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THE MIGRATION OF NEGRO COAL MINERS FROM ALABAMA TO SOUTHEAST KANSAS IN 1899

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Division in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

By

John M. Robb

KANSAS STATE COLLEGE OF PITTSBURG

Pittsburg, Kansas

July, 1965

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ABSTRACT

The Negro emerging from slavery after the Civil War was faced with the problem of making a living as a freeman. The only salable asset he had was his labor. In certain areas of the South, the Negro had turned by 1870, to mining bituminous coal. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, conditions in the coal mines of greater Birmingham, Alabama, reached such a state that a number of Negroes felt it imperative to remove themselves.

In 1899, a number of these Negroes migrated to Crawford and Cherokee counties of Southeastern Kansas to mine coal. Their arrival was clouded by the local labor conditions. By mid 1900, the Negro miner who stayed in Southeast Kansas had become an integral part of the local mining community. The memory of their arrival and of their lives is both universally and locally incomplete. The purpose of this investigation and of the writing of this thesis is to discover and to present the Negro miner of Southeast Kansas from the perspective of sixty-six years.

Because of the general lack of knowledge on this subject there was a dearth of information, a handicap overcome by nine months of perusing and collecting isolated accounts from official records, court records, collections of letters, and from the local newspapers from the period January 1, 1899, to January 1, 1902.

Numerous inquiries directed to the companies operating coal mines in this area, to the collections of labor history of several eastern universities, to the United Mine Workers of America, and to the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History of America, were all answered promptly and courteously; unfortunately, however, they supplied little material aid.

The most important single source of information was personal interviews. The people interviewed welcomed the writer cordially into their homes, and in addition to a phethora of invaluable information, they supplied him with hours of stimulating conversation that provided this study with a first-hand view of the Negro coal miner in Southeast Kansas.

PROLOGUE

"The history of the American Negro is the history of . . . longing to attain self-conscious manhood, . . . to be an American . . . to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape isolation." This plea, uttered by W. E. B. DuBois in 1897, was the expression of a people enslaved on the North American continent for nearly two and a half centuries who, after twenty-four years as freedmen, had been unable to attain their desired role in American life.[1]

The history of this striving by a people to escape their "place", a position to which they had been condemned by slavery and their color, had passed almost unnoticed through American historiography until the last decade, a full century after the Emancipation Proclamation, the American Negro is emerging as an organic part of American society. A study of his history reveals him to be not a carefree black appendage to the body politic, but an individual who by his strivings has become an inextricable segment of the American culture, creative and productive.[2]

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[1]W. E. B. DuBois, "Strivings of the Negro People," The Atlantic Monthly, LXXXI (August, 1897), 195. Cited hereafter, DuBois, "Strivings of the Negro."

[2]Herbert Aptheker, A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, xiii. Cited hereafter, Aptheker, A Documentary History.

The basic purpose of the following study is to present one portion of this striving of the American Negro to become a first-class citizen by the only means available, his labor. The Negro bituminous coal miner is generally unknown. Few have ever considered him as a miner delving "in the bowels of the earth, obscured from the rays of the sun in a place that teemed with darkness and danger."[3]

As W.E.B. DuBois stated, "of the common run of human beings, particularly the submerged working group, the world has saved all too little authentic record."[4] The Negro coal miner has either been omitted entirely in general histories of the coal industry,[5] or he has been casually referred to as "those negroes" in labor histories of the coal industry.[6] Only in recent histories of the Negro has he gained passing mention.[7]

In addition to this national dearth of knowledge about the Negro miner, there is extant today a plethora of local misinformation concerning the Negro coal miner,

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[3]John Mitchell, "Mine Workers' Life and Aims," The Cosmopolitan Magazine, XXXI (October, 1901), 622.

[4]Aptheker, A Documentary History, preface.

[5]Ethel Armes, The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama, passim.

[6]Arthur E. Suffern, Conciliation and Arbitration in the Coal Industry of America, passim.

[7]John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, A History of the American Negroes, passim. Cited hereafter, Franklin, Slavery to Freedom.

specifically in Southeast Kansas, the incident with which this study deals.[8]

This is a study of the man of toil, working in the darkness and danger of the pit, seeking not a revolution in social relations, but seeking equality of economic opportunity and treatment as a human being, by the only means left to him, a pick and shovel.[9]

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[8]Personal interviews: W. B. Gilliland, June 20, 1965. Orville Platts, December 12, 1964.

[9]John Hope Franklin, Reconstruction, After the Civil War, 91. Cited hereafter, Franklin, Reconstruction.

CHAPTER I

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The American Negro labor force that emerged from the Civil War was unique among ethnic labor groups. Of all the divers peoples that made up the mosaic of American society, only the Negro had not ostensibly migrated to the New World of his own volition. He had been brought to America expressly, and involuntarily, to provide cheap labor.[1]

The emergence of approximately four million persons, primarily in the southern States, as freemen into the culture had serious implications for the economic structure of the South.[2] With the exception of a few skilled mechanics, the Negroes' sole heritage from slavery was their ability to work and their desire to learn.[3] Unfortunately, however, ability to work did not automatically secure opportunity. No worker could any longer rely on his individual skills to earn a living. In the post-war era of industrial expansion the American laborer

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[1]Robert C. Weaver, Negro Labor, A National Problem, 3. Cited hereafter, Weaver, Negro Labor.

[2]John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, A History of the American Negroes, 306. Cited hereafter, Franklin, Slavery to Freedom.

[3]John Stephens Durham, "Labor Unions and the Negro," The Atlantic Monthly, LXXX (August, 1897), 226. Cited hereafter, Durham, Labor Unions.

reached the conclusion that his only recourse was to join with others.[4]

The National Labor Union, organized in 1866, was the first national federation to deal with the race problem.[5] Its prime mover, William Sylvis, maintained at the Baltimore convention that the consolidation of workers of the two races was necessary to preclude the destruction of the labor movement by the resultant antagonism between the races.[6] Disturbed by the equivocal nature of the National Labor Union's position on the question of Negro recognition, Negro workers held a convention in Washington, D.C., in January, 1869, to create a separate organization, The National Negro Labor Union.[7] This group sought affiliation with the National Labor Union without success. Disintegration of the National Labor Union in 1872, marked the end of national labor organizations for the Negro until after 1880.[8]

In the meantime, the Negro worker remained involuntarily outside the labor movement to become a victim of

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[4]Franklin, <u>Reconstruction</u>, 183-184.

[5]Weaver, <u>Negro Labor</u>, 215.

[6]Sterling C. Spero and Abram L. Harris, <u>The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement</u>, 25-26. Cited hereafter, Spero and Harris, <u>The Black Worker</u>.

[7]Benjamin Quarles, <u>Frederick Douglass</u>, 258-260.

[8]Joseph G. Rayback, <u>A History of American Labor</u>, 122-129. Cited hereafter, Rayback, <u>American Labor</u>.

the Gilded Age of Industrial Expansion. Shrewd employers perceptively observed that the Negro, distinctly denied equality in the labor movement, would generally work for lower wages than whites.[9] Most Negro labor came from rural areas and was unfamiliar with the processes of industrial organization. Nevertheless, it was along the rough road of strike-breaking that the first Negro workers got into heavy industry.[10] This use of Negro labor by industrialists to destroy local unions resulted not only in introducing Negroes to heavy industry but also in the creation of a great deal of long-lived antagonism among the organized whites, "whose very bitterest antipathies [were] aroused" according to Samuel Gompers, "against the colored workmen because they couple[d] them with an instrument of the employers to force down . . . the Caucasian race."[11] After 1882, the policy of using southern Negro labor was continually resorted to by industry during labor shortages.[12]

Of the several large labor organizations surviving the depression of 1873, only the Knights of Labor indicated

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[9]Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, 309.

[10]Weaver, Negro Labor, 607.

[11]"Trade Union Attitude Toward Colored Workers," American Federationist, VIII (April, 1901), 119-120. Cited hereafter, American Federationist.

[12]Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, 210.

any propensity for securing Negro members. The Knights, founded as a secret working brotherhood by Uriah S. Stephens in 1869, was the antithesis of contemporary trade unionism, in both philosophy and structure. In 1878, the Reading Convention transformed the Knights into a national organization open to any person who was working for wages regardless of race, sex, or skill, over the age of eighteen. The doctrine of interracial solidarity made the Order particularly significant in the South. Immediately following its re-establishment in 1878, fifteen organizers were dispatched to the South. In 1886, at the national convention, the national secretary-treasurer rejoiced that "Negroes were flocking to the Knights of Labor . . . manifesting a desire to be organized." By 1888, there were 10,000 members in the South concentrated around such cities as Birmingham, Alabama, Knoxville and Louisville, Kentucky, and Richmond, Virginia. To say that the color line had been transcended would be to exaggerate the power of the Order, but it was an influence in the direction of solidarity between Negro and white laborers. The Order reached its peak in 1886 with 703,000 members of which 60,000 were Negro. By July, 1887, however, the Knights had declined to 510,000 and by mid-1890 to 100,000. In 1893, Powderly, president since 1879, was replaced by James R. Sovereign. In the same year, the order secretly affiliated with the United Mine Workers of America and

lost all status as an independent labor organization. It's Negro members, along with the Negro laborer generally, were stranded.[13]

Following the decline of the Knights, the increase of unionism based on skill automatically excluded both white and Negro workers whose welfare had been the chief interest of the Order. In 1890, the American Federation of Labor, a confederation of autonomous craft Unions, made an initial stand on the question of Negro recognition but later determined that such a stand was limiting its expansion because independent craft Unions would not accept Negroes.[14] Even though the editor of the United Mine Workers Journal would later state hopefully that the "A.F. of L. has declared in favor of the necessity for organization of all workers, without regard to creed, color, sex, nationality, or politics,"[15] Samuel Gompers clarifed the issue by stating that he did not "necessarily proclaim that the social barriers . . . could or should be obliterated."[16]

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[13]Rayback, American Labor, 142-165, 178-180. See also Franklin, Reconstruction, 185; Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, 394; Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, 42-43; and C. Vann Woodward, The Origins of the New South 1877-1913, 220.

[14]Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, 394-395.

[15]United Mine Workers Journal, May 30, 1901.

[16]American Federationist, 118.

The general determination of white labor to exclude the Negro worker during the last two decades of the nineteenth century was attested to by some fifty strikes, 1882 to 1900, against the employment of Negro labor. The Negro was relegated, in the words of C. Vann Woodward, to the condition of "lint-head fealty."[17] From the creation of the National Labor Union in 1866 to the decline of the Knights of Labor in 1893, the Negro worker had been with few exceptions excluded from every American labor organization. John S. Durham was moved to remark in 1898 that "nowhere in the world is to be found so large a class arbitrarily restrained in its efforts to work."[18]

Excluded from organized labor, and generally unskilled, the Negro was indeed a prime subject for use in labor disputes. The bituminous coal mining industry was one employer of the Southern Negro labor reserve. As early as 1872, mining companies in Illinois and Indiana were seeking labor in the Richmond, Virginia, area.[19] In 1873, mine operators in the Hocking Valley of Ohio recruited 400 to 500 Negroes from southern cities. There was little additional use of Negro labor in coal mines for the remainder

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[17] C. Vann Woodward, The Origins of the New South 1877-1913, 222. Cited hereafter, Woodward, Origins.

[18] Durham, Labor Unions, 231.

[19] Charles H. Wesley, Negro Labor in the United States, 137.

of that decade.[20] Beginning about 1885, Negro miners began to grow in numbers in the South, and they were employed sporadically in Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.[21]

It is at this juncture that the United Mine Workers of America entered the scene. Throughout the 1880's, there were efforts to organize mine workers into a national organization. In this endeavor were the Knights of Labor and the National Progressive Union of Miners and Mine Laborers. In 1890, these two groups merged into the United Mine Workers of America. According to the initial constitution of 1890, its purpose was "to unite in one organization, regardless of creed, color, or nationality, all workers eligble for membership, employed in and around coal mines."[22] The United Mine Workers grew gradually as local unions were organized. In 1897, 10,000 Mine Workers struck in the Central Competitive Field of Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, putting 100,000 miners out of work, and in 1898, they secured the eight-hour day for a substantial number of miners. By 1901, they boasted a membership of 200,000

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[20]Herbert Gutman, "The Worker's Search for Power," in The Gilded Age, A Reappraisal, H. Wayne Morgan, ed., 56.

[21]Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, 206.

[22]Justin McCarty, A Brief History of the United Mine Workers of America, 3-5.

miners.[23] The constitution of the Mine Workers, redrafted in 1898, clearly set forth the Union's stand on the color line. Article VI, section 2, stated:

> No person, a member of the organization who holds a financial or clearance card, showing him to be a financial member (and in good standing), shall be debarred or hindered from obtaining work on account of race, creed, or nationality; and a clearance card from any legal or recognized labor organization, anywhere . . . shall be accepted.[24]

The only other national labor organization which consistently and firmly stood against all attempts to exclude Negro workers was the Cigarmarker's Union.[25] The United Mine Workers appeared to support their co-unionists because, in 1897, the National office of the Mine Workers paid a total of $330.20 of strike relief to various locals of the Cigarmakers.[26]

The geographic area, discussed in this study and referred to as Southeast Kansas, encompasses Crawford and Cherokee counties. Kansas, not usually considered a coal-producing state, was ranked third in total coal production, in 1898, by the Journal of the United Mine Workers,

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[23]Rayback, American Labor, 209-210.

[24]Chris Evans, History of the United Mine Workers of America from the year 1890 to 1900 with Illustrations of the officers during that period II, 542-543.

[25]Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, 429.

[26]Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Convention of the United Mine Workers of America held at Columbus Ohio, January Eleventh, 1898, 16-18. Cited hereafter, Ninth Annual Proceedings.

with a total tonnage of 2,754,023.[27] The two counties under consideration, bordering Missouri on the West and Oklahoma on the South, produced 85.46% of all the coal mined in Kansas in 1898 and employed 4,431 miners.[28]

The coal industry in Southeast Kansas was initiated by local entrepreneurs in 1878 who were soon replaced by the captains of industry, true to the tradition of the Gilded Age. Initially, however, the land was purchased and held by the large railroad companies. In 1885, in an attempt to save the independent operators, the Kansas State legislature enacted a law stipulating that no railroad company could own, or have interest in coal mines.[29] This legislation resulted in the creation of the "Big Four" coal companies. These four companies were the dominating force in the mining area under study.

The Western Coal and Mining Company, the only company for which any records are extant, purchased 5,363.81 acres on June 23, 1886, from one Jay Gould of New York City for $5,000 with the balance "to be paid in full paid capital stock of said company at its par value."[30] This transaction

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[27]United Mine Workers Journal, October 26, 1899.

[28]Eleventh Annual Report of the Kansas State Inspector of Coal Mines, 1898, 5-6. Cited hereafter, Kansas Mine Inspector 1898.

[29]Joseph Skubitz, (unpublished master's thesis) "A History of the Development of Deep Mine Production in Crawford County and the Factors that have influenced it," 9. Cited hereafter, Skubitz, "Deep Mine Production."

[30]Minute Book, Western Coal and Mining Company, July 3, 1886 to July 2, 1908 I, 12. Cited hereafter, Minute Book.

was indicative of the nature of these four operators.

The Kansas and Texas Coal Company, an outgrowth of the Frisco Railroad Company, remained one of the leading coal companies until purchased, in 1902, by the Central Coal and Coke Company, largest of the "Big Four."[31] The last of the four was the Southwestern Coal and Improvement Company. This was the smallest company and operated two large mines in Mineral, Kansas, on the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad. In 1887, the "Big Four" were operating fifteen mines in Southeast Kansas.[32]

From that year, the mining industry in this area expanded rapidly and by 1893 there were seventy-two shafts in Southeast Kansas, including the "dinkey mines."*[33] The population of the area increased from 58,056 in 1890, to 81,503 in 1900.[34]

The mining area, generally known as the Southwestern Coal fields, was divided into two parts, the north field and the south field. The north field, located entirely in Crawford County, Township 29-30, Range 25, contained

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[31] Skubitz, "Deep Mine Production," 9, 17.

[32] _Third Annual Report of the Kansas State Inspector of Coal Mines, 1887_, 42-44.

[33] _Seventh Annual Report of the Kansas State Inspector of Coal Mines, 1894_, 11, 17. Cited hereafter, _Kansas Mine Inspector 1894_.

* Dinkey mine: a small mine usually owned and operated by individual miners.

[34] _Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910_, II, 574-576.

the mining camps and towns of Cornell, Frontenac, Litchfield, Nelson, and Yale. The south field, located in southern Crawford county and part of northern Cherokee county, Township 31, Range 24, contained the mining camps and towns of Cherokee, Chicopee, Fleming, Kirkwood, Mineral, Weir City, and Scammon.[35]

Throughout the area delineated above, the coal industry was flourishing. One indication of this prosperity was the purchase by the Western Coal and Mining Company of 300 acres of additional land in Fleming and Yale, on July 28, 1898, at the behest of one Jay Gould.[36]

In 1898, 5,584 men were employed in the mines of Southeast Kansas, 45% of whom were employed by the "Big Four" companies.[37] At this point it is necessary to locate the mines of each of the companies that will come under later scrutiny. The mines of the Central Coal and Coke Company were all in the vicinty of Weir City and Scammon: #5, immediately northeast of Weir; #6, three-fourths of a mile west of Weir; #7, one and one-half miles north of Scammon; #11, two and one-half miles southwest of Weir and #16, one and one-fourth miles west of Scammon. These mines employed an average number of 608 miners in 1899. The mines of the Kansas and Texas Coal Company, located in

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35General Highway Map Crawford County Kansas, 1963.

36Minute Book, 85.

37Kansas Mine Inspector, 1898, 18-25.

Cherokee county were north and northeast of Weir, #18, #23, #55, #49. Those in Crawford county were located in Litchfield. These mines employed an average number of 494 men in 1899. The two shafts of the Southwestern Coal and Improvement Company were located, #6, at Mineral; #7, one mile east of Mineral with an average of 200 men in 1899. The mines of the Western Coal and Mining Company were located along the Missouri Pacific tracks in both the north and south field. They were #2, west of Fleming; #3, north edge of Fleming; #4, northeast of Yale; #5, Yale; #7, Fleming. The Western Coal and Mining Company employed, in all mines, an average of 409 men in 1899.[38]

It is necessary to establish roughly the number of Negroes and Negro miners in the area under discussion. No accurate tabulations are extant, but by considering the available statistics, it is possible to arrive at a reasonably accurate estimation. In 1860, there were 627 Negroes in Kansas territory. By 1870, the number had increased to 17,108. Several Negro families settled in the Pittsburg area as early as 1871, but the Negro migration at this time was primarily to other parts of the state.[39] Even though there

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[38]Twelfth Annual Report of the Kansas State Inspector of Coal Mines, 1899, 12-15, 34-35. Cited hereafter, Kansas Mine Inspector, 1899.

[39]Sister M. Augustine Clarahan, (unpublished master's thesis) "The Founding and Early Development of Pittsburg," 5.

were 49,260 Negroes in Kansas in 1890, there were then only 1,769 Negroes in Southeast Kansas. There is no record of any of these having worked in the mines.[40]

The first Negro miners to enter the local mines came in 1893. This influx of Negro miners, to Yale and Weir City, numbered approximately 375. The event that caused this increase of local Negroes was a conflict between the companies of the "Big Four" and an 1893 ruling of the Kansas Legislature that made it unlawful to screen coal with the one and one-half inch screen and pay the miners only for the lump coal instead of on the basis of mine-run. This strike, called in August, was made ineffective by the companies' failure to deal with the local United Mine Workers of America, the employment of Negro miners, and the arrival of winter. For the next five years, the Union was to build up its strength for the strike of 1899.

The reports of the Kansas State Mine Inspector for 1893 and 1894 made only passing mention of the Negroes in Yale and Weir City. For example, of Western Coal and Mining #4 at Yale, the inspector commented that "this mine is operated by imported negro labor from Alabama." One of the mines near Weir "employed an average of 109 men, majority of which are Alabama darkies."[41] One year later the inspector commented

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[40]Negro Population, 1790-1915, 43-44. Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910 II, 600.

[41]Sixth Annual Report of the Kansas Inspector of Coal Mines, 1893, 28, 119. Cited hereafter, Kansas Mine Inspector 1893.

even more laconicly, at Kansas and Texas #37, "the Alabama darkies still continue to hold the fort." About Central #6 and #8 he stated that the "majority of the miners are Negroes."[42] After the initial turmoil, these Negroes generally stayed in the mining camps with very little additional notice. There were not yet enough Negroes in the area to attract attention. In the newspapers of the period between 1893 and June 13, 1899, there was only an occasional mention of any Negro crime or misdemeanor. For example: "stabbing at Schawb's, all parties colored," or, "a colored miner took a shot . . . did no damage." There was one interesting social note, however, on February 3, 1899, "Ed Johnson, colored, of Fleming came over to Weir to see his girl." The above seemed to be the only accounts of the impact of the Negro miner in southeast Kansas before June 13, 1899.[43]

District #14, comprised of Southeast Kansas and segments of the Missouri fields, had been partially organized in the early years of the nineties but had suffered adversly from the abortive strike in 1893, until mid-1898. Throughout the fall and early spring of 1899, the "Big Four" companies had been expanding their holdings. In August of 1898, the Frisco began laying a new switch west of Chicopee, and by

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42 Kansas Mine Inspector 1894, 12-13, 22.

43 Weir City Journal, January 6, 31, February 24, 1899.

February a new shaft was being sunk by the Kansas and Texas between Chicopee and Kirkwood #55.[44] The Central Coal and Coke company was preparing to sink a new shaft on the Vaughn place in March, and work on the new Western Coal and Mining Company shaft between Yale and Minden was reported as being rapidly pushed.[45] Perhaps one reason for the strength of the Southeastern Kansas coal market was that the prolonged strike in Illinois had seriously reduced coal production in that state, and large consumers had turned to District #14 for their coal supplies as winter approached.[46]

The fortunes of the United Mine Workers of America had also been prospering in 1898. The national organization pledged in January, 1898, that "the resources of the organization in men and money" would be expended to extend the organization in all areas of the coal fields. This expenditure enabled the union to keep organizers at work on a full time basis.[47] By November 2, 1898, John Mitchell, young President of the United Mine Workers of America, wrote to R. T. Williamson that reports reaching his office from National Organizer G. W. Purcell, indicated a decided sentiment among the miners in Kansas in favor of organization,

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[44] Pittsburg Kansan, August 25, 1898, February 16, 1899.

[45] Ibid., March 9, 1899. United Mine Workers Journal, April 13, 1899.

[46] United Mine Workers Journal, November 10, 1898.

[47] Ninth Annual Proceedings, 13.

"which I am very pleased to note." Mitchell reported that he had instructed Purcell to call a delegate meeting of Kansas miners as soon as enough local unions had been organized.[48] Such a convention was held one month later in Pittsburg, Kansas. On December 3, 1898, District #14 was reorganized with eleven local unions and 901 members.[49] The national union went to considerable expense to organize the Kansas fields. In addition to a donation of $50.00 to District #14, they paid organizers Purcell, James Boston, and John P. Reese a total of $1,057.22 for their efforts in this area.[50] Organization boomed in this locale, and in March 18, 1899, Nick Teasdale, Journal correspondent from the "SUNFLOWER STATE", reported that work was "progressing wonderfully, Fleming organized to a man and doing very good work." Teasdale stated, however, that they were encountering some difficulty in Weir City.[51]

The first indication of coming labor difficulty in Southeast Kansas appeared on March 10, 1899. In the Scammon Miner, James Boston reported that the strike for recognition of the United Mine Workers in Arkansas and Indian Territory

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[48]Mitchell Letters: John Mitchell to R. T. Williamson, November 2, 1898.

[49]Pittsburg Kansan, December 8, 1898.

[50]United Mine Workers Journal, January 12, 1899. Statistics were included in the national Secretary-Treasurers report of expenditures.

[51]Ibid., March 23, 1899.

gave no signs of compromise. Boston remarked that the struggle would spread to Kansas shortly and advised Kansas locals to increase their efforts to get the miners organized before it did.[52] District #21, United Mine Workers of America, located in Arkansas and Indian Territory, issued pleas for money with which to combat the "Big Four" operators in their fight for recognition. The locals of Southeast Kansas responded to the plea and on April 15, sent $367.30, on April 24, $170.52, to their embattled brothers.[53] In addition to sending contributions for strike relief, the Union miners, heeding Boston's admonition to organize, began to hold mass meetings in the mining towns of the area. By April 7, 1899, Dr. D. W. King, mayor of Weir City, was able to report that the United Mine Workers were "organizing thoroughly in this city. Sixty names were taken at the last meeting."[54]

The drive for complete organization gained momentum on April 1, 1899, John P. Reese, of Albia, Iowa, member of the National Executive Board, and James Boston arrived in the Southeast Kansas fields. Their stated purpose was to "discuss the situation in the Territory." It was reported that on April 14, "Brother Boston made the usual clear and straight-forward statement about the situation in the

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[52]Scammon Miner, March 10, 1899

[53]United Mine Workers Journal, March 30, April 27, May 4, 1899.

[54]Weir City Journal, April 7, 1899.

Territory." From Brother Reese, "the men at Scammon heard the plain and naked truth about what was wrong in the Territory." The meetings were very popular and many men "joined up."[55]

A correspondent for the Weir City Journal reported on April 14, 1899:

> In response to the call . . . 200 miners met in Turner Hall and listened to addresses from the men sent into this district to organize. One Mr. Boston of Illinois advised the men to strike to assist the Indian Territory men. John P. Reese of Iowa followed . . . there were many good reasons advanced why the men should strike. Many men who quit in Indian Territory have come up here and are continuously talking strike.[56]

Even though hundreds of miners were attending the meetings and hundreds more were not able to crowd into the meeting halls, there was also strong sentiment against a strike. Reese himself stated on April 15 that "we are having large meetings here and the boys seem to be getting interested, but we find many of them opposed to quitting work."[57] This sentiment was locally expressed in letters to to the editor of the Weir City Journal, from April 14 to 21. For example, one writer asked, "What do these men in the territory and the organizers take the Kansas miners to be . . . . The miners of Weir refuse to shoulder any responsibility

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[55] Pittsburg Kansan, April 14, 1899; Pittsburg Headlight, April 12-16, 1899.

[56] Weir City Journal, April 14, 1899.

