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Separating the Whites from the Chaff: Whiteness, Blackness, Racial Exclusion in the Midwest Agrarian Mind

Philip Mohr

Eastern Illinois University

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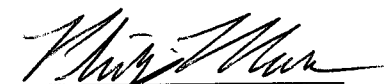
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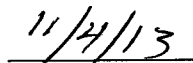
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Separating the Whites from the Chaff: Whiteness, Blackness,

Racial Exclusion in the Midwest Agrarian Mind

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BY

Philip Mohr

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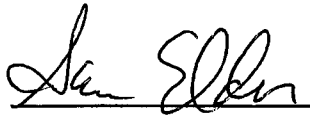
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Separating the Whites from the Chaff:
Whiteness, Blackness, and Racial Exclusion in the
Midwest Agrarian Mind from the Civil War to the Great Migration

Philip Mohr

September 18, 2013

Thesis for M. A. in History

Dr. Debra Reid, chair

Dr. Mark Hubbard and Dr. Sace Elder, panelists

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Abstract

This thesis approaches the construction of race through the vantage of one agrarian magazine, the *Prairie Farmer*. It analyzes the rhetoric of the people who wrote for this magazine to distinguish changing attitudes toward whiteness and blackness in the rural and agricultural Midwest from the end of the Civil War to the Great Migration. While whiteness was equated with what the *Prairie Farmer* saw as the active, progressive farmer, blackness was associated with stupidity, laziness, and threat to property. From this, the thesis argues we can build a base of knowledge from which to analyze the roots of racism in the rural Midwest that many historians take for granted when considering this era.

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Introduction: A New Agrarianism

White hegemonic agrarianism matured between 1890 and 1920. This was a time of rural outmigration and African American mobility, which in combination threatened a long-established mode of thought. At its most basic level, agrarianism placed importance on stable families that owned and operated farms. The agricultural life was supposed to produce an ideal citizenry, endowed with a work ethic and classical political disinterest. Agrarians conveyed these Enlightenment ideas to the majority of the United States population.¹ However, more factors contributed to agrarianism than a simple interpretations of Enlightenment ideas. Just like any other early philosophy of American citizenship, it relied on racial assumptions about the farm family. Agrarians assumed that farmers would be white, something that national legislation effectively ensured until emancipation. State laws defining the rights of citizens and the exclusion of certain peoples picked up where the federal fell away after the civil rights amendments concluding the Civil War. Midwesterners, however, applied cultural racism—the intellectual underpinning of codes and conduct but not actual laws—and understanding this phenomenon is paramount to our understanding of race relations in the Midwest farming population.² From the time of the American revolution up to the Civil War, this was a integral component of agrarianism. During Reconstruction and beyond, the rhetoric of race permeated agrarian writing and speech to justify measures of exclusion in modern agriculture. Racist agrarianism became explicit.

¹This paper uses “America” and “United States” interchangeably for the sake of varied vocabulary. America refers only to the United States. “The Americas” or “North America” refer to continents.

² Many works describe the reciprocating causal relationships between cultural values, social norms, and legal code. For this study, see Ian F. Haney-Lopez “The Social Construction of Race: Some Observations on Illusion, Fabrication, and Choice,” *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* (1994), 3-10.

People used the term agrarian to describe different philosophies or movements over the course of the nineteenth century. First, while Thomas Jefferson may stand out as the founder of American agrarianism, he did not invent the idea nor did he use the term.³ Rather, he advocated for culture and government to embrace a version of citizenry of independent, well-educated farmers. According to Jefferson, the morality stemmed from independence. He discussed this briefly in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1785. Advocates of any agrarian theory could then point back to this great forefather for intellectual legitimacy or at least associate their version with an influential name. His successors were not called “agrarians” either until radical Democrats advocated land distribution in the nineteenth century. They belonged to the Jacksonian strain of the American political tradition, and were to some degree inspired by utopian socialism.⁴ By the end of the nineteenth century, this form of agrarianism all but died out. But this is not to say that the original, Jeffersonian version of agrarianism perished.

