

African American Men in the American West, 1528-1990

By QUINTARD TAYLOR

ABSTRACT: The first black men to enter the West were Spanish-speaking settlers from central Mexico. They were followed by free English-speaking fur traders and by slaves primarily in Texas. Some males arrived in California during the 1850s, initiating a voluntary migration of farmers, miners, soldiers, and cowboys through the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, black men settled mainly in the cities and worked in unskilled nonunion occupations. By World War II, far more migrants had arrived in response to war-time work opportunities. War work allowed both newcomers and old residents access to skilled unionized employment for the first time. Discrimination continued, however, prompting a civil rights movement in the West in the 1960s that paralleled activities in the South. That movement opened new opportunities for the skilled and educated. However, postwar deindustrialization moved many unskilled African American men to the margins of the Western urban economy.

Quintard Taylor, the Scott and Dorothy Bullitt Professor of American History at the University of Washington, is the author of In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990 (1998) and The Forging of a Black Community: A History of Seattle's Central District from 1870 Through the Civil Rights Era (1994). He has written forty articles on African American history in the West.

THE saga of African American men in the West began in November 1528 with the experiences of an African male slave, Esteban, who along with 15 other men washed ashore on a sandbar near present-day Galveston, Texas, the survivors of an ill-fated expedition of 260 men that had begun in Havana, Cuba, eight months earlier. Born half a world away, in Azamor, Morocco, Esteban was the first African to set foot in what would become Texas and the western United States (Bandelier 1905, 53-65).

The stranded men endured a Gulf Coast winter and then were enslaved for the next five years by the Capoques Indians. By September 1534, Esteban and three remaining survivors escaped, crossed the Rio Grande, and straggled over Chihuahua and Sonora, finally reaching Mexico City in July 1536. Three years later, the viceroy of New Spain organized another expedition into the North American interior, led by Franciscan friar Marcos de Niza but which included Esteban as guide and interpreter. The expedition ended tragically at the Zuni town of Hawikah (just east of the present Arizona-New Mexico border) when, against the instructions of town elders, Esteban attempted to enter the town and was killed (Bandelier 1905, 72-108, 180-84; Hallenbeck 1987, 15-32).

Esteban played a crucial role in Western history. The de Niza expedition strengthened Spanish claims in the North, encouraging additional exploration and the eventual founding of towns such as Santa Fe, Los Angeles, and El Paso, and initiated

the tripartite meeting of Indian, Spanish, and Anglo cultures that would shape much of the Southwest's history. It also opened this northern frontier to subsequent dark-skinned settlers. For the next three centuries, persons of African ancestry more likely moved north from Mexico rather than west from the Atlantic slope (Weber 1982, xvi).

Men of African ancestry moved to northern New Spain to escape the discrimination they faced in central Mexico. Two men, Sebastian Rodríguez Brito and José Antonio, are typical. Rodríguez, the Angolan-born free son of African slaves, rose from servant to landholder in the late seventeenth century and eventually married Isabel Olguin, an *española* widow, in 1692. Antonio, a Congo-born slave brought to El Paso in 1752, married Marcela, an Apache maid in a neighboring household, eight years later (McDonald 1995, 1-34).

As the marriage of Rodríguez to Olguin suggests, Spanish colonial policies promoted upward social and political mobility among men of African ancestry. The Mexican War of Independence enhanced that mobility by abolishing slavery and declaring the equality of all Mexican citizens before the law. Fugitive slaves and free black men "from the states" soon took note of those promises. Beginning in the 1820s, a small number of African American men arrived in Texas, the Mexican province most accessible to people from the United States. Among those immigrants was Samuel H. Hardin, who wrote that he and his wife had moved to Texas because Mexico's

laws "invited their emigration" and guaranteed their right to own property (Woolfolk 1976, 22-37, 153-55). William Goyens, a North Carolinian, settled near Nacogdoches in 1820 and became a blacksmith, freighter, trader, land speculator, and slave owner. At his death in 1856, he had amassed nearly 13,000 acres in four east Texas counties (Prince 1967, 1-30).

A smaller number of English-speaking African Americans entered California between 1821 and 1848. One of them, West Indian-born William A. Liedesdorff, became a successful merchant captain in New York and New Orleans before arriving in San Francisco in 1841. Liedesdorff sailed his commercial schooner, the *Julia Ann*, on regular voyages between Honolulu and California and operated the *Sitka*, the first steam-powered vessel in San Francisco Bay. As one of the most prominent businessmen in the city, Liedesdorff was elected to the town council in 1847 and helped establish its school system (Savage 1953; Lapp 1977, 9-11).

THE ANTEBELLUM WEST

Much of the pre-1846 exploration and early settlement in western North America took place on Mexico's northern frontier. However, after 1788, some English-speaking African Americans entered the Rocky Mountains and Pacific Northwest. Like their more numerous white counterparts, African Americans chose this region primarily for the profits derived from trading or trapping. But the frontier afforded

freedom from racial restrictions typically imposed by "settled" communities (Hafen 1965, 21-72).

The life of James Beckwourth, who lived and worked in the West for nearly 60 years, symbolized that freedom. Born in Virginia in 1798 of a slave mother and white father who brought his family to St. Charles, Missouri, in 1810, Beckwourth worked as a hunter until he joined the Ashley fur trapping expedition in 1824. He lived twice with the Absaroka Indians in Montana and during that time took two Native American wives. Later he married Louisa Sandoval, a "young Spanish girl" in Santa Fe in 1840, and Elizabeth Lettbetter, an African American woman, in Denver in 1860 (Bonner 1972, 98-99, 122-41; Oswald 1965, 37-60).