[57] United Mine Workers Journal, April 20, 1899.

for the vicious and stupid blunders of Mr. Boston and his blind supporters." Another miner more practically cautioned his fellow workers that they were "just now recovering from the strike of 1893 . . . let every miner look at home first to see if he has got money enough . . . to carry him and his family through a strike, a strike now will mean death to this district." A third writer stated that "without fear of successful contradiction" he voiced the sentiment of three-fourths of the miners of the district by saying that "a strike now would only place the organized men in a bad light."[58]

Despite the undercurrents of opposition, the national organizers called a delegate convention on April 21, and next day issued a circular to all coal operators in District #14, requesting them to attend a joint convention with the Executive Board to decide the "right of a miner to belong to a labor organization." The underlying purpose of the meeting, as expressed in the United Mine Workers Journal, was to attempt to stem the shipment of coal from the "Big Four" mines in District #14 to their mines in District #21, and to attempt to restore "harmonious relations between employer and employee in the Indian Territory."[59]

The meeting with the Executive Board and the operators was unable to reach any decision on these questions because

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[58] Weir City Journal, April 14, 21, 1899.

[59] United Mine Workers Journal, April 27, 1899. See also, Pittsburg Kansan, April 27, 1899.

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an insufficient number of operators were present to act. One indication of the importance the national office of the United Mine Workers placed on the settlement of this strike is the fact that John Mitchell, National President, made a hurried trip to Southeast Kansas in early May of 1899 to survey the situation.[60] Mitchell later reported that the local unions in Kansas "did all in [their] power to make my stay pleasant."[61]

Because the operators failed to attend the meeting, it was decided by W. T. Wright, President of District #14, to limit work in the "Big Four" mines to three days a week until the strike was settled. This had little effect on the mines of the "Big Four", and on May 10, the executive committee of District #14 met in the City Council room and secretly laid plans for the coming work suspension. At several mass meetings on May 11 and 12, it was generally decided to quit work at noon on Saturday, May 13. The Union demands were centered primarily around the question of recognition of the United Mine Workers of America as sole bargaining agent. The decision for suspension of work was made by John Mitchell, National President from Indianapolis.[62]

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[60]Weir City Journal, May 5, 1899; United Mine Workers Journal May 11, 1899.

[61]Mitchell Letters: John Mitchell to Patrick Gillen, April 28, 1900.

[62]Weir City Journal, May 12, 1899; Pittsburg Headlight, May 12, 1899; Pittsburg Kansan, May 11, 1899; Scammon Miner, May 26, 1899.

On Saturday morning, May 13, 1899, local residents read the banner headlines "STRIKE IS ON." "Miners In Twenty Shafts are Ordered Out. District #14 Comes to Rescue of Territory Miners.." The enthusiastic headlines were later balanced by more realistic statements of the condition of the strike. "The Strike is On, but is not yet well attended. Yale is running at full quota, Western and K & T at Nelson CCCC shut, Fleming-Western 2, 3, 7 practically shut, Weir City-K & T almost shut." The only mines for which the results of the polls on the question of suspension are extant were Central Coal and Coke Company's mines of #6, #7, and #11, the votes at these shafts were 4-246, 50-175, and 24-69, respectively against suspension.[63] The fact that several of the mines remained in operation resulted in a great deal of bitterness among the miners of Southeast Kansas. Perhaps the best statement of this feeling was expressed by the mayor of Weir City, Dennis W. King, in a letter to Governor Stanley of May 18:

> The Union men are all out, the non-union don't want to strike under the five year contract which expires September 5, 1899 . . . A terrible feeling exists between the men, and it is going to be a war to the death . . . we can not curb or control the passions of the men. There have been more street fights and brawls in Weir in the last

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[63] Pittsburg Headlight, May 13, 1899; Pittsburg Kansan, May 18, 1899; Scammon Miner, May 19, 1899; Weir City Journal, May 19, 1899.

three days than in the last five years.[64]

This feeling of domestic animosity increased until June 15, when the Negro coal miners began to arrive from Alabama. This four-week period in the late spring of 1899 was to be one of great unpleasantness for mine operators, the United Mine Workers, and non-union miners. It was a period of violence and local terror for some individuals, and of domestic deprivation for others. In the perspective of sixty-six years, however, it can be broken down into two separate parts that reached a climax with the arrival of the Negro miners on June 13: the progress of the strike with the concomitant increase in local animosity, and the development of the rumors of the alleged importations, from their initiation to the eventual arrival of the miners themselves.

The former, the strike and development of violence prior to the arrival, began in earnest with the call for suspension on May 13. Pro-strike sentiment, unfortunately for domestic tranquility, was not unanimous among the miners. The primary battle ground appeared to be in the vicinity of Weir City, where District President Wright was personally in charge of the battle. The miners at Nelson had walked out of the Central shafts, but the Kansas and Texas shafts at Litchfield were running as usual. In Fleming, shafts 3

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[64]Governor's Correspondence, D. W. King to Governor W. E. Stanley, May 18, 1899.

and 7 were shut down temporarily. On the night of May 14, Kirkwood was the scene of a "pitched battle", the first of a series of conflicts.[65] Next morning, W. A. Clark, a non-union miner, found a skull and cross-bones affixed to his front door which stated "that he would be attended to later on." On the way to work the same day, U. Furlan was approached by two striking miners who told him that any one working would be shot; they then presented Furlan a cartridge and said that if he went to work "this was for him."[66]

Regardless of the uneasy situation, the suspension was not going well for the organized miners. By May 15, the status of work was practically normal. The Yale mines of the Central and Kansas and Texas were working; Kansas and Texas #28 at Weir City was working. A reporter for the Pittsburg Headlight asserted that "The seat of the war is certainly Weir City." He further reported that a "mass meeting nearly broke up in a brawl", and that "the town seethed all night with fights and crowds."[67]

Governor Stanley, in response to the troubled state of affairs, wrote the owners of the "Big Four" mines and called

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[65]Pittsburg Headlight, May 15, 1899.

[66]Central Coal and Coke Company v Wm. Wooten et. al. Southwestern Coal and Improvement Company v Js. Geddes et. al.

[67]Pittsburg Headlight, May 16, 1899.

a general meeting with them to be held in Kansas City to determine what could be done to mitigate the tense situation.[68] On May 16, the Western Coal and Mining Company hired eighteen of its former employees to resume work next day. That night striking miners assaulted one Frank Sporn "with clubs and other deadly weapons breaking one of his arms, two ribs, a finger, and otherwise bruising him severely." As a result, Sporn was unable to work and the other seventeen refused to work. On the same night, one M. Hadley was reported to have "stopped a rock with his face."[69] These two incidents illustrate the bitter animosities growing in Southeast Kansas.

By May 18, the outlook was still not encouraging for the United Mine Workers. A correspondent for the Headlight reported the "mines were working full time." W. T. Wright stated that there was "little change in the strike situation," in fact, a mass meeting was held in Weir City that resolved to "repudiate eastern agitators."[70] The loyal union miners, however, were determined not to be defeated and on May 19 two strikers met George Jarrett on his way to work and warned him: "God damn you, if you do not go back this morning, . . . you will not go back again." Not limiting their attempts

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[68]Governor's Letters, Stanley to Keith Perry, Ira Fleming, B. F. Hobart, R. M. McDowell, May 16-19, 1899.

[69]Western Coal and Mining Company v W. T. Wright et. al. See also: Scammon Miner, May 17, 1899.

[70]Pittsburg Headlight, May 16-18, 1899.

to the miners themselves, the Union approached the wives of non-union miners. One wife was told by a delegation from the United Mine Workers that if her husband did not stop working "he would be brought home in a sack." One H. Hallam was told by five Union men at 1 A.M. on May 20, that they would kill him if he did not stop working.[71] Up to this point the operators had been little concerned with the local reign of terror. On May 21, however, an incident occured that presented a danger to Company property. Several men were working in Western #7 at Fleming repairing tracks and underground works, when "fifty striking miners rushed to the top of the shaft in a loud and boisterous and threatening manner and ordered the employees to stop working." It was reported that these employees failed to report for work the next day.[72]

One employee of the Central Coal and Coke company addressed an open letter to the miners of the area on May 26, 1899, voicing his opposition to the strike:

> I for one shall . . . protest against being deceived and led by the nose by these blind Moses' into the Wilderness of disaster and certain defeat . . . contingent upon protracted idleness . . . we are face to face with an Autocratic rule.[73]

One sidelight on this struggle was the interracial conflict. The only reported instance of such a conflict

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[71]Central Coal and Coke Company v Wm. Wooten et. al., 104-105.

[72]Western Coal and Mining Company v W. T. Wright et.al., 13.

[73]Weir City Journal, May 26, 1899.

involved one Clyde Berry, a Negro miner, who was still working. On May 27, 1899, Berry was approached by a striking miner who stated "You are a black-leg, Berry. You are a black-leg* and I will cut your heart out." Whereupon the striker drew open a knife and "made an attempt to cut said Berry."74

The companies entered the strike in a more positive manner on May 29 by posting a notice in their mines stating that unless parties remaining away from the mines returned to their places before "the First day of June" they would be "requested to remove their tools from the . . . mines and [would] not be allowed in the future to work for the company."75 At this point, many of the Union miners sought work in the mines of the Central Competitive Field, and the miners who stayed in Southeast Kansas increased their efforts. In addition to the more prosaic individual brawls, the Union began to organize mass action. The first of this type was reported on June 2 at Fleming #7, where Union miners waited near the mines for the working miners. Fortunately, the trouble was stopped before any one was severely injured. There were also threats that

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74Kansas and Texas Coal and Mining Company v W. T. Wright et. al., 299.

*Black-leg: a non-striking miner, with no racial connotation.

75State of Kansas v Southwestern Coal and Improvement Company.

Union miners would burn the homes of working miners.[76] In Mineral, one such threat of property damage was carried out by three union miners upon the house of Frank Maizer and M. Bedenicher. The Union miners threw various missiles through their windows and threw a beer keg through the grape-arbor, "breaking said windows and partially destroying and damaging said grape arbor, all for the purpose . . . of intimidating them to refrain from working."[77]

In early June, the struggle was extended to the north field. On June 5, a meeting of Union miners near Litchfield school was called to discuss the best method to stop the work at Kansas and Texas #37. One striker was overheard to say "if [we] cannot get the miners at mine #37 to stop work in any other way [we should] burn down the damned shaft." On the following day an alleged group of 200 striking miners met at the crossing of the Memphis and Frisco tracks in Litchfield to intercept the miners working at #37. The workers of #37 subsequently voted to join the strike.[78]

The Pittsburg Kansan, announced on June 8, that the "Big Four" mines, excepting the Kansas and Texas had drawn

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[76]Weir City Journal, June 2, 1899. See also: Pittsburg Headlight, June 2, 1899; Scammon Miner, June 2, 1899.

[77]Southwestern Coal and Improvement Company v Js Geddes et. al., 199-200.

[78]Kansas and Texas Coal and Mining Company v W. T. Wright et. al., 296-298. See also: Pittsburg Headlight, June 6, 1899.

up a new scale which was "quite liberal". But the Union refused to recognize "this so-called settlement."[79]

Even though the "Big Four" companies attempted to settle with their own employees, Union harrassment contined unabated. On June 9 and 10, there were incidents in both the northern and southern fields. In Scammon, Union men stole the burrs* from Archie Reed's buggy; George Bell's garden was destroyed, and John Spenceberger was assailed with "vile epithets." In Yale, 300 men were camped around the shafts discussing the strike and at Kansas and Texas #54, six miles southwest of Pittsburg, 200 miners were grouped around the shaft.[80]

Not all non-union miners, however, were persuaded to leave their jobs. Such was the case of Charley Payne who, on the morning of June 10, was on his way to work; the following exchange as recorded in poignant prose by the Pittsburg Headlight:

> . . . a striker wanted him to stop and talk. Charley said he was late and wanted to get to his work, when the striker called him a m___ s___ b___ and started to draw his gun on him. Charley sit his bucket down in a house nearby and went home, but soon returned with a Winchester. The striker saw him coming and made down a side street and when he reached the main street he was under full headway and the last

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[79]Pittsburg Kansan, June 8, 1899.

[80]Kansas and Texas Coal and Mining Company v W. T. Wright et. al., 297-299. See also: Weir City Journal, June 9, 1899.

*Burrs: nuts securing wheels of vehicle.

> seen of him he was getting toward the east end of town. Charley read the riot act to those that stood by the wire fence and then they had business on the other side of the street.[81]

But even as bitter animosities stirred by the labor dispute increased, life continued in the coal camps. On June 12, in the local from Litchfield appeared this item: "Born, to Mr. and Mrs. Jim Gray, colored, a son."[82]

Five days after the strike had been called, on May 18, 1899, the first printed indication of the alleged importation of Negro miners appeared. Publicly, it appeared as a small news item in the Pittsburg Headlight, "Central Coal and Coke will open if they have to ship in colored miners."[83] Privately, it was made manifest in the letter referred to above* from Mayor King of Weir City to Governor Stanley. King reported that strikers were "guarding every road and avenue to the mines." He went on worriedly to state that "One company [was] already building a stockade, and agents [were] in the south securing negroes . . . within ten days 1,000 negro miners will be imported" to take the places of the striking miners. "When this comes you will see a fight, you might be called upon for aid . . . Serious times are

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[81] Pittsburg Headlight, June 10, 1899.

[82] Ibid., June 12, 1899.

[83] Ibid., May 18, 1899.

* Supra., 21-22.

ahead."[84] There was no reported reply to King's letter. The United Mine Workers officials were also concerned about these reports of importations. On May 20, W. T. Wright, president of District #14, queried the Governor on his policy toward the Negro miners:

> Definite information having reached us that the Kansas and Texas Coal Co. and the Central Coal & Coke Co. have completed arrangements to import undesirable labor into this state to take the places of the striking miners of those companies. We desire to know if as governor of this state you are prepared to take the same action and pursue the same course as has been followed by Governor Tanner of Illinois and Governor Jones of Arkansas.[85]

Wright was referring to the actions of two Governors who had earlier been faced with similar problems. In Illinois the United Mine Workers had struck in 1898. By August, 1898, most of the insurgent operators in the area, specifically at Pana and Virden, had settled upon the method of breaking the strike by tapping the huge Negro labor supply of the South. The politicians and United Mine Worker officials turned to the Governor who replied in the tradition of former Illinois Governor John Peter Altgeld in early November.[86]

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[84] Governor's Correspondence, D. W. King to Governor W. E. Stanley, May 18, 1899.

[85] Governor's Correspondence, W. T. Wright to Governor Stanley, May 20, 1899.

[86] Victor Hicken, "The Virden and Pana Mine Wars of 1898." Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, LII (Summer, 1959), 266-267.

> I reinterate that I will not tolerate wholesale importation of foreign labor into Illinois . . . if I hear that a mob is to be brought into this state such as was brought into Virden I care not on what railroad it comes or for whom. I will meet it at the state line and shoot it to bits with Gatling Guns.[87]

The action of Governor Jones, of Arkansas, was less dramatic. The "Big Four" had been using Negro miners earlier in 1899 in the strike of Arkansas and Indian Territory, and Jones simply forbade "bringing in irresponsible and undesirable persons to take the place of strikers."[88] Wright was destined to be dissappointed if he expected the Governor of Kansas to act in like manner. On May 22, 1899, Stanley replied to Wright:

> I will not pursue the same course . . . I trust no serious difficulty will grow out of this strike, and that no violence will be offered either to persons or property by either side . . I shall endeavor only to protect persons and property that may be threatened, irrespective of who they are or to whom they belong.[89]

The respective camps pounced immediately on this reply and "stripped it of its verbiage." Press reactions were excellent indications of the political positions of faction. The Headlight stated briefly "Governor Stanley will not call out Militia in case of trouble." The Scammon Miner reported that he would "send out all three regiments of

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[87]United Mine Workers Journal, November 3, 1898.

[88]Pittsburg Headlight, May 26, 1899.

[89]Governor's Letters, Stanley to W. T. Wright, May 22, 1899.

of militia to protect the life of imported labor and property of the companies." John P. Reese, national organizer, stated that "Governor Stanley has said he won't obstruct scab labor, he as always identified himself with the capitalistic class who believes capitalism has a right to haul its employes into a hell of wage slavery." Reese also said that the miners of Kansas "should remember the Pittsburg Headlight newspaper and fight them to the bitter end after this fight is won."[90]

While the letters were being exchanged and rumors were spreading around Southeast Kansas, the coal operators were quietly preparing the camps for the Negro miners. Construction began about May 18. By May 20, the high fences around the Kansas and Texas shafts #18 and #23 practically enclosed the buildings. On May 25, the fence at #23 was ready for the gates. The first rumor of a definite arrival of Negro miners appeared on the night of May 25. It was noised about that a train of the miners had been taken to either Nelson or Weir and unloaded. This false report had been started when a Pittsburg and Gulf excursion train bound for Kansas City, Missouri, passed through Pittsburg, with a large number of Negroes.

The Headlight considered it impossible for the companies to bring in Negroes unless shelter was provided and argued

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[90]Pittsburg Headlight, May 23, 1899. Scammon Miner, May 26, 1899. United Mine Workers Journal, June 1, 1899.

that unless "houses commence going up near the shafts, or families move out", an importation would not occur. "An importation of colored men and their families could be expected" when accomodations had been completed. The next day, May 27, the Central, Kansas and Texas, and Western coal companies sent out wholesale eviction notices for their tenants to leave the company houses or be evicted "so the houses could be fixed up for colored labor." This conversion was expected to require four or five weeks for completion and was to prepare for "one of the largest and most complete emigrations of colored people ever known in this country, if the plans [were] carried out as outlines."[91]

Public officials of Cherokee County, led by Sheriff Oliver Walker Sparks, were determined to see that the plans were not carried out as outlined. Sheriff Sparks on or about May 25 called F. E. Doubleday, an official of the Kansas and Texas Coal Company, to state, "I understand that your company is going to ship niggers into Cherokee County." Doubleday replied that this was correct and that "the company [was] erecting stockades within which to keep the niggars [sic] when they arrive." To this Sparks replied that he "would not afford protection for imported riotous men and would prevent them from coming in if it took all the able-bodied men in Cherokee County to do so." Sparks later met

[91] Pittsburg Headlight, May 20-27, 1899.

company officials Doubleday, J. R. Crowe, and Morris Cliggitt at Baxter Springs, Kansas. Sparks stated at this time that he would provide protection only for citizens of Kansas. When questioned if he would protect Negro miners from Crawford County, Sparks said he "did not know whether he would or not, but he would see."[92]

This exchange of views represented the opening skirmish between the officials of Cherokee County, the United Mine Workers of America, and the "Big Four" coal companies. On May 26, 1899, Judge Skidmore of the Cherokee County District Court granted the first of a series of injunctions against the "Big Four" to prevent them from providing transportation for Negro miners into Southeast Kansas.

Cherokee County Attorney Charles Stephens had requested a temporary injunction "restraining the defendant [Western] from bringing into or attempting either directly or indirectly to bring into . . . said county any and all persons to take the place of defendant's employes." To justify this request, Stephens charged in the Petition that:

> said defendant has for several weeks agents traveling through the country soliciting and collecting together a low, unhealthy, immoral, vicious, indifferent, reckless, desperate, criminal, and undesirable class of people for the purpose of putting them within an enclosure about their mines and working them in the mines without giving ear to their own employes . . .

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[92]State of Kansas v Kansas and Texas Coal Company. Affidavits of O. W. Sparks and F. E. Doubleday.

> If this class of people are permitted to come into this country they will cause riots and bloodshed, will disturb the public peace and quiet . . . people afflicted with contagious infection and other diseases, and people who would permanently and irreparably impair the public morals.

The plaintiff concluded by predicting an "enormous increase in crime" that would be caused by this class of people.[93]

In reply to these charges the coal operators immediately filed a motion to vacate the injunction. The affidavits in support of this motion provided an excellent rebuttal to Stephens' statements. On June 12, I. M. Fleming, company superintendant, stated simply that the charge "is not true." He denied each allegation catagorically and concluded his statement by asserting "that the company is one of the largest tax-payers in said County, paying the sum of $1,047.35 taxes annually, that it would not be to its interest to in any way increase the burden of taxation."[94] F. E. Doubleday stated that the charges were "wholly false and untrue." As a mine official he maintained that:

> the mines can be made profitable only by operating them as to produce coal . . . and [the] purpose is to hire and employ such miners wherever they may be found in the United States . . . not criminals or persons affected with contagious or infections or any of the classes enumerated in the plaintiff's petition . . . the

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[93]State of Kansas v Western Coal and Mining Company, Petition.

[94]State of Kansas v Southwestern Coal and Improvement Company. Affidavit of I. M. Fleming in support of motion to vacate temporary injunction.

> affiant understood that the charge low, etc., was intended and designed to apply generally to any or all miners who might seek employment in the mines of the defendant.[95]

These affidavits failed to impress the Court, and it determined that such "open, notorious, wanton, flagrant, repeated, continuous, intentional, defiant, and wrongful violation" of State Law and of the "equitable rights" of the public should be restrained. The court order issued on May 26 "temporarily restrained and enjoined" each of the defendants from attempting to bring "into the County any of the kind, character and class of people in the petition . . . until further order . . . of the judge."[96]

While mine officials and county officers had been working in the court rooms, miners had been moving out of company houses. In Fleming some miners were reluctant to move and had to be evicted by Constable Landsdowne. In other camps the evacuation was proceeding quietly. During the week end of June 10, Western Coal and Mining Company commenced construction of the stockade at #7 Fleming and by Tuesday morning, June 13, it "looked as if they were prepared to bring in a force of workers."[97]

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[95] State of Kansas v Kansas and Texas Coal and Mining Company. Affidavit of F. E. Doubleday in support of motion to vacate temporary injunction.

[96] State of Kansas v Western Coal and Mining Company; State of Kansas v Kansas and Texas Coal and Mining Company. Court Order.

[97] Pittsburg Kansan, June 1, 15, 1899; Pittsburg Headlight, June 6-13, 1899.

CHAPTER II

THE ALABAMAN EMIGRES

With the 1899 mine labor situation in Southeast Kansas established, it is now necessary to turn to Alabama. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century the South had begun to feel the impact of the industrial and economic revolution that had been moving the North forward since before the Civil War. Negroes, however, discovered that only with great difficulty would they secure any of the benefits of that great development. In 1891, for example, the 196 major industrial employers of the South were using only 7,395 Negroes.[1] This was only a pittance in an area that contained 87.5% of the total Negro population in the United States; 45% of the Negroes in the South lived in Alabama, approximately 681,431.[2]

Immediately following the Civil War, hindered by the uncertainties and instability of political reconstruction, the South was slow to develop the available labor source. The primary economic potential was the availability of inexpensive labor. There were four million freedmen at work under conditions much like those of slavery. The factor of

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[1]Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, 393.

[2]Frederick L. Hoffman, "Vital Statistics of the Negro," The Arena, V (April, 1892), 529. Cited hereafter, Hoffman, "Vital Statistics."

an unusually large laboring class, generally unskilled in, in a changing economic structure resulted in the Negroes being caught in what then appeared to be a position of permanent inferiority.[3] It would be difficult to find a better summary of the Negro's place in early southern industry than in this statement of a superintendent of a plow factory in Kentucky: "Negroes are employed because they are cheaper . . . . The Negro does a different grade of work and makes about ten cents an hour less."[4]

Pertinent to this discussion is the Negro employed in the coal and steel industry of the greater Birmingham area of Jefferson County, Alabama, in 1890-1899. Jefferson County is located in the center of the iron, coal, limestone, belt of the South; its principal agricultural produst was cotton. In 1890, the county's population included 32,142 Negroes and 56,334 whites.[5] The primary coal belts of this area, are the Warrior, Cahaba, and the Coor. The numerous coal camps that sprang up in these fields such as Pratt City, Ensley, Woodlawn and North Birmingham, were

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[3]Franklin, <u>Reconstruction</u>, 176-189.

[4]Spero and Harris, <u>The Black Worker</u>, 169.

[5]Thomas McAlroy Owen, <u>History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography</u>, 807-811. Cited hereafter, Owen, <u>History of Alabama</u>.

later incorporated into Greater Birmingham.[6] One of these camps, Pratt City, was the home of the majority of the Negro miners who migrated to Southeast Kansas in 1899.

The Pratt Coal and Coke Company, the first large coal operator in Alabama, had been organized in 1878 by Daniel Pratt. This company was later bought out by the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company, a subsidiary of United States Steel.[7] The coal mines of the Pratt Division of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company were located within a five mile radius of Pratt City on the eastern out-crop of the Warrior Coal field.[8] In 1898, this field was producing 17,400 tons daily, more than 50% of the total output of Alabama.[9]

The fact that there were Negroes employed in these mines is undeniable. The proximity of the southern field to the reserves of Negro labor seeking to enter heavy industry made it possible to introduce the Negro into the mines.[10]

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[6]William C. Oates, "Industrial Development of the South," North American, LXI (November, 1895), 569. Oates was Governor of Alabama when he wrote this article. See also: Woodward, Origins, 569.

[7]Ethel Armes, The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama, 273, 436. Cited hereafter, Armes, Coal and Iron.

[8]First Biennial Report of the State Inspector of Mines of Alabama, December 31, 1892 to December 31, 1894, 5. Cited hereafter, Alabama Mine Inspector, 1892. See also: Alabama Mine Inspector 1898, 16-19.

[9]Mines and Quarries 1902, Special Report of the Department of Commerce and Labor, 680. Cited hereafter, Mines and Quarries.

[10]Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, 221.

According to the Alabama State Mine Inspector in 1899, 61% of the mining force in Alabama was Negro. Of these, 17% were laborers, 10% were employed as day-men, 38% were miners, and 35% were miner-convicts. None of the Negroes held administrative posts. Of the white labor force in the mines for a comparable period, only 5% were laborers, 19% were day-men, 8% held administrative posts, 58% were miners, and only 10% were miner-convicts. There were approximately 4,500 Negro miners in Alabama in 1899.[11]

These 4,500 Negro miners depended greatly upon the mines of Alabama. As the economic base of the South was converted from one of unskilled agriculture to skilled industrial work, the Negro in semi-urban areas, unable to make a decent living as a share-cropper but yet unable to secure skilled industrial employment, was forced by economic necessity to work in the mines. This problem was further complicated by the ever increasing number of Negroes in contention for the decreasing number of "Negro jobs." From 1890 to 1900 the Negro population of the black-belt in Alabama increased 21.94% while the white population for the same area increased only 20.08%.[12] The question of why the Negro miner left Alabama was not unique in itself. Negroes of all occupations had been deserting their native habitats

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[11]Alabama Mine Inspector, 1898, 52-59. Alabama Mine Inspector, 1900, 72-74.