Between the Civil War and 1920 (the middle of the Great Migration), the United States saw a very important demographic shifts. Industry and technology pulled people off farms and into cities. Other factors pushed people off farms, such as drought, plagues, and the consolidation of land by wealthy landowners. Population, society, and culture shifted with the people. Pete Daniel's *Breaking the Land* and Jack Temple Kirby's *Rural Worlds Lost* both explain the push and pull factors of moving from the Southern farm and

³Richard Bridgman, “Jefferson's Farmer before Jefferson,” *American Quarterly* (Winter 1962) 567-77. Bridgman's article is valuable in regards to the general idea that Thomas Jefferson wrote in an era that already praised the independent farmer in American and perhaps England is important to understanding Jefferson's ideals and their prominence within context.

⁴John Ashworth's *'Agrarians' and 'Aristocrats': Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846* (New York: Cambridge, 1983, 1987) notes that the term “agrarian” began as a Whig insult to the extreme Jacksonians, 130. This book is probably the best introduction to polar politics during the 1840s and 1950s except for its treatment of race as something to the side of core issues instead of an integral aspect of political ideologies.

into industrial centers during the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth. Both consider how sharecropping, tenant farming, and land owning interacted with local, regional, and national racial attitudes. With fear of implying that the two works are more similar than they truly are, they argue that particular crop cultures drove the racial divide in the South. The capitalization of farming perpetuated the exclusion of African Americans from landowning. Neither of these books address the racialized nature of midwest agriculture. Nevertheless, their great contributions to understanding the push of the agricultural population—especially African Americans—from the American South contributes to our perspective on the Great Migration. As the sales of public lands ended, the American frontier closed, making farmland a scarce commodity across the entire nation.⁵ Attention paid to landownership by agrarians and capitalists augmented its importance within their respective social and cultural ideologies.

Mark Schultz's *The Rural Face of White Supremacy* provides foundational ideas about the creation of whiteness in the Southern rural setting. The black-white divide in the South provides contrast for this thesis on the Midwest. Schultz shows that the biracial South developed whiteness from “face-to-face” interaction with people of the other race.⁶ The Midwest was not a majority black, but an overwhelming white region except in some urban centers. Scattered across the farmland were some pockets of black and bi-racial communities, but these were few and far between. It is not surprising that articles from Southerners that the *Prairie Farmer* printed would fit Schultz's assessment, but not my own. *The Prairie Farmer* intentionally delivered white Southern racial rhetoric to a

⁵While the term “American Frontier” is problematic for a number of reasons, it is useful to summarize a cultural idea from the turn of the twentieth century. The closing of the frontier represents a time when farmland became a scarce commodity in the United States.

⁶Mark Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy* (Urbana, IL: The University of Illinois Press, 2005), 7.

predominantly white Midwestern audience, but these were outside perspectives on the merits and demerits of the races in another place, not considerations on Midwestern reality.

The agrarian ideal appeared to crumble underneath those with a true belief in the value of a farming lifestyle as the population exited the prairie for booming industrial centers. However, people reformed agrarianism in reaction against perceived threats to its way of life. These threats came in the form of liberal education, urbanization, and racial mixing. Recognizing the trend of the young population being drawn toward industrial jobs, the *Prairie Farmer* published articles reinforcing the value of rural life and the importance of instilling those ideas in childhood education.

Given the roots of agrarianism as an individualism movement, one can see that believers around the turn of the twentieth century bore striking similarities to its forerunner a century earlier. Steven A. Vincent's *Southern Seed, Northern Soil: African-American Farm Communities in the Midwest, 1765-1900* explores this topic. It also ends just before the era covered by this project. Vincent provides an invaluable look into the settlement of blacks in the Midwest farm setting and how these people interacted with their white counterparts in the year covered by this study.

Studies of race relations in the Midwest exist. Most of that literature deals with the urban setting; the dominant narrative being the concentration of the black population in Northern urban centers. For example, William W. Giffin's *African Americans and the Color Line in Ohio* looks at that state as a whole and provides broad contextual information about institutional segregation trends. Like many works on the Great Migration, however, it focuses almost exclusively on the urban settlement of African

Americans. Giffin, like Peter Daniel's *Breaking the Land* on the South, places blame on government policies. According to these two historians, discrimination in federal loans, farm aid, the Extension Service, and land grant universities doomed African American farmers. They almost completely miss the cultural component that caused non-codified segregation, and they fall short of explaining why white Americans created policies that excluded African Americans.