Beckwourth trapped at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in 1826 and two years later along the Snake River in Idaho and Wyoming. By the mid-1830s he supervised trading operations at Fort Vasquez, New Mexico, and in 1845 he joined the rebel forces of Juan Bautista Alvarado in an abortive attempt by *californios* to gain independence from Mexico. By 1847, he had returned to New Mexico in time to help the Americans defeat Mexican forces in the region (Weber 1982, 101-2; Bonner 1972, 456-65; Oswald 1965, 50-55).

In 1849, Beckwourth reappeared in California and discovered the pass through the Sierra Mountains that now carries his name. He then took a land claim on the California side of Beckwourth Pass and built a combined hotel and store that sold

supplies to California-bound emigrants. This business anchored the town eventually named after him. Sixty-one-year-old Beckwourth moved to Denver in 1859 during the Pike's Peak Gold Rush, and he managed a trading store. He died quietly of natural causes a month after returning to the Crow Indian country in 1866 (Bonner 1972, 518-20; Hafen 1928, 138-39; Oswald 1965, 43-46).

Few historians link African bondage with the West. Yet on the eve of the Civil War, 182,556 slaves composed 30 percent of the total population of Texas, while the Indian Territory's 7367 black slaves comprised 14 percent of the total population (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1864, xv; Doran 1975, 501-2). Black men in Texas and Indian Territory did the heavy work of plowing, felling trees, and digging ditches and occasionally developed some special skills, as in Indian Territory, where they were ferrymen and stevedores, and Texas, where they became cowboys (Campbell 1989, 55-56, 251).

California adopted an antislavery constitution in 1849. Yet state officials were unable or unwilling to challenge slaveholders who continued to bring their bond servants to the state until the outbreak of the Civil War. By 1852, 300 slaves were working in the gold fields, and an undetermined but sizable number were house servants in California cities. California had, by far, the largest number of bond servants west of Texas (Lapp 1977, 65).

Slavery was short-lived in the other states and territories of the West. Indeed, one state, Kansas, came to symbolize freedom for

African Americans held in bondage in neighboring states. Twelve thousand blacks took advantage of the Civil War to gain their liberty through flight. Henry Clay Bruce, the brother of future Mississippi senator Blanche K. Bruce, recounted how he and his fiancée escaped from Missouri to Kansas in 1863. Bruce strapped around his waist "a pair of Colt's revolvers and plenty of ammunition" for the run to the western border. "We avoided the main road and made the entire trip at night . . . without meeting anyone. . . . We crossed the Missouri River on a ferry boat to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I then felt myself a free man" (Taylor 1998, 97).

Free blacks sought out the Far West for economic opportunity and refuge from racial restrictions. Yet white Western state and territorial governments rapidly constructed familiar racially based proscriptive legislation that denied voting rights, prohibited African American court testimony, and banned black homesteading, jury service, and marriage with whites. Some black men challenged these restrictions. Missouri farmer George Washington Bush, who led his wife and six children and four other families on an eight-month, 2000-mile journey to the Pacific Northwest in 1844, declared en route that "if he could not have a free man's rights [in Oregon], he would seek the protection of the Mexican Government in California or New Mexico" (Minto 1901, 212). The Bush party eventually reached Oregon, but, unlike the majority of white settlers who spread out over the Willamette Valley south of the

Columbia, they chose the sparsely populated area north of the river, a decision that initiated subsequent migration into the area and organization of Washington Territory.

Economic gain motivated black migration to antebellum California as much as racial refuge. For the intrepid, the effort seemed well worth the dangers. In 1851, Peter Brown described his new life as a gold miner to his wife, Alley, in St. Genevieve City, Missouri. "I am now mining about 25 miles from Sacramento City and doing well," he wrote. "I have been working for myself for the past two months . . . and have cleared three hundred dollars. California is the best country in the world to make money. It is also the best place for black folks on the globe. All a man has to do, is to work, and he will make money" (Taylor 1998, 84).

Such reports prompted additional migration. By 1852, the black population in California had doubled to 2000 women and men. As with all mining frontiers, it was overwhelmingly male. Of the 952 blacks counted in 1850, only 9 percent were women. Ten years later, when black California numbered 4086 inhabitants, black women comprised only 31 percent of the total population (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1853, xxxiii; 1864, 33).

California's antebellum urban black men pursued a range of occupations similar to those available in eastern cities. A few fortunate African Americans in San Francisco became wealthy business owners. John Ross operated Ross's Exchange, a used-goods business, while James P. Dyer, the West's only antebellum

black manufacturer, began the New England Soap Factory in 1851. Although Mifflin W. Gibbs arrived in San Francisco in 1850 with ten cents, within a year he formed a partnership with fellow Philadelphian Peter Lester, the Pioneer Boot and Shoe Emporium, a store that eventually had patrons from Oregon to Baja California (Gibbs 1968, 44-45; *Proceedings* 1855, 18).

THE POST-CIVIL WAR ERA

In February 1863, while eastern America fought the Civil War, and the Emancipation Proclamation was less than two months old, black San Francisco newspaper owner Peter Anderson wrote an editorial that envisioned a great march of freed people westward, urged on by "our leading men in the east," and "our white friends who have been battling in the cause of freedom" (*Pacific Appeal* [San Francisco], 14 Feb. 1863, 2). That great march would come, however, only after black men and women were convinced their rights would be respected. The most important of those rights was suffrage. In 1866, a convention of black men meeting in Lawrence, Kansas, challenged the widely held idea that black voting was a privilege that the white male electorate could confer or deny at its pleasure. Then the convention issued this warning to the Euro-American majority in the state: "Since we are going to remain among you, we believe it unwise to . . . take from us as a class, our natural rights. . . . We must be a constant trouble in the state until it extends to

us equal and exact justice" (*Kansas Tribune* [Lawrence], 28 Oct. 1866, 2).

