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The Iowa Bystander: a history of the first 25 years

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The Iowa Bystander:
A history of the first 25 years

by
Sally Steves Cotten

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
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Signatures have been redacted for privacy

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1983
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to thank my parents for the help and encouragement they have given me in this project.
I. INTRODUCTION

For years the colored people of the country have served as anvils. The day is dawning very fast when they will become the hammer.

_Bystander, October 26, 1894_

The _New Iowa Bystander_ today distributes over three thousand copies every Friday to members of both the black and white communities throughout the United States. Schools, libraries and businesses receive the paper on a regular basis. Begun in 1894, during a dismal period of racial injustice, the paper is one of the five oldest surviving commercial black weeklies in the United States. Through the years, the _Bystander_ has chided and complained, cautioned and humored, while keeping a vigilant and scrutinizing eye on the status of the black community in Iowa and the nation. While providing a needed perspective on local, national and world events, it has encouraged black political involvement. It has helped the race to make the educated judgments and decisions necessary in order to work its way into a rightful and appropriate place in American life. It has been a fighting press for most of its ninety-year existence.

This study will focus upon the early years of the
paper, from its birth during a period of Southern racial hostility and accompanying Northern indifference, through the period of the First World War when John L. Thompson, the crusading and insightful editor, sold the paper in order to concentrate upon his legal practice. The political and economic issues and the social problems of the times will be mirrored as they affected the lives of blacks and as the editors of the *Bystander* labored to inform and encourage their readers. This will be a study in resourcefulness and determination as early *Bystander* editors, lacking formal journalism training, sought to bring to the black people a just appreciation of their own power and potential.

An important news medium, the black press today publishes over 150 weekly and daily newspapers. It is a militant organ for protest as are many white papers which are ever-alert to current racial questions. The *Bystander* began in what has been characterized as the "second growth period," of the black press. The papers in this second period, 1866-1905, "picked up the fight for social equality with even greater vigor than did the pre-Civil War journals." Yet, the small circulation of these papers reduced their crusading impact and restricted their influence.

When the *Bystander* first went to press, black achievements, social news or human interest stories simply did not appear in the white papers. The few articles which did appear were sensationalized stories of black crime or "humor-
ous" racial degradations. It seemed that about the only way a black person could get his name into the paper was by killing somebody. According to Arthur P. Trotter, a ninety-six year old long-time Des Moines resident, and a former president of the Des Moines NAACP: "We wanted to hear some of the good things about each other and the Bystander put in what we wanted to hear."  

In his classic study of the black dilemma in American society, Gunnar Myrdal finds:

All Negroes, and particularly the ambitious upper and middle classes of Negroes who make up most of the reading public, are aware that white Americans deny them social status and social distinction. This makes class and accomplishment tremendously important. The display of Negro "society news" in the Negro press is partly an answer to the social derogation from the whites.  

The black criminal stereotype was reinforced by the constant repetition of pejorative adjectives. 'Burly Negro,' 'Negro Ruffian,' 'African Annie,' 'Colored Cannibal,' were all terms used in Northern white newspaper headlines from 1877 through 1901. 'Coon,' 'darky,' 'pickaninny,' 'nigger,' or 'niggah' appeared in anecdotes, jokes, cartoons, and narrative stories.

Typical headlines from the period include:
- NEGRO'S HORSE STEALING METHODS
- KILLED AT A NEGRO FAIR
- SHE KILLED HER LOVER, MINNIE HALL, A NEGRESS
- DEATH OF A MAN SHOT BY DISSOLUTE NEGRESS
- HELD UP BY MASKED NEGROES
In Iowa, as Civil War emotions cooled and the sympathetic interest of an earlier day lessened, and as the black population increased, the number of newspaper items concerning their affairs decreased. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the occasional reports of happenings in the black community almost invariably involved crime. Readers of white Iowa newspapers were not informed of any black social projects or educational accomplishments. No honors bestowed upon blacks were acknowledged. President Harrison's appointment of an Iowa black as minister to Liberia in 1890 was completely ignored by the State's press.

A rare item did appear in the Iowa State Register, January 10, 1888, under "Legislative Notes" acknowledging the appointment of a Negro to a "janitorship" in the Iowa State Senate.11 Ironically, this position was filled by a William Coalson, a Des Moines barber, who was to become one of the first three owners of the Iowa Bystander in 1894.

From the point of view of black people, the twenty years after the Reconstruction Era were years of "reaction and pessimism."12 The North had won a military victory, but the hoped for changes had not materialized. Reconstruction for the blacks may have ended when Rutherford B. Hayes, in conferences at the Wormly Hotel in Washington, D.C., in February of 1877, promised Southern delegates that he would remove the Federal troops from the South and leave the states alone in return for support from Democratic Southern
Representatives.

In 1893, the year preceding the Bystander's birth, Grover Cleveland had little say in regard to the blacks in his Second Inaugural Address. He simply noted that race or color should not impair equality before the law. Cleveland, fearful of losing Southern Democratic support by showing tendencies favoring social equality for blacks, did little to suppress racial discrimination in the South or to impede the move toward Southern white supremacy.13

By 1894, as much as Northern protestors deplored them, the Jim Crow laws in the South were taking hold.14 Plessy v. Ferguson, a case involving the purchase of a ticket in a white railroad car by a black man, was a Supreme Court decision made in 1896 which would entrench Jim Crow laws for several more decades. Every Southern state instituted state and city laws which prohibited blacks and whites from using the same schools, libraries, playgrounds, parks, railroad cars, sections of streetcars and buses, hotels, and restaurants.15 Discrimination existed in the North as well, especially in the black use of public facilities and private commercial establishments. Lacking legal backing, much of the Northern discrimination was actually unconstitutional and illegal.

In spite of sporadic Northern protest, Southern constitutions were often rewritten before the turn-of-the-century to eliminate the political rights of black citizens. The
Southern Negro was quite effectively disfranchised through intimidation, white primaries, the poll tax and literacy tests. A joke made the rounds concerning the blatant discrimination of these tests: A Mississippi registrar, when confronted by a Harvard-educated black man who could read not only English but also Latin and Greek, rejected him when he was baffled by a Chinese newspaper.16

Many Northerners were horrified by the Southern lynchings and protested against their inhumanity, yet between 1889 and 1918, 3,224 men and women were lynched in the United States, most of them in the South.17 Hanging was sometimes too tame for Southern lynch mobs; they often burned their victims alive, and the turn-of-the-century newspaper accounts of "lynching bees" were certainly not for the squeamish.

Booker T. Washington emerged as the black leader of this era as he won support from many blacks and most whites with his doctrines of separation and submission. He suggested that blacks and whites were as separate as the fingers of a hand and urged the blacks to become farmers, mechanics, and domestic servants and not to battle for racial equality. Philanthropists channeled their money to blacks through him and, in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt would invite him to the White House for an interview and dinner. In the 1890s, the great majority of blacks in both the North and the South did accept segregation and discrimination, believ-
ing that, as they approached the white man's standards, they would win the white man's tolerance and eventually be accepted.18

Appearing at the end of the century, the Populists became a new factor in the public life of the nation. Advocating agrarian reform and dedicated to human welfare, rather than narrow class interests, the Populists were able to throw a real scare into national Republican ranks in the elections of 1892, 1894, and 1896.19 Iowan James B. Weaver of Bloomfield was the leader of the People's Party--later the Populist Party--and ran for President on the Populist ticket in 1892.

Welcoming black votes, the Populists temporarily broke the one-party system in the South in the 1892 elections. The most significant black political figure to arise from the political coalitions of the time was George H. White of North Carolina who was elected to Congress in 1896 and 1898. The momentary success of the blacks, however, frightened resentful whites of the South into even more severe racial suppression. It was during this time that most local and state segregation laws were passed.

Throughout the "tumultuous 1890s when so much of the prairie land blazed with Populist fire," Iowa retreated into conservative Republicanism.20 Iowans had been little concerned with James W. Weaver, and were little bothered when Kelly's Army marched across the state in 1894 to join
Coxey's Army in Washington, D.C. to protest unemployment.

Most Iowa blacks as well as whites were Republican and the Bystander began publication as a black Republican organ. Blacks tended to cling to the party of Lincoln and Emancipation as they bitterly opposed the racist policies of the Southern Bourbon Democrats. In reality, their vote counted for little, yet blacks in Iowa proudly declared their Republican loyalties and the Bystander continually urged its readers to support their party at the polls. Black suffrage had been approved by constitutional amendment and the word "white" had not appeared as a voting qualification since 1880.21

When William Coalson, Jefferson Logan and T. E. Barton organized the Bystander in 1894, most black Americans still lived in the South. They would migrate very little until the time of the First World War, when many left the Southern states to work in Northern industry. Census reports for the period indicate that only 10,685 Negroes lived in Iowa in 1890. The figure about doubled by 1920 when the Iowa black population was 19,005, still less than one percent of the total state population.22 The greatest migration in Iowa before this period was that of the Southern Negroes who came to work in the southern Iowa coal mines and in the towns along the Mississippi.

Those black people who did live in Iowa in the 1890s were concentrated in the larger towns and cities. There has
been a steady decline through the years of blacks from the agricultural counties of southern Iowa to the cities, showing a tendency toward urban concentration. Census figures for 1890 show that only three Iowa counties had a black population numbering over one thousand. Des Moines was responsible for the Polk County figure; Lee County contained the industrial river cities of Keokuk and Fort Madison, and the coal mines accounted for the large number of blacks in Mahaska County.

In comparison to the hostile atmosphere in the South, most Iowa blacks lived in relative harmony with their white neighbors, as long as they did not over-step their social bounds or try to steal white jobs. Most Iowa whites favored political rights for the powerless black minority, but were more reluctant concerning social rights. It would take Iowa years to emerge from the mire of social discrimination. Blacks lived in their own neighborhoods and had their own churches, lodges and entertainments. The first civil rights case reached the Iowa Supreme Court in 1887. In the case of State v. Hall, a barber refused to shave a black man. The court ruled that the defendant could not be convicted of a misdemeanor since no criminal discrimination was shown.

The Bystander's editors seemed eager to begin their paper in Iowa and, in spite of some circumstances working against them, lauded Des Moines, the new paper's home city:

Des Moines has long been noted as a convention
city. Her growth is slow and substantial and permanent and it is one of the best towns in the country for those who desire to labor, go into business or buy a home. If one wants to work come to this city; if not stay away.25

Beginning the tradition of praising the race to instill security and a sense of pride in its black readers, the paper declared that in the city of Des Moines were: "as thrifty, industrious, and intelligent a class of colored men and women as one will find anywhere in the country among any class of people."26

According to the list of occupations given in the City Directory for 1895-1896, there were 517 employed black males in Des Moines. The majority were working as laborers, porters, barbers, waiters and cooks; next came janitors and those in "domestic service." There were three black firemen, two policemen, and one mail carrier. One person was listed for each of the following: lawyer, physician and engineer. No occupation was given for 144 men. According to the Census of Iowa for 1895, there were 1,367 blacks in Des Moines at the time the Bystander first went to press.27

These people would comprise the new paper's immediate and initial audience. The Iowa State Register welcomed the Bystander to Des Moines as the Republican organ of the colored men of Des Moines and Iowa: "by being the paper which colored men and women too will read for the news and its information."28
NOTES TO CHAPTER I


2. The four other papers are: the Philadelphia Tribune (1885), Houston Informer (1892), Baltimore Afro-American (1892), and the Indianapolis Recorder (1895).

3. The paper began as the Iowa State Bystander, June 8, 1894, Des Moines, Iowa. On January 21, 1916, it became the Bystander, and from 1927 to February 24, 1972, the Iowa Bystander. From March 3, 1972, until the present time the paper has been the New Iowa Bystander. Papers are missing from 1921-1927. Hereafter cited as Bystander.

4. The Bystander uses "Negroes," "racemen," "Afro-Americans," and "colored race" in reference to blacks. "Blacks" will be the standard reference term in the following chapters of the text.


7. Information obtained from personal interview with Arthur P. Trotter, Des Moines, Iowa, January 30, 1983. The tape is in the author's possession.


10. Logan, p. 221.


14. The term "Jim Crow" dates to 1830. Thomas Rice, a white entertainer, observed a Negro singer-dancer performing in a Baltimore alley. Rice "borrowed" the man's song and dance routine. Whites found the character humorous but it was hateful to Negroes. The song went: "Wheel about, turn about, dance jest so—every time I wheel about I shout Jim Crow!"


17. Ward, p. 44.


21. The word "male" remained, however, until 1920.

22. United States Census, Iowa, 1890-1920, as cited in Bergmann, p. 34.

23. Census of Iowa, 1890, as cited in Bergmann, pp. 34-35.


25. Bystander, June 22, 1894.


27. Census of Iowa, 1895. Since there was no census for 1894, it is assumed there were approximately 1,367 blacks in Des Moines in 1894.

II. THE EARLY YEARS

It is reported that the White House of the Southern Confederacy is now used as a school house for Negro children. What a marked improvement.

_Bystander_, May 19, 1895.

Each of the three founders had other employment when the _Bystander_ was incorporated with a capital stock of $5,000 dollars in June of 1894. This seemed to be characteristic of black newspaper owners of the time who could not rely solely on their papers as a means of livelihood. William Coalson, the vice president, was "employed in Governor Jackson's office at the capitol," and, according to the _Bystander_, was "well and favorably known."¹ Of treasurer Jefferson Logan, a messenger at the state capitol, the paper said, "He owns some of the most valuable property in Des Moines, which requires his personal attention."² And of the first president:

Mr. T. E. Barton is president of the company. He has been a resident of this city for eleven years and of the state for seventeen. He has been in business here ever since and has been successful. He owns valuable real estate in the city. He is known as a brave soldier, a good citizen, and a pleasant and honorable man to do business with or meet socially. Hon. E. H. Conger secured Mr. Barton a place at the National Capitol which he held for several years.³
Apparently the Bystander had a hard time getting off the ground financially, as six months later the following statement appeared: "A friend of this paper says 'it is too young to die.' Don't worry or lose any sleep about this paper. The men who started it had visible means of support before they started. They have always been willing to do honest labor for their existence."4

Two brothers, Charles and Thaddeus Ruff, were the first editors of the new paper. In December 1895, they acknowledged that the men who had founded the paper had often found it necessary to dip into their own pockets to keep the paper going, but that all were dedicated to the idea of giving the Afro-Americans of Iowa their own newspaper. They went on to say that many had doubted the expediency of starting a Negro newspaper, but the men had "pluck, perseverance and money" and that nothing had daunted them.5

Charles Ruff evidently authored the following statements introducing himself and his brother, Thaddeus:

Mr. Charles F. Ruff is the editor. He received his first dose of paregoric in the city of Muscatine, Iowa. It is the best town in the state in which to be born. He lived in Mt. Vernon for a number of years and attended Cornell College. He began the printers' trade there and has worked in various parts of the state and country. He has been employed on the Iowa State Register for the past eight or nine years.

Mr. Thaddeus Ruff is the associate editor. He was born in the city of Mt. Vernon, Iowa, graduated from the public schools of Atlantic, and became a 'devil' soon the Iowa State Register and learned the printers' trade. He owns a bicycle and a pony and will chase a local item to its lair.6
Praise for the new editors came in from other Iowa papers as they wished the Bystander success. The editor of the Bulletin Journal of Independence had known the Ruff brothers since their boyhood. Charles had been employed by the Bulletin Journal and was known to be "a man of ability, a first class printer and a hard worker."7 From the Oska-loosa Negro Solicitor came the following salutation: "The editors, Charles and Thaddeus Ruff have brains and character, push and ambition, and unless we miss our guess, they will dig up a stamp labelled on the bottom 'success.'"8

The Bystander reprinted a letter from the Daily Iowa Capital on July 6, 1894, which was also filled with praise and stated, that among the stockholders were some of the best men of the African race in Des Moines, and that the Ruff brothers were well-educated, good printers and good writers. With such "quality behind it," the Bystander, it believed, "will take high ground and keep it."9

The Bondurant Times, also quoted in the Bystander, found Charles and Thaddeus both "practical printers who are thoroughly qualified to successfully assume the varied duties devolving [sic] around all-around newspaper men."10

The first edition of the Bystander appeared on June 8, 1894, but is unavailable, and only fragments of the second and third survive. The second issue explains the reason for choosing the word "bystander" as the name of the new paper. It was chosen in honor of Albion Tourgee, a former judge
from North Carolina, who was for years a great friend to the blacks. He was a Republican in the South when it took real courage. Tourgee wrote "Bystander Notes," for the black paper Chicago Inter-Ocean, and in this column he continually spoke out against the cruel treatment of the blacks. "We have adopted the name, "bystander," said the Ruffs, "because we believe in the man and his principles and are willing to follow such good examples and teachings if even from a distance."11

In addition to combating the black criminal news in the white local papers and circulating social news among their people, the owners of the paper hoped to employ interested black journalists. In 1894, black people interested in journalism either had to start their own paper or find other outlets for their talent and energy.12 The new owners were also eager for young black people to be given an opportunity to learn and work in the newspaper field.

Although both of the editors of the paper had previous newspaper experience, the owners had never operated a paper and knew little about running one. They did not own a press for over a year, and it was with the help of the employees where the paper was printed, that they received enough pointers to get their new paper headed in the right direction.13 They immediately began negotiating for a well-equipped printing office in order that they might employ as many young blacks as possible.
The Bystander acquired a printing press in December 1895, and made the following joyous announcement:

Today the Iowa State Bystander has presses, type and other things pertaining to a first class newspaper. It is now proposed to give employment to as many as possible and to add all of the very latest styles of type and increase the news gathering force of the paper and give more attention to both general and local news. Politics, religion and the economic questions of the day will receive due attention. The Bystander will continue to fight for the home and its sacred altar, for good society and for good government.  

Although it would change several times through the years, the original Bystander format was a four-page, seven-column broadsheet. Club rates were available and a single one-year subscription sold for $1.50. The printing office was listed as Register Block, Third Floor.

The Afro-American Protective Association of Iowa, designated the Bystander its official paper as did the Masonic Grand Lodge of Iowa. The names of both associations appeared in the paper's masthead. The Afro-American Protective Association was part of the Afro-American League of the United States which, organized in 1889, was the first real attempt to establish a continuing black organization. The structure and objectives of the League had a great deal of influence on the later Niagara Movement and the NAACP. Northern blacks predominated in the League and worked hard to improve the status of their Southern brothers. Early national proposals included the formation of an Afro-American bank, a black lobbying committee in Washington, and an im-
migration bureau to assist internal immigration. Each of these proposals was to become a reality after 1900.15

The Iowa branch of the organization met in Ottumwa in July 1894. It resolved that it was the duty of all loyal Americans, regardless of their party affiliation, to express their sentiments in regard to lynch law and mob violence in the United States.16 The Bystander was made the organization's paper by resolution:

WHEREAS, We have a new race paper in the field of journalism known as the Iowa State Bystander, therefore be it

RESOLVED, That we welcome the Iowa State Bystander in its enterprise and commend it upon its firm stand taken against the lynch and mob law and southern outrages: and, further be it

RESOLVED, That the Iowa State Bystander also be one of the official organs of this association.17

Meetings of the Afro-American Protective Association and the Grand Masonic Lodge usually made the front page of the Bystander, as did the large church conferences. Yet, the editors eventually became somewhat disenchanted with their role of "official organ," since many association and lodge members did not subscribe to the paper they had designated as their mouthpiece.

The following notice appeared on the front page of the paper in December 1895:

The Afro-American Protective Association saw fit to designate this paper as the "official organ" as did the Grand Lodge of Iowa S.F. and A.M. This is simply an empty honor, unless the members of these
organizations do their full duty, by patronizing the "official organ" to the extent of a year's subscription. It costs money to run a paper, and the management of this paper is willing to put in dollar for dollar with the patrons. Is this fair? Again, there are many who like to read the news but are unwilling to pay for this or any other newspaper. This way of doing business is not the manner by which the German, Irish, Swedish and American papers are made successful and powerful for good.18

In addition to news of the Afro-American Association, lodges and church conferences appeared on the front page. Special stories from unions or exchanges occasionally appeared here as well, and always the announcement of Emancipation Day Celebrations in Iowa. Editorials were printed in the lefthand columns and often a great deal of page one was devoted to black news from around the state and sometimes from Missouri and Illinois. This column, which was originally titled OUR FRIENDS WRITE US, helped to provide a feeling of closeness in the black community throughout the state and to increase circulation as well.

The first correspondence came from Sioux City, Ottumwa, Albia, Burlington, Clinton, Marshalltown, Oskaloosa and La Grange, Illinois, which evidently had a sizable black population. By November 1894, news was also received from Muchakinock, a coal-mining town in southeastern Iowa. The corresponding towns and cities would vary through the years as black populations shifted in the state, but the column would remain a continuing part of the paper. The items appearing in the Bystander from around the state varied in content and
style, since each was submitted by a different correspond-ent. Meetings and church news were a priority, as well as visitors, travelers, marriages, parties and outings. A sick list and obituaries were included weekly in the news from each town. In August 1894, an especially interesting outing was reported by the Burlington correspondent who found associating with whites to be a real accomplishment:

Mrs. Till Jones and her son, Mr. Harve Jones were members of a very swell fishing party this week. They were the only colored participants in this affair, the others being members of aristocratic white families of this city. The neat and crafty little steamer, "Nautilus," run by Captain Bouvar, was secured for the occasion and the happy party spent a most enjoyable time at a popular fishing resort known as Otter Dam. . . . At night between ten and eleven the little steamer was seen nearing Burlington with a very happy and well pleased party of excursionists on board. 19

The correspondent from Newton humorously told of a Sunday School outing in the same issue of the Bystander:

The A.M.E. Sunday School picnicked in Hixon's Grove Wednesday. A good time was had by those present. During the day while boat riding, Mesdames Moore, Brown, Fine, Stanton and Messrs. Moore and Stanton were thrown into twelve feet of water by the boat being over turned. Excitement ran high, but like the Israelites, they reached dry land in safety. 20

Also in the summer of 1894, the following short announcement came from Keokuk: "W. W. Fields and A. J. Fields have recently become the possessors of very fine safety bicycles, the only gentlemen of color possessing them in our city. Mr. W. W. Fields has proved himself quite an expert rider." 21
Another interesting item from Keokuk appeared in the fall of that year: "The community at large are complimenting Mr. C. H. Williams for receiving our many young ladies into the canning factory. Some have made as high as $7 per week."

Weddings were often reported in great detail and sometimes included lists of presents and refreshments, although there was an advertising charge for lists of gifts. The following announcement from the Clinton correspondent is a typical colorful example which described a wedding supper as an elaborate one served by caterer Hampton of Lyons. "The presents were useful and ornamental. Mr. and Mrs. Jackson are well known in Clinton and have a host of friends who wish them a long and happy life."

Mishaps and accidents were noted and were often accompanied by editorial comment. The correspondent from Burlington sent the following tale to the Bystander:

John Simmons met with an almost fatal accident last Saturday forenoon. He and Mr. Cooper were talking over some money matters and got to quarreling, and Mr. Cooper struck him on the head with a cane, bruising the old man badly. Mr. Cooper is under bonds and we hope he may have to pay out some of his fortune. He has so much. Mr. Simmons is getting along nicely and we hope he will recover, as he has been under the weather all winter.

Des Moines news appeared in a column headed LOCAL NEWS usually on page four of the Bystander. News of the same variety was reported concerning the local blacks as was sent
in from the correspondents around the state. Items of interest concerning the city government or local politics were sometimes included as well. The column was made up of short announcements interspersed with an occasional longer story. The following examples are typical of the column:

Joe Brown was out driving with his horse and buggy and collided with a runaway team. He was thrown out and badly injured. The buggy was badly wrecked. The accident happened at the corner of Ninth and Grand Avenue, Tuesday.

