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**“TO BE FREE FROM THE SLAVERY OF CAPITALISM”: DAVID
WALKER, PETER H. CLARK, AND GEORGE WASHINGTON
WOODBNEY’S BLACK SOCIALIST THOUGHT**

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Dedication

To my father, George Frank Holm (1959-2018).

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This project would not have been possible without the support of my family, especially my mother, Karen Hom; my brother Frank Holm; and my sister, Jennifer Holm. My father, Geroqe Frank Holm, left this world during the completion of this project, but his spirit continued to guide and encourage me from the world of ancestors, and in many ways continues to shape everything that I do. This work is dedicated to his memory.

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Abstract

“TO BE FREE FROM THE SLAVERY OF CAPITALISM”: DAVID WALKER, PETER H. CLARK, AND GEORGE WASHINGTON WOODBNEY’S BLACK SOCIALIST THOUGHT

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2021

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Beginning with David Walker’s *Appeal, in Four Articles, Together With a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, But in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*, and Henry Highland Garnet’s 1843 call for a general strike to end slavery, this dissertation traces a genealogy of early Black socialist thought beginning with the abolitionist movement through the ideas and efforts of Peter H. Clark and George Washington Woodbey, two of the most significant Black Socialists prior to World War I. While Clark was the first Black Socialist in terms of being the first to openly identify as a member of a Socialist party in the United States, this study argues Woodbey engaged in the first sustained effort, as a Black Baptist preacher, orator, and organizer for the Socialist Party of America, to make socialism relevant to the Black working class and extended a distinct tradition of Black radicalism within Black political thought.

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INTRODUCTION

Rev. George Washington Woodbey was born enslaved in Tennessee in 1854 and in 1901 joined the Socialist Party of America (SP) while living in Omaha, NE. After moving to San Diego, CA in 1902 he quickly became one of the party's most sought after speakers, and in 1903 published his first book, *What to Do and How to Do It, or Socialism vs. Capitalism*. In his text's dedication, Woodbey described himself as "once a chattel slave" who now wanted "to be free from the slavery of capitalism." He used the history of abolition and emancipation to theorize that although capitalism may appear inescapable, as a system which violated the laws of God it could and would be overthrown. Socialist "agitators" were "following in the footsteps" of their predecessors, and for Woodbey socialism was a philosophy aligned with Biblical prophetic wisdom.¹ Woodbey took his message across the U.S. seeking to recruit Black workers to the socialist cause by joining the Socialist Party and the international working class struggle against capitalism: "The Negro and all other races, regardless of former conditions, are invited into its fold."² Although Philip S. Foner's heavily cited pioneering work attributes Woodbey's "first acquaintance with the principles of socialism" to Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward* and a speech delivered by Socialist five time Socialist presidential candidate

¹ George Washington Woodbey, *What to Do and How to Do It, or Socialism vs. Capitalism* (1903), in *Black Socialist Preacher: The Writings of Reverend George Washington Woodbey and His Disciple Reverend George W. Slater*, edited by Philip S. Foner (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications, 1983), 40, 50. Woodbey laid out his understanding of the relationship between his religious faith and socialism in his second book, *The Bible and Socialism: A Conversation Between Two Preachers*, in 1904. See George Washington Woodbey, *The Bible and Socialism: A Conversation Between Two Preachers* (1904) in *Black Socialist Preacher*, ed. P. Foner, 87-201.

² George Washington Woodbey, "The New Emancipation," *Chicago Daily Socialist*, 18 July 1909, also republished in *Black Socialist Preacher*, ed. P. Foner, 247-250.

Eugene Debs in Omaha,³ this study how Woodbey encountered anti-capitalist and socialist ideas much earlier and locates sources for his early Black socialist political imagination outside and prior to his affiliation with organized Socialist parties and European and white radicalism.⁴ Along with Peter H. Clark, who in 1876 became the first African American to publicly identify as a member of a Socialist political party in the U.S., Woodbey's political commitments originated in Black cultural and political spaces prior to his involvement with organized Socialism, and drew from traditions of Black political thought and activism including Black abolitionist thought, the Colored Conventions Movement, and the liberationist theology and prophetic traditions of African American Christianity.⁵

Beginning with David Walker's *Appeal, in Four Articles, Together With a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, But in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*, and Henry Highland Garnet's 1843 call for a general strike to end slavery, this dissertation traces a genealogy of early Black socialist thought beginning with the abolitionist movement through the ideas and efforts of Peter H. Clark and George Washington Woodbey, two of the most significant Black Socialists prior to World War I. While Clark was the first Black Socialist in terms of being the first to openly identify as a member of a Socialist party in the United States, this study argues Woodbey engaged in the first sustained effort, as a Black Baptist preacher, orator, and organizer for

³ Philip S. Foner, "Reverend George Washington Woodbey: Early Twentieth Century California Black Socialist," *Journal of Negro History* v 61 no 2 (April 1976); Philip S. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); Philip S. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher: The Teachings of Reverend George Washington Woodbey and his disciple, Reverend George W. Slater, Jr.* (San Francisco, CA: Synthesis Publications, 1983).

⁴ For a discussion on the sources of Black political thought's political imagination, see Michael Hanchard, *Party/Politics: Horizons in Black Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁵ Nikki M. Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist: The Radical Life of Peter H. Clark* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013); P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Patterson, editors, *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021); Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance: An Introduction to Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (1982, new ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

the Socialist Party of America, to make socialism relevant to the Black working class and extended a distinct tradition of Black radicalism within Black political thought.

Conceptualizing this genealogy to include the abolitionist movement David Walker inspired, Peter. H. Clark helped build, and George Washington Woodbey regularly invoked as an organizer for the SP, as well as Black Christianity, African American populism, and anti-racist organizing in the late nineteenth century, this project acts against what Cedric Robinson calls “the foreshortening of socialist thought” in his work *An Anthropology of Marxism*.⁶ In this work, Robinson’s primary concern is to reveal Marxism as but one iteration of a much older and deeper tradition of Western socialism originating in the peasant uprisings and heretical Protestant movements of 13th century Medieval Europe, and what he sees as Marx’s failure to adequately recognize and theorize based on these sources of his own thought. Robinson’s earlier and influential work, *Black Marxism*, on the other hand, concerns the development of the Black Radical Tradition originating among enslaved Africans and through its historical development forming “an accretion, over generations, of collective intelligence gathered from struggle” against slavery and racial capitalism.⁷ Combining these insights, the argument of this study concerning early Black socialist thought addresses the sources of these ideas in this Black Radical Tradition, and how a socialist impulse can similarly be located outside Europe and within Black political thought much earlier than its encounter with Marxism.

Robinson provides an example of the Black Radical Tradition in his discussion of W.E.B. Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction*, a work in which he argues Du Bois discovered the “revolutionary consciousness of the slaves,” developed through “collective action” and

⁶ Cedric Robinson, *Anthropology of Marxism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2001), 13.

⁷ Cedric Robinson, Preface to the 2000 Edition, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xxx.

which “achieved the force of a historical antilogic to racism, slavery, and capitalism.”⁸ Robinson’s suggestion that the Black Radical Tradition always contained an anti-capitalist “antilogic” may appear ahistorical, yet he also stresses its historical nature and the ways “Black opposition to domination has continued to acquire new forms.”⁹ Minkah Makalani further underscores the need to approach Black radicalism historically. Drawing from former African Blood Brotherhood member Richard B. Moore’s description of a “radical” as a person or demand advocating “basic change in the economic, social, and political order,” Makalani argues we must approach Black radicalism with attention to its “historical, intellectual, and political influences” in different historical moments in order to more fully comprehend “how black radicals have always been concerned with particular historical realities.”¹⁰

Using biography, history, and political theory, this approach informs how this study locates the historical, intellectual, and political influences and sources for Black socialist thought in Black abolitionist writings, nineteenth century African American organizing, and the liberationist traditions of Black Christianity. Building off other biographical studies on Black radicals, this study contributes to recent scholarship extending the framework for considering Black socialism beyond the twentieth century and prior to the revolutionary moment of 1917.¹¹ Finally, it fills significant historiographical gaps in the

⁸ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 240.

⁹ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 5.

¹⁰ Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 14; Richard B. Moore, “Afro-Americans and Radical Politics,” WCBS-TV broadcast, Black Heritage Series, March 19, 1969, Manuscript, Richard B. Moore Papers, in *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem: Collected Writing 1920-1972*, edited by W. Burghardt Turner and Joyce Moore Turner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press/London: Pluto Press, 1992), 215-221.

¹¹ For recent biographical studies see Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), Jeffrey B. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*; Jacqueline Jones, *Goddess of Anarchy: The Life and Times of Lucy Parsons*,

extant literature on early Black Socialists, most significantly regarding George Washington Woodbey's early life and years after his active period as an organizer for the SP, while revising and correcting inaccuracies in this literature. Perhaps most importantly it addresses the mistaken narratives about Woodbey's dismissal from Mount Zion Baptist Church in San Diego due to his outspoken socialist views, and recuperates the lost contributions of his first wife, Annie R. Goodin (Woodbey) as a remarkable intellectual-activist-preacher in her own right whose work alongside her husband evidence how Black women contributed to Black radical thought in ways deserving significantly more attention. As recent work on Black women's intellectual history makes clear, women like Annie Woodbey have regularly been erased from histories of the Black freedom movement, Black internationalism, and Black political thought.¹² Carole Boyce Davies argues this "erasure" of Black women's intellectual and activist work in histories of the left has been widespread,¹³ while political scientist Michael C. Dawson emphasizes how such erasure results in a "misapprehension of the nature, scope, and activities" of the left.¹⁴ The erasure

American Radical (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Jeffrey B. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Struggle for Equality, 1918-1927* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020); Kerri K. Greenidge, *Black Radical: The Life and Times of William Monroe Trotter* (New York: Liverlight Publishing, 2020). Relevant studies concerning Black Socialists and Communists in the twentieth century include Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Great Depression* (1983; repr., Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists in the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia in Early Twentieth Century America* (New York: Verso, 1998); Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communist and African Americans, 1917-1936* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998); Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*; Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa, and the Diaspora, 1919-1939* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013).

¹² Keisha N. Blain and Tiffany M. Gill, eds. *To Turn the Whole World Over: Black Women and Internationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019); Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, *A Black Women's History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2020); Martha S. Jones, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

¹³ Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, 1-10.

¹⁴ Michael C. Dawson, *Blacks in and out of the Left* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 16-17.

of Annie from discussions of her husband would be even more remarkable if this period of his own life had not been neglected until now.

Most of the literature on Black Socialists and Communists, as well as studies more broadly concerned with Black political thought in the United States, leaves the impression that anti-capitalism and socialism were alien if not hostile to Black political thought prior to the twentieth century.¹⁵ Influencing this dearth of attention to Black socialists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century is the fact that before Peter H. Clark joined the Workingmen's Party in 1876 there appear no readily identifiable Black members of a political party identifying itself as "Socialist" in the United States, and until the 1930s Black membership in Socialist and Communist parties remained relatively low. However, Winston James argues that despite being "numerically small, perhaps never exceeded more than a few thousand up to 1930, black socialists constituted a significant presence within the wider Afro-American community" beginning in the nineteenth century.¹⁶ In *American Socialism and Black Americans* (1977) Philip S. Foner first observed the marginal attention paid to pre-1930s era Black socialists from scholars of Black political thought as well as

¹⁵ Philip Foner observed in the 1970s "little interest in the attitude of black leaders toward radical movements of any kind, to say nothing of socialism," and "no awareness of socialist influence in the black community prior to World War I." P. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, xi. Examples he cites include August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963); August Meier, Elliot Rudwick, and Francis L. Broderick, *Black Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc, 1965); Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States from Colonial Times to 1910* (New York: Citadel Press, 1951); June Sacher, *The Unbridgeable Gap: Blacks and Their Quest for the American Dream* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1972); Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (1972; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Charles V. Hamilton, *The Black Experience in American Politics* (New York: Putnam Press, 1973); Tony Thomas, ed., *Black Liberation and Socialism* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974).

¹⁶ Winston James, "Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America: On the Ideology and Travails of Afro-America's Socialist Pioneers, 1877-1930," in *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*, edited by Charles M. Payne and Adam Green (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 337.

historians of the socialist movement in the United States.¹⁷ His work discusses Black abolitionist criticisms of “utopian socialists,” as well as Clark and Woodbey at some length. Foner portrays Clark as “moving to the left” following the U.S. Civil War and downplays the his ideas during his involvement in the Colored Conventions Movement and the abolitionist movement.¹⁸ He also found little in his research on Woodbey’s early years, and only briefly mentions his involvement with the Prohibition Party of Nebraska, which Woodbey dedicated nearly a decade of his life to building.¹⁹ While Woodbey read and was doubtless influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx and other European socialist thinkers, their ideas only augmented a worldview shaped within Black Christianity and what Cornel West calls its “prophetic tradition.”²⁰ Moving away from a narrow focus on formal membership in Socialist political parties helps appreciate how Black socialist thought developed with much of Black political thought outside prevailing definitions of the political and formal political institutions affiliated with the state.

Studies on Black anti-slavery and the abolitionist more generally also contribute to the difficulty in imagining anti-capitalism as part of Black political thought before the twentieth century. In the 1970s, influential scholars like Eugene D. Genovese portrayed slavery as a precapitalist social formation, and historian David Brion Davis hypothesized how “the antislavery movement...reflected the needs and values of the emerging capitalist order.”²¹ Historians Sven Beckert notes the trend among mainstream historians of

¹⁷ P. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, xi-xii.

¹⁸ P. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, 47.

¹⁹ P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 6.

²⁰ Cornel West, “Prophetic Christian as Organic Intellectual: Martin Luther King, Jr,” Address delivered in Washington D.C., October 1986, in *The Cornel West Reader* (New York, Basic/Civitas Books, 1999), 426.

²¹ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan, Roll: The World the Slave Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution: 1770-1823* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 350. For critical assessments of these positions, see

capitalism has been to treat it as “cruel, but marginal to the larger history of capitalist modernity, an unproductive system that retarded economic growth, an artifact of an earlier world.”²² If slavery is seen as an archaic institution and abolitionists viewed as consciously or unconsciously aligning with capitalist values, what sense does it make to discuss anti-slavery or abolitionist anti-capitalism? This study considers some of the historiographical, intellectual, and political problems a Black abolitionist anti-capitalist tradition originating in the nineteenth century poses for Black political thought. Black Studies scholars have created the space to address these questions, and provide the basis for the current study’s argument regarding the abolitionist movement’s place in the history of Black socialist thought.

Even before the formation of Black Studies programs in the United States, in the 1930s Black Marxists argued for slavery’s centrality to capitalism’s development, and much recent scholarship owes a debt to the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, and Eric Williams in particular for their contributions showing not only how slavery provided an initial basis for capitalist accumulation and development, but remained an essential part of capitalism itself, a dynamic and thoroughly modern system of exploitation through racial and class rule.²³ Historian Manisha Sinha highlights the implications of this work for

James L. Huston, “Abolitionists, Political Economists, and Capitalism” *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 no 3 (Autumn 2000): 487-521; Manisha Sinha, “The Problem of Abolition in the Age of Capitalism,” *American Historical Review* (February 2019): 144-163.

²² Sven Beckert, “Slavery and Capitalism,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dec. 12, 2014, accessed Nov. 27, 2020, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/slavery-and-capitalism/>

²³ See W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935, repr. New York: The Free Press, 1992); C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938, sec. ed. Rev. New York: Vintage Books, 1986); Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (1944, repr. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). It must be noted that James, Du Bois, and Williams, while similar, vary in their accounts. In particular, Williams’ thesis that abolition resulted from the diminishing profitability of slavery is fundamentally at odds with Du Bois’ argument that it was through a “general strike” of enslaved Black workers that defeated slavery in the United States, or James’ argument that slavery remained extremely profitable for French capitalists in the Caribbean on the eve of the Haitian Revolution. John Clegg provides a useful discussion of these arguments and the origins of current debates among Black Marxists beginning in the 1930s. See John Clegg, “A Theory of Capitalist

reconsidering the politics of abolition itself. According to Sinha, “If slavery is capitalism...the movement to abolish it is, at the very least, its obverse.”²⁴ Her work locates the origins for this argument in W.E.B. Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction* where Du Bois argued a “general strike” led by enslaved Black workers transformed the U.S. Civil War into a revolutionary war against slavery. Following the war in a movement for “real economic emancipation” the masses of Black workers developed an oppositional consciousness and desire “to rid themselves of the dominion of private capital.”²⁵ The defeat of their struggle and capitalism’s global reorganization on the basis of white supremacy created what Du Bois calls “the real modern labor problem...Out of the dark proletariat come the Surplus Value filched from human beasts which, in cultured lands, the Machine and harnessed Power veil and conceal. *The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black.*”²⁶

Returning to Richard B. Moore’s discussion on what it means to be “radical,” this study considers Black abolitionists like David Walker and early Black socialist George Washington Woodbey as radicals within their specific historical contexts. “In relation to

Slavery,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 33 (2020): 74-98. Recent scholarship on slavery and capitalism includes Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014); Sven Beckert and Rockman, eds. *Slavery’s Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2017); Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019); Christopher Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

²⁴ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 3.

²⁵ Manisha Sinha, “The Problem of Abolition in the Age of Capitalism,” 157, 163; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 15, 55-83, 206, 381.

²⁶ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 16. Emphasis added.

chattel slavery,” Moore defines abolitionists as “radical” for demanding slavery’s “replacement by another system such as the free wage labor system,” and with “respect to the system of capitalism” he defines as “radical” the demand for “a socialist order of society.” My argument revisits the abolitionist demands referred to by Moore to establish how, for example, David Walker’s *Appeal* articulated what Robinson calls the Black Radical Tradition’s “antilogic to racism, slavery, and capitalism.” In a similar vein, Sterling Stuckey argues Walker’s *Appeal* expressed a fundamental “hatred of the spirit of capitalism as well as of slavery and racism.” According to Stuckey, Henry Highland Garnet, who republished Walker’s *Appeal* alongside his own *Address to the Slaves* in 1848, shared Walker’s “anticapitalist ethic,” developed a class analysis, and “many of the values one associates with socialism informed his thought and behavior, and some were not unique to European socialism.”²⁷ Drawing from Stuckey’s insightful commentary on Walker and Garnett, and Winston James’ argument that scholars have overlooked the “strong and organic connection” between early Black socialists like Peter H. Clark and George Washington Woodbey and “the later influence of black socialists in American life,” this study considers how Clark and Woodbey’s socialism shows connections with the earlier efforts and ideas of Black abolitionists and an earlier Black internationalism.²⁸

In her groundbreaking biography of Peter H. Clark, who was born the same year Walker first published his *Appeal* and was himself a contemporary of Garnet and Frederick

²⁷ Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (1987, repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 117, 190. Nikki Taylor’s biography of Peter H. Clark clarifies that he was the “first African American to publicly identify as a socialist in U.S. history,” referencing Stuckey’s claims about Walker and Garnet in a footnote. See Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 4. On non-European origins and expressions of non-European socialist values, see also Ayi Kwei Armah, “Masks and Marx: The Marxist Ethos vis-à-vis African Revolutionary Theory and Practice,” *Presence Africaine* 3e TRIMESTRE Nouvelle srie no. 131(3e TRIMESTRE 1984): 35-65.

²⁸ W. James, “Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America,” in *Time Longer Than Rope*, ed. Payne and Green, 336-337.

Douglass, Nikki M. Talyor argues socialism “permeated Clarks’ worldview and colored his activism dating back to the 1840s. Taylor therefore shows how Clark’s socialism originated around the time he first entered the Colored Convention Movement long before his brief membership in the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) at the end of Reconstruction.²⁹ Even so, Taylor primarily attributes “his socialist and revolutionary ideologies and his formal affiliation with socialist political parties” to “German political philosophy” and his relationships with white radicals.³⁰ Adopting Taylor’s use of biography as a way to explore Black intellectual history, I consider how upon joining the SLP, Clark was already moving away from his earlier abolitionist radicalism, rather than simply “moving to the left” as Foner suggests, raising questions about the extent to which Clark’s brief membership in the SLP constitutes a useful way understanding of the origin of the Black socialist tradition in the United States.

Jeffrey B. Perry’s recently completed two-volume biography of Caribbean born radical Hubert Harrison, who was a member of the Socialist Party in Harlem from 1909-1913, provides this project with another model for using biography to explore Black political and intellectual history. After leaving the SP, Harrison went on to launch an all Black political party called the Liberty League, and provided the Jamaican born Marcus Garvey with an important early platform and model for organizing the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).³¹ Perry shows that Harrison, a self-educated working class Caribbean migrant to New York City in the early twentieth century, joined the SP

²⁹ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 6.

³⁰ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 8.

³¹ Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism*; Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Struggle for Equality*. Perry has also edited an excellent collection of Harrison’s writings, as well as written an introduction for a republished edition of Harrison’s book, *When Africa Awakes*. See Jeffrey B. Perry, editor, *A Hubert Harrison Reader* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001) and Hubert Harrison, *When Africa Awakes* (1920), edited with a new introduction, and notes by Jeffrey B. Perry (New York: Diasporic Africa Press, 2015).

because of its “position on the ‘Negro’ question,” and also because of its “intellectual appeal; its use of science, economics, and rational and evolutionary theory; its approach to women and foreigners, its potential for assisting Black progress; its analysis of ongoing class struggle; its offering of an opportunity to make a better world for working people; and its militancy.”³² Based on immense archival research, Perry is especially useful for his detailed discussion treatment of Harrison’s efforts to develop a Marxist analysis of race and class and adopt a specific strategy to organize Black workers into the SP.

While Harrison does not figure prominently in my own study, Harrison’s article in the *New York Call* on December 16, 1911 substantiates part of my argument concerning George Washington Woodbey’s significance within the Black socialist tradition. Harrison argued the SP needed to engage in “special work” to reach the Black working class, and this required the party to develop “special equipment” to break through “the color line.” This “equipment” included literature and speakers who could appeal to Black Americans on topics related to the Black history, experience, and culture. Harrison cited Rev. George Washington Slater Jr.’s 1910 pamphlet *The Colored Man’s Case as Socialism Sees It*, as an example. In Harrison’s experience, this kind of literature already proved effective in developing interest in socialism among Black audiences and attracted whites to the party as well. Harrison also called on the party to enlist more Black organizers, writing: “I know of only one, Comrade Woodbey of California. He has been amazingly effective.”³³ Woodbey himself recruited Slater, another important early Black Socialist preacher and

³² Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism*, 148.

³³ Hubert Harrison, “How to Do It—and How Not,” *New York Call*, 16 December 1911.

the author of *The Colored Man's Case as Socialism See It*, while lecturing in Chicago in 1908.³⁴

Unlike Clark, who said little about the relationship between socialism and the concerns of Black people in the United States, Rev. George Washington Woodbey's efforts for the Socialist Party of America (SP) aimed directly at spreading the socialist message among the Black working class. Like Clark, however, George Woodbey lived a long life and his politics as a member of the SP should be understood in light of his earlier engagement with radical political ideas and movements. This study therefore considers the entire breadth of Woodbey's life for the first time, in order to locate his significance as a Black socialist thinker representing a key moment in the development of a distinct Black socialist tradition of Black political thought.

While Rev. George Washington Woodbey's name appears in numerous studies on Black socialists and communists in the early twentieth century, there has been no significant study of his SP years since Philip S. Foner's work in the 1970s.³⁵ Discussions of Woodbey's SP years largely continue to rely on Foner's biographical sketch and Woodbey's writings in Foner's edited volume, *Black Socialist Preacher: The Teachings of Reverend George Washington Woodbey and his Disciple, Reverend George G.W. Slater, Jr.* While studies on religious radicalism and the Social Gospel movement have begun to more substantially address Woodbey as a reform minded Christian radical, this scholarship remains reliant on Foner's source material and focuses on Woodbey during his most active

³⁴ Rev. Geo. W. Slater, Jr., "How and Why I Became A Socialist," *Chicago Daily Socialist*, 8 June 1908; Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 293-295. Foner's volume includes several of Slater's writings, including the *Chicago Daily Socialist* article cited here.

³⁵ Philip S. Foner, "Reverend George Washington Woodbey: Early Twentieth Century California Black Socialist," *Journal of Negro History* v 61 no 2 (April 1976): 136-157. This article reappears with minor changes in the chapter "Black Socialist Preachers," in *American Socialism and Black Americans*, 151-181 and his, Introduction to *Black Socialist Preacher*, 1-35.

SP years.³⁶ Historian Winston James' observation acknowledging Foner's research in rediscovering Woodbey in the late 1970s even as he left many questions unanswered, applies to other discussions of Woodbey as well..³⁷ Foner found little information on Woodbey's early life, and nothing on the final two decades of his life, concluding: "We know nothing of Reverend Woodbey after 1915."³⁸

Studies on Black socialists refer to Woodbey as one of the few African Americans of note to join the SP prior to World War I, but although he was a national organizer for the party until 1912, more often than not when thinking about the relationship between the socialist movement and Black Americans in the first decade of the twentieth century W.E.B. Du Bois, rather than Rev. Woodbey, comes to mind.³⁹ However, Rev. Woodbey himself contributed to early twentieth century debates around integration in the Black community Du Bois also participated in, debates which became known as the "Du Bois-Washington debate." As Cornell West writes, Woodbey "called into question the pro capitalist assumptions circumscribing" the discourse of both Du Bois and Booker T. Washinton's positions, and instead tethered Black freedom to anti-capitalist working class struggle.⁴⁰

³⁶ See Robert H. Craig, *Religion and Radical Politics: An Alternative Christian Tradition in the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Jacob Henry Dorn, *Socialism and Christianity in Early 20th Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998); Gary Dorrien, *The New Abolition: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). Excerpts and a brief discussion of Woodbey's writings appears in Leonard Harris, ed., *Philosophy born of Struggle: Anthology of Afro-American Philosophy from 1917* (2nd Ed., Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1983/2000).

³⁷ W. James, "Red and Black in Jim Crow America," in *Time Longer Than Rope*, 359

³⁸ P. Foner, "Reverend George Washington Woodbey," 156; P. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, 173; P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 31.

³⁹ Vincent B. Thompson notes that although contemporaries, Du Bois never appears to have acknowledged or mentioned Woodbey. I also have not located a direct reference to Du Bois from Woodbey. Vincent B. Thompson, *Africans of the Diaspora: The Evolution of African Consciousness & Leadership in the Americas, From Slavery to the 1920s* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2000), 196.

⁴⁰ West, *Prophesy Deliverance*, 39.

Providing the fullest biographical treatment on Woodbey to date, this study on early Black socialists concludes with Woodbey's contributions to the Black socialist tradition, arguing his commitments and involvement in the SP were shaped by his personal experience with slavery, emancipation, and migration, the Black church, and the abolitionist tradition. Before joining the SP, Woodbey was known as an expert on African history and was involved in organizing around Jim Crow racism, U.S. empire, and working class reforms. As an SP organizer, he deployed his oratorical skills, honed and crafted as a Black Baptist minister, in the service of working class internationalism, and helped pioneer "the soapbox oratory tradition" of Black socialists nearly a decade before Hubert Harrison praised Woodbey's efforts to recruit Black members to the party.⁴¹ His writings appealed directly to Black Americans, adopting a vernacular and culturally rooted language and awareness of history to convey socialist politics in an accessible way. Later in life, Woodbey continued his political activism outside the SP, helping establish San Diego's first chartered branch of the NAACP before joining the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1921. He briefly edited a Black socialist newspaper in the 1920s called the *New Idea*, continued lecturing on Black history until the 1930s and regularly preached at San Diego's Calvary Baptist Church.

The chapters that follow begin with the early nineteenth century abolitionist movement. David Walker's *Appeal* and Henry Highland Garnet's 1843 "Address to the Slaves of the United States" are first considered as political texts providing foundational arguments within Black political thought for an anti-capitalist internationalism class-based

⁴¹ John M. McClendon, "Richard B. Moore, Radical Politics, and the Afro-American History Movement: The Formation of a Revolutionary Tradition in African American Intellectual Culture," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* vol 30 no 2 (July 2006): 17. While McClendon rightfully claims Harrison "pioneered the soapbox oratory tradition," Woodbey's efforts preceded Harrison, and as Harrison himself followed Woodbey's efforts this suggests he may have modelled his own efforts after Woodbey to a degree.

strategies for self-emancipation (Ch. 1). The next chapter then considers Peter H. Clark (Ch. 2), who read Walker and along with Garnet was active in the Colored Conventions Movement and third-party politics prior to the U.S. Civil War. The following two chapters (Ch. 3 & Ch. 4) provide a biographical portrait of Rev. George Washington Woodbey's and explore his politics from his early involvement in the temperance and women's suffrage movements, to his continued work as a Baptist preacher toward the end of his life. Chapter 3 explores Rev. Woodbey and his first wife, Annie R. Goodin (Woodbey)'s political life together in the Midwest, beginning with their years organizing new congregations and supporting the Prohibition Party in Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. Woodbey joined the Socialist Party of America shortly after its founding convention in 1901, and chapter 5 with Rev. Woodbey's life during his most active years as a SP organizer, his intellectual production and politics as a socialist, and finally sketches his activities from the outbreak of World War I until his death in 1937.

Chapter 2 draws especially on Cedric Robinson's conceptualization of the Black Radical Tradition as containing its own anti-capitalist logic, as well as Sterling Stuckey's observations regarding Walker and Garnet's anti-capitalist ethical critiques, socialist values, and class analysis in his study *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. This chapter reads David Walker's 1829 *Appeal* and Henry Highland Garnet's "Address to the Slaves," originally delivered in 1843 before the National Convention of Colored Citizens in Buffalo, New York, as early political expressions of Black political thought containing core elements of what came to constitute Black socialist thought in the twentieth century: internationalism and a class based analysis of the Black liberation struggle. While much has been written concerning Walker's

pamphlet and its relationship to Black nationalist and Pan-Africanist Black politics,⁴² few have discussed his texts anti-capitalist aspects nor, somewhat surprisingly, referred to his work as internationalist. Relatedly, Garnet's "Address," which developed similar ideas and which Garnet republished alongside Walker's *Appeal* in 1848, included elements of a class-analysis and suggested a mass labor stoppage or general strike as a means through which the enslaved could self-emancipate themselves from slavery. Despite its origins in a 1843 speech before a National Convention of Colored Citizens in New York, however, Garnet is rarely mentioned in discussions regarding the origins and development of the general strike idea. Commonly considered a European phenomenon associated especially with Marxist theories of revolutionary change in the early twentieth century, if, according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in 1844 Marx first began to make a significant innovation to the idea in an effort to theorize and effect "an epistemological change in workers" consciousness about their power at the point of production, it is significant that Garnet's "epistemological project" preceded Marx by an entire year. Whereas Spivak usefully refers to W.E.B. Du Bois' use of the "general strike" idea in his 1935 work *Black Reconstruction* as an instance of "rethinking Marxism" and "rethink the revolutionary subject from within slave labor," Garnet was himself independently and prior to Marx theorizing the revolutionary power of enslaved Black workers. His "Address" proposed a general strike not for "political change alone," but like the Silesian textile workers 'Spivak describes as fulfilling Marx's "epistemological project" in 1844, he understood its power in "working for change in social relations."⁴³

⁴² Thabiti Asukile, "The All-Embracing Black Nationalist Theories of David Walker," *The Black Scholar* 29 no. 4 (Winter 1999): 16-24.

⁴³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "General Strike," *Rethinking Marxism* 26 no 1 (2014), 9-14.

Sterling Stuckey observed anti-capitalist values and sentiments in both Walker and Garnet. According to Stuckey, Walker's *Appeal*, expressed a "cry [that] was at bottom one of hatred of the spirit of capitalism as well as of slavery and racism."⁴⁴ Stuckey's argues Garnet extended Walker's anticapitalist ethic, and Garnet's thought evidenced socialistic values. Guided by Stuckey's largely unexplored comments, this chapter present Walker and Garnet as political thinkers articulating the Black Radical Tradition's anticapitalist logic, itself developing from the ideas and actions of enslaved Africans and free and fugitive Black people collectively engaged in struggle against racial slavery.

Chapter 2 focuses on Peter H. Clark, a contemporary of Garnet who was first radicalized largely through his involvement with the abolitionist movement and participation in the Colored Conventions Movement. By the late 1840s, Clark was familiar with the ideas found in both Walker's *Appeal* and Garnet's 1843 "Address" through his involvement in the Ohio Colored Conventions. This chapter builds largely off Nikki Taylor's biography of Clark to discuss how his involvement with the Colored Convention Movement, his contacts with European radicals including former associates of Karl Marx, his decision to briefly join, and then leave the Socialist Labor Party of America (SLP). Emphasizing how his anticapitalist and socialist ideas found sources and developed prior to his involvement with the SLP, I argue his brief involvement with the SLP occurred as he drifted away from these sources and the radicalism of his earlier years. Although important as most likely the first African American to join a Socialist political party in the United States, Clark's speeches and writings on socialism said little about its relationship to the realities facing Black Americans after the U.S. Civil War. Relatedly, while widely

⁴⁴ Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 117, 190.

witnessed and read at the time, little evidence suggests his ideas on socialism shaped the development of a distinct Black socialist tradition in the early twentieth century.

Unlike Clark, the socialist writings and speeches of George Washington Woodbey attempted to make socialism relevant to Black working class people and people of faith. Based on extensive archival research, oral and family histories, church documents, and on-site research conducted in Emporia and Wichita, KS and San Diego, CA, Chapter 4 establishes the early roots for Woodbey's socialist thought during his years in Midwest. During the 1880s and 1890s, Rev. Woodbey and first wife Annie R. Goodin (Woodbey) became well known preachers and political activists in the region, where together they participated in various religious, political, and cultural institutions in emerging Black communities across Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska, and were involved in movements supporting women's suffrage, black equality, and the democratization of the U.S. political system. Through the Prohibition Party they also joined a larger populist movement inspired by agrarian and urban working-class revolt against monopolistic capitalism, fighting for democratic reforms and worker rights and an end to racial violence and discrimination. Until now obscured in studies discussing his later involvement in the SP, this chapter provides a new foundation detailing a variety of sources from which he later developed his arguments on socialism's relationship to Christianity and Black workers.

Chapter 4 covers Woodbey's most active years as a member of the SP between 1902 and 1915. After providing an overview of his extensive activities as a socialist agitator and organizer, I explore his significant intellectual production as a member of the SP, especially his oratory and published writings, and conclude by filling in the gaps left in the extant literature regarding his activities from WWI to his death in Los Angeles in 1937. From 1915 until his death Rev. Woodbey continued to preach the socialist gospel, and remained active in the San Diego and Los Angeles Black communities through the church

and organizations like the NAACP, the UNIA, and the Progressive Baptist Association. In addition to presenting Woodbey's political thought as informed by sources outside European and white Christian socialist writings and movements, this chapter significantly revises the existing narrative regarding how Rev. Woodbey's socialism drove a wedge between himself and his congregation at Mount Zion Baptist in San Diego, a narrative in which the congregation reportedly dismissed him from the pulpit for preaching "too much socialism." In fact, Rev. Woodbey remained active at Mount Zion until 1916, when he resigned over a question related to church dogma and procedure. After resigning, between 1916 and 1918 he travelled back to Kansas and Nebraska and eventually returned to his birthplace in Tennessee. Returning to California in late 1918, he continued lecturing on Black history and politics until the early 1930s.

As orators, abolitionists, and authors, David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet sought to unite the Black community in the United States around shared ideological and strategic opposition to slavery. George Washington Woodbey, who joined the Socialist Party of America in 1901, regularly invoked and took inspiration from the abolitionist movement they, and his Black Socialist predecessor Peter H. Clark, helped build. Woodbey in fact conceived socialism as a new abolitionist movement, a movement "to be free from the slavery of capitalism."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Woodbey, *What to Do and How to Do It*, in *Black Socialist Preacher*, 40.

Chapter 1: David Walker, Henry Highland Garnet, and Black Abolitionist Anti-Capitalist Internationalism

Nearly two decades before Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels penned their famous *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, calling on workers globally to unite and throw off their “chains,” David Walker, a free Black man living in Boston, Massachusetts, published an *Appeal, to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. Directly tailoring his message to Black people living in the United States, Walker urged education and self-emancipation, and insisted their freedom required “the *entire emancipation of your enslaved brethren all over the world*.”¹ Marx and Engels’ *Manifesto* and Walker’s *Appeal* imagined and sought to constitute through these texts communities conscious of their shared interests in overthrowing their oppressors on an international scale. Walker imagined community is an explicitly racially conscious one, united through shared experiences with enslavement and colonization, and while Marx and Engels’ rhetoric appears “colorblind,” it conveys an image of a largely white and European working class. Both texts contain their own contradictions, Walker at times espousing a civilizationist rhetoric not unlike the language used to justify European colonialism in Africa, while Marx and Engels both praise and condemn capitalism, fluctuating between viewing it as a historically progressive social force and condemning it as the most inhuman system ever created.

Sharing a fundamentally similar internationalist impulse, however, Walker’s 1830 program for Black liberation and Marx and Engels’ 1848 program for working class struggle potentially represent, to borrow from Cedric Robinson, “two programs for

¹ David Walker, *David Walker’s Appeal, in Four Articles, together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, But in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America* (1830) edited by Peter H. Hinks (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 65. All citations from the *Appeal* are from this republication of the 1830 third edition, which contains Peter Hinks’ useful notes on sources, language, and the variations from previous editions.

revolutionary change” that “may be so distinct as to be incommensurable”: the Black Radical Tradition on one hand, and Marxism on the other.² The Black Radical Tradition as posited by Robinson has its foundation in the “persistent and continuously evolving resistance of African peoples to oppression” during slavery and emerged from “the ideas and cultures” of early enslaved Africans to develop into “an enduring cultural complex of historical comprehension.” Marxism, on the other hand, is “a Western construction—a conceptualization of human affairs and historical development that is emergent from the historical experiences of European peoples mediated, in turn, through their civilization,” and according to Robinson, is a tradition of Western radicalism imbued with European racialism, or “the legitimation and corroboration of social organization as natural by reference to the ‘racial’ components of its elements.”³ In another study, Robinson considers how Marxism nevertheless was just one iteration of a Western socialist tradition originating in the heretical Christianity and peasant movements of the 13th century. The “socialist ethos” or “socialist impulse” preceded not only Marx but capitalism itself, and according to Robinson, remains “an irrepressible response to social injustice” and understood in this register, “it has been immaterial whether it was generated by peasants or slaves, workers or intellectuals, or whether it took root in the metropole or the periphery.”⁴ This chapter to explores the extent to which a socialist impulse operates within the political thought of Black abolitionists David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet, whose work informed the early radicalism of Black socialist Peter H. Clark.

Despite the study of the abolitionist movement on the whole being commonly depicted by scholars and popular sources alike as a white led movement embracing the

² Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 1.

³ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 2.

⁴ Robinson, *Anthropology of Marxism*, 61, 157.

values of “bourgeois liberalism,” historian Manisha Sinha has recently argued how from its inception, the movement was shaped, driven, and led by the actions and ideas of enslaved people, fugitives, and free Black activists, and how abolitionists developed their own anti-capitalist critiques and anti-colonial internationalism. According to Sinha, abolitionists “posited an alternative notion of universal human rights” rooted in Enlightenment ideas about natural rights and liberty, but that went much further. “Emancipation, in this understanding,” Sinha writes, “included not only the abolition of slavery but also the liberation of all oppressed people.”⁵ In relation to the exclusion of Black political thought from scholarly understanding of abolition, Anthony Bogues has discussed how “a common problem within the domain of knowledge production is that blacks produce experience and whites produce theory.”⁶ Particularly true in relation to the nineteenth century abolitionist movement, Sinha and Bogues both reject this common framework and consider Black abolitionists’ intellectual production and ideas about the nature of slavery, freedom, and emancipation.

Early on African born writers like Equiano Olaudah and Ottobah Cugoano in England, Mary Prince in the Caribbean, and Phillis Wheatley in the United States added to the early abolitionist movement’s sense of moral urgency with compelling arguments found in their personal narratives, philosophical treatises, and poetry. Ottobah Cugoano’s *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of The Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787/1791), also noted how his “observations” on slavery might “lead into a larger field of consideration.” In this passage Cugoano signifies how his ideas went beyond the natural rights discourse dominate among white English abolitionists at the time,

⁵ Sinha, *Slave’s Cause*, 1, 339.

⁶ Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (London: Routledge, 2003), 25.

placing him in what Bogue calls the “heretical” Black intellectual tradition defined by its challenge to orthodoxy, white/European normativity, and often the creation of new categories of thought.⁷ At the same time, the “larger field of consideration” might refer to how Cugoano’s anti-slavery ideas, as with other Black abolitionists and intellectuals, extended to a critique of other forms of domination and a concern with other forms of oppression, including economic systems like capitalism. Cugoano, for example, condemned poverty and proclaimed: “it is evil with any people when the rich grind the face of the poor.”⁸ He provided a sustained and explicit attack on the slave trade and colonialism under the British empire.

This chapter begins with a brief section on early Black anti-slavery thought’s relationship to anti-capitalism and African resistance and insurrection, before building especially on Sterling Stuckey’s work to examine how David Walker and later Henry Highland Garnet articulated a Black anti-capitalist ethics, internationalism, and class analysis which served as a potential source of influence in the political thought of early Black socialists Peter H. Clark and George Washington Woodbey. Walker and Garnet developed what Stuckey calls a Black Christian “theory of social change” rooted in the oppositional practices and ideas found among enslaved Africans. Their anti-capitalist and socialistic ideas appeared before the “scientific socialism” of Marx and Engels, drawing from cultural and religious sources of thought, including “slave folklore,” where according to Stuckey “white wealth acquired at the expense of blacks is seen as a major feature of the process of history and as such is subjected to withering analysis.”⁹

⁷ Ottobah Cugoano *Ottobah Cugoano Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, 4; Bogue, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets*, 33.

⁸ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, 88. Bogue outlines key proposals in Cugoano’s text, one of which being: “That society should be constructed as a common harmonious community which looks after its poor.” Bogue, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets*, 35.

⁹ Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 190.

SLAVERY'S CAPITALISM AND BLACK OPPOSITION

The relationship between capitalism and slavery has been an “indispensable one,” economic historians Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman acknowledge in their introduction to *Slavery's Capitalism*. Such increasingly popular claims about this relationship among scholars, they point out, also have held a “long-standing” presence in Black Studies.¹⁰ A sociologist, Eduardo Grüner also describes the importance of slavery to capitalism, writing: “the exploitation of the labor power of slaves was a much more essential element in the formation of the *capitalist* mode of production” than previous historical instances or traditions of slavery. An institution with social, cultural, and psychological meaning for different societies throughout and across human history, within emergent capitalism these “were *overdetermined* by the strictly economic necessities of production, accumulation, and rates of profit.”¹¹ By the late eighteenth century, the ongoing profits accumulating from the kidnap, torture, and enslavement of Africans fueled an industrial revolution solidifying slavery's importance for the no longer emergent, but rapidly expanding capitalist world-system. Race took on immense importance in the maintenance and reproduction of this system.

