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# Still in the fight: The struggle for community in the Upper Midwest for African American Civil War Veterans

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**Still in the fight: The struggle for community in the Upper Midwest**

**for African American Civil War Veterans**

by

**Dwain Coleman**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

Major: History

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## ABSTRACT

The Civil War and Emancipation had a transformative effect on the nation as a whole but an even greater effect on the lives of African Americans. While historians have examined the effects of the Civil War and Emancipation on African Americans in the South in detail, few have explored the effects of such events on African Americans in the Upper Midwest.

Also lacking in this historiography is how the military service of African Americans affected the lives of these veterans and the communities in the Upper Midwest they helped to form after the Civil War. Using the black community of Newton, Iowa after the Civil War as a case study, this thesis argues that African American veterans who settled in the Upper Midwest used the political capital of their service, kinship ties, and other social institutions to forge and maintain space for African American communities.

African American Civil War veterans and other black citizens continued for decades after the war to remind their white neighbors of their earned space in the community. They viewed their emancipation and citizenship as rewards for their military service and loyalty to the nation and struggled to obtain the full rights of citizenship still denied them. They did this by using the few unconventional political tools at their disposal namely the political capital accrued through military service and kinship ties. The African American citizens of Newton, as a result, were able to create a prosperous and influential black community and secure many of the social rights reserved for full citizens in what was before the war a region of the country fearful of black immigration.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

On August 10, 1894, five thousand veterans of the Civil War gathered at the Iowa State capital for a historic celebration. Iowa Governor Frank D. Jackson had ordered the Civil War battle flags of Iowa's units moved to a hermetically sealed glass case at the state capital for display. Previously stored at the state arsenal, they had slowly deteriorated as they lay forgotten in their tomb. Diligent memorialists had rescued the tattered banners from their ignominious fate, hoping they would serve as a memorial to the men who fought and died under them in the preservation of the nation. The flags had earned an honored place like the men in this solemn procession who now bore them to their final abode.

Scores of citizens watched and wept as thousands of gray-haired, bent, and embattled soldiers marched through the streets of Des Moines to the capitol building, remembering the sacrifice that these men and their fallen comrades had made in the preservation of the nation. As the flags passed, one old man in the crowd of onlookers, with tears in his eyes, cried out, "My boy fell defending that flag." The crowd made way as he moved forward and the color bearers allowed him to touch, kiss, and bathe the flag in his tears. This solemn and revered scene played out repeatedly as the crowds watched in silence as these men of a bygone era and the colors they bore marched on to their rest. These men, too, were symbols, inspiring in those that looked upon them to remember their sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Battle Flag Committee, *Battle Flag Day: August 10, 1894. Ceremonials Attending the Transfer of the Battle Flags of Iowa Regiments from the Arsenal to the Capital* (Des Moines: F.R. Conway, State Printer, 1896), 14.

In the midst of this crowd of thousands of living memorials was a group of men whom those watching the procession could not help but notice. These men were members of the 60<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry (USCI) formerly known as the 1<sup>st</sup> Iowa Regiment of African Descent. Some of them had come, like their white comrades, over great distances to be present for the ceremonies. They were there to remind fellow Iowans of the sacrifices they had made in their defense and why they had earned their right to be called citizens of the state and the nation.<sup>2</sup>

Among these men of the 60<sup>th</sup> USCI were Jason Green, Alexander E. Fine, Lewis Mays, Anderson Hays, Clement and John Miller, and Walker Wolden, all from Newton, Iowa.<sup>3</sup> Having stolen their freedom, each of them made their way, some together, from Missouri to Iowa. Once in Iowa, they were not content to claim freedom for themselves; they also hoped to free the rest of their friends, neighbors, and loved ones, as well as secure the rights of full citizenship in the community of Newton.

The veterans and the family and kin they fought so hard to free from bondage would eventually create a small yet respected black community in the predominately white Upper Midwestern town of Newton, Iowa. While the battle for equal rights for African Americans was waged at the national and state level by such men as Alexander Clark of Muscatine and others, African American Iowans like those in Newton had to contend for community space and rights at the local level. Throughout the rest of their lives, the African American veterans of Newton waged small battles of a different sort. The right to employment, education, community participation, and to dictate the terms of their membership in the community were battles fought.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 18; Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans*, (Lawrence: The University of Kansas, 2004), 33. Shaffer points out that African American Civil War vets in the South were visible leaders in their black communities. This is also true of Upper Midwestern States such as Iowa.

<sup>3</sup> "Iowa Soldiers Celebrate," *Iowa State Bystander* (Friday August 17, 1894): 1.

Though they could rely on the patronage of some white Newton residents, this small community of African Americans used this and other tools at their disposal to facilitate the changes that would shape not only themselves but the whole community as well. Leveraging their military service was a crucial tactic they and many others used to obtain their goals. Rooting their community in kinship networks created through military service and using their status to demand rights in education, business, homeownership, and participation in community organizations, they constantly reminded Newton residents and other Iowans that they had earned their place in the community through their service.

Similar to Steven Hahn's argument about African-Americans in the South in *A Nation Under Our Feet*, African Americans in the Upper Midwest developed a distinct culture and community in the face of great opposition and not only transformed themselves but the world around them. Though small in number and lacking traditional political power, African Americans in the Upper Midwest were able to surmount both state and local prejudices. Former slaves were able to forge space for themselves in the Upper Midwest by using both pre-emancipation social institutions and relationships formed in slavery, along with those formed as a result of military service.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Massachusetts: Harvard University, 2003), 5.



## CHAPTER 2

MAKING THE 60<sup>TH</sup> UNITED STATES COLORED INFANTRY

These men of Newton were not alone in their struggle. Over eleven hundred men served in the 60<sup>th</sup>, stationed for most of their two-year service on the banks of the Mississippi River in and near the town of Helena, Arkansas. They suffered much due to the oppressive southern heat, bitterly cold winters, malaria-infected mosquitoes, and, most of all disease.<sup>5</sup> Of the 1,153 soldiers enlisted in the 60<sup>th</sup> USCI, eleven were killed in combat while the vast majority, 332, succumbed to disease and injury.<sup>6</sup> Most of the surviving men of the 60<sup>th</sup>, like veterans from Newton, would suffer for the rest of their lives, and some, years later, would die from the afflictions contracted as a result of their service.<sup>7</sup>

For the men of the 60<sup>th</sup>, the road to obtaining the right to bear arms, wear the uniform and carry the flag of the state was a battle itself. At the start of the war in 1861, they were denied the right to take up arms in the defense of their state and nation. Long held racial prejudice and fears about African Americans migrating to the state made Iowa a somewhat inhospitable place for African Americans.<sup>8</sup> Many in the state and the nation believed that this was a white man's war and world and that there was no place for African-Americans in either.<sup>9</sup> When Iowans finally allowed these men to fight, men like Governor Kirkwood did so under the rationale that it was

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<sup>5</sup> David Brodnax Sr., "'Will They Fight? Ask the Enemy": Iowa's African American Regiment in the Civil War,' *The Annals of Iowa* Third Series 66, no. 3, 4 (Summer/Fall 2007): 278-280.

<sup>6</sup> Guy E. Logan, *Roster and Record of Iowa Troops In the Rebellion Historical Sketch: Together with Historical Sketches of Volunteer Organizations, 1861-1866*, Vol. 5 (Des Moines: "N.P.", 1910), 1587.

<sup>7</sup> Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 55. Examining the Pension Records of Jason Green, John and Clement Miller, Lewis Mays, Walker Wolden, Alexander Fine, and Anderson Hays all suffered from some chronic illness. Jason Green in particular contracted heart problems during his enlistment and suffered with it until he died of heart failure years later.

<sup>8</sup> David Brodnax, "Breathing Freedoms Air: The African American Struggle for Equal Citizenship in Iowa, 1830-1900," (Evanston: UMI Microfilm, 2008), 132.

<sup>9</sup> James McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War for Union*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 22.

better for a black man to die than for a white man.<sup>10</sup> Now during the Battle Flag Day celebration in 1894, these once enslaved and disenfranchised men were Iowa citizens. Their military service was crucial in this transformation. The political capital accrued during their service allowed them to secure the right to vote, equal education in many cases, and space in local communities like Newton for themselves and their families. Through their service, they not only represented the state of Iowa and defended it with their very lives but also transformed the state and their communities in the process. The veterans of the 60<sup>th</sup> USCI, who made Newton their home, are just one example of the hundreds of other African-American Civil War veterans who used their service to build, strengthen and negotiate space in white northern communities.

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<sup>10</sup> H.W. Lathrop, *The Life and Times of Samuel J. Kirkwood, Iowa's War Governor* (Iowa City: "U.P." 1893), 258; Leslie Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 114; Brodnax, "Breathing Freedoms Air," 134.

## CHAPTER 3

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Once discharged from service on October 15, 1865, at Devalls Bluff in Arkansas, members of the 60<sup>th</sup> made their way home to Iowa. They arrived in Davenport on November 2, 1865, to a hero's welcome. According to the regimental historian, they "were greeted by the authorities and the loyal thousands of Iowa."<sup>11</sup> Such a reception was a change from the initially hostile position that many in Iowa and throughout the nation had taken concerning the enlistment of African American soldiers. Here, after many years of toil, disease, death, and discrimination, the people of Iowa welcomed the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> home as exultant victors. They had proven that they were men, and many of their members had sacrificed their lives to preserve the union. In the process, the perceptions that many white Iowans had of these men were transformed. Soldiers and politicians who were once critical of the abilities of black men were now praising and honoring them for their service.<sup>12</sup>

Such a reception, however, should not be construed as evidence of an overall desire of white Iowans to formally grant African-American men with any new degree of civil rights. Like other white northerners, many Iowans came to believe that African Americans were entitled to basic rights such as life, liberty, and happiness, but this is where they drew the line. Social rights or secular privileges were rights reserved by the community for only the most worthy.<sup>13</sup> Wartime

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<sup>11</sup> "Iowa Soldiers Celebrate," *Iowa State Bystander* Friday (August 17, 1894), 1; *The Davenport Daily Gazette* (November 4, 1865), 4. The *Davenport Daily Gazette* states that due to the late notice of the regiment's arrival and the poor weather that there was no parade held upon their return on November 2. The *Iowa State Bystander* in 1894 however quotes Sergeant Burton (most likely Isaac Burton) as saying, "they were greeted by the authorities and loyal thousands of Iowa." It could be likely that a reception was held in the days following their return.

<sup>12</sup> Brodnax, "'Will they Fight? Ask the Enemy,'" 270-271; Brodnax "Breathing Freedom's Air", 161.

<sup>13</sup> V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro During The Civil War*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 4.

service did, however, provide the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> and other African American Iowans with an opportunity. Their military service had earned the men substantial political capital or goodwill that could be used to influence much needed and desired policy changes concerning their status in Iowa communities.<sup>14</sup>

Among those present to greet the returning men of the 60<sup>th</sup> was Alexander Clark, Sr. Though Clark was not able to participate alongside the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> by bearing arms, the honored sergeant major still served in their battle for freedom on the home front.<sup>15</sup> There, Clark worked on behalf of the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> to demand equal rights and protection under the law in Iowa. Demanding the equal rights of citizenship represented a significant component of the mission of the members of the 60<sup>th</sup> from the very beginning.

