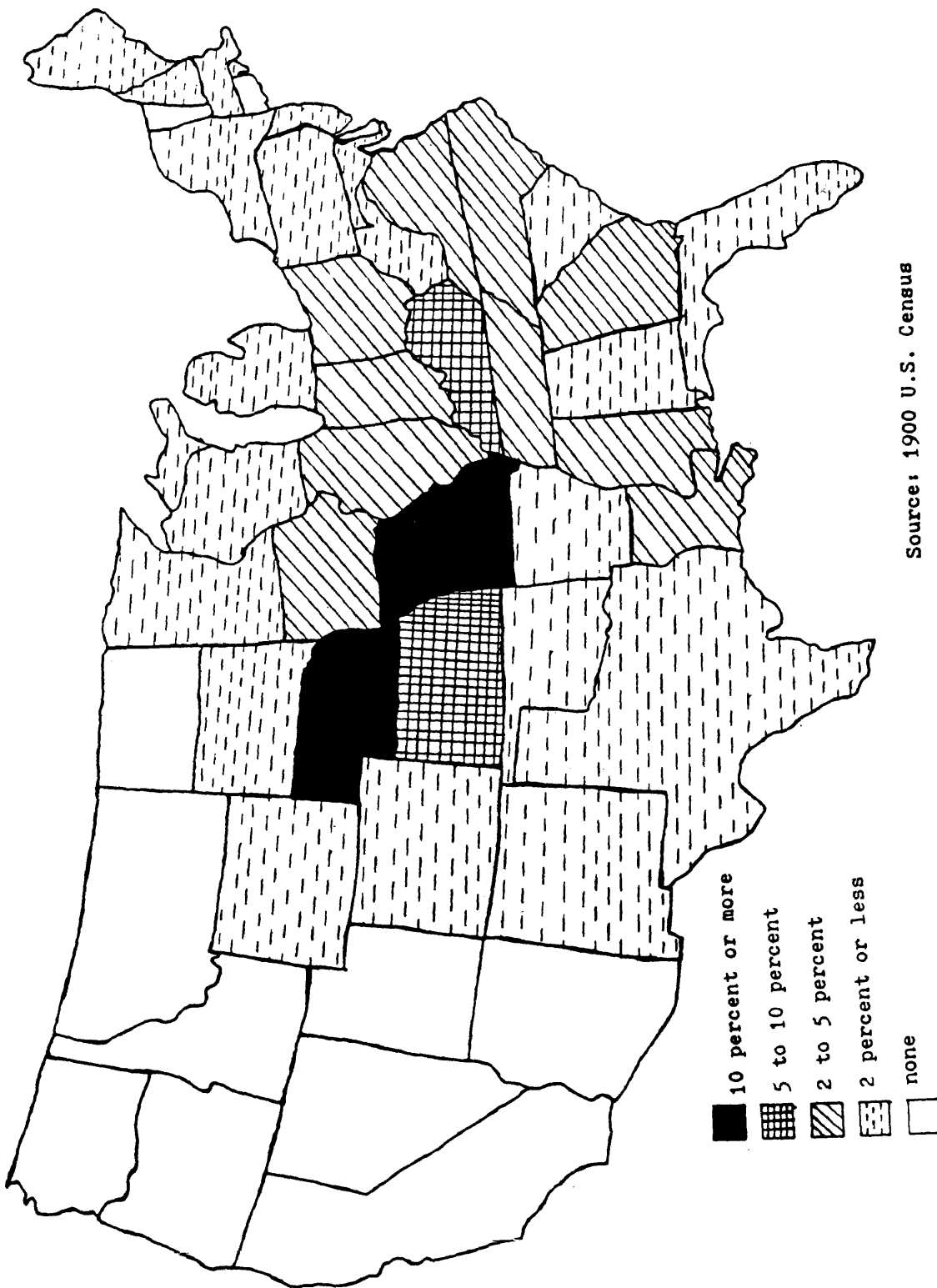


Source: 1900 U.S. Census

FIGURE 4.2

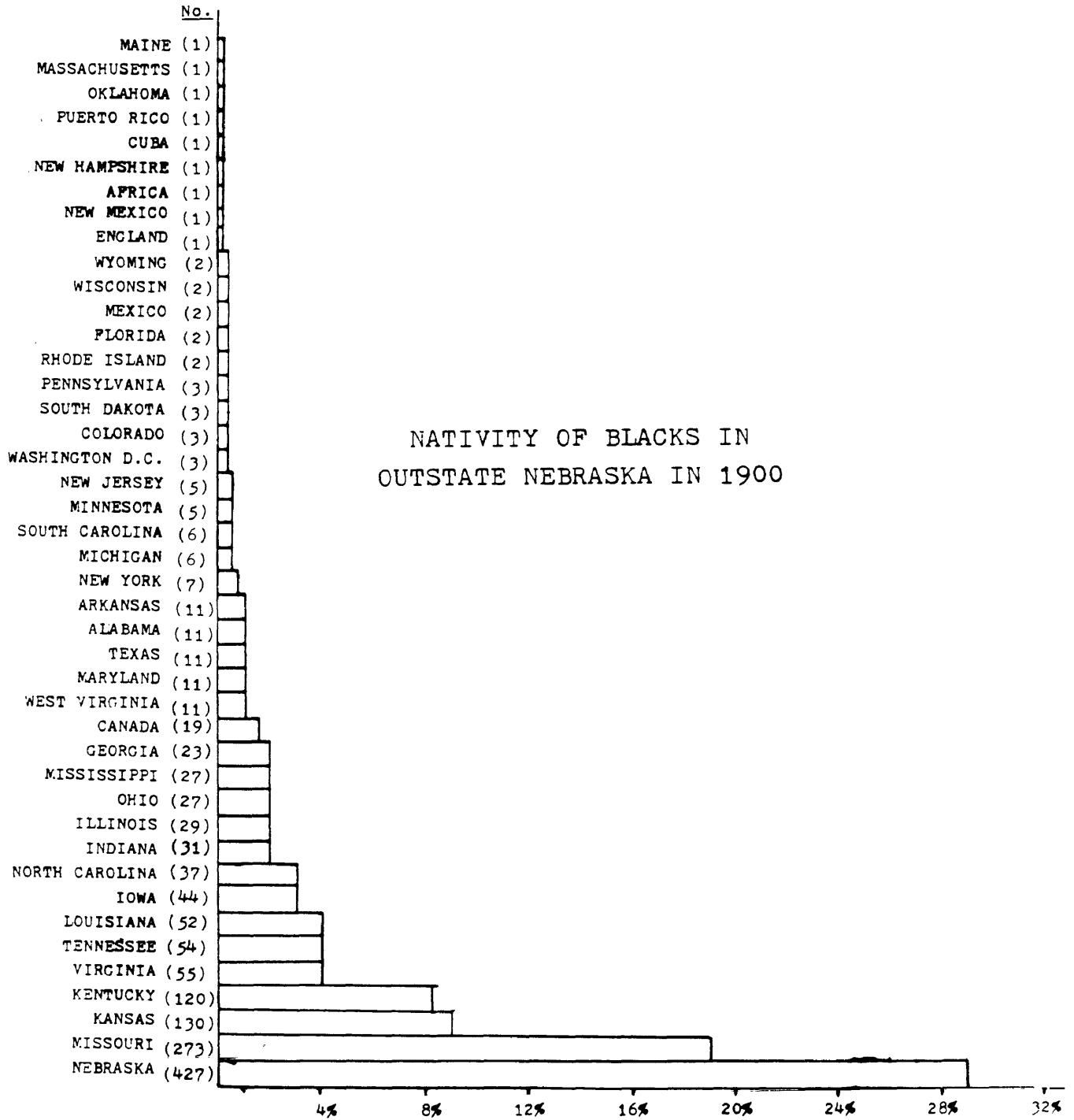


NATIVITY OF OUTSTATE NEBRASKA BLACKS IN 1900



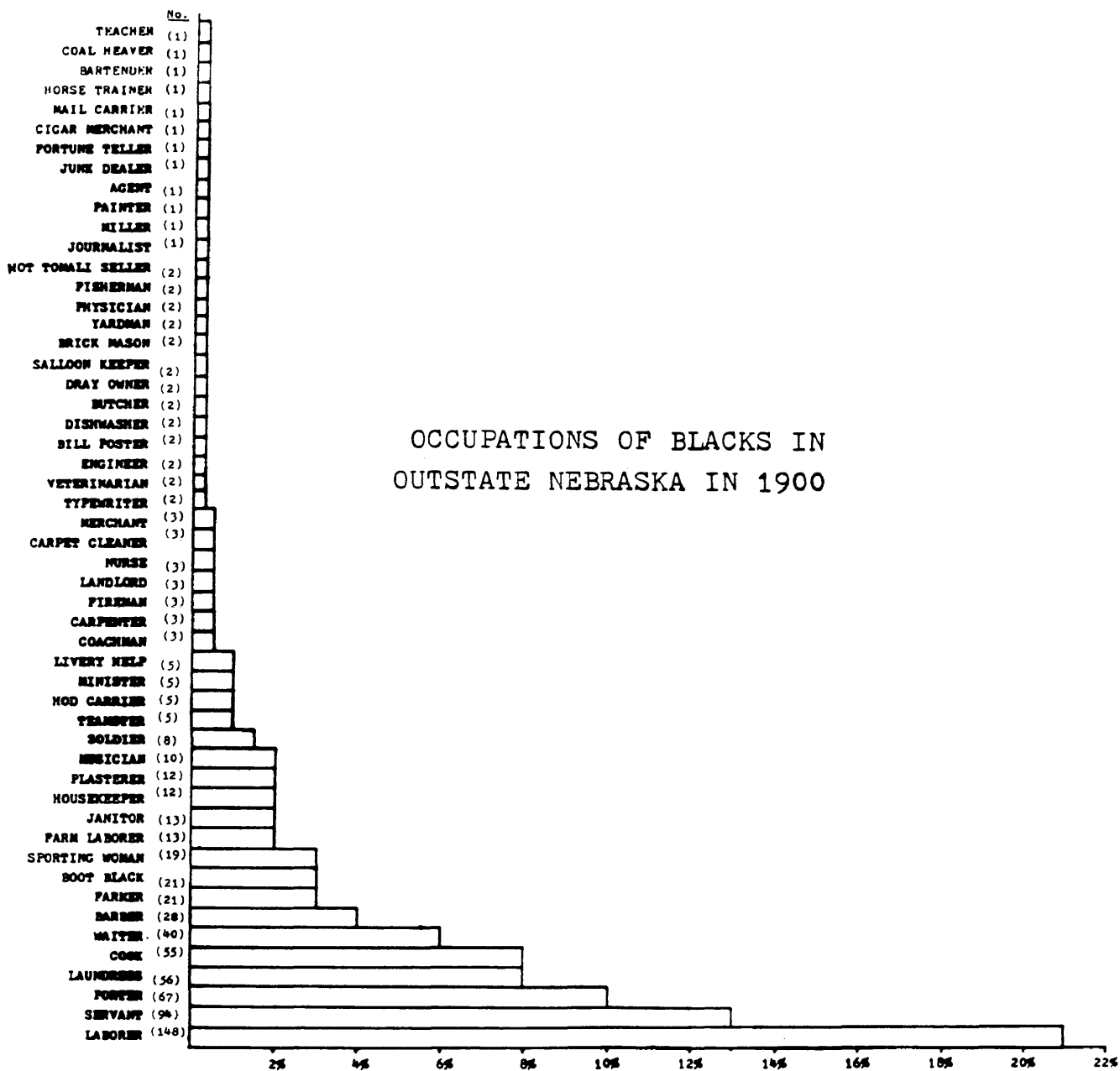
Source: 1900 U.S. Census

FIGURE 4.3



Source: 1900 U.S. Census

FIGURE 4.4



Source: 1900 U.S. Census

FIGURE 4.5

that at least 1300 fewer blacks lived in Nebraska during 1900. Nebraska had the largest decline in the number of blacks of any state west of the Mississippi River during the decade. <sup>60</sup>

The segments of the black population hardest hit by the depression were common laborers and farmers. Prior to 1900, Lincoln had a large percentage of its blacks working as laborers; however, it seems that the depression forced many of these laborers out of work. The percentage of common laborers in Lincoln dropped from twenty-four percent in 1885 to nineteen percent in 1900. Laborer occupations were some of the better paying jobs which blacks held. As a result, many of the blacks who worked as laborers were married and raising families, circumstances which reflected their income abilities. The depression put many of these wage-earners out of work, leaving them unable to find positions with comparable pay. As a result, many black families left the state. In Lancaster County alone during 1885, forty-eight percent of the black workers were married, but by 1900, only thirty-eight percent were married. <sup>61</sup>

The largest occupational gains involving blacks included barbers, laundresses, servants, cooks, waiters, and boot blacks. The percentage of blacks in these occupations increased from thirty-five percent in 1885 to sixty percent in 1900. An increase in these occupations can be seen as somewhat detrimental to blacks overall because, for the most

part, these types of jobs paid less than laborer positions. Although it is difficult to document why blacks were eliminated from the better paying jobs, a reasonable assumption can be attributed to race prejudice. Probably when economic difficulties started to occur in the state, blacks were laid off to make room for unemployed white workers. This forced increasing numbers of blacks to take lower paying jobs or to leave the state. As a result, the 1900 black population was younger and more likely to be single than earlier Nebraska blacks had been. It appears that blacks who did migrate into Nebraska during the 1890s were almost always single and did not travel far to get to Nebraska. In 1900, blacks native to Nebraska and its neighboring states made up sixty-one percent of the state's total black population.<sup>62</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Nebraska's rural population suffered severely from the 1890s economic crisis. Many farmers apparently were forced to leave their heavily mortgaged farmsteads as a result of the crisis. It appears that these poor economic conditions forced most of the black farmers from Wheeler, Hamilton, and Colfax Counties to leave their farms during the decade. Only four farmers lived in the Wheeler and Holt County area during 1900. That year, Jerry Freeman sold his homestead of 160 acres for \$500. Freeman carried mail from Ewing to Bliss and he evidently moved to Ewing to be closer to his work. Some of the blacks moved on to St. Paul, Grand Island, and Omaha after selling their homesteads.

Wheeler Blair and William and John Dixon moved to Grand Island where they found employment. Ben Dixon moved to Omaha and Oscar Freeman moved to Ewing and later to St. Paul. It seems that many of the black families in the Holt and Wheeler County area moved as a result of the poor agricultural economy, relocating in areas where they could find employment. In a similar situation, the black farmers north of Aurora in Hamilton County had also relocated by 1900, reducing that county's black population to fourteen from fifty-eight in 1890. Likewise, the few blacks who had farms in Colfax County had also moved elsewhere by 1900. <sup>63</sup>

Counties which realized a growth in their black population by 1900 include Box Butte, Custer, Dodge, and Madison. Again, railroads appear to have helped to stimulate the economies of these locales, opening up opportunities for blacks. The completion of the railroad from Alliance in Box Butte County to Denver in 1900 completed the rail system from Spokane, Washington through Billings, Montana and Alliance to Denver. This line brought Denver closer to Spokane than any other route and equally important, it linked the Platte Valley and the eastern terminals with this western rail system at Alliance. This helped to bring a large increase in business to Alliance which provided jobs for its growing black population. Blacks in Alliance were employed as railroad laborers, porters, and firemen. The hotels that opened as a result of the railroad business employed blacks as

cooks, servants, laundresses, boot blacks, dishwashers, and waiters. Black population increases in Dodge and Madison County seem to have resulted from an upturn in the economy in those areas by 1900. Blacks in these counties were primarily located in the communities of Fremont and Norfolk. In both locations blacks mostly worked as laborers, servants, cooks, laundresses, barbers, and porters. <sup>64</sup>

Black settlement in Custer County increased during the last decade. Ironically, many of these pioneers settled on homesteads and rented farms at a time when most black farmers were moving into more urban areas. At least four black families, those of Joe and John Speese and John and Jerry Shores, farmed near Westerville, while the Robert Conrad and Arnold Richardson families farmed close to Broken Bow, the county seat. These families had lived in North Carolina and Indiana before moving to Nebraska. <sup>65</sup>

It appears that by 1890 blacks throughout the state were very aware of the various black settlements in the state. It has already been noted that in 1892 blacks throughout the state came together in Hastings to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. This successful gathering of blacks in the state may have been aided by a meeting in April, 1890 which established a League for Colored Citizens of Nebraska. This league was formed "for the establishment of a bureau of information and immigration to aid colored people throughout the Union to purchase homes

and farms in Nebraska, and other matters of interest pertaining to the race." <sup>66</sup> This league was endorsed by many blacks across Nebraska and the meeting was well attended by blacks who represented settlements throughout the state. A large number of blacks from Omaha and Lincoln were in attendance, but also present were blacks representing settlements in Platte, Hamilton, Dawes, Dawson, Colfax, and Custer County. <sup>67</sup>

In a time when blacks in Nebraska were making a unified effort to communicate the needs and experiences of their race, an event in Omaha probably sent shock waves throughout the state's black settlements. This event was the hanging of a black by a mob in Omaha early in the morning of October 10, 1891. Joe Coe (alias George Smith) was hanged for the assault of a five-year-old white girl, Lizzie Yates, earlier in the week. According to newspaper details, Coe attacked the Yates girl near her house and was captured the following day in a hay field not far from the scene. On Friday, October 9th, a crowd had already gathered, ironically, to witness the third legal hanging in Omaha's history, that of Ed Neal who was the convicted murderer of Allan and Dorothea Jones. The Neal hanging was witnessed by at least seventy-five people at twelve o'clock noon. This hanging may have encouraged a similar act of violence. It was just a few hours later that Omaha's residents heard a false report that Lizzie Yates had died from the alleged assault by Coe. Residents, angered by



this report, gathered at the courthouse later that evening to take justice into their own hands and avenge the girl's death. By ten o'clock an estimated few hundred people overwhelmed the much smaller police force and seized Coe. They took him from the jail and continuously beat him as he was dragged to the street. Coe was reportedly unconscious and possibly already dead from the severe beating before he reached the street. Coe's lifeless body was then hung from an electric trolley wire at the corner of Seventeenth and Harney streets. <sup>68</sup>

