

forthcoming study on the Farm Crisis is a welcome addition.²⁴ Significantly, Margaret Weber has pointed a way forward in her study of how agribusinesses wove their narratives into the fabric of farming and rural culture.²⁵ We can hope that Weber and other young scholars will renew the field of Iowa agricultural history with careful work and creativity.

Race and Iowa History

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HISTORY IS A POWERFUL FORCE. Like blizzards, derechos, and other environmental phenomenon, the narratives we share shape our civic landscape. The refiguring of these collective stories can occur incrementally or all at once. In the popular imagination, Iowa represents the nation's quintessential core, a pastoral meritocracy where hard work inevitably leads to success. It is also a place envisioned as exclusively white, Christian, and American-born. This frame, enduring and incomplete, informs past and present understandings. It is no accident then, that narratives which challenge this myth are contested, ignored, or invalidated. A more expansive, inclusive state history is not cause for panic, but rather celebration. Documenting the stories of all Iowans highlights resistance, collaboration, and continual commitment to "our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain."

In a 1971 speech for the Institute of the Black World, historian Vincent Harding argued that "intellectual work is connected to politics—whether the politics of reaction, or politics of the status quo, or politics of some kind of forward movement."¹ History is never a neutral subject, explaining the considerable debate and frequent pushback about certain interpretations. While his terminology is dated, Harding advanced a useful framework to understand the politics of history, particularly

24. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *When a Dream Dies: Agriculture, Iowa, and the Farm Crisis of the 1980s*, unpublished manuscript, cited with permission of the author.

25. Margaret Weber, "The American Way of Farming: Pioneer Hi-Bred and Power in Postwar America," *Agricultural History* 92 (Summer 2018), 380–403.

1. Vincent Harding, "History: White, Negro, and Black," in "No More Moanin': Voices of Southern Struggle," ed. Sue Thrasher, special issue, *Southern Exposure*, 1 (Winter 1974), 52.

the study of African American people. Harding argues that most mainstream history “finds basic justification and basic goodness in the very nature of American society.”² The second category maintains the same commitment to the overall triumphant narrative but asks to “include [African Americans] in the basic, good story.”³ In so doing Black people can be “fitted in without the story crumbling apart.”⁴ In essence, the story remains unaltered but the cast becomes more racially diverse. Harding wrote of the final category,

Black History is not just about black people; Black History is not just about black things. Black History speaks about seeing all of America through black eyes. . . . If you do that, then a totally different picture of America emerges, because black history says our experience, our history, our story cannot be assimilated into the mainstream American story.⁵

These categories are not marked by the race of the scholar documenting the history, but rather from whose perspective the authors seek to understand the past.

This conceptualization is important when considering the historiography of Black Iowa. In his classic *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois speaks of double consciousness, that of being both Black and American. “One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. . . . The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife.”⁶ Black people are Iowans too, and their double consciousness must be reflected in the histories told about them. To interpret Black Iowans as anomalies leads to their double erasure: the invisibilizing of Black struggle in the state coupled with the disbelief (improbability) that Black people live here. This double erasure, of race and region, exemplifies Harding’s second schema, the inclusion of Black historical experiences only when they adhere to dominant narratives of progress.⁷

2. Harding, “History,” 52.

3. Harding, “History,” 54.

4. Harding, “History,” 57.

5. Harding, “History,” 57.

6. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, 1903), 2–3.

7. In his book *Bright Radical Star*, Robert R. Dykstra documents “Iowa’s transformation from perhaps the most racially conservative free state in the Union into one of its most progressive,” yet William L. Hewitt convincingly illustrates the tension between progressive legislation and racist social practices in his “Blackface in the White Mind,” where he argues “as Iowans moved to protect