Before the war and from the establishment of Iowa as a territory, the state was a battleground in the fight for equal rights for African Americans. Though the state's judiciary had made rulings that appeared progressive, Iowa had also legislated some of the strictest black codes of any northern state.<sup>16</sup> Much of this dichotomy rested upon the young state's demographics. The earliest settlers to Iowa were mainly white southerners, most from Kentucky.<sup>17</sup> These transplants from the South brought with them many racist ideas concerning African Americans. Holding the majority in the state government, they enacted laws that strictly

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<sup>14</sup> Brodnax, "Breathing Freedoms Air," 162.

<sup>15</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 119.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star: Black Freedom and White Supremacy on the Hawkeye Frontier*, (Ames: Iowa State Press, 1993), 26.

<sup>17</sup> Leola Nelson Bergmann, "The Negro in Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, (Iowa City: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1969), 6-8.

limited African American immigration to the state. Even though Iowa was a free territory and state, slaves were still brought to the state and kept as slaves.<sup>18</sup>

Iowa also enacted a number of Black Codes. These black codes were some of the most repressive laws of any northern state. The first session of the Territory Legislature in 1838, Iowa passed a number of black codes that firmly established white supremacy in the territory. The “Act to Regulate Blacks and Mulattoes” was meant to discourage persons of African descent from migrating to Iowa by making it a crime to enter the territory without posting a \$500 bond to ensure good behavior and written proof that they were legally free. For most potential settlers to Iowa, let alone newly freed African Americans, it was nearly impossible to pay such an exorbitant bond. Those found to have entered the state illegally could be hired out for six months at “the best price in cash that can be had.” The restrictions on African-Americans extended further to exclude them from the state house, public schools, juries, the state militia, and also banned them from interracial marriage and voting. The purpose of such acts emerged to protect white employment and racial superiority by discouraging black migration to Iowa.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these restrictions, black migration continued to occur even after the passing of these laws.<sup>20</sup> In some places and circumstances the laws were enforced by local governments and in others, they were not. If anything, these laws were enacted to remind African Americans of

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<sup>18</sup> One prominent slave who dwelt in Iowa for a time was Dred Scott who lived with his master John Emmerson in Davenport.

<sup>19</sup> Brodnax, “Breathing Freedom’s Air”, 25-26.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Dykstra, “White Men, Black Laws: Territory Iowans and Civil Rights, 1838-1843,” *The Annals of Iowa* 46, no.6 (Fall 1982): 409-10.

their precarious position in which they could at any moment be reduced to virtual slavery or expelled from the state.<sup>21</sup>

Given the unevenness of Iowa's racial laws and the capriciousness of their enforcement, some in the state began to look for possible political tactics that could be used to secure citizenship rights for African Americans. Of the proposed tactics, military service became the most prominent. After moving from Cincinnati to Muscatine, Iowa in 1848, Alexander Clark would have been keenly aware of Iowa's laws and also subject to them. On January 5, 1857, a "colored convention" was held in Muscatine to debate issues of inequality in the state. Clark was a prominent presence at this convention and acted as secretary.

During the conference, he and other members debated whether African Americans should emigrate to escape the inequalities they faced in Iowa. The committee appointed to review this measure concluded that the convention's members, as patriotic citizens, ought to be patient, remaining loyal to their state and hoping for equal rights in the future.<sup>22</sup> But the fact that African American Iowans were even considering the possibility of emigration displays the great frustration they felt with the inequalities that existed in the state and the nation. Still, they decided to remain patient and continue to use the tactics at their disposal.

The convention's Committee on Declaration of Sentiment noted that "the colored people of the State of Iowa, in convention, assembled, feel ourselves deeply aggrieved by reason of cruel prejudice we are compelled to suffer, in this our native land, which is as dear to us as the

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<sup>21</sup> Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 28-29. Iowa's black codes, which attempted to restrict the migration of African Americans from entering the state, were excluded in Iowa's new 1857 constitution. There were however, attempts up until 1863 to expel African American's from the state using past laws.

<sup>22</sup> McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War*, 76; The issue of emigrating to another country or colonizing some portion of the West was a popular reoccurring topic among African Americans and whites during the decades leading up to the war and after it.

white man....”<sup>23</sup> Their suffering was particularly unjust, the committee argued, “...knowing full well that the blood of our forefathers, in common with that of the white man, was poured out in open battle-field, in defense of the liberties we are now deprived of....” Convention members were keenly aware of the sacrifice that previous generations of African American men had made in the preservation of the country and they, years before the Civil War, were attempting to capitalize on this dedicated service in their fight for equal rights.

It should be no surprise, then, that Clark and others continued this appeal for equal rights for African American men by using the same rhetorical tactics used in the years before the Civil War began. Their demand for equal rights for African-American men on the basis of manhood and military service was an important tactic in the fight for freedom, citizenship, and space in Iowa’s communities. This strategy was used both in Iowa and throughout the nation.<sup>24</sup> After prevailing against the initial opposition from Iowa Governor Samuel Kirkwood, Democrats, white Iowans, and soldiers, Clark and others enthusiastically went to work joining and enlisting men to the ranks of the regiment that would become known as the 60<sup>th</sup> USCI.<sup>25</sup>

In August 1863, John and Clem Miller, Anderson and Henderson Hays, Alexander Fine, Alexander Nichols, Daniel Segiel, Walker Wolden and other African American men from Newton enlisted in the 1<sup>st</sup> Iowa Regiment of African Decent, later renamed the 60<sup>th</sup> USCI. All became members of Company E. From there they rendezvoused with the rest of their newly formed regiment at Keokuk, Iowa. After the organization of the regiment in Keokuk they were then stationed at St. Louis for a short time before eventually arriving at Helena Arkansas. Once

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<sup>23</sup> “Colored Convention in Iowa,” *Provincial Freeman* (March 21, 1857).

<sup>24</sup> McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War*, 163.

<sup>25</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora*, 109. Iowa, like other Midwestern states saw intense opposition to even the idea of African Americans serving as soldiers. As Schwalm points out, the long held racial prejudices of white Northerners who rarely regarded African Americans as adults, made it difficult for them to accept African American men in such an equalizing masculine roll as soldiering.

in Helena, the men of Company E were stationed on Island 66 guarding government-employed wood cutters against possible Confederate attack. Speaking of their assignment on Island 66, Captain George F. Work of Company E said, “we were stationed there for about three months to guard a government woodyard and until quarters were built the boys had a hard time and being constantly threatened with attack by guerrillas kept each one frequently on picket duty owing to the long line to guard and the fewness of my men.”<sup>26</sup> The harsh conditions, long hours of duty, and lack of adequate housing took its toll, and many like Alexander Nichols and Henderson Hays died as a result.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout their service, the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> were engaged in a few minor skirmishes and one major battle at Wallace’s Ferry in Big Creek Arkansas for which they won the praises of white officers and soldiers. One officer, Major Carmichael of the 15<sup>th</sup> Illinois, stated, “The officers and men of the Fifteen all unite in awarding the highest praise to the officers and men of the colored troops for their stubborn bravery in every action of the day.”<sup>28</sup> Though the heroics of the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> were few, their service, like that of many other colored troops on the battle fronts of the Mississippi Valley, were valuable to the defeat of the Confederates in that region of the country and the overall war effort.<sup>29</sup>

While the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> served, Clark and those who remained on the home front continued to petition for the expansion of rights for African Americans in the state. Upon the return of the 60<sup>th</sup>, Clark organized a convention on behalf of the men and their Colonel, John

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<sup>26</sup> Affidavit of Capt. George F. Work, July 14, 1892, Jason Green Pension File, RG 15, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as NARA).

<sup>27</sup> Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions, November 8, 1889, Henderson Hays, RG 15, NARA. Henderson was reported to have died on Island 66 of either quick consumption or pneumonia.

<sup>28</sup> Brian Robertson, “Will They Fight? Ask the Enemy”: United States Colored Troops at Big Creek, Arkansas, July 26, 1864” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* Vol. LXVI, no. 3 (Autumn 2007): 331.

<sup>29</sup> William Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops 1862-1867* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013), 248.



Hudson for one last duty. On Tuesday, October 31, 1865, after their arrival in Davenport, 700 men of the 60<sup>th</sup> gathered at Camp McClellan, electing honorary Sergeant Major Alexander Clark as president of the convention. The men of the 60<sup>th</sup> saw Clark as one of their own. Though he did not suffer the same hardships they endured, he nonetheless represented them as an important spokesman in their fight for equality. He was a soldier in their cause.

Clark addressed the mass convention saying, “Now, my friends, we have a work to perform, and here today. A duty we owe ourselves and our race, in asking for those political rights of which we are now deprived.”<sup>30</sup> He continued adding, “therefore, we can now ask the legislature to do its duty and prepare the way for our approach to the ballot box.” For Clark and the men of the 60<sup>th</sup>, now, with the political capital secured through military service, was the time to demand suffrage rights for African American men. Iowans were listening. An editorial in the Davenport Daily Gazette praised the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> arguing that “each one of these seven hundred colored soldiers represented in the field a white citizen... They have nobly performed their duty as citizens in the field; they ask for recognition as citizens at home.”<sup>31</sup> More importantly, the editorial asked, “can anyone anywhere tell us why the ballot should not be placed in the hands of these Iowa soldiers who have so faithfully used the bullet in the Nation’s defense?” Towards the conclusion of the convention, a committee of ten were appointed, consisting of one sergeant from each company. These sergeants had the responsibility of gaining the signature of each of the men of their company for a petition which would then be sent to the next state legislature requesting that African-American men in the state have the right of

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<sup>30</sup> “Convention of Colored Soldiers at Camp McClellan” Davenport Daily Gazette, November 4, 1865.

<sup>31</sup> “The Appeal of the Colored Soldier of Iowa,” Davenport Daily Gazette, November 4, 1865.

suffrage. Alexander Clark had the privileged appointment of conveying this petition to the next state legislative session and there presented the men of the 60<sup>th</sup>'s request.<sup>32</sup>

Other meetings and conventions were held in the fight for black male suffrage over the next three years. Black male suffrage would not be realized in Iowa until 1868 by referendum. The service of the 60<sup>th</sup> and the continued petitioning of a political activist like Alexander Clark were crucial components which helped to change perceptions in Iowa concerning voting rights for African American men. As Robert Dykstra has pointed out, Iowa over the decades both preceding and following the Civil War saw a drastic shift in its citizens attitudes towards blacks, "From one of the most racist territories in the North in the 1840's, Iowa became by the late 1860's one of the most egalitarian states in the entire union."<sup>33</sup> At the time of the passage of black male suffrage in Iowa in 1868, the state became one of only five Northern states to grant full suffrage to African American men.<sup>34</sup> This transition of the Hawkeye state from racist exclusionist to "The Bright Radical Star" of the North owes much to the actions of the African American men and women of the state and especially to the men of the 60<sup>th</sup>.<sup>35</sup> Not only did Iowa's enfranchisement of African-American men affect the state, it also further paved the way for the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 and, with it, black male suffrage throughout the country. Securing the right to vote as well as working toward other essential civil liberties for African Americans, represented one step in obtaining the vision that African American Iowans

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<sup>32</sup> "Convention of Colored Soldiers at Camp McClellan," Davenport Daily Gazette, November 4, 1865.

