

# **Seeking a Hoosier Home: Black Migration to Indiana and the Politics of Belonging**

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**History**

Today, Greencastle, Indiana is a small, typical Midwestern community fifty miles from Indianapolis with a population of around ten thousand. Home to DePauw University, the unassuming nature of this quiet Hoosier college town belies the heated controversy that engulfed the state and the nation when over two hundred southern blacks left their homes in 1880 to settle in Greencastle. Prompted by the systematic oppression they experienced in their home state of North Carolina, these men and women were part of larger phenomenon known as the Exoduster Movement. Former slaves across the South left the place of their birth behind in order to build new lives for themselves and their families in the West and Mid-West. For many, the ultimate goal was Kansas, but for a contingent from North Carolina, the beacon of a better life shone brightest in Central Indiana.

The movements of these nascent Hoosiers and their Exoduster colleagues were part of a wider shift in the politics and values of the nation as a whole. It is no coincidence that black migration sentiment and the Exoduster movement came to a head in the late 1870s and early 1880s. This was at a time when the efforts of Congressional Reconstruction had been abandoned. Southern leaders reasserted their hegemony at the expense of the power of both the Federal government and black civil and economic potential. Black migration to Indiana was fundamentally linked to issues surrounding the demise of Reconstruction and the process of “redemption” in the Southern states. Moreover, the movement of blacks to Indiana itself was only possible as a result of the changes wrought both in popular attitudes and legal opinions as a result of the Civil War, and the transformations that Appomattox brought to the Hoosier state. Before the sectional war, Indiana barred blacks from even entering the state while Hoosiers themselves held opinions similar to those across the Union about the undesirability of blacks and their inability to be equal players in white society.

Before the Civil War, white society excluded blacks from full engagement in civil society across the North. In Indiana, prejudice went beyond social discrimination and was articulated in statute. The Indiana constitution of 1851 restricted the exercise of the franchise to white men and, like many other Midwestern states, Article 13 of the Constitution forbid the migration of blacks to Indiana. This same Article also prohibited whites from entering into contracts with

blacks and prevented the hiring of any newly arrived black person. If any of these stipulations were violated, the perpetrator was fined anywhere from ten to five hundred dollars, and the money raised from this went towards the creation of a black colonizationist society.<sup>1</sup> Provisions like these demonstrated the spread of mentalities of race and identity in the United States defined by the slave system.<sup>2</sup> These mentalities were not limited to the South, and were felt in every state in the Union. The settlement of blacks in Greencastle and in other communities across Indiana represented a transformational shift in Hoosier mentalities and legal definitions of citizenship and race brought about through Reconstruction measures such as the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Federal Constitution. Black migration to Greencastle provides a window into the national impact of Reconstruction, as well as changing conceptions and continuities of black citizenship and racial merit experienced in Indiana and across the Union.

Yet, despite the unique perspective that migration to Greencastle presents, there is not a substantial amount of scholarship concerning the movement of Exodusters to Indiana. The majority of scholarship has focused on the movement of blacks to more westerly destinations, primarily Kansas. Works like *A Century of Negro Migration*, by Carter Woodson, *Exodusters* by Neil Painter, and *In Search of Canaan* by Robert Athearn either entirely ignore the Exodus to Greencastle, or only mention it only in passing.<sup>3</sup> Even the Indiana State Library, which houses publications like *The Greencastle Banner*, largely ignores black Exodusters in their section on African American Hoosiers. This is mainly due to the higher number of blacks migrating further West and the establishment of all black towns such as Nicodemus. However, the focus on Kansas has resulted in an underdevelopment in the scholarship of both the Exoduster and black experience in Indiana. This is especially regrettable as research into migration to Indiana provides a unique opportunity to investigate how citizenship was defined for newly arrived blacks in long existing white dominated communities in the Midwest. The lack of scholarship on Indiana is also lamentable due to the widespread and unique collection of firsthand accounts of blacks who came to Indiana and records of the reaction the migration provoked from the white population. The migration to Greencastle in particular and Indiana in general from various points in North Carolina forms over a third of a three volume report of an 1880 Senate Select

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<sup>1</sup> "The 1851 Constitution of the State of Indiana," Article 13.

<sup>2</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

<sup>3</sup> Carter Godwin Woodson. *A Century of Negro Migration*. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969). Nell Irvin Painter. *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction*. (New York: Knopf, 1977). Robert G Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879-80*. (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978).

Committee. Officially titled the *Select Committee of the United States Senate to Investigate the Causes of the Removal of the Negroes from the Southern States to the Northern States*, this five member committee collected over four hundred pages of testimony from sixty-nine witnesses about the conditions of blacks in North Carolina, their motivations for migration, and their experiences upon arrival in Indiana.

