Image and Ideology

BLACK-TOWN NEWSPAPER EDITORS, promoters, and their agents employed the tactics common to most town propagandists in the American West and South to entice settlers. Boosters candidly admitted that words were inadequate to describe fully the natural advantages of each community and its hinterland. Most tried, however. In 1888 the editor at Nicodemus apologized for a pen unable to do the town justice, but assured his readers that residents there enjoyed a climate representing a healthy median between the “malaria of the lowland and the intense cold of the north,” inspiring long life, good appetite, and prodigious energy. The countryside around Langston in 1892 was “as fertile as ever was moistened by nature’s falling tears, or kissed by heaven’s sunshine.” With such soil and climate it was little wonder that crops were always bountiful and on occasion yielded valuable by-products, reflected in the case of a farmer near Langston in 1895 whose corn stalks were “almost large enough for house logs.”¹

Only the absence of settlers prevented the transformation of nature’s masterpiece into the garden spot of the continent. To attract those settlers, promoters formed immi-
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traction societies, gave away town lots, sponsored celebrations, arranged excursion tours, dispatched traveling agents, and mailed out booster literature, all aimed at extolling the virtues of the area and coaxing the cautious or disbelieving into the new Eden. Those who came were sometimes forewarned. The editor of the Clearview paper in 1904 cautioned people contemplating their first visit to that town that after beholding it with the naked eye leaving might be difficult. Therefore, he instructed them to “bring your trunk when you come.”

Sometimes booster literature was aimed directly at those who might consider leaving rather than at the prospective buyer. Blacks were frequently warned of the inhumanity found in the white-dominated world just beyond the town limits. And although life might seem difficult, residents of the black town could rest assured that economic prosperity would eventually come to the patient and industrious who stuck it out. Quitters faced certain disaster. Those who grumbled about high prices, a heavy tax burden, or poor services were labeled “town knockers” and admonished to mend their ways and remain silent. “If you can’t boost, don’t knock,” counseled the Clearview Patriarch in May, 1912. Editors stereotyped those who complained as lazy, shiftless malcontents lacking initiative and jealous of the success of others.

To counteract unfavorable internal comments and the possible appeal of other towns, newspapers occasionally ran stories on the high cost of living in other areas. M. C. Inlow, editor of the Nicodemus Cyclone, advised Nicodemus readers in November, 1887, that “the people of Graham County and western Kansas need not think for a single moment that hard times are confined principally in their midst. . . . The tightness of money is universal.” The following spring, the Cyclone interviewed a visitor who reported high land prices and living expenses in the West, convincing the editor that northwest Kansas offered “greater advantages to a poor man than Cal[ifornia].” In 1908 the Boley Beacon attacked those
opposing a new school building, because taxes in Boley were supposedly much lower than in other states.\(^4\)

Those who criticized and those who departed were branded as traitors to the race, and black-town boosters continually played upon the guilt and fear of racial members living in the South in order to attract them to the new communities and to hold them once they arrived. Stories disclosing atrocities against the race dotted the columns of most black newspapers throughout the United States. Black-town leaders, however, used such incidents as a promotional device. Promoters in Nicodemus and the three Oklahoma towns ridiculed those who seemed content to live in terror in the South, unable to protect themselves or families from white insults, discrimination, and physical harm. The black-town press detailed and embroidered upon accounts of racial injustice and violence in southern states and printed verbatim speeches containing racial slurs by prominent politicians such as James K. Vardaman, governor of Mississippi. These stories usually prompted editorial comment inviting the abused to move to a black town where people enjoyed the full benefits of political freedom and economic security. “Langston City,” argued the \textit{Herald} editor in August, 1894, was “the negro’s refuge from lynching, burning at the stake and other lawlessness.” In early 1906, the \textit{Boley Progress} equated moving there with the Pilgrim’s search for freedom.\(^5\)

The maintenance of true manhood, argued the promoters, demanded an immediate exodus from a hostile environment. B. Kernan Bruce, editor at Clearview in 1904, seemed convinced that in time the “best element of the race” would depart the South while the “chicken-hearted and ignorant Negro will stay there and become a shy beast.” Bruce urged those who were determined to remain in Alabama to visit the local graveyard to call on Ham’s mother. Some editors followed the approach of the \textit{Langston City Herald}, suggesting that a subscription to the newspaper provided concerned blacks with the opportunity to keep abreast of the latest brutality against the race in southern states.\(^6\)
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A deep sense of urgency permeated the propaganda issued by most black-town boosters. Much of the argument for haste, however, reflected nothing more than the "Come! Rush! Boom!" mentality of all American land speculators and real estate agents from the colonial period to the present. Each day of hesitation, according to their pronouncements, jeopardized chances to get in on the beginning of a marvelous investment where possibilities for quick wealth loomed just over the horizon. Town newspapers heralded the weekly arrival of new families who always found the surrounding countryside a wonder to behold. Nicodemus was full of "strangers looking for homes in this new Garden of Eden," according to the Western Cyclone in 1887, while the great influx of newcomers into Boley in December, 1905, had forced developers there to open several new additions to the town site just to accommodate them. Surprises were also possible. In 1912, potential Clearview settlers were cautioned to expect the unusual; those who purchased land for farming might later discover that they also owned "a coal bed or an oil pool." To the boosters, increased population and rising land values meant a spurt in economic prosperity for all and unlimited growth in the future. Usually eager to elaborate on any subject at great length, Hugh K. Lightfoot, the Nicodemus editor, found one word adequate to describe the phenomenal activity in his town during March, 1887: "Boom! Boom!! BOOM!!" 7

Promoters felt that appeals to racial pride were an effective drawing device, and many of their booster campaigns centered upon the white belief in black inferiority. Segregated and isolated from white society, blacks could disprove current racial theories as well as bolster the validity of their demands for political and economic equality, activity which would ultimately eliminate white prejudice. In March, 1905, the Boley Progress appealed to blacks to "come and help to prove to the caucasian race . . . that the Negro is a law-making and law-abiding citizen and help solve the great racial problem before us." And in April of the following
year, the *Western Age* proudly announced that the "Negroes of Langston are daily demonstrating to the world that the race can form a municipal government and conduct its official machinery as good as other races."\(^8\)

Boomer literature also warned blacks that the new towns perhaps represented their last opportunity to acquire a home or farm of their own. Furthermore, the promoters insisted that ownership of property, and especially land, constituted the first step toward full citizenship. As long as blacks remained mobile and lacked property, political freedom would continue to elude them, relegating the race to a continuing life of poverty and discrimination. As the *Boley Progress* phrased it in March, 1905, "if you will come here now and get a good location . . . we will be able to demand our rights." Pointing out that two-thirds of the black voters of Logan County in 1906 earned their living farming, S. Douglas Russell, editor of the *Western Age* at Langston, concluded, "they are indeed free men, the bosses can't touch them." Blacks who purchased land also blocked the encroachment of whites who, it was claimed, were pouring into the area and buying up choice farms. In the spring of 1906, the *Boley Progress* reported on the tide of white homeseekers entering Indian Territory, cautioning the race that if the available lands fell into the "possession of the white people the hope for the Negro is gone."\(^9\)