<sup>33</sup> Dykstra, "White Men, Black Laws: Territorial Iowans and Civil Rights, 1883-1843," 403.

<sup>34</sup> Robert R. Dykstra and Harlan Hahn, "Northern Voters and Negro Suffrage: The Case of Iowa, 1868," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (summer, 1968), 202-205. Four New England states prior to 1868 had permitted African Americans to vote and New York allowed limited suffrage. Only one other northern state, Minnesota, in 1868 also voted to enfranchise African American men.

<sup>35</sup> Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star*, 227, Grant in 1868 had placed his trust and hope in the people of Iowa "the bright radical star" that they would, "be the first state to carry impartial suffrage through unfalteringly."

had for creating more inclusive communities throughout the state. The political act of military service stood at the forefront of making this vision a reality.

## CHAPTER 4

## ACTIVISM AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Taking their place among the gathered men at the 1865 convention at Fort McClellan were John and Clement Miller, Alexander Fine, Anderson Hays, Walker Wolden, and Daniel Segiel-- all members of Company E and former inhabitants of Newton, Iowa. While African American Iowans would continue to struggle for equal rights at both the state and national level, they also had to contend with issues of race at the local level as well. Many of the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> chose to make Iowa their permanent home, some for the rest of their lives. As soldiers, they had represented the state of Iowa and the nation with honor. They now sought a place within the very nation and the state they had helped to preserve. Many of the surviving men of the 60<sup>th</sup> who enlisted in Newton would return to the community that had taken them in. The political capital they had secured through their service would be crucial in their effort to establish a permanent space in their adopted hometown of Newton.<sup>36</sup>

After the conference held by the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> in October 1865, the regiment was disbanded, and the soldiers journeyed home to communities throughout Iowa and neighboring states. They said goodbye to the men they had fought side by side with, nursed back to health when they became ill, and shared many other unspeakable hardships. Such goodbyes would have been difficult, but these relationships would not be forgotten. In fact, some of these bonds would last for the rest of their lives. Many of these men would choose to live together or in proximity to one another in order to continue the close associations they had enjoyed with one another during

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<sup>36</sup> Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 51. A disproportionate number of African American veterans lived in the North after the war. Many of them living in urban communities.

their service. Such a bond formed between the veterans who returned to Newton. Jason Green, Alexander Fine, John and Clement Miller, Anderson Hays, Walker Walden, Lewis Mays and William Moore all proud members of Company E would make the journey home to Newton together. There they would continue their battle for equal rights holding up their service as a testament to their earned status as citizens and men.

Their admission as permanent inhabitants of Newton would require negotiations between the men of the 60<sup>th</sup>, their families, and white residents. What type of access to public resources and organizations would be available to African Americans? Would African Americans have equal access to facilities such as churches and schools? Where would they live? In which occupations would African Americans be employed? Would African Americans be able to participate as equal citizens? These were just some of the many questions which this new Newton community would need to negotiate. Newton residents would come to conclusions about some of these questions sooner than others. Still, other issues would require more time and constant negotiations and renegotiations for decades to come.

The creation of African American communities in predominately white northern cities and towns was no easy task. African Americans had to compete with long-held prejudices, limited access to community resources and jobs, and other inequalities. Freedmen and women did not just seek to assimilate into white communities but sought to create communities that fit their own preconceived ideas. This new life meant the ability to recreate themselves. To do this, they combined both old community and familial practices while also adopting local community norms.

An important resource that the men of Newton possessed in the process of community building was the experience of service. Both the relationships they had made in the service and

the strengthening of previous bonds as fellow soldiers allowed them to rely upon one another thus increasing their odds of success in their community building process. Military service also had trained them to adapt to even the harshest conditions as they had done while serving in the dangerous and unforgiving environment of Helena, Arkansas. The political capital of service also provided them with some level of respectability. As former soldiers, they held a position of honor in the postwar United States. As a young state, Iowa drew from its service, like the soldiers of the 60<sup>th</sup>, a collective identity.<sup>37</sup> The state sacrificed much in the preservation of the Union, contributing 76,000 soldiers and suffering 13,000 casualties. The number of enlisted men amounted to nearly half of the state's prewar white military age population. In Jasper County alone, about 1400 men served in the army, out of a population of 9,983 people at the start of the war. Most of the men from Newton and the surrounding area eagerly enlisted and became known as the Jasper Grays. These men served in such fierce battles as Gettysburg and Cumberland Gap.<sup>38</sup> Leslie Schwalm points out that "Soldiering was a gendered and gendering experience."<sup>39</sup> Soldiers were the epitome of manhood, and in the nineteenth century America, manhood had come to symbolize citizenship. It was this political capital, secured through their service that allowed African Americans such as those from Newton to create space in communities in the North following the end of the war.

Of the sixteen African American men who enlisted from Newton nine survived the war. Of those who survived, most would return to Newton directly after the war at least temporarily. Of these men John and Clement Miller, Walker Wolden, Anderson Hays, and Alexander Fine, would make Newton their home. Other brothers in arms Jason Green, Lewis Mays, and William

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<sup>37</sup>Edith McElroy, *The Undying Procession*, (Des Moines: Iowa Civil War Centennial Commission, 1963), 3,7.

<sup>38</sup>Lynne Wiley, "Civil War Was Costly," *The Newton Daily News* (August 10, 1957).

<sup>39</sup>Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 107.

Moore would join them shortly. All of these men had served in Company E of the 60<sup>th</sup> USCI. Why these eight men chose to settle in Newton for the rest of their lives is important to understanding what ideas they had about the type of community they wanted to inhabit.

It is no coincidence that these men ended up in the Newton area before the war. Each of them arrived as runaway slaves from Northern Missouri. John Miller and Anderson Hays had escaped to freedom from their master in Nodaway County with two others, Anderson's brother Henderson Hays and friend Alexander Nichols. All four would enlist in the 60<sup>th</sup>, but only Miller and Anderson Hays would survive the war. After a harrowing journey in the fall of 1861, all four arrived in the satellite community of Wittemberg just a few miles away from Newton. Sympathetic whites directed the men along the way to this community where they would receive protection from some of the inhabitants.<sup>40</sup> Wittemberg was a community that had strong abolitionist sympathies. Many of the first settlers to Wittemberg were from Southern Ohio and were members of the Free Presbyterian church.<sup>41</sup> Two of the community's founding fathers, Richard Sherer and Reverend Thomas Merrill, for example, were members of this denomination. The religious values of the Free Presbyterians animated Wittemberg, including opposition to slavery, prohibition, and other evangelical principles.<sup>42</sup> Other opponents of slavery would come to settle in the Newton area, such as John P. Beatty, who was a conductor on the Underground Railroad in Ohio before he settled in Iowa.<sup>43</sup>

Wittemberg was home to the Wittemberg Manual Labor College, which was founded just two years after the community itself. The creation of such a college was in keeping with the New

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<sup>40</sup> CC. Stiles, "John Ross Miller". *Annals of Iowa Vol. XIX* (July, 1934): 384-86.

<sup>41</sup> The Free Presbyterian church had separated from the Presbyterian church over the issue of slavery.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Kerr, "The Wittemberg Manual Labor College. Iowa City": *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics. Vol. XXIV*, (1926): 1-3.

<sup>43</sup> Kerr, "The Wittemberg Manual Labor College", 23.

England traditions and heritage of many of these early settlers to the region. Richard Sherer became the college's first president. The foundational principles of the labor college would have seemed radical for many during this period. Not only were they openly opposed to slavery but their bylaws also allowed for the enrollment of African Americans and even women.<sup>44</sup> This pious community of opponents of slavery provided an environment that would both shield the many freedom seekers that passed through on their way to Canada and furnished a permanent residence for those like John Miller and Anderson Hays, who stayed to make Iowa their home.

Many of the men and women freedom seekers that came to settle in the Newton and Wittemberg area found work as laborers for local farmers and businessmen. It appears that most of the freedom seekers who desired to stay in the area hired out to various families. For instance, John Miller, who would eventually enlist under the name of John Sherer, took the name Sherer after Richard Sherer, who had sheltered and employed him when he arrived in the Newton area.<sup>45</sup> The changing of John Miller's name from John Graves to John Sherer could be seen as a sign of gratitude and respect for his new employer or as a practical choice aimed at throwing off any would be slave catchers. At the same time, there is also evidence to suggest that Miller's taking of the name Sherer represented the continuation of a common practice in slavery of taking a new master's name. Due to John Miller's name change to Miller after the war, it became necessary for him to prove that he was indeed John Sherer to secure a pension. Jason Green, a resident of Newton after the war and a fellow 60<sup>th</sup> comrade who testified on Miller's behalf in his attempt to obtain a pension later in life, remarked that Miller had changed his name "following

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<sup>44</sup> Kerr, "The Wittemberg Manual Labor College", 16. Article six of the college's constitution reads, "No person of good moral character who is not a slaveholder in practice or principle shall be denied the privilege of being a shareholder in the institution, none shall be rendered ineligible to the office or refused admittance as a student on terms of perfect equality on account of caste color or sex."

<sup>45</sup> General Affidavit of John Miller, September 16, 1891, John Miller Pension File, RG 15, NARA. John Miller's name was originally John Graves.



the custom of slavery times.”<sup>46</sup> Such an explanation poses further questions of the perception that freedom seekers like Miller and Green had about their new status as employees. It is unclear whether these men and women received pay, if they worked merely for food and board, or both. Green’s statement might suggest that such distinctions were not always so simple and that newly freed people interpreted their new situation using the reference points that were familiar to them.

Miller’s name change also represents a merging of two very distinct cultures. Freedom seekers had to adapt to their new surroundings and cultural differences. This entailed at times merging and manipulating ideas from both their old and their current worlds and creating something new. Not only were the new arrivals changed by their new environment but influenced change as well upon the communities who accepted them. The men and women freedom seekers who made Newton their home both before Emancipation and after did not just assimilate into their new community but enacted changes of their own as well. Their very presence, cultural practices, and their preconceived ideas of community would require all inhabitants to negotiate the conditions of their place as members of the community. Whatever the specific reasons these men and women freedom seekers had for settling in the Newton area, all found their new situation more desirable to that of their old existence in slavery and proved their willingness to defend their new station with their very lives through military service.