The campaign for suffrage in Colorado Territory had national implications. Between 1864 and 1867, Colorado Territory's 150 African Americans, including Lewis Douglass, son of the national civil rights leader Frederick Douglass, waged a relentless campaign to press Congress to delay statehood for the territory until their suffrage rights were guaranteed. William J. Hardin, who had arrived in Denver in 1863 from Kentucky, assumed the leadership of this effort, contacting Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner by telegram to outline the grievances of the territory's African Americans. Senator Sumner declared his opposition to Colorado statehood after reading the telegram from the black leader before the U.S. Senate. The debate over black suffrage restrictions in Colorado prompted Congress to pass the Territorial Suffrage Act in January 1867; the act gave black men the right to vote months before similar rights were extended to African Americans in the South and three years before the Fifteenth Amendment ensured similar rights for African American males in Northern and Western states (Berwanger 1981, 144-45).

In Texas, mostly ex-slave men attempted to guarantee their voting (and other civil) rights through the Texas Republican Party. On 4 July 1867, approximately 20 white and 150 black delegates met in Houston to form the new party. They were led by George T. Ruby of Galveston and Matthew Gaines of Washington County, both of whom were elected to

the state senate in 1869 and thus were the highest-ranking black elected officials in Texas during the Reconstruction period. By 1898, 42 black men had served in the legislature at different times (Taylor 1998, 110).

The Seminole, Creek, and Cherokee Nations allowed their former slaves to participate fully in tribal government. In all, 68 men were elected to the Seminole, Creek, and Cherokee legislatures. The Creek Nation had the largest and most consistent black political representation anywhere in the West during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Creek freedmen were elected judges and district attorneys in tribal courts, and district officials for the tribal government. One freedman, Jesse Franklin, was elected justice of the tribal Supreme Court in 1876 (Debo 1941, 185-237). Nine other African American men were elected to other Western state and territorial legislatures in Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma Territory (which was separated from Indian Territory in 1867), Washington, and Wyoming.

After the Civil War, tens of thousands of African American men headed west toward a thousand-mile frontier extending from North Dakota to Oklahoma. Sometimes these homesteaders followed promoters such as Kansas emigration leader Benjamin Singleton and created thriving communities such as Nicodemus, Kansas; Boley, Oklahoma; and Dearfield, Colorado. More often than not, however, they came on their own, like future scientist George Washington Carver in Ness

County, Kansas, in 1886, and future filmmaker Oscar Micheaux in Gregory County, South Dakota, in 1904. A fortunate few homesteaders such as Robert Ball Anderson in Nebraska generated their own success stories on the plains. Born a Kentucky slave, Anderson was 41 years old when he took his first homestead claim in Box Butte County, Nebraska, in 1885. By 1918, Anderson owned 2000 acres and was the largest black landholder in the state (Taylor 1998, 137-55; Anderson 1967, 58).

Cattle herding and soldiering were the two Western occupations that remained almost exclusively male. Black cowboys, who were more numerous in Texas than in any other Western state or territory, nonetheless comprised only 4.0 percent of the total of Texas herders in 1880 and 2.6 percent in 1890. Overall, 1200 black cowboys were about 2.0 percent of the total in the West. Black cowboys may have been few in number, but they worked throughout the West, as recounted in numerous newspapers, journals, biographies, and histories that briefly mention their activities (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1897, 532-626; 1918, 513-16).

Typical of such accounts was J. Frank Dobie's description of Pete Staples, a former Texas slave, who after the Civil War worked along the Rio Grande with *vaqueros* (cowboys), both in northern Mexico and west Texas (Dobie 1924, 52-53). Mississippi-born slave Bose Ikard was lifted from anonymity by the praise given him by his employer, Texas cattleman Charles Goodnight. "Ikard . . . was my detective, banker, and everything else in Colorado, New

Mexico, and the other wild country I was in. . . . [He] was the most skilled and trustworthy man I had" (Haley 1949, 242). On rare occasions, men such as Daniel Webster "80 John" Wallace in Texas and James Edwards in Wyoming rose from cowboys to cattlemen. Each owned 10,000-acre ranches in their home states by 1910 (Webb 1957, 1-35; Guenther 1989, 21-24).

Twenty-five thousand black men served in the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry of the United States Army between 1866 and 1917. Black soldiers fought the Kiowa and Cheyenne in Kansas in 1867, the Comanches in Texas in 1869, and the Apache in New Mexico in 1880 and participated in the Ghost Dance campaign against the Sioux in 1890-91. They also protected Indian Territory reservations from white encroachment throughout the 1880s, defended Kiowa women and children from attack by Texas Rangers in 1879, and protected Ute Indians from Colorado militiamen in 1887 (Taylor 1998, 169-74).

Buffalo soldiers performed police duty throughout the West, pursuing desperados and Mexican political revolutionaries in the Rio Grande border region, including Francisco "Pancho" Villa in 1916. On other occasions, buffalo soldiers stood between whites and Chicanos, as in the El Paso Salt War of 1879, and between clashing cattle ranchers in Lincoln County, New Mexico Territory, in 1878 and Johnson County, Wyoming, in 1890. By the 1890s, black troops were most frequently utilized to preserve the peace in Western labor disputes such as the

mining strikes of 1892 and 1899 in the Coeur d'Alene valley of northern Idaho (Taylor 1998, 174-90).