[12]"Race Census of Alabama," The Nation, LXXIII (July 11, 1901), 24-25.

since the conclusion of the Civil War, but the Negro coal miner went north for the specific purpose of bettering his condition by pursuing his trade in a more productive field. Bad conditions in the Alabama coal mines were not the sole motivatival force behind the move. Perhaps the most comprehensive term for a complimentary motivating factor for the move would be, in C. Vann Woodward's phrase, the southern "capitulation to racism."[13]

This alleged capitulation began to make itself manifest in 1877 when the North, particularly the Republican party, ceased to wave the bloody shirt of reconstruction. As Benjamin Quarles has stated, "the North began to grow weary of the "eternal nigger", and was prepared to abandon the befuddled Negro to the mercy of local southern sentiment.[14] The North seemed quite content with the South's contention in this regard. The Southerner's were, by their own admission, "a people, conservatively progressive by tradition and habit, deeply rooted in love of country . . . proud of [their] history . . . and of [their] good blood."[15] Unfortunately though the Negro was included in their tradition, habits, and history not as an equal citizen, but as the mudsill of society.

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[13]For an excellent general account of this "capitulation" see C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow.

[14]Benjamin Quarles, Frederick Douglass, 252-253. See also: Franklin, Reconstruction, 200-219.

[15]Owen, History of Alabama, v.

The South of the late 1890's was inundated with a plethora of "Jim Crow" legislation. These laws applied not merely to the rowdy, drunken, or surly element of the Negro community but to all individuals who were at least one-eighth black. The reign of the white supremest gave free rein to massive aggressions that might otherwise have been curbed. The "Jim Crow" laws were "constantly pushing the Negro farther down."[16]

This pall was discernible in the Birmingham area in the spring of 1899. For example, on April 11, 1899, a bill was introduced requiring all Railroads to have separate cars for "colored and white, and anyone who [rode] in a car with a negro [could] complain to the Corporation Commission and ask that suit be brought."[17] This exclusion from public transportation actually did not affect the miners a great deal, but it is an indication of the condition of society in general. A speech made by one Colonel W. H. Denson to the Democratic State Convention in Birmingham on April 5, 1899, is exemplary of the situation:

> You are met here to determine the question of whether or not the Anglo-Saxon race is to control Alabama . . . To eliminate the negro . . . to preserve the White race . . . the negro is an idler, he has no pride of character, he can live on what would mean starvation for a white man . . .

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[16] C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 93.

[17] Birmingham News, April 11, 1899.

> it is hard for me to know that white people in Alabama cannot read and write and yet the black man . . . is being educated.[18]

The Southern situation was indeed lamentable, with little prospects of improvement. In 1892, one author had pessimistically remarked that no one could predict the course of the Negro in America, but the facts did "indicate tendencies which warrant us to believe that the time will come when the negro . . . will be a vanishing race."[19] The Negro coal miner in Alabama was in no danger of vanishing, but he was struggling to maintain himself and his family. As W. E. B. DuBois remarked in 1897, "while sociologists gleefully count his bastards and his prostitutes, the very soul of the toiling sweating black man is darkened by the shadow of a vast despair."[20] This same feeling of despair was reflected by Sol Hester, born of slave parents in Athens, Georgia, in 1875, who had grown up in the vicinity of Pratt City, Alabama. He related his experiences in the Pratt City mines when as a young man he worked at slack, cleaning rooms, and other contract work. By his own testimony he was "subjected to all sorts of things." The regular miners fared little better. "Sometimes they would have a big cave-in," he recalled, "maybe as tall as this house, and maybe

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[18] Ibid., April 5, 1899.

[19] Hoffman, "Vital Statistics," 542.

[20] DuBois, "Strivings of the Negro," 197.

four or five would work on it a whole week, and they would get nothing. The company would not pay them to clean it up."[21] The fact that the miners of this district were not paid for hauling dirt or for crossing horse-backs was substantiated by the later Union contract demands. Eight months before the migration to Kansas, Frank Dilcher, National United Mine Workers organizer, reported from Pratt City that, "the men are on strike for 37½ cents, with day labor $1.15."[22] It is suggested, that if this was the wage of the organized miner in Alabama, the pay received by the Negro miner, organized or not, was in all probability even lower.

An additional hardship caused the "sweating black man" to despair for his future in the deep South: the atrocious system of convict leases used in the mines of the South. The convict-lease system was used to provide Negro labor for whites who needed hands.[23] It had become an issue of major importance during the era of reconstruction. By 1887, the Federal Government put an end to the practice of contracting Federal criminals, and most of the states followed suit. In 1900, however, only the South still resisted the trend.[24] Leasing the state's convicts represented a gain in

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[21]Personal interviews, Sol Hester, October 9, 14, 1964.

[22]United Mine Workers Journal, September 1, 1898.

[23]Franklin, Reconstruction, 223-224.

[24]Rayback, American Labor, 163.

state revenue, if additional convictions could be secured, instead of increased taxes. To be certain of a sufficient number of convicts for leasing, new criminal codes appeared which placed inordinate penalties on petty offenses for which Negroes would be probable offenders. One example of this was the "Pig Law" of Mississippi which defined the "theft of any property over ten dollars, or any cattle or swine of whatever value," as grand larceny.[25] In addition to state, even municipal ordinances were designed to maintain what the legislators considered "due subordination." Professor John W. Burgess concluded, in 1902, that,

> Almost every act, word or gesture of the Negro not consonant with good taste and good manners as well as good morals, was made a crime or misdeamor, for which he could first be fined . . . and then consigned to a condition of almost slavery for an indefinite time, if he could not pay the bill.[26]

The son of an experienced miner of the Warrior field reported that his father had found it "hard to stay out of trouble."[27] Another contemporary, the Negro janitor at the Court House in Jefferson County, reported that "If a nigger goes out of a night now, he is tracked right up the road."[28]

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[25]Woodward, Origins, 212-213.

[26]Franklin, Reconstruction, 49.

[27]Personal interview, Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

[28]Birmingham News, February 23, 1899.

Laws limiting the hours of labor or types of work were non-existent. C. Vann Woodward has stated that "In the mining camps of Alabama, convicts were worked through the winter without shoes, standing in water much of the time."[29] In 1898, the Alabama State Mine Inspector reported on three such mines in Jefferson County:

> Slope #2, Tennessee Coal, Iron Company: This mine is operated exclusively with convicts, who are kept in a large prison built by the Company at a great expense immediately at the mine for this purpose. There are 500-600 convicts kept at this mine, the majority of whom are State convicts, and are leased from the State at so much per head per month, depending upon their class. They are cared for, clothed, fed and guarded by the Company.

In regard to Shaft #1, of the same company, the Inspector only stated that "The same remarks will apply to the prison at this mine as were noted in connection with Slope #2." The other convict-leasing mine that rated any comment in 1898 was the Coalburg mine, located ten miles northwest of Birmingham. About their operation the inspector remarked, "Near No. 4 mine is located the large prison of the Company. From the stockade surrounding the prison the men have access directly to the mines through a manway."[30] The statement that the mines of Pratt City, Alabama, were worked by Negro convicts was fully corroborated on June 15, 1899, by the Birmingham News in this brief news item: "Pratt

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[29] Woodward, Origins, 214.

[30] Alabama Mine Inspector, 1898, 13-14, 27-29.

City mines manned by Negro convicts."[31] This use of Negro convict labor necessarily reduced the already limited opportunity for Negro employment in the mines and made Negro living conditions in the vicinity less than agreeable.

There were other factors contributing to the reduction of job opportunities for the Negro engaged in the bituminous coal industry in Alabama besides mine discrimination, a "Jim Crow: society, sub-standard wages, and the convict-lease system. Foremost among these was the growth of the steel industry in Birmingham. The Southern steel industry, like every other Southern industry in the post-war era, had to rebuild from total destruction. By 1880, however, the South was producing more pig-iron than the entire nation had produced during the war. From 1880 to 1890, the production of steel works and rolling mills in Alabama alone increased from 508 tons to 46,612 tons; by 1900 it reached 100,318 tons. Ranked fifteenth of steel producing states in 1880, Alabama reached fourth position by 1890.[32] The increase in production of iron and steel was even more phenominal: It climbed from 56,237 tons in 1880 to 1,303,595 tons in 1900. But one factor of the iron and steel industry did not greatly increase: the number of wage-earners engaged in it. In 1890 there were 5,685 wage-earners in the

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[31]*Birmingham News*, June 15, 1899.

[32]Armes, *Coal and Iron*, 273-274.

iron and steel industry; in 1900 there were only 7,238.[33] The disparity between the increase of production and workers indicates the introduction of mechanization with the resultant increase in skilled labor. Operating on the assumption that "employers will use that proximate and available supply of labor the productive efficiency of which they estimate to be the highest for the industry", one arrives at the determination that the operators of the iron and steel companies used foreign and domestic white workers to supplement their Negroes.[34] When United States Steel came into Birmingham in 1907, it found that the Negro was employed as menial labor with the exception of a few coal miners and other miscellaneous jobs.[35]

Also in the South was a considerable number of Negroes not fortunate enough to secure employment in mining who migrated to Kansas at the same time. These were the rural Negroes. Following the Civil War there was no radical break down of the earlier plantation system of the deep South. Granted, such institutions as day labor, renting, and sharecropping were innovations, but the individuals participating in them were in reality occupying positions that bore a distinct resemblence to the former system. Though not slavery,

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[33] Census of Manufacturers: 1905, Bulletin 78, Iron and Steel AND Tin and Terne Plate, 13, 15, 17, 65.

[34] Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, 221.

[35] Ibid., 168.

the position of the agri-Negro was subordinate in every way.[36] The end of Reconstruction brought little relief for the rural Negro. Handicapped by his inexperience and lack of capital to purchase their own farms or machinery, the only stake the average Negro farmer had was his labor for which he received only $9 to 15 dollars a month.[37] In 1880, not more than one in one-hundred Negro farmers owned their own land.[38]

These hardships were poignantly described by Sol Hester, who grew up in the midst of them:

> Many and many a day I've chopped cotton twelve long hours for thirty-five cents, my father at forty cents a day. We'd be out in that field time it got full day light. We had to do our chores up at the house, pack the water to fill up all the wash-tubs and pots so mamma would have plenty of water to wash and do til' we got back. Then pull a lot of persley* and stuff and throw over in the hog pen then we'd light out to the field. At noon they would bring our meal out there and set it under the shade, then we would eat our dinner and work till it was so dark you couldn't see. Then come home, wash your feet and legs, then go through all that again.[39]

Mr. Hester went on to relate several stories of his childhood experiences in Alabama. He discussed health

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[36]Franklin, Reconstruction, 219-220.

[37]Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, 307, 377, 390-1.

[38]Woodward, Origins, 205.

[39]Personal interview, Sol Hester, October 14, 1965.

*Purslane: A succulent herb, common as weed in garden.

problems under those living conditions with graphic descriptions, especially how they ate:

> Mama would sweep out the hearth and put cake in the ashes between two big oak leaves and cover it up with hot embers, and cook it. Boy, you could smell it from here to there. You didn't have to take any medicine; the ashes would take care of your stomach.

He did say, however, that it was not all hard. They had some lighter moments, that are probably rendered even lighter by eighty-five years of contemplation.[40]

Aside from the pathos and humor of their condition, the Negro farm laborer was essential to the Southern economy. Frederick Douglass, the great American Negro leader commented, in 1879, that the desertion of the Negro farm laborers would be "shocking for the Southern man to contemplate." He was convinced that the only thing that could save the South was "the naked iron arm of the Negro."[41] The Southern whites had, indeed, contemplated the specter of a South without Negro labor and instituted policies similar to the convict-lease system of the mines to curtail any migration.[42]

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[40]Ibid., Certain white youths in Pratt City, Alabama, who knew Mr. Hester's father was fond of oppossum delighted in securing a succulent opossum firmly to a tom-cat' by his tail and suspending them both over a wire. Then they would say to young Sol, "boy, go get that 'possum for your daddy." Mr. Hester's comment then was, "Man, they sure would scratch, but the 'possum was worth it."

[41]Philip W. Foner, The Life and Writing of Frederick Douglass, 325. Cited hereafter, Foner, Frederick Douglass.

[42]Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, 392.

Such systems were not wholly successful, however, because more than one group of emigres departed Alabama in search of the "eden of the twentieth century." Even though Southern whites advised the Negro to "stay home where he is needed and loved,"[43] the Negro who could, heeded the warning of Frederick Douglass: "men, like trees may be too thickly planted to survive," so if some Negroes departed, "the condition of those who remained [would] be better because of those who [went]."[44]

The Negro laborer in the South felt his poverty, "without a cent, without a home, he entered competition with rich, landed, skilled neighbors." After thirty years of national life, "thirty years of renewal and development . . .the swarthy ghost of Banquo* sits still in its old place at the national feast . . . the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land."[45]

One of those who felt this disappointment with freedom was Dan Freeman who remarked, "I was born on that plantation. My parents were slaves. I was born just a few years after

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[43] United Mine Workers Journal, December 29, 1898.

[44] Benjamin Quarles, Frederick Douglass, 288-289.

[45] DuBois, "Striving of the Negro," 195-196.

*Banquo was a Scottish thane and fellow general of Macbeth in Shakespeare's Macbeth. After his murder in Act III, Scene III, the ghost entered a banquet and took Macbeth's place, in Scene IV. In this context DuBois was no doubt referring to the ghost of slavery.

emancipation [circa 1872], and I can't find my history any further back than emancipation." Asked what he had gained by his freedom, he curtly stated, "if you give me what belongs to me, you ain't given me nothin'."[46]

Perhaps the most poetic statement of the plight of the Southern Negro was written by W. E. B. DuBois in 1897.

> The shades of the 'Prison house' closed round about us: Walls strait and stubborn to the whitest but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to the sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopefully watch the streak of blue above.[47]

In early summer, 1899, approximately 1,000 sons of night, hopefully watching the streak of blue, "adopted [the] simple, lawful and peaceable measure" of emigration to effect the "quiet withdrawal of [their] valuable bones and muscles from a condition of things which [they] considere[d] no longer tolerable." They "deliberately laid down the shovel and the hoe," picked up the pick and shovel, "and sought homes in Kansas."[48]

Why did the Alabaman emigres select the "Grass-hopper" state as the "eden of the twentieth century"? A great number of Negroes had left Alabama in the 1870's as part of the "Exoduster" movement. In fact, some had even settled

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[46]Personal interview, Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964.

[47]DuBois, "Strivings of the Negro," 194.

[48]Foner, Frederick Douglass, 324.

in southern Cherokee County, Kansas. It is improbable that these aided materially in boosting Kansas. In 1893, a few Negro miners came to Southeast Kansas, the majority to stay and work the mines. It is difficult to calculate the effect these Kansas Negroes could have had on their Alabama friends and relatives in 1899. Probably except for isolated incidents, this method had no great effect on Alabama Negroes. The most logical explanation of the Negro miners' decision to come to Kansas is the coal company recruiting agent.

Grim as the conditions in Alabama were, most Negroes had, according to John Hope Franklin, "neither the resources nor the initiative to go to new areas."[49] The company agent provided both resources and initiative. When the "Big Four" strike began in Arkansas and Indian Territory, before it spread sympathetically to Kansas, the companies involved organized what one labor historian termed "a corps of agents", sent south to preach the state of affairs in the Northern coal fields.[50]

As early as February of 1899, Negroes from Georgia were reported to be passing through Birmingham on their way to Arkansas under the guidance of the "Big Four". Throughout

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[49]Franklin, _Slavery to Freedom_, 393.

[50]Andrew Roy, _A History of the Coal Miners of the United States from the Development of the Mines to the Close of the Anthracite Strike of 1902 including a Brief Sketch of the early British Mines_, 356.

the spring of 1899 agents were touring the South in search of Negro laborers. By April 4, officers of District #21 of the United Mine Workers were requesting the officers of District #20 to use every means available to stem the flow of Negro miners to Indian Territory.[51]

The first definite evidence that agents from the Southeastern Kansas coal mines were in the Birmingham area appeared as a news item on June 6, 1899. Two of these agents were J. O. Duffey and Thomas Owens; their locations in Birmingham were 1705 Third Avenue and 300 South Fifteenth Street, respectively. The article in the News went on to state that these agents were in Birmingham in search of Negroes to work in the mines of Kansas, and that they had hopes of securing "no less than 600 laborers." Additional comment indicated that the movement was opposed by Alabamans, in general, and particularly by the local labor agents. The article concluded by predicting that "some lively hustling was expected."[52]

Any agent who defected from the Union generally made good copy for the Journal as, for example, this:

> SAM BURGIS, Engaged In Importing Miners Into Weir City Field: one Sam Burgis has left Alabama with a train of negroes for Weir City Kansas. This

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[51]Birmingham News, February 20, April 4, 1899.

[52]Ibid., June 6, 1899.

> load is made up of ex-cons and off-scourings of this country. He has wired his family to come to him. They will leave here tonight with the same filth . . . he has gone to Kansas to assist the Big Man that wears an Indian feather in his hat crush the UMWA to the wall . . . if Sam returns we can take out our sticks and make it very interesting for him.

The "Big Man" with the Indian feather was mentioned in no other place, and Sam Burgis apparently never returned to Alabama. On June 29, 1899, Burgis arrived in Weir City with his wife and four children.[53]

As late as October 4, 1899, Kansas agents were still in Alabama. President John Mitchell warned W. R. Fairly, President of District #20, in Pratt City, "to keep an eagle eye on agents . . . going through the southern states to employ men for the striking territory."[54] Two of these men were residents of Southeast Kansas, T. B. McGregor and Matthew G. Reed, both of Weir City. Local mine workers were aware that they had "crossed the pond", and were now "hirelings for the Coal Companies."[55] One correspondent added the hope that "when their earthly race is run they [will] be alloted the hottest corner hell affords."[56]

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[53] United Mine Workers Journal, July 13, 1899. See also: Scammon Miner, July 7, 1899.

[54] Mitchell Letters: Mitchell to W. R. Fairley, October 4, 1899.

[55] Scammon Miner, October 6, 1899.

[56] United Mine Workers Journal, August 3, 1899.

How did these agents reach the average Negro coal miner? The primary method by which this was accomplished was by the use of hand-bills and posters displayed in prominent places and distributed throughout the area. The first reported flyer boldly proclaimed in early June, 1899:

> WANTED! Colored Coal Miners for Weir City, Kansas, District. The paradice for colored people. Ninety seven cents per ton September 1 to March 1: 87½ cents per ton March to September 1, for screened coal over 7/8 opening. Special train will leave Birmingham the 13th. Transportation advanced. Get ready and go to the land of promise.

Another hand-bill elaborated on conditions in the Kansas fields:

> COLORED COAL-MINERS WANTED for Weir City District, Kansas. Coal 3 feet 10 inches high. Since issue of first circular, price paid for mining has been advanced to one dollar per ton in winter and ninety cents in summer, for lump coal, screened over 7/8 screen. Pay day twice a month, in cash. Transportation will not exceed ten dollars, which will be advanced. Special train leaves Birmingham Tuesday night, June 13. Leave your name at the Kansas City railway office, 1714 Morris Avenue.[57]

Still another circular discussed the particulars of transportation:

> Colored Coal Miners Wanted, For Weir City, Kansas . . . Transportation will not exceed $10 which will be advanced and ample time given you to pay the same. Several hundred miners are at work at this point making big wages: Next and last train for Weir City, Kansas, leaves Birmingham, Tuesday night, June 20, 1899.[58]

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[57] Fourteenth Annual Report Kansas Bureau of Labor, 1898, 33.

[58] Pittsburg Headlight, June 22, 1899.

The last reported bill was circulated in July of 1899:

> WANTED 200 COLORED COAL MINERS to go to WEIR CITY, KANSAS. Transportation Train will Leave, Wednesday, July 19. Get ready and join your friends in the land of plenty.[59]

In addition to these widely circulated hand-bills and circulars, agents used classified advertisements in a leading Birmingham newspaper:

> SPECIAL TRAIN. The Kansas City, Memphis and Birmingham announces that on next Tuesday, a special train will be run out of Birmingham carrying colored coal miners for Weir City, Kansas. . . Agents are now at work gathering laborers.[60]

One means by which some Negro miners may have been notified was the United Mine Workers Journal. From May 25, through July, weekly notices were submitted by the Executive Board of District #14 which stated simply: "MINERS, STAY OUT OF KANSAS."[61]

Most appealing to the Negro miner perhaps was the "colored orator." An agent after becoming acquainted with a Negro community, would select its influential members to help him secure miners. One such orator was a Mr. Wilson, experienced miner in the Warrior fields and pillar of his society. Selected by agents in 1899, to encourage Negro miners to leave Alabama, he was instructed to stress

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[59] Pittsburg Kansan, July 20, 1899.

[60] Birmingham News, June 17, 1899.

[61] United Mine Workers Journal, May 25, July 28, 1899.

availability of good jobs in Kansas, higher wages, a better life as freemen, more privileges, and fewer restrictions.[62] The Reverend William Elston, of Birmingham, gave a lecture immediately upon his arrival in Kansas and eloquently expressed the feeling of the Emigres toward the movement. His text was Ezekiel 37: 3: "son of man, can these bones live?" Reverend Elston elaborated:

> Can the bones of the thousands of Negroes in the South and other places that are lying, bleaching and drying in the Southern sun live? Can they not find [in Kansas] the Eden of the twentieth Century. They can find [in Kansas] that which will give any bones life.[63]

In addition to the vital issue of freedom in society there was also the basic matter of survival, health and basic economics. One example was the father of Ben White. Mr. White was a teacher-minister in Alabama who discovered that he was unable to support his family in his chosen profession. To aleviate this lamentable condition, he became a coal miner and subsequently came to Kansas, because, as his son stated, "Kansas beckoned him to come for a real good job."[64]

A cursory examination of the conditions described on the circulars about the Kansan coal fields revealed that the

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[62]Personal interview, Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

[63]Pittsburg Plain Dealer, July 3, 1899.

[64]Personal interview, Ben White, June 4, 1965.

the circulars were, for the most part, factual. A comparison of the contract the miners of Southeast Kansas had been working under since August 14, 1897, with the advertisements indicated the veracity of some of the agents' claims.[65]

Were the Alabama Negro miners aware of the Southeastern Kansas strike? It was possible. Agents had been in the greater Birmingham area since early February: weekly notices had appeared in the press, and the Executive Board of District #14 had attempted to prevent the migration. The only shred of evidence that the Negro had been informed of the strike was the statement of one Mr. James, agent for the Kansas City, Memphis and Birmingham railroad. He had told the Negro miners that the strike was over Union recognition and there were no differences regarding the pay. Perhaps a few of the Negro miners were aware of the strike but only a small percentage.[66]

A brief examination of the statistics (of which the Negro miners were unaware) indicates that there was indeed factual basis to Rev. Elston's statement that the "bones of thousands of negroes in the South . . . were bleaching and drying in the Southern sun." The question of mine wages is

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[65] State of Kansas v Southwestern Coal and Improvement Company. The 1897 contract provided the following: winter 97¢, summer 87.5¢ per ton for lump coal passed over the standard 7/8 screen. In addition, all the dirt handled by the miners was to be paid for at 50¢ per yard or 10¢ per box.

[66] Pittsburg Headlight, June 22, 1899.

traceable back to the average price per ton for which the Company sold the coal to the consumer. In Alabama the company received $1.20, while the average operator in Kansas was receiving $1.30. In 1899, the average daily wage for miners in Southeast Kansas was $1.88; in Alabama only 5.1% of the miners received a comparable daily wage. In Kansas 14.4% of the coal miners received a daily wage varying from $2.75 to $2.99; the same group of Alabama miners amounted to only 4.2% of the total number of miners.[67]

The desparity in wages by geographic area carried over into other areas of life, including mortality rates, illiteracy rates, median ages, and home ownership, all conditions of a basic standard of living. In Alabama the death rate was 26.64 for Negroes and 14.85 for whites. The median age of Negroes in Alabama was 18.5, while in Kansas it was 27.8 in 1900. In 1900, the illiteracy rate among Negroes in Alabama was 57.5% and in Kansas it was 22.3%. In the same year, 37.5% of the Negro children in Alabama were in school and in Kansas 75.8% were in school. In Jefferson County in 1910 only five Negroes were reported as owning farms out of 90,617; in Southeast Kansas, thirty-two farms were owned in a Negro population of 2,744. Statewide, home-ownership statistics for Negroes for Alabama and

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[67] Mines and Quarries, 680, 710-714. See also: Sixteenth Annual Report Kansas Bureau of Labor 1900, 88.

Kansas were 11.3% and 50%.[68]

Perhaps the best way to determine why the Negro miner chose Southeast Kansas is to look to the testimony of that miner. On June 22, 1899, twenty-five Negro miners swore to and signed an oath that they had come to Fleming, Kansas,

> of their own free will and choice with a view to bettering their condition by mining coal in the southeastern Kansas coal fields. They were offered better wages than they were offered when they left Alabama to come to Kansas to work . . . they came to Kansas for the purpose of finding employment in their line of work.

Eleven Negro miners from Yale, Kansas, signed a similar affidavit stating that they "came voluntarily for the purpose of trying to better their condition by obtaining employment in the coal fields of Kansas."[69]

The statements of these men appear cold, couched in legalistic terms, compared to the personal comments of the men who came to Kansas, or of the sons of those men. Sol Hester stated that

> the K & T men just said, 'you all are not getting very much down here. Up there they pay you better, an opportunity to be your own boss, with real wages, houses, transportation to where you can be free! So they decided they would try it out.[70]

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[69]State of Kansas v Kansas and Texas Coal and Mining Company. The men from Yale were, F. Palmer, Alford Hiter, Relius Howard, Robert Smith, Henry Weeks, Alfred McAlpine, Sandy Rudolph, Bill Rogers, James Alexander, Louis Slaughter, and Robert McCurtis. The Fleming miners were, P.C.G. Davis, Reverend J.M. Austin, Wm. Curtis, Bob Smith, Richard Parsons, J.A. Bently, Henry Jones, John Harris, George Scott, Will McAfee, George Pearson, Willie Sparks, M. Williams, James Harris, Willie Wilson, James Pearson, Isum Lovak, Wm. Jackson, Robert H. Smith, Charles E. Sterling, Lewis Kempe, John George, O. Williams, and Wm. Davis.

[70]Personal interview, Sol Hester, October 9, 14, 1964.