The exploitation of enslaved African labor through the system of chattel slavery was marked by the simultaneous and ongoing development of racial ideologies and these consciously and unconsciously served to justify slavery and European colonialism. Differences attributed to “race” in emerging “scientific” discourses and classification systems related to “species” as applied to human beings were quite literally invented, and

¹⁰ Beckert and Rockman, “Introduction,” *Slavery's Capitalism*, ed. Beckert and Rockman, 2-3.

¹¹ Eduardo Grüner, *The Haitian Revolution: Capitalism, Slavery, and Counter-Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020), 13.

served the new racial regime.¹² Racism facilitated profitability on the plantation through the hyper-exploitation of enslaved, racialized “others” in a system of chattel slavery, which according to Gruener, produced simultaneously a false sense of superiority among Europeans and “white” laborers constituting a barrier within the working class preventing it from organizing and advocating effectively against its collective “masters.”¹³ Those who experienced this new racialized chattel slavery directly constantly resisted and regularly revolted against it and against the racial ideologies undergirding it.

An early important piece of political theory produced by a formerly enslaved African, Ottobah Cugoano’s *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787) described the new, “modern slavery,” and its brutalities compared to ancient and other contemporary forms of slavery. In the West Indies under this new regime of racial slavery, “the design of slave-holders” and their almost singular “intention,” according to Cugoano, was to exploit enslaved Africans “as a kind of engines[sic] and beasts of burden. ” “That their own ease and profit may be advanced, by a set of poor helpless men and woman whom they despise and rank with brutes, and keep them in perpetual slavery, both themselves and children, and merciful death is the only release from their toil.”¹⁴

¹² Robinson defines racial regimes as “constructed social systems in which race is proposed as a justification for the relations of power. While necessarily articulated with accruals of power, the covering conceit of a racial regime is a makeshift patchwork masquerading as memory and the immutable. Nevertheless, racial regimes do possess history, that is discernable origins and mechanisms of assembly. But racial regimes are unrelentingly hostile to their exhibition. This antipathy exists because a discoverable history is incompatible with a racial regime and from the realization that, paradoxically, so are its social relations. One threatens the authority and the other saps the vitality of racial regimes. Each undermines the founding myths.” Cedric Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), xii-xiii

¹³ Grüner, *The Haitian Revolution*, 13, 29.

¹⁴ Cugoano *Thoughts and Sentiments*, 22.

Cugoano provided a historical analysis in which other forms of slavery and servitude were not based on notions of African inferiority, arguing instead what we would call anti-Black racism and ideas about African backwardness were relatively new, as Europeans began constructing what Bogue calls “a theory of human history and origins that justified the so-called inferiority of the African.” Cugoano constructed his own oppositional “conception of history” from divine and secular sources, as history became an important weapon in efforts to overthrow slavery and the “scientific” ideas out of which germinated modern racism.¹⁵

Written on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, where enslaved Africans took up rifles and swords, text’s like Cugoano’s stood out among a wealth of sources of Black abolitionist thought. The enslaved masses of African and African descended people in the Americas theorized, agitated, and organized against their enslavement from the very beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Maroonage, or “the act or state of being a fugitive slave,” became a universally practiced form of African resistance to slavery throughout the Americas as maroons escaped the plantation and formed new communities originally reconstructed largely based on cultural values and political norms found on the African continent. Carolyn Fick argues the significance of maroonage lies in that the practice “was a continual blow to the plantation system and the foundations of slavery in the New World,” a form of opposition produced from “the human dynamics of the master-slave relationship” itself.¹⁶

¹⁵ Bogue, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets*, 40.

¹⁶ Known variously as *palenques*, *quilombos*, *mocambos*, *cumbes*, *ladeiras*, or *mambises*, these new societies ranged from tiny bands that survived less than a year to powerful states encompassing thousands of members and surviving for generations or even centuries.” Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slaves Communities in the Americas* (1979, New Edition, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press,

Existing within and acting against this relationship, enslaved people were shaped by their direct experience and the conditions of their enslavement, and the various ways they resisted these remained at first directly informed by elements of African belief systems and cultural values.¹⁷ Vodun cosmologies and practices provided ideological and organizational direction among the Black revolutionaries in Saint Domingue at the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution, for example, which culminated in the abolition of slavery and establishment of Haiti as an independent Black republic. The Haitian Revolution inspired other documented insurrections, whether planned or carried out. In many cases, organizers justified these insurrections with reference to ideas found in the Declaration of Independence or the French Declaration of the Universal Rights of Man, while also drawing from ideas and ways of knowing outside the Enlightenment world.

In 1800, a man named Gabriel enslaved on a Virginia plantation, led an insurrection involving thousands of enslaved and free Africans, and a small number of white allies, invoking the American Revolution and quoting George Washington as justification for their attack on slavery. A few years later Charles Deslondes of African and European descent headed the largest slave rebellion in U.S. history in Louisiana alongside two African born men named Kook and Quamana.¹⁸ In 1822, white authorities in Charleston, South Carolina discovered a plan for insurrection against slavery led by a formerly enslaved free Black man named Denmark Vesey, who had been to Saint Domingue, and not only saw the Haitian Revolution as a model but expected assistance from the Black

1996), 1; Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 8.

¹⁷ See Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

¹⁸ David R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011).

Republic if his plans failed. Vesey and his co-organizers laid the groundwork for their planned uprising over a period of four years, and Vesey used Hebrew scripture to recruit and organize for the cause. According to one participant, “he would speak of the creation of the world, in which he would say all men had equal rights, blacks as well as whites, -all his religious remarks were mingled with slavery.” Vesey’s most important co-conspirator, Gullah Jack, was an East African priest, a conjurer who communicated with “the African Gods.”¹⁹

Stuckey argues that “nowhere was there greater consciousness of African values than in South Carolina in the early 1820s” in the United States at the time Vesey’s conspiracy was discovered.²⁰ Although Vesey was a member of the city’s African Church established in 1817, but which was repeatedly destroyed and repressed by Charleston’s city officials, Stuckey describes how “an essentially African religion was being practiced there” and more recently David Egerton has interrogated depictions of Vesey as a believer in the Christian faith. For example, Vesey only cited passages from the Hebrew Bible in his recruitment efforts and discussions with possible supporters. Gullah Jack and an Ibo man named Monday Gell, who were also members of the African church, did not see “any contradiction between the religious teachings of their childhood” and what Vesey taught during night classes there. Egerton therefore argues it was not New Testament Christianity, but the Hebrew Biblical law fused with African spiritual practices which “transformed” Vesey’s “timid disciples into revolutionaries.”²¹ According to Stuckey, Vesey’s ideas drew much from African culture and traditions of thought among enslaved Africans, represented

¹⁹ William W. Freeling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 54-56. 101-125.

²⁰ Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 46.

²¹ Ibid; Egerton, *He Shall Go Free*, 120.

in stories like “The Slave Barn,” and “contained the seeds of socialism” which later informed twentieth century Black radical theory.²²

Even after Christianity became a crucial component of Black antislavery activism, African religious beliefs and practices remained a significant force. As greater numbers converted in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Black people enslaved and free embraced not the Christianity practiced and proscribed by their white enslavers but converted to the new faith largely on their own terms. Early on as the Southern ruling class expressed little interest in proselytizing among their human property, they were largely introduced to Christianity through revivals held by Baptist and Methodist itinerant preachers. These were largely interracial affairs where laboring class whites worshipped alongside enslaved Africans and free Blacks.²³ Filtered through the experience of slavery and African spiritual beliefs and rituals, African American Christianity was born, affirming Black humanity and promising salvation, in this life or the next.²⁴

In 1829, this faith found radical expression in David Walker’s abolitionist *Appeal, to the Colored Citizens of the World*. Richard S. Newman notes the term “immediatism” had not entered the U.S. based abolitionist lexicon, even among Black abolitionist texts, but following the *Appeal*’s publication “the message that Americans had to end slavery at once came through more loudly and clearly than ever.”²⁵ Immediationism demanded exactly what its name implies, the immediate rather than gradual abolition of slavery. The demand had already expressed itself outside the United States concretely in the Haitian Revolution, and in the political writings of Black abolitionists like of Cugoano. It also

²² Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 49.

²³ Sinha, *Slave’s Cause*, 28.

²⁴ See Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (third edition, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).

²⁵ Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 97, 105-106.

found early expression in the United States in the organized efforts and plots to destroy slavery through insurrections on plantations and in cities like Charleston. Walker's *Appeal* did not originate the argument for immediate abolition, but made it forcefully, on the eve of the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society by William Lloyd Garrison and Nat Turner's bloody insurrection in 1831. His manifesto both represents a turning point in the struggle to overthrow the system of racialized chattel slavery, and intervened in the shift toward a more militant movement. Causing panic for southern enslavers and politicians, its arguments and ideas became a ideological weapons in the hands of both Black and white abolitionists.²⁶

DAVID WALKER

Born to a free Black mother and enslaved father somewhere near Wilmington, North Carolina in the late eighteenth century, David Walker had spent time in Charleston when Vesey and Gullah Jack began planning their uprising between 1817-1821 and may have stopped in Philadelphia before moving to Boston around 1825. Literate and extremely well read, Walker's biographer Peter Hinks suggests he may have received his education from an underground black run school while in Wilmington, but his religious education definitely began in the Black church.²⁷ In addition to placing Walker in and around Charleston in a period overlapping with the initial planning of Vesey's insurrection, and linking Walker with the city's African church where Vesey was a class leader, Hinks finds several commonalities between Walker's 1829/1830 *Appeal* and testimony regarding Vesey's plot. Both men used religious arguments to condemn slavery, provided similar descriptions on the condition of black life, shared a hostility toward informants and those

²⁶ Patrick Rael, *Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States, 1777-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 2.

²⁷ Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 15.

who were content with these conditions, sought to create unity between enslaved and free Blacks, and expressed shared appreciation for the Haitian Revolution. Furthermore, both Vesey and Walker show a “preoccupation” with the problem of consciousness, or “how to make each individual...pointedly aware of his or her oppression, and then how to move them to reject it and join together in a firm struggle against it.”²⁸

Although the extent of Walker’s involvement or familiarity with Vesey’s planning remains speculative, Walker’s thought clearly “issued from a well-established tradition of black antislavery and religious oratory.” What made the *Appeal* unique was the way he comprehensively, urgently, and publicly approached his arguments, rather than simply the arguments themselves. Walker provided “a new, if demanding, way out of the painful political and existential conundrums confronting his black contemporaries” and appeared following a rebellious decade of slave revolts and planned insurrections in the Caribbean and the United States.²⁹

Walker’s text, I suggest, can be read as an early authorizing text for Black anti-capitalist and socialist thought. A potent and for many a revolutionary call against chattel slavery and a society corrupted by its influence, became an ongoing source of inspiration for Black radicals following its publication. Its significance within Black political thought has been widely noted. W.E.B. Du Bois praised the *Appeal* as the first “program of organized opposition to the action and attitude of the dominant white group” in his autobiography *Dusk of Dawn*.³⁰ More recently, Stephen H. Marshall has positioned Walker as “an important founder of the African American tradition of prophetic political critique,”

²⁸ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 30-38. 36.

²⁹ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 173, 197-198. See also John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 4; Blackburn, *American Crucible*, 278.

³⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & world, Inc, 1940), 192.

who provided “systematic reflection and critique” concerning the nature of the United States as a society proclaiming freedom and equality on the one hand, while displaying an “equally resolute commitment to disregard, if not destroy” Black life on the other.³¹ In a previously unpublished lecture at the 1997 Black Studies Conference at the University of Ohio, Cedric Robinson describes the *Appeal* “as an authorizing text for Black Studies” for its insistence on the importance of pursuing knowledge in the interest of liberation: “Black Studies was to be emancipatory, and populist, employing inquiry for the purpose of mobilizing for deliberate and informed social action.”³²

CONTEXT

Walker was born in the latter half of the eighteenth century in North Carolina, between 1785 and 1797. Information about his parents is scant, although we know his mother was a free Black woman and his father was enslaved.³³ While living in Wilmington, North Carolina the Methodist church proved attractive to Walker with its relatively large and autonomous Black congregation, providing him many opportunities to familiarize himself with the enslaved’s cultural and spiritual life.³⁴ Sometime after 1816 Walker left Wilmington and moved to Charleston, South Carolina. As already mentioned, Walker likely was aware, and possibly directly involved in Vesey conspiracy, and he undoubtedly grew familiar with his African brethren and the Haitian Revolution during these years. In the early nineteenth century, nearly twenty percent of the enslaved population in the region had been born in Africa and maintained a “personal memory of freedom.” During the

³¹ Stephen H. Marshall, *The City on the Hill from Below: The Crisis of Prophetic Black Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 27

³² Cedric Robinson, “David Walker and the Precepts of Black Studies,” in *Cedric J. Robinson: On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance*, ed. By H.L.T. Quan (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 351.

³³ Walker, *Appeal*, 32; Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 10-13.

³⁴ Hinks, *To Awake My Afflicted Brethren*, 19-20, 29-30.

Haitian Revolution Charleston became a popular site for French colonists to resettle, many bringing with them enslaved Africans who later became Vesey's co-conspirators. Known to read and spread news about the Black revolutionaries from Saint Domingue, Vesey envisioned leading Blacks in a mass exodus to the Black republic, and rejected any desire for integration within U.S. society, instructing his followers "not to spare one white skin, for this was the plan they pursued in St. Doming," as part of their plot to leave the U.S.³⁵ Mathew Clavin notes how Vesey and Walker saw in the Haitian Revolution the revolutionary potential of enslaved Blacks and considered the Haitian Republic and its people natural allies.³⁶ For Walker, the Haitian Revolution and ongoing existence of the independent Black state made Haiti "the glory of the blacks and terror of tyrants."³⁷

Sometime before Vesey's plans were spoiled, Walker left Charleston and travelled throughout the South before ending up in Philadelphia. There he likely became involved in the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) church, which functioned as an autonomous Black space in which the city's African American population-built community, worshipped, and expressed their opposition to slavery and racism. The church's founder, Richard Allen, assisted fugitive slaves escaping the south, and along with other free Blacks petitioned courts and published pamphlets promoting abolition. His efforts helped inspire Walker's own decision to write and publish the *Appeal* after moving to Boston, Massachusetts sometime after 1825.³⁸

³⁵ Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free*, 41-51, 126-148; Confession of William Colcok, July 12, 1822 qtd. in Egerton, 148.

³⁶ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 30-33; Mathew Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 33-34

³⁷ Walker, *Appeal*, 23.

³⁸ Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 39-60, 83-106; Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 66; Walker, *Appeal*,

In Boston, Walker quickly established himself in the city's Black community. He married Eliza Butler in 1826, the daughter of Jonas Butler, bringing him into what Hinks calls "a well-established black Boston family," as both Eliza and Jonas were born in the city. Through his marriage, Walker gained access to the Boston's Black community he may have lacked as a newcomer. He and Eliza had three children before his death in 1830, although only one, Edwin Garrison Walker, survived infancy.³⁹ Walker also joined the city's Masonic African Lodge, the city's oldest Black institution. As Black free masonry, according to Sylvia Frey, created a "pan-African civic religion" connecting the political, social, and spiritual concerns of diasporic Africans with Africa itself,⁴⁰ Walker's initiation into Boston's African Lodge brought him into one of the most important and earliest organizational forms of Black internationalism. As an orator and organizer of events, Walker helped lead the African Lodge's 1828 celebrations of the Haitian Revolution and Haitian independence. The celebration featured speeches celebrating the Black Republic, denouncing slavery, and envisioning universal Black freedom, reflecting Black Free Masonry's diasporic concerns.⁴¹

Walker's abolitionist efforts after arriving in Boston were directed toward uniting free Black communities, and for this purpose he and other Black Bostonians formed the Massachusetts General Colored Association (MGCA) in 1826. The MGCA hoped to foster Black unity locally and nationally around issues affecting both free and enslaved Black people, placing the organization in the vanguard of what became the Colored Conventions Movement, which according to P. Gabrielle Foreman "extended both the assumptions and

³⁹ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 69-70.

⁴⁰ Sylvia Frey, "The American Revolution and the Creation of a Global African World," in *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution*, edited by Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 52-55.

⁴¹ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 74.

the questions” of his *Appeal*.⁴² As one of the organization’s most effective speakers, Walker took on a prominent role and in a speech before its semi-annual meeting in 1828 prefigured some of the arguments he developed in his text.

Although records concerning the MGCA are elusive, his speech was reprinted in *Freedom’s Journal*, an early abolitionist newspaper which Walker also served as an agent for in the Boston area.⁴³ According to Walker, the MGCA intended to build Black unity where “practicable and expedient” by “forming societies, opening, extending, and keeping up correspondences, and not withholding anything which may have the least tendency to ameliorate our miserable condition” that did not violate its own organizational rules or the U.S. Constitution.⁴⁴ Walker announced his appreciation for his “white brethren and friends who are making mighty efforts” in the antislavery cause, calling it “obvious” to support cooperation and united efforts based on “a spirit of friendship and of love among us.” However, explaining the value of the new organization and its mission, he criticized those in the Black community only “exclaiming every now and then” about injustices, or worse, remaining “neutral spectators of the work” others did on behalf of “the sons of Africa.” Walker also spoke on the responsibility and power of free Northern Blacks to link their efforts with those in bondage. Although a relatively small group, free Blacks who were actually what he called “two-thirds of the way free,” had the power to bring about massive change if they “resolved to aid and assist each other to the utmost of their power.” Walker

⁴² P. Gabrielle Foreman, “Black Organizing, Print Advocacy, and Collective Authorship: The Long History of the Colored Conventions Movement,” in *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Patterson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 26. See also Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 92-93.

⁴³ *Freedom’s Journal*, December 19, 1828.

⁴⁴ *Freedom’s Journal*, December 19, 1828.

condemned as a “gang of villains” anyone within the free Black population who would “kidnap and sell into perpetual slavery, their fellow creatures!”⁴⁵

WALKER’S *APPEAL*

After living and working in Boston for several years, David Walker published his *Appeal* in three editions in 1829 and 1830 elaborating upon these themes.⁴⁶ He explained the texts purposes and motivations for doing so in its Preamble:

Having travelled over a considerable portion of these United States, and having, in in the course of my travels, taken the most accurate observation of things as they exist—the result of my observations has warranted the full and unshaken conviction, that we, (coloured people of the United States,) are the most degraded, wretched, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began; and I pray God that none like us ever may live again until time be no more...those heathen nations of antiquity, had but little more among them than the name and form of slaver; while wretchedness and endless miseries were reserved, apparently in a phial, to be poured out upon our fathers, ourselves and our children, by *Christian* Americans.⁴⁷

Following his Preamble with four “Articles,” Walker’s text takes a form similar to that of the U.S. Constitution.⁴⁸ Article I considers Black suffering or “our wretchedness in consequence of slavery,” Article II “in consequence of ignorance,” Article III “in consequence of the preachers of the religion of Jesus Christ,” and Article IV “in consequence of the colonizing plan.” It is structured throughout by what Hinks describes as a contemporaneous Black oral culture including “extemporaneous black preaching,”⁴⁹ and is infused with religious imagery and language.

⁴⁵ *Freedom’s Journal*, December 19, 1828.

⁴⁶ Walker, *Appeal*, 24-25.

⁴⁷ Walker, *Appeal*, 3.

⁴⁸ For the *Appeal* as political constitution, see Marshall, *City on the Hill*, 26-56.

⁴⁹ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 193.

Gayroud S. Wilmore describes Walker as “a lay theologian and prophet of radical religion” who produced a “critique of the deep corruption of the American church and society...unparalleled in American literature.”⁵⁰ Drawing upon a theological orientation found in Black Christianity, Walker bolstered his arguments with personal and historical evidence including his experience of travel (referring to his time in the South), his study of ancient Jewish, Greek, and Roman history, and familiarity with the prevailing conditions and attitudes among free and enslaved Black people in the United States. He hoped his “*dearly beloved Brethren and Fellow Citizens*” would read his words, and “understand and believe the truth.” He made an “appeal to Heaven,” to God: “my object is, if possible, to awake in the breasts of my afflicted, degraded and slumbering brethren, a spirit of inquiry and investigation respecting our miseries and wretchedness in this *Republican Land of Liberty!!!!!!*”⁵¹ The profound religious sentiment present throughout the *Appeal* reflects the distinct theological concerns and beliefs of a Christian faith itself the product of slavery. Unlike the Christianity of the whites, condemned by Walker as thoroughly corrupt, he drew from the Christianity of the enslaved, and in what Bogues calls the “heretical” tradition of Black Radical thought,⁵² interpreted the Bible as a story of liberation promising an exodus from bondage for the oppressed and destruction of those who would continue to uphold the sin of slavery.

⁵⁰ Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 62.

⁵¹ Walker, *Appeal*, 4-5.

⁵² Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets*.

By titling his text an “appeal,” Melvin L. Rogers observes how Walker uses “the cultural and linguistic norms associated with the term appeal in order to call into existence the political standing of black folks.” Rogers further argues as a pamphlet, Walker’s text “exemplifies the call-and-response logic of democratic self-governance.”⁵³ Like other “appeals” published as pamphlets in the early nineteenth century, Walker viewed “citizenship as an activity” and naming his “colored brethren” “citizens of the world” sought “to call into existence a political status that [was] otherwise denied” Black people when citizenship is viewed only through a legalistic framework.⁵⁴ Adopting a prophetic voice, Rogers and others note Walker’s use of a Jeremiad presupposing a promise, a failure to keep it, and the continued possibilities of its fulfillment and simultaneous consequences of its remaining unfulfilled. Read in this way, for Walker failing to live up to the promise of the Declaration of Independence and its ideals the United States has been corrupted by slavery. White Americans can only begin to address this corruption by adequately understanding and fulfilling the ideas evoked by their own founding political documents, and free Blacks must evaluate the nature of their own limited “freedom” in order bring about the universal freedom of themselves and their enslaved brethren.

The importance of oratory and rhetoric in the Black political tradition has a long history. Oratory by and among the enslaved, James Oliver Horton writes:

more than an important social instrument: it was a practical weapon against the power of slavery that sought to be all-controlling, a means to psychological and

⁵³ Melvin L. Rogers, “David Walker and the Political Power of the Appeal,” *Political Theory* 43 no 2 (2015), 28.

⁵⁴ Rogers, “David Walke and the Political Power of the Appeal,” 43.

emotional survival, and a vehicle for maintaining personal dignity and self-respect. It was a means of resisting slavery's intent to reduce its victims to the level of subhuman property taking value solely from a master's appraisal.⁵⁵

It also served an important function among free Blacks in the North, especially among Black abolitionists who used "the art of public speaking as a critical tool for organizations against slavery and for the establishment and maintenance of civil rights."⁵⁶ Walker understood and used the power of speech as a weapon against slavery as he sought to educate and organize the Black community, and his rhetorical strategy invited his audience to judge, assess, and act upon his words. The political community he imagined as his audience and sought to establish exceeded the boundaries of the U.S. nation state, but he "expressly and in particular" directed his words at Black people in the United States to whom his call for "inquiry" and action against the causes of their "wretchedness" was immediately designed.

ANTI-CAPITALIST BLACK INTERNATIONALISM

In their work "Haiti, I'm Sorry," Michael O. West and William G. Martin discuss the Haitian Revolution as a foundational moment in the history of Black internationalism. In a similar register, they consider Walker's *Appeal* one of Black internationalism's earliest and most significant written expressions. Defining Black internationalism as a specific historical phenomenon and political orientation within the African Diaspora first appearing in the Americas as an ideological development before cohering into clear organizational

⁵⁵ James Oliver Horton, "Introduction," *Say It Plain: A Century of Great African American Speeches*, edited by Catherine Ellise and Stephen Drury Smith (New York: The New Press, 2005), xvii.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, xviii.

forms, West and Martin show how during the Black international's formative stages in the period Walker was writing, Black internationalism also entailed "common visions of life outside the bounds of capitalism, and the active pursuit of those goals."⁵⁷ But what sense does it make to read Walker in this anti-capitalist and Black internationalist register? Peter Hinks, for example, claims "Walker perceived slavery as an abominable aberration in a society that was otherwise healthy and even morally righteous."⁵⁸ A more theoretical assessment by Chris Taylor argues Walker's economic critique of slavery was "a kind of subaltern Lockeanism," and that Walker like mainstream abolitionists advocated a "liberal-capitalist" society.⁵⁹

Beginning with his preamble, however, Walker's analysis already challenges these conclusions. As the chief "source" of Black misery, slavery, according to Walker, is a form of exploitation dependent on the cheapness of enslaved labor and the immense wealth it produces for "avaricious usurpers" who "overlook the evils." He understands slavery not just in the national context of the United States but places it within a larger international political economy dominated by slave trading colonial powers Spain, Portugal, England, France, and finally the United States.⁶⁰ As such, Black people's freedom depended on an international struggle, "*the entire emancipation of your enslaved brethren all over the world.*" Or in Sterling Stuckey's words, Black liberation implied "challenging the leaders

⁵⁷ Michael O. West and William G. Martin, "Haiti, I'm Sorry," in *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution*, eds. West, Martin, and Wilkins, 84-85, 95-96.

⁵⁸ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 247.

⁵⁹ Chris Taylor, "Divine Servitude Against the Work of Man: Dispossessive Subjects and Exodus to and from Property," *Religion* 50 no 2 (2020):230, 228.

⁶⁰ Walker, *Appeal*, 5.

of world economic exploitation.” Stuckey and others have considered how Walker’s analysis “helped establish the rationale for Pan-Africanism”⁶¹

Walker’s Black internationalism was partially based on a Biblically rooted analysis of political economy not uncommon in abolitionist arguments against slavery. While the non-coercion principles of evangelical Christianity were certainly used to support liberal notions of free market capitalism, abolitionists more commonly used it to criticize slavery as a monopolistic and anti-democratic institution. As one abolitionist and Liberty Party co-founder expressed in 1840, was there no “monopoly so great as for 250,000 slaveholders to monopolize the labor of 3,000,000 of people without compensation?”⁶² Rita Roberts, however, argues that although Walker “regarded the profit motive as critical for understanding the persistence and perpetuation of slavery,” for him “the problem was individual and collective greed.” But if his attack was not on “the economic system” but on the individual choices of those who acted in ways perpetuating the evils he outlines,⁶³ Stuckey’s observation regarding Walker as articulating an “anti-capitalist ethic” remains useful. And if capitalism is, as many believe, a system dependent on the exploitation of cheap labor which requires capital to “overlook the evils” upon which it draws its wealth, applying Walker’s analysis of slavery to capitalism directly can only result in an anti-capitalist conclusion.

⁶¹ Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 152.

⁶² Alvan Stewart, “An Address by the ‘National Committee of Correspondence,’” (1840), *Writings and Speeches of Alvan Stewart, on Slavery*, ed. Luther Rawson Marsh (New York: 1860), 244-255.

⁶³ Rita Roberts, *Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform in Northern Black Thought* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 98.

Another central concept for abolitionist arguments was self-ownership. According to James L. Huston, scholars of abolition often link this notion to John Locke, who “extended the idea to cover ownership of whatever an individual’s labor created, and...propounded a natural right to all private property.” Huston further points out, however, that “it is of some interpretive consequence to determine whether abolitionists celebrated self-ownership in a contractual fashion...or whether they intended only that self-ownership established the capacity to develop and explore one’s self without domination from another.”⁶⁴ It is the latter meaning which operates in Walker’s text. Ultimately, however, Walker rejects the principle of self-possession. Walker explains in his Preamble: “God made man to serve Him *alone*, and that man should have no other Lord or Lords but Himself—that God Almighty is the *sole proprietor* or *master* of the WHOLE human family, and will not on any consideration admit of a colleague, being unwilling to divide his glory with another.”⁶⁵ Walker also asserted “The greatest riches in all America have arisen from our blood and tears” and insisted Black people had a right to their homes and property, and perhaps a greater claim to the land than the white ruling class based on this fact. But reading these passages as reflecting a Lockean understanding of political economy obscures more than it explains. Walker’s analysis of wealth, according to Gabrielle Foreman, was “a prophetic articulation of economic and ethical facts as they cohered,”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Huston, “Abolitionists, Political Economists, and Slavery, 255-256.

⁶⁵ Walker, *Appeal*, 7.

⁶⁶ P. Foreman, “Black Organizing, Print Advocacy, and Collective Authorship,” in *Colored Conventions Movement*, 26.

and these facts cohered fundamentally through his understanding of Biblical precepts interpreted through a Black Christian liberationist theological perspective.⁶⁷

IMPACT AND CIRCULATION

Walker's text, emerging in the wake of the Haitian Revolution and after a decade of insurrectionary attempts among enslaved people to liberate themselves in the U.S., Caribbean, and elsewhere in Latin America, was revolutionary in that it consciously drew inspiration from the Haitian example, endorsed violence as a means of liberation, and sought to destroy one of Atlantic capitalism's central pillars: racial slavery.⁶⁸ Responses to his manifesto among the enslaver class affirm his text's unique ability to inspire, and terrify, those whose system it threatened.⁶⁹ While it gave slave-owning whites nightmares, among Blacks those who read it or had it read to them found inspiration.

Walker's *Appeal* circulated widely following its publication, largely thanks to his own efforts. He distributed the pamphlet via mail and gave copies to sailors who frequented his shop (often sewn into their clothes). Copies were found as far away as Georgia and Louisiana shortly after its publication. White Americans called the text "incendiary," "seditious," and "dangerous," and feared its defense, justification, and endorsement of violent resistance.⁷⁰ Following Nat Turner's insurrection in 1831, it Walker's ideas seemed even more dangerous. New laws were passed making it illegal to teach literacy skills to enslaved people, influenced directly by fears that Turner may have been influenced by

⁶⁷ Taylor, "Divine Servitude Against the Work of Man," 227; John Jea, "The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher," in *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White*, ed. Graham Russel Hodges (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 89-164.

⁶⁸ On revolutionary Black internationalism see West and Martin, "Haiti, I'm Sorry," 92-97.

⁶⁹ Stuckey, *Origins of Black Nationalism*, 1-2; Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 264-292.

⁷⁰ Lori Leavell, "Recirculating Black Militancy in Word and Image: Henry Highland Garnet's 'Volume of Fire,'" *Book History*, 20 (2017): 152-154.

reading Walker. A more radical abolitionism at the time of Turner's revolt had been on the rise, yet a strong pacifist current (among mostly white abolitionists) was also reinforced by its proponents following the bloodshed.⁷¹

In this context an associate of Walker's, the pacifist William Lloyd Garrison, distanced themselves from the *Appeal*. In January 1831, in a review of the text in his paper *The Liberator*, Garrison bluntly stated: "men should never do evil that good may come...we deprecate the spirit and tendency of the Appeal."⁷² After Nat Turner's rebellion that same year, Garrison continued proselyting non-violence and expressed horror at the Turner events.⁷³ Against Garrison's strict non-violence, a white voice from the labor movement expressed sympathy with Turner's intention "to emancipate themselves" and even if he believed "their only hope of doing so was to put to death, indiscriminately, the whole race who held them in bondage," still "their cause was just."⁷⁴

Black people in Boston read the *Appeal* with enthusiasm, or had it read to them, as Walker intended. Conscious that many of his brethren would be unable to read its contents directly, Walker instructed his audience "read it, or get someone to read it to them."⁷⁵ In

⁷¹ Hinks, "Getting the Good Word Out," *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 116-172; In Virginia, one such law prohibited "any person" who would "write, print, or cause to be written or printed, any pamphlet or other writing, advising person of colour within this state to make insurrection, or to rebel, or shall knowingly circulate, or cause to be circulated, any" such writing, with punishments for "a slave, free negro, or mulatto" ranging from lashings to execution, and for "a white person" a fine "not less than one hundred nor more than one thousand dollars. "An Act to amend an act entitled, 'an act reducing into one the several acts concerning slaves, free negroes, and mulattoes, and for other purposes," Article 7, passed March 15, 1832, in *Acts Passed at a General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Begun and Held at the Capital, in the City of Richmond* (Richmond: Thomas Ritchie, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1832), 20-22, "Nat Turner Project," <http://www.natturnerproject.org/laws-passed-march-15-1832>;

⁷² William Lloyd Garrison, Editorial, *The Liberator*, January 8, 1831. Many originally believed Walker may have been assassinated by pro-slavery forces, but Hinks argues he likely died of consumption. See Hinks, Introduction, *Walker's Appeal*, xlv.

⁷³ William Lloyd Garrison, Editorial, *The Liberator*, September 3, 1831 (Boston, MA).

⁷⁴ *New York Daily Sentinel*, 17 September 1831, in *Nat Turner*, edited by Eric Foner (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1971), 76-77.

⁷⁵ Walker, *Appeal*, 2.

1830 a journalist reported free Blacks in the city had indeed “read this pamphlet, nay, we know that the larger portion of them have read it, or heard it read, and that they glory in its principles, as if it were a star in the east, guiding them to freedom and emancipation.”⁷⁶ Following the *Appeal*’s publication and directly influenced by it, Black abolitionists became more confident and assertive more and more took up Walker’s call to refute and challenge slavery in their own words. Walker certainly had not been the first free or formerly enslaved Black person make its arguments, but his impact can be sensed according to John Ernest, as his “influential and prophetic work was echoed in both argument and historical method in subsequent publications.”⁷⁷

For the fugitive Black abolitionist minister Henry Highland Garnet, Walker’s text became a major force of influence and a reference point in his own radicalizing rhetoric and strategic arguments for achieving abolition a decade after Walker’s death. Greatly influenced by Walker’s text, especially in his rhetoric and strategic arguments for abolition in the decades after Walker’s death, in 1848, Garnet republished the *Appeal* along with his 1843 “Address to the Slaves” where he proposed a mass strike as a means for the enslaved to self-emancipate and abolish slavery at once.

HENRY HIGHLAND GARNET

Born enslaved in 1815, Garnet escaped slavery with his parents in 1824. He eventually settled in New York and attended the African Free School with a cohort including other future Black abolitionists and political leaders, among them Alexander Crummel and James McCune Smith. A preacher by profession, Garnett became a leading radical voice within the abolitionist movement in the 1840s, a decade full of tensions and disagreements over the best way forward for the movement. Garnet regularly clashed with his peer,

⁷⁶ *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, 28 September 1830.

⁷⁷ Ernest, *Liberation Historiography*, 4.

Frederick Douglass, although eventually the two had more in common and Douglass came to publicly embrace positions argued by Garnet on violence and political abolition.

Three things especially support characterizing Garnet as part of the more radical wing of the abolitionist movement. His “Address,” first delivered in 1843 and again in 1847 before National Colored Conventions, called for a mass movement against slavery among the enslaved themselves, whereas most mainstream abolitionists made free northern Blacks and their allies the center of their abolitionist thought. Second, Garnet conceptualized a “strike” against slavery as the starting point for a general insurrection against slavery, foreshadowing what Du Bois later called the “general strike of the slaves” during the U.S. Civil War. Finally, Garnet gave early support to anti-slavery third parties.⁷⁸

Garnet’s positions often places him at odds with Garrison’s wing of the movement. “The abolitionists were one of the most faction-ridden reform movements in the history of the United States,” according to one historian.⁷⁹ and the biggest split occurred over the formation of an anti-slavery party in 1840, leading to a new American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society as a rival to the Garrison led AASS. This split occurred amidst ongoing debates about the role of women in the movement, racial prejudices among white leaders, and increasing demands among free Blacks that they be the movement’s key spokespersons.⁸⁰ Rifts concerning the strategy of moral suasion and opposition to formal politics also grew increasingly apparent. Garrison had long held that political parties were necessarily proslavery operating under a proslavery constitutional framework.⁸¹ At the

⁷⁸ On Garnet and anti-slavery third parties, see especially Omar H. Ali, *In the Balance of Power: Independent Black Politics and Third-Party Movement in the United States* (2008, rev. and updated edition Cincinnati: Ohio University Press, 2020), 29-31, 36.

⁷⁹ Bernard Mandel, *Labor, Free and Slave: Workingmen and the Anti-Slavery Movement in the United States* (1955, new ed. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 135.

⁸⁰ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 42-67.

⁸¹ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 42-46.

time, Frederick Douglass stayed in AASS while Garnet joined the newly formed AFASS.

Garnet supported the formation of the Liberty Party in 1840, which interpreted the U.S. Constitution as founded upon the ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence, and therefore in principle viewed it as an antislavery document. Politics, in this view specifically electoral politics, became an important realm for abolitionist agitation and struggle.⁸² Free northern Blacks strongly supported petition efforts throughout the 1830s supporting abolition and voting rights, and in New York were involved in electoral campaigns for the Workingmen's Party, an early third party focused on worker's rights. Based on the limited success of such efforts, some saw the value of supporting the formation of an abolitionist party.

Although at first few in number, Garnet was among those who enthusiastically supported the Liberty Party and what Omar H. Ali calls its "decidedly pro-black" goals. His support and leadership in supporting third parties, argues Ali, was Garnet's "most significant contribution to the abolitionist struggle."⁸³ In 1844, speaking to a Liberty Party convention in Massachusetts, Garnet "predicted that if the hope which the Liberty Party held out for speedy and peaceful emancipation of the slaves...was taken away, a bloody revolution would inevitably follow."⁸⁴ Garnet saw value in waging war against slavery from multiple fronts, including moral suasion, electoral politics, and mass armed struggle.

GARNET AND DOUGLASS

Garnet's 1843 call for a mass uprising against slavery by the enslaved themselves placed him further at odds with Garrison and Douglass, and Douglass personally helped defeat

⁸² Mandel, *Labor, Free and Slave*, 137-140.

⁸³ Ali, *In the Balance of Power*, 29-31, 36.

⁸⁴ Garnet qtd. in Ali, *In the Balance of Power*, 40.

Garnett's proposal at the Negro National Convention held in Buffalo, New York in 1843.⁸⁵

The 1843 Convention minutes provide only a glimpse into Garnett's "Address" as he first delivered it. Speaking for over an hour, Garnet:

reviewed the abominable system of slavery, showed its mighty working, its deeds of darkness and of death—how it robbed parents of children, and children of parents, husbands of wives; how it prostituted the daughters of the slaves; how it murdered the colored man. He referred to the fate of Denmark Vesey and his accomplices—of Nat Turner...as well as to many other case—to what had been done to move the slaveholders to let go their grasp, and asked what more could be done---if we have not waited long enough—if it were not time to speak louder and longer—to take higher ground and other steps.⁸⁶

After he finished, the "whole Convention, full as it was, was literally infused with tears."

The minutes refer to Douglass' opposition to "certain points in the address," namely their being "too much physical force, both in the address and the remarks of the speaker last up."

Douglass wished to continue using "moral means a little longer" and warned: "could it reach the slave, and the advice, either of the address or the gentlemen, be followed, while it might not lead the slave to rise in insurrection for liberty, would, nevertheless, and necessarily be the occasion of an insurrection." Douglass wanted to play no part in causing such an explosion.⁸⁷ While Garnet responded he merely "advised the slaves to go to their

⁸⁵ See Joel Schor, "The Rivalry Between Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet," *The Journal of Negro History*, 64 No. 1 (Winter, 1979): 30-38. Schor is incorrect to dismiss seeing Garnet's speech as "revolutionary." *Ibid*, 32. See also Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 156-216; Earl Ofari Hutchinson, *Let Your Motto Be Resistance: The Life and Thought of Henry Highland Garnet* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972); Joel Schor, *Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice of Black Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Praeger, 1977).

⁸⁶ National Convention of Colored Citizens (1843 : Buffalo, NY), "Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens; Held at Buffalo; on the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th of August, 1843; for the purpose of considering their moral and political condition as American citizens.," *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 25, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/278>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

masters and tell them they wanted their liberty, and had come to ask for it; and if the master refused it, to tell them, then we shall take it, and let the consequence be what it may,” Douglass rightfully understood that those consequences would be “insurrection,” which he called “a catastrophe.”⁸⁸

Endorsement for Garnet's position failed by a single vote. Half a decade later, Garnet published his own version of the “Address,” along with Walker’s *Appeal*, evidencing how he saw his views aligned with Walker’s on the question of violence. While the 1843 Convention failed to support his “warlike” call which “encouraged insurrection” by a single vote, by 1848 things had changed, in part marked by Garnet’s decision to publish the “Address” and Walker’s *Appeal* on his own.⁸⁹

Garnett’s “Address” proposed a general strike or work stoppage against slavery. “Cease to toil for the heartless tyrants, who give you no other reward but stripes and abuse.” Gayatri Chakravory Spivak’s discussion of the “the European phenomenon of the general strike” focuses on Europe, as Spivak accepts that “the industrial revolution started in Britain and...the bourgeois revolution and its consequences happened in France,” and therefore iterations of the general strike idea appear to her more relevant in the European context. Spivak argues Marx innovated the general strike idea in seeking “an epistemological change in workers.” Yet Garnet’s “epistemological project,” which he developed in the same moment as Marx’s is significant for whereas Spivak usefully refers

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Henry Highland Garnet, “An Address To the Slaves of the United States of America (Rejected by the National Convention, 1843) in *Walker’s Appeal, with a Brief Sketch of His Life: And Also Garnet’s Address to the Slaves of the United States of America*, by Henry Highland Garnet and David Walker (New York: J.H. Tobitt, 1848).

to W.E.B. Du Bois' use of the "general strike" idea in his 1935 work *Black Reconstruction* as an instance of "rethinking Marxism" and "rethink the revolutionary subject from within slave labor," Garnet was, at the same time Marx was beginning to propose his theory of working class consciousness, theorizing the revolutionary power of enslaved Black workers. His "Address" proposed a general strike not for "political change alone," but like the Silesian textile workers 'Spivak describes as fulfilling Marx's "epistemological project" in a 1844 strike, he utilized the general strike idea in "working for change in social relations" through the abolition of slavery.⁹⁰

In the mid-1840s, Black abolitionists moved increasingly beyond pacifist and moral suasion strategies, adopting more militant options and radical calls for Black political unity articulated in Walker's *Appeal*. This included endorsing the right of the enslaved to adopt violent resistance and even supporting a mass uprising as a strategy for achieving abolition. Henry Highland Garnett's arguments in his 1843 "Address" increasingly attracted public endorsement even among those who most vehemently opposed him in the past.⁹¹

Although in 1847 the National Colored Convention again failed to endorse Garnet's "Address," it considered encouraging Black parents to "instruct their sons in the art of war."⁹² Two years later, Garnet's proposals received an indirect endorsement when

⁹⁰ Spivak, "General Strike," 9-14.

