

## Reading Prestatehood Muskogee: Racial-Political Discourse in American Indian, African American, and White Newspapers, 1905–07



*By Angela M. Person\**

In late 1907 a small-town newspaper editor from Indian Territory secured an audience with Republican President Theodore Roosevelt. The editor, a black man named W. H. Twine, was concerned. The constitution for the new state of Oklahoma was being written by Democrats, and the latest draft included such Jim Crow provisions as racially segregated schools. During their meeting with the president, Twine and others from Indian Territory implored Roosevelt to take note of these concerning racist developments. After the meeting, Twine felt relieved. Roosevelt had agreed with him—even saying that the draft constitution “was not fit for publication.”<sup>71</sup> These words gave Twine hope upon his return to Indian Territory, a hope that would later dissipate as the war over black rights continued.

As Twine’s interaction with Roosevelt illustrates, public opinion of race relations in Muskogee, Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), was made manifest through political discourse. Newspapers published

## MUSKOGEE NEWSPAPERS

between 1905, just before the Joint Statehood Convention, and 1907, when statehood was conferred, illustrate how this discourse played out locally.<sup>2</sup> Analyzing several of these papers reveals how African American Republicans, “lily-white” Republicans, white Democrats, and American Indian Democrats in Muskogee perceived and fought over the rights that should be afforded to African Americans leading up to statehood, when Twine would meet with Roosevelt. By studying four Muskogee newspapers, each of which catered to different racial and political readerships, we can trace the ways that racialized, political discourse in Muskogee changed over time, depending upon the political aims of each paper’s editor. In this way, we see that discourse pertaining to race was frequently mobilized as a tool to frighten voters, swaying them to vote for or against a political party. These political battles between Republicans and Democrats often pivoted around the question of black rights. Although equality was enshrined in the US Constitution—and Roosevelt threatened not to approve a discriminatory Oklahoma Constitution—ultimately Jim Crow reigned in Oklahoma when it gained statehood. How the dream of equality was eroded is evident in these four newspapers, which illustrate the disintegration of support within the Republican Party amid contrived “black threats.”

Muskogee, Oklahoma, was founded in 1872 in the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. First known as “Muscogee Station,” it initially consisted of a railroad station and a post office and was built to serve the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas (MK&T) Railway. Early on, several key developments helped Muskogee grow and prosper as an important business and cultural center. In 1874, for example, the US Indian agencies for the Muscogee (Creek), Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole Nations were combined to form one agency, the Union Agency. The Union Agency office was built in Muskogee and sponsored annual Indian Fairs that encouraged beneficial interracial and intertribal relationships. In addition to Union Agency employees, among the other early residents of Muskogee were African Americans, who settled there to take advantage of the economic opportunities offered in the community. Very soon, Muskogee’s Second Street became a core of all-black businesses, including restaurants, newspaper publishers, real estate offices, and oil companies.<sup>3</sup> By 1885 Muskogee was also a prominent hub of white economic power, in the midst of its population of Muscogee (Creek) Indians and freedmen.<sup>4</sup>

During its first two decades Muskogee became an influential location within Indian Territory. For example, in 1889 Indian Territory’s first federal district courthouse was built in Muskogee, and the Dawes Commission, which was charged with enrolling members of the Five

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*Union Agency in Muskogee (12660.2, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS)*

Tribes, was based in Muskogee beginning in 1894. Several years later, in 1898, Muskogee was officially incorporated as a town, and by 1900 the population was a little over four thousand.<sup>5</sup> Muskogee continued to grow rapidly, and by 1907, at the time of statehood, the population of Muskogee had grown to 14,418, making it the second largest city in Indian Territory. Its population was racially diverse, and a significant number of its residents—nearly one-third of the total population (4,298 people in the statehood census)—were African American.<sup>6</sup> As of the 1910 census, Muskogee County, of which Muskogee was the county seat, had a total population of 52,743, with 33,403 residents identified as “white,” 16,464 residents identified as “Negro,” and 2,886 identified as “Indian.”<sup>7</sup>

The Muscogee (Creek) Nation, in which Muskogee was located, allowed its former male slaves, known as freedmen, to vote in elections.<sup>8</sup> Because of this, Muskogee had a racially diverse voting base, comprised of whites, blacks, and American Indians. Leading up to statehood, Muskogee’s diverse population became strongly divided among three primary party affiliations—those of the Republican, lily-white

## MUSKOGEE NEWSPAPERS



*Dawes Commission headquarters in Muskogee, 1899 (15879, Aylesworth Album Collection, OHS)*

Republican, and Democratic Parties. Up until this point, the territorial election campaigns levied by each party lacked substance, and issues of political significance were not often debated. Instead of arguing over controversial issues, the issues on which each party focused during campaign seasons tended to be allegations that the opposing party's candidates had bad accounting practices or were "crooks."<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that the parties did not often run campaigns on ideological premises, the question of how to settle the "race question" for the new state of Oklahoma became a significant platform issue that divided the three parties as preparations for statehood were made.