Chris Hunter, whose brother and father came first to be followed later by the rest of the family simply stated that they had to come to "keep living."[71]

Clyde Fry poeticlly stated that "the Negroes came seeking an honest living, like the pilgrims, trying to raise decent God-fearing families."[72] Hugh Wilson, son of the "colored orator" summed it up by stating "it was a better life."[73]

The Negro miner had attempted to emerge from the shades of the 'prison house' into the blue above where he could rise. As the Reverend J. Austin said after he reached Kansas,

> This is a paradice for the Negro that is now ripe only needing the harvestors, so I say unto you all my people look on the field. Let us lift up our eyes and gaze upon this golden field. Let every Negro in the Southland who is weary and tired come to the companies and they will give them work and rest.[74]

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[71]Personal Interview, Chris Hunter, October 9, 1964.

[72]Personal Interview, Clyde Fry, December 12, 1964.

[73]Personal Interview, Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

[74]Pittsburg Plain Dealer, July 3, 1899. Reverend Austin based his sermon on John 4:35. "Behold I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look upon the fields; for they are white already to harvest."

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCTION OF NEGRO MINERS INTO SOUTHEASTERN KANSAS

To the Alabama Negro miner, Kansas sounded like opportunity knocking on the door of freedom, "a streak of blue" was barely discernible through the door. The older men who had dug coal most of their free days, decided to try their hands at Kansas coal; younger men were certain they could learn. To move this new labor force from Alabama, the companies secured special trains, variously routed to Kansas. Some came through Memphis, Little Rock, Fort Smith, Coffeyville, thence to Pittsburg; others passed from Memphis to St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri, before arriving in the coal fields. Fort Scott, Kansas, center of three rail lines, was used by most of the four companies as a general marshalling yard for their special trains.

No records of these special trains seem to have survived except in newspaper reports and the recollections of those who rode them. Both the Missouri Pacific and Frisco Railway companies reported that after thorough search of their records and histories they were "unable to . . . give any further information in connection with these moves."[1]

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[1]Replies to letters of inquiry: Harry E. Hammer, March 25, 1965. Martin M. Pomphrey, April 2, 1965.

After boarding the trains in Birmingham, the Negroes first departed for Southeast Kansas on Saturday, June 13, 1899. The first indication of anything unusual occurred in Memphis where agents gave instructions for their Negro charges to stay on the train until they were unloaded. Well supplied with bread, bologna, coffee, and a keg of whiskey, the miners were ill-disposed to disobey the agents. As the train moved north, it was met by armed employees of the coal companies. The miners were now ordered to stay on the cars, and to avoid the open windows if the train passed through any towns.[2] This brief testimony of Sol Hester, the sole account of the trek northward, is corroborated by related information. Representative of most of the trains from Alabama to Kansas in 1899, this train was the first of a series of moves through the summer. The last train was reported on September 14, 1899.

During that summer, Southeast Kansas was in considerable turmoil. The situation was confused with charges and counter charges by the various factions. Probably the most reliable source was the Pittsburg Headlight. Located between the two camps, with a moderate editorial policy, this paper had little to gain by favoritism to either faction. It was the only daily paper covering the entire period with stories by a special reporter, not depending upon rumors or heated assertions made by either the companies or officers

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[2]Personal Interview, Sol Hester, October 9, 1964.

of the Union. The following discussion is divided into two main sections, the number of trains and Negro miners coming into Southeast Kansas, and the reception by various factions in the same area.

The first train arrived in Fleming, Kansas, on June 15, 1899.[3] Consisting of three coaches and a baggage car, it carried 125 people, including one child and six women. The train approached Fleming from the South, on the Missouri Pacific tracks, stopped at the switch at Western Coal and Mining #3, and backed south on the spur into the stockade built around #7, approximately three quarters of a mile to the south. They were met by an estimated three hundred miners who had waited all night for their arrival. Several Negro miners mistakenly got off the train at #3 to mix with the strikers. The reaction of this will be recorded later. The remainder of the miners disembarked safely inside the protective walls of the stockade.[4]

On June 16, the Birmingham News reported that, to handle the active movement of Negroes from Jefferson County to Weir City, Kansas, coal mines "another train [would] be run out of Birmingham on June 20, carrying an even greater number of Negro miners." It was asserted that there were 140

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[3]State of Kansas v Kansas and Texas Coal and Mining Company, Affidavit of E. B. Harris cashier.

[4]Pittsburg Headlight, June 16, 1899.

experienced miners in this lot, that "they were in the best of humor . . . [and] expected to arrive in Kansas some time on June 22."[5]

On the morning of June 22, this train arrived in Fleming. Instead of the 140 miners reported in Birmingham, there were only seventy-four men and twelve women; but all the men were experienced miners, carrying their own tools. This train brought Reverend J. M. Austin to his "golden fields."[6]

Reports of this movement strangely correlated: date-lined dispatches from the Headlight were picked up by the Birmingham News, and from the News they were printed by the Scammon Miner as authentic local news reports.[7] The Scammon Miner did, however, add its own observation that "the importation of the Negro [did] not set the world afire."[8]

Not all Alabama Negroes came directly from Alabama. At least one train load came from Pana, Illinois, where the miners had gone a year earlier. On May 22, non-union Negro miners had been ordered out of the area of Pana. On June 26, they were reported by the Globe Democrat to be in St. Louis,

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[5]Birmingham News, June 13, 21, 1899.

[6]Pittsburg Headlight, June 22, 1899.

[7]Pittsburg Headlight, June 15, 1899 (Thursday), Birmingham News, June 20 (Tuesday), Scammon Miner, June 23, 1899 (Friday).

[8]Scammon Miner, June 30, 1899.

"ready for shipment to the Weir City coal fields." On June 27, three cars and a caboose full of Negro miners pulled into Weir City, 150 in all. On the same day, sixty-five more Negro miners arrived at Scammon #23.[9] The miners from Illinois, like those coming directly from Alabama, were seeking opportunity to ply their trade. They had seen enough bloodshed in the Virden and Pana mine wars. The scarring effects of this conflict is still evident in 1965. One participant, asked if he had come from Pana in 1899, refused to say any more, on any topic.[10] On June 29, the last special train of the month brought eighty-seven Negroes into Fleming, and 100 into Scammon; most of them were practical miners.[11]

July saw a more regular pattern of about one large importation per week. On July 1, a "large number varying from 75 to 225," reached Scammon. On July 3, a full train of Negro miners passed through Pittsburg "as quietly as they could at about a 20 mile speed without stopping or whistling." The only casualty here was a horse and wagon that failed to hear the train at the Locust street crossing.[12]

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[9]Pittsburg Headlight, April 27, June 26, 27, 1899.

[10]Personal interview, Walter Moore, December 12, 1964.

[11]Weir City Journal, June 30, 1899.

[12]Pittsburg Headlight, July 1-3, 1899. Pittsburg Kansan, July 6, 1899.

One week later, the Birmingham News commented on the regular movement of the Negro miners to Kansas, and estimated that 500 "had already been sent thither." This report estimated that 200 more had left Thursday night, July 6, and that the Kansas and Texas secured and took sixty on July 10. One Negro in this movement was reported to have said that he was going "to make an investigation as to the true conditions in that section of the country."[13]

Late on July 11, a load of 150 arrived in Yale #4, known as the "Negro shaft." On July 13, fifty-seven Negro miners arrived to work for the Central, and 300 were waitint in Fort Scott, to be "run into" Southeast Kansas on the next day. On July 17, sixty new miners began to work at Central #6, and by July 21, 103 had joined Western #7 in Fleming.[14]

Central received another "train load of negroes" on July 26, and two coaches arrived at Nelson. Western gained forty-three at #7 Fleming, and it was reported that 150 more would arrive before August 15. Scammon #7 added sixty-nine, and by July 29, the estimated number of Negro miners in the area was 600.[15] There is no way to substantiate this

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[13]Birmingham News, July 11, 1899.

[14]Pittsburg Headlight, July 10, 21, 1899. See also Scammon Miner, July 21, 1899.

[15]Pittsburg Headlight, July 27, 29, 1899. See also Weir City Journal, July 29, 1899.

figure, but on July 28, the Birmingham News reported that the "large importations" to Kansas promised "no end of trouble for the operators" in Alabama. The paper reported that some operators had suspended mining and that if these depletions of colored miners continued, white miners might be called upon "to take the place of the vanishing negro."[16]

The mine dispatch filed by the Headlight reporter assigned to cover the strike on August 2, 1899, read as follows:

> Central Coal and Coke, 669 struck, 238 working; Western Coal and Mining, 450 struck, 225 at work; Kansas and Texas, 305 struck, 210 at work; Southwestern Improvement, 300 struck, 170 at work.

Of the men at work, 600 were Negroes.[17] In early August, importations became less frequent. An Opolis, Kansas, item in the Headlight, August 5, stated that four "car loads of dusky people who dig the black diamonds from underneath the ground passed through out town."[18]

A curious sidelight to the question of the arrival of an element alien to the society reached the press on August 10, when "Polanders" from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, appeared on the Kansas scene. Although they did not go to work, the Executive Board of District #14 was considerably upset about them. The controversy reached such a state that

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[16] Birmingham News, July 28, 1899.

[17] Pittsburg Headlight, August 2, 1899.

[18] Ibid., August 5, 1899.

P. L. Dolanc, President of District #5 in Pittsburgh, wrote to John Mitchell admitting that some men had "been shipped from here to work in the mines in Kansas," but that he was sure that "not many more, if any would leave this region."[19]

No district president was apologizing for the Negro miner, however, and on August 1, 162 more arrived at Nelson, including twenty-two women.[20] The last two loads of miners arriving in August numbered 156, of which twenty-four were white. A final shipment of 125 men arrived on September 4, in Fleming, to work the large Western #7 shaft there.[21]

The task of reaching the total number of emigres was facilitated by use of Federal Population figures. The tally of newspaper reports shows a curious disparity. The tally, as reported by the local press, was from highest to lowest:

Pittsburg Headlight	1,659
Weir City Journal	1,138
Birmingham News	424
Scammon Miner	241
Pittsburg Kansan	240

The average of these journalistic estimates was 740 Negro miners with ninety-four women and children.

Statistics on Negro Population in Southeast Kansas in 1900, show 1,734 Negroes had been born in Alabama, roughly

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[19]Mitchell Letters: P. L. Dolanc to Mitchell, July 25, 1899. See also: Pittsburg Headlight, August 10, 1899.

[20]Weir City Journal, August 11, 1899.

[21]Pittsburg Headlight, August 17, 18, 1899.

48% of the local Negro population of 3,613. This represented a 57.7% increase in Negroes born outside of Kansas. By combining the statistics of the Kansas Mine Inspector for the year 1899-1900 and those of population break-down, one arrives at the number of Negro miners in Southeast Kansas as 950, to the nearest twenty. This figure was determined by basic percentages.

In 1900 there were 3,612 Negroes in the district; of these 1,191 were males over twenty-one. This represented an increase of 1,845 since 1890. A statistical comparison of nationwide and local figures yielded the fact that 75% or 884 of the Negro males in Southeast Kansas over twenty-one were employed by mining companies. Employees in the mines were not limited to those over twenty-one. To adjust this figure upward in order to include those under twenty-one, the number of Negro youth in school was determined, 45% of this total was added to 884 and the tentative total of 950 was reached. Further, based on a population in 1895 of approximately 2,200, adding sufficient numbers to account for natural increase and comparing the difference, the figure of 1300 emigres as the total number of Alabamian emigres coming to Kansas during period of 1899-1901.[22]

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[22] Negro Population 1790-1915, 71-78, 509-520, 809. Thirteenth Census of the United States, II, 600. Kansas Mine Inspector 1899, 14-35.

When approximately 1,300 strangers enter a community already strained with economic animosity and even physical terror, a certain amount of conflict is inevitable. When the Alabama Negro miners came to Southeast Kansas, tension was further heightened by the basic economic issue of the strike, the political question, and the race problem. In the face of these factors, reactions of local residents or groups were determined by the sides they took; economic or political.

Sol Hester discovered when he got off the train that the whites who met him and his fellow miners "had a little bit of taste against the colored." He described a night inside the stockade:

> the strikers would come to the North gate with a big old drum and bugle corps, and when they would sound, the others on the outside would know by that signal that they were going to start the fire-works; then they would all start to shoot, right where the people were.[23]

Mr. Hester had come into Yale. A miner who came to Weir City, Dan Freeman, master of brilliant understatement, simply stated when asked about his arrival that "there was a strike on in some places, but I only saw one stockade. I heard they had one in the north end, too."[24] A Negro miner in Fleming stated to a <u>Headlight</u> reporter on June 20,

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[23]Personal Interview, Sol Hester, October 9, 1964.

[24]Personal Interview, Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964.

in ironic tones: "We left the south to come to the paradice [sic] of Kansas. If this is paradice, well then, I want to tell you that I am just as near Heaven as I ever want to get."[25]

Perhaps the most important local group to the newly-arrived Negro was the company which had hired him. The company had gone south, secured his services, advanced his train fare, and now had to protect him. But before the company protected the Negro miner it had to protect itself. The primary threat to the operation of the "Big Four" mines in early June of 1899, was the order of the Cherokee County district court that "temporarily restrained and enjoined" the "Big Four" from attempting to bring "into the County any of the low, unhealthy, immoral, vicious . . . class of people . . . until further order of the judge." This court order constituted a major obstacle to the companies' use of Negro labor. The companies did not wait for further action by the judge; with remarkable speed each filed a separate suit in the Circuit Court of the United States, District of Kansas, Third Division at Fort Scott, Kansas. The companies had to find a way to render the County's injunction null and void. To do this, the companies sought an injunction against the Union's "conspiracy" to deprive them of their property.

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[25]Pittsburg Headlight, June 21, 1899.

In the initial Bill of Complaint, submitted June 13, the same day the special trains began to leave Birmingham, the Western Coal and Mining Company states as its intent and purpose: "to bring from other places to its mining camps at and near the said towns of Fleming and Yale, other mine workers to take the place of those who have quit work and who refuse to work for your orator." The orator held that if the miners were brought into the camps before an injunction could be obtained to restrain the defendant from "combining and conspiring to interfere with such persons by means of threats or intimidations, force or violence," there would be two unfortunate results, 1) working the mines would have to be suspended indefinitely, thus delaying work and "entailing a loss upon your orator of many thousands of dollars," and 2) preserving the peace would be impossible, and "great and irreparable injury and damage" would result "as well as loss of life."[26] Apparently Judge Hook was moved by the pleas of the companies more than Judge Andrew Skidmore had been, and on June 14, granted the operators their desired injunction. This restrained all defendants (the companies included all Union officials and organizers in the suit) from hindering or obstructing "the business of the said complaintant, [sic]" this included

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[26]Western Coal and Mining Company v W. T. Wright et. al., 16. Bill of Complaint.

included specifically coal shafts, railroad tracks, machinery, houses, appliances, "and all other property in or near the towns of Yale and Fleming." The defendants were further enjoined from entering any company-owned ground for the purpose of "inducing or compelling by threats, force, violence, or by any direct of individual coercion, any of said companies present or future employes from performing their duties as such employes."[27]

Orders issued for all "complaintants" were identical except for the areas and camps specified therein. "Stripped of [their] verbiage," these injunctions represented a blanket approval for the use of imported Negro labor. On June 15, United States' Marshall W. E. Sterne went into the Southeast Kansas coal fields to serve the writs against the defendants. In Yale, he served 205 and in Fleming 231. Among the more important individuals served in Fleming were, W. T. Wright, President of District #14; Hugh Bone, treasurer of District #14; Robert Gilmour (Gilmore) secretary, District #14; R. T. Williamson, United Mine Workers organizer; J. G. McLaughlin, Irish humorist and agitator; and Bert Boyar, Fleming ruffian. Five Negro miners, all members of District #14, were included; Gid Lee, Alf Jones, G. Washington, Joe Yarborough, and Will Dupree.[28]

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[27] Ibid., Restraining Order.

[28] Ibid., United States Marshall's Return.

In the restaining order itself, Sheriff O. W. Sparks was included in both his official and private capacity. He was enjoined not to interfere with or take "any steps to prevent any person from coming into said county for the purpose or with the intention of entering employ of complainant."[29]

The Headlight commented: "it would be well to remember" that it had been Sparks who was credited with making the statement that he would arrest every colored miner imported into the district or every operator who did the importing and "all the United States Marshalls who undertook to guard them."[30] The Kansan, on the other hand, remarked that "the Executive Board and every miner in District 14" were tied up.[31]

With their new employees legally free to come to Kansas, the companies now had to insure their security. One of the first means of accomplishing this was the erection of stockades around the mines in which the "Big Four" intended to work the Negro miners. In Southeast Kansas six stockades were erected to protect the companie's new miners.

The first stockade was in Fleming, the location of the Western Coal and Mining Company's shafts #2, 3, and 7 (at

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[29]Central Coal and Coke Company v Wm. Wooten et. al., 899. Restraining Order.

[30]Pittsburg Headlight, June 12, 1899.

[31]Pittsburg Kansan, July 20, 1899.

that time). On June 14, it was reported that "great haste was being made to complete the stockade before the arrival of the Negro miners." The stockade, located around Western #7, was in the southeast corner of Fleming. (At the present time this property is in the middle of the Elk's Country Club Golf Course, southwest of Pittsburg.) The stockade encompassed approximately one and a half acres. It was 800 feet square, with walls eight feet high, of closely nailed 1 x 12's, braced by vertical cross-ties. To accommodate the miners, seventy-five tents had been pitched. There was also a wash house 10 x 50, a dining hall 25 x 50, a kitchen 18 x 18, a store room 12 x 12, a thousand foot artesian well, and one entrance, the rail spur. The store room, according to a miner who played there as a boy, was used as the company arsenal.[32]

The Headlight reported that the sanitary conditions were good, and everything looked secure. One week after the arrival, a reporter from the Weir City Journal inspected the Fleming stockade and "found it in good order, the dining hall in modern shape, the cooking done with steam and everything clean." He reported that on Sunday, June 18, the

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[32] Personal Interviews: Frank Collins, February 21, 1965; Ethel Delaney, February 23, 1965; Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965; Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

strikers had attempted to break down the stockade but had not succeeded.[33] On July 8, Mr. Lawrence of the Headlight braved muddy roads between Fleming and Pittsburg to inspect the #7 stockade again. He reported that the company had received a car-lot of tents for the use of more miners and that the stockade was still intact. He found one hundred men in the shaft, producing 200 tons of coal per day. His dispatch concluded with the statement that there had been "no change since the arrival of special trains of negroes on June 22."[34]

The mine inspector remarked on July 9, that all that "detracted from the appearance" of #7 was the large board fence built around it, and "the number of Winchester rifles that were kept in office, close to the mouth of the shaft." He stated that about eighty Negro miners were at work at the time of the inpsection. One month later, the only additional comment he had to make was that "nearly all colored men" were working.[35] The company did provide one extra benefit for living in #7 stockade: they gave their Negroes an acre of land from the "old Risteau place" just north of

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[33]Pittsburg Headlight, June 14-15, 1899. Weir City Journal, June 23, 1899.

[34]Pittsburg Headlight, July 8, 1899.

[35]Kansas Mine Inspector 1899, 18-19, 23.

the shaft along the Country Club road, to be fenced off as a cemetery.[36]

The only recorded comments on the Southwestern Coal and Improvement Company's stockade at Mineral was that it contained ninety-eight men, fourteen women from Birmingham on July 10. Thirty-five tents were provided for the families. One 18 x 44 tent served as a dining hall operated by two Negro miners who had contracted for the job. The only report the mine inspector had was that the shaft was "enclosed by a stockade, all colored men." He went on to comment subjectively that "they were not crowding the market with coal."[37]

The Central Coal and Coke Company, at Nelson in the northern field, did not erect a stockade as soon as did Western in Fleming. The first report came on July 3: "The work of building a stockade around the mines . . . was commenced this morning." This stockade was said to be large enough to encompass all the company houses surrounding shaft #9.[38] The state mine inspector remarked in August that the camp was surrounded on all sides by a large board

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[36] Personal Interviews: Frank Collins, February 21, 1965; Ethel Delaney, February 23, 1965; W. E. Matthews, February 11, 1965; Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

[37] <u>Pittsburg Headlight</u>, July 10, 1899. <u>Kansas Mine Inspector, 1899</u>, 43.

[38] <u>Pittsburg Headlight</u>, July 3, 8, 1899.

fence, with a large gate on one side to serve as entrance to the mine. Entering, the inspector had an encounter indicative of company security in the stockades:

> I was accosted by a man who commanded me to stop. I paid little attention to this command . . . whereupon the man . . . caught my horse by the bridle and held it firmly, repeating his command and stating that he had orders to allow no one to pass through until he was satisfied who they were and what their business was.

The inspector was allowed to pass and completed his report. He stated that the outside had been forboding enough but that the inside "revealed a strange sight in a peaceable little mining camp . . . it looked like a perfect fortress, manned with armed guards . . . ammunition and food enough to resist a long seige from the 'enemy'."[39]

The Central mines north of Scammon had a unique system by which to protect their workers. There was not enough room around the shaft-house to construct a camp for the Negro miners because it was in the middle of a small triangle bordered by two railroads and a wagon-road. The Central owned land around the triangle, however, and had an air-shaft in an adjacent pasture a quarter mile away. Here a stockade was constructed, and houses were moved in by the company. A road was constructed between the stockade and the shaft, so miners could either descend at the shaft-house or at the air-shaft inside the stockade. A boarding house

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[39]Kansas Mine Inspector 1899, 23.

and a company store were both constructed within the enclosure. An observer for the Headlight stated that "a miner might live a lifetime within the stockade, and not suffer for any of the necessities of life."[40] The mine inspector seems to have had a different point of view toward the life of the hundred Negro miners at #7 Scammon. "The scene was revolting," he reported, "a large barricade . . . extended halfway to Scammon. Along the prairie inside, the dusky miners lived and disported themselves."[41]

The Western shafts #4 and #5 at Yale in the northern field were only briefly referred to, but these reports corroborated perfectly the testimony of Sol Hester. Shaft #4 was surrounded with barbed-wire, under which the strikers would frequently crawl. Mr. Hester recalled that while some strikers would divert the attention of the Negro miners at one end of the enclosure, other strikers would attempt to enter the opposite side. When they crawled under the wire, Hester chuckled, "they looked just exactly like hogs crawling." For the safety of the miners at #5, the Western depended upon a subterfuge. The Negro miners arrived in squads of less than twelve men, thus attracting little attention and not nearly so disturbing to the strikers as were mass shipments of 150 Negro miners.[42]

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[40] Pittsburg Headlight, July 8, 10, 1899.

[41] Kansas Mine Inspector 1899, 33.

[42] Personal Interview, Sol Hester, December 13, 1964. See also: Pittsburg Headlight, July 8, 12, 1899.

The mine inspector, definitely not sympathetic with the operators, said of Western #4 that "80 Negroes were employed." Of #5 he remarked that, "a close observation of their manner of digging coal has convinced me that a majority of them . . . would never clog the wheels of the coal trade with an overproduction of the article."[43]

The stockades of the Kansas and Texas shafts in Weir City were not so refined as were the bastiles at Scammon or Fleming. At both #18 and #23 the men lived in tents protected by barbed-wire. At #23 "the prairie around the mine was literally covered with the tents in which those [Negro] miners and their families lived."[44]

Most of the guards secured by the companies to maintain stockade security were regular administrative employees detailed to guard duty. One of the guards at Fleming #7 was A. E. Hill, a young Western clerk, whose duty in the stockade as keeper of the gate was to examine passes of all who sought to enter, and to allow no one to pass without proper clearance. After two weeks at his post, young Hill was accidently shot. Two individuals who were there and who knew Hill stated that it was an accident. This was the

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[43]Kansas Mine Inspector 1899, 17.

[44]Ibid., 36-37. See also Pittsburg Headlight, July 8, 1899.

only reported fatality in any of the stockades.[45] Not all of the guards were employees, however; an insubstantiatable number of them were Negroes from Fort Scott, Kansas. The Pittsburg Headlight reported that "a car load" of young Negroes from Fort Scott arrived in both Yale and Fleming on June 17, two days after the initial importation.[46] In Fort Scott in 1900, there were 400 Negro males over twenty-one. No more than half this number could have been considered "young" so the "car load" could not have amounted to more than 200.[47] These guards were paid the same wage as qualified shot-firers in the "Big Four" mines, $2.50 per day.[48]

Reports of relatively quiet, well ordered, clean stockades were frequently challenged on various grounds. William Matthews, retired **Physics** professor at Kansas State College, cautioned against accepting the "remarks" of the mine inspector en bloc. He held that inspectors were careful "not to print anything that might offend."[49] The mine inspector in 1899 was a resident of Chicopee, a United Mine Workers

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[45]Personal Interviews: Frank Collins, February 21, 1965; Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965; See also: Pittsburg Kansan, June 29, 1899.

[46]Pittsburg Headlight, June 17, 1899.

[47]Negro Population 1790-1915, 97.

[48]Pittsburg Kansan, June 22, 1899.

[49]Personal Interview: W. E. Matthews, February 11, 1965.

strong-hold. He agreed that the companies had provided transportation for the Negro miners but held that no sanitary precautions had been taken against small-pox or other contagious diseases.[50]

One month before the first Negro miners arrived, Mayor D. W. King of Weir City complained that the "sanitation of the town was in a deplorable condition" and requested residents to gather rubbish from their yards and pile it in the alleys.[51] Even though King indicated that conditions in Weir City were not ideal, the rumor that the miners at Fleming were afflicted with small-pox gained strength. In July, J. H. Cushenberry, Crawford County Health Officer, with County Commissioners Braden and Elder visited the Fleming stockade to inspect the miners' living conditions. They found the camp in good condition and "no suspicion of disease." They agreed that those in charge evidently had taken "every precaution against disease." For the peace of mind of the surrounding communities the $19 Cushenberry charged for the inspection was apparently well spent.[52]

The general health of Southeast Kansas was not damaged, as charged by the opposition, by the arrival of the Negro

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[50] Kansas Mine Inspector 1899, 117.

[51] Weir City Journal, May 12, 1899.

[52] Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners, Crawford County Kansas, 408. See also: Pittsburg Headlight, July 10, 1899; Pittsburg Kansan, July 6, 1899.

miners and their families. A thorough study of the annual reports of the State Board of Health in 1899 revealed that there were twenty-seven cases of small-pox in Southeast Kansas and only two fatalities. There was no evidence that small-pox or any other communicable disease was epidemic.[53] One case of small-pox was not reported until later was John P. Reese, national organizer of the United Mine Workers of America.[54]

Protection of the Negro miner by the company was entirely logical. The Negro miner represented a business expense, and if they were to yield any dividends at all they would have to be in condition to work efficiently. It simply would not have been practical for the "Big Four" to advance the transportation, erect the stockades and hire guards merely to act as a deterrent to the organization of the United Mine Workers in the Southwestern fields. For one train bearing 162 miners to Kansas, it was reported that the Western Coal and Mining Company had paid $1,620, or $10 per miner.[55] If 1,300 individuals came to Kansas as postulated above, it is reasonable to assume that the companies spent at least $13,000 on transportation alone.