Those seeking settlers for the black towns also called upon members of the race to sacrifice now for the benefit of future generations. Blacks alone must and could solve the race issue once and for all, they argued, and its leaders now held the solution within their grasp if only the black population of the country recognized the need for solidarity through colonization in segregated communities. "Your children's children will call you blessed if you take advantage of this wonderful opportunity," argued the *Boley Progress* in 1905. And in a speech to the first colony of Mound Bayou settlers, Isaiah T. Montgomery exhorted them not to stagger at the difficulties they faced. Calling upon them to think of
the past while looking to the future, Montgomery asked, "Have you not for centuries braved the miasma and hewed down forests like these at the behest of a Master? Can you not do it now for yourselves and your children unto successive generations?" Even if financial rewards failed to come to the living, to the promoters the black town represented more than just another incorporated community. In an advertisement appealing to southern farmers in 1906, Thomas M. Haynes, Boley's promoter, compared his town to the pyramids of Egypt, "an imperishable attestation of the power, might and intellectual genius of a race."10

In short, black-town developers tried to convince potential settlers that the success of their community would eliminate poverty and racial prejudice, prompting whites to extend to blacks the full rights of American citizenship. Several settlers who articulated reasons for moving to black towns mentioned the desire to escape from white discrimination as a major reason prompting relocation. According to one early resident of an Oklahoma town, people moved there because they wanted to be free and "they was tired of the way white folks was treating them," while an ex-slave who came to Indian Territory with her father claimed blacks "came in searchin' for education and freedom. I mean they come here lookin' for de same things lots of Negroes is goin' North for now." To several, leaving the South meant gaining self-respect and personal dignity. A farmer recalled that living in Texas required having to "bow down and grin to all the poor white folks. I even had to call little poor white boys 'Mister,' " but in Langston, "no matter how little you be here, you can still be a man." While outside Boley, asserted one of its settlers, "you always have that prejudice to contend with," but inside the town limits "everybody can be somebody."11

Proving that blacks possessed the ability to incorporate a town and govern it without white knowledge or supervision ranked especially high with some settlers. One man who moved from Texas to Langston in 1892 at the age of
twelve remembered that in its formative years people there displayed an intense pride in the community because “everybody wanted to prove to the world that colored folks could run a town without white folks.” And although Langston businessmen claimed they earned few profits in some years they continued to operate just to demonstrate “that the colored man was capable of running his own business.” The practice of attempting to exclude whites tended to unify divergent groups which sometimes clashed over municipal policies and regulations. One black-town resident argued that “we might have fought among ourselves because we didn’t know nothing about organizing a town, but we was hellbent on keeping whites out.”

In addition to race pride and escaping to freedom, the quest for economic security also attracted blacks to the new communities. The attitudes and actions of R. B. Scruggs, born in the South in 1861, exemplified many black-town residents. Scruggs, who described himself at the time of his departure from the South as “just an old green boy, never away from home,” moved to Nicodemus in 1878 because he thought migration represented his one “chance to own a real piece of land.” Upon his arrival in Kansas, Scruggs realized that the abundant game and fertile soil promised by W. R. Hill and other promoters constituted nothing but a cruel hoax designed to attract settlers. Nevertheless, he filed on a claim near Nicodemus and then accepted part-time employment—in livery barns in Stockton and Ellsworth, odd jobs in Bunker Hill, and railroad work near Salina—in order to support his family. In time, Scruggs built up his holdings to a total of 720 acres. Asked about the hardships of the early years, he later remembered, “no matter how bad it got . . . we was just so proud of the land.”

Nicodemus drew other early settlers primarily from the Upper South. Of the original 149 families, a majority came from approximately the same geographic location, the area north of Lexington, Kentucky. Although most of the first families came from the South, others arrived from Rhode
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Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, and Vermont. A scattering of settlers from Sweden, Italy, France, and England could also be counted among the first arrivals. The average family size in early Nicodemus consisted of from four to five members with an adult median age of forty-four. The editor of the Ellis Standard described a party of eighty individuals bound for Nicodemus who passed through his town during the fall of 1877 as "not advanced beyond middle age and seemingly in robust health." Convinced that a new life would come through the ownership and cultivation of the land, these poor rural blacks first responded to the booster literature and speeches of Nicodemus promoters. Professionals and those who later came to occupy positions of social, economic, and political prominence and power in the town migrated from the northern states.

A somewhat different pattern of settlement and leadership developed farther south in Mound Bayou. Settlers from the South, a majority in their mid-thirties, moved to the new town during the 1890's. More than half of the original fifty were from Mississippi, with one coming from as far away as the West Indies. At Mound Bayou's inception it seemed only natural that Isaiah T. Montgomery should exert leadership since Montgomery had plotted the town site and migrated there with several of his former laborers. As development continued, however, economically prosperous blacks from biracial communities in the state soon became the major decision makers. Indicative of this trend was Charles Banks. Before moving to Mound Bayou in 1903, he had operated a successful mercantile business in Clarksdale, Mississippi. After organizing the Bank of Mound Bayou the following year he became the town's most prominent figure as well as one of Mississippi's most politically active Republicans.

From the very beginning, promoters in Boley, Langston, and Clearview appealed to blacks living in the South while expending little time or money to attract people residing in
other regions. Most of the black settlers who entered these towns, therefore, came from the Deep South and the border states of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri. A majority of the first settlers in the three Oklahoma towns were sharecroppers or laborers drawn to the area by the possibility of acquiring farms in Indian Territory or in the Unassigned Lands. In all three cases, black professionals trained in the South arrived later and assumed leadership positions in the new communities.  

Aside from the skin color and mutual poverty of their residents, Nicodemus, Mound Bayou, Clearview, Boley, and Langston possessed several common characteristics which differentiated them from white communities of similar size during the initial stages of development. A large number of residents lived inside the town limits but earned their livelihood during the day by farming land they owned or rented in the surrounding countryside. Also, rapid population growth frequently resulted from the efforts of town boosters or their agents who were able to lure large family groups, with strong kinship ties inside each family, from the same geographic area. Individual settlers continued to trickle into the towns, but population during the early years usually increased in spurts with as many as one hundred immigrants arriving at the same time. Many persons of each town were acquainted with, if indeed not distantly related to, one another before they arrived. This mutual background of shared friends and family no doubt helped to ensure group cohesiveness and mitigate conflict. Rather than the typical pattern of development of most small agricultural communities in the West and South—that is, the arrival of the farmer, then the merchant, the artisan, and later the professional—in some of the black towns all these economic and social groups arrived at approximately the same time. Finally, although black and white settlers alike shared the hardships of the frontier environment and the difficulty of attempting to build a rural community at a time when all national indices pointed in the opposite direction, because of their lack of
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capital, the absence of skills, inadequate farm machinery, and racial prejudice, blacks migrating there suffered deprivations unknown to the typical white settler.

As in all young communities, the black-town press maintained a constant chatter of optimistic predictions of future growth and prosperity. Black-town editors, however, went further. The new towns offered a controlled environment, isolated from the dominant white society, permitting the economic and moral uplift of the race. The addition of each new business, church, street, lodge, or person ensured the continued economic success of the venture and also illustrated the potential capabilities of blacks in general. Boosters tried to convince residents that pride in the race and pride in the community were synonymous, and each day the town continued to exist reinforced the argument that blacks could improve if given the opportunity. This double mission of boosterism and race pride added an extra optimism and an ideological orientation to black-town newspapers seldom found in their white counterparts.