Miss Zella Davis commenced a musical course upon the violin at the Des Moines Musical College, Monday of last week under the instruction of the eminent teacher and performer, Herr Carl Riedelsberger.

R. N. Hyde is the proud possessor of thoroughbred colts. Horse flesh is very valuable property when backed up by a standard breeding and it is hoped that Mr. Hyde will be successful in raising the colts to horses and in making a barrel of money.

Chester Woods, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Woods is recovering from a spell of sickness.

Carrie Knight, a woman of color and a "loud" reputation, attempted to commit suicide Tuesday. It required three men to hold her. She went raving crazy after the first attempt.

Baseball is becoming the principal attraction for physical development among our colored boys. On last Saturday the Arcade Nine crossed bats with the Savery House Club on the Belt Line ball-ground.
"Parental Blunders" is the subject for discussion Sunday afternoon at 4 p.m. at the young men's meeting at St. Paul's A.M.E. Church.

Mr. N. D. Valentine, a prosperous farmer of Stuart, Guthrie County, Iowa, drove down from there a few days ago to visit friends and relatives in this city. Himself and family were entertained while here by Mr. and Mrs. Bell and other relatives who reside in the city.

Miss Olive and Naomi Courts will give a grand entertainment at Hansen's Hall, corner of East Sixth and Locust, Thursday, October 19. Everybody should come and have a jolly good time.

The Bystander editors obtained the national and international black news from an exchange with other black papers. This column of news was originally entitled MULTUM IN PARVO and appeared on either page two or three of the paper. In 1900 it became RACE ECHOES and in 1911 changed to AFRO-AMERICAN CULLINGS. It was in this column that the most edifying and uplifting news of the race appeared and it was most likely the intent of the editors to use the column to instill racial pride and dignity. Some quite unusual stories appeared; one told of native blacks in the Caribbean island of Curacao who, upon hearing of racial equality and the abolition of slavery in Venezuela, lashed themselves to tree trunks and threw themselves into the sea in hopes of being carried to freedom by the swift but treacherous currents.
In 1895, the Bystander noted the death of Alexander Dumas, the well known French novelist, and acknowledged him to be a great man, as unashamed of his Negro blood as his father had been. Dumas had been a great sympathizer with the Negro cause and had stated upon several occasions that he had only to go back four generations to find Negro slave ancestors.28

Other typical items from the MULTUM IN PARVO column for 1894 through 1896 follow:

Eight Negro physicians and surgeons practicing in Baltimore, Md., have organized a faculty of medicine, and on June 1st opened a hospital and free dispensary to be called Providence Hospital. It is the only hospital in the South controlled and attended by Negro physicians.

The birthplace of James Monroe, fifth President of the United States is now owned by a Negro named Steward. It is located on the Potomac River, near the birthplace of George Washington.

There are no colored anarchists or bomb throwers.

Quite a stir was caused in Philadelphia last week, when an English steamer in the charge of a Negro captain arrived in port at that city.

The most finished Negro scholar in the world today probably is Edward Wilmot Blyden who represented Liberia at the Court of St. James. He is a valued contributor to many English magazines, is a linguist of pronounced ability, and is one of the most profound thinkers the Negro race has yet produced. Dr. Blyden is a pure Negro without a trace of white blood.
in his veins.

A colored man in Vicksburg, Miss., owns and operates the largest drug store in the city, and the strange thing about it is he is patronized by colored customers. 29

The great black orator Frederick Douglass died on February 20, 1895, and the Bystander of the 22nd carried on the front page a three-column eulogy and story of Douglass' career along with a photograph of the revered statesman. This practice would continue on each succeeding anniversary of his death. 30

The news from around the state which was not especially pertinent to the black community appeared on page two of the Bystander under the headline SELECTED HAWKEYE MENTION. The Iowa news usually took up at least two and sometimes three or four columns. In 1895, the headline changed to HAWKEYE HAPPENINGS and, in 1896, to simply THE NEWS OF IOWA. The stories contained only the name of the town or city from which they originated and the date; evidently they came from a state exchange or union. This state report was a combination of the newsworthy and the bizarre or obscure as these typical headlines indicate: WHIPPED BY WOMEN, RAILWAY WRECK, KILLED HIS COMPANION, A BRUTAL TRAMP, FIRE AT STATE CENTER, AWFUL DUBUQUE ACCIDENT, HORSES FATALY BURNED, ARMY WORM IN DES MOINES COUNTY. 31
ALL OVER THE WORLD appeared also on the second page next to the Iowa news. This information, supplied by a newspaper union or syndicate, was often several days old and contained the same blend of unusual and topical items. National news was included as well as the international: NIHILIST ASKS PARDON, OHIO PROHIBITS CIGARETTES, ITALIAN CRISES, GIRLS FOR SALE, CLAIMS HE CAN CURE LEPERS, ROWING ACROSS THE ATLANTIC, NEBRASKA REPUBLICANS. The stories were brief and unbiased and contained only the place of the story's origin and the date. A typical example of the type of story which was offered in the world news section is the announcement of a lynching of a black near Cincinnati, Ohio, August 22, 1905. Ordinarily the Bystander editors would put the news of lynchings on the front page and cry out against the injustices they exemplified. This, coming from the exchange, takes a different tone entirely and almost seems to condone the mob violence:

LYNCHED A NEGRO MURDERER
   Ohio Banker Choked to Death by a Man
   Whom the Mob Hung.

CINCINNATI, O., August 22--At New Richmond, O., Twenty-five miles up the Ohio River from Cincinnati, a mob took Noah Anderson, colored, from the jail and hanged him for the murder of Franklin Friedman, nearly 80 years old and president of the First National Bank of that place. Anderson choked the aged banker to death for no apparent cause.
In addition to informing its readers of state, national and international news and news of blacks locally, nationally and worldwide, the editors of the Bystander intended also to present "choice and current news in literature and general discussion, fashion notes and household information." The choices in literature were obviously made by the newspaper organization which supplied the Bystander and probably numerous other small weeklies with stories. Most of them were printed on pages three and four of the paper, and almost without exception, dealt with white heroes and heroines. Often they were maudlin and unrealistic. For example, one story dealt with a lily-white and aristocratic English girl who worked herself to death helping the poor derelicts who came to the Salvation Army Station.

They were lifting her tenderly out of the car. She was white as snow, and her eyes had the look of one who sees quite through the intervening veil that floats between this life and the other. The bonnet on her head was a blue poke, and by that token I knew she belonged to the Salvation Army.

Another serialized story, which seems even more ridiculous in a Midwestern black newspaper, is a tale called "Capturing an Earl," in which an English aristocrat engages in a great deal of pretentious conversation with a young American girl.

"I should be very happy indeed to see you at our house to tea tomorrow evening, if you have no other engagement. I have always had a very high idea of the English and am glad to have an opportunity to show it."
"Thank you ma'am," the Earl replied with alacrity. "I will certainly call. At what time do you sup?"

"At whatever hour will prove most convenient to you," was the gracious reply.  

It is unfortunate that during the first three years, the only story which in any way related to black community life appeared in the Bystander in the fall of 1894 and was titled TEMPE'S VENTURE. The illustration accompanying the story showed a fat black woman with her hair tied up in a polka-dot bandanna, Aunt Jemima style. The story reinforced stereotypes and included debasing terms:

Tempe waddled out from behind her table hailing the magistrate in excited accents:

"Judge Tice, sah oh, Judge Tice! Speak here to dis yere nigger! He 'bout to eat all I'se got."

The judge sauntered to the curb, surveying the scene with amused eyes [italics added] and Pete explained the situation.

"Dis leddy 'low I cud eat twel I warn't hungry no mo' fer ha'f a dollah, sah, an' I done gee her de money, but I a'nt eat 'nuff yet."

Perhaps some blacks found humor in this little tale of a wise white judge helping to settle a tiff between two foolish black people, but most likely the great majority were tired of and humiliated by this sort of humor. The editors perhaps had no choice as to what would be sent to them from the syndicate which provided their subscribers with stories and vignettes. They were obviously written with white newspaper readers in mind.

The general discussion, fashion notes and household in-
formation which appeared on the Bystander's front page was equally unsuitable for a black paper, except for black housewives who fantasized and dreamed of being rich and fashionable. Gunnar Myrdal does point out in his study of Negro culture, that from the days of slavery, Negroes have known what is considered good taste and fine manners, and have sought to pattern their own lives after those of their masters.38

Today black papers are filled with stories about blacks and the illustrations are of black people; the same is true for black periodicals. Stories from these early Bystanders would be a shock and an affront to black readers, but the editors probably had no more choice in selecting fashion articles for their paper than they did the stories. Long articles were written about serving tea on the veranda of a summer house or a garden gazebo. The hostess should be appropriately clad in a flowing tea dress for the occasion. For outings she should choose an English duck suit. [See Appendix A.]

Perhaps the most outlandish "general discussion" article taking up most of the front page of an 1894 issue dealt with women's arms. The article compared Caucasian arms from European countries with those of the American beauty. The American arm won out as it was perfectly proportioned and appropriately plump and curvaceous. The French arm was next in nearing the perfect shape, however,
it was found lacking since "it is covered with coarse dark skin and with hirsutic adornment." 39 Black arms were, of course, not considered in the competition.

It is difficult to determine whether it was circulation or advertising which kept the paper going during its first years. Most early black papers depended primarily on subscriptions and, only within recent years, have these papers been financed mainly through their advertising. There were many white firms advertising in the Bystander by the end of the nineteenth century. By February 1896, the Bystander was making monthly contracts with home merchants for $300 worth of advertising. 40 White advertising indicated both a lack of black businesses in Des Moines and a lack of prejudice among the white population which solicited black trade. Millinery shops invited blacks to come in to try on hats, and department stores urged them to try on their clothing. [See Appendix B.] Both of these practices were unheard of in the South at the time.

The fact that most businesses advertising in the Bystander the first few years were white firms was confirmed by Allen Ashby, a Bystander columnist for fifty years, who recognized the names and addresses of many local advertisers. 41

Railroads advertised excursion rates and sleeping cars, but from reading the fine print in many of the ads, it appears that some Jim Crow laws were in effect in the North as
well as the South; the blacks had separate cars and sleeping accommodations. Some national advertising appears in the early papers, primarily for medicines, farm products, and baking powder. Those ads appearing on the pages containing news from a newspaper union could possibly have been supplied by the union to all of its clients on ready-print sheets.

Occasionally, ads read like a short story or special news report. Only when the reader reached the end of the column would it become apparent that the ad was for a particular brand of curative pink pill.

The \textit{Bystander} charged an extra fee of five cents a line for lists of presents or refreshments at wedding parties and for special fund-raising events of churches, clubs, or lodges. A Populist magazine ran an advertisement in the paper, even though the Republican blacks disdained their cause. A great many Republicans were given free endorsements by the paper, but some politicians running for office or announcing their candidacy bought advertising.

The \textit{Bystander} allotted free space to blacks seeking employment in the \textit{LOCAL NEWS} column: "Anyone seeking employment may advertise free in the \textit{Bystander}," was often repeated along with the Des Moines news. Barbers especially were urged to apply at the \textit{Bystander} office.

Late payment of subscriptions was a frequent complaint of the editors and a plea would often appear on the first
page of the paper, generally in the editorial column. The circulation by October 1894 was 612 to homes in Polk County and the paper was circulated throughout the state as well.\(^\text{42}\) Frequently, the paper was passed from one household to another and often the *Bystander* was the only newspaper read by many Iowa blacks.

An article appearing in the June 14, 1895, *Bystander* indicated that some whites were supporting the paper and paying their subscriptions, but that many blacks were late with their money:

> During the last year we have sent the Iowa State Bystander to many people at their request. We have not received the pay for the past year and the coming year is now overdue. We hope all will see to this matter at once. If your kind words and wishes for success mean anything, pay the paper what you owe. If you desire more news and a larger paper, pay what you owe. If you desire that the Negroes of Des Moines shall establish new enterprises support the one you have by paying your honest debt up to it. A white gentleman who was under no other obligation to the Iowa State Bystander only that of a strong personal friendship for the men who established it, gave the business manager $10 and said: "send that number of copies to colored persons who are unable to pay for the same." . . . . The businessmen of Des Moines are patronizing the paper. Their accounts run from $4 to $25 a month each. All we have asked and all we expect from the Negroes of Des Moines is $1.50 per year but we expect it in good hard cash and expect it when it is due.\(^\text{43}\)

Despite their dismay and obvious concern over unpaid bills and regret that more local blacks did not subscribe to the *Bystander*, the editors continued to work hard at keeping their readers informed of the most pressing national and local black concerns. Although there had been no lynchings
of blacks in Iowa by 1894, two whites had been lynched in the state in both 1893 and 1894. Lynching remained, however, the greatest injustice from which the Southern Negroes suffered.\textsuperscript{44}

The Ruff brothers firmly and consistently took issue with the outrages perpetrated upon their Southern brothers. In the third issue of the \textit{Bystander}, the Ruffs condemned the churches and the religious press for not taking a stronger position against mob violence, just as they had not taken a stronger stand against slave-holding. They accused the religious press of minimizing the lynching problem, saying that if the majority of the perpetrators of the violence had been Catholics, the religious press of the country "would have been aflame with indignant protests against the wrongs done to the colored citizens."\textsuperscript{45}

Often articles from other black papers on the \textit{Bystander}'s exchange were reprinted in the paper, especially if they cried out effectively against the lynch mobs. A particularly bitter piece was reproduced in the \textit{Bystander} from the \textit{Richmond Planet}. It indicated that if the whites had left the Negroes in Africa and "kept their whiskey, we'd have known nothing of these outrageous acts (thievery, arson, murder and rape) and would not have had the white folks about to teach us how to practice them."\textsuperscript{46}

Deploring the barbarism in the South, the \textit{New York Mail} and \textit{Express} sent an article to the \textit{Bystander} in July 1894,
indicating that the lynch law, following the Southern example, was now spreading to the West as well. The same article criticized the white Charleston News and Courier for complimenting the "orderly fashion," with which a local lynch mob had carried out its last job.47

Miss Ida Wells, a young black woman, had taken the story of lynching outrages to England in order to receive support for the anti-lynching cause. She reported that she had been criticized by the white Southern press and that it was not only defaming her in the United States but also sending erroneous reports to the British regarding her personal life and the lynch statistics.48

In September 1894, Miss Wells traveled to Des Moines as part of a speaking tour she was making throughout the country to promote interest in the anti-lynching cause. The Bystander of September 21st reported that when Miss Wells spoke at the Tabernacle there was a large audience in attendance. Laboring men, businessmen and professional men were present and gave their undivided attention to the address. In her speech, she praised the white citizens and officials in Tennessee who had brought six lynchers to trial.49 The Ministerial Association of Des Moines made the following resolution after Miss Wells' address:

We condemn all forms of lawlessness whether by individuals or by communities, and invoke the strong arm of the law in punishment of the same. We commend the law-abiding citizens and officials of Memphis and Tennessee for their prompt and vigorous action in the recent horror which has added further
disgrace to the county of Shelby and the state of Tennessee. We bespeak the approval of the civilized world and pledge moral support of Des Moines for the people of Shelby County, Tennessee in meting out punishment to the murderers of those six helpless Negroes.

Des Moines had its own Anti-Lynching Society, which began meeting regularly in the fall of 1894. There is no indication whether this was composed entirely of blacks or whether whites were also present at the meeting. From the wording of the editorials and announcements, it seems as if the membership was most likely completely black. If whites had been present, this probably would have been noted. The Bystander urged attendance at the Society's meetings, and suggested that it was impossible for the blacks to rise in the North while their kin were suffering in the South. The plea was made for the same unity and endurance as the Irish had shown when they joined together to support their families and friends in Ireland:

Let us be patriotic and persevering as the Irishmen all over the world, who never forget Ireland and her suffering people, and are always ready with brain and brawn and money to assist in lifting the yoke from Ireland. Can the African afford to do less? Let us all say so in the meeting to be held on November 22. Be present!

The Bystander often blamed the continued lynchings in the South on the Democrats who, if they were not actively supporting lynching, did little to legislate against it. The Bystander noted that a Senator Blair of West Virginia had introduced a resolution into the United States Senate in
1894 to investigate lynchings which had occurred in the country, but it was, according to Bystander editors, referred quickly to a sifting committee where it would remain pigeon holed. They maintained, "The Democratic party has no desire to investigate this since this is the Democratic way of dispensing justice." The editors took another slap at the Democrats when they questioned, "Why do the Negro Democratic editors never talk of disfranchising the Negroes in the South or hangings by mobs? They would make elegant campaign news."53

In the winter of 1895, the Bystander again berated the Democrats for turning away from the lynching problem in the United States in order to concentrate on the plight of the Armenians. The paper stated that 134 Negroes had been lynched in the South in 1894, and yet the Democratic house refused to investigate lynching in the United States claiming it had no jurisdiction: "The United States turns its face away from the atrocious crimes of its own to those of Armenia."54

The Bystander made another reference to Armenia when it stated that the butchering of American Christians and Armenians by the Turks was no greater a crime than "that law-abiding, industrious, Negroes are lynched, shot down and burned by a lawless element of southern 'chivalry.'"55

It was obvious to the editors of the Bystander that the first humane work must be done in the United States:
Some Negroes are talking of going to foreign lands to civilize and Christianize the heathen. Why talk of this when so much remains at home to do? In this country things are done that no heathen would do. There is no need of going away from home to further the cause of justice when men are burned at the stake, their eyes burned out, flesh torn from their living bodies and all the sensitive nerves of pain sought out and drawn from the helpless victim.56

Throughout the early years of the paper's existence, the front page was filled with articles concerning lynching and the editorial outrage against it. An editorial in 1895, described the lynching of a black woman in Tennessee who was lynched on "suspicion of being guilty of incendiaryism." The editors queried if the next case would not concern a lynching of a Negro who was "thinking of incendiaryism."57

A particularly eloquent article appeared under the headlines SUCH CAN NOT ALWAYS EXIST. Referring to a case where an Andy Martin was buried alive in South Carolina by a white man, the editors maintained that the country would have arisen in arms had a white citizen been buried: "Think of the suffering of the Negro race. God made of one blood all nations, and this country cannot and should not exist so long as its colored citizens are burned, shot, hanged, and buried alive." The editorial continued by pointing out that a broken treaty or territorial infringement always received prompt government attention—yet the United States government did not protect its own citizens and such a government must fall like the Roman Empire. "We are offered no protection
and our life is as the sand of the seashore—washed away and hardly missed."\(^58\)

An unusual occurrence was the lynching of a white man by blacks in West Virginia and the editorial position taken by the Bystander in response. The editors made the pronouncement that the Bystander did not stand for violence regardless of the perpetrators of the crime. The paper stood for the proper enforcement of the law and found that lynch law was a particularly dangerous thing. There was no telling what the outcome would be if it were allowed to continue un-checked.\(^59\)

But there were racial problems to be dealt with in the North as well, and the Ruff brothers hoped to unite black people in a common front against all mistreatment:

The Negroes of the South need assistance. They are suffering many tortures, and the time spent in local disputes is time thrown away. The more united the Negroes of the country are the greater will be the results in any case in which they may enlist. One of the fundamental principles upon which the Iowa State Bystander was founded is that of massing the colored people of Des Moines and Iowa in one good, strong body. United we can lift the burdens from those who are being maltreated in both the North and the South.\(^60\)

In 1894, following the nation-wide business collapse of the previous year, the Pullman Palace Car Company sought to protect the profits of its stockholders by reducing its work force and lowering the wages of those still retained on the company payroll. Pullman employees called a strike and members of the American Railway Union enacted a sympathetic
boycott by refusing to handle any trains carrying Pullman cars. The boycott spread throughout the Middle West and the Railroad Manager's Association fought back by bringing in blacks as strikebreakers. This aroused the hostility of striking white workers and caused a stir within the black community. Eventually Eugene Debs, President of the American Railway Union, was sentenced to prison for six months for refusing to obey an injunction against the strikers, and the entire strike collapsed.

The Bystander reported in October 1894, that, as a result of Debs' strike, many of the Southern and Western railroads had indeed replaced white union strikers with black labor, and that two thousand black men were employed on the Santa Fe and Union Pacific railroads. The editors reminded their readers that the American Railway Union had brought about its own troubles by voting to exclude Afro-Americans from membership in their union.61

Debs himself had been in favor of striking out the words "born of white parents," saying that it was not the colored man's fault that he was black, and not the fault of six million Negroes that were living in the United States in 1894. Debs urged that the blacks be accepted into the American Railway Union, but his plea was rejected by a vote of 113 to 102. In pleading his case, he referred to blacks in rather contradictory terms:

They were brought here by the avarice, cupidity
and inhumanity of the white race. If we do not admit the colored man to membership the fact will be used against us. I am not here to advocate the association with the Negro, but I am ready to stand side by side with him, to take his hand in mine, and help him whenever it is in my power.62

The following month, in response to the drawing of the color line by the American Railway Union, the black railway workers formed their own union. The new association was known as the Anti-Strikers Railroad Union and its object was to form "a thorough organization of the colored men who have had sufficient experience to fill the different positions vacated by the members of the American Railway Union, now on strike."63

The attitude of the Bystander editors and apparently much of the leadership of the black cause in 1894, was that the white strikers had no cause to complain because it had been their own choice to bar the black man from their organization and deny him the union protection to which he was entitled:

In drawing the color line, the American Railway Union lost much sympathy, and until the action of the Chicago convention is undone or in some practical manner repudiated, that sympathy cannot be regained. Men asking for equal rights should not forget the legal maxim that "he who seeks equity must do equity."64

The action of the American Railway Union and the black response was in no way unusual for the times. Blacks had displayed incipient interest in the organized labor movement since before the Civil War, but facing rejection by the white
unionists, had been forced to form protective labor societies of their own. Since the ante-bellum period, considerable hostility toward blacks had existed among white workers whose prejudice was strong enough to keep the black man excluded from their unions.65

The situation for the black coal workers was no better. This affected the local black population more than the railway union bans had, since so many black men were employed by the Iowa coal mines and so many had been used locally as strikebreakers. This would engender great hostility in the white immigrant laborer who was replaced by the black man in the mines. The report of a union miners' attack on black miners in Birmingham, Alabama listed 150 injuries. "The union men are on strike and will not work and do not want others to work in their places."66

The second issue of the Bystander reported trouble in the coal mines of Iowa, announcing there was "imminent danger of trouble in the coal regions of Mahaska County and the governor took precaution to avert an impending outbreak." The Iowa National Guard had been sent into the county and distributed at various localities to maintain peace. The paper found this to be a wise move. The editors acknowledged that men have a right to work and a right to quit as well. Yet, they pointed out, there were 486 colored miners in Muchakinock who were not union men because of white discrimination. The paper quoted one black miner who most likely
summarized the feeling of his fellows regarding the strike:

I am not allowed to belong to the white union and if I were to get out of employment I would be thrown on the "cold charities of an unfeeling world." My sympathy is with the union men but my duty is with my family. I came from Virginia and am a long way from home. I am making good wages and think I will stick to my family first. 67

The end of June found the union coal miners of Iowa still in trouble with many of the strike leaders who were without jobs. Many of the operators refused to sign a compromise contract and as a result some of the mines in Mahaska County were still idle. The Bystander editors noted that, before another year passed, yet six hundred more Negroes might be digging coal in Iowa. The operators were satisfied that the blacks made the "safest and best miners—all things considered." 68

A letter reprinted in the paper signed by a Jacob Howard, evidently an Iowa black subscriber, clearly expressed the general editorial policy of the Bystander towards the black miners who refused to go on strike with their white co-workers. He pointed out that the blacks were barred from railway and coal mining unions simply on account of their color. Howard recounted that when both associations went on strike, the colored man stepped to the front in a "characteristic spirit of self respect," and continued to work. Since they were not considered to be loyal, hard-working or respectable enough to join the unions, Negroes would not participate in any union inspired activities. 69
The **Bystander** was not all condemnation however; it praised the local trade unions which had braved criticism and accepted the Negro into their organizations. Although most trade unions in the country excluded the black man and would continue to do so for years, Des Moines was found to be a notable exception:

Thad S. Ruff, the local editor of the paper was elected to an office in the Typographical Union No. 118 by two more votes than received by any other officer elected at the same time. He has been a member for four or five years and his brother Charles S. has been a member for over fifteen years. Both commend the uniform and generous treatment accorded them by the members and by the men who employ union labor. The Register, the Leader, the Capital and News and numerous job-printing establishments have made no distinction only as to workmanship.

