

The Uncertain Trumpet

Iowa Republicans and Black Suffrage, 1860-1868

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IOWANS have taken pride in the fact that in 1868 their state recorded, as Robert Dykstra described it, "the nation's first and only grass-roots victory for black equality where the ballot offered voters a clear alternative to uncompromising racism." Several years ago Dykstra and G. Galin Berrier, in separate articles, dealt with the topic of black civil rights in some detail, particularly with the period from 1865 to 1868, starting with June 14, 1865, when the state's Republicans, by a 2 to 1 margin, voted in state convention to promote black suffrage. Both authors noted the passions aroused by this step which initiated a three-year political and state constitution-mandated process aimed at achieving black suffrage. And both concluded that the victory was not an unalloyed triumph of principle over policy, although Dykstra argued that to deny the presence of principle was to take too cynical a view of the motivation of Iowans who supported black suffrage.¹

Indeed the triumph was not unalloyed. And some Iowans of principle surely did promote it. Thus, any discussion of the black suffrage issue must deal with voter motivation. Motivation is related to political dynamics. Part of the political dynamic in Iowa was the impelling need for powerful winners—Republicans enriched by a treasure of virtue accrued from being on the winning side during the Civil War—not to

1. Robert R. Dykstra, "Iowa: 'Bright Radical Star,'" in *Radical Republicans in the North: State Politics During Reconstruction*, ed. James C. Mohr (Baltimore, 1976), 167-193; G. Galin Berrier, "The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa—1865-1868," *Annals of Iowa* 39 (Spring 1968), 241-261.

lose on any issue which they had introduced and on which a particularly scorned enemy—Democrats tarred as Copperhead Southern sympathizers—so opportunistically and gratefully took a stand. Seen in this light the victory of black suffrage in the state was largely assured once the convention voted to promote it. What happened thereafter through the final victory of black suffrage in the fall of 1868 was almost anticlimactic.

But that is hindsight. Such a victory was not so clearly seen at the time, although some astute observers predicted it. Certainly the record of Iowans on matters involving race, right up to the convention vote, did not inspire confidence that they would soon move down the path toward black suffrage. Worth investigating, therefore, during the years immediately preceding the convention's action and the ensuing four-month campaign, are the state's record on racial matters and its citizens' attitudes toward blacks.

From territorial days Iowans generally had not welcomed black settlers and had treated the few who came as second-class citizens. In 1857 voters had rejected a proposal to permit black suffrage by a 9 to 1 margin.² Black voting was limited in that era throughout the North. Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts did permit black suffrage, but New York restricted the vote to those blacks owning \$250 in property who had lived in the state for three years. Pennsylvania rescinded its black residents' right to vote in 1838. Indiana forbade black votes in 1851. And in the fall of 1865 referenda promoting black suffrage would fail in Connecticut (44.8 percent), in Wisconsin (45.6 percent), and in Minnesota (45 percent).³

2. Morton Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War: A Decade of Frontier Politics* (Norman, Okla., 1972), 150-151, 154; Leola Nelson Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1969), 20; Dykstra, "Iowa," 168.

3. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1967), 220; Eric McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction*, Phoenix ed. (Chicago, 1967), 59 n29. The Wisconsin state supreme court, however, ruled in 1866 that Wisconsin blacks could vote. The judges held that an 1849 suffrage referendum—in which only one-sixth of the voters who voted in the concurrent gubernatorial race actually voted on the referendum issue—had legalized black suffrage, a decision based on a dubious interpretation of Wisconsin law and voter intent. Richard Current, "Wisconsin: Shifting Strategies to Stay on Top," in Mohr, *Radical Republicans*, 147-149.

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Iowa Republicans generally were uncomfortable about the abolitionists within their ranks and about Democratic charges that they were sympathetic to blacks. During the 1860 political campaign and intermittently thereafter, depending on how strongly the Democrats pushed them, some of them tried to demonstrate that Democrats, not Republicans (or Whigs earlier), had promoted black equality and "amalgamation." Citizens certainly had no reason to assume that Republicans desired either goal, they declared. Nor should they fear that abolitionists would bend the party to their will.⁴

Republicans, in overwhelming control of the state legislature during the war, were not notably sympathetic toward bills or resolutions which promoted gains for blacks, especially during the first half of the conflict. Even as late as 1864, sixteen Republicans could not fully commit themselves to support resolutions proposing congressional action to end slavery. And in the 1864 House, twelve Republicans even sided with the Democrats, in preliminary though not in final balloting, against a bill to repeal Iowa's dead-letter black exclusion act of 1851. Two Republican senators opposed repeal to the end.⁵ Still, the vast majority of Republican legislators did favor repeal of the act. Was this a sign that these men and their constituents had, during the war years, come to accept the migration into Iowa of a people to whom, a year later, many of them were prepared to grant the vote? Hardly. Instead, they were much more likely to assure each other that Union victory and the end of slavery would keep blacks in the South. Moreover, those blacks who had come to Iowa to escape slavery would depart once the war was over and slavery was dead.⁶

4. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 1 September, 30 November 1860; Henry Scholte, letter in *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 19 September, 26 September 1860 (Scholte was a leader of Iowa's Dutch settlers.); "C" in *Hawk-Eye*, 21 November 1861; see also *Hawk-Eye*, 4 December 1861. *Dubuque Times*, 26 April, 10 May 1861; *Dubuque Herald*, 11 May 1861; *Davenport Democrat*, 15 July 1861; Eliphalet Price to Samuel Kirkwood, 8 August 1861, Samuel J. Kirkwood Correspondence, Iowa State Historical Department, Des Moines; *Fairfield Ledger*, 26 March 1863.