The predominant trajectory of scholarship relating to race and ethnicity in Iowa has been an act of recovery, but the tide is turning.⁸ Building on this vital work, historians must also take care to decenter our perspectives from triumphalist or exceptional narratives to provide a more complete history of the Black Iowa experience. Yes, episodes of anti-Black terror must be documented, but so too must Black joy and everyday Black life.⁹ Esther Walls's collection at the Iowa Women's Archive is but one example of the richness of Black Iowans' lives. Among her papers include an essay she penned about the struggles growing up in a predominately white town but also her dance cards from social

the civil rights of blacks, they also witnessed changes in the ways blacks were portrayed in popular entertainment," such as the increase in minstrel shows including a performance which culminated with a scene featuring "a watermelon ten feet high . . . sliced so as to show the luscious meat and the black seeds . . . the latter representing the faces of pickaninnies." Robert R. Dykstra, *Bright Radical Star: Black Freedom and White Supremacy on the Hawkeye Frontier* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 238. William L. Hewitt, "Blackface in the White Mind: Racial Stereotypes in Sioux City, Iowa, 1874-1910," *Palimpsest* 71 (1990), 68-79. Here by taking up Harding's charge to move from narratives of progress to also consider the totality of the Black experience, a more nuanced, and sadly regressive, portrait of race relations in the state emerges. Relatedly, in his autobiography, *Fly in the Buttermilk*, Cecil Reed captures Harding's second schema writing, "When you are a fly in the buttermilk you can be a visible irritant if you aren't careful. We [the Reed family] demonstrated that we were honest, hardworking people no different in our hopes than whites." By aligning himself with the dominant values and narrative of the state, Reed was able to insert his unique experiences within Iowa's history without the dominant narrative crumbling apart. Cecil A. Reed with Priscilla Donovan, *Fly in the Buttermilk: The Story of Cecil Reed* (Iowa City, 1993), 85.

8. There are several very good foundational texts on Iowa's Black history including Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Iowa City, 1996), particularly chapters 6 and 11; Bill Silag, Susan Koch-Bridgford, and Hal Chase, eds. *Outside In: African-American History in Iowa, 1838-2000* (Ames, 2001); Lena M. Hill and Michael D. Hill, *Invisible Hawkeyes: African Americans at the University of Iowa during the Long Civil Rights Era* (Iowa City, 2016); Leola Nelson Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1969); Christopher P. Lehan, "Migrating Southerners: Slavery in Iowa," in *Slavery in the Upper Mississippi Valley in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin* (Jefferson, NC, 2011); Donald H. Strasser and Melodie Andrews, "The Modern Civil Rights Movement In Iowa and Minnesota," in *Black Americans and the Civil Rights Movement in the West*, eds. Bruce A. Glasrud and Cary D. Wintz (Norman, OK, 2019), 181-96.

9. Christine Pawley, "Race, Reading, and the Book Lovers Club, Des Moines, Iowa, 1925-1941" *Annals of Iowa* 65 (2006), 35-39.

events.¹⁰ The microhistories of small communities, families, and organizations, like the Iowa Federation of Colored Women's Clubs' Home for Girls or the mutual benefit association, The Colony in Muchakinock, show both the complexity of race relations as well as Black people's resistance, including the creation of their own vibrant communities.¹¹

Related to the investigation of microhistories, scholars of Black Iowa must broaden their efforts to new locales and accounts. While the story of Buxton is important, it cannot stand in for the whole of the Black Iowa experience, especially as its depiction as "black utopia" fits squarely into an Iowa exceptionalist narrative.¹² Similarly while accounts of Emancipation and Iowa's Underground Railroad and abolitionist tendencies are important, it is also crucial to grapple with the exclusionary laws contemporaneously passed throughout the state.¹³ This undertaking is an essential enterprise to more critically assess and provide an honest accounting of our state's history, challenging notions of a "good region." Iowa, and the Midwest more generally, struggled through many of the same discriminatory practices that the South did. The sanitization of these messy histories, in support of a less accurate but exultant narrative, does a disservice to all those who read it.

Today 45 percent of Iowa's Black population resides in Des Moines, Davenport, Waterloo, and Cedar Rapids.¹⁴ This means that the remaining

10. Kathryn M. Neal, "Being Seen and Heard: African American Documentation Initiatives in Iowa and Minnesota," *Negro History Bulletin* 64 (2001), 43.

11. Richard M. Breaux, "'To the Uplift and Protection of Young Womanhood': African-American Women at Iowa's Private Colleges and the University of Iowa, 1878-1928," *History of Education Quarterly* 50 (2010), 176-77; Pam Stek, "Muchakinock: African Americans and the Making of an Iowa Coal Town," *Annals of Iowa* 68 (2009), 37-63.