The following morning Omaha's Mayor Richard C. Cushing said " it was the most deplorable thing that had ever occurred in the history of the county." <sup>69</sup> Seven members of the mob were arrested, charged with the lynching, and later released on bail. News of the hanging undoubtedly reached the black settlements throughout the state as it became obvious that this was a brutal act of racial prejudice. The reaction by the state's black residents to the hanging is not easily determined since written accounts of the incident have not been found. However, one would imagine that the black community was greatly concerned about such an overt display of racism. <sup>70</sup>

The black population in Nebraska was severely hurt by the depression of the 1890s partly because of their lower status in society. Legal questions brought before state courts in Nebraska during this time seemed to reflect this lower stat-

us. In 1880, the Nebraska Supreme Court overturned a lower court discrimination suit decision between a black, Arthur Warwick, and the owners of the Commercial Barber Shop in Lincoln. Warwick had been refused a shave in the shop because he was black. Warwick won the suit in the District Court because it violated Nebraska's Civil Rights Laws. However, when the decision was appealed to the Supreme Court, that body held that because there was no evidence proving that Warwick was a Nebraska citizen, the law did not extend to him. <sup>71</sup>

In 1902, another discrimination case was brought before the courts. Robert Haynes, a black from Lincoln, was denied the use of an elevator in Lincoln's Lindell Hotel. Haynes filed a \$2,500 discrimination suit against the owners of the hotel, and once again the lower court found the hotel owners in violation of civil rights laws and the jury awarded Haynes \$500 in damages. The hotel appealed the decision to the Nebraska Supreme Court where it was overturned because the lower court had erred in advising the jury about damages in the suit. In both of these cases, blacks lost decisions because of technicalities deemed important by the highest court in the state. <sup>72</sup>

However, a few blacks in the state did achieve some success in the political machinery of the day. In 1892, a black mail carrier from Brownville, Henry Brown, lost a close race for mayor to Charles Schantz. In the next election he

ran again and won, making him the first black mayor in the state. <sup>73</sup>

Also during this time some blacks rose to prominence as political functionaries for their race, although these positions probably served only the Republican party. The number of blacks in Omaha and Lincoln was large enough to make them politically valuable. Bud Lindsey of Lincoln was a black who helped deliver the black vote for the Republican Party. As a young man, Lindsey worked as a waiter in the Lincoln Commercial Hotel, where he gained respect from his employers and customers. This helped him attain the position of head waiter and in this position he earned enough money and probably established enough business contacts to help him purchase the Savoy Hotel. Because of his status, Lindsey was able to convince black and white voters to cast their allegiance with the Republican Party candidates. As a result of his work within the party he was rewarded with a trip to the National Republican Convention as a delegate in 1896 where William McKinley was nominated for President. <sup>74</sup>

At the turn of the century the black role in Nebraska was becoming more clearly defined. The depression in the previous decade severely hurt blacks economically. Some left the state and those who remained filled positions which paid below standard wages. Increasingly, blacks were refused in certain businesses and their lower status in society was becoming more obvious. However, a few blacks became influen-

tial, mostly because they served whites' interests. As bad as the situation seemed, by the end of the decade the depression was easing and blacks probably felt hope for the new century.

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, Population (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893) I: 246; Edgar Z. Palmer, "The Correctness of the 1890 Census of Population for Nebraska Cities," Nebraska History, 32 (December, 1951) pp. 259-267.

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, I: 246; Bureau of the Census, The Statistical History of the United States (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), pp. 28-36.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, I: 246; Bureau of the Census, Statistical History (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976) pp. 28-36.

<sup>4</sup> James C. Olson, History of Nebraska (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, second edition, 1966), pp. 195-206; Addison E. Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), Volume I, pp. 660-670.

<sup>5</sup> Census of Nebraska, 1885, Nebraska Manuscript Census of Population, Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, (Copies at Nebraska State Historical Society); Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Nebraska Manuscript Census of Population, Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, (Copies at Nebraska State Historical Society); Bureau of the Census, Statistical History, pp. 28-36.

<sup>6</sup> Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, I: 246.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>8</sup> Richard C. Overton, Burlington Route: A History of the Burlington Lines (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 520; Robert G. Athearn, Union Pacific Country (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. 229; Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 202, 248-258; Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, I: 625, 647; Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, I: 246.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; Bureau of the Census, Statistical History, pp. 28-36.

<sup>11</sup> Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, I: 246.

- <sup>12</sup> Valentine Reporter, May 31, 1883, p. 1; "Fort Niobrara," The WI-IYOHI, Bulletin of the South Dakota State Historical Society, 20 (March 1, 1967), p. 8.
- <sup>13</sup> Valentine Reporter, June 14, 1883, p. 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Transfers Deed Book F, Cherry County Clerks Office, Valentine, Nebraska; Valentine Reporter, January 17, 1884, p. 2.
- <sup>15</sup> Transfers Deed Book F, Cherry County Clerks Office, Valentine, Nebraska; Cherry County Democrat (Valentine), October 28, 1909.
- <sup>16</sup> Valentine Reporter, January 3, 1884, p. 1.
- <sup>17</sup> Valentine Republican, July 25, 1890, p. 1.
- <sup>18</sup> Valentine Reporter, December 10, 1883, p. 2, January 3, 1884, p. 1; Valentine Republican, September 23, 1898.
- <sup>19</sup> Valentine Democratic Blade, December 11, 1885, p. 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 1; "Fort Niobrara," THE WI-IYOHI, pp. 1-6; William L. Katz, The Black West (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1973), pp. 199-224.
- <sup>21</sup> "Fort Niobrara," THE WI-IYOHI, pp. 1-6; Valentine Democratic Blade, May 14, 1886, p. 1; Valentine Republican, May 11, 1906, p. 1.
- <sup>22</sup> Valentine Democratic Blade, April 22, 1887, p. 1.
- <sup>23</sup> "Fort Niobrara," THE WI-IYOHI, PP. 1-5.
- <sup>24</sup> Frank N. Schubert, "Black Soldiers on the White Frontier: Some Factors Influencing Race Relations," Phylon, 32 (Winter, 1971), pp. 411-412; Valentine Republican, May 18, 1906, p. 1.
- <sup>25</sup> Valentine Republican, January 31, 1888, p. 1.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., March 9, 1906, p. 1.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., May 11, 1906, p. 1.
- <sup>28</sup> Omaha World-Herald, June 25, 1892, p. 1; James W. Savage and John T. Bell, History of the City of Omaha (New York and Chicago: Munsell and Co., 1894), p. 516.
- <sup>29</sup> Omaha World-Herald, June 24, 1892, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Valentine Republican., May 11, 1906, p. 1; May 25, 1906, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> "Fort Niobrara," THE WI-IYOHI, pp. 1-6; William H. Leckie, Buffalo Soldier: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), pp. 252-258; Ray Allen Billington, Martin Ridge, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 5th edition, 1972), p. 607.

<sup>32</sup> Elton Perkey, Perkey's Nebraska Place Names (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1982), p. 57; Frank N. Schubert, "History of Fort Robinson," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toledo, 1977), p. 26; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1885.

<sup>33</sup> Schubert, "Fort Robinson," pp. 113-115; Frank N. Schubert, "The Fort Robinson Y.M.C.A., 1902-1907: A Social Organization in a Black Regiment," Nebraska History, 55 (Spring, 1974), p. 166.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony J. Hytrek, "The History of Fort Robinson, Nebraska from 1900 to the Present," (M.A. Thesis, Chadron State College, 1971), p. 114; Crawford Tribune, May 9, 1902, p. 1, May 18, 1906, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Hytrek, "The History of Fort Robinson," p. 113-116.

<sup>38</sup> Crawford Tribune, March 13, 1903, p. 1, May 1, 1903, p. 1, August 26, 1904, p. 1, April 14, 1905, p. 1, March 2, 1906, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Schubert, "Fort Robinson," pp. 225-226.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 197, 198, 225.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 53, 71-73, 203; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1900.

<sup>42</sup> Harold J. Cook, Tales of the O-4 Ranch (Lincoln, 1968), p. 60-62, 93-100; Schubert, "Fort Robinson," pp. 203-207; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1900.

<sup>43</sup> Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1900; Schubert, "Fort Robinson," pp. 210-212.

- <sup>44</sup> Valentine Democrat, November 22, 1906, p. 1.
- <sup>45</sup> Schubert, "Fort Robinson," pp. 197-198; Valentine Republican, March 9, 1906, p. 1, May 11, 1906, p. 1; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1900.
- <sup>46</sup> Sara Bernson and Robert Eggers, "Black People in South Dakota History," South Dakota History, 7 (Summer, 1977), pp. 248-249.
- <sup>47</sup> Dorothy Weyer Creigh, Adams County: A Story of the Great Plains (Hastings, Nebraska: Hastings Centennial Commission, 1972), pp. 129-131; Manuscript Census of Population for Nebraska, 1900.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, I: 246; Overton, Burlington Route, p. 520.
- <sup>50</sup> Lillian Anthony-Welch, "Black People: The Nation Building Vision," Broken Hoops and Plains People (Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, 1976), pp. 105-109; Manuscript Census of Population, 1885, 1900.
- <sup>51</sup> Lillian Anthony-Welch, "Black People: The Nation Building Vision," p. 142; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1885, 1900; Works Projects Administration Writers' Program of Nebraska, The Negroes of Nebraska (Lincoln, Nebraska: Woodruff Printing Co., 1940), pp. 8-9.
- <sup>52</sup> W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, p. 44; Aurora Sun, February 27, 1903, p. 3; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880, 1900.
- <sup>53</sup> Nellie Snyder Yost, Before Today: The History of Holt County Nebraska (O'Neill, Nebraska: Miles Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 363-364; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880, 1900.
- <sup>54</sup> Dawson County, Nebraska 1890 School District 45 Census, Dawson County Superintendent Office, Lexington, Nebraska; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880, 1900.
- <sup>55</sup> Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 13, 167, 195-200.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 202-204.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 232-235.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 204-206.



<sup>59</sup> Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, pp. 732-738.

<sup>60</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880, 1885, 1900; Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, I: 246.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.; Yost, The History of Holt County, Nebraska, pp. 353-354.

<sup>64</sup> Overton, Burlington Route, p. 233; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1900; Anna Phillips and Velma Ball, History of Box Butte County, Nebraska (Hemingford, Nebraska: Ledger Printers, 1939), pp. 51-52, 97.

<sup>65</sup> Solomon D. Butcher, Pioneer History of Custer County, Harry Chrisman, ed. (Denver: Sage Books, 1965), p. 307; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1900.

<sup>66</sup> The Progress (Omaha), March 22, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Daily Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln), October 10, 1891, pp. 1-2; October 11, 1891, p. 2; Omaha World-Herald, October 10, 1891, pp. 1-2.

<sup>69</sup> Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln), October 11, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Warwick v. Messenger, 25, Ne. Sup. Ct., p. 674 (1889).

<sup>72</sup> Haynes v. Hoover, 65 Ne. Sup. Ct., p. 557 (1904).

<sup>73</sup> Marion Marsh Brown, "The Brownville Story: Portrait of a Phoenix, 1854-1974," Nebraska History, 55 (Spring, 1978), pp. 110-112; W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, p. 28; John H. Dundas, Nemaha County (Auburn, Nebraska: N.P., 1902), pp. 188-189.

<sup>74</sup> Eldora Frances Hess, "The Negro in Nebraska," (M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1932), pp. 69-70; W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, p. 28.

## CHAPTER V

### HOPES FOR A NEW CENTURY: BLACK NEBRASKANS, 1900-1930

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Nebraskans looked forward to a successful future and tried to forget the 1890s depression. The success of the 1898 Omaha Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition generated optimism and high hopes among Nebraskans for the twentieth century just at the time that the state's economy started to expand. Railroad mileage continued to increase in the state. In 1902 the automobile first appeared on Lincoln's streets. The public also listened to and bought the new phonographs or "talking machines" while the telephone's use gradually spread throughout the state as new lines were built. The times were definitely changing. <sup>1</sup>

In spite of the optimism and progress, immigration into Nebraska remained modest during the first decade of the 1900s, when compared with the previous twenty years. The population in the state grew by almost 132,000, a ten percent increase from 1900. Meanwhile, Nebraska's black population increased by 1,420, a twenty percent increase. Outside of Douglas County, the largest black population increases occurred in Hall, Dawes, and Cherry Counties. By 1910, railroads and their terminal locations continued to have a major impact on the settlement patterns of blacks in Nebraska. Crawford, which was situated at the intersection

of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad with the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, and also located near Fort Robinson, saw its black population increase from twenty-four to sixty-eight people between 1900 and 1910. In Grand Island, where the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy crossed the Union Pacific Railroad, the number of blacks increased from 42 to 129. Eight of Grand Island's blacks, representing ten percent of the black workers in the area, were employed by the railroad as porters. In Crawford, six black railroad porters also comprised ten percent of that area's black work force. <sup>2</sup>

The overall percentage of blacks employed by the railroad does not represent a significant proportion of the black population in either community, and it might seem that the railroad terminals did not play as large a role in luring blacks as might be imagined. However, railroad communities provided other job opportunities for blacks, because a higher number of hotels and restaurants existed in these towns because of the business opportunities that the railroad generated. In the few communities across the state with two railroads, the number of hotels and restaurants was even greater than in one-line towns, expanding the opportunities for blacks to gain employment.

It has been noted earlier that several black Army retirees continued to work at Fort Robinson, helping to solidify Crawford's black community. In addition to the fort, the

railroad provided opportunities for many of the settlers. Twenty-six percent (15) of Crawford's black workers were employed as cooks, waiters, hotel porters, and hotel janitors. In Grand Island, hotels and restaurants provided employment for twenty-four percent (18) of the city's black laborers. <sup>3</sup>

The black populations in at least three other counties were significantly influenced by the location of communities on rail lines. Blacks in Kearney, Hastings, and Alliance depended on railroads and the businesses catering to them. At Alliance, a major terminal on the Burlington Railroad and the county seat of Box Butte County, black workers were employed as porters, cooks, janitors, and dishwashers in local hotels and restaurants. Although the number of blacks in Box Butte County declined from seventy-eight in 1900 to fifty-five in 1910, the number of blacks employed by the railroad and the local hotels increased during the same period. <sup>4</sup> Although no blacks in Adams County worked for railroads in 1910, twenty-seven percent (11) of Hastings' black laborers were employed as hotel cooks, porters, and janitors. In the central part of the state, all of Buffalo County's employed blacks worked in local hotels as porters, cooks, or waiters. <sup>5</sup>

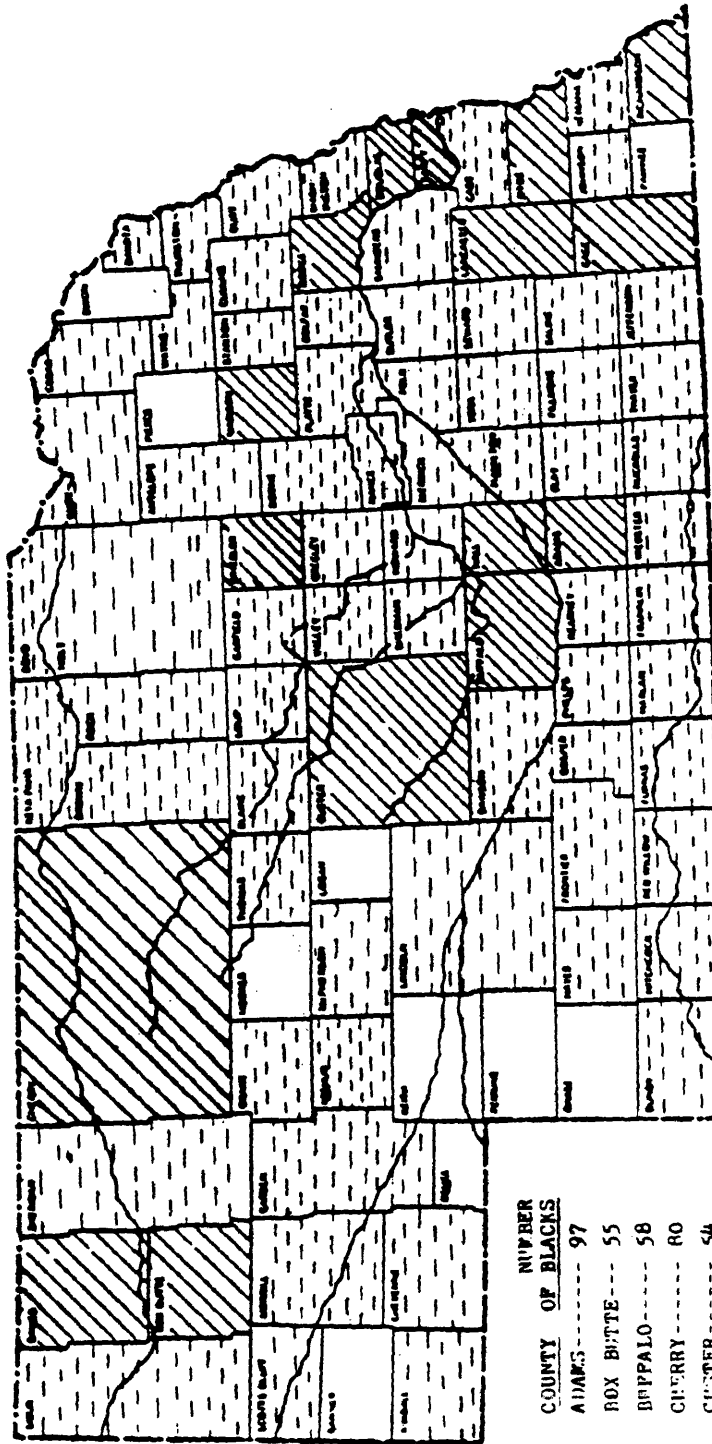
By 1910, an increasing number of blacks had moved to the formerly unsettled sandhills area in north-central Nebraska primarily as a result of the Kinkaid Homestead Act. The

