

There is a huge generation gap between Slotkin and Frederick Jackson Turner, but in the end Turner could not ask for a better legacy: the frontier mattered, and still matters, even if in ways he did not anticipate.

Bright Radical Star: Black Freedom and White Supremacy on the Hawkeye Frontier, by Robert R. Dykstra. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. xi, 348 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendixes, notes, index. \$47.50 cloth.

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In the fall of 1868 Republican presidential candidate Ulysses S. Grant urged Iowa, the "bright Radical star" as he called it, to "be the first State to carry impartial suffrage through unfalteringly" (227). Iowans responded positively to his appeal, passing by an astounding 57 percent a state constitutional amendment granting suffrage to all adult males regardless of color. Only one other state opened the ballot to African Americans before the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. Yet only nine years earlier, in equally convincing fashion, Iowa had reaffirmed its racially defined suffrage restriction. With its vote in 1868, Iowa had been transformed from "perhaps the most radically conservative free state in the Union into one of its most progressive" (238).

Robert R. Dykstra charts the course of this dramatic change in his painstakingly detailed, broadly informative book, *Bright Radical Star*. Taking advantage of Iowa's small population, Dykstra constructs an intimate portrait of race relations in frontier Iowa. His account of the years 1833 through 1880 successfully penetrates the complexity of racial attitudes and shrewdly delineates the impact of political developments on the evolution of racial policies.

Dykstra's story starts with the earliest entry of African Americans into the Iowa territory. He meticulously recounts the history of their first settlements in the region, concentrating particularly on Dubuque and Muscatine, and then pursues the development of each of their communities during Iowa's frontier years. The numbers he deals with are small, and the generalizations he can make about the early African-American experience in Iowa are therefore limited. Nevertheless, his description of their difficulties, his biographical treatments of their leaders, and especially his analysis of the differences in the ways they were treated in various parts of the territory make a significant

contribution to our understanding of African-American life on the western frontier.

Dykstra turns next to an account of abolitionism in early Iowa. He describes in characteristic detail the communities of abolitionists that took root in the southeastern portion of the territory in the early 1840s. Settlements of New England Congregationalists at Denmark, Quakers at Salem, and Presbyterians in Washington and Des Moines counties formed a strong source of antislavery sentiment throughout the period of Dykstra's study. Abolitionists in these communities believed deeply that discriminatory policies in Iowa legitimized the prejudice upon which slavery was based and so had to be fought with the same energy devoted to attacks on human bondage in the South.

The politics of racial prejudice that these abolitionists fought is Dykstra's central focus in *Bright Radical Star*. He carefully describes the passage at the first territorial legislature in 1838 and 1839 of laws that would govern the African-American population of Iowa. These Black Codes, which would define the terms of the political debate over race for the coming four decades, barred African Americans from voting, receiving public education, serving in the militia, intermarrying with whites, being a witness at trials where a white person was a defendant, and, finally, from entering the state without first posting a bond.

In 1843 an Iowa Anti-Slavery Society organized to oppose not only southern slavery but the Black Codes as well. Receiving strong support from abolitionists in southeastern Iowa, these activists confronted a powerful opposition to any attempt to reform the race laws. Dykstra examines in great detail the legislative and state constitutional debates of the 1840s. Shifting combinations of Whigs and Democrats formed a "moderate center" in those debates. A few Whigs would always join with a unified Democratic legislative delegation to oppose any attempt to reform the Black Code, while a group of Democrats would always join with a unified Whig delegation to oppose any legislative attempt to keep African Americans from coming into the state.

Iowa's abolitionists did not view these positions as either moderate or acceptable. To further their reform efforts, they joined the Liberty Party and, with some hesitation, became Free Soilers in 1848. In that year they came close to achieving a statewide balance of power, but failed. That failure, as Dykstra shows, limited their effectiveness. Finding that the Democrats were far too hostile to their cause to be interested in any kind of a union, Free Soilers established a tentative alliance with the state's Whigs. But when the Whigs discovered that their antislavery allies were too weak to ensure them a victory, the coalition faltered.