James W. Loewen's *Sundown Towns* discusses the phenomenon of excluding African Americans from residency in counties, towns, suburbs, and neighborhoods. These "sundown towns," called such because the general rule was no black people allowed after sundown, are one manifestation of exclusive white supremacy. This sociological take on the history of race relations north of the Mason-Dixon line focuses on Illinois and the Midwest, and identifies a similar community of whiteness to this study. Loewen provides valuable research on the exclusion and removal of black people from many communities in the Midwest. But if *Sundown Towns* lacks in any way, it focuses on showing racism as the cause of exclusion, but lacks intellectual depth in finding the roots of racism. Here, research such as mine into the *Prairie Farmer* can apply Loewen's ideas to specific situations and make more clear the reason some whites desired their communities to be racially pure.

Debra A. Reid's article, "Land Ownership and the Color Line: African American Farmers in the Heartland, 1870s-1920s," looks at some later, lingering settlements. She emphasizes the role of agrarian thought as seminal to black rural identity in agriculture. Reid's further work in "The Whitest of Occupations?" exposes whites' exclusion of African Americans from the rural Midwest from the end of the World War II into the

twenty-first century.⁷ Together, these articles begin a historical exploration into African American farming demographics in the Midwest. However, they lack explanation for the northern racism that contributed to the low numbers of blacks in Midwest agriculture as well as the disproportion of the rate of population decline in the black versus the white farming populations. This study offers a perspective on the attitudes of white racism that contributed to and rejoiced in diminishing rural black populations.

What all of these works on Midwest rural race relations lack are a discussion of the ideology underpinning and causing racial demonization and exclusion. For inspiration on that, this thesis turns to a controversial book from the 1980s that sparked a subfield of whiteness studies. David R. Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* stands seminal to studies of whiteness and white supremacy evident in discourse such as that in the *Prairie Farmer*. Roediger uses linguistic analysis to fill a hole left in economic-based Marxian explanations of nineteenth-century working-class identity. Not entirely poststructuralist, Roediger reaches into his background as a Marxist. *Wages* views language as inherently tied to a very real and discoverable social context. From such a model, this project will consider the merits of Roediger's arguments about the causal relationship of working-class whiteness. Whereas Roediger looks at the American laboring class and asks why it divided along racial boundaries instead of forming a proletariat, this study looks at a rhetorical construct of the ideal citizenry for why white people excluded African Americans. They are similar. The temporal reaches of *Wages* and this thesis will overlap in the nineteenth century, and some parallels may be drawn between exclusive whiteness in the working class and in agrarian ideology.

⁷ Debra A. Reid, "The Whitest of Occupations?": African Americans in the Rural Midwest, 1940-2010" in *The Rural History of Illinois since World War II*, edited by J. L. Anderson (DeKalb: The Northern Illinois University Press, 2013).

Agrarians perceived a racial declension—a loss of the white purity that vitalized the nation—along with the decline in people living rural lives. Agriculturalists embraced scientific methods of farming, technology that completely changed labor, and capitalist markets that altered the farmer's place in the world. Even so, they resisted beliefs that urban industry made the best workers. They held fast to the idea of rural living, vocational training for farming, and racial assumptions underpinning these ideals. This is not to say that their beliefs were static, but that these people reformed agrarianism to suit their changing world. Many embraced political organizations like the Grange and Populism. Many attended classes from the Farm Extension Service or attended land-grant institutions for a formal education in agriculture. They believed in Darwinian evolution to the extent that it explained improved breeds of livestock and crops. They embraced chemistry to enhance soil fertility. Along with advanced biological theories came greater understanding about genome control in plants and animals. While scientists attempted to figure out what traits pass from generation to generation through heredity versus through learning, agrarians as lay-scientists fit recent theories into their racial preconceptions. This was part of the greater trend known as “scientific racism” where people utilized Darwinian thought as justification for empire, hegemony, and eugenics.

Modern agriculturalism required farmers to operate within the burgeoning capitalist economy. Capitalism came hand-in-hand with new technology to the farming community. William Cronon's work *Nature's Metropolis* focuses on the development of Chicago, but explains the effect of market capitalism on farmwork in the era of industrialization. His study overlaps with this thesis, but Cronon shies away from discussing the social and cultural aspects as much as the ecological and economic

changes due to technological innovation and heightened desire for efficiency. This thesis makes forays into understanding the social and cultural implications of introducing modern systems of knowledge to the Midwest farming community.