The scholarship that has used the Indiana portions of this report primarily attempted to repudiate the conclusions of its Democratic majority opinion. The Democratic majority Senators, Daniel Voorhees, Zebulon Vance, and George Pendleton, despite the gathered evidence, denied the notion that blacks suffered any form of mistreatment in the South and concluded that black migration to Indiana was part of a scheme to produce Republican majorities in Hoosier elections. Democrats blamed State and local Republican leaders such as George Langsdale for encouraging blacks to leave the South in order create a “solid North” full of Republican majorities, and in order to influence the results of both the elections and census of 1880. This accusation was branded as mere party politics and scare tactics by the small amount of later scholarship. Hoosier historians like John G. Van Deusen dismissed charges of Republican “colonization” or “Africanization” of Indiana as “absurd.”<sup>4</sup>

However, while highly exaggerated by the Democrats, there is a small grain of truth in the charges that has been widely overlooked by previous scholarship. George Langsdale, Greencastle’s Republican *homme célèbre* and editor of the *Greencastle Banner* was fully aware that black immigration would result in an increase in Republican voters and promoted this idea on several occasions. Langsdale expressed this viewpoint in an editorial he wrote for his paper encouraging black immigration to Indiana on December 12, 1878 stating “what is the duty of the colored men of the South? Clearly, to move to the North. Let them come to this side of the Ohio river and assist in making a Solid North against a Solid South.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the outright rejection of any notion that white Republicans actively encouraged black migration for political reasons is unfounded. As a result, the historiographic tradition concerning black migration to Greencastle is in need of correction in addition to expansion. But, black migration to Indiana cannot simply be seen as a Republican scheme. Blacks choosing to migrate to Indiana demonstrated their personal and collective agency in the face of white oppression. Migration to Greencastle was a rejection of the re-imposition of white hegemony

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<sup>4</sup> John G. Van Deusen "Did Republicans 'Colonize' Indiana in 1879?" *Indiana Magazine of History*. (Vol. XXX), 346.

<sup>5</sup> G. J. Langsdale. “Will They Come North?” *The Greencastle Banner*. December 12 1878, 2.

in North Carolina, and was facilitated, not produced, by Republican agents in Indiana.

Long before George Langsdale was accused of trying to rig Hoosier elections, black men and women across the South were dealing with the oppression and hatred stemming from the death throes of Congressional Reconstruction. Over the course of the decade preceding the move to Greencastle, Southern blacks were confronted with mounting violence in the form of white racist brutality and an increasingly inhospitable legal and political environments stemming from Southern “redemption.” North Carolina and its black citizens were not spared from this pan Southern development. Indeed, the motivations given by blacks for their exodus from the Tar Heel state centered on the mounting legal restrictions they faced and a fear of physical violence. The effort by Southern whites to retake control of local and state government in the face of Federal control was building steam throughout the 1870s and came to a head in North Carolina during the 1876 election cycle. On a national level, the disputed presidential election led to the Compromise of 1877 that gave the White House to Rutherford B. Hayes and initiated the winding down of Federal intervention in the former Confederate states. In North Carolina, the 1876 elections were a hotbed of white supremacist activity. The depravity of Reconstruction’s “negro rule” was presented by the Democratic Party and their gubernatorial candidate Zebulon Vance as the greatest tyranny ever to befall the state, and a massive effort was made to return the state to the “white man’s governance.”<sup>6</sup>

This campaign, largely characterized by its anti-black tone, carried the day.<sup>7</sup> Democrats were able to take control of the governor’s mansion, every Congressional seat save one, and attained large majorities in the North Carolina General Assembly. North Carolina Redemptionist historian Joseph Gregoire de Roulhac Hamilton characterized the election as a return to an idyllic form of white governance stating that “the cause of peace, order, and good government had triumphed.”<sup>8</sup> While this may have been true from a white Redemptionist standpoint, it was hardly indicative of the state of affairs for black North Carolinians. Almost from the instant the new legislature was sworn in, it began a systematic effort to deprive blacks of their political and social claims to citizenship. The County Government Act of 1877 commenced the organized dismantling of black participation in governance by placing the election of local

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<sup>6</sup>Joseph Gregoire de Roulhac Hamilton. *History of North Carolina: North Carolina since 1860, Vol. III.* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1919), 187, 190.

<sup>7</sup>Frenise Avedis Logan. *The Negro in North Carolina, 1876-1894.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 49.