In choosing to settle in Iowa and specifically in Newton, these men must have pondered the consequences of such a decision. Many of their family members were still in the South most in Missouri. Some former Newton inhabitants like Daniel Seigel, who initially returned to Newton for a few years after being discharged, eventually returned to Nodaway County,

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<sup>46</sup> General Affidavit of Jason Green and Anderson Hays, September 24, 1891, John Miller Pension File, RG 15, NARA.

Missouri the place of his previous enslavement.<sup>47</sup> Another former Newton enlistee Corporal William Tait of Company E of the 60<sup>th</sup>, would also return to Missouri and live with John Miller's family for a time before settling in Kentucky.<sup>48</sup> Still, others moved back and forth like John Miller and Anderson Hays before permanently settling in Newton.

Newton, Iowa provided these men and their families with the opportunity to make a life for themselves. Iowa had experienced a labor shortage since its early days, and Jasper County was no exception. By 1865, Newton, the county seat, was still very much a frontier community surrounded by tall prairie grasses. By 1860, the population of Newton barely exceeded 1600. Many inhabitants still lived in log cabins, and there were few stores and businesses. As one resident of the time recounted, "Deer meat, venison, was sold in Newton at all of the butcher shops... and by the hunters who peddled it around to the few dozen houses then in our city." She continued by describing the wildness of the land saying, "Prairie wolves would gather at the wood pile which was next to the Laws Creek woods and serenade the pioneers till they could not sleep."<sup>49</sup>

Though still somewhat of a rural frontier community, many of the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> found employment among farmers and business men. Amongst the first industries in Newton were brickyards and coal mining south of Newton. Alexander Fine worked for a time as a coal driver for James Mershon and as a farm laborer for Evan Henshaw, both before and after the war.<sup>50</sup> Later Newton became part of the mainline of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. In

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<sup>47</sup> General Affidavit of John Miller, February 27, 1889, Daniel Seigel Pension File, RG 15, NARA. John Miller testified that both he and Daniel Seigel enlisted together in Newton and returned home to Newton together after the war.

<sup>48</sup> 1870 United State Census, Benton Township, Holt County, Missouri, population Schedule, p.43, dwelling 306, Family 290, John Miller; digital image, ancestry.com, assessed April 1, 2016 [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1870usfedcen&h=5336347&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&\\_phsrc=GzD87&\\_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=6742](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1870usfedcen&h=5336347&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=GzD87&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=6742) He was listed with John Miller and his family and working as a laborer.

<sup>49</sup> "A Glimpse of Newton at the Close of the Civil War," *The Newton Press*, (December 14, 1926).

<sup>50</sup> Deposition of James R. Mershon, July 26, 1883, Alexander E. Fine Pension File, RG 15, NARA.

1897, Newton saw the birth of what would soon come to be known as the Maytag Corporation when F.L. Maytag began manufacturing farm implements and later made wooden tub washing machines.<sup>51</sup> Others such as John Miller and Walker Wolden became farmers and also worked as laborers.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Iowa Pioneers. *Jasper County Research Guide* [database online]. Des Moines, Iowa: Iowa Genealogical Society, 2016. <http://www.iowapioneers.com/County%20Guides/JasperCoGuide.htm> April 11, 2016

<sup>52</sup> Department of the Interior Bureau of Pensions John Miller, May 20, 1898, John Miller Pension File, RG 15, NARA. John Miller also worked doing odd jobs such as house cleaning and lawn care; 1880 United States Census, Buena Vista Township, Jasper County, Iowa, population Schedule, p.49, dwelling 455, Family 476, Walker Wolden; digital image, ancestry.com, assessed April 1, 2016, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1880usfedcen&h=47738656&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&\\_phsrc=GzD86&\\_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=7163](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1880usfedcen&h=47738656&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=GzD86&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=7163)

## CHAPTER 5

## MILITARY SERVICE AND CHANGING PERCEPTIONS IN NEWTON

Newton thus held excellent prospects for employment and growth. These various opportunities, coupled with the relatively tolerant attitude of many of the white inhabitants and the military service that these African American men had provided, forged a space in which black residents could not only establish a place in the community but help to dictate some of the terms of its development. Black men had shown through their service that they deserved a place in the Newton community.

White soldiers, having fought alongside African Americans during the war and witnessed their courage and sacrifice, returned home with more tolerant attitudes towards African Americans. As David Brodnax points out, “Although some had been comparatively fair-minded on racial issues before the war, many others were transformed by the conflict itself.”<sup>53</sup> One soldier, John Matthews of the 13<sup>th</sup> Iowa Infantry and later an officer in the 8<sup>th</sup> Louisiana Colored Infantry, had one such change of heart. Whereas he had previously considered “darkies,” as he called African Americans, little more than property, he changed his opinion of them after serving alongside colored troops as an officer. Though still a racist, he praised the men of his regiment by saying, “the colored troops of this command have made a glorious name for themselves, they have proven themselves as brave as the bravest... You may think me an enthusiastic, but when you have passed through what I have with them and seen what I have seen, you will better

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<sup>53</sup> Brodnax, “Will They Fight? Ask the Enemy,” 270.

understand my feelings toward that unfortunate race..." He continued by saying, "There is a better day coming for these poor people."<sup>54</sup>

White Newtonians serving alongside African American troops were, no doubt, changed as well. Of the officers who served in the 60<sup>th</sup> three were from Newton. Two of them, Captain George F. Work and William G. Work, were members of Company E. The Regimental surgeon Andrew Patton was also from Newton. Each of these men returned to Newton for a time after the war. Captain Work spoke highly of the men under his command and praised them for their bravery and their sacrifice. Speaking of Jason Green, Captain Work said, "This man was a good soldier and was always ready and willing for duty when able."<sup>55</sup>

Other white Iowa soldiers returned to Newton not only with new and more tolerant views but also brought African American men and women with them. One such black Newtonian to make his way home with a white Iowa regiment was Henry James, better known as "Big Jim" due to his height of six feet eight inches. Big Jim had endeared himself to the men of Company B of the 13<sup>th</sup> Iowa Infantry while they were stationed at Summerville, Alabama. He was always "ready to carry the burdens, do the cooking and other drudgery of the camp." Not only did Big Jim do the unsavory jobs of camp life, but he also risked his life a number of times while crawling to pickets that were under fire to carry meals to men. After his sudden death, while working as a laborer in Newton in 1884, he was mourned by "the boys of Co. B." Though not recognized by the government as a soldier, Big Jim through his service and shared experience with Iowa soldiers had earned a place among them and in their Upper Midwestern community.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Brodnax, "Will They Fight? Ask the Enemy", 271

<sup>55</sup> Proof of Disability Captain George F. Work, July 14, 1892., Jason Green Pension File, RG 15, NARA.

<sup>56</sup> "Sudden Death", *Newton Journal*, April 9, 1884; Barbara Gannon, "She is a Member of the 23<sup>rd</sup>: Lucy Nichols and the Community of the Civil War Regiment," *This Distracted and Anarchical People: New Answers for Old Questions*

The service of African American troops had both a collective and individual effect on Iowans. While their service weakened long held prejudiced perceptions about African Americans, it did not open the way, even in Newton, to full acceptance of African Americans as citizens of the city and state. African Americans had to assert their right to be recognized as equal members of the community. One stage in which this fight for equality took place at the local and state level was in the classroom.

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About the Civil War-Era North, ed. Andrew Slap (New York: Fordham University Press), 184-199. Gannon argues that individuals such as Lucy Nichols, an unofficial black nurse for a white regiment, were at times adopted into the community of the regiment as fellow soldiers as a result of their sharing the same everyday military environment with regular soldiers.

## CHAPTER 6

### FIGHT FOR EDUCATION RIGHTS

From the early days of the establishment of the territory, black Iowans had to contend with discriminatory laws, which excluded them from obtaining an equal education. On January 1, 1839, the Iowa territorial legislature passed a general school law that established common schools in each of the counties. The law stated that these common schools "... shall be open and free for every class of white citizens between the ages of five and twenty-one years."<sup>57</sup> From the very formation of Iowa's laws, African Americans were purposefully excluded from the formal education afforded all classes of white people. White Iowans, like much of the country, believed African Americans to be inferior to white Americans and sought to segregate the two in an attempt to perpetuate these ideas of white superiority. African Americans, as a result, exerted their efforts to transform both state and local attitudes to secure equal education rights for themselves and their children. Newton veterans of the 60<sup>th</sup> were on the frontlines of this fight. Shortly after returning home to Newton, Jason Green and Lewis Mays began working for the families of Robert Hill and David Matchett. During that first winter, they caused some controversy in the community when they started attending the local school. Like many inhabitants of Iowa, a sizable number of Newton residents had migrated from the South, many from Kentucky. These residents brought with them long held beliefs about race and an abhorrence for what they considered racial amalgamation. As a result, they expressed their disapproval at the idea of "niggers" being allowed to attend school with their white children. Even in the midst of this opposition to their integrating the local school, Jason Green and Lewis Mays persisted in their desires to obtain an education. The prejudiced opposition in the

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<sup>57</sup> The Statues Laws of the Territory of Iowa, (Dubuque: Russell and Reeves Printers, 1839), 191.

community soon subsided, most likely as a result of the support and respect other community members had for these men. In the end, both Jason Green and Lewis Mays became apt pupils “worthy of respect.”<sup>58</sup>

It is not surprising that longtime advocate and honorary member of the 60<sup>th</sup> Alexander Clark would also play a vital role in this battle. On September 10, 1867, Alexander Clark Sr. of Muscatine, still actively involved in fighting for African American men and their suffrage rights, attempted to enroll his daughter, Susan B. Clark, at Grammar School No. 2, located near their home. Clark’s daughter was refused admission to the school because she belonged to the “colored race.” Clark was also told that he should enroll her instead at a separate school created for colored children. Clark, as a result, brought suit against the Muscatine school board. The suit made its way to the Iowa Supreme Court in the case of *Clark v. The Board of Directors, City of Muscatine*.<sup>59</sup> Under a technicality as a result of the new 1857 constitution, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiff. The new constitution stated that the board of education must, “provide for the education of all the youths of the state.” This provision had initially been intended not as an effort to create an integrated education system throughout the state but to create separate schools for blacks. This court decision which struck down segregation in Iowa schools did not lead to full integration, but it did open the door for further educational opportunities for African Americans.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Newton Recorder* June 22, 1899.

<sup>59</sup> Hal Chase, “You Live What You Learn”: African-American Presence in Iowa Education, 1839-2000, *Outside In: African-American History in Iowa: 1838-2000*, (Des Moines, State Historical Society of Iowa: 2001).

<sup>60</sup> Chase, *Outside In*, 135. Explains that education in Iowa for African Americans went through three acts. In the first act African Americans were excluded. The second act known as “tokenism,” saw the admitting of a few blacks to schools, colleges, and universities. The third and final act was integration.



This fight for equal education continued and found its way onto the college and university campuses throughout the state. Again, the Clark family were at the forefront when Alexander Clark Jr. in 1879 became the first African-American to graduate from the University of Iowa's law school. Shortly thereafter his father Clark Sr. became the second African-American to graduate with a law degree from the University of Iowa in 1884. Not only had they succeeded in opening the door for equal education at Iowa institutions, they also helped to disprove long-held stereotypes that Iowans had about of the inferiority of African Americans.

