A Black Odyssey

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CHAPTER TEN

A Call to Arms and the Last Frontier

John Waller's lifelong quest for personal and racial advancement dramatically broadened his intellectual horizons and produced a world view that was ever more complex and universal. As a slave Waller existed in a milieu that was minuscule, limited as it was to the Sherwood plantation and its immediate environs. The peculiar institution, moreover, was as confining mentally as it was physically. Even within the context of his relatively privileged family, the overriding goals of life were, first, survival and, second, a minimal amount of personal freedom. Emancipation placed the young freedman in a position to experience the world beyond the Sherwood estate and New Madrid County, Missouri, a world he had only dreamed about previously. Dominating Waller's existence during the years immediately following the Civil War was a search, first, for knowledge and, subsequently, for a vocation that would allow him maximum growth—economically, professionally, and intellectually. As a former slave and contraband and as an Afro-American, Waller had lived in environments over which he had had little control; consequently, the drive in him to manage his own destiny and manipulate the societal factors that might affect it was particularly strong. Sometime in late adolescence or early manhood Waller realized that because he was a Negro personal achievement could not be separated from racial advancement. Responding to that perception, he began a lifelong search for a frontier where blacks could enjoy the blessings of democracy and capitalism, and yet be free of the blight of racism. He turned first
to a domestic "out-back"—Kansas—and then to an overseas frontier—Madagascar. In each environment Waller's plans for personal and racial fulfillment went awry, his political plans in Kansas subverted by domestic racism and his concessionary scheme in Madagascar by colonialism. In his continuing effort to find the key that would unlock the door to equality and acceptance, Waller upon his return to the United States in 1896 dabbled in journalism, politics, education, military service, and, inevitably, empire building. These efforts, just as his pre-1896 exploits, ended in failure. As a result, by 1900 John Waller had developed a world view that was truly global and that recognized both the relationship between racism and colonialism, and the pervasiveness of the struggle between white and nonwhites for natural resources and living space.

Waller left Nimes, where he had served the bulk of his ten-month term, on the evening of February 21, 1896. The would-be entrepreneur had lost eighty pounds during his incarceration. He complained, in addition, of impaired vision. Nonetheless, Waller was in high spirits when he arrived in Paris on the twenty-second. He immediately called on Eustis, who gave him a chilly reception, but the ambassador, as he had been ordered, provided Waller with enough money for the return trip to the United States. Journeying to London, he conferred briefly with Underwood Harvey and other British investors who had evidenced an interest in Wallerland. After a six-week sojourn in England, Waller departed Southampton on April 1, arriving in New York eleven days later.1

For the ex-consul "the Waller case" was far from over. He still believed that he could use the wave of public outrage created by his imprisonment to extract a sizable indemnity from the French. Accordingly, no sooner had he stepped off the U.S.S. New York than he began blasting the Cleveland administration, particularly Wetter and Olney, in hopes of generating support for a claim to indemnification. In an address to the Twenty-ninth District Republican Club on April 13, he accused Wetter of betraying him to the French. He repeatedly denied that there was a shred of truth in the charges leveled at him by France and the Cleveland administration. The assembly responded by passing unanimously a resolution affirming Waller's innocence and requesting Congress to extract compensation from France. Following a brief outpouring of sympathy, however, the American public rapidly wearied of the affair. Abandoning his campaign for reparations, Waller decided to pursue another tack. After innumerable letters to the State Department, the French legation, and his acquaintances in Great Britain, the black Kansan succeeded in persuading France early in 1897 to purchase Wallerland
for $10,000. How much of this money he actually received is unclear, for it was not transmitted through the State Department but paid to one of Waller's friends in England, presumably Underwood Harvey.2

Waller hoped not only to convert his experiences into cash but to turn a political profit from them as well. The now-famous former diplomat decided to repair to the scene of his past political triumphs. His return to Kansas was delayed by a whirlwind speaking tour which took him to Baltimore, Philadelphia, Washington, St. Louis, and Chicago. When John returned to America, Susan and the children were living in Baltimore where Warner McGuinn had secured lodgings for them. The lecture tour was necessary to raise money to finance the family's trip home and to buy a house once they reached their destination. Lectures completed and money in hand, Waller gathered the clan and set out for Topeka, arriving there on May 2, 1896. Following a flurry of receptions and "socials," the family moved to Kansas City and bought a small but comfortable house at 836 State Street.3

The America to which John Waller returned in 1896 had changed dramatically since his departure five years earlier. The nation was still struggling to extricate itself from the chronic depression that followed the panic of 1893; unemployment remained high in several areas, and a significant number of Americans lacked the necessities of life. Agrarian discontent had mushroomed into a full-fledged revolt; Populists and free-silver Democrats plotted the demise of the "plutocrats" who were allegedly exploiting and oppressing the common man. Further contributing to social unrest were a series of bloody clashes between labor and management—the Homestead and Pullman strikes were among the more notorious—confrontations which served to convince middle-class Americans that unions were tools of alien radicals bent on destroying the nation, and the laboring class that America was controlled by an unholy coterie of businessmen, politicians, and lawyers determined to exclude the common man from economic and political decision-making.

Nowhere were social and political cleavages deeper than in Kansas. Declining prices and increasing farm mortgage foreclosures continued to keep farmers up in arms, while bankers, businessmen, and professional people, fearful that the state's burgeoning reputation as the seedbed of agrarian radicalism would drive eastern capital away, mobilized to squash "Sockless" Jerry Simpson, Mary "Yellin" Lease, and their Populist followers. In 1892 the Democrats and Populists fused at the state level. The Republicans responded with an attempt to steal the Populists' thunder, adopting a platform calling for public control of railroads and telegraphs, a redemption period for debtors, the Australian ballot, and

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woman suffrage. Convinced, moreover, that Benjamin Foster's nomination by the Populists in 1890 had had much to do with their success, the Republicans selected Blanche K. Bruce, principal of the South Leavenworth School and editor of the *Leavenworth Herald*, as their nominee for state auditor. The tide of agrarian discontent was running too high, however, and neither a radical platform nor a black face on the ticket prevented the fusionists from sweeping the state. Two years later, however, the Democrats and Populists were unable to reconcile their differences. As a result, the Republicans, headed by Leavenworth banker and real-estate promoter E. N. Morrill, returned to office.⁴

Morrill's election hardly signaled a return to Republican dominance. To the acute dismay of Cy Leland and other party leaders, the Leavenworth businessman managed in the space of two years to antagonize virtually every voting constituency in the state. In 1895 Morrill publicly pronounced prohibition a failure and called for modification. Fanatical drys decided then and there to bolt the party. The administration subsequently alienated western drought sufferers by refusing to call upon the legislature to appropriate moneys for direct relief, even though there was a surplus in the state treasury. Black leaders had been promised during the '94 convention that if they would agree to an all-white slate of candidates, and if the Republicans won, several of the best appointive positions in the state would go to Negroes. When Morrill limited his black appointees to B. K. Bruce, a number of black Republicans promised to retaliate at the polls. Further dimming the party's prospects for 1896 was the free-silver issue over which the Republicans were badly split and the Democrats and Populists solidly united. Finally, the Populists and Democrats decided to return to the strategy that brought success in 1890 and 1892—fusion.⁵