The racial ideology in part explains the type of local news which filled the columns of the black-town press. Starting with so little, any growth seemed monumental. Editors frequently launched into lengthy discussions on any event, from the program of a Sunday school to the construction of a house, indicating town growth or the economic and moral uplift of the race. As he had done with similar meetings in the past, the editor of the Western Age at Langston pointed to a gathering at the New Hope Baptist Church in July, 1908, as indicative of "mental, moral and intellectual improvement." 18

Black-town leaders blamed the race for many of its problems, and editors played upon the theme of racial inferiority to attract settlers, neutralize internal dissension, and to promote unity and pride in the town. Black inferiority, they argued, resulted from bad habits developed during years of dependence and bondage, imitation of whites, lack of equal opportunity, and white exploitation, rather than innate dif-
ferences. In the environment of a segregated community, blacks could uplift themselves morally, accumulate capital, acquire business and trade skills, and learn self-government. This would convince even the most doubting members of white society that they deserved acceptance as equals. Self-help, moral uplift, and racial solidarity, as those terms were employed by Booker T. Washington, comprised the formula, the isolated black town the laboratory.

Since skin color, poverty, and uplifting the race to the point of white acceptance constituted the common bonds in black towns, few similarities existed between them and the various utopian communities established in the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In many cases those who joined in the utopian experiments rejected the values of the larger society and sought to withdraw from its real and imagined evils. Although a few black-town settlers mentioned moving there in order to protect their children from white discrimination, from their arrival they generally accepted the capitalist system and the Protestant ethic. Like the Booker T. Washington philosophy, the black-town ideology contained an implicit assumption that at some time in the future the race would be accepted into the mainstream of American life. In the case of the black town that meant that ultimately it would cease to exist. Boosters either failed to recognize the internal contradiction in their own argument or simply ignored it as a reasonable possibility in the foreseeable future. If the town succeeded as a racial experiment, it failed as a viable community, thereby spelling economic disaster for those with investments there.

If black-town editors praised those who pursued endeavors consistent with racial uplift, they also attempted to set the moral tone of the community and to regulate social behavior by strongly condemning individual and group activity thought to be antisocial or detrimental to the image of the town and race. Editorials and local news items sometimes warned citizens that bad habits and conduct might
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discourage potential settlers, adversely influence women and young children, and discredit blacks in the eyes of whites living in nearby towns. Although they seldom did it, editors continually threatened to ridicule publicly those people who misbehaved by printing their names in the newspaper. Some editors possessed more than moral suasion. In May, 1908, for example, S. Douglas Russell of the Western Age suggested it was "about time to stop the . . . loafing and marble playing on the principal streets" in Langston. Those involved would have been wise to respond. Russell was also justice of the peace.

Furthermore, almost all editors opposed leisure time spent in idle activities. The work ethic was essential to the economic success of the community, and adults, they believed, should place high priority on the example they set for the younger generation. Men and women who spent time at the local croquet court, at baseball games, on Sunday excursions rather than at church, or whiled away summer hours on street corners encouraged idleness among the young and degraded work in their eyes. Since it was believed that gambling was a direct result of boredom and monotony, the city fathers of each black town passed ordinances prohibiting games of chance. Similar to most small rural communities of the time, however, the town marshal, either by design or neglect, failed to visit the back rooms of some businesses on main street. Years later, a resident of Nicodemus recalled that lodge meetings and public gatherings were always held on the second floor of one particular building, while the "back room of the Talbert Drug Store was used by those seeking less educational entertainment."

The attitude toward drinking intoxicants varied over time and from town to town depending upon its legality, prohibitionist sentiment, the influence of local ministers, and the personal preferences of the current owner or editor of the newspaper. Since the sale of liquor was illegal in Bolivar County, Mississippi, the leaders of Mound Bayou faced no open opposition when they banned it from the town. When
an election was held to legalize liquor sales in the county, Mound Bayou voters rejected the proposition, perhaps responding to the warning of Isaiah T. Montgomery that alcohol attracted undesirable whites into the community. In those towns where the sale of intoxicants was permitted,
persons selling wine, beer, and liquor usually paid a high occupations tax in order to operate such a business. In Langston, for example, the town treasurer received $9 per month from its one liquor retailer, an amount exceeding the total monthly fees collected from all other licensed businesses. During its settlement, Nicodemus promoters made clear their opposition to alcohol. At the time people bought lots in Nicodemus, they signed an agreement which forbade them from selling intoxicating beverages on their property for a period of five years from the date of purchase, and the town charter contained a provision prohibiting liquor shops and saloons. Prohibitionist sentiment remained strong in Nicodemus, encouraged by the town newspaper and the formation of a temperance society in December, 1879. Not all Nicodemus residents, however, favored total abstinence. Approximately fifty people signed a petition in early 1887 seeking permission to allow Walt Korb to dispense "prescription whiskey" at his drug store.22

Aside from the legal and religious aspects of liquor sales and consumption, black-town editors pointed to the absence of saloons as an indication that blacks were a moral, law-abiding race and that a segregated community offered the best environment in which to raise children. Editors sometimes invited the leaders of neighboring white towns either to follow the black-town example of banning saloons or to restrain their wandering citizens who overindulged. In July, 1886, the editor at Nicodemus warned Webster, Kansas, to "keep her whiskey guzzling young bloods at home, or they might get taught a little morality when they come up this way in the future."23 Over and above the moral question and the racial and town image, several black leaders opposed the legalization of liquor in their communities for very pragmatic reasons. Liquor sales, they insisted, encouraged drunkenness among those least able to afford it. More important, saloons attracted promiscuous white men searching for black women, and such encounters increased the possibility of racial conflict and physical violence.
Newspaper editors attempted to project the image of the black town as a peaceful rural village free of the crime and violence they claimed characterized biracial communities. If unmolested by whites, they argued, the race was law-abiding and the tranquility found in their community proved the point. According to Arthur Tallman, editor of the *Western Cyclone*, in May, 1886, Nicodemus had “no whiskey shop; no billiard hall or other gambling hole . . . [and] no drunkenness or rowdism, no cursing or whooping disturbs the peace of the place.” And Mound Bayou leaders claimed that because of the absence of problems the constable and deputy sheriff were the only idle men in the town. Editors seemed especially sensitive to suggestions that black-town conflict or crime equaled that found in other communities of a similar size, and they angrily responded to stories in white newspapers implying the contrary. When a fight between two men broke out at the 1887 Nicodemus Emancipation Celebration, most of the weekly newspapers in Graham County reported the incident. In responding, the Nicodemus editor pointed to the apparent double standard of news reporting applied by the newspapers in Stockton, Logan, and Webster who were “howling about the fracas, [but] say little about the same thing in their own towns . . . and because our skin happens to be a little dark we are to be condemned in the severest terms for what two outside strangers did.”

Spokesmen complained that what little violence existed in black towns normally occurred late at night or on holidays and weekends when outsiders entered the community. During its early years Boley residents were sometimes aroused from bed to fight late-night clashes with the ex-slaves of the Indians who tried to shoot up the town or by an occasional brawl with railroad workers. Citizens of Nicodemus faced a similar problem. On July 4, 1888, a railroad construction crew bent upon celebrating American independence visited the town around midnight, and, according to the newspaper, the streets were “alive with noisy, good natured fellows intent
on having fun. They got it—several got it in the neck.”

Despite booster disclaimers, not all serious confrontations resulted from encounters with whites or with those living outside the town limits. Benjamin T. Green, a Mound Bayou merchant and one of its founders, was shot and killed in his store in January, 1896, following an argument with a local customer over a five-cent box of rivets. And at the 1909 Clearview Christmas celebration the town constable shot and killed two blacks. Moses J. Jones, city attorney of Boley, told a reporter for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* in February, 1913, that “there has never been a serious quarrel here, and there has never been a killing in the town.”

