

# The Issue Squarely Met

## Toward an Explanation of Iowans' Racial Attitudes, 1865-1868

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IOWANS have good grounds for priding themselves on their forebears' encounter with racial discrimination in the post-Civil War era. Consider the magnitude of pioneer Iowans' triumph: one of the most racist territories in the North in the 1840s, Iowa by the 1860s had transformed itself into one of the most egalitarian states in the Union. What Hubert H. Wubben tells us of the color prejudice that nevertheless infected Iowa in those years does not diminish this resounding achievement, but in fact enhances it: Iowans of the 1860s opted for racial justice *despite* prevailing opinion—in the Hawkeye State as elsewhere—that black Americans constituted an inferior caste legitimately denied civil equality. *Why* Iowans did what they did is, in a sense, less interesting than that they did it at all.<sup>1</sup>

A proper appreciation of their achievement includes re-emphasizing the profoundly negative role of Iowa's early Democratic party. The heavy-handed racism of Iowa's Democrats, so unpleasantly observable in the 1860s, had been apparent from the party's beginning, and was only the most obnoxious aspect of its hopelessly reactionary character. The Democratic party, in fact, dominated Iowa through its first sixteen years as a separate political entity, and Iowa's public policy on matters of slavery and race reflected that unfortunate hegemony with exceeding clarity.

Let three examples suffice: First, in the late 1840s Iowa was the only free state in the Union whose legislators resisted in-

1. All references to Wubben cite his article, "The Uncertain Trumpet: Iowa Republicans and Black Suffrage, 1860-1868," in this issue of the *Annals*.

structing its congressional delegation to support the Wilmot Proviso, which would have banned slavery from the nation's newly acquired western territories. Second, Iowa was the only free state whose United States senators both voted in favor of the notorious Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Third, Iowa's statute books and its constitution not only contained the usual racially discriminatory "black code" common to most northern states, but its general assembly in 1851 enacted the North's first "exclusion law"—forbidding free black migration into a state—to be passed in the nineteenth century. Early Iowa's political image, in consequence, was not an enviable one.<sup>2</sup>

The overthrow of this reactionary regime occurred, as is well known, in 1854, when the state's Free Soilers and Whigs finally coalesced and captured the statehouse, in 1856 transforming themselves into a Republican party and delivering Iowa's electoral vote to the nation's first Republican presidential candidate, John C. Fremont.<sup>3</sup> The following year Iowans participated in the first of a series of popular referenda on civil rights that measured, at roughly decade-length intervals, their attitudes toward blacks.

Iowa was not the only state to hold such referenda on propositions aimed at extending the liberties of northern blacks. But among the two dozen or so such referenda held in the North in the mid-nineteenth century, the Iowa referenda stand out as unique. The first of the three, Iowa's black suffrage proposition of 1857, won a mere 10 percent of the ballots cast, representing

2. The failure by 1849 of the Democratically controlled Iowa legislature, alone among those of the free states, to instruct its United States senators to support the Wilmot Proviso was frequently noted in the nation's Free Soil party press. See, for example, the *Washington (D.C.) National Era*, 26 April 1849. Senatorial votes on the Fugitive Slave Law are displayed in Holman Hamilton, *Prologue to Conflict: The Crisis and Compromise of 1850* (New York, 1964), appendix A. Iowa's 1851 black exclusion law is placed in appropriate context in Jo Ann Manfra, "Northern Exclusionary Measures and the Privileges and Immunities of Free Blacks, 1778-1857: An Unexamined Theme in Antislavery Constitutionalism" (LL.M. thesis, Harvard Law School, 1979). New Jersey and Massachusetts passed exclusion laws in the 1780s, but the former had been repealed in 1798 and the latter in 1834. *Ibid.*, 15, 88n.

3. David S. Sparks, "The Birth of the Republican Party in Iowa, 1854-1856," *Iowa Journal of History* 54 (January 1956), 1-34; Morton M. Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War: A Decade of Frontier Politics* (Norman, Okla., 1972), chapters 4, 6.

one of the two worst civil-rights referenda defeats on record. In the second, the black suffrage referendum of 1868, the proposition won 57 percent of the ballots cast, being the first civil-rights proposition to gain a majority in any state where voters knew unequivocally what they were voting for or against. Finally, Iowa's third referendum, the 1880 proposal to open the general assembly to black membership, won by a landslide: 64 percent of the ballots. Thus it is not the 1868 referendum alone that compels admiration; it is instead the astonishing political accomplishment by which, in just twenty-three years, a large population's positive attitude in a matter of racial equality rose by over 50 percentage points.<sup>4</sup>

The state's judicial hostility to racial segregation in the post-Civil War era also bears emphasis, since it, too, proves to have been unique. In an era in which the "separate-but-equal" doctrine was employed to legitimize racially segregated public facilities, the popularly elected Iowa supreme court ruled against separate-but-equal public schools in 1868 and again seven years later. It did the same for public accommodations, specifically in the case of a segregated Mississippi River steamboat, in 1873. In doing so, the Iowa court employed a twentieth-century definition of equal rights that proved to be very far in advance of its time.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever Iowans' collective *beliefs* by the late 1860s, their

4. Iowa's first two referenda may be compared with others in Tom L. McLaughlin, "Grass-Roots Attitudes toward Black Rights in Twelve Nonslaveholding States, 1846-1869," *Mid-America* 56 (July 1974), 176. The author presents an incorrect percentage for Iowa's 1857 antiblack vote, however, which was 89.6 rather than 85.9. See Robert R. Dykstra, "Iowa: 'Bright Radical Star,'" in *Radical Republicans in the North: State Politics During Reconstruction*, ed. James C. Mohr (Baltimore, 1976), 168, 190n. Only Colorado's 1865 black suffrage referendum yielded greater hostility to blacks (89.8 percent) than Iowa's 1857 plebiscite. After two previous defeats, Minnesota's 1868 black suffrage referendum fared slightly better than Iowa's that same year, but apparently only because Minnesota's Republican leadership had submitted the constitutional question to voters as "an amendment of Section 1, Article 7"—that is, without any direct reference to a racially impartial franchise. *Ibid.*, 169-170.

