

They Fought for Votes

The White Politician and the Black Editor

*By Nudie E. Williams**

There never was a more favorable time than now for you to secure good homes in a land where you will be free and your rights respected. Oklahoma is open for settlement; come in and help make it one of the best states in the Union.¹

Such newspaper editorials encouraged blacks who first migrated to Oklahoma. Newspapers like the *Langston Herald*, the pioneer black weekly in Oklahoma Territory, not only implored them to move west but publicized the opportunities to be found in the city of Langston.² Besides the lure of free land made possible by a series of Oklahoma land openings beginning in 1889, there also was the all-important new chance for equality.³

Black newspapers played a significant role in the struggle to get blacks' rights respected. In fact, black newspaper editors led the fight to challenge the territorial political structure when the best interest of blacks was threatened. Most of these early journals were Republican in nature because they associated the Republican party with Abraham Lincoln, the Emancipation Proclamation, and protection of the former slaves' civil rights.⁴

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The men who edited and published these newspapers were the most vocal and usually the best-educated group in the black community. These men understood and were actively involved in the political system. Most of their newspapers were highly responsive to political issues and kept the community politically informed. In Oklahoma these editors played leading roles in the early territorial struggle to get a larger share of the political patronage and constantly demanded more Republican party support for blacks seeking elective office.⁵

On the very eve of statehood, patronage was still a bitter political issue with black republicans in Oklahoma.⁶ Stephen Douglass Russell, Sr., Logan county politician, newspaperman, and native of Maryland, led the attack. Russell was born July, 1854. He later migrated to Arkansas where most of his seven children were born. By 1892 the newspaperman had moved farther west and was residing on East Harrison Avenue in Guthrie, Oklahoma Territory, where he owned and published *The Constitution*, a weekly Republican newspaper. Two of his older sons, Abraham Douglass and Frederick Douglass, were employed in the family business as composition and pressmen. In 1904 Russell organized the *Western Age* in Langston, one of the early all-black towns in Oklahoma.⁷

Under Russell's editorship, the new Republican newspaper replaced the *Herald* in Langston as the political voice for blacks in Logan County.⁸ Russell had openly challenged the recently appointed republican governor in 1906 for more official recognition of blacks in the party. He urged Frank Frantz, the new Republican governor of Oklahoma Territory, to benefit blacks more than his Republican predecessor, who had appointed only four blacks to office. However, Russell was quite careful to point out to all, blacks and whites, that when blacks were appointed they must be competent, honest, fit, loyal to the party, but above all other considerations, they must be "Negroes who represent the Negroes of Oklahoma!"⁹ With the territorial governorship safely in the hands of Republicans, according to Russell, the business at hand was to get the party mobilized for the coming local county and congressional elections.¹⁰

Such enthusiasm for the party's future in Oklahoma had been generated under the leadership of congressional delegate, Bird Segle McGuire, of Pawnee. In 1894 the native of St. Clair County, Illinois, had moved to Pawnee County, Oklahoma, where he practiced law until he was appointed Assistant United States Attorney General for Oklahoma Territory in 1897.¹¹ His service in this capacity was terminated upon his election as Oklahoma delegate to Congress in

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1903.¹² In fact, the *Western Age* had praised the delegate as a Republican leader who stood for an “open door policy to all Republicans in Oklahoma.”¹³ Logan County black Republicans believed that he meant to nominate a good black and a liberal white candidate to the party ticket and that he would work to get them elected to political office in the 1906 campaign.¹⁴

What limited political success blacks had enjoyed in elective offices in Oklahoma as Republicans proved to be embarrassing to their white colleagues. Many white politicians had begun labeling the Republican Party the “party of the black man.”¹⁵ As a result, the decision finally was made to dissociate the Republican Party from its black supporters, and a movement began within the party to nominate and endorse only white Republican candidates for political office. The so-called “Lilly White” Republican campaign was underway by 1906.¹⁶

The movement especially annoyed Russell, because in 1905, he was one of the few blacks defending the Republican Party and particularly congressional delegate McGuire against “a certain element of Negroes [who are] telling [everyone] that McGuire is unfriendly to the Negro race.”¹⁷ Russell also challenged McGuire’s black detractors to “call him by name that [had] made application to McGuire, properly endorsed by the Republican County organization or territorial [government] for an appointment.”¹⁸