The veterans of the 60<sup>th</sup> who made Newton their home placed high importance on education and the possibilities that it held for them and their families. They did this by educating themselves, as in the case of Jason Green and Lewis Mays, and making sure that their children received an equal education like every other citizen in the city. The desire to gain an education may have been instilled in Jason Green and Lewis Mays while they were still in the service. It was not uncommon for teachers or benevolent societies to establish schools for black regiments that taught them to read and write. The Western Sanitary Commission established one such school in Helena, Arkansas for the black soldiers stationed there.<sup>61</sup> Jason Green, in particular, demonstrates the possibilities that education could provide newly emancipated African Americans by not only attending school but also then going on to learn the barber trade. As a result, he became a successful businessman in Newton.<sup>62</sup> He also saw to it that all five of his children graduated from high school. His only son Fred Green attended law school at the University of Iowa but returned home when his health began to fail. His daughter Lottie was a gifted singer and after graduating from high school attended school in New York.<sup>63</sup> Other

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<sup>61</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 129.

<sup>62</sup> "Death of Prominent Colored Citizen" *Newton Journal* (June 21, 1899), 3.

<sup>63</sup> "Local News," *Iowa State Bystander* (February 28, 1896).

African American children in Newton went on to have success as well and one, Virgie Whitsett, became a renowned poet. These young black men and women of Newton, most if not all the children of former slaves and 60<sup>th</sup> veterans, were praised for their academic accomplishments. *The Iowa Bystander* pointed out that for the African American community of Newton it was the “fashion” for students to attend school until they graduated. The article added that “in proportion Newton has more Afro-American graduate(s) than Des Moines.”<sup>64</sup>

The fight for equal education at the local and state level and the tensions that resulted, demonstrate the challenges that African Americans faced in their attempt to establish community space. Negotiating space took not only courage but also alliances with community members who were sympathetic to their causes. It also required a united community base from which to draw collective strength in the face of opposition. Much of their communities concerted power derived from familial bonds developed both before and during military service.

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<sup>64</sup> “Meet at Newton: A.M.E Conference and Sunday School Session.” *Iowa State Bystander* (June 12, 1896), 1.

## CHAPTER 7

## BUILDING AN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN NEWTON

In 1865, Anderson Hays of Company E of the 60 USCI, made his way up the Mississippi River with his regiment. They were returning home victorious from the battlefields of Arkansas and the Civil War. They had suffered much, and these fortunate survivors would forever bear the scars of their ordeal both visible and unseen. They willingly endured their trial by fire knowing that they were fighting not only to end slavery, but also to free family, friends, and sweethearts that they had not seen for many years.

As the boat, transporting Private Hays and his regiment, approached Cape Girardeau, Missouri he must have remembered that his mother Lovina Marian had resided there. Both Private Hays and his mother had experienced the harsh realities of slavery when he was sold away from her while yet a child. Many years had passed since that traumatic experience. No longer was he a child or a slave but a soldier and a man. Having stolen his freedom, he sought to remake himself into a free man with all of the rights that nineteenth-century manhood could bestow. Hays, his regiment having stopped at Cape Girardeau to resupply, saw his opportunity to discover what had become, if he could, of his mother.

Making his way through the town by inquiry to the home of his old master, one can imagine the excitement and anxiety he experienced. Upon finally reaching his destination both mother and son were reunited. His mother could once again embrace the child whom she had lovingly cared for before having him ripped from her arms. Before her stood the child of her bosom now a man, a freeman, and a soldier. Her joy at this reunion would, unfortunately, be marred as she learned of the sacrifice that her other son, Henderson Hays, had made for the cause

of freedom; his body buried somewhere in what would become a forgotten grave on a river island in the south.<sup>65</sup>

For Private Hays and others, freeing, reunifying, and strengthening family and kinship bonds was a crucial reason for their fight. Hay's reunion only lasted a few short hours before he had to leave his mother, return to his regiment, and continue the journey home to Iowa. This meeting would not be the last time he would see his mother. Time would pass, but they would once again live together as a family in a new community, a community of their own making, different in many ways from the one they had known as slaves. For Private Hays and many of his comrades, that place was Newton, Iowa.

Anderson Hays and the rest of the men of his regiment had sacrificed much in their escape to freedom and their service to their country. Some like Anderson and Henderson Hays had left wives and children behind when they made their escape. Others like Walker Wolden had left siblings and parents. The effects on family members could not have been easy. Some were punished for the actions of these men as in the case of Louisa Bass and Ellen Hays. Louisa, the sister of John and Clement Miller, and Ellen Hays the wife of Henderson Hays along with many other slaves were a few days after the escape of these men transported from the plantation they lived on further south in Missouri.

The reason for such a move was most likely due to the fears their owners had of other slaves following suit. Those fears were realized some time later when Alexander Nichols returned and led a daring raid that freed his siblings Daniel and Ellen Seigel as well as Lizzie and

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<sup>65</sup> Claim of Brothers and Sisters for Arrears Bounty Money by Anderson Hays, December 20, 1889, Henderson Hays Pension File, RG 15, NARA. Anderson claimed that Henderson had died on Island 66.

Lettie Miller other sisters of John and Clem Miller.<sup>66</sup> Alexander Nichol's heroic raid on his former master's plantation and the freeing of four additional family members demonstrates that these men had no intention of leaving their families and friends in bondage. They had hopes that one day all of their family and friends would be free.

It also appears that some of these men may have harbored ideas about military service while still in slavery and perhaps saw service as a means to secure this freedom for all. In 1890, an investigation was conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Pensions to determine if Ellen Hays was indeed the widow of Henderson Hays and entitled to his pension.<sup>67</sup> During the inquiry, she was adamant that her husband had run away leaving her pregnant and alone with two small children saying "Henderson Hays ran away from his master in Nodaway County to join the army."<sup>68</sup> She was resolute in her conviction that her husband had run away to join the army and repeated it multiple times throughout her various recorded interviews.

Other interviews conducted by special examiners found similar testimonies given by others to corroborate her statement.<sup>69</sup> W. P. Hubbard, the son of the slaveholder whom Ellen Hays resided with after Henderson's escape, also substantiated that Henderson Hays had run

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<sup>66</sup> "Fifty-One Years in Slavery Clarissa Miller, Born a Slave, Dies at age eighty-five Years" *The Newton Recorder* (October 29, 1897).

<sup>67</sup> The intensity of the investigation was the result of two issues. The first was the fact that Ellen Hays was not legally married at the time that Henderson ran away. Like many other former slave widows of USCT soldiers they were not married as a result of restrictions to the marring of slaves. As a result, they faced great hurdles in proving their relationships and also great prejudice from the investigators. The second issue resulted from Anderson Hays petition for his brother's bounty pay after his death and the war. He stated in his deposition that Henderson had no wife or other dependents. Most likely this occurred as he had not heard anything from Ellen Hays in many years as she was sold further south after they ran away.

<sup>68</sup> Interview Record of Ellen Hays St. Louis, MO., May, 12 1890, Ellen Hays Widow Pension File, RG 15, NARA.

<sup>69</sup> Deposition C. Louisa Bass, August 13, 1892, Ellen Hays Widow Pension File, RG 15, NARA. Louisa Bass provided further information on the events that transpired after the escape of her brother and brother in-law. She also stated that he had run away and join the army. Neither Louisa Bass nor Ellen Hays knew what had happened to the men until about 1888.

away to join the army.<sup>70</sup> Even in slavery, military service was seen as a way of providing the means to transform not only their status as slaves to freemen but also the status of loved ones they left behind in bondage.

For the members of the 60<sup>th</sup> USCI, military service would not only be used to create space for themselves in communities in Iowa but would create space for their families, friends and other African Americans who would come to inhabit the state. As Steven Hahn points out, community for slaves was a “matter of people and purposes.”<sup>71</sup> The same could be said for the newly freed African Americans of Newton. As a newly freed people, they brought with them their own social constructs about community and sought to implement them in their new environment. The work by veterans of gathering family members to Newton began before emancipation but would take on new vigor after they returned home. The reappropriation of family relationships of people once deprived of the right to control their familial bonds constituted a political act. They were now free to dictate their own sexual and familial norms without approval from a white master.<sup>72</sup>

One of the first issues the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> would address after their return home concerned the need to reconnect with family and friends. Some, like John and Clem Miller, had already reunited with family members when two of their sisters Elizabeth (Lizzie) and Lettie joined them in the Newton area. Many other family members were still in Missouri and elsewhere, and these men had not seen them since they had run away and joined the army. In some cases, like that of Anderson Hays and his mother, they were separated from family for most of their lives. These men would now capitalize on the freedom which emancipation now

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<sup>70</sup>Deposition of W.P. Hubbard, August 13, 1892, Ellen Hays Widow Pension File, RG 15, NARA.

<sup>71</sup> Hahn, 35

<sup>72</sup> John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford Press, 1972), 153.

provided them. Some like Anderson Hays and John Miller would return for a time to Missouri and the home of their old slave masters and their old slave neighborhoods. In other cases, spending a few years before moving whole families back north to Newton. Anderson Hays, for example, had left behind a wife he had married in slavery and four small children in Nodaway County, Missouri at the time he ran away and joined the army.<sup>73</sup> He returned there shortly after the war and brought his wife and his children home to Newton, Iowa. Years later he would also bring his mother Lovina Mariana to Newton as well. John Ross Miller also spent several years after the war living in Missouri with his parents Paulice and Clarissa Miller. After John, Clem and their sisters Lettie and Elizabeth escaped to freedom, Paulice and Clarissa Miller were overjoyed that their many prayers had been answered and that many of their children were free. Still, they had no idea what had become of these children until after the war. John Miller stayed for a time in Missouri and then brought his parents back to Newton with him where they spent the rest of their lives. Being reunited with their parents again, both John Shrerer and Clement Graves had their names legally changed; this time making their father's name of Miller their family name.<sup>74</sup>

The members of the 60<sup>th</sup> searched for family and kin in different ways, and many would spend decades in their pursuit. Anderson Hays after years of not knowing what had become of his sisters Louisa and Millie Hays finally reconnected and was overjoyed to see his sister Louisa Hays Bass when she visited him in Newton in 1888. This reunion also enabled Ellen Hays the widow of Henderson Hays to reconnect with Anderson, her brother-in-law and finally receive some closure as to the fate of her husband. Vast networks consisting of family and close

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<sup>73</sup>Affidavit of Anderson Hays, Nov. 13, 1897, Anderson Hays Pension File, RG 15, NARA.

<sup>74</sup>Jasper County Court Record, January 31, 1878, Clement Miller Pension File, RG 15, NARA. Clement Graves requested his name be legally changed from Graves to Miller.

associates over immense distances aided newly emancipated people in reconnecting family and friends lost as a result of the practices of the “peculiar institution.”

