A Black Odyssey

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The period from 1886 through 1891 was one of great expectations and disappointed hopes for black politicians in general and for John Lewis Waller in particular. A challenge to Republican supremacy mounted by the Democrats and Populists led many Negro leaders to believe that the party of Lincoln would offer special inducements to blacks in order to retain their allegiance. They reasoned that if blacks could play one political faction against another their leverage would be increased and a new era of equality and opportunity would result. The reality was quite different. While white Republicans were willing to accord minimal recognition to a few blacks in order to keep the Negro vote, they generally refused to respond to threats of ticket splitting. The Democrats and Populists, both separately and in coalition, displayed an inclination to appeal to the black electorate, but by 1894 exclusionist elements had temporarily gained the upper hand in both parties. It was against this backdrop that Waller made an unsuccessful bid for nomination and election to the position of state auditor. Failure and the disillusionment that inevitably ensued caused the frustrated black politician to look beyond Kansas for the ways and means to advance his interests and those of his race.

Waller’s year in Atchison was not one of the more propitious periods in his life. The *Western Recorder* proved to be a financial albatross; by the time he sold it, the paper had accumulated more than $500 in debts. Plans for the New Orleans World’s Fair were cancelled shortly after
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Waller was named director of the Kansas Negro Exhibition. There was a silver lining, however. Soon after his arrival in Atchison the lawyer-turned-journalist made the acquaintance of John A. Martin, wealthy editor of the *Atchison Champion* and one of the leading Republican politicians in the state. Waller's relationship with Martin, in turn, led directly to his recognition by white Republicans as black Kansas' chief political spokesman.

In 1884 the Republicans wanted desperately to regain control of the governorship, lost to the Democrats in 1882. A group of younger men, headed by Martin and Cyrus Leland of Troy, was determined not only to defeat the Democrats but also wrest control of the party from the clique that had directed it since the Civil War. With Leland, who was Kansas' national committeeman from 1878 to 1917, working tirelessly in his behalf, Martin managed to garner the gubernatorial nomination. The Democrats chose Glick again and, just as they did in 1882, came out in favor of resubmission of the prohibition amendment to the electorate. A group of antiprohibition Republicans, headed by David Overmeyer, fused with the Democrats after being given the right to name the Democratic nominee for lieutenant-governor. In the election Martin defeated Glick by a vote of 146,777 to 108,284. Waller delivered a number of speeches during the campaign in behalf of Martin, McCabe (who was renominated), and the entire Republican ticket. According to one observer, Martin received a larger percentage of the black vote than any previous gubernatorial candidate. Whether or not Waller's attacks on the Democrats were related to Republican successes in 1884 is unclear; he managed, however, to convince Martin that they were. Indeed, by the time of his inaugural in 1885, the new governor viewed Waller as his personal representative within the black community, the man who above everyone else could hold Negroes in line in 1886.³

As a reward for his efforts in behalf of the ticket in 1884, Martin secured for Waller a position at the Kansas State Prison at Lansing. Waller moved his family to Leavenworth in May, 1885, and eagerly began his duties as assistant steward. His salary was a respectable $60 per month plus room and board. The competition for positions at the prison among the rank and file of the Republican party was fierce. Waller's appointment was significant, especially given the fact that he was neither white nor a member of the Grand Army of the Republic.⁴

The state penitentiary was an imposing structure even in 1885. The inmates, who numbered nearly a thousand, one-quarter of whom were black, were housed in four cellblocks situated around a central courtyard. Nearly all of the convicts worked. As previously noted, some were hired
out; others labored in various prison facilities; and still others toiled in
the state-owned coal mines just outside the gates. All types of criminals,
from mass murderers to embezzlers, were housed under the same roof.\textsuperscript{5}

Waller’s duties at the prison consisted of securing, storing, and distrib­
uting supplies to the various prison departments. In addition, every
morning at 3:30, he unlocked the gate of the south block to allow those
prisoners assigned to extramural labor to leave for their duties. Waller
evidently got along well with the warden, Captain John H. Smith, and
with his white co-workers. At one point he even intervened with Govern­
nor Martin in behalf of Martin J. Cuff, an Irish Republican ward heeler
from Atchison. When Cuff, who was fairly elderly, found his duties as
nightwatchman arduous and a threat to his health, Waller succeeded
in having him assigned to a position in one of the shops. With the people
of Lansing and with the deputy warden, John Higgins, however, the
assistant steward did not fare so well. Because no white in Lansing would
rent to him, Waller was forced to settle Susan and the children in
Leavenworth while he lived on the prison grounds. In addition, from
May, 1885, until his departure in the fall of 1886, Waller wrote a steady stream of letters complaining of his treatment at Higgins' hands. On one occasion the deputy warden had Waller called before Captain Smith on charges that he had been selling copies of the *Leavenworth Times* to an inmate (convicts were allowed reading materials only as a reward for good behavior). As it turned out, the inmate, a young half-breed, had been placed in solitary confinement on Waller's order and was simply seeking revenge. Smith, upon learning of these circumstances, dismissed the charges. On another occasion, after Waller had shown a political circular to a Negro inmate named J. C. Pusey, the deputy warden tried unsuccessfully to persuade Pusey to swear that Waller was delivering unauthorized mail to the prisoners. In August, 1886, so oppressed was Waller by Higgins' machinations that he wrote to Martin threatening to resign and accept a job elsewhere. Martin, who was counting upon Waller's speechmaking ability for the forthcoming state campaign, persuaded him not to go, and then ordered Smith to interpose his authority between the deputy warden and the assistant steward. Nonetheless, Waller resigned at the end of the year.

Both John Martin and John Waller anticipated that they would profit politically from the latter's appointment to the staff of the state prison. The spoils system was no less firmly rooted in Kansas than in other states during the last part of the nineteenth century. Officials from governor to mayor carefully selected their most ardent and influential supporters to fill the appointive posts under their control, and then called upon these worthies to deliver speeches, write articles, and utilize their
connections throughout the state or county in behalf of the official who appointed them. Since the state's admission to the Union, those Kansas politicians who were out of office had complained bitterly if vainly about the political activities of appointed officials, especially those at the state prison. Not surprisingly, then, Martin, who even went so far as to formally name Waller as his personal representative among black Kansans, persuaded Warden Smith to release his black steward several days a week during the summer and fall of 1886 in order that he might campaign for the Republican ticket. For his part Waller perceived that he could use his position at the prison—and as Martin's emissary to the black community—to enhance his own political fortunes.