12. Rachele Chase, *Creating the Black Utopia of Buxton, Iowa* (Charleston, SC, 2019); Dorothy Schwieder, Joseph Hrabá, and Elmer Schwieder, *Buxton: A Black Utopia in the Heartland*, Expanded Edition (Iowa City, 2003).

13. James L. Hill, "Migration of Blacks to Iowa, 1820-1960," *Journal of Negro History* 66 (1981), 290. For works on emancipation and Iowa's Underground Railroad, see Thomas R. Baker, *The Sacred Cause of Union: Iowa in the Civil War* (Iowa City, 2016); Lowell J. Soike, *Necessary Courage: Iowa's Underground Railroad in the Struggle against Slavery* (Iowa City, 2013); Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009); Arnie Cooper, "A Stony Road," *Annals of Iowa* 48 (1986), 113-34; David Brodnax Sr. "The Brightest Star under the Blue Dome of Heaven": Civil Rights and Midwestern Black Identity in Iowa, 1839-1900," *Middle West Review* 7 (2020), 41-56.

14. The State Data Center of Iowa and the Iowa Commission on the Status of African Americans, "African-Americans in Iowa: 2020," *State Data Center*, February 2020, 2. While there are certainly not an abundance of studies in these

population, more than half of the total, lives somewhere else. What are their stories and experiences? How does the documenting of Black rural people and the worlds they've built outside of significant Black population centers challenge our understandings of race and region?¹⁵ One area that may prove particularly fruitful is the investigation of intra- and interracial interactions. What are the tensions and stratifications within Black communities? What have been the connections between people of color within the state? What have been the points of rupture? When the story of Black Iowans is viewed solely through a Black-white binary, we lose complexity. In considering these histories, it is essential to complicate basic assumptions, meanings, and definitions, shifting perspectives that Black Iowans are synonymous with outsiders.

Similarly, when Iowa is written about as an isolated place without considering the connections, migrations, and intra-regional interactions, we lose sight of how people within the state interact with each other as well as the social, political, and community connections created across state lines. Through organizations such as the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), Peace Movement of Ethiopia (PME), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and other entities, scholars can trace these regional interactions.¹⁶ As an

named locales either, key published works include Hal S. Chase, "Struggle for Equality: Fort Des Moines Training Camp for Colored Officers, 1917," *Phylon* 39 (4th Qtr., 1978), 297–310; Bruce Fehn, "'The Only Hope We Had': United Packinghouse Workers Local 46 and the Struggle for Racial Equality in Waterloo, Iowa, 1948–1960," *Annals of Iowa* 54 (1995), 185–216; Brie Swenson Arnold, "An Opportunity to Challenge the 'Color Line': Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Women's Labor Activism in Late Nineteenth-Century Cedar Rapids, Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 74 (2015), 101–41; Herbert Plummer Jones, "The Shaping of Freedom: Industrial Urbanism and the Modern Civil Rights Movement in Waterloo, Iowa, 1910–1970," (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1997); Bruce Fehn and Robert Jefferson, "North Side Revolutionaries in the Civil Rights Struggle: The African American Community in Des Moines and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, 1948–1970," *Annals of Iowa* 69 (2010), 51–81.

15. While not exclusively about the rural Black Iowan experience, Debra A. Reid's "'The Whitest of Occupations?': African Americans in the Rural Midwest, 1940–2010" in *The Rural Midwest Since World War II*, ed. J.L. Anderson (Ithaca, NY, 2014) provides historical background to declining numbers of Black farmers. Contributing author to this volume Dwain Coleman has also recently published "Times Certainly Have Changed: Burlington, Iowa's Black Community on the Mississippi, 1860–1920," *Middle West Review* 7 (2021), 29–45.