For some, the search for the family would last many decades. Margret Hays, the mother of Lewis Mays, for example, was still continuing to search for a son, Henry Mays, in 1894. Henry Mays had apparently joined the army during the war, but his mother had not heard from him since.<sup>75</sup> Many of these families would never be completely whole as was the case with Walker Wolden’s family. Wolden’s centenarian father David (Davy), Wolden, had many children, some of whom were dead, and others sold into slavery and all trace of them long ago lost.<sup>76</sup> They nonetheless attempted to find as many as they could. In the case of one son David Wolden, Jr., he and his wife Sarah Emeline Darby Wolden were sold south from Missouri to Galveston, Texas where he was a coachman and she a house servant. Shortly after the war, they returned to Missouri. Davy Wolden learning of his son and daughter-in-law living once again in Missouri hitched up a team and headed down to bring them to Newton.<sup>77</sup>

In conjunction with this gathering of family to Newton can also be found the gathering of fictive kin. The men and women freedom seekers who came to Iowa were connected by their shared experience but also by both real and fictive kinship relationships. Many of the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> and their families came from the same slave neighborhood. They had grown up together, escaped together, served together and then lived the rest of their lives together in the same community. Louisa Hays Bass observed this as she reflected on her visit to Newton in 1888 saying:

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<sup>75</sup> “Information Wanted” *The Christian Recorder* (June 7, 1894).

<sup>76</sup> Obituary of Davy Waldon, *Newton Journal* (July 2, 1890). Davy Wolden was born in Richmond, Virginia and claimed to be alive at the time of President George Washington’s first inaugural address. He died in 1890 at the estimated age of 110.

<sup>77</sup> Obituary of Eveline Waldon, *Newton Daily News* (April 23, 1906): 4.



I then heard that my brother Anderson was living in Newton, Iowa and in April 1888, I went to see him. I found him there three blocks from the RR depot in Newton, IA and he is still living there. I also saw Clem and John Miller and Lewis Mays all of whom run away from our neighborhood and were in the army with my brother Henderson when he died.

Walker Wolden, Clem and John Miller, Daniel Seigel, Alexander Nichols, Anderson and Henderson Hays, and Alexander E. Fine were all neighbors, and many were childhood friends before their enlistment.<sup>78</sup> Jason Green while yet a slave in Clinton County, Missouri near the town of Barnesville was well acquainted with both Margret Hays and her son Lewis Mays, who were slaves in his neighborhood.<sup>79</sup> It appears that this particular slave neighborhood or network of families of which these men were apart, covered a substantial area between three counties: Nodaway, Clinton, and Andrew. Though they may have been owned by various individuals and lived on different farms, the families who owned these people were often connected through familial ties or had social or monetary connections. Anthony Kaye points out in his examination of slave neighborhoods of the Natchez District of Mississippi that, “Owners created neighborhoods from a cluster of households surrounded by wilderness; connected by ties of kinship, sociability, exchange; distinguished by family and wealth.”<sup>80</sup> While disconnected by physical boundaries, farms were connected through social ties. Steven Hahn also explains that ties and obligations of kinship for slaves had a spatially fluid character adding that, “the

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<sup>78</sup> General Affidavit of John and Clement Miller, Dec. 1913, Walker Wolden Pension File, RG 15, NARA; General Affidavit of Alexander E. Fine, July 25, 1883, Alexander E. Fine Pension File, RG 15, NARA; Claim of Declaration of Brothers and Sisters for Arrears, Bounty Money. Testimonies of Joseph Newland and Shadrick Ricketts July 1866, Henderson Hays Pension File, RG 15, NARA. Other members of company E who did not settle in Newton after the war were also from this slave neighborhood. For example, Shadrick Ricketts and Joseph Newland, both soldiers in Company E attested to both being personally acquainted with Anderson and Henderson Hays ten years before the war.

<sup>79</sup> General Affidavit of Jason Green, April 27, 1883, Jason Green Pension File, RG 15, NARA; Green says that both Margret Hays and Lewis Mays were slaves in the same county but Anderson Hays testifies in his pension record that he married Margret in August 20, 1854 in Nodaway County and that they lived together continuously up until the time of his escape from slavery and enlistment in the army. Department of the Interior Bureau of Pensions November 13, 1897.

<sup>80</sup> Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 35.

geographical, social net could become fairly large and diverse.” These kinship networks in the upper south he argues “routinely traversed wide stretches of the countryside and formed relations linking town and country, agriculture and industry, slave and freed.” These neighborhood and community ties would play a significant role in how African American men and women would form their new community in Newton.<sup>81</sup>

Not only did the African American men and women of Newton reestablish past familial and kinship ties, but they also created new relationships as well. Some members of the 60<sup>th</sup> who were not inhabitants of Newton before the war chose to follow their Newtonian comrades home after the war. Jason Green, Lewis Mays, and William Moore all made such a choice to resettle in Newton having lived previously elsewhere in Iowa before enlistment. For example, Jason Green had lived and worked as a farm hand in Ringwald County, Iowa before enlisting at Mt. Ayr. Lewis Mays recounts, speaking of his relationship with Jason Green, that “We enlisted in the said organization at the same place and the same time and was discharged at the same time and went home together.” Clement Miller also commenting on his long relationship with Jason Green said, “Saw him at the time he came home, we came home together.”<sup>82</sup> It is interesting to think of this fairly large group of African American men making their way across the Iowa prairies returning home together. Newton was for them home and as such, these men and their families sought to create a community that would be comfortable and familiar to them.

Though most of the soldiers in Company E and the 60<sup>th</sup> did not make Newton their home, their bonds to one another remained robust even over decades. Many still kept in touch with one

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<sup>81</sup> Hahn, 35

<sup>82</sup> General Affidavit of Lewis Mays, July 1, 1899, Silvia Green Widow Pension File, RG 15, NARA; General Affidavit of Clement Miller, September 10, 1892, Jason Green Pension File, RG 15, NARA.

another even over long distances and would occasionally visit one another.<sup>83</sup> *The Iowa Bystander* became a valuable tool in connecting African Americans to one another by providing important information about African American communities and individuals throughout the state. Some members of Company E would live for a time with fellow brothers-in-arms for various reasons as in the case of Tait Williams, a former Newton resident, who lived with John Miller and his family in Holt County, Missouri in 1870 employed as a laborer.<sup>84</sup> Another example of this is Clem Miller and Lewis Mays, who lived with Anderson Hays, his wife, and children in 1870.<sup>85</sup> These connections would become even more important as the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> dealt with the lingering and debilitating effects of their service.

The hard conditions endured by the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> during the war took an especial toll on their bodies. As a result, many of them suffered for the rest of their lives from various conditions, most suffering from multiple ailments. Alexander Fine, for instance, while in the service contracted chronic diarrhea, had problems with his liver and kidneys, suffered from sunstroke and a dislocated jaw with nerve damage. While admitted to the hospital for chronic diarrhea, Fine dislocated his jaw. During the middle of the night, he attempted to stand and fainted hitting his jaw as he fell. When morning came, he was finally found. For the rest of his life, his jaw would painfully dislocate on occasion.<sup>86</sup> His former employer James Mershon, both

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<sup>83</sup> General Affidavit of Daniel Seigel, April 27, 1883, Jason Green Pension File, RG 15, NARA. Former Newton Resident, Daniel Seigel, returned to Missouri a few years after the war but was able to assist Jason Green by testifying in his behalf over a decade later. These men were not sedentary as they traveled throughout the state and out as well over the years, as seen in various articles from the *Iowa State Bystander*.

<sup>84</sup> Ancestry.com. *1870 United States Federal Census* [database online]. Provo, Utah: Generations Network, Inc., 2016. p.43.

<sup>85</sup> Ancestry.com. *1870 United States Federal Census* [database online]. Provo, Utah: Generations Network, Inc., p.23, dwelling 157, Family 154, Anderson Hays, (accessed April 1, 2016). [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1870usfedcen&h=35466768&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&\\_phsrc=GzD50&\\_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=7602](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&db=1870usfedcen&h=35466768&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=GzD50&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&rhSource=7602)

<sup>86</sup> Exhibit B of Alexander E. Fine, July 21, 1883, Pension File of Alexander E. Fine, RG 15, NARA; Jason Green suffered from liver, kidney, and heart disease which he would die from, as well as shortness of breath and joint

before enlistment and after, testified that Fine was broken down and emaciated upon his return; only able to work occasionally.<sup>87</sup> Decades later the veterans of Newton would rely upon each other as they sought to prove to the U.S. Pension Bureau that their conditions were indeed the result of their service and thus entitled them to a pension.<sup>88</sup> Their continued connection and interaction with each other became essential as they wrote affidavits for one another in the hopes of obtaining pensions. Daniel Seigel, a one-time resident of Newton, chose to return to Maryville, Missouri. He would, years later, while filing for a pension for an eye disease that left him almost blind, rely upon his brothers in arms Lewis Mays, John Miller, Alfred Shelton, and John Lewis, all whom still live in Iowa, to testify on his behalf.<sup>89</sup> In pension after pension file, former brothers-in-arms described the horrible physical conditions and illnesses that they suffered together. Often due to a large number of those ill at any given time and the limited resources which the regimental surgeon Andrew Patton could provide, they were forced to rely once again on each other by caring for and nursing each another back to health. Clement Miller and Jason Green cared for Anderson Hays when he contracted asthma, heart trouble, and pain in his side.<sup>90</sup> All too often during their service, they also found the necessity to bury one of their own like Henderson Hays and Alexander Nichols. They were a family and their bonds, though not all connected through blood, were nonetheless intricately tied to one another. These men had

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and limb aches. Anderson Hays Contracted Typhoid malarial fever, liver disease, chronic pain in his left side, and an asthmatic cough. Walker Wolden suffered from heart disease and scurvy. Daniel Seigel contracted a disease in his eyes that made him almost completely blind as well as chills. John Miller contracted throat disease, rheumatism in his shoulder, catarrh of the bladder, as well as kidney and liver disease.

<sup>87</sup> Deposition I of James R. Mershon, July 26, 1883, Pension File of Alexander E. Fine, RG 15, NARA. Walker Wolden and Alexander Fine worked as laborers for Mershon hauling coal.

<sup>88</sup> General Affidavit of Clement Miller, John Sherer, Walker Waldon, Lewis Mays, June 14, 1880, Pension File of Alexander E. Fine, RG 15, NARA. Clement and John Miller, Walker Wolden, Lewis Mays, and Jason Green all testified in a general affidavitt concerning Alexander Fine's contracted ailments from the service.

<sup>89</sup> Affidavit of Lewis Mays, John Sherer, Alfred Shelton, John Lewis, Pension File of Daniel Segiel, RG 15, NARA.

<sup>90</sup> Proof of Disability by Jason Green and Clement Miller, 12, Aug. 1892, Pension File of Anderson Hays, 507.267, RG 15, NARA.

learned through experience that they could rely upon one another and even after their service saw the importance and the strength in staying together.