Indeed, one of the few things the Republican party had going for it in 1896 was the Waller affair. Kansas Democrats complained to Washington throughout 1895 that Congressmen R. W. Blue and Charles Curtis and Senator Lucien Baker were making bales of political hay out of the inability of the Cleveland administration to secure Waller's release and an indemnity from France. The whole affair, wrote one irate Democrat, "will enable the jingoistic Republican politicians, who are without number since the last election, in these parts, to further denounce the 'weak' foreign policy of this administration."⁶ Criticism continued after the ex-consul's release. Addressing the Republican state convention (called to elect delegates to the national convention) in Wichita in March, the permanent chairman promised that if a Republican administration was voted into office Americans around the world would once again enjoy
the full protection of their rights. "Then, no American will be tried by a court martial and the record of such a trial [will not be] refused a single day from immediate inspection, when properly demanded."7

This, then, was the political environment that John Waller entered upon his return to Kansas in 1896. The ex-consul was pressed into action by beleaguered Republicans almost as soon as he stepped off the train. He embodied an issue that could be used to attract white as well as black votes. In dozens of speeches delivered during the summer and fall he put his misadventures to use for himself and the Republican party. "Mr. Waller is an impressive speaker," reported the American Citizen, following a political rally at the Tenth Street Baptist Church, "and when he told about how the French spat upon him and tried to kill him with abuse, all because he was an American Negro and a Protestant, the audience groaned in sympathy. . . . When he denounced the present administration for having allowed an American citizen to be trampled on by a foreign nation, the audience hissed. . . . The names of Attorney General Olney and Mr. Eustis . . . were hissed again and again and when Mr. Waller said that James G. Blaine, the Negroes' friend, would have sent the whole American navy to rescue him, the audience applauded."8 Waller's speech must have been impressive indeed, for the day he delivered it, George A. Dudley, the owner of the Citizen, hired him as editor-in-chief.

Although he continued to extol the virtues of sound money, a high tariff, and the home market, Waller's specialty during the 1896 campaign was, not surprisingly, foreign policy. In the editorial columns of the Citizen and on the speaker's stump he blasted Cleveland for abandoning the nonwhite peoples of the world to the evils of colonialism, and he promised an Anglo-American rapprochement if the Republicans regained control of the White House. "Our candidate will have a foreign policy that will look to and defend the honor of our flag and protect the rights and property of American citizens abroad," he wrote to William McKinley. "He will not flaunt the red flag of war in the face of Great Britain over Venezuela and at the same time allow France, Turkey, and Spain to ruthlessly imprison, pilfer, and rob American citizens."9 In August Waller began a campaign swing that took him to Des Moines, St. Louis, and Chicago. In Iowa he recalled past victories and urged the state to help return the party of Lincoln and Blaine to power. In Chicago he joined Ferdinand Barnett and other prominent black Republicans in demanding the rejection of an administration that had made America a synonym for craven cowardice among the nations of the world.10

Waller's decision to immerse himself in the campaign of 1896 stemmed from a number of considerations. Politics, of course, was his
business, and he had never known any home other than the Republican party. Despite the Compromise of 1877 and the lily-white tactics of Arthur and Harrison, the G.O.P. was still the party of Lincoln, Seward, and Stevens. The Populists were an unknown quantity, while the Democrats could hardly be trusted as long as they continued to accord ex-Confederates places of honor and power within the party. And, moreover, Waller continued to be angry with the Cleveland administration for not actively defending the Malagasies. Finally, there was as always the personal motive. Waller hoped that the publicity he had gained while in prison in France and while on the stump in Kansas would lead to his being named, if the Republicans won, recorder of deeds, the highest paying and most powerful federal office traditionally given to a black man. The recorder not only controlled dozens of jobs directly but advised the president on all black appointments made during his administration. C. H. J. Taylor filled the post during Cleveland's second term. It was not unreasonable to expect, Waller believed, that one good Kansas man could follow another.11

Many hopes were disappointed in the year 1896, not the least of which were those of Kansas Republicans and John Waller. Despite the fact that there were no less than six slates of candidates running for office in Kansas in 1896, and although once again most Negroes, grumbling all the way, voted Republican, the fusionists won a clear-cut victory. John W. Leedy, a political opportunist who had at one time or another been a member of all three major parties, was elected governor, while the Demo-Pops claimed majorities in both chambers of the legislature. Although William McKinley won the presidential contest, Waller's bid to succeed Taylor was not to be realized. He received a good deal of support from black Republicans for the position but none from white. Waller's dreams of filling the post made famous by Frederick Douglass, Blanche K. Bruce, and others vanished when in April, 1897, McKinley settled on Henry P. Cheatham of North Carolina.12

With the recordership decided, John and Susan Waller were free to turn their attention to more mundane matters such as earning a living and finding a niche in Kansas City society. For a black family with social standing and a steady income, life in Kansas City at the turn of the century was not unpleasant. Kansas City, Kansas, which had been consolidated in 1886, had a total population as of 1896 of 40,676, which included 5,055 blacks. Although there were enclaves in the northern and extreme western portions of the city, most Negroes lived in the heart of the community within a seven block band that paralleled the river. Kansas City's packing houses, stockyards, grain elevators, and flour mills
provided employment for hundreds of Negroes. Others earned their livelihood serving whites indirectly as waiters, porters, and barbers, or directly as domestics. As was the case in Topeka, Leavenworth, and Lawrence, the black community in Kansas City was stratified by education, church affiliation, degree of adherence to conventional morality, and, to a certain extent, place of residence. There was near the stockyards and close to the river a section called Smokey Row, a line of shanties interrupted here and there by a black bawdy house or saloon. Some of the stockyard, mill, and packing house workers were forced to live in Smokey Row, but those blacks with social pretensions, a group which would certainly include the Wallers, avoided contact with the inhabitants of this area except at election time. The respectable element—including B. S. Smith and his family, the Dudleys, the Corvine Pattersons, and the Wallers—lived in tree-lined if dilapidated neighborhoods farther away from the river. The Waller’s house at 836 State was located in one of these areas. Also like the other cities of eastern Kansas, Kansas City had its coterie of professional and business people. The handful of lawyers, doctors, and merchants comprised the city’s Negro middle class. They attended one of a number of A.M.E. churches, debated current events and literary topics in Kansas City’s three black literary societies, and took the lead in politics and civic affairs. Between the elite and the inhabitants of Smokey Row, both physically and socially, stood a mass of semi-educated black laborers who struggled to duplicate conventional behavior patterns and life-styles of the middle class. They belonged for the most part not to the A.M.E. church but to one of the city’s Baptist churches. Lack of education, white racism, and grinding poverty closed so many doors to this group that their existence consisted primarily of a struggle for survival.13