Jones evidently forgot the shotgun-rifle duel on Boley’s main street six years earlier between Mayor J. R. Ringo and James S. Oldham, a local farmer. Oldham shot and killed Ringo over the mayor’s enforcement of a town ordinance requiring the confinement of his livestock.

Such incidents seemed to be the exception, however. Most reported crime or violence in the black towns involved the usual fights between men, public drunkenness, failure to confine chickens, petty theft from households or businesses, galloping horses or driving buggies at high speed, discharging firearms inside the town limits, and a host of other misdemeanors common to small rural communities. The first fight inside Nicodemus, for example, was allegedly a harmless scuffle between two ministers following a heated exchange over the interpretation of a passage of scripture. In 1907, Mound Bayou’s leaders claimed that during the first twenty years of its chartered existence only three people from the town had been bound over to circuit court for trial, two of whom were charged with theft. And of the 163 criminal cases in the previous ten-year period, sixty-four were for disturbing the peace and twenty-eight involved trivial offenses that never went to trial. Charles Banks, a Mound Bayou developer, boasted in a 1912 advertising brochure that since its founding there had never been a case of rape in the community and only one homicide.
The actual extent of violence and crime probably fell somewhere between the black claims that no serious conflicts occurred in the towns and the reports of some white newspaper editors in surrounding communities who seemed to delight in exaggerating the most minor deviations of blacks from the exact letter of the law. Excluding conflicts stemming from racial antagonisms—that is, when whites or Indians entered the black towns, during the early years of their existence—the towns were probably more peaceful than biracial communities of a similar size. Several forces worked simultaneously to mitigate violence and reduce crime. Many town leaders possessed a good deal of power and were quick to point out that antisocial behavior hindered moral uplift, projected a poor racial image to whites, and jeopardized the future of all. Black criminals who committed even minor offenses were worse than white criminals—they betrayed the race. Many residents owned property, some for the first time, and even those who did not hold title to a farm, house, or town lot enjoyed an economic security unknown in their previous environment. Leaders continued to preach to this group that their continued upward mobility in large part depended upon the success of the town-building venture. Many members of the community were thus intolerant of any conduct which might threaten their new status. People who refused to work or were considered undesirable citizens were either asked to reform or physically forced to leave. Finally, in most cases the black towns lacked a large propertyless lower class that would have been frustrated by the economic exploitation of whites and, therefore, prone toward acts of crime and violence. Although exploitation existed, that suffered by those occupying the lower stratum of black-town society was probably less than the exploitation imposed upon blacks living in a mixed community. Furthermore, it seems obvious that once most residents recognized that the black town would eventually fail, or had reached a growth limit far short of that anticipated, frustration increased, precipitated by the enormous
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discrepancy between the raised expectations of the settlers and their actual achievement. At that point, violence and crime no doubt became more commonplace.

Town leaders usually blamed blacks for past and current problems and warned that acceptance into American society would come slowly and only after it was earned. Until that time, leaders stressed that the race question could be solved if blacks built a spotless reputation, superior even to that of whites, and acquired property. Although the total environment of a segregated community provided the ideal setting, moral uplift began at home, and the ownership of that home was the first step. Residents and potential settlers were told that all great races had achieved greatness only after they stopped wandering, and that as long as blacks continued to move from place to place seeking better conditions (but never finding them) they would be subservient to less transient races. Property provided its holder and the race with stability and dignity as well as political, economic, and social status. Buying a farm or home and laboring to pay for them set an excellent example for the young, showing them the personal economic rewards to be reaped from hard work.

Like much of rural America at the turn of the century, black-town residents believed that young children were born innately cruel, amoral, lazy, and dishonest. Since the younger generation represented the key to racial uplift over time, they could become worthwhile adults only through strict discipline at home and especially in school. Black-town parents insisted that teachers concentrate on maintaining order in the classroom while instilling pupils with the work ethic and Christian principles. Naturally, black-town churches and schools worked hand-in-hand toward that end. Teachers were usually active in local Sunday school classes. Some ministers earned a livelihood during the week teaching school, and those who did not entered classrooms to give brief talks on such topics as punctuality, thoroughness, vanity, and ambition.
Although black-town residents supported education, some newspaper editors ridiculed "high book learning," arguing that the race must first educate children's hands and avoid useless school subjects of little immediate value in everyday life. Blacks with too liberal an education, it was believed, lacked courage and refused to stand and fight for the race, and the editor at Clearview failed to count the well-educated among those "trying to earn an honest living." Vocational education, on the other hand, would bring economic classes together, prevent the abuse of child labor, and eventually bring racial prosperity. Teach them a trade, argued S. Douglas Russell at Langston in 1909—children must "first learn how to earn bread and butter." Training in manual skills began early in most black-town schools and, consistent with the Washington philosophy, such courses extended into the college years. At Mound Bayou, first-grade children learned sewing and basketry, while three of the four departments at what later became Langston University emphasized training useful in workshops, homes, and on farms. Businessmen in some towns also helped. One Mound Bayou blacksmith shop filled the needs of area farmers and also served as a training school for the instruction of young boys wishing to learn the skill.

To encourage school attendance and to boost circulation, editors sometimes held contests offering to fund for one year the educational expenses of the child who sold the most newspaper subscriptions. Despite such efforts, few black-town schools ran a nine-month term, and those that tried found parents reluctant to send children during the planting and harvesting seasons. "You can always raise another cotton crop," lectured the Boley Progress in late September, 1905, "but there is only one time the child can get an education." Attendance at Clearview was compulsory, but employed children were excused as long as they were working. As late as December 21 the editor at Clearview was still urging farm parents to enroll their children in school and keep them there for the remainder of the 1911–
1912 term. In general, the attendance rate for boys, as compared to girls, remained low, with many boys dropping out completely before finishing the seventh grade.

Although isolated from the dominant society, black-town school patrons attempted to compete with whites for county funds, and the resulting discrimination hindered black attempts to provide adequate educational facilities and qualified teachers. In 1904, Clearview parents were forced to form a "subscription school" after they learned that the Okfuskee County Superintendent had failed to submit a list of children living in Clearview, depriving the town of any public funds for education. During the same year, white schools in Bolivar County, Mississippi, in which Mound Bayou was located, received 79 percent and black schools 21 percent of all available funds even though black children outnumbered white. Such a situation forced black-town residents to finance their own schools, many of which operated for only a few months each year, or to seek outside philanthropy.