⁹¹ Garnet, "An Address To the Slaves of the United States of America (Rejected by the National Convention, 1843)."

⁹² Schor, "Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet," 32-33; National Convention of Colored People and Their Friends (1847 : Troy, NY), "Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People and Their Friends; held in Troy, NY; on the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th of October, 1847," *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 25, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/279>.

delegates to the 1849 Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio passed the following resolution:

Resolved: That we still adhere to the doctrine of urging the slave to leave immediately with his hoe on his shoulder, for a land of liberty, and would accordingly recommend...copies of Walker's Appeal and Henry H. Garnet's Address to the Slaves be obtained in the name of the Convention, and gratuitously circulated.⁹³

This resolution came from Black abolitionists who increasingly considered, without necessarily fully embracing or encouraging, armed revolt as an abolitionist strategy, informed by Black radical histories as well as contemporary revolutionary struggles in Europe. Most likely among them was Peter H. Clark, who may have accompanied his uncle John Isom Gaines to the convention.⁹⁴

Also in 1849, Willis Hodges wrote and published an article responding to hypocritical support for Hungarian independence among Louisiana's political class, with the call: "Slaves of the South, Now Is Your Time! Strike for your freedom now." Hodges encouraged slaves to collectively act ("Let your determination be general, and well understood"). By "strike" Hodges implied a double meaning, not unlike Garnet in 1843, to use both physical force and a general work stoppage as a way to end slavery. He considered the refusal to work to be the place to start ("By such a course, you will throw the responsibility on them of a resort to physical violence").⁹⁵ Even Frederick Douglass increasingly expressed himself publicly in ways aligning with Garnet's justifications for violent resistance. In 1850, in Cazenovia, New York, a convention convened to respond to

⁹³ State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio (1849 : Columbus, OH), "Minutes and address of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, convened at Columbus, January 10th, 11th, 12th, & 13th, 1849.," *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 25, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/247>.

⁹⁴ See next chapter.

⁹⁵ *The Liberator*, 3 August 1849.

the pending Fugitive Slave Law, and issued a “Letter to the American Slaves,” likely written by Douglass himself, stating: “you are prisoners of war, in an enemy’s country — of a war, too, that is unrivalled for its injustice, cruelty, meanness: — and therefore by all the rules of war, you have the fullest liberty to plunder, burn, and kill, as you may have occasion to do to promote your escape.”⁹⁶ By 1850, whether or not such statements ever reached their stated intended audiences, such messages amplified a perspective on abolition centering the role of enslaved Africans and African Americans themselves. At the same time, they reflected the increasing pessimism among Black abolitionists like Garnet and Douglass that any solution other than a bloody revolution or civil war would accomplish their abolitionist goals.

The insurrectionary struggles of enslaved and fugitive Blacks, abolitionist agitation, and even the 1848 revolutions sweeping Europe discussed in the following chapter, all contributed to the shift behind these statements. Nevertheless, it was not until John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry, and the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War, that the call for mass and self-consciously revolutionary armed struggle against slavery become the watchword of the day. John Brown himself is rumored to have financed Garnet’s 1848 publication of Walker’s *Appeal* with his “Address.”⁹⁷

According to Lori Leavell in the late 1840s and 1850s Garnett’s decision to republish Walker’s text along with his Address in a single volume both “coincided with” and helped “radicalize black leadership.” Leavell argues that while historians commonly accept the radicalization of Black leaders in the movement in the 1840s, Garnet’s

⁹⁶ Fugitive Slave Law Convention (1850: Cazenovia, NY), “Cazenovia Fugitive Slave Law Convention, August 21-22, 1850,” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 25, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/234>.

⁹⁷ Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 151; Schor, “Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet,” 33. On the 1848 revolutions and their relationship with abolition and radicalism in the U.S. see next chapter.

republication of Walker's *Appeal* with his own "Address" was more than a mere reflection of this radicalization but a significant factor in the radicalization process itself.⁹⁸ Garnett, like Walker had earlier, connected the conditions of free Blacks and their "enslaved brethren:" "While you have been oppressed, we have also been partakers with you; nor can we be free while you are enslaved. We, therefore, write to you as being bound with you." Enslaved and free Blacks were "bound" in Garnet's political imagination not only by their "common humanity," but also by both real and imagined familial connections.

Garnett's "Address" did not go into the horrors inflicted by slavery. His audience, he wrote, "feel them from day to day, and all the civilized world look upon them in amazement." Instead, Garnett outlined the efforts of humanitarians, philanthropists, and so-called Christians to end slavery and together labelled them a complete failure. Harkening back to a history of slave revolts and the Haitian Revolution, and resistance against the slave trade in Africa itself, Garnet asked his readers to "now use the same manner of resistance, as would have been just in our ancestors."

Elsewhere Garnett drew inspiration from events in Europe, and in Douglass' *North Star* in 1848, he observed:

the time has been when we did not expect to see revolution; but now they are daily passing before our eyes and change after change, and revolution after revolution will undoubtedly take place until all men are placed upon equality...then, will all enjoy that liberty and equality that God has destined us to participate in. ⁹⁹

Douglass, who published Garnet's words, shared this enthusiasm for the European revolutionaries and what they represented. Viewing the abolitionist struggle as part as a

⁹⁸ Henry Highland Garnet, "An Address To the Slaves of the United States of America (Rejected by the National Convention, 1843)"; Leavell, "Recirculating Black Militancy," 166, 164

⁹⁹ *The North Star*, 19 January 1848.

rising global insurrection for freedom, Douglass characterized the revolutionary moment thusly:

We live in times which have no parallel in the history of the world. The grand commotion is universal and all-pervading. Kingdoms, realms, empires and republics, roll to and fro like ships upon a stormy sea. The long pent up energies of human rights and sympathies, are at last let loose upon the world. The grand conflict of the angel Liberty with the monster Slavery, has at last come. The globe shakes.

Douglass added:

We are more than spectators of the scenes that pass before us. Our interests, sympathies and destiny compel us to be parties to what is passing around us. Whether the immediate struggle be baptized by the Eastern or Western wave of the waters between us, the water is one, and the cause one, and we are parties to it...The oceans that divided us, have become bridges to connect us...The morning star of freedom is seen from every quarter of the globe.¹⁰⁰

Garnet and Douglass both in 1848 imagined the Black struggle for freedom as a constituent part of an international revolutionary movement. The next chapter considers how Peter H. Clark, the first African American to join an organized socialist party in the United States, was radicalized within the Black struggle and the politics of this moment of international revolutionary upheaval. Familiar with Walker and Garnet, he also followed European events closely and read radical European political works. Within the abolitionist movement Clark engaged in the Black radical tradition at the same time as his ideas were shaped through relationships with German speaking socialists and other white radicals. Clark's brief membership with an organized socialist party did not solely spring from those relationships, however, but from sources including the Black radical thought of Walker and Garnet.

¹⁰⁰ *The North Star*, August 4, 1848.

Chapter 2: Peter H. Clark, the Colored Conventions Movement, and the Socialist Labor Party

In January 1849 in the “professedly free state” of Ohio a State Convention of the Colored Citizens convened in the city of Columbus. Delegates representing Ohio’s free Black population resolved to “sternly resist, by all means which the God of Nations has placed in our power, every form of oppression or proscription attempted to be imposed on us, in consequence of our condition or color.” Understanding themselves in a moment of historical upheaval where “both the old and new worlds are shaken throughout their length and breath, by the uprising of oppressed millions who are erecting firm foundations and stupendous platforms” from which to wage a universal struggle for freedom, delegates linked the struggle for Black freedom in the United States with revolution in Europe. Calling for free Blacks to unite against both slavery and Ohio’s racist Black Laws, “relying only on the right of their cause and the God of Freedom” they also openly encouraged enslaved people to seize freedom for themselves. Not only did the convention’s resolution affirm the spirit of David Walker’s *Appeal* and Henry Highland Garnet’s 1843 “Address to the Slaves,” it voted unanimously to publish and distribute these texts:

Resolved, That we still adhere to the doctrine of urging the slave to leave immediately with his hoe on his shoulder, for a land of liberty, and would accordingly recommend that five hundred copies of Walker’s *Appeal*, and Henry H. Garnet’s *Address to the Slaves*, be obtained in the name of the Convention, and gratuitously circulated.¹

¹ State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio (1849 : Columbus, OH), “Minutes and address of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, convened at Columbus, January 10th, 11th, 12th, & 13th, 1849.,” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/247>.

Earlier conventions held by Ohio's free Black community advocating for civil and political rights and education primarily adopted the language of moral suasion and racial uplift in their resolutions and depended on a legislative strategy for accomplishing their stated goals. Nikki M. Taylor argues the 1849 resolutions marked "a watershed moment in the spirit and tone of these conventions."² The 1849 convention expressed itself with a more pronounced sense of urgency, demanded total commitment from the free Black community in struggle against slavery, and defended violent resistance by the enslaved *and* the use of armed resistance against any person attempting to kidnap or re-enslave fugitives. Individuals and organizations in the Black community who failed to assist fugitives, remained silent on the issue of slavery, or were discovered to treat Blacks in any way less than they treated whites were to be considered an "enemy to the cause of justice and humanity" "deserving of our deepest reprobation" and treated as "outcasts."³ As Peter H. Clark's biographer, Taylor suggests a teenaged Clark attended the 1849 convention with his uncle John Isom Gaines, who attended his own first convention in 1838 at age 16. Just eight years older than his nephew Gaines was already one of the state's most vocal abolitionists and advocates for African American education.⁴

² Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 45-46.

³ State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio (1849: Columbus, OH), "Minutes and address of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, convened at Columbus, January 10th, 11th, 12th, & 13th, 1849.," *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/247>.

⁴ Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 42. Although Taylor writes "Peter H. Clark certainly accompanied his uncle" to the 1849 convention, it would be more accurate to say he likely attended the convention with Gaines. Clark is not mentioned as present in the convention *Minutes and Addresses*, and I have been unable to locate evidence he was there outside his close relationship with his uncle at the time.

In 1852 Peter Clark not only attended but served alongside his uncle as a delegate to the Convention of the Colored Freedmen of Ohio in Cincinnati. Among the convention's resolutions against slavery and the "cruel and bitter prejudice...against the colored race" delegates announced their sympathy "with the oppressed Hungarians and German Socialists in their efforts to throw off the yoke of despotism and reestablish their liberty." Reviewing the history of Black participation in the American Revolution and the support free Blacks in the U.S. expressed for Simon Bolivar's and independence struggles in Latin America, the convention further resolved: "That tyranny in Russia, Austria and America is the same and that tyrants throughout the world are united against the oppressed, and therefore the Russian Serf, the Hungarian Peasant, the American Slave and all other oppressed people, should unite against tyrants and despotism."⁵ Calling on "the American Slave" to unite with European Socialists against their common enemies, these resolutions expressed a profoundly internationalist perspective suggesting Peter H. Clark and his fellow delegates saw abolition as part of a global revolutionary struggle. This chapter further explores how this abolitionist internationalism shaped Peter H. Clark's political trajectory and his brief membership in the Socialist Labor Party when he became "America's first Black Socialist."

Building off Taylor's major biographical study of Peter H. Clark this chapter emphasizes Clark's extended involvement with the Colored Convention Movement while

⁵ Convention of the Colored Freemen of Ohio (1852 : Cincinnati, OH), "Proceedings of the Convention, of the Colored Freemen of Ohio, Held in Cincinnati, January 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19, 1852.," *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/250>.

exploring the sources of Clark's socialism and membership in the Socialist Labor Party between 1876-1879, and his trajectory away from the radicalism of his early twenties following Reconstruction's defeat. Although Clark may have been the first African American to join and likely the first to leave the Socialist Labor Party, Taylor argues his "radicalism was actualized most clearly through socialism" and his lectures for the SLP "constitute the foundations of African American socialist thinking."⁶ This chapter alternatively offers Clark's years in the SLP marking in some ways a departure from a longer Black anti-capitalist and internationalist abolitionist tradition. His speeches as a member of the SLP and his small number of writings on socialism published in Ohio newspapers did not significantly shape the formation of a Black socialist tradition in the United States, even as they now constitute part of its archive. Instead, his larger significance for Black socialist thought came through the abolitionist movement and the Colored Conventions.

EARLY LIFE

Born in Cincinnati in 1829, Peter H. Clark's childhood was defined by extreme moments of racial violence which punctuated the city's history in what was already one of the most violent places for free Blacks in the United States. In August 1829 the first in a series of race riots broke out in the city. A white and largely working-class mob terrorized Cincinnati's Black residents for over a week, wrecking homes and businesses. Constituting nearly ten percent of the city's population before the riot, nearly half or over 1,000 Black

⁶ Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 5-6.

fled before it was all over. David Walker in 1829 put the ostensibly free state of Ohio on par with Southern slave states in its barbarities and cruelties toward his brethren: “I dare you to show me a parallel of cruelties in the annals of Heathens or of Devils, with those of Ohio, Virginia and of Georgia.”⁷ In 1836 when Peter was only seven, “a series of mob actions” between April and July targeted Cincinnati Blacks and destroyed the offices of former enslaver turned abolitionist James Birney and his newspaper the *Philanthropist*. A third large-scale anti-Black riot in 1841 targeted the neighborhood where Clark lived in Cincinnati’s First Ward. Named “Bucktown” by the city’s whites, Blacks concentrated in the area due to “the availability of unskilled work, low rents, and the proximity of black institutions like churches and schools.”⁸ During the 1841 violence, Clark witnessed the community fight back when a “well-organized black militia defended homes and residents.” According to Bridget Ford, 50 armed black men held off a mob of hundreds of angry whites, only succumbing after the mob brought in a cannon and fired upon Black residents as the city police stood by and watched.⁹

Ohio’s “Black Laws” originally passed in 1804 and 1807 curtailed the state’s free Black population’s rights. Black residents were required to maintain documents certifying their status as free persons and pay fees establishing legal residency and gain legal

⁷ Walker, *Appeal*, 56. Elsewhere in the *Appeal* Walker wrote: “Ohio always was and is now a free State, that it never was and I do not believe it ever will be a slaveholding State; the people I believe, though some of them are hard hearted enough, detest Slavery too much to admit an evil into their bosom, which gnaws into the very vitals, and sinews of those who are now in possession of it.” Ibid, 71.

⁸ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 24.

⁹ Bridget Ford, *Bonds of Union: Religion, Race, and Politics in a Civil War Borderland* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 96-98. See also Nikki M. Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati’s Black Community, 1802-1865* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

employment. Following the 1829 riot and citing Ohio's white supremacist legal system, the Colored Conventions Movement was born as "events in Cincinnati solidified a national black consciousness among free blacks and initiated a national dialogue about the conditions and future of the race."¹⁰ The first National Convention of Free Colored Persons held in Philadelphia in 1830 explicitly stated as its motivation for meeting "the enactment of laws in several States of the Union, especially that of Ohio, abridging the liberties and privileges of the Free People of Color, by denying a right of residence, unless they comply with certain requisitions not exacted of the Whites, a course altogether incompatible with the principles of civil liberty."¹¹

Another significant factor during Peter H. Clark's childhood was his family.¹² Long rumored to be the descendent of explorer William Clark, of Lewis and Clark fame, Nikki M. Taylor traces his lineage back to Elizabeth "Betty" Clarke, his grandmother, who was born enslaved in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1784. After relocating with her owner John Clarke to Kentucky in 1794, Elizabeth was repeatedly raped by her master, beginning at age fourteen. In 1798 Elizabeth gave birth to Peter's father, Michael Clarke, and John may have been the father of three other children by Elizabeth. After John's death, Elizabeth and her children were manumitted as stipulated in his will, except her youngest son Elliot. In

¹⁰ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 71. See also Kate Masur, "On the Grounds of Expediency and Good Policy' Free-State Antislavery Laws in the Early Republic," *Until Justice Be Done: America's First Civil Rights Movement, from Revolution to Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2021).

¹¹ American Society of Free Persons of Colour (1830 : Philadelphia, PA), "Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour, for improving their condition in the United States; for purchasing lands; and for the establishment of a settlement in upper Canada, also, The Proceedings of the Convention with their Address to Free Persons of Colour in the United States," *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/70>.

¹² See Taylor's remarkable genealogical research in *America's First Black Socialist*, 8-25.

1816 she left Kentucky for Cincinnati, OH (and dropped the e from her last name), married Isom Gaines, and had three more sons, one of whom, Peter's uncle John Isom Gaines, was born November 6, 1821.

Michael Clark (in Cincinnati the family dropped the e from their last name) married three times. With his first wife Riney Clark Michael had his first child, Ann. Riney died in 1828. Peter's mother, Ann Humphries, was Michael's second wife, and was just seventeen at the time of their marriage. She died when Peter was four years old from cholera. Eliza Jane Morris, who Michael married soon after Ann's death, raised Peter and gave birth to three more children. A barber by trade, Michael was able to provide a decent living for his family, who lived in a pleasant house on South Broadway Street. Having something of an "elite status" in the Black community, Michael forged relationships with well-respected whites in Cincinnati and in 1844 helped found Cincinnati's Colored Orphan Asylum, and according to Taylor, Peter and Michael's "sisters, and their husbands all served in leadership roles in that orphanages for decades as matrons, stewards, and members of the board."¹³ Despite growing up in a relatively privileged free Black family that enjoyed a degree of economic independence and the benefits that came from his lighter complexion and mixed race ancestry, Peter's childhood took place amidst violent and pervasive anti-Black racism in the Bordertown of Cincinnati, neighboring the slave state of Kentucky.¹⁴ As he later recalled, anti-Black violence and prejudice "stood by the

¹³ Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 23.

¹⁴ Ford, *Bonds of Union*. See also Henry Louis Taylor, *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

bedside of my mother and intensified her pains as she bore me. It darkens with its shadow the grave of my father and mother. It has hindered every step I have taken in life.”¹⁵

EARLY SOURCES OF CLARKS RADICALISM

In this borderlands between freedom and unfreedom, Clark committed himself to the anti-slavery cause and became well acquainted with socialist streams of thought and organization in the process. Clark’s earliest explicit introduction to socialism likely occurred while enrolled in Cincinnati’s “Gilmore” Highschool, a private institution established by British philanthropist Hiram S. Gilmore in 1844 for Cincinnati’s Black youth. After Ohio’s Black population attempted to take advantage of a 1828 law creating a public education system in the state, the state legislature passed another law in 1829 denying them access to public education. Despite such restrictions, several attempts were made to provide education to the city’s free Black children. Several independent Black institutions emerged in the 1830s often holding classes in “churches and private homes” and in the late 1830s an Education Society collected funds to pay tuition for Black children at white controlled private institutions.¹⁶ Founded in 1844, Gilmore’s private school provided a rare opportunity for Cincinnati’s African Americans to acquire a more formal education. The school eventually educated over 300 students, offering students classes in subjects such as art, music, Greek and Latin.¹⁷ Touring Gilmore’s school in 1848, Black

¹⁵ *Dayton Evening Herald*, 22 September 1873 qtd. in Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 126/ Also see *Cincinnati Commercial*, 23 September 1873.

¹⁶ Ford, *Bonds of Union*, 158.

¹⁷ Samuel Mathews, “John Isom Gaines: The Architect of Black Public Education,” *Queen City Heritage* 45 (Spring 1987): 41-48; Robert Lee Cayton, *Ohio: The History of a People* (Cincinnati: Ohio University Press, 2002), 57-66; Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 161-174.

abolitionist Martin R. Delaney reported in the pages of Frederick Douglass' *The North Star* his disappointment. He speculated the school's location was chosen "to hide the pupils from public view" and accused its students of learning "comparatively nothing." Nevertheless, before closing a mere five years after its founding, the school became reputable among African Americans in northern states for providing an excellent education, encouraging some to relocate to Cincinnati as a result.¹⁸

Taught and mentored by Gilmore, whose pedagogy and philosophies drew on the communitarian ideas of British socialist Robert Owen and French philosopher Charles Fourier, while attending the school Clark was almost certainly exposed to his teacher's "utopian" socialist beliefs. Owen founded and inspired planned communitarian experiments as models to be emulated until establishing a universal social harmony. One such experiment was New Harmony in Indiana in 1824, which attracted participants from Cincinnati. These settlements usually excluded free Blacks or incorporated them solely as laborers as a way to "prepare" them for embarking on colonization projects. Owenites and Fourierists declared support for anti-slavery efforts and the early women's movement, but their support proved inconsistent according to Philip Foner. Usually promoting the ideas "that slaves and women will be restored to their natural rights, and their true social position" only after "wage slavery" was abolished, their arguments "often crossed into

¹⁸ *The North Star*, June 9, 1848, p. 2-3, in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, edited by Robert S. Levine, new edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 95; Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 162-163.

what amounted to a defense of racialized chattel slavery.”¹⁹ While sympathetic to the efforts of such “utopian reformers,” for this reason in 1843 Frederick Douglass and Charles Lenox Remond famously rebuked white antislavery lecturer John A. Collins when he attacked abolition for not doing enough “to remove the cause which makes us all slaves.”²⁰

Cincinnati became known as a major hub among socialist-minded communarians in the 1840s, and Gilmore and his sons founded a group called the Universal Brotherhood promoting harmonious relationships and communities through a rejection of individual private property for the sake of the “common good.” Putting their beliefs into practice, Gilmore also started planned socialist community outside Cincinnati. Unlike other communities, his project seems to have been more racially inclusive, and several African Americans, including a few members of Clark’s own family, joined the community. As a teenager, Clark may have been familiar with the experiences of an aunt and uncle who joined Gilmore’s community. However, the experiment failed after a severe flood in late 1847. Clark’s uncle, John Woodson, was among those who perished in the disaster.²¹

¹⁹ P. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, 6-11. Also see Foner’s discussion in *Ibid*, Chapter 3. Also see Charles Rozewenc, *Cooperatives Come to America: The History of the Protective Union Store Movement, 1845-1867* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1975), Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), and Marc A. Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 34-46.

²⁰ P. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, 11-13.

²¹ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 31-36. Taylor writes: “Gilmore and his associates recruited an estimated one hundred people to their religious communarian scheme in Clermont County, just east of Cincinnati. The settlers included...Cincinnatians, including Clark’s aunt Evelina, and her husband, John P. Woodson.” *Ibid*, 32. See also *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, 22 December 1847 and “Terrible Calamity—Loss of Seventeen Lives,” *National Era*, 30 December 1847. For more on Gilmore, also see Thomas D. Hamm, *God’s Government Begun: The Society for Universal Inquiry and Reform, 1842-1846* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 58-59, 219.

After leaving Gilmore's school, additional exposure to socialist thought came from Clark's apprenticeship with Thomas Varney, a local white printer who along with his wife Maria Varney published and promoted a diverse array of radical ideas and projects. The apprenticeship put Clark within orbit of some of the most radical political economists, philosophers, and reform movements of the mid nineteenth century. Some of the Varney's associates included Josiah Warren, "the first American anarchist," and Lewis Masquerier who worked with George Henry Evans' Land Reform Association and participated in a 1840 effort "to commence the organization of the classes of all nations." Working for Varney exposed Clark to the radical print culture associated around such movements.²² John Pickering's *Workingman's Political Economy*, published by Varney in 1847, articulated a self-emancipatory vision of social transformation, arguing the working classes must "work out" their own "salvation" by creating a world where "all men had the equal use of the elements." For Pickering, "slavery, in any form" would be impossible in the society thus created.²³ While in the same text Pickering suggested "the condition of the

²² Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 37-38; Lause, *Young America*, 81, 202; Marc A. Lause, *Long Road to Harpers Ferry: The Rise of the First American Left* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 41-44, 122-125; William Bailie, *Josiah Warren: The First American Anarchist, A Sociological Study* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906); Maria L. Varney's articles in *Herald of Truth, a Monthly Periodical, Devoted to the Interests of Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Science, and Art* (Cincinnati: John White, Printer, 1847), 81-87, 231-237; William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (Cleveland: Geo. M. Rewell & Co., 1887), 374-375; *New York Freeman*, 3 January 1885. On Masquerier and Owenite internationalism 1830s and 40s, see Gregory Claeys, "Notes and Documents: Lewis Masquerier and the Later Development of American Owenism, 1835-1845," *Labor History* 29 no. 2 (1988): 230-240. Claeys discusses how Owenist internationalist organizational efforts preceded and were models for more extensively studied examples like International Workingmen's Association.

²³ John Pickering, *The Working Man's Political Economy Founded Upon The Principles Of Immutable Justice, And The Inalienable Right of Man; Designed For the Promotion of National Reform* (Cincinnati: Thomas Varney, 1847), 10, 181.

negro slave (who has a good master)” might be “preferable to that of the poor white man,” he emphasized: “We do not make these remarks as an apology for chattel slavery.” In his view, both “pseudo free labor and chattel slavery systems” were to the benefit of “Northern and Southern capitalists,” and the working class could either “decide which system is the best to suffer under” or resolve “*to be free*.”²⁴ As Varney’s apprentice Clark became familiar these anti-capitalist arguments, and according to Taylor the experience “planted the seeds of socialism in his mind.” Yet his apprenticeship came to an abrupt end after the Varney’s sold their press and moved to California in 1849.²⁵

Clark launched his life of activism in that year. After briefly managing his father Michael Clark’s barbershop, following his father’s death in 1849 he took up employment at a grocery store owned by his uncle John Isom Gaines. More than simply his employer and uncle, Clark accompanied Gaines into abolitionist spaces and debates.²⁶ As previously mentioned, at age 19 Clark likely joined his uncle at the 1849 Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio. The convention saw fierce debates concerning emigrationism and Black nationalism. While debating support for emigration and colonization schemes, one delegate declared “We must have nationality. I am for going anywhere, so we can be an independent people” while another stated: “We have come here for our rights, and our rights we will have.” Eventually, and after lengthy and heated debate across several days, delegates

²⁴ Pickering, *Working Man’s Political Economy*, 68-69. For more discussion of Pickering’s text, see Mandel, *Labor, Free and Slave*, 80-81, 85; Lause, *Young America*, 81; Lause, *Long Road to Harpers Ferry*, 122-125.

²⁵ Pickering, *Working Man’s Political Economy*, 4-5; Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 37-38.

²⁶ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 38-40; Mathews, “John Isom Gaines: The Architect of Black Public Education.”

resolved to “never submit to the system of Colonization to any part of the world, in or out of the United States” but would “remain in the United States, and content for our rights at all hazards.” Even after taking a clear anti-colonization and emigration position, opposing delegates continued to voice their disapproval based on their experiences living under “a white man[‘s]” government.²⁷

Emigration, colonization, and questions of nationalism were consistent themes of the early convention movement. In Cincinnati, in 1824, some of the city’s Black population had already considered emigrating to Haiti. By 1829 emigration took center stage in calls for a national convention following the race riot in Cincinnati that year. Some considered emigration a possible solution to increasingly violent attacks facing free Blacks in the North. The Constitution adopted by the first national convention in 1830 included plans “for the establishment of a settlement in the Province of Upper Canada.” Rather than fully embrace or shun emigration options, conventions in the 1830s supported what Leslie Alexander calls a “dual agenda of voluntary emigration and American citizenship.”²⁸

²⁷ Mathews, “John Isom Gaines: The Architect of Black Public Education,” 44; Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 43; State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio (1849 : Columbus, OH), “Minutes and address of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, convened at Columbus, January 10th, 11th, 12th, & 13th, 1849.,” 12, 26, 8, 17, 13, *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/247>. Also see Taylor, *Race and the City*; Ford, *Bonds of Union*, 162-169.

²⁸ American Society of Free Persons of Colour (1830 : Philadelphia, PA), “Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour, for improving their condition in the United States; for purchasing lands; and for the establishment of a settlement in upper Canada, also, The Proceedings of the Convention with their Address to Free Persons of Colour in the United States,” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/70>.; Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American? Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 78.

In its early years, the Colored Conventions Movement tended to present relatively safe, conservative “moral uplift” strategies that would allow African Americans to eventually succeed in their quest for citizenship in the United States, according to some critics emphasizing the primacy of “moral reform” at the expense of abolition and anticolonization efforts. Debates also arose around whether or not to maintain independent Black organizations, or to dissolve these and discontinue using words like “colored” or “African” in identifying themselves. These issues ultimately helped halt the convention movement nationally in 1835, until it resurfaced in the early 1840s.²⁹ These conventions did not represent the only articulations of Black resistance and calls for freedom in the 1830s however. The decade saw major instances of slave resistance and even insurrection, beginning with an uprising led by Nat Turner in Virginia and an uprising of tens of thousands of slaves in Jamaica’s Christmas Rebellion, both in 1831. By the late 1840s, such upheavals in addition to increasing attacks on the rights of free Blacks prompted more aggressive calls for immediate abolition.³⁰

In a 1849 speech in Columbus, Ohio Clark’s uncle John Isom Gaines demanded the “overthrow” of slavery and supporting an international movement he hoped would inaugurate “the common brotherhood of man.” Gaines called slavery “a disease in the body politics that required a political remedy,” heaped praise on “the black chieftains of San Domingo,” and scorned what he saw as conspiracies by the U.S. and Great Britain to

²⁹ L.M. Alexander, *Africans or Americans?* 76-96.

³⁰ Sinha, *Slave’s Cause*, 207-212; L.M. Alexander, *African or American?* 97-120.

reimpose slavery in Haiti, efforts he deemed doomed to fail when faced with the Black state's revolutionary resolve.³¹ The Haitian Revolution's anti-slavery and anti-colonial meaning for Gaines and other abolitionists expressed itself in anti-imperialist rhetoric and arguments within the movement.³² Describing the call for immediate abolition as "sounded in the valleys and upon the hill tops; sounded upon the plantations of the South; thence it crossed the billowing of the Atlantic," Gaines understood the struggle in internationalist terms.³³ No doubt, as his uncle, one time employer, and continued mentor in abolitionist spaces, Gaines perspective influenced Clark and he soon became an outspoken leader in the Colored Convention Movement alongside his uncle.

RADICAL ABOLITIONIST

From the 1849 Ohio State Convention through the end of the U.S. Civil War, Clark lived a thoroughly abolitionist life. He became a prominent figure in the Black Convention Movement, lectured widely, started his own newspaper, and briefly helped edit Frederick Douglass', and participated in third party efforts like the Radical Abolitionist Party before lending his support to the Republicans. Clark also clandestinely supported the Underground Railroad, implementing and facilitating the work of encouraging a Black

³¹ John Isom Gaines, "Oration, delivered on the First of August, 1849, before the Colored Citizens of Columbus, Ohio," in *Orations, delivered on the first of August, 1849; before the colored citizens of Columbus and Cincinnati*, J.I. Gaines and J.H. Perkins (Cincinnati, 1849), 4, 5, 6, 9, 10.

³² Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 461; Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989). Sinha over-emphasizes the anti-imperialist dimensions of abolitionism, on the one hand because her primary focus is on radical abolitionists, and on the other as a likely deliberate and much needed corrective to depictions of abolitionists "acting as stalking horses for imperialism." See Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, 339, 371-380.

³³ John Isom Gaines, "Oration, delivered on the First of August, 1849, before the Colored Citizens of Columbus, Ohio," in *Orations, delivered on the first of August, 1849; before the colored citizens of Columbus and Cincinnati*, J.I. Gaines and J.H. Perkins (Cincinnati, 1849), qts. 4, 5, 6, 9, 10.

exodus from slavery endorsed by the 1849 Ohio convention.³⁴ As Taylor argues, “if Clark had not been completely radicalized” by the 1849 convention, “the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law certainly finished the job.”³⁵ After the law went into effect, Clark seriously considered a move at odds with the spirit of the 1849 convention, however. The act dampened the hopes of many free Blacks in the possibility of ever becoming full and equal citizens in the United States, and emigrationist desires spread as some looked to Liberia and elsewhere hoping to escape a land in which they lived forever under threat of enslavement.

In September 1850, Clark along with two Oberlin college graduates, Lawrence M. Minor and William R. Casey, formed the Liberia League and began making serious plans to leave the United States. Clark even wrote the American Colonization Society for details on what to expect in Liberia, and the League asked the ACS for financial support as well. Planning to settle in an ACS outpost founded by Charles McMicken, a slave owner, called “Ohio in Africa,” Taylor argues “Clark’s emigrationist desires...were born of protest about, and discontentment with, the African American condition.”³⁶ But when McMicken met Clark in January 1851 in New Orleans along with four of his own enslaved bondspeople and walked them to the ship that was to carry them to Liberia, Clark had a change of heart and returned to Ohio. As Taylor aptly puts it, “As a free man, he had a

³⁴ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 90-91; State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio (1849 : Columbus, OH), “Minutes and address of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, convened at Columbus, January 10th, 11th, 12th, & 13th, 1849.,” 12, 26, *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/247>.

See also Keith Griffier, *Front Line of Freedom: African Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky Press, 2004).

³⁵ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 46.

³⁶ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 50.

choice; McMicken's bondspeople, who could only enjoy freedom in Africa, were not as fortunate."³⁷ While continuing his support for emigration upon rejoining the state convention movement in Ohio in 1852, after attending and serving as a convention secretary at his first National Black Convention in Rochester, New York the following year, Clark became an outspoken opponent of emigration.

Opening the 1853 Rochester convention, Frederick Douglass read a report which outlined the various foundations upon which most delegates considered themselves citizens, and why he rejected efforts to either forcibly or voluntarily remove themselves from the country:

By birth...by the principles of the Declaration of Independence...within the meaning of the Unites States Constitution...by the facts of history, and the admissions of American stateman...by the hardships and trails endured; by the courage and fidelity displayed by our ancestors in defending the liberties and in in achieving the independence of our land, we are American citizens.³⁸

Clark adopted this basic perspective from 1853 onwards, influenced by Douglass' argument, and focused his efforts on expanding the possibilities for Black freedom through a struggle based on what Douglass called the "facts" of their citizenship. From this perspective, he fiercely denounced not only the ACS but the National Emigration Convention of Colored People held in Cleveland, Ohio in 1854 organized by Martin Delaney and his supporters. At the time, Delaney encouraged emigration to South America,

³⁷ Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 51.

³⁸ Colored national convention (1853: Rochester, NY), "Proceedings of the Colored national convention, held in Rochester, July 6th, 7th, and 8th, 1853.," 7, *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/458>.; *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 20 October 1854.

the West Indies, or Canada “rather than remain in the United States, the merest subordinates and serviles of the whites.”³⁹

In 1855 Clark tried his hand at running his own newspaper, the *Herald of Freedom*, later described as “one of the best advocates of Abolition among the Afro-Americans” with “an editor of good sense and vast knowledge, both natural and acquired” in I. Garland Penn’s 1891 volume, *The Afro-American Press, and Its Editors*. It nevertheless had a short life span and unfortunately no copies of the original seem to exist. In Cincinnati the *Cincinnati Commercial* editorialized against *The Herald* and its calls for racial equality, while in New York Frederick Douglass quoted the *Herald* in his own paper. Douglass was so impressed with Clark’s work, after *The Herald* collapsed due to financial difficulties, he invited Clark to move to Rochester to work as assistant editor on *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* while Douglass himself toured the country promoting his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*.⁴⁰

The move to Rochester and collaboration with Douglass brought Clark into the Radical Abolition Party in 1856. This party’s inaugural 1855 convention, according to John Stauffer, “marked an unprecedented moment of interracial unity and collapsing of racial barriers.” Participants included Gerrit Smith, James McCune Smith, Frederick Douglass,

³⁹ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 59; *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People; Held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, The 24th, 25th and 26th of August, 1854* (Pittsburgh: By A.A. Anderson, Print, 1854), 69.

⁴⁰ I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (Springfield, MA: Willey & Co., Publishers: 1891), 76; *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, 12 June 1855 and 19 June 1855; Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 377; *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 21 September 1855; Peter H. Clark, “Biographical Sketch of Peter H. Clark,” n.d., William C. Breckenridge Papers, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia Missouri cited in Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 94, 262fn25.

and John Brown, who would later go on to raid a federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry to spark an insurrection against slavery. Neglected as insignificant or unacknowledged in much scholarship, the Radical Abolitionists continued to exist alongside the rising of the Republican Party until the late 1850s, presenting an alternative to its more conservative anti-slavery stance which appeared to demand only limitations on slavery's expansion into new territories and did not proclaim for abolition. Radical Abolitionists, on the other hand, sought to forge a unified political force for overthrowing slavery and demanding full equality for Black Americans. Most founding delegates, Black and white, refused to compromise with political anti-slavery forces unless they supported immediate abolition.⁴¹

In 1856, Douglass introduced Clark to the party's national convention in Syracuse where Clark spoke about the "doctrine of universal brotherhood." He argued the U.S. was built upon a "radical error"—slavery, and that "to abolish slavery" meant to "combat it wherever it is found, whether in political parties, in churches, or in your own homes."⁴² Clark attempted to spread this message as an abolitionist lecturer over the next two years from Ohio to Chatham, Canada. In 1856 he also participated in both New York's and Ohio statewide Black conventions. Clark increasingly threw himself into abolitionist work with relentless energy and passion.⁴³

⁴¹ Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 88; John Stauffer, *Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 8-44; *Proceedings of the Convention of Radical Political Abolitionists, held in Syracuse, N.Y., June 26th, 27th, and 28th, 1855* (New York: Central Abolition Board, 1855).

⁴² "Discussions in the National Abolition Convention, At Syracuse, May 28th and 29th, 1856," *Radical Abolitionist* 12 No. 12 (July 1856): 98.

⁴³ Taylor, *America's First Black Socialist*, 95-96.

Serving on the address committee for the 1856 Ohio convention, Clark presented the convention's "Address, To the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Ohio" demanding they repeal "white" from the state constitution and the legal basis for racial discrimination from all state laws. His address challenged white rule by a "government of white men" and promoted instead "the doctrine of the universality of human rights," arguing the American revolution had garnered "the sympathy and aid of the world" who saw the struggle as "contending for principles of universal application" to "found of government" turning doctrines of "human equality" into "practice." Clark went on to declare that free Blacks, as a "discontented population---dissatisfied, estranged," would "welcome any revolution or invasion as a relief" if government inaction continued.⁴⁴ During the 1856 Radical Abolition Party convention Douglass had similarly declared himself "ready to fight, when satisfied it would accomplish anything" and German speaking radical Ernst Helde told the convention he and his fellow Turners were "Revolutionists...numbering many thousands" ready to take up arms slavery.⁴⁵

Increasingly open to action beyond moral suasion and or building political alternatives, after the *Dred Scott* decision, delegates at the 1858 Ohio state convention resolved that if the decision represented "a true exposition of the law of the land," it then released "colored men...from all allegiance to a government which withdraws all protection." A previous resolution, however, made the case for slavery's immediate and unconditional abolition by "the American government." While seemingly conflicting, in this resolution, "government" meant not the U.S. nation-state whose supreme court had

⁴⁴ State Convention of Colored Men (1856: Columbus, OH), "Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored Men, Held in the City of Columbus, Ohio, Jan. 16th, 17th, and 18th, 1856.," *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/252>.

⁴⁵ "Discussions in the National Abolition Convention, At Syracuse, May 28th and 29th, 1856," *Radical Abolitionist* 12 No. 12 (July 1856): 68-104.

ruled in the *Dred Scott* case, but according to Clark, “the people of the United States, who having the supreme power, can if they wish, alter or abolish all laws or constitutions, that stand between the slave and his freedom.”⁴⁶

Although Clark expressed faith in potential outrage and action of the masses, such faith did not mean he believed they were ready to dismantle “all laws” maintaining slavery. Before resolving to constitute a new Anti-Slavery Society, Clark asked the delegates to “pause”:

If any lesson at all was to be learned from the past, it was that the people would not support such movements. The thing to be done was to get the colored people themselves, interested in their own welfare, and then would be the time for the organization of societies, to operate upon Slavery in the South, or caste in our own State.

Instead of forming another new organization welcoming “Any man or woman” who shared “its principles,” the task at hand, Clark argued, remained to cohere a movement among Black people themselves whose actions could inspire and push the movement forward, expressing his continued faith in the centrality of independent Black struggle.⁴⁷

Rising in stature among abolitionists, Clark remained steadfastly in fierce opposition to the newly formed Republican Party. While others saw in “the decline of the Democratic party, and the rise of the Republican, omens of hope for the colored people,” Clark “did not consider his rights any safer with Republicans than with Democrats” and “believed Slavery would be more secure with the Republicans than with Democrats.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio (1858: Cincinnati, OH), “Proceedings of a Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio, Held in the City of Cincinnati, on the 23d, 24th, 25th and 26th days of November, 1858.,” 6-8, *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/254>.

⁴⁷ Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio (1858: Cincinnati, OH), “Proceedings of a Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio, Held in the City of Cincinnati, on the 23d, 24th, 25th and 26th days of November, 1858.,” 13-14, 20, *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/254>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 9.

Through the Black convention movement and the Radical Abolition Party, Clark developed and contributed to a rising radicalization within the abolitionist movement independent of the dominate political parties of the time, and simultaneously embraced framing abolition as a revolutionary struggle to abolish slavery. Beginning in the late 1840s, another significant influence on his abolitionist and early socialist conscious came from German speaking radicals and exiled revolutionaries from Europe.

GERMAN SPEAKING RADICALS

The 1852 Convention of the Colored Freemen of Ohio passed a resolution expressing solidarity with “oppressed Hungarians and German Socialists in their efforts to throw off the yoke of despotism and re-establish their liberty,” and another stating: “That Tyranny in Russia, Austria, and America, is the same and... tyrants throughout the world are united against the oppressed, and therefore the Russian Serf, the Hungarian Peasant, [and] the American Slave and all other oppressed people, should unite against tyrants and despotism.”⁴⁹ These resolutions lent support to European revolutionaries while calling for international solidarity between oppressed people everywhere. The resolution referencing “Socialists” was almost certainly introduced by Clark himself—being the only delegate with close ties to exiled European socialists living in Cincinnati at the time.⁵⁰ The resolution expressed a concrete stated position on different forms of tyranny and despotism, making the case for unity and solidarity among the oppressed. Its call for Black solidarity including from the “American slave” in the fight against oppression facing Russian serfs and Hungarian peasants, in addition to committing themselves to financially and militarily

⁴⁹ Convention of the Colored Freemen of Ohio (1852: Cincinnati, OH), “Proceedings of the Convention, of the Colored Freemen of Ohio, Held in Cincinnati, January 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19, 1852.,” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/250>.