Because freedmen were able to vote and hold political office in Muskogee, up until just before statehood, blacks in Muskogee ran for the offices of mayor, recorder, tax collector, street commissioner, and city council, and had access to public facilities. Blacks were not only able to run for office, but they also held real political power in other ways—in Indian Territory they had built up capital and wealth and could be "found in every occupation and profession."<sup>10</sup> During this time, blacks were primarily Republican, in large part because the Republican Party openly encouraged black support and, in return for this support, would

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*The Katy Hotel in Muskogee, 1907 (20579.TO.M184.51.1.3, Oklahoma Genealogical Society Collection, OHS)*

place black politicians in minor political offices. Additionally, unlike the Democrats at the time, Republicans had a policy of “social equality” and did not seek implementation of Jim Crow laws limiting black rights in Indian Territory.<sup>11</sup>

By contrast, the Democratic Party was vehement that blacks should not be afforded any political or social respect at all. This allowed the Democrats to easily attack Republicans during election time, simply because Republicans accepted blacks into their party.<sup>12</sup> The argument made by Democrats was couched in terms of a “negro threat” that was imminent, because Republican acceptance of blacks had the potential to allow blacks to become very powerful in Indian Territory. This same logic was extended to make the argument that, if white supremacy was not defended in the political arena, blacks from the Deep South would begin inundating the area to take advantage of opportunities Indian Territory offered that were uncommon for blacks in the South at the time. Additionally, American Indians began aligning themselves with the Democratic Party, because tribal leaders were similarly worried about “negro domination.”<sup>13</sup> These anxieties related to “negro domination” likely stemmed from the fact that by 1890, American Indians were in the minority in Indian Territory due to the recent onslaught of white settlers and the widespread immigration of blacks from neighboring states.<sup>14</sup>



*Two children in a cotton field near Muskogee, c. 1900 (15859, Aylesworth Album Collection, OHS)*

In response to the Democrats' constant criticism of Republican support of social equality as a way in which to gain support of citizens concerned about the "negro threat," a group of Republicans formed their own racist branch of the party—the lily-white Republicans. Lily-white Republicans, similar to the Democratic Party at the time, supported white supremacy and were opposed to black participation in Republican politics. To this end, they supported the separation of blacks and whites in schools, waiting rooms, and coaches. Perhaps the most surprising phenomenon that arose with the formation of the lily-white faction was the support it gained from some blacks as it became more powerful. Black support of lily-whites was, of course, reluctant, and occurred because blacks did not want the Republican Party as a whole, lily-whites notwithstanding, to lose ground to the Democrats.<sup>15</sup>

Because of the diverse racial and political circumstances in Muskogee leading up to statehood, the town offered a large selection of newspapers that catered to varying members of its public. Each of these papers represented different political viewpoints, with vocal

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*Second Street in Muskogee, looking north, 1908, photograph by Robertson Studio in Muskogee (20579.TO.M184.51.1.9, Oklahoma Genealogical Society Collection, OHS)*

editors who had unique perspectives on how the “race question,” or the implementation of Jim Crow laws, should be settled at the outset of statehood. In relation to such territorial newspapers, historian Danney Goble wrote that:

These partisan newspapers played invaluable and highly visible roles in party work. Their editorials and news columns could be relied upon to inform partisans of the merit of their party and the perfidy of the opposition. At election time, their pages would inspire the faithful to turn out in large numbers—a function that not infrequently spelled success or defeat for the party.<sup>16</sup>

While the opinions expressed in each of these papers are those of their respective editors and are not necessarily shared by their readerships, these editorial opinions were nonetheless closely tied to the actions of the readers when they arrived at the polls. Focusing on articles that included discussions of race and politics, this article samples four of these newspapers—each with a different racial-political editorial perspective—during the two-year period before statehood: one geared toward American Indian Democrats, the *Indian Journal*; one written for black Republicans, the *Muskogee Cimeter*; another for white Republicans, the *Muskogee Phoenix*; and, finally, one written for white Democrats, the *Muskogee Times-Democrat*. Because racialized discourse was

## MUSKOGEE NEWSPAPERS



*Carolina Building in Muskogee, 1907, photograph by Robertson Studio in Muskogee (19687.TO.M184.51.2.20, Chester R. Cowen Collection, OHS)*

one of the primary means through which political parties rallied support at the time, these four local newspapers provide significant insight into the ways this discourse was constructed and changed over time.

The four newspapers sampled in this study were each published to serve different racial and political audiences. For example, the Muskogee (Creek) Nation subsidized the *Indian Journal*, which is the oldest newspaper in Oklahoma that has been continually published since its establishment. The *Indian Journal* was first published in Muskogee in 1876 and, in 1877, it was moved south to Eufaula, while retaining the city of Muskogee as a significant portion of its readership.<sup>17</sup> George Raker, the *Indian Journal's* editor between 1905 and 1907, was a staunch Democrat who frequently published “letters to the editor” written by local American Indians. These letters asked the *Indian Journal's* Native readership to vote with the Democratic Party. Though many American Indians were opposed to joint statehood, Raker was a proponent of this idea, in which Oklahoma and Indian Territories would be united to form the state of Oklahoma.<sup>18</sup> With regard to Indian political leanings, Raker wrote, “If the trend of the Indians may be told by their leader’s positions only the full bloods will remain with the republican party [*sic*].”<sup>19</sup> Because of Raker’s feeling that “full bloods” would align themselves with the Republican Party, it seems that the *Indian Journal* was geared toward an audience of mixed-race American Indians. Making Raker’s avid support of the Democratic Party even more ap-