Kansas City politics was noted for its cynicism and corruption. Vote purchasing, ballot box stuffing, and false counts characterized not only general elections for city, county, and state office but primary elections as well. In 1898 Populist Police Chief W. T. Quarles was accused of collecting $1,200 per month from the city’s gamblers and “jointists,” and splitting the boodle with Leedy. When Waller moved to Kansas City, the Republican county organization was badly split between two rival factions, one headed by former mayor C. W. Trickett, and the other by George A. Martin, editor of the Kansas City Gazette. While rank-and-file blacks in Kansas City traditionally voted Republican, the city’s Negro politicians had a well-deserved reputation for rebellion. In 1891 Eagleson, Turner Bell, and William D. Matthews had put up an all-black slate of candidates for municipal office. In 1896, in an effort to secure more
recognition from the party leadership, a group of disgruntled black Republicans challenged the Democrats and regular Republicans with the Abraham Lincoln Republican ticket. C. H. J. Taylor used Kansas City as his base of operations during his intermittent residence in the state. Moves toward independence were not totally counterproductive, as evidenced by the fact that in 1896 blacks were employed on the police force and in the fire department, and one was on the city council. The city attorney was a Negro, and there was one black justice of the peace. Waller was somewhat taken aback by the cynicism of Wyandotte county politics and frustrated with the fragmentation within the Republican party. Regarding city or county office as somewhat beneath him, Waller attempted to function as a conciliator and unifier. For the most part his efforts went unheeded.

As usual Waller supported himself and his family through a variety of activities. Evidently, a major source of his income during this period came from public lecturing. Among his advertised topics were “An American Consul and Citizen Abroad,” “Experiences and Treatment in French Prisons,” and “Madagascar, Her People, Customs, and Habits.” Fees were scaled from $50 or $75 for lectures in opera houses or public halls to $25 for speeches sponsored by churches. The ex-consul obviously earned something as editor of the Citizen but certainly not enough to feed and house the family. Early in 1897 he opened a law office at 117 West Sixth Street in partnership with W. H. Payne, former principal of Lincoln Institute in Jefferson City, Missouri. Susan supplemented the family income by taking in boarders and lecturing to ladies clubs on the charms of Madagascar. Waller planned to publish a book recounting his experiences under the title, Madagascar, Customs and Religion of the People, Eleven Months in a French Prison. Whether or not it was ever written is unclear. Money came in bits and pieces, but such was the family’s prosperity that John, Jr., was able to attend Emporia Normal school, and Minnie the Chicago Conservatory of Music, simultaneously.

Waller’s stay in a French prison had not diminished his ability to keep himself in the public eye. Despite the damning report delivered by the Cleveland administration to Congress just prior to his release from prison, many midwestern and western blacks viewed Waller as the most notable Negro the region had yet produced. On the first anniversary of his release from prison a monster celebration was held in his honor in Kansas City. Prominent blacks from Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Oklahoma Territory came and witnessed an extensive program featuring voice and instrumental presentations, a history of Waller’s life and adventures, and a “cotillion.” Telegrams were read from groups in Chicago and
other cities where black leaders were holding commemorative celebrations concurrently.\textsuperscript{16}

In the midst of his abortive bid for the recordership Waller became head of an association of well-to-do Kansas blacks, including old acquaintances Albert Thomas and James H. Guy, which had as its object the establishment of an Afro-American Industrial College in Cowley County in southeast Kansas. Waller had always been an exponent of racial solidarity and self-help; it was natural for him to become caught up in the mania for industrial education that seized leaders of both races during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The purpose of the association, according to its charter, was "to facilitate, aid, foster, and encourage the general school, literary, mechanical, industrial, agricultural, physical, mental, and art education of the Afro-American."\textsuperscript{17} Although the group filed articles of incorporation, raised money during 1897, and obtained an option on a $6,500 ranch near Winfield, the scheme came to naught, primarily because of the Spanish-American War and Waller's election to the rank of captain in the Twenty-Third Kansas Volunteers.\textsuperscript{18}

Waller had been an ardent supporter of the Cuban revolution ever since his return to the United States. In July he proclaimed in the \textit{American Citizen}: "The Cuban insurgents deserve the most hearty sympathy and encouragement of all who believe in liberty untrammeled ... and we hope there will be no abatement of the war on their part until the Spanish shall have conceded the Independence of Cuba."\textsuperscript{19} The United States government, he concluded, should recognize Cuban belligerency at once. In December, 1896, Waller headed a huge pro-Cuban rally at Chicago's Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church. "There are about six hundred thousand colored people in Cuba," he told the meeting, "and all of them are determined upon the independence of the island, and we are glad the colored people of Chicago, as elsewhere, are heart and soul for Cuban independence."\textsuperscript{20} That Waller should express sympathy for the Cubans is hardly surprising. The black Kansan's overseas adventures, as well as his domestic experiences, had given him a broad sympathy for exploited, oppressed peoples of all regions. He continued to be deeply troubled, for example, by the plight of the Malagasies, even after it was clear that he would never be able to return and claim his concession. "The situation of Madagascar is such that the civilized, Christian world ought to intervene and put down the attempt of France to pillage and rob that people of their country," he wrote. "It is fully as unjust and revolutionary as it would be were she to undertake to invade the United States and set up a dominion over them."\textsuperscript{21} Waller, like many of his brethren, hoped that the United States would act in the Caribbean
basin, if not in East Africa, as a counterweight to European colonialism. He reasoned that American intervention into the Spanish-Cuban conflict would redound to the benefit of blacks everywhere. It would make the white majority in the United States more aware of its oppression of the Afro-American, serve as a warning to other colonial powers, and possibly lead to the establishment of a vigorous black republic that would command the respect of nations everywhere. A benefit of American intervention not immediately apparent to Waller was the opportunity for him to win a commission in the United States Army and ultimately a chance to revive his dream of commercial empire.