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[53] Reply to letter of inquiry: Robert W. Richmond, March 1, 1965.

[54] United Mine Workers Journal, April 19, 1900.

[55] Ibid., June 22, 1899.

In one respect, the companies did discriminate against their employees. Negro miners, unfamiliar with the operation of the script and withholding system of company store operations, were at times encouraged to purchase articles not really necessary. Generally, when the company secured new labor, one of the first steps was to take them to the company store and tell them "they could have anything they wanted." One miner, according to legend, even secured a cow and a calf in this manner, the cost of which was later "taken out of his wages."[56]

The earlier statement in one of the Birmingham flyers, and the testimony on the wage system are corroborated by this notice in all mines of the Central Coal and Coke Company in August: "Those in debt for transportation and expense of going to housekeeping will be allowed two-thirds of their earnings to live on; the other one-third will be credited on their balances."[57] Indeed, the miner owed a great deal to the company store. In the words of one participant, "you were always in the hole."[58]

The "Big Four" maintained their position towards the Union, even though all the other coal operators in the District signed with the organization. Indeed, President W. T.

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[56]Personal Interview: Sol Hester, October 9, 1964.

[57]Kansas Mine Inspector 1899, 23-24.

[58]Personal Interview: Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

Wright remarked on June 22, that they "showed no sign of weakening."[59]

The reception of the Negro miners by the company officials and even the company employees who had refused to strike was logically predictable. The reception by the local community as a whole, however, was generally illogical and depended upon how the individual or group was affected by the presence of Negro miners at work.

The reaction with the widest base of popular support was that motivated by economic factors. To the average miner in Southeast Kansas, who was on strike, the use of other labor to operate the mines endangered his life and the life of his family. This feeling of hatred toward the working miner grew in intensity as the strike progressed, until the operators of the area excluding "Big Four" signed contracts. Jack London related the motivating factors behind this feeling very graphically. "To strike at a man's food and shelter is to strike at his life. . . . It is for this reason that a laborer is so fiercely hostile to another laborer who offers to work for less pay." To London, a striker who struck a non-striker was only acting in self-defense. The miner attempting to gain his rights as a working man was only trying "to kill the man who was trying to kill him."[60]

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[59] Pittsburg Headlight, June 22-28, 1899.

[60] Jack London, "The Scab," The Atlantic Monthly, XCIII (January, 1904), 54-55.

The developments of the strike, from May 13 to mid-June (discussed in Chapter I) were manifestations of this simple idea. One young miner, a recent German immigrant, who worked in Chicopee at the time of the strike, reported that he had joined the Union and "had to do what they told him to do." He struck loyally and, because of this, his family was reduced to eating "lard with hot water mixed with bread."[61] Conditions of this sort naturally tend to develop animosity. A Weir City miner who participated in the strike spoke of the hardships and deprivations. They were, he said, "real tough times all the way around." The little strike aid from the Union was negligible.[62]

The men who had assailed the employees of the company with "vile epithets" in the initial stages of the strike became hungrier and were moved to act in a rasher manner as the strike progressed. The men were understandably disturbed in late May when rumors began to circulate through the camps that the companies were planning to use Negro miners in the place of the men who were not at work. Miners of six years experience could remember the strike of 1893 which had all but destroyed District #14. In this strike, Negro miners had also been used by the "Big Four". It was reported on June 14 that the tales of Negro miners coming

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[61]Personal Interview: Charlie Neigsch, February 18, 1965.

[62]Personal Interview: Tom O'Grady, February 28, 1965.

to Fleming and Yale "caused no little talk in the streets, and. . . excitement prevailed."[63]

Unfortunately, there was a plethora of charges and counter charges propounded by both factions immediately preceding the arrival of the Negro miners. There were too few calm heads to arrive at an settlement equitable for the disputants. The injunction gained by Cherokee County Attorney Stephens helped little to sooth harried nerves.

On June 15, the move that presaged an era of hope for the Alabama miners was the beginning of an unfortunate period for the white miner, a period marred by the deadly miasma of labor unrest complicated by the question of race.. At approximately seven o'clock in the morning of June 15, the first train arrived in Fleming. It was met by striking miners of the Western shafts of Fleming and nearby Chicopee. According to an eye-witness report, when the train pulled up to Western #3 to back down the spur to #7, a Negro woman, one Mary Davis, waving a kerchief, encouraged the miners to get off while the train stopped briefly. The number of Negroes who got off was a matter of great conjecture at the time and still remains unresolved. Regardless of the number, however, the situation in the local community was the same: the Negroes who got off, outside the stockade were "wined,

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[63]Pittsburg Headlight, June 14, 1899.

dined and Unionized." After being served a keg of cool beer, they were scattered around throughout the community.[64]

This apparently friendly welcoming of the Negro miners was unique. All subsequent arrivals with the possible exception of those at #5 Yale, were met by what appeared to be organized attempts to prevent the safe arrival of the emigres. The Western charged that the Union had adopted a "systematic course of threats and intimidation" against their employees.[65] B. F. Hobart, President of the Kansas and Texas, stated that the danger was not caused by the companies but by former employees of the companies seeking to prevent their miners from going to work.[66]

Even though the "Big Four" had, by this time, secured their own injunction against the striking miners, they still managed to speak to a great many Negroes. Following the Fleming arrival, all the trains were run through Pittsburg instead of Cherokee to prevent the loss of any miners to the strikers. Superintendent Archie Craig, of Western #7, is alleged to have said as one of the trains rolled past the switch at #3: "You can't get them this time boys; we have

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[64]Personal Interview: Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965. See also: Pittsburg Headlight, June 16, 1899; Scammon Miner, June 16, 1899.

[65]Western Coal and Mining Company v W.T. Wright et. al., 8.

[66]State of Kansas v Kansas and Texas Coal and Mining Company. Affidavit of President B.F. Hobart.

them locked in."[67] A question for speculation is: Were the Negro miners locked in, or were the Union miners locked out? Sol Hester reported that one of the things the strikers told his group when they arrived at #4 Yale was to be sure "and stay at home, especially after dark."[68]

The last, apparently organized, violence occurred on Sunday night, June 18, when the strikers attempted to break down the stockade at Fleming. Seventy-five to one hundred shots were reported to have been fired, but no one was seriously wounded.[69] On Wednesday, July 21, all the operators in Southeast Kansas acceded to Union demands except the "Big Four".[70] Now it was truly the "Big Four" strike. The settlement with the smaller operators eased the tension in the area considerably. The other mines allowed the men to double up in the workings to provide the hungry with relief.

From this point until the final settlement in 1900, the strike assumed a different air. In fact it became almost an accustomed way of life. Union shafts were operating and the "Big Four" were operating. Excluding a few isolated cases of harrassment, Union policy toward the Negro miners

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[67]Personal Interview: Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

[68]Personal Interview, Sol Hester, October 9, 1964.

[69]Weir City Journal, June 23, 1899.

[70]Pittsburg Kansan, June 22, 1899.

took three forms: peaceful persuasion, indignation meetings, and plans to send them home. One of the harrassment cases involved "Winchester Bill" James, a locally renowned crack-shot, who was acclaimed for sitting in Fleming and shooting at any heads which appeared over the top of the stockade.[71] The practicability of this Jamesian policy is doubtful because the range was approximately 500 yards.

The United Mine Workers policy of peaceful persuasion was based on the issue of "assurance of support". The average Negro miner, if he had left his employer, would have been stuck without a job in an alien land.[72] Most of the Negro miners had expended their meagre savings--if they had ever had any. If they did quit they would be not only unemployed miners but also unemployed Negro miners. Most Negro miners, some with families, for this reason stayed with the company until they were absolutely certain that they would not be cast adrift. In addition to facing the difficulty of convincing the Negro of his security in the ranks of the organized, the Union had to be careful not to violate the injunction forbidding them to interfere with the "Big Four" mine employees.

The first reported mass meeting held to reach the Negro miners was held on the morning of June 20. Under the

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71Personal Interview: Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

72Personal Interview: Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

leadership of John P. Reese and James Boston, sixty-three Negro miners from Fleming (the majority of whom had arrived on June 15), walked to Pittsburg from Fleming, a distance of five miles, on the Missouri Pacific tracks. While they rested in the shade and ate watermelon, between Sixth and Seventh streets, they were addressed by union officials. Some of those present, reported that they had found it even better in Kansas "than it had been represented." In the afternoon, addresses were made by James Boston, C. C. Clemens, and an unnamed Negro miner. An attempt was made by union officials to organize a fund among local businessmen to provide transportation for the Negro miner to return to Alabama. This attempt had only a "varying success." In the evening, after the Negro miners had been fed at the Globe restaurant, John P. Reese concluded the day with an extended address.[73]

The following day, another meeting was held in Fleming with a large body of miners present. Featured attractions at this gathering were the Weir City Band and a speech by "a colored miner from Alabama." That mass indignation meeting and meetings with the Negro miners met only "varying success" was attested to by the Pittsburg Headlight on July 8: "All efforts failed to cripple the companies, the shafts are all working."[74]

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[73]Pittsburg Kansan, June 20-22, 1899.

[74]Pittsburg Headlight, July 8, 1899.

Nevertheless, the meetings continued. The Executive Board called a meeting for July 8 in Weir City to discuss "the detriment of the undesirable imported labor class." Four hundred people attended but from the speakers and speeches it is evident that this was not a meeting to secure the support of the Negro miner as in the case of earlier meetings.[75] This fact was made more obvious two weeks later when, at a similar meeting, the most popular suggestion was to "start the fire and level the stockade." Cooler heads prevailed, however, and William James from Fleming offered the practical suggestion that since the company usually won the battles, to attack the stockade would mean the state militia.[76]

Union miners generally obeyed the orders of the Executive Board, and additional mass retaliation was avoided. On August 8, the Board issued a lengthy address to miners working for the "Big Four" Coal Companies stating that if it had not been for the Negro miners the strike "would have been ended before now." It agreed that the objective of the strike was to secure the "recognition as American freemen." In closing its address, the Board called on the Negro miners as men, as Americans, and as "lovers of liberty to cast aside your tools and refuse to work for

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[75] Weir City Journal, July 14, 1899. See also: Pittsburg Headlight, July 8, 1899.

[76] Weir City Journal, July 28, 1899.

any company that seeks to deprive a man of his God-given and constitutional liberty."[77] This address generally marked the beginning of a shift in sentiment from the heated oratory of the strike to a more patient outlook with a feasible end in sight. That end was settlement and the subsequent organization of the Negro into the ranks of the United Mine Workers of America.

From late June to early August, there had been only sporadic attempts to ship the Negro back to Alabama. The first suggestion appeared on June 19, ten days later it was reported that some little money had been collected by the United Mine Workers to "help them on their way."[78] The only definite indication that the Union attempted to help any who wanted to return to Alabama appeared in Mineral, on July 31 in this form:

> To Railroad Men and Others
> Please assist ______________ to reach his home in Alabama as he has been shipped to this place under misrepresentation and oblige.
>
> SEAL Harry Bousfield, vice president
> District #14, U. M. W. A.

The only additional comment on this "pass" was that "no one has returned to tell how much it helped."[79] Later, on

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[77] *Pittsburg Kansan*, August 3, 1899.

[78] *Pittsburg Headlight*, June 19, 1899; *Pittsburg Kansan*, June 29, 1899.

[79] *Pittsburg Headlight*, August 8, 1899.

October 26, it was not Negro miners the Executive Board was shipping out, but white. It was reported that "about 3,000" were shipped out of Southeast Kansas to ease overcrowded conditions in the mines.[80]

Not only were Union miners unimpressed by some colored miners, but local business men of Pittsburg drew up a resolution heartily condemning "men of such low, and vicious habits," and even endorsing the strike.[81] The business men of Weir City signed a similar statement commenting on the Negro miners' recklessness and indifference. Other comments stressed his "shiftlessness, quarrelsome disposition and general unreliability."[82]

In addition to economic and social objections to the Negro miner in Southeast Kansas there were also political. This was more evident in Cherokee than in Crawford County because of its Democratic-Populist orientation.

The initial expression of the political side of the issue appeared in Mayor King's appeal to Republican Governor Stanley for aid. Warning that "serious times are ahead," King pointed out, "I hate to see the 'niggers' come, but

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[80] Pittsburg Kansan, October 26, 1899.

[81] Scammon Miner, September 15, 1899.

[82] State of Kansas v Kansas and Texas Coal and Mining Company. Affidavit of Weir City businessmen. See also: Fifteenth Annual Report Kansas Bureau of Labor 1899, 459.

there is one redeeming feature, they are all Republicans and would displace a thousand Pops."[83]

In 1899, the only Republican listed among the county officials was Hon. Andrew H. Skidmore, judge of the district court and chairman of the Republican committee. Charles Stephens, a declared Democrat, and Oliver Walker Sparks was the leading Democrat of Cherokee County.[84] It was difficult to determine the effect the Negro miners had upon the political structure of the area until the election of 1900, but as a rule the Democrats and Populists were opposed to the Negro miner, and the Republicans were either in favor of his coming or did not care. This attitude toward the strike and the Negro miners was expressed in a clipping from The Farmers Advocate in the Scammon Miner which suggested that miners "leave the mines to the negroes and dig up the ground in the air."[85]

Two United Mine Workers officials in District #14 were active enough as Populists to merit mention in Nugent's Tolerant Populists, Hugh Reid and Hugh Bone. One other local figure, Jack McLaughlin the Irish humorist from Scammon, was listed as the Socialist candidate for State

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83 Governor's Correspondence: D. W. King to Stanley, May 18, 1899.

84 Nathaniel Thompson Allison, ed., History of Cherokee County Kansas and Representative Citizens, 216, 406-420.

85 Scammon Miner, July 14, 1899.

Representative.[86] The fact that a majority of the men on both sides of this controversy were active politicians injects certain political overtones into the controversy, particularly as the election of 1900 approached.

One of the major problems faced by the Negro miner was his color. The question of "race" was never an important part of the question of the miner but it was omnipresent. As Booker T. Washington stated, "Strikers seem to consider it a much greater crime for a Negro . . . to take the place of a striking employee than it was for a white man to do the same thing."[87] This was true to a certain extent in the Kansas mines but not as much as, perhaps, it was elsewhere. In Kansas it was not so much the question of a Negro miner replacing a striking white miner, but of a miner replacing a striking miner. On this point, minor as it seems, a great deal of antipathy was built.

Actually the worst aspect of the race question in Southeast Kansas was the stereotyped Negro: the low, reckless, irresponsible, shiftless darkey, never granted recognition and treatment as an individual man. There were numerous instances of a Negro's arrest only to be later released because the officials discovered that he was the

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[86]Walter Nugent, The Tolerant Populists, 125, 171.

[87]Booker T. Washington, "The Negro and the Labor Unions," The Atlantic Monthly, CXI (June, 1913), 757.

"wrong" Negro. One aspect of the life of the Negro miner in a community already made uneasy by labor unrest was the constant passage of rumors of an insurrection. On September 6, for example, it was rumored that a mob of "colored miners" from Fleming were on their way to anihilate the inhabitants of Chicopee. This rumor caused great "consternation." It was the opinion of the Headlight that the rumors had been spread to heighten racial enmity or as a practical joke.[88]

One disadvantage under which the Negro labored, in a situation of wildly flying rumors, was that his color made his appearance inevitable. The presence of twelve Negroes in a crowd, according to Spero and Harris, made them "appear like one hundred."[89] Following on this statement, a train with ten to fifteen Negroes in one car could quite easily look in passing like "150-175, or at least a 'coach full'." A participant, Ben White, summed up the race issue very well in one sentence, "The white miners were not particularly hostile, but the fact that we were Negroes didn't help anything."[90]

The reception of the Negro miners by their "colored brethren" was highly individualistic in nature. For the

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[88]Pittsburg Headlight, September 7, 1899.

[89]Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, 132.

[90]Personal Interview: Ben White, June 4, 1965.

most part, however, the overall reaction was favorable. The only adverse comment by local Negroes against the Alabamans was made by Negro Union miners. In Fleming, on or about June 25, an incident occurred to characterize this reaction. On that evening Henry Scott and several other miners from Western #7 went into Fleming from the stockade to an infamous local tavern operated by a Mrs. Possing. In the process of securing a drink, the Western miners came in contact with several striking miners, Ephriam Holloway, Isaac Starr, and Steve Davis. The striking miners assailed Scott and his friends for being at work, and subsequently a palpable conflict developed. Scott retreated toward the stockade in the face of growing opposition. When he was fifty yards from its security, Starr fired at him with a shot gun, and the peppered number four shot inflicted flesh wounds. The firing attracted a crowd both inside and outside the stockade, but further violence was prevented by company and Union officials.[91] A similar incident occurred in Yale a month later. John Yarborough, a local resident and operator of a tavern, fired upon an Alabaman, living in Litchfield, inflicting minor wounds.[92] These incidents were

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[91] Pittsburg Kansan, June 29, 1899. Cherokee Sentinel, June 30, 1899. Weir City Journal, June 30, 1899.

[92] Pittsburg Kansan, July 27, 1899.

further corrobated by Dave Williamson who related that "every now and then some Negroes from the stockade would wind up in the cemetery."[93]

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[93]Personal Interview: Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

CHAPTER IV

ASSIMILATION OF THE NEGRO MINER INTO THE LABOR FORCE OF SOUTHEASTERN KANSAS

For the average Negro coal miner introduced into Southeast Kansas in June of 1899, it was not a matter of choice whether to join the United Mine Workers or to stay with the companies. It was a matter of survival. Native whites and the Negroes who had come in 1893, could afford to stop working for the "Big Four", more easily than the emigres could. The Negro miner was, as Hugh Wilson put it, "stuck." He had no money with which to return to Alabama, and although a few did return home, the idea, to most Negro miners, was repugnant. They had come to Kansas in search of a better life, and they were unwilling to abandon that search in the face of adversity.[1] Sol Hester told of his feeling when he learned of the strike: he "had been fooled and made to look foolish." Nevertheless, he thought it better to feel foolish than to risk leaving the protection of the company for the Union, which was then an unknown quantity.[2]

The course of the strike and of the court battle, as it turned out, was favorable to both the Negro miner in the

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[1]Personal Interview: Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

[2]Personal Interview: Sol Hester, December 13, 1964.

employ of the company, and his organized brothers. In June, the tension of the situation had been lessened by the signing of the other operators in the Southeast Kansas fields. The settled mines allowed the men to double up in the Union mines to aid their striking neighbors. This aid in addition to the strike relief donated by the United Mine Workers prevented the strike from becoming more serious than it might have been.

By October 19, the Pittsburg Kansan could remark that "it would be well to remember that the strike is still in progress."[3] John P. Reese had optimistically reported to the national office in late August, that "the 'Big Four' will soon be in a bottle and I wish to be there and help put in the cork."[4] Unfortunately, however, Reese was too zealous in organizing Negro miners and on October 23, was served with a summons for contempt of court. According to the District Court, Judge Williams, he had violated the injunction. The so-called "Reese Case", was significant for the legal footing of organized labor, but to the Negro miner it was not very important. Reese was convicted of contempt, fined $100 and immediately confined in the Bourbon County jail at Fort Scott on November 30.[5]

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[3] Pittsburg Kansan, October 19, 1899.

[4] Evans, History of the United Mine Workers, II, 472.

[5] Pittsburg Headlight, October 24, November 30, 1899.

The conviction was immediately appealed, on December 15, Judge Thayer of St. Louis granted Reese a writ of habeas corpus, and he was released on $3,000 probationary bail. Reese did not, however, stay out of District #14 as suggested by Judge Williams of Fort Scott.[6] Early in 1900, O. T. Boaz, soliciter for the defense, filed a motion to dissolve the injunction. This attempt failed, and on April 24, 1900, the temporary injunction was made "permanent and perpetual."[7]

Plaintiff appealed the discharge of Reese to the United States Court of Appeals. On March 28, 1901, the court, sitting in St. Louis, handed down a decision sustaining the judgment of the Circuit Court. Judge Adams held that it had not been demonstrated that Reese had conspired to injure the property of the company in his conversations with the Negro miners.[8]

The end of the four suits by Cherokee County suffered a more ignominous demise. They had generally been ignored throughout the strike and had completely failed to accomplish their objective. On September 7, 1900, T. N. Sedgewick of the Missouri Kansas and Texas Railway Company placed

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[6]Scammon Miner, December 19, 1899.

[7]Western Coal and Mining Company v W. T. Wright et. al., Final Record.

[8]Sixteenth Annual Report of Kansas Bureau of Labor 1900, 316.

the capstone on them by notifying Judge A. H. Skidmore in Columbus, Kansas, that he ratified the agreement to dismiss the injunction against the Southwestern Coal and Improvement Company, provided the county would pay the court costs, and the company would waive all claim for damages.[9]

In wrapping up the loose ends of the "Big Four" strike in Southeast Kansas one should recall the rejoinder in October, 1899, and remember that the strike was still in progress. Following the conviction and subsequent release of John P. Reese, little was heard of the strike until late May of 1900. The "Big Four" were apparently ready to settle their differences. On May 15, W. H. Barrett, leasor of a Kansas and Texas mine, offered his employees a contract. This was the initial move that ended in complete settlement in June of 1900. The last company to sign, Southwestern Coal and Improvement, acceded to Union demands on June 25.[10]

The contracts secured from the "Big Four" contained all the more salient points desired by the United Mine Workers. The contract with the Western Coal and Mining Company made and entered on June 4, 1900, was representative of the four. No discrimination was to be made between Union and non-union miners, no employee was to be discharged "for

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[9]Letter, September 7, 1900. T. N. Sedgwick to A. H. Skidmore.

[10]United Mine Workers Journal, May 30, June 7, 14, 1899; Pittsburg Kansan, June 21, 1899.

being or not being a member of the Union." The wage scale was similar to those non-union miners had been receiving, and the Company agreed to negotiate any grievances outside running hours. It is significant that four of the Union representatives who signed the contract were Negroes from Alabama: J. L. White, G. W. Reid, A. F. VanHood, and Peter Hibbs.[11]

The Negro miner in one year had gone the complete circle. The Alabaman Emigree had entered Kansas with high hopes only to be met with walls, confusing conflicts, and harrassment. This change had been effected primarily by the conscientious efforts of the United Mine Workers to organize the Negro miner. A labor force originally intended to weaken organized labor emerged to strengthen it. This process of Unionization was neither rapid nor easy. It was slow and, at times, painful for both organizer and organized.

The organization of the Negro miner in Southeast Kansas was not unique in the history of the United Mine Workers. Considering the general discussion of the organization of bituminous coal, above, it was evident that the United Mine Workers were, indeed, serious in their attempts to organize all persons engaged in the mining industry, regardless of ethnic characteristics. The constitution, drafted in 1900, (Article VI, Section 2) stated that no

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[11]Fifteenth Annual Report of Kansas Bureau of Labor 1899, 466.

member of the organization who held a current membership card would be "debarred or hindered from obtaining work on account of race, creed or nationality."[12]

Officials of locals in Southeast Kansas had only one course of action if they were to adhere to their constitution--to organize the Negro miner. The officers were aware of this situation, and five days before the Negro miners arrived, on June 10, 1899, John G. McLaughlin of Scammon, in an open letter notified the "Big Four" that if they did proceed in their plans, as outlined, to use Negro miners, the Union would act accordingly. "For every three, you succeed in getting to work under present conditions in your mines [the United Mine Workers] will enlist two under the banner of the Union before they [have] paid you for their transportation."[13] This statement accurately predicted the course of the strike. The organization of the Negro miners began in some mines before the companies had collected for the advanced transportation, and a year later, about sixty-five per cent of the Negro miners belonged to the Union.

Organization of the conscientious Negro miner was not characterized by force or violence, but by decision of the miners after considering the alternatives. The initial

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[12]<u>Proceedings United Mine Workers of America, 1900</u>, 26.

[13]<u>United Mine Workers Journal</u>, June 22, 1899.

peaceful meeting for the purpose of organizing the Alabamans was held in Fleming on June 17, 1899. This meeting was arranged by the Union, and Negro and white miners and their families attended. E. B. Harris, cashier for the Kansas and Texas in Weir City, reported that the families "mixed and mingled one with the other and enjoyed the same social intercourse in common and equal hospitality." The Negro miners were said to have been "well-dressed and well-behaved."[14]

The Negroes who attended this and other meetings until mid-July were those who had remained outside of the stockade upon their arrival in Southeast Kansas. Following the June 17 meeting in Fleming, they were permitted to draw rations from the Union commissary. There was strong evidence that some of the Union members were sympathetic to the predicament of the Negro miner uponhhis arrival, not only because of the hardship he would face without Union aid but also because of the hardship the Union member would be required to bear if conditions forced all the emigres to work for survival.[15]

Early in the drive for organization, certain Negro miners exibited a propensity for leadership. One such individual appeared before a Union meeting on June 21. The

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[14]State of Kansas v Kansas and Texas Coal Company, Affidavits of E. B. Harris. See also: Personal Interview: W. E. Matthews, February 11, 1965.

[15]Pittsburg Headlight, June 17, 1899.

officers present judged him to be a "sharp and shrewd man", and a "leader among the negroes brought up here." This man, unnamed in the reports of the meeting, stated that his people did not "wish to make any body's condition bad or worse than their own," so they had stayed out of the stockade. This man was also a veteran of the Cuban war.[16]

In one respect, the question of organization was an exemplary manifestation of the individuality of the Negro miner. The Negro miners were not unanimous either for or against organization. Abram Harris, in The Black Worker, stated that Negro leaders such as ministers frequently counseled Negroes to avoid the efforts of their white counterparts to organize them.[17] Southeast Kansas proved to be no exception. At a large meeting held in the Fleming stockade, Western #7, on June 25, the Reverend William Elston of Birmingham advised his listeners to continue working. His reasoning is fascinating. Elston, expressing a nationalistic point of view, stated that it was the foreigner who was the enemy of the Negro, and because of the number of foreigners in the Union, it should therefore be avoided. He concluded in part,

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[16]Ibid., June 21, 1899.

[17]Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, 129.

> Our fore-parents tilled the soil, and shed their blood and helped make this country what it is . . . then why should we not be allowed to work for whom we please, when we please, and at any price we please? Why should we be led by a set who have only been in this country a few years and cannot speak the English language? . . . I say let us work or die in the effort.[18]

This expression, not only anti-union, but anti-foreign, was not to be the only voice raised against the organization of the Negro miner, but it would prove to be in the minority.