An interesting letter appeared on the front page of the **Bystander** in January 1895, from a Des Moines correspondent to the Sioux City **Journal** which indicated that Des Moines was making some real headway in solving the "Negro problem."
The author found that in the capital city he had seen a more "practical and manly solution of the Negro problem in the North than he had seen anywhere this side of Mason and Dixon's line." He noted that in the composing room of the **Register** he had seen two black compositors working side by side with white men. In the drug store where he had made a purchase, he had been waited on by an "affable clerk, but his skin was black." "If there is any prejudice against the Negro here," he continued, "these publishers and these mer-
chants are braving it."72

The correspondent had asked the white foreman at the Register's composing room what the white compositors had said when the blacks were hired. The foreman had replied, "Oh they made a howl at first but they soon got over it."73 Perhaps this would be an apt description of the blacks' attempt to settle into their rightful spot in a white society, "a howl" at first and then a gradual acceptance.
NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. Bystander, June 15, 1894. It is not clear what employement William Coalson had with Governor Jackson.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Bystander, January 1, 1895.

5. Bystander, December 6, 1895.

6. Bystander, June 15, 1894. "Devil" is a term referring to a typesetter.

7. Bystander, June 29, 1894.

8. Ibid.


10. Bystander, August 3, 1894. Many of the remaining quotations from the paper are filled with grammatical and typographical errors. For the sake of clarity and readability, the author has made the appropriate corrections and omitted the use of [sic].


14. Bystander, December 6, 1895. By March of 1896, the paper advertised facilities for doing commercial printing.


16. Bystander, July 6, 1894.

17. Ibid.
18. Bystander, December 6, 1895.
20. Ibid.
22. Bystander, September 7, 1894.
23. Bystander, September 14, 1894.
25. Items taken from Bystanders: July 13, 1894; October 5, 1894; October 12, 1894; January 5, 1895; February 1, 1895; and February 22, 1895.
26. Latin term meaning "much in little."
29. Items taken from Bystanders: July 6, 1894; August 3, 1894; August 10, 1894; February 1, 1895; and February 2, 1896.
30. Many blacks felt Douglass had sold them out when he married a white woman. The Bystander article is entirely complimentary however, and mentions simply, "His second wife, whose skin is white and whom he married ten years ago, survives him."
31. Headlines taken from Bystanders: August 22, 1894; August 25, 1895; March 20, 1896.
32. Headlines taken from Bystanders: August 24, 1894; May 22, 1896.
33. Bystander, August 23, 1895.
34. Bystander, August 24, 1894.
35. Bystander, September 21, 1894.
36. Bystander, August 24, 1894.
37. Bystander, October 19, 1894.
38. Myrdal, p. 919.
The only black lynching in Iowa from the period 1889-1924, occurred in 1901. During this same period, 7 whites were lynched in the state.

45. Bystander, June 22, 1894.
46. Bystander, July 6, 1894.
47. Bystander, July 27, 1894.
48. Ibid.
49. Bystander, September 21, 1894.
50. Ibid.
51. Bystander, November 16, 1894.
52. Bystander, August 24, 1894.
53. Bystander, June 7, 1895.
54. Bystander, January 12, 1895.
55. Bystander, November 22, 1895.
56. Bystander, May 24, 1895.
57. Bystander, March 22, 1895.
58. Bystander, September 14, 1894.
59. Bystander, August 24, 1894.
60. Bystander, September 212, 1894.
61. Bystander, October 12, 1894.

63. *Bystander*, July 20, 1894.

64. *Ibid.*


68. *Bystander*, June 29, 1894.


70. *Bystander*, August 2, 1895.


III. PULLING OURSELVES UP

A nation should sweep its own house before it cleans other people's houses.

_Bystander_, November 25, 1898

John Lay Thompson was a young state-government employee and part-time law student when he purchased a controlling interest in the _Bystander_ in July of 1896. Thompson took over the paper's editorship as well as its ownership. Charles and Thaddeus Ruff published their last editorial statement in the July 3rd issue under a headline entitled THE LAST. They admitted that their work had not been entirely without error or regret and that they had labored under "adverse conditions within and without." The editorial ended with the metaphor of the press as a looking glass: "We look into it every morning and find ourselves dirty. But we do not want to find fault with the glass. We want to wash ourselves."¹

Of the new editor the Ruffs had this to say:

We have been superseded by a young man of integrity, honesty and ability, and by the intelligent cooperation of those associated with him and the hearty support of patrons he cannot fail. We retire from editorial duties wishing success to the paper and thanking both our friends and enemies-with malice toward none.²

Thompson had received previous recognition from the
Bystander in 1895 as an intelligent young man with a good record, contending for File Clerk in the Iowa General Assembly. The editors pointed out that he had "materially assisted the Republican cause in the state by making strong speeches." In January 1896, the Bystander again mentioned Thompson, who had by then won this office, as holding the highest position ever accorded a colored man in Iowa. The paper described him as "very courteous, obliging and intelligent, a good speaker, and a politician."

Thompson was born May 28, 1869, in Decatur County, Iowa, the son of a former slave from Kentucky. In 1898 he received his law degree from Drake University in Des Moines where he had been the winner of a gold medal in a state oratorical contest and a member of the Athenian Debating Society. In addition to serving as the File Clerk for the Iowa State Senate, Thompson had been selected as a U.S. Census enumerator. By the time he was written up in Who's Who in Des Moines for the year 1929, Thompson had been a resident of the city for thirty-two years. In addition to being the Bystander's owner-editor and a practicing attorney, he was the owner of two hotels and engaged in the real estate business. The yearbook credited him with making speeches throughout Polk County for Liberty Bonds and the Red Cross drives during the First World War. It acknowledged him to be an influential worker among the war camps in Des Moines, a member of the Union Congregational Church, the Boy Scouts
of America, Y.M.C.A., and a past Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge.5

John Thompson published his first editorial statement under VALEDICTORY headlines in the same issue of the Bystander in which the Ruffs bade their readers farewell. Thompson assumed the editorship modestly, fully realizing his inability to "meet the demand of our literary people in the way of journalistic news," yet asking support and a helping hand from his readers in order to improve the paper with each issue. He stated his intentions of publishing a "clean, clear, simple, progressive and newsy paper." He announced the Bystander's principles would be broad, non-sectarian and elevating with "equal rights to all and special privileges to none."6 In politics the paper would be in accord with Thompson's own Republican views and in the interest of sound money, protection and an honest ballot and fair count in every election. Thompson went on to heap praise upon Iowa and the state's progressivism:

Located as we are, in the center of Iowa, the brightest star under the blue dome of heaven; the first state to wipe the black laws from her statute books; our great common school system that is second to none; our vast rich and undulating prairies that lie within the heart of the Mississippi Valley, with beautiful clear rivers and prosperous towns.7

All these factors encouraged Thompson to believe the Bystander could become "the greatest race paper west of the Mississippi River."8 He was anxious to lead and encourage
his new readers, as he optimistically assumed the editorship.

Thompson traveled all over Iowa, first on his bicycle and later by automobile, collecting subscriptions and visiting readers to secure information about blacks in various communities. His annual visits were presented in a chatty and yet informative style as he broadcast the news of the people he had visited throughout the state. In the following item, THE EDITOR'S TRIP, the state of the blacks in Ottumwa in 1897 is described:

The colored people are doing very well; they have one policeman, Mr. Bradford; a bookkeeper, Mr. Joe Hopkins; a few working in the public buildings, a large number in the packing house. Mr. Gilbert keeping one of the best chop houses in the city, Mrs. W. H. Bailey has a home bakery, and is doing fancy baking. There are nine barber shops owned and operated by colored men—quite a number of successful citizens. They have a fine class of young society people.

Although Thompson continually lamented the discrimination against the blacks in both the North and the South, he espoused the Booker T. Washington philosophy which was accepted by many black leaders of the times. Washington taught, that in order to become fully accepted by the whites and fully integrated into a white society, the black people must better themselves and work to improve their race. In September 1895, Washington, then President of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, delivered a speech at the Atlanta Exposition which was praised by both blacks and whites throughout the country. This became known as the Atlanta Compromise.
Speech. The most often quoted lines from his address, "Cast down your bucket where you are," would have the black man "making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded." Washington suggested that blacks seek employment in agriculture, mechanics, and domestic service as well as aspiring to commerce and the professions. "No race can prosper," he said, "until it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem."

The Ruff brothers also had admired Washington and before his appearance at Atlanta had praised him as one of the most level-headed men in the country. After the Compromise Speech, they continued to lecture to their readers the "Washington philosophy" which stated, that in order to succeed, the blacks would have to work on improving both their habits and attitudes. Washington suggested that the blacks be content to remain separate from whites, while being given a chance to prove themselves. In his autobiography, published in 1901, Washington stated that the wisest among his race understood that the agitation concerning questions of social equality were foolish. Progress in the enjoyment of "all the privileges that will come to us," he wrote, "must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing." The Ruffs, and Thompson succeeding them, advocated the use of more "force" than Washington, but basically they followed his admonitions and suggestions in
dispensing their own advice to the Bystander readers.

For example, the Bystander of August 10, 1894, reprinted part of an address delivered at the Emancipation Day Celebration in Burlington by Rev. W. J. Laws of Des Moines. It is a typical example of Booker T. Washington philosophy:

The outcome of the race question rests upon the Negro himself and that by sobriety, industry, frugality, and perseverance assisted by firm determination to acquire knowledge and become educated the colored race will be able to dictate the terms of its own destiny and wring from the white race the recognition of all things which it would then deserve.13

Echoing this idea, the following editorial comment which included a quote from Washington appeared in the Bystander two weeks later, authored by one of the Ruff brothers:

The colored people have yet to learn that the solution of the so-called race problem lies almost entirely within themselves. As citizens of state or nation, be watchful. Take advantage of everything that promises to open the avenues of business and respectability that may present itself. Let every colored person reason when he or she accepts a position that "upon my integrity and enterprise depends the future of my race."14

The Ruffs offered many suggestions for "race improvement" as they edited the paper for three years. They referred to the importance of personal cleanliness which should be maintained by taking baths and combing hair. A black person ought to "wear neat and clean clothing," they suggested, and "have good manners, otherwise he is obnoxious to refined tastes."15 Blacks were urged to avoid bad company, to save money, and to buy homes, even if on a very low
scale of wages. They were told to buy "reasonable things at a reasonable price," and to purchase things necessary for actual consumption and not the luxuries of life lest they would soon see their money slipping away.

The editors urged parents to watch over their children carefully and not to use the street as a nursery, for if they did slight their children they would "rue the day you did it as sure as you were born." Young people were cautioned not to loaf or, while congregating, not to "laugh loud enough to be heard in the next country." The Ruffs also had suggested a list of THINGS WE CAN DO for those blacks seeking employment:

Seek work on the streetcar lines.
Seek work in the carpenter shops.
Seek work in the blacksmith shops.
Seek work as bricklayer's apprentices.
Seek work as cigar maker's apprentices.
Seek work as printer's devils.
Seek to learn some trade. It will be a benefit.
Seek employment as drivers for grocery, dry goods and other stores and be faithful. A promotion will come.

All should not be hotel men. All should not be cooks. All should not be barbers. All should not be janitors. All should not be in any one line of business.

These matters are of more importance than all the politics in the state and all the jobs acquired through political influence. We must rise from the beginning.
A great concern of the editors during the first three years of the *Bystander*'s publication was the lack of diversification of jobs for black people in Des Moines. In addition, they were concerned that many of the women, although they had received good educations, never seemed to have a chance for a job. In May 1895, there was not a black girl employed in a grocery or dry goods store in the city of Des Moines. The Ruffs, and later Thompson, protested this discrimination and suggested that Negroes refuse to do business with stores which refused to employ Negroes. They should give all their trade to those merchants who did not discriminate:

There should be a change. Suppose that fifty families agree to do their trading with a grocery store if they will employ a reliable Negro boy or girl as clerk. Suppose the same is done with a dry goods store and so on. In this way young business men and women could be educated. Who will be the first to fall in line?  

John Thompson did even more admonishing, suggesting and advising than the Ruffs had done. In his twenty-three years as *Bystander* editor, he became a real Dutch Uncle to the Iowa black community. Towards the end of his editorship, his main concern seemed to be the need and the desire for a good education for all blacks, in order for them to succeed in life. During the earlier years his concerns were more diversified.

Thompson was always hopeful that the black people would elevate themselves to white middle-class society's "expecta-
tions." His own standards, preferences and concerns appeared often to be those of the white population of Des Moines. He wrote descriptions of black parties, dances and other "entertainments" in flowery language with as many superlatives as did the white press of the period:

TERPSICORHEAN CLUB

BANQUET AND HOP SETS A PRECEDENT FOR SOCIETY.

On last Monday evening, Cycle Hall, corner of 6th and Locust Sts. was the scene of much beauty and refinement, for there Des Moines elite had met for the purpose of celebrating the First Anniversary Entertainment given by the Esmeralda Terpsicorhean Club.

The Hall was beautifully decorated, sweet music by Prof. Kromer's orchestra, one of the very best Des Moines affords, hundreds of beautiful women and handsome men, all blended together, made the evening one to be long and pleasantly remembered by those who happened to be lucky enough to receive one of the club's handsome invitations.

The costumes of the ladies were beautiful and the different variety of flowers intermingled with the bright colored dresses, gave the hall the appearance of a flower garden.

Among the 150 ladies present, we noticed many familiar faces, and among them were:

Misses Beatrice Micklin, blue organdie and chiffon, flowers; Zelia Davis, white silk, pearl and lace trimmings, flowers; Estella Burnaugh, . . . .21

When minstrel shows visited Des Moines, Thompson chastised the Negro for attending as he found nothing elevating or inspiring in the presentations. It was lamentable, he felt, to see the Negro spending money on a show that presented all that was ludicrous in the life of the blacks. He often recommended Chautauqua events instead or concerts and the opera house attractions. Thompson wrote an especially
severe reproach after a circus appearing in Des Moines had attracted a large black crowd. In his editorial, appearing under the headline STOP GOING TO CIRCUS, he insisted that there was a larger percent of "our people than the Anglo-Saxon race" in attendance.22 Like the dancing room, he said, "the same old sights are seen again and again." "We as a race should quit these things and seek higher ideas and conceptions." It would be far better, he suggested, that the fifty cents spent on the circus be saved or used to help build up the churches.23

As the Ruffs had before him, Thompson counselled young people to behave in a more seemly fashion. They should not try to use "all the sidewalk,"24 or to talk or whistle so loudly as to attract attention. These things, he felt, reflected upon the race in general and should young ladies behave in such a fashion, it was particularly offensive and "extremely unbecoming."25 Thompson suggested that all Negro youths spend their leisure time reading good books:

How often have we entered the homes of many young youths and found them reading fruitless books, or seen lying on their table literature that should not be found in the homes of well-regulated families. Youths, your association should be with the highest and most cultured class. Parents, these may seem little things to you; yet you should watch little things for they make large ones.26

Further advice to the young included the old proverb "If you button your jacket wrong at the top, it is sure to come out wrong at the bottom." Thompson explained that
habits formed in youth were sure to stick through life and that bad habits would impede a person's progress. Young men and women should not let opportunities for the future pass them by, while, according to Thompson, "a studious and industrious brother in white is reading or studying or apprenticed to some trade or art." Although opportunities were better for the "white brother," Thompson insisted that free time should be used productively and the Negro should be prepared for any opportunity which might present itself. In an article the following year, the theme was again repeated when Thompson, only twenty-six himself, urged young people to go to their rooms and read, or to go to the city library, "but don't stand on street corners telling funny stories."28

Parents owed it to their children to keep them warned against tempting snares of "sin fallen men and women, the dice and crap table, the billiard halls and thousands of unmentioned attractions." Thompson advised Negro parents to set a good example and to steer their children in the right direction:

They should be taught while young, nay while a babe upon their mother's knee, the evils of wrongs and its results, the evils of disobedient children and where it would lead to, the evils of bad company and the troubles that may follow . . . . Home should be made pleasant; it should be filled with music, good books, and pictures of pure, honest Christian characters. There should be peace and sunshine.30

Much of what Thompson suggested for adults sounded a great deal like Booker T. Washington speaking in Atlanta.
Thompson wanted the blacks to let their actions, good works, and examples speak for them. "First," he suggested, "try to make a useful man in the community in which you live." He hoped that Negroes would strive to be of influence and power in whatever vocation of life they followed, "whether in agriculture or professional."32

There is no question that Thompson revered Washington. The Bystander during the years of his editorship contains numerous references to Washington's wisdom and prestige. In an 1897 article, which suggested black men for Republican offices, Thompson pointed out that it was time that men of Washington's caliber be acknowledged: "We would like to see the new colored man of the Booker T. Washington type, the younger class, recognized."33

It must have been with great pride and honor that Thompson appeared as a guest orator along side Washington in August 1898, when Emancipation Celebrations were held in Keokuk. The following announcement of the festivities appeared on the front page of the Bystander a week preceding the event:

GLORIOUS EMANCIPATION

CELEBRATION

COLORED CITIZENS OF KEOKUK

EXTEND AN INVITATION TO ADJACENT TOWNS TO JOIN
Prof. Booker T. Washington, of Tuskegee, Ala., Geo. E. Taylor, of Oskaloosa and John L. Thompson of Des Moines are the Orators From Abroad. 34

Throughout the first sixteen years of his editorship, Thompson remained a staunchly loyal Republican and the Bystander's editorials mirrored his loyalties. He was a noted speaker for the Republican cause among the blacks, always desiring political cohesion as well as clout. Both the state and the national Republican tickets and platforms were routinely printed in the paper, and a rooster would invariably crow for Republican victories. [See Appendix C.]

Charles and Thaddeus Ruff had begun this official political policy in 1894 when the Bystander first went to press. They blatantly panned the Democrats as "jackasses," as well as the Populists as "putrid," while generously praising all Republican candidates and policies. The following editorial notes from 1894 and 1895 are typical of the Ruff's style and ideas:

... the largest Democratic jackass hails from that state Indiana, and he, unfortunately is alive and kicking.

There are good and substantial reasons why a man should be a Republican. There is a semblance of an excuse for an American citizen being a Democrat. But there is no reason or excuse why a man should become inoculated with
the disease known as Populism. Its doctrines, if enacted into law, would destroy our institutions and spread disaster and ruin more extensively than has the Democratic party during the past few months.

There will be a grand and enthusiastic Republican love-feast given by the Young Men's Colored Republican Club at the Courthouse.

All Republican hearts and more especially the hearts of Iowa Republicans beat with a throb of joy in the triumph of one of her most brilliant and far-seeing congressmen. Hon. J. P. Dolliver, representing the Tenth Iowa Congressional District, had the distinguished honor to deliver the Memorial Address at Gettysburg.

Traditionally blacks had been Republican since Emancipation. Some deserted the party temporarily in 1912 when they voted for Theodore Roosevelt who was running on the Progressive ticket. Others did not leave the party of Lincoln and Grant until the end of the Depression and the New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The adulation of Lincoln, the Emancipator, continued from one generation to the next as party loyalty remained fixed. A masterful politician with an extraordinary insight, Lincoln had actually quite consistently reflected the thoughts and prejudices of most white Americans. As a spokesman for the Republican party, he had made his position on Negro rights quite clear. "We cannot make them [blacks] equals," he had said at a political rally in 1858. Recogniz-
ing white supremacy, Lincoln had continued:

I will say then, that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, [applause] - that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people. Physical differences make political and social equality impossible. . . . I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.37

Perhaps some black leaders and editors were uncomfortably aware of this "other Lincoln," but the majority of the black populace continued ardently to admire their liberator and his party. The Democrats were lynching and disfranchising blacks in the South, so there was no question of Northern blacks lending them any political support. The great black leader Frederick Douglass had cautioned his fellows with a now famous dictum: "The Republican Party is the ship; all else open sea."38

Mark Hanna, a good friend of William McKinley and a prominent Republican politician, had boasted around the turn-of-the-century that he carried the Negro vote "in his vest pocket."39 Republican leaders rarely became this complacent and most worked continually to keep blacks "in line." Various tactics and chicaneries were employed; money was "donated" to black churches and newspapers, and some to the voters themselves on election day. Frederick Douglass and other black Republican leaders were hurried around the country giving speeches during election years. Some patronage
was given the blacks to keep them, if not content, at least temporarily pacified.

In reference to the black as a political tool, Thompson had the following to say in 1897, a year after McKinley's election:

How often has it been said by our Anglo brothers that the Negro vote could be sold and bought with a dram of whiskey or a few dollars? How long is our race to be flooded by so-called self leaders who are so tricky and disreputable that even their friends fear them?40

Thompson acknowledged a deep respect for the black man and his loyalties as evidenced by the Negro's unwillingness to take money for his vote. It is shown in the following:

PARTY LOYALTY

It is a true maxim that the colored race is ever loyal to the Republican principal. Last week, Mark Hanna could have been defeated for United States Senator by only one of the two colored representatives in the Ohio Legislature, but no they remain firm and true to their promise, true to their party, and true to Hanna. Money nor other inducements could not change them. The colored vote is the balancing power in Ohio.41

The black population of Iowa was too small in the 1890s, the first years of the twentieth century, and even today, to make it any real political balancing power. Although the Republicans carried the state in all of the Presidential elections from 1856 to 1912, the margin was often slight.42 Iowa blacks, therefore, liked to believe that their votes really were important. Although it is open to question, black leaders in many Northern states attempted to demon-
strate as Thompson did, how loyal electorates had swung crucial states into the Republican column.\textsuperscript{43} Using the balance of power argument, they could and did increase their demands.\textsuperscript{44}

Black leaders and editors had a hard time reaching certain segments of the community. Many had become apathetic toward politics, some, because of the shabby treatment they felt they had received at the hands of politicians. The By-\textit{stander} editors' greatest political efforts were made in getting the blacks to register and then go to the polls. Forming and maintaining an active black political organization was another objective. The Ruffs had pointed out in 1895 that the German population received recognition far beyond its voting power, because they were politically unified. The editors believed that the Negroes of Iowa should show more interest in political affairs. "The German vote received recognition in Iowa far beyond its actual importance," they said, "from the fact that they are active and united."\textsuperscript{45}

Early black dissatisfaction with the Republican party arose in the 1880s when some blacks realized the hollowness of Republican professions of faith in equality and civil rights.\textsuperscript{46} Leslie Fishel writes that "after 1880, the Northern colored man tried almost desperately to strip white condescension and black obsequiousness from the realm of politics; he sought equal recognition granted to other minority groups."\textsuperscript{47} By the 1920s a growing number of black leaders
advised black voters to cast off their traditional political ties to the G.O.P. and to use their votes to bargain for desired objectives, regardless of party.48

Except for a switch to the Progressives in 1912, Thompson and the Bystander remained in the Republican fold, but not without some dissatisfaction. Thompson's greatest concern was the lack of appreciation for the black vote on the local level indicated by a scarcity of black appointments. Upon the defeat of a black man named Woodson, for the position of File Clerk of the Iowa Senate in 1898, Thompson cautioned that "as a matter of politics the G.O.P. must distinctly understand that the colored votes must receive consideration."49

In August 1897, Thompson had noted that never in Iowa's history had a colored Republican been represented on the State Central Committee. Therefore, he stated, "We deem it necessary and earnestly hope that the leading Republicans will not overlook this fact at the coming convention."50 He urged that they add one more member to their list as a member at large. This had been accomplished in both Illinois and Kansas so why not Iowa?51

Under the headlines, COLORED MAN IN POLITICS IN IOWA, Thompson discussed the black man's status in politics. In analyzing the lack of recognition for blacks by both political parties in Iowa, Thompson found one of the causes to be the fact that blacks were not united enough on any one issue.
Perhaps their leaders tried to push themselves too rapidly to suit the conservative elements of both colored and white. He went on to say that, "then again unfit men of our race force themselves on a community." Most of the trouble he attributed, however, to sheer racial prejudice:

We are sorry to say that a majority of the white men of Iowa are color prejudiced and do not wish to vote for a colored man at all, as was recently demonstrated in Mahaska County. In this county both parties had a chance to nominate a colored man on their ticket but their convention has come and gone and the colored man is left with nothing. . . .