5. Iowa, *House Journal*, 10th G.A., 1864, 86-87, 184-185, 308; Iowa, *Senate Journal*, 10th G.A., 1864, 176, 352, 570.

6. V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro During the Civil War* (Chicago, 1967), 56, 58, 107; *Dubuque Times*, 20 August; 2, 6, 12, 20 September; 12 December 1862; 6 February; 30 August

In 1862, numerous House Republicans voted with the Democrats on one issue involving color. They helped defeat, 60 to 23, an effort to delete the word "white" from a Senate-passed resolution asking Congress to give all white soldiers of foreign birth their naturalization papers when honorably discharged from the service. Proponents of deletion wanted to expand the measure to include soldiers of all colors.⁷

Meanwhile, another development may reveal changing racial attitudes: Iowa soldiers voted from 78.3 percent to 91 percent Republican in the elections of 1862 through 1864. This group, a rough cross-section of the state's populace, was experiencing contact with black people to a far greater degree than most other Iowans ever had. Had the soldiers become more egalitarian as a result? The bulk of the fragmented evidence suggests that they were not, particularly after the Emancipation Proclamation became effective. Some soldiers resisted officers' efforts to get them to sign resolutions supporting the proclamation. Others said they had no wish to be "Negro protectors and help negro stealers." Some reported violent expressions of contempt or hatred toward contrabands who fled their masters and sought protection from the army. Soldier Peter Wilson, seeing freed blacks near Memphis in the spring of 1863, was not that harsh, but he wrote, "They are a kind of people I would not like to have for neighbors."⁸ One judgment of soldier opinion in September 1863 claimed to report mainstream attitudes in the army and may have been correct. It dealt primarily with slavery, but indirectly it revealed the degree of soldier empathy or sympathy for the enslaved and for blacks generally. There

1863; Edward Younger, *John A. Kasson: Politics and Diplomacy from Lincoln to McKinley* (Iowa City, 1955), 136; James Grimes to Salmon Chase, 20 October 1862, in William Salter, *James W. Grimes* (New York, 1876), 218.

7. Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 27; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 7 February 1862. Republicans outnumbered Democrats sixty-five to thirty in the Iowa House.

8. Iowa, *Election Records, 1839-1913* (Iowa City: University Libraries, microfilm), reel 1, 1838-1887; *Keokuk Constitution*, 25 July 1862; *Washington Democrat*, 16 May 1863; Mildred Throne, ed., *The Civil War Diary of Cyrus F. Boyd, 15th Iowa Infantry, 1861-1863* (Millwood, N.J., 1977), 118-119, 132. See also *Dubuque Herald*, 19 February, 8 April, 6 May 1863. *Keokuk Gate City* (w), 25 March 1863; *Muscatine Courier*, 30 March 1863; "Peter Wilson in the Civil War, 1863-1865," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 40 (October 1942), 360; *Keokuk Gate City* (w), 16 March 1864.

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was little of either. Commissary officer and future Iowa governor Cyrus Carpenter wrote from Corinth, Mississippi, "The soldiers believe in putting down the rebellion and they argue everything from the anti-slavery standpoint, not because they have any feelings on the moral questions of slavery but because they think it a good joke on the rebels to strike them through the institution they cherish."⁹

Neither Iowa Republicans nor soldiers spoke with unanimity on the prospect of using black troops against the South. For the Republican *Dubuque Times* part of its objection lay in the editor's assumption about alleged black deficiencies—deficiencies, one could infer, which would make blacks poor material for entrance into a voting booth: ". . . If the white man," he wrote, "with all his intelligence and bravery can not save this government, the poor, subservient, ignorant negro slave never can." Negative soldier opinion could be equally specific as well as more complex. An Iowa lieutenant wrote that arming blacks was a cunning scheme to give them social and political equality. If it took their help to whip the rebels "we would be a most ungrateful people did we not give them all the rights of white citizens"—a prospect Lt. H. Rickel hoped to avoid.¹⁰

In August 1862, a Muscatine black, Alexander Clark, wrote Governor Samuel Kirkwood asking that the state organize companies of black soldiers to serve in Iowa regiments. Nathan Brainerd, the governor's secretary, answered in Kirkwood's absence. His reply provides one informed assessment of Iowa feeling about blacks just three years before the Republican move on black suffrage: "You know better than I the prejudices of our people for you have felt them more severely and you know your color would not be tolerated in one of our regiments. However wrong this may be we cannot ignore the fact."¹¹

9. Cyrus C. Carpenter to Emmett Carpenter, 13 September 1863, C. C. Carpenter Papers, Iowa State Historical Department, Iowa City. For a similar view see Mildred Throne, ed., "An Iowa Doctor in Blue: The Letters of Seneca B. Thrall, 1862-1864," *Iowa Journal of History* 58 (April 1960), 110.

10. *Iowa City Republican*, 7 May 1862; *Der Demokrat* (Davenport), 14 August 1862; *Dubuque Times*, 12 July 1862; Lt. H. Rickel in *Davenport Democrat*, 28 February 1863; *Dubuque Herald*, 25 February 1863. See also Throne, *Cyrus Boyd*, 118-119.