Congress voted to intervene in the Spanish-Cuban War in April, 1898, and immediately black Kansans began clamoring for the right to serve in the armed forces. This demand marked the culmination of a prolonged struggle by blacks to end exclusion from the state's militia. The right of Afro-Americans to bear arms has been one of the more controversial issues in American history. Viewing military service as an undeniable badge of citizenship, white supremacists struggled from the American Revolution through World War I to exclude blacks from the armed forces in general and combat units in particular. Simultaneously, civil rights activists, just as certain of the intimate relationship between military service and full membership in society, placed the right to bear arms at the top of their list of priorities. This was no less true in Kansas than other areas. Although Kansas' founding fathers, determined to keep Negroes out of uniform, provided in Article VIII of the Wyandotte Constitution that "the militia shall be composed of all able bodied white male citizens," they could do nothing to bar blacks from federal service. Consequently, upon the outbreak of the Civil War, blacks organized the First Regiment, Kansas Colored Volunteers, which was mustered into federal service in January, 1863, the fourth Negro regiment to enter the Union Army. Both this outfit and the Second Kansas Colored Regiment saw considerable action against Confederate units in Arkansas and in Indian Territory. Eventually, the Kansas regiments were merged with the Eleventh and Fifty-fourth United States Colored Troops, two all-black brigades. Following the close of the war, many of these G.A.R. veterans returned to Kansas. As the years passed, their ranks were swelled by Negro troopers who retired from units stationed in the West to fight Indians. Thus, the black community in Kansas that developed during the 1860s and 1870s could look with pride on a distinguished record of military service; that tradition made the militia clause in the Wyandotte Constitution particularly onerous and had much to do with the effort that began in the 1870s to abolish it.
Blacks first tested the discriminatory provision during the Great Railroad Strike in 1878. No sooner had that walkout paralyzed the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe than the managers of the road began to import strikebreakers. When the strikers mobilized to prevent scabs from operating the roads, the governor called for able-bodied men to join the militia and help quell any violence that might develop. Although Adjutant General Peter S. Noble later denied that there was any discrimination, it is clear that blacks who volunteered were turned away.25

The Negro community responded to exclusion first by organizing “independent” militia units; that is, companies specifically authorized and partially supported by the state. By 1880 there were in Kansas three all-black militia companies: the Lawrence Guards, commanded by John M. Mitchell; the St. John Guards of Topeka (later supplanted by the Morton Guards), captained by John M. Brown; and the Garfield Rifles of Leavenworth, with Captain George W. Jackson in command. In 1887 the black citizens of North Topeka formed the Logan Rifles and elected John Johnson company commander. By 1890 Kansas City Negroes had formed the Kansas City Colored Company, with Captain N. W. Overton in charge. Apparently, the Lawrence and Leavenworth units were the best organized and most prosperous. Each had its own armory, uniforms, and a hundred state-supplied rifles.26

Simultaneously, black activists with Waller in the lead opened an aggressive campaign to have the word “white” eliminated from Article VIII of the constitution.27 Waller displayed a life-long interest in things military. Too young to fight in the Civil War, he joined the Lawrence Guards upon moving to Douglas County in 1879. He rose rapidly through the ranks and in 1881 was elected one of the unit’s two lieutenants.28 Waller’s speeches were heavily laced with history and specific references to the prominent part played by Negro troops in past national conflicts. The ex-slave was drawn to the military because he perceived it to be a facet of republican citizenship and thus important to the Negroes’ struggle for civil equality, not because he was particularly interested in tactics, strategy, or soldiering per se. From the stump and the editorial columns of the Western Recorder he denounced the discriminatory militia clause as a slap in the face to all black Kansans. “In the name of the devotion of the people of Kansas to equality, equity, and fair play,” he wrote in the Recorder, “we demand that the word white be stricken from the Constitution of this State, not because we want to fight, but because of the justice of it.”29 Waller used his influence with John Martin and persuaded the governor to officially request the legislature in 1886 to end discrimination in the state militia. When a number of powerful white
Republicans, such as Joe Hudson of the *Capital*, joined the campaign, the Kansas legislature in 1887 passed and in November, 1888, the people of Kansas endorsed a constitutional amendment eliminating the word from section eight.\(^{30}\)

Resistance to enlistment of blacks was still very strong, however, and succeeding administrations employed two tactics designed to maintain the racial purity of the state's citizen army. When the Garfield Rifles, Lawrence Guards, and other black units applied for incorporation into one of the state's four national guard regiments or asked to form a regiment of their own, they were told that the number of units in the guard was set by law and no black unit could be admitted until one of the white companies dropped out. As criticism of this position mounted among blacks, the adjutant general embarked in 1892 on another tack. He ordered his regimental commanders to "inspect" the black units to determine if they were fit for state service. In each case they were found wanting in equipment, leadership, or training.\(^{31}\) This, then, was the situation upon the outbreak of the Spanish-American War.

In Kansas political conditions operated to the advantage of those blacks seeking military recognition. Governor Leedy, it will be remembered, had won election in 1896 on a fusion (Populist-Democrat) ticket, but by 1898 his political coalition was on the verge of disintegration. Democrats insisted that they had brought 100,000 votes to the alliance but had received just a handful of state and county appointments. In addition a number of Kansas Democrats objected to the party's penchant for free silver, while others were repelled by the Populists' call for woman suffrage. Moreover, the Leedy administration had alienated Kansas voters in general by failing to deliver on several campaign promises. The legislature rejected a measure calling for a secret ballot, which had often been listed as one of the party's prime objectives. Despite the fact that the fusion platform in 1896 had called for a repeal of the metropolitan police act which gave the governor the power to appoint police boards for each city in Kansas, both the legislature and Governor Leedy refused to localize the boards. If state control were abolished, Leedy declaimed, the cities would elect Republican police boards, which would effectively eliminate political opposition from every city, county, and state election.\(^{32}\) State authority, apparently, was evil only when someone else controlled the machinery.

According to one estimation, Leedy had received 2,000 out of the 16,000 black votes cast in 1896. Encouraged by this figure, the governor was convinced that he could win a majority in 1898. To this end the Populists subsidized the *Colored Citizen*, a black Populist sheet founded
in 1897 in Topeka by Albert Eagleson and Marshall Holloway. In addition the party nominated four blacks for county office in 1898, the Republicans none. James Beck, a black Populist from Wamego, was named assistant inspector of mines. By 1898 two colored organizations—the Independent Political League, claiming a membership of 1,643, and the Colored Free Silver League, which estimated its following at 3,000—were working actively for Leedy's reelection. Despite the frantic efforts of black independents, however, there was no reason to believe that a larger percentage of blacks would desert the Republican party than had done so in 1886 or even 1896. What was needed was a dramatic, highly symbolic act that would offset the "bloody shirt" rhetoric emanating from the party of Lincoln. The opportunity for such a gesture presented itself in the summer of 1898 when Kansas Negroes mounted a campaign to have the administration accept an all-black regiment with black officers as part of the state's quota of troops for the Spanish-American War.