In April 1898, Thompson published an editorial discussing the slim local Republican vote which had been cast for Negro Frank Blagburn, a successful candidate for Market Master. The city election had been a Republican victory all around, but Thompson felt the Republican voters had not come through for the black man as they should have.

Yet when Republicans did respond to the black voters with some small gestures of gratitude, the editor was grateful and proud. In 1897 Governor Leslie M. Shaw reappointed William Coalson as messenger of the executive department. After praising Coalson as a "Christian gentleman, easy to approach and congenial, well qualified and a representative race man." Thompson went on to say, "The governor has done well and no better appointment could have been made."

In spite of some bitter feelings of neglect and abandonment by the local and state Republicans, in 1897 the Bystander continued to urge all its readers to stick with the State
G.O.P.:

Iowa should not forget the good work done for the Republican party by the Hon. A. B. Cummins, and he should be the next U.S. Senator from Iowa.

A vote for Cheshire, Carr, Stewart, Stout, Murphey, Brenton, and Spain, is a vote for the party of Lincoln, the party of Grant and the party of McKinley.

Those who desire good government, will not waste their votes by voting for the Democrats.

A vote for the Republican ticket is a vote for good times.

Vote your state and county ticket straight.

Go to the polls early.

Thompson was astonished when any blacks voted for Democrats. After elections in 1896, he expressed great surprise that some in his home county of Decatur had gone over to the Populists and that the entire Democratic ticket was elected. "I wonder what is the matter down there," he queried. It was, he felt, "Something very unusual to elect a Democratic official."

The issues in the Presidential elections of 1896 seemed to center primarily on free silver, imperialism and tariff
protection. No mention was made in the Republican platform of protection for the blacks. A large segment of the black population in the United States at the turn-of-the-century accepted the idea that the President was constitutionally unable to intervene and prevent the continuing violence in the South.58

Thompson was a strong supporter of William McKinley in his contest with William Jennings Bryan and he let it be known in the Bystander. In August 1896, Thompson published a lengthy front-page article containing the speech Major McKinley had delivered to a delegation of two hundred Afro-Americans in Ohio. McKinley had "complimented the race on its splendid progress," before going into the issues of sound money.59

Thompson included an exchange article from the Dallas Express on the same page, which strongly advocated McKinley's election. It maintained that colored voters in both the North and the South were strongly supporting McKinley, knowing him to be a true friend:60

There has not been a single public issue touching the rights of the colored people for the last quarter of a century in which he [McKinley] has not shown his interest in their behalf.61

Thompson pointed out that the national Democratic platform for 1896 contained everything but a plank opposing either lynch law or mob rule.62 The Republicans, he said, were on record as opposed to this "manner of override law,"
and had expressed themselves in unmistakable terms. "The loyal Afro-American," Thompson concluded, "will not be long in deciding which party he will support."

Thompson urged black Iowans to stay with the Republicans:

The Republican party has saved this country from dishonor several times in its history and in November will do so again.

This is a Republican year and you need not fear the result as the people cannot be fooled all the time.

The series of Republican meetings being held this week were a success. Good speaking, good music and good attendance were characteristic.

After McKinley's victory in 1896, Thompson's comments showed his pleasure:

While McKinley is President and Sherman is Secretary, we will venture the assertion that it will not be good for any one to haul down the American flag.

They may reorganize, they may rally the Democratic Party, if they can, but it will be the same old party that ruined this country with free trade. The same party made the Jim Crow car law.

One month from yesterday President-elect McKinley will be sworn in as President of the United States. Oh! Think of the many happy ones to see the old reliables coming into power again.
William Coalson, traveling with the Iowa Governor's party, was the only colored man from Des Moines to attend the Inauguration:

He was permitted to sit in the gallery and watch seven hundred of high Washingtonians waltz. He says some of the colored people are doing extra well, yet the colored prejudice is stronger there than here, especially as to public accommodations.67

Thompson was pleased with McKinley's cabinet choices. He found that the President-elect had selected men who would "fearlessly and honestly carry out the policy which the American people endorsed at the last election."68

Blanche K. Bruce, former black United States Senator from Mississippi, was appointed Register of the Treasury, and John C. Deveraux and John C. Dany, both black men, received positions as Collectors of the Port of Customs at Savannah, Georgia, and Wilmington, North Carolina. Bruce thanked McKinley for all three appointments which he said would be received gratefully by the colored people of the country. Pointing out that the Administration was less than a year old, Bruce praised McKinley as having "done more for this class of our fellow-citizens than any of your distinguished predecessors. God bless you, Mr. President."69

Thompson was pleased and honored for his people by Bruce's appointment. In December 1897, he proudly published a list of McKinley's seven black appointees to date. Each of the men would receive over $3,000 a year in salaries. Thompson was proudest of all when T. E. Barton, former Presi-
dent of the Bystander Company, received a federal appointment, although the new position was not identified:

An Iowa Colored Man

Honored with an Appointment at Washington, D.C.

Mr. T. E. Barton the First Colored Man from Iowa to Receive Recognition Under the New Administration

Mr. Thomas E. Barton, a well-known and highly esteemed citizen of our city, received a message from our congressman Hon. John A. T. Hull last Saturday, stating he had secured him a position at $100.00 per month for him to come at once. He did not name the position. . . .

Thompson was pleased with the Republican's black appointments, yet he had no way of knowing the President's true feelings toward the race. An excellent example of McKinley's and his advisors' true attitudes toward the idea of racial patronage of the time is shown by the application of a black man, George H. Jackson of New Haven, Connecticut, for a consular appointment. In behalf of McKinley, J. A. Porter, his private secretary, asked the Secretary of State to find a position for Jackson who was considered to be a very worthy and well educated colored citizen. His petition had been endorsed by influential men throughout Connecticut,
including the entire delegation from the State Congress. McKinley's secretary urged that if a suitable opportunity did occur, Jackson might receive some appointment "proper for a colored man to hold." What kind of position McKinley or Porter felt a black man could properly hold is undetermined. However, this correspondence suggests that the concept of "the black man's place," was not unique to south of the Mason-Dixon line.

McKinley's appointments paled in significance to the growing friction between the United States and Spain over Cuban independence. "War is the only interesting topic of the day," reported Thompson in the spring of 1898, in his CITY NEWS column. It would seem the blacks of the United States had themselves taken up the "white man's burden" in their fervor and patriotism regarding American's war with Spain.

Although Thompson's was the popular black view, some radicals were critical of black support for the war. Charles G. Baylor, an attorney from Providence, Rhode Island, questioned:

Shall the Liberty cause in Cuba be thus betrayed and sacrificed without a determined resistance by liberty men and women everywhere? I ask the question because the American Negro cannot become the ally of imperialism without enslaving his own race.

William Simms, a Negro soldier fighting in the Philippines wrote home:
I was struck by a question a little boy asked me, which ran about this way—"Why does the American Negro come from America to fight us when we are much friends to him and have not done anything to him? Why don't you fight those people in America that burn Negroes, that made a beast of you, that took the child from the mother's side and sold it?"

The white imperialist, although somewhat in sympathy with Cuba's abused masses, and concerned about American business interests, felt he had a duty to perform as well. William Allen White, noted American author and editor, defined this duty in the Emporia Gazette, March 20, 1899:

It is the Anglo-Saxon's manifest destiny to go forth in the world as a world conqueror. He will take possession of all the islands of the sea. He will exterminate the peoples he cannot subjugate. That is what fate holds for the chosen people. It is so written.

Even though empire building was not universally applauded, by 1897, the American eagle had spread its wings—and its talons. For the most part, the Negro was willing to join in the fray.

Beginning in 1896, the Bystander continually kept its readers informed regarding the Cuban situation. Most of the early information appeared in the back pages from AROUND THE WORLD and dealt primarily with the Cuban rebels and the efforts of Spanish Governor General Valeriano Weyler to contain them. The stories were tinged with the yellow journalism of the times, such as Weyler's "forcing" a young Spanish lieutenant to commit suicide, or how he "ordered" all Cuban prisoners at Morro Castle to swim daily, since sharks would
consume the majority of them and they could thus be easily eliminated. Throughout 1896, although American sympathies were leaning toward the Cuban insurgents, President Grover Cleveland insisted war rumors were "disturbing and unjustified."

Thompson's first real editorial on Cuba appeared in the Bystander's Christmas issue of December 1897, under the headlines, CUBAN FREEDOM:

Is it time for America to declare the Cuban freedom? This holiday thought, when the old year is about to pass out and the new one enter, the tragic story comes to every American of the struggling Cuban heroes and patriots for their independence and liberty from the tyrannical oppression of the Spanish government. . . . Cuba, that sits beneath the feet of America, "The Pearl of the Sea," "the beautiful Queen of Antilles," "the loveliest garden of the tropics" has been under the iron heels of Spain for centuries, and for two years she has been struggling with manly courage and ultimate hope of freedom. The Spanish brutality and injustice and atrocious rule of the haughty Castilians is sufficient reason for them to ask for freedom. We hope the time will soon come when she will have won her liberty and be annexed to the United States. It is to the United States' interest to receive Cuba—-from a financial and industrial standpoint . . . . Remember that Sparta had her Thermopylae, Scotland her immortal Bruce, America her Washington and Grant, Haiti her Toussant L'Ouverture, and Cuba her beloved Maceo.

The "beloved Maceo" to whom Thompson had referred in his editorial was a mulatto insurgent General. He had been eulogized with a poem in the Bystander shortly after his death in 1897:
When freedom, crushed neath tyrant's heel
Was pleading for a martyr's soul
Who scorned to yield or longer kneel,
The slave of any despot foul;
The world a Maceo brought forth,
Of dusky face, but sterling worth. . . .

According to a later report in the Bystander, this same Antonio Maceo was a man who "commenced life as a donkey driver, and by his courage, coolness, and military subordination rose to the rank of Lieutenant General." The Spanish used his name to show that the war was "led by Negroes." The United States battleship Maine was sunk in Havana harbor on February 15, 1898. Of the 260 officers and men lost, 22 were black. Although it was impossible to determine whether the sinking was the work of Spanish loyalists or Cuban insurgents, or was entirely accidental, the war faction made "Remember the Maine" their slogan. The Bystander headlines covering the event were THE SPANISH SUSPECTED OF TREACHERY, and Thompson's editorial cast the blame upon Spain.85

Early in April the Bystander reported that "while we do not favor war, yet we think that the time is fully ripe for the United States to free Cuba and get indemnity for the destroying of our vessel." On April 11th, the paper announced that COLORED TROOPS MAY GO TO CUBA. On March 29th a regiment of blacks had been sent to the Tortugas Islands,
close to Cuba. According to Thompson, the government felt that the blacks were better able to withstand the Cuban climate than were white men. A week later Thompson disputed this idea and questioned the sincerity of Americans who were now so lavish in their praise of the black soldier:

VALOR OF THE COLORED MAN

During these troubled times when war seems inevitable, you can hear the white man tell of the loyalty, bravery, gallantry of the colored man in the late war. It is indeed very strange that they waited until now to tell how useful our race was in time of battle. Nearly every paper and magazine has an article about the Negro as a soldier and how he could stand the tropical climate of Cuba better than the white man. We do not believe that, for the colored Americans are just as much American in their habits, customs and nature as the white man.

He also pointed out to Bystander readers that Uncle Sam was always in need of black soldiers. They were called up first, "given a front seat," but when it came to sending black students to the Naval College to be trained in naval discipline, the government refused. This he found to be very inconsistent.

Yet Thompson had nothing but praise for Republican President William McKinley and his adept handling of a fiery Cuban situation:

McKINLEY'S COOLNESS

It is wonderful to watch William McKinley's slow, cool, and steady course with which he has held the American people from acting rashly to appease the Spaniards and to free Cuba. His measures are wise notwithstanding the strong
censure and criticism he has received. We were not ready for war until last week. Now we have good coast defenses, well-equipped navy, and men ready to go. Everything is ready for war if it must come.

On April 11, 1898, McKinley had sent a message to Congress charging that the Spanish government was unable to suppress the Cuban rebellion and yet was unwilling to grant an armistice and leave the island. The War Resolution of April 10th inspired Thompson to publish this highly-emotional article sympathizing with Cuba and praising the step America had taken:

CUBANS WILL BE FREE

So decided Congress last Monday night at 2 o'clock. . . . The moan of the Atlantic, the sigh of the Gulf of Mexico, the piercing cries of disconsolated mothers, the pleadings of dying fathers, the prayers of an enslaved nation has at last been answered by the patriotic, loyal Christian nation of America.

The following poem submitted to the Bystander by a woman from Greenfield accompanied the above editorial:

A CRY FOR FREEDOM

Hark to the cry of the thousands
Suffering in Cuba today
Suffering from work and starvation,
Suffering from mental decay.
Yet amid all of their suffering
Caused by the country of Spain
Long have they struggled for freedom
Yet have they struggled in vain.

Shall we not see that they have it?
Shall we go on as before?
No, for the voice of Humanity
Calls us away from our shore
Into the island of Cuba
There to make Spain set her free,
So that the thousands now dying
Henceforth may have Liberty.92

When war was officially declared and the news reached Des Moines, "whistles blew, the bells tolled and great excitement prevailed."93 A committee of black men immediately called on McKinley in Washington, led by ex-governor P. P. Pinchback of Louisiana. He pledged the support of the colored race, saying "the loyalty of 9,000,000 of his race would assist."94

On April 22nd, the full text of McKinley's ultimatum appeared in ALL OVER THE WORLD along with the announcement that the Spanish minister, a Señor Polo, had left for Canada.95 THE NEWS IN IOWA reported that Governor Shaw had issued an order to the National Guard to prepare immediately for active service.96 War fervor had struck the country and the state.

The following Friday, the Bystander proudly announced the "Famous Ninth Black Cavalry" had passed through Iowa en-route to Florida.97 According to the paper, crowds cheered the former Indian fighters as they journeyed to the front. "If these black fellows get at the Spaniards, we will have revenge for the Maine," an admiring spectator wearing a Grand Army button is reported to have said.98 The veteran continued to praise the colored fighters of the Ninth Cavalry:

When they showed up on the frontier the Indians called them "buffaloes" in derision, because their hair was curly. Before they got through with the Indians the most desperate band of redskins that
ever went on the warpath would break and run at the sight of them. And I want to say right here that any troops who can beat the American Indian at his own game are fighters from the ground up. The American Indian is the toughest proposition in the fighting line that lives. And these black fighters can outmaneuver, outride, outshoot and outbedevil even the red devil of the plains. They charge with reins between their teeth and a revolver in each hand. They ride like cowboys. They shoot as fast as machine guns with each hand. With the saber they are fiends incarnate. When they drive in the spurs and charge home, God help anything in front of them.99

In spite of the glowing reports from the Bystander, which gave the impression that all America was in awe of these black heroes, most discovered, as they reached the front, that they faced the usual racial humiliations. They were often jeered at whistle stops in Southern towns; they were given separate quarters on transport ships and forbidden to socialize with white troops enroute to Cuba. They ate in separate sections of the mess hall, which they could enter only after the white troops had been seated, and they took morning coffee alone after the white men had departed.100

Thompson announced on June 3, 1898, that Iowa was to have its own colored company. The "leading colored military men" of Des Moines had first applied to the governor to organize a black company, but after receiving no satisfaction from him, had appealed to Iowa Congressman G. A. T. Hull who immediately sent the following telegram:

Washington, D. C. May 31, 1898.
Capt. E. T. Banks, "Colored" Des Moines, Iowa--Secretary of War agrees to accept company of colored troops from Des Moines. Will write full.

G. A. T. Hull101
Enrollments were opened and immediately fifty names were entered on the ledger by Thompson, who was now the secretary of the new colored company. Congressman Hull sent another telegram the following week explaining that he hoped the Iowa company could elect its own officers. He had suggested this to the War Department, but there had been no decision made as yet. The Iowa company, organizing in Des Moines, elected its own black officers June 14, 1898, in hopes that Washington would come through.

One of Thompson's most eloquent pleas for black action and assertiveness appeared in the June 24, 1898, edition of his paper, under the headlines SHALL WE HAVE COLORED OFFICERS? The time had come, he maintained, when the Negroes must "stand up like men or humiliate and skulk like the wolf." He insisted that no race-loving man could bear to see a colored company led by white officers. He admonished his readers, pointing out that, as a race, they had been "too humble, too weak, too easy to accept anything offered to us," and, he continued, "too easy to compromise with a wrong." Thompson concluded with a description of the humiliation which would be inherent in a black company under white command:

We will be chagrined and feel inferior when we meet the Cuban insurgents and see colored men majors, colonels, generals and commanders of armies there in Cuba where color prejudice nor race caste does not exist. We will look at ourselves and say like Shakespeare, "The fault dear colored man that we are underlings is not in the
stars, but in ourselves." Now let us stand up firm for right and be men for we are making history for future generations.105

But the Iowa black troops marched off under the command of Amos Brandt, a white man. Brandt was chosen in spite of a well-attended meeting at the Courthouse in Des Moines, protesting the idea of a white captain for black troops. Other Iowa papers and prominent citizens also opposed such an appointment. The Bystander reported on July 22, 1898, that COLORED COMPANY UNDER WHITE CAPTAIN HAS GONE. A crowd of nearly two thousand, including five hundred whites, bade them farewell. Thompson describes their send off:

It was a rather sad scene to see them, bidding the last sad farewell and goodbye, to hear the sweet voice of eternal love as mothers and fathers part from their sons, sweethearts from lovers and wives from husbands probably never again to meet; the scene indeed a memorable and sad one, yet the noble cause they were going for was a just one.106

The United States won the Spanish War with relative ease and the Peace of Paris was signed in December 1898. The black soldiers in Cuba fought with spirit and great determination during the brief encounter. Frank Knox, a Rough Rider cohort of Theodore Roosevelt, was sure that many of the black cavalry men who rushed up San Juan Hill would live in his memory forever.107 Roosevelt, however, recalled incidents in which black troopers had shown a tendency to "drift to the rear."108 He did not note that black soldiers were often ordered to perform such menial duties as removing casualties to the rear, or going back to stock up on rations
Thompson did not miss any chance to commend the black soldier's fighting ability, his stamina and bravery. Charles Salzman, a Des Moines lieutenant in the First Cavalry, home on leave from Cuba in late July, reported to the Bystander that black troops had done much to save the Rough Riders from being cut to pieces. He affirmed that in the Battle of Santiago all the colored troops participated and "conducted themselves with great credit," particularly in their charge up San Juan Hill.

In September 1898, General Miles of the U.S. Army paid the very highest compliment to the colored soldiers, "for bravery and behavior," and recommended that they be used for garrison duties in Cuba and Puerto Rico. The Bystander article, explained why he had suggested them for duty.

Thompson seems to contradict his earlier opinion on the superior ability of the blacks to withstand the heat:

His reasons are, First--As we all know, members of the colored race can bear the heat and resist the diseases, of those Islands better than the white man. Secondly--Because they perform more willingly such fatigue duty as is necessary for proper sanitation. Thirdly--Because they can be relied upon, when well officered, to fight as well as Spaniards or Tagalese.

In late September, the Negro Twenty-fourth Infantry stopped briefly in Des Moines enroute to a government post near Cheyenne, Wyoming. Thompson commented that "no finer looking body of men ever wore uniforms." He also inter-
viewed the white captain of the regiment:

Captain James said the regiment had proven that colored men make just as good fighters as white men. They opened the eyes of the world as fighters. Even against odds, they never complain; they are as cool as can be, and every time they fire someone gets hurt.113

Under the provisions of the Treaty of Paris, which had met with much opposition in the Republican Senate, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines were ceded to the United States, while Cuba was eventually to be given its independence. This overseas expansion was the result of many motives, some mercenary and nationalistic. Yet, to others the idea of their country's "manifest destiny," was paramount: the United States must uplift and civilize the population of these islands.

Thompson's own conclusion after pondering the acquisition of new territories followed President McKinley's justifications. Thompson published his thoughts in an editorial headed FIRST EXPANSION:

We are opposed to the acquisition of new territory that does not border upon the United States, where the American would have to acquire it either by conquest or purchase, but where it comes into our possession as the islands we have recently acquired upon humanitarian principles, it is all right, and we should keep all the new acquisition, unless it would be the Philippines where we might establish a protectorate. . . .We should not seek expansion, yet when it is asked of us or at least becomes necessary to acquire territory for the progress of humanity and the welfare of the nations for us as a nation to hold or control we should do so.114

In November 1898, Thompson harked back to injustices to
blacks within the United States. He commended the black soldiers for uncomplaining loyalty in the trenches of Santiago, and suggested that the citizens of this country display their gratitude by treating the black man humanely. Cynically he suggested that perhaps one reason so many blacks had enlisted in the war is that they were used to "being shot at."\textsuperscript{115}

Soon after their acquisition by the United States, reports came from the Philippines that the American troops were using barbarous means of subduing the inhabitants. There was mass civilian slaughter, towns were torched, and captives were sometimes cruelly tortured.\textsuperscript{116}

"Our troops in the Philippines," wrote a Boston Herald correspondent, "look upon all Filipinos as of one race and condition, and being dark men, they are therefore 'niggers'." "They are," he said, "entitled to all the contempt and harsh treatment administered by white overlords to the most inferior races."\textsuperscript{117}

In October 1899, Lewis Douglass, the son of Frederick Douglass, wrote:

It is a sorry, though true, fact that whatever this government controls, injustice to dark races prevails. The people of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Manila know it well, as do the wronged Indian and the outraged black man in the United States, . . . Its American expansion means extension of race hate, cruelty, barbarous lynchings and gross injustice to dark people.\textsuperscript{118}

The century ended with the American flag flying over
Hawaii, Cuba, Samoa, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. Some additional eight million "little brown brothers" had come under United States rule and America resolutely assumed her "white man's burden."

Thompson was reluctant to face the new century too optimistically. He was concerned over the continued discrimination against his people. He was disappointed that the blacks were not being given the proper credit and respect they deserved after helping so much in America's imperialistic venture. His militancy would continue and not fade with the peace and the promises of new politicians. Thompson's concern would mount as he watched black hopes fade, while the United States swept out its house during the Progressive Era.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III


2. Ibid.


7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.