In February, 1886, John M. Brown announced that he would challenge McCabe for the Republican nomination for auditor. Brown, who was called "the Colonel," made public his plans at a mass meeting of blacks held in Topeka on February 10. Brown and his lieutenants hoped the gathering would be unanimous in their support, but, unfortunately
for the Colonel's cause, the McCabe people had gotten wind of Brown's plans and packed the courthouse with their supporters. Sol Watkins, a Brown man, was beaten for the chairmanship by A. J. Darnell, a McCabe supporter, by a vote of sixty-seven to sixty-five. Following a prolonged and acrimonious debate, the gathering endorsed McCabe for a third term in a close vote. Brown had thrown his hat in the ring to stay, however, and he regarded this initial setback as only the first skirmish in a much larger war.  

The rivalry between McCabe and Brown placed Kansas blacks in a difficult position. There was a tradition against third terms in Kansas politics—John Martin and ninety other delegates had signed a pledge opposing third terms at the state convention in 1882—and it appeared to many that McCabe's greediness was threatening the black community's representation on the state ticket. McCabe's candidacy offered Republican bigots an opportunity to conceal their Negrophobia behind a mask of opposition to a third term. On the other hand Brown was challenging a proven incumbent. McCabe had earned a reputation as an honest, industrious, and courteous public servant, and he enjoyed the support of a number of white papers, including the powerful *Topeka Daily Capital* and *Leavenworth Times.*  

As far as Waller was concerned, McCabe had had his day. Although he attended the Topeka meeting and made a speech in behalf of unanimity following McCabe's victory, three weeks later he wrote a long letter to P. I. Bonebrake, chairman of the Republican state central committee, lashing his former friend. Waller charged that McCabe had supported black independents in Wyandotte and Leavenworth in 1885 when they fielded a "colored men's ticket" for county offices. These renegades had cost the regular Republican nominees hundreds of votes in both cities. Now, Waller charged, McCabe was plotting with Republican rebels and with black Democrats such as William Eagleson and C. H. J. Taylor, a prominent Kansas City lawyer and politician, to foist his third-term candidacy on the Republican party and the black citizens of Kansas. The vast majority of his brethren opposed McCabe, and he, Waller, would not support the former real-estate dealer from Nicodemus even if he were nominated.  

As McCabe and Brown struggled throughout April, May, and June to line up delegates to the state convention scheduled for July in Topeka, the competition degenerated into a mudslinging contest. George C. Smith, a former Kansan and now a minor official in Washington, D.C., who had known Brown during his days as sheriff of Coahoma County, Mississippi, charged that the Colonel had been driven out of that state
not by "bulldozers" but respectable citizens enraged by his record of graft and corruption. The *Capital* at once called for Brown's withdrawal lest he prove, if nominated, to be a political millstone. Although Brown issued a public denial and filed a libel suit against Smith, the major Republican journals continued to give the story credence.11

When the Republicans assembled on July 7 in the capital, Martin was duly renominated and a platform adopted which advocated prohibition, protectionism, a square deal for the workingman, and, as always, "a free ballot and a fair count." The only real question was whether or not the party should renominate McCabe and Samuel T. Howe, the state treasurer, who was also running for a third term. Howe's fate was tied
to McCabe's because nearly all agreed that the party could not deny the state auditor another term without rebuffing Howe. To do otherwise would be to risk appearing blatantly racist. Chief challenger for McCabe's place was General Tim McCarthy of Larned. This ebullient Irishman rolled into Topeka on the opening day of the convention complete with "the famous Coyote band" and a contingent of Pawnee Indian supporters. Although most agreed that McCabe had a majority of the delegates in his camp on the eve of the convention, his support melted quickly during the next two days. A caucus of 100 who opposed the third term met on the evening of July 7 and listened to Sol Watkins tell them that, although blacks deserved continued representation on the state ticket, they would not ask a third term for any member of the race. There were other blacks, he pointed out, who were equally competent to fill the post. The situation had deteriorated to such an extent that McCabe officially withdrew before the balloting began and half-heartedly threw his support to Brown. When the first tally was completed, Brown had received 105 votes to McCarthy's 145. In a subsequent runoff among the top three candidates, Brown polled only 85 to McCarthy's 231. The blacks' four-year "lock" on the auditorship had been broken. 12

Waller was bitterly disillusioned; crossing McCabe had been a dangerous gamble. McCabe had lost, but so had Brown, and there was a good chance that blacks in Kansas would blame Waller and Brown for their loss of representation. Waller was doubly disappointed because he had evidently been promised a good position in the auditor's office if Brown won.

If Waller was appalled at the outcome of the Republican state convention, the Democrats were overjoyed. "Set it down that the colored vote will never again be a unit in support of the Republican ticket in Kansas," predicted the *Topeka Democrat*. "Thank God we are rid of the nigger is the exulting cry that is coming up among Republicans throughout Kansas." 13 While the Democratic party housed some of the most strident Negrophobes in the state, party leaders were sensitive to the black vote and some had even actively courted it. In 1884 Governor George Glick invited Waller to visit him at the statehouse. According to Glick, the anti-Negro feeling extant within the party was due to the "villainous and abusive articles against myself and the democrats" in the state's black newspapers. If Negroes would open their minds, the Democrats could offer them a home. On August 5, 1886, the Democratic state convention met in Leavenworth, nominated Colonel Thomas Moonlight for governor, adopted a platform calling for a tariff for revenue only, protection for the workingman, and the immediate opening up of all Indian lands.
Ignoring the Negrophobes of the party, the assembled delegates then named William D. Kelley, a black, as the Democracy's candidate for auditor. The *Topeka Democrat* hailed Kelley, then turnkey at the Leavenworth county jail, as "one of the best known representatives of his race in Kansas" and noted with pride that after his nomination by acclamation he was received with open arms by Thomas Fenlon, Governor Glick, and other party luminaries. The *Democrat* claimed that the action of the Democratic convention in nominating a Negro "marked an epoch in Kansas." 

The Republicans at first pretended to be amused: "The whole state was laughing yesterday over the stupendous blunder of the democratic convention trying to catch the colored vote by nominating a black man for state auditor," editorialized J. K. Hudson in the *Capital*. "Such a backaction, double somersault took the breath of every old mossback." This blasé attitude proved transitory, however. Rumors soon began to circulate to the effect that antiprohibition Republicans would bolt the party and fuse with the Democrats in a solid antiprohibition front. A number of the choice offices had allegedly been promised to the wets. Sobered by news of the impending merger, Republican papers began to attack Kelley and the Democrats in earnest. "The mulatto—W. D. Kelley ... is a man of no standing either at home or abroad, and a blatherskate and blackguard who will not receive the support of a corporal's guard of the colored voters," sneered Anthony in the *Times*. During the campaign Anthony, Hudson, Thacher, and other Republican editors constantly reminded black Kansans which party had been responsible for the Emancipation Proclamation. Indeed, the bloody shirt was much in evidence. "Who burned their [Negroes'] schoolhouses in southern states? Who beat and maimed their teachers? Who has disfranchised them in half a dozen states? ... Every colored man knows it was the democrats that did these things, and not one of them ever heard a Kansas democrat denounce the outrages," thundered the *Capital*. In fact, declared Hudson, the Democrats would do the same thing in Kansas were the Republicans not there to restrain them. Suddenly Republican leaders became very critical of black bloc voting. When a state convention of Negro men met in Topeka on August 5 and passed resolutions urging blacks to become a united force in politics and to support the Democratic party, which had dared to nominate a Negro, Hudson accused Kansas Negroes of drawing the color line. It was positively un-American.

