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Brent M. S. Campney

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, brent.campney@utrgv.edu

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"A White-and-Negro Environment Which Is Seldom Spotlighted"

The Twilight of Jim Crow in the Postwar Urban Midwest

ABSTRACT This article investigates white-black race relations in postwar urban Kansas. Focusing on seven small and mid-sized cities, it explores how white Kansans continued to maintain discrimination, segregation, and exclusion in these years, even as they yielded slowly to the demands of civil rights activists and their supporters. Specifically, it examines the means employed by whites to assert their dominance in social interactions; to discriminate in housing, employment, and commerce; and, in some cases, to defend their all-white (or nearly all-white) municipalities, the so-called sundown towns, from any black presence at all. In addition, it briefly discusses the white backlash which followed as whites turned sharply to the right on racial issues, convinced that blacks now enjoyed full equality and no longer required further concessions. In so doing, the article provides insight into the history of the black freedom struggle in a sampling of cities in a midwestern state, supplements the historiography of racism in Kansas, and opens new lines of inquiry into the historiography of the freedom struggle in the North during this period of rapid and profound transformation. **KEYWORDS** Civil Rights, segregation, Midwest, Kansas, sundown towns, police violence, Jim Crow

In the early 1960s journalists fanned out across America to document the efforts of civil rights activists to delegitimize and dismantle Jim Crow, and of racial conservatives to defend and repackage it. Reflecting their assumption that anti-black racism was essentially southern and their belief that the most sensational, spectacular, or violent stories were the most newsworthy, many focused on those events in the South which have come to epitomize the popular, and often the scholarly, memory: Freedom Rides, Mississippi Freedom Summer, and the demonstrations in places like Birmingham and Selma, among others. With their eyes trained on Dixie, they were decidedly less interested in documenting Jim Crow elsewhere or the efforts to topple it. A reporter in Great Bend, Kansas, bemoaned this bias. "After the extremes seen in Southern racial problems," he concluded, "anything less than a riot, sit-in

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or picket seems to indicate that all is well at the local level.” He was quick to add that, according to many black Kansans, “all is not well.”¹

Another contemporary who was interested in the “racial problems” of Kansas was Jack Kelleher, a reporter for the *Hutchinson News* who, in 1960, penned a series of articles documenting the daily practices of Jim Crow locally. “When I first asked how Hutchinson got along with its few Negroes, I had little idea of the research which lay between me and an answer,” he recalled. Kelleher addressed midwestern Jim Crow with a perceptiveness that eluded his more southern-myopic contemporaries. “Here was a white-and-Negro environment which is seldom spotlighted in news story or survey,” he explained, “and it was proving more interesting than the well documented situations of the nation’s racial hot-spots.”²

Like the writings of Kelleher, this study shifts the focus from “the nation’s racial hot-spots” and onto the less visible ones in the Midwest, as exemplified by Kansas. Focusing principally on smaller cities and towns between 1960 and 1965, it explores how white Kansans maintained Jim Crow, even as they yielded to the demands of civil rights activists and their supporters within the state and across the country. While many scholars and laypersons today tend to associate Jim Crow with the legally mandated racist policies in the South, I use the term to describe the popularly accepted racist practices characteristic of the Midwest, as demonstrated by the widespread use of the term by Kansans. “Jim Crowism,” declared a black Kansas newspaper in 1941, “is a national institution.”³

More specifically, this study examines the means employed by whites to assert their dominance in social interactions, to discriminate in housing, employment, and commerce, and in some cases to defend their nearly all white municipalities, the so-called sundown towns, from any black presence. In addition, it also discusses the white backlash which followed as white Kansans—now claiming that blacks enjoyed full equality and required no

1. Dave Hudson, “Barton County Negro Feels His Lot as Citizen Could Be Much Improved,” *Great Bend Sunday Tribune*, November 26, 1961, 3.

2. Jack Kelleher, “Record’s Liberal, Not Good,” *Hutchinson News*, September 12, 1960, 7.

3. “Jim Crowism, a National Institution,” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), March 7, 1941, 7. In using the term Jim Crow in the North, I am not unique. See, for example, Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008). For an interesting meditation on the differences between racism in the North and the South, see Matthew D. Lassiter, “De Jure/De Facto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth,” in Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds., *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25–48.

further concessions—adopted new and publicly palatable color-blind arguments for describing what they still believed. In so doing, the study provides insight into the history of the black freedom struggle in a sampling of cities in this midwestern state, supplements the historiography of racism and discrimination there, and engages new lines of inquiry into the study of this struggle in the North more generally during this period of rapid and profound transformation.

PARAMETERS OF THE STUDY

To a large extent, a study of this sort in Kansas *must* focus on urban centers because those places were quite simply where the vast majority of black residents in the state lived. In the two decades after the Civil War, many of those who had migrated from the southern and border states sought opportunity in rural Kansas as farm workers or farmers, vocations long practiced by them. Greatly outnumbered by hostile whites, they soon began concentrating in the cities (and increasingly the largest cities) where their sheer numbers offered better opportunities and greater safety. Black Kansans continued this pattern well into the twentieth century; by 1940 80 percent of them lived in cities. Hence, both the Jim Crow system and the campaign to upend it were overwhelmingly urban phenomena.⁴

To investigate this struggle in these small cities, this work employs a range of sources. These include black newspapers which provided extensive coverage of racial discrimination and opposition to it, and white newspapers which chronicled hometown racial etiquette, reported on local challenges to Jim Crow, gauged white responses to these challenges, and on occasion included perspectives not available elsewhere, such as reports written by civil rights activists or obtained from them in interviews. They also include the papers of the state branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the collected papers of civil rights groups, like the Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy (LLPD) and the Douglass Community Center in Manhattan, materials from the Kansas

4. Brent M. S. Campney, *This Is Not Dixie: Racist Violence in Kansas, 1861–1927* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015). Unless otherwise noted, all demographic data is derived from *Census of Population: 1960*, Volume I, *Characteristics of the Population*, Part 18, Kansas (Washington: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census), 67, 71, 81, 83; and *1970 Census of Population*, Volume I, *Characteristics of the Population*, Part 18, Kansas (Washington: U.S. Department of Commerce, Social and Economic Statistics Administration, Bureau of the Census, 1973), 108, 112, 122, 123.

Commission on Civil Rights, community surveys, and the correspondence of U.S. Representatives Joe Skubitz and Robert J. Dole, and of local school board officials.

Several scholars have examined the black freedom struggle in a few specific cities in post–World War II Kansas, including Wichita, the state’s largest city; Topeka, the state capital; and Lawrence, the site of the University of Kansas (KU).⁵ Like these studies, this one explores the struggle in urban Kansas. Unlike them, it focuses primarily but not exclusively on seven small and mid-sized cities (albeit, including Lawrence) across the state to understand this struggle within such places and to mitigate the scholarly bias toward the largest metropolises, not only in Kansas but in the literature generally.

In 1960 these seven cities ranged in size from 4,248 to 43,202 residents with the smallest being Hoisington, a railroad town. Atchison, Great Bend, and Hays ranged from roughly twelve to seventeen thousand; and Hutchinson, Lawrence, and Salina varied from thirty-three to forty-three thousand. The seven cities were diverse in economic and cultural terms as most maintained their small local manufacturers or state institutions.⁶ Two of them—Hays and Lawrence—were college towns. Atchison, Hutchinson, and Salina were, or had recently been, retailing and wholesaling centers. Situated over a substantial oil field, Hays and Great Bend also “formed the core for what became known as the Kansas oil patch.”⁷ Neither Hoisington nor Hays had more than two black residents; Atchison had 1,268, or just over 10 percent of

5. Gretchen Cassel Eick, *Dissent in Wichita: The Civil Rights Movement in the Midwest, 1954–72* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001 [paperback 2008]); Rusty L. Monhollon, “*This Is America?*”: *The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas* (New York: Palgrave, 2004); Mary L. Dudziak, “The Limits of Good Faith: Desegregation in Topeka, Kansas, 1950–1956,” in *Kansas and the West: New Perspectives*, ed. Rita Napier (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003): 344–80; Charise Cheney, “Blacks on *Brown*: Intra-Community Debates over School Desegregation in Topeka, Kansas, 1941–1955,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 42 (Winter 2011): 481–500; Robert Beatty and Mark A. Peterson, “Covert Discrimination: Topeka—Before and After *Brown*,” *Kansas History* 27 (Autumn 2004): 146–63; Kristine M. McCusker, “‘The Forgotten Years’ of America’s Civil Rights Movement: Wartime Protests at the University of Kansas, 1939–1945,” *Kansas History* 17 (Spring 1994): 26–37; Rusty L. Monhollon, “Taking the Plunge: Race, Rights, and the Politics of Desegregation in Lawrence, Kansas, 1960,” *Kansas History* 20 (Autumn 1997): 138–59; Brent M. S. Campney, “‘Hold the Line’: The Defense of Jim Crow in Lawrence, Kansas, 1945–1961,” *Kansas History* 33 (Spring 2010): 22–41.

6. James R. Shorridge, *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 262.

7. *Ibid.*, 262.

its total population. The remaining four cities recorded between 470 and 1,657 blacks, roughly 3 to 5 percent of their total populations.