Kinkaid Act allowed settlers to homestead 640 acres of sandhills land, four times the acreage of the original homestead act. Many blacks saw this as their final chance to become land owners and some blacks moved to the sandhills region from various areas of the state. The majority of black farmers locating in Cherry County moved there from Dawson County. In 1910, thirty Cherry County blacks were either homesteading Kinkaid lands or working as farm laborers. In more modest numbers, blacks also moved to Wheeler, Grant, Thomas, Blaine, and Garfield counties to homestead Kinkaid land. Because of the sparse population in the sandhills counties, they made up a higher percentage of the total population in these counties than in most other areas of the state. The sandhills counties of Wheeler, Dawes, and Box Butte had black concentrations ranging from 1.25 to 1.5 percent. Douglas County, where blacks made up three percent of the population, had the highest concentration of blacks in Nebraska. Blacks constituted 1.2 percent of the population of Lancaster County, the state's fifth highest concentration. In 1910, 5,208 blacks, sixty-eight percent of the state's 7,689 blacks, lived in Omaha. Other than Douglas County, only Lancaster with 870, Hall with 129, and Dawes with 105, reported over 100 blacks. Ten counties in Nebraska reported between fifty and 100 blacks. Overall, blacks in 1910 represented only .65 percent of Nebraska's population. <sup>6</sup>

Black migration into Nebraska remained minimal throughout the first fifteen years of the twentieth century. After the hard times experienced in the 1890s, few blacks journeyed to Nebraska to seek employment and make a home. As a result, in the 1910 census more Nebraska blacks reported Nebraska as their birth place than any other state. Thirty percent of blacks were native Nebraskans and eighteen percent were born in Missouri. Only Custer, Box Butte, Dawes, and Gage counties had more blacks who were natives of one other state than those who were Nebraska natives. In Box Butte County, Colorado blacks, and in Gage County, Kansans, represented the largest segment of the black population. These totals indicate that blacks did not migrate to Nebraska in large numbers during the first few years of the century and when they did, they usually came from contiguous states. <sup>7</sup>

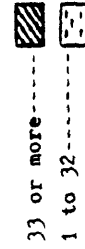
During the first decade of the twentieth century, as some Nebraska blacks moved to more rural areas, those who remained in the state's cities experienced increased discrimination as a result of continuing social and economic hardships. According to a sociological study of Lincoln blacks made in 1904, slightly over thirty percent of Lincoln's black population arrived in the city between 1899 and 1904. It appears that by 1900, blacks were again migrating into Lincoln to enjoy expanding job opportunities. However, by this time, blacks confronted growing discrimination, which forced increasing numbers of them to settle in less

NEBRASKA COUNTIES WITH BLACK POPULATIONS IN 1910



COUNTY	NUMBER OF BLACKS
ADAMS	97
BOX BUTTE	55
BUFFALO	58
CHERRY	80
CUSTER	54
DAMES	105
DODGE	56
DODGEMAN	5208
GAGE	58
HALL	129
LAWCASTER	870
MADISON	61
OTOE	81
RICHARDSON	83
SARPY	36
WHEELER	33

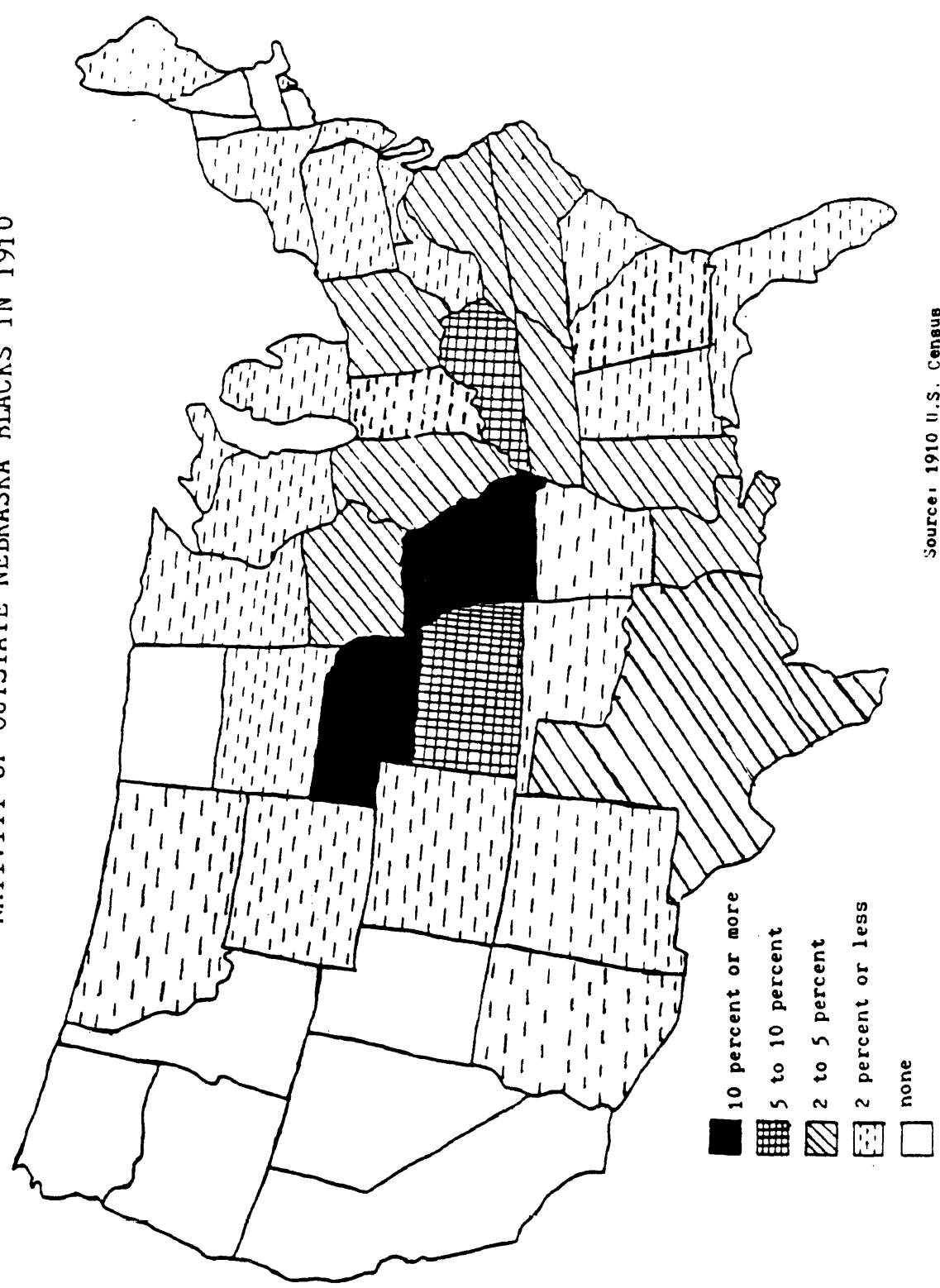
BLACK POPULATION



Source: 1910 U.S. Census

FIGURE 5.1

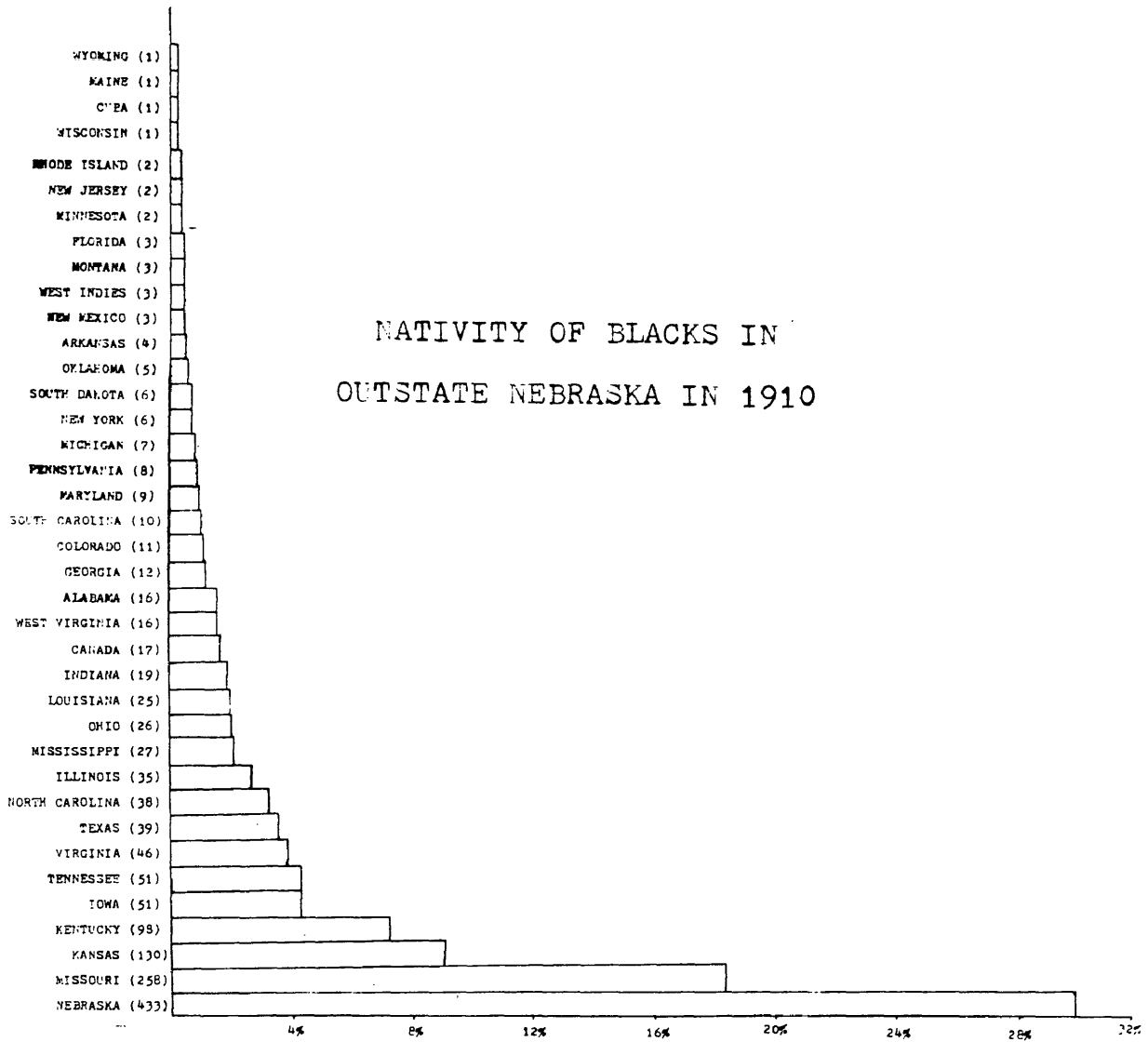
NATIVITY OF OUTSTATE NEBRASKA BLACKS IN 1910



Source: 1910 U.S. Census

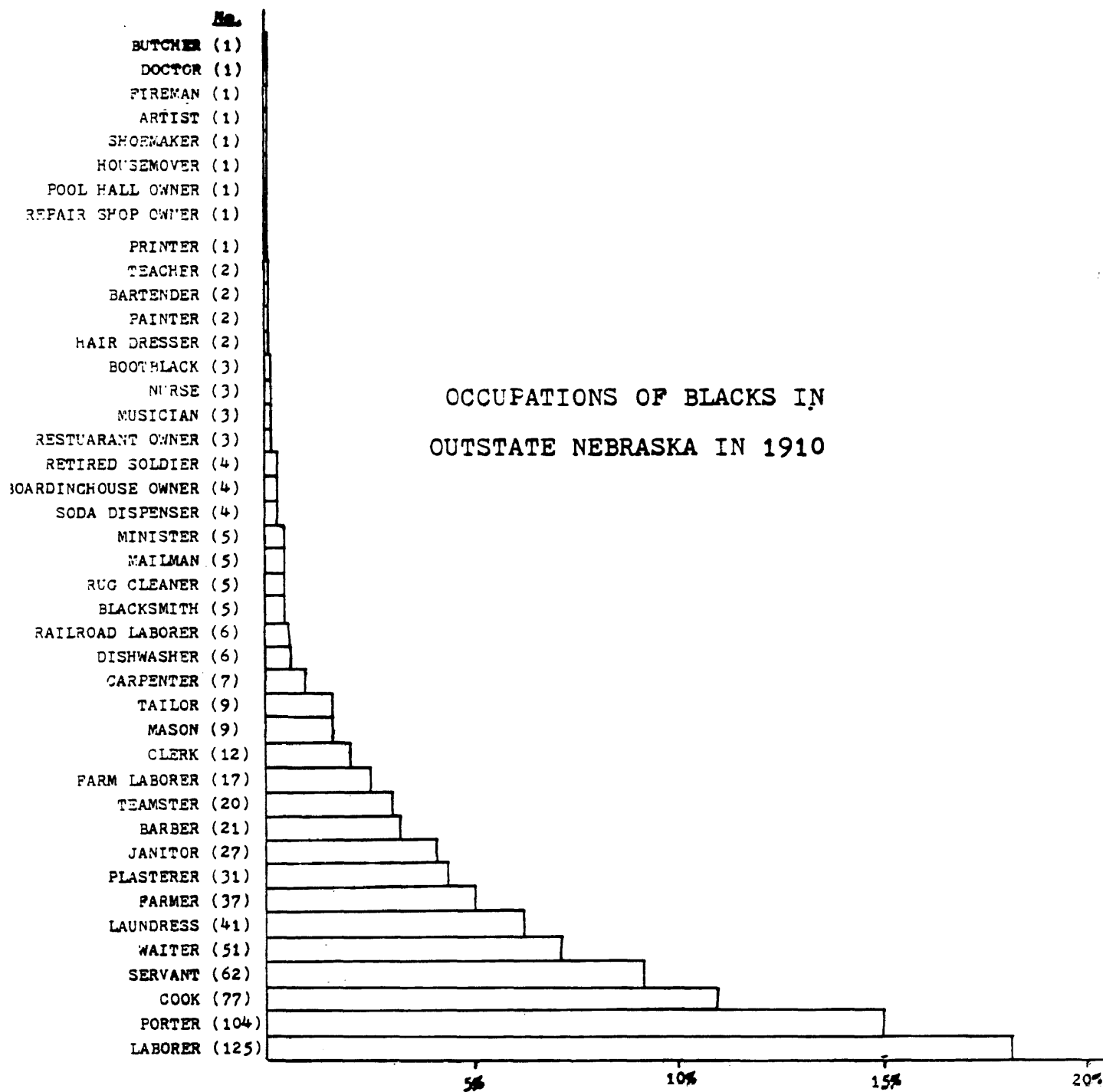
FIGURE 5.2





Source: 1910 U.S. Census

FIGURE 5.3



Source: 1910 U.S. Census

FIGURE 5.4

desirable areas of the city. Although Lincoln blacks lived throughout the city, low wages forced a large number to live in the less costly and consequently, sub-standard residences in the vicinity of the Burlington and Rock Island Railroad tracks. <sup>8</sup>

Lincoln's black residents were primarily employed as unskilled and semi-skilled laborers. Only four percent reported owning and operating a business. In 1910, fifty percent of Lincoln's 355 black workers were employed either as waiters (12%), porters (12%), cooks (9%), janitors (7%), barbers (5%), and servants (5%). Four Lincoln blacks were ministers. Dr. Arthur Moss was the only black physician, but a small number of blacks also worked as teachers and nurses. The 1904 study also indicates that the average monthly income of blacks was between thirty and forty dollars, much lower than the area's overall average income of sixty dollars per month. In 1932, a comparison of monthly rentals in Lincoln revealed that the average renter in the city paid thirty-five dollars for housing, while blacks paid an average rent of twenty dollars. Evidently, lower wages forced many blacks to live in less desirable neighborhoods of the city. <sup>9</sup>

A similar situation existed in Grand Island, home of the third highest black population in the state. Most of that community's 129 black residents lived on East Second Street, along the path of the Burlington Railroad. As in Lincoln,

many of Grand Island's blacks worked in lower paying occupations, and as a result, lived in the less desirable part of town. This area soon became known as the "Negro section," and was often referred to as "Foggy Bottom." In other areas of the state, black neighborhoods were not as well defined as in Omaha, Lincoln, and Grand Island, mostly because of smaller black populations. <sup>10</sup>

While the larger black settlements in the state were experiencing increased segregation, Nebraska did not have any laws which forced residential or economic segregation. Nebraska's blacks were legally able to attend public schools alongside whites, unlike in Kansas, where a board of education could organize a separate school for blacks. These schools were usually organized where there was a heavy concentration of blacks. In 1900, eighty-six percent of school-age blacks in Kansas attended school, while eighty-five percent of school-age blacks in Nebraska attended regularly. In 1910, the number of Kansas blacks attending school decreased to eighty-five percent and the number of Nebraska blacks attending school increased to eighty-eight percent. Although Nebraska did not have segregated school systems, certain schools in Nebraska educated most of the black students. Because blacks generally lived in the same neighborhoods in the larger communities, a de facto segregated system developed. <sup>11</sup>

While most laws in Nebraska were made without regard to race, marriages between blacks and whites remained illegal. Nebraska's territorial government had enacted a law making illegal any marriage between a white person and an individual with at least one-fourth Negro blood. During 1913, the law was made even stricter, as state representatives unanimously passed legislation forbidding marriages between a white person and anyone who was at least one-eighth Negro, Japanese, or Chinese. In addition to voiding the marriage, punishment included a fine of up to one-hundred dollars and up to six months in jail. The unanimous approval in both Nebraska's House and Senate confirm the strong attitudes most Nebraskans had against interracial marriages and it also demonstrates how Nebraskans were keeping in step with white residents in the rest of the nation who were developing a less tolerant attitude toward non-whites. <sup>12</sup>