⁵⁰ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 66.

assist European revolutionaries, was a radical expression of internationalism, even if in practice largely unrealizable.⁵¹

Viewing various forms of oppression as “the same” and urging a united struggle, echoed Pickering’s language in his 1847 *Working Man’s Political Economy* comparing the tyranny of kings, capitalists, and landlords.⁵² But Clark’s decision decades later to join the Workingmen’s Party and Socialist Labor Party was more profoundly impacted by his relationships with German speaking radicals, especially immigrants escaping the counter-revolutionary backlash against the uprisings of 1848. Unlike other socialists at the time, these were more consistent in their anti-slavery and argued any successful working-class movement required as its precondition the abolition of chattel slavery.⁵³ According to these socialists, class struggle and the fight for democracy meant prioritizing the antislavery struggle.

Clark and the other delegates may have been motivated by the anti-slavery of Ohio’s significant community of exiled Europeans radicals from the 1848 revolutions, and like other Black abolitionists admiration for the anti-slavery commitments especially of German speaking exiled participants from those struggles like Joseph Wedemeyer and August Willich, former associates of Karl Marx.⁵⁴ In 1851, a meeting of German socialists

⁵¹ Convention of the Colored Freeman of Ohio (1852 : Cincinnati, OH), “Proceedings of the Convention, of the Colored Freeman of Ohio, Held in Cincinnati, January 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19, 1852.,” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/250>.

Taylor describes these resolution as “sheer irony,” in that Clark and others here appear to have “looked not to the U.S. South, Haiti, Africa, or Jamaica for revolutionary role models, but to Europe.” She claims therefore “they cannot be considered Pan-Africanists—who believed in the global struggle for black freedom—but *internationalists*.” See Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialists*, 56-57.

⁵² Pickering, *Workingman’s Political Economy*, 10.

⁵³ Mandel, *Labor, Free and Slave*, 167.

⁵⁴ See Mischa Honeck, “An Unexpected Alliance: August Willich, Peter H. Clark, and the Abolitionist Movement in Cincinnati,” in *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange*, edited by Larry A Greene and Anke Ortlepp, 17-36 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011); Bruce Levine, “Against All Slavery, Whether White or Black: German-Americans and the Irrepressible Conflict,” in

in Cleveland agreed to “use all the means which are adapted to abolishing slavery, an institution which is so wholly repugnant to the principles of true Democracy.”⁵⁵ Within Black expressions of militant opposition to slavery such cross-Atlantic conceptions of solidarity and linked struggles runs deep, and broad support was found among Black abolitionists for the 1848 revolutions prior to their participants exile to the U.S.⁵⁶

In Cincinnati, German speaking radicals founded radical organizations like the Turnverein in 1848, and a Workingmen’s Club, as well as other clubs where members discussed, among other things, writings by Karl Marx and abolition. In 1854, Turners in Cincinnati organized fierce opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which included a “popular sovereignty” clause allowing these territories to potentially enter the U.S. as slave-allowing states. Unlike others in the opposition, however, these German speaking radicals went so far as to support a “free-soil doctrine” for African American as well as white settlers. Against English and German language attacks from papers like the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and the *Cincinnati Volksfreund*, these “ultra” abolitionists rejected the growing white supremacist “social order” found in whites only policies for westward expansion, and called instead for the abolishing slavery everywhere it existed.⁵⁷ These positions attracted sympathy for exiled European radicals from Clark and others in Cincinnati’s Black community. In Cleveland, Ohio, one group of African Americans even contributed funds to Gottfried Kinkle, an exile visiting from London in 1852, for the

Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, and Germany in the Modern World eds. David McBride, Leroy Hopkins, and Carol Blackshire-Belay (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1998), 53-64.

⁵⁵ *Daily State Gazette* (Trenton, OH), December 6, 1851. Mandel, *Labor, Slave and Free*, 87.

⁵⁶ Benjamin Fagan, “*The North Star* and the Atlantic 1848,” *African American Review* 47 No. 1 (Spring 2014): 51-67.

⁵⁷ Mischa Honeck, *We Are the Revolutionists: German-Speaking Immigrants and American Abolitionists after 1848* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 75, 78-79; Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 65.

“National Loan” fund established to collect monetary resources for use in the revolutionary movement some German speaking exiles still hoped could be rekindled.⁵⁸

Ostracized from a largely English speaking and pro-slavery American public, German speaking radicals were public and outspoken in their opposition to slavery. For example, the editor of the New York based *Turn-Zeitung* wrote in a 1853 editorial:

Anglo-Saxon civilization, which measures the value of a human being only on the basis of income, in which outer appearance is everything, truth and honor nothing, leads to moral servitude, material slavery, and antisocial barbarity; it destroys all bonds of society, consolidates monarchical principal, where it exists, and undermines the republic.⁵⁹

In Cincinnati German radicals invited Clark to speak at their Thomas Paine celebration in 1853.⁶⁰ His oration celebrating Paine had dire consequences for him personally. The Cincinnati School Board terminated his teaching position partially due to the controversy following his speech, and because Clark allegedly failed to teach the New Testament in his classroom. His termination occurred despite a Special Committee report which “fully exonerated Clark from the charges made against him” and Clark’s own defense that he did not realize he had violated any official school policy. The city’s German radicals likewise came to his defense but were mockingly described as a “Society of Infidels” by the *Cincinnati Enquirer*.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 65; Honeck, “Unexpected Alliance,” in *Germans and African Americans*, 17-36; Bruce Levine, “Against All Slavery, Whether White or Black: German-Americans and the Irrepressible Conflict,” in *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, and Germany in the Modern World*, 53-64.

⁵⁹ Honeck, *We are the Revolutionaries*, 21; *Turn-Zeitung*, October 15, 1853 qtd. in Ibid.

⁶⁰ *Cincinnati Daily Times*, 6 August 1853. On German speaking Americans and Thomas Paine, see Mark O. Kistler, “German-American Liberalism and Thomas Paine,” *American Quarterly* 14 No. 1 (Spring 1962): 81-91.

⁶¹ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 68-69; “School Board,” *Cincinnati Enquirer* Thursday, July 28, 1853, pg. 3; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 10 August 1853, p. 3; See also *Louisville Daily Courier* (Louisville, KY), 13 August 1853, p. 2.

The first Paine celebration in Cincinnati occurred in 1838, and like celebrations the same year in Boston and New York it drew together radicals from various movements. Frances “Fanny” Wright, an outspoken women’s rights activist and abolitionist who in 1830 was one of the earliest to deploy the concept of “class war” used the Paine celebration to speak for women’s rights while attacking slavery as part of a shared “universal” struggle in “common cause against oppression. “According to a Boston newspaper report, organizers might as well have had “the devil himself...come and preside over the ceremonies.”⁶² In 1853 Protestant temperance activists called Paine a “notorious profligate, a libertine and drunkard” whose writings aimed “to corrupt, poison, and destroy the unwary.” Their condemnations wrapped themselves in anti-German xenophobia and hostility toward the revolutionary politics Paine celebrations represented, labelling the “infidel groups” behind them as “disorganizers of society.”⁶³ Clark’s association with these “disorganizers” evidences what historian Mischa Honeck calls his and his German radical counter-parts’ “interrelated critiques of the rapidly changing cultural and political worlds through which they moved.”⁶⁴.

German speaking immigrants, especially those who came to the United States following the 1848 revolutionary upheavals in Europe, celebrated Paine “as a champion of freedom in all its forms, and as a bitter foe of prejudice, superstition and traditionalism.” Their celebrations sought to bring these ideas to a wider audience, and therefore included

⁶² Kenneth W. Burchell, “Birthday Party Politics: The Thomas Paine Birthday Celebrations and the Origins of American Democratic Reform,” in *Thomas Paine: Common Sense for the Modern Era*, eds. Ronald F. King, and Elsie Begler (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 2007), 182-184; Fanny Wright, “The People at War,” *Free Enquirer*, 27 November 1830; *Boston Investigator*, reprinted in *The Beacon*, February 24, 1838.

⁶³ “Tom Paine Celebration,” *The Ohio Organ of the Temperance Reform* (Cincinnati, OH), February 11, 1853, 28.

⁶⁴ Honeck, *We Are the Revolutionists*, 12.

German and English speaking orators.⁶⁵ As a fellow admirer of Thomas Paine, and abolitionist, Clark found value in the culture of free thinking radicalism among these German speaking Cincinnatians and celebrated him for his free thought, anti-slavery, and socialistic ideas.⁶⁶

These “Forty-Eighters,” Clark associated with belonged to a revolutionary international political community formed through participation in what Mike Rapport portrays as a “violent storm of revolutions” sweeping across Europe in 1848.⁶⁷ Clark developed social and political ties with German speaking radicals from this community in the early 1850s, and these radicals were themselves marginalized from mainstream U.S. society by xenophobia and religious fanaticism, and for maintaining a so-called “un-American” class struggle politics informed by the realities of U.S. slavery. For some, this made them “natural” allies in the struggle for Black freedom.⁶⁸

In 1854, a group of these allies gathered in Kentucky and adopted the Louisville Platform explicitly denouncing slavery and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. In 1855, the Turnerbund likewise stated its opposition to slavery, which they called “unworthy of a republic and directly opposed to the principles of freedom.” A similar conference in 1844 of German speaking radicals in Illinois declared: “We consider the agitation against slavery *the most important issue of all* [emphasis added].” And in Ohio delegates to a similar conference the same year opposed slavery’s expansion and the Fugitive Slave Law and

⁶⁵ Kistler, “German-American Liberals and Thomas Paine,” 84.

⁶⁶ On Paine’s “socialism” see John S. Nicols, “‘A Broader Patriotism’: Thomas Paine and the Promise of Red Republicanism,” *The S Word: A Short History of an American Tradition* (New York: Verso, 2011), 25-60.

⁶⁷ Mike Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), ix.

⁶⁸ Sinha, *Slave’s Cause*, 364-365.

supported a land settlement program “irrespective of color.”⁶⁹ It was largely these actions which motivated Frederick Douglass in 1859 to proclaim: “A German has only to be a German to be utterly opposed to slavery.” He considered these radicals “active allies in the struggle against oppression and prejudice.”⁷⁰ As Bruce Levine points out, it was not just any “Germans,” but specifically working class “radical democrats” who “vigorously opposed all forms of political privilege and inequality” whom Douglass praised for their abolitionism.⁷¹

These radicals, many socialists and communists, developed their politics and internationalism based on previous experiences in Europe and through their involvement in the abolitionist movement. In doing so they drew from both their specific historical conditions and experiences, and as Levine notes, “ideological influences...both international in origin and circulation.”⁷² Their commitment to universal emancipation was not unique, sharing commonalities with similar conceptions found within Black radical traditions stretching back to the writings of late eighteenth authors of the Black Atlantic.⁷³

The 1848 European revolutions gave radical abolitionists powerful symbols in their fight against racial slavery and white supremacy. They helped foster and project a revolutionary internationalist spirit within the movement, “imbuing their fight with

⁶⁹ *Der Pioneer*, qtd. In Honeck, “Unexpected Alliance,” 25; *Chicago Daily Journal*, 17 March 1854; *Daily Democratic Press* (Chicago), 20 March 1854; *Turn-Zeitung*, 15 April 1854; *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 25 March 1854; *Daily Cincinnati Gazette*, 25 March, 1854.

⁷⁰ “Adopted Citizens and Slavery,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, August 1859. See also Honeck, *We Are the Revolutionists*, 34-37 and Honeck, “An Unexpected Alliance,” in *Germans and African Americans*, 17.

⁷¹ Levine, “Against All Slavery,” in *Crosscurrents*, 59.

⁷² Levine, “Against All Slavery,” in *Crosscurrents*, 60.

⁷³ Sinha, *Slave’s Cause*, 363-371; West and Martin, “Contours of the Black International: From Toussaint to Tupac,” in *From Toussaint to Tupac*, 1. For anthologies of these writings, see Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr, eds., *Black Atlantic Writers of the Eighteenth Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995) and Joanna Brooks and John Saillant, eds., “Face Zion Forward”: *First Writers of the Black Atlantics, 1785-1798* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002).

revolutionary and transnational meaning.” Exiled 48ers themselves connected anti-slavery struggles with the labor movement, linking enslaved Black workers and white wage laborers in a working-class abolitionist-socialist politics, prioritizing abolition as the precondition for organizing an effective working-class movement in the United States for the self-emancipation of the working class internationally.⁷⁴

A significant figure in this project, the former Communist League member and associate of Karl Marx, August Willich moved to Cincinnati’s Over-the-Rhine district in the late 1850s and edited the *Cincinnati Republikaner*. Following John Brown’s attempt to foment an insurrection against slavery at Harper’s Ferry in October 1859, he helped organize an event honoring Brown through the Social Workingmen’s Club. Clark was invited to speak, and his words showed he shared with Willich a commitment to overthrowing slavery, and indeed that doing so would require revolutionary violence. It was a struggle “that must be fought to the death” using “all the weapons of freemen.”⁷⁵ Willich, deeply impressed by Clark’s oration, denounced those in the Over-the-Rhine district who maintained racial prejudice and excluded an interested group of African Americans from attending a fair put on by the local Turnverein only days after the Brown memorial and promoted an interracial class struggle internationalism in a conscious effort to attract support from the Black community.⁷⁶ These efforts contributed to Clark’s entry into the organized socialist movement following the U.S. Civil War.

CIVIL WAR AND REVOLUTION

⁷⁴ Sinha, *Slave’s Cause*, 367-368; Robin Blackburn, *An Unfinished Revolution: Karl Marx and Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Version, 2011).

⁷⁵ *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 6 December 1859; *Cincinnati Volksfreund*, 6 December 1859; *Weekly Anglo-African*, 17 December 1859...Honeck, *We Are the Revolutionists*, 95.

⁷⁶ Honeck, *We Are the Revolutionists*, 96-97.

The “conditions and very existence of social movements,” Robin D.G. Kelley argues, allow “participants to imagine something different, to realize that thing need not always be this way.”⁷⁷ Slavery and racism against African Americans, and the working class anger which burst open following the Civil War in the midst of catastrophic economic crises and rising influence of corporate power, produced social movements in which millions came to desire radical social changes, rejecting the notion that this was the best, or only world possible.⁷⁸ If that were the case, a different world would have to be fought for anyway. The Colored Peoples Conventions contributed to building a more radical abolitionist mass movement domestically and internationally, providing an important space where Clark developed his relationships with and views on Black freedom struggles, and other movements against oppression. His work and passion as an educator and early labor union organizer encouraged his affinity for the struggles of European immigrant workers, and the class anger and politics about to explode in Europe and the United States in struggles for the eight-hour workday.

The outbreak of the U.S. Civil War also created conditions for significant solidarities between radical movements and their participants to coalesce. These solidarities helped make abolition the central question of the war, and influenced the formation of the IWMA, according to David Featherstone, “one of the first attempts to organize a politicized, working-class internationalism” that as Marx expected “opened up possibilities” for the labour movement in the United States.”⁷⁹ Abolitionism brought European communists into coalition with Black radicals. Although beginning “literally oceans apart,” their radical outlooks were shaped by revolutionary movements that crossed

⁷⁷Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 9.

⁷⁸ Cedric Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 45-65.

⁷⁹ David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 3.

oceans. Coming from different backgrounds, political traditions, and even speaking different languages, these radicals saw the struggle against slavery and oligarchy, if not capitalism, “as kindred movements.” Indeed, Sinha notes how proslavery leaders began viewing “Abolitionists and Socialists as identical” in their efforts to upend existing property relations, depicting abolitionism as a kind of socialism in blackface.⁸⁰

Among white and Black radicals, memory of the Haitian Revolution informed how the war was understood. Mathew Clavin highlights how many came to see the war as “a second Haitian Revolution, a bloody conflict in which tens of thousands of armed bondmen, ‘American Toussaints,’ would redeem the republic by securing the abolition of slavery and proving the equality of the black race.”⁸¹ Indeed, even prior to the war’s outbreak, John Brown and his company at Harper’s Ferry “joined their movement to a black revolutionary tradition that began in Haiti and, as the Vesey plot attests, survived throughout the antebellum period.”⁸² Even if the war appeared as merely a conflict between two social systems, one intent on maintaining and expanding slavery, the other uninterested in intervening with slavery where it already existed, the actions of enslaved workers and their radical allies would transform the war into a revolutionary war for abolition. This transformation occurred in no small part as a result of what W.E.B. Du Bois referred to in *Black Reconstruction* as a “general strike of the slaves.”⁸³

This general strike opened up a period of “revolutionary time” David Roediger calls “the most liberating and important period in US history.”⁸⁴ At the time, the importance of

⁸⁰ Honeck, “Unexpected Alliance,” in *Germans and African Americans*, 19; Sinha, *Slave’s Cause*, 364-365.

⁸¹ Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War*, 5.

⁸² Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War*, 35.

⁸³ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 55-83, 128; Roediger, *Seizing Freedom for All: Slave Emancipation and Liberty for All* (New York: Verso, 2014), 1-23.

⁸⁴ Roediger, *Seizing Freedom*, 13-15.

“the slave movement” was observed even by Karl Marx in London, who considered “the slave movement” at the center of what he hoped would be a renewed outbreak of revolutionary struggle not seen in Europe since 1848, signaled by John Brown’s actions at Harper’s Ferry and a “slave revolt” in Missouri.⁸⁵ In Cincinnati, Clark had similar expectations that “the execution of John Brown and his associates,” would “mark a new era in the anti-slavery agitation.”⁸⁶

Formatively shaped by Black and European radicalism in the 1840s and early 1850s, Clark belonged to the abolitionist movement’s radical wing prior to the U.S. Civil War. It was the abolitionist movement, rooted in slave resistance and fugitivity, along with the rise of antislavery politics nationally in the U.S. that provided impetus for the outbreak of war. In the 1850s, Clark briefly joined the Radical Abolition Party, became more involved in the Black Convention movement, started, edited, and contributed to various abolitionist newspapers, including Frederick Douglass’ paper, and eventually joined the Republican Party. It was this activity that signaled his development into a political abolitionist, seeing the state as a viable vehicle through which to fight and win Black freedom.⁸⁷

Following the war, Clark continued his abolitionist work, both aimed at eradicating slavery and creating Black citizenship. For example, in March 1871, at a ceremony celebrating the 15th Amendment, Clark and others met to mark what one speaker called the transformation of the U.S. “from the position of a slaveholding nation to freedom, to universal citizenship, to the universal ballot...a government of the whole people, for the

⁸⁵ Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels in Manchester, January 11, 1860, in *MECW* (New York: International Publishers), 43:3-5, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed November 7, 2016, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1860/letters/60_01_11.htm.

⁸⁶ “The Irrepressible Conflict in Cincinnati,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 18 November 1859.

⁸⁷ Sinha, *Slave’s Cause*, 461-499; Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 89-90.

whole people, and by the whole people.” The speaker went on to emphasize ongoing efforts to violently defeat and roll back what he characterized as *revolutionary* gains fought for by Black abolitionists, especially the right to vote for freedmen. “Great revolutions in favor of human rights never go backward,” he stated. “This revolution can not and shall not go backward. The people will again arise in their might as during the war and compel their will to be respected.” Clark described the meeting’s “double value” as both an opportunity to celebrate abolition and to learn about and discuss ongoing “political questions.” Focusing on “states rights,” which Clark argued “derived from the dogma of the divine right of Kings,” he supported federal intervention to halt murderous outrages in the South, and called the 15th Amendment “a triumph of the people’s rights over State rights” while urging “further steps in the same direction.” These steps included “a uniform system of education, uniform laws and uniform civil rights,” and a national definition and defense of “the rights of the American citizen.”⁸⁸

He became a Republican Party activist, but as the promises of Reconstruction came increasingly under threat, he began to question his party allegiance. At one point Clark considered the Republican Party “the instrument which has freed and enfranchised” formerly enslaved Black men, a “fact” he considered “known and well known to the dullest black man in the South.” As such, it would remain “their ark of safety... until they deem all danger past.”⁸⁹ For a brief period, he affiliated with Liberal Republicans, many of whom articulated a clear anti-black political message. He supported granting amnesty to Confederate leaders and supported national unity. He participated and led the Chillicothe Convention in 1873, which he organized in Ohio, issuing a ruthless critique of Republicans for failing freed people and Northern Blacks. After this convention, Clark moved further

⁸⁸ “Commemoration of the Proclamation of the 15th Amendment,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1 April 1871.

⁸⁹ “Peter H. Clark on the Southern Vote,” *Belmont Chronicle* (Saint Clairsville, OH), 16 May 1872.

toward political independence, even as other Black leaders like Douglass remained firmly wedded to the Republican Party. By 1876, he could be found defending African Americans who considered aligning with southern Democrats.⁹⁰

Yet on the brink of formerly entering the organized socialist movement, he remained firmly entrenched in Black political traditions and thought, an institutional vehicle for which was Black masonry. In 1875, Clark gave a speech reported in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, “The Colored Masons,” during a “celebration by the Brotherhood of Colored Masons...of the Hundredth Anniversary of Prince Hall’s Admission into the Craft.” Prince Hall, born in Barbados, and over a dozen other Black men became Masons in Boston Massachusetts in 1775. Eventually segregated by their Anglo brothers, and led by Hall, these early Black Masons found the African Lodge, the foundation for African American Freemasonry that promoted in its relationship with the Black church “ideas of race pride and race unity among ordinary black men and women.”⁹¹

Covering the emergence and history of Black masonry following the American Revolution, Clark’s speech noted how masonry originally created a space where “white and blacks” could “meet together...upon the common level of the equal brotherhood of man.” This changed following Denmark Vesey’s conspiracy:

Vezey’s[sic] conspiracy...caused considerable excitement in the South. Numbers of colored men were hung, those who were Masons receiving the assistance of their white brethren escaped into the North. Since then no colored men have been initiated by the white Lodges of the United States, save in the State of New Jersey.⁹²

⁹⁰ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 107-129.

⁹¹ Frey, “Creation of a Global African World,” in *Toussaint to Tupac*, 55; “Documents Relating to Negro Masonry in America,” *Journal of Negro History*, 21, no. 4 (October, 1936): 411-432.

⁹² “The Colored Masons,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 8 March 1875.

Denmark Vesey, an early Black mason, plotted an insurrection against slavery in the city of Charleston, South Carolina, and part of the backlash against his conspiracy was the sharpening of racial divisions within masonic spaces. Black masonry, then, developed as an institution due to segregationist practices that emerged as a deliberate response to the threat of slave rebellion.⁹³

Black masons kept the idea of “the brotherhood of man” alive for Clark, who ended his speech highlighting how the Grand Lodge of Ohio “won the esteem and respect of even the most violent opponents of colored Masonry.” He envisioned a day when between these “violent opponents” and “all regular Masons” a new “brotherly love” would “prevail, and every moral and social virtue cement them.”⁹⁴

With his own dream of “brotherly love” still alive, Clark joined the organized socialist movement in 1876, and quickly “emerged as one of the most influential of the American socialists” in a movement dominated in the U.S. and internationally by Germans.⁹⁵ He joined the movement influenced by his previous relationships with European socialists who proved themselves in the fight for abolition. The anti-slavery debate itself, as Marc E. Lause points out, “turned on the argument that economic profitability had priority over people, that the property rights of the owners superseded the most basic human right for those who did not own property.” Therefore “the story of how growing numbers of Americans turned against slavery was ultimately inseparable from

⁹³ On early establishment of Black masonry during the Age of Revolution in the U.S., see “Documents Relating to Negro Masonry in America,” *Journal of Negro History* v. 21 no. 4 (October 1936): 411-432.

⁹⁴ “The Colored Masons,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 8 March 1875.

⁹⁵ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 130; Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

how they thought about the prospects of abolishing capitalism.”⁹⁶ With slavery abolished, and Reconstruction failing, Clark’s faith in organized socialism makes sense only in light of his ongoing relationship with the abolitionist movement and its legacies.

Although likely the first to join an organized socialist party, Clark was not the first African American to lend his support for such a cause. Thomas Skidmore’s Workingmen’s Party, launched on October 19, 1829, on a platform supporting expropriation of large landowners, found support from New York City’s free Black community. In May 1848 at a meeting of the National Reform movement in Cincinnati attended by nearly a thousand people, including African Americans, speakers emphasized the struggle against “the prejudices of color” and announced support for “Universal freedom and homes for all—for the colored man no less than the white.” The labor struggle itself was framed as including enslaved workers: “The time had come when the laborers of the North must make common cause with the laborers of the South.”⁹⁷ The Workingmen’s Party Clark joined in 1876, which then merged and became known as the Socialist Labor Party of America, demanded abolition of “all unjust social and political conditions...class rule and class privileges, and...laborers’ dependence on capitalism by eliminating the wage system and replacing it with cooperative labor.”⁹⁸ Socialist reimagined emancipation as the “industrial emancipation of Labor...achieved by the working classes themselves.”⁹⁹

Clark outlined his criticism of capitalism in March 1877. In the South, poor whites remained dominated by an elite ruling class, as “capitalists banded together” against them. Black workers, on the other hand, were provided only the bare minimum to stay “alive,”

⁹⁶ Lause, *Long Road to Harper’s Ferry*, 5.

⁹⁷ Lause, *Long Road to Harpers Ferry*, 56, 88; “National Reform Banquet,” *Cincinnati Daily Herald* reprinted in *Harbinger*, 10 June 1848, 45-46.

⁹⁸ Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 136.

⁹⁹ Socialist Labor Party of North America, National Platform, Adopted by the First National Convention, at Newark, N.J., December 26-31, 1877.

as a new “aristocracy” exploited and lived off their “hard labor.” This ruling class opposed selling, let alone redistributing free land to “the oppressed race” that continued its resistance against “the degradation into which capital has plunged them.” The state used violence to crush working class organizing efforts, forcing them to remain “groveling in the dust.” And under this system working class women worked long hours to merely “eke out bare existence.”¹⁰⁰

On July 22nd, 1877, before an “immense crowd” gathered in Cincinnati, OH in support of striking railroad workers, “Clark gave a rousing speech supporting the strikers while propagandizing socialism as the only solution to the crisis he saw producing—and produced by—the strike. Speaking to the assembled workers and their supporters, Clark summarized his views:

Society has already made strides in the direction of Socialism. Every drop of water we draw from our hydrants, the gas that illuminates our streets at night, the paved streets upon which we walk, our parks, our schools, our libraries, are all *the outgrowth of socialistic principles. In that direction lies our safety; in any other, anarchy or slavery.* The people can be trusted. Choose ye this day which course you will pursue.¹⁰¹

The Great Railroad Strike of 1877, as it became known, at the time was widely described in military terms. Headlines and newspaper reports labelled it a new “Civil War,” “a deadly war,” “a war on the Rails.” Socialists agreed and framed it as a class war between labor and capital.

Within this context, Clark’s speech resonated broadly within socialist and working-class circles, propelling him to the forefront of a growing organized socialist movement in

¹⁰⁰ *Cincinnati Commercial*, 27 March 1877 and *The Emancipator* (Cincinnati, OH), 31 March 1877.

¹⁰¹ “The Socialistic Meeting,” *Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, OH), 23 July 1877.

the United States. Largely as a result of his speech, Taylor argues Clark rapidly “emerged as one of the most influential of the American socialists” in a movement largely dominated by German speaking immigrants and exiles from Europe.¹⁰² Clark denounced state and federal troops sent to “shoot down American citizens guilty of no act of violence.” He observed how “women, --wives and mothers—were...chief forces employed by the strikers to keep others from taking their places,” While insisting non-violence was preferable, he also justified and defended meeting “force with force” in the conflict between the strikers and the state. He proposed socialism above everything as the “one efficacious remedy” for “the evil of poverty.”¹⁰³

Socialism, Clark argued, was the remedy to poverty and conditions which gave rise to a politics placing “whole States...at the mercy of an ignorant rabble who have no political principals except to vote for the men who pay the most on election days and who promise to make the biggest dividend of public stealings.” He rejected blaming “the negro scarcely ten years from slavery” as “the chief sinner in this respect.” Trade unions and

¹⁰² For contemporary press accounts of the 1877 strike and its relationship to popular memories of the recently fought Civil War, see Troy Rondinone, “‘History Repeats Itself’: The Civil War and the Meaning of Labor Conflict in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *American Quarterly* 59 no. 2 (Jun., 2007): 397-419 and how the strike signaled the beginning of consequential shifts in U.S. social and economic life see Troy Rondinone, “Drifting toward Industrial War: The Great Strike of 1877 and the Coming of a New Era,” in *The Great Industrial War: Framing Class Conflict in the Media, 1865-1950* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 38-57; Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 130. For a useful consideration of immigrants and the early U.S. socialist movement, see Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: A History of the American Left* (revised and expanded third edition, New York: Verso, 2013), 19-57.

¹⁰³ “The Socialistic Meeting,” *Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, OH), 23 July 1877. Similar accounts are found in *Cincinnati Commercial*, 23 July 1877 and *The Emancipator*, 28 July 1877.

cooperatives were not enough to cure what ailed, in Clark's view, they "merely poultice the ulcer in the body politics which needs Constitutional treatment."¹⁰⁴

Not everyone welcomed Clark's message. The *Cincinnati Commercial* ridiculed Clark, labelling him an unorthodox thinker and amateur theologian, mocking the apparent rapidity with which he went "beyond the boundaries of the Republican party" to "supply the want of the poor for a comforter. Peter is not a politician, or he could make his diversion as a Socialist useful."¹⁰⁵ The *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* questioned his identity as a "laborer" and suggested his proposals had nothing to do with socialism but was a "caste scheme" in which the government employers would exploit and live off all other labor, by reducing them "to a lower caste." Clark's proposals would only result in laziness and, the paper suggested, repeat what it called "the San Domingo relapse to barbarism. Is it the teaching of such stuff in our public schools that is to make our people intelligent for self-government?"¹⁰⁶

After intense scrutiny and attacks in the press for his involvement with the strike and for his affiliation with the SLP, Clark decided to leave the party. Before its National Executive Committee on July 21, 1879, a committee he served on, Clark announced his intention "for the future, the indefinite-future, to sever... connection with the Socialistic Labor party as a political organization." Still considering himself a socialist, he said, Clark criticized the party's dogmatism and its unclear "political policy," urging it abandon

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ *Cincinnati Commercial*, 29 June 1879.

¹⁰⁶ "A Benefactor of Laborers," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 30 July 1877.

operating as a political party and first “agitate, to make [socialism] more or less a matter of agitation for some time yet.”¹⁰⁷ He revealed the intimidation and threats he received as a SLP candidate from established political powers, including a campaign to fire him from his teaching position at Gaines High School. This plan failed, according to Clark, because of the overwhelming support he received from Cincinnati’s Black community. “I really belong to that people,” he said, and because this community “unanimously” defended him from retaliation. He would therefore rejoin the Republican party, “that is the party I came from, and was always attached to it,” a statement of dubious merit considering his original hostility and lack of faith in the Republican Party in the 1850s.¹⁰⁸ After leaving the party, he followed through on his promise to rejoin the Republican party, later again causing controversy by supporting the Democrats in the 1880s. For the remaining years of his life, Clark became increasingly conservative and embraced of the anti-radical Black politics of Booker T. Washington.

CONCLUSION

During his membership in the SLP, Peter H. Clark gave dozens of speeches on behalf of the party, and explained his views on socialism in the press. He said very little on the relationship between socialism and Black people specifically, however, and made no apparent effort to directly recruit Black workers into the organization. Therefore, while Taylor and others rightfully position Clark as a significant figure in the history of Black

¹⁰⁷ “The Socialists,” *Cincinnati Daily Star*, 22 July 1879. Transcript of Clark’s speech can be found in “The Socialists...Peter H. Clark Abjures His Relations With The Party,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, 22 July 1879.

¹⁰⁸ “The Socialists...Peter H. Clark Abjures His Relations With The Party,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, 22 July 1879.

radical political thought and activism, and despite his being the “first” African American to join an organized Socialist political party, viewing Clark as the foundation of the Black socialist tradition is misplaced. The next two chapters consider how Rev. George Washington Woodbey’s intellectual production as a radical Black Baptist preacher and organizer for the Socialist Party of America, helped establish more clearly a distinct tradition of Black socialist thought with relevance and a lasting legacy for twentieth century Black radicalism.

Chapter 3: George W. Woodbey and Annie R. Woodbey, Black Populist Preachers

Delivering the keynote address at the Emancipation Day celebration in Clarinda, Iowa in August 1894, Rev. George Washington Woodbey surveyed the history of slavery and emancipation in the U.S., Caribbean, and Latin America and compared their struggle to overthrow slavery with the temperance movement's effort against the liquor interests. As leaders of the Nebraska Prohibition Party Rev. Woodbey and his wife Annie R. Woodbey supported not only efforts to stop the sale, production, and consumption of alcohol but believed in a broad reform agenda including demands for women's suffrage, public ownership of land, banks, and railroads, universal public education, and the abolition of the convict leasing system. In his Emancipation Day oration in Clarinda, a local paper reported Rev. Woodbey "discussed the question of capital and labor, and said chattel slavery was not the only slavery; there could be such a thing as wage slavery."¹ Between their marriage in November 1873 in Emporia, KS and Annie Woodbey's sudden death from an unknown stomach illness in April 1901, this powerful pair of preacher-activist-intellectuals lived and worked in three states where they helped organize new Baptist congregations in both small rural communities like Atchison, Kansas, as well as some of the Midwest's rapidly growing city's including St. Joseph, MO, Wichita, KS, and Omaha, NE. As preachers, temperance activists, Prohibition Party leaders, and Black intellectuals, in the 1880s and 1890s George and Annie Woodbey became well known across the Midwest for their ability to speak on topics ranging from ancient African history, political economy, philosophy, and the Bible. Their church and political activities included travel to at least a dozen states, and perhaps hundreds of small towns and cities where they

¹ "Colored People Celebrate," *Clarinda Journal*, 10 August 1894.

spoke from pulpits and podiums and in public parks and private parlors, before audiences ranging from a few dozen into the thousands. After Annie Woodbey's death in April 1901, George Woodbey moved to San Diego, California and dedicated himself to the struggle "to be free from the slavery of capitalism." After his death in September 1937, the editor of the *California Eagle*, possibly managing editor Charlotta Bass, eulogized him as "one of the nation's brightest men" who had been "an outstanding figure in the battle for women's rights, fighting side by side with Susan B. Anthony and others" and described the "Old Man" as "prominently identified with every reform movement launched during the past fifty or more years." According to the *Eagle*, "No man in all America was better posted on Negro history than was our now sainted friend, George W. Woodbey."²

George Woodbey has rightly been considered the most important Black Socialists in the first decade of the twentieth century. Between 1901 and 1912 he delivered hundreds of speeches for the Socialist Party of America (SP), attended two national party conventions, became a national organizer for the party, and published three books advocating socialist principals: *What to Do and How to Do It, or Socialism vs. Capitalism* (1903), *The Bible and Socialism* (1904), and *The Distribution of Wealth* (1910). However, before he joined the SP Rev. Woodbey spent nearly a decade with his first wife Annie R. (Goodin) Woodbey building the Prohibition Party. His effectiveness as an organizer for the SP stemmed directly from abilities, he first developed in the 1880s and 1890s while living in Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. From fomenting a possible emigrationist movement in Emporia to building the Omaha and Nebraska chapters of the Afro-American League, he and Annie Woodbey's commitments extended far beyond temperance. In the Prohibition Party they supported demands for women's suffrage, worker's rights, and financial reform,

² Editorial, "Passing of the Old Guard," *California Eagle*, 7 October 1937.

and encountered a powerful current of Christian Socialism through Mrs. Woodbey's work in the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.).

The extant literature on Rev. Woodbey focuses primarily on his life between 1902 when he moved from Omaha to San Diego, California and 1915 when his activities in the SP seem to drop off. Unable to locate much on his early life, Philip S. Foner concluded in his pioneering studies of the *Black Socialist Preacher*: "We know nothing of Reverend Woodbey after 1915."³ His early women's rights activism, involvement in the Afro-American League (AAL), and years of work inside the Prohibition Party (PP) today remain almost completely unknown, as does the existence and contributions of his first wife Annie R (Goodin) Woodbey, who died in April 1901. During the 1880s and 1890s, however, Annie Woodbey's reputation as a preacher, orator, political activist, and intellectual rivaled her husband's.⁴ As Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross have recently argued, Black church women like Annie Woodbey "effectively shaped the Black community's social and moral development." Furthermore, Berry and Gross emphasize how "Black women preachers and wives of clergyman" such as Annie Woodbey worked "to sustain community members and their ministers."⁵ This chapter introduces Annie Woodbey into the narrative of her husband's socialism and Black intellectual history and argues she played a significant role in her husband's intellectual and political development during the 1880s and 1890s when together they became outspoken advocates for African American civil

³ P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 31.

⁴ Some sources mention his marriage to Annie, or his second wife Mary E. (Hart) Woodbey, but often confuse the two, suggesting Mary was his wife during his Prohibition Party days, or that Annie lived past 1901. One primary source, published in 1915, mistakenly lists Annie Woodbey's year of death as 1891. See John Mather, *Who's Who of the Colored Race: A General Biography of Men and Women of African Descent vol I* (Chicago: 1915), 290-291.

⁵ Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, *A Black Women's History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2020), 113.

rights, women's suffrage, and working class struggles while living and working in Omaha, Nebraska.

Based on extensive archival newspaper research, and oral, church, and family histories, this chapter reconstructs George and Annie's lives as Black intellectuals, activists, and preachers. At the same time, their inseparably linked intellectual and political biography provides the foundation for understanding George Woodbey's later socialist internationalism and its relationship to traditions of Black political thought and radicalism. George Woodbey's reputation as a capable organizer for the Socialist Party and his socialist politics originate largely from the social, cultural, and political work he and Annie together engaged in while living in the Midwest in the 1880s and 1890s. Whether behind the pulpit or speaking from the floor of a Prohibition Party convention, their politics drew from a deeply rooted understanding of the Bible as a liberationist text and Black Christianity's radical stream.

ORIGINS

George Washington Woodbey began life in 1854 near what is today Mountain City in Johnson County Tennessee but at the time was a small town called Taylorsville. His parents Charles and Rachel were enslaved, and so was George and his younger sister Mary, along with an extended network of family relations in the area. Slavery in northeastern Tennessee differed in its scale and the social dynamics between "masters and slave" compared with slavery in states like Mississippi and Alabama, or even western Tennessee. In 1860 enslaved people constituted close to nine percent of eastern Tennessee's population, and this group primarily lived and worked on "small, diversified farms" quite different from the large cotton plantations associated with slavery in the Deep South. Historian John Cimprich argues these relatively small operations "made personal master and slave

relationships likely, something that was not necessarily to a slave's benefit."⁶ Woodbey's childhood recollections evidence the personal and familial dynamics between his own large extended family and the families of their white enslavers.

"The old farm" on which George and his family lived and worked prior to emancipation was located less than a mile from Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Mountain City. The church was founded in 1845 by white settlers to whom George, his parents, his grandparents, and other relations legally belonged as "property." Among them were William Gamble, David Wagner, and the "young master Nicolas Stout," who George later recalled he and his younger sister Mary used to call "uncle Nick...because of the good things he used to bring us to eat." He also remembered a man named John Vaught; "another slave holding deacon who owned my grandfather Jonas and his sister Ester, whose daughter, Rose, he sold—in my recollection." The Gamble, Wagner, Stout, and Vaught families, especially the men, were important figures in Johnson County's business, civic, and social affairs according to early local histories. Unfortunately, these same histories omit any reference to their involvement with slavery, or to enslaved people's contributions to the community. George's mother Rachel's maiden name was Wagner, and Charles Woodbey took his last name from the family of William Woodbey, another early white settler in East Tennessee.⁷

⁶ John Cimprich, "Slavery's End in East Tennessee," *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, 52 & 53 (1980-1981): 78-88; Charles Faulkner Jr., "The Civil War in East Tennessee: A Social, Political, and Economic Study," PhD dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1978, https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/2667.; Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 287-290.

⁷ *Godspeed's History of Johnson County* (Nashville, TN: Godspeed Pub. Co, 1887); Ernest Edward Carrier, *Pilgrims in Paradise: The Story of Baptist Pioneers of Upper East Tennessee* (Mountain City: 1976).

In his first book, *What to Do and How to Do It*, published in 1903, Woodbey informed readers he “was once a chattel slave freed from the proclamation of Lincoln.”⁸ In reality during the U.S. Civil War, when the Emancipation Proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863, it excluded Tennessee from its provisions as the state was under military occupation by the Union army. Future vice president Andrew Johnson was appointed military governor. East Tennessee had defied the rest of the state in refusing to support the Confederacy, and both Confederate and later Union armies faced tremendous obstacles establishing military control there. Union troops first occupied areas of West and Central Tennessee, and only effectively occupied the Eastern region in the Fall of 1863. Yet while the Emancipation Proclamation may not have directly “freed” Woodbey or in fact any enslaved person, it encouraged what Du Bois called a “general strike” of Black workers across the South who flooded into the Union army and transformed the war to “preserve the union” into a revolutionary war for emancipation. Across the South armed Black soldiers played a central role in slavery’s *de facto* and legal abolition. Elected vice president in 1864, before leaving Tennessee Andrew Johnson endorsed a state convention that overwhelmingly voted to abolish slavery in February 1865. Elected as Johnson’s replacement to head the new reconstructed state government, William G. Brownlow pushed through a law guaranteeing white male suffrage for those who had been loyal Unionists during the war, a measure opposed by whites in much of the state but supported in Eastern Tennessee. Black men were excluded from its provisions.⁹

⁸ Woodbey, *What to Do and How to Do It*, in Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 40.

⁹ Cimprich, “Slavery’s End in East Tennessee,” *East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications*, 52 & 53 (1980-1981); Faulkner Jr., “The Civil War in East Tennessee: A Social, Political, and Economic Study”; Egerton, *Wars of Reconstruction*, 287-290; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (1988, rev. and updated edition New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2014), 43-45.