5. *Ibid.*, 186. It seems entirely relevant that Iowa Supreme Court Justice Chester C. Cole, the Harvard-educated former Democrat who in 1870 became the court's chief justice, boasted of having been an early proponent of black suffrage. In 1865, according to an authorized biographical sketch, "he came out boldly and unequivocally in favor of negro suffrage, in an open letter writ-

collective *behavior* on matters of racial justice, compared to the rest of America, was of high quality indeed.<sup>6</sup>

WHY DID Iowans approve black suffrage in 1868? The answer, which I gave on the previous occasion cited by Professor Wubben, is that the state's Republican voters supported it at the polls. And why did Republican voters support it? Because the state's Republican leadership wanted it approved, and made the support of black suffrage a straightforward test of loyalty to the party and, indeed, to the Union itself.

Wubben does not dispute these findings, which embrace matters of proximate causation. Instead he asks a more fundamental question: Why did the Iowa Republican leadership want black suffrage to succeed at the polls? His own answer is that it was simply a fluke, given that most Iowans in the 1860s appear to have been racists. What happened, he suggests, is that through some unaccountable political accident the delegates to the 1865 Republican party convention voted a strong black suffrage plank into the platform for that year, committing the party to revision of the state's racist constitution. Finding themselves stuck with the convention's oddly progressive handiwork, Republicans had no political choice but to push the issue through to success in 1868. Wubben therefore views this as having been a victory for "policy" rather than a genuine commitment to the civil equality of blacks. His larger point, then, takes

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ten to Mr. Windsor, his old friend and Presbyterian brother in Taylor County, and was probably the first man of influence in the state to put himself thus publicly on record in favor of this then unpopular measure, which he fearlessly defended, ably arguing that it was right and reasonable, and that justice to the colored race demanded it." A. T. Andreas, *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa*, reprint ed. (Iowa City, n.d.), 363.

6. It is important to be absolutely clear here. Iowa's accomplishment in the post-Civil War period was in outlawing what psychologist James M. Jones terms "institutional" racism: "those established laws, customs, and practices [that] systematically reflect and produce racial inequalities in American society . . . whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have racist intentions." This differs from what Jones calls "individual" and "cultural" racism, which embrace beliefs about black inferiority that have served to legitimize institutional racism. See Jones, *Prejudice and Racism* (Reading, Mass., 1972), especially 118, 131, 148. Thus, Iowans acted strongly against institutional racism *despite* the existence among them of considerable individual and cultural racism.

the form of a *moral* judgment: the Iowa Republican party did a good thing, but for a bad reason.

This is not the place for a disquisition on means and ends. As every historian knows, however, less-than-noble motives have often led to good ends, and—unless the actual *means* employed to accomplish a good end prove to have been intrinsically evil—we normally experience no problem in evaluating the accomplishment as good. A few historians, for example, have made scholarly careers out of being cynical toward the fact that slavery's abolition did not always proceed according to high moral purpose, but none of them, one assumes, would argue that the death of slavery was thereby morally wrong. The writings of such historians are primarily useful in helping to explain how so many millions of white Americans who had agitated and prayed and voted for emancipation of the slaves could then fail to follow through on the logic of the antislavery crusade by fighting more effectively for the civil rights of free blacks, North and South.<sup>7</sup> But in postwar Iowa the ultimate logic of the antislavery crusade *did* express itself in a civil liberties movement of such vigor, compared to other states, that cynicism seems singularly misplaced.<sup>8</sup>

7. Over the past several years, scholars of northern racist attitudes have been drawn into a lively debate among scholars of southern Reconstruction, who have divided themselves into what may be thought of as "pessimist" and "optimist" schools. The pessimists stress the failures, lost opportunities, and essentially conservative nature of Reconstruction policies, and attribute them to certain inherent weaknesses in the nation's Republican party leadership, of which, they insist, a racial prejudice virtually indistinguishable from that of white southerners was the most damaging. The optimists, on the other hand, stress Reconstruction's achievements, and lay primary responsibility for its ultimate failure at the feet of institutional constraints on effective federal policy—the nineteenth-century deference to states' rights, for example—and strongly dispute the allegation that there was little to choose between the two major parties with respect to attitudes toward blacks. Thus my preliminary work on Iowa has been cited in support of the optimists. See Michael Les Benedict, "Equality and Expediency in the Reconstruction Era: A Review Essay," *Civil War History* 23 (December 1977), 325; idem, "Racism and Equality in America," *Reviews in American History* 6 (March 1978), 20n. On the other hand, Professor Wubben's article accords well with the pessimist historiographical position. For perhaps the most important recent statements of that position see William Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879* (Baton Rouge, 1979), as well as a number of the essays in Otto H. Olsen, ed., *Reconstruction and Redemption in the South* (Baton Rouge, 1980).

8. That Iowa's nineteenth-century civil rights record seems too good to be

With respect to color prejudice, of course, there is nothing gained by attempting to make nineteenth-century Iowans better than they were. The results of the 1857 referendum still speak for themselves: 90 percent of Iowa's voters opposed civil equality for black Iowans, revealing attitudes on the part of both Republicans and Democrats that obviously persisted into the war years and are widely reflected in private correspondence and newspapers, as Professor Wubben is at pains to point out. But a few words on Republican editorial hostility toward interracial sex and interracial marriage would be in order, since that phenomenon carries so much of the weight of Wubben's argument and appears to be so decisive in demonstrating the depths of Republican racism.