16. Erik S. McDuffie, "The Diasporic Journeys of Louise Little: Grassroots Garveyism, the Midwest, and Community Feminism," *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 4 (2016), 146–70; Keisha N. Blain, *Set The World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia, 2018), 65; Denise Lynn

illustration, in the late 1960s the Black Panther Party chapters in Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas collaborated so closely together that they often rotated members.¹⁷ Additionally, by employing a transnational approach to trace Latinx, Asian, and African migrations to the state, we place Iowa in a global context. In undertaking Harding's charge to see Iowa history through Black eyes, we will discover in fact that there is not a singular Black Iowa but a multitude.

Crucial to the support of these new Iowa histories is the investment in and creation of archives preserving the history of Iowa's many diverse communities. As former researcher at the African American Museum of Iowa, Pamela Edwards, noted,

The history of Iowa's African Americans is as fascinating and diverse as the history of blacks in large cities like New York or regions like the Deep South. Yet preserving that history and making it available to the public has been an uphill task. The reason? In history, as in matters of the heart, the old proverb holds true: the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. Past indifference to Iowa's black history has allowed invaluable information and artifacts to be lost forever and is still a challenge today.¹⁸

We cannot allow indifference to slow this momentum. Hidden histories must make their way into archives. This shift is necessarily a reciprocal process. Community archivists, those with papers, historical artifacts and other materials, must be willing to place items in repositories, and professional archivists should be actively seeking such collections and putting local people at ease in the process. In the meantime, communities must also create their own archives.

History is not a static endeavor. New methods, new sources, and new frames create opportunities for historians to reassess what we thought we knew about the past. At the discipline's very core, it is interpretive, expansive, and corrective.¹⁹ By broadening the scope of

Pate Spruill, "From the tub to the club: black women and activism in the Midwest, 1890–1920," (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 2020).

17. Reynaldo Anderson, "Practical Internationalists: The Story of the Des Moines, Iowa, Panther Party," in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, eds. Jeanne Theoharris and Komozi Woodard (New York, 2005), 284.

18. Pamela J. Edwards, "Are There Any Black People in Iowa: The African American History and Cultural Center," *History News* 58 (2003), 18.

19. Brian Dill and Ronald Aminzade, "Historians and the Study of Protest," in *Handbook of Social Movements Across Disciplines*, eds. Bert Klandermans and Conny Roggeband (New York, 2007), 141–83.

Iowa's history to more fully consider the experiences and perspectives of Black and other racial, ethnic, religious, and social minorities, we add depth to our shared past. Through this dynamism, we will discover that while our state may be flat, our history certainly isn't.

Iowa, The Bright Radical Star of the Civil War Era

DWAIN COLEMAN

DURING THE DECADES following the Civil War, Iowans participated in various community and statewide celebrations. Memorial days, Emancipation Day celebrations, and even a special Battle Flag Day held in Des Moines in 1894 commemorated how Iowans had sacrificed during the nation's greatest conflict. Many Iowans also reveled in the abolitionist spirit that existed in some Iowa communities before the war and took great pride in the fact that Iowa was one of the first Northern states to vote to grant Black men suffrage. From that time until now, many have contributed in various ways to preserving the memory of Iowa during the Civil War era.¹

Today, Iowans are still proud of their state's participation during the antebellum conflict over slavery. Iowans influenced the national debate on slavery through their abolitionist efforts and support of the Free-Soil movement in Kansas. For example, more Iowans accompanied John Brown on his ill-fated raid on Harper's Ferry than participants from any other state. However, many Iowans were staunchly proslavery, antiwar copperheads. In the decades after the war, county histories and the State Historical Society recorded some of the reminiscences of Iowa abolitionists and of the freedom seekers who came through the network that led through Kansas, Nebraska, and across Iowa to Illinois.²

1. *Report of the Battle Flag Committee, Battle Flag Day: August 10, 1894* [. . .] (Des Moines, 1896), 14; Leslie Schwalm, "Emancipation Day Celebrations: The Commemoration of Slavery and Freedom in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 62 (2003), 291–332.

2. For more, see Lowell Soike, *Necessary Courage: Iowa's Underground Railroad in the Struggle Against Slavery* (Iowa City, 2013); Lowell Soike, *Busy in the Cause: Iowa, The Free State Struggle in the West, and the Prelude to Civil War* (Lincoln, NE, 2014); Hubert Wubben, *Civil War Iowa and the Copperhead Movement* (Ames,