Through the bonds of marriage, many men of the 60<sup>th</sup> would eventually be connected. Walker Wolden, for instance, married Elizabeth Miller, the sister of John and Clem Miller. Anderson Hays married Lewis May's mother while still in slavery. Lewis Mays married Josephine Wolden, the niece of Walker Wolden. When Josephine died, Mays married Viola Wolden, the daughter of Walker Wolden and the niece of John and Clem Miller. Parents also married each other as in the case of Walker Wolden and Alexander Fine. Fine's mother Rachel married Wolden's Father David Sr. Alexander Fine's first wife Susan Carriger was the sister of Company E comrades Nathaniel and Samuel Carriger.<sup>91</sup>

John Miller, Alexander Fine, and Jason Green each returned to Missouri and married women from their old neighborhoods.<sup>92</sup> It is likely that these women were sweethearts that they had not married prior to their escape and enlistment in the 60<sup>th</sup>, but with whom they may have had a relationship. Returning to the place of their previous enslavement they married and then brought their spouses home to Newton with them. While some former slaves continued to practice the same slave marriage customs after slavery, these men and women were eager to

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<sup>91</sup> Ancestry.com. *Miller Family Tree, Paul Miller* [database online]. Provo, Utah: Generations Network, Inc., Miller Family Tree, Paul Miller, (accessed May 21, 2016). <http://trees.ancestry.com/tree/56612033/family>; Deposition F by Walker Walden, July 25, 1883, Pension File of Alexander E. Fine, RG 15; Ancestry.com. *1870 United States Federal Census* [database online]. Provo, Utah: Generations Network, Inc., p. 40, dwelling 300, family 304, (assessed May 21, 2016). [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?\\_phsrc=GzD110&\\_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&gss=angs-g&new=1&rank=1&msT=1&gsfn=Alexander&gsfn\\_x=0&gsln=Fine&gsln\\_x=0&msypn\\_\\_ftp=Missouri,%20USA&msypn=28&msypn\\_PInfo=5-%7C0%7C1652393%7C0%7C2%7C0%7C28%7C0%7C0%7C0%7C0%7C&MSAV=1&cp=0&catbucket=rstp&uidh=yt2&pcat=ROOT\\_CATEGORY&h=1780453&db=1870usfedcen&indiv=1&ml\\_rpos=3](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=GzD110&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&gss=angs-g&new=1&rank=1&msT=1&gsfn=Alexander&gsfn_x=0&gsln=Fine&gsln_x=0&msypn__ftp=Missouri,%20USA&msypn=28&msypn_PInfo=5-%7C0%7C1652393%7C0%7C2%7C0%7C28%7C0%7C0%7C0%7C0%7C&MSAV=1&cp=0&catbucket=rstp&uidh=yt2&pcat=ROOT_CATEGORY&h=1780453&db=1870usfedcen&indiv=1&ml_rpos=3); Alexander Fine while living for a short time in Missouri with his first wife Susan Carriger lived next to various members of the Carriger family including 60<sup>th</sup> comrade Samuel Carriger.

<sup>92</sup> Affidavit of Mrs. Silvia Green, Aug. 2, 1892, Pension File of Jason Green, RG 15, NARA; Bureau of Pensions Form of John Miller, July 19, 1898, Pension File of John Miller, RG 15, NARA; Bureau of Pensions Form of Alexander Fine, March 12, 1915, Pension File of Alexander E. Fine, RG 15, NARA.

legalize their relationships.<sup>93</sup> In discussing the marriage and family relationships of black Civil War veterans, Donald Shaffer argues that family and marriage became an important way in which these men asserted their manhood after the war. He further states, “By helping to destroy slavery, these men opened up new possibilities for themselves and other black men to assert their authority within their families.”<sup>94</sup>

All of the additional family members along with other migrants who relocated to Newton helped to grow substantially and strengthen the black community there in a short amount of time. In 1860 only one African American resided in Jasper County. By 1870 there were 69 black residents. By 1880 that number had risen to 121. By the century’s end, there were 190 African Americans living in Jasper County most of whom lived in Newton, the county seat.<sup>95</sup>

The reuniting of fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, wives and husbands was an important part of righting the wrongs of slavery. Where they had once suffered the pains of cruelly forced separation, they now took power in strengthening family bonds and kinship relationships. An important aspect of recreating these bonds was place. These men and women needed a place where they could establish a community of their own that would foster and strengthen these familial bonds. Reconnecting with family and friends would be crucial to the establishment of a community they wished to belong too. In the process, they reimagined the city of Newton as they sought to implement both old and new community norms.

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<sup>93</sup> Andrew Slap, “No Regular Marriage”: African American Veterans and Marriage Practices after Emancipation’ *This Distracted and Anarchical People: New Answers for Old Questions about the Civil War-Era North*, ed. Andrew Slap and Michael Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 171-183.

<sup>94</sup>Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 97.

<sup>95</sup> Willis Goudy, “Select Demographics: Iowa’s African American Residents, 1840-2000,” *Outside In: African American History in Iowa 1838-2000*. (Des Moines, State Historical Society of Iowa: 2001), 40.

The gathering of family members after the war represented a culmination of years of suffering, hope and diligent sacrifice. African American servicemen viewed the end of the war and the emancipation of their family and kin as the fruits of their own labor in the cause of freedom. Their service had helped to free their people just as they had hoped it would. In securing this right to freedom through their military service, they continued to use the capital it created to obtain other rights yet denied them. Gathering family and kin to Newton represented yet another moment in which the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> could cash in the political capital of their service. They had earned the right to be called men and citizens and claimed their rightful place as patriarchs of their own homes. They could now dictate where they wished to settle, put down roots, and direct the affairs of their families in the fashion they deemed right all in the community of their choice.

## CHAPTER 8

### CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

Having purchased their space in the Newton Community using the political capital of their service, the men and women of Newton turned their attention to maintaining it. They did this by continuing to cultivate and nourish the growing good will and respect of their white neighbors. They also held any newcomers to their community to the high standards that they had set for themselves.<sup>96</sup> These men and women, most of them former slaves, developed a vibrant black community actively involved in Newton as well as throughout the state. They made their home in the Northern part of town or “North Newton,” as it was known. So large and dynamic had the African American community of Newton become, that the *Iowa State Bystander* frequently ran a column called “Newton Notes,” describing the various activities and accomplishments of the community. Their active participation in churches like the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E. Church) and the Methodist Episcopal Church (M.E. Church) in Newton, on committees, or their activity in organizations like the Afro-American Progressive Association are examples of how both the African American men and women of Newton, though limited in traditional political power, nonetheless maintained their space in the community through their constant presence and community efforts.

The A.M.E Church, in Newton as elsewhere, acted not just as an association of worship but provided the black men and women of Newton with a place that they could congregate and organize. Such community organizations in which African Americans could participate were

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<sup>96</sup> Stella McCord, “North Newton,” *A History of Newton Iowa*, ed. Larry Hurton (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1992), 79. McCord, describing the importance of the military service of the African American men of Newton, points out that “the heads of the families who fought with the Union armies commanded the respect of the Newton citizens.”



limited. Organizations such as the Masonic Lodge in Newton as in other place did not allow blacks to join, as well as the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R) in Newton that excluded the black veterans of the city from becoming members.

Membership in the G.A.R, in particular, would have been important to these men whose identities and very place in the community had become entwined with their military service. While some other G.A.R posts in the state allowed African Americans veterans to join, Newton did not. Jason Green and Alexander Fine both attempted to join the local G.A.R in Newton. Fine's application was withdrawn while Green's was rejected. It is not clear why this occurred other than some in the G.A.R post objected to their joining.<sup>97</sup> Still, it appears that these objections to African American Civil War veterans joining the G.A.R post in Newton may have eventually subsided. At least one African American Newton veteran, Anderson Hays, was reported to be a member of the G.A.R. According to the Newton Daily News, he attended the G.A.R.'s reunion held in Des Moines in 1922, the year before he died. Anderson's admission and participation in G.A.R events, even during the last few days of his life, demonstrates his great pride and demand for acknowledgment of the service that he and others had rendered through their military service.<sup>98</sup>

Not only were the men active participants of the A.M.E church in Newton but their wives and daughters were as well. Jesse Moore, daughter of William Moore, at one time acted as a

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<sup>97</sup> Ancestry.com. *Jason Green G.A.R Garrett Post 16 Application* [database online]. Provo, Utah: Generations Network, Inc., (accessed May 31, 2016), <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C95N-F9KS-Q?i=231&wc=3ZX8-6TL%3A1583213502%2C1583214101%3Fcc%3D2351982&cc=2351982>; Ancestry.com. *Alexander Fine G.A.R Garrett Post 16 Application* [database online]. Provo, Utah: Generations Network, Inc., (accessed May 31, 2016), <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C95N-F95Q-X?i=198&wc=3ZX8-6TL%3A1583213502%2C1583214101%3Fcc%3D2351982&cc=2351982>.

<sup>98</sup> "Well Known Negro Is Dead: Anderson Hays Passes Away at Soldiers Home at Marshalltown Yesterday," *Newton Daily News* (October 6, 1923).

teacher for the Sunday School in Newton.<sup>99</sup> The *Iowa State Bystander* praised Newton as one year they held the A.M.E Sunday school convention. The convention praised them for the elegant affair that the African American community had prepared. Sylvia Green, Jason Green's wife, held a reception which provided a band with sixteen members and refreshment on one of the evenings during the two-day conference.<sup>100</sup> Such events allowed the African American community to display their affluence and high standards, not just to other African Americans, but to whites as well.<sup>101</sup>

The women of Newton were also actively involved in the Afro-American Progressive Association, an organization dedicated to the uplift of the race. During the 1894 Afro-American Association's Business Men's Conference, Jesse Moore, Virgie Whitsett, and Josie Whitsett attended the conference as delegates from Newton. Virgie Whitsett, a poet, was even unanimously elected as recording secretary on account of her "marked ability." She recited an original poem she had written at the conference. Katherine Davis Chapman Tillman, another well-known poet, and activist, also lived at one time in Newton.<sup>102</sup> The women of Newton were conscious of the inequalities that they and others of their race still experienced in Iowa and the rest of the country as well. They worked both to overcome these injustices as well as encourage their male counterparts to fulfill their masculine duties.

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<sup>99</sup> "Newton Notes," *Iowa State Bystander* (March 29, 1895).

<sup>100</sup> "Meet at Newton: A.M.E Conference and Sunday School Session," *Iowa State Bystander* (June 12, 1896).

<sup>101</sup> "Newton Notes," *Iowa Bystander* (November 12, 1897). Article contains various Sunday school positions held by the men and women of Newton; "Newton Notes," *Iowa State Bystander* (August 17, 1900). Article announces some of the various parties and visitors that Newton residents were always hosting.

<sup>102</sup> Katherine Davis Tillman, "Lines to Ida B. Wells," *The Christian Recorder* (July 5, 1894); "The Afro-American Citizens Headed by the Pastor," *The Christian Recorder* (June 28, 1894). Katherine Tillman published "Lines to Ida B. Wells from Newton. At the time she did the Newton A.M.E church's pastor was a Reverend Tillman, most likely her husband. Katherine Tillman besides being a writer and poet was out spoken about the rights of African Americans and women's rights.