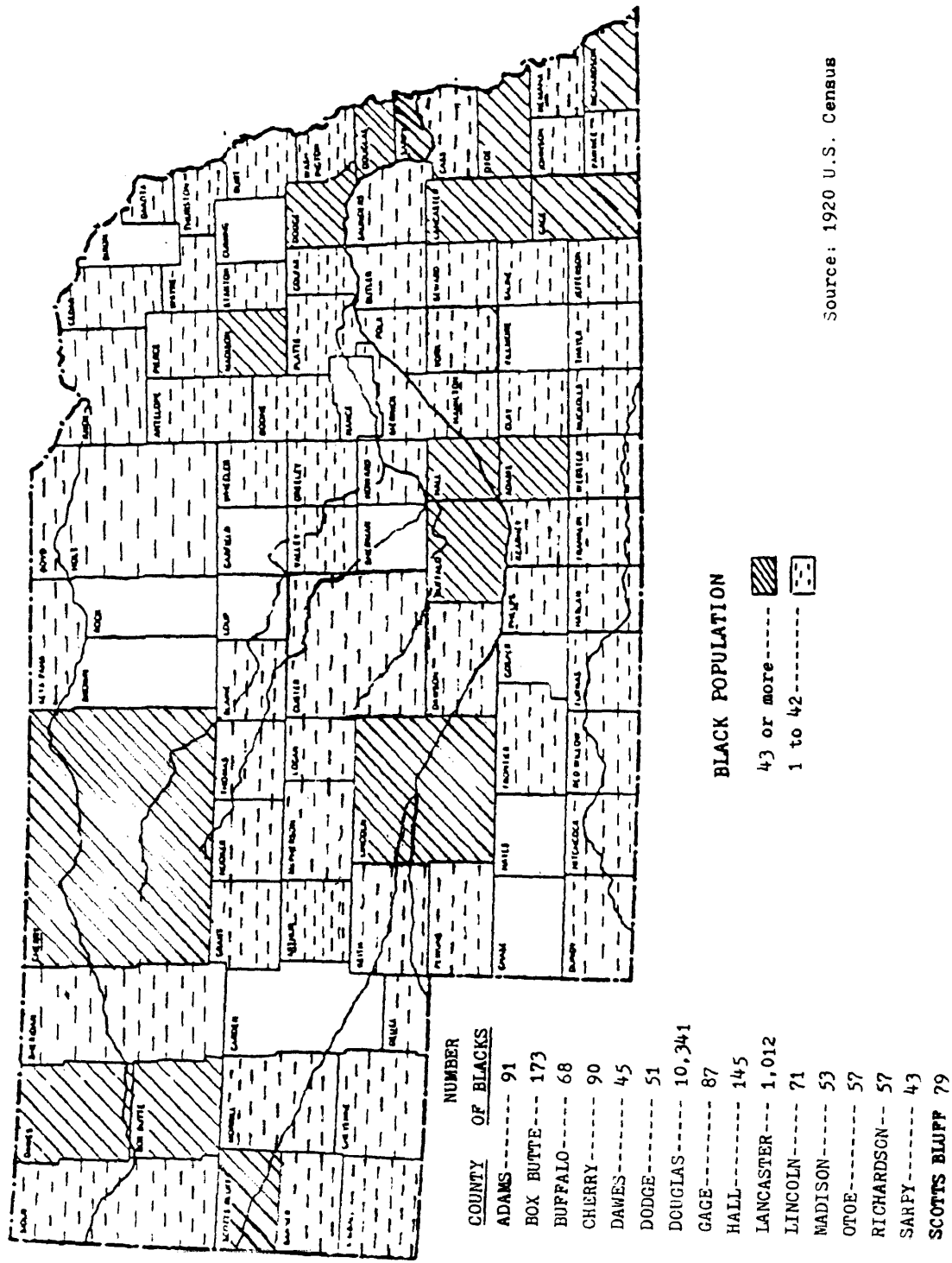
Nebraskans reflected an attitude toward blacks which was similar to that held by residents of other states. Many states had laws concerning race, and some continually enacted laws regarding segregation. Many of these laws remained in force until they were nullified by federal civil rights legislation. Over forty states had laws prohibiting interracial marriages until the mid-1960s. Ironically Kansas, which had legalized segregated schools, did not have a law forbidding mixed marriages. Many Nebraskans of mixed

descent who wished to marry, traveled to Kansas to have the wedding ceremony performed. <sup>13</sup>

America's entry into World War I in 1917 acted as the catalyst for another large black migration into the state. As Nebraskans answered the call to war, many industries were left in desperate need of workers. Omaha and Lincoln attracted practically all of the new workers coming into the state, and a significant number of emigrating workers were black. In order to obtain the needed workers, many meat packing plants paid the fares of southern blacks to bring the workers north. In addition, railroad companies pitched in by offering reduced rates to groups of twenty-five workers or more. As a result, between 1910 and 1920, Omaha's black population doubled from 5,208 to 10,341. Lincoln's black population increased from 873 to 1,012 during the same period. <sup>14</sup>

Blacks also were attracted to the communities of Scottsbluff, North Platte, Alliance, and South Sioux City. Increased irrigation development in Scotts Bluff and Lincoln Counties helped to increase agricultural production. This boosted business activity in the communities of Scottsbluff and North Platte, which stimulated railroad business, and in turn provided job openings for many unskilled and semi-skilled laborers. Some of these positions were filled by blacks. Similar business activity in Sioux City, Iowa, which helped to increase the economic growth of South Sioux

NEBRASKA COUNTIES WITH BLACK POPULATIONS IN 1920



Source: 1920 U.S. Census

FIGURE 5.5

NEBRASKA COUNTIES WITH BLACK POPULATIONS IN 1930



COUNTY	NUMBER OF BLACKS
ADAMS	102
BOX BUTTE	228
BUFFALO	35
CHERRY	33
DAKOTA	77
DAVIES	46
DOUGE	58
DOUGLAS	11,166
GAGE	91
HALL	132
LANCASTER	1,138
MADISON	41
LINCOLN	35
OTTOE	61
RICHARDSON	54
SCOTT'S BLUFF	99

BLACK POPULATION

- 32 or more
- 1 to 32

Source: 1930 U.S. Census

FIGURE 5.6



City, Nebraska, attracted a few blacks to that community in northeastern Nebraska's Dakota County by 1930. <sup>15</sup>

The black population in the rest of the state realized a much smaller increase during the same time period. The largest percentage gain of blacks in outstate Nebraska occurred in Box Butte County where an industrial boom was caused by the war. Many lakes immediately east of Alliance contained alkali from which potash could be produced and this was utilized as an oxidizing agent for explosives and for fertilizer. The impact that this industry had on the area is reflected by the area's population gains. The small community of Antioch, located fifteen miles east of Alliance, was in the center of the potash-producing area and it hosted the largest potash industrial plant. Antioch's population grew from less than 300 to nearly 2,500 during the war. Likewise, Alliance's population doubled during the same period, aided by the fact that it was also a division headquarters for the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad. As the railroad operations expanded, the number of hotels and restaurants increased to accommodate the growing population. Blacks in the county were employed as restaurant laborers, hotel porters, railroad laborers and porters, and within the potash industry. <sup>16</sup>

During World War I increased anxiety and tension between blacks and whites occurred as larger numbers of blacks moved into the state. One of the first official discriminatory

acts occurred on the athletic fields of the University of Nebraska. In 1917, University officials announced that black students would no longer be allowed to participate in collegiate sports activities. Ever since 1892, a few blacks had participated in inter-collegiate sports at the University, and during 1896, George A. Flippin was elected the first black captain on a Nebraska football team. Other black players who participated include William Johnson, Bud Taylor, John Johnson, and Clint Ross. University officials apparently felt that increased racial tensions in Nebraska made it undesirable to have blacks participate in sporting events while many white athletes were fighting the war in Europe. In addition, pressure from other schools that forbade blacks to take part in sports probably encouraged the University to keep all blacks out of athletics, rather than have other teams refuse to play them.<sup>17</sup>

By the end of the war, nation-wide discrimination and hatred against blacks reached critical levels. Veterans returned to changed neighborhoods where blacks now held their old jobs and lived alongside them. In most cases, the whites regained their old jobs, which only added to the tension. Blacks had moved to northern industrial cities when laborers were needed to replace those that had gone to fight, but now that the war was over, the government made little effort to help blacks retain their jobs and homes. As a result of these tensions, what became known as "Red

Summer" erupted. Between June and December of 1919 at least twenty-five race riots occurred in the United States. One of these riots was in Omaha.<sup>18</sup>

In late September, 1919, chaos erupted in Omaha, when a black named Will Brown allegedly attacked a nineteen-year-old white girl, Agnes Loebeck. Brown was arrested and held in the county court house. Area citizens learned of the attack and Brown's subsequent arrest on September 28th. A mob of several hundred people gathered at the court house and demanded that the legal authorities turn Brown over to them for quick punishment. The local police refused the mob's demand, and the lawless group promptly set fire to the court house. Mayor Edward Smith was present and desperately tried to calm the outraged crowd which had grown to an estimated 4,000 people. He and other legal authorities were seized by the mob just as Will Brown was dragged from the cell, repeatedly shot and then hanged. After that, his body was cut down, tied to an automobile, dragged through Omaha's streets, and then burned. During the uprising, threats were made against the entire black population of Omaha. Many blacks reportedly left Omaha during the crisis and others stayed in their homes.<sup>19</sup> The governor called out the National Guard to restore order, but by the time the troops arrived, the uprising had quieted and most of the rioters had returned to their homes. Property damage amounted to nearly one million dollars, but more importantly, a man had

been murdered, two other persons had died in the upheaval, while others were severely injured, including Mayor Edward Smith.<sup>20</sup>

A recent article written by political scientist Orville Menard discusses the political situation in Omaha during the summer of 1919. He explains the role of Omaha political boss Tom Dennison and editor of the Omaha Bee, Victor Rosewater, in the 1919 riot. Menard found, "that there is little doubt they [Dennison and Rosewater] helped create a climate ripe for mob action, thereby realizing the goal of discrediting [Mayor] Smith and recapturing control of city government in the next election."<sup>21</sup> He also concluded that "the riot was not merely a spontaneous reaction to racial tensions that had been building through the summer of 1919 in Omaha and other American cities."<sup>22</sup> Both of these statements are logical inferences about the Omaha race situation of 1919. The opposition press in Omaha acted like many throughout the country by discrediting politicians that they did not support. The racial tensions in post-World War I America provided newspaper editors with an easy target to exploit the ineffectiveness of politicians in power. Earlier in this thesis it was noted that some of Nebraska's newspapers were very active in manipulating the Exoduster situation of 1879 for political reasons. Similarly, during the summer of 1919, some newspapers throughout the country manipulated racial incidents, to further their own political

ambitions. <sup>23</sup>

Whatever the contributing factors which helped to cause it, the race riot and its aftermath immediately became a major concern for Omaha and Nebraska officials, as well as the state's citizens. Blacks across the state undoubtedly were very worried about the Omaha tragedy. To many it must have seemed that the cancer of race prejudice was spreading out of control and now it was in their own backyard. Only two months earlier, Nebraska blacks heard about a race-related riot in Chicago which resulted in the deaths of thirty-eight people, including twenty-three blacks. Other race riots occurred in Knoxville, Tennessee and Elaine, Arkansas that summer, resulting in additional deaths. Nebraska blacks had legitimate reason to be anxious about their future. <sup>24</sup>

It appears that most of Omaha's citizens were embarrassed and felt disgraced by the incident. The day after the uprising the Omaha World-Herald reflected their shame editorially:

We have felt, however briefly, the fetid breath of anarchy on our cheeks. We have experienced the cold chill of fear which it arouses. We have seen as in a nightmare its awful possibilities. We have learned how frail is the barrier which divides civilization from the primal jungle, and we have been given to see clearly what the barrier is. It is law. It is the might of the law wisely and fearlessly administered. It is the respect for and obedience to law on the part of members of society. When these fail us, all things fail. When they are lost, all will be lost. Should the day ever come when the rule that was in Omaha Sunday night became the dominant rule, the grasses

of the jungle would over spread our civilization, its wild denizens, human and brute would make their foul feast on the ruins and the God who rules over us would turn his face in horror from a world given over to bestiality. May the lesson of Sunday night sink deep.<sup>25</sup>

If the shame showered on Omaha by the local populace was not enough, residents of Omaha could read criticisms by newspaper editors in other cities. An editorial in the Topeka Plain Dealer stated, "Omaha adds to the shame and disgrace of white America. Acts of white thugs are again laid at the door of blacks."<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, in Omaha, a federal investigation headed by General Leonard Wood was initiated to find out who was at fault in the incident and to make recommendations for preventing similar events in the future. Many people were arrested during the first few days following the incident. By October 2, over sixty people had been arrested, most of them teenagers. Wood finished his investigation on October 6, concluding that a weak city administration and a lack of action by Omaha's Police Chief Marshall Eberstein were major contributions to the mob scene. Wood recommended that Eberstein be removed from office and he criticized the police department for allowing an initial crowd of vocal youths to grow into an uncontrollable mob.<sup>27</sup>

Racial conditions in Omaha and throughout the nation gradually improved, but all of the problems did not go away. The racial incident which occurred in Omaha would not be forgotten soon. Blacks in Nebraska's communities were be-

coming more segregated from whites. This caused anxiety among both blacks and whites, which escalated racial tensions. Another racial incident, this time in North Platte on July 13, 1929, indicates how volatile the race situation remained. <sup>28</sup>

Although North Platte in 1920 had only seventy-one black residents, the black population in the city had almost tripled from the twenty-five persons reported in 1910. Most of the blacks were employed as hotel waiters, cooks, and porters. <sup>29</sup>

The incident, sometimes referred to as the North Platte race riot, involved the murder of Edward Green, a North Platte police officer by a black man named Louis (Slim) Seeman. Earlier in the week, Seeman had been convicted of beating Ada Miller, a black woman who lived with him. He was given the opportunity to pay a \$100 fine, remain in jail, or leave North Platte for good. He agreed to leave North Platte, and in the late evening of July 12, boarded a west-bound train. Just beyond the outskirts of North Platte, Seeman jumped off the train and returned to his former residence. Early on July 13, Ada Miller discovered that Seeman was still in the city and immediately notified the authorities. Police officers George Fitzgibbons and Edward Green went to his home to apprehend him. Meanwhile, Seeman secured himself in the upper floor of his home. Green climbed the stairs to search the upper level. When he

reached the top of the stairs, Seeman fired at him with a shotgun. Green fell to the bottom of the stairs, mortally wounded.<sup>30</sup>

Immediately after the shooting, Fitzgibbons called for more help, and numerous policemen, firemen, and local members of the Nebraska National Guard situated themselves outside the Seeman residence. Attempts to persuade Seeman to surrender failed, and a new group of men was chosen to move into the building. Once inside, the men removed Green's body and then cautiously attempted to apprehend Seeman. They proceeded upstairs, but found that portion of the house vacated. Seeman was discovered hiding under a trap door in the ground floor of the house. Again, efforts were made to call him out, but he refused to move. The men decided to burn him out of his position with a gasoline fire. Amid the fire, Seeman allegedly took his own life with the same sawed-off shotgun which he had used to kill Green.<sup>31</sup>

The ink had barely dried on the area newspapers' accounts of the incident when a new twist was added to the story. It was reported that after the incident black residents in North Platte were warned to leave town or be subjected to physical violence. Both the Lincoln Star and the Omaha World-Herald highlighted the story with the respective headlines, "Negroes Leave North Platte" and "Negroes Flee Mob Wrath".<sup>32</sup> The earlier deaths did not raise much concern



among state officials; however, the threat of racial violence and a possible riot prompted public officials to investigate the matter. A delegation of black leaders from Omaha and Lincoln met with Governor Arthur Weaver to discuss the incident and subsequent attempts to force blacks from their homes by North Platte residents. Weaver told the group that he had ordered Attorney General Christian A. Sorensen to conduct a complete investigation of the affairs in North Platte. <sup>33</sup>

Investigations by the Attorney General revealed sufficient evidence to bring charges of unlawful assembly and disturbing the peace against North Platte residents Albert Hastings, James Miller, John Campbell, and Edward Supanchik. Overwhelming evidence against the men was presented at a jury trial during mid-August. At least fifteen witnesses testified that they had been contacted by one or more of the accused and asked to help eliminate the black presence in North Platte. In spite of the evidence, the jury found all four men not guilty. <sup>34</sup>

Later research into the 1929 North Platte incident by David Dales indicates that quite possibly Seeman was shot by one of the police officers, instead of committing suicide. It also seems reasonable that the four men charged with the misdemeanor of unlawful assembly and disturbing the peace probably would have been found guilty by a more objective jury. The quick action taken by Governor Weaver probably

did more to quiet the situation in North Platte and gain the respect of both black and white citizens in the state than a jury's guilty verdict could have done. It appears that both the black and white communities were appeased with the final outcome of events in North Platte during the summer of 1929. <sup>35</sup>

Certainly not all conflicts which occurred in Nebraska between blacks and whites in the early part of the decade resulted in potential riot situations. It appears that in many areas of the state, especially rural ones, blacks and whites worked and lived together harmoniously. However, as each year passed, blacks increasingly moved to the larger cities in the state. In rural areas black numbers decreased to a point where very few remained. As they moved into the larger towns to find employment, they found increasingly segregated conditions. As a result of living in separate sections of the cities, suspicion and distrust were nurtured. In most cases, blacks avoided confrontations that might upset white citizens. Omaha had the largest percentage of blacks in the state, yet they represented less than six percent of the city's total population in 1920. <sup>36</sup> It is clear that blacks did not have the numbers to stand up to the white majority if there was a confrontation. As a result, blacks continually faced the possibility of having to leave their homes if racial problems occurred. <sup>37</sup>

The early years of the twentieth century were important

in the solidification of a black press in Nebraska. Black newspapers had been published sporadically in Nebraska ever since Horace Newsom published the Western Post in Hastings during 1876.<sup>38</sup> A publishing attempt by Nebraska's black population did not occur again until 1889, when The Progress was published by F.L. Barnett in Omaha for slightly over one year.<sup>39</sup> Between 1892 and 1899 the Afro-American Sentinel was published in Omaha by Cyrus Bell. The Enterprise, published in Omaha by George Franklin and Thomas Mahammitt existed from 1893 until 1911.<sup>40</sup>

Between the years 1911 and 1915 no known newspapers specifically addressing black concerns existed in the state. After examining many newspapers in towns that supported black populations, it appears that local newspapers wrote few reports about black residents, reflecting a practice increasingly followed throughout the United States in the early twentieth century. Historian Kenneth Porter labeled blacks "the invisible men" because of the continual absence of mention of them in newspapers and other publications of the time.<sup>41</sup> It seems that news concerning blacks was not sufficiently reported even in Omaha after 1911.