THE URBAN WEST

While some nineteenth-century black men trailed cattle from Texas to Dodge City, grew wheat on the high plains, or mined gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota, a larger number of African American males moved to Denver, San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles and smaller cities such as Salt Lake City, Topeka, and Helena, Montana, seeking employment in the expanding urban economy. These men founded and supported churches, fraternal organizations, and social clubs that helped shape the pattern of black city life well into the twentieth century (Taylor 1998, 192-96).

Regardless of the city, African American men performed similar work. They were personal servants in wealthy households, hotel waiters, railroad porters, messengers, cooks, and janitors. In ports such as Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco, they were sailors, ship stewards, and dock workers. Some entrepreneurial black men operated barbershops, restaurants, saloons, drugstores, and hotels. By the 1890s, most Western urban black communities had a few doctors and lawyers and newspaper editors and ministers (Cox 1982, chap. 4; Taylor 1994, chap. 1).

A handful of African American males became remarkably successful. San Franciscans Richard Barber, William E. Carlisle, Peter H. Joseph, George Washington Dennis, and Henry M. Collins had acquired

modest fortunes in real estate by the 1870s (Daniels 1980, 29-30). Colorado's most prominent African American male settler, Barney Ford, built Denver's largest hotel, the Inter-Ocean, in 1874. Later in the decade, Ford accepted the invitation of Cheyenne businessmen to build a hotel in the Wyoming territorial capital (Hall 1895, 4:440-41). In 1905, Robert C. Owens, grandson of Los Angeles black community leader Bridget "Biddy" Mason, constructed a six-story, \$250,000 building, earning him the designation "the richest Negro west of Chicago" (Crumbly 1905; Bunch 1988, 17-19).

Few black Western newspaper editors matched the wealth of Barney Ford or Robert C. Owens, but they often ranked as both prosperous businessmen and community leaders. Among the most prominent in the region were San Franciscans Peter Anderson and Philip Bell, who edited the region's oldest African American newspapers, the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* (Broussard 1977, 49-54). Other newspaper men included Joseph D. D. Rivers, editor of the *Colorado Statesman*; Joseph Bass of the *Montana Plaindealer*; William L. Eagleson, owner and editor of *Colored Citizen* in Topeka; and Horace Cayton, who organized the *Seattle Republican*. Los Angeles's *California Eagle* served the community from 1879 to 1966 (Fisher 1971, 163; Taylor 1994, 19-20). Salt Lake City's small African American community supported two newspapers between 1895 and 1910. The larger, the *Utah Plain Dealer*, edited by William W. Taylor, ran from 1895 to 1909, while its rival, the *Broad Ax*,

was published by Julius Taylor from 1895 until 1899 (Coleman 1980, 89-103).

Politics attracted African American urban males regardless of their wealth or occupation. By all indications, black men eagerly voted in city, state, and federal elections, usually supporting the Republican Party despite meager patronage rewards and few opportunities to campaign for office. Topeka, Kansas, proved an exception with respect to patronage and campaign opportunities. Between 1879 and 1881, nearly 3000 migrants to Topeka expanded the existing community of 700. The new citizens turned to politics, electing black Republican Topekans to numerous local offices. Alfred Kuykendall, for example, was elected constable in 1879, a post he held for 10 years, while Wesley I. Jameson was justice of the peace in 1888 and "Colonel" John Brown became Shawnee county clerk in 1889. Beginning in 1897, Fred Rountree represented the Fifth Ward in the Topeka City Council. Black Topeka's crowning achievement in this area came in 1891 when President Benjamin Harrison appointed local attorney and political activist John L. Waller U.S. consul to Madagascar (Woods 1981, 104, 120; Cox 1982, 82-83, 123-24, 145).

Nineteenth-century urban employment patterns for African American males continued virtually unchanged until World War II. C. L. Dellums, vice president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, recalled work opportunities soon after he came to the San Francisco Bay Area from Texas in 1923: "I had been around here long enough to

realize there wasn't very much work Negroes could get." They could either "go down to the sea in ships or work on the railroads" (Broussard 1993, 40).

Despite their poverty, working-class black men supported a growing number of professionals and entrepreneurs. By 1915, black Houston had nearly 400 businesses (SoRelle 1992, 103-15). Black Los Angeles had fewer but more high-profile businesses along Central Avenue. Businesses on "the Avenue" included the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company and the Hotel Somerville, built by dentist J. Alexander Somerville, and the Hudson-Liddell Building, owned by Dr. H. Claude Hudson and designed by black architect Paul Williams (Bunch 1988, 31).

By the early 1930s, black voters had turned to the Democratic Party. Los Angeles's black voters epitomized this shift when, in 1934, Republican Frederick Roberts, who had served 16 years in the state assembly, was defeated by a 27-year-old Democrat, Augustus Hawkins. Hawkins represented the south-central Los Angeles assembly district until 1962, when he became the first African American congressman from California. With his ties to unions and left-wing politicians, Hawkins personified an emerging political nexus of liberals, labor, and blacks in the Roosevelt coalition (Fisher 1971, 228-35).