In order to understand their role in the impersonal, global market described by Cronon, farmers turned to the Extension Service, the Illinois Farm Bureau, and to agricultural magazines such as the *Prairie Farmer*. Writers from land-grant institutions, scientists in the field, successful farmers, and Chicago-based intellectuals contributed to the farmer's understanding of markets and rural life. So an intellectual history of these people and, especially, their printed work aids us in understanding the perpetuation of agrarianism and exclusive whiteness in the rural Midwest. The *Prairie Farmer* began publication in 1843, but readership exploded in the first two decades of the twentieth century.⁸ Even as the portion of the U.S. population devoted to farming dropped, a significant number of those who chose to farm turned to the *Prairie Farmer* for the latest information.

In the middle of this era, Frederick Jackson Turner introduced his “Frontier Thesis” in 1893. He used rhetoric lifting the American civilization above the rest of the world. The so-called closing of the frontier—the end of United States expansion westward on the North American continent—threatened the future of agrarianism with limits on land and markets. Imperial aspirations aside, Turner indicated the racial climate around the turn of the twentieth century. Agrarian idealism linked citizenship to morally upright, independent landowning farmers. The western experience modified that version of American citizenship to add intrepid innovation, survival of the fittest, and

⁸John J. Fry, *The Farm Press, Reform, and Rural Change, 1895-1920* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5. Fry uses various estimates to create his statistical analysis of the *Prairie Farmer* and similar publications. The estimates for readership of the *Prairie Farmer* in 1895-1905 are 25,000; 42,052 in 1910; 89,088 in 1915; and 112,128 in 1920.

frontiersmanship—a combination of Jeffersonian agrarianism with scientific racism.

As a bookend to this study, one can look to H. G. Wells's *The Outline of History* (1920) and *A Short History of the World* (1922) for the eventual eugenicist fruition of scientific racial thought.⁹ Wells believed that the human history of racial groups could be summed up in Darwinian terms. Of course, the pitfall of all these racial thinkers was their misperception about the relationship of biology and culture—in the proverbial nature versus nurture debate, they formed a contingent of radicals in favor of nature. Wells and similar thinkers belonged to the eugenics movement, meaning they believed in the elimination or marginalization of those who failed to meet certain measurements of the ideal citizen. These measures could be mental, behavioral, or physical, but all eugenicists believed that heredity played the greatest role in determining the fitness of any person for society. From such an assumption, controlling human breeding made as much sense as controlling animal breeding for farm production. Furthermore, the *Prairie Farmer* demonstrates that drawing a line between those who believed in good breeding among humans and eugenics is a difficult distinction. The following chapters explore breeding and eugenics within agrarian texts.

Science contributed greatly to reconstructing racism during the late nineteenth century. It would be beneficial to understand definitions of race and racism. Ian F. Haney-Lopez defines race as

a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry. I argue that race must be understood as a *sui generis* social phenomenon in which

⁹H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind* (London: Newnes, 1920); and H. G. Wells, *A Short History of the World* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1922).

contested systems of meaning serve as the connections between physical features, races, and personal characteristics. In other words, social meanings connect our faces to our souls. Race is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions.¹⁰

For the purposes of this paper, racism can therefore be defined as oppressive differentiation of human groups based on cultural perceptions of biological differences. The burgeoning fields of biology and genetics provided thorough explanations of this differentiation. This relied on the same modernist belief in the process of science: the certainty that “hard science” could translate into the study of politics, society, and culture. Winthrop D. Jordan’s seminal book *White over Black* helps set the scene for understanding the kernel of American racism in the era of slavery. Jordan set out in the 1960s to help the concurrent civil rights movement understand the nation's racist past, but the book ends too soon to explain racial thought to 1968. *White over Black* demonstrates that the socio-cultural construct of race and the socio-economic institution of slavery were mutually constructive, not causal. Such an argument complicates a linear narrative of racism. This study takes inspiration from Jordan since it does not seek to truly explain a cause of racial exclusion in the Midwest as much as offer a history of one racist perspective as it interacted with advancing science and capitalism in agriculture.