This vacuum was filled when the Reverend John A. Williams began publishing The Monitor in Omaha during July, 1915. In the paper's first edition, Williams said that the newspaper "has come into being to satisfy a popular demand, to meet an urgent need, namely, that of a special publication and

mouthpiece for the colored people of the community." <sup>42</sup> Williams' newspaper promoted segregation between the races and outlined opportunities available to blacks. Although the paper was little more than a local happenings sheet for blacks, some local political actions were addressed from time to time. After the lynching of Will Brown in 1919, Williams praised the actions of Mayor Edward Smith in a Monitor editorial, calling him a white hero. Williams attacked the Omaha Bee for trying to undermine the mayor politically and for over-publicizing alleged assaults by blacks. In defending his charges, Williams declared that of the seventeen persons charged with assault who awaited trial in district court, only four were Negroes. He went on to say that "one, a white man, Alfred J. Ramsey, who was accused of attempting an assault on a sixteen-year-old colored girl was found not guilty by a jury." He claimed that all blacks who are charged are found guilty and usually given the maximum sentence allowed. <sup>43</sup> Only rarely did Williams blame state or city officials for the conditions that blacks endured in Nebraska. Instead, he promoted black self-help programs as the practical way of assisting his race. <sup>44</sup>

By 1920, George Parker began publishing another black newspaper, The New Era, in Omaha. Parker took a tougher stand against racism than did The Monitor. In July, 1922, a front page article headlined, "Women attacked by White Brute," condemned certain judges in Nebraska for unfair

racial treatment in court. It claimed that blacks usually were convicted and given heavy sentences, while whites were rarely convicted for the same crimes, and when found guilty, their sentences were usually light. <sup>45</sup> Clifford Mitchell and C.E. Galloway began publishing The Omaha Guide in Omaha in 1927. This paper, published until 1958, was the only black newspaper which survived past the 1920s. The Guide concerned itself with a wider variety of issues and news than did the Monitor. As the Guide became more popular, Monitor subscriptions declined to the point that its publication was ceased in 1929. <sup>46</sup>

While black Nebraskans had to turn to their own newspapers for news concerning the black community, they also depended on other predominately black institutions as a result of escalated segregation. Overall, between 1910 and 1930, blacks increasingly worked in low paying, unskilled occupations which created a black lower class. By 1930, Nebraska's blacks had few employment choices and only a slight chance for receiving a higher education, thus worsening their already poor economic situation. Between 1910 and 1930, many blacks left the smaller towns and rural areas for the cities of Lincoln and Omaha. In 1910, seventy-nine percent of Nebraska's blacks lived in these two cities, and by 1930, ninety percent of the state's black population resided in these urban centers. It appears that blacks in the state continued to lose ground in the struggle for equality.

Actions by state officials concerning marriage laws and university athletics demonstrated the high level of prejudice that many Nebraskans apparently felt towards blacks. This perceived lower status was tragically confirmed during the Omaha riot of 1919 and the North Platte incident in 1929. These actions illustrate all too well the deep-seated nature of racial bias within the state.

<sup>1</sup> James C. Olson, History of Nebraska, second edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 248-260.

<sup>2</sup> Richard C. Overton, Burlington Route: A History of the Burlington Lines (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 520-521; Robert G. Athearn, Union Pacific Country (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. 229; Manuscript Census of Population, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Nebraska Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives. (copies in Nebraska State Historical Society).

<sup>3</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1910.

<sup>4</sup> Overton, Burlington Route, pp. 520-521; Athearn, Union Pacific Country, p. 229; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1910.

<sup>5</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1910.

<sup>6</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1910; Forrest M. Stith, Sunrises and Sunsets for Freedom (New York: Vantage Press, 1973), pp. 19-31.

<sup>7</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1910.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Emily Davies and Genevieve Marsh, "A Study of the Negro in Lincoln," (M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1904), pp. 40-46.

<sup>9</sup> Davies and Marsh, "The Negro in Lincoln," pp. 108-112; Nebraska Manuscript Census, 1910; Eldora Frances Hess, "The Negro in Nebraska," (M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1932), p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> Work Progress Administration, The Negroes of Nebraska (Lincoln: Woodruff Printing Company, 1940), p. 19; Nebraska Manuscript Census, 1910.

<sup>11</sup> Bureau of Census, Negro Population in the United States; 1790-1915 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), pp. 376, 390-398.

<sup>12</sup> Revised Statutes of the Territory of Nebraska (Omaha: E.B. Taylor, printer, 1866), p. 254; Compiled Statutes of Nebraska, 1929 (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1931), p. 1033; Nebraska Legislature, Senate, 48th Session, April 7, 1913, Journal, p. 841; Nebraska Legislature, House, 48th Session, February 18, 1913, Journal, p. 434.

<sup>13</sup> Hess, "The Negro in Nebraska", pp. 57-60; W. Sherman Savage, Blacks in the West (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), pp. 188-190.

<sup>14</sup> W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, p. 12; Bureau of Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Volume III, Population (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923), pp. 595-600; Elinor L. Brown, History of Lancaster County, Then and Now (Lincoln: Np., 1971), p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Velma D. Ball and Anna N. Phillips, History of Box Butte County, Nebraska (Hemingford, Nebraska: Ledger Printers, 1939), pp. 50-52, 97; Ira Bare, An Illustrated History of Lincoln County Nebraska 2 vols. (Chicago and New York: American Historical Society, 1920), I: 237; Grant L. Shumway, History of Western Nebraska and its People 3 vols. (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Co., 1921), I: 112; George Molstad, Dakota County History (Dallas, Texas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 10-15.

<sup>16</sup> Ball and Phillips, History of Box Butte, pp. 50-52; Richard E. Jensen, "Nebraska's World War I Potash Industry," Nebraska History, 68 (Spring, 1987), pp. 28-42; 1920 U.S. Census, Nebraska Population, III: 595-600.

<sup>17</sup> J. Harvey Kerns, "Study of the Social and Economic Status of the Negro in Lincoln, Nebraska," (Typewritten manuscript, The Race Relations Committee of Lincoln, 1933), pp. 25-26; W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, pp. 34-35; Dennis N. Mihelich, "The Formation of the Lincoln Urban League," Nebraska History, 68 (Summer, 1987), p. 67.

<sup>18</sup> John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans 4th edition, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), pp. 357-361; Arthur Age, "The Omaha Riot of 1919," (M.A. Thesis, Creighton University, Omaha, 1964), pp. 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), September 26, 1919, p. 1, September 27, 1919, p. 1, September 29, 1919, p. 1, September 30, 1919, p. 1; The Monitor (Omaha), October 2, 1919, pp. 1-4.

<sup>20</sup> The Monitor, October 2, 1919, pp. 1-4.

<sup>21</sup> Orville D. Menard, "Tom Dennison, The Omaha Bee, and the 1919 Omaha Race Riot," Nebraska History, 68 (Winter, 1987) p. 153.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>23</sup> Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, pp. 357-358.



<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 357-361; The Monitor, October 2, 1919, pp. 1-4.

<sup>25</sup> Omaha World-Herald (morning edition), September 29, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Topeka Plain Dealer, October 3, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Menard, "Tom Dennison, The Omaha Bee," pp. 161-163; Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln), October 6, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, p. 19; David G. Dales, "North Platte Racial Incident: Black - White Confrontation, 1929," Nebraska History, 60 (Fall, 1979), pp. 424-446.

<sup>29</sup> Bare, History of Lincoln County, I: 237; 1920 U.S. Census, Nebraska Population, III: 595-600.

<sup>30</sup> North Platte Telegraph (evening edition), July 12, 1929, p. 1, July 13, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., July 13, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Lincoln Star, July 14, 1929, p. 1; Omaha World-Herald, July 14, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Dales, "North Platte Racial Incident," pp. 431-433.

<sup>34</sup> North Platte Telegraph (evening edition), August 13, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Dales, "North Platte Racial Incident," pp. 426, 440-443.

<sup>36</sup> 1920 U.S. Census, Nebraska Population, III: 595-600; Bureau of Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1939, Population, Vol. III, pp. 82-95.

<sup>37</sup> Dales, "North Platte Racial Incident," pp. 428-429.

<sup>38</sup> W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, p. 44; No known copies of the Western Post exist.

<sup>39</sup> W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, p. 44; The Monitor, July 3, 1915, p. 4. The Library of Congress has only a few copies of The Progress published in 1890 and 1891. No other known copies exist.

<sup>40</sup> W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, p. 44; The Monitor, July 3, 1915, p. 4; The Nebraska State Historical Society

has a few issues of the Afro-American Sentinel between 1896 and 1899 and a few copies of The Enterprise between 1895 and 1911.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth W. Porter, The Negro on the American Frontier (New York: Arno Press, 1971), pp. 1-3; Lawrence B. deGraf, "Recognition, Racism, and Reflections on the Writing of Western Black History," Pacific Historical Review, 44 (February, 1975), pp. 22-24.

<sup>42</sup> W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, P. 44; The Monitor, July 3, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> The Monitor, October 9, 1919, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> The Monitor, October 23, 1919, pp. 1-4. The Monitor was published from 1915 to 1929 and the Nebraska State Historical Society has many copies of it.

<sup>45</sup> The New Era, July 21, 1922, p. 1. The New Era was published from 1920 to 1926. The newspaper was named after Frederick Douglass's earlier publication by the same name. The Nebraska State Historical Society has a few copies of it from the years 1922 to 1926.

<sup>46</sup> W.P.A., The Negroes of Nebraska, p. 44; The Nebraska State Historical Society has many copies of The Guide for the period from 1932 to 1958.

## CHAPTER VI

### LAND AND A DREAM: BLACK FARMERS, 1870-1930

After the Civil War ended in 1865, blacks celebrated as never before. Many of the former slaves sang and danced when federal troops reached their areas. Throughout the South, exclamations of freedom sprang forth from blacks young and old. They rejoiced that now they and their families would never be sold again. One slave from a Georgia plantation summed up his feelings, "Ise don't b'longs to nobody, Missus. Ise owns self." <sup>1</sup>

Along with emancipation came the responsibility of earning one's own keep. Some freedmen remained with their former owners, either because of personal loyalty or because of a fear of the unknown. Others left to find decent landowners for whom to work. Many blacks, however, believed that they could only experience true freedom by owning their own farm. Many blacks were simply unable to buy land for themselves. As a substitute, they rented land and operated it as their own. They thought this way they could plant what they wanted and manage the land without interference. Because the freedmen possessed little money and no supplies, the landlord often furnished the machinery, animals, and necessary seed, in return for a share of the crop. Initially, the freedmen favored this system, which provided them with the essential tools to raise crops without major super-

vision by a landlord. <sup>2</sup>

Soon, however, many freedmen were caught in a system they could not escape. Many landowners demanded more crops than the freedmen raised. In most cases the former slaves fell deeper into debt, and just as in the days of slavery, owed their labor to the white landowner. To avoid the tenant or crop-lien system, some blacks purchased small strips of inexpensive timber land which proved totally worthless for agricultural purposes. One man noted that he "could not raise a peck of corn to the acre." <sup>3</sup>

Some felt their only chance of acquiring land was to go north. In 1862, the Republican Congress passed the Homestead Bill, which President Lincoln promptly signed. By its terms, settlers could obtain 160 acres of good farm land in government-surveyed frontier locations by paying a small filing fee and making improvements on the land. After they lived on the land for five years, they owned it. Many blacks felt this was the only way for realizing their dream of freedom and acquiring land of their own. During the 1860s, as many blacks moved north, the black population in Iowa increased from just under 1,000 to almost 5,800. Even more dramatic was the change in Kansas, where the black population rose from 627 to 17,108. Likewise, Nebraska's black population increased from just eight-two in 1860 to 789 in 1870. These were the three largest black population increases of any state or territory west of the Mississippi

River during the decade. <sup>4</sup>

Lacking proper resources, many blacks moved to the North's larger towns to secure work. Realizing the need for capital to begin farming and the problems isolated black families experienced on the plains, some promoted the idea of colonies of people settling together. In 1869 Benjamin (Pap) Singleton, a black real estate dealer from Tennessee, became interested in forming colonies of blacks in the western states. He secured land in southeastern Kansas in 1873, and within two years, a colony of blacks had organized the community of Baxter Springs in Cherokee County. Other blacks formed Kansas colonies named Nicodemus, Hodgeman, Dunlap, Little Coney, and Wabaunsee between 1875 and 1876.<sup>5</sup>

In 1871, Nebraska's first recorded colony of blacks, composed of about ten families, was organized in Franklin County in the south central part of the state. Some of the members filed for homestead claims along a small stream they named Lovely Creek. By early May, 1871, they laid out the town of Grant nearby in the southern part of the county. The creation of a brick yard in the community indicated that they planned to make a permanent settlement despite the fact that they owned little money and only one team of animals. <sup>6</sup>

A Franklin County correspondent reported to the Omaha Daily Herald about an unusual economic hardship which came to the colony. The residents evidently pooled much of their money and trusted one of the members to keep it safe. This

treasurer supposedly carried the funds in a pocket book on his person at all times. One afternoon, while returning from a hunting expedition, one of the colonists inquired about the funds. The treasurer immediately reached into his pocket to retrieve the money and discovered his pocket book missing. He evidently lost the colony's money, along with eighty-two dollars of his own during the hunting excursion. His word was not questioned, as those along on the hunt knew he had the money when they left. On that day their hopes of developing homesteads and the village of Grant vanished. Apparently the settlers packed their belongings and moved to Kansas. The stream which they named Lovely Creek is still known by that name today. <sup>7</sup>

The 1870 census listed only three black farmers in Nebraska. George Baxter, an elderly Kentucky native, along with his wife, Lavena, homesteaded in Skull Creek township west of David City in Butler County. In Saline County, Henry Burden from West Virginia homesteaded 160 acres in Pleasant Hill Township, north of Wilber. Before moving to his new homestead, Burden worked at the Atwood Hotel in Lincoln to save enough money for supplies to start a farm. In Colfax County, James Johnson, his wife, Elmira, and five children homesteaded on a farm west of Schuyler. <sup>8</sup>

The following decade witnessed the arrival of other black farmers, but the numbers remained a small portion of the overall population. David Patrick homesteaded in Valley

Precinct, Hamilton County, northwest of Aurora in 1870. An Illinois native, he lived in Lucas County, Iowa before settling in Nebraska.<sup>9</sup> In 1871, Robert Anderson homesteaded in Butler County, just below the Platte River. He had been a slave in Green County, Kentucky until 1864 when he fled and enlisted as a private in the 125th Colored Kentucky Infantry. While the regiment was still in training, the war ended, so the army sent it to the West to aid settlement and put down possible Indian uprisings. Anderson spent the next two years in Kansas, Missouri, Texas, and New Mexico.<sup>10</sup> It was during his service in the 125th that Anderson met former slave and fellow Kentuckian George Mattingly who would become his lifelong friend. After both were discharged in 1867, it appears that they became dissatisfied with the opportunities in Kentucky, and together they moved to Iowa by 1869. Anderson worked for a time in a brickyard near Tabor where he subsequently secured work from a farmer named G.D. Gregory, and thus began to earn money. Mattingly likewise acquired land nearby and farmed there for a few years. Evidently, Iowa was not the land of opportunity for which they had hoped. In 1870, Anderson spent part of his savings on a team of oxen and a wagon and he secured a job freight-ing goods to Butler County, Nebraska. The job enabled Anderson to move to Butler County without spending any more of his savings. Upon his arrival, he located eighty acres of unclaimed land and staked his homestead. George

Mattingly later followed Anderson to Butler County, where he homesteaded eighty acres in Center Township. <sup>11</sup>

Farming in Nebraska in the 1870s was not the easiest of occupations. Still, the first three years of the decade were relatively profitable and land prospectors did a good business as homesteaders filled the countryside. Although hard to obtain, credit usually could be found. Farmers produced bountiful crops which kept their optimism high. <sup>12</sup>

In September, 1873 the New York investment firm of Jay Cooke and Company failed, which precipitated a panic across the country. The depression hit farmers especially hard, as prices for agricultural goods quickly fell to a point where some could not sell their grain at any price. If this were not bad enough, thick clouds of grasshoppers descended on the plains states, destroying everything in their path. Drought, low crop prices, tight credit, and the flood of grasshoppers continued through 1875. <sup>13</sup> As a result, many farmers in the state could not persist. "Eaten out by grasshoppers, going back East," became a familiar saying. <sup>14</sup>

By 1876, conditions had gradually improved, but not until after hundreds of people had already deserted their farms. It was not until 1879 that large numbers of pioneers again settled in Nebraska. Of the five black homesteaders in Nebraska during the early 1870s, only George Baxter left his farm before 1880. Robert Anderson, unable to overcome the economic conditions of the earlier depression, lost his land



the following year. <sup>15</sup> Anderson later described his years in Butler County:

One year the grasshoppers came and ate up everything. Then came four years of drought. Money was scarce and practically everyone was in the same condition as I was. A great many times during my years on that homestead, it was a case of jack rabbit or no breakfast. It wasn't as bad in the summer time, but in the winter it was pretty hard to live at all. For firewood, I twisted hay or wild grass into tight twists and burned that. <sup>16</sup>

The other black homesteaders fared better. Henry Burden married, but within two years his ailing wife and newborn child died. He later remarried, raised a family of eight, and continued to improve the farm until his death in 1913. George Mattingly remained on his farm in Butler County through the difficult years. He retired in 1898 and moved into a house he purchased in the nearby community of David City where he lived the rest of his life. He passed away on April 17, 1924, leaving an estate worth nearly forty thousand dollars.) Four other black farmers, Harry Browning and Joseph White of Kentucky, and John White and Stephen Hill of Michigan, settled in Colfax County by 1880, making it third in the number of black farmers in the state behind Hamilton and Dawson counties. <sup>17</sup> Perhaps David Patrick helped to increase black migration into Hamilton County, as six black farm families had settled there by 1880. These included: Virginia native, Jason Fears; Indiana natives John Fears, Edwin Ellis, Richard Ridgely, and Clint Harper; Charles

Smith, a New Yorker; and Bob Hamilton from North Carolina. Most of the Hoosiers arrived in April, 1880 and instead of securing a homestead, they rented farmland north of Aurora. <sup>18</sup>

Other black farmers settled across the state. In Seward County, brothers Moses Speece and Jeremiah Shores rented farmland near Seward. Both grew up as slaves near the North Carolina towns of Salem and Inville. As children they were separated and became the property of white landowners Speese and Shores. After the Civil War, each brother adopted the name of his former owner, and together they traveled to Indiana to enjoy their recently acquired liberty. Five years later, in 1879, they moved to Nebraska, where they believed better opportunities awaited them and their growing families. <sup>19</sup>

In Washington County, John Alexander, an Ohio native, began farming near Blair in the late 1870s. In Richardson County, Tennessee-born Moses Dickerson and Virginians James Thompson and Will Sayers began farming near Falls City. After Sayers' death in the early 1880s, his wife Mary and their sons continued to farm the eighty acre tract. It was a productive farm with a total of seven horses, three cows, twenty hogs, forty chickens, twenty-five acres of corn, and one acre of sorghum, potatoes, and apples. <sup>20</sup>

Also by 1880, one of the largest colonies of blacks, made up of ten families, settled in Dawson County just northeast

of Overton. At least eight of these families journeyed from near North Buxton, in southwestern Ontario, Canada in May, 1879, after learning of good available farmland in the area. Most of the elders of the group were ex-slaves who had escaped to Canada where slavery was illegal during the 1840s and 1850s. After the Civil War, these blacks looked for a place to resettle in their native land. <sup>21</sup>

Originally the group's destination was Plum Creek (now Lexington), but all of the land was already claimed, so they filed homestead claims about ten miles further east. Five of these settlers finalized their homestead claims: William Walker from Ohio and his family of four; Joshua Emanuel, originally from New York and his family of five; William Raner and his family of four from Virginia; William Small and his family of four from Canada; and Richard Robinson from Indiana, with a family of six. These families had saved money and prepared themselves for the expenses they would incur after moving to their new location. They had planned to move back to the United States for quite some time, but had waited for the right opportunity. Most had held low paying jobs in North Buxton and they desired to secure their own farmland. In 1971 a niece of William Walker quoted her uncle, stating, "Ownership of land was a true symbol of freedom." <sup>22</sup> This ambition to secure farmland for themselves and their families evidently was the driving force which led them to Overton, Nebraska.