In laying out Mound Bayou in the late 1880's, Isaiah Montgomery and Benjamin Green set aside a plot of land for the location of the Mound Bayou Institute. The town then entered into an agreement with the American Missionary Society, which constructed several buildings on the site and financed a portion of the instructional costs. The institute offered instruction through the twelfth grade concentrating on courses in domestic science and agriculture. By 1912, the school served approximately 172 students per year, some of whom were black children from nearby communities in the Yazoo Delta. In 1900, the General Baptist Convention helped to establish the Mound Bayou Industrial College, which also specialized in vocational training. The two institutions, plus a public school, coexisted until 1920 when a merger was arranged. Boley also received help in a similar form in 1906 when the Colored Methodist Episcopal Conference authorized creation of a high school for blacks who lived in districts without them. Throughout the school's
brief operation, the CME Church funded most of the costs of the Oklahoma Normal and Industrial Institute near Boley. In 1893, two years after Langston's incorporation, a priest and two nuns from Belgium opened a Catholic school there. A gift from the Drexel family of Philadelphia made the school possible and permitted Father Anciaux and two sisters to instruct approximately one hundred students free of charge. 37

Enterprising teachers or businessmen who sought to establish private schools and colleges in the black towns found it difficult to operate them on a paying basis. Residents witnessed several such attempts, however, and the career of J. C. Leftwich typified a few who exploited the black hunger for education. After traveling in Oklahoma and surrounding states seeking students and funds in 1910, he opened the Creek-Seminole Industrial College at Boley. In recruiting teachers, Leftwich neglected to inform them that upon their arrival in Boley they would be expected to hustle their own salaries as well as food for the students. When confronted with complaints, he is said to have responded, "This school is organized to train minds, not appetites." 38 After the building burned and some teachers instituted legal action against him, Leftwich left Boley. Four years later he was in Clearview where he opened the Creek-Seminole Agricultural College. In order to help finance the new school, James E. Thompson, Clearview's most prominent citizen, appealed to the State Board of Agriculture for funds. Leftwich, meanwhile, had assumed the editorship of Thompson's newspaper, the *Clearview Patriarch*, and in addition to advertising the college through its columns, he embarked on a speaking tour asking for aid from white groups in Shawnee, Oklahoma City, and other towns. The pair evidently met with some success, because in August, 1916, the college advertised the opening of the fall term with seven separate departments. Leftwich's location and activities during the next three years are unknown, but by 1919 he had established the Agricultural School for Negro Boys and Girls at
Bookertee, Oklahoma, another black town in the immediate area. In March of that year the *Guymon Herald* reported the introduction of a resolution in the Oklahoma Senate proposing to buy the Bookertee school building and its adjoining eighty-acre tract of land for $1 with the proviso that the state would continue to fund its operation in the future. Fortunately, not all those who attempted to bring private education to the black towns possessed Leftwich's entrepreneurial spirit. Many, such as G. W. Wood, who incorporated the Boley Agricultural and Business College in 1912 to offer night classes to adults, found the desire for education strong but the money necessary to attend lacking.  

When black children were not in school, it was assumed that they would respond to a gentle, yet strong-willed mother who worked to create a home environment conducive to personal and racial uplift. In addition to performing ordinary household tasks, married women were perceived as a strong moral force, lovingly controlling and manipulating their men in order to channel male energies into those areas considered beneficial to family, race, and nation. "You very seldom find a harsh, unpleasant man where you find a loving wife," argued L. W. Warren, the editor at Clearview in 1911. A good woman brings "hubby home early, [and] keeps him from the Club, [which] fills the larder and puts better clothes on the wife's back." Those women who doubted him were advised to "manage your husbands . . . and see results."  

Warren, like other black-town editors, believed that historically all great races had advanced because of the strength and purity of their women, and he frequently editorialized on the duties and obligations of wives and mothers praising their virtue and devotion. If, on the other hand, the speed of racial uplift appeared to be slowing, he was quick to point to jealous, self-centered females as the cause. In addition, young men contemplating marriage were cautioned to search for sincere, hard-working partners while avoiding "worthless girls who have the giggling and spending vices reduced to a frazzle." In divorces, Warren blamed the
wife 98 percent of the time, husbands 1 percent, attributing the remainder to the absence of love.

It was through such spokesmen that black communities were able to exert considerable social and legal pressure to keep marriages together, separate those living out of wedlock, and point eligible young people toward matrimony. Although for several issues during the spring of 1895 the *Langston City Herald* jokingly followed the nightly romantic exploits of “The Fast Stepper,” a mysterious, unidentified local bachelor, single men were usually encouraged to marry at an early age, buy a home, and raise a family. One literary society echoed an attitude common to all segregated communities when its members debated the proposition that “Batchelors Are A Detriment To Langston.” Divorces and unmarried couples living together were disapproved of. Town opinion-makers preached against divorce and lent moral and political support to local judges who refused to grant them except on serious grounds such as physical cruelty and desertion. Single and divorced women were denied membership in the Ladies Commercial Club of Boley, a group organized in 1908 to meet biweekly for sewing and social activities. When a local church survey revealed approximately forty unmarried couples living together in Mound Bayou, the offending parties were contacted and offered the choice between a quick wedding ceremony or assistance in leaving the colony. Most opted for matrimony.

Prostitution was seen as an evil which threatened family structure, the very core of racial uplift. During the early years of settlement, officials in some of the towns found it necessary to close the back room of the local billiard parlor and invite its temporary occupant to move on. The money earned from picking cotton or from the sale of crops also prompted local marshals to watch out for enterprising ladies who visited during special celebrations or on fall weekends. Prostitution and extra- or pre-marital relations were considered bad enough, but sexual intimacy between a black-town woman and a white man was worse. It jeopardized
racial purity. Some residents would have agreed with the editor at Langston in January, 1908, when he proposed that the Oklahoma legislature pass a law against miscegenation; male offenders would be hung, females imprisoned. Although whites were usually blamed for initiating such contacts, the community condemned black-town women who sold themselves. In 1910, for example, the *Boley Progress* warned that "this thing of our women meeting white men at the trains, under any pretext, don't go with the people [here]." Black men were very defensive about whites who entered their town searching for female companions. Newspapers such as the *Western Age* at Langston cautioned white men to "keep out of our back yard after sun-down."

The emphasis upon a stable family life and its protection from forces threatening to destroy it stemmed directly from the black towns' patriarchal family structure. During the early years of their development, large family groups, not single transients, settled most of the towns. Thus, the so-called matriarchal family was absent. In a few cases the grandfather stood at the apex of a pyramid composed of many members; and if the extended family owned property, controlled capital, or could advance credit, kinship ties were very important in determining one's social and economic position in the community. In the case of Mound Bayou, membership in the Montgomery, Francis, Green, Banks, or Booze families, all of which were interconnected in some way through blood, marriage, or business investments, assured a certain degree of security and status.

Although newspaper editors and promoters alike preached egalitarianism while boasting of an internal consensus spawned by race pride, each black town possessed a definite class system. During the first few years of settlement, classes were less definable—servant and worker, master and mistress hoed the same fields, ate at the same table, and slept in the same tent or cabin. But as population increased, fortunes grew. Each new day witnessed the arrival of newcomers who had not endured the early years of hardship and
hunger, and distinctions in wealth and position became more discernible. Even then, classes tended to blend into one another, and upward mobility remained possible for those with enough ambition or good fortune to acquire property. The black town lacked capital, and it was only a matter of time until those who had it to invest or loan would come to occupy positions of social as well as political and economic prominence.49

Local businessmen and those owning large farms in the immediate vicinity of the town occupied the upper stratum of society. This small proprietorial group, along with less prosperous lawyers, physicians, teachers, ministers, and a few white-collar workers, made the relevant decisions affecting the town. Because these two groups needed each other, much more so than in a racially mixed community where the proprietorial class would have enjoyed contacts with influential whites, they usually united on most issues. Occupation, length of residence, family membership, and education also helped in determining class ranking. Family connections were important, but membership in a poor family was of little value. Since the black-town ideology stressed training in practical skills, formal education alone, even at the college level, failed to provide status. Income, economic security, and business aggressiveness, however, overshadowed all other factors.50

Laborers, artisans, and those small farmers living close enough to be affected by town development made up the large black-town middle class, but this group usually deferred to members of the proprietorial and professional classes who held leadership positions in the community. Merchants and ministers dominated a few black towns, but in most cases the banker, through the allocation of capital in the form of credit and loans, came to be recognized as the premier citizen. In addition to their investments and financial control, the power of such individuals quickly spread to all aspects of town life. They presided over school boards and town councils, funded local newspapers, influenced churches, and or-
organized lodges and fraternal societies. In a few instances bankers even displaced the original town promoter as the actual leader of the community. Although Thomas M. Haynes

in Boley and Isaiah T. Montgomery of Mound Bayou remained the symbolic father figures for most residents, David J. Turner, head of the Farmers and Merchants' Bank, and Charles Banks, cashier of the Bank of Mound Bayou, had assumed leadership in their respective communities within a few years after their arrival.