11. N. H. Brainerd to Alexander Clark, 8 August 1862, Governor's

The segregated First Iowa African Infantry regiment was finally organized during the late summer and fall of 1863. It saw no action but performed guard and garrison duty in St. Louis and in other sections of the Mississippi Valley. During their service the black troopers composed an address to the Iowa citizenry on the matter of equal political rights. It "received the earnest attention of the thoughtful and fair minded citizens" according to editor-politician-historian Benjamin Gue, one of the few party leaders who accepted black suffrage enthusiastically. Evidence of such "earnest attention" other than Gue's claim is hard to find, however.¹²

Much easier to find, especially during the last year of the war, is proof that most Iowans, Republicans as well as Democrats, could not abide social intermixture with blacks, especially miscegenation. When Thomas Clagett, editor of the Democratic *Keokuk Constitution*, charged that a black-white marriage ceremony had taken place in Fairfield, Republican editor W. W. Junkin was outraged at this "slander on our city." Junkin tried to turn the accusation to Republican advantage. "Even if the story was true," he wrote, "there would be far more morality about it than about the illicit intercourse which white men, claiming to be Democrats, have with Negro wenches." The Republican *Nonpareil* in Council Bluffs agreed with Junkin's sentiments. The paper claimed that one of Pottawattamie County's politically active Democrats had been "peaceably miscegenating" with a black woman for years and that everybody knew it. Moreover, nobody objected because "Copperheads and niggers have a perfect right to mix, but it is highly improper for any loyal man or woman to be party to such a case. . . ." Also following the Junkin line of counter-attack was the Republican *Keokuk Gate City*. When Des Moines Democratic editor William Merritt complained about the frequency of black male-white female social contact in the capital, the *Gate City* smugly announced that such "unseemly

Letterbook, 1861-1863, Kirkwood Correspondence; Berrier, "Negro Suffrage," 244, 246.

12. War Dept., *The War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901), series II, vol. 3, 563, 576, 993, 1113; John Briggs, "The Enlistment of Iowa Troops During the Civil War," *Iowa Journal of History* 15 (July 1917), 363; Benjamin Gue, *History of Iowa*, 4 vols. (New York, 1903), 2:366-367.

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conduct" was acceptable for Copperhead ladies and Southern slaveholders but not for Republican ladies. In Muscatine the Republican *Journal* claimed that two nephews of Ohio Copperhead Clement Vallandigham had married black women. One supposedly lived in Muscatine with his "lubbly wench, black and greasy as a Guinea native" and the other just across the Mississippi in Illinois. The Republican *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines) may have missed a cue when it failed to tie Copperheads to miscegenation. But the paper's tone was unhappy enough when it reacted to rumors that blacks and white women had attended a dance, apparently together. Exclaimed the paper, "This is horrible if true!" Few Iowans would have challenged Senator James Harlan's view, announced in the United States Senate, that mixed marriages were "loathsome associations."¹³

Not all black-white associations were so loathsome. Davenport-area Republicans were embarrassed in the winter and spring of 1865 when Jesse Henley, Pleasant Valley Republican member of the county board of supervisors, who was also a district school director, objected to a young black girl's presence in a school attended by his own children. Ironically the racially permissive teacher was a staunch Democrat. Moreover, she boarded in Henley's household. Henley incurred considerable wrath, including that of some Democrats; the *Davenport Gazette* of abolitionist Edward Russell read him out of the party. The school director pulled his children out of school, but the black child, named Bessie, got her schooling from the uncowed teacher—who, not unexpectedly, had to secure new lodgings and easily did so in the aroused and sympathetic community.¹⁴

Nevertheless, little overt evidence suggests that many Iowans, regardless of political affiliation, favored either black-white social mixture or black political rights before 1865.

13. *Fairfield Ledger*, 31 March 1864; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 9 April 1864; Robert Rutland, "The Copperheads of Iowa: A Re-examination," *Iowa Journal of History* 52 (January 1954), 19; *Keokuk Constitution*, 6 January 1864; *Keokuk Gate City* (w), 16 March 1864; *Muscatine Journal*, quoted in *Dubuque Times*, 15 March 1864; Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 28; *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 2d sess., 1865, appendix: 321.

14. *Davenport Democrat*, 20 February, 12-13, 16 May 1865.

Moreover, what receptivity there was existed almost exclusively among Republicans. So far as suffrage was concerned, Dubuque businessman-soldier Solon Langworthy doubtless expressed the view of thousands in his party when he wrote privately after the 1864 election that any Republican faction which did speak out for black suffrage would harm the party. Langworthy himself left the door open to some political life for blacks: the qualifying test for any voter, he said, should be "is he capable[?] is he honest[?]"¹⁵

When the subject had surfaced publicly, some Republicans acted defensively. *Keokuk Republican* editor James Howell clearly did so in the spring of 1862 when he replied to a charge that he was a hypocrite for not favoring black suffrage or other political or social rights for blacks. Just because he did not believe in slavery or because he did believe in "equality of natural, inherent God-given rights," Howell replied, was not to say that he believed in "equality in physical and mental capacities and endowments nor political and social rights or position."¹⁶ The *Dubuque Times's* first pro-black suffrage editorial, in May 1865, favored black suffrage, *only in the South*. That, fuzzing of the issue, was defensive. The paper argued that blacks were as intelligent as "one-half of the foreign population of the North who are permitted to vote." In Dubuque, with its 42 percent foreign-born citizenry, that was clearly offensive.¹⁷

The *Times* was not, however, the first major Republican paper to suggest that black suffrage, at least in the South, was a possibility. The breakthrough appears to have come in the *Iowa State Register* of February 2, 1865. Blacks, said editor Frank Palmer, had fought well during the war. They had aided the escape of Northern prisoners from Southern prisoner-of-war camps. Thus, there would be "another question to be settled" if they continued to show their loyalty and usefulness to the na-

15. Solon M. Langworthy Diary, 20 November 1864, Langworthy Papers, Iowa State Historical Department, Iowa City.

16. *Keokuk Gate City (w)*, 30 April 1862.