The very next year, however, the editor of the *Western Age* had reason to question the position of delegate McGuire and the Logan County brand of Republicanism for their lack of support of black candidates for elective office. James Thompson, the black school land inspector appointed by former territorial Governor Thompson B. Ferguson, (1901–1906), was removed from office in 1907.¹⁹ McGuire did not feel obligated to follow Dennis T. Flynn’s lead as congressional delegate by appointing blacks to government positions. His failure to appoint a single black did not go unchallenged.²⁰

Several of Russell’s editorials reflected the dilemma facing the black voter and politician at the height of “Lilly White” Republicanism and early statehood in Oklahoma. First, he questioned the political fairness of the new trend:

There are some White Republicans who [are] candidates for office in Oklahoma who [are] guilty of saying, ‘that [it] is not time for Negroes to aspire to be elected to public office’. If by reason of color they are not [good] enough to vote for White men to hold office. What’s sauce for the goose, is sauce for the gander.²¹

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And second, he appealed to the principles of the party's founding fathers:

When White aspirants for political office [bob] up one against the other, the duty of the Negro is to carefully weigh the various candidates and after careful and thorough study of such candidates, always support the one who sticks the closest to the party doctrine as taught by Abe Lincoln, Fred Douglass and U. S. Grant. Stay by the men who are willing to vote for black men as well as having black men vote for them. Stand by such white Republicans as are in favor of DIVORCING social feats from political feats. On the rock "social-politics" our grand old ship is about to be wrecked.²²

Black politicians realized that the real issue was race paranoia and not solely politics. Toward this end they worked to reassure their colleagues and the voting public that their needs were not singly oriented toward social equality. The separation of the races was traditionally acceptable and now legally enforceable.²³ However, equality was not an ideal to be compromised, and while most blacks might agree to "blot out the word social equality," they would do so only if the principle of "political equality" was its substitute.²⁴

At stake was the state's first general election. Russell, also a justice of the peace, and several other blacks were elected as delegates to represent Logan County at the state Republican Convention on August 1, 1907, in Tulsa. The meeting at Tulsa proved to be a continuation of the political disappointment encountered by blacks in Oklahoma.²⁵

The black delegates suffered a complete voting shut out for positions on committees at the state convention. The only concession the party made to blacks was the State Republican Central Committee Resolution which did express a desire to guard "the Negroes' equal right[s] before the law with all other men."²⁶ Besides this token gesture, the Republican Party authorized a ten-man Advisory Committee composed of "two representatives of the colored race from each of the Congressional Districts of the state, . . . to advise and consult with" the Party in conducting the election campaigns in the state.²⁷

Russell, appointed Secretary and Manager of the Advisory Committee, offered a motion to lease a suite of rooms at the Melrose Hotel in Oklahoma City; he then secured office furniture, employed two stenographers, "and opened up state headquarters where all colored men in particular could freely meet and council on matters of the state campaign."²⁸ A significant number of black voters and politicians in Oklahoma objected to this sort of voluntary political separa-

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tion. Thus when an Oklahoma City *Times-Journal* reporter asked Russell "what have you to say about the criticism made about separate headquarters?"²⁹ The Republican editor replied straightaway that "it is known by every sane man in Oklahoma, that in churches, lodges and in schools my race [is] separate. Then I see no good reason why we should not have a separate state headquarters."³⁰ He went on to explain, "I can see no difference in having separate political headquarters for my race, since all religious denominations, Methodist, Baptist, etc., have separate churches—all worshipping the one and same God."³¹

The staunch Republican continued to defend the logic of his position because of the need "to relieve the political tension from any racial feelings."³² He also felt that the "separate headquarters is further proof that my race is not seeking social equality with the other races, as one prominent democratic candidate asserted a few days ago."³³ Furthermore, many black Oklahomans already had determined that "political equality" was the key issue for their survival in the transition from Republican territorial politics to statehood and Democratic state politics.³⁴

From the outset, blacks had rejected the new state constitution

The legislature took a flying start on the jim crow law. The people wanted it--the democrats promised it--and now they "made good."

21,361
DAILY AVERAGE FOR NOV.

THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN
LARGEST DAILY NEWSPAPER IN GREAT OKLAHOMA

VOL. 16, NO. 36
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1907—FOURTEEN PAGES
PRICE 5 CENTS

RACE SEPARATION IN OKLAHOMA PROVIDED FOR IN FIRST BILLS PRESENTED
STATE LEGISLATURE STARTS TO MOLD JIM CROW LAWS

"That Listens Real Good"

DEAD BODY OF CASNER DISCOVERED
Mystery In Disappearance of Lawton Man Solved
FIND CORPSE IN CREEK
Probably Is That He Was Driven In by Bush Failure
—Accuses OW

VICTORY IS SCORED BY GAMESTERS
Must Be Proved That Gamblers Play for Real Money
ZWICK GIVES DECISION
Fact That Police Must Shut Down Doesn't Count

BILLS PROVIDE FINE OF FROM \$100 TO \$1,000 FOR EACH VIOLATION OF LAW
State Capital Location Measure Introduced
Providing for a Special Election to Be Held Next Year

FEEL THAT THERE WILL BE "POSSIBLY" IN GOING TO STOP THAT
UP AGAIN FELLERS
SAY YES
WILL YOU STAND FOR HIGHER PRICES

RUN SPECIALS IN MARKET | **President's** | **WOMAN SHOTS**
IN MARKET | **IN MARKET** | **IN MARKET**

As the first state legislature reinforced the walls of segregation, Russell desperately sought to preserve the political victories of the territorial era.

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because of its provision for separate schools. They believed the provision set a dangerous precedent for future "Jim Crow" laws in Oklahoma. Still, the state general election produced the first resounding defeat for black "political equality" on September 17, 1907. The Democrats captured the gubernatorial chair, swept 39 of the 44 state senate seats, and swamped the lower house by winning 93 of the 109 positions. The state constitution also was a victory for the the opposition, for the voters of Oklahoma provided a state-wide margin of five to two in favor of the document. This was an overwhelming mandate for racial separation despite the fact that there were only 55,684 blacks in the state compared with 670,204 whites. Being a political or numerical minority had little effect on the prevailing attitude which favored racial segregation during early statehood.³⁵

Perhaps the greatest irony of all, at least politically, was that twenty-two Republicans elected to state office in the general election were successful largely because of the black Republicans' bloc-voting tactics. Unfortunately, even Republican Charles H. Filson, Secretary of Oklahoma Territory, proceeded to complain that "it would be better for both races if the Negro would divide his vote between Republicans, Democrats and Socialist[s]." ³⁶ For the blacks of Oklahoma, their long political association with the Republican Party and their belief that the party was "the ship; [and] all else is sea" was being severely tested.³⁷

When Representative McGuire returned to Washington in 1908, editor Russell and other black Republican leaders monitored his performance. In the pages of the *Western Age*, Russell waged a relentless editorial war directed at the political accountability of all elected Republicans, state and national, but his campaign especially focused on Representative McGuire. After labeling Republican delegate, John W. Capers, of Guthrie a "political hack" at the state convention in Oklahoma City, the editor went on to describe the black delegate as an underling hired by "Lilly White" Republican bosses for window dressings and to deliver the black vote. At the same time, he began his editorial assault in earnest in the "Unchain the Truth" campaign in the *Western Age* to prevent the re-nomination of Representative McGuire in April, 1908.³⁸

The white Republican bosses of Logan County retaliated with a "boycott" of the *Western Age*. But to make the effort effective they needed the cooperation of the local Democrats; the opposition, of course, failed to support the scheme. Democrats simply welcomed any division among the Republicans and especially anything that would

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split the solid-voting black Republicans. Meanwhile, McGuire's black supporters constantly reminded him of his dereliction of duty to them. More insulting politically was the newspaper's refusal to support McGuire's bid and its endorsement of a former Oklahoma Republican supreme court justice for the party's primary on August 4, 1908.³⁹

Russell, without much support from other black newspapers in Guthrie, took on the county and state Republican establishment and kept up the pressure in his editorials. Thus when the *Western Age* openly challenged McGuire's poor congressional voting record on critical issues, there were few Republicans who dared defend it, and certainly not McGuire. The editor's high-pressured campaign was effective because the congressional representative was forced into action.⁴⁰ But it was Russell's perfectly timed editorial that set the stage for the showdown between McGuire's political strategy to obtain the black vote in his district and Russell's own campaign to unseat the uncooperative congressman.