<sup>8</sup>Logan. *The Negro in North Carolina*, 191.

officials in the hands of the General Assembly.<sup>9</sup> While the act affected all communities, it specifically targeted counties in the eastern part of the state with large black populations who, until this point, had been able to enter the political arena at the local level. This insured that the white majorities in the state legislature were able to monopolize local offices even when their party or their race was in the minority. Thus, the whites of North Carolina were willing to sacrifice local control over county affairs in order to assert and maintain white dominance. This loss of local control in order to satisfy racial prejudice was not unique to North Carolina or even the American South. Post emancipation societies across the Western hemisphere centralized state authority in an attempt to restore a form of citizenship based on a community of white men.<sup>10</sup>

Black suffrage rights were further abridged by the Act to Regulate Elections ratified by the General Assembly on March 12 1877.<sup>11</sup> The act was an attempt at systematic regulation of the voting process in order to disenfranchise as many North Carolina blacks as possible. This was done by granting considerable power to the local registrars to determine voter eligibility. Individual voters were allowed to challenge the appearance of any name on the voter rolls, allowing less than scrupulous whites to challenge the eligibility of black men in order to prevent them from voting.<sup>12</sup> Evidence of this is provided by the example of Richmond County. In the Stewartsville precinct three hundred and seven whites and four hundred blacks registered to vote. Yet, on election day, the white majority challenged and subsequently reject one hundred and sixty seven black votes, while only one white voter was rejected.<sup>13</sup> When the legislature was confronted with black majority districts, it actively engaged in gerrymandering in order to reduce or remove this majority. This was especially the case in the eastern portions of the state which had the highest ratio of black dominated districts and towns. Importantly, it was this area of the state where most of the immigrants to Greencastle would originate.

Aside from election law, a series of other measures curbed the economic options available to blacks. The Land Lord and Tenant Act of 1877 manipulated black farmers into economic dependency on the landed classes and forced a constant state of indebtedness. All crops grown on land rented to blacks were legally regarded as the landowner's property, and it was the landlord's

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 49.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Foner. *Nothing But Freedom*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007). 27.

<sup>11</sup> *Laws and Resolutions of the State of North Carolina Passed by The General Assembly, 1876-1877*. (Raleigh: The Raleigh State Printer and Binder, 1877), 516.

<sup>12</sup> *Laws and Resolutions*, 518.

<sup>13</sup> William Alexander Mabry. *The Negro in North Carolina Politics Since Reconstruction*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970), 22.

responsibility to divide the crop between himself and his lessees.<sup>14</sup> This paved the way for a gross manipulation of the system by white landowners in order to exact the greatest harvest from their tenants while returning little of the crop to them.<sup>15</sup> Any attempt to contest the practices of the landlord were sent to either the local justice of the peace or courthouse, both of which had fallen under the control of the white dominated state legislature as a result of the Local Government Act. Thus, the protests of most poor black sharecroppers fell on unsympathetic ears. Any attempt to appeal the decision of white dominated local government was thwarted by the Land Lord and Tenant Act's stipulation that a lessee had to provide double the amount of property contested in the hearing as bond during the appeal process.<sup>16</sup> This stifled the possibility of appeal for the vast majority of blacks and left them at the mercy of a resurgent white landowning class that had successfully regained its monopoly over local law and justice.

North Carolina migrants cited these limitations on black suffrage and economic potential as the main reasons for their flight to the Hoosier state. Indeed, in their Minority Report, Senators William Windom and Henry Blair pointed to the extreme economic hardships and political injustices inflicted upon blacks by whites seeking to regain and maintain their own personal dominance, and the dominance of the Democratic Party in North Carolina.<sup>17</sup> These were men and women who "unable longer to endure the intolerable hardships, injustice, and suffering inflicted upon them by a class of Democrats in the South, had, in utter despair, fled panic-stricken from homes and sought protection among strangers in a strange land."<sup>18</sup> According to Blair and Windom, these injustices were building for years across the South and stemmed from a concerted effort on the part of white Southern Democrats to reinstitute antebellum notions of citizenship, labor, and race. The Southern white effort to establish antebellum normalcy systematically deprived blacks of political and economic opportunities, and the search for these expressions of citizenship spurred emigrationist sentiment.

In their own words, blacks from North Carolina testified to the hardships that Blair and Windom elucidated in their summary of the Senatorial investigation. W. G. Fearing was a native of Elizabeth, North Carolina who became a secretary in the Emigrant Aid Society in Washington D.C. in order to "help [his] brethren to

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<sup>14</sup> *Laws and Resolutions*, 551.

<sup>15</sup> Logan, *The Negro in North Carolina*, 80.