*Editorial cartoon from the Indian Journal, August 31, 1906. The caption reads, "The democracy favors laws providing for separate schools, separate coaches and separate waiting rooms for the negro race. The democratic party will lift the Indian and the white race to a plane above that to which it has fallen under republican rule." (The Gateway to Oklahoma History, gateway.okhistory.org)*

parent were his openly racist editorial pieces and cartoons supporting Jim Crow laws, as well as his criticism of the Republican Party for accepting black members. For example, Raker's paper conveyed the sense of a black threat supposedly posed to white women and advocated for "separate schools, separate coaches and separate waiting rooms for the negro race" to avoid this supposed threat.<sup>20</sup>

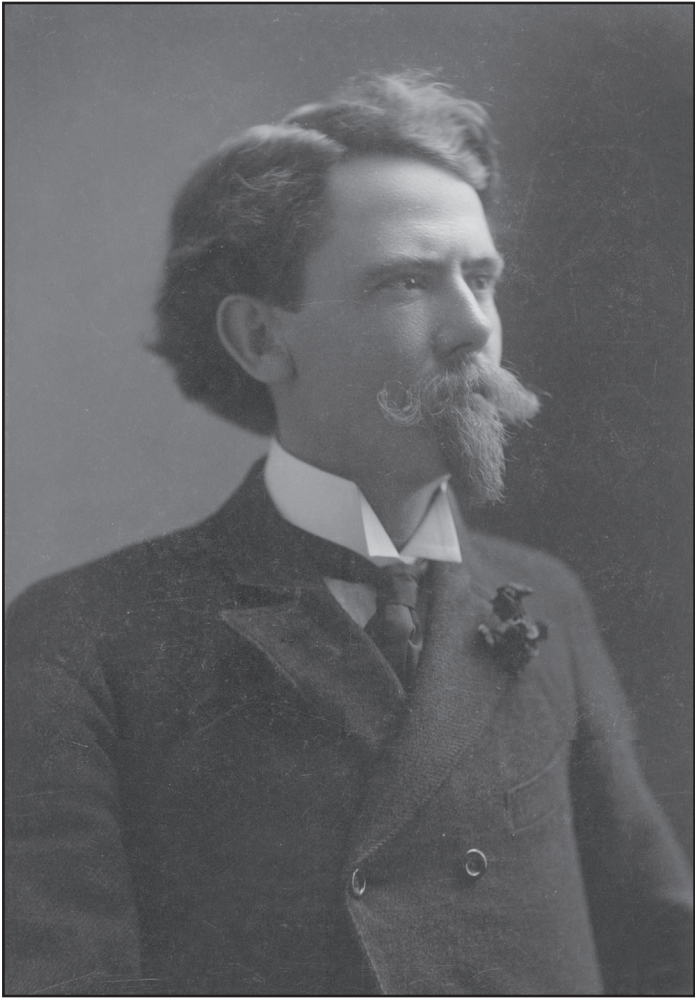
## MUSKOGEE NEWSPAPERS

While Raker's *Indian Journal* encouraged Indians to join the Democratic Party in response to "negro domination" in the Republican Party, one of Muskogee's prominent white Democratic papers, the daily *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, employed similar tactics; for example, reporting that "Another Choctaw Has Enough [of] G.O.P.," implying that a Choctaw Indian was leaving the Republican Party because of its sympathy for blacks.<sup>21</sup> During this time, the *Times-Democrat* was edited by W. E. Decker, but sold to George Dun in November of 1906. Though the *Times-Democrat* was geared for a primarily white audience, Dun continued Decker's practice of encouraging American Indians to vote a straight Democratic Party ticket in elections. Meanwhile the *Times-Democrat* discouraged the integration of blacks into society by openly supporting the implementation of Jim Crow statutes at the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention, and suggesting time and again that blacks were not competent enough to be involved in politics.

In the two years prior to statehood, the *Muskogee Phoenix* conveyed a variety of perspectives—Republican, Democratic, and lily-white Republican—with respect to politics in general, and the "race question," specifically. The Republican editor, Clarence Douglas, was an attorney whose parents founded the community of Ardmore. Douglas moved to Muskogee in 1900 to serve on the Dawes Commission and, several years later, partnered with other businessmen to purchase the *Phoenix*. Under Douglas's Republican editorial leadership, the *Phoenix* courted Indian voters, with the hope that these voters would choose to vote a straight Republican ticket. During this time, Douglas referred infrequently to the fact that a large number of Muskogee Republicans were black, and made little mention of black members of the Republican Party in articles pertaining to party politics.

For a very short period, between December 1906 and February 1907, the *Phoenix* belonged to a Democrat, J. Fentress Wisdom. Fentress was the son of Dew Wisdom, a prominent Indian agent and former Muskogee mayor.<sup>22</sup> Fentress's *Phoenix* immediately began publishing material in support of Jim Crow laws and denying that Muskogee was a "negro town."<sup>23</sup> Fentress, a Democrat, held sentiments toward blacks in Muskogee that were not that different from those of Douglas, an emerging lily-white Republican, just before he sold the paper to Fentress. By mid-1906, Douglas had begun to make his transition to lily-white Republicanism overt, writing that the "negroes of this vicinity have learned by bitter experience a very needful lesson. They have learned that self respecting White men will not tolerate negro leadership and negro domination." Douglas continued, "They have learned that the worst enemies of their race are those who attempt to stir them

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*Clarence Douglas (4432, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS)*

up by race equality talk and encourage them in their attacks on their White friends.”<sup>24</sup> When Douglas repurchased the *Phoenix* in 1907, the paper itself became aligned with the lily-white Republicans. As editor, Douglas persisted in his failure to mention the strong black ties to the Republican Party, going so far as to print “the negroes are with the Democrats.”<sup>25</sup>