Russell denounced McGuire for failing to support blacks politically; he also knew that the politician would have to come soliciting because he still needed the black vote:

THE LAST CALL

Look Out[!] Look Out! Look Out!

Iowa, Cimmaron, Antelope and Springvale [townships], he is coming! Who? Why McGuire, he wants you now[.] It's time he thinks to round you up like so many cattle; if you listen you are lost; be men and give him what he has give you [nothing], and [he] will renew it if you will let him[.] [W]ill you? We shall see.⁴¹

On August 1, 1908, only three days before the primary, McGuire, as predicted, sponsored a barbecue beef-and-bread fete in Iowa township, Logan County. The politician was making his very first appearance in the nearly all-black township after representing them in Congress for almost six years. Moreover, the free food was being served without the traditional coffee; the diners were forced to wash down their sandwiches with the five-cent red soda water sold at the rally.⁴²

After introducing the platform guests and concluding the short business agenda, the large, restless crowd began to chant: "McGuire[!] McGuire[!] McGuire[!]"⁴³ The honorable representative, duly persuaded, ascended the speaker stand "with copies of the *Western Age* and the *Congressional Record* [under his arm]," and all

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Grand-father clause in the election bill, that I would reduce the democratic representation in Congress?" Of course I did, [he replied] to himself. . . . Did I not save 100,000 acres of land for the maintenance of the Langston University. I guess that was doing something he said. Oh no, he reiterated, I never did anything according to the *AGE*,⁴⁵

McGuire continued to focus his attack on the editor and to defend his past actions and political record to the crowd. Of course, he never missed a chance to point out all of the good he had done for the district. The congressman's political boasting and attack on Russell continued for an hour. When McGuire finished his speech and returned to his seat, the stunned crowd stood in momentary silence before slowly recovering with polite applause.

Some members of the gathering began to call for the black editor. Others joined in, thinking it was only fair play to give Russell a chance to defend himself, while a few realized that they were about to witness a political campaign rally being turned into a hot political debate. After much prompting and applause, Russell went to the stage to reply to the politician's charges. He began simply:

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I didn't know that I was a candidate for Congress against Mr. McGuire until I heard McGuire's speech. I beg to inform you that I am not a candidate; but I am unalterably opposed to Bird S. McGuire, this "lilly white" Republican who told a committee of colored Republicans at the Royal Hotel in Guthrie, that this is too far south for Negroes to aspire to hold office. I for one believe Oklahoma is a little too far north for Negroes to support a "lilly white" Republican like this man McGuire.

I am somewhat astounded at the littleness of McGuire, after serving in Congress for six years, then today, condesending [sic] even below the level of a 'Pot-House-Politician' to deliver a long political speech of one hour in abuse of a poor humble Negro newspaper man who is trying to make honest bread and butter for a loving wife and children and in the mean time, doing all in my power to promote my race, and lead them to higher and more independent and honest [sic] citizenship.

If McGuire had been even a success[ful] 'ward-healer' and had slip[p]ed into congress, it seems to me that he might have gotten by absorption a few of the elementary principles of a statesman or a politician. He should have been big enough to discuss national issues before you to-day, instead of discussing *THE WESTERN AGE* and S. Douglass Russell. I am not a candidate for office. However in a brief way I will make answer to his harang[ue].

Mr. McGuire has placed himself on the rack to-day, and I, for one shall help add excruciating pain to his political misery.

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This fellow McGuire came down here from Kansas holding office; he hardly had been here long enough to digest a beef-steak before he was on [a] hot trail after a soft job of assistant U. S. District attorney. Yet, this is too far south for Negroes to aspire to hold office. This man McGuire soon found out that S. Douglass Russell, E. P. McCabe, E. I. Saddler, G. N. Perkins, F. R. McKinlay, and other race loving colored men had made it possible to make Oklahoma Republican, hence McGuire and the bunch harnessed up the black boys to ride into office on, and then hitch[ed] us on the outside in the rain until they need us again.

Hear me colored men! Hear me in behalf of your wife and children. It is now time for you to throw off the yoke of political slavery. In this you have [everything] to gain and nothing to lose.