Given Brown's defeat and the nomination of Kelley by the Democrats, Waller's active support of the regular Republican ticket seemed to Martin and Bonebrake a matter of no small import. Waller was not
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anxious to participate, however. "It was my hope," he wrote to Governor Martin on September 11, "that the present campaign could be run without my having to take any special part more than to cast my ballot and work at the polls."

Again Waller faced the Negro politician's classic dilemma; if he were ever to hold elective office, he would simultaneously have to avoid undue controversy, cultivate powerful whites, and maintain his credibility with the black community. He felt the party had let him down, and he did not relish the prospect of campaigning against a Negro. In fact, in an interview with the Kansas City Times on September 3, Waller expressed his dissatisfaction with Brown's rejection by the Republican party and announced his intention to sit out the '86 campaign. Waller's statement elicited angry rebukes from both Warden Smith and Martin, and subsequently another personal appeal from the governor to stump the state for the Republicans. Waller, with some misgivings, eventually decided to campaign for Martin, whom he regarded as his patron and a true friend of the race. In the end Waller perceived that the best stratagem for blacks in their pursuit of office was not to play off one party against another but to demonstrate their absolute loyalty to one organization. Then, it was hoped, the rank and file of that party—the Republicans in this case—would view black candidates for office as Republicans first and Negroes second. "We have no sympathy with that class, or element, of republicans, who mean to rule or ruin," he wrote in 1888. During the period from October 5 to October 30, Waller, on leave from his job, delivered twenty-two speeches in twenty-two towns. Typical was an address he gave on October 18 in Topeka: "I stand here tonight and say that all of you will walk up to the polls and vote the straight republican ticket. . . . There may be some men on the state ticket that you do not like. . . . There may be some men on the ticket whom I do not like. Nevertheless, they are the regularly nominated candidates of the party and should receive your support and mine." He steadfastly refused to attack Kelley, however, and in interviews with the Leavenworth Times and Atchison Champion chided those white Republican papers that were then raking the Democratic candidate: "This slandering of a whole race to get at Kelley is the most inexcusable thing ever resorted to. . . . Today we are 'niggers', tomorrow 'coons'. . . . The colored people have become utterly sick of that sort of rot in both Republican and democratic papers. . . . It is a blow to our manhood and tends to humiliate us. . . . The colored people are in the politics of the state and nation to stay and the sooner the papers of all parties come to a realization of that fact the better."

In the end Martin swamped Moonlight, receiving a plurality of
Kelley's nomination by the Democrats did little to help the rest of the ticket; the vast majority of blacks took Waller's advice and stuck with the party of Lincoln. In fact Kelley enjoyed solid support among neither Democrats nor blacks. He received 92,284 votes to McCarthy's 161,052, running 15,000 behind Moonlight and the rest of the ticket. Of the counties with a significant black population, Kelley carried only Leavenworth. As one frustrated Democrat of Howard put it: "Not a God-Damned nigger in Howard could be bought, persuaded or driven into voting the Democratic ticket." At least one Negro politician came out of the election of 1886 smelling like a rose. Soon after Tim McCarthy was sworn in as auditor, he named John M. Brown to a $1,200 a year clerkship. Perhaps, as the McCabe forces had charged, Brown had in fact acted as a foil for the Irishman.

Early in February, 1888, Waller moved from Leavenworth to Topeka and established a law office in partnership with another young black attorney and Republican politician named Turner W. Bell. Topeka seemed to Waller an ideal base of operations. Aside from the fact that it was the state capital, thus enabling Waller to keep in touch with the white power structure, 8,000 of Kansas' 75,000 blacks lived there. Since selling the Western Recorder in 1885 Waller had lacked a forum for his views and the means for keeping his name before his constituents. Consequently, in partnership with his cousin, Anthony Morton, he established the American Citizen on February 23, 1888. Where he got the funds for such an undertaking is not clear, but given the fact that there had been no black paper in Kansas since the collapse of the Benevolent Banner in October, 1887, other Negro politicians and the Republican state central committee probably helped defray the cost of publication.

Waller's second newspaper was a six-column, four-page weekly, with the first and fourth pages containing original matter, and the second and third, syndicated national and state news. A single copy was five cents while a year's subscription was $1.50. Subscription sales received a boost when a week before the first number appeared J. K. Hudson ran a very favorable article on Waller and his plans for the Citizen. "It shall be our aim to bend every effort in an honorable way," Waller informed his readers in the initial issue, "to protect the material, intellectual, and political interests of the colored people of Kansas." But, he added significantly, "while we are republicans, we shall . . . place the citizen before the state, and adhere to the party only as a means to attain the greatest good to our great country."

Topeka in 1888 was a thriving community of some 40,000 people. Situated in the center of the city were the extensive repair shops of the
Rock Island, the Union Pacific, and the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroads. There were in addition stockyards, several packing houses, a soap factory, pickling plant, and vinegar works. The letting of numerous state contracts kept the construction industry booming, and real estate prices increased geometrically in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Retail business flourished. North Topeka, separated from the rest of the city by the Kaw River, offered nearly every economic opportunity that was available south of the river. In short, Topeka in 1888 was a western boom town, proud, self-confident, optimistic.  