While the *Phoenix* vacillated between several lines of racial and political discourse, W. H. Twine’s *Muskogee Cimeter*, whose masthead



Colonel Dew M. Wisdom, seated at center, 1900 (14765, Heye Foundation Collection, OHS)

read, "Published every week in the interest of the negro," was devoutly Republican. Again and again, Twine encouraged the Republican Party to stay unified in its efforts to seal a "square deal" for blacks leading up to statehood. Twine, the son of former southern slaves, was born the year after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and spent much of his life fighting for black civil rights in Muskogee. Twine moved to Oklahoma Territory to participate in the land run of September 22, 1891, and was admitted to the Oklahoma Territory Bar that same year. Several years later, in 1904, Twine moved his family to Indian Territory because attorneys were needed to sort out the work of the Dawes Commission, based in Muskogee. That same year, Twine established the *Cimeter*, which he continued to edit until 1921.<sup>26</sup> Twine's *Cimeter* was the most vocal of these four newspapers when it came to discussing the roles that blacks should have in society and advancing a raceless concept of freedom. In nearly every issue, Twine actively sought to increase black political participation, to solidify equitable

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*The brick building in this photograph is believed to be the city hall of Taft, Oklahoma, which was formerly known as Twine, Indian Territory, 1914. Twine was named in honor of W. H. Twine (22127.2.6, Currie Ballard Collection, OHS).*

civil rights for all, and to explain—quite candidly—which party (the Republican Party) would best serve black interests.

Two major events prompted intense racial-political discourse in the two years leading up to statehood: the November 1906 elections for the 112 seats at the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention and the September 1907 election to approve the constitution that resulted from this convention. While racialized political discourse certainly appeared at other times, these two events prompted more inflammatory and vigorous writings by each of the papers' editors; and, in some cases, even prompted a shift in the discourse.

By the time the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention was held, Jim Crow laws had been in place in the southern states for more than a decade, and legally sanctioned since 1896 with the US Supreme Court's ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Oklahoma and Indian Territories, by contrast, still gave blacks the right to vote, in large part because Republicans had controlled territorial politics up to this point. In an effort to

attract Republican voters and gain seats at the convention, Democrats made their desire to segregate blacks the primary platform issue during the campaign to elect constitutional convention representatives. Democrats argued that, because the new state was “partly northern and partly southern,” it was the place that the “negro question” would be settled once and for all.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, lily-white Republicans emerged in force, competing with the Democrats to prove “which party hated the African American more.”<sup>28</sup> These arguments in favor of Jim Crow laws were made despite the fact that the bill President Roosevelt signed authorizing the Oklahoma statehood convention in 1906 explicitly provided that, “the constitution shall be republican in form, and make no distinction in civil or political rights on account of race or color and shall not be repugnant to the constitution of the United States and at the principles of the Declaration of Independence.”<sup>29</sup> These newspapers each expressed an awareness that President Roosevelt may not sign the new state’s constitution if it included Jim Crow provisions, but the Democratic and lily-white campaigns pressed on, voicing their desire to include them, nonetheless.

Early in 1906, in anticipation of the election for constitutional convention participants, the *Indian Journal* published an article that outlined potential constitutional provisions, writing, “Clauses that ought to be embodied in the constitution [include a] ‘separate coach’ law for Whites and Blacks.”<sup>30</sup> While the *Indian Journal* was focusing specifically on constitutional details at the time, the *Muskogee Times-Democrat* emphasized Decker’s notion that blacks were unable to organize their own political movements:

The republicans are having the negroes get together tonight, at which time, through hired agents, they will develop the first campaign machine, which, in the guise of being strictly a negro move, will for a time fool some of the race into thinking they are exercising their own minds, when, in truth, they are following hired leaders. This much is known to be a positive fact.<sup>31</sup>

Decker’s assertion that blacks are “following hired leaders” was a move to perpetuate two inaccurate, insidious points—that blacks were unable to organize themselves in any politically meaningful way, so it was not necessary to pay attention to their “campaign machine.” And that even if this was a meeting of black Republicans, Decker was making it clear that white Republicans—the “hired leaders”—were closely tied to blacks, and so they were suspect.



*Masthead from the Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 1907 (Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City, OK)*

Meanwhile, as the convention election approached, Twine's *Cimeter* emphasized that it was not concerned with the ethnicity of the politicians elected, rather that whoever was elected was Republican, writing that, "We don't want to see a man on the republican ticket on account of his color. Competency alone should rule and then again we want to see the kind of a ticket that the democrats don't want, and everyone knows what those cusses want."<sup>32</sup> This represented a marked shift away from Twine's earlier thoughts regarding a municipal election, when he stated, "The colored men on the ticket are worthy of the support of all citizens regardless of party affiliations and if elected (and they will be), they will make the city splendid officials."<sup>33</sup> When contrasting Twine's commentary in February 1906 against his comments from early in 1905, it is possible to observe his sense that, in the current political climate with lily-whites and Democrats coming down so heavily on black political involvement, Republican circumstances had changed, as well. Now, it would not be possible to elect a black politician to the constitutional convention. Black Republicans' best bet, Twine thought, was to stick together and vote a straight—albeit white—Republican ticket.