Expressed concern about racial "amalgamation" need not be taken seriously as a measure of Iowans' racial attitudes in the 1860s, the reason being that miscegenation has provoked *universal* hostility throughout American history, North and South, East and West, down to the present day. As recently as 1963, for example, almost half the states in the Union—including Indiana, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, and Idaho—still had laws against interracial marriage, and 64 percent of Americans supported them. The United States Supreme Court

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true has recently attracted the attention of others besides Wubben. Robert Cook, a doctoral student from Oxford University, according to columnist Walt Shotwell, is "convinced [that] much of this do-good history that rubs off on [Iowa's] Republicans was accidental; actually some Republican leaders were 'unprincipled people' whose real motive was to use blacks to control the South." See Shotwell in *Des Moines Register*, 27 April 1983. Cook's viewpoint, if accurately conveyed, is that of the Reconstruction pessimist school, which stresses that much Republican party behavior in the 1860s and 1870s was blatantly political rather than authentically concerned with uprooting slavery and racism. Cook evidently wishes to enhance that line of argument by devising a negative interpretation of Iowans' attitudes and actions. Iowans of the Civil War era, in this respect, are in good historiographical company: scholars recently have had to defend the Great Emancipator himself from such criticism. See, for example, Otto H. Olsen, "Abraham Lincoln as a Revolutionary," *Civil War History* 24 (September 1978), 213-224; Peyton McCrary, *Abraham Lincoln and Reconstruction: The Louisiana Experiment* (Princeton, 1978); and especially LaWanda Cox's brilliantly persuasive *Lincoln and Black Freedom: A Study in Presidential Leadership* (Columbia, S.C., 1981). For the "fallacy of responsibility as cause" involved in the search for human agents to blame for Reconstruction's failure, see David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York, 1970), 182-183.

put an end to all such laws in 1967, but nine years later 34 percent of Americans *still* favored them.<sup>9</sup> And of course the newsworthy 1983 Supreme Court decision against South Carolina's Bob Jones University involved a religious stricture against interracial dating, which remains to this day an enormously volatile issue. Belaboring nineteenth-century Iowans for hostility to "race-mixing" makes about as much sense as applauding them for favorable attitudes toward motherhood and God.

Even Iowa's civil-rights activists, not excluding Edward Russell, felt themselves compelled to deny they favored interracial "social" equality, a disclaimer any scholar of the nineteenth century will recognize as the standard response by racial progressives everywhere to the ubiquitous specter of miscegenation. Giving special credence to such sad, politically necessary utterances, of course, is to make meaningless any distinction at all between the relatively enlightened and the wholly reactionary.<sup>10</sup>

As for the 1865 Republican party convention, Professor Wubben argues that "the victory of black suffrage in the state was largely assured once the convention voted to promote it." If this be so, then any ultimate moral judgment of the Republicans' civil-rights campaign of the late sixties may be said to rest primarily on what transpired at that uniquely decisive gathering. Republican *motives* in the 1865 convention, in other words, are the key to Republican *behavior* in 1868. Were those motives good or bad?

Professor Wubben mainly finds them mysterious: he cannot fathom why—given the racism of Iowans in general and Iowa Republicans in particular—black suffrage overwhelmingly carried the convention. Is he suggesting that a small ultra-radical cabal somehow quietly engineered, cleverly horse-traded, or arrogantly ramrodded black suffrage through the unknowing, naive, or somehow intimidated gathering? Let us examine the possibility.

9. George Eaton Simpson and J. Milton Yinger, *Racial and Cultural Minorities: An Analysis of Prejudice and Discrimination*, 4th ed. (New York, 1972), 502-504; D. Garth Taylor et al., "Attitudes toward Racial Integration," *Scientific American* 238 (June 1978), 43; Thomas F. Pettigrew, "The Mental Health Impact," in *Impacts of Racism on White Americans*, ed. Benjamin P. Bowser and Raymond G. Hunt (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1981), 114.

10. Russell's disclaimer ("there is not and cannot be any such thing as

The names of 663 individuals are listed as delegates to the convention, making it, according to the editor of the *Des Moines Register*, "one of the largest deliberative bodies ever convened in the State. . . ." <sup>11</sup> A number of distinguished political figures came as delegates: Congressmen Josiah B. Grinnell and Hiram Price, former governor (and future United States senator) Samuel J. Kirkwood, Lieutenant Governor Enoch W. Eastman, Adjutant General (and former New Hampshire governor) Nathaniel B. Baker, and Peter Melendy, United States marshal for the District of Iowa. Military officers of high political standing included James B. Weaver (future congressman and Greenback and Populist presidential candidate), James A. Williamson, and Marcellus M. Crocker, the popular general who would forthrightly endorse black suffrage later that summer. Future governor William Larrabee, Henry P. Scholte (patriarch of the Pella Dutch), and former newspaper editor Jacob Rich, shortly to achieve prominence as William B. Allison's political manager, also counted as notables. Editors of important urban newspapers present as delegates included Edward Russell of the *Davenport Gazette*, Frank W. Palmer of the *Des Moines Register* (a future congressman), Clark Dunham of the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, and Charles Aldrich, lately of the *Dubuque Times*. (Benjamin F. Gue, the Fort Dodge editor, attended the convention, but not as a delegate, seeking and winning nomination as the party's candidate for lieutenant governor.)