<sup>16</sup> *Laws and Resolutions*, 552.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Senate, *Report and Testimony of the Select Committee of the United States Senate to Investigate the causes of the Removal of the Negroes from the Southern States to the Northern States*, Senate Report 693, 46<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Part I (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880), XIV.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Senate, *Report and Testimony*, Part I, X.

get away from North Carolina.”<sup>19</sup> Fearing noted that some of the primary motivations for the black exodus from the Tar Heel state centered on increased opportunities. Blacks who moved to Indiana took advantage of higher wages, ranging from \$15-\$20 a month, compared to the \$6-\$7 a month that blacks received in North Carolina. Moreover, Indiana provided blacks with increased educational opportunities. Fearing recounted to the Committee that blacks were motivated to go to Indiana because Hoosier schools were open “all year around, except in summer months, when there is a vacation.”<sup>20</sup> He further alluded to the widespread manipulation of black votes and attempts to suppress black suffrage, noting that to have the right to vote “does not seem to do us much good” in North Carolina. Overall, he contended that blacks in North Carolina, up until this point, had given the state and the white population every benefit of the doubt, and had exhausted every effort to try to improve their condition. With all of these efforts coming to naught, Fearing stated that the only option left to his brethren was to flee the state.<sup>21</sup>

Like Fearing, a letter from James A. Stokes to George Langsdale cited the political and economic oppression experienced by blacks in North Carolina, and the increased opportunities that Indiana held as the main reasons for the exodus. Stoke, originally from Rocky Mount, North Carolina, explained to Langsdale that he left his native state because it was impossible for him to lead a respectable life. Like the rest of the black population, he was systemically forced into perpetual debt, as a result of the Landlord and Tenancy Act. Moreover, he was prevented from earning a respectable wage and was only paid in credit to the store his landlord owned, an establishment that regularly overcharged him for basic goods. Stoke also noted that he and his compatriots were unable to exercise their civic rights in North Carolina. He described the affects of the Suffrage Acts on his own ability to vote, noting that the election process was completely controlled by the Democrats who prevented blacks from voting through the use of election judges. In general, according to Stoke, the black in North Carolina had to “submit to insolence and insult, besides being robbed of the just reward of [his] labor.” This, explained Stoke, was why he and many like him, “determined to leave that inhospitable country and seek homes in a land where we could enjoy those rights that are justly ours...and came right to Greencastle.”<sup>22</sup> Stoke’s Senate testimony highlighted the economic and political handicaps he faced in North Carolina, and

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<sup>19</sup>U.S. Senate, *Report and Testimony*, Part I, 93.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, 94.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>22</sup>U.S. Senate, *Report and Testimony*, Part I, 98.

demonstrated his own agency through the rejection of these limitations as an Exoduster.

Adding to the economic and political repression of blacks, R.C. Badger, a lawyer and former State Representative from Richmond county North Carolina, recounted the violence inflicted on blacks by organized groups of whites. These Klan, or Klan inspired organizations, instilled fear into the hearts of blacks across the South and added to the general feeling that the region was not a hospitable environment. Badger claimed that the violence was a means by which whites could reestablish their political and economic control, noting that it was done “for political reasons, and a part of it for the regeneration of society.” He stated that whenever a black man “got too big for his pants” he became a target for abuse, usually verbal at first, but then physical.<sup>23</sup> An indication that a black man had become “too big for his pants” was usually membership in an organization like the Union league and his exercise of the franchise in favor of Republicans.

Badger further noted the systematic discrimination experienced by blacks in North Carolina court rooms. In the vast majority of cases, blacks were presumed guilty rather than innocent and were almost never found innocent at the expense of a white person.<sup>24</sup> The discrimination experienced by blacks in the halls of justice was recorded by a number of other witnesses throughout the Senatorial investigation. Hilliard Ellis of Wilson County noted the general feeling among blacks was that they did not get fair treatment in courtrooms “because of their color.”<sup>25</sup> Wiley Lowerey of Lenoir County contended that these courtroom injustices resulted from changes caused by the Local Government Act. By removing local control of local offices, Republican majority districts were transferred to Democratic control.<sup>26</sup> The evidence given by Ellis confirms the notion that the Local Government Act was an effort by whites to monopolize political power in North Carolina. By systematically removing local control from blacks, Democrats eliminated Republican controlled areas of the state and completed the redemption process. Further, through control of the courts and elections, whites deprived the black population of its civic potential.

The testimonies of these blacks called before the Congressional investigation mirrors that of the leader of the exodus to Greencastle, Samuel Perry. In his testimony, Perry noted the importance that economic factors played in motivating him and his followers to exit the state. Accompanying the general economic inhospitality were a series of poor harvests that further stimulated a desire to leave

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 399.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, 401.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid, 257.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 308.



North Carolina. As well, Perry cited what can only be described as the North Carolina equivalent of the *corvée* as one of the main grievances of the black population. The law required laborers to work on the public roads at least ten days a year, and Perry testified that overseers of the public roads would specifically target blacks to work longer periods on the roads, usually during harvest time. The unpaid work took away from personal farming time and limited the economic potential of blacks.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, economic factors were the primary motivating factors in Perry's personal decision to begin an emigration movement. His original petition to solicit funds for emigration explained the need for black exodus in economic terms, stating that blacks "having labored hard for several years under disadvantages over which we had no control...our progress has been retarded as to nearly nullify all our efforts...our deliberate conviction is that emigration is the only way in which we can elevate ourselves to a higher plane of true citizenship."<sup>28</sup> In his petition, Perry cited economic opportunity as a key motivating factor for emigration, and an essential aspect of full citizenship.