McGuire said to you that Russell, is in the employ of Governor [Charles N.] Haskell and the Democratic administration. He is either ignorant of the records or maliciously lied to you! Here is the truth in the matter—last Summer (1907) Russell went to Oklahoma City and established State headquarters; labored day and night, and without cost to the committee for my personal expense.

When the campaign ended September 17, 1907, Governor Frank Frantz, the governor of Oklahoma territory, informed me that [at] the next meeting (October) of the Regents of the C. A. and N. University, that he would have me appointed advertising agent of the University. On schedule the appointment was made and all was well. All of you know that the state went Democratic. The good book says: 'The wise men foreseeath the evil, but the fool goeth on and is over taken in the error of his way.'

Hence you can see how I happened to be on the payroll of the state as McGuire says. But the time came when I took issue with McGuire, and opposed his return to Congress; this of course, stir[r]ed the beast in the menagerie; and some of my own race insisted that I should not carry on such a war against a big White republican like McGuire. But now they are getting their eyes open[ed].

Through the columns of the *AGE* I charged that McGuire was a "lilly White" Republican and was opposed to colored men holding office. Then the McGuire machine 'got busy'; they tried the system of coaxing and it failed. Then they said, we will ripple him financially and crush him to the earth.

Then came McGuire's machine man, Joe Norris, and he issued an edict that Russell must be ousted as advertising agent for Langston University because he is against McGuire. They had a willing tool on the Board of Regents in the person of Guss. When the board met, Guss took the initiatory [sic] step; when they reached Russell's name on the payroll, he then and there motioned that Russell be dropped from the payroll as advertising agent for Langston University. I of course had learned to play politics according to the rules of the game so I doffed my hat to other

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people who had power on the Board and as a result of that I am still in the employ of the State of Oklahoma as advertising agent for Langston University. Mr. McGuire has been in Congress six years. The census shows that there are 4,507 [N]egro voters in the ten counties in the First District. Mr. McGuire's plurality last year as shown by the returns in the office of Secretary of State [were] 1391 votes. Mr. McGuire's plurality over his Democratic opponent is less than the number of [N]egro vot[ers] in Logan county alone. I [will] ask you in the name of heaven could Mr. McGuire have enjoyed that place if it wasn't for the votes of the [b]lack men. I am surprised at a gentleman of his standing making those personal thrusts upon a poor, humble newspaper man. Nothing but a poor little [N]egro trying to educate a family of eight and try[ing] to make them fit subjects for citizenship. When you get a congressman that so [far] forget[s] the dignity of that office to condescend to things he has done, I am in favor of relegating him to the rear and send[ing] a man to Congress who will stand up like a man [and] discuss issues and not Russell. What has he done for [b]lack folk? Done nothing. He tells you that he appointed a man to a place at Iconium. I beg to inform McGuire at this time, that there will be three votes polled for [B. T.] Hainer in the Iconium district against every one polled for him. He says he appointed Taylor post master. Yes, I confess he did, who else would have it. Nothing there but a few [N]egroes, and he was the only one that wanted it. He told you about doing something for other colored men. He goes down to Red Bird, another [N]egro community and appoints a Negro Postmaster. These are places that nobody else would have except the colored men who ask[ed] for them.

I submit to McGuire through the public press and his manager, that the day that McGuire recognize[s] 4,597 black votes of this district and secure[s] the appointment of a decent colored man to a respectable place, that is the day I am going to pull for him. But he has failed to do that because he is a "lilly White" republican of the milkivered kind. He had the brazen gall, the unspeakable gall, the unmitigated gall to say that he kept a colored man on the list of eligibles after he had taken a civil service examination in Arkansas years before he moved to Oklahoma, and then had him appointed to a place in Washington. He had the gall to tell you that he kept this name on the list of eligibles. That is the kind of stuff that might go down in Africa or China, but it won't go here. He states to you about what he had done for the [b]lack folk in reference to Langston University. I am compelled to tell you in unchaining the truth, that years ago one man by the name of McCabe had prepared and offered a bill in the Legislature of Oklahoma to found and establish a school at Langston for the colored race. That bill failed of passage that year. Later on [the] Hon[orable] D. P. Marion, a democrat, re-introduced the bill in a Democratic legislature of Oklahoma, and it became a law, and five thousand dollars was appropriated out of the public funds of the [T]erri-

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tory of Oklahoma by a Democratic legislature to found Langston University, not McGuire [who] tells you he gave 100,000 acres of land. He hasn't any land to give. He meant to say that he insisted upon setting aside 100,000 acres of land. It was Mr. Saddler in his speech on this forum, who said: 'that we lacked 75,000 acres of having our just pro rata of land upon the basis of per capita of population.' Mr. McGuire then should have had 175,000 acres of public lands set aside for Langston University.