At least nineteen delegates, among them Grinnell, Price, and Kirkwood, had been present at the creation of the Iowa Republican party in 1856, but only in Kirkwood's Johnson County delegation did such "charter" Republicans make up as much as a third of the members. At least five former Free Soil activists attended, the most prestigious being Major Henry O'Connor, the Irish-born former Kansas freedom-fighter and

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*social equality*") is quoted in G. Galin Berrier, "The Negro Suffrage Issue in Iowa—1865-1868, *Annals of Iowa* 39 (Spring 1968), 250.

11. The official convention minutes, containing a list of delegates, appeared in the *Iowa State Daily Register* (Des Moines), 15 June 1865. The quote is from *ibid.*, 14 June 1865. A total of 664 persons are listed as delegates, although the original delegate from Carroll County was later disqualified. Worth and Wright counties are noted only as "Represented."

Civil War combat veteran, now a Muscatine lawyer, whom Iowans would elect as their attorney general a year hence. At least one old Liberty party man, H. T. Reid of Lee County, symbolically represented the Republicans' distant ancestry: the political abolitionism of the 1840s.<sup>12</sup>

Such men, however, accounted for only a tiny minority of the 663 delegates, most of whom had been drawn from the historically anonymous party rank-and-file. Each county had been permitted to send at least one delegate, but the weighting system that defined the size of each delegation ("one additional delegate for every hundred votes, and fractional part of a hundred over fifty, including the Soldiers' vote, cast at the late Presidential election for the Union electoral ticket") gave the numerical advantage to delegations from heavily Republican urban counties such as Scott, Lee, and Linn, which had been allotted the largest delegations: 34, 32, and 29 respectively. But distinctly nonurban Henry County—that venerable bastion of antislavery politics—followed close behind with 27. The convention's designers, clearly enough, had sought to achieve the most scrupulous geographical reflection possible of the state's rank-and-file Republican strength.<sup>13</sup>

Only seventy-two of Iowa's ninety-nine counties sent representatives, however, and many delegations consisted of fewer members than authorized. But whoever represented a county cast that county's entire authorized vote. Clayton County, allotted twenty-six delegates, actually sent only five men to the convention. The rules permitted these five to cast 5.2 votes each to form Clayton's 26 total votes. Thus the 663 delegates found themselves entitled to cast a grand total of nearly 900 votes.

12. For the names of all known delegates to the Iowa Republican party's first convention see Louis Pelzer, "The Origin and Organization of the Republican Party in Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History* 4 (October 1906), 521-525. A listing of Liberty and Free Soil party activists is included in Ward Robert Barnes, "Anti-Slavery Politics in Iowa, 1840-1856" (M.A. thesis, University of Iowa, 1968), appendix A.

13. For the rules allocating delegates see H. M. Hoxie (for the Republican State Central Committee) in *Iowa State Daily Register*, 13 June 1865. Henry County had fielded Iowa's first Liberty party ticket back in 1843. See Robert R. Dykstra, "White Men, Black Laws: Territorial Iowans and Civil Rights, 1838-1843," *Annals of Iowa* 46 (Fall 1982), 430.

Could many delegates have been unaware that black suffrage might come before them at the convention? Probably drawing up the 1865 Republican nominations, especially for governor, stirred more interest among the delegates than did the specific makeup of the platform they would write. Yet the dullest must have had at least some inkling of the importance of the party platform in that very political first postwar year. Such a document, as political scientist Benjamin Ginsberg reminds us, is designed less for voters than for the leadership: "The completed platform is a symbolic contract among the party's major factions—a contract in which each important faction has stated the terms on which it has agreed to cooperate with the . . . party's campaign efforts."<sup>14</sup> And those Republicans importantly committed to extending the civil rights of blacks had given ample warning that they intended to make their presence felt.

Edward Russell, as Professor Wubben reminds us, had publicly urged the party to endorse black suffrage nearly a month before the delegates met, and Iowa's editors of both parties lost little time in bringing the controversial proposal before their readers. In addition, prominent newspapers throughout the North had begun discussing proposals to enfranchise ex-slaves in the South as a means of preventing the resurgence of the old white power structure there—an idea Frank Palmer's *Register* had introduced to Iowans as early as February 1865. Black suffrage, when it came specifically before the convention delegates, should have come as no complete surprise.

The committee on resolutions, charged with devising the 1865 party platform, had initial authority over all campaign proposals. It consisted of one delegate from each of the state's twelve congressional districts. Five political notables made up a committee minority: James W. McDill, a future congressman; George W. McCrary, a future congressman and United States secretary of war; editors Edward Russell and Frank Palmer, who had instigated the campaign for black suffrage, and Jacob Rich, who, as editor of the *Quasqueton Guardian* back in 1857, had been the only newspaperman in the state brave enough to suggest that Republicans vote in favor of black suffrage that

14. Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Consequences of Consent: Elections, Citizen Control, and Popular Acquiescence* (Reading, Mass., 1982), 125.

year.<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Gue, a fourth editorial proponent of black suffrage, was first appointed to the committee, but then removed when it was disclosed that he was not an official delegate.

Russell's proposal for a strong and forthright party endorsement of black suffrage, however, evidently did not carry even the platform committee egalitarians: a few years later Russell would recall "the tremor of the eleven prudent men in the Committee on Platform, when one Radical member would not abandon his conviction [in deference] to their fears. . . ." <sup>16</sup> But his progressive colleagues did join Russell in forcing through the committee a compromise Resolution 4 that, importantly enough, endorsed the principle underlying a racially impartial suffrage: "with proper safe-guards to the purity of the ballot-box, the elective franchise should be based upon loyalty to the Constitution and Union, recognizing and affirming the equality of all men before the law."