Like the other witnesses, Perry also noted the inability of blacks to receive a fair trial in North Carolina. Perry experienced this firsthand upon returning to North Carolina after his initial trip to Indiana. He was arrested and falsely accused of forging documents in an effort to swindle \$54 from the local schools. The evidence was completely fabricated and local law enforcement deliberately released the man known to be the forger in order to arrest Perry. He was then forced endure a show trial where the judge categorically stated that "a nigger was no better than a beast." Perry's only recourse was to sell his already mortgaged farm in order to pay down the amount he was accused of stealing.<sup>29</sup> The experience of the leader of the exodus to Greencastle at the hands of North Carolina law enforcement was typical of the experiences of his fellow blacks. Blacks like Perry were systematically denied fair hearings and judgments across the state and white preference ruled the day. Perry himself made this perfectly clear, stating that "it does not take the same evidence to convict a colored man--that is, as much of it--as to convict a white man."

As the testimony of blacks before the Senate inquiry reveals, blacks in North Carolina and across the South were systematically deprived of their legal rights to suffrage through intimidation and legal restrictions imposed by measures like the Local Government Act and the manipulation of voting laws. Blacks were prevented from challenging this by a systematic deprivation of their rights to the redress of grievances in the courtroom. The Landlord and Tenant Act pushed them

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<sup>27</sup>U.S. Senate, *Report and Testimony*, Part I, 284.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid, 281.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid,301.

into an economically subordinate position through measures such as payment only in the form of credit to an overpriced plantation store. By systematically depriving them of the rights of citizenship, this widespread climate of oppression forced the black population of North Carolina into a subaltern position in relation to Southern whites. By definition, the subaltern state implies a systematic deprivation of voice, influence, and participation within the hegemonic power structure of any given society or state. Through their use of government structures and regulation, as well as the fostering of a climate of fear and oppression, the white population of North Carolina was able to regain and re-implement the hegemonic control they had wielded in the days of slavery. The only way for the black population of North Carolina, and blacks throughout the former Confederacy, to reject their subaltern status was to flee the state.

By making the choice to abandon North Carolina, blacks challenged the white hegemonic structure and reasserted their status as citizens and attempted to redefine their place in the United States as a whole. This hegemonic structure was first challenged in North Carolina during the Civil War and Congressional Reconstruction. Men like General Edward A. Wild Blacks actively recruited blacks into “African Brigades” to serve as Union soldiers. These troops actively engaged in the liberation of slave population throughout North Carolina and, in the process, overthrew antebellum power structures and assumptions of black identity based on their acquiescence to the slave system.<sup>30</sup> After the War, blacks challenged the political dominance of whites by participating in group activities such as marches to commemorate Lincoln or emancipation, and by joining organizations such North Carolina Equal Rights League.<sup>31</sup> The black challenge to white social and political hegemony was further advanced by the acquisition of the right to vote by black men. This equal claim to public space and political rights challenged the dominance of Southern whites and their traditional political class. Motivated by the challenge of black agency, whites began a systematic process to return blacks to an antebellum status through political manipulation and violence. By the late 1870s this had effectively been accomplished. Thus, the migration to Greencastle is part of a longer and larger process of black rejection of a subaltern status and white hegemony.

The rejection of subaltern status and the migration to Greencastle mirrors that of Exodusters across the South, and presents in a microcosm the ways in which blacks developed and sustained networks of communication and support. Emigration sentiment, according to Perry, originated as early as 1872 and

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<sup>30</sup> Stephen Hahn. *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, From Slavery to the Great Migration*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 93.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 117, 124.

coincided with the first inroads made by Democrats in state elections and mounting Klan violence. Perry and his compatriots were spurred on in their Exodus sentiments by the circulation of pamphlets and flyers promoting towns such as Omaha, Nebraska as possible places for black resettlement.<sup>32</sup> Calls for emigration were also spread by the wide circulation of publications such as the *New York Herald* which reported the “Kansas fever” infecting the black communities of the South. Motivated by this information, Perry and one hundred other blacks from Eastern North Carolina formed the *National Emigration Aid Society* to raise money for a proposed migration to the West, preferably Kansas.<sup>33</sup>