During the time just before the constitutional convention election, Muskogee's white Republican newspaper, the *Phoenix*, was not interested in addressing "the race question" as it pertained to blacks. The editor, Douglas, made almost no mention of black rights or black political participation in his party; instead, he focused repeatedly on gaining Indian votes, writing, "There is a spirited contest in the Indian Territory part of the new state between republicans and democrats to get the Indian vote. . . . The Indian has the same reasons for wanting to belong to the party of progress that other people have."<sup>34</sup> With this statement, it is evident that Douglas was frustrated with Democratic papers, but, as a Republican, he was lacking ammunition powerful enough to compete with the white Democrats' ability to levy accusations of white Republicans' consorting with blacks. Soon thereafter, the *Phoenix* expressed that the new state's constitution "should teach such a lesson in the art of freedom and self-government as will be a veritable

## MUSKOGEE NEWSPAPERS

light at the feet of all men,” a statement whose emphasis on “freedom” seems to provide a direct contrast to the Democrats’ encouragement of constitutional Jim Crow laws.<sup>35</sup>

Several months later, in August, when the election determining who would attend the convention was just two months away, the *Phoenix* began to tend strongly away from its discourse of “the art of freedom,” issuing a warning to black Republicans:

The attempt to play up the racial question is so very old that it no longer frightens Republicans into handing political victories over to the Democrats. The republican party of Indian Territory will be dominated by the White republicans. The negroes will be treated fairly, but they will not be permitted to rule. The negroes will understand this when the campaign opens and there will be no more such exhibitions as have recently been witnessed. The negro knows that without the leadership and aid of the White republicans, he is politically lost and he knows that self respecting White men will not tolerate the assumption on his part of the position of leader or master.<sup>36</sup>

Douglas denied that blacks held a meaningful role within Indian Territory politics. Right before the election, Douglas’s *Phoenix* had become lily-white.

Twine’s *Cimeter* quickly took note of the turn in the *Phoenix*’s brand of republicanism, republishing an inflammatory *Phoenix* article several times leading up to the constitutional convention election, asking that *Cimeter* readers cut it out and read it repeatedly—even memorize it. Twine seemed to believe that imploring his readers to focus on this unsettling language would energize their opposition of the lily-whites. This piece in question, signed by members of the local Republican Press Association, read as follows:

The Republican party has DISCHARGED its OBLIGATIONS to the NEGRO in that it gives him full civil rights, equal with every other citizen and still stands for that policy.

Therefore, be it resolved by this association that the Republican party of the Third Congressional District is OPPOSED to NEGRO DOMINATION in any sense.

That it stands for separate schools, SEPARATE COACHES and SEPARATE WAITING ROOMS for NEGROS which shall have equal facilities and comforts of those furnished other races.



## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

That it is opposed and WILL USE EVERY MEANS at its command to PREVENT the domination of Negroes on any elective ticket, seeking the suffrage of the other races.

On this declaration of principle, all classes and all nationalities of citizenship are earnestly invited to align themselves with the party of progress and prosperity.<sup>37</sup>

Douglas's feelings were now explicit—not only was he unwilling to tolerate blacks taking a leading role within the Republican Party, but Douglas and his Republican newspaper editor peers were staunchly in favor of Jim Crow laws. By inviting “all classes and all nationalities of citizenship” to join them, these lily-white Republicans sought to gain Indian voters while courting racist white Democrats.

The *Indian Journal* provided reasons why, despite lily-white support of Jim Crow laws, American Indians would still oppose the Republican Party. For example, the letter to the editor, “Why I am a Democrat,” outlined the argument in racial-political terms: “I am a democrat because the Republican Party confiscated our lands for homesteads for the negroes, thus thrusting upon us an undesirable African citizenship.”<sup>38</sup> This letter to the editor reminded Indians that—even though lily-white Republicans wanted to restrict black rights, which many Indians favored—it had been the Republicans who required, in some cases against their will, that the Five Tribes give their black freedmen citizenship, which, in turn, entitled the freedmen to allotments.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, the *Times-Democrat* responded to the *Phoenix's* advocating Jim Crow laws, saying that, despite this, all of the Republican power was locked up in the black vote, so the lily-whites were, in actuality, hurting themselves by supporting Jim Crow laws. On October 22, 1906, it wrote, “Who does not know that the strength of the Republican Party is the negro? Who will deny that the negro makes it possible for republicans to hold office in Oklahoma?”<sup>40</sup> This statement by the *Times-Democrat* was, perhaps, prophetic, as the Republicans ultimately lost support of their black voters in the constitutional convention election—with many black voters choosing to sit out the election. In the end, the lily-white Republican faction alienated black voters, despite the voters' initial willingness to overlook the party's elements of white supremacy.

The result? The Democrats swept the election—of the 112 delegate spots available, 99 of them were awarded to Democrats. Republican candidates did not fare well in Muskogee, and the lily-white Republi-

# The Muskogee Cimeter.

Vol 9 Muskogee, I. F., Friday, October, 4, 1907. No 1

## May Yet Beat Statehood.

**“PRESIDENT ‘OPEN TO CONVICTION,’ OKLAHOMA REPUBLICANS HEAR.**

Washington, Oct. 1. (Special) A strong effort is being made by Republican leaders to have President Roosevelt re-open the Oklahoma case. Last Thursday the President stated that he would promulgate the constitution when it reached him. His chief reason was the tremendous majority given it at the election. At the time he said his opinion of the constitution “was not fit for publication.” Later he told a Western senator that while he had made the announcement, he “was still open to conviction,” and that if it could be shown that the constitution was not republican in form he would yet reject it.