There is not a white man in this country, let him be a democrat or a republican, who is not in favor of giving all the public land necessary in teaching Negroes scientific farming. Even McGuire, for right now he would rather see me following 'Beck' up and down the cotton rows, than to see me on this forum.

The late democratic state legislature made an appropriation of \$100,000 for [the] Negro University, and with the amount of money on hand, places to the credit of Langston University \$145,000 [t]he largest single appropriation ever made for Negroes by any state in the [U]nion.

The regents will now have a \$65,000 building erected in the place of the \$17,000 building lost by fire. This seems to me to be a fine showing at the hands of a democratic legislature and Governor. It appears to me, that Gov[ernor] Haskell has proven himself to be more than a match for Bird McGuire and the entire bunch. And when he or any other man does the square thing, I am prepared to say [publically] that he stands for a square deal and a full meal for every honest Negro.

Haven't I a just reason and a right to speak well of him and his administration? Of course I have. But McGuire told you that I [was] being paid to oppose him; this I brand as a campaign lie. And furthermore I can prove that right here on these picnic grounds today, he, McGuire, is a boodler, and [has] slipped five dollar bills in colored men's hands, plainly buying their support. I want you to plainly understand that McGuire is no angel of light.⁴⁶

Russell, pausing briefly to look at the seated congressman and his black political ally, John W. Capers, continued his discourse. He then held up a letter for all to see and read its contents to the crowd:

Guthrie, Okla[homa], July 16, 1908

My dear Mr. Russell,

I ought to have written you before now; I was still figuring with McGuire. He made me a proposition for [me] to give you one hundred subscriptions (one hundred dollars) if you will let up on that newspaper fight on him.

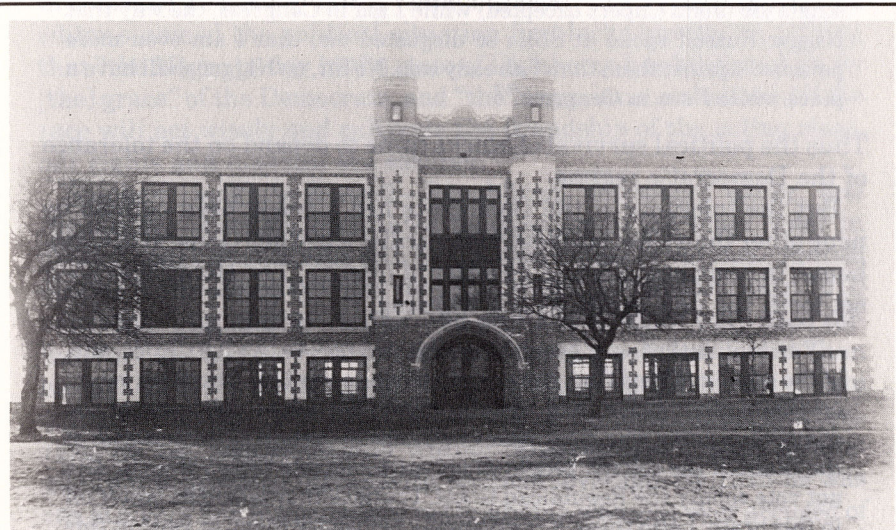
Very truly,
-----⁴⁷

Now my friend[s] right here to McGuire's face I brand him as a 'lilly-white' Republican," the editor said.⁴⁸ And that he personally

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found the congressman “an unfit person to receive the support of [the] colored men in free Oklahoma.”⁴⁹

The debate was exciting and it created much interest in the primary, August 4, the up-coming general election, November 3, 1908, and of course in the political race in the first congressional district. And notwithstanding the lack of appreciation and even political considerations, the black voters not only returned McGuire to Congress, but voted two additional Republican congressmen into office as well. This was a noteworthy Republican victory for another reason. A. C. Hamlin, a black farmer from Springvale township, was elected



