From Appomattox to World War I, black citizens worked for a secure position in the American system. The problem was how to be both black and American—how to find acceptance, or even toleration, in a society in which the very definition of what it meant to be an American was determined and enforced by whites. A few black leaders proposed self-segregation inside the United States within the protective confines of an all-black community as one possible solution. The black-town idea reached its peak in the fifty years after the Civil War; at least sixty black communities were settled between 1865 and 1915.

Norman L. Crockett analyzes the formation, growth, and failure of five such communities: Nicodemus, Kansas, established at the time of the black exodus from the South; Mound Bayou, Mississippi, perhaps the most prominent black town because of its close ties to Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Institute; Langston, Oklahoma, visualized by one of its promoters as the nucleus for the creation of an all-black state in the West; and Clearview and Boley in Oklahoma, twin communities in the Creek Nation that offer the opportunity observe certain aspects of Native American–black relations in this area.

“Evokes the ethos of [black towns] and gives a wealth of information about the leaders who brought them into being and struggled to keep them alive.” —Journal of American History

“Highly recommended to the scholar and student of black, state, regional, urban, and social history.”—The Historian

“Black Towns is well written and well documented. It deserves a wide reading.” —Pacific Historical Review

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“A critical and compassionate mosaic of local history intertwined with national events.”—Colorado Magazine

Norman L. Crockett was professor emeritus of history at the University of Oklahoma. He wrote, coedited, and coauthored several books, including The Power Elite in America and The Woolen Industry of the Midwest.

University Press of Kansas
Lawrence KS 66045
www.kansaspress.ku.edu