At the Civil War's conclusion Tennessee's Black population began defining and establishing what Black freedom would mean on their own terms. Black mobility, the building of schools, and the formation of independent Black churches were important expressions of this movement. Shortly after the war ended, Charles and Rachel Woodbey relocated their family near Johnson City, TN and rented a farm. Charles helped start a "subscription" school there in an "old log shanty" where George remembers being taught by a disabled Union veteran named George Perkins. Around 1866, his mother Rachel became "one of the organic members of the Baptist church" of Johnson City led by Rev. William Jobe, and in a transformative moment in his young life, Rev. Jobe gave George his first copy of the New Testament and told him: "My boy the Lord has a great work for you to do."¹⁰ Formerly enslaved, Rev. Jobe still worked as a "farm laborer" in 1870 and in 1872 he helped establish Johnson City's Thankful Baptist Church. Nearly Fifty years later during his first visit to the area since his childhood, George Woodbey delivered a sermon at the church.¹¹ While Rev. Jobe certainly did not know how his prophecy about the young boy would be fulfilled, the New Testament he gave George Woodbey changed his life. He

¹⁰ George W. Woodbey, "What I Have Learned of the Negro Schools," unpublished manuscript, n.d. (c. 1918/1919), personal collection of Josephine Woodbey Clark. A pdf transcript was shared with the author while in San Diego researching Woodbey in the summer of 2019. George Woodbey's recollections in this source were likely written around the time of his return to California in November 1918 after spending two years away from the state. During this time he visited Kansas and Nebraska and returned to Tennessee for the first time since his childhood. A partial transcript of a speech he delivered in Johnson City mentioning his mother's involvement with the church and their years in Johnson City was published in the *Johnson City Staff* on January 25, 1918 under the headline "Johnson City Fifty Years Ago."

¹¹ 1860, United States Federal Census, Jonesboro, Washington County, Tennessee, digital image s.v. "William Jobe," *Ancestry.com*; 1870, United States Federal Census, Johnson City, Washington County, Tennessee, digital image s.v. "William Jobe," *Ancestry.com*; "Thankful Baptist Church," Washington County TNGenWeb, <https://tngenweb.org/washington/records-data/churches-of-washington-county/thankful-baptist-church/>, accessed January 4, 2020; George W. Woodbey, "What I Have Learned of the Negro Schools," unpublished manuscript, n.d. (c. 1918/1919), personal collection; "Johnson City Fifty Seven Years Ago," *Johnson City Staff*, 25 January 1918.

studied it intensely, telling a reporter in 1937 how “it was the only book I could get aside from my two schoolbooks. It seemed so wonderful to me.”¹²

The creation of schools like those initiated by George’s father and the establishment of independent Black churches often led by formerly enslaved Black preachers signaled how recently emancipated people acted to develop and define freedom. Considered within the long struggle for Black education begun during slavery, Lasana Kazembe argues freed people’s efforts around schooling after the Civil War “underscored a Black Radical Tradition in Education that reflected Black people’s capacity to reshape their lives, assert their freedom, and write themselves into history.”¹³ Schools like the “subscription” one George attended emerged throughout the former Confederacy. “Sabbath schools” sponsored by Black churches also provided educational opportunities for those who could not attend a regular school day. Eventually as W.E.B. Du Bois and others argue, the Black movement for education and literacy developed in the South into a “great mass movement for public education at the expense of the state.”¹⁴

Hundreds of new Black churches arose. Built and pastored by former slaves, these independent Black churches emerged, according to Cedric Robinson, as “the Afro-Christianity that had seethed beneath the regime of slavery now burst forth.”¹⁵ The “invisible institution” of Black religious life during slavery became highly visible through the construction of churches and the role of Black preachers like Rev. Jobe. Like the “slave

¹² M.L. Brown, “Ex-Slave, 83 Interesting Minister,” San Diego, California, Associated Negro Press, *Omaha Guide*, January 30, 1937; “Ex-Slave Once Bryant’s Rival for U.S. Senate,” *Indianapolis Recorder* (Indiana), January 30,

¹³ Lasana Kazembe, “Listen to the Blood”: Du Bois, Cultural Memory, and the Black Radical Tradition in Education,” *Socialism and Democracy* vol. 32 no. 3 (2018): 149.

¹⁴ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 649-656. See also James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 3, 4-32; Heather Andrea Williams, *African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 80-95.

¹⁵ Cedric Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 101.

preacher” prior to emancipation, however, during Reconstruction those who openly preached “a gospel of equality within earshot of whites” lived under the constant threat of white supremacist violence.¹⁶ When in 1867 Tennessee passed legislation granting universal male suffrage, becoming the first state in the former Confederacy to do so, white racist violence and intimidation against Black communities and individuals increased. By 1870 poll taxes and literacy tests aimed to disenfranchise Black men, and a separate and unequal education system was adopted. Facing curtailed political opportunities, threats of physical violence, and limited economic prospects, many Black families decided to leave and take their chances elsewhere. Selena Sanderfer discusses three distinct “separatist movements” between 1866-1880 among Tennessee’s Black populations in the Middle, Western, and Eastern parts of the state. Black individuals and families decided to emigrate to Liberia or Kansas. According to Sanderfer, an “upsurge in political violence in late 1860s East Tennessee spurred the emigration of 144 freedmen from Knox County to Liberia in 1866” alone, and between 1867-1873 “over 200 blacks from three different areas in East Tennessee” were involved in movements supporting emigration to Liberia. While other emigrationists favored Kansas, all “were motivated by the common cause to obtain rights as landowners.”¹⁷

Early Black migrants to Kansas, like those who left the South in the late 1870s who became known as “Exodusters,” hoped to acquire land and develop farms. “Farming one’s own land on one’s own account meant being one’s own master,” as Nell Painter puts it. When the redistribution of plantation land in the South failed to materialize during Reconstruction and with the rise in anti-Black violence, a literal Black *movement* out of

¹⁶ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (1978, updated edition New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), ix- xi, 232.

¹⁷ Selena Sanderfer, “Tennessee’s Black Postwar Emigration Movements, 1866-1880,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* vol 73 n 4 (Winter 2014), 270, 259.

the South began in earnest.¹⁸ In early 1870, Charles and Rachel Woodbey choose to leave Tennessee for Kansas, becoming some of the state's earliest Black settlers. They purchased a small homestead near Emporia and George and Mary were able to enroll in school. A biographical sketch in the *Indianapolis Freeman* published in 1890 describes how his formal schooling was cut short after his father died suddenly shortly after the move to Kansas:

On account of his father's death he was obliged to quit school when but just beginning his education, the third reader being his text-book at the time. A poor boy, working hard to help his mother in support of the family, but he managed to read widely, devouring and with powerful mind assimilating the truth in all the books he could get hold of.¹⁹

While further details regarding his education and work during his early days in Kansas are scarce, in 1903 Iowa Socialist Allen W. Ricker recalled how Comrade Woodbey "worked in mines, factories and on the streets and at everything which would supply food, clothing and shelter" for his family.²⁰ After his father's death and still in his teens himself, the once enslaved George Woodbey was compelled to leave school and work by the economic circumstances facing his family.

¹⁸ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (1976, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1992), 6. Painter's account focuses mainly on the "major" migration of Black people from the South after Reconstruction officially ended in 1877.

¹⁹ "Rev. George W. Woodby," *Indianapolis Freeman* on November 1, 1890. See also "Rev. G.W. Woodbey," *Enterprise* (Nebraska), Apr. 4, 1896.

²⁰ A.W. Ricker, "What to Do, and How to Do it," *Appeal to Reason* (Girard, KS), Oct. 31, 1903. For background on Ricker and the *Appeal to Reason* see also: William H. Cumberland, "The Red Flag Comes to Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 39 no. 6 (Fall 1968): 441-454; Elliot Shore, *Talkin' Socialism: J.A. Wayland and the Role of the Press in American Radicalism, 1890-1912* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1988). Shore's account unfortunately leaves out any discussion of Woodbey's relationship with Ricker, Wayland, and the Socialist Party.

ANNIE R. GOODIN AND CHURCH BUILDING IN THE MIDWEST

George met Annie R. Goodin, another new arrival in Emporia, shortly after moving to Kansas. Born on February 27, 1855 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, little information about Annie's parents has been located but her mother was born in Virginia and her father in Maryland and may have first arrived in Pennsylvania as fugitives from slavery.²¹ Especially after passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, Harrisburg served as an important hub on the Underground Railroad, defined by Eric Foner "as an intercity, interregional enterprise" composed of "local groups that employed numerous methods to assist fugitives, some public and entirely legal, some flagrant violations of law." These groups helped individuals and families in their search for refuge from slavery by facilitating their movement further north often to New York or Canada.²²

Annie displayed keen interest in historical, political, and religious questions from an early age and according to the Nebraska temperance newspaper *Our Nation's Anchor* "began her career as a speaker when yet a child on religious and historical subjects, as well as suffrage and temperance."²³ George shared many of Annie's interests, and likewise developed his passion for history, politics, and public speaking during his youth. After witnessing "young people make speeches" at a school near Johnson City, TN, his "love for

²¹ 1875, Kansas State Census, Emporia, Lyon County, Kansas, digital image s.v. "George Woodby," *Ancestry.com*; 1900, United States Federal Census, Omaha Ward 6, Douglas County, Nebraska, digital image s.v. "Annie R. Woodbey," *Ancestry.com*, accessed July 25, 2021.

²² Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015), 7, 15. On Harrisburg and the Underground Railroad, see *ibid.* 119-150, especially 123, 158-160, 207-208.

²³ "Our Candidates," *Our Nation's Anchor* (Lincoln), 20 July 1895.

oratory” first began to grow.²⁴ In addition to these shared intellectual interests, George and Annie shared a deep religious faith and on November 13, 1873, they were married in Emporia’s Second Baptist Church, later renamed St. James. They had three children together: Mary, George, and William.²⁵

George and Annie spent their early years together organizing Baptist congregations in Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska at least three of which continue to exist today: St. James in Emporia, Calvary Baptist in Wichita, and Zion Baptist in Omaha. St. James was formally founded as Emporia’s Second Baptist Church in 1872. Wichita’s Calvary Baptist likewise originally was known as the Second Baptist Church, the “First” Baptist in both city’s serving the white community. Originally referred to as the African or simply the Baptist Church, Omaha’s Mount Zion quickly became the city’s largest African American congregation from which another Baptist congregation Mount Pisgah split off and was established in the 1890s. Through these institutions the Woodbey’s left an impressive and ongoing legacy, helping forge enduring Black communities in predominately white and racist environments.²⁶

²⁴ “Rev. George W. Woodby,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, 1 November 1890; “Rev. G.W. Woodby,” *Enterprise* (Omaha), 4 April 1896; Woodbey, “What I Have Learned.”

²⁵ *Lyon County Kansas Marriage Index* vol. I, 4 May 1854 through 31 December 1889, second edition, compiled September 1999 (Emporia, KS: Flint Hills Genealogical Society), 184; Frank Lincoln Mathew, *Who’s Who of the Colored Race: A General Biography of Men and Women of African Descent vol. I* (Chicago: 1915), 290-291. *Who’s Who* incorrectly states Annie’s year of death as 1891.

²⁶ St. James Baptist Church in Emporia holds services today at 730 Sylvan St. Wichita’s Calvary Baptist also continues to hold services today at 2653 N. Hillside Dr. in Wichita, while a magnificent brick building designed for the church by African American architect Joshua Walker and built in 1917 today houses the Kansas African American Museum. Omaha’s Mount Zion Baptist Church is now known as the Zion Baptist Church of Omaha and holds services at 2215 Grant Street in North Omaha. I visited Emporia, Wichita, and Omaha and the current and previous sites for each church. The Woodbey’s role in founding these congregations has been largely forgotten, except in Wichita where the Kansas African American

In Kansas they belonged to a growing community of Black migrants from across the South who trickled and then streamed into the state during and after Reconstruction: between 1879-1881 alone over 20,000 African Americans emigrated to Kansas.²⁷ Nell Irvin Painter describes how the majority of these migrant families were “ordinary, uneducated former slaves” who struggled against and ultimately rejected through a mass exodus the new racial regime being constructed in the former states of the Confederacy.²⁸ In 1886 the Kansas Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics published a report including specific details on the “Exodusters” living in and around Wyandotte County, just east of Emporia. When they arrived in the state most “were, as a class, utterly destitute; they had expended their last cent in reaching the land of promise, and they had no food to save them from starvation, and no roof to shelter them.” Within a few years, however, some “managed to erect small shanties huddled closely together...and they contrive to exist, probably as well, or, as many of them say, better than they did in their Southern home.”²⁹

Migrants came from Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee and found work in various occupations: brick mason, hod carrier, junk carrier, seamstress, minister, plasterer, mechanic, washerwoman, one grocery keeper, and many simply as general laborers. Some worked in packing houses near Kansas City, others in the

Museum lists a “Rev. Woodby” as Calvary’s first preacher, but as of summer 2020 nothing else of his biography was mentioned, nor was the later connection between this “Rev. Woodby” and the Socialist Party of America known by museum staff who graciously allowed me to dig into their archives during an unannounced visit.

²⁷ Painter, *Exodusters*; Omar Ali, *In The Lion’s Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 7, 19.

²⁸ Painter, *Exodusters*, ix.

²⁹ *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics* January 1, 1886 (Topeka, KS: Kansas Publishing House; T.D. Thacher, State Printer, 1886), 249.

coal and salt mines of central and southeast Kansas.³⁰ George Woodbey may have been one of the first African Americans to work in the southeast Kansas coal mines, before the industry took off in the mid-1870s feeding the industrializing U.S. economy. By 1910 formerly enslaved persons represented roughly eight percent of coal miners in the U.S., and approximately 1,000 worked in Kansas.³¹ His experience as a miner played a significant influence in his concern for mine workers which he would later express during the 1896 Prohibition Party national convention, and his understanding of class struggle as a member of the Socialist Party of America. A small but significant number of Black coal miners in Kansas, Arkansas, and Texas later joined the SP themselves, but in the 1880s Black coal miners and workers in other industries in Kansas joined organizations like the Knights of Labor and were already expressing clear anti-capitalist sentiments. According to one African American “Laborer and Minister” living in Kansas in the mid-1880s,

The present condition of the laborer and his family is not as good as it should be in this country. I know this is caused by the craftiness of the idle classes, scheming to take from us what we produce, without giving us proper recompense. Their purpose is to keep us poor, so that we shall be compelled to toil for their benefit. Our legislators are not true to our interests; they are too willing to obey the demands of capitalists.... Our condition is rapidly growing worse, and serious results will surely follow, if something is not done. The colored people are getting awake on this matter. The time is past when they can be deceived. They are beginning to think for themselves.³²

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ On African Americans and the Kansas Coal Industry, see John M. Robb, “Black Coal Miner of Southeast Kansas,” *History of Minority Groups in Kansas*, no. 2 (Topeka: State of Kansas Commission on Civil Rights, 1969). For a more general overview of the industry in southeast Kansas see William E. Powell, “Former Mining Communities of the Cherokee-Crawford Coal Field,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 38 no. 2 (Summer 1972): 187-199.

³² *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics* January 1, 1886 (Topeka, KS: Kansas Publishing House; T.D. Thacher, State Printer, 1886), 253.

Migrants were more than just laborers, however. Just as enslaved Africans carried much more than just their labor-power with them across the Middle Passage, but also culture and beliefs systems, migrant workers from the South arrived in Kansas with a distinct form of Christianity shaped by their experiences and longings during slavery and the beliefs and practices of their African ancestors. Edwina Buckner, the daughter of founding members of St. James Baptist Church in Emporia, characterized the congregation her parents and Woodbey's belonged to as founded by people with a "deep religious faith that was born out of slavery and oppression."³³ The Woodbey's were instrumental in the church's early history, beginning when it held its first services in the basement of the County Courthouse with just 16 members in January 1872. George Woodbey was ordained minister with the church in 1874. In 1876 he started the congregation's first Sunday School with 18 pupils under his instruction. Briefly housed in a "frame church building at Eighth and Constitution" provided by Emporia's (white) First Baptist Church, in 1880 Rev. Woodbey helped lay the "corner stone" for a new building at 9th and Commercial St.³⁴ In the meantime, the Woodbey's had moved to Wichita where they organized what became the city's Calvary Baptist Church.

³³ "120 Years of History, As told by 'Edwina Buckner,'" in *St. James Baptist Church 120th Anniversary* (Emporia, KS: 1992). Lyon County Historical Center and Historical Society. The church was originally called the Second Baptist. Emporia's First Baptist served the white community.

³⁴ "120 Years of History, As told by 'Edwina Buckner,'" in *St. James Baptist Church 120th Anniversary* (Emporia, KS: 1992). Lyon County Historical Center and Historical Society; Laura M. French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas* (Emporia, KS: Emporia Gazette Print, 1929); *Emporia News*, 24 September 1880.

Moving to Wichita in 1876 they joined another small but vibrant black migrant community. At the church's fiftieth anniversary celebration in 1928, according to the Wichita Black owned newspaper the *Negro Star* original church member Mother Hodge remembered Rev. Woodbey there back when "they went to church on laid boards of 18 inches, thru sunflowers and weeds."³⁵ He served as the church's first pastor when it was formally established in 1878 as Wichita's Second Baptist Church. As in Emporia, a Sunday school helped grow the congregation, this time under Annie's direction. According to Calvary's Rev. J.W. Hayes's *History of Calvary Baptist Church 1878-1943*, "the church began to flourish" after Annie Woodbey organized the school.³⁶

Annie and George moved again in 1880 to Atchison, KS, where Rev. Woodbey had been called to preach. On May 21, the *Herald of Kansas* described the new minister who had been chosen to "take charge of the First Baptist church," as "young in years but old in scriptural knowledge." In Atchison, the Woodbey's became involved in local temperance movement work. In 1881, a reception and fundraiser hosted by community members provided Mr. Woodbey with "a new suit of clothes and a pair of shoes," and during a spell of illness community members expressed get-well wishes for Annie's quick recovery in a local newspaper. One remarkable aspect of their social life in Atchison was their

35 "Calvary Celebrates Fiftieth Anniversary," *The Negro Star*, 15 August 1928. Mother Hodge's remarks at an event celebrating the church's anniversary and Edwina Buckner's story of Emporia's St. James Baptist cited above are vital oral histories of the Black communities in Kansas as well as George and Annie Woodbey lives in those communities. On Black Wichita, see The Kansas African American Museum, *African Americans of Wichita* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2015).

36 "Highlights of Our First Hundred Years," *Calvary Baptist Church: First 100 Years, 1878-1978* (Wichita, KS: Calvary Baptist Church, 1978), Second Baptist Church Folder, Kansas African American Museum; Rev. J.W. Hayes, A.M.B.D. *History of Calvary Baptist Church 1878-1943* (Wichita: 1944), 4, Second Baptist Church Folder, Kansas African American Museum.

involvement the town's "L'Ouverture Literary Club," named after the famous leader of the Haitian Revolution, Toussaint L'Ouverture. Meeting programs printed in the *Topeka Tribune* list George as a reader of poetry, speeches, and one of the club's frequently featured debaters.³⁷

Early Black Kansans, like other African Americans, established a tradition invoking the Haitian Revolution in the names of organizations, clubs, and schools.³⁸ During the U.S. Civil War Mathew J. Clavin argues "Louverture's name was for Africans Americans the touchstone of a transatlantic identify, one that transcended both time and space as it joined their violent struggle for freedom and equality to the black revolutionary movement that began in Haiti"³⁹ and memory of Louverture and the Haitian Revolution continued to play a role in how African Americans constructed identities long after the war's end. In 1887 William J. Simmons, a formerly enslaved man from South Carolina, praised Louverture "the soldier, the statesman, the martyr, Toussaint L'Ouverture" as the father of a coming new civilization, and Frederick Douglass's 1893 "Lecture on Haiti" at the World's Fair in Chicago argued Louverture and the Haitian Revolution "were linked

37"From Atchison," *Herald of Kansas*, 21 May 1880; *Emporia News*, 21 September 1880. "Letter from Atchison," *Topeka Tribune*, 1 January 1881; "Atchison Notes," *Topeka Tribune*, 22 January 1881; "Atchison Inklings," *Topeka Tribune* (Topeka) 16 June 1881, 23 June 1881; 21 July 1881, 8 September 1881, 22 September 1881, and 6 October 1881; "Temperance Talk," *Atchison Daily Patriot*, 13 June 1881; "The Temperance Meeting," *Atchison Daily Champion*, 14 June 1881; "Ebenezer Baptist Church," *Atchison Daily Champion*, 2 November 1881.

38 L'Ouverture Elementary in Wichita was founded in 1912 after a prolonged but defeated struggle by the city's African American population against segregated schools in a 15-room building serving 300 Black students, and today exists as the L'Ouverture Career Exploration and Technology Magnet Elementary School. Another school was named after Frederick Douglass. "History of L'Ouverture," *L'Ouverture Career Exploration and Technology Magnet Elementary School* (Wichita, KS: Wichita Public Schools), <https://www.usd259.org/Page/4716>; Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 217-218.

39 Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War*, 122.

and interlinked with their race,” constructing a black internationalist identity linking the struggles of African Americans with “the black man’s country” and “the freedom of every black man in the world.”⁴⁰ Through the “L’Ouverture Literary Club” in Atchison, the black community invoked memory of the Haitian Revolution proudly as they met to discuss, debate, and celebrate black culture and engage political questions facing their community amidst an overwhelmingly white population.

While the Midwest is often portrayed as exceptional for its lack of anti-Black violence in the aftermath of Reconstruction, Black people there regularly faced racist violence from hostile whites, argues historian Brent M.S. Campney. The Atchison local press followed up on an attempted lynching in Atchison in September 1880 of a Black agricultural worker named Ike Sneed with attacks on his family’s “character.” According to Campney, “whites targeted these beleaguered black families for an extra share of abuse not because they were of bad character but because—in their manner, their conduct, their provocation—they challenged white supremacy to an unusual extent and refused to submit to it.”⁴¹ Campney provides several additional examples where racial violence including lynching and attacks in the press in Kansas and Missouri targeted specific Black families who “were unusually committed to bucking racist conventions and to cultivating spirited

⁴⁰ See William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive, and Rising* (1887) and Frederick Douglass, *Lecture on Haiti. The Haitian Pavilion Dedication Ceremonies Delivered at the World’s Fair, in Jackson Park, Chicago, Jan. 2d, 1893* in *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents* edited by Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon (New York: Routledge, 2010), 195-202, 202-211.

⁴¹ Brent M.S. Campney, *Hostile Heartland: Racism: Repression, and Resistance in the Midwest* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 74-75. See also Brent M.S. Campney, *This is Not Dixie: Racist Violence in Kansas, 1861-1927* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

resistance in their children.”⁴² George and Annie Woodbey’s increasing visibility as preachers and political reformers would have certainly attracted attention in places like Atchison, and they later faced racist attacks in the press and lived in Omaha when in 1891 a white mob broke into the Douglass County jail and lynched a Black man named George Smith before a crowd of thousands in 1891. Thirty years later a massive mob lynched Will Brown.⁴³ Before they settled in Omaha the Woodbey’s spent time in St. Joseph, MO, where they lived about a year. George Woodbey led congregation there listed in the 1883 city directory as Mount Zion Baptist. Built in 1881, the structure which housed Mount Zion still stands, but the congregation seems to have been short lived.⁴⁴

Having supported James Garfield during his 1880 presidential campaign, George Woodbey joined St. Joseph’s Colored Republican Club. After Garfield’s assassination in 1881, several African American voters in Atchison reportedly broke with the Republican Party when “no colored man was invited” to speak during a procession mourning Garfield’s death.⁴⁵ Rev. Woodbey stayed in the party another two years. A small but insightful sense of his political concerns at the time is found in a speech he delivered before a “meeting of

⁴² Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 88; Adam F.C. Fletcher, “The Lynching of George Smith,” January 29, 2011, *North Omaha History*, <https://northomahahistory.com/2011/01/29/a-history-of-omahas-first-recorded-lynching/>; Adam F.C. Fletcher, “The Lynching of Will Brown,” February 19, 2019, *North Omaha History*, <https://northomahahistory.com/2019/02/19/the-lynching-of-will-brown/>.

⁴³ The lynching of George Brown received significant newspaper reporting at the time

⁴⁴ Hoyer’s *Seventh Annual City Directory of the Inhabitants, Manufacturing Establishments, Businesses, Farmers, Etc. in the City of St. Joseph* (St. Joseph, MO: Steam Printing Company, 1883). 389. The listing reads, “Woodbey, George W. Rev (col’d) pastor Mount Zion Baptist Church, r. 815 S. 15th.”

⁴⁵ *Emporia News* 24 Sept 1880; “Atchison Inklings,” *Topeka Tribune* 6 Oct 1881; “The Colored Men in Line,” *St. Joseph Daily Herald*, 28 October 1882; “The Colored Voters,” *St Joseph Weekly Herald*, 2 November 1882; “The insult to Rev. Moses Dickson,” *St. Joseph Daily Gazette*, 7 November 1881.

colored citizens at Turner hall” in November 1882. According to the *St. Joseph Herald*, Rev. Woodbey made “powerful arguments in favor of protection,” likely a reference to the Republican Party’s support for higher tariffs and spoke against Missouri Democratic candidate for Congress James N. Burnes’ for his false “pretensions to friendship for the colored race.” According to the *Herald*, George Woodbey supported tariffs because he believed they would benefit all workers, including “hod carriers and other day laborers” not just certain industries. His speech also remarked on the status of African Americans and what needed to be done to address racial inequality. “He said that legislation had done all that it could for the colored race in this country—that the laws recognize their equal rights; that the trouble is to enforce the laws. He said that legislation was powerless to effect social equality; that the colored race must win it by industry, intelligence and worth.”⁴⁶ Woodbey’s speech, as summarized by *Herald*, introduces some of the core themes and concerns that would largely define George and Annie Woodbey’s political commitments over the next two decades: racial uplift, civil rights, and economic inequality.

NEBRASKA

George and Annie Woodbey moved to Omaha in 1883, where they lived for the next 18 years. In the late nineteenth century Omaha claimed one of the most vibrant and fastest growing African American communities West of the Mississippi River. Churches served as the bedrock institutions of Black Omaha’s spiritual, social, cultural, and political life, and the Woodbeyes helped organize one of the city’s oldest Black congregations, the

⁴⁶ *St. Joseph Herald*, 1 November 1882. See Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

Mount Zion Baptist Church. Largely through Mount Zion and later Mount Pisgah and Ebenezer Baptist, they quickly became involved in every aspect of the community. Newspaper George Woodbey served as Mount Zion's first pastor. "Temporary quarters [for the church] were secured in Lytle's block," near 11th and Farnham St., reported the *Omaha Daily Bee* in August 1883. A new church building was constructed in 1890 and by 1896 the congregation boasted 120 members.⁴⁷

Mr. Woodbey was not the only "Rev. Woodbey." As a preacher herself Mrs. Woodbey worked independently from her husband and developed her own reputation as a church leader. In 1895 a Lincoln newspaper noted Annie "often fills the pulpit for her husband," and Omaha's Black owned newspaper the *Enterprise* regularly announced her sermons at Mount Pisgah, a congregation which grew from Mount Zion. She also led her own congregation in South Omaha, as on July 4, 1896, the *Enterprise* announced "Rev, Annie Woodbey" had "charge of the Ebenezer Baptist church" and a week later on July 11 noted that "Under the pastorate of the Rev. Annie R. Woodbey, Ebenezer Baptist church is growing." Annie also participated in Baptist mission work during what historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham calls "the era of women's missions." According to Higginbotham the mission movement was started "by Protestant denominational societies during the 1860s" and helped foster support for "black education during the decades following Reconstruction." Black women's mission work "and other self-help activities served to inculcate within the masses of poor and uneducated blacks psychological allegiance to

⁴⁷ *Omaha Daily Bee*, 7 August 1883; "Worshipped by Every Race," *Omaha Daily Bee*, 15 June 1890; "Baptist Church," *Enterprise*, 4 April 1896.

certain mainstream values and behavior.” Mission women also organized and fundraised in support of “long-term educational and other needed programs of the black community” including “schools, publishing houses, old folks’ homes, and orphanages.”⁴⁸

Annie and George Woodbey’s politics centered largely around their identities as preachers and people of faith. Beginning in the 1880s, they established themselves beyond the pulpit as orators, activists, and political leaders across Nebraska. Involved in the political and cultural life of Omaha’s Black community, their activities extended across the Midwest and reports of their lectures and political work appeared regularly in the local and regional press. While scholars have noted in passing George Woodbey’s involvement in the Prohibition Party, Annie’s role in the party, including her nomination to run for University of Nebraska Regent in 1895, is far less known. They were also involved in debates around emigration and anti-racist organizing in Omaha’s Black community.

In 1892 Elia Peattie, a white woman columnist for *Omaha World Herald*, described “Black Omaha’s Population” as a “nation within a nation” and estimated 6,000 African Americans lived in the city. Peattie’s column portrayed a community thriving, where “women are almost all in their homes” and the “employments of the men are many” despite racial discrimination: Among other things Peattie mentions, Black Omaha had its own labor radicals, lawyers, ministers, fraternal organizations, gambling dens and pool halls, women’s clubs, politicians, and press. Although most African Americans lived in the city’s

48 “A.M.E. Missionary Meeting,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 15 August 1888; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 95-111, qt. p. 96.

third ward, “the homes of the colored men” were “scattered all over the city.”⁴⁹ Black Omaha’s community, its families, and work ethic were seen through a heavily racialized and gendered lens and judged according to a white bourgeois value system. Peattie described its Black men as “naturally” cheerful, against labor unions, and “very adaptable” in what they would do “to earn them a livelihood.” Black women receive attention as mothers, respected property owners, and those employed as dressmakers and “forms of domestic work.” Among the prominent individuals mentioned, “Rev. G.W. Woodbey” makes this list, but not Mrs. Woodbey, perhaps because she was not the kind of women to stay home, unencumbered by “any sort of work” outside the family.

Mrs. Woodbey appears in perhaps the earliest mention of the Woodbey’s in the Nebraska press after their move to Omaha. On June 15, 1883, the *Lincoln Daily News* announced: “Mrs. Annie R. Woodbey, (colored), will lecture at the Baptist church, corner L and 11th streets, to-morrow night. Subject—‘The Existence of God.’ Admission ten cents.” A few days later coverage of a thunderstorm, seemingly of divine origin, referred to “the timid and even stout-hearted, some of whom attended Mrs. Woodbey’s lecture on the subject ‘Is there a god,’” who “stood watch during the siege with fear and trembling.”⁵⁰ Evidently her lecture, like the storm, proved memorable. A year later a columnist for T.

⁴⁹ Elia W. Peattie, “Omaha’s Black Population,” *Omaha World Herald*, Sept. 25, 1892. “Elia Peattie: an Uncommon Writer, an Uncommon Woman” is a digital history project with significant resources on Peattie’s work and biography. One of the interesting columns which appears on the website is Peattie’s June 24, 1894, article on lynching, “The Blot on the Name of Civilization and Why It is There,” which discusses the criticism of Ida B. Wells toward Frances Willard and the W.C.T.U, and condemns lynching as unjustifiable. “Elia Peattie: an Uncommon Writer, an Uncommon Woman,” Center for Digital Research in the Humanities, University of Nebraska, <http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/peattie/>.

⁵⁰ *Lincoln Daily Evening News*, 15 June 1883; “June Thaw,” *Lincoln Journal Star*, 18 June 1883.

Thomas Fortune's *New York Globe* reviewed a recent delivery of her "Belief in God" lecture in Omaha, noting Annie had "a fine mind and good memory, and the lecture was a rare treat." The column mentioned George would deliver a speech on June 11 on his continued support for the Republican Party.⁵¹

Fortune's paper later changed its name to the *New York Freeman* and then the *New York Age*, and in the late nineteenth century his papers became a platform for debate and political discussion for Black Americans, with national distribution and wide range of contributing voices. The Woodbey's read the paper regularly, and in September 1884 the paper published a letter to the editor signed by George Woodbey. "For many months past your valuable paper has been a welcome visitor in my family. We love THE GLOBE and we admire its courage and ability," his letter stated. However, his purpose in writing concerned Fortune's position on Liberia and emigration. Fortune claimed, "There has been no more lamentable failure in the past one hundred years than the attempt to colonize colored Americans on the West Coast of Africa."⁵²

African Americans emigrationist desires spread following the defeat of Reconstruction. Notions regarding the "racial destiny" of African Americans drove arguments both for and against emigration, according to Michele Mitchell. Among emigrationists "ecclesiastic visions of destiny suffused 'civilizing missions' undertaken by Afro-Americans missionaries" whereas "competing concepts of collective racial destiny

⁵¹ "Nebraska Doings," *New York Globe*, 21 June 1884.

⁵² George Washington Woodbey, "Liberia and the Negro," *New York Globe*, 20 September 1884. Fortune qtd. in *ibid.*

promoted full inclusion in the American body politic” or called for “separate race culture, institutions, and even territories” for Black people then living in the United States.⁵³ Fortune opposed emigration and according to Woodbey believed African Americans desired “to deposit their bones in the sacred soil of the United States.” Yet Woodbey cited “letters from friends who have gone from Nebraska to Liberia” to criticize what he considered Fortune’s failure to report news from Liberia.

George’s Woodbey’s own experience with the emigrationist debate began in Tennessee, where in the 1860s the question of emigrating to Liberia caused significant discussion among freedpeople even before Reconstruction’s official collapse in 1877. According to Selena Sanderfer, between 1867 and 1873 “over 200 blacks from three different areas in East Tennessee” joined “emigration movements to Liberia.”⁵⁴ It is more than possible that Rachel and Charles Woodbey were aware of such movements, although ultimately, they and many others choose or were driven by lack of resources to resettle in Kansas instead. George and Annie themselves apparently promoted Liberian emigration in 1883 back in Emporia, KS, where according to the *Emporia Weekly News*, they started a “movement” encouraging emigration:

We learn[ed] that Mr. and Mrs. George Woodby[sic] have set on foot in this community a movement which is liable to result in the emigration in the spring of a large number of colored people to Liberia. The advantages of that colony have been presented by means of circulars and newspaper articles, and we are informed that between twenty and thirty families have signified their intention to start for Africa in the spring.⁵⁵

⁵³ Michele Mitchel, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). 8.

⁵⁴ Selena Sanderfer, “Tennessee’s Black Postwar Emigration Movements, 1866-1880,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* vol 73 n 4 (Winter 2014), 259, 270.

⁵⁵ “Looking to Liberia,” *Emporia Weekly News*, 9 August 1883.

Like other emigration proponents in the nineteenth century, their possible support for emigration evidences an assessment concerning the possibilities for Black life and freedom in the United States.

According to Robin D.G. Kelley, Black emigrationist desires reveal “a great deal about what people dream about, what they want, how they might want to reconstruct their lives.” Promised but denied freedom in the U.S. in the nineteenth century significant numbers of Black people “imagined real freedom” a possibility elsewhere, and Liberia was “upheld by African-American intellectuals as evidence that, if left alone, black people could develop a free and industrious nation on the basis of their own intelligence, frugality, and good planning.”⁵⁶ George’s letter to the *New York Globe*, published on September 20, 1884 reflected similar arguments, but also went beyond them: :

I agree with you that our freedom gives us the right to remain in this country; and it also gives us the right to go if we so desire. You seem to think that colored men ought to remain in the South. I think those who desire to remain there should, and those who do not should go. The argument has long ago become obsolete that the Negro in order to succeed must confine his operations to any one place on the globe. Let the Negro scatter out, go to Africa, come to the West, or go anywhere else that any other man can go, with the full assurance that he can succeed as well as they. The Negro like the white man should go wherever in his judgement he can best succeed.

Valuing Black freedom of movement, an expression of self-determination, Woodbey rejected as racist arguments suggesting Black people should not or could not succeed “in a new country.” His awareness of the emigration debate in Tennessee and his family’s move to Kansas, along with he and Annie’s seemingly constant movement since 1876 likely informed his views.

⁵⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 16-23.

At the same time, his comments on Africa and the role Black Americans were to play in “civilizing” the continent display what Jeannette Eileen Jones calls a “colonizing impulse” among those “who thought because of their Western identities... they could best solve the African question.” The views of Black American leaders who at different times supported emigration to Liberia such as Henry Highland Garnet, Henry McNeal Turner, and Edward W. Blyden may have been motivated by a desire to escape the oppression Black people faced in the United States, but according to Jones differed little from white-dominated groups like the American Colonization Society in their belief that African American settlers “would bring Christianity, commerce, and civilization” to the continent.”⁵⁷ Similar beliefs operated in Woodbey’s letter, which praised Black American settlers for beginning “the work of civilization” in West Africa through “building “churches, schools, farms and gardens” in “place of slave pens, wild wood, ignorance and superstition.” His main argument was that Black people had a right to live freely and should decide for themselves. He did not believe that Black Americans were destined to remain in the United States but did observe that for those who remained in the country “there was plenty to be done.”⁵⁸ At the same time based on his letter’s text, to the extent he imagined their relationship with Africa Rev. Woodbey positioned African American settlers as responsible for the continent’s “progress” and did not fundamentally challenge dominate colonial and imperialist justifications regarding Africa’s supposed “backwardness” and the superiority of European/white civilization except for in insisting the Black “man” could and should do anything the white “man” could do.

BOYD’S OPERA HOUSE AND CIVIL RIGHTS

⁵⁷ Jeannette Eileen Jones, “‘The Negro’s Peculiar Work’: Jim Crow and Black Discourses on US Empire, Race, and the African Question, 1877-1900,” *Journal of American Studies* 52 no. 2 (2018): 333, 336.

⁵⁸ George Washington Woodbey, “Liberia and the Negro,” *New York Globe*, 20 September 1884.

When Reconstruction officially ended in 1877 with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, leaving African Americans in former Confederate states to fend for themselves, the system known as Jim Crow had yet to fully emerge. Yet as Quintard Taylor points out, Reconstruction had never been merely “a conflict between the federal government and ex-Confederate states over their restoration to the Union but a larger national debate over the relationship between federal and state power.” In the 1860s and 1870s “Black westerners,” including those living in Kansas and Nebraska, followed Reconstruction closely out of concern for blacks in the South and their own current political and economic realities. In order to secure the right to vote, access to public education, and the right to serve on juries in the Midwest, African Americans organized, using the press and petitions. Nebraska allowed Black male suffrage beginning in 1867 when it became a state, but in Kansas the right to vote came only after the state ratified the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870.⁵⁹ Benefiting African Americans across the country, the Reconstruction era 1875 Civil Rights Act guaranteed “full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters, and other places of public amusement...to citizens of every race and color, regardless of any previous condition of servitude.”

Although in practice the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was never fully enforced, in 1883 the Supreme Court of the United States gutted the law and weakened the Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments. The court ruled in the 1883 Civil Rights Cases discrimination by private entities based on race “imposes no badge of slavery or involuntary servitude” and limited the power of the federal government to intervene in cases of private discrimination.

⁵⁹ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 105, 125-126

The decision curtailed the rights of African Americans and opened the door for southern states to create new legal system legitimizing racial apartheid.

In this context, George Woodbey was denied entry to an event hosted by the Women's Christian Temperance Union at Boyd's Opera House in Omaha in May 1885. The W.C.T.U. had rented the theater, owned by mayor James Edward Boyd, and provided George a ticket to attend its function as a thank you for lectures he had delivered for the organization. Prohibited from entering the theater by the building's manager "on account of his color," George filed a lawsuit. The *Omaha Daily Bee* explicitly linked the case to the 1883 Civil Rights Cases, noting Nebraska passed legislation in February affirming rights found in the 1875 Civil Rights Act, including the right to "full and equal enjoyment" of theaters for all citizens of the state regardless of race.⁶⁰ Portraying Boyd's racial prejudice as a product of the south and foreign to Nebraska values, its editorial on the case reproduced a common trope among contemporary white Midwesterners who Campney argues "concealed their own racism by portraying the Midwest as a land of bucolic virtue and racial justice compared to the South, a place defined nationally by racism."⁶¹

Details about the suit remain vague. Boyd's defense team attempted but failed to have the case dismissed altogether. Accepting the case the judge also ruled "the question of civil rights, though not touched upon in the petition could be brought forth in special pleadings," according to the *Omaha Daily Bee*. Why the "question of civil rights" did not enter Rev. Woodbey's claim is unclear considering his very public accusation of racial discrimination. Finally in June 1887 the *Omaha World Herald* reported his lawyers dropped his case after he rejected a settlement where Boyd would pay his lawyer fees and

⁶⁰ "Equality Before the Law," *Omaha Daily Bee*, 15 May 1885; "Adding Insult to Injury," *Omaha Daily Bee*, 20 May 1885; *Omaha Daily Bee*, 22 May 1885.

⁶¹ Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, 8.

court costs. According one of his lawyer's cited by the *Herald*, his suit was doomed from the beginning: "It would be impossible, for political reasons, to get a jury that would agree."⁶²

Nevertheless, George Woodbey's case elicited an immediate reaction in May 1885 among Omaha's African American population, who packed a court room on Monday May 20th and "in mass meeting assembled" protested "the insult and abuse" of Rev. Woodbey. "Expressing Indignation," the meeting called "the insult that has been offered to Elder Woodbey...an insult to every colored citizen of Omaha." The meeting resolved to "protest against all discrimination" and to "take all honorable means of securing our rights as citizens."⁶³ Days later a multiracial "civil rights meeting" was organized on May 29th featuring a litany of speakers. Edwin R. Overall called the meeting to order. Born enslaved in Missouri, Overall had been educated in Chicago where he became involved in abolitionist work and later worked as a recruiter for the Union army during the Civil War. After moving to Omaha in the late 1860s he became the city's first black mail carrier and became active in the city's labor movement through the Knights of Labor.⁶⁴ Edward Rosewater, owner of the *Omaha Daily Bee*, was among the meetings speakers. A Jewish immigrant from Bavaria, Rosewater spoke about how his father taught him his "forefather were slaves in the land of Egypt." As a boy Rosewater told the audience he "carried letters" to imprisoned black leaders in Ohio after the Wellington Rescue. A speaker from Boston, "Rev. Mr. Copeland," recalled his experiences in Boston's abolitionist movement when "it

⁶² *Omaha Daily Bee*, 3 August 1885; *Omaha World Herald*, 15 October 1886; "The Rev. Woodbey's Case," *Omaha World Herald*, 4 June 1887.

⁶³ "Expressing Indignation," *Omaha Daily Bee*, 20 May 1885.