This victory was not enough for Russell. After the party platform had been read from the podium and "received with enthusiastic applause," Russell, from the convention floor, moved as an addition to Resolution 4 the following phrase: "therefore, we are in favor of amending the Constitution of our State by striking out the word 'white' in the article on suffrage." The convention's presiding officer ruled that a move to table Russell's motion would table the entire report of the resolutions committee, which forced the delegates to settle the question in open discussion.

Benjamin Gue left us our only substantive description of

15. In June 1857 Rich had deplored the fact that Iowa's proposed constitution did little for blacks: "The Constitution may be adopted and yet the negro have no more rights than he has at present. We confess that this is our great objection to it." Six weeks later he quietly encouraged a prosuffrage vote in the referendum by printing a facsimile of the Buchanan County Republican ballot that phrased the suffrage question as follows: "Shall the word 'White' be stricken out of the article on the 'Right of Suffrage?'—YES." So far as I have been able to discover, this was the only instance in which an Iowa editor suggested that his readers support the 1857 proposition. See *Quasqueton Guardian*, 13 June, 1 August 1857. For biographical data on Rich see George E. Roberts, "The Career of Jacob Rich," *Iowa Journal of History* 13 (April 1915), 165-174.

16. Quoted in Berrier, "Negro Suffrage," 260. Unless cited differently, from this point on all information on proceedings within the convention has been extracted from the official minutes (see note 11).

the debate. "Many of the timid delegates were alarmed and made strong efforts to persuade Mr. Russell to withdraw his resolution," reports Gue. "But he refused, and made a vigorous defense of his measure." Several delegates, he adds, then rose in opposition to it.<sup>17</sup> They included Josiah Tracy, the genial Burlington lawyer who had just been elected chairman of the Republican State Central Committee, perhaps F. W. Cowles of Wapello County, and either W. G. Sample or H. W. Sample, delegates from Lee. But far and away the most prestigious spokesman for the opposition was Congressman J. B. Grinnell, the urbane, nationally prominent clergyman, educator, publicist, and promoter, and, what was perhaps most salient in the context of the moment, one of Iowa's most distinguished antislavery activists of the late 1850s.

Explains Gue: "Grinnell and many who opposed the Russell amendment were in favor of the principle for which it stood, but opposed a bold declaration for the reform as impolitic and liable to bring party defeat." The congressman and others argued that many Republican voters, while strongly antislavery, opposed black suffrage, "and it was urged," says Gue, "that they held the balance of power in Iowa politics and that this amendment would drive them from the party."<sup>18</sup> As Iowa City's Republican editor Nathan H. Brainerd put it, Russell's motion "elicited a warm debate, many of those opposing it saying that the resolution as originally reported covered the whole ground, and it was making the question needlessly prominent to add the amendment. In other words, they were willing to say 'vote' to the black man, but did not wish to say it so loudly and plainly as to be heard too far."<sup>19</sup>

17. Benjamin F. Gue, "The Public Services of Hiram Price," *Annals of Iowa* 1 (January 1895), 598.

18. Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa*, 4 vols. (Des Moines, 1903), 3:1; idem, "Hiram Price," 598. The speeches of Tracy and Sample are alluded to in the official minutes and in Gue, *History*, 3:1. For identification of Tracy see Edward H. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers and Public Men of Early Iowa* (Des Moines, 1916), 306-308. Only the minutes refer to remarks in opposition made by "Cowles, of Wapello," and this may well have been a garbled reference to "Stiles, of Wapello." The standard biography of Grinnell is Charles E. Payne, *Josiah Bushnell Grinnell* (Iowa City, 1938).

19. *Iowa City Republican*, 21 June 1865. Despite his disparaging remarks about the convention's equivocators, in the same breath editor Brainerd

After Edward H. Stiles, a young attorney and state legislator from Ottumwa, had heatedly reiterated these arguments, emphasizing again the political peril to Iowa Republicanism introduced by the Russell amendment, Congressman Hiram Price, Russell's colleague in the Scott County delegation, could contain himself no longer. He rose to challenge these dire prognostications.<sup>20</sup>

Price, at age fifty-one, was the quintessential midwestern Republican, a poor Pennsylvania farm boy who, by his own efforts, had risen to become one of Iowa's leading bankers and railroad capitalists. Stiles terms Price "an old-time radical abolitionist," but this was a misapprehension. In 1846, two years after moving to Davenport, Price had signed a petition calling for a "north-western Liberty convention" to be held at Chicago, but that appears to have been his only flirtation with abolitionism.<sup>21</sup> He remained a Democrat probably until 1854, when the Whig-Free Soil coalition platform embraced the two programs closest to his heart: opposition to slavery extension into the West and passage of a law prohibiting the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors in Iowa. As longtime president of the state's foremost temperance organization, Price helped write the Iowa prohibitory law of 1855.<sup>22</sup> The following year he was one of the most active members of the convention that founded the Iowa Republican party.<sup>23</sup> At the outbreak of the war he was

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mildly disapproved of the Russell amendment: "We think there was no necessity for offering this amendment—that the original resolution was clear and explicit. . . ." He later claimed to have voted for black suffrage in 1857. See Berrier, "Negro Suffrage," 246. Brainerd is the same man quoted by Wubben as hypothesizing in 1862 that Iowans would disapprove of racially integrated military units.

20. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches*, 63. Stiles errs in recalling that "the fourth resolution of the platform reported by the committee . . . recommended the amendment of the State Constitution by striking out the word 'White' in the article on Suffrage," and he identifies Hiram Price as "undoubtedly the author of that plank." Stiles has, of course, confused the Russell amendment with the original Resolution 4, and is obviously (and apparently with no real evidence) suggesting Price's authorship of the amendment.

21. Gue, "Hiram Price," 585-587; Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches*, 63; Davenport petition in *Chicago Western Citizen*, 1 April 1846.