San Antonio blacks in the 1930s supported Charles Bellinger, an African American political boss who in the 1920s forged a deal with San Antonio's Latinos and the white-led political machine. In exchange for

increased public services—parks, water lines, and street paving—Bellinger delivered a bloc of approximately 8000 votes. Unique in Texas at the time when most of the state's African American voters were disfranchised, Bellinger's machine demonstrated how blacks and Latinos could exert leverage in a hostile political system (Sapper 1972, 36-69, 102-3; Mason 1994, 184-91).

Black men also developed a Western literary tradition, which began when Texas author Sutton E. Griggs wrote *Imperium in Imperio*, an 1899 novel that urged economic and political autonomy for black Texans. It continues with contemporary Western writers such as Berkeley author Ishmael Reed and Seattle playwright August Wilson. Three 1920s-era writers, Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, and Arna Bontemps, attempted a Los Angeles renaissance before moving on to Harlem in 1925. Hughes, Thurman, and Bontemps worked with lesser-known writers at the 28th Street YMCA, near Central Avenue. These artists were supported by Thurman's short-lived *Outlet* magazine and its successor, *Flash Magazine*, two of the earliest black literary journals in the West (Taylor 1998, 245).

Western African American jazz musicians fared better than writers. These black men thrived in Kansas City, Los Angeles, Seattle, Dallas, Oklahoma City, and Denver and, in the process, helped shape the evolving national jazz culture of the 1920s and 1930s. By the 1920s, Kansas City had emerged as a vital center of jazz. Black musicians from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Colorado

made their way to Kansas City's nearly 500 nightclubs, taverns, and cabarets, creating a dynamic music scene rivaling Harlem and Chicago's South Side (Stowe 1992).

Black Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, El Paso, Oklahoma City, Denver, and Omaha provided the first audiences for little-known but ambitious jazz artists. Dallas's Deep Ellum, for example, "swarmed with blues singers, boogie woogie pianists and small combos" who constantly formed and dissolved acts that played the clubs and bars of the city. Jazz bands also went on the road. The Troy Floyd Orchestra in San Antonio, the Blues Syncopaters of El Paso, and the Oklahoma City-based Blue Devils, which at various times included Count Basie, Jimmy Rushing, and Lester Young, traveled a circuit through Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Wyoming, Texas, Colorado, South Dakota, and New Mexico (Rice 1996, 108-10; Stowe 1992, 66).

WORLD WAR II

World War II changed forever the African American West. The region's black population grew by 443,000 (33 percent) during the war decade and redistributed itself toward the West Coast. Most of these newcomers concentrated in five major metropolitan regions: Seattle-Tacoma and Portland-Vancouver in the Pacific Northwest; the San Francisco Bay Area, comprising San Francisco, Oakland, and smaller cities such as Berkeley and Richmond; the Los Angeles-Long Beach area; and San Diego. The numbers were less

dramatic in Denver, Omaha, Phoenix, Tucson, and Honolulu, but these cities also saw surging black populations (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1943, tab. 35; 1952, tab. 53).

The population grew because of expanding work opportunities. After decades of menial labor, thousands of black men entered the region's factories and shipyards. Migrants came west for work in shipbuilding and aircraft production, initially lured by recruiters. Between 1942 and 1943, Kaiser Shipyards brought nearly 38,000 workers on "liberty" trains that originated as far east as New York City. Another 60,000 paid their way to the West Coast. Wartime migration soon assumed a momentum independent of Kaiser's recruiting efforts. By 1943, black workers were writing home about the high wages, the mild climate, and greater freedom (Johnson 1993, 38, 52-54; Moore 1989, 78).

Wartime labor demands guaranteed that black men would work; they did not guarantee equitable treatment. Throughout the war, black workers, shipyard and aircraft plant managers, and union officials engaged in a triangular struggle over workplace segregation and worker assignments. Black workers, for example, could build ships but not repair them, or they could clean ships but not paint them. Eventually labor shortages and production demands broke down this racial classification, but most black workers remained in unskilled work for the rest of the war (Kesselman 1990, 41-43; Archibald 1947, 60-84; Johnson 1993, 63-75).

The International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (American Federation of Labor) accounted for much of the black workers' difficulty. After years of complete exclusion, the union in 1937 reversed its policy and created all-black "auxiliary" locals. Four years later, the Boilermakers negotiated a closed-shop agreement with West Coast shipbuilders guaranteeing jurisdiction over 65 percent of the U.S. shipyard workers and all of those in West Coast yards except in Seattle. By 1944, 32,000 black employees had been forced into A-26 in Oakland, A-32 in Portland, A-92 in Los Angeles, and A-41 in Sausalito (Harris 1981; Hill 1977, 192-200; Smith and Taylor 1980).

When black workers protested their status in the summer of 1943, the Boilermakers compelled the shipyards to fire black workers for protesting the auxiliary scheme. In rapid succession, 200 workers were dismissed at Marinship in Sausalito, 100 at Moore Drydock in Oakland, 300 workers at Cal Ship in Los Angeles, and 350 at the three Kaiser shipyards in Portland. Among the dismissed Marinship workers was Joseph James, president of the San Francisco chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Shipyard workers in each community immediately mounted legal challenges. Joseph James's suit against Marinship near San Francisco reached the California Supreme Court in 1944. The court ruling in *James v. Marinship* ordered the Boilermakers to dismantle their auxiliary structure in the state. A U.S. district court in

Portland ruled much the same, and in 1946 the California Supreme Court in *Williams v. International Brotherhood of Boilermakers* reaffirmed and extended the earlier *James* opinion (Taylor 1998, 260)

Thousands of African American men came west in uniform. Fort Huachuca, in the Arizona desert, had the largest concentration of black soldiers in the nation after the Army combined the 25th, 368th, and 369th Regiments to create the U.S. 93rd Infantry Division. Fort Huachuca, once a base for buffalo soldiers, now expanded to accommodate 14,000 soldiers, who constituted the only all-black division. However, unlike the buffalo soldiers, who were led by white officers, the 93rd had nearly 300 black officers (Jefferson 1995, 231-43).