As early as March, 1898, petitions began pouring in from prominent blacks asking Leedy not to discriminate against the Negro population in calling for volunteers if war came with Spain. Sympathy for the downtrodden, simple patriotism, and the hope of winning full citizenship were among the motives of those insisting that the Afro-American be allowed to serve. Among those agitating for a black regiment was a group of individuals who, frustrated by the Afro-American's inability to turn Oklahoma into a Negro homeland, and anticipating that the United States would acquire an island empire as a result of the war, perceived that blacks might be allowed to fulfill their political and economic destiny in the nation's new overseas possessions. "I believe it to be a good idea for the colored people to all join in case of war with Spain," wrote William Buck of Paxico. "There is [sic] three islands that will be confiscated if the war goes on," he predicted. Blacks ought to be allowed to form their own "companies" and should be allowed to "take charge" of at least the Philippines and Puerto Rico. Clearly, it was the black man's destiny to rule himself, for "the bible tells us that the Ethiopian shall stretch forth their hands and become a great nation." Eagleson and Holloway of the Colored Citizen concurred. Free from "degrading vices" and untrammeled by "color prejudice," the Afro-American would be able to establish farms and workshops, found educational institutions, and "work out our own solution without fear and trembling."

Apparently, the state agreed initially to include an all-black company in the three regiments allocated to Kansas by the War Department, and recruiters enlisted blacks from Wyandotte, Shawnee, Leavenworth, and
Douglas counties. The state's Negro leaders, however, quickly voiced their dissatisfaction with this arrangement. In the first place, they argued, any black units mustered into service should be commanded by black officers. Indeed, many conditioned their offers of enlistment upon this. Negro spokesmen also complained that those of their brethren who had been recruited were being abused by their white compatriots at Camp Leedy, the temporary military facility established at the Topeka fairgrounds to house the state's volunteers. It seems that white soldiers whiled the time away by "blanketing" black troopers and their friends and relatives who came to visit. Blanketing consisted of seizing a victim and tossing him or her high into the air with a blanket. Much more offensive to Negroes were the "vile, wanton, and unprovoked insults" heaped upon black women who entered the campgrounds. Such incidents produced at least one minor race riot.

The deteriorating political situation, racial tensions at Camp Leedy, and the obvious dissatisfaction of black leaders prompted Leedy to respond to the president's second call for volunteers, in June, by authorizing the formation of an all-black regiment—the Twenty-Third Kansas Volunteers—with a full complement of black officers. Leedy's decision to raise a Negro regiment provoked little comment, but announcement that it would be commanded by Negroes aroused the ire of a number of white Kansans. Some believed Negroes incapable of command and feared that the Twenty-Third would disgrace the state. Most of those who complained of Leedy's decision, however, merely resented the fact that blacks would be filling officer slots that might otherwise go to whites. There were in Kansas a number of G.A.R. members who had commanded Negro troops during the Civil War and who hoped to use their experience to obtain high rank in the Twenty-Third. Nonetheless, Leedy, who believed there was more to be gained politically by naming black officers to command the Twenty-Third, stuck to his decision.

With a few notable exceptions the officers appointed to the Twenty-Third were Populists, or at least political independents. Leedy, fearful of political repercussions if Kansas' black regiment failed to perform well, first offered command of the regiment to Charles Young, the only black graduate of West Point, but Young declined, having accepted a similar post with an all-black Ohio unit. He then proffered the colonelcy to James Beck, the Wamego farmer who had held appointive posts under both Lewelling and Leedy. Beck accepted. One of the exceptions to the governor's political rule of thumb was Waller. The ex-consul was among the first to pressure Leedy to appoint a Negro regiment with black officers. "Certainly, inasmuch as you have assured me in a former
letter that *all* the citizens of Kansas would be fairly treated in selecting volunteers in defense of the honor of the government and free Cuba," he wrote to the governor in April, "you will allow us one out of the three regiments to be raised." At the same time, Waller began making his peace with the Populists. For example, although W. A. Harris was a former officer in the Confederate Army, Waller applauded the senator as a true friend of the black man. Blacks who had received patronage jobs at the hands of the fusionists came in for repeated praise as "representative men of the race." The Populists, in turn, still respecting Waller's political clout, included him in the command structure of the Twenty-Third. Waller first asked to be named regimental commander but indicated that he would be willing to accept a battalion, if this were not possible. In the end Leedy authorized him to raise a company of volunteers in Wyandotte, thus in effect appointing him to the rank of captain. On June 24, 1898, a notice appeared in the *American Citizen* calling upon "all persons who have signed with Mr. John L. Waller to enter one of the two colored battalions of volunteers and as many others who wish to enlist in Mr. Waller's Company" to meet at the *Daily
More than a hundred Kansas City blacks, all of whom had been previously contacted by Waller, dutifully assembled outside the Citizen's press room, elected the ex-consul company commander, and agreed to meet at the Waller residence on Monday, July 3. Company C, as Waller's outfit was subsequently designated, was not able to leave until July 4; in order to prevent last-minute changes of heart, which would leave the company under strength, Susan, Helen, Jennie, and Minnie cooked three meals for the troops and bedded them down in the yard. Anticipating such an emergency, Waller had previously collected funds to pay for the provisions from Armour and other Kansas City merchants. On July 4 Waller and his 117 recruits entrained for Topeka where they were mustered in, issued equipment, and given a bivouac location. Two additional companies were subsequently recruited in Wyandotte, and in the final analysis that county furnished more troops for the Twenty-Third than any other, a fact of which Waller was exceedingly proud.

There was some doubt at first among the officers of the Twenty-Third as to whether the regiment would even be ordered out of the country. The Twentieth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Second Kansas Volunteers had not fared well in the matter of assignments. As of July, the first two were stationed at San Francisco and Chickamauga, respectively, and the Twenty-Second was located in Washington. Waller feared that the War Department would assign Kansas' black regiment to garrison some isolated post in the West. In mid-August, however, Washington notified Colonel Beck that his command was to go to Cuba as part of the army of occupation.

The monotony of life at Camp Leedy during the six weeks prior to the unit's departure was broken by frequent visits from wives, girl friends, and delegations of appreciative black dignitaries. On July 27, for example, a contingent of Kansas City ladies headed by Susan Waller journeyed to Topeka and presented Company C with a large hand-made American flag. The women were appropriately attired in white dresses with red, white, and blue belts, and white sailor hats with red, white, and blue bands. On the day of departure, Monday, August 25, the Twenty-Third rose at 3:00 A.M., broke camp, paraded past a review stand full of dignitaries headed by Governor Leedy, and then marched to the train station. The scene there was one of jubilant confusion. Wives and friends filled the platform and spilled over into the space between the tracks. Women rushed about with baskets of lunch, glasses of lemonade, and sacks of smoking tobacco. Small boys competed to fill the soldiers'
canteens. Finally, the train pulled out and the Twenty-Third was on its way to Cuba where, some hoped, black Kansans might eventually share in the fruits of a new American empire.