Black Topekans lived primarily downtown near the capitol and central business district, in the western portion of the city in Tennessee­town, and in a large enclave in North Topeka called Redmonsville. There were in Topeka, as of 1889, twenty-five colored churches, eight black schools (public or private), thirteen Negro policemen, nine black firemen, and one black justice of the peace. Most Negroes worked for the packing plants, railroad shops, construction companies, the city, or the state. A number of women found employment as domestic servants for the city's sizable white middle class. Like Leavenworth, Lawrence, and Kansas City, black Topeka had its wealthy elite. John Brown; W. I. Jamison, the justice of the peace; William Harris, a dry goods merchant; and saloon-keeper Nick Chiles were allegedly worth from $20,000 to $30,000 each. In addition the black community could boast several groceries, over a dozen restaurants, two barber shops, several lawyers, and two doctors. "Culture" enthusiasts were proud of the fact that Topeka contained more literary societies and women's auxiliaries than any other town in Kansas. Among the largest were the Pleasant Hour and Interstate Literary clubs; Waller belonged to both. Situated in North Topeka was Garfield Park, a beautiful, wooded area that served as the site of emancipation celebrations and excursions which annually drew blacks from all over the state. In August of 1888 and 1890, for example, Waller addressed emancipation crowds in Garfield Park that exceeded 10,000 persons. Blacks from all over eastern Kansas would arrive early by rail and spend the day consuming tons of barbecue and gallons of punch, listening to speeches, and playing baseball. All in all, for an educated, sophisticated Negro with a rather compelling political ambition, Topeka seemed the place to be in 1888.  

Unfortunately for black Republicans in Topeka and throughout the state, the Brown-McCabe split did not end in 1886. In September, 1887, for example, McCabe supporters, responding to a call in the New York Age by T. Thomas Fortune for the establishment of a national Afro-American League, convened a meeting of black men in Salina. Although
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the league was promoted as a nonpartisan civil rights organization, Brown, Sol Watkins, and other supporters of the Colonel denounced the Salina meeting as a political rally and unsuccessfully tried to persuade state race leaders to attend a separate convention. In the end, the Colonel was forced to abandon his scheme and attend the Salina gathering, which did in fact avoid politics and merely established a state league.33

Waller chose to deal with the McCabe-Brown problem by posing publicly as a compromise, unifying figure who could put an end to the "factionalism" that had so long plagued black Republicans, while simultaneously working to undermine his two rivals within the party. During the preceding four years, Waller wrote in the Citizen in 1888, the race had been weakened by a divided leadership. Factionalism had diverted the attention of Negro spokesmen from such pressing problems as an increase in school segregation, exclusion from public facilities, and prejudice in general. Petty quarrels, moreover, had enabled the state's white politicians to put off black demands for representation on the state ticket. Time and time again members of the central committee had told Negroes that nomination depended upon black Kansas' ability to unite behind one man. This, according to Waller, was exactly what blacks must do. Simultaneously, Waller began booming Brown for a seat in the state legislature and McCabe for county clerk of Shawnee County. If he could interest his rivals in these lesser posts, the way would be clear for his nomination for state office. Brown did in fact run for a seat in the House but lost in the Republican primary. McCabe disdained the county clerkship and instead sought first to be elected delegate-at-large to the Republican national convention and then clerk to the Republican state central committee. Fearing that election to either of these posts would enable McCabe to once again lay claim to being Kansas' "representative Negro," Waller worked assiduously for his defeat. McCabe, he told the state central committee, no longer represented the blacks of Kansas. They were tired of his grasping ambition and were ready for a new face. Whether or not Waller's maneuverings had any impact on the party's decision is unclear, but McCabe did not go to Chicago nor did he receive a job with the central committee.34

While Waller labored to undo Brown and McCabe, he sought to maximize his own visibility among blacks as a champion of civil rights and an untiring crusader for political recognition. When in early July two black men were lynched near Chetopa, Waller cried out in the Citizen: "It seems that Kansas is gradually drifting into the Ku Klux. . . . Mob violence must go whether in Kansas or elsewhere."35 In April he successfully defended three Leavenworth Negroes, Walter, Joseph, and
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Solomon Drake, accused of slitting the throat of one Henry Richter, a well-to-do butcher. The incident so aroused Leavenworth whites that the sheriff had to move the Drake brothers to Topeka to keep them from being lynched. On the opening day of the trial, Waller and his clients entered the district courtroom in Leavenworth to find it filled with a large crowd of armed and angry whites. The Topeka lawyer managed not only to avert a lynching but succeeded in persuading an overwhelmingly hostile jury that his clients were innocent. Several weeks after completion of the Drake trial a white farmer and his son shot and wounded Ed Ramsey, a young Topeka black man accused of raping the farmer's daughter. When the authorities elected to keep Ramsey in jail while releasing the two whites on bond, Waller pronounced equal protection under the law to be a thing of the past in Kansas. At times Waller's militant image called for public criticism of the Republican party. Particularly galling to Negroes was the defeat in early April of G. I. Currin for police judge of Topeka. Currin was the regular nominee of the Shawnee County Republicans, and party leaders, both white and black, campaigned hard for his election. Nonetheless, rumors to the effect that Currin was illiterate and that election of a Negro police judge would retard immigration to Topeka induced hundreds of Republicans to scratch him. Waller was furious. In a series of editorials he denied charges by the Topeka Capital and other white papers that blacks had deserted Currin; his demise was due, he said, to ungrateful and prejudiced white "mugwumps." "We are at a loss," he subsequently wrote in disgust, "to discover a distinction between North Carolina sentiment and that of Topeka touching the Negro."36

The problem of appealing to two potentially antagonistic constituencies was hardly new to Waller; the solution to this perennial dilemma was implicit in his political philosophy. He continued to regard the Republican party as the political organization most likely to advance his interests and those of the race. Throughout 1888 he emphasized in his speeches and editorials the party's traditional commitment to human rights. In an address to the Shawnee County Republican League Waller declared, "I am for John Sherman [for the Republican presidential nomination] because he belongs to the Abraham Lincoln school of republicanism. . . . We want a statesman, a man with a backbone for president. . . . one-half of the voters of this union are virtually disfranchised and we seem helpless to stop it. I believe in a government that is able to protect its citizens everywhere, and that is the principle upon which the Republican party is based: protection to our homes, protection to our industries, and to the citizens of this country."38 This approach allowed
Waller to remain a party loyalist and yet avoid appearing to his black constituents as a cringing sycophant. It also provided him with frequent opportunities to wave the bloody shirt. Waller rarely missed an opportunity to link Kansas Democrats with their southern brethren who were then allegedly lynching, burning, disfranchising, and exploiting the black man. This in turn served to deflect somewhat the ire of white Republicans aroused by his criticism of the party and the state.

The Republican delegates who gathered in Wichita on July 25, 1888, for the state convention were fairly optimistic. The Democrats were badly split by the prohibition issue. Indeed, when that party held its convention in June, Governor Glick and other party members who favored repeal of the prohibition amendment had lost control to the drys, headed by Judge John Martin of Topeka. The liquor forces were disconsolate. "To hell with John Martin," declared an irate former saloon-keeper, "I would rather vote for William D. Kelley, the damn black nigger!" A few Republicans were apprehensive about the Union Labor party, which had gained considerable support among the depression-ridden farmers of southern Kansas, but most were sanguine about the party's chances to recapture the state house. Although they proved unwilling to nominate a black to run on the Republican state ticket with Lyman Humphrey, the convention's gubernatorial nominee, the Republicans did select Waller as a presidential elector and as an alternate delegate to the national convention slated to meet in Chicago later in the month.