Like most cities in Kansas, each of these had ugly histories of racist discrimination and violence. Between the end of the Civil War and the end of World War I, white mobs lynched black residents in six of these seven cities, and in three of the cities, policemen gunned down black residents in sensational incidents. In Hutchinson, the only city without a confirmed lynching or police killing, a white stranger murdered a black man in 1905 and then lounged about town for days without arrest. In 1910 an official there expressed his satisfaction with the work of the officers who had expelled supposed transients from the city. "Hutchinson is almost cleaned of the bad class of negroes now," he affirmed.⁸ In Lawrence, a lynch mob murdered three black residents in 1882, hanging them from a bridge over the Kansas River. In 1927, a white socialist reflected on the racism at not only the University of Kansas in Lawrence but also in the college towns across the state in the 1920s, writing that her "heart [is] torn with pity and the sheer senselessness of the evil tree of prejudice that has begun to flourish at 'Manhattan' (as our Agricultural College is generally called) and, gnarled and ugly, with spreading branches, stands now deeply rooted [in Lawrence] at our university [KU]." Reflecting on Hays, she simply quoted the mayor who had recently conceded that "for more than thirty years we have had no Negro residents."⁹

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WHITE SUPREMACY AND BLACK RESISTANCE IN KANSAS

In the twenty years after the American Civil War, white Kansans employed widespread violence to establish their control over a black population which had grown rapidly through an initial migration of freed people displaced by the war and then through a subsequent migration of so-called Exodusters from the Deep South seeking economic opportunity and social justice at the end of Reconstruction. Between 1865 and 1885, lynch mobs, race rioters, police officers, and lone vigilantes killed more than sixty blacks. They terrorized others with whippings, tar and featherings, and house burnings. Once they had asserted their dominance over black Kansans, whites maintained and reinforced it with periodic acts of racist violence and, increasingly, with

8. "A Word for the Negroes," *Hutchinson News*, March 8, 1910, 7.

9. Marcet Haldeman-Julius, "Negroes in Kansas Colleges (1927)," in *Spurts from an Interrupted Pen* (Girard, Kans.: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1931), 69, 72.

the development of the system known as Jim Crow. Bemoaning the largely informal and piecemeal nature of this system, an observer lamented in 1933 that black Kansans “have their rights but no one seems to insist that their rights be respected.”¹⁰

Although whites statewide discriminated against blacks, those whites who lived in sundown towns had few if any blacks against whom to discriminate. Whites in Hays ridded their city of blacks in 1869 with violence that claimed the lives of eleven black men. Subsequently, whites kept blacks out with demonstrations in the 1870s and 1880s that assured the exclusion of blacks for the next century. In 1904 a reporter noted that Hays “does not number a single negro among its citizenship.”¹¹ Upon the founding of Hoisington in 1888, whites excluded blacks from most of the town but tolerated a small number in a colony south of the railroad tracks. When the city’s population expanded between 1910 and 1912 as part of a local economic boom, the white population shattered the hopes of black residents’ participation. In April of 1912, a mob invaded the black colony, lynched a resident, and expelled the remainder of the black population.¹²

By the 1940s whites exercised impressive control over the state’s black population. “There are no Jim Crow laws in the state of Kansas, but . . . the ‘Jim Crow rule’ supplants the ‘Jim Crow Law,’” explained the *Plaindealer*, the self-proclaimed “Oldest Negro Newspaper in the Southwest,” which had been founded in Topeka in 1899 and published in Kansas City, Kansas, after 1934.¹³ “Negroes are refused service in public eating houses in Kansas. In several cities, signs appear [reading] ‘Service for white only.’” In Kansas City some diners had “‘Jim Crow’ eating counters for Negroes just like they exist in any of the southern states where there are jim crow laws.”¹⁴ In 1955

10. “Kans. Writer Raps Unfair Sports,” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), November 3, 1933, 1. On the instances of racist violence, see also Campney, *This Is Not Dixie, passim* and appendix 1.

11. “No Negroes at Hays,” *Atchison Daily Champion*, April 22, 1904, 3.

12. On the events in Hays and Hoisington, see James N. Leiker, “Black Soldiers at Fort Hays, Kansas, 1867–1869: A Study in Civilian and Military Violence,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 17 (Winter 1997): 3–17; Campney, *This Is Not Dixie*, 31, 33, 48, 68, 78–79, 142, 148.

13. For the slogan “The Oldest Negro Newspaper in the Southwest,” see *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), November 30, 1945, 1. On the publishing history of the Topeka *Plaindealer*, see Tim Hrenchir, “Topeka Bridge Could Be Named after African-American Newspaper Editor,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 7, 2017, <https://www.cjonline.com/news/local/2017-04-07/topeka-bridge-could-be-named-after-african-american-newspaper-editor>. On the publishing history of the Kansas City *Plaindealer*, see <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032353/>.

14. “Asks Kansas Supreme Court to End Jim Crow in Theaters,” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), October 15, 1948, 1.

the *Plaindealer* again reported that blacks “are denied service in public places throughout the state,” and with excusable hyperbole added that “Topeka is the capitol of Kansas, but Negroes don’t have any more civil rights in Topeka, than they do in Jackson, the capitol of Mississippi.” In Kansas, it was “Jim [C]row all the way!”¹⁵

After the Civil War blacks vigorously challenged white efforts to fetter them. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they took up arms to defend themselves against white mobs. After 1900, they increasingly established civil rights organizations, published newspapers, and pursued justice in the courts of law. Often, black residents fought for justice through the local and state branches of larger organizations (primarily the NAACP in the post–World War II years), or through the development of local groups. In so doing, they periodically encountered internecine difficulties involving unity, money, and leadership. In a frank report compiled after a 1948 NAACP conference in Leavenworth, for example, an official in a memorandum to a colleague mourned “that this was the worst attended meeting they have ever had and from what I saw from the general procedure of the sessions there is a lot of work to be done in this state.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, and often with the support of an assertive black press and bar, they did accomplish a great deal.

As they had after every previous war, blacks fought nationally for full citizenship at the end of World War II. In 1945, the *Plaindealer* exhorted the “Negro voters [of] Kansas” to use “the ballot to let their Representatives and Senators know that they protest them denying them their rights to first class citizenship.”¹⁷ In addition, leaders at civil rights conferences reported on local activism and developed new strategies and tactics. “Cases on Civil Rights were taken up from Clay Center, Great Bend[,] Manhattan, Salina, and Kansas City,” reported the *Negro Star*. “Lack-of-funds[,] a handicap to the successful prosecution of these cases[,] is to be remedied by the creation of a State Legal Defense Fund.”¹⁸ In Lawrence a combination of black residents, black KU students, some white ones, and KU administrators, attacked Jim

15. James A. Hamlett, Jr., “Week-End Chats,” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), November 18, 1955, 1.

16. “Memorandum to Mr. Current from Madison Jones,” September 9, 1948, page 6, in “Kansas NAACP Branch Files: Kansas City to Winfield, c. 1940–1955” [microfilm], MS 1394, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

17. “Will the Republican Kan. Legislature Let Negroes Remain 2nd Class?,” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), March 2, 1945, 1.

18. “N.A.A.C.P.,” *Negro Star* (Wichita), April 9, 1948, 1.

Crow in flurries of activism. The KU chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) led sit-ins at theaters and restaurants in 1947 and 1948. During the same period, “Over 60 representatives of about 20 groups over the state met . . . on the campus of Kansas University in Lawrence, for the Interracial Workshop for civil rights in Kansas.”¹⁹ Blacks organized mass protests, including a march of several hundred organized by the NAACP in 1963 and in which participants carried protest signs with “slogans such as . . . ‘I Want to Swim in Lawrence’ and ‘We Want to Work Where We Shop.’”²⁰

Across Kansas new civil rights leaders emerged, assuming courageous roles in the struggle. In Salina, the Reverend Whalon H. Blackman conducted an energetic campaign for equality and challenged the whites who resisted. A transplant from Mississippi, he expressed openly his philosophy about direct action, although he greatly overstated the apathy of earlier generations of black Kansans. “You have to fight for what you want,” he declared. “I think some of the Negroes here could have made advancements if they had been more vigilant.”²¹

In his capacity as a Methodist pastor, Blackman undertook “quiet efforts” in 1963 to forge an inter-racial and ecumenical denomination. He later discussed his approach. He indicated that interracial teams of church members visited the homes of other community members, explaining their theological and social philosophies, inviting them to attend services, and urging them to call on the church if they needed sustenance of any sort.²² After the violence in Selma in 1965, Blackman and others took to the streets. “Singing freedom songs, an estimated 100 Salinans marched . . . as a protest against racial injustice in Alabama and Salina,” reported the *Salina Journal*. “The Rev. Whalon Blackman, local NAACP president, told the marchers here that they had walked with the thousands who are making the march this week from Selma to Montgomery.”²³

Activists in Topeka displayed faith in the legal system in 1947 and 1948 when they appealed to the courts to compel theaters to cease discrimination.

19. “Report of the Kansas Interracial Workshop,” [1948], in “Kansas NAACP Branch Files: Kansas City to Winfield, c. 1940–1955.”

20. “Housing, Jobs Emphasized in Rights Meeting,” *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, July 22, 1963, 1.

21. Rica Hammerstrom, “We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To,” *Salina Journal*, May 16, 1965, 34.

22. “Salinans Pioneer Inclusive Fellowship,” *Salina Journal*, February 7, 1964, T2.

23. “100 Stage Protest March in Salina,” *Salina Journal*, March 22, 1965, 6.

After theater operators and city officials colluded to avoid desegregation by repealing a licensing ordinance, and after the state Supreme Court upheld their efforts, Elisha Scott, the black attorney for the plaintiffs and a prominent activist, vowed that “Kansans may be assured that this is not the end of this case by [any] means.”²⁴ Black Kansans achieved a more satisfactory result in 1955 when a lawsuit in Parsons forced change across the state with respect to public swimming pools. “The Kansas Supreme Court ruled today [that] the city of Parsons has no right to refuse the privileges of its municipal swimming pool to a . . . Negro,” noted the *Hutchinson News-Herald*. “Similar cases had been taken to the high court by Negroes residing in Herington and Topeka but these were not ruled on today.”²⁵

After the war black Kansans gained leverage by comparing American racism to the practices of those against whom the country’s servicemen had recently fought. “The Kansas Legislature will determine the fate of these measures which are of vital significance to the 100,000 Negro citizens,” noted the *Plaindealer*. If it failed, it would be responsible for “a ‘Nazi’ move to deprive human beings of their rights.”²⁶ White reformers likewise manipulated wartime rhetoric with an appeal to the Free State narrative which, since Bleeding Kansas in the 1850s, had portrayed the state as anti-South. They hinted that continued Jim Crow would tarnish that image and erode representations of Kansas as existentially different from the ‘racist South’ routinely under attack in the northern press. “The state’s capital city has, in effect, adopted a ‘Jim Crow’ law of the sort that Kansans from the beginning have felt themselves above,” the *Hutchinson News-Herald* worried after the theater shenanigans in Topeka. “Such things have been considered obnoxious evils in uncivilized places like Mississippi and Nazi Germany, but this state always has taken comfort in the thought [that] ‘it can’t happen here.’”²⁷

As suggested by the editorial in the *News-Herald*, blacks now enjoyed the support of a small-but-growing number of white allies, many of whom were administrators, faculty, or students at the state’s universities. Although Lawrence and KU became rigidly segregated between 1900 and 1930, Chancellor

24. “Kansas Supreme Court Upholds Theater Bias,” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), November 26, 1948, 1.