With this ray of hope the Republicans of Oklahoma have renewed the fight. They have submitted to Attorney General Bonaparte a brief, showing wherein they believe the constitution to be un-republican in form. They build their case around the initiative and referendum. Incidentally, as a serious objection, they cite the constitution fixes no minimum price for the sale of school lands, and charge that the Democrats are in a conspiracy to dispose of all that land to their friends at a small price, thus robbing the school fund.

Mr. Bonaparte has promised to give the constitution and the brief serious consideration. He has also asked Mr. Woodruff, attorney for the department of the interior, to make a legal investigation of the two documents, and furnish an opinion. Woodruff was brought into the matter because the interior department has control of Oklahoma and Indian Territory as long as they are territories. The attorney general says he will be ready to give the president a final opinion on the constitution upon the latter's return from his bear hunt.—Ex.

It is now up to us to convince the President of the rottenness of the constitution.—Editor.

## Suffrage League Convention.

The Suffrage League with Coody Johnson as chairman convened here yesterday. The call was for the purpose of selecting delegates to go to Washington in order to present the league's objection to the constitution. There were present only three delegates from Oklahoma City the call having not been generally known. Prior to this meeting the Creek Nation had elected ten delegates. After wrangling all day a conference committee of three from the league and three from the mass meeting held here on the twenty sixth of September were appointed to harmonize matters. This was done by the league's selecting six delegates from that organization and approving the work done by the Creek Nation in mass convention. The credit for the work of harmony is due to W. A. Rentie, A. G. W. Sango, L. A. Bell, A. V. Jones, P. A. Lewis and others who were members of both the mass meeting and league.

The consensus of opinion was that the finance committee appointed by the mass convention should continue to collect money and make its report. The entire people are a unit in the matter of sending the delegation to Washington. The following are the delegates from the mass convention: W. H. Twine, Judge H. C. Reed, L. A. Bell, W. A. Rentie, Mose Grayson, J. A. Roper, J. H. Lewis, A. V. Jones, A. G. W. Sango, John W. Simmons. Delegates from the league: J. Coody Johnson, M. J. Sango, Wm. Payne, Wm. Harrison, G. W. F. Sawner, Walter Goodwin.

The convention adjourned about one o'clock a. m. October 4. Aside from the unfair methods of chairman Johnson and the desire of some ambitious fellows to crowd out some who are not rich in worldly goods, things were carried out pleasantly.

Reporter.

## Convention Dots.

Chairman Johnson tries as

best he can to be a Czar but makes a poor trial of it.

The Dr. from Haskell ran upon another snag the little cuss was in sympathy with the last meeting.

Ed. Jefferson was not re-elected as a delegate to Washington.

The indefatigable Dr. Waterford wanted the delegates to pay \$50 each. Now why? The convention said no.

Harrison the lawyer from Oklahoma City was much in evidence and stood in with the GANG but one thing to his credit is the fact that he would recognize a man when his attention was properly claimed.

The autocratic actions of Coody Johnson, reminds one of the fact that the time has long since passed for the election of a chairman but perhaps the old men have decided that the office must be perpetual.

The \$500 graft deal would not work even though the big would be autocrat was a silent well wisher.

**THE WORK OF THE MASS MEETING WAS CONFIRMED AND REMAINS AS IT WAS THE COMMITTEE WILL CONTINUE COLLECTING MONEY AND REPORTING.** The money must be raised by October 12, or soon thereafter as the delegates must leave on or before the 20th. Get busy.

Some people who desire to prevent the delegation from going to Washington are using their best efforts to prevent money from being collected are throwing all blocks in the way possible but right will prevail.

## Democrats Stole Oklahoma Election.

Oklahoma City, Sept. 25.—Leading Republicans of Oklahoma and Indian Territory together with the chairman of county committees, met at Republican headquarters at the Threadgill hotel in answer to a call issued by chairman C. E.

Hunter of the state central committee to discuss the hundred reports of fraud during the recent election.

Secretary Wells read a long list of glaring irregularities, many of which started those who attended the meeting, although they had been prepared to hear much because of the election outrages in their own localities.

As the reading progressed the amazement became greater as each charge was repeated.

In one county 617 Republican votes were thrown out in three precincts, all being classed as nullified ballots when all were fairly legal. The throw out these ballots defeated four Republicans, a congressman, a senator, a representative, a district judge.

All sorts of rank faauuds were committed by the democrats.

Chairman Hunter estimated that the votes thrown out by the democrats, will average 20 in each of the 2,000 precincts in the state or a total of 40,000 votes stolen. In fact he substantiated his claim that Governor Frantz had been elected easily, if the votes cast for him had been counted.

Chairman Hunter announced that he would at once begin a vigorous investigation and equally vigorously prosecute those implicated in the frauds wherever found.

The committee unanimously pledged \$4,000 to be used in conducting the prosecution and settling the affairs of the committee.

The following resolutions were adopted during the meeting unanimously.

“Whereas Chairman C. E. Hunter, Secretary O. A. Wells, and the executive committee have shown great zeal and ability in the conduct of the recent campaign and the committee has full confidence that they will continue to manage the affairs of the Republican party in the interest of American citizenship and American Government.

“Therefore, be it resolved, that Chairman Hunter, and his conferees, be and they are hereby heartily and fully for honest ballot, and will stand by every citizen no matter what has rank

(continued on last page.)