The wives of many black-town leaders exerted considerable influence in their own right and helped their husbands set the tone of the community by teaching in both public and Sunday schools, directing charities and celebration programs, giving parties, and organizing social clubs. To the people living in Clearview in 1911 there should have been little doubt which family occupied the top position in society. A large picture of James E. Thompson appeared in each weekly issue of the *Patriarch* along with an article written by him, a discussion of his latest activities, or the transcript of a speech he had recently delivered to a local audi-
Debates, discussions, or lectures at the monthly meeting of the Thompson Literary Society provided Clearview ladies with intellectual stimulation. Those women seeking entertainment might join Mrs. Thompson at one of her frequent parties, attend meetings of the Sisters of Ethiopia, a sorority, or the Alpha Club, a social group, both organized by Thompson's wife, Neva.

Over and above income, investments, and political and social influence, town leaders were readily identifiable by the location and size of their residence and their membership in a particular church. Excluding a few wealthy landowners who resided in the country, most upper-class members lived in one section of the town, and the cost and size of their houses clearly set them apart from the average citizen. The most prominent members of Boley lived in its northeast area, while Mound Bayou's upper class constructed homes near the periphery of the town away from the business district. Charles Banks' $12,000 house and Isaiah T. Montgomery's well-shaded twenty-seven-room brick mansion offered a marked contrast to other Mound Bayou residences. The attendance of Banks and Montgomery at the Sunday services of the African Methodist Episcopal Church—although second in total membership in Mound Bayou—indicated their status within the community. In Boley, the size of the Baptist congregation made it a powerful force in the town, and those who sought political office and social prestige found it advantageous to join. 51

Lower-class inhabitants of a black town—primarily transients and a few people temporarily attracted there by the novelty of the community—were too few in number to oppose town leaders. And even some members of the middle class who deeply resented the ostentatious display of wealth and power felt economically intimidated and afraid to voice their feelings publicly. One resident of an Oklahoma black town who was brought there as a small child remembered bitterly that the upper class "built large houses like southern plantations, had luxuries, owned lots of land, possessed ten-
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ants, drove horses with beautiful buggies, and had or tried to have the same thing as a southern aristocrat. . . . Those old boys really controlled everything; they even owned the church; that is, the bank held the mortgage and almost every member of the church owed the bank, so nobody could ever object to nothing."

The institution of slavery and previous geographic location in part determined class structure and antagonisms in the Clearview-Boley area. The physically violent confrontations between Creek freedmen ("Natives") and the ex-slaves of southern planters ("Watchina" or "State Negroes") who moved into what became Okfuskee County subsided after the two towns were permanently established. Natives and Watchinas continued to maintain social distance, however, the former objecting to what they considered Watchinas' acceptance of white discrimination and their willingness to acquiesce to it. Those Natives who had previously held positions of authority in the Creek Nation, or who were listed on Indian rolls and had received land allotments, identified with their former captors. During their early years Boley and Clearview both contained a Native population of approximately 10 percent. In a short time, however, no freedmen lived inside Clearview's town limits although a few freedmen children attended school there. One freedman recalled that "when I went to Clearview Negro School there was more of them than us [so] I buddied with my own." Even where Watchinas and Natives resided in the same immediate vicinity, they seldom mingled. Natives usually isolated themselves into social "neighborhoods" with activities centered in small rural churches. Such a group was the one composed of fifty freedmen who lived at Grassy Lake near Clearview. Some freedmen seemed proud of any physical characteristics which they thought set them apart from other blacks. "Everyone in Boley knows I'm a Freedman and part Indian," proclaimed one man. "They just look at my beard and know."

Because of their isolation, black-town residents escaped
the daily reinforcement of their subordinate rank in the larger society. In general, their emphasis on physical characteristics in determining social position was the exact opposite of what found among blacks living in a mixed community. Indeed, during the years when optimism concerning the town’s future was at its height, black-town citizens rejected light skin color as a status symbol in the community, and individuals with such complexions sometimes suffered. An older man remembered that as a child his color made a difference in Boley: “I happened to be light skinned and, boy, did I have a time. Those ‘darkies’ in Boley don’t like light-skinned Negroes and they show it. I was a victim of their prejudice. . . . All the boys would refer to each other as ‘nigger’ . . . but I could never use that word.” His complexion proved such a disadvantage that when he married he selected a dark-skinned wife so his children “wouldn’t have to go through all that mess. . . . It was hell!”

Black-town editors insisted that past association with whites had corrupted the race and that before racial uplift could progress blacks must voluntarily stay away from them and cease what one newspaper called “the inherent worship of a white skin.” For example, in a June, 1911, front-page article entitled “COLOR NOT THE CAUSE,” a writer for the Clearview Patriarch claimed that most Americans favored black over white as evidenced by the public preference for dark shoes, suits, and horses. The race suffered discrimination, he argued, because of certain objectionable customs and manners found in people possessing the color. Continued emphasis upon color made members of the race ashamed and desirous of ridding themselves of it, rather than concentrating on the real cause. With moral uplift, he argued, any prejudice against black would completely vanish.

The black-town press sought to bolster race pride with reports on the accomplishments of past and present national figures. Most of the speeches of Booker T. Washington and the events at Tuskegee Institute were either covered in separate stories or carried in syndicated columns like “Afro-
American Cullings." Holiday and public school programs usually recounted the loyalty and bravery of Crispus Attucks, Peter Salem, and blacks with George Washington at Monmouth or with Andrew Jackson at New Orleans, as well as the deeds and exploits of the 9th and 10th cavalries. In December, 1909, the Boley Progress ran a story on the National Negro Doll Company of Nashville, Tennessee, hoping to encourage parents to order black dolls for their small children. The story related the suspicion that white merchants were attempting to bankrupt the firm through a boycott of its products. For a time the fights of Jack Johnson, the world heavyweight champion, received elaborate coverage, with one newspaper even carrying a round-by-round account of his victory over Jim Flynn at Las Vegas, New Mexico, in July, 1912. Praise for Johnson quickly faded, however, because of his marriage to a white woman and his social escapades which many felt disgraced all blacks.