After arriving in Dawson County, these blacks immediately filed homestead claims on vacant hill land north of Overton. The community in which they settled was located along the Union Pacific Railroad in the Platte River valley. The valley measured five to seven miles across, with rolling sandhills to the south and heavier soiled hills to the north. Overton is situated about three miles north of the Platte River and two miles south of the northern edge of the valley. Because of its proximity to the railroad, the valley land surrounding Overton was almost entirely settled by 1880, so pioneers settled the hill land closest to the valley. <sup>23</sup>

During the first year these new black homesteaders in Dawson County cultivated little of their virgin 160 acre homestead claims, but the crops they did plant were mostly corn, wheat, and potatoes. In addition, each owned two horses, one to five milk cows, a small number of hogs, and five to twenty chickens. Overall, the types of crops they grew and the livestock they owned were similar to those of their white neighbors. <sup>24</sup>

By 1885, Robert Allen, Henry Guilds, William Raner and their families, and Richard Robinson and his son were the only ones who had left the Overton area. Allen, from Kentucky, was not one of the Canadian blacks, but in 1880 he settled within their community. Robinson divorced his wife, Matilda, who with their daughter remained in Overton with

her brother, Leroy Guilds. Isaac Riley, the oldest of the blacks, passed away in 1880 at age 67, and his widow Catherine, moved in with their son, William.<sup>25</sup> The black settlement in Dawson County was augmented when William Crawford's family of four and Charles Meehans' family of six came to Overton from the North Buxton, Ontario area by 1885 and both immediately filed for homestead claims. Meehan, of Irish descent from Detroit, moved with his parents as a youth to North Buxton. There he married a black girl named Hester Freeman.<sup>26</sup>

The farmers cultivated more of their homesteads each year. By 1884, Riley, Small, Tann, and Emanuel each had over thirty acres of land under cultivation. Most of the others had cultivated at least twenty acres. Corn continued to be the leading crop, amounting to seventy-one percent of all cultivated acres. Wheat was planted on twenty-one percent of their farmed land, with the remainder in oats, barley, rye, beans, and potatoes.<sup>27</sup> Each of the homesteaders owned two to six horses and cows, and as many as eighteen hogs and seventy chickens. Two of the farmers raised sheep, including William Riley who owned eighty head, a comparatively large number for the area.<sup>28</sup>

The largest colony of blacks to settle in Nebraska by 1885 was located on homesteads in northern Wheeler and southern Holt counties. This colony of blacks, consisting of fourteen families and numbering eighty persons, home-

steaded over one thousand acres of land. The most successful families were the Freeman, Dixon, Patterson, and Jackson families. Jerry Freeman sold his homestead for \$500 in 1900 to Richard Burtwistle and moved to Ewing, Nebraska. Hector Dixon, born a slave at Harpers Ferry, Virginia in 1842, received an education before homesteading in Nebraska. Dixon taught in the rural Holt and Wheeler County schools for a few years before he was appointed Justice of the Peace. Many of Dixon's children received a good education and moved elsewhere. While Ben Dixon settled in Omaha, William and John Dixon moved to Grand Island to gain employment. Even though his children relocated elsewhere, Hector Dixon remained in Holt County. In order to supplement his farm income, Dixon worked for the Amelia Creamery during the early 1900s. The elder Dixon and his wife were buried in Trussell cemetery in rural Holt County. However, many of the blacks in the area were buried at Goose Lake cemetery, which was later referred to as the "Negro cemetery," even though some whites were also buried there.<sup>29</sup>

Elsewhere in the state, James Thompson and his family moved from Richardson County to Nemaha County and settled on a rented 160 acre farm. They owned a horse, a cow, fifteen hogs, and twenty chickens, and raised twenty acres of corn, far below the average of the farms in the area.<sup>30</sup> By 1885, virtually all of the black farmers who had moved to Hamilton County in 1880 had left. Only David Patrick and Joshua

Freeman from Pennsylvania remained. Patrick owned 160 acres valued at twenty dollars an acre. He raised a variety of crops including corn, oats, wheat, flax, potatoes, and apples. He owned five horses, two milk cows, and thirty hogs. Joshua Freeman and his family of six moved to Nebraska between 1880 and 1882.<sup>31</sup> Instead of homesteading, he rented 160 acres of farmland on shares, entitling the landowner to a percentage, or share, of the crop. He raised corn, wheat, and potatoes and owned two mules, two milk cows, six hogs, and forty chickens.<sup>32</sup>

In southeastern Holt County black farmers John James, John Fears, and John Freeman each owned farms, although only James owned enough land to support a family. He owned eighty acres on which he cultivated ten acres of corn, two acres of beans, and an acre of potatoes. He used the rest for pasture and hay for his few head of livestock. Freeman owned fifteen acres, and Fears ten, the bulk of which was pastureland and hay ground for their milkcows and horses. Both planted two acres of corn in 1884.<sup>33</sup> In the northwestern portion of the state, African-born Robert Smithson, and his family of eight, rented twenty-two acres of farmland in Dawes County, all of which was used as pasture or hay land for his two mules and three milk cows.<sup>34</sup> By 1885, all of the black farmers living in Colfax County during 1880, including James Johnson, Joseph White, John White, and Harry Browning, had moved elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

In the spring of 1882, Moses Speese and Jeremiah Shores, along with their brother Henry Webb, journeyed 120 miles further west from the Seward area to Custer County in a caravan of wagons long remembered by locals. Only Shores' son, James, remained in Seward, working as a plasterer. Upon arrival, the three brothers and four of their children filed homestead claims of 160 acres each west of Westerville and immediately constructed sod houses.<sup>36</sup> Speese worked on the Burlington Railroad line which was built through Custer County during the summer of 1886. Other family members worked for area farmers, while maintaining their own homesteads.<sup>37</sup> During the spring of 1883, Moses Speese and his sons helped construct the foundation of the initial church in the community. Establishing a new community created plenty of extra work. Neighbors assembled to help each other with everyday chores, thus trading work so that everyone finished more quickly. These gatherings served social needs as well and neighbors became surrogate relatives. Many early Westerville families reported the help rendered by the area's black families.<sup>38</sup>

Around 1883, the families of John Taylor, Daniel Baxter, Albert Marks, Robert Conrad, and William Jones moved to the Westerville area. Baxter had been a slave in North Carolina before enlisting in the Union Army in 1865. After the war he remained in North Carolina until moving to Custer County.<sup>39</sup> These new settlers added an important link for



the maintenance of the black community in the area. At the time of their arrival, the Speese and Shores children were reaching adulthood, and there had been no other blacks to provide spouses for them. If the new black families had not arrived, the Speese and Shores families would likely have remained in the area for only one generation. Shortly after these new homesteaders settled, blacks in the community married. In 1886 Minerva Shores married Albert Marks who carried mail from Loup City to Westerville to supplement his farming income. The following year, William Sanford Shores married Mary Baxter. <sup>40</sup>

These families highly regarded education. The children attended nearby rural schools at Copsey and Ingram Grove, northwest of Westerville. Moses Speese's son, John, continued his education and eventually became an attorney, while his son, Henry, became a preacher, as did Albert Marks. Both of these men preached at the Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church, and Church of God in Westerville. Marks also later preached in Broken Bow. <sup>41</sup>

Similarly, near Overton, practically every black child between the ages of seven and fifteen attended country school District 45 north of Overton between 1885 and 1900. In 1889 and 1890 William Walker directed the school, which enrolled sixty students, sixteen of them black. A black directing a school where seventy percent of the students were white signifies good community relations, as well as

the importance that blacks placed on education. <sup>42</sup>

Most accounts indicate relations between the black and white farmers were good. Ellis Dustin, a white, lived amid the colony of blacks on his parents' farm north of Overton. He remembered no occasions of discrimination or other un-neighborly actions towards the blacks while he was growing up. Most black families settled there before the white homesteaders in the area, so they were always a part of the community. Dustin attended school with blacks and worked beside them when neighbors needed help, such as at harvest time. They ate at each others' homes and occasionally stayed overnight, usually in celebration of a birthday or other special occasion. <sup>43</sup>

Dustin also told how important the District 45 school was to the settlers, both black and white. The school was not only used for educational purposes but also as a center for social, religious, and political activities of the community. On Sunday the school was often used for church, but services were held only when a preacher traveled through the area. Sometimes both whites and blacks attended services together. At other times, blacks held separate services. <sup>44</sup>

In 1884 Robert Anderson made a second attempt at farm ownership in Box Butte County, after several years of homesteading in Butler County. In 1881 Anderson had moved to Kansas where he worked as a farm laborer. Since he was no longer eligible for a homestead because of his earlier

homestead, Anderson examined other ways to acquire land, such as the Timber Culture Act. This act required the owner to establish trees on at least ten acres of his 160 acre claim. Anderson planted the trees that he could obtain and transplanted others from Pine Ridge just a few miles to the north. He was well on his way to owning his farm again and during his spare time, he worked for the Burlington Railroad. It paid well and Anderson saved \$1,600 within three years, but then lost it in a bad investment.<sup>45</sup>

Anderson was determined to succeed and own a prosperous farm. He claimed that the determination was planted in him as a Union soldier. With no money and in need of farm supplies, Anderson turned to the local banker for help. He secured a loan at three percent interest to cover his needs. Gradually he made money on his farmstead, enough to pay back the bank and buy the neighboring farm. As Anderson later recalled, "I lived alone, saved, worked hard, lived cheaply as I could."<sup>46</sup> Working hard included good management of his land and money when he rented out the unused portion to earn extra money. By 1900, Anderson owned 640 acres of land and a determination to own more.<sup>47</sup>

For most farmers in the state, the 1890s were trying times. The drought, poor grain prices, and tight money forced many to leave their farms to search for other forms of employment. During the 1880s, eight to ten percent of the black workers in outstate Nebraska farmed. Blacks en-

gaged in only three other types of employment more often - housekeeper, common laborer, and servant. However, by 1900 the number of black farmers dropped to three percent of the black work force. Seven other occupations employed more blacks.<sup>48</sup>

In Custer County, many of the black homesteaders who arrived in the early and mid-1880s left their farms to secure employment in larger towns. Robert and John Conrad, Albert Marks, Henry Moss, George Lewis, John Harbor, and William Rone all moved to Broken Bow to find work, most as common laborers. John Conrad secured a position as a cook in a local hotel and Marks preached at a neighborhood church.<sup>49</sup>

James Kelly was one of the first blacks to live in the western portion of the state. He was a Texas native who worked throughout the 1860s and 1870s as a cook and cowboy for Print Olive, a Texas cattleman who annually drove herds from Texas to northern railroad stations for shipment to the East. Throughout the 1870s, Kelly was involved in these drives, and when Olive decided to start a ranch in Nebraska, Kelly came with him. Kelly gained quite a reputation for his abilities with livestock. After the Olives sold their holdings in Nebraska, Kelly and another black ranch hand employed by Olive, Amos Harris, remained. Both worked as ranch hands in the counties of Dawson, Custer, Blaine, and Loup throughout most of the 1880s and 1890s. Kelly finally settled in Ansley about fifteen miles southeast of Broken

Bow. Harris settled north of Brewster, Nebraska. <sup>50</sup>

The Speese and Shores families remained on their homesteads in Custer County. The 1890s were not the best of times for them, but they were innovative and tried different types of crops in the hope of making their farm more profitable. They even tried some of the crops such as cotton which they previously had grown in the South. It is not known if it was a success or not, but a local booster hailed Shore's crop as one more of a wide variety of crops that could be successfully grown in Custer County. <sup>51</sup> Because the depression during the 1890s severely hurt the county and resulted in a significant decline in population, local officials wanted to spread good publicity. <sup>52</sup> Likewise, the black families near Westerville wanted more blacks to try farming in their area. In February, 1899, an article written by John Speese entitled "A Colored Man's Experience on a Nebraska Homestead" appeared in the Omaha World-Herald. Most of the article told about his success on the farmstead. He related how he had come to Custer County practically penniless, and had homesteaded 160 acres. Buying the necessary supplies took all of his money, but he worked odd jobs when necessary to obtain cash and saved whatever he could. Later, he was able to obtain some timber claim land adjoining his homestead. Now, after eighteen years on his homestead, he was out of debt and farmed over 200 acres. The products of his farm included alfalfa, corn, fruit trees,

cattle, milkcows, and hogs which he valued at \$10,000. The article asserted that "What a poor colored man can accomplish every man in the east can do, with vim, economy, and integrity." <sup>53</sup>

The rest of the article reads like a real estate advertisement. The article promotes Custer County and Nebraska to prospective buyers with pitches such as:

The broad bottom lands are of a deep black mold of great depth and fertility. Cereals of all kinds grow and flourish here. Blue joint and buffalo grasses are abundant and are eagerly sought by ranchmen from Texas, Colorado, and Kansas. Large numbers of their cattle are fed and fattened here in the winter, thus giving us an excellent local market for our corn. The climate is healthful and invigorating. <sup>54</sup>

One almost questions why there would be a need to advertise such a wonderful place. The article concludes by inviting, "All those in the east in moderate circumstances and those without homes to come and live where the opportunity for making a livelihood is legion, and where industry and economy are the keys to success." <sup>55</sup>

The article served three different purposes. The businesses of Custer County needed more people in the area to again be prosperous. The black homesteaders in Custer County wanted more blacks to venture to their area, and the editors of the Omaha World-Herald may have believed that ridding the Omaha area of black workers would lessen unemployment in Omaha, which was severely hurt economically during the 1890s depression, as well as ease racial ten-

sions. During this period, racial tensions heightened as unemployment increased, as many believed all available jobs should go to whites. By the late 1890s the depression was ending, but racial tensions remained.<sup>56</sup> In spite of the limited efforts, a migration from Omaha to Custer County never materialized. It really never had a chance since most blacks simply did not have enough money to make the move and then buy supplies and land, for by this time, practically all of the good land had been homesteaded.<sup>57</sup>

Most of the original black homesteaders near Westerville lived the rest of their lives on their farms. Moses Speece and Henry Webb both died before 1900. Jeremiah Shores passed away in 1906, and his wife, Rachel, died ten years later. Daniel Baxter died in 1901. They were all buried in the Westerville cemetery. After passing to their children, their homesteads were eventually sold to neighbors. The second generation of Westerville blacks worked in Broken Bow at the time of their parents' deaths as none chose to remain on their farms.<sup>58</sup>

The colony of blacks near Overton also survived the difficult economic times of the 1890s. Their land holdings did not change over the period, although heavier mortgages were placed on them. To overcome increased debts, many from the colony took other jobs. Members of the William Walker and William Crawford families were paid by the local school district to establish a fire in the heat stove before school

and perform other janitorial duties. Charles Meehan worked as traveling salesman, or as the local newspaper called him a "soap and lace man." Evidently, Meehan was a supplier of general merchandise. He occasionally obtained goods from Lexington or Cozad and distributed them in the area. <sup>59</sup>

Good relations continued between the blacks and their neighbors. Almost weekly, news of the blacks could be found in the local paper. During 1903, news of the colony included accounts of William Walker losing a horse in April; Charles Meehan delivering goods in May; Albert Riley's injury from a farm accident and Charles Meehan being sick in bed in August; Anne Meehan's birthday party in November; and Robert Walker's slight injury in a shooting accident in December. <sup>60</sup>

The black children excelled in neighborhood sporting events. During the 1904 Fourth of July celebration at Overton, five blacks won foot races. Later that year, Edward and Dennis Meehan and George Riley started on the Overton high school football team. Both Meehan boys played guard, and George Riley played quarterback. Through mid-October, Overton remained undefeated. Their real test would come when they played Lexington, the county seat and a school many times larger than Overton's. But more students did not help, as Overton won the contest 27-0 to remain undefeated. <sup>61</sup>

By 1905, the majority of the Overton blacks had lived in



the community for twenty-five years. Any family who survived that many years on a homestead must be considered a success. In 1903, most of the original homesteaders' children were either attending high school or working on their parents' or a neighbor's farm. Overall, however, few opportunities existed for the younger generation of blacks, who did not have the resources to buy land. They also wanted to go to larger black communities where they could meet other young blacks. Then an opportunity appeared which they could not pass up. <sup>62</sup>