The Twenty-Third’s journey to the Ever Faithful Isle carried it through the midwest, Pennsylvania, and finally to New York where it departed for Santiago aboard the Vigilante. The seas were very rough during the trip from New York to Cuba. Waller, probably because of his previous voyages, was one of the few who did not become seasick. Arriving late in the day on August 31, the eight companies of black troops were transported the next morning by train to their camp at San Luis, situated in the mountains some twenty-six miles inland from Santiago. Camped nearby were the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantry, and the Ninth Louisiana Immunes. Black occupation troops in Cuba were not assigned specific duties and were even spared the hard manual labor that so often had been reserved for black soldiers in past American conflicts. Many of the natives around Santiago were deprived of even the bare necessities of life, and the American command provided partial relief from their suffering by employing them as laborers. Relations between the Cubans and the black soldiers around San Luis were
generally good, although the Ninth Immunes became involved in a drunken scrape with the local police which took the lives of two soldiers and two policemen. Members of the Twenty-Third seemed especially compatible with the natives; at least three married Cubans during the unit's six-month stay in the island. The black troopers encountered some discrimination at the hands of whites, both Cuban and American, but most found the racial climate tolerable.47

The lush vegetation, fertile soil, and abundant labor supply in Cuba turned Waller's mind once again to thoughts of commercial empire. In the fall of 1898 he wrote a series of letters to friends in Kansas City and Topeka extolling the virtues of the area. The fields were in need of cultivating; the mineral resources, of mining; and the native population, somewhat inferior to the Malagasies, of civilizing and uplifting. "A year's touch of American hand and civilization . . . will make Santiago one of the greatest places for money-making in Cuba because it sits in the midst of a rich agricultural and thickly populated country," he predicted. "We found the condition of the natives greatly changed for the better by the help of the Americans."48 He was particularly struck by the swarm of naked orphans who begged in and about the camps. Laying the blame for their condition squarely on the Spanish, he praised the McKinley administration for making possible their salvation. Clearly, Waller began developing plans for locating permanently in Cuba while still on military duty there, for in January, 1899, he had Susan and the three girls come to San Luis and discuss the possibility of duplicating Wallerland.49

The Twenty-Third Kansas left Cuba in early March, 1899, arriving in Leavenworth some ten days later. When the all-black regiment was subsequently mustered out on April 10, each enlisted man received from $100 to $150 and each officer from $500 to $1,500. The Twenty-Third had seen no action, but unlike the Ninth Immunes it had earned a reputation for discipline and orderly conduct.50

Waller accompanied Company C back to Leavenworth and was duly mustered out. The ex-consul's return was temporary, however, for almost as soon as he stepped off the train in Leavenworth he announced the formation of the Afro-American Cuban Emigration Society, whose goal was the establishment of an agricultural colony that would provide a refuge for the frustrated black entrepreneurs of America.51 "I think there is a good opportunity for enterprising people in Cuba," he told the Kansas City Gazette, "but one should not go there without a well-filled wallet. . . . We can get an option on about 100 acres of good land near Santiago, and we will cultivate tobacco exclusively."52 In truth, Ben-
jamin Harrison's former representative to Madagascar had never really abandoned his dream of overseas empire.

By the time he was released from prison in early 1896, Waller had rejected the idea of African emigration as impractical—not because the American Negro could not survive and thrive but because that continent already had been divided up by the Great Powers. "It is perhaps needless for me," he wrote a business acquaintance in 1896, "to draw your attention to the fact that all Europe is today making a raid on Africa with the view of finally and fully acquiring by conquest or otherwise all the most productive and tillable territory in Africa, not for the purpose of settling colored people, but to make havens for the poor white people of their respective countries, and to broaden and extend their empires and to enhance their political ascendancy and perpetuation." Waller's pessimism in regard to Africa did not mean that he had rejected the concept of emigration. When it became apparent that the United States had gone to war in 1898 for empire as well as idealism, he began to dream of developing black commercial operations in the territories about to come under the control of the United States. Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines appeared to offer all the advantages of Madagascar without some of its drawbacks. Waller, much impressed with the way the Twenty-Third had been treated in San Luis, surmised that the natives would greet Afro-American immigrants with open arms. At the same time, those who emigrated would not have to give up the blessings of American democracy and free enterprise. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Spanish-American War had rid Cuba of European colonialism forever. "There is before this people now an 'open door' as a result of the Spanish-American War," he wrote in June, 1899, "which makes it possible for the colored people of the states to emigrate in large numbers to the islands and still be under the protection of the Stars and Stripes." In trying to sell his scheme to Afro-Americans and white Negrophiles, Waller resurrected a rationale that he had invoked in advocating emigration to first Oklahoma and then Africa. A partial immigration to Cuba would provide a final solution to the "Negro problem" in the United States. "There can easily be spared from the South 3,000,000 colored people, 2,000,000 of whom should emigrate to Cuba and the remainder be divided between the other two islands," he proclaimed in a circular which appeared in the Washington Post in 1899. Such an outpouring would create shortages of labor in the South so acute that businessmen and farmers would be forced to grant the Negro his rights and pay top wages. If the South continued to pursue its racist course, the remainder of its black population would leave, with the result that "the
Negro problem would be solved as was the Israelitish problem and Protestant problem." Finally, just as Waller had hoped would be the case in Africa, Afro-Americans could utilize their racial affinity, adaptability to tropical climes, and knowledge of American technology and institutions to perform a civilizing and uplifting role: "The intermingling of our race with that of the Cuban will infuse new blood, new life and will awaken new enterprise in the people of this country that will make them one of the strongest, most energetic, and fearless people in the world."56

Waller departed Kansas City for San Luis in April, 1899. During the ensuing six months he flooded newspapers in the United States with circulars advertising his scheme. At one point he even considered petitioning Congress for $20,000,000 to finance Afro-American emigration to Cuba. Whether due to hostility on the part of United States occupation authorities, native resentment stemming from fear of job competition from Negro emigrants, or Afro-American apathy, Waller's grandiose plans came to nothing. Judging from Waller's subsequent complaints about the military command in Cuba and his denunciation of American imperialism in general, one suspects that the military government of General Leonard Wood played a large role in preventing the establishment of a Cuban Wallerland. While waiting for a response to his letters and circulars, Waller sank the family's savings in real estate around Santiago. It was, as one observer put it, "a poor investment." As a result, the opening weeks of 1900 saw the ex-consul to Madagascar working as superintendent of a street gang for Barber Asphalt Paving Company.57 He, Susan, and the girls returned to the United States in September, 1900, this time to stay.