The initiation fee for the United Mine Workers had before the strike been approximately $3.00, ranging upward to $5. To encourage the Negro to join, this notice was posted on August 3:

> ATTENTION MINERS, MINEWORKERS, You are hereby notified that on next Tuesday night, August 8th, you can be admitted into full membership in the UMWA on the payment of fifty cents as fee. After that date the admittance fee will be increased. All miners and mineworkers are earnestly invited to join the order.[19]

From the appearance of this handbill, into the fall of 1899, organization proceeded at a slow but steady pace. By September 10, Reese was able to report that "the strikers [are] re-gaining ground." One week before he was served with the summons for agitating the miners and endangering company property in Yale, Reese reported that "the clouds

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[18]Pittsburg Plain Dealer, June 25, 1899.

[19]Pittsburg Kansan, August 3, 1899.

are beginning to clear away . . . a better and more friendly feeling is being worked up between the strikers and the men who have been imported in here by the Big Four, many are quitting and joining Union camps." Reese also reported that some of the Alabaman miners did not have to join the order: they merely had to produce their paid up membership cards from their home locals.[20] There were not, however, very many in this class.

In the heat of the "Reese Case", the miners of District #14 held a delgate convention. One of the several resolutions passed dealt with the problem of the Negro miner. "We recommend that each local union see to it, that at no union shaft in this district any brother be discriminated against because of race, color, nationality, or religion."[21] This and similar acts on the part of the United Mine Workers marked the beginning of an attempt by the Union to secure mining employment for the Negro, outside the mines of the "Big Four."

The effect of these efforts of the organized miners was descernible in the number of men working in non-union shafts. In late November, 1899, the United Mine Workers Journal reported that the drive for organization had been

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[20] United Mine Workers Journal, September 10, October 26, 1899.

[21] Pittsburg Kansan, November 2, 1899.

so successful that the force in the mines of the "Big Four" was "almost depleated."[22]

The incarceration of national organizer John P. Reese did not act as a deterant to the organization. Reese emerged from his confrontation with the Federal Court a martyr for the cause of organization. On December 13, union miners braved a severe snowstorm to hold a meeting on the spot in Yale where Reese had been apprehended.[23]

One aspect of the conflict only briefly referred to above was the animosity between the Knights of Labor and the United Mine Workers in Southeast Kansas. In this area, the "Big Four" companies recognized the Knights as a bargaining agent because they [the Knights] did not recognize the existence of a strike. Apparently several of the Negro miners were still affiliated with the Knights when they came to Kansas and the companies capitalized on this fact. From August to November 1899, to slow the United Mine Workers of America, the Knights were active in behalf of the companies. One indication of this activity occurred in early August: George Hinton, an Alabama miner, attended a Knights of Labor convention in Arkansas City as a delegate from Local Assembly 2002 of Weir City, Kansas. The following week he was appointed assistant pit boss in Western #7

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[22] United Mine Workers Journal, November 30, 1899.

[23] Ibid., December 21, 1899.

at Fleming. Throughout the months of August and September, this local held regular meetings every Thursday evening at 7:30 in Boyd's Hall in Weir City. "Visiting brothers [were] cordially invited to attend." On Labor Day, 1899, there were two mammoth picnics in the Weir City area, one sponsored by the United Mine Workers, the other by the "Big Four" for the Knights of Labor. It is significant that George W. Hinton was secretary in charge of arrangements, Matthew G. Reed presided and Reverend Elston argued that the Republicans were the true friend of labor. Several anti-populist speeches were made, and after a barbecue, there was dancing to a string band. At this meeting it was also announced by T. B. McGregor that Governor Stanley would not be able to attend.[24] Apparently Reed and McGregor were the primary leaders of local opposition to the organization of the Negro into the United Mine Workers. Later in the fall, John Mitchell cautioned W. R. Fairly to "keep an eagle eye" on this same pair in Alabama where they were then attempting to secure additional labor for the "Big Four" mines.[25]

Robert M. Goodman, a Knights' representative, assailed the United Mine Workers for being Populists and Democrats. He asserted that he had found the Republican party to be

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[24] Weir City Journal, August 4, September 8, 1899.

[25] Mitchell Letters, John Mitchell to W. R. Fairly, October 4, 1899, Birmingham, Alabama.

"a party of progress and individual liberty." He maintained that the Knights saw no strike, no work stoppage, and that the "Big Four" contract was the best in the state. The United Mine Workers became severely annoyed by this harrassment and on September 21 Reese and Boston appealed to the Knights "to just lay [sic] still and they would get something out of the Big Four."[26] In October, it was reported that T. B. McGregor had organized several Knights of Labor in the Weir City vicinity, but beyond this, the Knights were never again any threat to the United Mine Workers.[27]

The slow process of organization continued throughout the winter of 1899-1900, and by March, John Manning of Weir City was able to report that the "imported men" were no longer doing the United Mine Workers any harm.[28] The union, firmly resolved to "join hands with the noble army of industry . . . in the march for the human emancipation and higher civilization," waited for the collapse of the "Big Four" in Southeast Kansas. In late May, they were rewarded when contracts were drawn up with the first clause stating that there would be "no discrimination between union and non-union."[29] Their campaign had succeeded.

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[26] Weir City Journal, September 15, 22, 1899.

[27] United Mine Workers Journal, November 2, 1899.

[28] Ibid., March 15, 1900.

[29] Pittsburg Kansan, May 3, 24, 1900.

Following the signing of the four contracts, the miners all returned to work, and the organizing increased its tempo. Throughout 1900 and into the spring of 1901 there was little change in local conditions. A correspondent reported from Chicopee in April, 1901, that the mines were "in splendid condition," and that the only problem was a shortage of flats. The mines in Fleming were also in splendid condition. Local Union 469 had elected Isaac Starr, an Alabama Negro miner, its president. In a letter to the Journal, Starr reported that the work in Fleming was "pleasant and unionized."[30]

In less than two years, Negro miners had become Union miners, working under a union scale contract, and holding offices of authority in their brotherhood. One man perhaps more than any deserves individual treatment here. He was Milton Reed, Negro orator. The national office of the Mine Workers Union thought Reed was important enough to be discussed in their Journal, and on July 25, 1901, Reed was featured on its front page. Below his picture was a comprehensive sketch of his career in the Union.

Milton Reed, born in Selma, Alabama, in 1875, moved to Jefferson County at the age of five, and in 1893, came to Crawford County, Kansas. "By close application [he] became a good miner and worker in the ranks of labor." Reed

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[30]United Mine Workers Journal, April 25, 1901.

mined coal in the Weir City district for nine years and "gradually became prominent in the work of persuading and encouraging the work of the Mine Workers' Union." When the Negro miners began to arrive in June, 1899, Reed was appointed temporary National Organizer. The Journal reported that Reed, "made such headway, and displayed such oratorical powers that in 1901 he was made one of the National organizers."[31] Milton Reed had in Southeast Kansas disproved Booker T. Washington's charge that the Negro was "weak as an organizer."[32]

Contemporary sources and Reed's personal acquaintances confirmed the Journal's statement that he was "one of the best posted men in the District, and certainly the best posted colored organizer in the State." Dan Freeman, two years older than Reed, proudly stated that "of course he knew him; he has sat right here in this very house."[33]

Even prior to the arrival of the Negro miners, Reed had been active. On May 22, 1899, he presided at a meeting held in Yale to vote on the question of work suspension.[34] In no meeting was he ever accorded a second seat; he was an

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[31] Ibid., July 25, 1901.

[32] Booker T. Washington, "Weakness and Strengths of the Negro Race," Review of Reviews, VI (September, 1897), 334.

[33] Personal Interview: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964.

[34] Pittsburg Headlight, May 22, June 25, 1899.

organizer. Proof that Reed was both a miner and an organizer was found in the 1900 United Mine Workers constitution: "The president shall appoint . . . organizers and workers . . . in the field as may be required." More specifically, in Section VII, Article 3: "President shall not employ any organizer or agent who is not a miner . . . and a member in good standing of a local union.[35] Milton Reed was a hard working miner.

On July 22 in Kirkwood, Reed cautioned the Union miners that if their object was to exclude the Negro, he would have to object "as they might drive him out."[36] In August, Reed was sent by the national office to organize in the districts of Lexington and Richmond in Missouri.[37]

On Labor Day, at the United Mine Workers picnic, in Pardon B. Smith's grove one mile south of Weir City, Reed was one of the main speakers. He suggested a boycott of the "Big Four" mines coal.[38]

In 1901, the Journal reported that the settlement of the strike was to his credit, that "it was largely due to his efforts that . . . these men were enlisted in the ranks

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[35] Proceedings United Mine Workers of America 1900, 40, 50.

[36] Weir City Journal, July 23, 1899.

[37] United Mine Workers Journal, August 10, 1899.

[38] Cherokee Sentinel, September 9, 1899.

of organized labor and made friends of the cause."[39] His efforts were not limited to organization; he was also successful in negotiation. On October 13, 1900, Milton Reed signed a United Mine Workers of America contract with the Home-Riverside Coal Mining Company of Kansas City, Missouri, as representative of the District Board.[40] His efforts were not without recompense. For the year 1899, he was paid $260.47 for salaries and expenses and in 1901, he received $896.51.[41] Even though the Union Hall in Fleming belonged to the Western, who charged the United Mine Workers $5.00 a night for its use, the work was going well. In late June, 1901, a contract was secured with the operators of District #14 that stated (Section 23) that, "the color line shall not be a bar to employment."[42]

The Alabama Negro miner who came to Kansas in 1899, was now the Kansas Negro miner, a union member in good standing. He had assumed his place in the ranks of the organized. Local 469, with President Isaac Starr, contributed $55.30 to strikers in the anthracite strike of 1902.[43] The Negro miners who stayed in Kansas to ply their trade all became good Union men. They felt, and still feel, strongly about

[39]United Mine Workers Journal, July 25, 1901.

[40]Sixteenth Annual Report Kansas Bureau of Labor 1900, 78-79.

[41]Proceedings United Mine Workers of America 1900, 27-29; 1902, 72.

[42]United Mine Workers Journal, August 8, 1901. See also: Sixteenth Annual Report Kansas Bureau of Labor 1900, 261.

[43]Proceedings United Mine Workers of America 1903, 442.

their union ties. Dan Freeman related that

> Those Union officers were mighty good old scouts. One thing I will say about the Union, they gave me opportunity. The Mine Workers helped me pay for my own house. After organization things got a whole lot more, and better work conditions.[44]

Sol Hester and Chris Hunter both reported that they had been glad to join the union "for about fifty cents;" Ben White's father and W. B. Harris' father and brothers, Charley and Fred, all were reported to have been very strong Union members. Hugh Wilson's father, like Milton Reed, had aided in the organization.[45]

With the coal miner, conditions on top are only part of the total picture. Down under, in the pit where the miner worked eight hours each day, was actually more important to the life of a miner. In the case of the early Negro miner, it was even more important. In the pit, the color line tended to be lost in the darkness. Robert Weaver stated in his book on Negro labor, that "segregation . . . . has generally been absent in coal mines."[46] Research in the area of Southeast Kansas had indicated that this was indeed true.

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[44]Personal Interview: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964.

[45]Personal Interviews: Sol Hester, December 13, 1964; Chris Hunter, October 9, 1964; Ben White, June 4, 1965; W. B. Harris, June 20, 1965; Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

[46]Weaver, Negro Labor, 201.

This condition of relative freedom below did not result solely from the lack of light or the considerable amount of grime a miner's face would accumulate in an eight hour shift. Perhaps this statement by John L. Lewis in 1920 best exemplifies this impalpable bond that united the mine workers: Lewis spoke of a "spiritual fealty that exists between men who go down into the dangers of the mine and work together . . . a man who works in a coal mine is not afraid of anything . . . injunctions, or politicians, or verbal castigations or slander."[47] This eloquent statement was corroborated by two independent witnesses, both veteran coal miners, both born in the deep south, both militant United Mine Workers: "Black-damp and rock-slides didn't care what color you were."[48]

In Southeast Kansas, after the labor difficulty of 1898 had subsided, the mines settled down to a period of relative peace and quiet for the Negro miner. For the most part, it made no difference to the mine owners or operators what color their coal diggers were, as long as they maintained production. There were, of course, minor inconveniences such as the monthly deductions for medical expense or rent, but these fell on white and Negro alike, and made

[47]McCarthy, United Mine Workers, 3.

[48]Personal Interviews: Sol Hester, October 14, 1964; Chris Hunter, October 9, 1964.

little difference in determining actual working conditions in the mines. There were even some small benefits accrued from the company: for a Christmas bonus in 1899, the Central Coal and Mining Company gave their employees 500 pounds of hard candy.[49]

To the organized miner, the treatment he received from his union was even more important than that from the company. Officially, the United Mine Worker stood by their members, white or Negro. One example of this was recorded in the Journal: in January, 1901, two Negro organizers, Taylor and Cook, were murdered in the Eastern field. With the aid of the United Mine Workers, the authorities apprehended the culprits, who were subsequently punished. The Union's comment at the receipt of this news was, "Cook and Taylor join Crispus Atticus as Negro blood spilled for freedom. A monument will be erected for Bros. Taylor and Cook while their foul murderers carry the brand of Cain."[50]

Not so eloquent but certainly as significant, was the statement of Thomas N. Crawford, president of District 20, in Birmingham, the home of the emigres. Crawford stated that he had "found them to be very loyal members of the organization [and that] the negroes probably gained more benefits

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[49]Weir City Journal, December 29, 1899.

[50]United Mine Workers Journal, June 6, 1901.

of the union than the white members."[51] John Mitchell remarked that "The Negroes . . . make first class Union men."[52] One retired miner in Weir City, who still had a picture of "President" Mitchell hanging on his wall, firmly asserted that "the colored made the best Union men, after they joined up."[53]

Dan Freeman generally agreed with these statements and added that he had been "accepted fine as a miner here. I was in a minority but they [the Union] gave me jobs all the way from Pit Committee to financial secretary." Mr. Freeman related a story illustrating some of the benefits gained from the Union out of the mines. One day he went into Frontenac, Kansas, a town in which no Negro was allowed, for a glass of beer. When the proprietor told Freeman that he would not be served, a white miner approached and said, ". . . this man's a Union man and aren't you going to serve him anyway." The proprietor refused, whereupon the Union miner said, "you can quit selling to me after this," and walked out.[54]

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[51] Reply to writer's letter of inquiry. Thomas N. Crawford, March 31, 1965, Birmingham, Alabama.

[52] Booker T. Washington, "The Negro and the Labor Unions," The Atlantic Monthly, CXI (June, 1913), 760.

[53] Personal Interview: Tom O'Grady, February 28, 1965.

[54] Personal Interview: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964.

Even though the Union was in charge, all was not right in the mines. Edwin Perry, secretary-treasurer of the United Mine Workers, expressed the problem: "It is possible that misguided individuals may, in some isolated instances discriminate against the Negro."[55] This was also true of the fields of Southeast Kansas. Hugh Wilson, an experienced miner, stated that the treatment of the Negro miner depended entirely upon the individual mine, that some mines simply "refused to work colored." One of these mines bore the suitable title of the "White Elephant." Mr. Wilson recalled that any discrimination he had experienced in the shafts was completely impalpable, discrimination that could not be taken up with the pit committee because of lack of proof. For example, the pit boss could give one miner a room with a fault or with a "horse-back"* to cross, while saving prime digging places for his friends. Wilson concluded that "by and large, though, the Union was completely fair."[56]

The treatment of Negro miners by their co-workers was generally the same as that of the Union. The better part of the white miners considered the Negro primarily as a coal

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[55]Booker T. Washington, "The Negro and the Labor Unions," The Atlantic Monthly, CXI (June, 1913), 761.

[56]Personal Interview: Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

*"Horse-back." A vein of dirt separating two seams of coal.

miner. In areas worked mostly by Negro miners, there was a more negative reaction against foreign-born miners than against the American Negro. A retired miner-merchant in Chicopee reported that he "would rather work with a [Negro miner] than an Italian miner, any day of the week."[57] Frank Collins, who was born and grew up in Fleming, asserted, "The Negroes became the best miners in the whole area, with practice."[58]

Two miners in 1899 swore to signed affidavits for the Kansas and Texas in their struggle against Cherokee County. These affadavits stated that the miners, Jasper Graham and E. S. Nevius, of Litchfield and Yale respectively, had worked closely with Negro miners for six years in the mines and had found them, generally, to be hard working men, as "peaceable as any like number of miners white or black."[59]

As with the Union, not all men were pleased with the Negro miner. One example of several clashes occurred in July, 1899, when Alex Wilson beat Clyde Berry with a pit-whip.[60] Two unnamed miners reported to the Kansas Commissioner of Labor in December, 1899, that the most objectionable

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[57]Personal Interview: Charlie Neigsch, February 18, 1965.

[58]Personal Interview: Frank Collins, February 21, 1965.

[59]State of Kansas v Kansas and Texas Coal Company.

[60]Pittsburg Headlight, July 17, 1899.

feature of working in the Southeastern Kansas mines was the presence of "negroes, and all paupers."[61] Perhaps the best way to get the truth about race relations in the mines is to consult participants. Dan Freeman reported that he had once taken a young boy into his workings when he saw the boy was new in the mine. After several days of instruction, the young man told Mr. Freeman that his father had severely reprimanded him for working with a Negro miner; the boy had replied to his father, "I always heard you say that colored people would steal, but that man down there, he is helping me out, . . . [even though] you taught me never to work with a colored man."[62]

In Southeast Kansas in 1899 the largest employers of the Negro were coal mine operators. Many factors motivated the Negro to work in the mines. One reason was practical economics. The mines provided a good living for a hard working miner, not luxurious but bearable. At no other industry in the area could the Negro secure so good a living. Reverend J. M. Austin had been aware of this when he preached his sermon, on June 25, on the text of John 4:35: "Let every Negro in the Southland who are weary and tired come to the companies and they will give work and rest." Reverend Elston had stated a similar belief: "Can not they find

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[61] Fifteenth Annual Report Kansas Bureau of Labor, 1899, 226.

[62] Personal Interview: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964.

here the Eden of the twentieth century?"[63] Reverend Austin indicated that he was sending back to Alabama for more people to re-locate in the Kansas fields. In August, 1899, according to the Birmingham News, Tobe Moore had returned to Alabama "for the purpose of securing more colored miners."[64]

In addition to the simple economic reality of the importance of the mines to the Negro was the matter of working conditions. The individual miner was fairly independent of any control once he was in his "room". After the pit boss assigned the miner a place to work, it was the miner's own responsibility to work or not. He was paid by the number of cars he filled, not by the color of his skin. A slack miner did not receive as much pay as did an industrious miner. Mr. Freeman was proud of his ability as a "coal-digger", and his claims were corroborated by an independent witness [W. B. Harris] who had worked with him in the mines. Freeman put it proudly: "Lots of people claimed I was a pretty good miner. I always topped the sheet as a rule. I was a greedy miner. I hated to see the sun go down." Freeman liked the relative freedom of the pit, also: "If there was any shortage of cars--some of the men would sing

[63]Pittsburg Plain Dealer, June 25, 1899.

[64]Birmingham News, August 17, 1899.

out, 'Let's go home,' and we would all pack up and go home."[65]

W. B. Harris, born in Dolomite, Alabama, stated that "the only job [he] ever enjoyed", was mining coal. Harris liked the equal treatment: "Any grievance could be taken up with the pit committee and pit boss." And he enjoyed the freedom: "you could dig as fast as you felt like, there was no one looking down your shirt collar." Harris lived a distance from the mine where he worked and on mornings if he were late, he reported that "the white drivers would take my mules down the cage and have them harnessed when I got there." Some of those drivers were still his friends in 1965.[66]

All the evidence compiled in this study on the Negro in Southeast Kansas is in perfect accord with the statement by Professor George Surface of Yale University in 1909: "The maximum producing Negroes are on a par with the maximum producers of all other classes."[67]

Besides work as a regular miner, the Negro was drawn to the dangerous job of shot-firer. A shot firer was paid by the day, considerably more than the average miner received, and had more hours off than on.[68] Sol Hester was a licensed

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[65]Personal Interview: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964.

[66]Personal Interview: W. B. Harris, June 20, 1965.

[67]George T. Surface, "The Negro Mine Laborer," 341.

[68]Personal Interview: Frank Collins, February 21, 1965.

shot-firer but resumed regular mining after a narrow escape from a premature shot.[69] That the job was dangerous and that many Negroes were shot firers is attested to by accident reports filed by the Kansas State Mine Inspector. In 1899: "July 31, Kansas and Texas #18, George Reid, col, Weir City. Shot-firer, premature explosion, burned and bruised. October 10, Western #7, William James, Fleming, col. shot-firer, premature explosion burned and bruised." In 1900: "Central #9, Fatal. W. C. Scott. Central #15. Samuel Guy, colored miner, 50 years old, large family." "George Oliver, a negro employed in CC & C No. 11, fatally burned by an explosion of powder last week."[70]

Not all Negro miners stayed in Kansas; by 1910 the number had dropped to 619 in Southeast Kansas.[71] One area to which some miners migrated from Kansas was New Mexico. In 1900, large tracts of undeveloped coal lands in New Mexico were beginning to be developed. Throughout the spring of 1900, weekly advertisements appeared in the United Mine Workers Journal, extolling the virtues of the New Mexican coal fields.[72] On March 19, 1900, 150 Negro miners left Pittsburg for Raton, New Mexico, under the

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[69] Personal Interview: Sol Hester, October 9, 1964.

[70] Annual Report Kansas Mine Inspector 1899, 135; 1901, 51.

[71] Negro Population, 509.

[72] United Mine Workers Journal, March 5, April 12, 1900.

direction of S. A. Driver, mining engineer for the Sante Fe Railroad mines. The miners and their families were reported as all well dressed and well fed. One miner, when asked why he was leaving replied, "Well, we like to travel, and see the world, and if there is any trouble out there, we are used to it."[73] On April 20, 1900, it was reported that another 200 Negro miners departed Pittsburg for employment with the Raton Coal and Coke Company, primarily from Nelson, Yale, and Fleming.[74]

Earlier in the strike, several miners departed Yale for points in British Columbia.[75] In February, 1900, twenty-five left Scammon for Kentucky, and in March, an agent was in the area recruiting miners to work in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana.[76] Not all the Negro miners journeyed so far. Sheriff O. W. Sparks reported in August, 1899, that several of the Alabamian emigres had moved to Galena, Kansas, a lead mining camp twenty miles southeast of Weir City.[77] With a population of 580 Negroes in Galena in 1900, this is entirely possible.[78]

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[73]Pittsburg Kansan, March 19, 1900.

[74]Pittsburg Headlight, August 20, 1900.

[75]Ibid., August 28, 1899.

[76]Ibid., February 1, 1900. Pittsburg Kansan, March 8, 1900.

[77]Pittsburg Headlight, August 8, 1899.

[78]Negro Population, 97.

Those who stayed in Southeast Kansas became some of the most competent coal miners in the area. Perhaps the best indication was the organization of the Coal Valley Mining Company. This company, with mines two miles northeast of Weir City, was composed by Negro miners for Negro miners. It was capitalized at $600 by the sale of capital stock. The officers were T. E. Berry, president, Sam Hopkins, secretary, John Pittman, treasurer, and Thomas Haygood, superintendent.[79]

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[79] Pittsburg Headlight, February 3, 1900.

CHAPTER V

THE NEGRO MINER IN SOUTHEAST KANSAN SOCIETY

The Negro miner had come to Kansas from Alabama to better his condition by digging coal. After the initial confrontation with the strike situation, he began to do that. He was generally accepted by the companies, the United Mine Workers of America, and his fellow workers as a miner. He had departed Alabama not only to dig coal but to seek relief from the Southern society. The question now posed is twofold: What was the reaction of the native populace to the Negro miner, and how did he adjust to living conditions in Southeastern Kansas coal fields?

The society of Southeast Kansas was, at that time essentially Jim Crow in nature. One of the most difficult problems the Negro miner had to overcome was the stereotype of the dice-throwing, banjo-strumming, irresponsible figure, laughing and carousing on the periphery of community life. In the local press, Negroes who conformed to this pattern received excellent coverage. This item appeared on the front page of a local paper:

> Ben Simpson, a negro who lives at Yale got his Winchester and started after another negro for blood Saturday night . . . he openly declares he is a bad man with blood in his eye, and seems to be longing for some excitement. It is freely predicted that the saffron hued gent will get what he is looking for . . .

And this item appeared in the same issue on the back page: "George T. McGrath, former state mine inspector . . . stabbed Bob Halstead over the part taken by each during the late strike."[1]

Even though Clyde Fry had compared the Negro miners to pilgrims seeking a better life in freedom, they were in no way a community of saints. They were coal miners. Mine-official F. E. Doubleday swore that the "colored miners [are] on an average as law-abiding, quiet and peaceable as any class of miners . . . either white or black." W. H. Barrett, resident of Weir City and employer of miners for twenty years, testified that he knew the Negro to be "as peaceable as any other like number of miners in Southeast Kansas." Several Negro miners in Yale testified that it could not be said that there were no bad Negro miners, but that they would "average as peaceful as any number of miners picked up in a crowd in Cherokee or Crawford County."[2]

All the evidence gathered verified these statements on the character of the Negro miner. He was an individual, his behavior depended upon that individual. Questioned on this point Dan Freeman firmly stated,

> there were wild fellows in our race just like there is in yours, but they lay that on us, that we are all criminal . . . when one Negro

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[1]Pittsburg Kansan, November 29, 1900.

[2]State of Kansas v Kansas and Texas Coal Company.

> would do something they would blame all of us, all just alike. That was sure one of the bad features of our race, all the way down.[3]

Several articles in the local press provide examples of these lamentable racial stereotypes. "Jesse Brown, a well known colored miner of Litchfield, was arrested this morning on suspicion . . . because he filled the description. He was later released." Two Negroes were arrested by Constable Terrel after the Frisco depot in Fleming had been robbed. The only charge was that a man "had noticed a couple of darkies loafing around and looking suspicious on the platform." Both were released.[4] On Wednesday, August 16, 1899, the "entire police and detective force" in Weir City were "catching every tall darkey they see," because an individual of that description was wanted by the authorities in nearby Joplin, Missouri.[5]

An extensive tabulation of accounts of "shooting scrapes," and "cutting scrapes," and other activities ranging from disturbing the peace to manslaughter in the first degree, from January 1899 to January 1902, reveals that the affidavits were correct in stating that the Negro miner, on the whole, was as peaceable as any other group of miners in Southeast Kansas. Not relying merely on journalistic

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[3]Personal Interview: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964.

[4]Pittsburg Headlight, July 8, 1899.