C. Vann Woodward's influential *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* laid a foundation for understanding racism after Reconstruction. Writing in 1955, Woodward proposed that the 1890s mark the beginning of the harsh racism known as the Jim Crow

¹⁰Haney-Lopez, 7.

era and this laid the foundation for twentieth century racism. From the end of the Civil War to the 1890s, an attitude of political equality dominated civil discourse and law. Then, white people imposed new codes of racial exclusion in an effort to regain control of the American nation. This thesis looks mostly at changing agrarian attitudes centered around the decade of the 1890s as well, but focuses on the discourse rather than the legal codes.

Joel Williamson's *A Rage for Order* summarizes the post-Civil War racial climate. Following Woodward's thinking, Williamson argues that free African Americans faced a new racism suited to the new situation, but that there were cultural aspects to Jim Crow that began before the 1890s. He covers events in both the urban and rural South, while this paper looks only at rhetoric on the rural North. Nevertheless, Williamson's assessment of early efforts of disenfranchisement offers a background for the attention paid by *Prairie Farmer* writers to the racial conflicts of the South. Williamson points out that various reactionary groups held to the idea that black people were either lazy or violent immediately after that war. Such stereotypes transposed into racial thinking outside of the South as other regions dealt with the dissonance of an ideal exclusive whiteness with the possibility of racial mingling. While the arguments about black self-depoliticization are debatable, *Rage for Order* provides a good perspective on white efforts to marginalize the African American population politically. Williamson briefly touches on the topics of land ownership and cultural institutions, and historians must continue to look at these aspects of life traditionally not considered to be "political" for evidence of political struggle. Doing so, we can see that the exclusion of black Americans from formal politics was only the tip of the iceberg. By looking at the *Prairie Farmer* we

see discourse in the cultural battle of racism in the early twentieth-century United States, North and South.

A look into agricultural literature from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reveals that thinkers and farmers combined the practices of better breeding with improvement of the human race. Eugenics made sense in the Progressive Era scientific mind. It fit very well with modern concern over choosing the correct spouse and good human breeding. It also fit very well with the development and purification of animal breeds that farmers had conducted since time immemorial. These two themes appear repeatedly in the *Prairie Farmer*. Columns about family life frequently referred to the importance of choosing the correct mate to perpetuate the success of the farm and the success of the species, specifically the hardworking, white ruralite. Writers of articles on breeding often referred to human breeding and vice versa. This indicates that some writers placed great stock in the virtue of good farming or good citizenship encoded in human genetics as opposed to culture and social pressures, or in simpler terms nature over nurture. This is not to say that columns on farming, family, and rural life did not include ideas about environmental conditioning—education and childrearing, for instance—but that the scientific versions of agriculture and racism appear much more frequently. Furthermore, it fit well into the previous knowledge of breed and pedigree. In retrospect, we can see that the nature versus nurture argument is itself a social construct, and one not yet settled.

A major component of agrarianism, and one too often absent from history texts, was its insistence on whiteness. Racialism played a central role in determining the ideal citizen to so many Americans throughout United States history. In the late 1800s and

early 1900s, modernist agrarian thinkers produced racial histories relating to agriculture. Articles focused on one racial group's use of specific crops, livestock, and ecology, continuously praising the place of the farmer and agriculture within the human race and the development of civilization. This idea merged with the phenomenon of whiteness as described by Roediger in his seminal *Wages*. He argued that the lower classes of the North—who would rise up against the capitalists and planters in a Marxist world—recognized something more than the capitalist-proletariat binary. Whiteness provided them with social status independent of economic class. Likewise, the farmers of the North attached themselves to racial hierarchy to protect their community. Workers wanted a market solely for white labor. Farmers wanted the same.

The idea for this thesis began as an inquiry into why Great Migration history contains no sub-narrative about the movement of African Americans from the rural South to the rural North. A number of push and pull factors created the Migration. Prime among these were systematic exclusion of landownership in the South and the attraction of industrial jobs in the North. The hypothesis assumed that some fled the South, but sought out a better rural life than in the South. The project then turned to explaining the systems of exclusion that prevented blacks and other racial minorities from obtaining and holding onto land in the Midwest. This thesis looks into one version of whiteness developed by the *Prairie Farmer* around the turn of the twentieth century. Agrarianism held onto whiteness during this transition in the most highly capitalized agricultural region in the nation. Even as science and technology changed farming markedly, agrarians conserved their racial ideas with the support of the same scientific thinkers who brought high-yield grains, livestock epidemiology, and soil chemistry.