   A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal, "Water, water; we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly vessel at once came back. "Cast down your bucket where you are." A second time the signal, "Water, water; send us water!" ran up from the distressed vessel, and was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are." And a third and fourth signal for water was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are." The captain of the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River. To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbour, I would say: "Cast down your bucket where you are"—Cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
16. Bystander, July 6, 1894.
17. Bystander, August 3, 1894.
18. Bystander, September 6, 1895.
20. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
27. Bystander, December 11, 1896.
28. Bystander, March 26, 1897.
30. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Bystander, April 9, 1897.
34. Bystander, July 22, 1898. Second headlines were in black letters in the original.
35. Items taken from Bystanders: June 22, 1894; October 19, 1894; and May 10, 1895.

37. Litwack, pp. 276-277.


41. *Bystander*, January 21, 1898.

42. The Iowa Republican margin in popular votes cast for President was as follows: 65,000 in 1896; 99,000 in 1900; 159,000 in 1904; 71,000 in 1908; 58,000 in 1916. In 1912 the Democrats won by a margin of 65,000 popular votes. Information obtained from: Historical Statistics of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1961), pp. 687-688.


45. *Bystander*, April 19, 1895.

46. Fishel, p. 466.

47. Fishel, p. 467.


49. *Bystander*, January 14, 1898.

50. *Bystander*, August 20, 1897.


52. *Bystander*, July 22, 1898.

54. A market master assigned stalls, adjudicated quarrels and was the general overseer of the Des Moines City Market.

55. Bystander, November 19, 1897.

56. Items taken from Bystanders February 6, 1897; October 22, 1897; October 29, 1897.

57. Bystander, November 13, 1896.


60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.


63. Ibid. There was no reference to mob violence or lynching in the Republican platform of 1896.

64. Ibid.


66. Items taken from Bystanders: January 22, 1897 and February 5, 1897.

67. Bystander, February 5, 1897.

68. Bystander, February 12, 1897.

69. Sinkler, p. 302.

70. Bystander, April 19, 1897.

71. Sinkler, p. 301.


73. Bystander, April 22, 1898.


75. Goldston, p. 159.

77. Ibid.

78. *Bystander*, September 11, 1876.


80. Ibid.

81. *Bystander*, December 24, 1897.

82. *Bystander*, January 22, 1897.

83. *Bystander*, March 18, 1898.

84. Ibid.

85. *Bystander*, February 18, 1898.

86. *Bystander*, April 1, 1898.

87. *Bystander*, April 11, 1898.


89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. *Bystander*, April 22, 1898. In 1898 four colored regiments remained on active duty: the 9th and 10th Cavalry and 25th Infantry.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

101. Bystander, June 3, 1898.

102. Bystander, June 17, 1898.

103. Bystander, June 24, 1898.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Bystander, July 22, 1898.

107. Ploski, p. 571.

108. Ibid.

109. Ibid.

110. Bystander, July 29, 1898.

111. Bystander, September 16, 1898.

112. Bystander, September 30, 1898.

113. Ibid.

114. Bystander, September 23, 1898.

115. Bystander, June 17, 1898.


117. Ibid.

118. Goldston, p. 158.
INJUDICE IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

This intolerable, inexcusable, diabolical American race on color prejudice will continue how long? Will end where?

_Bystander, November 23, 1906_

The Progressive Era, generally considered by historians to be those years of the twentieth century preceding the First World War, was characterized by revolt and then reform in almost every aspect of American life. Within both political parties, but especially among the Republicans, the men and women who championed economic and social change were known as "Progressives." The movement made heroes of reformers and innovators in journalism, philosophy, and scholarship as well as in the political arena.

According to Allan Nevins and Henry Steele Commanger, the period involved much more than simply trust busting and carrying a "big stick" in the Caribbean. It was a "fine frenzy of reform," as old political leaders were replaced by new ones, the machinery of local and national government overhauled and political practices scrutinized. Economic institutions—especially the corporation and the trust, as well as great fortunes, "were called before the bar of reason and asked to justify themselves or to change their ways."
Although Progressive policies were imbued with a certain amount of humanitarianism, they also manifested some conservative and perhaps even reactionary leanings. Progressives displayed attitudes of racial superiority which found expression in their support for colonization of subject peoples, and, according to Foster Rhea Dulles, "discrimination against Negroes and intolerance toward the new immigrants from southeastern Europe." The Progressive mentality may have contained a "rather ugly strain of racism."

Many early twentieth century academic "Progressives" shared the assumption that blacks inherently lacked self-restraint and would never succeed in fitting into the mainstream of white American society. In 1903, psychologist James M. Cattell told readers of the Popular Science Monthly that "A savage brought up in a cultivated society will not only retain his dark skin, but," he said, "is likely also to have the incoherent mind of his race."

Though blacks were being disfranchised in the South and were still encountering almost all of the difficulties of the past, they looked hopefully toward the future. The nation's expanding economy and national political developments seemed to hold new promise for them as well as for white people. The Progressives became increasingly powerful in national politics after Theodore Roosevelt became President in September 1901. The blacks were hopeful that his new programs of social and economic reform, as well as his attacks on
privilege and wealth would help them to achieve some measure of social justice.

Blacks turned to more aggressive solutions in attempting to solve their own problems. Open resistance to the policies of Booker T. Washington's reliance on compromise was begun in 1903 by Dr. W. E. B. DuBois with the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*. DuBois, the first black to have received the Doctor of Philosophy degree from Harvard University, and a professor of economics and history at Atlanta University, initiated a meeting with other black intellectuals at Niagara, New York in 1905. This Niagara Movement (a forerunner of the NAACP) openly opposed the conciliatory policies of Washington and vowed to work for abolition of all distinctions based on race.

Throughout this period, Thompson and the Bystander remained relatively silent in regard to the Niagara Movement and DuBois' break with Washington. Editorials appearing in regard to Washington continued to be loyally favorable. On June 8, 1900, Thompson published the following advice to his readers:

**LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE**

If you are a race man, you will not condemn the work of its leaders. If you are living the proper life, let your light shine. If you would be a leader, let others see where you stand. If you are a Christian, you will not seek the association of gamblers and drunkards.
If you are educated, you will seek the company of the elevated and not those who carry the can.
If you wish the race to be great, stop finding fault with its leaders. They have done more than you have done. Such men as Douglass, Bruce Revels and Washington, all have benefited their race.
What have you done? 7

Washington was the founder and promoter of the National Negro Business League which met for the first time in Boston in August 1900. "We are in full sympathy with all such movements," Thompson stated, "and wish more of our race would turn their attention to business." 8 He said that no better leader could have been selected than Washington, "with his careful, wise and good judgment." 9 A front-page story described the first meeting of the League as "the greatest gathering of substantial, reliable, honest businessmen ever held in the world." 10

The League's approach mirrored Thompson's own desire to see blacks improve themselves. For example, Thompson endorsed resolutions by organizations like the Negro Press Association, founded in 1895. Thompson was even a member of the Resolution Committee when the Association met in Des Moines in 1908. That year's resolutions urged editors of the two hundred or more newspapers and magazines published by blacks to "give more space in urging the race to engage in farming, in conducting business enterprises, in the purchasing of homes, . . . ." 11 The NPA also publicly thanked the
iron and tin workers for agreeing to accept black men and urged on blacks "the importance of thoroughly identifying themselves with the best elements of American life. . . ."12 The NPA platform of 1908 also urged the suppression ofpeon-age which existed in many of the Southern states. But that was about as far as Thompson or most other blacks at that time were willing to go. In spite of the reform movement, few black leaders could be found who suggested that the white society should somehow be reformed to accommodate blacks. For most, it was a matter, as Thompson stressed, of blacks proving their worth to whites.

In September 1908, Thompson wrote an editorial encouraging Bystander readers to take heart when everything seemed so dismal for the race "in the future of America."13 He expressed sorrow over the racial tensions still so prevalent in the country and indicated that the blacks must be ever mindful of enemies:

THE NEGRO RACE IS PROGRESSING

In these times when our race is undergoing a scourging so to speak when everything seems to be dark and gloomy for the race in the future of America, when we have so many enemies in the South, enemies in the North, East and West and enemies within our own camp all trying to pull us down and destroying our good name in the various communities and heap abuses, falsehoods, and even white men trying to black up and commit crimes in the guise of Negroes. It does lead one sometimes to believe that the race is losing out and retrograding, but when one takes the optimistic spirit as ye editor we are making progress, we are rising.14
Concluding in this "optimistic spirit," Thompson listed large national gatherings, conventions and conferences that had been "successfully held by the Negroes all over the country." These meetings were "straws," he said, "that tell to the world that we are coming." "The Negro is progressing, so lift up your heads, be men and go onward and upward." 

Although he urged his black readers to forge ahead and adopt more optimistic attitudes, Thompson's own spirits were dampened by continuing prejudice against his people. The Bystander reflected his concerns at the international, national and local levels.

Early in the century, Thompson turned his attention to another suffering minority group. He expressed concern over the barbaric treatment of the Jews in Russia. In particularly severe tones, Thompson declared his sympathies. The Spaniards had been condemned for their cruel treatment of the Cubans, and the Southern whites for "foul lynchings and burning at the stake of poor colored people," yet, Thompson maintained, the entire civilized world stood "aghast and horrified at the treatment of the Jews of Russia." "The cruelties were perpetrated," he declared, "because of strict adherence to a religion that was as precious and dear to them as life." Thompson mentioned a meeting he had attended in Des Moines, raising money for the orphaned children of Russian Jews.
Russia and Japan were at war in 1904 and Thompson announced that, unlike most white Americans who sided with the Japanese, his sympathies were with Russia. He listed his reasons which included the fact that the Japanese had "done little to civilize the world." He was incensed by Japanese racist attitudes. The Japanese government had recently said they would have an exhibition at the St. Louis World's Exposition provided they would not have to mix with blacks. "Think of such a class of people," Thompson said. "Why, we don't think any self respecting American Negro would want to be caught in their society, however we think our sympathy will remain with the Czar of Russia."

The Bystander protested the discrimination shown against the Japanese in San Francisco. The Oriental children were not allowed to attend the white schools. "The Japanese government has a right to be indignant," Thompson maintained, and our government owed Japan an apology for the insult. Our government likewise owed an apology to black children, he said, for separating them from whites in the schools of many states, and giving them poor school buildings with inadequate accommodations.

Racial prejudice in the United States erupted into rioting during the first ten years of the twentieth century. Though lynchings decreased slightly after 1900, there was a noticeable increase in the intensity and number of race riots.
The *Bystander* of August 30, 1901, reported an eye-witness account of a particularly violent lynching. A woman was assaulted and killed in Pierce City, Missouri, and it was assumed her killer was a black man recently seen in the vicinity about an hour before the crime was committed. Bloodhounds were put on the trail of the "murderer" and a suspect was taken from a Negro cabin. A black witness described the frenzied lynching:

. . . they were pulling a Negro up by a rope and were hanging him to the balcony of one of the principal hotels in the town. As soon as he was hanged the mob opened fire on him with all of the weapons available. Immediately after the firing ceased the mob procured oil and set fire to all of the cabins, some seven or eight in number, and while the fire burned, the crowd watched for escaping Negroes. I saw several escape from the rear of the burning homes, and it was a sight for the gods to behold to see the brave members of the mob armed with state guns firing at women and children as they fled from their homes.24

The first real mention and condemnation of race riots appeared in the *Bystander* in 1900. RACE RIOTS CONDEMNED were headlines in the paper on August 3rd. A meeting of colored citizens was called in Des Moines that same month to denounce a recent New Orleans riot. The Des Moines *Register and Leader* was complimented for denouncing the "howling mob." The Leader's editorial was printed in the same edition of the *Bystander* in which Thompson condemned the riot as barbaric:

"The Spaniards would throw their hands up in holy horror and learn a lesson from the so-called civilized America in butchery and cruelty. The man-eating cannibals of the islands
would be shocked to see such a thing as was in New Orleans."²⁵

In August 1902, the Republican State Convention held in Des Moines included in its platform a resolution condemning both lynch law and mob violence. Thompson was a delegate to the convention and through his efforts this plank was adopted. What good it would do remained to be seen, but the resolution at least existed on paper.

The violent race riots and lynchings underscored both the insecurity with which the black people still lived and the inadequacy of the protection they were afforded. In 1904, two blacks were accused of murder in Statesboro, Georgia. Their trial set off a frenzy of racial violence during which scores of black people were assaulted without provocation. Immediately after the two defendants were convicted and sentenced, they were taken by the mob, dragged from the courtroom, and both were burned alive. The mob leaders went unpunished.²⁶

On September 22, 1906, the most violent riots to occur in the South during the decade broke out in Atlanta, Georgia. Atlanta had become a "veritable social tinder box."²⁷ Crime had increased alarmingly and a small and ineffective police force was unable to cope with it. Racial hostility had been sharpened through the inflamed talk arising from the movement to disfranchise the blacks. The Clansman, a racist play demeaning the blacks, given in Atlanta, had further
inflamed white feelings. Atlanta newspapers kept the race issue continually agitated and emphasized black crimes with typical startling headlines.28

On the evening of September 22nd, a thousand young white mobsters invaded the black neighborhoods, looting, beating and killing the inhabitants. Thousands of blacks fled the city, while equal numbers sought refuge in skating rinks, train terminals, black college buildings, and some even in the homes of their white employers. The white Southern press was unified in its belief that the Atlanta atrocities had been precipitated by a series of assaults against white women by "black fiends" and "brutes."29 For a month prior to the riot, Atlanta citizens had read in their local papers of "assaults against innocent matrons and young pure flowers of Southern maidenhood."30

Two days later, blacks in Brownsville, an Atlanta suburb, began arming themselves in case of further attacks. Police officers attempted to arrest the armed blacks and two whites and four blacks were killed in this effort. The president of an Atlanta Negro college was severely beaten over the head by a police officer. Eventually, a group of Atlanta citizens of both races organized the Atlanta Civic League to prevent further lawlessness, however, those responsible for the bloodshed went unpunished.

The Bystander chronicled the event as the ATLANTA DISGRACE. Thompson disputed the reports from the white press
that the trouble had arisen over assaults on white women by black men. "When the true facts are known," he said, "it was not a race riot, for the Negro race made little or no resistance." It was, he maintained perpetrated by white hoodlums:

A gang of lawless white murderers over-riding law, order and human respect, butchering, killing and murdering innocent people simply because they happen to be colored. Then the papers call it a race riot or race war; what bosh. One race murdering or killing members of another race without cause, who were not guilty of any crime at all.31

Thompson denounced this "disgraceful lawless scene" as "a shame on the boasted American civilization and a mockery to our police protective power to quell such a mob."32

Some race riots occurred in the North as well as the South. A riot broke out in Springfield, Illinois, in the late summer of 1908 which required five thousand state militiamen to restore order. During the course of this riot two blacks and four white men were killed, seventy persons were injured and more than one hundred arrests were made. The riot took place a few months before the centennial of Lincoln's birth and within two miles of his grave. It shocked the entire country and convinced people of both races that racial hostility was indeed a serious problem.

Thompson, outraged by the Springfield tragedy, advised his readers to bravely protect themselves should they be accosted in the same manner: "We believe like Governor Deneen, who says, 'this outbreak upon innocent colored people is as
intolerable as it is inexcusable.' It is indeed a most atrocious crime and every man or woman who participated should be severely dealt with."33

Then, for the first time, Thompson dropped his Booker T. Washington philosophy and lashed out. The time has come, he declared, for blacks to unite and help law-abiding citizens to suppress such outbreaks. Blacks as a race, he warned, must be prepared to protect themselves. "When these brutes come to your home, let him destroy your home over your dead body." Thompson wrote, "Be brave, protect yourself; the world likes a brave man and abhors a coward--so don't run like a rabbit at everything, but defend yourselves."34

Historians August Meier and Elliott Rudwick find that piece by piece the patterns of disfranchisement, segregation and racial subordination were actually brought to completion during the early part of the twentieth century, during these "Progressive years."35 The twin ideologies of white supremacy and Negro inferiority triumphed in the South, then spread northward and westward as well. Keeping the black segregated from the mainstream of white society came to be commonly known as "drawing the color line."

Thompson kept his readers ever aware of black successes in "breaking through" or further entrenchments of the hated "line." The South had more legal authority with locally enacted Jim Crow laws, however, occasionally blacks were successful in thwarting them. In 1900, Thompson reported a
well-directed boycott of the streetcars in Atlanta which had cost the street railway company an estimated $5,000.36 The City of New Orleans' Jim Crow streetcar law was declared unconstitutional in 1902.37

Month after month during the first decade of the new century, Thompson posted news of the "color line" as it was drawn locally as well as nationally. Lacking the necessary legal backing to segregate, many Northern whites resorted to extra-legal pressures thinking that blacks lacked both the funds and the incentive to bring suit.

In 1905, Booker T. Washington was refused a hotel room in a Kansas town. Kansas was further disgraced, Thompson said, when the state legislature passed a bill establishing segregated high schools for cities of over a certain population and the governor signed it into law. Thompson was sure John Brown and his followers would be horrified to see this rampant prejudice in their home state:

Little would one think in this day and age of intelligence that Kansas, where the border ruffian was and many blood scenes in the 60s and the house of John Brown, where he gave most of his labors in behalf of the slave. Oh! If those patron saints of freedom, justice and equality could rise from their tomb and see the change that their prejudiced ancestors have brought they would sink their hoary heads in shame.38

Washington accepted the Kansas hotel's refusal without taking legal action but in Iowa, in 1900, Attorney I. E. Williamson did bring suit against a Des Moines restaurant. It had been discriminating against the blacks by charging
them exorbitant prices. Williamson was required to pay ten cents for a piece of pie, while white customers paid only five cents. This was the basis of the litigation and Williamson was aided in his suit by editor Thompson. The case was bound over to the grand jury and no more mention was given to it in the Bystander. Thompson, commenting upon the case, indicated that it was "indeed a shame and humiliating" that in this age in Iowa, blacks had to resort to courts to compel "public inns to perform their simple duty." 39

In 1907, another Civil Rights suit was brought against Bell Banner Coffee for $1,500 damages when the company's manager refused to serve coffee to S. Joe Brown, a well-known black attorney and his wife at a fairground food stand. According to Thompson's editorial in the Bystander, "several prominent men are pushing this case and they intend to make the company suffer." He continued, "All persons should be punished who would attempt to draw the color line, at least in Iowa." 40

Thompson found other instances of the color line in Des Moines. He told his readers that the Star Restaurant, opposite the streetcar waiting room on Sixth Avenue, gave Afro-Americans service "somewhat worse than nothing." 41 He described how a black man had been obliged to ask a waiter to take his order. The waiter had then taken two other orders before providing service. "So," Thompson said, "we would suggest to all Afro-Americans not to go to that 2x4 cheap
chop house, because their food is worse than an egg that has been in cold storage for several years, and then again they don't want your trade."42

Yet in 1902, Thompson was able to strike an optimistic note when he wrote an article under the headlines COLOR PREJUDICE GIVEN A BLOW BY THE NEW MAYOR. A newly-elected Des Moines Mayor, J. M. Brenton, had taken to task the female manager of the Home for Friendless Children for refusing to accept black children. Brenton indicated that unless this practice ceased, all city treasury aid to the home would immediately stop. Thompson congratulated the new mayor: "That is good, Mr. Mayor, your heart is right, keep on striking this monster color prejudice and gross injustice that is being heaped upon our race."43

Thompson also complained of prejudice in education. In the fall of 1908, Highland Park College in Des Moines had refused admittance to black students fearing that their presence would tend to prevent Southern youth from enrolling. In 1909, evidently in need of funds which could be obtained only through an increased student body, the college invited Thompson to attend commencement exercises and asked him to send the names of young blacks interested in attending college in the fall. Thompson indignantly declared that he would not send one name. The names of the black graduates he knew would be sent to "universities and good colleges that have never refused Afro-American students."44
This was not the first time Thompson had lashed out against segregation in education. In March 1907, President Eliot of Harvard addressed the students of Berea College in Kentucky. He indicated, much to Thompson's displeasure, that schools should remain segregated and the only reason Harvard did not disbar blacks was there were so very few in attendance. Thompson voiced his objections in an editorial ELIOT'S NARROW POSITION:

We do not agree with this distinguished scholar, for he gave no sound reason for separation. Certainly education broadens a man and makes him free. The two races must live, work, learn, trade and build up human character together here; why not educate together. We speak the same tongue, live under the same flag and pay tribute to the same government. Then let us join hands together for the good of all the American children. We are much surprised at the president of so great an institution to have become so narrow or talking to suit the narrow whims of the prejudiced South.45

In 1909, it appeared the "color line" was being drawn even in a Des Moines cemetery. Evidently, a separate section in the Glendale Public Cemetery was set aside for black people. One black woman's funeral was delayed when her original grave, which had been dug in the "white section" by mistake, had to be filled and a new one dug in the appropriate area. This so enraged Thompson that he declared his intention of demanding this practice be stopped immediately.46

Thompson was often disgusted with the unfair treatment local blacks received in the white press, especially in its descriptions of black criminals. Before any suspect had been
arrested, white local papers would often cast the blame upon a black person. In April 1902, two small children were assaulted and killed in the Highland Park area of Des Moines. The first suspect was a black miner from Saylor. The black man was arrested, detained and then freed since he had a convincing alibi. Thompson criticized the Des Moines Daily Capitol and News for "trying to heap the blame on some Negro."

While it is a great injustice to see how two of our daily papers the Capitol and News tried to heap the crime on some Negro and further excite the angry feeling between the two races, if a colored man had done the awful crime, it would be just as shocking to us as a race and we would assist in the arrest and quick punishment of him. We do not hold up for any crime that a colored man may do, yet we want to see justice done to our race by the press and not hold to the public as rapist or criminals any more than any other races. 47

In the summer of 1902, Thompson was infuriated by the way Des Moines Chief of Police referred to blacks as "bucks and wenches." The Daily Capitol reporters evidently quoted the police chief verbatim. 48 Thompson continued to lambast the Daily Capitol "who would have the people believe that all the crimes that are committed have been done by colored people." "There is scarcely an issue of this paper," Thompson said, "where it does not slur the race." 49

In October 1902, bloodhounds tracked down a white rapist in Melrose, Iowa, and he was subsequently jailed without an uproar. Thompson was sure that had the rapist been a black man, the incident would have been handled differently by both
the Melrose citizens and the Iowa press: "...the people would have wanted to lynch him and the newspapers would have hurled it over the country that he was a 'Black Fiend' or a 'Black Brute,' especially in the Des Moines Daily Capitol thus ridiculing or stigmatizing our downtrodden race." 50 "Why did not those same journals call him a white brute or fiend?" asked Thompson. "Is the colored man any more of a brute than the white man who did this fiendish thing," queried Thompson. The editorial ended with a plea: "Oh, our white contemporaries--Let us be fair and deal honest. We have feelings." 51

Two years later, a white man "assaulted and ravished" a seven year old white girl who lived in "one of the wealthiest and fashionable," parts of Des Moines. 52 Thompson pointed out the way in which the local papers had dealt with such an atrocious crime. Why had they not published the news on the front page in large face black type "A White Brute Ravished a Little Innocent White Girl?" Thompson was certain if a black man had committed the crime it would be at the top of page one. Each of the white dailies had tried to suppress the facts or condense them and place the article in an obscure corner of the paper. Thompson castigated the "Anglo-Saxon" race for its unfairness:

Oh how unfair is your Anglo race, which tries to mold sentiment. When one member of your own race commits those heinous crimes that you accused some members of my race, you try to screen him and his terrible crime from the public. Our brother contem-
poraries, why don't you condemn the whole white race because of the act of this one low man? Why don't you say they are all alike, as you would if it had been our race? Oh thou hypocrite! All we contend and ask for is to treat all the American citizens alike. If you say black brute, say white brute; if you condemn my race, condemn your race for doing the same crime. Is not that fair?