[5]Ibid., August 16, 1899.

accounts of the "special pencil shovers" (as the editor of the Kansan put it), who could not "afford to confine themselves to facts," this writer turned to the Trial Dockets of Cherokee County.[6] This county provided an extensive record of arrests for various violations because of the dearth of sympathy for the Negro miners on the part of the County officials. A thorough examination of the accounts of arrests by the sheriff's office in Cherokee County, 1898 to 1902, revealed that with the arrival of the Negro miners there was no appreciable increase in the number of arrests or charges. A compilation of the individual arrests by race indicated that a higher percentage of white miners were arrested than Negro miners.[7]

To the charge that the Negroes were frequenters of saloons and brawlers, the letter by a resident of Weir City, August 4, 1899, to the editor of the Weir City Journal is presented. This citizen complained that the saloons in Weir City should be police-governed and moved to back streets, to prevent the "indecent and profane frothings of the patrons of a dozen hell-holes."[8] It is significant that Negro miners in Weir City were not encouraged to use the local tavern facilities.

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[6]Pittsburg Kansan, June 22, 1899.

[7]Trial Dockets, Cherokee County Kansas, 1898-1902.

[8]Weir City Journal, August 4, 1899.

Dave Williamson reported that as a boy in Fleming he recalled seeing a "little war," between John Rawlins and Bert Boyer, two defendants in the case of Western Coal and Mining Company v W. T. Wright et al. The action in this case involved one emptying his .38 through the ceiling, and the other getting hit in the face with a broken glass.[9] Sol Hester testified that in the northern field "everything was generally quiet until pay day when there was always shooting and killing." The allegation has frequently been made that the Negro miners always went heavily armed. On this point Hester maintained firmly that if the Negro miner "wanted to go any place [on pay day] a whole group had to go carrying clubs and guns to protect ourselves."[10]

One piquant aspect of this investigation revealed that while some white witnesses felt Negro miners were disreputable, the converse was also true. Hugh Wilson related that some of the white miners and their families "really lowered the moral standing of the camps," adding that families of some white miners were allowed to do things that his father never would have permitted.[11]

In filing the Cherokee County petition for an injunction to prevent the "Big Four" from using Negro labor,

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[9]Personal Interview: Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

[10]Personal Interview: Sol Hester, October 9, 1964.

[11]Personal Interview: Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965. See also: Pittsburg Headlight, August 17, 1899.

Sheriff O. W. Sparks charged that this labor would greatly burden the tax structure of Cherokee County. Late in July, 1899, residents of Scammon resolved that the county hold the "Big Four" accountable for any expense incurred in the control of the Negro miners.[12] The only unusual expense incurred by Cherokee County as a result of the use of the Negro labor was that accumulated by the Sheriff's traveling from one camp to another investigating the companies. On September 13, Sparks presented the County Commissioners an expense account for $233.00, (including such items as horse feed .60¢, board two days, $4.00, and train fare between Columbus and Weir City). Failing to receive any reimbursement, Sparks filed suit against the County Commissioners. County Attorney Stephens informed him, however, that his services had not been of an "Extraordinary Character," and that he did not "state facts sufficient to constitute a cause of action."[13] The briefest and most accurate summation of the general social situation of Southeast Kansas was expressed by two individuals who were there, Clyde Fry and Sol Hester. Independently, they stated that, "It was a lawless era all the way around,

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[12] Scammon Miner, July 21, 1899.

[13] O. W. Sparks v The Board of County Commissioners of Cherokee County.

black or white, people can always make conditions worse than they really are."[14]

In reality, working and living conditions in the mining camps were inextricably intermeshed. For the purposes of a detailed examination of the Negro miner, however, these conditions have been separated and further delineated into categories.

Housing for the Negro miners was of primary importance. Initially, they were tented in stockades, but as the strike developed, it became evident that the stockades were not accomplishing their purposes and had become unnecessary. The time had come for the companies to locate homes for their Negro miners. The Western Coal and Mining Company was the first to act. In Yale, their initial action on July 9 was to convert an old skating rink into a boarding house for unmarried miners.[15] Sol Hester was one of the boarders, and his most vivid memory of the house was the meals. He reported that the company would kill a beef, remove the choice cuts, and give the remainder to the cook at the boarding house. "They would have boiled beef and potatoes and coffee. All you could eat for thirty-five cents; always plenty to eat at the house."[16]

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[14] Personal Interviews: Clyde Fry, December 12, 1964, and Sol Hester, December 13, 1964.

[15] Pittsburg Headlight, July 10, 1899.

[16] Personal Interview: Sol Hester, December 13, 1964.

In Fleming, the location of the large #7 stockade, Negro miners were assigned to company houses in the town proper and were given orders to move their effects on July 11, 1899.[17] By July 21, it was reported that all of them had moved from the stockade into company houses.[18] To the south, in Scammon, The Central Coal and Coke Company began tearing down their stockade in the first week of August and building houses with the material. By August 19, Central had eighty new houses started in the vicinity of #18.[19] To expedite their construction in Fleming, Western hired a contractor from Cherokee. The Kansas Homestead proudly reported on December 23, 1899, that A. R. Van Horn had two thirds of the contract completed.[20] Completing the construction of houses in January, 1900, a correspondent from Nelson was able to report that "Every house. . . was full of colored men."[21]

The housing situation from late 1899 to the settlement of the strike in June, 1900, was confused. The company would automatically evict any Negro miner who joined the Union, and the Union did not have any place to house their

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[17] Pittsburg Kansan, July 13, 1899.

[18] Weir City Journal, July 21, 1899.

[19] Ibid., August 5-19, 1899.

[20] Kansas Homestead, December 23, 1899.

[21] Pittsburg Kansan, January 4, 1900.

Negro members. Evidence indicates that the Negro miners attempted to remain in company houses as long as possible.

After the settlement of the strike, the Negro miner was allowed to live in company houses. There were three main types of houses, the single, the four and the double. The single, one to two room, was used primarily for single miners who were "batching" and married men who were saving to send for their families. The four, a type still commonly seen today in Southeast Kansas, was a square house with a hipped roof, it was used either for a family or four or five unmarried miners. The largest, the double, was a two-story house with four rooms down and two upstairs. This type of dwelling was for two families, or one family who wanted to take in boarders. Rents varied from $5 to $7 per month and were deducted from miners' wages. According to one resident of Fleming, all of the Western houses were painted salmon pink, the Central houses, red and yellow. Mrs. Delaney recalled that most of the "two-roomers" had morning glories growing at either end.[22]

There is little extant information regarding the location of the homes of the Negro miner at the end of the strike in the northern field. The only information available is that they lived in Yale, Nelson, and Litchfield. In the southern field, however, a great deal of information

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[22]Personal Interviews: Frank Collins, February 21, 1965; Ethel Delaney, February 23, 1965; Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964; and Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

was available. Negro miners moved into homes on the west side of Fleming, extending a half mile west on the present Country Club road, then non-existant. These homes were located directly north of Western #7, where most of the Negro miners in Fleming were employed.[23] In the Scammon-Weir City area, most of the Negro miners were located in an area from West Weir southwest to Scammon, accesible to the large mines of the Central. In addition to the Negro areas in the mining camps themselves, a great number of Negro miners lived in the nearby towns of Cherokee, Weir City, and Pittsburg.[24]

Two witnesses who grew up in Fleming had considerable contact with the Negro homes in that area. Both of them had sold produce and milk to the miners and were frequently in the homes. These two independent witnesses stated precisely the same opinion of the Negro houses. The Negroes did not use linoleum but scrubbed their floors white, "so clean you could eat off them." The two were also both impressed by the strictness with which the Negro children were brought up.[25]

The reactions of the miners themselves toward their early company homes in Kansas was varied. Sol Hester called

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[23]Personal Interview: Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

[24]Personal Interview: Tom O'Grady, February 28, 1965.

[25]Personal Interviews: Ethel Delaney, February 23, 1965; and Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

his first house a "weather-board shack." Chris Hunter remembered that his had been "fairly nice." Dan Freeman commented that it was certainly nice when he moved into his own house.[26] Contrary to popular belief, a great many Negro miners, like Freeman, did buy their own homes in a few years. Two examples of such miners, who not only purchased their own homes but also turned to farming, were John Anderson of Weir and Hugh Wilson's father in Litchfield. Wilson had to forego mining because of his health, but his sons continued to work in the mines. His son, Hugh Wilson, related that they had found that the Company "gave better breaks to those who lived in Company houses," but that they still preferred owning.[27]

Related to housing was the question of food. As a class, nationwide, the Negro miner has maintained a high standard in the purchase of food supplies, allegedly spending 40% of his total wage on food.[28] This was true of Southeast Kansas in isolated cases.

When the Negro arrived in the care of the companies there was no question of the source of food. It was provided, prepared, and served by the company. Those who left

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[26]Personal Interviews: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964; Sol Hester, December 13, 1964; and Chris Hunter, October 9, 1964.

[27]Personal Interviews: John Anderson, December 12, 1964, and Hugh Wilson, December 12, 1964.

[28]Surface, "The Negro Mine Laborer," 339-340.

the stockades were able to draw upon the Union commissary for aid. When the stockades were abandoned, the Negro miner was given access to the infamous company store. As Ben White put it emphatically: "you know that song about the company store? It was the very truth; you did owe your soul to it." White called the company store system a hindrance to all miners, but particularly to Negro miners who were not accustomed to it.[29] Sol Hester explained the use of script:

> On the first of the month they would draw out 5, 10, 25, 50, and a dollar: blue, yellow, red and white, each one of them signified a certain amount. You would draw out all you had coming to you, then turn it back in to buy stuff with. If you had any left the next pay day you would get it in cash.[30]

Hester remembered that he had never managed to have any left over. The Negro miner who managed to secure any cash could go out into the surrounding country and purchase "chickens and eggs, real cheap."[31] Countering this is the observation by Dave Williamson that if you lived within one mile of Fleming "it was never any use to try to raise chickens."[32]

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[29]Personal Interview: Ben White, June 4, 1965.

[30]Personal Interview: Sol Hester, October 14, 1964.

[31]*Ibid.*, December 13, 1964.

[32]Personal Interview: Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

Asked about the culinary qualities of the camps, Dan Freeman commented briefly, "Food was good, if you had money to pay for it."[33] By contrast, the Wilsons, who had a farm to supplement their larder, had pork every week day and beef on Sunday.[34]

Negro miners were concerned not only with their temporal condition but also with their spiritual. John Hope Franklin, the great American Negro historian, remarked that, "socially and culturally it was more necessary for the Negro to maintain a separate existance than economically."[35] This was necessary to maintain group unity for survival in a hostile society. One agency of basic importance in maintaining this unity was the church. Kansas was no exception.

An example of the importance of the church to the Negro miner is the extended dialogues between Sol Hester and the writer on the importance and nature of the church in 1965. If the support of his religion was that strong after sixty-five years, it must have been formidable in 1900. Hester has been actively involved in the Mt. Hebron Church of Pittsburg since 1906. He repeatedly asserted that the religion

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[33]Personal Interview: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964.

[34]Personal Interview: Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

[35]Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, 419.

of the Negro miner was, "a religion of the heart, they followed their spirits."[36] In Pittsburg the Mt. Hebron Church had been founded in 1886, and the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal two years later. A corps of organized religionists was ready to assist the Negro miners when they arrived.[37]

One of the first activities of the Negro miners in Fleming was to organize a Sunday School. This they did at a large meeting under the auspices of the Western Coal and Mining Company on June 25. Of the staff, all but two were from Birmingham.[38] The Western was fully aware of the miners' need for a church in Fleming, and soon after their arrival erected a thirty by fifty foot structure immediately west of the Catholic Church, where a small number of miners attended. Local white youths revelled in disrupting Negro worship services. A favorite pastime of the boys was to watch the baptisms, held in the #3 Western shaft pond north of #7.[39]

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[36]Personal Interview: Sol Hester, October 14, December 13, 1964.

[37]Sister M. Augustine Clarahan, "The Founding and Early Development of Pittsburg," 142.

[38]Pittsburg Plain Dealer, June 25, 1899. Personnel of the Sunday School was: Superintendent, Reverend J. M. Austin; Assistant Superintendent, Reverend William Davis; Secretary, J. A. Brantly; Assistant Secretary, William Osborn; Treasurer, Miss Ellen Thomas; Teachers, William Elston, Richard Stratton, Mrs. J. A. Brantly, Mrs. M. Coleman.

[39]Personal Interviews: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964; and Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

In Weir City, Freeman recalled there had been three Negro churches will 800 attending, and in Yale there were three more: two Baptist and one African Methodist Episcopal.[40] In 1899, frequent revivals and religious meetings took place in the Negro mining community. Some local Negro religionists gained a measure of fame by their efforts. B. F. Berry of Weir City was rated "oratorical giant and Champion of Eloquence of Southeast Kansas," at the Society of Love and Amity meeting in Baxter Springs in August.[41]

Besides churches, some companies provided cemeteries. The earliest reported cemetery for Negro miners was in Fleming. Others were in the Weir City area, one south of Scammon, presently the location of an electrical transformer station and another on the land occupied by Central #6, immediately southwest of the present Weir school. In addition to these small now forgotten burial grounds was Hosey Hill Cemetery, west of Weir City. Several Negro miners were buried on the east side of this large, still operating cemetery. This is the final resting place of such men as Bill Craddock, David Mackie, W. T. Wright, and Matthew G. Reed.

For Negro miners with families, schools for their children presented an additional problem. Unfortunately the

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[40]Personal Interviews: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964, and Sol Hester, October 9, 1964.

[41]Pittsburg Plain Dealer, August 1, 1899.

records of the local school system are not available prior to 1910, according to Louis Brunetti, Crawford County Superintendent of Schools. From existing sources a partial picture of the schools in the mining towns however, can be compiled. In Weir City, in the fall of 1899, Negro mothers attempted to enter their children in school. According to Tom O'Grady, they "were run off with bricks." One of the participants received a broken nose for his efforts to exclude the Negro children.[42] To alleviate the difficulty the Weir City administration provided separate facilities. On September 29, the Weir City school registration included 763 white and forty-four Negro children.[43] Two years later, Weir City proudly reported "three fine school buildings in different parts of the city with 17 teachers.[44] The Negro school was located on the old baseball diamond, in the present city park, east of the depot. Among the first class to graduate from the eighth grade in Weir City was W. B. Harris, who maintained that at that time a Negro miner's son had three alternatives: "dig coal, go to school, or move away."[45]

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[42] Personal Interview: Tom O'Grady, February 28, 1965.

[43] Weir City Journal, September 29, 1899.

[44] Nathaniel Thompson Allison, ed., History of Cherokee County and Representative Citizens, 174.

[45] Personal Interview: W. B. Harris, June 20, 1965.

In Fleming, "the only friction between the races was between the school kids." Initially, there had been only one school there but conditions reportedly reached an impasse, and a separate school was constructed immediately south of the white school, with a board fense between. The white children were said to have been afraid of the Negro children; one witness reported that Negro children chased her home from school every night.[46] In October of 1899, a regular teacher, Charles Miller, was employed as a teacher in the Fleming Negro school.[47]

In the north field there was only one Negro school, at Yale.[48] The secondary schools of the towns surrounding the camps generally excluded Negro children until 1924. The problem was alleviated somewhat in 1912, when the Pittsburg Board of Education, perceiving that the "necessity existed for the erection of a building," provided a location and funds for Douglass school.[49] Most of the teachers in the Negro schools were local residents, in some cases the older children of miners.[50]

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[46]Personal Interview; Ethel Delaney, February 23, 1965.

[47]Pittsburg Headlight, October 21, 1899.

[48]Personal Interview: Sol Hester, October 14, 1964.

[49]Minutes, Pittsburg, Kansas, Board of Education, February 22, 1912.

[50]Personal Interview: Ben White, June 4, 1965.

Sixteen months after their arrival in Kansas, the question of the political activities of the Negro miners assumed greater importance than it had yet enjoyed. The occasion was the election of 1900.

The first indication that local politicos were aware that the Negro migration might have an impact on the political structure of Southeast Kansas appeared on May 18, 1899, in Mayor King's letter to Republican Governor Stanley. King wrote that while he was reluctant to see Negroes come to Weir City, "there [was] one redeeming feature. They are all Republicans and would displace a thousand Pops."[51] The period following their arrival produced a local manifestation of a nascent national shift of Negroes from their traditional mentors, the Republican party, to the Democratic. This shift had not yet occurred by the election of 1900 but it was beginning.

In Southeast Kansas, officials were either Democratic, Populist or Socialist. Most frequently, however, they were active participants in the "demopop" movement, also known as the Fusion party. On September 28, 1899, the "Popocratic" delegates at the regional "Demopop" convention were Hugh Bone, UMW secretary, and W. T. Wright, president of District #14.[52]

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[51] Governor's Letters, Mayor King to Stanley, May 18, 1899.

[52] <u>Weir City Journal</u>, September 29, 1899; <u>Pittsburg Headlight</u>, October 2, 1899.

Shortly before the election of 1900, John G. McLaughlin of Scammon was nominated by acclamation as the Socialist candidate for congress for the Third District.[53]

At this time, political fever ran high between Republican and Fusion parties. Sheriff Sparks, for example, publicly blamed "all the trouble" in the local mines upon the Republican party. On the opposing side, a letter in the Weir Journal held that the Democratic party "had hired the Devil to kick them and the popocratic party to bray for them."[54]

Throughout the campaign, the race issue appeared in the press. An editorial asked Governor Stanley if he believed the "whites and blacks of this country have a right to govern themselves [while] the whites and blacks and browns of the Philippines have no such right?" One week later the Kansan announced that Captain John L. Waller of the 23d Kansas Volunteers in Cuba was going to vote for Bryan.[55] This was probably an attempt to influence the Negro vote in Southeast Kansas. On November 10, the Weir City Journal charged Sheriff O. W. Sparks with hiring sixteen deputies to keep Negro miners in Coal Valley from voting.[56]

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[53]Pittsburg Kansan, July 26, 1900.

[54]Weir City Journal, October 27 and November 3, 1899.

[55]Pittsburg Kansan, September 6, 13, 1900.

[56]Weir City Journal, November 10, 1900.

It was impossible to substantiate this charge, but it is indicative of the temper of the times.

The results of the election of 1900 reveal several significant facts: State wide, the election was a Republican victory but in Crawford county, Bryan enjoyed a plurality of 103, while the Fusion candidate for governor, John W. Breidenthal, had a margin of 107 votes. In Cherokee County, Bryan received a majority of 832 votes and Breidenthal 868. In both counties local Fusion candidates were victorious. Mayor King had predicted that Negro miners would "replace a thousand Pops," but the election results proved that, while he had exaggerated, he was basically correct. In Yale, McKinley received 305 votes to Bryan's 94; Governor Stanley, 299 to Breidenthal's 99. This three to one Republican sweep held for all offices, including county commissioner. The Republican candidate for commissioner, E. F. Porter, had 295 votes to his opponents 94. In Litchfield, which also had a high percentage of Negro miners, the Republican margin was comparable. In Frontenac, by the testimony of both white and Negro a town which excluded Negroes, returns showed Republicans with only twenty-two per cent of all votes cast. In Cherokee County, which gave Bryan a majority of 823, areas in which Negro miners lived showed a strong Republican vote. This is remarkable in that Weir City was considered the center of UMW action. There Bryan carried only two precincts, and carried the city by only twenty-seven votes. The Democratic candidate for

governor carried Weir City by only fifteen votes. The number of votes for John G. McLaughlin was not recorded because "the Socialist vote was very small [about sixty] therefore it is omitted."[57] These election figures indicate that Negro miners were permitted to vote and did vote in significant numbers.

At the turn of the century, legal rights of the Negro miner in Kansas were protected, with one notable exception: the lynching of George Wells, in Weir City. At about ten o'clock on the night of October 24, 1899, Gus McArdle, Weir City bartender, was fatally shot. Four Negro miners were immediately arrested on suspicion: Dudley Payne, Mike Patton, John Anderson, and George Wells, and were secured in the local jail. At about three o'clock next morning a masked crowd held Marshall Hatton and Patrolman French in bond, secured Wells, and hanged him to a utility pole on the northwest corner of Jack Cornell's billiard hall. According to the newspaper report, murder "without a trial seemed to meet the approval of the people." The county coroner's report described Wells' demise as "death at hands of unknown parties caused by strangulation and numerous

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[57] Weir City Journal, November 23, 1900. Supplement, Official Table, Election in Cherokee County, November 6, 1900. Girard Press, November 15, 1900. Supplement, Official Canvass of Election held in Crawford County, Kansas, November 6th, 1900.

gun-shot wounds." Following the dual murders, tension ran high, but further bloodshed was avoided.[58] Curiously the murder of McArdle appeared in the Birmingham News before it made the Weir City Journal.[59]

On November 17, the Weir City Journal reported that B. M. Allen, "one of the finest lawyers in the state of Alabama" had arrived in the area to bring suit against Weir City and Cherokee County for $25,000 for the murder of George Wells.[60] No additional information could be developed on Allen and this suit, in either the records of the courts or in the local press. Evidently the suit was never prosecuted.

Cherokee County, however, pursued the murder of McArdle, and the case of State of Kansas v Dudley Payne, Mike Patton, and John Anderson was filed on December 21. On January 2, 1900, each defendant entered a plea of not guilty. Two days later, the jury reached its verdict, finding all defendants guilty of manslaughter in the first degree as charged, to be delivered to the State. The fate of these three men remains unknown.[61]

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[58] Weir City Journal, November 3, 1899; Pittsburg Kansan, November 2, 1899; Pittsburg Headlight, October 25, November 1, 1899.

[59] Birmingham News, October 31, 1899.

[60] Weir City Journal, November 17, 1899.

[61] State of Kansas v Dudley Payne, Mike Patton, and John Anderson.

Another significant move in the Negro effort to become a full citizen was the development of his own press. Prior to the arrival of the Negro miners there was only one Negro-operated paper in the area, the Parsons Blade. This two page paper for the 807 Negro residents of the "Queen City of the Prairies", thirty miles west of Weir City, made no comment on the mines of Southeast Kansas, the strike, the UMW, or the Negro miner. Casual reading of the paper yields no clue that its publishers were Negro aside from the pictures of the staff on the editorial page. The editorials, incidentally, consisted primarily of reprints of Booker T. Washingtons' speeches.[62]

The first Negro journal to appear in the coal fields was The Weir City Eagle. This paper was begun on December 29, 1899, "for the best interest of the colored people of this city."[63] Like the Parsons paper, the Eagle made no mention of race, avoiding any information at all on the Negro miner or the mines. Its one sheet carried political articles taken directly from the metropolitan papers, with no editorial policy, either Republican or Democratic, a plethora of local items, such as, "Susie Jackson visited the home of Mrs. Oliver Robinson", and appeals for advertisers and news items "of your friends and neighbors." A

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[62] Parsons Blade, passim, January 1899 to January 1902.

[63] Weir City Journal, December 29, 1899.

reader of the Eagle unacquainted with the names of local Negroes would have been unable to conclude that its publishers were indeed, Negro. This papers was short-lived.[64]

The Kansas Homestead of Cherokee, published by John Lewis began operation in December of 1899. Like the Eagle, this four-page paper had no discernable political affiliation, no news of the mines or of the county in general, and was short-lived. It published only minor locals and general national news with some space given to political action in the Philippines.[65]

Because of the nature of his work, the Negro miner had some summer leisure time in which to enjoy himself. The primary winter entertainment, according to one Negro miner, was to "sit around the monkey stove on rockers made out of two-dollar powder kegs and play cards and talk."[66]

In the summer, however, the entertainment was more varied. Activities in which the Negro miners participated depended upon their individual taste, but all can be characterized as group activities. Asked what he did in his off-duty hours, W. B. Harris replied "play ball, run around, carouse, drink whiskey, shoot craps, you know, just ordinary things." Not all miners, he maintained, were heavy

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[64]Weir City Eagle, passim, December 1899 to February 1900.

[65]Kansas Homestead, passim, December 1899 to January, 1900.

[66]Personal Interview: Sol Hester, December 13, 1964.

drinkers. "Father never allowed me in a saloon, and no one had better talk back to old man John." Beyond this brief survey of the off-duty activities, Harris commented on recreational facilities in the mining camps: "they were not really segregated, but they were just not mixed."[67]

The first entertainment in which the recently arrived Negroes participated was a celebration given by the Western Coal and Mining Company in Fleming on June 25. All the Negro miners from Weir City, Yale, Litchfield, Pinchlong, Cherokee, and Pittsburg were invited to welcome the new arrivals. It was estimated that between 950 and 1,000 attended, including many prominent white residents. At eleven o'clock in the morning, a large camp meeting was held, at which the Reverend J. M. Austin of Birmingham preached on the text of John 4:35. The Reverend J. D. Morrow, The Reverend William Elston of Chocalacco, Alabama, Mr. Pickens, and William Miller, a young Negro attorney from Pittsburg, also spoke, and "after a hearty handshake" the meeting was dismissed.

During the meeting the head cook, W. A. Walker, and his staff had prepared dinner for the guests. Lunch began at one-thirty, and "Wm. Keibe, the steward, saw to it that everyone was well served." After eating, the guests were permitted to inspect the mine (#7 Western) under the guidance of Mr. Gardner, the pit superintendent.

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[67]Personal Interview: W. B. Harris, June 20, 1965.

At three o'clock The Reverend Elston delivered a lecture on the text Ezekiel 37:3. Later, a Sunday school was organized and more speeches were given. In the evening Austin, Elston, Deacon Stratton and Miller made brief remarks. "The big crowd was let out, and everybody seemed to enjoy themselves."[68] While this peaceful assemblage was in progress, strikers near Weir City "got into a free-for-all," and three men were wounded.[69]

Meetings of this magnitude were unusual, most of the off-duty activities involved smaller groups. A universally popular activity with all miners was drinking beer. The most common form this pastime took was the "beer-club." At a late August "Big Four" sponsored picnic in Hall's grove near Weir City, a "beer and amusement club was organized."[70] One member of a "beer-club", explained it in this way: "We would all chip in one dollar and have a beer-club. We would sit around on Sunday and drink beer."[71] The universal appeal of this activity was corroborated by the testimony of a native German, Charlie Neigsch, the "strongest man in Chicopee". "On Saturday we would all go

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[68] Pittsburg Plain Dealer, June 25, 1899; Pittsburg Headlight, July 3, 1899.

[69] Weir City Journal, June 30, 1899.

[70] Ibid., August 25, 1899.