25. “City Can’t Ban Pool Use by Negroes,” *Hutchinson News-Herald*, July 6, 1955, 1.

26. “Will the Republican Kan. Legislature Let Negroes Remain 2nd Class?”

27. *Hutchinson News-Herald*, reprinted as “‘Jim Crow’ in Kansas,” *Emporia Daily Gazette*, October 3, 1947, 4.

Franklin D. Murphy reversed that trend in the 1950s, using “the chancellor’s office as a lever for social change by threatening to show first-run movies and open barbershops and cafes on campus that would compete with Lawrence’s segregated businesses, which convinced many business people to open their doors to blacks.”²⁸ Although these white activists were genuinely committed to the destruction of Jim Crow and, in one way or another, to the development of a more racially egalitarian society, they did sometimes demonstrate their own racism by expressing paternalistic attitudes.²⁹

Confronted by these growing demands from civil rights activists, some white racial conservatives chose to reinforce the *status quo*. In 1945 those in Pratt banned black soldiers from a parade in which only white servicemen were invited to participate. “Is this type of rank discrimination and segregation what Negroes are to expect when the present global conflict is concluded?” grumbled the *Plaindealer*. “Recently Governor Andrew Schoepel appointed a committee of nine to handle all post-war issues involving GI’s, and failed to consider a Negro appointee. The Governor’s failure to even consider, to say nothing of appointing a Negro, is in keeping with what Negro citizens of Pratt, Kansas, think will be the lot of Negro veterans of World War II, and the incident at Pratt lends [credence] to the all too fast-growing belief.”³⁰

In an unknown number of school districts in the 1940s and early 1950s, whites continued to enforce segregation. In 1948 the *Plaindealer* described matters in Merriam where black taxpayers contributed to the funding of a new school which only white students could attend. The school “was built after the floating of a bond for that purpose and Negroes living in the community were not exempt once the bond proposal was favorably voted,” it stated. “The stucco building, poorly arranged for the purpose [it] purports to serve, hard to heat and keep dry inside, is the Negro school. Its rest room is nothing more than a typical rural OUTHOUSE.”³¹

In Miami County, some whites still employed violence in 1947 when a posse in Osawatimie captured George Miller, a railroad worker, accused of killing the local police chief. Some of its members “threw a rope around Miller and ‘only the cooler heads of the legal officers’ saved the Negro’s life,”

28. Monhollon, “*This is America?*,” 46.

29. For an example of white activists’ paternalism toward black activists, see Monhollon, “Taking the Plunge,” 146–48.

30. “Ban Troop from Parade,” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), July 13, 1945, 1.

31. “This Is Not Even Equal Accommodation,” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), May 28, 1948, 2.

although not before Miller was manhandled and paraded through the streets. A Miami County official conceded that many whites were “pretty sore” but claimed that they had “cooled down now and we aren’t expecting any trouble.”³² Notwithstanding his assurances, whites continued to terrorize blacks there; on several occasions in 1947–1948, vigilantes in Miami County drove black patrons from restaurants and bars at gunpoint.³³

More commonly by this time, police officers had appropriated the tactics of the mobs. Following the threatened lynching in Osawatomie, police officers there allegedly “misused” another black resident, prompting him to file suit with a lawyer in the county seat of Paola. Suggesting that this lawyer was not ethical, the victim claimed that “the Osawatomie police had the Paola lawyer . . . throw the case out of court.”³⁴ When he discussed the mob violence in Osawatomie the year after it occurred, a NAACP official compared it explicitly to a notorious 1941 case of police violence, what he called the case of a “Negro soldier murdered by police officers at Junction City.” In both cases, the official noted, the witnesses had refused to talk to authorities about what they had seen due to a fear of reprisals.³⁵ In 1947, the *Plaindealer* likewise tied police violence to mob violence in explicit terms, arguing that “police brutality gives the lyncher[s] . . . the green light to take the law in their hands.”³⁶

By the mid-1950s, however, white racial conservatives were fighting a losing battle, despite their often successful efforts to “hold the line” on some issues. They plainly recognized that, if they did not relax Jim Crow, Kansas might become linked in the national imagination with the South which was under constant assault in the northern press. To avoid the fallout which befell the South after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education (Topeka)* case

32. “Negro Rescued from Irate Mob,” *Waukesha (Wisc.) Daily Freeman*, February 4, 1947, 1. See also “Kans. Pres. of NAACP Branches Sees Need of Civil Rights,” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), October 1, 1948, 1.

33. “Leavenworth Kansas,” March 21, 1948, in “Kansas NAACP Branch Files: Kansas City to Winfield, c. 1940–1955.” White anger may also have undermined Miller’s right to a fair trial. In 1948, a black leader expressed concern that he “never had an opportunity to tell his whole story to the Court.” See “Kans. Pres. of NAACP Branches Sees Need of Civil Rights.” After two trials the state executed Miller in 1950.

34. “Leavenworth Kansas,” March 21, 1948, in “Kansas NAACP Branch Files: Kansas City to Winfield, c. 1940–1955.”

35. “Kans. Pres. of NAACP Branches Sees Need of Civil Rights.” On the Junction City killing, see “Kansas Police Kills Soldier in Brawl Near Ft. Riley,” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), April 25, 1941, 1; “Fort Riley Negro Shot by Policeman,” *Manhattan Mercury*, April 2, 1941, 1.

36. “Too Much Police Brutality,” *Plaindealer* (Kansas City), June 13, 1947, 7.

(especially when the case originated in Kansas), Kansas school boards dealt with the matter quickly and effectively, as corroborated in a KU study completed in November 1955 and briefly detailed in the *Atchison Daily Globe*.³⁷

Amid a groundswell of northern white support for racial reform, particularly when that reform was directed at the South, prominent white Kansans moved in the mid-to-late 1950s to eliminate other Jim Crow practices. Under such pressure, racial conservatives, including judges, politicians, and businessmen, agreed after years of foot-dragging to desegregate restaurants and theaters. As was evident elsewhere, blacks in Barton County decried continued discrimination but acknowledged “that conditions are ‘much better than they once were,’” reported the *Great Bend Sunday Tribune* in 1961. “The last ten years, they point out, have seen some of the racial bars torn down. In that time Negroes have been admitted to the swimming pool and are allowed access to all seats in local movie houses.”³⁸

For their change of heart, prominent whites could credit several interrelated variables. Some—a distinct minority—genuinely viewed racial discrimination as immoral. Others—particularly those eager to strengthen distinctions rather than commonalities between Kansas and the South—expressed disgust at the demonstrations of white southerners to maintain the ‘color line.’ Still others recognized the risk, as the Cold War unfolded, of alienating potential non-white allies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, who might reject the racism of the United States and cast their lot with the Soviet Union.³⁹

Influenced by these currents, legislators acted and in 1959 they amended the Kansas public accommodations law, making “it a misdemeanor to discriminate in ‘any place of public entertainment or public amusement, for which a license is required by any of the municipal authorities of this state’ because of ‘race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry.’”⁴⁰ In 1961, they amended the Kansas discrimination law (first passed during an earlier reformist urge eight years earlier) to ensure fair hiring practices. Like the judges,

37. Campney, “Hold the Line,” 37. For the University of Kansas study, see “Racial Integration,” *Atchison Daily Globe*, November 29, 1955, 4. For a case of backsliding on school integration, see “Negroes Attack Coffeyville Policy,” *Salina Journal*, October 5, 1961, 13.

38. Hudson, “Barton County Negro Feels His Lot as Citizen Could be Much Improved.”

39. On the role of the Cold War and the American “image” in driving civil rights reform, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

40. Monhollon, “Taking the Plunge,” 144–45.

politicians, and businessmen before them, ordinary whites—even the most racially conservative ones—yielded, haltingly but inexorably, to a renegotiation of the *status quo* in the 1950s. While many resented the demise of Jim Crow, they accepted that outcome—as an unavoidable, if undesirable, reality of the postwar era. In a report on Hutchinson, journalist Jack Kelleher captured the resigned sense of inevitability that seized many whites in these years. “Though one restaurant proprietor immediately retired [rather than adhere to the law], the restaurant reaction to the [public accommodations law] requiring the Negro to be served was received without dispute or on-the-spot resistance.”⁴¹

THE TWILIGHT OF JIM CROW, 1960-1965

Jack Kelleher of the *Hutchinson News* provided a richly textured portrait of discrimination there, even if “Hutchinson is regarded as ‘fairly liberal’ by Negroes who have lived in other communities of Kansas and the American midwest.” As an outsider to the area, a journalist from New Zealand, and a recipient of a year-long position with an American newspaper sponsored by the State Department, he marveled at how naturalized Jim Crow was. “Discrimination against the Negro is a way of life,” he wrote. “It is built in.”⁴² Not surprisingly, he found that many whites subscribed to the self-serving philosophy of delay: “‘This thing is evolving. Much has happened in our lifetime. It doesn’t want any hastening. It’s working itself out. Let it go on that way.’” If whites preferred not to discuss discrimination, blacks “spelled out the issues simply, unemotionally, almost flatly.”⁴³

According to black Kansans, many of their white counterparts concealed their animus beneath a veneer of tolerance, according blacks some superficial trappings of respect but discriminating against them in ways which were personal, institutionalized, or both. Hailing from the Deep South, Whalon Blackman reflected upon the more open (and therefore, he reasoned, more honest) hostility that he had known there. “Here in Salina, Mr. Blackman says the matter of prejudice is more concealed than it was in his home state of

41. Jack Kelleher, “Social Discrimination Is Bar to Hutchinson Negroes,” *Hutchinson News*, September 7, 1960, 9. On this legislation, see Kansas Human Rights Commission, “Kansas Act against Discrimination (KAAD) and Kansas Age Discrimination in Employment Act (KADEA),” 4, in <http://www.khrc.net/KHRCStatuteBookUpdatedEffective07-2009.pdf> [accessed September 15, 2018].