In 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Kinkaid Act which provided homestead lands of 640 acres in northwest Nebraska. The sponsor of the law was O'Neill Congressman Moses P. Kinkaid. It had long been recognized that the 160 acres provided by the Homestead Act were insufficient to support a family in the more arid portions of the state, especially in the sandhills region. Townspeople from the remote area pushed for the act since they needed more people near their communities to provide for better business. By contrast, ranchers did not approve of homesteaders coming into their rangelands, especially because the cattlemen did not have title to them. <sup>63</sup>

The Kinkaid Law probably seemed like a godsend to many of the Overton blacks as they could now acquire land. In 1905, an event occurred between an Overton citizen and William Crawford which caused some hard feelings. In late February,

1905 Crawford published an announcement in the local newspaper:

All who may be interested personally, or otherwise, that the statement, circulated that he had seen Mr. Duffy, February 15, was untrue as he had neither seen nor communicated with the gentleman either directly or through other sources. Also that the report of his being under quarantine was a base slander on himself and race, as it is no disease, and the people who have been shying and sidetracking when meeting him, need have no fear as the case is hereditary and not contagious. <sup>64</sup>

The events surrounding this article, along with information regarding Mr. Duffy, remain unknown. However, within two months after the article appeared, Crawford and other blacks packed all of their belongings into three wagons and moved to the sandhills. <sup>65</sup> They left more behind in Overton than twenty-five years of their lives. Two of Charles Meehan's children, William Walker's wife, Sarah, and Isaac Riley had previously died and were buried at Overton. Because of these ties and the uncertainty of the new Kinkaid lands, these blacks did not dispose of the Overton lands immediately. Charles Meehan was the first to dispose of his Overton land in 1907. Although most of the Overton homesteads were sold before 1912, William Walker did not dispose of his Overton property until 1923. <sup>66</sup>

During the spring of 1905, Meehan, Crawford, and Brown were the first of the Overton colony to file Kinkaid claims. Brown claimed section 1, township 27 north, range 30 west, while Meehan and Crawford claimed sections 34 and 35

of township 28 north range 30 west, located immediately to the north of Brown's claim. By 1907, seven separate claims had been filed by blacks, most from Overton. The earliest black to file was Clem Deaver, a railroad worker in the area. He filed his claim in 1904, but did not remain long enough to receive title to his land. However, he became a promoter for the establishment of a colony of blacks in the region. <sup>67</sup>

The news of the colony reached Omaha in 1907, when Clem Deaver alerted city officials and immediately the Omaha Bee published an article about it. In mid-April, 1907, Victor Rosewater, editor of the Bee, addressed the Mutual Interest Club, an organization of blacks, about the "Negro problem" in Omaha. He said the percentage of blacks in Omaha was too small to give Omaha a serious Negro problem. He went on to say that they "should consider themselves fortunate as compared with Negroes in southern cities; while a race prejudice undoubtedly exists, [in Omaha] it has not become acute except in a few directions." <sup>68</sup> He stated that the black tensions in Omaha rested on their numbers, and if these remained low, there would be no problem.

Some of Omaha's leaders may have hoped that some of the city's blacks would move to the western portion of the state. In a flowery Bee article, Rosewater compared the Cherry County colony with Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute and called the colony a movement "of social ame-

lioration." <sup>69</sup> He stated that the solution to Omaha's black problem was for the blacks to move elsewhere and challenged them to move westward where "Vast tracts of public land are available to colored people; every negro who wants to become a farmer can obtain 640 acres of this land, and by thrift and industry establish a valuable home for himself and family." <sup>70</sup>

If some white Omahans hoped for such a movement, many of the black Kinkaiders also hoped that additional hard-working blacks would join them. Word of the colony soon spread; some of the black Kinkaiders who settled in the area were Austin Curtis of Lincoln, Charles Murphy of Alliance, Burt Morgan of North Platte, Joe Boyd and Henry Surrell of Central City, Jacob Thomas of Schuyler, William Wallow of Omaha, Joseph Conrad of Broken Bow, and Charles Speese of Westerville. Blacks from outside the state - Bess Woodson, Miles Dewitty, and Robert Hannah from Kansas, Roy Hays, William Kerby, and Clarence Matterson from Missouri, and Turner Price, William Ford, and George Griffin from Ohio - also received news of the colony and ventured to Cherry County. <sup>71</sup>

By 1910, twenty-four black families had filed claims to over 14,000 acres in Cherry County, and a community took shape. School District No. 113 opened in 1908 and provided education for the earliest Kinkaiders in the area. Additional families in the area made more schools necessary,

forcing in 1909 the organization of District No. 110, a few miles northwest of District No. 113, and District No. 164 was formed in 1911.<sup>72</sup> Realizing a need for supplies in the community, Miles Dewitty built a moderately-sized building and opened a store, which also served as a postal drop-off location. In 1915, it was listed as an official post office and named Dewitty after its owner. In 1910, the Reverend O.J. Burkhardt traveled to Cherry County to establish a church about a mile north of Dewitty. He returned to Lincoln after forming a congregation and making preparations for Dewitty's first pastor, the Reverend W.H. Mance, who was succeeded a few years later by the Reverend William Kerby.<sup>73</sup>

Many Dewitty blacks possessed musical talent, and some of the men formed a band and played at social functions in the area. The boys formed a baseball team called the Sluggers, which suffered only a few defeats against area teams between 1910 and 1920. In the summer months, picnics, Fourth of July celebrations, rodeos, and footraces brought the community together socially.<sup>74</sup>

In 1913, John Bachelor, owner of the Sandhill Land and Cattle Company, accused Charles Meehan and Frank Curtis of stealing his cattle. A search was ordered on their property, but no cattle were found. Cherry County Judge James Quigley released them from custody for lack of evidence. The local newspaper in Brownlee spoke out for the accused by

declaring that "In justice this alleged wrong doing for years is the only one occurring, and no prejudice should arise against them as a settlement." <sup>75</sup>

The colony reached its peak between 1912 and 1918, when an estimated 185 blacks lived in the settlement with claims on nearly 40,000 acres of the sandhills. By 1920, the number of blacks dropped to ninety, and the number of acres to 15,000. Most of those who stayed and received final deeds to their homesteads were from Overton. Many of those who left moved to Denver, Lincoln, Omaha, Alliance, North Platte, or Valentine. Albert Riley was the last of Dewitty's citizens to leave in 1936. However, in 1986 a descendant of one of the homesteaders still owned eighty acres in the area which were rented to a nearby rancher. <sup>76</sup>

In 1910, only Cherry, Sioux, Wheeler, and Blaine counties contained more than five black farmers. Cherry County, home of the Dewitty colony, claimed twenty-four. Blacks were also attracted to Sioux and Blaine County by the Kinkaid Act. Wheeler County, with eight black farmers, had the second largest number of black farmers. Some of the Wheeler County blacks were Kinkaiders, and the rest were the last of the black farmers who homesteaded in the 1880s. By 1920, all of the black farmers in Blaine and Wheeler counties had left, and Sioux and Cherry counties realized a noticeable decline in the number of farmers. <sup>77</sup> Blacks and whites lost their Kinkaid land for similar reasons. The land was some

of the poorest in the region. By 1900, most of the best valley land in the sandhills was claimed. Because of this, even the 640 acres offered by the Kinkaid Act could not support a family. Twenty acres of land was required to keep a single head of cattle, compared with five acres in the central and eastern sections of Nebraska. Moreover, meadow land was necessary to establish a productive farm or ranch. The best meadow lands usually were within a river valley or a long wide draw between two ranges of hills. These lands were not grazed in the summer, but rather harvested for hay to be used in the winter months. <sup>78</sup>

The blacks around Dewitty homesteaded some of the poorest land in the region. Although many of their homesteads were located along the North Loup River, the valley here was very narrow, probably not more than one-quarter of a mile wide. <sup>79</sup> Blacks in the area were used to farming a heavier soil which could maintain itself and produce crops annually. However, even the best valley land here did not have soil heavy enough to maintain yearly cultivation of the crops with which they were familiar. Within a few years, the soil became worn to a point where not even grass would grow. By the time many of the black homesteaders realized this, their land was useless and heavily mortgaged. As a result, most of the blacks either lost their land through foreclosure, sold it to large local ranchers, or simply left the area. <sup>80</sup> Blacks made their best showing as farmers on the Nebraska

frontier before 1920. After 1930, attempts at farming by blacks were limited to a few isolated endeavors.<sup>81</sup>

After the Civil War, blacks predominantly remained in agriculture. One of the responses of the federal government to the blacks' needs involved land giveaways to the freedman, but many of the government's promises did not materialize. Blacks wanted to own land, a true sign of freedom, and blacks in Nebraska revealed their interpretation of freedom as land ownership.<sup>82</sup>

Very few blacks directly from the South became farmers in Nebraska. At least seventy-five percent of those who farmed had lived for a time in the northern United States or Canada prior to migrating to Nebraska.<sup>83</sup> Also, a significant number of homesteaders had served in the Union Army during the Civil War. The education that blacks received in the North and their military experience proved valuable. Robert Anderson, who owned more land than any other black Nebraskan, explained the reason for his success: "The idea of owning my own land and being independent had been given me while I was still in the army and I had never been able to get rid of that idea. It is to that determination, formed when a soldier, that I owe my independence today."<sup>84</sup>

After the Civil War, the South was an economic disaster, offering little hope of success for blacks. The northern states at least extended examples of how certain individuals used their desire and determination to prosper. Most of the



black homesteaders saved money for the expenses they would encounter on their farms before they came to Nebraska. Many worked another job while trying to succeed on their homesteads.<sup>85</sup>

Most blacks trying to secure a homestead were determined to make it work over a sustained period of time. Henry Burden homesteaded in 1869 and lived on his land until his death forty-four years later. Robert Anderson first homesteaded in 1871 and owned a Nebraska farm for over fifty years. David Patrick spent the final thirty years of his life on his Nebraska homestead. The Overton colony members who later moved to Dewitty spent over forty years farming on the Nebraska frontier and many of the blacks from Westerville and Wheeler County lived over twenty years on their Nebraska homesteads. A high percentage of black homesteaders lived on their lands for the rest of their lives.<sup>86</sup>

Overall, farming and farm labor always ranked among the seven occupations in which most outstate Nebraska blacks were employed between 1870 and 1910, and with the exception of 1900, farming was in the top five. Blacks who owned their farmsteads were consistently more numerous than those employed as farm laborers between 1880 and 1910. Homesteading was always among the top eight black occupations and certainly was the leading occupation of private enterprise in which Nebraska blacks were engaged. Other occupations

**OCCUPATIONS OF BLACKS IN OUTSTATE  
NEBRASKA FROM 1870-1910**

<u>1870</u>			<u>1880</u>		
<u>Rank</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number Employed</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number Employed</u>
1	Housekeeper	36	1	Housekeeper	136
2	Common Labor	29	2	Common Labor	133
3	Servant	14	3	Servant	49
4	Cook	8	4	Farm Owner	48
5	Farm Laborer	5	5	Laundress	43
6	Farm Owner	3	6	Barber	36
Combined Farm Owners and Farm Laborers number 8 and rank 4th among all occupations in 1870.			7	Cook	30
			8	Waiter	28
			9	Farm Laborer	21
			Combined Farm Owners and Farm Laborers number 69 and rank 3rd among all occupations in 1880.		

<u>1885</u>			<u>1900</u>		
<u>Rank</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number Employed</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number Employed</u>
1	Housekeeper	155	1	Common Labor	148
2	Common Labor	106	2	Servant	94
3	Servant	42	3	Porter	67
4	Farm Owner	40	4	Laundress	56
5	Laundress	31	5	Cook	55
6	Barber	26	6	Waiter	40
7	Cook	21	7	Barber	28
8	Hotel Labor	14	8	Farm Owner	21
9	Plasterer	12	9	Boot Black	21
10	Hotel Porter	11	10	Sporting Woman	19
11	Farm Laborer	5	11	Farm Laborer	13
Combined Farm Owners and Farm Laborers number 45 and rank 3rd among all occupations in 1885			Combined Farm Owners and Farm Laborers number 34 and rank 7th among all occupations in 1900.		

<u>1910</u>		
<u>Rank</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number Employed</u>
1	Common Labor	125
2	Porter	104
3	Cook	77
4	Servant	62
5	Waiter	51
6	laundress	41
7	Farm Owner	37
8	Plasterer	31
9	Janitor	27
10	Barber	21
11	Teamster	20
12	Farm Laborer	17

Combined Farm Owners and  
 Farm Laborers number 54  
 and rank 5th among all  
 occupations in 1910.

Source: 1870-1910 U.S. Census

FIGURE 6.1

which employed many Nebraska blacks between 1870 and 1910 include housekeeper, common laborer, servant, cook, waiter, porter, and laundress. Many blacks turned their dream of owning land into a reality. Blacks, however, were never numerous in rural Nebraska. In 1910, only ten of the state's ninety-three counties claimed three or more black farmers, and only two counties, Cherry and Wheeler, had over five. By 1920, blacks were leaving rural Nebraska in increasing numbers for a variety of reasons.<sup>87</sup>

If blacks were successful, why did practically all of them leave their Nebraska homesteads by 1930? The majority of the early black homesteaders in Nebraska had been slaves, but had experience as freedmen prior to settling in the state. Often the black farmers arrived in Nebraska with families, and as they worked to establish the homestead, their families grew. For example, Henry Burden raised eight children between 1870 and 1900. Also during this time many Europeans migrated to Nebraska and formed their own ethnic colonies. Sociologists J. Allen Williams, Jr., David R. Johnson, and Miguel A. Carranza, in a work on ethnic assimilation in Nebraska, determined that generally an ethnic group with a low population density experiences a greater degree of assimilation than do larger groups. They also state that small ethnic groups in a larger population usually marry in greater percentages outside of their own ethnic group which in turn speeds social and cultural as-

similation.<sup>88</sup> For most ethnic groups who settled in Nebraska this was true; however, for blacks in outstate Nebraska, discriminatory practices did not allow this to happen. These sociologists also note that "discrimination against an ethnic group can hinder or prevent social interaction" or, in other words, diminish assimilation.<sup>89</sup> Many different ethnic groups settled in Nebraska before 1920. Often the children of these settlers married outside of their own ethnic group, resulting in extensive assimilation into the larger group culture. During the same time period in Nebraska, blacks realized very little assimilation, and one major reason for this was that blacks and whites rarely intermarried. Not only were racially mixed marriages considered taboo, they were against the law. It appears that this in itself made a great impact on the demise of small black communities in Nebraska. Blacks simply did not have enough non-related adults in each colony to sustain themselves.<sup>90</sup>

Throughout the state isolated black colonies with fewer than five families experienced similar trends. After reaching adulthood, children of rural blacks would usually travel significant distances to larger black communities to marry and settle. Between 1895 and 1905, many of the children of the original Overton homesteaders reached adulthood. By 1900, two young Overton blacks married within their colony, while others moved to larger communities. By 1905, young

blacks in Overton had few prospects for marriage or acquiring farm land. This problem was temporarily solved by the Kinkaid Act. By 1915, almost 200 blacks had moved to Dewitty from all around the region, making this the largest black colony ever to exist in Nebraska. This younger generation of blacks now owned land of their own and had an opportunity to marry. Within the first ten years of the colony's existence, at least twenty marriages were performed. This united many black families and sustained the colony a few years longer in the Nebraska sandhills. However, even this larger settlement gradually disappeared from the Nebraska countryside. <sup>91</sup>

A lack of determination and poor economic conditions played significant roles in reducing this and other rural black communities in Nebraska. Most of the former slaves who homesteaded in Nebraska died on their homesteads. In almost every area of the state, blacks such as David Patrick of Aurora, Robert Anderson of Hemingford, George Mattingly of David City, Henry Burden of Wilbur, Moses Speese, Henry Webb, Daniel Baxter, and Jeremiah Shores of Westerville, and Hector Dixon of southern Holt County lived the rest of their lives on the homesteads they proved upon. However, the second generation of blacks were not as determined to stay and make it on their family's homestead. Second generation rural blacks usually relocated in larger communities with sizeable black populations. After marriage, many second

generation blacks were not willing to live the isolated, difficult existence they were raised in, even when they had the opportunity to do so, thus reducing the black population in rural Nebraska. The difficulty of farming unsuitable land near the Dewitty settlement financially ruined Nebraska's largest rural endeavor by blacks. Possibly, if this settlement had been located on better land, it might have survived further into the twentieth century. All of these factors worked against the maintenance of a sustained black existence in rural Nebraska, resulting in a very diminished rural black population by 1930. The population continued to dwindle to the point that by 1940, blacks were practically non-existent in rural Nebraska.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Leon F. Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 390-401, 446-447.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 447.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Beth Norton, Howard Chudacoff, Paul Escott, David Katzman, Thomas Peterson, and William Tuttle Jr., A People and a Nation: A History of the United States (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986), pp. 420-424; A People and a Nation, p. 468; U.S. Bureau of the Census, The Statistical History of the United States (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), pp. 28-36.

<sup>5</sup> Robert G. Athearn, In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas 1879-80 (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), pp. 75-78; Morgan Peoples, "Kansas Fever in North Louisiana," Louisiana History, II (Spring 1970), p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> Omaha Daily Herald, May 27, 1871, p. 4; A.T. Andreas, History of the State of Nebraska, 2 vols. (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), 1:867.

<sup>7</sup> Omaha Daily Herald, May 27, 1871, p. 4; Andreas, History of the State of Nebraska, 1:867; Nebraska County Map Guide (Elkhorn, Nebraska: State and Local Publications, 1986), p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Nebraska, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, located in the Nebraska State Historical Society; Gary Johansen, "Black Homesteaders", Omaha Sunday World-Herald, Magazine of the Midlands, March 15, 1970, pp. 18-24.

<sup>9</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1870; Johansen, "Black Homesteaders," March 15, 1970, pp. 18-24; Manuscript Census of Population, 1885, Nebraska Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, located at Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>10</sup> Johansen, "Black Homesteaders," pp. 18-24; Daisy Anderson Leonard, From Slavery to Affluence: Memoirs of Robert Anderson, Ex-Slave (Steamboat Springs, Colorado: The Steamboat Pilot, 1927), pp. 42-50; Donald D. Wax, "Robert Ball Anderson, Ex-Slave, A Pioneer in Western Nebraska, 1884-1930," Nebraska History, 64 (Summer 1983), pp. 162-165.