17. Ignoring the *Times's* limitation of black voting to the South, the *Dubuque Herald* and the *Keokuk Constitution* saw its words signifying a return to Know-Nothingism. *Dubuque Times*, quoted in *Dubuque Herald*, 5 May 1865 and *Keokuk Constitution*, 9 May 1865.

tion. The question was: ". . . where shall be the line of limitations upon their privileges as soldiers and citizens?" Might they not "vote well" as they have behaved well and fought well in the national crisis? The *Register's* look into the future elicited no response, and the paper did not return to the subject until ten days before the state convention. When it did, Palmer made two additional points: black votes were needed in the South to keep that region loyal; and black suffrage would speedily come to the rest of the country when there came a "proper recognition of the *manhood of men* in every state of this government."¹⁸

Neither the *Times* nor the *Register*, however, directly urged that blacks be given the vote in Iowa or that the Republicans campaign in their behalf on that issue if necessary in the fall elections. Controversial editor Russell promoted both ideas in a May 17 editorial in his paper and followed them up successfully in the state convention. There he spearheaded efforts urging the party to support deletion of the restrictive word "white" from the state constitution's article on suffrage. Many delegates were furious with Russell for refusing to let them evade the issue by simply affirming that those professing "loyalty to the Constitution of the Union" deserved the vote. James Howell, however, did see some merit in black votes; he may have articulated the views of some black suffrage supporters. Irish Catholics, Howell charged, constituted the "regular forces of the Church to carry out in the country the policy of the Pope's Encyclical Letter against Civil and religious liberty. . . ." Blacks and Protestants were friends of liberty. Catholics, therefore, opposed black votes which would help block their "schemes of religious domination." But after the convention Howell complained that Russell's maneuvering had interjected an issue which would "distract" the voters.¹⁹

Among those disgruntled by Russell's preconvention stand were the Republican papers in Burlington, Iowa City, and Webster City. They disliked his timing and they feared disaffec-

18. *Iowa State Daily Register*, 2 February, 4 June 1865.

19. *Davenport Gazette* (w), 17 May, 7 June 1865; *Iowa North West* (Fort Dodge), 30 May 1865, quoted in Berrier, "Negro Suffrage," 244; *Keokuk Gate City* (d), 13, 21 June 1865, quoted in Berrier, "Negro Suffrage," 246 n25. But also see *Gate City* (w), 17 May 1865, for favorable comment on certain eastern newspapers' advocacy of black suffrage and on Abraham Lincoln's qualified approval.

tion in Republican ranks. The Webster City editor argued, as others would later, that intelligence and loyalty, not color, should be the conditions applied to new voters. Considering the racial climate of the era, some timidity among the Republicans was hardly surprising. It was surprising, however, to see the usually forthright *Burlington Hawk-Eye* editor Clark Dunham weasel around the subject after the convention. The Republican platform decided nothing, he wrote. The people would vote their own sentiment. And he suggested that making "war" on President Johnson over suffrage would help neither blacks nor whites. Frank Palmer of the *Iowa State Register*, ex-governor Samuel Kirkwood, and Congressman John Kasson also, to varying degrees, stressed that the convention's position was relatively unimportant since "the people" would eventually have to make the decision. Dunham, too, tried to avoid further controversy by genuflecting before the people. Responding to a Democratic critic who accused him of favoring black suffrage, he said that what he believed about black suffrage was "immaterial" since the choice was up to the electorate. Few Civil War-era editors were that modest in assessing the merits of their own opinions. Yet, in the same editorial, the Burlington man followed with a judgment which was surely more accurate. He stressed that the "odium and infamy" of the Democrats—the "Copperhead party"—was so repugnant that if they opposed black suffrage, the voters would surely approve it.²⁰

DEMOCRATS never expressed sentiments favoring black suffrage. On one occasion prior to 1865, Patrick Robb, the only wartime *Dubuque Herald* editor to support the war, objected when the United States Senate rejected suffrage restriction to whites in a bill which created Montana Territory. Robb claimed that after the war blacks would be numerous enough in nearly all states to hold the balance of power if they had the vote. Keokuk's Thomas Clagett sounded the same note in the spring of 1865. Keokuk, Iowa's most southeastern Mississippi River metropolis, was experiencing a growth in its black population, although it

20. *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 23 May; 20, 28 June 1865. See the May 31 *Hawk-Eye* for a letter by a Republican who agreed with Russell. *Hamilton Freeman* (Webster City), 3 June 1865; *Iowa City Republican*, 31 May 1865, quoted in Berrier, "Negro Suffrage," 244.