Waller's last years are even more obscure than his first. He and Susan remained in Kansas City only long enough to sell their house Late in 1900 he moved the family to Yonkers, New York. In essence Waller retired from public life after his return from Cuba. He edited the Yonkers Progressive American for a time, and during the last year of his life worked for the New York Customs House. One Sunday afternoon in October, 1907, Waller called on a friend who lived several miles outside Yonkers. Compelled to walk home in a cold rain, he contracted pneumonia and died within a week. He was fifty-six.58

The Cuban fiasco marked the final disillusionment of John Lewis Waller. As a young man full of dreams and expectations, he had left Iowa in search of a stage upon which he could play out his life free from the paralyzing effect of racial prejudice, an environment where he could realize his full potential. He turned first to a domestic frontier—Kansas.
There he plunged into politics and developed a philosophy of racial uplift—civil rights militancy and black capitalism—that he believed would simultaneously advance his interests and those of his race. That philosophy, while improving his political standing with his black brethren, did not significantly improve the position of the Negro community within the larger society. The Republican party's refusal in 1890 to nominate Waller—a man who had been previously designated by Kansas blacks as their political spokesman—for state auditor seemed to underscore the futility of his program for individual and collective advancement. The disappointment and frustration that followed his defeat did not force Waller into apathy or rebellion. Instead, he sought his idealized frontier abroad in Madagascar. Waller's attempt to gain control over an economically underdeveloped area and convert it into a Negro colony that would benefit himself and blacks everywhere ended even more disastrously than his bid for political power in Kansas. The culprit in 1895 was not domestic racism but European colonialism in the guise of French imperialism.

By 1897 Waller had begun to perceive the world as a giant battleground on which the white and nonwhite peoples of the world struggled for food, markets, and raw materials. Superior wealth and technology enabled whites to win victory after victory. In a letter to J. H. Lendenberger, president of the American National Bank of Louisville, Waller expounded on his views: "India (a black country) in the east is now firmly in the hands of England, as well as a great portion of South Africa, and the Army of Her Britannic Majesty is now operating in Egypt with a view to extending her colonial dominion not only in that country but in all Africa." France, he continued, had overrun "black" Algeria with "an army of Freebooters" and cemented her hold on east Africa. Germany was in black Samoa, "and although Italy lost all but 14 percent of her best troops in the attempt to take charge of a black country, yet she is 'up and at them' again." The European powers, Waller concluded, were "hellbent" on robbing the black peoples of the world of their liberty "at the point of the bayonet and by the aid of the Gatling guns in the name of humanity and Christian religion." Conspicuously absent from this pantheon of colonial powers was the United States. As of 1897 Waller did not think of America as an "imperial" power. Washington's refusal to come to the aid of the Hovas was due to the apathy and weakness of the Cleveland administration, not American acquiescence in European colonialism. He did not see that racism and colonialism are just two sides of the same coin nor that United States expansion would bring in its wake colonial exploitation. As a result, when the United
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States acquired overseas possessions at the end of its “splendid little war” with Spain, Waller convinced himself that there now existed an environment, a “frontier,” that would be free of both racism and colonialism. Cuba boasted a multiracial environment and abundant, undeveloped natural resources—a veritable paradise for Afro-Americans bent on acting out the Horatio Alger myth. This time, moreover, no avaricious foreign power could intervene to rob him and other black entrepreneurs of their concessions. But in 1898–1900 Waller’s plans fell victim not to racism or colonialism but to a combination of both. Generations of oppression and exploitation had rendered black Americans either unwilling or unable to taste the fruits of America’s new empire. In addition, Waller quickly learned that the United States had not gone to war with Spain and acquired overseas possessions to satisfy frustrated black entrepreneurs. The United States protectorate that Congress subsequently established over Cuba by passing the Platt Amendment to the Army Appropriations Act of 1901 was designed in part to ensure that the island remained a safe and profitable area for investment by whites. Waller was finally forced to admit that the United States, no less than France or Italy, was guilty of exploiting nonwhites not only at home but abroad, and that in supporting American expansion he had in essence been supporting the exportation of American racism. John Waller’s lifelong dream of founding a frontier where the black man could realize the promise of American life was dead at last.

Something remains to be said of Waller’s role as race leader. According to Nell Irvin Painter, two leadership types predominated in the late nineteenth-century South. At one pole were those labeled by black and white newspapers as “representative colored men,” a term meaning the best the race had to offer. Such individuals were not mass leaders but, rather, assimilated Negroes who had become adept at manipulating whites. For the most part, representative colored men imposed themselves and their ideas on the inarticulate rural masses. Because these individuals had a “Western” education and were acquainted with whites, black farmers and laborers made use of them when a clearly racial issue surfaced but refused to defer to their judgment in matters that cut across race lines. Painter argues that representative colored men, in criticizing black folk for deviating from conventional, Victorian norms of behavior, played into the hands of white demagogues. Instead of unequivocally demanding the enforcement of state and federal laws that would protect the person and property of rural blacks, they asked unskilled Negroes to change their life-styles. Through thrift, industry, sobriety, and conformity to prevailing mores, the black masses would gradually earn the respect
of whites; and as a result institutionalized racism would diminish. Reproductive colored men discussed legal and political questions on a cultural level, allowing white supremacists to shift the blame for discrimination and exclusion from themselves to their victims.60

At the opposite pole in Painter's leadership continuum were the "executors." Contrary to myth, when rural blacks needed to take public, community action, they invariably reached commonsense conclusions hammered out in public meetings. Once participants had expressed and discussed their options, they would make a decision as a whole and designate a speaker or organizer to execute policy in their behalf. The executor was not empowered to decide policies without prior consent of the people. Because the executor's mandate was circumscribed, he necessarily had to remain in close contact with his constituency.61

Historians such as Allan Spear, David Katzman, and David Gerber have discovered the existence of two distinct leadership groups among blacks in northern urban areas. There was in Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and New York at the turn of the century an educated and acculturated black elite made up of men and women who enjoyed close relations with their white counterparts. Most were light-skinned, native northerners, and descendants of freedmen and abolitionists. Well-educated and relatively well-off, these individuals were uncompromising integrationists and civil rights agitators. Their ultimate goal was unquestioned: the integration of Negroes into the mainstream of American life. The means of attack were traditional: legal assaults on institutionalized segregation, political pressure to secure civil rights legislation, and frequent protest meetings. Attempts to form separate black institutions were looked down upon as self-segregation.