Perry, and his colleague Peter Williams, collected twenty-five cents each from the members of their society and set off with the stated intention of finding a suitable place for resettlement somewhere in the West. However, Perry and Williams soon realized that they did not have enough money to make it all the way to Kansas. Taking advantage of a letter of introduction to the minister of the Second Baptist Church in Indianapolis that they had obtained while laid over in Washington D.C., the two men stopped in the Hoosier capital and made the acquaintance of local Republican and black leaders. These men encouraged the North Carolinians to stay in Indiana, citing the opportunities for high wages and work. They gave Perry another letter of introduction to the pastor of Greencastle’s African Methodist Episcopal Church, Reverend John H. Clay, whose circulars advertising Greencastle as a place for black settlement had run in George Langsdale’s *Greencastle Banner* and had caught the attention of Perry. These local leaders convinced Perry that Greencastle was a suitable place for black resettlement and dissuaded him from seeking points further west.<sup>34</sup>

After inspecting the area around Greencastle and Putnam County, Perry, despite receiving several threatening letters telling him not to come back, returned to North Carolina to spread the word about settlement in Indiana. It was at this point that he experienced firsthand the discriminatory courtroom practices that he would later describe to the Senate inquiry. After he escaped the drama of his courtroom ordeal, Perry once again began to spread the word about Indiana in the churches of Eastern North Carolina and started to prepare the members of his emigration society for the trip to Greencastle. Literature supplied for him by the reverend John Clay and his AME church in Greencastle provided valuable assistance in his effort. Clay’s advertisements for Indiana described the state’s economic opportunities and praised the social and legal equality that blacks would experience if they came to the state. Clay described Indiana as a “rich state of

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Senate, *Report and Testimony*, Part I 280.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 281.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 283-284.

fertile lands” with great opportunities for “farm hands and house servants [who] can readily find employment.” The legal position of blacks in the Hoosier state stood in stark contrast to their position in North Carolina. Indeed Clay advertised that “in Indiana all stand equal before the law—the black man being protected in his contracts, property, and person the same as the white.” The overall tone of both Perry and the Reverend’s publicity offered blacks liberation and salvation in the Hoosier state and told black North Carolinians to “come overland to Indiana, like the children of Israel marched out of Egypt.”<sup>35</sup> Residence in Indiana was promoted as an opportunity to take the advantages of citizenship which were denied in North Carolina.

Moreover, the black church also became an arena to assert black civic participation and claims to citizenship. The church served post-emancipation blacks as a nexus of family and community connection. The church, especially the rural church in places like Eastern North Carolina, was a center of community mobilization and political action.<sup>36</sup> As a result, active involvement in church life became a way to engage in politics and reassert the voice of blacks in the face of an imposed subaltern voicelessness. It is little wonder, then, that the message of emigrationism was spread in and by churches and, like Clay’s pamphlet, often utilized religious metaphors and imagery to explain and proselytize its merits. As Perry explained to the Senate Committee, churches were regularly involved in providing money and lodging for blacks making their way to the North. Perry himself turned to the church when he ran out of money on his first venture to the North looking for resettlement locations, and when he arrived in both Indianapolis and later in Greencastle, the first contacts he made were with black ministers.

The leaders of black churches were not the only ones promoting black emigration in the North. The Republican Party and local Republican advocates in Indiana took an active role in the promotion of black migration to their state. As Perry and Williams noted, upon their arrival in Indianapolis, some of their first contacts were with the local leaders of the Republican Party. These men provided essential information for the arriving North Carolinians, and took an active role in promoting their exodus to the state. Moreover, it was local white Republicans who were charged with convincing the wider Hoosier population to accept newly arrived blacks. The efforts to entice blacks to Indiana and to convince the white population to accept the new Tar Heel Hoosiers largely played out in the local press. The mouthpiece of the Putnam County Republican Party, the *Greencastle*

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<sup>35</sup> U.S. Senate, *Report and Testimony*, Part I, 166.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Hahn. *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 230-232.

*Banner* was one such forum for debate. Owned and operated by George Langsdale, the paper and its editor took an active role in the emigration debates.

The articles and editorials in the *Banner* were part of the wider debate surrounding black emigration, and contextualized white definitions of black citizenship and usefulness used to support their presence in the state. Langsdale set the initial political terms of the exodus in his December 12 1878 editorial when he stated “what is the duty of the colored men of the South? Clearly, to move to the North. Let them come to this side of the Ohio river [sic] and assist in making a ‘Solid North’ against a ‘Solid South.’” From the white perspective, the *Banner* presented blacks as tools in a lingering sectional and political divide. Blacks were primarily seen for their political potential as Republicans. Langsdale made this point even clearer by encouraging blacks to come to Indiana before the census of 1880 in order to be enumerated where “they will increase the number of their friends in that body [Congress].”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, in later issues he went on to say that “the charging of a rebel fortification by colored troops during the war was not a more necessary or gallant action than would be that of moving on the Democratic stronghold in Indiana in time to carry their works at the next election.”<sup>38</sup> By this statement, Langsdale linked the sectional struggle of the Civil War to the political potential of black men’s votes for the Republican Party in the continued conflict between Democrats and Republicans in the post-War period. The editorial position of the *Banner* revealed the perceived pawn-like status of blacks by the white citizens of Greencastle and their local Republican leaders. Their potential exploitation by white Hoosier politicians was one of the primary markers of their identity and citizenship. This was representative of the wider nature of the political climate in Greencastle and Indiana as well as a marker of blacks’ status across the United States.