Despite such efforts, leaders could never completely conceal their recognition that color determined class and status in the white world outside the town. Asked by a reporter writing a feature on Mound Bayou in 1909 if he thought other blacks in the South could duplicate the experiment there, Isaiah T. Montgomery, the town's founder, responded, "Why not? We are plain negro men and women, not any better or whiter than other American negroes." In issuing an invitation to Graham County residents to come to Nicodemus to celebrate American independence on July 4, 1888, the editor of the Cyclone assured prospective visitors that "you will have a way up time and be treated white." For some editors, profit superseded pride. They apparently saw no contradiction between their lectures to the race on black pride on the front page and advertisements on page two for skin bleach and hair straightener. Such items usually appeared in the "patent" or "readyprint" sections of the newspaper ordered from a publishing house in a large city. Occasionally, however, readers of the Boley Progress and the
Western Age at Langston might find advertisements for Ford's Anti-Kink Pomade, The French System Hair Straightener, or Complexion Wonder Creme interspersed with town news items on those pages run off on local presses. A few black-town visitors were quick to point to what they thought was a dichotomy between race pride and a desire to be white. Hiram Tong, a white reporter who journeyed to Mound Bayou in 1909 to conduct interviews and collect information for a story on the town, commented on cosmetic advertisements in the Mound Bayou Demonstrator and a picture which appeared on a promotional calendar given away by the local bank. Tong noted that the well-dressed lady on the calendar was "clearly African, but is light-chocolate brown, has red on her cheeks and straight hair." When questioned, the cashier of the bank there argued that the physical characteristics shown in the picture had no significance since the calendars had been ordered from a black company in Louisville, Kentucky.

Although they tried, leaders could never totally control those who sought to make skin color a criterion for social position. As each community grew larger, and once some citizens recognized that the black town no longer held out the promise of freedom and prosperity, emphasis on black pride subsided. In 1910, three women in Boley formed a club emphasizing better English, good housekeeping, and the social graces, with membership open only to ladies with light skin. Community reaction was immediate. As one early settler remembered the "crazy bastards tried to organize a 'Blue Vein Society' . . . but we run them out of town. I helped run them out 'cause we [could not] divide up on the color question." Boley's leaders must have felt besieged. In early January, 1910, businessmen W. A. Kennedy and O. H. Bradley announced plans to open the White Way, a hotel designed to cater to whites visiting the town. Except for those who worked there, Boley blacks were prohibited from entering the lobby without permission. The White Way was all the more bitter to take because, as editor of the
Progress during 1905 and 1906, Bradley had frequently preached race pride. In two scathing editorials, Ernest D. Lynwood, the Boley editor, found it impossible to understand how "Negroes as black as Kennedy and Bradley" could sponsor such an undertaking; a week later Lynwood concluded that it was just "another story of Jacob and Esau, wherein Jacob sold his birthright for a mess of pottage." As a commercial enterprise, the White Way was shortlived. It was never again mentioned in the newspaper, and within one month Bradley was back in his old office editing the Boley Progress.

At first, color distinctions were unimportant in Mound Bayou, "a community in which only a few persons, mostly women, were lighter than medium brown." Also the social mores of the community dictated total isolation from the dominant race in the Yazoo Delta. Even those whose normal business activities brought them in contact with outsiders found little prestige inside the town from their intimacy with middle- and upper-class whites in Mississippi. All this changed. When Eugene P. Booze moved there sometime after 1904 and married Mary Montgomery, Isaiah's daughter, the color line was drawn. Because of his light skin, Booze was immediately suspect. Benjamin A. Green, the mayor of Mound Bayou in the early 1940's, remembered him well but disliked him intensely because, as Green put it, Booze "always pretended he was a white man's nigger." Either Mary or her husband, Eugene, persuaded the elder Montgomery to donate $2,500 and a small tract of land for the construction of an Episcopal mission. The new mission attracted few members, partly because the town already had four churches, but, more importantly, it had definitely been established for residents with lighter-than-average complexions. Only Mary and a few light-skinned blacks from the county attended during its brief existence, but when it closed, color had become a factor in the community.

Hazy and at times contradictory attitudes regarding color only mirrored a larger black-town ambivalency about
whites in general. Through successive generations, it was argued, all whites had exploited the race in order to satisfy their own greed and lust, in the process choking the spirit and pride from its members. And, since whites continued to block the path of black advancement, they obviously could not be trusted in the future. Yet, some town leaders clearly distinguished between two classes in white society. “Poor Whites,” who the Clearview Tribune charged would “wade through hell to steal a dinner pail,”71 were blamed for most of the violence directed at the race. On the other hand, the “better class of white men” really wanted blacks to advance, opposing only that progress which offered direct economic competition to them. Self-segregated from the larger society, the black town offered protection from the harassment and terrorism of lower-class whites while posing no competitive threat to either group. Townspeople were told that as the community prospered and the race uplifted itself, intelligent whites would soon recognize that current racial theories were invalid and would have to be modified. Racism would cease. Until that day arrived, however, residents were urged to keep their distance from all whites.

Of course, total isolation was impossible, and the black-town proprietorial class recognized the necessity of some external interaction. In their contacts, usually to transact business, such individuals demanded respect. One prominent town leader related that “in Boley, the white people we deal with treat us as equals because we don’t deal with them on personal terms unless they need us for something. . . . You see, if we needed them, we would have to stand any treatment, like being called ‘Boy,’ or ‘Sam,’ or by our first names. . . . A white man will call you ‘Mister’ all right, if he needs you.”72

Respect worked both ways. Editors lectured their readers on the necessity of making a favorable impression on whites. Every white person who left the town feeling he or she had been courteously treated represented another convert for the cause, one who might help to dispel fallacious
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rumors and misconceptions about the race and the community. In April, 1906, O. H. Bradley, editor of the Progress, pointed out that every time a white left unmolested it refuted the claims of some people in the nearby town of Paden that they were in danger while inside Boley. Bradley had aimed his short editorial directly at “a certain Negro (if that is not a misname),” who made a practice of insulting white gentlemen. It might be better, he hinted, for the offender to leave town peacefully while it was still possible to do so. Like other editors, Bradley sometimes lost his temper over comments in out-of-town newspapers suggesting that whites were unwelcome, discriminated against, or mistreated. He seemed especially riled in July, 1905, after reading a story about Boley in the Kansas City Journal claiming that “if a white man is in it or near it he stays blacked up or under cover.” Bradley insisted that many whites lived near Boley, several shopped there, both day and night, and most used it as their post office. Furthermore, on any weekday, white drummers could be found at the hotel or on the streets soliciting orders from local merchants. Regardless of color, he said, all people in Boley were treated with respect.

The black towns varied in regard to segregating the races and providing whites who visited with separate facilities. For the $1 daily rate, J. F. Gooden, proprietor of Hotel Boley, which was located on Main Street near the rail depot, offered equal room accommodations and dining service to all guests, irrespective of color. At times, however, a white traveler in Mound Bayou was isolated from others during his stay. Whites who wished to remain overnight in the town were ushered into hotel rooms reserved for the exclusive use of Caucasians. Rather than joining other boarders at the hotel dining table, or being seated separately, meals were sent to them. Isaiah T. Montgomery’s house contained one bedroom which, it was claimed, had never been occupied by a black, and two white men who stayed there around 1910 remembered eating in the regular Montgomery dining room—all alone. In Nicodemus, the Emancipation Day Celebration
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attracted a large number of outsiders to the town once each year. Candidates for public offices and prominent white and black leaders delivered speeches to the assembled crowd of several thousand, and during the early years it was said that the races danced together.\textsuperscript{74}

The respectful treatment of white visitors helped to promote a positive racial and community image, but permitting them to live inside the town limits served no useful purpose. “Where do we need their presence as citizens?” asked Ernest D. Lynwood, the editor of the \textit{Boley Progress} in November, 1909. “They are not our fellows and why should we encourage them to live among us . . . if a white man can make a ‘lily white’ town why can’t we make a little black settlement . . . ?”\textsuperscript{75} In both Boley and Mound Bayou, whites were discouraged from buying real estate. From time to time a few whites lived inside Nicodemus and white men operated stores there.\textsuperscript{76} Most residents, however, objected to absentee ownership and to white laborers who entered the towns looking for work. During September, 1904, Ernest Lynwood, the editor at Clearview, noted the continued presence of a white carpenter who believed “in the ethics of southern social customs,” yet continued to loiter on the streets attempting to underbid local contractors. Lynwood suggested that the people of his home town of Weleetka should find steady employment for “this poor outcast of Southern aristocracy.”\textsuperscript{77}