[71] Personal Interview: Sol Hester, October 9, 1964.

in and buy a keg of beer and sit around in the shade and drink it."[72]

Because of area "not-mixed" conditions, the Negro miners established their own saloons. One in Fleming was located immediately north of the Missouri Pacific tracks, across from the Western company store.[73] In Weir City the saloon was located on First South Street near the Memphis Depot.[74] A third Negro saloon was located mid-way between Scammon and Weir City.[75]

A subsidiary mining activity was dice playing. This sport was taken very seriously by some individuals. Hugh Wilson reported that as a boy in Litchfield he sold "Bull Durham sacks of sand" to dice players as amulets. Chuckling, Wilson recalled that "some of them were just stupid enough to pay $5 for them."[76]

Not all Negro miners were engaged in such pastimes. Dan Freeman maintained that he "never had any time to go out and carry on." He enjoyed staying home "raising hogs, chickens, and stuff in the garden."[77] This was true of many

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[72] Personal Interview: Charlie Neigsch, February 18, 1965.

[73] Personal Interviews: Ethel Delaney, February 23, 1965, and Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

[74] Weir City Journal, December 1, 1899.

[75] Cherokee Sentinal, September 29, 1900.

[76] Personal Interview: Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

[77] Personal Interview: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964.

miners who preferred staying at home and working in their gardens and around their homes to mixing in society. Significantly all the Negroes interviewed still had excellent gardens and cultivated them daily.

Very popular among the "urban" Negro miners were celebrations and group parties. The largest annual affair was the celebration of Emancipation Day, September 22. In Fleming on Emancipation Day in 1899, over a thousand attended the festivities. There was a band concert, ball games, dancing and Yale and Fleming horses raced. Cake finished the day. From early spring, announcements appeared in the camps of celebrations. Most of them provided "food, program, free water, air, lemonade, watermelon and transportation." In August, 1899, one such meeting was held in Pittsburg on West Fourth Street. The entertainment at this meeting consisted of three papers on the "advances of the colored race." It was reported that all the papers "showed intelligence and understanding of the subject." A Cake Walk had been planned to conclude the speeches, but it "was called off on account of the lateness of the hour." Significantly, several Negro miners, miners' wives, and daughters of miners took part in the program. These included: R. T. Berry, Mrs. Gid Lee, Miss Ella Berry, Mrs. M. L. Holman, Miss Lizzie Goodwin and Mr. H. Coles.[78]

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[78] Pittsburg Plain Dealer, July 29-31; Pittsburg Headlight, August 1, September 22, 1899.

The Cake Walk was an important part of the entertainment for both white and Negro residents of the mining area. It was frequently reported that the miners "tripped the light fantastic to a very late hour." A Mrs. Lancaster was billed as "the cake walk queen of Weir City." She was often requested to perform, and on occasion "consented to assist in the cake walk at the Opera House." It was generally the responsibility of the committee to locate "some handsome colored man to dance with her in the walk." Cake Walkers were even given special billing in entertainment advertising: "High stepping cake walkers, the best in the business will be here tonight for a swell time . . ."[79]

One feature of the Negro's life in Southeast Kansas was according to John Hope Franklin, "another manifestation of [his] struggle to become socially self-sufficient."[80] This was the organization and growth of fraternal orders and benevolent associations. In addition to the Masons, the Knights of Tabor and the Knights of Pythias competed for membership among the Negro men of the community. In Weir City, the Knights of Tabor was the first fraternal order to appear, closely followed by the Uniformed Daughters of Twelve. The first recorded meetings of these two were in

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[79]Pittsburg Headlight, May 18, November 28; Pittsburg Plain Dealer, July 31, 1899.

[80]Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, 399.

mid-August of 1899.[81] The Knights of Pythias was organized in January of 1900. The charter membership of the lodge, Morning Star #18, was fifty. The officers included The Reverend R. J. Rodgers, J. Muse, James S. Dewberry and Westly Lewis.[82] The Masons organized a Negro lodge a few years later, and it became the largest of the three.[83]

The Negro miner also enjoyed music, both vocal and instrumental. As early as July 17, 1899, some 400 miners and their families gathered in the Weir City Opera House to "sing all the late songs." Bands did not appear until the strike neared settlement in May 1900, when a Negro band was organized in Weir City.[84] On October 3, 1900, Theodore Roosevelt stopped in Pittsburg for a six-minute speech. It was reported the next day that "Teddy came and is gone . . . only the big colored band from Yale ... . helped to break the monotony. Teddy's big teeth and goggles in spite of their magnificent reputation did not prove drawing cards in Pittsburg." One month later, Negro miners at Nelson #9 organized a brass band, perhaps to share the glory of that Yale combo.[85]

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[81] Weir City Journal, August 18, 1899.

[82] Pittsburg Headlight, January 30, 1900.

[83] Personal Interview: W. B. Harris, June 20, 1965.

[84] Pittsburg Headlight, July 17, 1899; Pittsburg Kansan, May 17, 1900.

[85] Pittsburg Kansan, October 4, November 15, 1900.

The Negro miners had athletic entertainment as well as musical. Even before the brass bands and lodges were organized, the miners were playing baseball. An early report in June of 1899 stated that "they amused themselves after their arrival in ball playing."[86] Baseball in the coal camps seems to have filled a basic need. According to those who were there, most of the coal camps were built around ball diamonds.[87] The brand of baseball played by these Negro miners was one of the most popular spectator-sports in the area, and many teams were organized. The Negro teams played white teams, but the personnel were never mixed on the same team.[88]

As early as June 18, 1899, a Negro team defeated its white opponents, 15-5, at Weir City #6. Arrangements were made for a return game the next Sunday.[89] In Pittsburg the main entertainment on July 4, 1899, at Forest Park was a game between a team of Negro miners from Yale and the Pittsburg team; Yale won 26-7. Teams of miners were proficient as the scores indicate, the results of two games played Sunday, July 9, 1899, were, 32 to 19, and 20 to 14,

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[86]Weir City Journal, June 30, 1899.

[87]Personal Interview: W. B. Harris, June 20, 1965.

[88]Personal Interviews: Ethel Delaney, February 23, 1965; W. H. Matthews, February 11, 1965; and Tom O'Grady, February 28, 1965.

[89]Pittsburg Headlight, June 20, 1899.

in favor of the Negro teams. Some teams even traveled to other towns. On August 6, the Pittsburg Blues went to Carthage, Missouri, but refused to play because they were treated poorly.[90] According to a former pitcher for the Weir Rough Riders, the teams of old Alabama miners were the best, and most difficult to defeat. In addition to the Weir Rough Riders, there were the Yale Hornets, the Nelson Night Owls, and the Cherokee Flashlights.[91]

It is difficult to summarize the off-duty activities of the Negro more comprehensively than this recollection by one who was there:

> sometimes we would get up around together and drink beer on Sunday. Sometimes we would set a beer keg up there and shoot to see which one had the strongest gun, to shoot through the head of the keg. That was real sport to us. Then we would go out there and clear off a place and cast some logs there and make seats for the women in the shade and play ball. We enjoyed it.[92]

One aspect of the social assimilation of the Kansas Negro miner that is neither economic nor social in the usual sense, was the formation of Company L, 48th United States Volunteer Infantry in late September of 1899, for duty in the Philippines. From the beginning of the Spanish-American war, American Negroes had been involved. The regular army of 28,000 in 1898 included four wholly Negro organizations.

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[90] *Ibid.*, July 3, July 10, August 7, 1899.

[91] Personal Interview: W. B. Harris, June 20, 1965.

[92] Personal Interview: Sol Hester, October 14, 1964.

The initial call for volunteers included only already organized state militia units which were closed to Negroes. Under mounting pressure and military necessity, Congress authorized the activation of ten regiments of Negro soldiers, with all ranks above second lieutenant to be white.[93] These regiments played an active part in the war in Cuba. One of the second lieutenants in the Tenth United States Cavalry was Jerry White, a native of Girard, Kansas.

In the spring of 1899, Congress, faced with a need for additional troops, and expiration of emergency enlistments, chose the alternative Samuel Sewall, Puritan magistrate, had suggested 199 years before: "As many Negro Men as there are among us, so many empty places are there in our Train'd Bands."[94] The Act of Congress of March 2, 1899, authorized an increase of the Regular army to 65,000 men with 35,000 volunteers to be recruited from the country at large. Two of the volunteer regiments were to be made up of Negroes.[95]

One of the two, the 48th United States Volunteer Infantry, was ordered to be organized on September 9, 1899,

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[93]Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, 411-412, 417.

[94]Samuel Sewall, "The Selling of Joseph," in American History told by Contemporaries II, Building the Republic, 1689-1783, ed. Albert Bushnell Hart, 294.

[95]James A. Richardson, A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents IX, 6385. Cited hereafter, Richardson, Messages.

by General Order, Number 166, Adjudant General's Office. Fort Thomas, in Kentucky, was designated as the place of organization. Drill was to begin on September 25.[96] On September 14, Lieutenant White was commissioned First Lieutenant and was ordered to report to regimental headquarters at Fort Thomas.[97] There, White was assigned recruiting duty by Special Orders, Number 217, Adjudant General's Office.[98]

On September 20, White appeared in Pittsburg, Kansas, to recruit Negroes for service in the Philippines. From his recruiting office in the Broadway Hotel in Pittsburg, White reported that the "young colored men [had the] desire to don the blue and travel abroad." The Negroes who volunterred were for the most part young coal miners who had come from Alabama in June and July and had joined the UMW. The $15.60 per month with board and uniform was not the only motivating factor. Several native Negro miners had returned from service with the 23d Kansas in Cuba, and probably influenced some of the young men. Observers reported that "the majority of the recruits were from the South, hardy specimens of colored manhood." It was noted at

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[96]Regimental Returns, 48th United States Volunteer Infantry, September-October, 1899. Cited hereafter, Regimental Return.

[97]Company "L" Return, September and October, 1899.

[98]Regimental Return.

enlistment that "all those from Alabama could read and write with ease and [were] of an intelligent turn." The recruits were "blocked in dozens and twenties and looked with pity on those who did not pass the rigid exam." By September 30, White had collected sixty-three qualified volunteers and departed for Fort Thomas. After he left, sixteen more Negro miners appeared, White having announced before his departure that, if the regiment was not yet full, he would return to Pittsburg for more.[99]

The regiment had not been filled; the volunteers from Kansas had received favorable comment, and on October 4, White returned to fill the regiment. On this second effort as in the first, a majority of the troops were Negro miners for whom the "Big Four" had provided transportation. Enlistment of this second group exceeded that of the first and by October 5, sixty-five men had been signed up.[100]

On October 1, the 48th Regiment reported forty-seven officers and 1,285 enlisted men.[101] Of these, approximately 120 were Negro miners from Southeast Kansas. Most of these were assigned to Company L. The company commander, Captain John Buck, had nineteen years of continuous regular army

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[99]Pittsburg Headlight, September 21-30. Pittsburg Kansan, September 28, 1899.

[100]Pittsburg Headlight, October 5-6, 1899.

[101]Regimental Return, October, 1899.

service. His last organization and rank had been first sergeant of Troop "B", Tenth Cavalry. Company L, with 106 new men, were issued their uniforms on October 18, and the same day were marched thirteen miles to the rifle range at Visula, Kentucky. After qualifying the company with their weapons, the company moved back to Fort Thomas and reported a strength on October 31, 1899, of three officers, 102 enlisted for duty, three on special duty and one in confinement.[102]

On the very day when Lieutenant White left Pittsburg with his sixty-five new volunteers, Lieutenant Robert B. Mitchell was recruiting white men for the 40th United States Volunteers. Newspaper comment on Mitchell was that he "didn't begin to have the luck filling his list with white that White had with black."[103] The Muster Roll of Mitchell's unit from September 25 to October 31 indicates that he had secured only seven recruits in that period, all from Eureka, Kansas.[104]

In mid-November, the 48th United States Volunteers were in San Francisco awaiting shipment for the Philippines, and by December 5, President McKinley was able to announce

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[102]Company "L" Returns. See also: Records of Events, 48th United States Volunteer Infantry, October, 1899.

[103]Pittsburg Kansan, October 5, 1899.

[104]Regimental Records of 40th United States Volunteer Infantry. Muster Roll, Company E, September 25-October 31, 1899.

that "Two of these volunteer regiments . ... made up of colored men, with colored line officers . . . take the place of troops returning from the Philippines." McKinley reported that 25,388 were already in Manilla, and 14,119 were en route.[105]

An incident occurred during recruiting that may indicate one reason some Negro miners chose the Philippines to Southeast Kansas. Henry Leigh, private in the 38th United States Infantry, refused to salute a Negro Captain of the 48th while the captain was on recruiting duty in Kansas. Leigh was arrested and confined until he saluted the uniform. In uniform, the Negro miner was more easily recognized as an American, not a malevolent intruder.[106]

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[105]Richardson, Messages, IX, 6385.

[106]Cherokee Sentinel, October 6, 1899.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND AFTER WORD

"The new century was one of hope for almost everyone in America . . . There were even signs of hope for the American Negro."[1] This feeling of optimism was beginning to appear in the lives of Negro miners in Southeast Kansas as 1900 began. In half a year they had removed themselves from a prescribed "place" in Alabaman society to new and better conditions in the expanding West.

At the end of the Civil War the American Negro had been faced with an almost insurmountable task--to become an active, creative, independent member of his society by his own efforts, hindered by the opposing efforts of certain elements of that same society. Excluded from most craft unions and skilled trades, the Negro had to rely in great part, on his ability to perform heavy manual labor.

One of the best examples of this lamentable condition was the bituminous coal mining industry. The first Negro miners, appearing only five years after the end of the war, were introduced to the large Northern mines as replacements for striking Union miners as strikebreakers. Exclusive of the use of the Negro in labor-management troubles, was the development of a mining class in the South. Initially, the

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[1]Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, 426.

Negro in the mines was used only for day-labor and slack work. Gradually as the base of Southern industry broadened during the Gilded Age of industrial expansion, more Negroes became miners in their own right, but only a limited number.

With the end of political reconstruction in 1877, the Southern view of the Negro began slowly to change. The Bourbon Aristocracy was gradually supplanted by elements gaining political precedence by the use of the lower strata of Southern white society, and its fear of Negro competition. As this development began to manifest itself, the condition of the Negro grew steadily worse, particularly in the last decade of the century.

The appearance of industrial and social change pressed the Negro either into abject poverty or into "negro jobs." As the need for inexpensive labor increased in the coal mines of the South, the use of the system of convict-lease labor gained in popularity with the mine operators. Local officials also appreciated this system because it served to increase revenue, decrease the cost of operation of penal institutions, encouraged industry to locate in the area, and served to reduce the number of Negroes in the competitive labor force. Increased use of convict-labor in the mines naturally limited job opportunities for freedmen. Coupled with the growth of the Southern coal industry was the development of the iron-steel complex of greater Birmingham.

As steel production increased, the opportunity for skilled and semi-skilled labor decreased, a condition complicated by the use of foreign skilled labor.

Negroes engaged in agricultural pursuits fared little better. The ante-bellum plantation system had been broken down in name only in the post-war period. The agri-Negro, ostensibly a freeman was actually, in many cases, a peon. He was unable to better his own condition, and help was offered.

In the spring of 1899, an organized corps of men appeared in Birmingham, Alabama, employed by mining concerns to secure Negro miners for the Southwestern bituminous coal fields. Aided by Negro orators, and printed propaganda, these men extolled the glories and advantages of the Kansan scene as compared to the lamentable conditions in Alabama. These men provided not only news of a better land, but transportation to that land, and an opportunity for the Negro miner to ply his trade there. To the Alabama miner, these promises sounded like opportunity knocking on the door of freedom. Eager to reach the better land, the Negro miner boarded trains provided by the companies and set out for "Beulah-land." When he reached the Kansan fields he discovered with surprised dismay, that a coal strike was in progress, and he himself was the weapon with which the companies sought to break the strike.

The strike by the United Mine Workers of America for recognition by the mining companies was threatened by the arrival of the Negro miners, but a general confrontation between Union and companies was circumvented when all operators in Southeast Kansas, with the exception of the "Big Four" acceded to Union demands. During the ensuing period of adjustment by both white and Negro miners, approximately 65% of the Negro miners were organized into the ranks of the United Mine Workers. By December, 1899, Negro miners had joined the United Mine Workers in such numbers that their value to the company as strikebreakers was generally lost. In June, 1900, the strike was officially settled. All Union demands were granted.

While the strike had been in progress, during the later part of 1899, the Negro miner gradually emerged as a member of the Southeast Kansas mining community. The place accorded him was not one of equality but one of grudging acceptance. In the mines he was a miner, on the top he was a Negro miner. His living conditions were not officially segregated, but in the words of Dan Freeman, they were just "not mixed." His social life was generally carried on apart from that of the white community. He experienced some difficulty in entering school, some local towns, and in overcoming the stereotypes of caste, but his was a measurably better life than that of the Negro miner in Alabama.

The stockades soon disappeared completely, and the Negro miner became a "scab" only in the minds of some residents. A Mr. Ballock who came to Fleming in 1888 from Austria, leased an acre next to the stockade and moved his house there. Reported to be the "best house in town," it had a white picket fence and the first organ in Fleming. The ball-diamond was in front of the house.[2] In slightly over one year a scene of bloodshed and strike had become the site of miners' homes.

By 1901, there were approximately 750 Negro miners in Southeast Kansas, roughly 10% of 7,560 miners; the mines in Southeast Kansas were producing over 90% of the coal mined in Kansas.[3] Producing 3.8 million short tons annually in 1899, production had climbed to 4.9 million in 1901.[4] This gain had been achieved without an appreciable increase in the number of men employed which suggests that no discernable reduction in efficiency of the mining labor force appeared with the introduction of Negroes.

The 750 Negro miners who stayed were generally professional miners who took pride in their tools and their daily production. Dan Freeman when queried how many there were like him in the mines remarked laughingly, "couldn't

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[2]Personal Interview: Ethel Delaney, February 23, 1965.

[3]*Kansas Mine Inspector 1900*, 29.

[4]*Mines and Quarries*, 218.

begin to tell, but, good God, there was many of them." W. B. Harris agreed that there were "quite a few."[5] Not all of the Negroes stayed in the mines; some turned to small business endeavors. In Yale, Ben White's uncle operated a grocery-shoe store that required two rigs to keep up with the deliveries. In Weir City, the Jacksons began a store, which is still operating in 1965.[6] Other men who left the mines, but whose sons stayed in the mines, like Hugh Wilson's father in Litchfield, and John Anderson, in Weir City, turned to farming to supplement their mine incomes.[7]

Turning now to the neighbors of those Negro coal miners who stayed and became "native" residents. One of the largest concentrations of "mining" Negroes was in Fleming. Independent testimony of residents of Fleming who grew up with the Negro miners and their families shows a remarkable correlation. A compilation of their testimony reveals that Fleming residents placed no blame on the Negro for having come to Kansas. The blame, their testimony agrees, should be placed on the companies, for making the expensive mistake of trying to break the strike. Some of the Negroes who came to Fleming were reported to have been

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[5]Personal Interviews: Dan Freeman, November 23, 1964, and W. B. Harris, June 20, 1965.

[6]Personal Interview: Ben White, June 4, 1965.

[7]Personal Interview: Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

"harsh and vicious," but these all "drifted out of the area." The Negroes who stayed in Fleming mined coal, and raised their families "were good, they could not help it if they were black." The unanimous opinion of the Fleming residents was that the Negroes "were not really bad people, they were just acting in accordance with their society, which was almost like the frontier," and were to be trusted, as opposed to the foreign element that entered Southeast Kansas slightly later. Dave Williamson tells the story of "Craker-jack" Jackson, to indicate how helpful some Negro miners were. Jackson loaned his new winter coat to Ed Flynn of Chicopee who had become intoxicated in Fleming and had to walk home up the Missouri Pacific tracks in a snow storm.[8]

The testimony of Weir City residents is the same. Tom O'Grady stated that he lived across the street from George Jackson, and knew Anderson and Fry well. He related that they were "all fine men."[9] In Cherokee, Kansas, an obituary appeared on December 29, 1899, that expressed a similar thought: "Died, George McClain . . . He was a young colored man who had won the respect and friendship of not only his own race but all who knew him. The world is a better place for his having lived in it."[10]

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[8] Personal Interviews: Frank Collins, February 21, 1965; Ethel Delaney, February 23, 1965; and Dave Williamson, February 16, 1965.

[9] Personal Interview: Tom O'Grady, February 28, 1965.

[10] *Cherokee Sentinel*, December 29, 1899.

Perhaps the most adequate statement of the local white miner's opinion of his Negro co-worker is this by Frank Collins of Fleming: "Those who stayed and lived 'til they died were good ordinary neighbors, nice folks to live next to."[11]

In some respects Southeast Kansas was indeed a "paradice" for the Negro miner. A comparison of the civil rights enjoyed by the average citizen of Southeast Kansas in 1899 with those of the average citizen of the posterity of Ham (Genesis 9:25), will reveal, however, that local society was a "Jim Crow" society. When the Negro miner arrived in this locale, he found a social order relatively free from restraint. In slightly over a year, however, the walls of exclusion were erected to stand unchallenged until the present era of Negro self-realization.

Dan Freeman reported that the first time he went into Pittsburg, <u>circa</u>. 1900, he had found that "the colored could go just about anywhere they wanted." When he returned a few years later he "was surprised, it was segregated, absolutely."[12] Without exception, all individuals interviewed concurred with the statement that in the towns of Frontenac, Chicopee, and Columbus, Negroes were not welcome. Hugh Wilson stated that every time he drove his father's

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[11]Personal Interview: Frank Collins, February 21, 1965.

[12]Personal Interview: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964.

team and wagon into Frontenac for supplies, he was greeted with a fusillade of rocks and other miscellaneous objects. If the reports about Chicopee are authentic, no Negro was allowed to "walk" through town, and no Negro dared go into Chicopee after sun-down, until later years.[13]

These conditions were true of the area as a whole, but on an individual basis, the Negro miner was treated with due respect. Mrs. Corine Carson, daughter of a miner, born in Weir City, grew up in Yale, and who married a miner, reported that in the coal camps themselves, they were generally considered to be miners. "They [as children] played, swam, ate, with good fellowship with whites, colored, Italians, Germans; all just coal miners." She confirmed Freeman's statement that the "bad feeling came in later."[14]

Those Negro miners who stayed, mined, and raised their families in Southeast Kansas were accepted as part of the local community, by the miners as miners, by the community as "negroes." Few of the descendants of these miners stayed in Kansas after they grew up. The coal mining industry was the largest employer of the Negro. When deep shaft mining began to decline, job opportunity for the Negro also

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[13] Personal Interviews: Dan Freeman, November 25, 1964; Sol Hester, December 13, 1964; and Hugh Wilson, June 12, 1965.

[14] Personal Interview: Corine Carson, June 3, 1965.

declined. In order to secure a dependable living, the Negro was again forced to move, this time to the large urban centers of St. Louis, Kansas City, Detroit, and to the rapidly expanding west coast.[15] A great number of heirs of Negro miners forsook the pit for the city. There were several who stayed in the locale and made a worth-while contribution to it. Two families deserve mention at this point. Ben White, son of an Alabama miner, was born in Yale in 1905. He mined in the area from an early age until the Depression, when he became a self-employed contractor. While self-employed he educated his three daughters at Kansas State Teachers College. At the present time they, Joan and Norma White, are working in California as Kindergarten teachers in Long Beach and as Probation Officer for Los Angeles county. Wanda White recently received her Master's Degree in Education from the University of Indiana, and is currently teaching in St. Louis. Ben White is a member of the maintainence crew at Kansas State College.[16] Hugh Wilson, son of the Negro orator from Alabama, is now living in Girard, Kansas. His oldest daughter, Edith, is currently completing her bach-elor's degree at Kansas State College, and recently married

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[15]Personal Interview: Sol Hester, October 14, 1964.

[16]Personal Interview: Ben White, June 4, 1965.

Robert Carson, son and grandson of coal miners. Carson is employed at a local garment factory and is a light truck driver in the Pittsburg Army Reserve Unit.[17]

There are other noteworthy individuals exemplary of the descendants of miners: James McAlpine, teacher in Wichita, Kansas; Kenneth Glenn, social worker in Detroit; Napier Bass, Physician at the University of Kansas Medical Center; and Carl Cain, United States government employee in Germany.[18] The lives of the Negro miners following their relocation in Kansas, and their subsequent move to the large urban centers is indicative of their continuing search not for a social revolution but for the opportunity for "manly self assertion."

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[17]Personal Interview: Hugh Wilson, December 12, 1964.

[18]Personal Interview: S. J. Estes, March 7, 1965.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The migration of Negro coal miners from Alabama to Southeast Kansas in 1899 was only one of a multitude of manifestations of the Negro's search for self-identity and realization as a participating American citizen. The Negro was seeking to create a better life for himself and his family by using the only skills he was allowed to use, his hands. Contrary to the view widely held in that period that the Negro was "in fact a mere passive instrument, ignorant and ductile,"[1] the Negro miner in 1899, determined that if he were to survive or in any way improve his lot, he would have to leave Alabama. He made his decision to migrate, and when the "Big Four" extended him an invitation, he accepted it at face value. There was never any malevolent conspiracy on the part of the Negro migrant to undermine or destroy the cause of organized labor in Southeast Kansas. He came with great expectations for a brighter future, he found a mining community divided into armed camps: one side attempting to make him work, the other trying to prevent him. In the overall view it was an extremely confused situation. Among those of his own race, there were those who counseled him to join the Union, and those

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[1]W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South, 117.

who urged him to stand by the companies which gave him "work and rest." As time passed the Negro emigre miner became acclimated to the political atmosphere of Southeast Kansas, and made his second decision. At this point Negro miner groups divided and became four. There were those who stayed to become the most staunch supporters of the United Mine Workers, those who stayed and maintained their independence, those who went elsewhere either to ply their trade in the coal fields of New Mexico, Iowa, and Wyoming, or those who chose to volunteer and serve their nation in Company L, 48th United States Volunteer Infantry. Largest of the four groups was the one who stayed to become an integral part of Southeast Kansas Society.

From a subservient, almost subjugated, class, the very mudsill of Southern society, the Negro miner by migration to Southeast Kansas secured economic opportunity for himself. By using the only tools the South had allowed him, he managed to escape a life of peonage, the convict-lease system, and the harsh Jim Crow legislation prevalent in the Deep South of 1899. Negro miners carved a niche for themselves in the Kansas economy and lived in it peaceably. They overcame the intense antipathy engendered by bitter economic strife and became brother-miners. The Negro miners belong to a class worthy of recognition. They not only faced danger in the pit but in the white society around them above ground. They succeeded in overcoming the

dangers imposed by that initially hostile society and in the pit, "they were black . . . [but] they endured."[2]

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[2]William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, 21-22.

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