⁶⁴ "The Afro-American League," *Progress* (Omaha) 21 June 1890; "E.R. Overall," *Enterprise*, 4 April 1896. See also George L. Knox, *Slave and Freeman: The Autobiography of George L. Knox* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979), 225 n 58, 226 n 59; Adam F.C. Fletcher, "Life of Edwin Overall of North Omaha," *North Omaha History*, December 22, 2020, <https://northomahahistory.com/2020/12/22/biography-of-edwin-overall-of-north-omaha/>.

was necessary to go armed” to attend a meeting featuring Wendell Phillips “for protection against malicious attacks.”⁶⁵

Born enslaved in 1858, the last speaker, Dr. Mathew O. Ricketts, moved to Omaha “penniless” in 1880, where he worked as a janitor while attending Omaha Medical College. He became the first African American to graduate from the school in 1884 and the first licensed African American medical doctor in the state.⁶⁶ By request, his remarks at the meeting addressed the question of “social equality,” which he argued “could not be fixed by law.” African Americans wanted civil rights including “that all places of public amusement should be open to them.” Because they paid taxes funding the city police which protected Boyd’s theater, Ricketts argued African Americans had a right to enjoy such establishments. black men had a special responsibility toward African American women as protectors of these rights: “We are peaceful, law-abiding, think as much of our wives and children as any white man, and so long as the laws of this state protect us, we should see that our wives and daughters are not denied any privilege or please which they are justly entitled to.”⁶⁷

Subscribing to a brand of “racial uplift” ideology prevalent among middle class African Americans in the late nineteenth century, Ricketts justified his claim for rights on ability to pay taxes and proper “peaceful, law-abiding” behavior. Notions about African American manhood and the family also operated in his speech. Ricketts’ ideas represented

⁶⁵ “Expressing Indignation,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 20 May 1885.

⁶⁶ “The Afro-American League,” *Progress*, 21 June 1890; “Doctor Ricketts,” *Enterprise*, 4 April 1896. See also Knox, *Slave and Freeman*, 225 n 58, 226 n 59; Adam F.C. Fletcher, “A Biography of North Omaha’s Dr. Matthew O. Ricketts,” *North Omaha History*, September 23, 2015, <https://northomahahistory.com/2015/09/23/omahas-matthew-o-ricketts/>.

⁶⁷ “Expressing Indignation,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 20 May 1885.

a then dominate strand of “racial uplift” ideology evidenced in many efforts led by Omaha’s black professional class, including ministers like Woodbey. According to Kevin Gaines, such “uplift ideology’s argument for black humanity...represented a limited, conditional claim to equality, citizenship, and human rights for African Americans” based on “a value system of bourgeois morality” including “bourgeois cultural values” such as “social purity, thrift, chastity, and the patriarchal family.”⁶⁸

Rev. Woodbey’s suit against the Boyd Theater manager and the community support he received evidence an unwillingness to quietly accept unequal treatment among the city’s African American population. The incident and the protest meetings were also important for two additional reasons. In the late nineteenth century Omaha’s African American community and their counterparts in other urban and rural spaces across the Midwest and Western states established churches, fraternal organizations, newspapers, and various clubs fulfilling what Quintard Taylor calls “the spiritual, educational, social, or cultural needs of the local inhabitants.” These institutions help fledging black communities form identities and connections with African Americans beyond their immediate local context. In addition, Taylor shows “protest forged bonds of community” as well. “Western urban blacks attacked school segregation and discrimination in employment and public accommodations,” and in the process “generated connections among blacks at the state and national levels.”⁶⁹ The protest meetings against racial discrimination at Boyd’s theater and fostered an activist identity in Omaha’s black community and at the same time evidenced

⁶⁸ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 4.

⁶⁹ Q. Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 194, 196.

its organizational capacity and willingness to take public collective action independently and in coalition against racial oppression.

Just a few years later members from the community, including George and Annie Woodbey, along with Ricketts, Overall, and others enthusiastically responded to T. Thomas Fortune's call to form a National Afro-American League (NAAL). The Omaha chapter established itself on December 31, 1889. Meeting at the African Methodist Church immediately following a prayer meeting, George and over 100 others discussed and voted on a constitution based on the call published in Fortune's newspaper *The Age*.⁷⁰ Fortune intended the League as a vehicle to combat racial injustice in all its forms: voter disenfranchisement, lynching, anti-Black mobs, unequal access to education, the Jim Crow justice system, convict leasing and chain gangs, and racial discrimination by railroad companies, hotels, theaters, and in other public places. More than 40 local and state chapters rapidly formed.⁷¹ At the Omaha chapter's founding meeting Dr. Ricketts protested against the constitution allowing anyone "regardless of race, color or sex" to join, fearing whites could "come in such numbers as to dominate over us and run the concern." After much debate the clause in question remained and the constitution approved. George was nominated but not selected to attend the national convention in Chicago.⁷² The Nebraska Afro-American League held its founding convention in late April. While women attended

⁷⁰ "Have Too Many Great Men," *Omaha World Herald* 1 January 1890. Although the article names only men (a focus reflected in the headline) Annie and George likely attended the meeting together and were likely to have been present together at the prayer meeting immediately preceding it.

⁷¹ Susan D. Carle, *Defining the Struggle: National Organizing for Racial Justice, 1880-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 31.

⁷² "Have Too Many Great Men," *Omaha World Herald*, 1 January 1890.

this first convention, they did not appear as delegates. They did unintentionally spark debate however when a delegate requested “the gentlemen should conduct themselves for the time as gentlemen” and cease smoking in the presence of “ladies.”⁷³

As temperance activists and ministers, George and Annie Woodbey were not immune from the gendered politics of respectability. However, their politics often transgressed bourgeois notions of “good behavior” and so-called “traditional” womanhood. When a Black sex worker named Georgiana Clark was discovered dead under “mysterious” circumstances in an Omaha police station in 1887, George Woodbey publicly condemned the city’s failure to investigate, accusing it of a racial double standard and reportedly warning “if things did not soon take a different aspect his race would retaliate and do such deeds of hooor as would freeze the blood in the veins of the civilized world.” His position likely echoed that of Rev. P.A. Hubbard, who replied to those who found it “strange” he allowed a meeting regarding Clark’s death to be held in his church. “It mattered not what her character [was]. She was a human being and entitled to protection.”⁷⁴ Rev. Woodbey’s involvement with the campaign to investigate Clark’s possible murder by the police contrasted with the politics of strict legality and respectable behavior earlier promoted by Dr. Ricketts.

Annie Woodbey challenged the idea “ladies” needed a male voice to guide and protect them. When the Nebraska League held its state convention in April 1892, she

⁷³ “Colored Men in Session,” *Omaha World Herald*, 1 May 1890; “Shall They Break Away?” *Omaha World Herald* 1 May 1890; “Will Right Their Wrongs,” *Omaha World Herald*, 2 May 1890.

⁷⁴ “Colored People Prepared for Investigation,” *Omaha World Herald*, 16 August 1887.

attended as a delegate-at-large along with other African American women. The convention unanimously passed a motion introduced by George encouraging women to “come into the league on an equal footing” with men. At the same, Annie would agree with other women who read papers before the convention emphasizing their responsibility for the morality of the race and “purity and virtue” of the family, and George read a paper linking temperance with racial progress.⁷⁵ The Woodbey’s subscribed to “racial uplift” ideas, and their positions were not uniformly either conservative nor radical but contained contradictions and changed over time.

Dr. Rickett’s address to the convention drew upon nationalist tropes and called out the U.S. government for refusing to protect its most patriotic citizens, who “have always upheld the flag and laid down their lives in its protection.” He criticized white church leaders who “beg for ministers to go to Africa” when there existed “less barbarity in Africa than there is in Mississippi.” Earlier in the year, “barbarism” came to Omaha with the lynching of an African American named George Smith. “The white man will not lift a hand to stop these outrages. We must do it ourselves,” Ricketts concluded.⁷⁶ He deployed African American patriotism to critique rather than praise the U.S. state, and invoked the “barbarian” image of Africa in a similar fashion. Self-help, a core tenet of racial uplift

⁷⁵ “Considering Its Affairs,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 29 April 1892; “Afro-American League,” *Omaha World Herald*, 29 April 1892. The brief accounts of G.W.’s speech in the *Bee* and *Herald* differ, with the latter claiming he blamed “a great many of the southern outrages” on alcohol. The *Bee* does not make any reference to such an argument, and conveys only that he believed “the liquor traffic....a great evil that must and would be reformed.” An example of the problems involved in heavily relying on newspaper accounts, which are themselves interpretations and recounted versions of speech.

⁷⁶ “Considering Its Affairs,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 29 April 1892; “Afro-American League,” *Omaha World Herald*, 29 April 1892.

ideologies, meant more than economic self-reliance and institution building. For Ricketts, it demanded anti-lynching “agitation until every negro in this country shall be as free as are his white brethren.”⁷⁷

Through the Afro-American League George and Annie Woodbey joined a cohort of Black activists that Susan D. Carle argues were “both inspired by and sought to move beyond the episodic national and regional meetings of the National Convention Movement.”⁷⁸ At the same time, although the NAAL differed from the convention movement, which itself extended into the early twentieth century, P. Gabrielle Foreman contends the conventions belong to the League’s genealogy, and both “were—and were meant to incite—collective action.”⁷⁹ Helping build the Omaha and Nebraska chapters of the NAAL therefore the Woodbey’s entered a tradition of Black collective organizing against the U.S. racial state stretching back to the early 1830s. During the 1892 Nebraska AAL annual meeting, they endorsed a call co-drafted by Peter H. Clark, himself a former leader of the Ohio convention movement and first African American to join a Socialist political party, for a National Day of Prayer against mob law, lynching, and the convict lease system. Several other local and state League’s endorsed the call and used it to successfully mobilize their communities not only for prayer, but to protest.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ “Considering Its Affairs,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 29 April 1892; “Afro-American League,” *Omaha World Herald*, 29 April 1892.

⁷⁸ Carle, *Defining the Struggle*, 31.

⁷⁹ P. Gabrielle Foreman, “Black Organizing, Print Advocacy, and Collective Authorship,” in *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Foreman, Casey, and Patterson, 34, 57.

⁸⁰ “Considering Its Affairs,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 29 April 1892; Shawn Leigh Alexander, *An Army of Lions: The Civil Rights Struggle Before the NAACP* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 57-58; Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist*, 216-218.

Like Peter H. Clark, who briefly supported the Radical Abolitionist party and later spent three years inside the Socialist Labor Party, in the 1880s the Woodbey's broke with the two-party system and joined a tradition of third-party political activism among African Americans.⁸¹ More than anything else, their ability as orators propelled them to party leadership in Nebraska, and allowed them to present their political and ethical visions before audiences big and small across the Midwest.

PREACHING AND POLITICS

The importance of oratory and rhetoric within the Black political tradition in the United States originates during slavery. For the enslaved, James Oliver Horton writes:

Bound in service to a land that claimed to be freedom-loving, public speaking was more than an important social instrument: it was a practical weapon against the power of slavery that sought to be all-controlling, a means to psychological and emotional survival, and a vehicle for maintaining personal dignity and self-respect. It was a means of resisting slavery's intent to reduce its victims to the level of subhuman property taking value solely from a master's appraisal.⁸²

Public speaking also served an important function among free Blacks in the North. Black abolitionists used "the art of public speaking as a critical tool for organizations against slavery and for the establishment and maintenance of civil rights."⁸³ The Woodbey's similarly deployed oratory as a way to organize politically against a different kind of "slavery," for political, economic, and social reform, and as a means of education.

⁸¹ See Ali, *In the Balance of Power: Independent Black Politics and Third-Party Movements in the United States*.

⁸² James Oliver Horton, "Introduction," *Say It Plain: A Century of Great African American Speeches*, edited by Catherine Ellise and Stephen Drury Smith (New York: The New Press, 2005), xvii.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, xviii.

As already mentioned, both Annie and George began practicing public speaking in their youth, combining their interest with rhetoric with an early passion for history and religion. Their oratorical abilities developed through the church. As a boy George Woodbey would have seen and likely mimicked the preaching styles of formerly enslaved itinerant preachers like Rev. Jobe, who introduced him to the Christian Gospel. Preachers like Rev. Jobe served an important function in Black communities as spiritual guides, political, and educational leaders and were effective not only due to the content of what they said but their style of delivery, body language, cadence, tone, and rhythm. These styles were shaped by what Cornel West calls three “principal African resources in black Christianity.” According to West, “*kinetic orality*,” was the “invigorated rhetoric, rhythmic freedom and antiphonal forms of interaction” which “permeated black sermons and songs, black prayers and hymns.” Black Christianity’s “*passionate physicality*” represented “black control and power” and asserted Black dignity and “*somebodiness*” through “bodily participation in stylized forms of spiritual response.” Finally, preachers “promoted and promulgated” Black Christianity’s “*combative spirituality*” through a highly performative mode of speaking, encouraging their congregations and “giving hope to the downhearted.”⁸⁴ As Black Baptist preachers, therefore, George and Annie’s oratory developed within “the major institutional product of black people” in the United States,

⁸⁴ Cornel West, “Prophetic Christian as Organic Intellectual: Martin Luther King, Jr.,” *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 428.

itself expressing and informed by elements of African spiritual practices and belief systems retained during slavery.⁸⁵

In the tradition of David Walker and Maria Stewart, George and Annie Woodbey used oratory to organize, incite, and educate and drew from a “black oral culture and especially the centerpiece of its expressive life, extemporaneous black preaching.”⁸⁶ George Woodbey regularly spoke at Emancipation Day celebrations in Omaha and elsewhere beginning in 1888,⁸⁷ just as Walker had addressed Boston’s 1828 celebration of Haitian Independence. Such celebrations served as important cultural and political events for Black communities beginning in the early nineteenth century.⁸⁸ Annie followed in Maria Stewart’s footsteps and spoke before multiracial audiences of men and women. The Woodbey’s lectures and addresses also shared similar concerns with those found in the speeches of Walker and Stewart including history, temperance, education, and religious faith.

George delivered his lecture, “Origin and History of the Negro Race,” in Council Bluffs, Iowa and Omaha, Nebraska in the summer of 1883, and continued deliver his popular lecture until the last decade of his life.⁸⁹ The 1883 lectures “Origin and History” Woodbey presented what Wilson J. Moses calls a “vindicationist” understanding of

⁸⁵ Ibid, 426.

⁸⁶ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 193. Hinks argues these structured Walker’s *Appeal*, which he suggests “has its roots in an oral, not a print, culture.”

⁸⁷ “Afro-American Picnic,” *Omaha World Herald*, 2 August 1893.

⁸⁸ “Emancipation Day,” *Omaha World Herald*, 2 August 1888; *Freedom’s Journal*, 5 September 1828 and 24 October 1828; Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 73-74.

⁸⁹ *Daily Nonpareil* (Council Bluffs), 20 July 1883; *Omaha Daily Bee* 7 August 1883. The last article explicitly referencing this lecture appears to be “Negro’s Contribution to the Arts” in the *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 1 March 1927, but announcements of George Woodbey lecturing appear throughout 1930s.

African and African American history popularized by many early African American historians and intellectuals, often relying on the construction of a utopian African past and explaining Africa's decline due to the slave trade and rise of European colonial power while promising "a glorious destiny for African people in the future."⁹⁰ Although no full transcript exists, newspaper commentary and reported quotes from his lecture show how Rev. Woodbey was interested not only in the African past and the "origins" of Black people, but their future in the U.S. and throughout the diaspora. His second most popular lecture, also delivered in some form as late as the 1920s, was his lecture on "Frederick Douglass."⁹¹ Douglass no doubt served as a model for George Woodbey when he first began developing his own style as an orator. In many ways, he also emulated Douglass' values regarding temperance, education, and the dignity of labor. Joining the Prohibition Party in the mid-1880s, however, he broke from the now elder statesman, who remained in the Republican Party, seeing no alternative in which African Americans could place their electoral hopes.⁹²

Annie Woodbey herself drew from a long-standing tradition of black women's oratory in the United States linking her directly with Maria Stewart, "the first African American woman to address an audience of both men and women on politics." According

⁹⁰ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21-23, 42.

⁹¹ *Holt County Sentinel* (Missouri) 3 December 1887; *Nebraska State Journal* 24 June 1896; "Fred Douglass," *Crab Orchard Herald* (Nebraska) 30 October 1896; *California Eagle* 19 June 1925.

⁹² David Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2018), 717-718. On Douglass' political thought after Reconstruction, see Jack Turner, "Douglass and Political Judgement: The Post-Reconstruction Years," in *A Political Companion to Frederick Douglass*, edited by Neil Roberts (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 203-235.

to Martha S. Jones, in Boston Stewart found work as a teacher following her husband's death in 1829, discovered her religious faith, and "stepped out from the shadows of home life and picked up where David Walker had left off after his own untimely death" in 1831.⁹³ Black women like Stewart built the abolitionist movement as speakers, authors, fundraisers, through assistance to fugitives, and as fugitives themselves. Although largely absent from the Convention Movement's published minutes and proceedings, they attended convention meetings and did the invisible labor making conventions possible.⁹⁴ After the U.S. Civil War, women abolitionists and equal rights champions like Frances Ellen Watkins Harper continued their work and joined organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), launched the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), and worked in more informal ways to advance their power in the interests of both racial and women's equality.⁹⁵

In the mid-1880s Annie Woodbey joined Harper and a small number of other African American women in the W.C.T.U. The organization elected her Nebraska's statewide superintendent for "Colored Work" in 1886, and she lectured delegates to the 1894 Douglass County convention on "work among the children, and particularly instruction in scientific temperance." A staunch advocate of women's suffrage, she served

⁹³ Martha S. Jones, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 29-31. See also Kersuze Simeon-Jones, "The Voices of the Foremothers: Race, Gender, and Survival," *Literary and Sociopolitical Writings of the Black Diaspora in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 69-98.

⁹⁴ Jewon Woo, "Deleted Name But Indelible Body: Black Women at the Colored Conventions in Antebellum Ohio," in *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Patterson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 179-192.

⁹⁵ M. Jones, *Vanguard*, 121-148.

on the “Plan of Work” committee and delivered an address titled “Woman Suffrage, Past, Present, and Future” at the Nebraska Woman’s Suffrage Association in October 1891. Her talk highlighted the significant “interest manifested by the colored women” she engaged as Omaha’s WCTU Susan B. Smith Union Superintendent of Literature.⁹⁶ Annie Woodbey’s organizational work and preaching established her as an independent force in reform politics and local churches. Whether leading rallies at Mount Zion or Mount Pisgah Baptist in Omaha, serving as president of the Nebraska and Iowa Foreign Missionary Society, or lecturing for the Omaha Women’s Club, which she helped found in 1895 Mrs. Woodbey’s made her voice heard.⁹⁷

BLACK POPULISTS

Annie Woodbey’s involvement with the W.C.T.U. and her work around women’s suffrage undoubtedly played a major role in motivating Annie and George to join the Prohibition Party. More broadly, during the 1880s and 1890s the Woodbey’s embraced the Populist movement’s radical critique of land monopoly and corporate greed, guided by their Biblically inspired Black radicalism originating in the Black church. Their oratory greatly influenced their emergence as leaders of the Prohibition Party of Nebraska party during this time as they lectured on a broad range of issues on behalf of the Prohibitionists and for numerous other organizations and churches. The Woodbey’s involvement in the

⁹⁶“W.C.T.U. Convention,” *Fremont Tribune*, 16 October 1886; “Friends of Temperance, W.C.T.U. Holds Its Annual Session,” *Omaha World Herald* 29 August 1894; “Work of Woman Suffragists,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 29 October 1891; *Woman’s Tribune*, 18 November 1891, p. 306

⁹⁷ *Enterprise* 19 October 1895; “Our Candidates,” *Our Nation’s Anchor* 20 July 1895; “Baptist Church Notes,” *Enterprise* 21 March 1896;

Prohibition Party reflected not only their concern with temperance, but education, economic reform, labor rights, and women's suffrage. At times at odds with the dominate views of other African American political leaders and voices in Omaha and elsewhere, their politics linked them with hundreds of thousands of agrarian workers, tenant farmers, and laborers who joined the Populist movement, black and white.

Like most voting African Americans, in the early 1880s George Woodbey supported the Republican Party while living in Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. In 1880 he campaigned for Republican presidential candidate James Garfield and remained a Republican until after the 1884 elections.⁹⁸ He and Mrs. Woodbey then entered the Prohibition Party, known for its zealous opposition to the saloon and alcohol industry. In 1887 George ran on the party's ticket for a Councilmen-at-Large position in Omaha. A year later Omaha's Metropolitan Prohibition Club praised his oratory, stating: "Mr. Woodby's [sic] fame is growing, and it is questionable if Nebraska has a prohibition speaker who can arouse greater enthusiasm in an audience or make a more telling address. Mr. Woodby's [sic] services will be in demand hereafter."⁹⁹ Annie's party activities and oratory likewise garnered attention. A delegate to state and national party conventions, her reputation in the party matched her husband's. In 1895 the party nominated for University of Nebraska Regent. Endorsing her candidacy, the temperance newspaper *Our Nation's*

⁹⁸ *Emporia News*, 24 September 1880; "Nebraska Doings," *New York Globe*, June 21, 1884; "It Was Born Only to Die," *Omaha World Herald*, 29 August 1890.

⁹⁹ "City Politics," *Omaha World Herald* 29 April 1887; "Prohibition Matter," *Omaha World Herald*, 28 July 1888; "The Prohibitionists," *The Columbus Journal* (Nebraska), 22 February 1888.

Anchor estimated: “As a speaker, Mrs. Woodbey is even more impressing and entertaining than her husband, who is considered an orator.”¹⁰⁰

The temperance cause first attracted George and Annie Woodbey’s support during their Kansas years. Organizationally, their involvement with the Prohibition Party likely began through Annie Woodbey’s membership in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.). A temperance society founded in 1874, after coming under the leadership of Frances Willard in 1879 the W.C.T.U. expanded its priorities to include support for women’s suffrage and the labor movement. The organization launched an independent political party in 1882 when Willard and the W.C.T.U. co-founded the Home Protection Party which soon merged with the National Prohibition Reform Party creating the Prohibition Home Protection Party, known after 1884 as the National Prohibition Party. The W.C.T.U. stood for what Willard called “that blessed trinity of social movements, Prohibition, Woman’s Liberation, and Labor’s uplift.” Struggles against racial oppression occasionally entered into the national organization’s “Do Everything” approach at the behest of Black women leaders like Frances Harper Watkins and criticisms from journalist Ida B. Wells.¹⁰¹ At its state convention held in Omaha in 1888, the Nebraska Prohibition Party condemned racial discrimination by local hotels against an invited guest from

¹⁰⁰ “Our Candidates,” *Our Nation’s Anchor*, 20 July 1895.

¹⁰¹ Frances Willard, *Address Before the Second Biennial Convention of the World’s Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, and the Twentieth Annual Convention of the National Women’s Christian Temperance Union* (London: White Ribbon Publishing Co, 1893),

<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-do-everything-policy/>.

See also Prudence Flowers, “White Ribboners and the Ideology of Separate Spheres, 1860s-1890s,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 25 no. 1 (2006): 14-31; Alison M. Parker, “Frances Watkins Harper and the Search for Women’s Interracial Alliances,” in *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*, edited by Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 145-171.

California, and nationally the party adopted a suffrage plank which declared “the right of suffrage rests on no mere circumstance of race, color, sex, or nationality.”¹⁰² These principled stances appealed to Annie and George Woodbey, who became stalwart party activists for much of the next decade.

Through the Prohibition Party, the Woodbey’s also entered the broader populist movement. While the populist movement’s electoral efforts are commonly associated the People’s Party founded in 1892, which became known as the “Populist Party” by its supporters, the People’s Party represents only the movement’s most visible electoral expression. As Omar Ali observes, Black populists participated in the movement through other third-parties, including the Prohibitionists.¹⁰³ The movement spread in 1880s and 1890s primarily among agrarian laborers and impoverished industrial workers demanding reforms from farm subsidies for poor farmers, minimum wage laws, land redistribution, and the abolition of convict leasing.¹⁰⁴ In 1890 according to one North Carolina lawyer this movement of the “laboring classes” threatened, to “overthrow everything in their way” through “a bloody Revolution”¹⁰⁵ and that same year North Carolina’s Democratic governor described “an uprising of the agricultural class...which amounts to little short of a revolution.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² “A Prohibition Ratification,” *Omaha Daily Herald*, 28 July 1888; “They’re First in the Field,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 17 August 1888; “South Omaha Gossip,” *Omaha Daily Herald*, 12 October 1888; “The Prohibitionists,” *Lincoln Evening Call*, 3 November 1888; “Prohibitionists on Deck,” *Omaha Daily Herald*, 20 November 1888; 1888 Prohibition Party Platform, http://prohibitionists.org/Background/Party_Platform/Platform1888.htm, accessed Dec. 15, 2020;

¹⁰³ On Black Populism and the People’s Party, Ali, “Black Populism and the ‘Negro Party,’” *In the Balance of Power*, 76-102 and Ali, Introduction, *In the Lion’s Mouth*, 1-12.

¹⁰⁴ Ali, *In the Lion’s Mouth*; Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Mathew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor & Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁵ Qtd. in Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor & Populists*, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Qtd. in Ali, *In the Lion’s Mouth*, 78.

According to Omar Ali, alongside the white-led populist movement an independent Black Populism emerged regionally spanning the states on the former Confederacy as well as Kansas and Missouri, states where “in many ways an extension of southern black life” existed following mass migrations. Along with the white-led movement Black populists opposed “the planter and business elite affiliated with the Democratic Party,” but maintained political and organizational independence. Black agricultural workers organized their own unions, and Black sharecroppers and small farmers formed cooperatives and associations like the Colored Farmers’ Alliance. While Nebraska lay at Black populism’s geographical periphery according to Omar Ali’s framework, George and Annie Woodbey’s politics reflected their relationship with the Black-led movement.¹⁰⁷

African American Prohibitionists saw the temperance movement as an extension of the abolitionist struggle. During the early-to-mid nineteenth century, Carole Lynn Stewart points out “temperance and abolition were strongly interlinked—most white and black abolitionists were temperance reformers.” Black temperance activists post-Reconstruction used “the slavery metaphor” to convey “understandings of inner” captivity, such as “slavery to the bottle” and “outer captivity” as in “denial of political freedom in chattel slavery.”¹⁰⁸ The Prohibition Party promoted values of self-reliance, uplift, education, and the dignity of labor also prevalent among black led organizations from the Colored Convention Movement to the National Afro American League. The Woodbey’s membership in the Prohibition Party of Nebraska preceded their involvement with the NAAL, yet the motivations behind both were similar.

¹⁰⁷ Ali, Introduction, *In the Lion’s Mouth*. 1-12.

¹⁰⁸ Carole Lynn Stewart, *Temperance and Cosmopolitanism: African American Reformers in the Atlantic World* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 7, 13.

In a summary published of one of his first public speeches for the party, Mr. Woodbey outlined the political logic behind his support for the Prohibitionists. Speaking in Central City, NE, he “commenced by stating the necessity of education and self-information on the part of a people upon whom rested the responsibilities of government and trusted...this generation would meet the obligations imposed upon them as their fathers before them had done.” Both the Republican and Democratic parties made “the tariff issue” central, only superficially discussing other questions, whereas Woodbey saw “the Prohibition platform broad enough for all the interests of this country to stand upon.” He dismissed the Republican argument that higher tariffs would lead to higher wages and called out free trade Democrats who “professed such solicitude for the poor man, robbed on every side by grasping trusts and monopolies, and yet had no word to say about the most gigantic and rapacious of all monopolies, the liquor traffic.” Finally, Rev. Woodbey argued “if the negro had no more rights in the South to-day as than he did at the close of the war,” this proved neither the Republican or Democratic parties could solve “this problem.” Prohibition, on the other hand, posed “a new issue that would *obliterate the color line*—that would unite the better elements of both races against the worst elements of both.”¹⁰⁹

Woodbey’s remarks summarized by the *Central City Courier* display the importance of “uplift ideology” not only to he and his wife’s efforts in Omaha’s African American community but as an ideological underpinning of their commitment to the Prohibition Party. Furthermore, they underscore how racial justice was not peripheral but central to their commitment to the party. Together black and white voters could “obliterate the color line” by supporting Prohibitionists on election day. Framing the upcoming electoral contest as one between the “better” and “worst” in both groups, on one hand

¹⁰⁹ “The Prohibitionists,” *Central City Courier*, 4 October 1888.

Woodbey's egalitarian vision rejected white racial "superiority" while on the other his rhetoric relied on a language moral elitism just as easily adopted by conservative proponents of racial uplift.¹¹⁰ Behind George and Annie Woodbey's moral and ethical support for prohibition however was a set of demands for racial, economic, and women's equality.

Both Annie and George Woodbey proved themselves committed party activists. Together they delivered hundreds of speeches supporting a campaign to adopt a prohibition amendment in 1890, and attended numerous local and state party meetings beginning in 1888. Both served as delegates to the 1896 national party conventions, and both ran as candidates for office on the party's ticket. In 1890 the party unanimously nominated George Woodbey to run as its candidate for lieutenant governor, and in 1894 nominated him for Congress in Nebraska's second congressional district. Remarkably in 1895 the Prohibitionists nominated Annie Woodbey for University Regent making her "the first Negro woman ever honored with a nomination on a state ticket by any political party in the United States" according to the Prohibitionist newspaper *Our Nation's Anchor*.¹¹¹ In Mrs. Woodbey's 1895 run for University of Nebraska Regent, she received 6,279 votes or 3.59%

¹¹⁰ See Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*.

¹¹¹ 1888 Prohibition Party Platform, http://prohibitionists.org/Background/Party_Platform/Platform1888.htm, accessed Dec. 15, 2020; "The Cold Water Brigade," *Omaha Daily Bee*, 23 September 1888; "The Prohibs in Council," *Lincoln Herald* (Nebraska), 30 August 1890; "Current Events," *Christian Nation*, (Sept. 3, 1890) vol. 13 no. 305 (1890): p. 150; *Leavenworth Advocate* (Kansas) 6 September 1890; "Doings of the Race," *Cleveland Gazette* 6 September 1890; *The Chronicle* (Kansas City, KS), 2 October 1890, p. 7; *Nebraska State Journal*, September 26, 1894, p. 6; *Our Nation's Anchor* 20 July 1895; *Nebraska State Journal*, 11 December 1895; *Nebraska State Journal*, 26 September 1896; *Omaha Nebraska, City Directory* (Omaha: 1898), 836; *North Platte Semi-Weekly*, 11 October 1895. See also "Prohibition Party Candidates," *History Nebraska*, accessed January 12, 2019, <https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/prohibition-party-candidates> and Patricia C. Gaster, "Woodbey for Regent!" *History Nebraska* accessed July 25, 2021, <https://history.nebraska.gov/blog/woodbey-regent>.

Anna R. Woodbey's nomination was also reported in *The Courier* (Bloomington, Indiana) 12 July 1895; *Stevens Point Gazette* (Wisconsin), 12 July 1895; *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln, NE), 5 October 1895, and *Nebraska State Journal*, 18 October 1895. Foner incorrectly suggests G.W. Woodbey ran for both lieutenant governor and congress in 1896 and does not mention Annie Woodbey's candidacy for regency.

of the vote, compared to her husband's 4,515 or 2.11% in his bid for lieutenant governor in 1892.¹¹²

Mrs. Woodbey supported a broad reform agenda within the party, which she and her husband believed would solve to end sectionalism between North and South, black and white.¹¹³ During the party's 1892 national convention in Cincinnati however "sectional" issues nearly tore the convention apart. The convention opened in controversy following a speech by Helen M. Gougar comparing intemperance to slavery where she related a story about "the sale of a negro child at the slavery auction block." Enraged Southern delegates pushed through a resolution barring "unnecessary references...that could be considered a reflection on participants in the late struggle." They claimed the "issues of the late war" were "settled and settled forever."¹¹⁴ When Black delegates were barred from eating with white delegates at the Gibson House hotel. "The color line caused considerable excitement."¹¹⁵

As they debated a new racial regime known as Jim Crow was taking root in the South. Under this new regime "disenfranchisement and segregation formalized black civil and political inequality by writing it into law."¹¹⁶ Lynching violence went hand-in-hand with the legalization of white supremacy and although Prohibitionists in Cincinnati failed to denounce lynching explicitly, they adopted a platform condemning the Democratic and Republican parties for their "inaction and treachery" allowing "the present reign of mob

112 Election results data based on the information compiled at http://www.prohibitionists.org/history/votes/NB_can.html

113 "Our Candidates," *Our Nation's Anchor* 20 July 1895.

114 "Bidwell and Cranfill: The Prohibition National Ticket Made at Cincinnati," *Baltimore Sun*, 1 July 1892.

115 "The Prohibition Party," *The Record Union* (Sacramento, CA), 29 June 1892.

116 Michael Perman, *Pursuit of Unity: A Political History of the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 171.

rule” and insisted “that every citizen be protected in the right of trial by constitutional tribunals.” As a delegate George Woodbey, described in the press as “a coal-black delegate from Nebraska,” motioned to amend this “mob rule” plank to include reference to voter disenfranchisement with language denouncing “the two old parties for their purchasing of votes, fraud and intimidation.”¹¹⁷ The convention also debated fusing with the newly formed People’s Party, a project which ultimately failed in part because the People’s Party did not include in its platform support for women’s suffrage . The Prohibitionists, on the other hand, demanded not only the vote for women but equal pay for equal work “without regard to sex.”¹¹⁸

On July 4th, Woodbey opened the Prohibition Party’s 1894 state convention with a prayer and was elected to the party’s Executive Committee. The convention took place inside the state capitol building, and half the convention’s delegates were reportedly women. Its keynote speaker Walter Thomas Mills, a radical prohibitionist from Chicago, said the Prohibition Party’s aims would remain unachieved “unless the grogshop, the corporation and the corrupt politician, all wings of one army, are buried in the same grave.” Mills’ speech suggests an early influence on Woodbey’s later socialism. Soon he joined Eugene Debs’ Social Democracy of America party and in 1901 was a founding member of the Socialist Party of America.¹¹⁹ Throughout its history the Prohibition Party took up questions socialists considered central in their political programs, like the eight hour work-

¹¹⁷ “Bidwell and Cranfill: The Prohibition National Ticket Made at Cincinnati,” *Sun* (Baltimore), 1 July 1892.

¹¹⁸ 1892 Prohibition Party Platform, http://prohibitionists.org/Background/Party_Platform/Platform1892.htm; “The Omaha Platform: Launching the Populist Party,” *The World Almanac*, 1893 (New York: 1893), 83–85. Reprinted in George Brown Tindall, ed., *A Populist Reader, Selections from the Works of American Populist Leaders* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 90–96, accessed via *History Matters*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5361/>.

¹¹⁹ “Talked While It Rained,” *Nebraska State Journal*, July 4, 1894. On W.T. Mills, see Eric Olssen, “W.T. Mills, E.J.B. Allen, J. A. Lee and Socialism in New Zealand,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 10 no. 2 (Oct. 1976): 112-129.

day and the right to strike, yet often excluded these from its official platform. George Woodbey participated in debates around these issues during both the 1889 and 1894 state conventions.¹²⁰

At the party's 1896 state convention in Lincoln both George and Annie served as delegates with George serving on the permanent organization and platform committees. They had been lecturing for over a month prior to the convention. At the convention Mrs. Woodbey argued that "the money question involved even greater dangers than the saloon."¹²¹ George was nominated as a delegate to the national convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It would be his last for the Prohibitionists.¹²²

Supporting a broad party platform at the 1896 meeting, he and Annie opposed the "narrow gaugers" focused singularly on the prohibition issue. They joined others who protested when the convention chair ruled the minority report favoring a multi-issue platform "out of order," barring the convention from appealing the decision. While speaking, the chair ordered Woodbey to take his seat or be ejected from the convention. "I will not do it," Woodbey replied. According to the *New York Times*, the "colored delegate from Nebraska" then "continued his rebellion by standing on his chair and shouting at the top of his voice." His credentials were challenged by a delegate from Indiana, a "band was called upon to drown the uproar," and "a squad of policemen was ushered into the hall to keep order."¹²³ A local paper summarized Woodbey's speech in some detail. He argued

120 The 1889 convention voted 88-39 to remove support for the eight-hour work day from the Nebraska party's platform. "Efforts of the Last Day," *Nebraska State Journal*, 23 August 1889; "Talked While It Rained," *Nebraska State Journal*, 6 July 1894.

121 See *Nebraska State Journal*, 8 February 1896; 14 February 1896; 21 February 1896.

122 *Lincoln Evening Call*, 15 February 1896; "We Will Have a Fine Time," *The Evening News* (Lincoln, NE), 22 May 1896; *Nebraska State Journal*, 26 May 26 1896.

123 "Prohibitionists in a Row," *New York Times*, 28 May 1896. See similar coverage in "On a Chair," *Boston Daily Globe*, 27 May 1896; *The Mail* (Hagerstown, Maryland), 29 May 1896.

the “party should have courage to aid the oppressed.” Woodbey focused on workers in Ohio, whose suffering “was not due to liquor”:

He cited scripture, which was loudly applauded, that the Lord hated robbery. It was impossible for the impoverished westerners to listen to Prohibition arguments while they are starving. It was cowardice to omit free silver from the platform. There are other moral questions than the liquor traffic. He reminded...that during the slavery day ministers temporized with the abolition question.¹²⁴

Speaking to the conditions facing miners in Ohio’s Hocking Valley region, Woodbey may have been referring to reports by Richard L. Davis, a Black coal miner and co-founder of the United Mine Worker’s of America (UMW) . Davis wrote for the UMW’s journal, and in 1895 described the bleak situation of Hocking Valley miners with “no work and much destitution with no visible signs of anything better.”¹²⁵

Sparked by Mr. Woodbey’s rebellion nearly 200 delegates supporting the minority’s “broad gauge” platform walked out of the meeting and held their own convention where they adopted a platform including support for women’s suffrage, silver coinage, government control over public lands, government ownership of railroads, telegraphs, and “other natural monopolies,” abolition of the “contract convict labor system,” government support for public schools, and democratic governance through direct elections and initiative and referendum processes. Like previous Prohibition Party conventions, the newly formed National Party called form more restrictive immigration policies “to exclude paupers and criminals” and limit suffrage to “naturalized citizens” after a year of having their citizenship papers issued.¹²⁶ It is unclear if Rev. Woodbey

¹²⁴ “Free Silver Beaten,” *The Pittsburgh Post*, 29 May 1896.

¹²⁵ Richard L. Davis qtd. in Herbert G. Gutman, “The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America: The Career and Letters of Richard L. Davis and Something of Their Meaning, 1890-1900,” in *The Negro and the American Labor Movement* edited by Julius Jacobson (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), 53.

¹²⁶ Both platforms fully reprinted in *The Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1896, Embracing Political, Military, and Ecclesiastical Affairs; Public Documents; Biography, Statistics, Commerce, Finance, Literature, Science, Agriculture, and Mechanical Industry* (Third Series, Vol. 1, Whole Series, Vol. XXXVI, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 759.

spoke for or against the immigration plank, but a decade later he spoke against any restrictions on immigration at the 1908 Socialist Party national convention.¹²⁷

Women's suffrage had been the key issue aligning the W.C.T.U. with the Prohibition Party, and a main reason George and Annie became members. On January 11, 1896 they had issued "A Challenge" in *The Enterprise* to debate two other Omaha preachers on women's equality, taking the affirmative on whether "The Bible Teaches the Equality of Men and Women."¹²⁸ When the Prohibition Party dropped women's suffrage from its platform, they must have agreed with Charles E. Bentley that the Prohibition Party's narrow platform was "a direct insult" to the W.C.T.U.'s "moral and political" contributions to the party's success.¹²⁹ In Nebraska after the convention, they helped form a new party with Bentley and others. Mr. Woodbey served as the Liberty Party's state convention president in August while the "old line prohibits" held a separate state convention. In 1897, Mrs. Woodbey was elected to the state executive committee.¹³⁰ During the 1896 elections they supported Bryan for President, and George Woodbey and Silas Robbins through the Afro-American Bimetallic League promoted their views on "the great questions" involved in the elections through lectures and a debate they proposed with Omaha's Colored Republican clubs.¹³¹

Along with frustration with the Prohibition Party's failure to support reforms beyond temperance, in 1896 two additional influences further prepared George's entry into

¹²⁷*Proceedings of the National Convention of the Socialist Party, Held at Chicago Illinois, May 10 to 17, 1908* (Chicago: Socialist Party, 1908), 106.

¹²⁹ "The National Party," *Patriot Phalanx* (Indianapolis, IN), 4 June 1896. For more on the split and Bentley's campaign, see Darcy Richardson, *Others: Third Party Politics During the Populist Period* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse Books, 2007), 216-221.

¹³⁰ "Who Are Prohibs?" *Nebraska State Journal*, 25 August 1896; "Liberty Party Nominees," *Omaha World Herald*, 1 July 1897; "City in General," *Enterprise*, July 3, 1897.

¹³¹ "Challenged to Debate," *Omaha World Herald*, 29 October 1896.

the SP: Eugene Debs and Edward Bellamy. In a letter to Debs in 1921 who was then incarcerated for his opposition to U.S. entry into WWI, Woodbey relates how he heard his “first socialist speech” when Debs came through Omaha in 1896. When Debs spoke in Omaha, he had only recently been released from jail in Illinois for his role in the 1893 Pullman Railroad strike, one of the largest labor insurrections in U.S. history. During his incarceration Debs “began to read and think and dissect the anatomy of the system in which workingmen, however organized, could be shattered and battered and splintered at a single stroke,” and soon after joined the socialist movement himself. In 1898 Debs participated in the founding convention of the Social Democracy of America in Chicago, and in December spoke in Omaha on “Liberty and Labor” as an avowed socialist.¹³²

Debs left an impression on Woodbey, who would soon be lecturing on socialism himself. He also shared Debs’ reading habits during this time in 1896 reading Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*. First published in 1888 *Looking Backward* became the first American novel to outsell Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.¹³³ Its plot revolves around the character Julian West, who falls asleep only to wake up 113 years later in the year 2000 and class conflict no longer exists. Julian describes his nineteenth century society to the one he awakes in, comparing it to “a prodigious coach which the masses of

132 George W. Woodbey, letter to Eugene V. Debs, 31 March 1921, The Debs Collection, Indiana State University Library, Cunning Memorial Library. Foner suggests Woodbey heard Debs first in 1900 while he was campaigning for president, while the *Chicago Daily Socialist* suggests he heard Debs in or around 1898. P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 6; “Negro Delegate at Convention,” *Chicago Daily Socialist*, May 11, 1908. Eugene Debs, “How I Became a Socialist,” *The Comrade*, 1 no 7 (April 1902): 146-148 in *Selected Works of Eugene V. Debs Volume II: The Rise and Fall of the American Railway Union, 1892-1896*, edited by Tim Davenport and David Walkers (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020), 640-644. Debs came to Omaha several times between 1896 and 1898. “Debs Will Lecture in Omaha,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 12 January 1896; “Eugene V. Debs is in Omaha,” *Omaha World Herald*, 22 December 1898; “Debs on Labor Conditions,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 23 December 1898; “Laboring Man Not Conscious of His Power,” *Omaha World Herald*, 25 December 1898.