The first chapter looks at the agrarian construction of whiteness between the Civil War and the Great Migration. This chapter establishes the ideal American farmer, his household, his place in the human race, and his place in the American race. It begins in broad strokes about the place of the farmer within the human race, moves to some basic tenets of rural life, and finally articulates the merits of the ideal citizen as early twentieth-century agrarian thinkers perceived them. Agrarians took part in the white hegemony of the United States on the continent and world. This is evident in their appeals to manifest destiny and technological determinism. Such a construction of whiteness could not stand alone without the existence of perceived “others,” but was not completely reliant on distinguishing the white race from African Americans, Native Americans, Chinese, and Mexicans. The *Prairie Farmer* defined whiteness more positively than negatively, meaning that writers both placed whites above other racial groups and said what whites were instead of what whites were not.

Furthermore, because this thesis looks at farmers it necessarily focuses on the masculine gender. This is not to say that women did not play an important role in the formation of American agrarian whiteness, but that the rhetoric of farming really dealt with white men's ownership of land and their work ethic.¹¹ More can be said about gender in the farming community in another work.

The second chapter explains the construction of blackness within the white agrarian mind. At its core, this chapter exposes the misgivings about allowing non-whites

¹¹For more gender in Midwest farming, see Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), Neth's chapter “The 'Farmer' and the 'Farmer's Wife'” argues that the farmer is necessarily masculine while women could only be farmer's wives, especially in the developing capitalist system where gender roles became more specialized and concrete; see also Jane Adams, *The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern Illinois, 1890-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

into Midwest farming. Writers for the *Prairie Farmer* discussed the virtues of African Americans, Mexicans, and Asians as well as various European groups (but this thesis focuses mostly on blackness for the sake of brevity). White people dominated the discourse of blackness, and they could therefore establish hegemony over the racial dynamic of Midwest farming. Midwest agrarians could look to the South or to the urban North for examples of what they wished to avoid. They relied on familiar stereotypes in the daily speech, non-fiction, fiction, and news reporting as well as the supposed expert opinions of Southerners who were supposed to be more familiar with “the Negro problem.” The writers point to the South for an example of what Midwest farmers wished to avoid: the “lazy Negro,” the “Sambo,” or the cause of violence. The *Prairie Farmer* writers looked out of the Midwest to the rural South, but also to the urban North to form their ideas about blackness. Race riots in the urban North affirmed agrarian ideas about the dangers of mixed-race communities. These numerous perspectives on blackness formed a corpus of reasons to exclude African Americans from Illinois or Midwest agriculture.

The third chapter exhibits some blatant language of exclusion. This chapter provides something of a bridge between the intellectual history of these agrarian thinkers and the actual farmers and rural communities. Many articles and advertisements clearly show the preference for racial homogeneity within farming communities. Sundown towns, as conceived by James Loewen, did not result from the pens or political power of land grant professors and Chicago magazine editors. However, *The Prairie Farmer* contributed to the atmosphere of exclusive whiteness. Tying into the first chapter, it looks at the desire for white American population expansion to dominate the entire land. It also

looks at scientific agriculture again as a practice only accessible to whites in the Extension Service. Finally, the chapter also covers the issue of human breeding, comparisons of this to animal and crop breeding, and the result of these same ideas in eugenics.

Understanding early twentieth century racism in a region where whites dominated agriculture can provide new bases for comparing the race relations in the South and the rise of racialized violence in cities. Specifically, we must reconsider the northward migration of African Americans during this time. The Great Migration's early stages is more complex than exent Southern farms, enter Northern cities. This is not a history of movement, but a history of thought in a time when African Americans and the white population were on the move. White agrarians reinforced their whiteness and looked upon others—both urban dwellers and black people—as problems in the United States. *Prairie Farmer* writers and editors boldly displayed their version of whiteness and blackness for their readership to carry in their minds, instituting a racial attitude for the twentieth century.

Chapter 1

Whiteness Defined: The Ideal Farmer Shifts from Nature to Nurture

Prairie Farmer editors used the terms “white man/men” and “white person/people” regularly over the course of this period. The vast majority of articles mentioned not only the white race, but compared and contrast European Americans with Native Americans, almost always called Indians. Sometimes the white man was compared with the “Chinaman” or “Chinese,” and as rare as that was, it still outnumbered the amount of times “white man/men” appeared in articles about African Americans. Racial construction in the United States was obviously more complicated than the black-white divide, but the lack of direct comparison tells us something very significant: concepts of whiteness did not totally rely on concepts of other races.