In May 1908, Thompson again protested the use of pejoratives by local papers in their descriptions of blacks. In this case a rather small eighteen year old boy who had assaulted a white girl had been described as a "big burly Negro" by the Daily Capitol. The Daily Capitol had warned the black community that if assaults on whites were not stopped, the blacks would suffer dire consequences. Thompson made the following retort:

How can we stop it any more than you white people can stop your white assaulters, while of course we detest a fiend be he black or white that does such a horrible act, yet are we to become a Don Quixote or an officer to hunt down such rascals among our race any more than you do among yours.

President William McKinley was shot by a crazed anarchist in the fall of 1901. Appearing on the front page of the Bystander on September 27th, was a three-column article explaining the heroic efforts of James Parker, a black "giant" who had hurled himself on the assassin and prevented a third shot from being fired at McKinley. The local white papers, much to Thompson's disgust, had reported that "a negro had dropped down on the assassin," "as if he had fallen from the dome!" If the assassin had been a black man, Thompson said, he had no doubt that "not an atom of his body could have
been found one hour after the deed had been committed."

In addition to praising Parker's brave deed, Thompson published a three-page eulogy and biography of the late President.

Until he cast his vote for Theodore Roosevelt and the Bull Moose Party in 1912, Thompson and the Bystander remained unswervingly Republican. A month after Theodore Roosevelt took office in 1901, he gave blacks reason to believe that he would alter the "hands-off policy" of his predecessors on the "Negro question." Although it infuriated white Southerners, Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington to dine with him at the White House. Thompson expressed his disgust with the Southern reaction:

> It is indeed a pity that our country is to have such shallow, narrow, selfish, prejudiced mean class of so-called American citizens, who claim to be leaders and statesmen from a certain part of the United States. Certainly if God himself should come down here and have a colored gentleman to sit down at the Lord's supper, those professed southern Christians would refuse heaven. If man cannot be taken for his honesty, character and ability rather than his color, then there is nothing in this merit system.

Roosevelt's prestige among blacks rose further in May 1902, when he publicly denounced lynchings as "human cruelty and barbarity." Thompson proudly announced Roosevelt's appointment of a black man, William D. Crum, as Collector of Customs at Charleston, South Carolina, and the President's refusal to accept the forced resignation of a Mississippi black postmistress. A Bystander election slogan for Roosevelt
in his 1904 Presidential race against Judge Alton B. Parker of New York was: "The Afro-Americans are with Roosevelt because he is with them."  

In August 1906, a group of black soldiers raided Brownsville, Texas to retaliate for racial insults. When one white man was killed and two blacks were wounded, racial passions were stirred to fever pitch. Three months later, after an official report had cast the blame upon the blacks, President Roosevelt dishonorably discharged three companies of the Negro Twenty-fifth Regiment. Eventually, the innocent victims of Roosevelt's order were permitted to reenlist, but the President had disappointed and alienated a great majority of the black populace.

The Bystander frequently reported news of the "Brownsville Episode" and criticized Roosevelt, the Republican standard bearer, whom it had so loyally supported. Yet in December 1906, an editorial written by Thompson complimented Roosevelt's Annual Message to the opening session of Congress indicating that, while he had censured President Roosevelt for the treatment of the colored battalion in Texas, "Yet we are always willing to commend the good he does." He further vindicated Roosevelt by saying:

If any man or ruler makes a mistake thinking he is right, with an honest intent, we ought to be reasonable and broadminded enough to forgive, for man is not perfect nor his acts. This is the first message that the President has ever mentioned the race problem, and we hope that both races will be benefited by what he says.
In February 1907, Thompson announced that the discharged soldiers were to be reinstated. "Let us hope," he said, "that the soldier boys will return to the Army and prove to the court and waiting world their innocence."63

Except for the Brownsville episode, for which Thompson eventually forgave Roosevelt, little seemed to dim the By-stander’s ardor for the President or the enthusiasm of many other blacks throughout the country. Yet, some black leaders still viewed Roosevelt with suspicion after the incident and lacked confidence in his Republican successor, William Howard Taft. Taft's pronouncements while he was still Secretary of War under Roosevelt were unacceptable to many blacks, for he endorsed ballot restrictions and criticized higher education for blacks.64

Thompson stayed with the G.O.P., however, in the election of 1908 and strongly criticized W. E. B. DuBois for endorsing the Democrats:

If these so-called Negro leaders like Prof. DuBois, Bishop Walters, Monroe Trotter and Julius Taylor are really going to swallow the democratic ticket next November, we would like to see those sainted leaders around the communion table with John Brown, Lincoln, Garrison, Sumner, Douglass, Bruce, Lynch, Langston, Pinchback and Washington, a queer feeling when divine blessings would be invoked and sins be forgiven.65

When the Republicans triumphed in November 1908, Thompson expressed his pleasure at the victories of both Taft over Bryan for the Presidency, and "our beloved Governor Albert Cummins" as the new United States Senator: "Thanking those
who have labored hard, and rejoicing with them we say HIP HIP HOORAY, for the GRAND OLD PARTY."\(^{66}\)

Thompson continued his support of Governor Cummins and local Republicans throughout the decade. Yet he persistently complained about the failure of the city, county, and state officeholders to help blacks seeking office or to offer any but the most menial janitorial positions to the majority of blacks.

In April 1900, Thompson had announced his own candidacy for Justice of the Peace of Des Moines and he quoted the Des Moines Daily Capitol in his announcement: "If the Republicans of Des Moines township nominate this young lawyer-editor they will have no occasion to regret it."\(^{67}\) On May 4th, he announced his defeat in the Republican primaries, which he blamed on white prejudices and black apathy:

The defeat shows two things, one is that the white man does not want a colored man in office and his promises to his colored workers are falsehoods, but sooner or later it will react upon him with greater vengeance. Second that the majority of our colored voters do not care to see their race elevated or receive their just merits. Yet you meet them and talk with them and will stand on the street corner and say they are not treated fair or get their just dues. Last Saturday they had a chance to go to the polls and show that they really mean what they talk. In one precinct there are 80 colored voters and only 14 voted; in another 96 and only 23 voted, and several others in that proportion.\(^{68}\)

Four months later, John McKay, the County Treasurer, appointed Thompson a clerk. He gratefully acknowledged this appointment saying that McKay deserved much credit for "his
honesty, fairness and loyalty to the colored race."

Throughout the century, Thompson continued to lecture to his readers, dispensing advice and giving praise when it was due. He was ever wary of white manipulation or exploitation. Above all, he hated to see his race ridiculed or demeaned in any way. In August 1906, Des Moines black men were asked to dress as Filipino insurgents. The women were to appear, decked out as "captured Filipino belles," as part of a parade held in downtown Des Moines. The black/Filipinos were to jump as from the bush attacking white veterans and the black/Filipino belles were to squeal in anguish.

Thompson gave the following advice in his typical, somewhat reproachful, but fatherly tone:

What is there elevating in playing the part of the ignorant Filipinos? Isn't it evident that our white brother has little thought of elevating or cultivating the Negro, when he seeks and encourages every act of barbarism which the Negro needs have eliminated?

"It is time," Thompson said, "for the Negro to realize that the white man is always ready to use him for his own advantages and gain." This, he insisted, was much to the Negroes' detriment. By the fall of that year, Thompson's disappointment and pessimism had heightened. He seemed to be at the peak of his editorial wrath when he ridiculed the United States as the "land of the free and the home of the brave." "Someday," he proclaimed, "the darker races will
arise and sweep the proud Anglo-Saxon from control." This pessimism would carry on into the next century, but his crusading ardor would diminish and his pen lose much of its eloquence.
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV


2. Ibid.


4. Ibid.


   So far as Mr. Washington preaches Thrift, Patience, and Industrial Training for the masses, we must hold up his hands and strive with him, rejoicing in his honors and glorying in the strength of this Joshua called of God and of man to lead the headless host. But so far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, North or South does not rightly value the privilege and duty of voting, belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions, and opposes the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds,—so far as he, the South, or the Nation, does this,—we must unceasingly and firmly oppose them.

7. Bystander, June 8, 1900.

8. Bystander, August 24, 1900.

9. Ibid.


12. Ibid.
13. Bystander, September 18, 1908.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid. In his editorial, Thompson listed the following national black organizations: The National Negro Medical Association; The National Negro Businessmen's League; The National Colored Women's Federation of Clubs; The 100th Celebration of Negro Masons in America; The Masonic Conclave; the A.M.E. church; the A.M.E. Zion church and C.M.E. church conferences; the National Baptist Association; the Elks, Odd Fellows, K. of P's, U.B. of F. also S.M.T.; the Congregational Council; the National Teacher's Association, and the Young People's National Religious Congress.

16. Ibid.

17. Bystander, May 29, 1903.

18. Ibid.


20. Ibid.


22. Ibid.

23. Bystander, February 9, 1900. The paper reported that only 107 persons were lynched in 1899, which was twenty percent less than the year before and the smallest number in any one year since 1884. Of the 107 lynchings, 103 took place in the South and 4 in the North.

24. Bystander, August 30, 1901.

25. Bystander, August 3, 1900. Thompson explained why the riot had occurred:

   The cause of all this was simply because a couple of officers were killed in an attempt to arrest a Negro desperado. In arresting desperadoes, white or black, officers may expect anything, therefore these hoodlums were not justified in acting as they did, because the better class of colored people deplored the act of this desperado as any person.

30. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Bystander, August 21, 1908.
34. Ibid.
36. Bystander, June 8, 1900.
37. Bystander, December 12, 1902.
38. Bystander, March 10, 1905.
40. Bystander, November 29, 1907. Later this firm changed its mind and served blacks. A decision reached in 1910 held that the business in question, a company's booth at a public show, was private and as such did not come under the semi- or quasi-public category covered by the intention of the formers of the Civil Rights Act. Information cited in Leola Nelson Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa* (Iowa City, Iowa: State Historical Society, 1969), pp. 55-56.
41. Bystander, December 14, 1900.
42. Ibid.
43. Bystander, April 25, 1902.
44. Bystander, July 16, 1909.
45. Bystander, March 8, 1907.
47. Bystander, April 18, 1902.
48. Bystander, August 8, 1902.
49. Ibid.
50. Bystander, October 17, 1902.
51. Ibid.
52. Bystander, March 25, 1904.
53. Ibid.
54. Bystander, May 15, 1908.
55. Ibid.
56. Bystander, September 27, 1901.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Bystander, October 5, 1901.
60. Bystander, August 26, 1904.
62. Ibid.
63. Bystander, February 26, 1907.
64. Meier and Rudwick, p. 170.
65. Bystander, October 9, 1908.
66. Bystander, November 6, 1908.
67. Bystander, April 13, 1900.
68. Bystander, May 4, 1900.
69. Bystander, September 7, 1900.
70. Bystander, August 7, 1906.
71. Ibid.

V. FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY

Buy your Bonds—Load the Guns
Buying Early Halts the Huns

Bystander, October 11, 1918

The era of progressive reform which brought advantages to many Americans in the years before the First World War, left blacks still second-class citizens. The race remained in the mire of discriminatory laws and practices. It continued to suffer from oppression and violence. Presidential reforms had done little for the black people and the "New Freedom" of President Woodrow Wilson would offer them practically nothing.

Booker T. Washington, the outstanding black leader who was so admired by his people, died in November 1915. Many blacks were unwilling to accept the militant agitation of W.E.B. DuBois and felt a real sense of loss. There seemed to be no leader of equal national prominence for them to follow.

DuBois and his fellow militants hoped to reform white society to accommodate the blacks. They demanded full citizenship rights, complete equality and justice and formed the NAACP in order to help achieve their aims. A formal organi-
zation was established in May 1910. The first issue of *The Crisis*, the official mouthpiece of the new organization which was edited by DuBois, appeared later that same year. It climbed to a monthly circulation of nearly 35,000 by 1914.

A year after the birth of the NAACP, the National Urban League was established to deal with problems created by the expanding black ghettos in the North. Industry was growing and because of the war in Europe few immigrants came from Europe between 1914 and 1920. Between 1910 and 1920, a half-million blacks moved to the North seeking jobs and looking for a better life. Most migrated to urban centers as they sought higher wages, better schools, and the right to vote. Escaping Southern oppression, many found more subtle but yet solid walls of discrimination in the Northern cities. Many blacks, accustomed to living on farms in the South, were confused by their new urban surroundings.

When the nation entered the First World War, many black Americans volunteered to serve their country. Still segregated racially, 100,000 troops were sent to France, with more than 40,000 as combat troops. Returning veterans looked forward to enjoying at home some of the democracy they had fought to save abroad.

But while returning war heroes were still in uniform, the violence began again. The "Red Summer" of 1919, would witness some of the worst and bloodiest rioting the country had known. The blacks seemed to be making little headway in
their struggle for equality. Twenty-five race riots occurred from June 1919 to the end of the year and gave substance to the fear that "America would return to 'normalcy'" rather than to wartime idealism as far as the Negro was concerned.3

Late in November 1915, the Ku Klux Klan reared its ugly head in Atlanta, Georgia. The new Klan was strong in the North as well as the South, and by 1919 boasted a membership of 100,000. A Klan victim might have a fiery cross burned on his lawn, or he might be flogged or murdered by the zealous nativists.

It was against this background of violent oppression that a disillusioned Thompson concluded his editorship of the Bystander. By 1919, his vigor seemed to have lessened but he continued to keep a vigilant and watchful eye over his people.

In Iowa, as in other Northern states, the black population grew during the war period. A training camp for Negro officers was established at Fort Des Moines in 1917 and later a regular army camp at Camp Dodge. Favorable reports from the officers, and assurances of mild weather in Iowa and greater pay, led to a heavy black migration to Des Moines in the fall and winter of 1917. In Des Moines, because of the scarcity of white labor during the war, the blacks moved out of almost exclusively menial and custodial occupations into jobs which had been previously closed to them. Although the blacks faced social discrimination and the courts
continued to rule against them, in Iowa during this period, "the schools, the polls, the legislature and the militia were open to them."4

Thompson continued to suggest to blacks the ways in which they might establish better relations with their white neighbors and help to prove their worth. He still lectured to them in the Booker T. Washington tradition. During this decade, education seemed to be a constant concern for Thompson. He published announcements of all local black high school graduates and commended them for having completed school. He was sure to note the fine work done at Tuskegee Institute, Howard and Fisk Universities. Black college graduates were generally acknowledged in front-page columns and highly praised for contributing so honorably to their race.

In 1899, Thompson had expressed his approval of a bill in the Iowa legislature requiring compulsory school attendance of children between the ages of seven and fourteen. Praising Iowa for standing in the "front rank of states with the smallest illiteracies,"5 Thompson felt such a law was still necessary. This would force the children who were being allowed to "run the streets," to attain a decent education.

The benefits of education were countless to Thompson and often he would editorialize upon this point. He frequently reminded his readers how Booker T. Washington had
struggled to obtain an education. Thompson regretted the fact that some black children were reluctant to attend school because their clothes were shabby. This, he said, should not deter them from seeking an education. This editorial is typical of his early advice:

Girls and boys, you do not need a tailor-made dress or suit to attend school. What if Lincoln, Brown, Sumner or Garfield, or the illustrious Douglass, had waited for good clothes to attend school? I fear that we would have been in bondage yet. If they had waited for their education until they could have worn good clothes. If I only possessed the power of impressing upon the young generation the value of an education like Shakespeare or Byron could do. It certainly would have some effect. 

Thompson felt that the time might not be far off when job seekers would be compelled to pass an examination before they could gain employment. He also hoped that some blacks who graduated from college would return to the farm or to household duties. "Some of the richest farmers," he said, "are graduates from some of the very best colleges in the country, and most all of the good hostess and housekeepers are graduates from some good school." 

He urged adults without high school diplomas to attend a night school in order to get one. Pointing out that the schools were free and open to all, he urged to everyone fifty years or younger to attend. Blacks, Thompson felt, usually demeaned education, saying that it was of no use, for they would never get a chance to use it. This, he insisted, was not true for if blacks were educated they would find many
new avenues of employment open to them: "Let our merit, our actions, our character and our general proficiency prove our ability and worth. We must educate! Or short will be our career from the cradle to the grave." 8

Each fall when the Des Moines schools opened, Thompson published an announcement usually under the headlines PUBLIC SCHOOLS OPEN. He always urged parents to have their children in school the very first day and to keep them in school regularly. Parents should point out to their children the importance of a good education:

Tell them of the future advantages of a thorough education, tell them to strive to excel in their class study and some day this old biased America may recognize merit, ability and worth, rather than the color of a man's skin. Parents, keep your children in school by all means. A good education is rather to be chosen than riches. 9

In the winter of 1916, Thompson scolded the black high school students of Des Moines for their unbecoming behavior. "There is," Thompson said, "a certain behavior decorum and civility to be maintained at school and in other public places." 10 He regretted that he had been informed that in one of the Des Moines high schools, "the colored children congregated together, and became boisterous, noisy, with loud talking and laughing and acting ridiculous." 11 "This must be stopped," he said. "You high school children should not segregate yourselves off and become ludicrous for your fellow white schoolmate, but rather," Thompson suggested, "be young men and girls of a genteel high ideal, reflecting
credit and character on our race."12

Through the years, the CITY NEWS column containing items selected by Thompson, indicated his intense interest in educational and cultural pursuits. He often included meetings of the Highland Park Culture Club, the Des Moines Negro Lyceum, Iowa Negro Literary Association, the Intellectual Improvement Club and the High School Girls' Club. In December 1915, Thompson devoted his EDITOR'S OBSERVATIONS of Iowa town to a discussion of their racial progress and educational advancement.

In January 1917, in conjunction with the national Negro Literature Week, Thompson urged all Des Moines blacks to purchase and read a worthy piece of black literature. Since the public schools neglected to teach the history of the race, Thompson pointed out that it was vital for young blacks to read black histories at home. It was important, Thompson felt, for every black home to contain Negro literature so that the young people could see "pictures of men and women of like hue as himself. . .".13

Every home should have its collection of Negro books of poetry, fiction, history and religion—not one book, but many, in order that it may have its proper atmosphere of racial self-respect, which is the foundation of racial progress. But, alas, we have so few homes with Negro books. Not one Negro in a thousand has read a book on Negro history. The 999 are ignorant of their glorious past; ignorant of the part played by their ancestors in Africa and America; ignorant of their prowess; ignorant of their opportunities.14
Editorials like this were common during Thompson's first ten years with the Bystander, but from 1910 until 1919, when he sold the paper, fewer and fewer appeared. His concerns remained the same but his vitality seemed to be gone; he seemed less hopeful and spirited. Perhaps it was the culmination of other activities taken on during his years with the paper that slowed him down as an editor.

In August 1900, Thompson had married Maud O. Watkins of Albany, Missouri. He had described the bride as "quite comely with many accomplishments." Her disposition," the paper said, "would win for her a host of friends in her new home." The reception was described as largely attended "by orderly and refined society people of the city." In September of that year, the County Treasurer appointed Thompson as clerk. He gratefully acknowledged this appointment, asking that the colored people of Polk County "support and appreciate our Treasurer's act." It was, he said, "the opening wedge for the other offices to deal fair by their colored friends."

In July 1901, Thompson announced his association in "a new law firm, colored, named Thompson, Wright and Holt." Thompson owned two hotels and had other real estate to look after as well. Although no mention of it is made in his editorials, he occasionally traveled to other cities lecturing on the Des Moines Plan of city government. After the United States government established a training camp for
Negro officers at Fort Des Moines, Thompson took a special interest in it and in 1917 began writing a book about the camp, *History and Views of Officers Training Camp*, which he completed in 1919. These added activities may have taken time which Thompson had previously devoted to the *Bystander*. There is a possibility that with the death of his mentor, Booker T. Washington, in 1915, Thompson was disheartened enough to have lost some of his editorial drive.

Gabriel Victor Cools, a New York Negro working on a master's degree at the University of Iowa, visited Des Moines for two weeks in 1918 in order to write his thesis on the state of the blacks in Iowa. Cools appraised Thompson's hotels as not being worthy of the name hotel and continued on by criticizing Thompson's paper. Although the *Bystander* was at its low point when Cools saw it, his was a hastily made and unjust appraisal. Cools had probably looked at only one or two editions when he said:

> The proprietor [Thompson] also owns the weekly paper called the "Bystander." This paper is a four-page sheet which records the weekly happenings among the Negroes in Des Moines and adjacent communities. It contains no editorials, nor does it aim, so far as could be ascertained, to shape the policy of the race.22

In January 1900, Thompson had changed the paper's format from four to eight pages. Thompson had been proud of the enlargement, which was due to additional subscriptions and advertising income. It was, "through the printers' ink of the colored journal," Thompson declared, "that the elevation
and advancement of the race depended."  

This expanded paper lasted only two years and, in 1902, the Bystander returned to its original six-column, four-page format. The pages which were cut out contained nothing of real importance but only additional advertising, poetry, syndicated stories and rather superfluous exchange items. Thompson regretted the cut-back, explaining that it was due to insufficient revenue.

The Des Moines news had been moved to the front page during the expansion period and continued to remain there in the left-hand column until January 1917. It included advertising and personals in addition to social reports of the local blacks:

CITY NEWS

Miss Fannie Walker will graduate from East High School in June. Her many friends will be pleased to hear of her success.

All kinds of New and Second hand furniture and Household goods, Stoves and Carpets. Repairing done at ALBERT HILL,
903 Walnut

Mr. Wm. Grey gave a New Year's stag party to a few of his friends. A very pleasant time was had by all present at his nice home, 1317 Day Street. Fred Johnson of Gravity was a special guest.

PERSONAL--Wanted to correspond with a light complexion, respectable, intelligent business
woman with ample means for a business partner. Prefer an unencumbered middle-aged maiden lady or widow. Only those who mean business need answer this ad. Address Golden Rule, care Bystander.24

The Bystander added a new feature which appeared in the first expanded issue and remained for seven years. The WAITERS COLUMN was included since so many Des Moines blacks held that position and were eager for news of each other.

The following item is typical of the column.

Mr. Scott Haglin of the Rock Island took charge of the kitchen of the Hotel Iowa last Monday to serve dinner only, the head cook being sick. Scott is one of the best cooks on the road, consequently the guests of the hotel noticed the sudden change and were well pleased.25

Thompson was not entirely pleased with the performance of waiters, however, especially in the large hotels. He felt that part of the reason the black waiters were losing their jobs was their inattention to business and lack of promptness and reliability. Some, Thompson said, did as little as possible "wanting a tip for every extra move they make."26

In 1913, Thompson added a syndicated SPORTING NEWS column. It appeared on page four and usually covered two columns. All sports were included—even billiards and horse racing. Generally the news was of white athletes and winning white teams, since a color line existed in the sports field until much later in the century. "Pugilism" was the section
which contained the news of young black athletes. Boxing for them was one of the few ways they had to make a name for themselves during these years. John Arthur Johnson, the son of slave parents, became World Heavyweight Champion in 1910 and his name appeared frequently in the column. When he returned from Europe in 1912, the paper noted that he possessed "the world's thinnest watch, the world's greatest quantity of gold teeth, and the world's largest squirrel fur coat." 27

Johnson's success provided an opportunity for Thompson to point out not only black accomplishments in the "pugilistic world," but in other areas as well. Speaking in praise of the Negro race, Thompson said it had indeed proven its competencies:

We have proven this fact in the pugilistic world, in the bicycle world, in the poetic field, in industrial education, in musical art, in the artistic painting, in oratory, in field of battle, in the long weary marches. In the quest of the North Pole, he [the Negro] was first to grab the McKinley assassin and today he is among the first in peace and to respect the stars and stripes. Then ought not the unbiased intelligent world give us our just merits and place the Negro race on the pages of history where it should be. 28

Many of the topics which Thompson had previously focused upon were written up by N. B. Dodson beginning in 1909. Dodson was the only black employee of the American Press Association and his opinions and concerns appeared in a front-page syndicated column exclusively devoted to American blacks. The column lacked the flavor and personal quality of Thompson's work. Dodson wrote as one further removed from
the problems his race was encountering. There was a trace of indifference as he reported black concerns throughout the world and the nation.