Other African American soldiers were also stationed at military facilities remote from any communities. The men of the 93rd, 95th, 97th, and 388th engineers regiments worked in temperatures as low as 70 degrees below zero while building the Alcan Highway through Alaska and the Canadian Northwest (Twichell 1992, chaps. 7, 9, and 10; Morgan 1992, 1-6). Black soldiers and sailors patrolled ammunition depots at Hawthorne, Nevada, and Hastings, Nebraska. At other times, however, African American soldiers were located at military bases near African American communities. The 5000 soldiers and sailors stationed at Seattle's Fort Lawton, Fort Lewis near Tacoma, or the naval base at Bremerton visibly increased the black presence in the Puget Sound region. Comparable concentrations

of servicemen in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, San Diego, Denver, and San Antonio all had a similar effect (Nash 1985, 105-6; Russell 1995, 76-80).

Western African American men shared the nation's joy on V-J Day, but the celebration soon ceased. By war's end, Western industrialists were scaling back war-related production and employees. Kaiser shipyards in Richmond shrank their workforce from 47,000 in December 1944 to 9000 in March 1946, a pace matched by other defense plants and shipyards. By 1947, thousands of unemployed black men who had been "essential workers" during the war now roamed the streets of Los Angeles, Oakland, and Portland. In 1947, black Oaklanders composed half of those applying for indigent relief, although they comprised only 10 percent of the city's population. Nearly half of the 4000 blacks in Vallejo, California, were unemployed. The prospects for postwar employment in Portland were so dismal that the black population declined by 50 percent (11,000) between 1944 and 1947 (Taylor 1998, 273-74).

Those African American communities that were larger in size became more politically visible and active. In 1943, an African American named Earl Mann, of Denver, was elected to the Colorado legislature. Five years later, Berkeley pharmacist W. Byron Rumford went to the California Assembly, where he joined Los Angeles assemblyman Augustus Hawkins. In 1950, attorney Charles Stokes who had arrived in Seattle only in 1944, became the first African American from his city to serve in the

Washington state legislature, while Hayzel Daniels and Carl Sims were elected to the Arizona legislature. A postwar political coalition of San Antonio blacks and Latinos elected Gus García and George Sutton to the local school board in 1948. Sutton was the first black elected official in Texas since the nineteenth century (Taylor 1998, 275).

Black Western popular culture soon brought changes to literature and music. Chester Himes's novel *If He Hollers, Let Him Go* was the first to capture the wartime migrant experience. But the greatest impact could be heard in bars and clubs and eventually on radios and in concert halls. Los Angeles's Central Avenue became the fountainhead of new jazz music styles such as bebop, pioneered by newcomers Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Coleman Hawkins, or the "cool jazz" of Nat King Cole, who teamed with local musicians such as Dexter Gordon, Charles Mingus, and Eric Dolphy. Central Avenue's numerous nightclubs and after-hours bars stretched seven miles from downtown to Watts, rivaling New York's famed 52nd Street (Marmorstein 1988; Cox 1996, 65-70).

THE STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

One half of the Double V campaign to defeat the Axis ended with V-J Day. The other half, the struggle for civil rights, continued virtually without interruption. Western black men confronted job discrimination, housing bias, and de facto school segregation through legal challenges and

direct-action protests such as sit-ins and other public demonstrations. The legal effort reached its apogee with the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. However, direct action preceded and followed the *Brown* decision (Taylor 1998, 278-80).

On Saturday, 19 July 1958, Ron Walters, a Wichita State College freshman and head of the Wichita NAACP Youth Council, led 10 African American high school and college students in a four-week sit-in at the Dockum drugstore lunch counter. The students won their battle, preceding by almost two years the more famous sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. The Wichita campaign also marked the beginning of seven years of direct-action protests in a dozen Western cities from San Antonio to Seattle. One of the largest protests, a challenge of the discriminatory hiring practices at the Sheraton Palace Hotel in San Francisco in 1963, involved 1500 demonstrators, including a young attorney, Willie Brown, and became the single largest civil rights action in the Far West (Taylor 1998, 285-92).

On 11 August 1965, in a predominately African American neighborhood near Watts, California Highway Patrolman Lee Minikus stopped 21-year-old Marquette Frye and in the process touched off the Watts riot, the largest African American civil uprising in the nation's history. When the conflict was over, 34 people were dead—29 blacks, 3 Latinos, 1 Asian, and 1 white. After 1965, the name "Watts" symbolized poverty, anger, alienation, resentment, and a

disturbing future for urban America (Horne 1995, 96).

Although the cry "black power" was first heard during a Canton, Mississippi, speech by Stokely Carmichael, its major manifestation evolved in the West. Within a year of the Watts uprising, Maulana Ron Karenga founded United Slaves (US) and soon emerged as the most prominent black nationalist in Los Angeles. In February 1966, he organized the first Watts Summer Festival, to honor the dead and recast the riot as a revolt. The festival attracted 130,000 people. Karenga also supported Freedom City, a proposal to allow Watts to secede from Los Angeles (Tyler 1983, 45, 221-22; Horne 1995, 200-201).