42. Kelleher, “Social Discrimination Is Bar to Hutchinson Negroes.”

43. Kelleher, “Record’s Liberal, Not Good.”

Mississippi,” noted the *Salina Journal*. “It was plainer down south,” he declared. “It is difficult at times [in Kansas] to distinguish politeness from respect and friendship.”⁴⁴

“Few [whites] knew Negroes well enough to know a single Negro by name,” Kelleher observed. Consequently, most whites understood blacks through a range of stereotypes which implied “that the Negro has less moral fortitude than the white” and was “given to lawlessness and general loose living.” Furthermore, many claimed “that they knew Negroes for whom they had more respect than they had for certain whites. It was almost a hackneyed opinion.” When pressed, however, they could never identify a single such “good Negro.” For most whites, “having respect for some of them was mainly a well-intentioned theory.”⁴⁵ Blackman identified other stereotypes that whites had long attached to black people in Kansas and throughout the United States as a means to justify their oppression, stereotypes to which many whites still clung with a vengeance. “There is the myth about the Negro’s superhuman sexual powers,” he observed. “There is also the image of the Negro as a brute,—filthy, diseased, shiftless and lazy. Perhaps it is safer for the white man to keep this image as a sort of protection.”⁴⁶ With these stereotypes, whites justified their discriminatory actions against blacks in all aspects of public life, including their segregation in impoverished neighborhoods.

Across the state, white Kansans practiced housing discrimination aggressively. “The Negroes of Atchison are confined to fairly definite neighborhoods,” observed the local NAACP in 1961.⁴⁷ Whites also pushed blacks into segregated neighborhoods in Newton, Dodge City, Salina, Emporia, Chanute, Wellington, and Great Bend, all places where blacks lived “in ghettos near the railroad tracks or in other undesirable areas.”⁴⁸ In other towns some whites—usually working-class ones—dwelled in more integrated neighborhoods. In Hutchinson, as Kelleher pointed out, “white and Negro do live side by side. Negro settlement is not specific. It is spotted

44. Hammerstrom, “We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To.”

45. Jack Kelleher, “Segregation May Be Hidden, But It’s Still Here,” *Hutchinson News*, September 6, 1960, 13.

46. Hammerstrom, “We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To.”

47. “Discrimination,” *Atchison Daily Globe*, May 28, 1961, 4A.

48. “A former Negro basketball star,” [untitled report, early 1960s], Folder 8, Box 3, “Civil Rights and Housing,” RH MS 48, Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy papers, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas, Lawrence (hereafter, Kansas Collection).

about.”⁴⁹ Nonetheless, in more affluent neighborhoods whites refused to permit blacks at all. Consequently, “even if the Negro family has the money to move into a previously white neighborhood, he is prevented from doing it,” explained a journalist in Salina.⁵⁰ In Lawrence, a 1964 survey found that “the possibility of [the Negro] obtaining decent housing (in or out of several informal ‘ghettos’) is very nearly non-existent.”⁵¹

In addition to the local spatial patterns spawned by distinctions reflecting racism and classism, blacks bemoaned an acute shortage of housing in habitable condition. In February 1965 Blackman declared that “the Salina Negro has the poorest conditions of housing I have ever seen.”⁵² In describing those conditions three months later, he emphasized that “the North End homes . . . are really bad” and that some “have no indoor toilet facilities.” He also called another location a “ghetto.”⁵³ After the black uprising in Watts in August, Blackman used the incident to warn white Kansans that “any community that intentionally or unintentionally locks a part of its population in a ghetto, and denies them decent homes and job opportunities, makes that community a potential Los Angeles, no matter where.”⁵⁴

When it came to maintaining their sundown neighborhoods, whites still appealed to threats, as Air Force Lieutenant Thomas Wilson and his wife Shirley discovered in Olathe in 1964 when they tried to move into the Lakeside Acres subdivision. Before the couple could even move in, “neighbor protest rose to a fever pitch” and residents held a meeting in which they demanded the departure of the Wilsons. Following the meeting, whites harassed the couple with around-the-clock phone calls, advising them that “We don’t mix with Negroes.” Before they could move in more than a few of their belongings, the Wilsons moved out again. “We weren’t trying to spearhead an invasion of Negroes,” Thomas explained. “He and his wife well understood ‘the fears surrounding the Negro,’ but added that he bears no hatred.”⁵⁵

49. Kelleher, “Segregation May Be Hidden, But It’s Still Here.”

50. Hammerstrom, “We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To.”

51. “Survey of the Lawrence Negro Community, 1964,” 2, Folder 3, Box 1, RH MS 714, The Children’s Hour papers, Kansas Collection.

52. Fritz Mendell, “Says Salina Has a Negro ‘Ghetto,’” *Salina Journal*, February 4, 1965, 13.

53. Hammerstrom, “We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To.”

54. “Negro Leaders See ‘Potential Los Angeles’ in Salina, Too,” *Salina Journal*, August 24, 1965, 12.

55. “Air Force Officer Forced to Leave Olathe Home,” *Reflector*, newsletter of the Kansas Commission on Civil Rights, May 1964, 4, Folder 16 (“Civil Rights—Kansas; Kansas Commission

Realtors were the frontline defenders of residential segregation. As such, they routinely showed “only those places to negroes that are in predominately Negro neighborhoods,” excusing their own behavior by saying “that personally it would be okay with them but the clients would not permit them to sell to Negroes” or that, “if we sell to you, everyone else would move away.”⁵⁶ In addition, private and public financial bureaucracies practiced interlocking forms of discrimination. “No Negroes have had the chance to borrow from banks or loan institutions for purchasing homes in non-Negro neighborhoods,” documented the Atchison NAACP. “Negroes have not been granted FHA or GI financing . . . in the new areas of [the city].”⁵⁷ By constraining housing options, whites ensured that blacks paid “higher rents, higher purchase prices, and higher interest rates” than their white counterparts.⁵⁸

“Since there is no fair housing law in Kansas, owners can’t be forced to sell their homes to Negroes,” observed the *Salina Journal* in 1965. “Negroes have found this out.” Although a realtor there preemptively disavowed any racism, she also stated that “I don’t think property owners should be forced to sell to anyone. I think they should be able to turn someone down because they don’t like his credit rating, or the color of his eyes, or the number of children he has.” A white seller though was more forthright about his racially tinged refusal. “[He] heard a colored family was interested so he notified the neighbors and property owners that he wouldn’t sell to Negroes.”⁵⁹

Occasionally, realtors did sell homes to blacks in restricted neighborhoods, sometimes out of genuine sympathy for their black customers and sometimes in pursuit of their own financial gain using a blockbusting strategy. Blockbusting involved the sale of houses in a white neighborhood to blacks to stimulate the panicked sale of other white-owned houses, the purchase of those houses on the cheap by the realtors, and their resale at higher prices to middle-class blacks desperate to escape deteriorating neighborhoods.

on Civil Rights”), Box 4, RH MS 48, Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy papers, Kansas Collection.

56. “Discrimination.”

57. Ibid. On discrimination against blacks in terms of FHA loans after World War II and its long-term implications, see, for example, George Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 1–23.

58. “A former Negro basketball star,” [untitled report, early 1960s], Folder 8 “Civil Rights and Housing,” Box 3, RH MS 48, Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy papers, Kansas Collection.

59. Hammerstrom, “We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To.”

However, because anonymity was impossible in smaller cities, realtors there were hesitant to participate in blockbusting. In Salina an agent explained that “I won’t jeopardise [sic] what I have for a Negro family. It would ruin my business.”⁶⁰ In Hutchinson another confided that, “if you want to be thrown out of town just go crack a good block with a Negro.’ No real-estate man would dare ‘crack’ a really good block with a Negro.”⁶¹ Nonetheless, realtors periodically cracked a ‘good block’ by accident, as occurred when Blackman purchased his house in Salina. “I don’t sound like a Negro over the telephone,” he chuckled, and this helped to explain his purchase. “Someone bought the house for me, not knowing I would be a Negro,” he told the *Journal*. Rather than integrating an all-white street, Blackman opened up a new black area. “When I moved out on Willow, there were no Negro families,” he explained. “When we moved in, [white] people started to move out. Eventually, Negroes started to move in.”⁶²

Just as they practiced stifling housing discrimination, so too did whites practice rampant discrimination in employment. “If you are a Negro, and you live in Salina,” the *Salina Journal* summarized in 1962, “opportunity is limited.” The number of blacks “employed as anything but janitors by government agencies at any level—city, county, state or federal—you can count on your right hand.” The *Journal* added that “the same is true in a large proportion of Salina businesses.”⁶³ Three years later, Blackman declared that the city “government has no white-collar Negro employees and that there are no Negro clerical or administrative workers in the welfare and health departments, the social security office, the post office.”⁶⁴ In 1964, investigators found that 57 percent “of all adult employed Negroes in Lawrence fall in the category of domestic employees (janitors, maids, busboys, cooks and cook’s helpers, etc.)”⁶⁵ A year later, the Kansas Commission on Civil Rights mused that “you need only the abacus of the fingers of your two hands (and you won’t need every finger) to count the number of Negro bank employees in the banking industry of the entire state, not counting janitors.”⁶⁶

60. Ibid.

61. Kelleher, “Segregation May be Hidden, But It’s Still Here.”

62. Hammerstrom, “We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To.”

63. Gerald George, “Jobs for Negroes Scarce in Salina,” *Salina Journal*, August 6, 1962, 4.

64. Hammerstrom, “We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To.”

65. “Survey of the Lawrence Negro Community, 1964,” 3, Folder 3, Box 1, RH MS 714, The Children’s Hour papers, Kansas Collection.

66. “Excerpt,” *Reflector*, newsletter of the Kansas Civil Rights Commission, July–September 1965, 1, Folder 16 (“Civil Rights—Kansas; Kansas Commission on Civil Rights”), Box 4, RH MS 48, Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy papers, Kansas Collection.