Despite these disappointments, antislavery activists remained committed to the goal of overturning the discriminatory laws of their state, even though there was little prospect of immediate success. Hope for success dimmed further with the passage of the Compromise of 1850 and the abandonment by both major parties of any interest in the pursuit of sectional issues. In this atmosphere the "moderate center," as Dykstra describes it, dissolved, and in 1851 the state legislature passed a law barring African Americans from the state. Using quantitative techniques, Dykstra is able to demonstrate convincingly that the movement for African-American exclusion was opposed by the non-Democratic members of the legislature and spearheaded by those who were southern in origin.

Dykstra's narrative continues with the story of the creation of the Republican Party amidst the meteoric rise and fall of the Know Nothing movement and the continuing influence of the prohibition crusade. Here, as elsewhere, Dykstra slips into the role of state political historian, offering valuable insights but revealing that his theme of race is at times but a vehicle for his larger goal of describing Iowa's shifting political loyalties.

Dykstra correctly sees that the mid-1850s conflict in nearby Kansas forced a dramatic change in Iowa's politics and in the course of its racial legislation. Not only did the controversy there energize the state's Republicans and help them carry Iowa for John C. Frémont, it also stiffened Republican opposition to the Black Codes. In the legislative session of 1856-57, Republicans joined together to repeal the law barring African-American testimony against whites; and at the party's 1857 convention they resolved to place the issue of African-American suffrage before the people.

This latter decision would soon lead to divisions within the party. Most Republicans were united on the goal of universal adult male suffrage, but many feared that support for such a measure would be politically damaging. Reacting to Democratic racist attacks, Republicans generally dropped their advocacy of suffrage reform. As a result, Dykstra argues, the referendum they had placed on the ballot was soundly defeated, with only 11 percent of the electorate voting in support. Republicans, Dykstra shows, split on the measure, while Democrats were united in opposition. As in past legislative balloting, party identification was the single most significant variable in determining the vote on a racial issue.

The political crisis of the 1850s had changed the terms of the political debate. The Civil War would radicalize Iowa politics still further. During the war the black exclusion law was repealed, and

following the war Republicans renewed their efforts to open the ballot to African-American males. This time, however, they showed greater unity and commitment than they had in 1857. Buttressed by strong showings at the polls, Iowa's Republicans ignored the kind of racist assaults from their Democratic opponents that had intimidated them in 1857, and continued to press for electoral reform. In 1868, riding a wave of popularity generated by the state's revulsion with Andrew Johnson and its idolization of Ulysses Grant, they remained united and successfully gained a 57 percent majority for African-American suffrage in a statewide referendum. Once again, party identification proved the key determinant to the outcome of a popular vote on an issue of race.

Revolutions can go backward, and Dykstra demonstrates that Iowa's revolution in racial attitudes did exactly that. By 1880, the nation, and with it the Republican Party, longed for compromise and peace with the white South. A referendum calling for the elimination from the state constitution of all references to restrictions based on race passed, but, as Dykstra's sophisticated quantification demonstrates, with far less support from the state's one-time champions of racial reform than in 1868.

Dykstra concludes his book by claiming that his account of reform in Iowa demonstrates the malleability of racial prejudice. Yet despite the victories won against the Black Codes, one wonders how deep the transformation of racial attitudes ever was. Dykstra himself shows time and again the centrality of party politics to the shifting fate of the state's restrictive racial legislation. A true moral revolution is difficult to discern in Dykstra's Iowa.

Dykstra's most important contribution is not his theory of racial prejudice. His detailed analysis of individuals and events reminds us of the dangers of the broad generalizations so often employed by historians of race. In addition, his numerous biographical sketches of Iowans, from the famous to the obscure, give immediacy to what otherwise could have been a dry and distant story. But most valuable is Dykstra's identification of the racial views of the vast array of constituencies that formed Iowa's frontier community. His creative statistical methodology allows him to analyze the political positions of Iowa's religious, regional, and ethnic groups and conclude that party dominated all other considerations for Iowa's voters. The "bright Radical star" was, above all else, the product of "the shrine of party."

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