133 Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 6; Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, 70; Howard H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1953), 79; Debs, “How I Became a Socialist,” in *Selected Works of Eugene V. Debs Volume II*, 640-644; *Chicago Daily Socialist*, May 11, 1908

humanity were harnessed to and dragged,” driven by “hunger” with passengers seated above in “breezy and comfortable seats.”¹³⁴ According to Mathew Beaumont, Bellamy’s utopian dream of a highly centralized and scientifically managed “public capitalism” combined “socialist and capitalist remedies to the social diseases the afflicted the end of the nineteenth century” and appealed to both working class and middle class audiences. As it did for thousands of other readers, its “eloquent indictment of capitalist society” helped push Debs and Woodbey to the class struggle politics of socialism, despite the author’s own aversion to this movement.¹³⁵

While outside Debs’ newly formed Social Democracy of America, in 1897 George and Annie expressed concern for class and labor in their continued efforts to build a “broad gauge” alternative to the Prohibition Party, and saw support for women’s suffrage as non-negotiable. The platform adopted by the state convention of the National Liberty Party, which they attended, supported women’s suffrage, abolishing land monopoly, and called for “government ownership of railroads, telegraph and other natural monopolies.” According to newspaper coverage, at the convention George “spoke quite humorously but forcibly on the question of classes and the oppression of the poorer ones.” Annie, “who made the most extended address” criticized a narrow focus on prohibition when she “spoke of the unworthiness and even crime of silence when questions of such moment were before the people.” The convention elected her to the party’s state executive committee.¹³⁶

Finally joining the Peoples Party in 1898, George Woodbey began expressing an anti-imperialist populism some considered more socialist than populist. The following year

134 Edward Bellemy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1888), 13.

135 Mathew Beaumont, introduction to *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* by Edward Bellamy (1888, repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), xvii, ix.

136 “National Liberty Party,” *Nebraska State Journal*, 26 February 1897; qtds. in “Mr. Bentley in Politics,” *Nebraska State Journal*, 30 June 1897; “Liberty Party Nominees,” 1 July 1897.

in Ainsworth, NE local Republicans, apparently assuming Woodbey was pro-Republican, engaged him to lecture. They were shocked when he criticized the Republican administration for its imperialist policy in the Philippines, telling them as a Christian he refused to condone its actions. The *Omaha Daily Bee*, after calling Woodbey “a semi-religious colored politician,” characterized his speech as delivering “genuine populist sledge-hammer blows” against the administration, “mixing in a little socialism with a little real anarchy.” An Ainsworth paper republished the *Bee*’s article adding a racial slur in the article’s headline.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, Rev. Woodbey supported the campaign of William James Bryan’s for president in 1900. As a member of the Peoples Party, he served on the credentials committee for Douglass County convention to nominate delegates to its state convention, and during the election campaign organized regular open air meetings supporting Bryan in Omaha and surrounding towns.¹³⁸ Between elections, George and Annie continued their work as preachers, leading revival meetings and ministering among Omaha’s Black community. George Woodbey also organized Omaha’s Afro-American Anti-Imperialist League in September for “all colored men opposed to the policy of imperialism.” He served the group as vice president and Silas Robbins was its secretary treasurer.¹³⁹ Although he campaigned for Bryan during the 1900 presidential election, he did so not as a Democrat as Foner and others have suggested. Instead, he remained outside the Democratic Party,

137 “Woodbey Did All He Could,” *Omaha World Herald*, 7 October 1899; *Omaha Daily Bee*, 11 October 1899, reprinted as “Niggerology of Pop Woodbey,” in the *Ainsworth Star-Journal*, 26 October 1899.

138 “Lively Convention in Prospect,” *Omaha World Herald*, 15 June 1900; “Delegation from Douglass,” *Omaha World Herald*, 17 June 1900; “Yeiser Gets Some Comfort,” *Omaha World Herald*, 17 June 1900; “Change in Convention Date,” *Omaha World Herald*, 29 August 1900; “Fifth Ward is Enthused,” *Omaha World Herald*, 5 September 1900; “Anticipate Pomeroy Meeting,” *Omaha World Herald*, 12 September 1900; “Populist Delegates,” *Omaha World Herald*, 21 September 1900; “Grand Rally,” *Omaha World Herald*, 19 October 1900.

139 “Tecumseh News Notes,” *Lincoln Evening Call*, 8 February 1897; “Correspondence,” *Enterprise*, 13 February 1897; “Anti-Imperialist League,” *Omaha World Herald*, 18 September 1900.

and served as an election judge for the People's Independent Party in the 1900 election.¹⁴⁰ By early January in 1901 Rev. Woodbey revisited the campaign trail "speaking for Socialism" and distributed copies of the socialist weekly *Appeal to Reason* around the Omaha area.¹⁴¹

Mrs. Woodbey likely joined him, although definitive evidence proves elusive and references to her become scarcer especially after 1898. However, considering Annie Woodbey's early membership in the WCTU, itself a significant factor in their joint activism around women's suffrage, entry into the Prohibition Party, and a political space where they first encountered the ideas of Edward Bellamy and the Christian Socialist philosophy of Frances Willard, Mrs. Woodbey may very well have shared her husband's newfound enthusiasm for the socialist movement. Many early women members of the soon to be founded Socialist Party of America came from the WCTU, and in 1902, the Omaha Woman's Socialist Union modelled its meetings on the WCTU's "parlor meeting" format, according to historian Mari Jo Buhle.¹⁴² Tragically, Annie Woodbey passed away just a few months into the year and within weeks of celebrating their daughter Mary Woodbey's marriage in Omaha.¹⁴³

CONCLUSION

¹⁴⁰ P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 6; "Judges and Clerks Named," *Omaha Daily Bee*, 25 October 1900. I have found no evidence to suggest Woodbey ever joined or campaigned on behalf of the Democratic Party.

¹⁴¹ *Appeal to Reason*, 5 January 1901.

¹⁴² Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 111-112.

¹⁴³ Richard Gillet and Mary L. Woodbey Marriage Record, 11 April 1901, Douglass County, State of Nebraska; "Marriage Licenses," *Omaha Daily Bee*, 13 April 1901. Annie's short obituary in the *Omaha World Herald* mentions only "stomach trouble" as cause of death. See "Pastor Woodbey's Wife Died," *Omaha World Herald*, 28 April 1901.

Rev. Woodbey's radicalism first germinated through and within a Black Christian faith "born out of slavery and oppression." Influenced by the activism and Black feminist theological concerns of his first wife Annie R. Woodbey, George Woodbey developed his opposition toward class, racial, and gender oppression from his direct experiences with slavery, exploitation, racial violence, and discrimination, and through his relationships with Black labor activists, former abolitionists, and involvement in organizations like the Afro-American League and the Prohibition Party. Providing a fuller biographical portrait of Rev. Woodbey's life prior to joining the SP, this chapter also rediscovered Annie R. Woodbey, a remarkable preacher-intellectual-activist who not only shaped her husband's politics and faith but challenged patriarchal power and racism as part of larger communities and movements of Baptist church women, temperance workers, and radical Populists.

The next chapter argues Rev. Woodbey's socialist political philosophy during the first decades of the twentieth century continued to draw from and evidence traditions of struggle emanating from an even longer history of Black radicalism. Formerly enslaved Black migrants like Rev. Woodbey's own family parents brought with them cultures, values, desires, and ideas about freedom, slavery, and liberation as they forged communities across the Midwest. From these materials and resources found across interconnected histories of the Black Radical Tradition, abolitionist internationalism, and the Black church, Rev. Woodbey's socialism carried forward the spirit of David Walker as he sought to spread the socialist gospel that one day we would "be free from the slavery of capitalism."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Woodbey, *What to Do and How to Do It*, in *Black Socialist Preacher*, 40.

CHAPTER 4: GEORGE WASHINGTON WOODBEY'S SOCIALISM AND BLACK RADICAL THOUGHT

A year after Annie Woodbey's death in April 1901, Rev. George Washington Woodbey left for San Diego, California ostensibly to visit his mother who he had not seen since she had moved to San Diego herself a decade earlier. Immediately upon his arrival, he delivered a series of lectures and sermons on socialism across southern California. Woodbey ultimately decided to remain on the West Coast but would return to the Midwest on several occasions as a national organizer for the Socialist Party of America (SP). Spending most of his remaining years in San Diego, he also spent a significant amount of time in Los Angeles. In the first decade of the twentieth century, his activities as a speaker, author, and organizer for the SP made him one of the most recognizable and important Socialists in the United States and the leading Black member of the SP. He attended the party's 1904 and 1908 national conventions and was the only African American delegate at both.¹ His book-length pamphlets, *What to Do and How to Do It, or Socialism vs. Capitalism* (1903), *The Bible and Socialism: A Conversation Between Two Preachers* (1904), and *The Distribution of Wealth* (1910) were widely read and reviewed in the socialist press. Published the same year as W.E.B. Du Bois' classic *The Souls of Black Folk*, Woodbey's *What to Do and How to Do It* sold over 20,000 copies in its first year and by 1908 had been translated into three languages. While Du Bois' text has since become a classic of Black political thought, at the time Woodbey's small book circulated among a far wider audience. Written with the explicit purpose to be used as an organizing tool for the SP, J.A. Wayland's socialist newspaper the *Appeal to Reason* began promoting the Woodbey's book after getting permission from its author to come out with its own edition,

¹ P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 1-35. In what follows, citations of Rev. Woodbey's books will refer to the republished versions found in Foner's edited volume, *Black Socialist Preacher*.

and in October 1903 encouraged SP locals to use it specifically in their efforts to reach Black workers. In 1917 while on an extended visit to Tennessee, in an article promoting one of Woodbey's lectures in the city, the *Nashville Globe* mentions the book's German and Finnish language editions, estimating the book had "a circulation of 100,000 in the English language."²

This chapter argues Rev. Woodbey's intellectual production and political practice as an organizer for the Socialist Party marked a significant moment in the creation of a distinct Black socialist political tradition in the United States. Woodbey's socialism drew from the Black Radical Tradition and developed through his involvement in the social, political, and religious life of Black communities in Tennessee, Kansas, Nebraska, and ultimately California. Building off the preceding chapter on his life in the Midwest, this chapter considers Woodbey's socialism in relation to his previously developed understanding of the Gospel, itself formatively shaped by what Edwina Buckner of St. James Baptist Church in Emporia, KS described as the community's "deep religious faith that was born out of slavery and oppression."³ At the same time, it highlights the abolitionist tradition in Woodbey's writings and speeches for the SP. Woodbey not only regularly invokes the abolitionist movement, but studied its history and had worked with former abolitionists in organizations like the Afro-American League. The Black abolitionist tradition of Walker and Garnet, a tradition joined and shaped by Woodbey's

² "What to Do, and How to Do It," *Appeal to Reason*, 31 October 1903; "Negro Delegate at Convention," *Chicago Daily Socialist*, 11 May 1908. Dozens of advertisements, reviews, and reader submitted comments on Woodbey's book appeared in *Appeal to Reason* between 1903 and 1904, many referring to the book's reception or usefulness among Black workers. See examples in *Appeal to Reason*, 28 November 1903; 5 December 1903; 1903; 19 December 1903; 26 December 1903; 9 January 1904; 23 January 1904; 21 April 1904; 28 May 1904. "Distinguished Lecturer," *Nashville Globe*, 14 December 1917.

³ "120 Years of History, As told by 'Edwina Buckner,'" in *St. James Baptist Church 120th Anniversary* (Emporia, KS: 1992). Lyon County Historical Center and Historical Society. See discussion in preceding chapter.

Black socialist predecessor Peter H. Clark, as well as Woodbey's personal experience with enslavement, emancipation, wage labor, racial oppression, and Black politics constitute important sources for his socialist thinking. While white Christian socialists, Karl Marx, and Eugene Debs's also clearly influenced his developing socialist philosophy, the socialist impulse was already there. His ideas about socialism were neither solely derived from European socialist writings, nor should they be understood primarily as propaganda.⁴ Despite his own claims to the contrary, Woodbey was a highly original thinker who, in conceiving socialism as a movement with direct bearing on the lives of working-class Black people and his efforts to recruit them to the SP, made a significant contribution to forming a Black socialist political tradition in the United States.

Relying primarily on Philip S. Foner's work, most scholarship concerning Woodbey focuses exclusively on his most active SP years up until 1915, after which Foner failed to locate sources regarding his activities. The extant scholarship on Woodbey also reproduces Foner's narrative regarding Woodbey's apparent dismissal from San Diego's Mount Zion Church for "mixing too much socialism with his Bible."⁵ This chapter overturns this accepted wisdom. In 1916, when Rev. Woodbey publicly announced his resignation from Mount Zion, it was not at the request of the congregation and nothing to do his socialism.⁶ This new information has interpretative consequences in light of the tendency to invoke the narrative regarding his dismissal from the church as suggestive of a more general antagonism between socialism, Black culture, and Christianity in the early

⁴ Philip S. Foner, for example, emphasizes Woodbey's first book was "an effective piece of socialist propaganda" but that his ideas about socialism reflected positions held by figures like Eugene Debs. P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 1, 11.

⁵ P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 31, 35 n57

⁶ George Washington Woodbey, "To the California Eagle," *California Eagle*, 5 February 1916.

twentieth century.⁷ Woodbey himself never abandoned his socialist ideas, and continued preaching in Baptist churches until the end of his life.

Beginning with his entry into the newly formed Socialist Party of America in 1910 this chapter provides a largely familiar overview of his involvement with the SP through 1915 before more closely examining his oratory, writing, and organizing during this period and its relationship with Black politics, liberationist theology, and the abolitionist tradition. It then provides an original portrait of George Woodbey's last decades, focusing primarily on his political and religious activities until his death in 1937, including his return to Tennessee in 1917, involvement in founding San Diego's first chartered National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) branch after returning to California, his brief membership in the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in the early 1920s, and his continued work as a preacher at San Diego's Calvary Baptist Church through the early 1930s.

WOODBHEY JOINS THE SOCIALIST PARTY

On January 5, 1901, the Kansas based socialist newspaper, *Appeal to Reason*, announced: "Rev. G.W. Woodbey, of Omaha, Neb., made speeches for Bryan during the last campaign. He is now speaking for Socialism." After Annie Woodbey's untimely death, the Reverend began holding "socialist gospel meetings" and in August 1901 joined the newly formed Socialist Party of America. That month he delivered a lecture on "Christian Socialism" before an audience of over one thousand people in Auburn, NE, and the news spread as far away as British Columbia that Rev. Woodbey, who "for a dozen years [served as] one of the foremost speakers in the Prohibition party and national committeemen in Nebraska, has

⁷ Ali, *In the Balance of Power*, 109-110; W. James, "'Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America,'" 357-359; Carl Mirra, "The 'Other' Black Church: Reverend George Washington Woodbey and Radical Politics in Early Twentieth Century America," *Scarborough: National Association of African American Studies* (2001): 1342-1343, 1340, 1347.

come out for the new Socialist party and taken the stump to preach socialism.”⁸ Alongside his enthusiasm for the SP, he continued to be involved in the women’s suffrage movement, and was an invited guest and speaker at the Custer County Women’s Suffrage Convention in October 1901.⁹ Before leaving the Midwest for California in late April or early May 1902, Rev. Woodbey held socialist meetings in Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Missouri, including in towns he had organized new congregations during the 1870s and 1880s.

What propelled Rev. Woodbey to join the SP within a month of its founding convention? In a letter written to Eugene Debs in 1921, Rev. Woodbey describes how he heard Debs speak in Omaha in 1896, which “set [him] to thinking,” and informs Debs he had “been a socialist since 1900.”¹⁰ After he bolted from the Prohibition Party in 1896, Woodbey remained committed to building an independent mass based political party and was already espousing a socialist political philosophy. Although in 1900 he campaigned for Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan and briefly aligned himself with the People’s Party in Omaha, his relationship with the campaign was always tenuous, and beginning in 1896 the People’s Party itself began to splinter over its fateful decision to support fusionist electoral campaigns, abandoning its political independence, and as it was violently crushed by racist campaigns led by the Democratic Party across the South. By 1900 it was but a mere shell of its former self.¹¹ The launch of the Socialist Party of America at its 1901 “Unity Convention” in Indianapolis by members of Eugene Debs’

⁸ *Nebraska Advertiser* (Nemaha, NE), 13 September, 1901; “A Negro Socialist Will Talk,” *Kansas City Times* (Missouri), 7 December 1901; *Chase County Leader* (Kansas) 24 April 1902; “Chautauquans at Auburn,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 19 August 1901; “Auburn Chautauqua,” *Omaha World Herald*, 20 August 1901; “Twentieth Century Assembly,” *The Granger* (Auburn, NE) 23 August 1901; “Institute in Session,” *Auburn Post* (Nebraska) 30 August 1901; *The Nelson Daily Miner* (British Columbia), 28 August 1901.

⁹ “Woman Suffrage County Convention,” *Custer County Republican* (Nebraska), 31 October 1901.

¹⁰ George Washington Woodbey letter to Eugene Debs, 31 March 1921, The Debs Collection, Indiana State University Library, Cuning Memorial Library, <http://visions.indstate.edu:8080/u/?evdc,12062>.

¹¹ See Ali, *In the Lion’s Mouth*; Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, & Populists*.

Social Democracy of America, a faction of the Socialist Labor Party, and independent socialist groups composed largely of disaffected populists from the People's and Prohibitionist parties, offered new hope for radicals like Woodbey who remained committed to building an independent political party to win political reform, and for some more revolutionary aims.¹²

The SP's founding convention issued a direct appeal to Black Americans, the first of its kind in the history of international socialism, when it passed a resolution addressed to Black workers inviting them to join the socialist movement. Black delegates William Costley from San Francisco, and Indiana coal miners John H. Adams and Edward McKay, were instrumental in passing the resolution despite opposition from delegates who argued it would hurt the party's electoral chances among white voters in the South. Although Adams and McKay were initially hesitant to appear supporting "special favor" for Black workers, they stood behind a proposal by Costley introduced amending the language of the original proposal to include a condemnation of lynching violence and voter discrimination. White Christian socialist Rev. George Herron also backed the resolution, stating he "would rather we lost every white vote in the South than to evade the question which is presented today." However, Herron inexplicably removed Costley's amended language while revising it for a final vote, and the resolution eventually adopted by the convention dropped any reference lynching or disenfranchisement of Blacks in the South.¹³

¹² On the 1901 Indianapolis Convention, see several summaries and reports on the proceeding can be found at the "Socialist Party of America" document download page via Marxists.org here <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/spa/spadownloads-1895-1905.html>. A useful summary is Walter Thomas Mills, "The Unity Convention," *Appeal to Reason*, 10 August 1901, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/spusa/1901/0801-mills-theunityconvention.pdf>.

¹³ Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, 94-97 ; "Negro Resolution Adopted by Indianapolis Convention," (adopted August 1, 1901). Published in the *Missouri Socialist* [St. Louis] 1 no 31 (Aug. 10, 1901), <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/spusa/1901/0801-spa-negroresolution.pdf>

The adopted “Negro Resolution” posited theoretical and political arguments in addition to serving as an appeal for Black workers to join. Slavery and their “but recent emancipation” placed Black Americans in “a peculiar position in the working class and in society at large.” Racial division was invented, maintained, and deployed as a weapon by capitalists to divide workers politically and exploit the entire working class more effectively. Expressing sympathy with Black workers, it defined as identical the “interests and struggles” of all workers “without regard to race, or color, or sectional lines,” and on this basis invited Black workers to join “the world movement for economic emancipation.”¹⁴ In the months and years following its passage, the resolution sparked fierce debate within and outside the party, although the SP for nearly two decades failed to pass any similar resolution directly taking up the question of anti-Black racism. Assessing the debates around the resolution and the interventions by Costley, Adams, and McKay, historian Winston James notes their efforts to pass the resolution constituted “an important contribution to the black socialist tradition.”¹⁵ Its text was immediately published in the socialist press and Black owned newspapers like the Washington D.C. *Colored American*.¹⁶ Its wide republication helped introduce the SP to a large Black audience and helped recruit a small but significant number of Black members almost immediately, including Rev. Woodbey.

During his early “socialist gospel meetings” beginning in January 1901, Rev. Woodbey distributed the socialist newspaper *Appeal to Reason*. In August he would have read a report from his former fellow Prohibition Party member Walter T. Mills summarizing the SP’s founding convention, as well as the full text of the “Negro

¹⁴ “Negro Resolution Adopted by Indianapolis Convention.”

¹⁵ W. James, “Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America,” in *Time Longer Than Rope*, 365.

¹⁶ For a brief summary of its republication and debate in Socialist and Black owned newspapers, see P. Foner, *Socialist Party and Black Americans*, 98-105.

Resolution” published in the paper on August 10th and 17th. By the end of the month, he had enthusiastically joined the new party.¹⁷ As one of the party’s first Black recruits, he was soon joined by a small but significant number of Black members across the U.S. which by 1919 included a number of migrants from the Caribbean concentrated in New York City.¹⁸ Moving in the opposite direction in 1902, Woodbey arrived in California and reunited with his mother Rachel Woodbey.

CALIFORNIA

Several factors likely influenced George Woodbey’s decision to move to San Diego. With Annie Woodbey’s death, he lost not only his wife of 27 years but his closest and most important intellectual collaborator, partner, and friend. In 1877, he had written a two-volume book of poetry dedicated to his “wife and companion in the great struggle of life,” adding a handwritten note sometime after her death describing how despite the efforts of relatives opposed to their marriage, they had loved each other and lived together from 1873 until her death in 1901, when she “went to heaven.”¹⁹ Her death was a devastating loss. She continued to inform his work however, and he kept her memory alive in his second book, *The Bible and Socialism: A Conversation Between Two Preachers*. Published in 1904, Rev. Woodbey’s second book made reference to his late wife and included an excerpt from one of her lectures “as a fitting close” to the book’s section on “What the Prophets Said of Economic Conditions of Other Nations.”²⁰ Even as the loss of his first

¹⁷ Walter T. Mills, “The Unity Convention,” *Appeal to Reason*, Aug 10, 1901; “The Socialist Platform,” *Appeal to Reason*, Aug 17, 1901; *The Nelson Daily Miner* (British Columbia), August 28, 1901.

¹⁸ W. James, “Red and Black in Jim Crow America,” 364-365.

¹⁹ A PDF copy of the original handwritten copy of this unpublished two volume book of poetry dedicated “To Mrs. Ann R. Woodbey” was shared with the author via email on July 19, 2021 by Woodbey descendant Mark Carlock, with permission from G.W. Woodbey’s granddaughter, Josephine Woodbey Carlock.

²⁰ For passages referencing Annie Woodbey, see George Washington Woodbey, *The Bible and Socialism*, in Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 188-190. Part of the quoted passages from Annie Woodbey’s lecture are excerpts from Constantin-François Volney’s *Travels Through Egypt and Syria, in the Years 1783, 1784*

wife brought him untold personal anguish, letters from his mother brought more news of tragedy. Rachel Woodbey had relocated to California sometime in the late 1880s or early 1890s. In January 1901, a disastrous fire almost destroyed her “home and nearly everything in it,” according to a local paper. By the time of his arrival, she was also reportedly ill. News of his mother’s circumstances no doubt reached him through his mother’s letters, which they exchanged after she left Kansas.²¹

Political motivations also lay behind Woodbey’s move West. After abandoning the Prohibition Party and ending his brief affiliation the People’s Party, Rev. Woodbey found a new political home in the SP and after living in Omaha for nearly two decades, his zealous socialist organizing informed his decision to resettle on the West coast. On August 1901, the *Los Angeles Times* noted Rev. Woodbey had been “moved by the spirit of unrest” to leave “the lands of the Nebraskas, to preach Socialism in the country of the people of Southern California.”²² California’s Black population doubled between 1880 and 1890, and had approximately 11,045 African American residents in 1900. Nebraska’s African American population grew even faster between 1880 and 1890 to around 9,000, yet by 1900 nearly a fifth of its Black population left the state.²³ In December 1900, Rev. Woodbey himself was again denied service due to racial discrimination by a private business, a local restaurant, after the head waiter informed his white companion “he could

& 1785: *Containing the Present Natural and Political State of Those Countries; Their Productions, Arts, Manufactures & Commerce; with Observations on the Manners, Customs and Government of the Turks & Arabs* (New York: John Tiebout, 1798) and Moses Hull’s *The Bible from Heaven, or, A Dissertation on the Evidences of Christianity* (1872).

21 “A Home Destroyed. Serious Loss of Mrs. Rachel Woodby by Fire,” *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 1 February 1901; *Los Angeles Herald*, 2 February 1901. Rachel Woodbey appears in an Emporia, KS city directory in 1887, then is listed as a resident of San Diego, CA in a local directory in 1893. Evidence that Rachel Woodbey and George Woodbey exchanged letters before his move appears in George Woodbey, *What to Do and How to Do It*, 41. Presented as a dialogue between mother and son, at the beginning of the text, Rachel informs him she “was never so much astonished as when you wrote me you had gone off with the Socialists.”

22 “City in Brief,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 August 1902.

23 Q. Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 134-135.

not serve the negro.” As in 1885, Woodbey filed suit against the business but again the case was dismissed, this time within a week, on a “technicality” according to the *Omaha World Herald*. According to the *Herald*, the judge ruled “the complaint did not allege that the defendants were in any way associated with the restaurant.” Unlike in 1885, there was little to no protest or response from Omaha’s Black community or Woodbey’s white political allies.²⁴ California offered Rev. Woodbey political opportunities, the chance to reunite with his mother, and the chance to return to preaching in a small but growing Black community as he had done in Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska during the 1870s and 1880s.

From 1902 until his death in 1937, Rev. Woodbey resided primarily in San Diego, a city whose African American history remains an understudied part of the history of the African American West, in part due to its relatively small Black population before World War I. After California became part of the United States following the U.S-Mexican War in 1850, San Diego County listed only eight Black residents out of a total population of 798.²⁵ By 1880 the city had only a few hundred Black residents, but soon an influx of Black migrants attracted largely by job opportunities flowed steadily into the area, including Rachel Woodbey, who moved to San Diego sometime between 1887 and 1893 at the tail end of an economic boom in the region driven by competition between cities to attract railroad investment and construction projects. In 1880 San Diego’s total population stood at 2,637. During this boom period it exploded to over 40,000 by 1888, before declining to around 16,000 in 1890. Most African American arrivals to the city found work as farm

²⁴ “Restaurant Man Arrested,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, 27 December 1900; “Failed to Reach the Color Line,” *Omaha World Herald*, 1 January 1901.

²⁵ Gail Madyun and Larry Malone, *Black Pioneers in San Diego, 1820-1920* (San Diego: San Diego Historical Society, 1981); Cristin M. McVey, “Traces of Black San Diego, 1890-1950,” Dissertation (University of California, San Diego, 2004), 26, <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/traces-black-san-diego-1890-1950/docview/305204582/se-2?accountid=7118>.

laborers, railroad employees, or in the service industries. Rachel Woodbey worked in a laundry. A grandson named Harry lived with her and worked as a boot black.²⁶

Early on, San Diego's Black community developed its own institutions and identity in a racially and ethnically diverse city. Political clubs appeared in the 1880s, and the city's first Black owned newspaper began publishing in 1892. Fraternal organizations such as the Prince Hall Masons and women's clubs were also organized. The rigid racial and economic segregation that came to define urban spaces in the United States, especially after World War II, had not yet been established, and Black San Diegans lived throughout the city and in the surrounding towns of Julian and Coronado.²⁷ Constituting less than one percent of the city's overall population in 1900, a significant number of African Americans lived near the city's emerging downtown in a neighborhood now known as Logan Heights. Most rented the properties they lived in, many from their employers, although a small number purchased and owned houses.²⁸ Black families lived side by side with Mexican, Japanese, and European immigrants in neighborhoods where native born white Americans predominated.

Just as early migrants who moved from the South seeking land and opportunities in Kansas and Nebraska following Reconstruction, early Black settlers in San Diego set about organizing and building places for religious worship and expression. One of the city's first African American churches was Mount Zion Baptist in Logan Heights, where Rev.

²⁶ Between her listing in an 1887 Emporia City Directory and 1893 when her residence is listed in a San Diego directory, I have been unable to locate any reference to Rachel Woodbey's whereabouts or what motivated her to leave Kansas and go further West. 1900; Census Place: *San Diego Ward 6, San Diego, California*; Page: 4; Enumeration District: 0197; FHL microfilm: 1240099, Ancestry.com, 1900 *United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2004. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1900. T623, 1854 rolls.

²⁷ Madyun and Malone, *Black Pioneer in San Diego*.

²⁸ Madyun and Malone, *Black Pioneers in San Diego*; McVey, "Traces of Black San Diego, 1890-1950," 25.

Woodbey began preaching in 1902 soon after his arrival. Formally established between 1900-1901 at 30th and Logan St. in the city's East End, the congregation had earlier roots.²⁹ In an oral history interview conducted in 1958, Earnest Morgan, who was six years old when he came to San Diego in 1884, recalled how the "colored people practically built the church themselves...Of course, it was nothing but some boards and nothing fancy, but it was a place to worship." He remembered the first worship services were held at his mother's home before a church was built, and that "many Baptist churches started from the Mt. Zion Church." Mount Zion's own website discusses its origins when a women named Joella Lee Freeman had a vision in 1895 where God instructed her, "The time is ripe. I want a church established in the next street, in the middle of the block!"³⁰ Other Black churches included Second Baptist, which later changed its name to Calvary Baptist and was founded in 1886, and the Bethel A.M.E. Church established two years later in 1888.³¹ Today Mount Zion identifies itself as a longstanding "center of spiritual, social and economic life" for the Black community in Logan Heights.³² Along with Calvary and Bethel A.M.E., in the early years of the twentieth century it served its community as a meeting place, cultural center, and provider of material and psychological support, political training, and a "language of resistance" for the Logan Heights community..³³

²⁹ "New Church Building," *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 26 May 26, 1900; "Zion's Opening," *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 23 March 1901; "Churches Burn Mortgages," *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 1 January 1903.

³⁰ "Our History," Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, San Diego, CA, <https://mtzionsandiego.org/read-more/our-history>.

³¹ Edgar F. Hastings interview with Earnest Morgan, November 13, 1958, San Diego Historical Society Oral History Program, San Diego Historical Society; Madyun and Malone, *Black Pioneers in San Diego*.

³² "Our History," Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, San Diego, CA, <https://mtzionsandiego.org/read-more/our-history>.

³³ Frederick C. Harris, *Something Within: Religion in African-American Political Activism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 186.

Born in San Diego in 1897, in a 1976 interview another early congregant of Mount Zion Baptist named Ethel Christina Oliver recalled how her family came to California from Illinois. Her father worked in the city and ran his own “shoe-shining parlor on Broadway near 4th Avenue” while her “mother didn’t work or anything.” When a young African American man named Walter McDonald arrived in the city from Texas, “there weren’t any colored people” in San Diego, she remembers, so Oliver’s father hired him at his parlor, helping him get settled in his new and unfamiliar environment. Oliver remembers the Logan Heights community as welcoming of newcomers and strangers, paints a portrait of the community’s character through its Masonic lodges, weekend dances, pleasant homes, church choirs, and personalities including preacher named Rev. Green at Mount Zion “preaching with no sense.” Asked directly if she remembered Rev. Woodbey, she replied:

Right, he was an old, old—he was in the Army. What do you call those older people with those old hats that point like that—those hats that point like that...that looked so funny?...And he had whiskers and everything—and in parades he was one of the top ones in there when he marched and people would come from all over to see the parades. He lived right down there—he had a lovely property on 29th and Commercial.

Q. Did he have a church?

He could have had a little house—he could have had once upon a time. I don’t remember that. Everybody respected him. He had a different kind of religion from us.

Q. I understand he was a Socialist also?

That’s what it was, Socialist. I call it religion.³⁴

³⁴ Robert Carlton interview with Ethel Christina Oliver, May 10, 1976, San Diego Historical Society Oral History Program, San Diego Historical Society. Rev. Langley and Rev. Green, mentioned in Oliver and Morgan’s interviews, are both listed as early preachers on the church’s history published on its website as well. “Our History,” <https://mtzionsandiego.org/read-more/our-history>.

Through this description of the Reverend and his “different kind of religion” Oliver provides an interesting set of visual images and associations about who Rev. Woodbey was and what he represented to her as someone who was just five years old when Woodbey arrived in the city in 1902.

“Every ‘story’ leaves traces; every ‘trace’ leaves more traces,” writes Christen McVey in her study of Black San Diego between 1890-1950. Examining photographic images including studio portraits of San Diego’s Black residents from the period, McVey argues “from the standpoint that to understand culture, one must think visually.”³⁵ Ethel Christina Oliver’s memories of Logan Heights, including her description of Rev. Woodbey as an army man who wore strange hats and practiced “a different kind of religion” allows for visually imagining the community’s “black life-worlds,” a term used by Michael Hanchard to represent “the vast array of identities and identifications” within the African Diaspora, which “are constituted by experiential knowledge and the lessons learned from such knowledge.”³⁶ And although George Woodbey was never a member of the U.S. military but remained a staunch anti-imperialist for most of his political career, Oliver’s story leaves important traces of another important figure in the history of Black political thought. Imagining this older Black army man with “whiskers” and a funny hat who marched in community parades, scholars of African American political and cultural history might see traces of Marcus Garvey, who W.E.B. DuBois once called “the Negro with a hat,” dressed in his military style uniform with a “funny” hat upon his head and a mustache or “whiskers” above his lips.³⁷ The end of this chapter follows this trace and Rev.

³⁵ McVey, “Traces of Black San Diego, 1890-1950,” 25, xii.

³⁶ Hanchard, *Party/Politics*, 6-7.

³⁷ See the image of Garvey on the cover of Colin Grant’s *Negro With a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), which takes its title from DuBois’ comments. This image spontaneously seemed to appear in my imagination as I read Oliver’s words, leading me to discover Woodbey’s membership in the UNIA.

Woodbey's involvement with the San Diego Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in the early 1920s. The next section focuses on his activities as a member and organizer for the Socialist Party of America, and his socialist political thought and practice.

Between 1902 and 1915, Rev. Woodbey worked tirelessly to advance the socialist movement through his efforts as a self-described agitator and organizer for the Socialist Party of America. Almost immediately after arriving in California he quickly gained a reputation as thousands heard his socialist sermons and lectures in churches, on street corners, in union halls and in parks. As a national organizer for the SP, he went on two national speaking tours with stops primarily in the Midwest and Eastern U.S. These tours coincided with the SP's national conventions in 1904 and 1908 in Chicago, both of which he attended as an elected delegate, and was the only African American represented at both conventions. Tens of thousands of people read his three books on socialism: *What to Do and How to Do It* (1903), *The Bible and Socialism* (1904), and *The Distribution of Wealth* (1910). Between 1903 and 1912, his socialist activism landed him in jail more than once and was a key figure in the 1912 San Diego "Free Speech Fights." Woodbey was also nominated for political office several times and on the SP's ticket became the first African American candidate for state wide-office in California when he ran for State Treasurer in 1914.³⁸

In 1904 Woodbey attended his first national convention for the SP, held in Chicago, Illinois, where he was elected to serve as vice chairman of the proceedings. Sen Katayama, a Japanese socialist and editor, was also in attendance, and was given a "seat of honor on

³⁸ P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*; W. James, "Red and Black in Jim Crow America" in *Time Longer Than Rope*; "Woodby First Negro To Be Candidate For a State Office," *Lori Sentinel*, 27 October 1914; "First Negro Candidate," *San Jose Mercury Herald* (California), 1 November 1914.

the platform and greeted with applause.”³⁹ In September that year he also attended the California state convention of the party, which nominated Woodbey as a Presidential Elector at large.⁴⁰ In 1908, as debates over immigration raged inside the SP, Woodbey sided with those in the party who maintained socialist internationalism required, on principle, steadfast opposition to any and all policies aimed at curtailing or restricting the rights of immigrants and the rhetoric and ideological posturing which pitted immigrant labor against so-called “native” workers. During the SP’s 1908 national convention, Woodbey opened the debate on the “immigration question” which in many ways operated as a stand in for discussing the “Negro question.”⁴¹

For Woodbey, racism had no place inside the socialist movement, whether directed against Japanese and Chinese workers, Mexican migrants, or African Americans. Like Peter H. Clark, he shared an admiration for Thomas Paine, and told the convention: “I stand on the declaration of Thomas Paine when he said, ‘The world is my country.’” He likewise shared his disgust at the proposal to have a committee to study the “race question” from a “scientific point of view,” stating, “We know what we think upon the question of race now as well as we would know two years from now or any other time.”⁴² Unfortunately, the SP continued to fall short when it came to living up to what Woodbey considered socialism’s principled opposition to white supremacy in all forms. Among the ruling elites, immigration policy continued to function as a way to manage, discipline, and recruit cheap

³⁹ “Japanese Editor in Socialist Convention,” *Saint Paul Globe* (Minnesota) 3 May 1904; *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Socialist Party, Held at Chicago Illinois May 1 to 6, 1904* (Chicago: National Committee of Socialist Party, 1904).

⁴⁰ “State Socialists Name Electors and Leaders,” *The Call* (San Francisco) 6 September 1904; “Official Returns of Local Contests,” *The Call*, 9 November 1904; “Official Vote of the State,” *The Call*, 29 November 1904.

⁴¹ *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Socialist Party, Held at Chicago Illinois, May 10 to 17, 1908* (Chicago: Socialist Party, 1908), 106.

⁴² *Ibid.*

sources of labor to work in both factories and fields, and in California even some Black businessmen saw opportunity in the exclusion of Japanese from the labor market. Years later in 1920, W.H. Sanders of the Industrial and Commercial Council of People of African Descent appeared enthusiastic about the possibility that “Negroes” might be substituted for “Japs” in the agricultural fields of California considering proposals to restrict Japanese settlement in the state.⁴³

The State Convention of the California SP expressed sympathy with Mexican revolutionaries at its meeting in August 1908, including passing resolutions in support of Ricardo Flores Magnon and his comrades who sat imprisoned in a Los Angeles jail.⁴⁴ In the 1908 Fall elections, Woodbey was nominated as an elector, and the SP also nominated three women, the only women candidates in the statewide elections, as electors.⁴⁵

After the 1908 Convention Woodbey continued his exhaustive efforts as a national organizer for the party. While on a speaking tour, he married his second wife, Mary Hart, in New Jersey and she delivered her own lectures during the remained of the tour. In November, Mrs. Woodbey spoke in Canton Ohio on “The New York Slums” while he addressed audiences “on Socialism” in the same venue.⁴⁶ By 1910 the relentless pace of his work began to take a toll on his health. Comrades in Montana published a plea, “Assistance for Comrade,” soliciting early orders for his third book *The Distribution of Wealth*. According to the appeal, he had “been taken down with a severe spell of sickness” forcing “him to leave the field” without any expectation of his possible return. “The

⁴³ “Negroes to Replace Japs,” *The Monitor*, 7 October 1920.

⁴⁴ “Countess is Refused Honor by Socialists,” *The Call*, 31 August 1908.

⁴⁵ “Seven Parties Get Places on Ballot, Socialist Ticket has Distinction of Bearing Names of Three Women,” *The Call*, 4 October 1908.

⁴⁶ George Woodbey Mary Hart Marriage Index Record, Ancestry.com. *New Jersey, U.S., Marriage Index, 1901-2016* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016. Mary Woodbey appears as a featured lecturer alongside her husband in the article “Speaks on Socialism,” *The Repository* (Ohio), 29 November 1908.

financial condition of the comrade is like that of the usual agitator who gives his life to the cause of the working people. He is without funds and compelled to ask for aid.”⁴⁷

Woodbey was arrested numerous times while speaking for the SP, most famously during the 1912 free speech fights in San Diego.⁴⁸ As early as 1903, he joined fellow African American SP member William Costley and others in suing the San Francisco police for arresting SP speakers “without warrant or legal right.”⁴⁹ In 1905, Woodbey was violently assaulted by a police officer named George Cooley in San Diego. According to one report, “Cooley landed two hard swings on Woodbey’s jaw and drove the orator” from the police station the day Woodbey charged the officer with assault. Cooley was arrested.⁵⁰

In early 1908, Woodbey faced arrest again, this time in Los Angeles “for speaking on the street without having obtained a permit from the board of police commissioners.” Pleading not guilty, Woodbey and his co-defendants challenged the constitutionality of their arrest. In July, socialists continued to challenge restrictions on their speech by violating city ordinances, and Woodbey’s case was appealed by his attorney.⁵¹ Speaking to a large audience shortly after his initial arrest, Woodbey addressed the crowd:

Really it is an honor to be arrested in some instances. This movement [for socialism] is an exact analogy to the other great movements for liberty in the world. I feel sure that if Jesus Christ were to come to Los Angeles now, he would be arrested. So long as the ruling class in this country had all their rights assured, the constitution was declared to be all-right. But so soon as the working class said ‘All men are born free and equal’ then trouble arose. In the Philippine islands the

⁴⁷ “Assistance for Comrade,” *Montana News*, 10 February 1910.

⁴⁸ Jeff Smith, “The Big Noise: The Free Speech Fight of 1912: Part One,” *San Diego Reader*, 23 May 2012, <https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/2012/may/23/unforgettable/>.

⁴⁹ “Street Orators Ask Protection,” *The Call*, 20 September 1903.

⁵⁰ “Colored Orator is Struck on Jaw by a Policeman,” *The Call*, 12 July 1905.

⁵¹ “Will Summon the Mayor, Free Speech Agitation May Assume Large Proportions—More Arrests and Arraignments Are Scheduled for Today,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 3 March 1908; “Preacher Found Guilty of Violating Ordinance,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 21 March 1908; “Puts Socialist on Probation, Another Speaker is Sent to the Chain Gang,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 11 July 1908;

declaration of independence translated in Spanish was distributed among the natives and it was promptly seized by the American government as something incendiary. There is an exact analogy between the slaveholder of the old abolitionist days and the manholder of the capitalistic class of the twentieth century.

This movement has the power not only to reach the mind, but the passions, enthusiasm, love and hate of men. We have got to reach that point where Patrick Henry said, 'Give me liberty or give me death.'