The campaign of '88 was bitterly contested. The Democrats denounced Humphrey and other Republican nominees as a coterie of loan sharks and usurious bankers totally out of touch with the common man. The Republicans, both white and black, relied on the "bloody shirt." No decent, freedom-loving citizen, they proclaimed, could vote for a party that systematically exploited millions of defenseless blacks and then murdered them when they resisted. Following his return from the Chicago convention, Waller threw himself into the state campaign, making some fifty speeches from August through October. In an address delivered in Osage City he attracted state-wide attention when he observed that it was ironic that the Democracy should be advocating separation of the races. True, white Democrats had always kept their distance from black males, but they had proven inordinately fond of black females.

Democratic divisions and Republican unity spelled disaster for the Democracy in 1888, and the Union Labor threat never materialized. Humphrey won in a landslide, the party of Lincoln captured 123 out of 126 seats in the Kansas House, and Kansas delivered proportionately the
largest plurality for Benjamin Harrison of any state in the Union. It was Waller's finest hour. "John L. Waller, republican elector at large from Kansas is the only colored man in the electoral college," trumpeted Joe Hudson in the *Topeka Capital.* "He represents the banner republican state, resides in the banner republican county as well as the banner republican precinct in Kansas." The Republicans celebrated their victory with a mammoth torchlight parade through downtown Topeka. From 7:00 p.m. until midnight the city was filled with a continuous roar from drums, cowbells, brass bands, and tin horns. The parade began with a volley from company B of the state militia. The revelers, headed by the Lawrence Cyclone Club with drum corps, closely followed by various Republican flambeau clubs (drill teams), 200 school children on horses, and various colored political organizations, proceeded north on Kansas Avenue to North Topeka and then countermarched back into the heart of the city. Various floats featured, among other things, workers tending a smelting furnace and a replica of a giant log cabin. Fireworks followed and then speeches by Republican dignitaries delivered from the balconies of the Copeland House and Windsor Hotels. Waller followed the lieutenant-governor-elect:

The Republican party has demonstrated the fact that when it lays aside its petty divisions, it is invincible. I am a black Republican. The time has come for a free ballot and a fair count. The leaders of the south claim they are afraid of Negro domination, and when the colored man attempts to use his legal right to cast one full ballot, he is refused the privilege, and if he protests the least is given the alternative of making himself scarce at the polls or being shot down in cold blood. . . . Grover Cleveland who found himself to be an expert fisherman, will soon have an opportunity to fish or cut bait. . . . His veto record has been vetoed by the voice of the people. I have the distinguished honor of being the only colored man who will sit in the electoral college and I shall vote for Harrison and Morton.

Having one of their number chosen presidential elector and alternate to the Republican convention in Chicago brought Kansas blacks a degree of national notice, but it did little to improve their image or power within the state. Waller's positions were largely honorary and certainly temporary; what they needed was a permanent power base within the state hierarchy. Thus, no sooner had the campaign of 1888 ended than the black Republican leadership of Kansas renewed its efforts to capture the party's 1890 nomination for state auditor. Maneuvering for the auditorship had become an annual rite among Negro Republicans by
1890, but they were particularly anxious to secure recognition from the party in that year because of a challenge to their hegemony within the Negro community by a clique of black Democrats and Populists.

Kansas Democrats made a serious effort to attract the black vote as early as 1884. The Democracy had been able to take advantage of a split within the Republican party to capture the state house. In their drive to retain power, party leaders proved willing to court the growing black electorate. Accordingly, in 1884, the Democratic state convention selected Charles H. J. Taylor, an aspiring black lawyer-politician, as a delegate to the party's national meeting. As Democratic leaders had hoped, Taylor's election, as well as his subsequent appointment by the Cleveland administration as minister to Liberia, attracted the attention of blacks throughout the state and nation. W. D. Kelley's nomination for state auditor two years later made an even greater impression. Although Kelley was defeated in the general election, many blacks remembered that the Democrats had nominated a Negro for state auditor when the party of Lincoln had been unwilling to do so.

The recognition accorded black voters by Taylor's appointment and Kelley's nomination was only one of a number of factors impelling Kansas Negroes to "give the Democrats a chance" in 1890. Rumors that President Harrison planned to resurrect Chester Arthur's policy toward the South antagonized many blacks. Others were swayed by the Democratic rhetoric which insisted that the high tariff, sound money, probusiness doctrines of the Republicans had nothing to offer the vast majority of black Kansans who were either farmers, day-laborers, mechanics, or small businessmen. Continued affiliation with the party of Blaine and Harrison would inevitably isolate the black leadership from the masses. Still others were rebelling against the tactics of intimidation frequently used by white Republican bosses. "Only blacks seem to lack the freedom to choose between parties, to scratch or boost as they please," H. W. Rolfe wrote Waller in May, 1888. "If a fellow seeks to remove the republican plack [sic] from the back of the Negro, he will be branded a traitor, a hypocrite, a fool, and a renegade by his own race and the bosses will tell him he can no longer haul dirt or clean the streets under a republican administration. Colored men have been dismissed from common labor on the streets simply because they refused to tell how they voted." But above all there was the hope of office and the recognition that it implied. Warner T. McGuinn, who took over the helm of the American Citizen in 1888, proclaimed in dedicating his editorial page to political independence that "one of the aims of the Citizen will be to lift the leaders of the race in Kansas especially from the dish pans of the state prison and

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tenth rate county offices to political positions more commensurate with their abilities."

Although there were black Democrats in Kansas well before Charles H. J. Taylor's arrival, it was this well-to-do Georgia immigrant who acted as Democratic pied piper to disgruntled black Republicans from 1887 through 1899. Historians such as August Meier have labeled him an unqualified accommodationist. And in fact Taylor's book *Whites and Blacks*, written after his return from Liberia in 1887, did breathe "a spirit of conciliation toward the white South." He was highly critical of Radical Reconstruction in this work and urged blacks to seek the friendship of southern whites whenever possible. Accommodation, however, was for Taylor a matter of style, a rhetorical device to deflect the initiatives of radical white supremacists. He was never willing to overlook lynching, discrimination, and disfranchisement in the name of racial harmony. From the editorial pages of the *Wyandotte World* and later the *American Citizen*, Taylor showed himself to be a staunch defender of the race against all forms of injustice. Indeed, he appealed to blacks to defect to the Democrats in order that they might gain political leverage, which in turn could be translated into equality of economic opportunity and full citizenship.