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was far from becoming a crucial voting bloc.²¹ A Democrat in Independence offered another objection, asking, "If blacks, why not Indians, or for that matter, why not women in preference to blacks? Women have high moral and intelligent minds, nearly equal to those of men, and if anybody is accorded the right to vote, other than white men, women should receive it."²²

Clagett, Democratic editor of the *Keokuk Constitution*, was more skeptical about the existence of highly moral white men. In condemning "fanatics" whom he saw trying to force black social and political equality, he conjured up a judgment about whites which must have raised a few eyebrows among his readers. Forced equality, he declared, would cause the progressive extermination of blacks, a fate as certain as that of the Indians. "This results," he argued, "from the vices as well as from the domineering character of the white men, which are certain to push the negroes to the wall and kill them off gradually, but surely, if they are left alone in freedom, intermingled with the whites with none especially interested in protecting and preserving them. . . ." On the other hand, M. M. Ham, Patrick Robb's successor at the *Dubuque Herald*, emphasized the potential for black violence under "full freedom." He asked if the vote should be extended "to the lousy savages [the Indians] who for two years have been massacring the white settlers in the upper Mississippi. . . ." Full freedom for blacks would lead them similarly to "plunder and murder white men, and in the revillings [*sic*] of a beastly nature to ravish white women."²³

Thus, when the Republican convention of 1865 announced that the party would promote black suffrage, the Democrats were delighted. The Democratic party was ridden with factionalism, had suffered a succession of increasingly lopsided defeats for nearly a decade, held no state offices, claimed no one in the state's congressional delegation, and at the end of the 1863 elections, filled only ten seats in the entire general

21. *Dubuque Herald*, 14 April 1865; *Keokuk Constitution*, 3 May 1865. The black population of Iowa never reached even 1 percent in any census year until 1970 when it climbed to 1.5 percent. Leland Sage, *A History of Iowa* (Ames, 1974), 173.

22. *Conservative* (Independence), 28 March 1865.

23. *Keokuk Constitution*, 19 May 1865; *Dubuque Herald*, 24 May 1865.

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assembly. Party members regarded the Republican endorsement of black suffrage as a godsend. Discredited (unfairly, to some degree) by the charge that they were Southern sympathizers during the Civil War, they needed an issue to regain credibility. They were so desperate that they took an extreme step, although not without fierce internal debate: they chose not to field a ticket of candidates for state office that fall, opting instead to support a slate of ex-army officers disgruntled at the Republican position on black suffrage. This group called itself the Union Anti-Negro Suffrage party.²⁴ The change of name fooled no one. Despite the Democrats' hopes, the "Soldiers" ticket was seen for what it was, a ticket which, if elected, would owe its success to the discredited wartime Democracy.

The Democratic campaign strategy added nothing new to the standard racist arguments against black participation in American life. The anti-black suffrage forces simply recited a litany of horrors which would stem from giving votes to blacks: blacks would migrate to Iowa where they would displace white artisans and laborers; such cheap labor would only line the pockets of the rich; lazy blacks from Missouri would invade Iowa; black "outrages" against whites would increase.²⁵

When the Republicans committed themselves to black suffrage in Iowa, their many editorial voices hardly spoke as one. Nor did individual papers always adhere consistently to one course throughout the campaign, as Robert Dykstra has shown. Two papers, the *Marshall County Times* and the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, claimed that they preferred that the vote be granted on the basis of intelligence. The *Nonpareil* had never taken a notably forward position on black rights, partly, perhaps, because its strong local competitor, the *Bugle*, which was hostile toward such rights, reflected a sizable portion of the communi-

24. Edward Johnstone to Laurel Summers, 15 July 1865; Charles Mason to George Jones, 22 July 1865; Jones to Summers, n.d., all in Laurel Summers Correspondence, Iowa State Historical Department, Des Moines; *Dubuque Herald*, 1 July 1865; *Davenport Democrat*, 28 July 1865, August 1865 *passim*; Mildred Throne, ed., "Erastus B. Soper's History of Company D, 12th Iowa Infantry, 1861-1866," Part III, *Iowa Journal of History* 56 (October 1958), 343-344; *Iowa State Register* (w), 9 August 1865; Herbert S. Fairall, ed., *Manual of Iowa Politics* (Iowa City, 1881), 70; Gue, *History of Iowa*, 3:5-6.

25. *Keokuk Constitution*, 11 July 1865; *Davenport Democrat*, 12 August 1865; *State Democratic Press* (Iowa City), 27 September 1865.

ty's sentiment. Other Republican organs like the *Hamilton Freeman* came to accept the idea that Iowa blacks deserved suffrage at least as much as those who fought against the government.²⁶

By August, the *Dubuque Times* supported black suffrage in Iowa as well as in the South, but the paper exercised moderation in Democratic Dubuque County. Moderation for the *Times* involved some straddling. To those who warned that blacks would get into trouble if they voted, the paper replied that trouble would come only if blacks ran for public office, a possibility the editor opposed. America was after all a white man's country and blacks had too much self-respect to seek office. Further, they were too few in number to acquire political influence, so why deny them the vote in the first place. To the contention that if blacks could vote, so should women, the editor asserted that such speculation was beside the point. "In spite of all plausible theories," he declared, "intelligent and refined people instinctively feel that women should not take part in the work of civil government." Late in the campaign the editor assured readers that those who were superior to blacks favored universal male suffrage while those who were inferior did not.²⁷

Edward Russell focused more consistently on the central issue, the justice of black suffrage, in his *Davenport Gazette*. He also employed invective which promoted sharp rejoinders from his more nervous political allies. The *Chicago Tribune*, *Rock Island Argus*, *Muscatine Journal*, and *Burlington Hawk-Eye* took him to task for an editorial which announced that opponents of black suffrage included "every ignorant, low-bred vulgar fellow in the country, whether native or foreign born. Almost every drunkard and every pimp, thief, vagabond and loafer whose white skin is all that he has to boast of. . . ."²⁸

Another Republican of stature who defended black suf-

26. Dykstra, "Iowa," 174-176; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 17 June 1865; *Marshall County Times* (Marshalltown), 28 June 1865; *Hamilton Freeman*, 1 July 1865. One stern suffrage supporter bluntly chastised his southern Iowa Republican editor for being silent on the issue. See *Opinion* (Glenwood), 15 July 1865.