Little attention was paid to the reality of the black population’s lack of social equality in Indiana and across the nation. White Hoosiers characterized the desire of blacks to leave the South as the result of oppressive labor practices and the inability to earn a fair wage. The *Banner*’s recruitment of blacks to Indiana reflected a wider political process occurring across the Union that emphasized labor and the economic potential of citizens, while deploring any attempt at “special interest” by any one group.<sup>39</sup> This was also part of the turn away from the insistence of Radical Republicans on the full social equality of blacks. The turn away from black civil rights, and the wider turn away from any “special interest”

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<sup>37</sup> G. J. Langsdale. “Will They Come North?” *The Greencastle Banner*. December 12 1878.

<sup>38</sup> G. J. Langsdale. “Editorial” *The Greencastle Banner* March 20 1879.

<sup>39</sup> Heather Cox Richardson. *West From Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America After the Civil War*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 2.

was evident in the Indiana Republican State Platform of 1878 and in local Greencastle politics. The Platform of 1878 endorsed the notion of equality before the law “without regard to race color, condition, or occupation” but immediately followed this statement with a qualifier. It stated that the Republican Party of Indiana was against any “exclusive privileges to individuals or classes.”<sup>40</sup> This, then, precluded any support by the party for active intervention for civil rights for the “special interest” of black Hoosiers and highlighted the disparity between the stated goals of equality and the practical reality of intervention to achieve them.

The general abandonment of the drive for black social equality was further reflected in the Greencastle Decoration Day speech of 1878. The speech, given by the Union veteran Colonel C.C. Matson, focused on national reconciliation and the virtue of the soldier. It mixed a typical medley of patriotism and martial pride in its commemoration of the nation’s dead. It also identified the major enemy currently facing Indiana and the United States, the dark and creeping menace of communism. To the thunderous applause of the audience, the spread of this ideology was cast as a “danger to life, danger to property and homes—and the most harmful danger to the welfare of the nation.”<sup>41</sup> Painfully missing in the remembrance service was any reference to slavery and the spread of civil and political rights to blacks advocated during Reconstruction or the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments to the constitution. The main points of the speech were the “brave boys in blue” and their restoration of national unity. The possible communist perversion of the labor system was presented as the greatest danger to the nation. Thus, the political dynamics of Indiana linked black identity to the Republican Party and characterized it as an unwanted “special interest” distracting from the more salient labor issues facing the nation.

Indeed, blacks were implicated across the nation as a “special interest” desirous of intervention on their behalf. This limited the potential for the achievement of black social equality, and forced blacks to identify their citizenship based on their political allegiance to the Republican Party. Additionally, this construct of black identity and citizenship also revealed a second and equally important black identity: laborers. This white conception of black citizenship was revealed by the *Brazil Enterprise* (IN) which advertized a need for menial labor in local coal mines, and proposed that these positions be filled by blacks coming to the state from the South. The perspective in favor of black emigration was discussed largely in economic terms focusing on a surplus of demand and a shortage of labor, and reflected the larger politicization of black identity and

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<sup>40</sup> G. J. Langsdale. “Republican State Platform, 1878” *The Greencastle Banner*, June 13 1878

<sup>41</sup> G. J. Langsdale. “The Nation’s Dead: Decoration Day in Greencastle” *The Greencastle Banner*, June 6 1878.

economic merit.<sup>42</sup> This sentiment was replicated by those in favor of black emigration across the state. The *Banner* expressed several of these sentiments in order to counter the claims made in the Democratic and national press that blacks were unwelcome in Indiana. Interestingly, the *Banner* mounted a defense of black inclusion in the Hoosier body politic on the basis of black economic contribution as lower level laborers serving as a bulwark against communist infiltration, and not on their intrinsic equality with their fellow men.