Taylor, perhaps more than Waller, realized that the black politician's ability to satisfy the demands of Negro voters was severely limited because he must serve the political machines supported by the propertied classes in the white community. Taylor argued that the average Negro shared a greater community of interest with the large landowners, small entrepreneurs, and international businessmen who dominated the Democratic party than with the financiers and industrialists who guided the Republican party. "The race has no interest in manufactures," he asserted in 1891. "They are not even employed in them. . . . Why should we want the necessities of life to help the home producers with whom we have no part." Thus, he reasoned, adherence to Democratic doctrine would enable the black politician to reconcile the two constituencies with which he had to deal far more easily than he could through continued membership in the Republican party.

In late May, 1888, black Democrats and "independents" met to discuss race problems in Kansas and to establish an organization that would disseminate their views. Taylor was elected chairman of the convention. Prominent black Republicans such as Turner Bell and Charles Langston not only attended but agreed to serve as members of a state central committee. The *American Citizen*, which Waller and Morton had sold in August to George A. Dudley and H. H. Johnson, two
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prosperous Kansas City real-estate dealers, subsequently became the Democracy's spokesman within the black community. As election day approached, a number of other journals became willing to advocate desertion of the Republicans, if only on a temporary basis. "The negro's place is not in the front, nor in the rear of this political battle, but halfway," advised the Topeka Benevolent Banner. "He has tried everything in politics, but the right thing, and that is the division of his vote as a man." The Democrats even went so far as to test Waller's loyalty, but he rebuffed them, declaring that "in our soul we are a republican."

No less alarming to Waller and other Republican leaders than the Democratic resurgence among blacks was the challenge from the Populists. Kansas Populism was rooted in the deterioration of the farmer's economic position during the decade that began in 1885. In the early 1880s the state had entered a period of exceptional prosperity based primarily on high prices for both corn and wheat. From 1880 to 1885 population increased by 37 percent, or more than 300,000, and the value of property more than doubled. This led to speculation, grossly inflated land prices, and credit purchasing by immigrants. The boom collapsed in the winter of 1887-1888 and mushroomed into a major depression as drought and crop failures during succeeding years further eroded the farmer's purchasing power. In 1890 the total mortgage debt of Kansas was 27 percent of the actual value of all Kansas real estate. When Kansas farmers, in an effort to end farm mortgage foreclosures, establish effective state regulation of railroads, and put an end to monopolistic practices by bankers and businessmen, founded the people's party in 1889, they decided to attempt a political alliance with the Negroes of the state. As their emissary to the black community, the Populists chose Benjamin Foster, who was a Topeka minister, a militant, and a former Republican. Foster was born a slave in 1856 but rose from that humble beginning to attend Trinity School and Emerson Institute in Alabama during Reconstruction, and subsequently to obtain a degree from Chicago Theological Seminary. He served throughout the late 1880s and 1890s as pastor of the Lincoln Street Congregational Church. In 1890 he stumped the state in behalf of the new party, and in the process established a Negro Populist league. As a reward for his efforts and as part of its bid for the black vote, the party convention which met in August selected Foster as Populist nominee for state auditor.

Initially, black Republicans reacted to the activities of Taylor, Foster, and their supporters with a good deal of anxiety. Not only did they feel that their own position within the black community was threatened, but they also feared that these mavericks would alienate white
Republicans, thereby paving the way for the triumph of those who favored keeping the Negro's role in party affairs to a minimum. Waller, McCabe, and others well remembered that, when they had warned the 1884 Republican state convention that failure to send a Negro to the national convention would result in mass defection, they had bluntly been told by a spokesman for the white majority, "If the colored men, after we, the Republican party, have freed them want to vote the Democratic ticket, because they were not given a representative to Chicago, let them go and be damned."61

Waller's successes in 1888 convinced most black Republican leaders that he was the party's best hope for heading off the Democratic-Populist rebellion among blacks. In the spring of 1889 W. B. Townsend and Blanche K. Bruce began touting Waller for minister to Haiti. These two Republican loyalists, then co-editors of the *Leavenworth Advocate*, believed that the threat posed by Taylor, Eagleson, Foster, and company was so pressing that the white leadership within the Republican party must demonstrate its good faith immediately. Even E. P. McCabe, then in Washington, agreed to recognize Waller's ascendancy among black Republicans and campaign for his appointment to the Haitian post. Not so John Brown. In December, 1888, he launched yet another attempt to establish an organization that would allow him to control black political life in Kansas, or at least to claim to do so. Brown and his chief lieutenants, Sol Watkins and S. W. Winn, joined with Judge Stephen A. Hackworth, who had appeared suddenly in Topeka in the mid-1880s, and another white Radical refugee from the South, W. H. Dinkgraves, to call a meeting of all southern Republicans who had been forced by the "ku-kluxing" Democrats to leave their homes and flee to Kansas. The stated objective of the organization was to apply pressure on the incoming Harrison administration to take whatever action was necessary to ensure a free ballot and a fair count in the South. Hackworth and Dinkgraves, however, hoped to use the association to obtain federal appointive positions in the South, while Brown wanted to be recognized by the new administration as spokesman for the black community in Kansas. The first state convention of southern expatriates was held in Topeka on February 15. Delegates from Leavenworth and other cities attempted to persuade the meeting to endorse Waller for the Haitian position, but the majority, most of whom were from Shawnee, hooted them down.62 Townsend, Bruce, W. A. Price, and other Waller supporters were furious. Townsend angrily charged that the meeting was "activated by the wishes of a clique in and about Topeka that have concerted themselves together to sit heavily not only upon the aspirations of Mr. Waller but upon those
of any other man who does not deem it necessary to bow to the whims and caprices of the 'gang of would-be political bosses and dictators.'”

Although Brown's opposition to Waller had little to do with the outcome of the situation, the Haitian mission eventually went to Frederick Douglass. The "Wallerites," the name given Waller and his supporters by the Brown faction, then appealed to General Harrison Kelley, a prominent Negrophile and a member of the state Board of Charities. As a result of Kelley's influence and a recommendation from Governor Humphrey, the board appointed Waller steward at the Osawatomie insane asylum in July, 1889. But this and his ensuing selection as deputy county attorney for Shawnee County, only earned him the ridicule of the Democrats and Populists. Denouncing Waller as a lackey of the white Republican power structure, the American Citizen observed that being named "head-waiter" at a "little one-horse asylum" was small reward for a presidential elector. "We cannot but regret," wrote McGuinn, "that he has not the backbone to decline such positions with thanks.""65

Waller himself was not happy in his new post. The insane asylum, a huge Y-shaped three story structure situated atop a ridge overlooking the town of Osawatomie, was far removed from the state's population centers and from Susan and the children, who remained in Leavenworth. Few of the denizens were black and none could talk politics. In September, 1889, Waller applied for and received a transfer to the state school for the blind in Kansas City, where he was to be superintendent of industrial arts—that is, overseer of the school's broom manufactory. The Board of Charities reasoned that Waller's political effectiveness would be much greater in Kansas City than Osawatomie.