The most uneasy man in Los Angeles tonight is the man with his millions. Like Belshazzar, he sees the handwriting on the wall. I expect some day to eat my breakfast in a co-operative commonwealth.⁵²

Woodbey's speech shows how he understood himself as part of a movement extending and carrying on the abolitionist tradition, and how his socialism was deeply informed by a Black Christian liberationist reading of the Bible. In part one of his series on the 1912 free speech fights in San Diego, Jeff Smith writes Woodbey "preached socialism like a religious revival."⁵³

While Philip S. Foner first made many of these details known in his groundbreaking biographical introduction to Woodbey's writings, less attention has been devoted to Woodbey as a political thinker and the significance of his ideas and practice for socialist and Black political thought. One exception is Cornel West, who in *Prophesy Deliverance* argued for an "alliance of prophetic Christianity and progressive Marxism" and suggested Rev. Woodbey's "life and writings best exemplify the point at which black theologians and Marxist thinkers are no longer strangers." Exploring his intellectual production as a Socialist agitator and organizer through his oratory and writings, Woodbey's political thought and practice made a unique contribution to the SP as an effective organizer and in his conceptualization of socialism in the long history of human struggles against slavery and oppression drawing on his faith, personal experience, historical and scriptural knowledge, and values as a Black Baptist preacher.

⁵² "Cheers For Free Speech," *Los Angeles Herald*, 6 March 1908.

⁵³ Jeff Smith, "The Big Noise: The Free Speech Fight of 1912: Part One," *San Diego Reader*, 23 May 2012, <https://www.sandiegoreader.com/news/2012/may/23/unforgettable/>.

SOCIALIST SERMONS

Within just months of his arrival in California, Woodbey reported in a letter to the *Appeal to Reason*, he had already delivered “something like 100 speeches” on socialism in the state.⁵⁴ At one of his earliest engagement on May 11, 1902 at “a grand rally of Socialists” in the Del Mar Valley, the *San Diego Union and Daily Bee* reported Rev. Woodbey “came along to give color to the occasion.”⁵⁵ As a formerly enslaved Baptist preacher originally from Tennessee and one of the few African American members of the SP at the time, in more ways than one Woodbey indeed brought something unique to the movement in California. During his first month in the state he addressed dozens of meetings between Los Angeles and San Diego. Most of these took place in parks or in front of public buildings like post offices, or on popular street corners where he would often speak extemporaneously before whoever happened to be around. Others were advertised affairs drew significant crowds and commentaries in local newspapers.⁵⁶

A self-identified socialist “agitator” in the abolitionist tradition, Woodbey directed his message toward the working class. His ideas about how the Socialist Party could more effectively reach Christians and particularly Black workers are reflected in the core themes, arguments, and the locations of the socialist sermons he delivered, and the spoken word served as his primary means of intellectual production and distribution, arguably even after the publication of his first book. He delivered his message on working class struggle in socialist sermons, and travelling widely as an organizer for the SP he preached socialism just as he and his first wife Annie Woodbey had preached the Gospel in the Midwest and in the same itinerant and iterant tradition of Rev. Jobe, the formerly enslaved preacher who

⁵⁴ “What Comrade Woodbey Says,” *Appeal to Reason*, 5 July 1902

⁵⁵ “Socialists Rally at Del Mar on Sunday,” *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 13 May 1902.

⁵⁶ “News of San Diego,” *Los Angeles Herald* 15 May 1902; “the famous socialist” qt. in *Kansas Commoner* (Wichita) 21 April 1904.

gave him his first copy of the Christian New Testament just after the Civil War.⁵⁷ In his agitational work, he relied on his voice and his language, idioms, and style as a missionary Baptist preacher.

In *What to Do and How to Do It* he considered agitational work essential to building the socialist movement. Agitation meant using “the press, the pulpit, the rostrum, and private conversation” to educate people around socialism. Relation to agitation, socialists had to build “political organizations” in order “to get into power and transfer the entire power of government into the hands of the people, that they may directly originate and pass their own laws.”⁵⁸ Rev. Woodbey practiced what he preached, and as an agitator promoted socialism through lectures, sermons, private conversations, and through his participation in struggles on the streets of San Diego and Los Angeles. As an organizer, while it is difficult to determine how many people he recruited to the party, part of what made him effective relates to his background and abilities as a preacher in the Black Baptist church. His ideas and their delivery represent a significant contribution to Black socialist political thought and practice, as his socialism remained tied up in his membership in the church and Black community, including his position on the relationship between Christianity and socialism and how the SP should orient itself toward working class people with religious beliefs. He rejected the argument common among his comrades that socialism was necessarily an atheist movement actively opposed to religion in all forms. Both Christianity and socialism were based on “faith,” or “the evidence of things hoped for,” he argued. Neither asked people to simply “believe” in what they could not see. Christian and socialist faith involved hope in something not apparent yet for which sufficient evidence existed.

⁵⁷ Woodbey, “What I Have Learned,” personal collection. See previous chapter’s section on Woodbey’s childhood in Tennessee.

⁵⁸ Woodbey, *What to Do and How to Do It*, 52-53.

For Woodbey, it was immaterial whether one found the evidence for one's faith through Biblical or "scientific" sources as both provided sufficient evidence to justify "hope of bettering the conditions for mankind."⁵⁹ For non-socialist Christians, he argued presented socialism was an ethical way of being in and comprehending the world in line with Christ's teachings, whereas what commonly passed as Christianity had little to do with the Gospels or the practices of the early church.

As Carmen Kynard suggests, Woodbey's socialist sermons show how "African American rhetoric was right there from jump in African Americans' commitment to socialism."⁶⁰ Unfortunately transcripts of Woodbey's public sermons and street corner lectures are partial at best, and reading his sermons fail as a substitute for what hearing, or rather witnessing, his delivery must have been like. *The Art of Lecturing* (1908) by fellow Socialist Arthur M. Lewis provides one rare and suggestive commentary on Woodbey's speaking style. Lewis criticizes "the tendency of speakers to become so addicted to certain hackneyed phrases that those used to hearing them speak can see them coming sentences away." Rev. Woodbey, on the other hand, uses repetition with the opposite effect entirely: "G.W. Woodbey, our colored speaker...never speaks an hour without asking at least thirty times, 'Do you understand?' but the inimitable manner in which he pokes his chin forward as he does so usually convulses his audience and makes a virtue of what would otherwise be a defect."⁶¹

Pausing with questions and non-verbal cues and gestures Woodbey's socialist oratory remained that of a preacher. In other words, in his socialist practice he *practiced*

⁵⁹ Woodbey, *The Bible and Socialism*, 111. Woodbey cites Hebrews 11:1 when making his case.

⁶⁰ Carmen Kynard, "'I Want to Be African': In Search of a Black Radical Tradition/African American Vernacularized Paradigm for 'Students' Right to Their Own Language,' Critical Literacy, and 'Class Politics,'" *College English* 69 no 4 (March 2007), 371.

⁶¹ Arthur M. Lewis, *The Art of Lecturing* (Rev. edition Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company Co-operative, 1908), 37, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001900910>.

what he preached. Traditionally lectures rely on a “sender-receiver” division between speaker and audience, whereas Tim Sensing observes in Black Christian worship how “the pulpit and the pew are engaged in a common work,” where the congregation is “actually helping the preacher to preach.” Call-and-response between the preacher and the congregations becomes “not only a dialogical interaction due to the content of the sermon, but also a catalyst for solidarity.” The church historically served African American communities as political spaces where effective preachers set people in motion by making “the world of the Bible directly bear upon their present concerns.”⁶² Rev. Woodbey preached socialism to Black Americans for he believed it beared directly on the overwhelming majority’s life. And, as his first two books show, Woodbey believed the Bible spoke directly to socialists as a history of class struggle and the inevitable victory of the poor and oppressed against the “slavery of capitalism.”

He travelled and lectured at first primarily in southern California and undertook two national speaking tours organized to coincide with the SP’s national conventions in 1904 and 1908. In 1905 one party local in Pennsylvania requested Woodbey be sent to help with the party’s “work among the colored population.”⁶³ During his national tours he spoke in venues across the Midwestern and Eastern U.S, including in 1908 Washington’s D.C.s Plymouth Congregational Church.⁶⁴

⁶² Tim Sensing, “African American Preaching.” *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry* 7 (Winter/Spring 2001): 38-53. Reprinted by Asbury Online Institute (an online continuing education effort of Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, KY), https://blogs.acu.edu/sensingt/cool-stuff/african-american-preaching/#_edn38.

⁶³ One article reports “The county committee of Allegheny, Pa., have requested the national office to arrange a tour for G.H.Woodbey[sic] of California, with the view of having his work among the colored population in their vicinity.” See “Socialist News from National Headquarters,” *Montana News*, 23 August 1905.

⁶⁴ *The Bee* (Washington D.C.) Nov 7, 1908.

One lecture from which partial elements appear reprinted in newspaper accounts was his popular lecture: “The Negro in Ancient History,” a lecture he delivered dozens if not hundreds of times across the Midwest beginning as early as 1883 and likely earlier.⁶⁵ After delivering his lecture soon after arriving in California and on behalf of the socialist movement, the *Los Angeles Times* described his arguments against “the conceited Caucasian theory that Mr. and Mrs. Adam were white,” and how he used “archaeology, ancient history and the Bible” as sources for his argument.⁶⁶ According to the paper, Woodbey claimed a Black person was “Every single person now living on the face of the globe, who, if he lived in the United States of America, would be obliged to take his place among the negroes.” African people once had blossoming civilizations, and it was not inherent racial characteristics but “force of circumstances” which led to their downfall, he said.⁶⁷ Race, in other words, was a historical and social construct, not a biological characteristic of human beings.

The *Los Angeles Herald* discussed and quoted from the lecture more extensively. According to the paper, Woodbey began with a criticism of historians who “eliminated facts and supplied extreme doctrines” on the subject. The scholars and works criticized included Barthold Georg Niebuhr, who published a three-volume *History of Rome* (1811-1832), David Friedrich Strauss, author of the *Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (1835-1836), and Ernest Renan, author of *The Life of Jesus* 1863).⁶⁸ Woodbey undoubtedly read

⁶⁵ The earliest reference to Woodbey’s lecture appearing in print appears in the Council Bluffs newspaper the *Daily Nonpareil* on July 20, 1883. The *Omaha Daily Bee* on August 7, 1883 contains an announcement for his lecture. Both papers give his lecture the title, “Origin and History of the Negro Race.”

⁶⁶ “City in Brief,” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 2, 1902.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Barthold George Niebuhr, *History of Rome* vols 1 & 2 trans. Julius Charles Hare and Connop Thirlwall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, vols 1-3 trans George Elliot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (London: Truebner & Co. Paternoster Row/Paris: M. Levy Freres, 1863).

each of these texts. Renan's work "eliminated facts" and excluded Africa from the history of monotheism, an exclusion Renan dogmatically justified in racist terms: "No great moral thought could proceed from races oppressed by a secular despotism, and accustomed to institutions which precluded the exercise of individual liberty."⁶⁹ Woodbey critically drew from these author's and a multitude of additional sources, including "the museums in modern times; the myths of Greece, Chaldea and Egypt; the poetry found on the tombs, and in the writings of Homer, Lucian Terence, Virgil and Horace; the prose of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon and Tacitus, and last but not least the Bible."⁷⁰ He regarded the Bible as a source of both spiritual and historical knowledge throughout his entire career as a lecturer.

The *Herald* quotes Rev. Woodbey addressing the question: "What does the world owe the negro race?"

It owes astronomy, sculpture, the alphabet. It was Nimrod, a negro, who established the first empire. It was Cadmus, a negro (because he was Phoenician), who invented the first alphabet.

There is every degree of civilization among white and black alike. Put the same conditions in Africa as you have surrounded yourself with and the same results will follow. Of whatever race anyone is he should be proud of anything that elevates humanity and ashamed of a thing that pulls it down. Call me a negro and you identify me with a class that ruled the world long before the Anglo-Saxon had emerged from his forests. The future of the negro will again become as glorious as his past if you would change the conditions surrounding him. The change would benefit the whole of humanity in thus promoting the brotherhood of man.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ernest Renan, *Life of Jesus*, 36-37.

⁷⁰ "Speaks of the Negro," *Los Angeles Herald*, Aug 2, 1902.

⁷¹ Qtd. in *Ibid*.

Rejecting scientific racist theories for the rise and fall of civilizations then in vogue, Woodbey articulated what Lewis R. Gordon calls “a critique that emerges in various forms in African thought...that when it came to the study of the so-called Negro, much of what was called research was unscientific.”⁷² Like W.E.B. Du Bois’s lecture “The Study of the Negro Problems” (1897) and Anton Firmin’s *The Equality of the Human Races* (1885) he sought to use a rigorous historical method which started from the premise of human equality, recognizing how “conceited Caucasian theory” distorted and manipulated the past to its own benefit. “Call me a negro,” countered Woodbey, “and you identify me with a class that ruled the world long before the Anglo-Saxon had merged from his forests.”⁷³ He continued to deliver his lecture on African history as late as 1930.

WRITINGS AND “PRIVATE CONVERSATION”

In addition to “the pulpit, the rostrum,” in his first book, Woodbey defined how agitational work took place through “the press” as well as “private conversation.”⁷⁴ His writings display both how he himself utilized “the press” to advance his socialist message, and many of his writings take the shape of a “private conversation” made public, *What to Do and How to Do It or Socialism vs. Capitalism*, for example, is a dialogue between himself and his mother, Rachel Woodbey. When a comrade from Pomona, MO asked the socialist newspaper *Appeal to Reason* for its “best” books in 1904, *What to Do and How to Do It* and the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* “went back in response.” Addressing his readers “as one who was once a chattel slave freed by the proclamation of Lincoln,” the book’s

⁷² Lewis R. Gordon, “An Africana Philosophical Reading of Du Bois’s Political Thought,” in *A Political Companion to W.E.B. Du Bois*, edited by Nick Bromell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 60.

⁷³ “Speaks of the Negro,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 2 August 1902.

⁷⁴ Woodbey, *What to Do and How to Do It*, 50.

dedication declared the author's desire "to be free from the slavery of capitalism."⁷⁵ In the text, Rachel Woodbey submits her son to extensive questioning about his new philosophy and, in the end, appears convinced by his answers. "Well, you have convinced me that I am just about as much of a slave now as I was in the south, and I am ready to accept any way out of this drudgery." Rev. Woodbey described his audience in the dedication as anyone from "that class of citizens who desire to know what the Socialists want to do and how they propose to do it."⁷⁶

Questions of gender and faith appear throughout the text, and according to Aaron Stauffer's insightful reading, "Sex and secularism frame Woodbey's dialogue."⁷⁷ His mother herself positions her womanhood as a central motivating concern behind her questions ("Like all other women, I want to know where we are to come in") but also questions her son's apparent decision to abandon "the Bible and ministry" for the political.⁷⁸ Reviewing Joan Wallach Scott's *Sex and Secularism* (2017), Stauffer argues as a "black socialist preacher," Woodbey triply challenged a "secularist logic, a logic synonymous with white Christianity" and its attendant gendered worldview.⁷⁹ Through the form of dialogue, Woodbey highlights and affirms his mother's beliefs and respects her as an intellectual, and in answering her questions aims to provoke a new understanding about the relationship between religion and politics against dominate secularized understandings prevalent at the time.

In *What to Do and How to Do It*, Woodbey declares right away his knowledge and shared "respect" for his mother's "belief in the Bible." As a Socialist, he says, his faith has

⁷⁵ Woodbey, *What to Do and How to Do It* 40; *Appeal to Reason*, 9 January 1904.

⁷⁶ Woodbey, *What to Do and How to Do It*, 40.

⁷⁷ Aaron Stauffer, "Islam, Sex, and Secularism," *Marginalia*, 18 January 2019, <https://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/islam-sex-secularism/>.

⁷⁸ Woodbey, *What to Do and How to Do It*, 70, 41.

⁷⁹ Stauffer, "Islam, Sex, and Secularism."

only increased. After further questioning about the SP's supposed atheism, he replies he "found a still larger number of unbelievers in the Republican party before [he] left it some twenty years ago." Arguing socialism is rooted in both scientific observation and scripture, for George whether one is an atheist or Christian is irrelevant. "I am free to believe that both science and the Bible teach it," he says.⁸⁰

Woodbey defines socialism as a system where all land, means of production, and means of distribution and transportation are collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class. "By the means of production" he means "any tools, or process by which we produce wealth," or "anything that is necessary for human comfort or pleasure." As life depends on more than just material necessities like food and shelter, but also "mental necessities" or the means to acquire "knowledge," these "necessities of life" also would be owned by "the whole people...instead of a few individuals, as now." Socialists were agitating and organizing a movement internationally, using speakers and literature to spread their message and building political parties "to get into power and transfer the entire power of government into the hands of the people, that they may directly originate and pass their own laws."⁸¹ Woodbey explains voting Socialists into political office as necessary for accomplishing these goals, but clarifies this itself would not be socialism. Neither government ownership nor a government controlled by workers, but only a government controlled by workers conscious of their "class interest" would create socialism in practice.⁸²

In answering more of his mother's questions, George makes several references to slavery. He compares the relationship between capitalists and wage workers with slavery. Where was the wealth of "the slave" he asks her? She replies, "his master got it." According

80 Woodbey, *What to Do*, 42-43.

81 Woodbey, *What to Do*, 49-53.

82 Woodbey, *What to Do*, 55.

to her son, the same occurs under capitalism; wages simply mask the process through which the worker is divested of the wealth they produce. His mother expresses concern that what the socialists advocate would lead to war, and he again references slavery in his reply. “The slaveholder did not dare to arm the Negro, on his side, without proclaiming emancipation, and to do that was to lose his cause; so with the capitalist,” he argues, “if he dares to offer all to the poor man who must fight his battles, he has lost his cause.”⁸³ “Socialism...only another name for the Golden rule, will unfetter and release [the church] from the load of capitalism which hinders her progress as did chattel slavery in its day.”⁸⁴

Rev. Woodbey’s second book, *The Bible and Socialism: A Conversation Between Two Preachers* (1904), also unfolds as a dialogue, between himself and his mother’s pastor. Intended for a mass audience, but especially other ministers and “Members of the Churches” Woodbey confesses his continued faith “in all the Bibles teaches and... allegiance to the church and the ministry.” profoundly liberationist reading of scripture very much in the Black abolitionist tradition of Ottobah Cuguano and David Walker. Whether divinely ordered or secularly based, for him socialism found support from both science and religion. Regarding the relationship between religion and politics, for Woodbey “politics has the sanction of God.”⁸⁵

Introducing his text and its purpose, Woodbey emphasized how “class struggle is made prominent” in his consideration of the Bible in relation to socialism. According to Robert H. Craig, Woodbey and other Christian socialists interpreted socialism as the core message of Christianity itself. God sides with the poor and oppressed against their oppressors, and Christians serve as “prophetic witnesses against societal forces destructive

⁸³ Woodbey, *What to Do*, 58-59.

⁸⁴ Woodbey, *What to Do*, 72-73.

⁸⁵ Woodbey, *The Bible and Socialism*, 90.

of human worth and dignity.”⁸⁶ Unlike other currents of Christian socialism however, Woodbey fully embraced a Marxist view of class struggle, even reading the Bible itself as “a history of the class struggle going on between the rich and the poor.” Woodbey views Marx as a prophet who “belonged to the same wonderful Hebrew race that gave to the world Moses” who would have been “made acquainted” with the “economic teachings” of the Jewish prophets.⁸⁷

With his dialogical rhetorical strategies, Woodbey blended “private conversation” into his efforts in the press to promote the socialist cause and recruit new members to the SP. While his mother may not have actually joined the party, his texts was likely based on real conversations the two must have had. Likewise, while impossible to estimate the number of new members his writings brought into the party, he did have some measurable success both as an orator and author in recruiting new members. As early as December 1903, a white woman named Mary E. Purdy from Chicago wrote a letter to the *Appeal to Reason* about how during a visit to San Diego, she attended Woodbey’s lectures every Sunday, “listening to his unanswerable logic, till at last I was convinced.”⁸⁸ More famously, in September 1908 Rev. George Washington Slater Jr. recalled in the *Chicago Daily Socialist* how in Chicago around the time of the SP’s national convention, Woodbey’s lectures and books convinced him to join the party. After studying the question further, Slater became convinced that socialism was the best possible solution to the problems facing Black Americans, and “the solution of the more serious phase of the so-called race problem,” and began holding “a Socialist meeting every Tuesday night” at his church.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Craig, *Religion & Radical Politics*, 118.

⁸⁷ Woodbey, *Bible and Socialism*, 89, 100, 92-93.

⁸⁸ “How a Noted Woman Writer Was Converted to Socialism,” *Appeal to Reason*, 5 December 1903.

⁸⁹ “How and Why I Became a Socialist,” *Chicago Daily Socialist*, 8 September 1908.

REPRESSION, WAR, AND CONTINUED SOCIALIST FAITH

Dennis V. Allen remembered Mount Zion dismissing Rev. Woodbey in 1912, the only apparent source from which many have interpreted Woodbey's radicalism as alienating him from the traditions of the Black community and the Black church.⁹⁰ Did Allen remember incorrectly? And Oliver's memory of Woodbey as an "army" man likewise seems strange. He never served in the U.S. military. What "army" then could she be referring to? This chapter will return to these questions during Rev. Woodbey's life after 1915, and turns now to his work as an organizer for the SP.

According to the Dennis V. Allen, as quoted to Philip S. Foner, Mount Zion relieved Rev. Woodbey from his ministerial duties in 1912 because he mixed "too much Socialism with his Bible." As a postal worker Allen delivered George and Mary Woodbey's mail between 1912-1916.⁹¹ While scholars have generally repeated the claim about Woodbey leaving Mount Zion in 1912, more recently historian Winston James raised questions about whether or not other factors motivated his dismissal, including outside pressure on the church.⁹² For example, in 1912 Woodbey himself reported being "violently" attacked by police officers, and a report in *The Citizen* described how five vigilantes were discovered outside his house who appeared intent on murdering the Reverend. Only an armed patrol from the Free Speech League seems to have prevented the lynching.⁹³ It would by no means be a stretch to assume Mt. Zion may have itself been targeted.

⁹⁰ P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 28, 35 n. 57.

⁹¹ P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 35 n. 57.

⁹² W. James, "Red and Black in Jim Crow America," in *Time Longer Than Rope*, 358.

⁹³ "Charge Policemen With Misconduct," *San Diego Union*, 22 February 1912; *The Citizen*, repr. In *St. Louis Labor*, 27 April 1912, qtd. in P. Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 29-30

According to Foner, Dennis Allen claimed to have helped recruit Woodbey to Mt. Zion “and was also part of the group which had him removed.”⁹⁴ I have failed to locate any additional source material regarding the matter beyond Foner’s secondhand citation of Allen from a letter he received from Harland Adams, which summarized Allen’s account. On the other hand, there is scant evidence Woodbey himself ever served as Mt. Zion’s primary pastor, although based on oral histories alone he certainly preached there regularly. In the majority of accounts published in California newspapers between 1902 and 1912 referring to Woodbey, he is described as an “orator” and only occasionally as a minister. Woodbey’s signature to a 1908 manifesto by Christian ministers across the country promoting socialism is listed under a section titled “Clergymen not in charge of congregations.” In the 1910 census his occupation is listed as “lecturer” of “socialist propaganda,” and a 1912 city directory likewise lists his occupation as “lecturer.”⁹⁵ That same year 1912 P.E. Robinson is named Mt. Zion’s pastor in advertisements for the church although only three years after apparently being dismissed from the congregation, Woodbey served as a representative of the church at the Western Baptist Association convention in Pasadena, CA in August 1915. The *California Eagle* reported him as one “of the convention’s parliamentarians—a forceful debater.”⁹⁶

Published in Los Angeles, the *California Eagle* provides evidence contradicting the accepted narrative regarding his relationship with the church. On Feb 5, 1916, the paper’s San Diego news section reported “Rev. G.W. Woodby[sic]” as Mount Zion’s pastor, and

⁹⁴ Foner, *Black Socialist Preacher*, 35 n57.

⁹⁵ “Big Church Movement for Universal Socialism,” *Houston Chronicle* (Texas) 17 September 1908; 1910 Census; 1912 San Diego City Directory.

⁹⁶ “Churches of All Creeds in City,” *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 1 January 1912; “Colored Churches Planning Revival,” *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 18 July 1912; “Black Evangelist Addresses Baptists,” *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 16 December 1912; “Colored Baptists Hold The Greatest Session in the History of Organization,” *California Eagle*, 22 August 1915.

notes his wife's involvement in organizing a celebration "in honor of the young ladies of the B.Y.P.U. and Sunday School of the Mt. Zion Church." In the same edition, the paper published a letter from Rev. Woodbey explaining his resignation from the church following a dispute on February 2 involving another minister, a Rev. Curry, who according to Woodbey "took communion in the A.M.E. church, after making a talk declaring that he believed it was right, and if his church turned him out, they could do so." Presenting the case before Mount Zion's congregation, according to Woodbey:

the church took a standing vote as to whether it stood for open communion; and the majority stood for making it an open communion organization. As a Baptist I stand where the Baptists have stood in all ages, upon the belief that the Bible stands for restricting the communion to the membership of the Baptist churches, and there was nothing left for me to do but resign.⁹⁷

Over a month later another letter published in the *Eagle* and signed by several deacons and other church members provided a different account of the dispute, stating Rev. Curry asked for "the church's pardon" if he had transgressed against its rules, and that the vote taken reflected only the personal opinions of those who participated rather than a decision by the congregation to embrace "open communion." The signers stated they were "pray[ing] to God to send us a missionary Baptist preacher" following Woodbey's resignation.⁹⁸

Foner and other scholars note Woodbey remained active in the SP until at least 1915, but here his story typically ends. Rev. Woodbey died in 1937 and remained politically active until his death. While he no longer maintained a high degree of activity inside the SP, after 1915 he participated in other organizations around civil rights issues and continued to speak on Black history. At the same time his work as a minister took on new dimensions. He attended regional and national Baptist conventions, in 1917 returning

⁹⁷ George Washington Woodbey, "To the California Eagle," *California Eagle*, 5 February 1916.

⁹⁸ *California Eagle*, 25 March 1916. The letter was signed by Brother J.W. Gray, Brother S. Freeman, Brother J. Langley, Deacons, and Mrs. C.E. Norwood, Clerk.

to Tennessee for the first and only time in his life. During his final decade Rev. Woodbey pastored at San Diego's Calvary Baptist Church (founded as San Diego's Second Baptist, one of the oldest African American churches in the city) and in 1932 represented Calvary's congregation at a fellowship meeting held at Mount Zion.⁹⁹

In 1914, Woodbey ran as the SP's candidate for state treasurer, becoming the first African American to run for state office in California. Running against Friend W. Richardson, who was endorsed by the Republican, Democratic, and Progressive parties, his campaign faced strong opposition. Although reported to have spent only \$109 on his campaign, Woodbey lectured and debated across the state before the election. In August, he gave a street corner campaign speech voicing his support for a law limiting the legal workday to 8 hours, and his views on a prohibitionist bill "from a labor and social standpoint." In Fresno he elaborated on the contradiction between employers who opposed the eight-hour law because it would cut wages: "Every employer wants the wages of the worker cut and if this law will cut wages, why are the employers fight it." He spoke in Fresno on "The New Slavery." His campaign aimed to win the broadest possible support, optimistically hoping for over 100,000 votes, and backing from African American voters.¹⁰⁰

As war broke out in Europe, Woodbey addressed it head on in a campaign speech on the corner of Eight and Main in Riverside in August. Woodbey first addressed how the

⁹⁹ Albert F. Ross, "San Diego, Calif.," *Chicago Defender*, 17 October 1931; E.B. Wesley, "San Diego News," *California Eagle*, 2 December 1932; Albert F. Ross, "San Diego, Calif.," *Chicago Defender*, 17 December 1932. The 1938 index of registered voters in California lists his political affiliation as Socialist. "California, Voter Registrations, 1900-1968," database with images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61066/>), downloaded October 11, 2020), San Diego County, 1938, Roll 026, George W. Woodbey, citing State of California, United States. Great Register of Voters. Sacramento, California: California State Library.

¹⁰⁰ "Socialist Candidate to Speak Tonight," *Santa Ana Register* (California), 29 August 1914; "Colored Socialist to Give Lecture," *Fresno Republican* (California), 22 October 1914; "Defends Socialists in European War," *Fresno Republican*, 26 October 1914; "First Negro Candidate," *San Jose Mercury Herald* (California), 1 November 1914.

Progressive Party seemed to have adopted a platform including demands the SP had been making for years. “We Socialist knew the Progressive party would come into existence,” he noted, “because the spread of Socialism always results in the splitting of the capitalist parties into their various constituencies.” Turning to events in Europe, Woodbey described how European Socialists had fought to prevent the continent’s capitalist “bulldogs” from tearing each other apart, describing the war as a fight between capitalists over the spoils of an ongoing colonialism.¹⁰¹ His analysis also considered the war as an instance akin to what Naomi Klein has called “disaster capitalism.”¹⁰² Woodbey proclaimed: “Vultures welcome war...and profit by it. The war will help America exactly as the earthquake and fire in San Francisco helped California. This made work, furnished employment to labor. Under Socialism it won’t be necessary to destroy cities and slaughter men on battlefields in order to keep labor employed.”¹⁰³ A month later, Woodbey expressed disbelief when reports suggested socialist parties in Europe were supporting the war in France and Germany. Similar to Lenin in Russia, who at first viewed reports the German Social Democratic Party had voted as a block in the German Reichstag in support of funding for the war as “a provocation, a trick by the government to confuse the opposition,” Woodbey assumed such reports were “a gross misrepresentation” due to censorship to “suit the conditions” of the war makers.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ “Socialist Speaks Here: Colored Man Defends Principals of His Party,” *Riverside Independent Enterprise* (California), 24 August 1914.

¹⁰² Klein considers how disasters war open up possibilities private capital and explores “the intersection between superprofits and megadisasters.” See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador Press, 2008).

¹⁰³ “Socialist Speaks Here: Colored Man Defends Principals of His Party,” *Riverside Independent Enterprise* (California) Aug. 24, 1914.

¹⁰⁴ Lars T. Lih, *Lenin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 121-122; Woodbey qtd. in “Defends Socialists in European War,” *Fresno Republican*, Oct. 26, 1914.

After resigning from Mount Zion in San Diego, Woodbey returned to the Midwest. On November 4, 1916, the Black owned Omaha newspaper the *Monitor* advertised “A Great Educational Lecture at Grove M.E. Church” on “The Negro in Ancient History by The Rev. Dr. George Woodby[sic], The Great Negro Socialist Lecturer of San Diego, Cal.” and the following week announced Woodbey’s plans to speak at St. James A.M.E. church, mentioning his “national reputation as a lecturer on Socialism.”¹⁰⁵

After spending some time in Nebraska and Kansas, in the fall of 1917 Woodbey was back in Tennessee, where he returned to the place of his birth for the first time since leaving for Kansas in 1870. Although no longer prominently identified as a member of the SP, Woodbey’s sermons in Tennessee reflected his ongoing socialist faith. In August before “A Large Audience of Several Hundred” in Nashville, he delivered a sermon on “rent, interest and profit” and concluded “to put the golden rule into practice would overthrow the present industrial system,” according to the *Nashville Globe*. He also delivered sermons on the war raging in Europe, according to the paper. One such sermon was advertised under the title, “Should the preachers Apply the Teachings of Christ and the Bible to the Present War?”¹⁰⁶

Visiting Johnson City in early 1918, a local paper reported on a lecture he delivered recalling his childhood growing up in the area, his father’s involvement in supporting the Union Army during the Civil War, the arrival of the railroads, his early education by a teacher who “somehow managed to get a knowledge of letters during his life as a slave” and his mother’s involvement in the “first Negro Baptist [church]” in the community. A

¹⁰⁵ “Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors,” *Imperial Valley Press* (California), 13 October 1916; *The Monitor*, 4 November 1916; *The Monitor*, 11 November 1916.

¹⁰⁶ “A Large Audience of Several Hundred Hear Rev. G.W. Woodbey’s Sermon Last Sunday at the Bijou Theater,” *Nashville Globe*, 17 August 1917. See also “Distinguished Lecturer,” *Nashville Globe*, 14 December 1917.

few months later, announcing another Woodbey lecture, the same paper commented on his politics, issuing what amounted to a veiled warning by stating “it is hoped that he is not the same type of socialist that has wrecked Russia, and has sided with the Germans in America.”¹⁰⁷ One reason Woodbey likely appears to have deemphasized his relationship with the SP likely was the heightened repression and threats faced by open socialists after the U.S. entered the World War, but it is clear from the little evidence that exists that he continued to expound a socialist philosophy rooted in his Christian faith.

After spending several more months preaching in Tennessee and Kentucky, Rev. Woodbey returned to California in November 1918. The *California Eagle* announced, “his return mad us think of the prodigal son.”¹⁰⁸ He quickly involved himself in efforts to organize a local branch of the NAACP in San Diego, and along with Dennis V. Allen was one of the original charter members of the new group in 1919.¹⁰⁹ In 1921 until around 1926 Woodbey also worked editing the San Diego’s Black owned newspaper *The New Idea*.¹¹⁰ Although unable to track down any surviving copies, an article from the *New Idea* was republished in the U.N.I.A.’s *Negro World*, on Oct. 1, 1921 and mentions Rev. Woodbey as the San Diego U.N.I.A.’s chaplain. At its second anniversary celebration, the San Diego branch met at Mount Zion Baptist Church, and paraded through the streets to Balboa Park, where Rev. Woodbey “was introduced as the speaker of the day.”¹¹¹ This parade, or one

¹⁰⁷ “Johnson City Fifty Seven Years Ago,” *Johnson City Staff*, 25 January 1918; *Johnson City Staff*, 13 March 1918.

¹⁰⁸ *California Eagle*, 30 November 1918.

¹⁰⁹ *California Eagle*, 28 December 1918; Application for Charter of San Diego, Cal. Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, San Diego, California, NAACP Branch Files, 1914-1920, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress,

¹¹⁰ *N.W. Ayer & Son’s American Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Sons, 1925), 108.

¹¹¹ “U.N.I.A. and A.C.L. of San Diego, Cal., Celebrate 2D Anniversary,” *Negro World*, 1 October 1921. The article’s tagline appears as “The New Idea, San Diego Cal.” “The Dollar Dinner of the U.N.I.A. was the Greatest Event of the Season in San Diego,” *Negro World*, 22 April 1922.

like it, is likely the source of Ethel Christina Oliver's recollections discussed earlier as someone who "had whiskers and everything—and in parades he was one of the top ones in there when he marched and people would come from all over to see the parades."¹¹²

While few details regarding his activities with the NAACP or UNIA exist, Woodbey also continued to be a popular lecturer. In May 1923, he delivered an address before the "Athenaeum Club" in San Diego on "One Phase of the Negro Question," and in August spoke on "America and the New Negro Problem."¹¹³ In 1927, the *San Diego Union* reported he was still delivering his popular lecture on the "Negro in Ancient History," at San Diego's Calvary Baptist Church, which he served as a preacher throughout the 1920s. At the beginning of the 1930s, he remained an active lecturer at clubs, schools, and churches, and his activities were reported as far away as the *Chicago Defender*.¹¹⁴

CONCLUSION

George Washington Woodbey lived a long and remarkable life, and his significance extends beyond his years as a prominent organizer for the SP. Nevertheless, his efforts to connect African Americans with the socialist movement during the first decades of the twentieth century mark an important moment in the history of Black socialist thought. Although scholars have until recently maintained a silence on his life after 1915, he continued to preach his gospel truth until his death in 1937, and socialists continued to remember and invoke his work. Omaha's Black owned newspaper the *Monitor* carried a letter from a local comrade in June 1918 recalling Woodbey's role in establishing "the

¹¹² Robert Carlton interview with Ethel Christina Oliver, May 10, 1976, San Diego Historical Society Oral History Program, San Diego Historical Society.

¹¹³ "Pastor Will Speak on Negro Question," *San Diego Union*, 1 May 1923; "Will Speak at Club," *San Diego Union*, 13 August 1923.

¹¹⁴ "Negro's Contribution to Arts to Be Theme," *San Diego Union*, 1 March 1927; "Negro Author Speaks Today," *San Bernardino County Sun*, 21 April 1930; "San Bernardino, Cal." *Chicago Defender*, 3 May 1930; "San Diego Calif." *Chicago Defender*, 12 July 1930; "San Diego, Calif.," *Chicago Defender*, 9 August 1930

Baptist church in this city” and his 1914 run for state treasurer on the SP ticket in California. The letter’s author, a white socialist named Jesse T. Brillhart, was replying to articles in the previous week’s paper on the SP’s nomination of three Black candidates to run for office in New York. Brill repeated tired arguments positing “wage slavery” as more “detestable than chattel slavery,” but at the same time claimed: “The Colored race holds the fate of industrial democracy [socialism] within the hollow of its hand.”¹¹⁵

Woodbey’s intellectual production as a preacher, organizer, and author reveal how his socialist political ideas and practices extended and drew from Black Christianity’s liberationist streams and the abolitionist tradition, as well as his deep historical knowledge, personal experience, and background in the Baptist church. Rev. Woodbey did not only introduce the Black prophetic Christian tradition and Marxist social analysis to each other, but discovered a socialist impulse in his Black Christian faith, an impulse he saw extending across human history. Woodbey did the “special work” and made the “special equipment” called for in 1911 by Caribbean born Harlem based SP member Hubert Harrison to recruit Black workers to the party. His contributions to early Black socialist political thought drew on the abolitionist traditions of Walker, Garnet and Clark, the liberationist theology of the Black Church, and a lifetime of struggle.

¹¹⁵ Jesse T. Brillhart, “Socialism and the Negro,” Omaha, June 22, 1917, Letter to the Editor, *The Monitor*, June 29, 1918. Brillhart’s letter refers to the previous week’s articles, “New York Socialists Nominate Candidates” and “New York Socialists Consistent,” *The Monitor*, June 22, 1918. In November, the *Monitor* published George Frazier Miller’s responses to a survey on his political positions. Miller was one of the SP’s candidates for Congress in New York, and among the three African Americans discussed in the previous articles. “Socialist Candidate States His Position,” *The Monitor*, Nov. 2, 1918.

CONCLUSION

The history and development of early Black socialist thought begins before and outside Black radicalism's encounter with Marxism in the twentieth century. As this study has attempted to show, the Black Radical Tradition itself has provided its own anti-capitalist critiques, internationalist political perspectives, and class-based analysis in struggles against racial capitalism, beginning with efforts to overthrow chattel slavery and white supremacy in the early nineteenth century. By looking outside their formal affiliation with organized socialist political parties, this study has provided an alternative ideological and organizational genealogy of early Black Socialists Peter H. Clark and George Washington Woodbey, introducing new sources for thinking about their gravitation toward the formally constituted socialist parties. Finally, considering at length George Washington Woodbey's radicalization alongside his first wife, Annie R. Woodbey between 1873 and 1901, as well as his intellectual production as the leading Black member of the Socialist Party of America in the first decade of the twentieth century, I have sought to establish Woodbey as a Black political thinker who made a significant contribution to the development of Black socialist and radical thought. Not only did he recruit an untold number of African Americans to the SP in the early twentieth century, but his work also inspired and impressed the Black Socialist Hubert Harrison, who went on to develop the first sophisticated Marxist analysis of the relationship between race and class before leaving the SP and participating in some of the

most important institutions and political efforts associated with the “New Negro” Movement.

Instead of viewing socialism as a political philosophy or tradition existing outside Black political thought, I have suggested the possibilities for imagining a Black socialist political tradition developing from within sources including Black abolitionist writings, the Colored Conventions Movement, Black working-class experience, and Black Christianity. In doing so, this study also calls attention to a greater ideological diversity within Black political thought in the nineteenth century on questions of nationalism, class, and capitalism than is commonly assumed. Considering the Black Radical Tradition as producing anti-capitalist critique and containing its own socialist values before the engagement between Black radicals and Marxism in the twentieth century produces not only new narrative possibilities regarding the historical development of the Black socialist tradition but opens up new possibilities for exploring how Black political thought addresses questions about the relationship between Black freedom, capitalism, and its possible alternatives.

The abolitionist writings of David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet directly influenced Peter H. Clark’s early political ideas as a participant in the Colored Conventions Movement, and George Washington Woodbey considered socialism an extension of the abolitionist movement’s efforts to overthrow slavery in all its forms. In addition to exploring what Sterling Stuckey calls “the seeds of socialism” in Walker’s

and Garnet's thought in my first chapter,¹¹⁶ I believe that Walker and Garnet remain vital sources for theorizing and imagining a liberatory oppositional politics and historical consciousness today. Building off Nikki M. Taylor's biography of Peter H. Clark, my chapters on Clark and Woodbey depart from accounts which consider Clark as the founder of the Black socialist political tradition in the United States. In part, this stems from my decentering of organized socialist political parties as the center around which a Black socialist politics emerges. At the same time, while Clark's oratory and writings while a member of the Socialist Labor Party were significant for their time, I have found little evidence of their impact after his decision to leave to party. Clark also did not significantly address socialism as something bearing direct and specific relevance for Black Americans or Black workers. Instead, his lasting legacy as an abolitionist, Colored Conventions Movement participant, and, after Reconstruction, his anti-lynching activism left an important legacy shaping the organizational and ideological context in which a young George Washington Woodbey, whose own writings and speeches as a national organizer for the Socialist Party did attempt to make socialism relevant for working class Black Americans and I argue marked a significant contribution to Black socialist thought, first developed as a political thinker and activist.

My chapter on Rev. Woodbey's early years, including his involvement in the National Afro-American League, the Prohibition Party, and work as a preacher alongside his first wife Annie R. Woodbey, fills an important biographical gap in the extant

¹¹⁶ Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 49.

literature on his later years inside the SP. At the same time, and perhaps more importantly, it maps out new areas for exploring the history and contributions of African Americans in the Midwest. I discovered an enormous amount of material concerning George and Annie Woodbey's activities and the larger Black community of Omaha in the 1880s and 1890s during my research for this project. This study also has brought to light new information about Rev. Woodbey's SP years and what came after. Rather than disappearing in 1915, Rev. Woodbey returned to the South and upon returning to California in 1918 continued to play an active role in San Diego's African American community. While details became scarce in his later years, his involvement with the UNIA, and editorship of the San Diego *New Idea* newspaper, deserve greater attention.

Finally, I hope this work encourages further study of the Black Radical Tradition as a source of comprehension and opposition to "a civilization maddened by its own perverse assumptions and contradictions."¹¹⁷ In the midst of an ongoing global pandemic, economic crisis, endless war, and a looming climate catastrophe, the Black Radical Tradition remains a radical source of faith. It tells us to remember, as the Rev. George Washington Woodbey might preach to us were he alive today: "Even unto death there is life, everlasting hope."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 318.

¹¹⁸ This is quoted as Rev. Woodbey's "motto" in an article written by Frank Andrews after referring to Woodbey's electoral defeat in his run for California state treasurer in the 1914 elections, titled "Prominent People Attending Fair" which appeared in the *Chicago Defender* on August 21, 1915.

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