In Hutchinson, whites practiced similar discrimination—particularly in skilled employment—against blacks who wondered “why there aren’t Negro fire-fighters . . . why the Negro . . . doesn’t appear behind the teller grill in any of the city’s banks . . . why a mobile-homes construction unit does not employ Negroes.”⁶⁷ In Atchison, black leaders reported that “we have only five teachers, one policeman, one social worker, and one clerk. We have one secretary in a private law office.” The black community had young people prepared for a host of positions “but because of our present conditions they must . . . go into maid work or other menial jobs which is far beneath their training.”⁶⁸

To achieve this discrimination in employment, whites utilized a variety of subterfuges in their hiring practices. “Qualified Negroes have sought and made application for sales and clerical jobs,” noted one report. “When applicants have gone back to inquire . . . they are always told, ‘We have no openings just yet; maybe we will call you later,’ or ‘if it was up to me personally, I would hire a Negro but the others would not stand for it,’ or ‘I would be forced to close my business.’ The blame is always passed to someone else.”⁶⁹ Employees sometimes banded together to dissuade bosses inclined to hire blacks. “Office workers . . . can prevent colored workers from being hired,” noted an observer. “I have seen that happen, but not too often.” In other cases, white patrons boycotted businesses which hired blacks, putting a damper on their economic outlook and sending a clear warning to their competitors. “There have been almost no Negro waitresses [in Salina] since one restaurant which used to employ them closed down.”⁷⁰

Even when blacks secured better jobs, they faced a glass ceiling which limited their future prospects. “[A] Negro who is employed in one of Great Bend’s larger supermarkets was candidly told by his employers that he had gone as far as he could go in the matter of salary and position,” noted the *Great Bend Sunday Tribune*. “The Negro, who has been with the store almost ten years, told of a white man in a comparable position with less time on the job who has been progressing on both counts.” Blacks lamented that employers seemed oblivious to their potential. “A Negro automatically falls into a certain class in the eyes of most employers,” one noted. “He is usually

67. Jack Kelleher, “Employment Bars are Biggest Hurdles,” *Hutchinson News*, September 11, 1960, 28.

68. “Letters to Editor,” *Atchison Daily Globe*, May 28, 1961, 5A.

69. “Discrimination.”

70. Hammerstrom, “We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To.”

thought of first for menial tasks, but never for a responsible position.” Another protested that officials in the local employment office “automatically look for janitorial and other servile jobs in their lists when we apply.”⁷¹

“State statutes make employment discrimination unlawful,” mused the *Tribune*. At the same time it acknowledged that the 1961 “Kansas Act against Discrimination is far from effective in achieving the purposes set for it” and it volunteered its view (and that of a great many white racial conservatives) that “a legislature can’t successfully dictate human relationships.” As an example, the newspaper asserted that the law made it illegal to require a photograph or to ask about an applicant’s race or religion but “all of these prohibitions relate to applications other than in person. In our local economy, where most jobs are filled by personal interview, the statutory regulations have no effect.”⁷² Indeed, the regulations apparently had a limited effect even when personal interviews were not involved, as a professional learned in 1961.

[An NAACP] member told of a Negro geologist from New York who had recently received his degree and written to a Great Bend oil firm for a position. He sent along a complete resume but did not include a picture. Impressed with his qualifications, the firm hired the young man by mail. When the Negro arrived and presented himself to his employers, however, it was a different story. ‘They flat refused to talk to him any further,’ recalls one member, ‘and shoved him out the door.’ After arriving in Great Bend with very little money, the Negro geologist had to throw himself upon the mercy of the Barton [County] NAACP. The chapter succeeded in collecting enough funds to get the young man back to his home in New York.⁷³

Concerned over the flight of black youths from municipalities across Kansas, the NAACP in Atchison asked, “How could we build up pride in our community when we can offer our youth nothing better than ditch-digging or a broom?”⁷⁴ Blacks located in other communities shared these same fears. “We’re living with the race relation problem in Manhattan and what we do, or don’t do, to help solve it will have lasting effects,” argued the *Manhattan Mercury* in 1961. “Many Manhattan Negroes have given up

71. Hudson, “Barton County Negro Feels His Lot as Citizen Could be Much Improved.”

72. “Job Discrimination,” *Great Bend Daily Tribune*, November 28, 1961, 4.

73. Hudson, “Barton County Negro Feels His Lot as Citizen Could be Much Improved.”

74. “Letters to Editor.”

trying to find employment here and have moved away.”⁷⁵ Blackman lamented that “the bright young Negroes leave Salina after college.”⁷⁶ In fact, professionals of all ages were leaving. “The Negro leaders . . . are leaving this area because of the lack of good job opportunities,” worried NAACP members in Great Bend. “Not only are they the losers [sic] here, but so is the community which in many cases discourages Negroes who have special abilities and would make good civic and business leaders.”⁷⁷

Certainly, many young and professional blacks fled the smaller cities—indeed, fled Kansas altogether—because of two problems. First, they were members of small black populations—so small in most cases that they could never hope to build strong black middle classes locally. Second, they lived within a Jim Crow system that was not legally proscribed and was, therefore, neither complete nor entirely inflexible. In this sense blacks confronted a system which inhibited the kind of unity that developed under the Jim Crow system in the South where the black population was far more numerous and the system was often legally mandated. Kansas, an investigator declared, was “a society which is segregationist without being blessed with any of the advantages of real segregation. The segregation is so loose that the Negro section is not tight or strong enough of itself to support the Negro graduate in any of the professions. He settles for menial employment or leaves the city.”⁷⁸ Blackman made a similar point. “In the Southern ghettos there are usually some business and professional men. . . . That isn’t true here.”⁷⁹ He might have added that the ‘ghettos’ of large northern cities, like Chicago or Detroit, also supported wealthy and influential black middle and upper classes because of the large numbers and the dense concentration of blacks in those places.

In many respects middle-class whites used employment discrimination to perpetuate the other forms of discrimination which were important to them but increasingly unpalatable publicly. The president of the Hutchinson Real Estate Board told a reporter that the economic wherewithal of the purchaser was the primary factor in determining where people of any race lived. “He knew of no case where a Negro had tried to buy his way in to [sic] the more

75. Margaret Cooper, “‘Color Bar’ Challenges Teenagers, Adults Too,” *Manhattan Mercury*, November 29, 1961, 13.

76. Hammerstrom, “We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To.”

77. Hudson, “Barton County Negro Feels His Lot as Citizen Could be Much Improved.”

78. Kelleher, “Segregation May be Hidden, But It’s Still Here.”

79. Hammerstrom, “We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To.”

exclusive districts. . . . There just weren't Negro people about with that sort of money."⁸⁰ A realtor in Salina made a similar point: "There aren't any colored people who could afford to live where it could do any damage."⁸¹ Recognizing these arguments, an investigator explained that employment discrimination was the linchpin of segregation in Kansas; it suppressed the small black populations just as effectively as did the racist laws of the South but avoided the ugly declaration of intent. "The South has one big discrimination, [but] the Negro [there] has opportunities in his segregated society. Here [in Kansas] there's this double discrimination—cutting off the Negro at the job level so he can't infringe [on] the social customs."⁸²

After the state's anti-discrimination laws were updated in 1959, whites could no longer ban blacks from stores and restaurants. However, they could and did subject them to second-class treatment. A woman told the *Great Bend Sunday Tribune* "that in most women's apparel shops the management will not allow Negro women to try on garments to see if they are the proper fit. 'This makes it difficult to purchase an entirely satisfactory item of clothing.'" Another remarked that "because there are no stores of this type catering to Negroes exclusively it is impractical to boycott stores which indulge in this practice." Yet another pointed to the hostility that blacks endured in restaurants that served them on an ostensibly equal basis. "You do have the feeling," commented one, "that they'd probably rather not. And it does make you feel strange to be sitting at a full counter where the only two seats vacant are on either side of you."⁸³ Overall, business owners just did not provide the same hospitality for black patrons. "The Negro isn't barred from the better restaurants, but when he leaves he won't hear the [typical] cheery sales shot. . . . 'Come back!'"⁸⁴ Years after the anti-discrimination laws were updated, some restaurateurs continued to exclude blacks. After spotting a highway sign for a café, a black professional stopped for lunch in 1964, only to discover that the proprietor had posted another sign on the building reading "'We don't serve Negroes here.' And then [the proprietor] sent the young Negro . . . down some side streets to a 'Negro' cafe."⁸⁵

80. Kelleher, "Segregation May be Hidden, But It's Still Here."

81. Hammerstrom, "We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To."

82. Kelleher, "Segregation May be Hidden, But It's Still Here."

83. Hudson, "Barton County Negro Feels His Lot as Citizen Could be Much Improved."

84. Kelleher, "Social Discrimination Is Bar to Hutchinson Negroes."

85. "Fine Foods," *Reflector*, newsletter of Kansas Commission on Civil Rights, May 1964, 1, Folder 16 ("Civil Rights-Kansas; Kansas Commission on Civil Rights"), Box 4, RH MS 48, Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy papers, Kansas Collection.