27. *Dubuque Times*, 11, 17 August 1865, reprinted in *Davenport Gazette*, 17 August 1865 and *Davenport Democrat*, 18 August 1865.

28. *Davenport Gazette*, 8 August 1865; *Davenport Democrat*, 9, 11 August 1865.

frage was General Marcellus Crocker, a former Democrat and one of Iowa's war heroes. Crocker wrote that freedom and citizenship were "merely nominal" without the ballot. The Iowa Republican convention's stand for black suffrage was proper, as was the timing. If more proof of its rightness were needed, Crocker concluded, there was the Copperheads' fierce opposition. Crocker's opinions appeared in a July 6 letter to Governor William Stone. For some reason Stone did not release the letter to the public until late in the campaign. By that time Crocker had died of consumption; however, the press gave his message wide circulation.²⁹

Crocker's unequivocal stand was one that some important Iowa Republicans were still unwilling to assume, among them Senator James Grimes and Congressmen John Kasson and Josiah Grinnell. Before the end of August, Grinnell did switch to Crocker's position. Kasson, former governor Samuel Kirkwood, and Governor Stone ultimately favored black suffrage also. But close reading of their statements in its behalf, particularly those by Kasson and Stone, reveals that they were not about to state their support directly if they could possibly avoid doing so. Former senator, by this time Secretary of the Interior James Harlan, publicly supported black suffrage shortly before the election.³⁰

Black enfranchisement held no terrors for one body which was strong in Iowa in 1865, or so some of its national leaders proclaimed. The *Methodist Quarterly Review*, in an article reprinted in a local Dubuque Methodist publication and in the Democratic *Dubuque Herald*, claimed that admitting blacks to the polls might double the Methodist vote nationwide. The *Quarterly Review* praised black potential invigorated by education and other black qualities: loyalty, Republicanism, and Protestantism (in contrast to the Irish Catholics who were "for slavery, retrogression, drunkenness, mobocracy and dis-

29. See *Iowa State Register* (w), 4 October 1865 and *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 7 October 1865 for the complete text of the Crocker letter.

30. James Grimes to Edward Stiles, 14 September 1865, in Edward Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers and Public Men of Early Iowa* (Des Moines, 1916), 63; Charles Payne, *Josiah Bushnell Grinnell* (Iowa City, 1938), 185; Josiah Grinnell to Thomas H. Benton, *Opinion and Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 30 September 1865; *Iowa State Daily Register*, 17 August (Kasson), 29 August (Kirkwood), 15 September (Stone), and 8 October 1865 (Harlan).

loyalty"). American-born blacks, claimed the journal, were more likely to use the ballot wisely than "the Romanish immigrant." Whether Iowa Methodists so enthusiastically favored black voting at that time is unknown. Still, during the war years Methodists frequently aroused the ire of Iowa Democrats for their support of the war, for the propensity of Methodist ministers to speak freely from the pulpit on public issues including slavery and black rights, and for presumed Methodist antipathy toward Catholics. As a denomination, Methodists had, in 1860, the largest membership in Iowa, two times as large as the various Lutheran groups and three times as large as the Catholics. More to the point so far as the 1860 to 1868 progress toward black suffrage is concerned is the recent assessment of an Iowa historian that the church from 1860 to 1870 was powerful, "virtually an adjunct of the Republican party."³¹

Even if most Methodists were safely pro-black suffrage, Republicans attempted to diminish citizen concern about blacks ever voting in any significant numbers in Iowa. The *Dubuque Times* printed and the *Hawk-Eye* and *Gate City* reprinted a story which detailed the departure of five Iowa blacks for the South. It was too cold in the North, the blacks said. "Thousands of liberated slaves now in the North will soon follow the example of this small party," the *Times* concluded optimistically.³²

Iowa's Republicans did win decisively in 1865 despite the fears of some of their leaders. They dominated the legislature by nearly a 6 to 1 margin. Governor Stone won a second term handily, although his 56.4 percent of the votes was a sharp drop from the party's 64.2 percent in 1865, a drop at least partly due to the soldier vote no longer being the enormous factor it had been in 1864. The Republican victory was no fluke, however. In 1866 the party triumphed 62 percent to 38 percent in the top

31. Sage, *History of Iowa*, 183; *Methodist Quarterly Review*, reprinted in *Dubuque Herald*, 14 March 1865; *Eighth Census of the U.S.*, 1860, 3:389-392. One Democratic editor in late 1862, happily reading of some national loss of Methodist membership, was willing to consign the church to oblivion when he exclaimed, "A church which leaves the straight and narrow path marked out by the Gospel . . . to enter the political arena deserves to die." *Council Bluffs Bugle*, 24 December 1862.