Conditions at the Kansas City institution proved even less tolerable than those prevailing at the insane asylum. The white director, Colonel Alan Buckner, was a prominent figure within the Kansas Republican party and had at one time in 1888 been touted for the post of attorney general. Though a clergyman, minister, Union veteran, and a Republican, Buckner was also a rabid racist. Upon Waller's arrival, he informed the students that a "nigger" had come to teach them. He subsequently assigned the entire Waller family to two tiny rooms above the institution's dispensary and ordered the cooks not to cook for them unless they sat at a separate table in the cafeteria. At one point, the "Reverend Colonel," as Waller referred to him, denied the Wallers use of the institution's washrooms, and then offered John a sum of money if he would leave. Never one to suffer abuse quietly, Waller described his treatment in a series of letters to Humphrey, the Board of Charities, the American Citizen, and the Leavenworth Advocate. The upshot was an unannounced
visit by the board to the institute in July, 1890, and, following a hearing, an official reprimand for Buckner. Despite his victory over the colonel, Waller left the institute for the blind in mid-summer, 1890. Nearly a year earlier he had decided to make an all-out effort to capture the Republican nomination for auditor.67

From feeling threatened by the activities of Negro Democrats and Populists, the Republican faithful had gradually moved to the position that, despite past evidence to the contrary, the political revolt could be used to advantage against the white supremacists within the party. Waller said as much in a document he issued calling a state convention of Negro men for August 11, 1890, to meet in Salina. The notice that appeared in the Advocate and Citizen on July 26 bearing his signature admitted that the Republicans, “fortified by a tremendous majority in this state,” had been able “to deny to the colored voters the representation . . . commensurate with our numerical strength.”68 Nonetheless, Waller advised prospective delegates, the means of redemption were at hand: “Because of the altered condition and threatened revolts, the colored voters are now in a position by a united effort to obtain some representation from the party whom they have loyally supported.”69 This mood of optimism was prompted by several developments that had taken place in 1889–1890. President Harrison’s failure to appoint an acceptable number of blacks and persistent rumors concerning his “southern policy” had galvanized black Republicans in Kansas and throughout the nation, and produced a storm of protest that the white leadership in the G.O.P. could not afford to ignore. The Wallerites believed that Republicans in Kansas would prove particularly sensitive to black demands because of the common front established by the Populists, Farmers’ Alliance, and Knights of Labor. In early January, 1890, the Alliance and the Knights formally agreed to cooperate in all matters business or political, and promised to work for currency inflation, passage of stay laws, enactment of antitrust legislation, a graduated income tax, and other reforms which black Republicans were sure would frighten their white counterparts into recognizing them. They reasoned that if conservative white Democrats in the South were willing to distribute political plums to black Republicans in order to enlist their aid against the rising tide of agrarian radicalism, why should not white Republicans in Kansas do the same. Finally, Negro Republicans were heartened by the election in the fall of 1889 of Colonel John Brown as Shawnee County clerk. Because blacks regarded it as a test of the party’s current attitude toward the “black and tan” faction, Brown’s campaign had attracted state-wide attention. Wallerites, Democrats, and Populists joined with the “Brown machine” to work for the
Colonel's election. Major white dailies such as the *Capital*, the *Lawrence Journal*, and the *Leavenworth Times* stood by the Colonel and managed to sway enough white voters to secure his election. Unfortunately, Brown's victory was not indicative of a new determination among white Republicans to accord Negroes the recognition for which they were clamoring. Brown won, but ran from 1,000 to 1,500 votes behind the rest of the ticket. The *American Citizen*, admittedly an independent sheet, estimated that no more than 12 percent of the white Republicans in Shawnee voted for the black candidate. Thus, the optimism that stemmed from Brown's victory was ill-founded.

Because of the uncertain political situation, the convention of Negro men that met at Salina on August 11, 1890, attracted state-wide attention among whites as well as blacks. A number of white Republicans objected to the meeting and accused the "black and tans" of drawing the color line. Nevertheless, the Wallerites pressed ahead, convinced that their success at the state Republican convention depended in no small part upon the black community's ability to avoid both the appearance and reality of factionalism. "The colored republicans of this state," wrote Townsend in the *Advocate*, "are forced to take such steps as this because the colored element only is ignored by the party and because we desire to avoid the stereotype argument or (subterfuge) . . . that 'you colored people are divided; one faction wants M and the other wants B; when you are united upon one man we will grant you your request.'" During the two days prior to the opening session, dozens of prominent Negroes representing every political viewpoint and every section of the state streamed into central Kansas. When Townsend was elected permanent chairman, it was clear that Waller and his supporters would control the meeting. Although there were several aspirants from northwest and southeast Kansas for the position of auditor-designate, Waller was the first choice of the convention by an overwhelming margin. His long service to the party, close contacts with the white power structure, and growing stature within the national black elite made him seem the best possible choice. Indeed, the convention reacted as if his election were tantamount to nomination by the Republican convention. "For four or five minutes [after Waller's nomination]," one observer reported, "there was the greatest rejoicing—hats were waved, ladies shook their handkerchiefs, men shouted themselves hoarse." Resolutions were passed expressing "cold indifference" and "supreme contempt" for all measures of forced expatriation of black Americans to a foreign land, which a number of southern white racists were then advocating, and declaring that "all discrimination of a public character founded on accident of race or color
are [sic] irritating, impolitic, and repugnant to the nature and spirit of the popular form of government." In an attempt to reassure Republican leaders as to their loyalty, the convention specifically repudiated the Farmers' Alliance.