In businesses that did not “come under the essential-services legislation,” whites maintained the color bar. Tavern-keepers were especially aggressive in skirting the requirements of the public accommodations act. “A Main Street tavern-keeper said he will admit a negro if he is with a group of whites, as sometimes happens during the National Junior College basketball week. But he’s so strict about his policy that the young Negro, sitting with his white team-mates, won’t be served.”⁸⁶ Hotel-keepers also resisted efforts to integrate their facilities. In 1961 a reporter “telephoned the ten motels in Great Bend posing as a Negro who wanted a room for himself and his wife.” After telling the managers that he was black, “five refused to take [me] as a lodger.”⁸⁷

In Lawrence, whites barred blacks from using the municipal swimming pool. To do so, they supported a private pool which functioned as the municipal facility for whites but could legally discriminate against blacks because of its private status. As a result, black children were compelled on hot days to pursue a dip elsewhere. In June 1955, twelve-year-old Wray Jones drowned while swimming in the Kansas River. “Jones was swimming in the Kaw that day because there were no safe places in Lawrence for him—or any blacks—to swim.” Although whites elsewhere surrendered on this issue in the 1950s, those in Lawrence did not.⁸⁸ Lamenting the situation in 1965, an activist invoked the memory of Jones as follows: Lawrence “doesn’t have a municipal swimming pool (the only type of pool covered under the federal Civil Rights Act) and that as a result, some of the Negro youths in the community swim in the Kaw River during the summer. ‘We’ve even had some drownings out there.’”⁸⁹

Because many personal (so-called non-essential) services were not covered by the state legislation, whites continued to countenance the discrimination practiced by those businesses. “Members of a House committee here were told Kansas Negroes live in segregation and in many areas don’t escape it after death,” recounted the *Hutchinson News* after hearings in Topeka in 1965. Samuel Jackson, president of the Topeka NAACP, advised legislators that “cemeteries are practicing segregation in this state.” As an example, he indicated that undertakers placed deceased blacks “in little groups and call it the

86. Kelleher, “Social Discrimination Is Bar to Hutchinson Negroes.”

87. Hudson, “Barton County Negro Feels His Lot as Citizen Could be Much Improved.” It became illegal to discriminate in hotels in Kansas in 1963. Eick, *Dissent in Wichita*, 72.

88. Monhollon, “Taking the Plunge,” 140.

89. Lee, “Negroes, Mexicans, Jews Tell of Kansas Bias,” *Hutchinson News*, March 12, 1965, 1. For more on the pool controversy in Lawrence, see Campney, “Hold the Line.”

'George Washington Carver' section, or something like that." He also reported that "some Negro families in southeast Kansas have to go to Missouri to find a mortuary that will handle their dead."⁹⁰

Barbers prompted civil rights "demonstrations in Winfield, Ottawa, Manhattan, Hays, and other towns over the refusal of barber shops to serve Negro citizens," reported the *Hutchinson News* in 1965. "The white barbers have said they aren't prejudiced—it's just that they don't know how to cut Negro hair. One Ottawa barber compared it to 'shearing sheep.'" A critic rejected their claims. "Any barber who claims to be a master of his trade should be able to cut any kind of hair."⁹¹ Black women faced similar discrimination. "Recently a light-skinned Negro woman went to have her hair done at a beauty shop in Salina," Blackman noted in 1965. Once seated and aproned, "She was asked if she was a Negro. She said yes, and was asked to leave."⁹²

Black patrons found themselves the subjects not only of humiliation but of considerable inconvenience. Unable to find alternatives, "several local Negroes get their hair cut out at the Hutchinson Reformatory." An observer chronicled that "Negro women . . . don't go to white beauty salons. 'There are several Negro beauty salons throughout Kansas which they usually go to.'"⁹³ Because these 'several' salons were spread across the state, blacks had to drive long distances to patronize them. During the hearings in the legislature in 1965, Charles Roquemore, state president of the NAACP, testified that "[he] travels 75 miles every two weeks to get his own hair cut." Adding to the indignity, he had to make the drive despite having a *black* barber in his hometown. "[The] Negro barber in Wellington . . . won't do it (cut Negroes' hair) because he is afraid he'd lose all his white customers."⁹⁴

Following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the *News* conducted interviews with white barbers in several towns. One explained that he had for years cut black hair. "I'm no better than anyone else," declared Bob Schroeder of McPherson. "It sure doesn't hurt my business any. If it did, I wouldn't worry about it." However, most expressed continued reluctance, if not hostility, to cutting black hair. When asked if he had ever done so, Ozzie Davis of Dodge City retorted: "I sure as hell haven't." Despite the Act, he

90. Lee, "Negroes, Mexicans, Jews Tell of Kansas Bias."

91. Mike Steele, "He Says Barber Schools Won't Admit Negroes," *Hutchinson News*, February 22, 1965, 1.

92. Hammerstrom, "We Have to Live Where People Tell Us To."

93. Steele, "He Says Barber Schools Won't Admit Negroes."

94. Lee, "Negroes, Mexicans, Jews Tell of Kansas Bias."

vowed to hold firm. “If a Negro came in and I had a customer in the chair I’d tell him I was too busy to give him a haircut. If he came in and I didn’t have anyone in the chair I’d tell him I was waiting for someone who had an appointment.”⁹⁵

Testifying to the change being foisted upon them, Davis and another barber expressed concern that discussions with reporters could prompt activists to target them. “There are quite a few Negroes here [in Dodge] but most of them know their place,” Davis opined. “He doubts that a local Negro would ever come into his shop. ‘But I’m looking for some outsiders to come in any time.’” Harold Lamberth of Hutchinson volunteered initially that he “had never cut a Negro’s hair” since 1936. Moments later he confessed that he had probably made a misstep. “I might have trouble if someone publishes this. . . . publishes the idea that no colored person has had his hair cut in this shop,” Lamberth stammered (as the ellipses in the original text suggest). “Nothing should be said until we have some trouble. Anytime you start hollering loud enough, something will happen.”⁹⁶

There was, according to Jack Kelleher, one “common reason advanced by all commodity retailers who discriminate: they don’t want to lose white customers.” He discussed the views of intransigent tavern-keepers. “If Negroes come in and they serve them, the downtown proprietors assure me, their few white patrons will drift out. The Negroes will go eventually back to the Negro taverns—and they probably won’t return. The regular customers, the whites, won’t be back either.” Invariably, tavern-keepers blamed their policies on their white customers rather than on their own prejudices. While they were promulgating a self-serving narrative, they were correct in recognizing the role of pressure applied by patrons. One proprietor flatly stated that “it’s not my fault. . . . Educate the white customers to accept the Negroes!”⁹⁷

Well into the postwar period, whites in sundown towns continued to enforce their exclusionary practices. In Barton County the local NAACP “leveled its sharpest attack at Hoisington where conditions as a whole, they say, are inferior to general conditions elsewhere in the county.” In fact, whites continued to enforce the same arrangements introduced in 1888 and reinforced by the 1912 lynching. As a newspaper article detailed, “There is a kind

95. Bob Kistler, “Stroke of Pen Hits ‘We Refuse’ Signs,” *Hutchinson News*, July 4, 1964, 1.

96. *Ibid.*

97. Kelleher, “Social Discrimination Is Bar to Hutchinson Negroes.”

of unwritten agreement in this town (Hoisington),’ remarked one Negro resident there, ‘which says that Negroes aren’t supposed to go north of the tracks to live.’” Every member of the NAACP branch “agreed that the ‘atmosphere’ in Hoisington is less friendly to the Negro. ‘You just feel it,’ said one.”⁹⁸ Corroborating this “atmosphere,” an activist wrote that “in Hoisington, Negroes have even been forced to live outside the city limits, many without running water or sewage facilities.”⁹⁹

Whites held the line in Hays where the black population increased from one to fifteen between 1960 and 1970 but still amounted to less than 0.1 percent of the total. “There is no Negro problem in Hays,” observed the *Hays Daily News* in 1971. “Since there are very few Negroes in Hays, the possibility of a problem seems extremely remote.” Many of its residents remained unapologetically hostile to the possibility of black residents. “Mention the word ‘Negro’ in Hays and in many cases you are immediately placed on the defensive as black people are classified as ‘dirty, unwanted revolutionaries,’ or worse,” the *News* conceded. “A person may then proudly reflect on the time when unwritten Hays law prohibited ‘the sun to set on Negroes in Hays,’ and when people would stop and stare at Negroes because they were ‘different.’” The *News* recalled a recent letter to the newspaper at Fort Hays State University from a local resident who “declared that the most important campus problem is that FHS has ‘. . . any damn niggers on campus.’”¹⁰⁰

Whites also created and sustained new sundown towns—or, more specifically, sundown suburbs—around Kansas City. In 1941 developers “began to develop five square miles to the south and west of Mission Hills as Prairie Village.”¹⁰¹ Here residents maintained sundown practices for the next quarter-of-a-century, as a minister lamented in 1965. “The pastor of the largest church in suburban Prairie Village, Kan., urged his congregation Sunday to ‘let the Negro move into our beautiful community.’” Although he claimed that a few parishioners had been swayed, he clearly did not move the majority of his congregation, as suggested by his expressed concern over what would happen “if a Negro moved into the large, all-white suburb.”¹⁰²

98. Hudson, “Barton County Negro Feels His Lot as Citizen Could be Much Improved.”

99. “A former Negro basketball star,” [untitled report, early 1960s], Folder 8 “Civil Rights and Housing,” Box 3, RH MS 48, Lawrence League for the Practice of Democracy papers, Kansas Collection.

100. Russ Cravens, “The Negro and Hays,” *Hays Daily News*, January 21, 1971, 4.

101. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains*, 302.

102. “Prairie Village Pastor Calls for Integration,” *Ottawa Herald*, February 15, 1965, 1.

White papers rarely broached the subject of violence directed at blacks by the police in the early 1960s but officers certainly employed it. Given the marginalization of the small black population and the overwhelming dominance of the white one, policemen no longer killed blacks as often as they had earlier. The savvy among them may have recognized that such killings might provoke protests that would not only embarrass their community and the state but also muddy the popular distinction between the racist South and the benevolent Kansas. Nevertheless, officers could still employ rough tactics and, as the police chief in Hutchinson hinted in 1960, still drive out so-called bad negroes, just as they had in 1910. “The Negro crime rate is in proportion to the number of Negroes in the community,” he declared. “It was higher than it should have been till we cracked down on some transients—they found our rules so tough they just moved on.”¹⁰³

THE WHITE BACKLASH

The mid-1960s marked the beginning of the end of a distinct period in the history of twentieth-century Kansas, a period which had begun with the end of World War II. In those years, whites submitted to—even accepted—an erosion of white supremacy, an adjustment largely attributable to unique postwar conditions. As illustrated, they surrendered, albeit for often self-serving reasons, to significant changes in etiquette in schools, movie theaters, retail stores, and restaurants. Nonetheless, they continued well into the 1960s to hold the line on flagrant discrimination in taverns, barber shops, and—in Lawrence, at least—swimming pools, and in real estate and employment practices. In places like Hays, Hoisington, and Prairie Village, they continued to maintain their strict sundown practices. Even when they relaxed explicitly racist practices, they enforced more subtle ones. As owners and employees in stores or services, they eyed black customers with contempt and withheld from them the gestures of courtesy and respect which they lavished upon their white clientele. As customers, they refused to sit next to black patrons and pressured shopkeepers and restaurateurs to hire white staffs.