Karenga promoted his views in a series of interviews with national newsmagazines in 1966. In an interview with John Gregory Dunne, Karenga dismissed the civil rights movement's goals. "Why integrate? Why live where we are not wanted?" And to Andrew Kopkind he reported, "Blacks should control their own communities. . . . We are free men. We have our own language. . . . Only slaves and dogs are named by their masters." Karenga soon eclipsed all rivals except Imamu Amiri Baraka of Newark, New Jersey, as the leading black nationalist in the United States (Taylor 1998, 303-4).

The origins of the Black Panther Party in Oakland reveal a similar repudiation of the civil rights struggle. Black Panthers founders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale conducted their first meeting at a West Oakland clubhouse on 15 October 1966. Newton and Seale had

histories much like those of thousands of black Oakland residents, whom the new party vowed to defend. Born in Monroe, Louisiana, Newton came west to Oakland with his family in 1945, when he was 3. Seale was born in Dallas, Texas, in 1936 but grew up in Codornices Village, the sprawling housing project that straddled the Berkeley-Albany border. Newton and Seale were members of the generation of black Westerners who, unlike their ship-building parents, could not secure a place in the postwar Bay Area economy. In 1961, Newton and Seale met at Oakland City College, drawn together by their mutual admiration for Malcolm X, "street brothers," and socialist theories (Newton 1973, 11-72, 105-9; Seale 1968, 4-8).

The Panthers called for armed self-defense of black communities, urged African Americans to embrace Marxism, and espoused alliances with other U.S. radicals and with revolutionary governments throughout the world. Moreover, the Panthers believed that direct confrontation with police across the United States would hasten the revolutionary struggle they and their allies were destined to win (Pearson 1994, 112-13).

The Panthers never found common ground with Maulana Ron Karenga's US. Both the Panthers' Southern California chapter and US operated in South Central Los Angeles and drew from the same constituency of impoverished, alienated black youths. To appeal to these youths, many of whom had gang backgrounds, both organizations promoted their streetwise bravado,

which quickly devolved into a series of street confrontations culminating in the bloody 1969 shoot-out on the University of California at Los Angeles campus that left Los Angeles Panthers Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter and John Huggins dead in a dispute over the first director of the campus's new Afro-American Studies Center (Brown 1992, chap. 8; Tyler 1983, 227-34).

Despite the evidence of racism all around them, many African American men continued to believe the West offered a chance for both economic opportunity and political freedom. Economic opportunity propelled hundreds of free blacks to enter Mexican Texas in the 1820s and thousands to come to Gold Rush California in the 1850s. In the 1890s, tens of thousands came to homestead in Oklahoma Territory for "the last chance for a free home." Seeking similar opportunity, 200,000 African Americans migrated to West Coast shipyards and aircraft plants during World War II. Indeed, the desire for freedom seemed centuries older than the quest for land. Ironically, the words of a deposition by a black woman, Isabel de Olvera, in anticipation of her move north in 1600 from central Mexico to what would become New Mexico, best summarized the views of black men. Expressing concern that she might face racially inspired discrimination, Olvera said, "It is proper to protect my rights. . . . I demand justice," and thereby illustrated a determination to challenge that discrimination. In their own way, black male Westerners who fought segregated Kansas schools from the 1870s to the 1950s, who

refused to accept the Boilermakers' discriminatory union plan during World War II, or who confront racial discrimination today through the courts or in direct-action protests continue the legacy of Olvera; they, too, demand justice ("Gordejuela Inspection" 1953, 562).

References

- Anderson, Robert. 1967. *From Slavery to Affluence: Memoirs of Robert Anderson, Ex-Slave*. Steamboat Springs, CO: Steamboat Pilot.
- Archibald, Katherine. 1947. *Wartime Shipyard: A Study in Cultural Disunity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bandelier, F., ed. 1905. *The Journey of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca*. New York: A. S. Barnes.
- Berwanger, Eugene. 1981. *The West and Reconstruction*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Bonner, Thomas D., ed. 1972. *Life and Adventures of James Beckwourth*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Broussard, Albert. 1977. *The New Racial Frontier: San Francisco's Black Community: 1900-1940*. Ph.D. diss., Duke University.
- . 1993. *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Brown, Elaine. 1992. *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Bunch, Lonnie, III. 1988. *Black Angelinos: The Afro-American in Los Angeles, 1850-1950*. Los Angeles: California Afro-American Museum.
- Campbell, Randolph B. 1989. *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