22. "Free Democratic" platform in Sparks, "Birth of the Republican Party," 7; Gue, "Hiram Price," 587-588, 592.

23. Price had been chairman of the 1856 Scott County delegation, the convention's largest, and is judged by Pelzer to have been one of the three

president of Iowa's state banking system and proved instrumental in organizing financial backing for the state's early military buildup, becoming the impromptu paymaster for Iowa forces in Missouri. In 1862 the voters of his district elected him to Congress.<sup>24</sup>

Price not only possessed a political stature to be reckoned with, but was also a man not to be trifled with in public debate. "He was both fiery and formidable," says Stiles, "and no man ever left an encounter with him free of scars." (The seasoned crowd-pleaser Henry Clay Dean had once refused to allow Price to rebut a speech of his, even after Price offered ten dollars for the privilege.) Now, on the floor of the 1865 GOP convention, Price unleashed "a very scathing and heated speech," recalled Stiles, "in reply to my own. . . ." Benjamin Gue recollected it in somewhat less personal terms, but as no less forceful. The congressman, he says, "made one of the great speeches of his life. . . . Those who heard it will never forget the fervid eloquence, the sledge-hammer logic, or the powerful and irresistible appeal [that] poured forth in a torrent of righteous indignation that has seldom been surpassed."<sup>25</sup> Although the speech "was entirely impromptu, and never reported or published," Gue remembered it as follows:

The Republican party is strong enough to dare to do *right*, and cannot afford now, or at any other time, to shirk a duty. The colored men, North and South, were loyal and true to the Government in the days of its greatest peril. There was not a rebel or traitor to be found among them. They ask the privilege of citizenship now that slavery has been forever banished from our country. Why should the great freedom-loving State of Iowa longer deny them this right? Not one reason can be given that has not been used to bolster up slavery for the past hundred years. The war just closed has swept that relic of barbarism from our

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most influential members of its platform committee. Pelzer, "Origin and Organization," 510n. As leader of the antiliquor faction in that convention, Price also led a determined, if unsuccessful, effort to obtain its endorsement of prohibition. See Gue, "Hiram Price," 593-594; Pelzer, "Origin and Organization," 508, 512-513; Sparks, "Birth of the Republican Party," 26-28.

24. Gue, "Hiram Price," 594-596, 597-598.

25. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches*, 63, 135; Gue, "Hiram Price," 596-599.

land; let the Republican party have the courage to do justice.

I have no fear of the result in a contest of this kind. We shall carry the election and have the satisfaction of wiping out the last vestige of the black code that has long been a disgrace to our State.<sup>26</sup>

"The timid delegates were shamed into silence," recalled Gue, thereby implying that no further remarks were to be heard from the amendment's opponents. Stiles, on the other hand, says he "rejoined in the same spirit. The result was considerable heat in the convention. . . ." Whatever the case, two other leading notables also spoke in the amendment's behalf. One of them, the eloquent Henry O'Connor, "was probably [Iowa's] most popular political orator," asserts Stiles. The other, Lieutenant Governor Eastman, an eccentric, homespun ex-Yankee attorney from Eldora, also happened to be "a speaker of unusual force. . . . He was a master of sarcasm, and no man who knew him well," Stiles testifies, "ventured to invoke its withering shafts." Eastman earlier had amused the delegates by declining renomination in favor of "the next best man." Now his and O'Connor's remarks on black suffrage, whatever their exact substance, powerfully reinforced the effect of Price's stunning eloquence.<sup>27</sup>

The delegates then decided the issue in a roll call vote about which the official minutes reveal only the result: 513½ votes (58 percent) in favor of the Russell amendment, 242½ (28 percent) against, and 123 votes (14 percent) not cast. The high political standing and brilliant oratorical talents of Price, O'Connor, and Eastman cleanly and clearly had carried the day against J. B. Grinnell and his likeminded fellow-delegates who had urged equivocation. It had been one of those moments, as Michael Les Benedict has written of the national encounter with racism, "that . . . once again testifies to the strength rather than the

26. Gue twice published this speech, and the two versions differ only slightly. See Gue, "Hiram Price," 598; idem, *History of Iowa*, 3:1-2.

27. Gue, "Hiram Price," 599; Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches*, 63. Both the official minutes and Gue, *History of Iowa*, 3:1-2, note that O'Connor and Eastman spoke in support of the amendment. For their backgrounds and Stiles's remarks on their rhetorical abilities see *Recollections and Sketches*, 405-406, 708-712.

weakness of the American egalitarian tradition."<sup>28</sup>

If today we would tend to doubt either the efficacy of that tradition or the sheer power of rhetoric on such an occasion as this, we might well find modern behavioral research on white racism helpful in overcoming skepticism. As perhaps the most distinguished student of the subject, social psychologist Thomas F. Pettigrew, has observed, race prejudice is a much more flexible phenomenon than was once thought, the reason being that only some 15 percent of white adult Americans are uncompromising racists whose extreme antiblack prejudices rise "from largely authoritarian personality needs. . . ." At the same time, "roughly 25 percent of white adults in the United States consistently support full rights for Blacks and in most situations will not exhibit antiblack attitudes or behavior." The remainder, something like 60 percent, hold *no* deeply motivated opinions about blacks, but will exhibit whatever racist—or racially tolerant—attitudes and behavior their society's institutions and opinion leaders appear to ask of them. It is this "conforming three-fifths" that can be *persuaded*, and in relatively short order, to attitude change.<sup>29</sup> "This process," adds Pettigrew, ". . . contradicts conventional wisdom. It is commonly held that [prejudiced] attitudes must change before behavior; yet social psychological research points conclusively to the opposite order of events as more common. Behavior changes first, because of new laws or other interventions; individuals then modify their ideas to fit their new acts."<sup>30</sup>

28. Benedict, "Racism and Equality," 19. The figure for votes not cast was derived by subtracting the 756 ballots for and against the Russell amendment from the 879 totals cast for candidates for governor and lieutenant governor. Had these 123 uncast votes been entered in opposition to the amendment, it still would have carried handily.