After yielding to the renegotiation of the 1950s and early 1960s, many whites—including racial liberals and those sympathetic to the earlier

103. Kelleher, “Segregation May Be Hidden, But It’s Still Here.”

reforms—began to resent the continuing demands for change and to shift the blame from themselves. “Leading white ‘liberals’ who swelled the ranks to fight discrimination are turning the spotlight from white negativism to minority responsibility,” observed the *Hutchinson News* in 1966. “The pendulum of public opinion is teetering away from sympathy for minority views.” One of those in retreat was Harry Levinson, chair of the Kansas Advisory Committee on the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. In 1962 he had spoken vigorously against discrimination but four years later he embraced a different position. “It’s becoming easy for the liberal to feel that the bigots were right all along . . . that we were just naïve,” he declared. “Many [blacks] just don’t want the revolution to end, but it has ended. When you win, you start to build stability and responsibility in your own camp—that’s what the minorities have to face up to.” As “a leading ‘liberal,’” Levinson conceded that “his present views may shock this state’s Negroes.”¹⁰⁴ Mary Moege of Wamego spoke for the many whites who claimed to have been in favor of some of the earlier civil rights reforms but who expressed horror as the number of such reforms began to accumulate in the mid-to-late 1960s. “People here are stunned and bewildered. The negro has been given too much now.”¹⁰⁵

Black observers, in turn, questioned the sincerity of their erstwhile allies. “There are many white liberals who are more than willing to talk your ears off and produce little action that would support all of the talk that flows from their lips,” mused *The Black Word Is . . .* in 1972. “White liberals can do us (Blacks) a favor and stop talking and start doing.”¹⁰⁶

Many ordinary whites made clear their opposition to the demands of blacks in their correspondence with Joe Skubitz, Republican U.S. Representative of the Fifth District of Kansas, located in the southeastern corner of the state. In response to President John F. Kennedy’s proposed 1963 legislation and President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Civil Rights Act of 1964, voters overwhelmingly advised, pleaded, or warned their congressman to oppose the measures. In 1964, one demanded: “What is America coming to that the ‘Niggers’ are the only ones who have ‘rights?’” Were not “White people” as

104. Wayne Lee, “Kansas Civil Rights Movement Has Run Out of Gas?” *Hutchinson News*, April 27, 1966, 1. For Levinson’s 1962 remarks, see “Prejudice Still Strong in Kansas,” *Salina Journal*, December 9, 1962, 14.

105. Mary Moege to Robert J. Dole, April 10, 1968, folder 2, box 48, “Civil Rights (1 of 3), 1966–1968,” Robert J. Dole House of Representatives Papers, 1960–1969, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

106. “Readers Rap,” *The Black Word Is . . .*, August 5, 1972, 4, F. 28, RH MS 497, Douglass Community Center Records, Kansas Collection.

“good as the ‘Niggers?’”¹⁰⁷ Another told Skubitz that “I don’t want to Socialize with the colored Race.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, virtually the only whites who wrote in support of the legislation were ministers, many of whom were plainly out of step with their congregations. A woman in Dodge City suggested as much in a letter to Representative Dole in 1966. “Several weeks ago our pastor asked that we write to you, seeking your support” of the fair-housing legislation under debate. “Instead we would like for you to vote against it. . . . Our pastor feels this is not Christian thinking but we feel he needs to face reality.”¹⁰⁹

While the vast majority of constituents opposed the proposed 1963 and 1964 legislation, they opposed almost universally the soon-to-be-defeated civil rights bill of 1966 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Even ministers, now more closely aligned with their flocks, withheld their support or opposed the legislation. Furthermore, while whites couched their opposition, as they had earlier, in arguments about private property and anti-communism, they turned increasingly toward more openly racist rhetoric. “The negro wants white skin,” declared one in 1966, and to make “every part of each town or city a slum area (witch [sic] it becomes after the negro’s [sic] invades the sections) in about thirty days after they become residents.”¹¹⁰ Another insisted that “the negro is going to have to change their ways + be willing to work as hard as the rest of us if they want to do what the white people do—if they spent the time cleaning up their back yards + houses as they spend marching—they’d get further.”¹¹¹ Yet another warned that “a lot (scads—multitudes) of white people” shared these views.¹¹² Opposing what became the Fair Housing Act, a voter echoed the views of many when he conjectured that it would make “it a criminal offense to refuse to sell a house to a negro” but “not a criminal offense for a bunch of Blacks . . . to Riot, burn buildings and shoot people.”¹¹³ In a revealing 1966 letter to Representative Dole, L. E.

107. Ethel Mahaffy to Joe Skubitz, [July?] 1964, Correspondence Subject, F. 318, Representative Joe Skubitz Collection, Special Collections, Leonard H. Axe Library, Pittsburg State University (hereafter PSU).

108. E. F. Atkinson to Joe Skubitz, May 12, 1964, Correspondence General, F. 316, Skubitz Collection, PSU.

109. Mrs. C. A. Long to Robert J. Dole, July 23, 1966, f. 10, box 47, “Civil Rights (1 of 3), 1966,” Robert J. Dole House of Representatives Papers, 1960–1969, Dole Archive.

110. “Opinion Ballot,” on Civil Rights Act of 1966, Gladys McGinnis, F. 2416, Skubitz Collection, PSU.

111. Evie Hibbard to Joe Skubitz, August 9, 1966, 2, 3, F. 2416, Skubitz Collection, PSU.

112. John R. Williams to Joe Skubitz, August 8, 1966, F. 2416, Skubitz Collection, PSU.

113. H. L. Athon to Joe Skubitz, March 12, 1968, F. 2434, Skubitz Collection, PSU.

Krause of Great Bend decried any new civil rights legislation in a professionally written and neatly typed letter that framed his opposition entirely in terms of color-blind concerns over property rights and anti-communism. At the bottom of the page, however, in a hand-written post-script, Krause peeled back the color-blind exterior to show his underlying racially motivated opposition. “Believe me, Rhodesia + So[uth] African govt’s look better to me all the time,” he wrote, referencing the harsh apartheid enforced against black populations by whites in those two African nations. “I didn’t use to think I was a ‘racist,’” he joked, “but recent events will make me one!”¹¹⁴

White women in Lawrence demonstrated their opposition to reform in 1968 when black students at the high school walked out to protest what they regarded as entrenched racism in all aspects of the institution. When the superintendent, Carl Knox, suspended the students, they expressed their support. One wrote Knox to say that she and her husband “are behind you 100% and please do not give into their ridiculous demands!” Another left a message saying that “I heartily approve of action he + board are taking in the ‘colored situation’ at the High School.” A third told him that “my daughter is now quite frightened with the recent angry attitude of a few negroes.” Among these notes is a document, provided by Knox, that listed no fewer than twenty-five people who had “called [his] house in support of adm. regarding ‘walkout.’”¹¹⁵

Confronting what has come to be known as the white backlash, activists lost momentum. “There are very few visible victories in the black communities in Kansas,” an observer remarked in 1969. “Things have grown worse, not better in the last few years.”¹¹⁶ Black students at Kansas State College in Pittsburg indicated their alienation when they hosted a black homecoming event in 1968. “We . . . are having a homecoming divorced from KSC’s because we feel as black students, we are divorced from the mainstream of campus life,” they wrote. “The black students are not satisfied with the present system.”¹¹⁷ In 1975, a writer for the *Wichita Times*, a black paper,

114. L. E. Krause to Robert J. Dole, July 25, 1966, f. 11, box 47, “Civil Rights (2 of 3), 1966,” Robert J. Dole House of Representatives Papers, 1960–1969, Dole Archive.

115. Mrs. Carl A. Reuter to Carl Knox, September 27, 1968; Mrs. Norma Adams, [undated]; Sarah A. Black to Carl Knox, [undated]; and “Called the House in Support of Adm.,” [untitled], all in “1968 Lawrence High School Walkout” Reference Files, Douglas County Historical Society, Watkins Museum of History, Lawrence, Kansas.

116. Wayne Lee, “Job Gap State’s Biggest Race Relations Problem,” *Hutchinson News*, December 25, 1969, 2.

117. “The Black Voice,” October 24, 1968, Black Heritage Week Folder, Special Collections, Leonard H. Axe Library, PSU.

mourned the gap between white resentment and the reality that most blacks still confronted. “Millions of white Americans are under the impression that during the last few years the Negro American has been brought far into the main stream of American life and democracy, that Negroes have won just about everything they asked for,” he wrote. “Typical of this attitude is the remark of a white housewife to her husband upon hearing a TV newscaster report a new demand in an area of civil rights. She said, ‘They make me sick with all this talk about civil rights. . . . What more do they want?’” The writer for the *Times* then turned to the situation facing most blacks. “The door of opportunity for the Negro in nearly all phases of American life has been opened a little wi[d]er, but for the most part it only stands ajar; for the majority of poor Negroes in Wichita and the rest of the country, it seems to me to be tightly shut.”¹¹⁸

Reflecting the backlash, whites in urban Kansas responded aggressively, if not always legally, to what they regarded as unceasing, unreasonable, militant demands. In and around Salina postal employees evidently interfered with the delivery of *The Black Word Is . . .*, the newsletter that turned a critical eye on discrimination there. In a recurring commentary, the editor tersely addressed the disruption in distribution. “We are having trouble with the U.S. Postal Service in some areas,” he told readers. “If at any time you are not receiving your Black Word Is . . . Newsletter please notify us IMMEDIATELY.”¹¹⁹ In 1973, the newsletter published four stories on harassment by police. About one of these, it noted that “the majority of this town may regard this article as nothing more than an unreasonable [tirade]. But the Black people . . . will know exactly where I’m coming from.”¹²⁰

In Lawrence, a more active freedom struggle produced a stiffer opposition from white residents. This was evident when in 1970 a white policeman gunned down Rick Dowdell, a black activist. Over the next two nights, some black residents retaliated with attacks on the police as well as acts of arson; others led a peaceful march on city hall. For their part, many white residents rallied behind the shooting. “If it’s going to take some killing to get the job done,” declared a merchant, “then I say let’s get on with it.” Blacks responded with renewed anger to the legal response. An all-white coroner’s jury absolved

118. Edwin T. Sexton, Jr., “Tokenism,” *Wichita Times*, June 5, 1975, 12.

119. *The Black Word Is . . .*, August 11, 1973, 4, F. 29, RH MS 497, Douglass Community Center Records, Kansas Collection.