- Coleman, Ronald. 1980. A History of Blacks in Utah, 1825-1910. Ph.D. diss., University of Utah.
- Cox, Bette Yarbrough. 1996. *Central Avenue—Its Rise and Fall (1890-c.1955)*. Los Angeles: Beem.
- Cox, Thomas C. 1982. *Blacks in Topeka: A Social History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Crumbly, F. H. 1905. A Los Angeles Citizen. *The Colored American Magazine* 9(Sept.):482-85.
- Daniels, Douglas Henry. 1980. *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Debo, Angie. 1941. *The Road to Disappearance*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Dobie, J. Frank, ed. 1924. *Legends of Texas*. Austin: Texas Folklore Society.
- Doran, Michael F. 1975. Population Statistics of Nineteenth Century Indian Territory. *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 53(4):501-2.
- Fisher, James A. 1971. A History of the Political and Social Development of the Black Community in California, 1850-1950. Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook.
- Gibbs, Mifflin W. 1968. *Shadow and Light: An Autobiography*. New York: Arno Press and the New York Times.
- Gordejuela Inspection: Inspection Made by Don Juan de Onate and Juan de Sotelo by Order of Gaspar de Zuniga y Acevedo, Count of Monterrey, Governor and Captain General of New Spain, August, 1600, The. 1953. In *Don Juan de Onate: Colonizer of New Mexico, 1595-1628*, ed. George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey. Vol. 5. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Guenther, Todd. 1989. "Y'all Call Me Nigger Jim Now, But Someday You'll Call Me Mr. James Edwards": Black Success on the Plains of the Equality State. *Annals of Wyoming* 61(2):20-40.
- Hafen, LeRoy R. 1928. The Last Years of James P. Beckwourth. *Colorado Magazine* 5(4):134-39.
- . 1965. A Brief History of the Fur Trade of the Far West. In *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, ed. LeRoy Hafen. Vol. 1. Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark.
- Haley, James Evetts. 1949. *Charles Goodnight, Cowman and Plainsman*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Hall, Frank. 1895. *History of the State of Colorado*. Chicago: Blakely Printing.
- Hallenbeck, Cleve, ed. 1987. *The Journey of Fray Marcos de Niza*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press.
- Harris, William H. 1981. Federal Intervention in Union Discrimination: FEPC and West Coast Shipyards During World War II. *Labor History* 22(3):325-47.
- Hill, Herbert. 1977. *Black Labor and the American Legal System*. Vol. 1, *Race Work and the Law*. Washington, DC: Bureau of National Affairs.
- Horne, Gerald. 1995. *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Jefferson, Robert Franklin. 1995. Making the Men of the 93rd: African American Servicemen in the Years of the Great Depression and the Second World War, 1935-1947. Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan.
- Johnson, Marilyn. 1993. *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kesselman, Amy. 1990. *Fleeting Opportunities: Women Shipyard Workers in Portland and Vancouver During World War II and Reconversion*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Lapp, Rudolph. 1977. *Blacks in Gold Rush California*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- Marmorstein, Gary. 1988. Central Avenue Jazz: Los Angeles Black Music of the Forties. *Southern California Quarterly* 70(4):415-26.
- Mason, Kenneth. 1994. Paternal Community: African Americans and Race Relations in San Antonio, Texas, 1867-1937. Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin.
- McDonald, Dedra S. 1995. Slavery and Freedom in the Southwest: African Descendants in Spanish Colonial New Mexico. Manuscript.
- Minto, John. 1901. Reminiscences of Experiences on the Oregon Trail in 1844. *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 2(3):209-54.
- Moore, Shirley Ann. 1989. The Black Community in Richmond, California, 1910-1963. Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley.
- Morgan, Lael. 1992. Writing Minorities out of History: Black Builders of the Alcan Highway. *Alaska History* 7(2):1-13.
- Nash, Gerald D. 1985. *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Newton, Huey P. 1973. *Revolutionary Suicide*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Oswald, Delmont R. 1965. James P. Beckwourth. In *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, ed. LeRoy Hafen. Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark.
- Pearson, Hugh. 1994. *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Prince, Diane Elizabeth. 1967. William Goyens, Free Negro on the Texas Frontier. M.A. thesis, Stephen F. Austin State College.
- Proceedings of the First State Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California*. 1855. Sacramento, CA: Democratic State Journal Printer.
- Rice, Marc. 1996. Frompin' in the Great Plains: Listening and Dancing to the Jazz Orchestras of Alphonso Trent, 1925-44. *Great Plains Quarterly* 16(2):107-15.
- Russell, Beverly. 1995. War II Boomtown: Hastings and the Naval Ammunition Depot. *Nebraska History* 76(2-3):75-83.
- Sapper, Gary. 1972. A Survey of the History of the Black People of Texas, 1930-1954. Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University.
- Savage, W. Sherman. 1953. The Influence of Alexander Liedesdorff on the History of California. *Journal of Negro History* 38(3):322-32.
- Seale, Bobby. 1968. *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Smith, Alonzo N. and Quintard Taylor. 1980. Racial Discrimination in the Workplace: A Study of Two West Coast Cities During the 1940s. *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 8(1):35-54.
- SoRelle, James M. 1992. The Emergence of Black Business in Houston, Texas: A Study of Race and Ideology, 1919-45. In *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston*, ed. Howard Beeth and Cary Wintz. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- Stowe, David W. 1992. Jazz in the West: Cultural Frontier and Region During the Swing Era. *Western Historical Quarterly* 23(1):53-73.
- Taylor, Quintard. 1994. *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 Through the Civil Rights Era*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- . 1998. *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Twitchell, Heath. 1992. *Northwest Epic: The Building of the Alaska Highway*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

- Tyler, Bruce. 1983. *Black Radicalism in Southern California, 1950-1982*. Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1853. *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850*. Washington, DC: Robert Armstrong.
- . 1864. *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- . 1897. *Population of the United States, 1890*. Part II. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- . 1918. *Negro Population in the United States, 1790-1915*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- . 1943. *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, Population*. Vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- . 1952. *Seventeenth Census of the United States, 1950, Census of the Population*. Vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- . 1953. *Census of Population, 1950*. Vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Webb, Hertha Auburn. 1957. D. W. "80 John" Wallace: Black Cattleman, 1875-1939. M.A. thesis, Prairie View A&M College.
- Weber, David J. 1982. *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Woods, Randall B. 1981. *A Black Odyssey: John Lewis Waller and the Promise of American Life, 1878-1900*. Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas.
- Woolfolk, George Ruble. 1976. *The Free Negro in Texas, 1800-1860: A Study in Cultural Compromise*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International.