Between 1890 and 1910 a new group of community leaders, composed of businessmen, professional people with business interests, and a new breed of professional politician, emerged to challenge the old guard. Members of this new leadership were dependent upon the Negro community for support. Most were self-made men with no more than a rudimentary formal education—even the professional men among them had substandard training. They tended to be darker-skinned, and many were the sons and daughters of southern immigrants. The leaders of the new element often associated with the lower socioeconomic stratum of both black and white society. As individuals who had their primary economic and social ties in the black belt, they contributed to the development of a separate institutional life in their respective ghettos. They established Negro businesses, built a Negro political machine, and participated in the organization of Negro social agencies. In short,
members of the new leadership were proponents of racial self-help and solidarity. 62

Was Waller a "representative colored man" or an "executor" type? Did he exemplify the traits and attitudes of the traditional black leadership in the North or those of the rising black middle class? Of immeasurable significance for Waller's later career were his childhood and adolescent experiences. His parents' positive attitude toward themselves and their racial identity, together with the educational opportunities and biracial milieu he experienced in Iowa, generated the self-esteem and to some extent the inner control that led him to aspire to a leadership role, but no one in Waller's life defined that role. The most important factor in shaping Waller's concept of racial advancement and his role in that projected advance was his Kansas experience. The state in which he spent most of his adult life was neither southern nor northern, but western. Many of the state's black residents were born in the South, while a fewer but significant number migrated from the North. Still another group was native to Kansas. The black population was neither predominantly urban nor rural; Negroes were fairly evenly distributed between the state's towns and its farms. A substantial number of blacks were illiterate and inarticulate; even more, however, were literate, and, even if not articulate, were assertive toward their environment. Black Kansans were a unique blend of idealism and practicality. Like Benjamin Singleton, they imagined Kansas to be a New Canaan where blacks would be able to work out their destiny free from the scourge of racial prejudice. At the same time, they recognized the existence of institutional racism in the state and fought through the courts and legislature to destroy it. What they demanded from the white power structure was equal protection under the law, the right to vote, and the opportunity to become property owners. Limited success in the battle for civil equality, coupled with a relatively high degree of physical freedom and economic opportunity, encouraged many to believe that their dream of a multiracial society dedicated to equality of opportunity could become reality.

John Waller possessed all of these traits, and his racial philosophy embodied his contemporaries' expectations. In one sense he was a representative colored man. Adept at dealing with whites, steeped in "Western" education, he was a tireless advocate of Victorian standards and conventional moral behavior. Yet he never intimated that even the most "degraded" of his black brethren did not deserve full civil and political rights. Waller did not confuse the cultural with the legal and political spheres. He was committed to "uplift," to educating and refining his fellow blacks; but he quickly realized that, because of white society's
undifferentiated view of the black community, the rights of one Negro could not be sacrificed without endangering the rights of all. As his activities in behalf of the Edward Washingtons in Lawrence, the Drake brothers in Leavenworth, and the Hovas in Madagascar indicate, Waller was no accommodationist. But neither could he be called an executor type. He was not thrust forward spontaneously by the black community to fulfill a specific commission; he plotted and planned every phase of his career. His constituency was not typically southern—that is, it did not consist of rural, unlettered farm laborers who, through bulldozing and political assassination, had been eliminated from the electoral process. Because they could vote, and because they were concentrated in and around the state's six largest towns, black Kansans exercised limited political power. For this reason traditional political practices and forms had some meaning for the black community. Waller attended conventions, organized meetings, delivered speeches, debated, and ran for office in much the same manner as white politicians in the Gilded Age. At innumerable barbeques, banquets, and parades he attacked white Democrats and even Republicans who he thought had abandoned the black race. His views on inter- and intraracial matters were subjected to scathing attack by other black speakers and newspaper editors. Carefully gauging the temper of his constituency, Waller devised a comprehensive plan for racial advancement—civil rights militancy, political activism, and black capitalism—that accurately mirrored the attitudes and expectations of black Kansas. Both the black opportunists who came to Kansas from Iowa, Illinois, and New York and the downtrodden Negroes who fled the South after 1875 were committed to the goals which Waller's stratagem was designed to accomplish. Equal protection under the law, the franchise, and property ownership would be the primary fruits of the New Canaan. The protection and relative economic opportunity that they subsequently encountered in Kansas heightened the expectations of both the opportunists and the exodusters. In effect Waller was arguing that the means to power were the very ends that had drawn so many blacks to Kansas. In his philosophy, object became subject, ends became means. His blueprint for racial advancement consisted of the expectations and goals of his fellow blacks.

Characteristically, black politicians in late nineteenth-century America had to appeal to two, often mutually antagonistic, constituencies—one black and one white. Waller refused to place white over black. In a state where Negroes could vote and did not always vote the color line (for example, in W. D. Kelley's race for the auditorship), to have placed the interests of party above race would have been political suicide. When
segregationist and discriminatory policies called for criticism of the Republican party, Waller rarely hesitated, calling upon racist elements to return to the ways of their Radical forefathers. Thus did he criticize James G. Blaine for emphasizing the tariff at the expense of a free ballot and a fair count, and Chester Arthur for pursuing a lily-white southern policy. At the state and local level he blasted the G.O.P. for its betrayal of G. I. Currin and its racist attacks on W. D. Kelley. Moreover, Waller's advocacy of Republican tenets was more than mere lip service. As his exploits in Madagascar and Cuba indicate, he was willing to act on the assumption that blacks could compete successfully within the capitalist system.

At first glance Waller would seem to be a typical member of the new urban middle class. He was a dark-skinned politician dependent primarily upon a black constituency. Conversely, he grew up in a biracial milieu and he participated in a service trade (barbering) that served both blacks and whites. In addition he fully accepted white society's cultural standards. Thus, predictably, there was in Waller's racial philosophy a clear ambivalence on the issue of integration versus separation. At one level he was an integrationist. Self-help and self-reliance were admirable, but self-segregation was counterproductive of the race's long-term goals. Waller belonged to a number of all-black organizations, but his speeches and editorials gave the impression that America's ultimate goal should be the establishment of an egalitarian, multiracial society. Thus, in the late 1880s, on the eve of his bid for the auditorship, Waller joined with Fairfax and Price in urging the legislature to pass a civil rights bill that would eliminate public school segregation wherever blacks objected to it, and he agreed to represent in court a Negro who had been denied service at a theater and another who had been barred from a lunch counter. While he accepted white Kansas' definition of conventional behavior and even flirted with the idea of the moral depravity of the poor, Waller could not accept the doctrine of parallel development. The concept still required segregation in certain spheres, and forced physical separation of the races implied the innate inferiority of one group and the native superiority of the other.

At another level Waller believed in the autonomy of the race, the ability of blacks to control their own destiny. Only massive, direct relief and free land grants could have significantly improved the Negroes' economic and political status in Kansas. Although a belief that the federal government would provide such aid was at the heart of the Kansas Fever idea, few Kansans other than Daniel Votaw publicly advocated substantial, long-term federal and state aid to blacks; it was contrary to the
American creed of self-reliance, individualism, and *laissez faire*, a creed accepted not only by the white leadership of the Republican party but its black element as well. At heart Waller was an idealist. He and other members of his generation were to serve as a bridge across which blacks would march on their journey from slavery to freedom. His version of the "talented tenth" and the way to racial uplift was for blacks to find a mechanism that would give them economic and political power, and to lead exemplary lives. Because he accepted the American creed and because he believed his generation could play the role destiny had assigned it, Waller would never concede that blacks could not overcome on their own those two most pressing problems—poverty and prejudice.
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