From 1910 to 1919, the Bystander printed a column of syndicated humor. As with the earlier short stories and fashion articles, the editor probably had no options in what to choose to make his readers laugh. Much of the column contained rather trite "witticisms," and many of the "jokes" ridiculed women, as exemplified by the following items:

**NO EMANCIPATION**

"And so you are an ex-slave," said the traveler in the south. "How interesting. But when the war was ended, you got your freedom."

"No suh," replied Uncle Rastus. "Ah didn't git no freedom. Ah was married."

**INFORMATION SURPRISED HER**

Mrs. Perkins--I called on Mrs. Upperson yesterday and she showed me her old masters.
Mrs. Parvenue--Her old masters! Dear me. I didn't know she was in service.

**SCALING THE PEAK**

Knicker--Is that Boston girl frigid?
Bocker--I should say so. When fellows call on her, they tie themselves together with ropes.29

Ads appearing in the Bystander from 1910 through 1919 were often for hair-straighteners and skin-bleachers. [See Appendix G.] Evidently black people were still emulating
of his race would see fit to finally accept the black people into their society. With less vehemence, but with heartfelt indignation, Thompson continued to cry out against the color line.

Articles from the syndicated news columns indicated that the race was suffering abroad as well as within the nation. Headlines pointed to continued persecution in the Congo and a distaste for black immigrants by the Canadians who seemed to want only Caucasians.

Prejudice in the South had abated little and in 1911, the Bystander reported that fifty colored farmers were leaving Oklahoma for Liberia in an attempt to escape persecution. In New York, even the Anti-Saloon League was drawing the color line, and Thompson wrote a front-page editorial on the prejudicial Baltimore ordinance which compelled Negroes to buy property in certain restricted areas.

In Iowa, especially in the urban areas, a less blatant but yet effective system of housing segregation existed. In Des Moines before the twentieth century, there was no record of segregated housing of any kind. Up to that time, the ability to pay rent or buy a home was the only determining factor in where blacks might live. Conditions began to change about 1910, when black people found that they were unable to rent homes in the more desirable sections of the
city. This "semi-restriction" was attributed to the propaganda of a newly arrived Southern real estate salesman who advocated residential segregation. Little appeared in the Bystander in regard to this discriminatory practice. Thompson complimented Llew Arntz, however, in 1911 as a "well known Doctor of Optics, who believes in treating the colored people the same as whites." This was evidenced by the fact that Arntz was willing to sell or rent to anyone his residence at 3215 Fourth Street, Highland Park, "which contains city water, sewer, gas, barn, etc., for $1,250, or monthly payments of $40."34

Discrimination existed in college athletics as well during this decade. Thompson announced in 1911 that the University of Iowa would not play a scheduled game with the University of Missouri since Missouri refused to allow a Negro halfback to play on their field. Iowa officials refused to keep the black player on the sidelines although they had done so the previous year at Missouri's insistence and, perhaps as a consequence, lost the game. Thompson faulted Iowa for even consenting to play with a team that showed such injustice based upon color.35

In June 1915, the Bystander registered a complaint against the Des Moines Chief of Police and Superintendent of Public Safety for raiding a black pool hall in search of whiskey. The officers claimed to have found one half-pint of liquor in the owner's private office den, upon which they
arrested everyone in the hall. Thompson affirmed that the Bystander had always stood for temperance, morality and a clean city but this was a clear-cut case of discrimination and an obvious injustice:

Those playing pool or sitting in there resting a few minutes, even those getting a shave in the barber chair, some forty or fifty people, were all taken to the police station, and this at 3:30 o'clock in the afternoon, which is all uncalled for and wrong. It is carrying this raiding business too far among the colored people. They would dare not go into a white man's pool hall at that hour and arrest everybody they happened to find in there. 36

In January 1915, Des Moines attorney S. J. Brown, called together all those interested in racial harmony to assist in organizing a local branch of the NAACP. This local chapter started with thirty-three members with Brown as President. Mrs. John Thompson was a member of the Executive Committee. 37

The branch had just been organized when it faced its first task which was to lead a fight against an "Inter-marriage Bill" in the Iowa Legislature. Brown addressed the House Legislative Committee, condemning the proposed law which would forbid the marriage of blacks and whites, as a dangerous precedent--fearing that it might easily become the first in a series of Jim Crow statutes.

The bill had been presented and defeated in 1913 and had new resurfaced. During both years, Thompson gave it full play in the Bystander, publishing letters to the editor concerning the bill and writing his own opinions commending
Brown and the new NAACP. Both times Thompson published the names of all state legislators who voted "against our race and for the bill." His own condemnation was strong. Thompson maintained that there was no demand for such legislation in Iowa; the white women of the state were not asking for such a law. He pointed out that there was not "two percent of racial intermarriage in the state." "This bill, he said, "is designed to permit white men to prey upon the virtue of our innocent colored girls and then not be forced to marry, or to make illegitimate what now under the present condition would be a legitimate child." He concluded: "The better class of colored people have not, never have and never will want to intermarry, but we don't want any such black laws upon our statute books, for the black laws were wiped off of Iowa statute books about fifty years ago."

The bill, through the efforts of Thompson, Brown and the NAACP Attorney, Casper Schenk, was defeated. A similar proposal did not reappear.

In January 1916, the film The Birth of a Nation was shown in Iowa. The Bystander first mentioned the "photoplay" when local NAACP members traveled to Newton to view it and pass judgment as to its inflammatory racial content. The three members immediately registered a protest and letters were read at the NAACP meeting from citizens of Mason City and Clarinda where the film had also been shown that "the lurid effects of the exhibition were already being felt in
Thompson explained to his readers that the film, "based upon Thomas Dixon's book, The Clansman, degraded the Negro as well as the Union soldier and boosted the "lost cause of the rebels." "It portrayed the idea," said Thompson, "that Jeff Davis and his gang were right." Thompson listed the city councils and state boards of censors throughout the United States which had prohibited the showing of the film. "Even in Houston it was not permitted to be shown," said Thompson, "and we in Des Moines propose to knock it--then we want our state legislature to pass a state law forbidding such plays in our fair state." 

In April, the Des Moines City Council, under the city ordinance, voted to prohibit the showing of the film. Thompson followed up by commending the "gallant councilmen" who voted against it and naming the one man, Harry Frase, who voted to show the film. Thompson condemned him. "It is too bad that our city is to have left one Judas. There is a reckoning day and we will not forget."

A year later, a coupon appeared in the Bystander to be filled out by blacks who would be interested in purchasing their own movie house. The offer, Thompson said, would involve the organization of a stock company to purchase the building where the Strand Theatre was located on West Eighth Street. Thompson was in favor of the venture, hoping that local blacks could purchase shares at twenty-five dollars a-
piece so the building could be purchased. He advocated the proposal "Since the present theatres segregate and discriminate against us if we go, and even some do not want our presence there at all."45 "It is about high time," he said, "for us to join ourselves together and buy one theatre of our own."46 There was no other mention of the theatre purchase in the Bystander after this editorial appeared, so presumably the venture failed.

Thompson had always been eager for favorable news of his race in the Des Moines' papers and he had earlier deplored the use of the degrading terms which they employed in describing black people. He was ever aware and dismayed that the blacks never received fair treatment from the local white press. He was especially dismayed when, in 1915, the Register and Leader began printing a regular column of Negro news under the headline AFRO-AMERICAN NOTES. Thompson referred to the new column as "Jim Crow Notes." He found them detrimental to the black community in Des Moines since they seemed to create the ideas of "race separation, segregation, and ostracism."47 The column, according to Thompson, helped to draw the color line with its presentation of trivial social affairs:

If some worthy colored man should go to the Register with worthy news about his friend, the reporters will dub it Afro-American notes or stick it in that column. It has done more to ridicule our race and lessen respect for them in the estimation of the white man. Many are disgusted seeing that Miss Jones entertained
elaborately, this club or that club entertained—such silly, sickening news. 48

Thompson said there was a movement started to have this column discontinued. He expressed "utter contempt for any person who will denounce and cry out against being Jim-Crowed in our city theatres, restaurants, or drug stores and then ask for a separate column or permit the color line to be drawn in a newspaper and furnish news for it." He questioned why the Register didn't have a "German-American column or a Swede, a Jew or a Dago column." 49

Two months later, Thompson published an editorial: AFRO-AMERICAN NOTES COLUMN DISCONTINUED. The Register had stopped publishing the column, he said, partially in response to a petition by "some of the leading ladies of the city." 50 Thompson congratulated the Register for honoring the petition and praised the women's committee for their work.

Thompson's interest in politics seems to have waned considerably by 1910 and most of the political news coverage was done by Dodson in his syndicated column. President Taft had proved to be a disappointment to black leaders and editors. Dodson said in March, 1910 that it seemed the President had "just awakened from a deep sleep" when he appointed two black men to positions with the National Government, both as special agents with the Department of Agriculture and the General Land Office. 51 About the only other news of Taft which appeared in the Bystander preceding the campaign of
1912, was a syndicated news item in 1911 which reported that in addressing a group of black businessmen in Los Angeles, the President had praised Booker T. Washington saying that the Negro educator was one of the "greatest men of the century."52

Monroe N. Work of the Tuskegee Institute in his *Negro Year Book* for 1911, discussed Taft's attitude in regard to black political appointees. The President had defended his failure to appoint more than a few blacks to national positions. "I have appointed none, where I knew that the race feeling was strong," Taft said, "and have preferred giving large offices to well equipped Negroes of the higher class to scattering a lot of petty ones among the mass of their race."53

Taft tried to recapture some Republican political power in the solidly Democratic South by establishing a "lily-white" political machine. This would presumably appeal to white Southerners by "out-demagoguing the Democrats on racial matters."54 There is little doubt that President Taft, if he had not actually abetted segregation, had done little to discourage it. During the election year of 1912, some blacks who had traditionally voted Republican shifted their allegiance to the new Democratic political leader, Woodrow Wilson, or to Theodore Roosevelt, who was back from a stay in Africa and running on the Progressive Party ticket. W.E.B. DuBois and many Negro intellectuals voted for Wilson; Thompson opted
for Roosevelt and the Progressives.

In October 1912, Thompson in a now rare political editorial, advised his readers why he favored Roosevelt as opposed to Taft. Thompson explained that Taft had completely repudiated the Republican platform and had absolutely disrupted the Republican party. He then called attention to the "chief facts incident to his Negro policy." This included the discharge of 128 Negro fourth-class postmasters, over 100 other federal colored appointees, and the issuance of an order not to permit colored enumerators to count white people in the South. Thompson also mentioned Taft's statement in a letter to the President of Fisk University that Negroes should be treated "separate and distinct from the white race."

Former President Roosevelt had recently announced that he would treat colored citizens on their merits alone. Roosevelt had, Thompson pointed out, abolished the post office at Indianola because the white patrons refused to treat justly a capable and efficient colored postmistress. Thompson's editorial continued to applaud Roosevelt's racial policy, with special emphasis upon his confirmation of William Crum as Collector of Ports at Charleston, and the dinner invitation he had extended to Booker T. Washington. Thompson concluded with eloquent praise for Roosevelt:

He repeatedly announced to the Negro and the world that the door of hope should not be closed against any man because of color, and that all men, black as well
as white, should have a square deal. And thus the Roosevelt Administration inspired the Negro to higher civic endeavors and opened before him a grander future than any administration since the days of Lincoln. In every phase and walk of American life, the Roosevelt influence was felt for a larger social and political justice for the colored citizens. 58

The Progressives, Thompson felt, represented the best "brain and conscience of the country, led by the greatest personality upon the globe." Thompson was convinced the new party would "take up the fight for humanity, for larger industrial and political justice and ask the Negro to take his place in the councils and the ranks upon his merit." With what was now rare fervor, he concluded his political plea:

Then arise!
Ye free-born tillers of the soil,
Come from the workshops and the field,
Prepare to conquer, not to yield,
The ballot box your sword and shield. 59

Woodrow Wilson won the 1912 election primarily because of the defection of many Republicans. 60 After Wilson's Inauguration, Thompson pointed out that it had been sixteen years since the Democrats had held power. He went so far as to say that he admired the "progressive views and spirit of President Wilson." "We only hope--yet we doubt--," continued Thompson, "that he will be able to carry them out." "Our race will watch you," Thompson concluded, "to see if you offer a gleam of hope. . . ." 61

Between 1912 and 1916, Wilson alienated many blacks. He immediately appointed a number of Southern Democrats to cabinet posts. Although most of the measures died in committee,
Congress, under Democratic control, received more anti-Negro bills in a single session than had ever before been introduced. Wilson bowed to Southern pressure and, by executive order, segregated Negro Federal workers in the use of employees' facilities.

Thompson turned his attention almost completely away from national politics between 1912 and 1919 and did not elaborate upon his disappointments. The only political references he made dealt with the fact that the Democratic Administration was bringing hard times. "Every time that the American states elect a Democratic president," said Thompson in 1914, "the same old hard times, high prices, scarcity of work exists, whereby the common laborer and working people must suffer." He complained at times of the Democratic tariff saying that, according to Wilson, the Underwood Tariff would set the small businessman free, but yet the lowering of the tariff had not cut the cost of living at all. Thompson was concerned that the laboring man had received nothing.

In 1916 Wilson won the close election primarily on his record of neutrality. Democrats waged his campaign with the slogan "He kept us out of war." Disappointed with Wilson's economic failures and lack of attention to the blacks, Thompson returned to the Republican ranks and supported Supreme Court Justice Charles Evans Hughes for President. Theodore Roosevelt endorsed Hughes and the Progressives were, for the
most part, reunited with the Republicans. The campaign revolved mainly around Wilson's foreign policy and the Underwood Tariff. The Democrats made no mention of the Negroes in their platform and the Republican plank was only a broad and rather ambiguous statement.

Thompson hoped that his readers would arouse themselves from the "lethargy of indolence" and vote Republican. After Hughes was defeated and Wilson inaugurated for his second term, Thompson expressed his lack of confidence in the President:

WILSONISM ANOTHER FOUR YEARS

To the regret of a vast majority of the American people and contrary to the expressed will of a majority of all the American citizens, President Wilson was sworn in as President for another four years, which will be years of uncertainty, of inability of hard times, of government debts increasing, of segregation, disfranchisement and lynching of the Negroes, another four years of class legislation and hatred, of wrong and injustice tule among the people, sowing race hatred and sectionalism.

Thompson expressed pleasure that the President's "pet bill" the Armed Neutrality Bill was defeated in the Senate. The bill would have essentially given Wilson the power to declare war. Thompson commended Iowa's two Senators, Albert B. Cummins and William S. Kenyon, for helping to vote it down.

Cummins had always been a favorite of Thompson and in January 1912, before the Republicans had chosen Hughes to represent them, Thompson and the Bystander supported Cummins
in his candidacy for the nomination. Cummins, Thompson felt, was a "true friend of the common people everywhere who believe and stand for justice and equality before the law." Thompson continued, "We can sincerely and honestly recommend his candidacy to the colored voters of the United States as worthy of their support."71

That same year a black attorney, George H. Woodson, from Buxton in Monroe County, received the Republican nomination from his district as a Representative to the Iowa General Assembly. Thompson printed a picture of Woodson, and acknowledged him as the oldest Negro continuously in the practice of law in the state. Thompson was hopeful that the Republicans of Monroe County would reward his tireless work for the party and elect him to office. He was defeated and the paper reacted by ignoring the issue rather than lambasting the ungrateful Republicans as it had so often done.72

In 1916, Thompson announced that he had tired of the local politicians who solicited the black vote, yet refused to advertise in the Bystander. He published a list of candidates running in the city elections who had advertised or announced their candidacy in his paper. The colored man's vote, he insisted, must not go to those who did not announce in the Bystander:

Below we publish a list of candidates who have advertised in the Bystander, as well as most of the other newspapers, and the editor, John L. Thompson, would ask all of the colored voters not to vote for any candidate whose name is not mentioned in our
paper soliciting you and announcing their candidacy. There are many of these candidates who will slip around to the colored voter and ask his support, but when it comes to put their political ads in the only colored newspaper they refuse, don't give a cent to the poor colored printer, but will give to their white printer. 73

In 1914 when President Wilson issued his proclamation of neutrality, the black people in the United States continued to concentrate on their own problems and, like most Americans, were hardly concerned with the European war. As early as 1911, rumblings of unrest had begun to appear in the back pages of the Bystander, but the news was spotty and syndicated, receiving no real attention from the editor. The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand at Sarajevo, Bosnia, in June 1914, was overlooked by the syndicate which supplied Thompson with his international news.

Taft's hopes for peace were reported early in 1912, and the President was quoted as to the "hideous wickedness of armed combat and the wastefulness and folly, not only of war, but of the great armaments which the present jealousy of the powers makes it necessary to maintain." 74

Thompson essentially agreed with Taft, but his first real war editorial did not appear until October, 1914. "The world," he said, was "in the midst of the greatest war ever recorded with seven highly-civilized world powers in deadly conflict, killing, and butchering hundreds of thousands and destroying billions of dollars worth of property." 75 Thompson sympathized with Germany, saying that the other powers
were "jumping on her as if to pound her out of existence."

He expressed his admiration for Germany, for he was sure that many countries envied her "rapid rise in agriculture, science, art and literature."\(^76\)

Two weeks later, Thompson reported that in the "great struggle now on between the Teutonic, the Slav and the Celtic races," it was the heroic Germans who were winning:

After the first six months of war, the mighty German empire, with her great guns, her well trained men, her perfect loyalty and united forces has whipped the allies and Russians on every battlefield. She has swept everything before her that she has tried except to go to Paris. The world must admire her heroic valor and great bravery and give her great praise for her wonderful victories with odds against her.\(^77\)

For the next two years, the Bystander alternately proclaimed the horrors and glories of war. Some human-interest stories told of heroic efforts and daring deeds. The stories, which were always from the syndicate, appeared on the back pages: UNKNOWN STRETCHER BEARER DESCRIBES HORROR OF HORRORS, SING AS THEIR SHIPS SINK, ITALIANS FACE DEATH WITH A SMILE AND A JOKE, WAR DRAMA AT SEA. No consistent picture of the war was presented because the United States was not yet directly involved. It was for the paper's readers, like viewing the war through a window.

In May 1915, Booker T. Washington had spoken out against the war and his statement appeared in AFRO-AMERICAN CULLINGS. He regretted the terrible cost in blood and misery that the war was causing and said he was thankful that he was a member
of a peaceful race:

I am sometimes inclined to thank God that I am not a member of a superior race. Rather I am disposed to thank God that I belong to a people that cannot hope and does not desire to prosper at the cost of any other race.

There is a certain advantage in belonging to a race that has to make its way peacefully through the world; a race that prospers, if it prospers at all, because it has made friends rather than enemies of the people by whom it is surrounded. . . .78

Thompson, too, deplored the war but still played up the German victories. He was concerned that America might enter the conflict. Thompson found President Wilson to be inconsistent in regard to human lives as exhibited by his great perturbance over the recent sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915. Thompson felt United States citizens had been sufficiently warned by the Germans to stay off belligerent vessels and the President, who had never shown concern for the value of black lives, was over-reacting. Thompson said that Wilson would allow "innocent, law-abiding citizens in his own country to be killed, murdered and burned at the stake." "I dare say," he continued, "that if the hundred or more Americans who were on the Lusitania were colored American citizens, he would not have made even a protest."79 In March 1916, Thompson again criticized Wilson for high-handed measures: "Don't talk about dignity and freedom of the high seas when our lives are endangered."80

But the United States was drifting toward war and news of involvement began to appear in the Bystander: A GIGANTIC
U.S. PLANT, DEFENSE DATA, ANSWERING CALL TO OUR COLORS.
Many black Americans migrated North. AFRO-AMERICAN CULLINGS for September 15, 1916, reported that the European war was opening once closed doors to the Negroes. The dearth of labor in some areas of the North offered fresh opportunities to Southern farm workers. 81

Congress declared war on April 6, 1917, and in the months prior to this, Thompson continued to criticize Wilson's "anti-German" policies and his support of the Allies. To Thompson, Germany's display of superhuman strength, with so many of the powers against her, seemed providential. 82 Thompson found United States policies of sending merchant ships through a war zone to be ill-advised, and Germany's blockade of England justified:

We believe Germany has a perfect right to use her submarines and every facility at her command to succeed, and it is not our right to ask them to stop their submarine warfare upon all vessels attempting to go past their war zone. Since England refuses to discuss peace terms, then Germany, like any other country would do, would put all her power into execution to whip, and it is not our American business to go into a house to sell goods when fighting is intense in that house. Let us stay away. We have no business except for mercenary purposes. 83

On February 9, 1917, many of Thompson's feelings surfaced in a two-column editorial UNITED STATES GETTING INTO TROUBLE. He criticized Wilson for severing friendly relations with Germany as a move to assist England and France in their effort to save themselves from "ignoble defeat."
Thompson then presented a litany of England's misdeeds in-
cluding her wars with the United States and her aid to "Jeff Davis and the Confederacy." He pointed out that Germany had assisted our cause in the Revolutionary War. Thompson concluded with a strong neutrality pronouncement:

We think that if a real expression from the 10,000,000 of Negro citizens were made they would vote against such a war on Germany. We also think that the 25,000,000 of Americans of German and Austrian lineage would vote no. Let us stay at home, develop our own country and treat all of our American citizens with equality and justice.

Thompson voiced his last ant-war plea before the country entered the conflict in March. He urged the United States to look to Jehovah as its god and not to Mammon. He repeated his request that we preserve the lives of our black American citizens rather than venture abroad to protect Europeans.

America had to be converted to war. Many black leaders held Thompson's views which advocated that the United States should secure democracy at home before going to Europe to help abolish autocracy. According to Carter Woodson, esteemed black educator and historian: "There was much apprehension as to the attitude of the Negroes. Throughout this country they had been treated as pariahs, unprepared for the full measure of that democracy for which Woodrow Wilson desired to fight in Europe."

The majority of the blacks, however, showed that they did love their country and would readily die to defend it. Many were among the first to volunteer at the recruiting
stations. Initially, a great number were not accepted into the Army. When they were finally called to meet the government quotas, they were forced to register in segregated units. Thompson was aware of the many discriminatory policies of the War Department and at first urged the black men not to flock to the colors, or to confuse patriotism with "getting excited, becoming made or a whoop and a hurrah." Thompson had put more vigor into his anti-war campaign than he had shown for years on any issue. He was not going to hastily change his policy and appear as inconsistent to Bystander readers as he had earlier found Wilson to be in regard to human life.

Blacks were eager to participate in the European War, not only as enlisted men but as officers. Partially in order to secure the loyalty of the race, the United States Government established a training camp for Negro officers at Fort Des Moines. On October 15, 1917, 639 blacks were commissioned there.