Citing Governor Haskell's support for increased appropriations to Langston University, Russell encouraged blacks to vote for the candidate, not the party.

as a representative to the state legislature with a solid Logan County black Republican vote.⁵⁰ The black vote was responsible for this complete reversal in the party's political fortunes. At the same time, the Democrats now were convinced of the strength of the black bloc and were determined to disfranchise the black voter. They began their “grandfather clause” campaign to make it legal to deny the ballot to blacks.⁵¹

Russell's own political convictions must have been tempered by the results of the elections following the debate. It was true that McGuire

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had won both the primary and general elections, but the Democrats controlled state politics. In September of 1908, the editor gave the first indication of supporting the Democratic Party, which he denied in his political confrontation with McGuire. The question is, what was Russell's real motivation for his new editorial position? Was it because he believed McGuire's re-election was a personal defeat and that black Republicans were without friends in the state legislature or Washington? Or did he feel that the newly elected Republicans were not really concerned with the general welfare of blacks? McGuire's own statements reaffirmed both suspicions:

I shall never use my influence to give a single Negro in my district a single job (John Capers excepted) while I am in Congress; the way that Nigger Russell spoke at Shilo so disgusted me, that I am even more poisoned against them than I already was. No Sir, no Nigger shall have a place while I am in Congress.⁵²

Thus the political survival of blacks came to depend on the tolerance of the Democratic regime.

But the tolerance of the Democrats had already been defined by none other than Charles West, Democratic Attorney General of Oklahoma, in response to Russell's letter of inquiry. The Honorable West set forth the new terms with a warning:

You realize that your people are subjected now to two hostilities, one, of the economic kind from the poorest of white workers who meet you in economic competition, and the other from the white politician of the democratic party who meet your resistance in certain of the counties of the State. If the colored people would either refrain from voting or else not vote solidly the Republican ticket, I believe they would be better off in this State. I also think it is extremely foolish for them, at least at this time, to apply for such public offices as members of the State House of Representatives or the State Senate, . . .

But anything I can do to aid you or them in their proper economic and individual progress, you may call upon me with the assurance that I will respond.⁵³

In a *Western Age* September editorial, "If Not, Why Not?" Russell discussed and reflected on the reasons for his position. The editor now proposed that blacks "as a race should have friends in all of the great political parties," and that the Democrats as a "party [are] now ready to receive men of the colored race into its fold."⁵⁴ He also cautioned that "all of the colored man's friends are not found in the Republican party[;] neither [are] all of his enenys [sic] found in the democratic party."⁵⁵

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At the local level, for example, it was clear to him that with “a Negro on the Republican ticket . . . the [white] voters wanted to make a protest so loud that no [N]egro would ever again be nominated on a Republican ticket in Logan County.”⁵⁶ Blacks, although accepted as citizens of the state, must understand that “the people have now declared him entitled to all . . . [constitutional] rights, except the right to aspire to and hold office.”⁵⁷

Russell also tried to put things in proper political perspective as he saw them in 1908; “the mere matter of holding office is an incident that is of small consequence compared to the more important right of the ballot itself and the legal environs which will enable the [N]egro to continue peaceably in his home building. . . .”⁵⁸ And finally the editor summed the political situation for blacks bluntly by stating that “the Negro to-day in the state of Oklahoma has his franchise by [the] grace” of the Democrats, and “the Negro is on probation[;] if the race will act wisely and cultivate the friendship of the ruling class, our rights and liberties are assured.”⁵⁹

Stephen Douglass Russell—Republican, newspaper editor, and race leader—perhaps overstated the position of the black voter in 1908. At that time, blacks still held public offices in various counties despite white objections, and they would continue to do so until 1910 when the “grandfather clause” and physical violence were used collectively to literally remove blacks. More of a political realist than most of his black newspaper colleagues, Russell urged blacks to vote more for the man and issues rather than for a political party. However, he also was personally willing to advocate a change in allegiance if it provided blacks with political leverage. By 1915 he was one of a very few black editors in Oklahoma who was ever accused of publishing a Democratic newspaper. Above all else, Russell wanted the black voter to consider all political alternatives and make the best political bargain possible, and move beyond being blindly tied to single-party politics when neither party was really committed to the best interest of blacks.