32. *Dubuque Times*, reprinted in *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, 17 May 1865 and *Keokuk Gate City* (w), 24 May 1865.

state race, and its vote increased by over twenty thousand.³³

After their victory in 1865, the Republicans embarked successfully on the three-year process required by law to amend the constitution. Some of those still skeptical about the wisdom of a total party commitment to black suffrage attempted to limit black voting rights. Their efforts failed, although they did stymie attempts to make black males eligible for membership in the state legislature. That restriction remained effective until 1880 when the state's electorate voted 63.5 percent in favor of deleting it from the state's organic law.³⁴

One interesting footnote to this part of the story concerns Samuel Kirkwood, Iowa's respected governor from 1859 to 1863, known thereafter as *the* Civil War governor of Iowa. Kirkwood, a former Ohio Democrat who turned Republican in 1855, was one of the war governors who had solidly supported Abraham Lincoln; but he was never strongly identified with the party's abolition wing which he and many of his closest party associates regarded as composed of impractical zealots. In January 1867, when Kirkwood was in the United States Senate, he tangled with Charles Sumner. Sumner wanted to know if Kirkwood approved the word "white" which was still in the Iowa constitution's suffrage provision. Turning the question away from his own person, Kirkwood answered, "I conceive it to be the business of the people of Iowa and not the business of the Senator from Massachusetts." These words evoked praise from two political cohorts: Reuben Noble reminded Kirkwood that he had predicted that ". . . you could not make yourself *damned fool* enough to please the long haired fools both male and female who control the Republican party. . . . You ventured to say '*none of your business*' to the Representative man of the long haired gentry, and the Miss Nancys of the feminine gender, and forthwith the pack are let loose upon you." George Tichenor told Kirkwood not to worry about newspapers which

33. Soldiers voted 16,854 to 1,883 (91 percent to 9 percent) for Lincoln in 1864. The few voters who were still soldiers in 1865 voted for Stone 736 to 607 (56.4 percent to 43.6 percent). Republican dominance in the legislature elected in the fall of 1865 is seen in the 118 to 20 vote by which that body sent James Harlan back to the United States Senate. Iowa, *Election Records, 1839-1913*, reel 1; *Keokuk Gate City (w)*, 16 January 1866.

34. Iowa, *Election Records, 1839-1913*, reel 1.

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were critical of his remarks since "the men of power in the state" were behind him.³⁵ Some "men of power" of that era in Iowa, like Theodore Roosevelt of a later time, could not abide the most earnest humanitarian reformers who were their party brethren. To them the reformers were often prissy, sentimental "do-gooders," intruding into the real world, a world which, in the end, was the domain of real men.

How, then, does one answer the questions raised by Robert Dykstra in his preliminary study of Iowa suffrage: "Principle or merely 'policy'? How much of this Republican triumph reflected a genuine respect for the doctrine of racial equality?"³⁶ In particular, is this "genuine respect" reflected in the events of 1865, the year the Republicans came out for black suffrage in convention and won the ensuing election, choosing men to the 1866 legislature who started the constitutional process rolling toward achieving that goal?

Other factors behind those 1865 developments reflect motivations other than acceptance of racial equality *per se*; Dykstra discusses some of them. The Republicans did dominate the state politically. Although some of them did not act like it during the campaign following the convention, they had little to fear from the political opposition, discredited so thoroughly by the dogmatism of the minority Copperheads within the Democratic party. Their shrill antiwar stance stigmatized all Democrats, making them appear less than unreservedly loyal to the Union.³⁷

Negative reference-group politics was at work with a vengeance. Almost all Republicans in those months after Lincoln's assassination did not want to be even remotely identified with "Southern sympathizer Democrats," who were campaigning almost exclusively against black suffrage. A. J. Bell demonstrated this perfectly when he withdrew from a race in

35. Dan E. Clark, *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood* (Iowa City, 1917), 315-317. For a defense of Sumner see the *Humboldt County True Democrat*, 25 January 1867, quoted in David Lendt, *Demise of Democracy: The Copperhead Press in Iowa* (Ames, 1973), 117. The *True Democrat* was a radical paper despite its name.

36. Dykstra, "Iowa," 185-186.

37. See my *Civil War Iowa and the Copperhead Movement* (Ames, 1980), especially the concluding chapter.

Pottawattamie County with the explanation:

To be elected by the votes of those men whom I now find rallying around me, would not be a victory of which I would be proud, for as parties have now shaped themselves, my success would be heralded abroad as a Copperhead victory, and there is nothing that I would more deeply deplore than to become instrumental in giving aid and comfort to those men whom I have known for the past four years as enemies of my country.³⁸

The Republican vote may have contained an anti-Catholic component, especially to the extent that anti-Catholicism tended to be linked to temperance. Dykstra noted that the "ultra Radical Republicans" (his description) elected to the legislature in the fall of 1865 differed from the "other Republicans" in their support for the existing state prohibitory law. These "ultra Radicals" also differed from the "other Republicans" in supporting all moves to eliminate race restrictions in the state constitution, not just the voting restriction.³⁹

Another factor might have aided the Republicans in the fall of 1865, but it hardly supplies evidence of a genuine acceptance of blacks as voters. Despite wartime fears fanned by the Democrats, blacks had not inundated the state. Whites, from overseas and from other states, immigrated in far greater numbers.

Positive evidence to support the idea that by the summer of 1865 Iowa Republicans were disposed toward black suffrage—and the degree of racial acceptance that implies—is hard to find. It is somewhat like the evidence about the dog in the Sherlock Holmes mystery, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*: the dog did not bark. In Iowa the bark in favor of black suffrage before the Republican convention was hardly earsplitting. Even Edward Russell did not speak out forcefully until May 17. And that was much too soon for most of his peers who preferred to coast through the fall campaign to certain victory as the party of Union, Lincoln, and loyalty.

38. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 30 September 1865. The *Nonpareil* spelled the name "Bill," but this was probably A. J. Bell, a former state legislator from the county. For similar refusals see: Mahaska County, *Oskaloosa Herald*, reprinted in *Keokuk Gate City* (w), 26 September 1865; Davis County, *Iowa State Daily Register*, 4 October 1865; Polk County, *Iowa State Daily Register*, 10 October 1865.

39. Dykstra, "Iowa," 178-180.

Perhaps, however, the dog was only slumbering. After the convention acted, the *Iowa State Register* had said that the issue might as well be faced since it certainly would come up later. Some Iowans had obviously been talking about achieving black suffrage sooner rather than later, even if many newspaper editors and important politicians had avoided the subject. And it would inevitably be coupled with the right of loyal Southern blacks to the ballot as a counterbalance to the vote of disloyal whites. Most radical Republicans and, perhaps, most other Republicans would at least acknowledge that Iowa's blacks deserved the same consideration.

We do not yet know enough about the degree of political solidarity of Iowa's supposedly radical Methodists, or about the solidarity of numerous other Protestant religious groups who might have shared their views. Certainly we know too little about their members who did *not* edit newspapers or who did *not* run for public office. Further research may uncover a real commitment to political, if not social, equality for blacks among these ordinary folk. Obviously some of them were in Des Moines on June 14, possibly making up a large share of the 513½ votes in favor of black suffrage.

Whoever they were and whatever their numbers, they did prod and irritate many of Iowa's Republican leaders, the "men of power" as George Tichenor described them. They were the Republican conscience, committed to equality for black males at the polls. That their other intraparty fellows and the party elite were as genuinely committed as they, is much less certain—and, in the end, much less important.

The events that followed the June 14 decision at the Republican convention may have been anticlimactic so far as the whole process of achieving black suffrage is concerned. Having taken a bold stand, Iowa's powerful Republicans could not retreat—nor could they stand to suffer a beating. Their hungry, opportunistic, "disloyal" Democratic opponents were not about to let them off the hook. They would have to follow through. Republican ego as well as honor was at stake.⁴⁰

40. On one other occasion during the war a similar situation occurred. At the Republican convention of 1863, dark-horse candidate Colonel William Stone won the party's nomination for governor. Many leading Republicans

If nearly all white Iowans were racist, throughout the struggle over black suffrage, the least racist among them were more decent than those who shamelessly exploited the issue. These people, also, were clearly more interested in justice than those who preferred to delay action until it was politically safe or until the federal government should make the first move.

Over ten years later, Charles Mason, formerly a Democratic "man of power" and a major architect of the failed party strategy of 1865, had occasion to speculate about blacks in politics. If the humorless Mason had possessed a sense of irony he might have been amazed at himself. Mason, wartime Copperhead, a man whose political career had run afoul of the Iowa Republican tide, was looking around for some way to run the Republicans out of Washington in 1876. Mason pondered the suggestion of a Mississippi friend, an ex-Confederate colonel, who proposed that the Democrats nominate a black for vice-president to counteract the Radical Republicans. "Would that have such an effect even if we could unite the Democrats on such a measure?" Mason asked in his diary. "It is worth thinking about."⁴¹

Three decades after Mason's query, deep in a period of national regression on the racial question, two Iowans who had been Republican radicals of the postwar era, both of them defenders of black civil rights, exchanged opinions. But General James Weaver, Civil War veteran, fighter for human rights, presidential candidate on the Greenback ticket for 1880 and on the Populist ticket of 1892, had at last given up the fight for racial justice. At a speech in November 1906, dedicating the Iowa monument at Shiloh, he declared that there was no solution for the "Negro problem" except for America's blacks to leave the country and for them to "set their faces toward Africa

who felt that they were better qualified than he were decidedly unhappy. Moreover Stone was not universally popular in the army. But Stone was the Republican nominee, and his opponent, the more popular General James Tuttle, was being supported, if not altogether enthusiastically, by most Copperhead Democrats. As Cyrus Carpenter told his brother, "Everybody in the army says it is a pity that Stone was nominated but since he is the candidate we must elect him." Cyrus Carpenter to Emmett Carpenter, 13 September 1863, Carpenter Papers.

41. Charles Mason Diary, 16 January 1876, Iowa State Historical Department, Des Moines.

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and a black republic." This stand dismayed James S. Clarkson, former editor of the *Des Moines Register*, a national party figure, and by 1906 the Port of New York's collector of customs. Clarkson wrote Weaver with all the earnestness he could muster from his experience as a long-time defender of America's exploited blacks: ". . . It is hard for me, believing in your generous heart, to believe that you are capable of such sentiment. Candidly and honestly, I see no more reason, nor more right for a man to be deported from this country because he is black in skin than I do because he is a methodist in religion." Weaver, in his despair, had also questioned black suffrage. Clarkson gave a response from his heart: "No Republic can base its suffrage on color, no Republic can base its suffrage on a basis of superior strength given to the strong as against the weak; no Republic could attempt such a basis and live; no Republic would be worthy to live on such a basis; no man of the highest type could find pride of citizenship in such a Republic."⁴²

Edward Russell and friends would have agreed.

42. Albert Fried, ed., "J. S. Clarkson Letter on Civil Rights," *Annals of Iowa* 35 (Winter 1960), 219.

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