29. Pettigrew, "Mental Health Impact," 109-118 (quotes from 116).

30. Thomas F. Pettigrew et al., *Prejudice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 29. What Pettigrew terms the "fait accompli phenomenon" underlying widespread and often dramatic change in white racial attitudes is perfectly exemplified in the sequence of public responses toward interracial marriage noted earlier: in 1963 only 36 percent of white Americans were against laws banning marriage between blacks and whites; in 1967 the Supreme Court struck down all such laws; in 1976 fully 66 percent opposed laws banning interracial marriage. The Gallup poll complements these findings by reporting that Americans positively approving marriage between whites and nonwhites rose from only 20 percent in 1968 to 43 percent in 1983. See note 9 above; *Parade Magazine*, 21 August 1983, p. 8. Pettigrew warns, however, that the phenomenon can also

Historians and other scholars of American racism have noted how little the basic components of antiblack prejudice have evolved through the centuries, which encourages belief that Pettigrew's model is as applicable to the 1860s as it has been to the 1960s.<sup>31</sup> No other behavioral conceptualization so satisfactorily explains how it was that a body of 663 men, most of whose ideas about blacks were undoubtedly negative on the morning of June 14, 1865, could by the evening of the same day have voted overwhelmingly to bestow the elective franchise on blacks. It had been a straightforward showdown between "right" and "policy," concludes Benjamin Gue, "and right prevailed over policy." Frank Palmer offered an even more perceptive conclusion. "The Convention being thus brought to a direct vote upon the [Russell] amendment," he noted, "and being unwilling to stand committed even in *appearance* against the principle of negro suffrage, adopted the amendment by a large majority, and the universal expression of the delegates after the adjournment was that inasmuch as the issue must be squarely

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work the other way: racial attitudes can be expected to retrogress whenever the public receives retrogressive signals from its government and opinion leaders. See Pettigrew, "Racial Change and Social Policy," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 441 (January 1979), 118-120. This, of course, is precisely what occurred in the United States from the 1890s through World War I, with absolutely devastating effects on the limited racial equality achieved in the Civil War era. See especially C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York, 1974).

In retrospect I discover that LaWanda Cox anticipated my employment of Pettigrew's findings. "Neither can it be taken for granted that [racism] is impervious to change," she writes. "There is no question but that racial attitudes affect behavior, but it is also recognized that behavior affects racial attitudes, though more slowly." Her backnote cites Pettigrew and others. See Cox, *Lincoln and Black Freedom*, 162, 215n.

31. The remarkably unchanging character of race prejudice is reflected in the fact that the same wartime increase in antiblack attitudes by Iowa soldiers campaigning in the South—made much of by Democratic editors in 1865—was replicated during World War II, when thousands of servicemen from the North received military training in the South and, it is assumed, became infected by southern racism. The presumed causal factor in 1861-1865 was therefore the same as in 1941-1945. See Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Regional Differences in Anti-Negro Prejudice," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 59 (July 1959), 31, 35. That Union soldiers' antiblack attitudes diminished in the later stages of the Civil War is argued by Marvin R. Cain, "A 'Face of Battle' Needed: An Assessment of Motives and Men in Civil War Historiography," *Civil War History* 28 (March 1982), 22-23.

met, it might as well be met this year as next."<sup>32</sup>

The Iowa Republican party had done a good thing, and had done it for precisely the right reason. That all it took was for a few good men to act does not in the least diminish that triumph.

As it was in the 1865 Republican convention, so it was also, we may presume, in the popular voting among loyal Republicans at large on the matter of black suffrage: a minority happened to be strongly racist; another minority happened to be strongly in favor of black civil equality; the majority, holding no strong position one way or another, came over to black suffrage at the urgings of their political leaders. But there is no need to leave this as a hypothetical proposition. With the aid of some simple calculations we can determine the approximate relative political strength of each of these three groups.

The extreme antiblack group within Republican ranks is the easiest to identify in quantitative terms. Its members revealed their numerical strength at the polls in 1868, when they cast ballots for Ulysses S. Grant for president but then—despite the strong urging of the party press, the party leadership, and (allegedly) Grant himself—either cast “no” ballots on black suffrage or refused to vote at all on the proposal. There were no more than about 15,000 of these voters, and they made up 13 percent of Grant’s support.<sup>33</sup> Altering the racism of such men, according to modern social psychology, might well have required some nineteenth-century equivalent of clinical therapy, but further close analysis of the 1868 referendum returns may yet suggest something other than a psychogenic explanation for much of this intransigence.<sup>34</sup>

It is a bit more difficult, but far from impossible, to define

32. Gue, “Hiram Price,” 599; *Iowa State Register* (w), 21 June 1865.

33. The official totals for both Grant and black suffrage are given in Berrier, “Negro Suffrage,” 258n. The assumption underlying my calculation is that virtually all those who voted in favor of black suffrage in 1868 had also voted for Grant—in other words, that virtually no 1868 Democrats knowingly cast ballots in favor of black suffrage.