<sup>11</sup> Wax, "Robert Ball Anderson," pp. 164; Leonard, From Slavery to Affluence, pp. 48-51; The Banner Press (David City, Nebraska), January 15, 1987, p. 1B.

<sup>12</sup> James C. Olson, History of Nebraska second edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 174; John R. Johnson, "Nebraska in the Seventies," Nebraska History, 37 (Spring, 1956), pp. 79-82.

<sup>13</sup> Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 174-175.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>15</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Nebraska, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, located in the Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard, From Slavery to Affluence, pp. 50-51.

<sup>17</sup> Johansen, "Black Homesteaders," pp. 21-24; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880; Frances Jacobs Alberts, ed., Sod House Memories (Hastings: Sod House Society, 1972), p. 258.

<sup>18</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880; Aurora Sun, April 17, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880; Papers from folder titled "Blacks in Custer County," located at Custer County Historical Society, Broken Bow, Nebraska.

<sup>20</sup> Omaha Bee, May 14, 1879; Forrest M. Stith, Sunrises and Sunsets for Freedom (New York: Vantage Press, 1973), pp. 26-27; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880.

<sup>21</sup> Omaha Bee, May 14, 1879; Stith, Sunrises and Sunsets, pp. 26-27; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880.

<sup>22</sup> Stith, Sunrises and Sunsets, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> 1904 Atlas of Dawson County, Nebraska (Chicago: George A. Ogle and Company, 1904), p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Manuscript Census of Agriculture, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Nebraska, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, located in Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>25</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1880 and 1885.



<sup>26</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1885; Papers of Ava Spéese Day, MSS, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>27</sup> Manuscript Census of Agriculture, Nebraska, 1885; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1885.

<sup>28</sup> Manuscript Census of Agriculture, Nebraska, 1885.

<sup>29</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1885; Nellie Snyder Yost, Before Today, The History of Holt County, Nebraska, (O'Neill, Nebraska: Miles Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 363-364.

<sup>30</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1885.

<sup>31</sup> Manuscript Census of Agriculture, Nebraska, 1885; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1885.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.; Solomon D. Butcher, Pioneer History of Custer County, Harry Chrisman, ed. (Denver: Sage Books, 1965), p. 307; Record of Deeds Books 4, 6, and 7, Custer County Register of Deeds, Courthouse, Broken Bow, Nebraska.

<sup>37</sup> Pioneer Stories of Custer County, Nebraska (Broken Bow, Nebraska: Purcell's Custer County Chief, 1936), pp. 99, 130, 167, 179, Berna Hunter Chrisman, When You and I Were Young, Nebraska, Harry Chrisman, ed. (Broken Bow, Nebraska: Purcell's Incorporated, 1971), p. 203.

<sup>38</sup> Pioneer Stories of Custer County, p. 150.

<sup>39</sup> Charlene Myers, Clear Creek Echoes: History of Westerville, Custer County, Nebraska (Callaway, Nebraska: Loup Valley Queen Printers, 1977), p. 307-308.

<sup>40</sup> Pioneer Stories of Custer County, p. 167; "Blacks in Custer County," folder at Custer County Historical Society.

<sup>41</sup> Myers, Clear Creek Echoes, p. 307-308.

<sup>42</sup> School District Number 45 Enumeration, Dawson County Superintendent of Schools, Courthouse, Lexington, Nebraska.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Ellis Dustin, August 10, 1986. Dustin attended grade school with black students in Dawson County.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Wax, "Robert Ball Anderson," pp. 163-167; Leonard, From Slavery to Affluence, pp. 55-57.

<sup>46</sup> Leonard, From Slavery to Affluence, pp. 54-55.

<sup>47</sup> Wax, "Robert Ball Anderson," p. 169.

<sup>48</sup> Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 232-233; Manuscript Census of Population, 1885; Manuscript Census of Population, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Nebraska, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, located in Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>49</sup> "Blacks in Custer County," folder at Custer County Historical Society; Manuscript Census of Population, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Nebraska, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, located in the Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>50</sup> Colleen Switzer, The Settlement of Loup and Blaine Counties (Broken Bow: Purcell's Inc., 1977), pp. 387-390; Richard Crabb, Empire on the Platte (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 298-299; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1910.

<sup>51</sup> Armada Watchman, September 26, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Chrisman, When You and I Were Young, Nebraska, pp. 197-199.

<sup>53</sup> Omaha World-Herald, February 11, 1899, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.; Addison E. Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, 3 vols. (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), 1: 783; Omaha World-Herald, October 10, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1910.

<sup>58</sup> Myers, Clear Creek Echoes, p. 307-308.

<sup>59</sup> Records of Deeds Book G, Dawson County Register of Deeds, Courthouse, Lexington, Nebraska; Overton Alfalfa Herald, May 1, 1903, p. 1; Dustin interview, August 10,

1986.

<sup>60</sup> Overton Alfalfa Herald, April 17, 1903, p. 9, May 1, 1903, p. 1, August 14, 1903, p. 1, August 21, 1903, p. 1, November 20, 1903, p. 1; December 19, 1903, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Overton Alfalfa Herald, July 8, 1904, p. 1, October 14, 1904, p. 1; Lexington Clipper-Citizen, October 21, 1904, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Dustin interview, August 10, 1986; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1900.

<sup>63</sup> Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 258-260; William D. Aeschbacher, "Development of the Sandhill Lake Country," Nebraska History, 27 (1946), pp. 219-221.

<sup>64</sup> Overton Herald, February 24, 1905, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Overton Herald, March 21, 1905, p. 1, April 7, 1905, p. 5; Beryl Decker, "The Lost Pioneers: Negro Homesteaders in Nebraska," Negro Digest, 12 (May, 1963), p. 63. Some sources say the year of arrival in the sandhills was 1907: See Jean Williams, "Nebraska's Negro Homesteaders," Nebraskaland, 47 (February, 1969), p. 30; Alberts, Sod House Memories, p. 261; Delbert Ray, "Dewitty," Nebraska Farmer, (January 17, 1959), p. 91; and Charles S. Reece, The History of Cherry County, Nebraska (Simeon, Nebraska, 1945), p. 93. Some sources report blacks arriving in Cherry County during 1909: See Stith, Sunrises and Sunsets, p. 34; and Works Projects Administration, The Negroes in Nebraska (Lincoln: Woodruff Printing Company, 1940) p. 14. However, the Overton papers noted that local blacks left in 1905 and this was the same year they filed Kinkaid claims.

<sup>66</sup> Stith, Sunrises and Sunsets, p. 28; Record of Deeds Book, Volume 46, Volume 65, Courthouse, Lexington, Nebraska; Lexington (Lexington), August 17, 1888, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Deed Book Volume 9, Cherry County Register of Deeds, Courthouse, Valentine, Nebraska; Williams, "Nebraska's Negro Homesteaders," p. 32; Marianne Beel and Barbara Gale, ed., A Sandhill Century: The Land, A History of Cherry County, Vol. 2 (Cherry County Centennial Committee, 1986), p. 246.

<sup>68</sup> Omaha Daily Bee, April 29, 1907, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., April 29, 1907, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Beel, A Sandhill Century, pp. 246-247; Papers of the

Rev. O.J. Burckhardt, MS #485, Box 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>72</sup> County School Records, Cherry County Superintendent of Schools, Courthouse, Valentine, Nebraska.

<sup>73</sup> Ray, Nebraska Farmer, p. 91; Papers of the Rev. O.J. Burckhardt; Elton A. Perkey, Perkey's Nebraska Place Names (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1982), p. 37; Decker, "The Lost Pioneers," p. 64-65; Beel, A Sandhill Century, p. 246.

<sup>74</sup> Beel, A Sandhill Century, p. 246; Alberts, Sod House Memories, pp. 262-273.

<sup>75</sup> Brownlee Soundings, November 27, 1913, p. 1; Cherry County Clerk, County Criminal Docket, pp. 100-105, Cherry County Clerk, Courthouse, Valentine, Nebraska; Interview with Don Hanna, Jr., August 24, 1986. Hanna attended school with black homesteaders.

<sup>76</sup> Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, Bulletin 129, Negroes in the United States (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1915), p. 179; Papers of Ava Speese Day, A/MSS, Nebraska State Historical Society; Deed Book Volume 9, Cherry County Register of Deeds, Courthouse, Valentine, Nebraska; Don Hanna Jr. interview, August 24, 1986.

<sup>77</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1910; Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), pp. 595-603.

<sup>78</sup> Olson, History of Nebraska, p. 259; Don Hanna, Jr. interview, August 24, 1986.

<sup>79</sup> Don Hanna, Jr. interview, August 24, 1986.

<sup>80</sup> Don Hanna, Jr. Interview, August 24, 1986; Decker, "The Lost Pioneers," pp. 63-65; Deed Book Volume 9, Cherry County Register of Deeds, Courthouse, Valentine, Nebraska.

<sup>81</sup> Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, p. 595-603; Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931), pp. 82-95.

<sup>82</sup> Stith, Sunrises and Sunsets, p. 26; Leonard, From Slavery to Affluence, p. 51; Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long, pp. 400-401.

<sup>83</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1870,

1880, and 1885.

<sup>84</sup> Leonard, From Slavery to Affluence, p. 51.

<sup>85</sup> Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long, pp. 336-386.

<sup>86</sup> Johansen, "Black Homesteaders," pp. 18-24; Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1870, 1880, 1885, 1900, 1910.

<sup>87</sup> Manuscript Census of Population, Nebraska, 1870, 1880, 1885, 1900, 1910.

<sup>88</sup> J. Allen Williams, Jr., David R. Johnson, and Miguel A. Carranza, "Ethnic Assimilation and Pluralism in Nebraska," in Frederick C. Luebke, ed., Ethnicity on the Great Plains (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), pp. 217-219.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp. 217-225; Compiled Statutes of Nebraska, 1929 (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1931) p. 1033.

<sup>91</sup> Papers of Ava Speese Day, "Black Kinkaiders File," located at Cherry County Historical Society, Valentine, Nebraska.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.; Johansen, "Black Homesteaders," pp. 18-24; Wax, "Robert Ball Anderson," pp. 61-64; Stith, Sunrises and Sunsets, pp. 25-40; Decker, "The Lost Pioneers," pp. 63-65; Jon Farrar, "Black Homesteaders; Remembering the Good Times," Nebraskaland Magazine, 66 (November, 1988), pp. 43-44.

## CONCLUSION

The historical study of blacks in Nebraska, especially outside of Omaha, has not received much attention. One obvious reason for this is the minimal number of blacks in the state. Blacks never made up more than two percent of the state's total population at any time. In addition, these blacks were practically all ordinary people of ordinary means for their group and time. This makes relevant primary source materials difficult to obtain. Another major reason for the lack of studies on blacks in the state is racial prejudice. Fair and equitable relationships between ethnic groups often did not exist and this reality probably impeded the recording of the black experience in Nebraska.

The black experience in Nebraska was shaped by the time period in which they lived in the state, the political and social attitudes, both nationally and within the state, and the physical environment of the state itself. Blacks for the most part, did not enter Nebraska as first class citizens, and therefore did not experience the fruits of total equality. This does not mean that Nebraskans were a uniquely prejudiced people, because those persons who settled the state brought with them the pre-existing values of the time and the prejudices of their native areas. When Nebraska and Kansas Territories were created in 1854, the status of blacks rested with the people of the new territories. Nebraska,

established as a northern territory, was less sought after by both slave owners and abolitionists. As a result, Nebraska never experienced the amount of fighting over the slavery issues that Kansas did. However, while Kansas attracted most of the abolitionists, a small handful of slave owners wielded enough influence in Nebraska Territory to keep slavery legal for almost seven years. Slavery was finally outlawed in the territory only after three consecutive legislative attempts, and then only after overriding Governor Samuel Black's veto. In 1867, when Nebraska was on the verge of joining the Union, an attempt to deny black suffrage in the state's new constitution became a roadblock to statehood.

It appears that both the public sentiment and politicians played a hand in keeping black immigration into the state in check. During the Exodus of 1879, negative sentiments concerning black migration, voiced by some of the state's leading newspapers, sent a clear message of racial prejudice to blacks and those aiding their settlement. In addition, neither the Nebraska legislators nor Governor Albinus Nance pushed for any aid for the black refugees. Nance's apparent attitude was certainly different from that of Kansas Governor John St. John who welcomed the Exodusters with open arms. During that same decade, Oliver Mason, Chief Justice of the Nebraska Supreme Court, made efforts in the courts to limit some civil rights for blacks.

After 1880, more blacks immigrated to Nebraska and most of them settled in Omaha and Lincoln, with about one-fourth of the new arrivals settling in other areas throughout the state. Blacks followed the railroads to newly emerging villages and towns along the line where they usually found employment in places such as hotels and restaurants as skilled and unskilled laborers, housekeepers, and servants. These occupations were certainly not among the state's higher paying and generally were among the lowest; however, they did reflect the type of work many Americans of the post-Civil War era felt was suitable for former slaves. Blacks rarely held professional occupations or engaged in private business.

A few blacks had the financial means and the determination necessary to settle on farmsteads in rural Nebraska during that time. More blacks were engaged in farming than any other type of private enterprise. However, many black farmers settled in Nebraska after much of the state's more fertile valley lands were already taken. This made making a living even more difficult for the black farmer. It also appears that black farmers experienced less discrimination than blacks who settled in towns. This was probably the case because turn of the century rural Nebraska did not have a wide range of social classes. In the state's villages and cities, a diverse social class structure usually existed, creating more distinct upper and lower classes. In the countryside, most of the residents shared similar social and



economic conditions which resulted in more fraternization among neighbors, regardless of ethnic background. In most instances reported by both rural black and white families, it appears that these groups got along well with each other. This was not as often the case for blacks who lived in many of the larger communities of the state.

The racial attitudes of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, which allowed increasing discrimination, were certainly present in Nebraska and often manifested themselves in discriminatory acts when certain prejudicial conditions were allowed to develop. Increased economic hardship often increased racial tension. Economic downturns during the early 1890s and after World War I produced an atmosphere ripe for aggressive acts against blacks. Some Nebraska newspapers tried to capitalize both politically and economically on the predicament of blacks throughout this time period. Issues such as slavery, the Exodusters, and crimes committed by blacks were subjects that were often sensationalized by certain editors. It often seemed that in the climax of a controversy, blacks often suffered the consequences of being an unpopular minority, as in the Omaha lynchings of 1891 and 1919.

In Lincoln, many blacks arrived during the Exoduster movement of 1879-1880. During that time, Lincoln offered blacks the hope of social and economic success. Although the reality did not meet the expectations, the establishment of a

significant black community was in place there by 1890. This community in Lincoln was large enough to sustain itself to this day. Elsewhere in outstate Nebraska, blacks usually settled in three types of locations: In towns situated along railway lines; at or near Nebraska forts, and on farmsteads in rural Nebraska. In the small towns across the state, blacks worked primarily as common laborers, servants, and as hotel cooks and waiters. The formation of an organized ongoing black community, for the most part, never occurred in these towns. Only in Lincoln, and to a lesser extent in Grand Island and Hastings, did a significant black community remain for more than one generation. The military posts of Fort Robinson and Fort Niobrara attracted a few blacks to these areas while black troops were stationed there. Although some of these blacks remained in the area near the forts after the black soldiers were transferred, most moved shortly thereafter. Some of the most successful black settlements occurred on Nebraska's rural farmsteads. Black farmers in Nebraska were probably among the most prosperous of their race, and many blacks who farmed throughout the state were just as successful as their white neighbors. Even so, most of these blacks also had left their farms by the early twentieth century. Despite the lack of social stratification in rural Nebraska, unspoken or muted racial prejudice may have led to a decline in the number of rural blacks. In many communities where blacks lived, the local press often

contained racial overtones. When newspapers contained stories about blacks they often were described with terms such as "darky", "dusky", and "nigger" among other racial slurs. However, editors in towns such as Overton rarely referred to blacks in these terms. Reports about the Overton blacks usually made no reference to race, leading one to believe that blacks in this community were viewed more as equals.

However, even rural blacks were never truly equal as long as an attitude existed which allowed a discriminatory law which forbade mixed marriages. This statute sent a message that whites commonly considered non-Caucasians to be second class citizens. The general attitude among Nebraskans which allowed this type of legislation helped lead to the demise of blacks in rural Nebraska. Many of Nebraska's clusters of people of certain European origins would have gradually declined in numbers also if they had not been allowed to intermarry outside of their ethnic group. Within a few generations these small ethnic groups might lose their visibility through assimilation resulting from inter-marriage; however descendants of these original settlers could probably still be found in the local area. Blacks did not have this choice. Those considering marriage were often forced to leave the rural areas for cities with a heavier concentration of blacks in order to find a spouse. Once they left, few of these individuals returned to their rural homes. In addition, the increased employment opportunities offered in the larger

cities helped to increase migration away from the farms. The timing of the settlement itself in rural Nebraska dramatically impacted the black experience. As stated before, black farmers usually located in less desirable portions of the state. However, for the most part, these farmers were successful and lived out their lives on their farmsteads. When the Kinkaid Act was enacted, many blacks saw this as an opportunity to increase their land holdings as well as a way to attract other blacks to rural Nebraska. Again, the additional lands they received were of the poorest in the region and would not support them. While the colony of blacks in Cherry County grew to over one hundred members, its existence was short-lived, resulting in part from the over-farming of the very light sandhills soil. After awhile, these blacks who settled in the sandhills went through the same struggle with the environment as did their white counterpart, and like him, they eventually left the sandhills region.

Overall, this variety of chronological, environmental, economic, political and social circumstances best explain why the black population decreased from 1890 through 1930 in most of outstate Nebraska. Meanwhile, Omaha and Lincoln's black population continued to grow, absorbing many of the rest of the state's blacks. This trend continued to the point, that in 1930, ninety percent of Nebraska's blacks resided in Omaha and Lincoln, as compared to only sixty-eight percent in 1890 when the black population in outstate Nebraska was at its

peak. The heyday for black settlement in Nebraska's small communities and rural areas was over.

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