The Republican convention that met at the Copeland House in Topeka on September 2, 1890, manifested considerable concern over the challenge posed by the Populists and Democrats; but their anxiety did not, as Waller and his associates had hoped, make them more solicitous of the black community. To appease laborers and farmers, the delegates constructed a platform that advocated such radical reforms as free textbooks, a popularly elected railroad commission, and the abolition of child labor, but they refused to come out in support of the black man's civil rights or denounce the racial violence that was then sweeping the nation. The only positions that were contested were state treasurer and state auditor. Humphrey and the rest of the ticket, all of whom were running for second terms, were unopposed. By the opening gavel no less than fifteen men had announced for auditor. Everyone acknowledged that C. M. Hovey, a farmer from Thomas County, and Waller were the leading candidates; but many predicted a deadlock, in which case the convention would have to turn to a compromise figure. Waller, whose name was placed in nomination by W. B. Townsend, actually led on the first ballot, 104 to 103 for Hovey. The next nearest candidate polled 49. On the second ballot Waller's total jumped to 128 but Hovey's increased to 169. During the third and decisive poll, the convention stampeded for Hovey, and all other candidates except Waller withdrew. The final vote was 450 to 99. Although the Salina convention had endorsed Waller by acclamation and white newspapers such as the Abilene Reflector and Leavenworth Times had boomed him for auditor throughout 1889–1890, the convention had chosen a white. According to one account, the extreme anti-Negro faction within the party delayed the third ballot for auditor for several hours while it convinced the majority that nomination of a "nigger" would drive white Republicans into the Democratic fold. Others insisted that Waller's downfall was the work of John Brown who, as a delegate to both the Salina meeting and the Republican convention, had secretly lobbied against Waller's election. Still others argued that vocation rather than skin color determined the outcome of the contest. According to the Topeka Capital, 370 of the 567 delegates to the convention were farmers and they were determined to elect a farmer. Historian William Chafe probably identified the principal reason for Waller's defeat when he noted that both party leaders and the rank and
file, remembering the landslide of 1888, were suffering from an acute case of overconfidence.

The Republican party in Kansas cannot be said to have caved in to a "lily-white" faction in 1890 or at any time during this crucial decade. There were no calls among Republicans during this period for disfranchisement of the black man or even for his exclusion from city and county office. In fact, in 1894 the party was to nominate Blanche K. Bruce for state auditor. The Republican party in Kansas did not, moreover, perceive itself as threatened by white supremacist Democratic and/or Populist parties, as did so many southern Republican organizations during this same period. Indeed, the Populists who nominated Foster for auditor and the Demo-Pops (the two parties fused in Wyandotte and several other counties) who nominated C. H. J. Taylor for a seat in the state legislature could hardly pose as racial purists. Nonetheless, there was a good deal of residual prejudice among the Republican rank and file. In addition, some party leaders such as J. K. Hudson felt that the Salina meeting constituted a dangerous precedent, and decided that it would be just as well if Waller were defeated in order to forestall future attempts by the "black and tans" to dictate to the party. Finally, most Republicans believed in 1890, as they had since the Civil War, that blacks had no alternative but to vote Republican. After all, Republicans "fought, bled, and died" to emancipate the Negro, while the Democratic party consisted primarily of former slave-owners, and the Populists were mostly poor whites who were even more virulently anti-Negro than the old slaveocracy. "The address of Candidate Foster to the colored voters will have very little effect on colored men who are accustomed to vote the republican ticket because it is the ticket of their friends on a platform of justice which knows no color or 'previous condition,'" predicted one Republican editor. In sum, Republicans simply did not feel that the black vote was necessary for victory, and they thus proved unwilling to placate the Wallerites by awarding them a place on the state ticket.

Waller was deeply disappointed and frustrated at his rejection by the Republican convention. His selection by the Salina gathering as the black community's choice for a place on the Republican state ticket represented ten years of patient work. At some financial risk to himself, he had established two newspapers in the interests of the race. His editorials and speeches had won for him, he believed, a reputation as an uncompromising yet thoughtful advocate of full civil rights and equality of economic opportunity for the black man. There were, moreover, no apparent tactical flaws in his decade-long push for state office. He had waited McCabe and Brown out, not making his move until the majority
of black Kansans, convinced that each of these leaders had had their chance, had tired of their bickering. Waller had been just as careful in cultivating the proper image among whites as among blacks. He had passed through the “severe American crucible,” to anticipate a phrase, and made something of himself. He was an educated, law-abiding, responsible, self-made man—a Negro whom John P. St. John, Daniel Votaw, Mary E. Griffith, Harrison Kelley, and John Martin could be proud of. His economic views were rigidly orthodox, and he had been faithful to his superiors in the party. Why, then, had he been denied at the threshold?

The answer was obvious, even to such an incurable optimist as Waller. He had been refused access to the inner councils of the Republican party and election to state office simply because he was black. Waller concluded in the wake of his defeat that the tendency within the Republican party to ignore the Negro in general, and himself in particular, was part of a deteriorating racial climate in Kansas and in the nation as a whole. Indeed, as early as 1888, Waller’s speeches and writings began to reflect a sense of deep foreboding. Reacting to G. I. Currin’s defeat for police judge, specifically, and to the lynchings and discrimination that seemed to be sweeping America, the editor of the American Citizen complained: “What with every work shop door slammed in the Negro’s face, every hotel, every restaurant, aye, every church in this city, why foster hope? . . . Shall we ever reach the end? Are we ever to be able to proclaim that the American flag is indeed the emblem of Liberty?”81 During the course of an address delivered in 1889 at the dedication services of the A.M.E. Church in Leavenworth, he warned:

A conspiracy is forming against the Negro in this country which has reached a larger and more gigantic proportion than many of us imagine. Race prejudice is on the increase . . . a cloud is gathering and increasing in size and unless averted by the Negro, will burst. . . . We are educating our children but when they are through with their schooling, what have they to do? The colored societies are a success in everything except protecting the race. . . . There is a conspiracy all over the North to drive the Negro from all the important marts of labor, and force him to hold on to the minimal occupations. . . . The anarchist who places a bomb under the spacious courthouse and blows it to pieces and who marches through the street with a red flag, can find a place for his boy in [the white man’s] business house, manufactory or machine shop, immediately after his return from the destruction of private property, while the law abiding Negro will be refused every time.82
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Such expressions of disillusionment by no means meant that Waller rejected the American creed of material betterment through self-reliance and enterprise. Despite disappointment at his own misfortune and his anxiety concerning the overall status of the Afro-American, Waller simply could not bring himself to reject the system. Nor could he purge his philosophy of the Social Darwinism and materialism that had become deeply rooted during the preceding decade. Waller had not espoused high tariff policies, paid daily homage to free enterprise, and held up the Gospel of Wealth as the pathway to salvation for blacks simply to ingratiate himself with the white power structure. Given the environment from which he had come, his attitudes, and his still rising level of expectations, the black Kansan could not accept separatism, socialism, Populism, or apathy as reasonable alternatives. Accordingly, instead of rejecting the Horatio Alger myth following his rebuff at the hands of the Republicans in 1890, Waller merely sought to act it out in a different milieu, one that would free him from the restrictions imposed by the color bar and at the same time would allow him to retain his American citizenship and work for the advancement of his people.
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