120. Tyress Allen, “Salina’s Police in Action,” *The Black Word Is . . .*, December 8, 1973, 9, F. 29, RH MS 497, Douglass Community Center Records, Kansas Collection.

the officer involved in the shooting and, when a young black witness insisted on testifying only under the protections of the Fifth Amendment, the officials did not allow her to testify at all. The coroner's inquest, declared a black activist, was "a Klanwash."¹²¹ In the wake of the Dowdell killing, a reporter mused over what he viewed as a baffling contradiction: violent racism in a bucolic small Midwestern city. "Lawrence, Kan., would seem to be the least likely place for terror and death." Lawrence, he added, "is a university town situated in the heartland of America. Now it is wracked by violence."¹²² With this statement he demonstrated, as many had before him, popular assumptions about the geographies of racism and racist violence: the South was the "likely place for terror and death" and the small-town Midwest—often regarded as the heartland—was not. Those considering these issues should recognize a fundamental truth articulated decades earlier by the *Plaindealer*: Jim Crow was a "national" phenomenon that "spread its evil wings to the four corners of the United States."¹²³

With their racist attitudes and practices, white Kansans mirrored those of white northerners generally towards racial liberalism. Increasingly, both claimed to believe that the destruction of Jim Crow in the South and the passage of federal legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were sufficient to ensure the equality of black Americans. They viewed those blacks who continued to level charges of racism (or who leveled charges of *northern* racism) as too lazy or irresponsible to do the hard work necessary to achieve success and only too willing to leverage white guilt to secure handouts. Historian Thomas J. Sugrue found that many northern whites believed that the "racial gap had narrowed or disappeared altogether. Racial optimists cheered the fact that Congress had enacted the most sweeping civil rights legislation" since Reconstruction and "polls showed that many whites believed that, in the aftermath of the 1960s, blacks were more advantaged than they were. But for many blacks—especially the northern working class and poor—the victories were hollow. 'Untouched by the civil rights movement,' wrote two Urban League officials, 'are millions of blacks whose days begin and end with one goal—Survival!'"¹²⁴

121. Ken Hartnett, "'Live and Let Live' No Longer Applies in Lawrence," *Salina Journal*, July 31, 1970, 2. See also Monhollon, "*This Is America?*" 165–86.

122. Hartnett, "'Live and Let Live' No Longer Applies in Lawrence."

123. "Jim Crowism, a National Institution."

124. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 494–95.

In many respects white Kansans in the 1960s mimicked the attitudes of an earlier generation towards racial liberalism. During and immediately after the Civil War, influential white racial moderates and radicals, driven by pragmatic and moral considerations, advocated the incorporation of the freed people as equal citizens. Pushed by the hostility of more conservative whites and pulled thereafter by political and economic self-interest, they soon retreated from their position. “Throughout the 1870s, northern white radicals and moderates accelerated their retreat. When the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870, many accorded it ‘a quick reputation as the final act of Reconstruction’; even many erstwhile radicals claimed that the ‘Republicans had [now] provided blacks with an ‘ample shield’ for their protection and ‘seemed ready to declare Reconstruction over.’” In their objectives, their legislative responses, their subsequent retreats in the face of conservative opposition, and their conviction that blacks had, after the passage of civil rights bills, received as much justice as they deserved, racial liberals in these two periods acted similarly. In this sense, their actions confirm the contention of historian C. Vann Woodward, who asserted that the period following World War II could be interpreted as a Second Reconstruction.¹²⁵

In grappling with anti-black racism in postwar America, contemporaries and historians alike have until recently subscribed to a narrative that minimizes the significance of northern and western racism, either by ignoring it or by attributing it to the actions of *individual racists* whose attitudes were supposedly anathema to the more racially progressive majority. In crafting this narrative, they downplayed northern and western racism—often more implicitly than explicitly—by portraying the South, with its state-enforced racism, its declaration of racist *intent*, and its conservative majority, as *uniquely* racist and violent, a place different from and *worse than* other regions. In a sense they have portrayed northern and western racism as relatively unintentional, and somehow *innocent*, while portraying southern racism as intentional and virulent.

By focusing on Jim Crow in a midwestern state, this study demonstrates that non-southern racism was neither unintentional nor innocent. White Kansans enforced racist practices against blacks, with or without legal sanction. Furthermore, officials sanctioned those practices by refusing to enforce

125. Campney, *This Is Not Dixie*, 48. On the Second Reconstruction, see C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002 [original: 1955]).

the spirit or the letter of the law. In short, white Kansans employed informal racist practices and legally mandated racist policies but relied more heavily on the former than on the latter to achieve their aims because the circumstances distinguishing the regions were profound. They did not, for instance, perceive the same political, economic, or social threat as did white southerners because their black populations were so much smaller absolutely and relatively. Accordingly, they did not *require* the legislation needed to control black populations in the South.

The Jim Crow system deployed in Kansas was more difficult to fight than it was in the South precisely because it was not as legally proscribed and was, therefore, more ambiguous. As a consequence, blacks there suffered from constant uncertainty about the limitations under which they lived. A black Kansan later concluded that this ambiguity made midwestern Jim Crow particularly hardy. “That’s one reason why in the South I think they made more progress than we did up here,” she noted, “because [in the South] they [white people] told you right out what you couldn’t do.”¹²⁶ She might have added that this is the reason that contemporaries and historians have found it easier to write about the South than about the North and the Midwest. As Sugrue put it, “The story of the southern freedom struggle is fundamentally a morality play, one that pits the forces of good (nonviolent protestors) against evil (segregationist politicians, brutal sheriffs, and rednecks).”¹²⁷

Over the last two decades some historians—mindful of the unrelenting popular and academic focus on the South—have shifted their focus to the North. “Since scholars first began writing the history of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s, black activism in the urban Northeast, Midwest, and West has largely been cast as secondary to the real struggle . . . in the South,” wrote Jeanne F. Theoharis.¹²⁸ In several influential monographs, Sugrue has demonstrated that “the exclusion of the North—or its selective inclusion as a foil to the southern freedom struggle—comes at a cost.”¹²⁹

126. Cheney, “Blacks on *Brown*,” 486.

127. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, xiii.

128. Jeanne Theoharis, “Introduction,” in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles outside the South, 1940–1980*, ed. Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3.

129. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, xiv. See also for historiography, Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991 [reprint 2004]); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of

Despite its new insights, this emerging historiography has established new sets of conventions, including a focus on the largest metropolitan areas and on areas with the heaviest concentrations of black residents, variables which are effectively synonymous. Recognizing, however, that a considerable number of blacks in the north lived in (or were excluded from) smaller cities, suburbs, and rural areas, Sugrue called for scholarship to address this reality, arguing that “Struggles for civil rights also reshaped small towns and suburbs—a part of the northern story that has been almost completely overlooked.”¹³⁰

Although scholars have begun to interrogate the ugly story of the struggle in the suburbs, this study is among the first to address it in the small towns of the North. With its focus primarily on seven heavily white, small, and medium-sized cities across Kansas, it provides a more complete picture of Jim Crow practices than a single city could.¹³¹ It shows that contrary to popular perception, there was indeed an active freedom struggle in the small cities of Kansas, a struggle often coordinated by branches of national and local organizations. It also shows that historians who pursue this subject in coming years will find determined and courageous individuals, like Whalon Blackman, who waged a difficult and often lonely battle for the rights of the black population of Salina. Born and raised in the South, Blackman perceived little distinction between the movement in the South and the one in Kansas. “This cause,” he declared, “reach[es] beyond the boundaries of race and section.”¹³²

Next, this study demonstrates that midwestern Jim Crow was not the softer, gentler version that historians have implied; instead, it imposed unique burdens that were not found in southern or northern cities. The relatively

Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

130. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, xxvii–xxviii. For a study of a notoriously violent Midwest town, see Kerry Pimblott, *Faith in Black Power: Religion, Race, and Resistance in Cairo, Illinois* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017).

131. On racism in the suburbs, see Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds., *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Walter David Greason, *Suburban Erasure: How the Suburbs Ended the Civil Rights Movement in New Jersey* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013); David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Todd M. Michney, *Surrogate Suburbs: Black Upward Mobility and Neighborhood Change in Cleveland, 1900–1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

132. “100 Stage Protest March in Salina.”

small black populations and the looser discrimination in these smaller cities undermined the development of the prosperous and independent black middle classes that developed in those other places. The lack of black middle classes assured that blacks were almost uniformly poor, allowing whites to maintain housing discrimination simply through job discrimination rather than through racist laws that would have undercut their moral authority vis-à-vis the South. Where anti-discrimination laws were in place or when they were expanded, whites circumvented them with legal subterfuges, as exemplified by the private pool strategy in Lawrence. When discrimination was practiced overtly, whites concealed their animus behind a façade of tolerance which included vague utterances of respect for blacks in the abstract.

Finally, this work suggests the need for a more comprehensive analysis of the decades-long persistence of sundown towns in the Midwest, a phenomenon that was never common in the South. Recently, some studies of sundown areas *within* these larger cities or on their suburban peripheries have been undertaken—a line of inquiry that may prove equally fruitful in Kansas, as the case of Prairie Village suggests. However, sundown towns that continued to thrive in small and medium-sized places, like Hoisington and Hays, remain invisible to scholars focused on the larger cities of the Midwest. These towns need to be incorporated into such studies to reckon with the number, the etiquette, and the long-term implications of the sundown towns that dotted the rural Midwest for generations.

BRENT M. S. CAMPNEY is a professor of history at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

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