In the three Oklahoma towns, black leaders displayed mixed feelings concerning treatment of American Indians. Envious of what they perceived as the Indians’ relatively higher status, yet sympathetic to a people facing discrimination and dishonesty, newspapers like the \textit{Boley Progress} cautioned Indians to be wary of legal promises, remembering that in the past “the white man had taken the labor of the Negro and the lands of the Indian, under full protection of the law.” Displaying great insight, black-town editors predicted that as soon as the federal government had broken tribal autonomy, clearing the path for white land speculators,
both groups would occupy a similar position in American society. Furthermore, blacks considered it unfortunate that Indians failed to comprehend the possibilities of a red-black political coalition. In June, 1905, S. Douglas Russell at Langston pleaded with Indian leaders to look to the immediate future and recognize that “negroes and Indians would have the political balance of power in the future state of Oklahoma, provided those votes would form a solid, undivided phalanx at the polls.” Such was not to be. And the editor at Clearview lamented, “Uncle Sam has got a half Nelson on the Indian. He’ll win in the next round.”

Such sympathy was not automatically extended to all other minorities in society, however. While Indians were pictured as honest, yet innocent children, slow to perceive the realities of American life, Jews were seen as perceptive, sinister, and untrustworthy. Convinced that Jews constantly pursued material wealth, blacks thought they controlled the money supply of the United States. Yet, because Jews had no permanent home and especially because of the discrimination and persecution they had suffered, blacks thought they could see in Jewish history many parallels with their own experience. Although disliked, Jews had to be respected, and residents were told that blacks might do well to follow their economic example. Newspaper subscribers at Langston, Boley, and Clearview were scolded for fretting about the plight of their race when they should be observing the Jews who were piling up wealth, building character, and acquiring prestige and position. On the other hand, to put down an opponent, the black-town press sometimes delved into its repertoire of anti-Semitic terms. Following a few derogatory references concerning Jews and the crucifixion, editor Hugh Lightfoot at Nicodemus reported on a heated political race in September, 1886, concluding that “Jew Harwi and Judas Dr. Fuller led the Republican party of Graham county up to the cross at Millbrook yesterday. . . .”

Jews were considered outsiders rather than native Americans, and this partially explained the black-town attitude to-
ward them. Editors and other leaders visualized the horrors of a future America filled with foreign-speaking immigrants willing to work for less than local laborers. If the immigrant tide continued unabated, they warned, blacks would soon lose their only means of livelihood, small as it might be, as well as the one region they could still call home. Speaking at the black Baptist church in Paris, Texas, in May, 1912, Clearview promoter James E. Thompson pointed to the horde of foreign immigrants currently flooding the South, crowding blacks into towns and cities where they must turn to crime or starve.81 Because of a few isolated, yet well-publicized experiments using Chinese and Japanese workers on large farms in the West and South, Orientals posed the greatest danger. Therefore, discrimination against them was considered justified. In December, 1887, M. C. Inlow, editor of the *Nicodemus Cyclone*, praised a recently passed city ordinance in Wichita, Kansas, deliberately designed to penalize Chinese laundries. Ironically, Inlow advised the Chinese in Kansas to return to their native country "where their appearance is more acceptable." As time passed, the black-town paranoia over immigration increased. "America for American laborers," proclaimed editor Russell at Langston in 1907. And four years later, the *Clearview Patriarch* warned readers that "if the Chinamen and Japs become citizens . . . it would not take a very heavy emigration of them to get a majority of the Pacific states." Such an invasion, the editor argued, was obviously an easier and cheaper means of acquiring territory than a declaration of war.82

Although partly a reflection of the national mood, much of the black-town push for immigration restriction stemmed from a sentimental attachment to the South as their ancestral home. Some blacks who moved north into segregated communities saw colonization there as temporary, lasting only a few generations, perhaps less. Believing that they, their children, or grandchildren might someday enter the larger society, they hoped to keep it much the same as when they left, but how could blacks return to a South filled with
strangers? Excluding those strangers seemed the obvious answer. But, whether good or bad, black-town residents were interested in the latest news from the South. And editors usually obliged them with items of local interest about the folks back home whether in Banks, Texas; Evergreen, Alabama; or Cotton Plant, Arkansas.

If the South was home, then Africa was not. As long as the black town remained economically and politically viable, with some prospects for future growth, residents there rejected various back-to-Africa schemes. Those who migrated thousands of miles to Africa were admitting that the race problem in America had no solution—the black-town settler had found it. To its citizens, living in a segregated community was neither a substitute for migration to a foreign country nor the acceptance of defeat inside the United States.83 Although some were fleeing discrimination and violence, most settlers entering the black towns came with great expectations for the future, convinced that the towns held out the promise of eventual entrance into the mainstream of American life complete with economic prosperity and full social and political rights for all. Newspapers at Clearview, Langston, Nicodemus, and Boley chided those contemplating an African exodus for failing to recognize that America was their home and that they would surely perish in transit or soon after they arrived. "Oh ye Africanites... who will not listen to reason. I see thy fate," warned A. R. Wheeler of the Clearview Patriarch in February, 1914.84 But as Wheeler wrote, the five black towns were dying. Despite their efforts, promoters found it increasingly difficult to counteract the lure of Africa, a land where plentiful game and rich soil supposedly offered economic security, free from the discrimination of whites.

That the black-town image and ideology contained contradictions merely indicated the extent to which people living there were echoing the ambiguity found in black thought throughout the country. Although promoters and residents espoused absolute allegiance to Booker T. Washington's phi-
losophy, some of their ideas were close to those of W. E. B. Du Bois—much more so than many perhaps realized or would have been willing to admit. The concept of racial uplift, both moral and economic, was not unique to Washington. Indeed, the same year that Langston was named as the site for Oklahoma’s black university, Du Bois published an article telling blacks that their first step involved “the correction of the immorality, crime and laziness among Negroes themselves, which still remains as a heritage of slavery.” Before his complete break with Washington after 1900, Du Bois supported industrial training, although arguing that such programs should complement a liberal university curriculum. At no point were the black towns closer to Du Bois than with their emphasis on race pride and especially their praise for the virtue and devotion of black mothers. Blacks, Du Bois argued, had a distinct mission as a race; and although he was at times vague concerning the exact contribution of blacks to civilization, the key to the black mission rested with the strength of the black mother figure. Racial and sexual purity were important elements in black destiny. “Unless we conquer our present vices,” he said, “they conquer us.” Du Bois called for the creation of black colleges, newspapers, and businesses for the uplift of the race, in time permitting its members to make the black spirit felt in America—but not for the purpose of a “servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture.” The Washington approach, he came to argue, led to complete acceptance of American capitalism and the spirit of avarice inherent in that system; what was needed was a sense of community among blacks, rather than extreme individualism. Like many leaders before him, Du Bois struggled with the dilemma of wanting to see blacks develop their own culture yet being free to participate fully in American society. Finally, in 1908, he asked if “it is going to be possible in the future for the races to remain segregated or to escape contact or domination simply by retiring to themselves?” No! Such a dream he considered impracticable and contrary to the
More and more, Du Bois came to focus on black civil rights.