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



*The signing of Senate Bill One, which was Oklahoma's first Jim Crow legislation, 1907 (1104, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS)*

can *Phoenix* attempted to pin blame on blacks for this the week after the unsuccessful election, writing:

The negroes of this vicinity have learned by bitter experience a very needful lesson. They have learned that self respecting White men will not tolerate negro leadership and negro domination and they have learned that the worst enemies to their race are those who attempt to stir them up by race equality talk and encourage them in their attacks on their White friends. In the last campaign a large number of negroes were deceived and misled by designing politicians, Black and White, who sought to use them for their own selfish end and the attitude of these misguided victims of the politicians' schemes aroused the White men to action as nothing else could have done and the result was as if always has been and always will be, the crushing defeat of such negroes as follow the demagogues who teach them equality of the races.<sup>41</sup>

## MUSKOGEE NEWSPAPERS

The argument made in this statement is complicated—blame for losing the election seems to be placed on both the black voters, as well as their “white deceivers,” presumably the Democrats who told black voters they were merely being used by their white Republican counterparts. Douglas was clearly frazzled by the election outcome and the fact that the lily-white Republican segment failed to stake out a reasonable presence at the constitutional convention. It is almost as though he knew that he must admit that the black vote was necessary for the Republican Party’s success, but he could not quite bring himself to do this. Instead, he produced this meandering statement that reminded black voters of their supposed inferiority, while implying that they should not follow (presumably Democratic) demagogues.

With Democrats now writing the constitution, the stage was set for Oklahoma to include Jim Crow laws as a piece of its constitution. Because the Democrats had gained such a sizable majority at the convention by running on a Jim Crow–laden platform, they set to work drafting such a constitution. When the convention met in Guthrie in early December, the institution of “Jim Crow cars” on trains was one of the first constitutional provisions debated.<sup>42</sup> By January 1907, however, both Democrat and Republican newspapers alike were buzzing with reminders that, should Jim Crow laws be included in the Oklahoma Constitution, President Roosevelt may not sign it into law.<sup>43</sup> In late February the *Times-Democrat* published a front-page article titled “Poor Old Jim Crow Can’t Caw ‘No Moah,’” a parody of African American vernacular English that tried to downplay the fact that nearly all of the Democratic constitutional convention participants who were in favor of Jim Crow laws had decided to leave them out of the constitution for fear of Republican Roosevelt’s dismissal of the constitution, should these provisions be included.<sup>44</sup>

The *Cimeter* initially applauded this decision, but, when a provision to mandate racially segregated schools was re-entered into the constitution, Twine set about making plans to subvert the document, writing, “We stand today where we have always stood touching the rebel constitution.” He continued, “It is not a fit object for which to cast our votes and we are unable to see how any Republican, black, red or white can support the poorly amended con.”<sup>45</sup> By this time, the white newspapers—Democratic and Republican alike—seemed satisfied with the constitution and made little mention of any need to worry about adding further Jim Crow stipulations. For example, rather than addressing Jim Crow laws as approval of the constitution neared, the *Phoenix* worried, instead, about what the official titles and rights of the chiefs of the Five Tribes would be following statehood.<sup>46</sup> Altogether,

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

it was understood that Jim Crow laws could be implemented more easily if they waited until after Roosevelt had approved the constitution.<sup>47</sup> Twine, however, used the *Cimeter* to call a convention of black Republicans in order to plan a convoy to Washington, DC. As mentioned earlier, this convoy would speak to President Roosevelt directly about the state of the constitution. In late September Twine and several others were able to arrange such a meeting with President Roosevelt. Twine reported that, during this meeting, Roosevelt agreed with the convoy—saying that the constitution “was not fit for publication.”<sup>48</sup> Twine returned to Indian Territory feeling hopeful.

Of Twine’s efforts, the *Times-Democrat* reported, “There seems to be little hope, however, of the president paying any serious attention to the negro delegation. His announcement a few days ago that he intended to approve the constitution is taken as a movement to forestall the sending of any [White] delegations to the national capital.”<sup>49</sup> As the *Times-Democrat’s* sentiments suggested, after returning to Indian Territory Twine had little luck convincing anyone at the constitutional convention that the constitution should be amended. Frustrated, Twine again arranged to meet with President Roosevelt in late October, reporting after the meeting that, “President Roosevelt is a Republican as we see it and we believe he will give the Black men of the new state a square deal and will see to it that the door of home is not closed against them.”<sup>50</sup> Two weeks later, however, the citizens of Oklahoma and Indian Territories, along with President Roosevelt, approved the Oklahoma Constitution, and Oklahoma became a state on November 16, 1907. The following campaign season, in which the first Oklahoma State Legislature was elected, focused its discourse, again, on the fear of “negro domination.” By December 1907 Jim Crow stipulations had been signed into Oklahoma law.<sup>51</sup>

The ways in which—and frequency with which—race is discussed within these newspapers changed over time, depending upon the political aim sought by each editor at any given time. For example, the papers’ immediate return to the alarmist discourse of “negro domination” during election season late in 1907, after going several months without expressing this fear, illustrates that racial discourse was often mobilized to induce fear during election time, then set aside during political lulls. The black paper, Twine’s *Cimeter*, was the most consistent, as it always sought to advance black rights; however, the other three papers took turns leaving out mention of black citizens, showing support for them, or belittling them, depending upon their aims at the polls. In other words, the white editors manipulated their discourse surrounding black rights in order to influence election re-

## MUSKOGEE NEWSPAPERS

sults. This tactic—to engender racial fear and, thus, induce particular voting behaviors—affected the rights of early Oklahoma African Americans in somber and enduring ways that belied the capricious manner in which this discourse was often employed.