Some black leaders had denounced the idea of a separate camp, contending that its establishment would only abet segregation. The NAACP, however, welcomed the idea, and Thompson vigorously supported it. For the next five months, the Bystander was filled with camp news, beginning on June 8, 1917, when the first soldiers arrived. Thompson published the official announcement on June 15th, pointing out that to the Negro race this camp meant a marvelous development and
advancement. "It was," Thompson said, "a challenge to our educated Negroes to become educated in military tactics." He seemed to forget the years of heartbreak over local discrimination and heartily praised both the black and white citizens of Des Moines:

We feel that no better location could have been selected in the United States than Fort Des Moines. While there are a few symptoms of race prejudice, yet we are so free from it that we seldom notice it and it will give our race a fair opportunity for development in all lines of their work. The colored citizens of Des Moines, along with the white citizens, welcome them to our city and there is a movement on foot by the editor and a few friends to give a public reception to demonstrate our feelings as to their presence in the city.

Thompson now seemed more willing to "Halt the Hun" and cautiously evidenced his changing opinion. The Bystander reported in May 1917, after Thompson had learned of the training camp: "Our late Civil War, hard and bloody as it was, is not to be compared with this great European war that we are in. Let us reconsecrate our lives to the great task before us."

Thompson added a new column to the front page of the Bystander, FORT DES MOINES OFFICERS CAMP NEWS. June 29, 1917, was a FORT DES MOINES SPECIAL EDITION. In September, Thompson published an editorial in which he commended the conduct of the black soldiers:

During the past three months, thousands of the best white people of Iowa have come in daily contact and touch with the educated and refined and cultured Negro and they all have been greatly astonished at meeting such high class, clean, well
developed, cultured mind and broad experienced as those soldiers are. Ye editor is mighty proud of the record they have made. 93

Black recruits arrived at Camp Dodge just outside Des Moines, in November of 1917. The majority were farmers and cotton gin workers from Alabama and Thompson noted that most of them had spent only one or two years in the public schools. The Bystander defended them, however, by complimenting their appearance upon arriving in Des Moines:

Despite the prediction of many that the Southern Negroes would arrive here poorly clad and half frozen, the men as a whole presented a splendid appearance. Many had managed to procure overcoats on the way north and are at present in no danger from severe weather. 94

He was disturbed that little heed had been paid to draft regulations as among the new arrivals were three ministers, and "about eight hundred married men, many of whom have as high as three children." 95 Thompson was also troubled that Negroes of Des Moines had requested that Governor W. L. Harding stop the immigration of thousands of black "hangers-on" and "camp followers" who had accompanied the Alabama regiment. The local blacks complained to the Governor that Des Moines did not have adequate housing facilities for all of these people and that the majority would seriously "affect the social and moral conditions" of the city. 96 Thompson found it an effrontery to approach the Governor with such a discriminatory request. He reminded them that many of their own ancestors had migrated from the South and many only a few years ago. Iowa was large enough, said Thompson, "to accom-
modate fifty thousand more farmers and laborers."⁹⁷

On November 11, 1918, an armistice was signed ending the European hostilities. The troops returned home from France. Thompson and the Bystander were ever ready with praise for the black soldiers as OUR GALLANT HEROES REACH AMERICA, many "bedecked with medals honorably won in defense of world wide democracy."⁹⁸ Thompson was hopeful that the great service performed by two million black soldiers in the pursuit of democracy would be appreciated by white America. He hoped that black people would now be granted "their own freedom in everything that relates to full citizenship."⁹⁹

But, as before, with the peace, the jubilation was shortlived and the hopes for democracy subsided. Thompson had been eager that the contributions of his race might have bought for them new opportunities in social and economic life and in their civil rights. He was again disheartened to see violent riots break out in the North and the Southern Negro "sent back into the Southland of hatred, prejudice, segregation and Jim Crow."¹⁰⁰ It was against this backdrop of racial oppression that he sold the Bystander in the fall of 1919.
NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1. The signers of the original charter included Dr. DuBois Jane Addams, John Dewey, William Dean Howells, and Lincoln Steffens. Dr. DuBois, the Director of Research and Publicity, was the only black officer of the new NAACP. Its first President was Boston attorney, Moorfield Story, later President of the American Bar Association.

2. Most Negro units were assigned to French command, and the first two American winners of the Croix de Guerre were New York black men who wiped out a twenty-man German raiding party. Other entire black units won Croix de Guerre citations.

3. New York Board of Education, p. 99. Lynching statistics indicate the extent of the hatred that swept the nation in 1919. More blacks were lynched that year than in any of the previous ten years. Of the 83 victims, ten were soldiers, several still in uniform.


5. Bystander, December 29, 1899.


7. Ibid.


11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.


14. Ibid.

15. Bystander, August 17, 1900.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
21. The Des Moines Plan combined a commission government with certain democratic checks in a blend that served as a model for many other communities.
23. Bystander, January 12, 1900. Circulation was about two thousand at the time.
24. Items taken from the following Bystanders: May 24, 1901; January 3, 1913; January 14, 1916.
25. Bystander, October 26, 1900.
26. Bystander, April 14, 1911.
27. Bystander, January 26, 1912.
29. Items taken from Bystanders, April 19, 1912; February 9, 1912; February 2, 1911.
31. Bystander, September 8, 1911.
32. Bystander, April 7, 1911.
34. Bystander, April 14, 1911.


38. **Bystander**, February 14, 1913.


40. **Ibid.**

41. **Bystander**, March 10, 1916. D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* opened at the Liberty Theatre in New York on March 3, 1915. The sensation it created was without precedent. After it was shown at the White House, the first movie ever to be screened there, President Wilson was said to have commented, "It is like writing history with lightning, and my one regret is that it is all so terribly true." The film revealed the extent of the white South's allegiance to the Ku Klux Klan which at its height had more than 700,000 members. As a result, the revived Klan of 1915–1927 continually claimed Griffith's approval and sought his active support.

42. **Bystander**, February 11, 1916.

43. **Ibid.**

44. **Bystander**, April 28, 1916.


46. **Ibid.**

47. **Bystander**, October 19, 1915.

48. **Ibid.**

49. **Ibid.**


52. **Bystander**, November 10, 1911.


55. Bystander, October 25, 1912.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. The popular vote for Wilson was 6,286,214; Roosevelt 4,126,020; and Taft 3,483,922. Electoral vote: Wilson, 435; Roosevelt, 88; Taft, 8. Democrats gained control of both Houses of Congress.


63. Ibid. Offices in the Treasury and Post Office departments (in which many Negroes served) began to be partitioned off--one side for blacks, the other for whites. Lunchrooms and restrooms were also segregated.

64. Bystander, October 2, 1914.


66. The Protection of American Rights plank read: We declare that we believe in and will enforce the protection of every American citizen in all the rights secured to him by the Constitution, by treaties and the laws of nations at home and abroad, by land and by sea, those rights, which in violation of their party made at Baltimore in 1912, the Democratic President and the Democratic Congress have failed to defend, we will unflinchingly maintain. Citation from: Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson (comps.), National Party Platforms, fourth edition (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 205.


68. Bystander, March 9, 1917.

69. Ibid.
Woodson was however, appointed Chairman of the Commission on the Virgin Islands in 1924 and in 1928 represented the Virgin Islands in Kansas City at the Republican National Convention.

Prussian Baron von Steuben was appointed Inspector General of the Continental Army. Prussia was a member of the League of Armed Neutrality (1780) which hampered British blockade efforts.
91. Ibid.
94. Bystander, November 2, 1917.
95. Ibid.
96. Bystander, November 16, 1917.
97. Ibid.
98. Bystander, November 21, 1919.
100. Bystander, May 2, 1919.
VI. CONCLUSION

The Bystander has stood as a beacon light, a shining star in the firmament, chronicling the news to all her thousands of readers holding up the high ideals of honesty, truth and justice.

_Bystander_, October 31, 1919

In September 1919, John Thompson announced in his EDITOR'S OBSERVATIONS that it had been difficult for "ye editor" to find time to write for the paper, since within the previous month he had attended four conventions. There is no doubt that Thompson was exceedingly busy with his law firm, real estate interests and all of his community work for the city and for his people.

Thompson sold the _Bystander_ in October 1919, during a month that had seen the greatest racial strife which had yet occurred in the North. In Omaha, the mayor had tried to protect a black lynching victim and was himself hanged for his efforts. Thompson sadly reported, "he was true to his oath, dying that he might give justice."2

This was to be his last recording of the bloody, senseless violence he so deplored. In saying goodbye, Thompson addressed his readers with a last thought provoking commentary on the state of the nation, WHITHER ARE WE DRIFTING. In
reference to the United States, he said: "The seeds of wrongs and injustice, hardships and segregation discriminations that she sows, she will someday reap the bitter harvest, as other countries and nations have done before her." If this government shall live" said Thompson, "and not perish from this earth, she must give to all of her subjects, white or black, rich or poor, Greek or Jew, male or female, perfect justice and equal opportunity."  

He said he was truly sorry to leave his paper and did so with much reluctance in order that he might concentrate on his law practice. Thompson continued to live in Des Moines for the next eleven years and died at age sixty-one on July 23, 1930. The Bystander announced his death in headlines, printed his picture and published a front page obituary.

The Bystander had lost a supporting pillar when Thompson left. He had guided Iowa black citizens for over twenty years, rejoicing in their victories and giving them the advice he felt was necessary in order for them to be proud and strong and accepted. Like the Ruffs before him, he had addressed himself to all the pressing needs and concerns of the black people. Thompson had been a believer, a little more skeptical toward the end, but always hopeful that through hard work and perseverance his people would work their way out of the mire which entrapped them. He knew the blacks had a rightfully deserved place in American life. He used the Bystander as a sounding board for a persecuted
people and provided the only means available for a communication network through Iowa's scattered black communities.

Thompson's Republicanism was partially a tool he had employed in order to gain more recognition for his people. He followed Lincoln's Republican philosophy, and was anxious that the blacks join together and support the party as a unified body. He expected their loyalties to be rewarded and was dismayed when they were not.

Through the pages of the Bystander, both the Ruffs and Thompson had published what was almost a manual for success for their readers: how to vote, how to dress, how to conduct oneself, what to read and above all, how to attain an education that would be worth a gold mine.

Thompson had studied the issues involved in labor unrest, in civil rights litigations, in all black protests against discriminatory practices, and he had kept the Bystander filled with these stories. Thompson himself had often taken the lead in crying out against a particularly blatant injustice.

Thompson had sent the local black soldiers into two wars with emotional farewells and, upon their return, he had praised them and rejoiced in their accomplishments. The Bystander let the people of Iowa know what the brave black men had accomplished overseas, whether on the hill of San Juan or in a muddy trench in France. Thompson was a just and righteous man, who, to the best of his ability, addressed
each issue with honesty and forethought. From 1886 to 1919, the Bystander had essentially been Thompson, and it was he who held up the high ideals of honesty, truth, and justice.

The Bystander floundered for several years after Thompson sold it to a new stock company. The new managing editor was Emerald Marsh, who had been Thompson's stenographer for eight years. Until the paper was sold again in 1920, hers was the only name appearing on the masthead. Professor Lawrence Jones, a University of Iowa graduate, purchased the paper in 1920. Jones, who founded the Piney Woods Country Life School in Mississippi, thought the Bystander could be used as an outlet for his printing students. The base of operations was too far away, however, the students too inexperienced to run a newspaper, and the Bystander began to lose money.

Attorney J. B. Morris, who was at the time Deputy Polk County Treasurer, purchased the paper in 1922. Morris took a solid stand on racial equality. His headlines "screamed" with racial injustices occurring in Iowa and across the United States. Like Thompson, in addition to being a practicing attorney, Morris was involved in a great many civic and political programs which gave recognition to the Bystander. The Des Moines Register recognized Morris' many efforts on behalf of the black community and called him "Mr. Civil Rights." He was also named a member of the Des Moines Commission on
Civil Rights.

Morris inherited a newspaper with a circulation of three thousand. Since 1922 circulation has fluctuated up and down, but never fallen below two thousand. It exceeded ten thousand at the onset of the Second World War.

From 1894 to January 1969, the Bystander was produced by means of the letterpress method. It now is printed by means of the offset process. During its ninety-year lifetime, there was only a brief period when the Bystander was not job-lotted to a local printer.\(^7\) This was in 1938-39, when Morris purchased a linotype machine and attempted to print the paper himself. "We only used that machine two to two and half hours a week and that's far from enough to make a linotype machine profitable," related Morris.\(^8\)

The Ku Klux Klan which numbered over 35,000 in Iowa by 1924, attempted to buy the Bystander from Morris, and then in 1925, "resorted to intimidation to halt its publication."\(^9\) But Morris resisted the pressure and the Bystander survived.

Morris recalled that the Great Depression almost killed the newspaper. He described how Harvey Ingham, editor of the Des Moines Register and a real friend to the blacks of the city, called him one day after the Bystander missed its first and only issue. "When I told him how bad things were," Morris said, "he urged me to continue printing and he suggested that I visit some of the wealthier businessmen in Des Moines
to request financial assistance to maintain the newspaper." "He told me," Morris said, "he would begin the fund himself with a $100 donation." In a few weeks Morris had solicited more than $700 and could pull the paper through the hard times.

During the Second World War, when blacks began gaining more opportunities, Bystander editorials supported the early emerging civil rights movement. Morris stressed the need for equal opportunities in all phases of life and particularly in the Armed Forces. Subscriptions at this time shot over the ten-thousand mark, placing the Bystander in over ninety percent of the black households in Iowa. With a significant increase in advertising, the paper formed a stronger economical base.

By 1950, the black population of Iowa was 19,692 and a more intense black civil rights movement had started. The civil and human rights activities of the fifties and the landmark decision of Brown v. the Board of Education in 1954 filled the Bystander's front pages.

By the 1960s, the Bystander gained momentum but began losing trained employees to white newspapers that were "integrating their newsrooms due to the tremendous uproar of the black rights movement." The militant sixties disturbed Morris who, like Thompson, deplored violence. Morris desired an "orderly process of change." Said Morris, "We have a lot to thank the Constitution for and I hope we can work
through it and not against it."¹⁵

Morris felt the need to sell the Bystander in 1972. He was by then eighty years old and desired to devote more time to his family and his law practice. Black businessman Carl Williams purchased the paper and changed it from a broadsheet to tabloid size. He was confronted with a multitude of financial problems which almost destroyed the newspaper.¹⁶

Triple S. Productions, a white firm, purchased the Bystander in 1973. During the following ten years, circulation decreased but advertising increased and kept the paper going. During this time, there was a succession of five black editors.¹⁷ In early 1983, the Bystander was purchased by FNCO Corporation, another white-owned firm. Morris Publications Inc. is currently negotiating for return of ownership to the family.

Robert V. Morris, a grandson of J. B. Morris, Sr., has edited the Bystander since 1982, and is hopeful that the paper will return to his family. He believes black papers should be owned by blacks and feels that the Bystander's white ownership was necessary in order that the paper might stay in publication. He explains that in 1973 the Bystander came close to total extinction after Williams, who had so badly managed it, "submerged under a wave of creditors and blew town."¹⁸ Morris further explains the situation:

The Bystander was dying and Triple S. Publications, a white-owned firm, bought the newspaper and paid off the huge debt it had made under Williams. At that
time, the newspaper was not a financial winner and Triple S., particularly Loren Sampson, saved a publication they did not need to. . . .

Though some black people, so blinded by racial hate, cannot comprehend the economic complexity of a business operation, I applaud Triple S. Publications for taking a step that most white businesses would not and saving a valuable and crucial institution in this state.19

The black press today faces some real problems and challenges. Part of its original purpose was to supply news of the black community which was left out of the white papers. Says William S. Morris, the managing editor of the paper, "The integration of the American media, which the black press had fought so hard for since the nineteenth century," is now, ironically, "killing off large portions of the black press, in the same way that school desegregation has started to injure predominately black colleges."20 Morris concludes on a more optimistic note:

While the black press has suffered more than its share of set backs, and continues to be afflicted by financial woes, it will continue to effectively serve as black America's most effective communicative tool, a source of news you still can't get, after almost twenty years of media integration, anywhere else.21

The Bystander, although it competes with white and electronic media, hopefully will survive. The Morris' exhibit the perseverance, determination and fire of John Lay Thompson. They predict that the black citizens of Iowa can count on the Bystander for the next ninety years. It is, after all, one of the nation's five oldest black newspapers, and has weathered years of turbulence and economic hardships.
"We have only begun to expand this newspaper," says Robert Morris. "With the support of this community, we will continue to grow and serve for many years to come."22

The Bystander still serves in the ways its founders had intended when they established the paper in 1894. It watches vigilantly over the black community and when necessary encourages its readers to action. It provides a needed black perspective on a local, national and global basis. It serves as a communications network for its readers. The Bystander continues to be a fighting press as it faces new tasks and challenges.
NOTES TO CHAPTER VI


2. Bystander, October 3, 1919.


4. There was no obituary notice for Thompson in the Des Moines Register and Tribune. According to the Bystander article of July 25, 1930, Thompson died after a lingering illness which had lasted over eight months. A letter from Thompson's son, John Nelson Thompson, indicated that his death might be due to complications from cobalt treatments.


8. Ibid.


10. LaBrie, "James B. Morris and the Iowa Bystander," p. 322. Circulation during the Depression dropped back to 2,000.


13. Ibid.


15. Ibid.


17. The editors from 1973-1983 were Charles MaCauley, Don Rhone, Ramon Ray, Bonnie Forrester and Niami Webster. Allen Ashby was with the paper then and has been a columnist for over fifty years.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.
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Personal interview with Arthur P. Trotter, former President Des Moines NAACP. January 30, 1983.
VIII. APPENDIX A

STORY AND FEATURE ILLUSTRATIONS
1894–1899
IX. APPENDIX B

ADVERTISING
1894–1899
The Last Day!

25 PER CENT.

DISCOUNT ON ALL TRIMMED HATS.

SPECIAL SALE ON
HOSIERY AND UNDERWEAR.
M. Sheuerman & Bro.,
504 WALNUT.

HAYE YOU FIVE-OR MORE COWS?

SHANK BROS.
FUNERAL DIRECTORS.

SATISFACTION
Always
At
YOUNKERS

THE BANNER ROUTE

Are You
A Subscriber of
The Bystander?
X. APPENDIX C

POLITICAL CARTOONS AND LOGOS
1894–1899
McKinley's Administration was Sustained.
XI. APPENDIX D

STORY AND FEATURE ILLUSTRATIONS
1900–1909
THE NEGRO DISFRANCHISED
THE FIRST STEP INTO A NEW SLAVERY
COLUMBIA

SENATOR TILLMAN IN CONGRESS "We do our best to keep every negro in our State from voting"
XII. APPENDIX E

ADVERTISING
1900–1909
SUBSCRIBE FOR THE
Iowa State Bystander

THE
OLDEST
COLORED
JOURNAL IN
IOWA

and the leading paper in the North-west.

It Goes Into
76 Counties in Iowa
20 States in the Union
2 Foreign Countries.

Agents in 24 towns in Iowa and correspondence from many different states.

DIPHTHERIA
AND
SCARLET FEVER
ARE
DANGEROUS

BUT
PERFECTLY
HARMLESS IF YOU USE

MUCO-SOLVENT

CONTENTMENT IS BETTER
THAN RICHES.

But man is so constituted—his
spiritual life, that contentment depends
not alone upon his food. To make
a man thoroughly dissatisfied
is as easy as it is to make
him happy.

Milled only by
SHANNON & MOTT CO.
DES MOINES, IOWA.
Satisfaction Guaranteed.

THE
Afro-American Hotel

...On European Plan.
Charming rooms and extensive halls.
Suites for families—Etc, Etc.

First Class in Every Particular.

Shannon & Mott Co., Prop.
XIII. APPENDIX F

STORY AND FEATURE ILLUSTRATIONS
1910–1919
ALWAYS OUT TO WIN WHOEVER IS BOSS

SMASHED BY THE AUSTRIAN SHELLS

ALWAYS OUT TO WIN WHOEVER IS BOSS

SMASHED BY THE AUSTRIAN SHELLS

-- The Best Musical Show Since Eve was Born --

GRAND OPERA HOUSE

Four Nights Sunday, April 16, with Matinee Sunday

J. LUBRIE HILL

AND

40 COLORED STARS 40

In the Three Act Musical Comedy

MY FRIEND FROM DIXIE

PRETTIEST GIRL IN AMERICA

---

Thanksgiving
XIV. APPENDIX G

ADVERTISING
1910–1919
Mrs. Stewart's
School of Beauty Culture
We teach Hair-dressing
Manicuring and Chiropractic
Diplomas Given
622 W. B. Way
COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA

SPECIAL SALE
On Diamonds, Watches Wrist Watches For Soldier Boys & Their Sweet
hearts $3.00 and up
Diamond Rings, Lave-
liers, And Broaches, $5.00 and up
Suit Cases, All Kind
$1.00 and up.
Trunks, All Makes,
$3.00 to $15.
Regulation Army Trunk
$7 to $10.00
Every Article Guaranteed.

O. COHEN
308 Walnut St.

Bradford's Barber Shop
204 3rd Street
DENTAL WORK
BATHS

Bradford's Pool Hall
M. J. BRADFORD, Prop
A LINE OF TOBACCO, CIGARS & SOFT DRINKS
Phone Wat. 1910 737 Walnut St.
DES MOINES, IOWA

REMEMBER
Lud Strothers' Cafe
417 W. Third Street
Meals and Short Orders at
all hours. Quick Service.
We serve on the
European style.
L. G. Strothers,
Proprietor
Des Moines

DR. FRED PALMER'S
SKIN WHITENER
Whitens dark or brown skin.
Removes all blemishes
and ensures the skin to grow
whiter. Used by thousands.

Oakland, Cal., Jan. 30, 1917.

JACQUE PHARMACY Co.
At the time I went to put
for a $10 box of Dr. Fred Pal-
mer's Skin Whitener, and I
liked it very much, but I
neglected and neglected of send-
ing for any more. Now that
my skin seems to be getting
in bad shape from the cold
winds, etc., I am sending for
another $1 box, and I think I
will try the Hair Dresser too.
I am sending enclosed
the sum of $1.

MAMIE JOHNSON.

I FORGOT THIS ORDER
"Please take this order: I forgot to
leave it on the train this morning.
Get it up to the house without fail, won't
you?"

The business man frequently hurries to catch his train
and forgets to leave the order for house supplies at the
grocer's or the butcher's.

Finding a memorandum in his pocket, he corrects the
error over the Bell Telephone.

Kinky
Hair
You may own this washer
on payments and at a re-
duced price besides

By a very fortunate

circumstance, we have

secured at a low price

a quantity of the well

known

O. K. WASHING MACHINES

They are guaranteed to do good
work, and they'll do it easier than
most hand power machines.

The regular price is $10.00
Our Special .................. $7.50

A dollar a week if you prefer

CHASE & WEST
616 between Walnut and Locust

Iowa Telephone

Company

Kinky Hair

Booker Washington

FOR SALE
Leather Binding $9.00
Every home should have one

E. N. B. THOMPSON,
Custodian Office
XV. APPENDIX H

ENTERTAINMENTS
1894–1919
Midland Chautauqua.

JUNE 24 to JULY 4, 1905.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 4th

PICNIC

Perry, Iowa

At Graney's Park, At the Graney Bridge

Band Concert, Piano Playing, Platform Dancing, Ball Game. Admission 10 cents; Dancing Free.

Don't Miss the

BOOZE T. WASHINGTON

In Concert, Washington, D.C., and_refreshments at all hands

Graney's Bridge.

Not to be Missed

Perry, Iowa

At Graney's Park—At the Graney Bridge

Band Concert by Perry Band, Piano Playing, Platform Dancing, Ball Game. Admission 10 cents; Dancing Free.

Not to be Missed

Perry, Iowa

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