In an article, she wrote for the *Iowa State Bystander* entitled “Things we can do,” Lottie B. Green, the daughter of Jason Green, spoke out against the unjust employment practices that African American men and women faced. She gave both advice on how to defeat this injustice and work for the uplift of all African Americans by first counseling educated young women to not “be contented to sit at home with idle hands, but to assert a spirit of independence.” Next, she called upon young African-American men to “fit yourselves for positions and be prepared to seize the opportunity when it presents itself.” She further added, “Be manly.”<sup>103</sup> This “spirit of independence” and can do attitude was no doubt instilled in her by her father who had overcome insurmountable odds to become a free and independent businessman.

Another way in which the black community of Newton maintained their space was through homeownership. According to the *Iowa State Bystander*, all of the black residents of Newton owned their own homes in 1896 except two families.<sup>104</sup> These homes were said to be well cared for and very comfortable. The homes in North Newton were known for their “white washed fences where climbed petunias in a riot of purple and pink.”<sup>105</sup> The residents of North Newton took pride in their homes evidenced by their meticulous care and beautification.

Homeownership mattered to these men and women. It represented capital and some affluence for the African American community of Newton. Homeownership also showed permanence in the community. As property owners they paid taxes, further demonstrating to their white neighbors that they were active and contributing members of the community and deserving of the space they had come to inhabit. Homeownership provided these men and their families yet further freedoms. As renters, they were beholden to and at the mercy of their

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<sup>103</sup> Lottie Green, “Things We Can Do”, *Iowa State Bystander* (May 24, 1895).

<sup>104</sup> “Meet at Newton: A.M.E Conference and Sunday School Session,” *Iowa State Bystander*, (June 12, 1896).

<sup>105</sup> Stella McCord, “North Newton,” *A History of Newton Iowa*, ed. Larry Hurton (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1992), 78-79.

landlords who could raise the rent or evict them. White members of the community could force out black residents by hiking up rents or forcing them from their temporary dwellings. Property ownership thus meant permanence and limited the intrusion of whites into the lives of African Americans.<sup>106</sup>

Property ownership also provided these men and their families with some form of economic security. Not only could their homes be an investment or a safety net during hard economic times it could also help families make ends meet. Disability plagued most if not all of the men. To provide further income or to reduce grocery bills families planted gardens. At various times, individuals like John Miller and Walker Wolden owned and operated farms as well as worked as laborers. John Miller owned land in both Des Moines and Newton at the time of his death.<sup>107</sup> Anderson Hays involved in real estate had purchased two adjoining lots both within one week of the each other.<sup>108</sup>

The monthly military pensions that the veterans of Newton received as a result of their service provided the ability to purchase homes and other property. The added income from a pension provided the men with capital in the form of steady, reliable income, important to men who worked for the most part as day laborers and at seasonal work. This additional income, the reward of their military service, not only aided them personally and their immediate family but strengthened the community by bringing in additional money that helped to stimulate the economy. The added economic benefits of their pensions thus provided them with moderate purchasing power that allowed them to buy and maintain some of the affluence for which the African American community of Newton was known.

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<sup>106</sup> Brodnax, "Breathing Freedom's Air," 43.

<sup>107</sup> "Iowa Negroes are Prosperous: They Own about One Million Taxable Property," *Iowa State Bystander* (June 16, 1911): 1.

<sup>108</sup> "Newton Notes," *Iowa State Bystander* (March 29, 1895): 1.

Military service provided the Newton USCI veterans with both social and economic capital. The benefits of military service could act as a safety net, as in the case of Anderson Hays, who during the last few years of his life lived in the Old Soldiers home in Marshalltown, Iowa.<sup>109</sup> Hays and his fellow brothers-in-arms claim's to these benefits were not viewed as a handout but as their rightful reward for their service. They thus claimed these benefits for themselves and their community. The ability of the USCI veterans of Newton to capitalize on the benefits afforded to soldiers not only aided them in their struggle for economic security, but it also demonstrated to all that they were worthy men and valuable assets to the community.

While some found economic stability through homeownership, Jason Green found economic stability in business. Green found employment in one of the few professions that were open to African Americans during the nineteenth century as a barber. Having broken the color line that forbade African Americans from receiving an education with white students in Newton, Green ambitiously sought out to claim both social and economic security for himself, his family, and other African Americans in his community. Green was known for being prompt in the mornings to his barber shop, a hard worker, and having an independent spirit. Green also became an active participant in both the M.E. Church and A.M.E. Church, becoming an assistant superintendent for eight years of the latter. Though Green became successful, he continued to remember those in his community that were less fortunate and was known for purchasing clothing for needy children regardless of "color, sex, or creed."<sup>110</sup>

Green, like the other members of the community, was aware of the prejudiced perceptions of many and sought through homeownership, self-employment, and community

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<sup>109</sup> "Well Known Negro is Dead: Anderson Hays Passes Away at Soldiers Home at Marshalltown Yesterday," *Newton Daily News* (October 6, 1923).

<sup>110</sup> "Death of Prominent Colored Citizen," *Newton Journal*, (June 21, 1899): 3.

activism to deny those who harbored such feelings from being able to substantiate their views. Military service had helped to secure some form of respectability and social rights in the community for African Americans in Newton. It now became important to keep up such perceptions and place in the community.

Though limited in their political power, the African Americans of Newton still actively participated in the political process both by voting and seeking elected and appoint positions. Known for being staunch Republicans, “the negro vote in North Newton was proverbially for the party of Lincoln.” John Miller, even after a career as a farmer, laborer, and the owner of several properties, still chose to accept the appointment as janitor of the courthouse in Des Moines, an honored position.<sup>111</sup> John Miller faithfully attended to this duty until December 29, 1923, when at the age of eighty-two he died of an apparent heart attack while boarding a streetcar on his way to work at the courthouse.<sup>112</sup> Fred Green, the son of Jason Green, became the only African American employed at the Newton Post Office as a mail carrier. He also won the election and reelection as city clerk in Newton in 1896.<sup>113</sup> The men and women of Newton were thus actively engaged in various forms to influence political and social change and maintain the gains they made as a result.

The City of Newton changed rapidly during the last half of the nineteenth century and into the next. With this change came an influx of new settlers who brought with them their own biases about race. The African American community of Newton had to remind both current and new arrivals of their earned space in the community. An important tactic in this attempt to dissuade hostility to their presence was through participation in community celebrations and

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<sup>111</sup> “Newton Notes,” *Iowa State Bystander*, (January 13, 1899): 4.

<sup>112</sup> Stiles, “John Ross Miller”.

<sup>113</sup> “Newton Notes,” *Iowa State Bystander* (March 6, 1896): 1.

organizations. Emancipation Day celebrations, for example, did not just celebrate the end of slavery, they also demonstrated a real desire to influence collective memory. African Americans understood the importance that such memories had on maintaining their space in the community and used such real and symbolic representations to remind their communities of their rightful place. African American Civil War soldiers often played prominent roles during these community celebrations. As Leslie Schwalm explains, “They reminded participants not only of slavery’s recent shadow over their lives, but also of the role African Americans had played in destroying slavery, securing black freedom, and defending the nation.”<sup>114</sup> They continued this remembrance through their participation in military reunions and state celebrations such as Battle Flag Day and holidays like the Fourth of July. Their patriotic zeal during these holidays harkened minds back to the service of the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> and the sacrifice they had made, a sacrifice that a democratic society in the post-Civil War Era demanded receive reward.

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<sup>114</sup> Lesile Schwalm, “Emancipation Day Celebrations: the Commemoration of Slavery and Freedom in Iowa,” *The Annals of Iowa* Vol. 62 (Summer 2003): 315-316.

CHAPTER 9  
CONCLUSION

The community that newly freed African American men and women established in Newton was not just the result of benevolent white benefactors bestowing gifts upon a needy people, but a concerted effort on the part of African Americans. Though limited in political resources they used the means at their disposal namely military service, kinship ties, and other social institutions, to aid in their fight for a better life for themselves and their families.

On July 27, 1894, the *Iowa State Bystander* ran an article on their front page entitled “Attention Colored Veterans,” in which they announced the upcoming Battle Flag Day celebration. In announcing the event, they called upon the members of the 60<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry to make a special effort to be present saying, “There will be no better way to which the colored soldiers can call to mind their patriotism and unselfish devotion to the country than by their assembling on this occasion and carrying their flag.”<sup>115</sup>

As the Newton USCI veterans and other 60<sup>th</sup> members on that Battle Flag Day in 1894 proceeded to the state capitol in Des Moines, they were answering a call once again to remind the people of Iowa of the earned place of African Americans in the state and the nation. They had achieved much in their lives. They had risen from the humblest station in American society as slaves to receive an honored place as soldiers and citizens both in the state and in their communities. Crucial to this transformation was their military service.

However, as the men of the 60<sup>th</sup> faded from public view, so too did the memory of their military service. As the city of Newton moved forward into the twentieth century, they saw an

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<sup>115</sup> “Attention Colored Soldiers,” *Iowa State Bystander*, (July 27, 1894).



industrial boom as manufacturing companies like Maytag made Newton their home. The increase in jobs brought with it an increase in the population of the city. This economic boom was not, however, shared by all members of the Newton community. As the population grew ever larger, the number of African Americans decreased. The children of the black Civil War veterans of Newton and others found it increasingly difficult to find good wage paying jobs due to their exclusion from working in businesses and factories such as Maytag. What few jobs were available to these educated African Americans were limited to low paying unskilled labor. The ever increasing number of residents led to a property and rent shortage that further drove up prices and the expense of those living in the community. On top of all of this, the atmosphere in Newton became increasingly hostile toward minorities and foreigners, and the Klu Klux Klan began to establish itself in the community and the surrounding area.<sup>116</sup> African American families in Newton began leaving by the dozens and by 1940 there were only 54 left in all of Jasper County.<sup>117</sup> Most of these migrants became part of the thousands of other African Americans who made their way to major Upper Midwestern cities like Des Moines, Omaha, Minneapolis, Chicago, Detroit, and Indianapolis during the Great Migration.

In the end, the political capital that the veterans of the 60<sup>th</sup> and other African American inhabitants used to create and maintain space in Newton was spent. As the city modernized and industrialized, it brought great prospects for some but not for all. Many years after the majority of African Americans had moved away from the community some still could remember the African Americans who inhabited North Newton and the beautiful homes they kept. Now, North

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<sup>116</sup>“Newton Klan Parade,” *Newton Daily News* (September 8, 1924): 1. There were between 400 and 500 klans men who participated in this particular Klan event in Newton.

<sup>117</sup> *Outside in*, 40. According to the U.S. Census Jasper County was home to 190 African Americans in 1900.

Newton is no more than the north side of town and the once proud community of African Americans who lived there, nothing more than faded memory.

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