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

### Endnotes

\* Angela M. Person, PhD, is a cultural geographer at the University of Oklahoma, where she serves as director of research initiatives and strategic planning for the Christopher C. Gibbs College of Architecture. Previously, Person was at the Smithsonian Institution, where she held a doctoral fellowship. The author wishes to extend her thanks to Robert Rundstrom, Jennifer L. Holland, and Stephanie Pilat, all of the University of Oklahoma, for their feedback on this work, as well as the staff at the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center for their support.

<sup>1</sup> "May Yet Beat Statehood," *Muskogee (OK) Cimeter*, October 4, 1907, 1, gateway. okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70085.

<sup>2</sup> The Joint Statehood Convention was also known as the Sequoyah Convention.

<sup>3</sup> Wallace F. Waits Jr., "Muskogee," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=MU018.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Green, "Creek Nation to Statehood," in *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma*, Charles Goins and Danney Goble, eds. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 106–07.

<sup>5</sup> Waits, "Muskogee."

<sup>6</sup> Danney Goble, "African Americans in Oklahoma and Indian Territories, 1907," in *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma*, 138–39.

<sup>7</sup> US Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910: Statistics for Oklahoma, Containing Statistics of Population, Agriculture, Manufactures, and Mining for the State, Counties, Cities and Other Divisions*, available from www.census.gov.

<sup>8</sup> Murray R. Wickett, *Contested Territory: Whites, Native Americans, and African Americans in Oklahoma, 1865–1907* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Danney Goble, *Progressive Oklahoma: The Making of a New Kind of State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 91.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>11</sup> Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 37.

<sup>12</sup> Goble, *Progressive Oklahoma*.

<sup>13</sup> Goble, *Progressive Oklahoma*.

<sup>14</sup> Donald A. Grinde Jr. and Quintard Taylor, "Red vs. Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post Civil War Indian Territory, 1865–1907," *American Indian Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1984): 211–29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Goble, *Progressive Oklahoma*, 88.

<sup>17</sup> L. Edward Carter, *The Story of Oklahoma Newspapers, 1844 to 1984* (Muskogee: Oklahoma Heritage Association and Western Heritage Books, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Shearer, *The Uniting States: The Story of Statehood for the Fifty United States (Oklahoma to Wyoming)* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> *Indian Journal* (Eufaula, OK), June 15, 1906, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, Oklahoma City, OK (hereafter cited as OHS Research Center).

<sup>20</sup> *Indian Journal*, August 31, 1906.

<sup>21</sup> *Indian Journal*, August 24, 1906; *Muskogee (OK) Times-Democrat*, August 25, 1906, OHS Research Center.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Thoburn, *A Standard History of Oklahoma: An Authentic Narrative of its Development from the Date of the First European Exploration Down to the Present Time, Including Accounts of the Indian Tribes, Both Civilized and Wild, of the Cattle Range, of the Land Openings and the Achievements of the Most Recent Period* (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1916).

## MUSKOGEE NEWSPAPERS

- <sup>23</sup> *Muskogee (OK) Daily Phoenix*, December 29, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>24</sup> *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, November 10, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>25</sup> *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, October 6, 1907, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>26</sup> Jimmie L. White Jr., "Twine, William Henry," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, [www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=TW006](http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=TW006).
- <sup>27</sup> Wickett, *Contested Territory*, 191.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.
- <sup>29</sup> Oklahoma Statehood Bill, reprinted in the *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, June 15, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>30</sup> *Indian Journal*, January 19, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>31</sup> *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, January 10, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>32</sup> *Muskogee (OK) Cimeter*, February 15, 1906, 4, [gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70025/m1/4](http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70025/m1/4).
- <sup>33</sup> *Muskogee Cimeter*, March 30, 1905, 4, [gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc69993/m1/4](http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc69993/m1/4).
- <sup>34</sup> *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, July 26, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>35</sup> *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, July 28, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>36</sup> *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, August 22, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>37</sup> *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* article, republished in the *Muskogee Cimeter*, September 27, 1906, 1, [gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70038](http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70038).
- <sup>38</sup> *Indian Journal*, August 10, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>39</sup> Wickett, *Contested Territory*.
- <sup>40</sup> *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, October 22, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>41</sup> *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, November 7, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>42</sup> *Indian Journal*, December 7, 1906, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>43</sup> See, for example: *Muskogee Cimeter*, January 11, 1907, 1, [gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70052](http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70052); *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, January 11, 1907, OHS Research Center; *Indian Journal*, January 25, 1907, OHS Research Center; and *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, February 22, 1907, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>44</sup> *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, February 22, 1907, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>45</sup> *Muskogee Cimeter*, March 8, 1907, 1, [gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70060/m1/1](http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70060/m1/1); *Muskogee Cimeter*, August 2, 1907, 4, [gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70078/m1/4](http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70078/m1/4).
- <sup>46</sup> *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, November 15, 1907, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>47</sup> Wickett, *Contested Territory*.
- <sup>48</sup> *Muskogee Cimeter*, October 4, 1907, 1, [gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70085](http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70085).
- <sup>49</sup> *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, October 3, 1907, 1, OHS Research Center.
- <sup>50</sup> *Muskogee Cimeter*, November 1, 1907, 4, [gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70088/m1/4](http://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc70088/m1/4).
- <sup>51</sup> Wickett, *Contested Territory*.