ENDNOTES

* Nudie E. Williams is an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas. His Ph.D. dissertation, completed at Oklahoma State University, focused on the black press in Oklahoma.

¹ The *Topeka American Citizen*, June 28, 1889, p. 1.

² Nudie E. Williams, “Black Newspapers and the Exodusters” (Stillwater, Oklahoma: Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 1977), pp. 110, 115–118, and 186–187.

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- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 119; and 125–126.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 189–194; and the Langston City *Western Age*, April 13, 1906, p. 4.
- ⁶ Williams, “Black Newspapers and the Exodusters,” pp. 203–205.
- ⁷ *Twelfth Census Report of the United States, 1900* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), Logan County, p. 161A.
- ⁸ Carolyn T. Foreman, *Oklahoma Imprints 1835–1907* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), p. 347.
- ⁹ *Western Age*, November 17, 1905, p. 2.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, January 26, 1906, p. 4.
- ¹¹ *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774–1971* (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), pp. 1377–1378; W. B. Richards, ed., *The Oklahoma Red Book* (Tulsa: Tulsa Daily Democrat Press, 1912), Vol. I, pp. 118–119.
- ¹² LeRoy H. Fischer, ed., *Territorial Governors of Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1975), pp. 105–107.
- ¹³ *Western Age*, November 4, 1905, p. 2.
- ¹⁴ Guthrie, *Oklahoma Safeguard*, March 5, 1906, p. 1; Kaye M. Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma, A Resource Book* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City public schools, 1971), pp. 175–176; *Western Age*, March 9, 1906, p. 4.
- ¹⁵ Arthur L. Tolson, *the Black Oklahomans, A History: 1541–1972* (New Orleans: Edwards Printing Company, 1972), pp. 106–112.
- ¹⁶ Danney Goble, *Progressive Oklahoma: The Making of a New Kind of State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), pp. 142–143.
- ¹⁷ *Western Age*, December 8, 1905, p. 2.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, May 10, 1907, p. 2.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, April 26, 1907, p. 2, June 14, 1907; Rex Harlow, *Oklahoma Leaders: Biographical Sketches of the Foremost Living Men of Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1928), pp. 460–461.
- ²¹ *Western Age*, June 28, 1907, p. 2.
- ²² *Ibid.*, April 26, 1907, p. 2.
- ²³ Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans*, pp. 152–153.
- ²⁴ *Western Age*, April 26, 1907, p. 2; *Oklahoma Safeguard*, March 23, 1905, p. 1.
- ²⁵ *Western Age*, July 12, 1907, p. 2, July 26, 1907, p. 1.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Hugh Hawkins, ed., *Booker T. Washington and His Critics: Black Leadership in Crisis* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1974), pp. 162–164; Rayford W. Logan, ed., *W. E. B. DuBois: A Profile* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971), pp. 185–200.
- ³⁵ Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans*, p. 144; Goble, *Progressive Oklahoma*, p. 225.
- ³⁶ *Western Age*, October 18, 1907, p. 2.

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- ³⁷ The Ardmore *Oklahoma Sun*, August 9, 1906, p. 1.
- ³⁸ John W. Capers was a black Republican Guthrie councilman and real estate agent who was a long time McGuire supporter, *Guthrie City Directory* (Sioux City, Iowa: R. L. Polk and Co., 1905), p. 60; *Western Age*, January 10, 1908, p. 2, February 14, 1908, February 28, 1908, p. 2, March 20, 1908, p. 2, and April 24, 1908, p. 2.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, May 1, 1908, p. 2, May 8, 1908, p. 2, June 5, 1908, p. 2.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, July 24, 1908, p. 2.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1908, p. 2.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, August 7, 1908, p. 2.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; the omitted signature was probably John W. Capers.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans*, pp. 153–154; Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, pp. 225–226.
- ⁵¹ Teall, *Black History in Oklahoma*, pp. 222–224.
- ⁵² *Western Age*, August 28, 1908, p. 2.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, January 15, 1909, p. 1.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, September 4, 1908, p. 2.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, September 25, 1908, p. 2.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, September 25, 1908, p. 3.

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German prisoners of war, such as these soldiers held near the front lines, would be shipped by the thousands to Oklahoma (Courtesy 45th Division Museum).