34. My ongoing research into the 1868 referendum is not yet complete, but this much can be said: computer-aided regression analyses reveal that those who voted for Grant but then voted against black suffrage do *not* appear to have been merely recent Democrats; in fact, this group supported Grant and suffrage in approximately equal measure. Specifically, about 15 percent of

the egalitarian bloc at the opposite end of the spectrum. There was not, as Wubben observes, much "bark" in those Iowans who held strongly favorable positions on black suffrage, but they existed, certainly enough, having offered a precise measure of their strength back in 1857. Only 10 percent of all Iowans had supported black suffrage that year, but—some 8,200 strong—these Iowans made up fully 18 percent of those who had voted Republican in the presidential election the previous fall. In 1857 this 18 percent voted for black suffrage even though their own state leaders and all their editors but Jacob Rich, manager of a small rural weekly, had disavowed the proposal. These non-conformist Republicans thus clearly constituted an ideologically problack hard core within the party, a rank-and-file constituency which favored civil rights through inner convictions presumably independent of, although supplementary to, strong party loyalty.<sup>35</sup>

This hard core made up nearly a fifth of the Republican faithful in 1857, but its relative strength by 1865 or 1868 is harder to estimate. I earlier demonstrated statistically that it was still "in place" in 1868. "The .64 correlation between the black suffrage referendum of 1857 and that of 1868," I noted on that occasion, "reveals that the basic configuration of the [1868] prosuffrage vote had congealed before the Civil War. . . . What occurred between the 1857 and 1868 referenda was a massive shift all across Iowa, wherein the prosuffrage percentage in every county rose dramatically, the altitude of its final approval very much related to how progressive its vote had been . . . in 1857."<sup>36</sup>

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those who had supported the Democratic gubernatorial candidate in 1867 favored Grant the following year, with virtually the same percentage favoring black suffrage. The statistical technique involved in these estimates is best briefly described in Peyton McCrary et al., "Class and Party in the Secession Crisis: Voting Behavior in the Deep South, 1856-1861," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (Winter 1978), 431-435.

35. For Fremont's official returns see Rosenberg, *Frontier State at War*, 144; for the official total on black suffrage in 1857 see Berrier, "Negro Suffrage," 242n. Once again, my simple calculation assumes that virtually all those who voted for black suffrage in 1857 had supported Fremont in 1856, and that virtually no non-Republican knowingly favored black suffrage in 1857.

36. Dykstra, "Iowa," 185. A subsequent recalculation yielded a .65 correlation between the two referenda.

We may be almost sure that this egalitarian hard core did not diminish in numerical size except through death and out-migration: radical on black suffrage in 1857, surely radical as well in 1868. And we may assume that it in fact increased in size—like all voter groups—through in-migration, the coming of age of new voters, and some ideological conversion of old voters. But we may also presume that this egalitarian fifth lost some *relative* strength within the party as more and more disillusioned Democrats and Know Nothings (the mass presumably conservative on racial issues) switched to the Republicans in the late fifties and early sixties, even though some of these—Enoch Eastman is a prominent example—would favor rather than oppose black suffrage. A worst-case estimate, whereby the egalitarian bloc is deemed numerically no larger in number in 1868 than in 1857, would place its relative strength within the party at 7 percent. A modest best-case estimate might be that its percentage strength kept pace with the general increase in Republican voters through the late fifties and sixties, and that it stood at 18 percent in 1868 as well as eleven years earlier. But for the sake of argument let us simply split the difference.

Thus we might divide the Republican rank-and-file on black suffrage in early 1865 as follows: about 13 percent racist, about 13 percent racially egalitarian, and about 74 percent “conforming bigots” who lacked strong inner convictions or psychological needs related to blacks but who passively reflected the racist norms embraced by the state’s institutions, its press, and, for the most part, the leaders of both its political parties.<sup>37</sup> It was this superficially racist three-quarters of the Republican rank-and-file that the party’s leadership successfully converted to black suffrage in the summer and early autumn of

37. A month after the 1865 GOP convention an irascible Democratic loyalist from Des Moines County confidentially reported his shock at discovering how little the opposition to “Negro equality” among local Republicans really stemmed from a deepseated racism. Although “some of them (say, one third) declare that they never can vote for Negro suffrage,” he confided to the chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee, “my own opinion in regard to this matter is that they don[’]t have so much objection to the principal [*sic*] involved as they have [merely] to running the risque of coming before the people upon that rather touchy question. . . .” See Robert Robinson to Laurel Summers, 17 July 1865, Summers Papers, Iowa State Historical Department, Des Moines.

1865, leading directly to the referendum triumph three years later.<sup>38</sup>

Eighteen-sixty-five, that first postwar year, may well have been the Iowa Republican party's finest moment, a political season in which—against apparently formidable odds—it mustered the moral courage to do justice in a matter of race. Today, when so many seem unaware that racial inequality remains this nation's most important unresolved problem, when new political initiatives seem so desperately needed, when the complacent tell us that there is no longer a problem and the hopeless tell us that perhaps the problem is, after all, unresolvable, it is good to have positive examples to prompt us. The strategies that won nineteenth-century Iowans to the political equality of blacks have always been relevant, and the more we know about them the better.

38. For this paper I specifically tested Wubben's suggestion that Iowa Methodists may have felt uniquely impelled to vote in favor of black suffrage in 1868. My results suggest otherwise. As a surrogate variable for Methodists I employed the well-known "church seats" data (despite their obvious limitations they remain the only data generally available), extracting from the 1860 United States published census each county's Methodist percentage of all enumerated church accommodations. These proportions correlate only  $-.06$  and  $.13$ , respectively, with the 1860 Republican and Democratic presidential votes, indicating that Iowa's Methodists were divided in their loyalties. The correlation with favorable votes on black suffrage in 1868 is only  $-.02$ , indicating that roughly as many Methodists opposed the measure as supported it. I interpret these findings as meaning that about as many Iowa Methodists were Democrats as Republicans, and that in 1868 Democratic Methodists tended to heed the *political* line on black suffrage more than they did the message sent by their national religious media.

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