The economic justification of black membership in the Hoosier community was demonstrated by several Hoosiers writing in to the *Banner* to tell how they had utilized the economic contribution of the newly arrived black migrants. A Riley Springer reported to “have two of the North Carolina colored men” who were “first rate hands.” Mr. Springer described them as wonderful and diligent laborers who were able to “saw off six ‘back logs’ two feet thick.” N.R. Evans of Groveland, Indiana wrote that the state needs more good farm hands and that he wanted a black “family with two adult males and girl to work in [the house].” M.A. Moore wrote that a large labor supply was the thing that Putnam County and the state needed in order to double agricultural production. L.B. Smith of Reelsville, Indiana noted the great need for labor in Putnam County and that “fences want repairing and briars and bushes cut out, and logs and brush cleared.” B.P. Coleman deplored the state of fencing in Putnam County and that “a thousand men brought into the county today wouldn’t get the fences reset, the briars cut out of the fence rows, and the logs burned off the pastures in a year. Labor is the great want of the county. We can use the colored men who come and want to work to good advantage.”<sup>43</sup> These letters to the *Banner* presented the merits of black emigration and involvement in Hoosier communities in terms of black labor readiness and ability to provide economic improvement.

However, the potential economic contribution of newly arriving black Hoosiers was fundamentally tied to their ability to labor in menial positions for white landowners. Blacks were not invited to come to Greencastle to become doctors, lawyers, or large scale landowners. They were an economic class whose citizenship was justified by their low level labor potential. Undoubtedly, if Mr. Springer’s two North Carolinians were unable to chop his two big back logs, he would be less willing to employ them, and resultantly, less willing to invite them to his state. Further, these testimonies reveal a rather troubling characterization of proprietorship of blacks by their white employers. Mr. Evans advertisement for two strong men and a girl to work in the house parallel slave advertisements describing blacks by gender, strength and skill in the field or home. As a result,

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<sup>42</sup> Reported in the Greencastle Banner, Jan. 23 1879

<sup>43</sup> G. J. Langsdale. “What the People Say” *The Greencastle Banner*, December 4, 1879.

when the black North Carolinians under the leadership of Samuel Perry arrived in Indiana they still faced similar mentalities concerning black identity and their role in the economy. While the pay was better and there was less outright legal discrimination, these mentalities, indicative of a turn away from radical Republicanism and Reconstruction, still characterized white perspectives of black identity and participation in the Hoosier body politic and economic system.

The Exodusters to Greencastle, while rejecting the reassertion of an antebellum subaltern identity in North Carolina, still found themselves characterized by their economic position and political usefulness as Republican voters. Yet, in coming to Indiana, North Carolina blacks demonstrated an independence and agency that the pigeon holes of white Southerners or Hoosiers had attempted to deny them. Moreover, by coming to Greencastle, the new Tar Heel Hoosiers did indeed claim the possibilities of greater educational, economic, and political opportunities than the Redemptionists in the South were willing to allow. However, these increased opportunities must be weighed against the limiting definitions of acceptable black participation in the Hoosier body politic that prevented a full attainment of social equality.

As the 1880s and 1890s progressed and eventually gave way to the twentieth century, Hoosier blacks faced an increasing repudiation of the very opportunities of social equality they came to Indiana to obtain. The sons and daughters of the blacks who emigrated to places like Greencastle increasingly left the rural environment in favor of urban spaces like the west side of Indianapolis where they faced de facto segregation in housing, education, and employment. As the state increasingly industrialized, racial mentalities hardened and blacks faced mounting and violent pressures against their assertions of social equality. Periodic outbursts of anti-black violence erupted in communities across the state, notably in Evansville and Shelbyville, and twenty blacks were lynched in Indiana between 1865 and 1903.<sup>44</sup>

Indiana was also home to one of the last lynchings to occur in the North. On August, 7 1930 a 2,000 member strong white mob in Marion hung Thomas Shipp and Abraham Smith, two black men accused of raping a white woman and killing her boyfriend. This incident and others helped to place Hoosiers at the center of a revived Klan movement that swept the United States in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>45</sup> Interracial social contact occurred less and less frequently as Hoosier blacks faced increasing segregated from the public activities of the white population.<sup>46</sup> The

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<sup>44</sup> James H. Madison. *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America*. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 18.

<sup>45</sup> Emma Lou Thornbrough. *The Negro in Indiana Before 1900: A Study of a Minority*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 393.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 392.



mounting black violence of the turn of the century and the interwar period had a variety of social and economic causes. But, at its heart, it reflected the definitions of black Hoosier citizenship defined by menial labor and political pawn-ship inspired by the failures of Reconstruction and the Hoosier encounter with the Exoduster movement. The migration of blacks to Greencastle did demonstrate black agency in the face of Southern attempts to restore white hegemony. However, it also revealed the less than inclusive Northern constructs of black identity and the second class status slowly imposed on blacks across the Union after the failure of Congressional Reconstruction. Far from a minor footnote in Indiana history, the emigration of a group of blacks from North Carolina led by Samuel Perry is an essential story in the historiography of Reconstruction and in the shifting definitions of black citizenship in the United States.

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