Agrarians constructed whiteness out of the positive ideas of good citizenship already part of their ideology. Most of the articles that also discuss Native Americans use the racial terms to break up the history of North America into two eras, what we might here call “the age of the Indians” and “the age of the white man.” This ties directly back to ideas about the place of farmers within the human race. Articles here mentioning “white man” mostly deal with the advance of civilization in the very way that Frederick Jackson Turner did in his “Frontier Thesis.” In terms of the rural Midwest between the Civil War and the Great Migration, this meant first a look backward to understand what white people brought to the continent and then it meant an in-depth look at what white farmers had to do in order to continue providing for the race—human, American, or white.

From the 1860s through the 1890s, articles discussed the white man and the

Caucasian race's expansion. From the 1890s onward, however whiteness took on a greater nuance, more focused on the use of land already settled and under white control for generations. They shifted agrarian ideology from the Manifest Destiny spread of civilization through westward expansion to a reworking of farming in the land already possessed and settled by the United States. They thus had a creative solution at the time when Turner declared the frontier closed. White Americans had to look for and find land in areas already inhabited by their national kindred. The *Prairie Farmer* editors desired more white people to fit on the land, physically through subdivision or through pushing out the black population. This thinking actively expanded white power.

1.1: The 1860s to the 1890s: Boasting the Midwestern Farmer

Between the 1860s and 1890s, the superiority of the white Midwestern farmer was assumed by merely appealing to color and ethnicity. That is, the *Prairie Farmer* largely assumed the supremacy of whiteness simply based on merits it attributed to Midwestern farmers. Agrarian writers looked to the expansion of white civilization, particularly small landowning farmers, for a model of whiteness. Technological development melded with ability to farm as an inherent racial quality. Thus, the *Prairie Farmer* editors believed in a form of Manifest Destiny for their ideal white American farmer.

Following the end of slavery, white people had to sort out racial hierarchies in a free labor market. They looked at free black, wealthy white plantation owners, and migrant labor for inspiration for their ideals of whiteness. No *Prairie Farmer* article belittled the work ethic of Midwest farmers. Even so, it radicalized labor vicariously through the lenses of other newspapers reporting from other regions of the country. The

July 30, 1870, issue contained an editorial condensation of the opinions of three California newspapers that told about the divide between Chinese and white labor. The former would perform difficult work for low wages, allowing the white people to perform skilled jobs.¹² According to the article, white people previously scared of the Chinese settlers flooding the labor market became liberated to place the Chinese in the lower tier of society and raise the white race. So, whiteness was not deprived of its role as a working race, but it instituted a hierarchy within the labor system.

This developing establishment in the West endured well into the twentieth century.¹³ But the work that these newspapers worried about was not that of the agricultural laborer of the Midwest. Large, plantation-like operations comprised much of California. The Chinese worked as hired labor—often migratory—or sharecroppers and tenant farmers at best. Otherwise, the non-whites worked in factories that processed the food grown on the farms. Such jobs did not fit the *Prairie Farmer's* ideal of whiteness or good living in general. Agrarians held the rural community to a high standard of honest work to make their independent farms succeed.

Midwest agrarians also perceived a chance at spreading their family farm model to the South. There was some discussion of whether or not white people could farm effectively in the South. Many of slavery's proponents before the Civil War pointed to pseudo-biological theories that white men were unfit for laboring in that climate, but that people of African descent were especially fit for it. The idea must have remained because at least one article argued against it—see Figure 1.1. This article listed reasons why white farmers would have no problem relocating to the South in an attempt to draw emigrants.

¹²“The Chinese in California,” *TPF*, July 30, 1870, 237.

¹³See “Bringing in Chinamen,” *TPF*, July 13, 1918, 10.

Specifically, the writer wanted to populate the area with white farmers. Among a long list of reasons farming was bountiful and easy in the South, the author specifically noted that “white men” could tolerate the summer sun. The author implied that men could fulfill their white duty to work hard if they relocated to the South. However, the article qualified the statement by noting that white men work well in forested areas, specifically the “Piney Woods region” of Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida. It was not a blanket statement that the agrarianism of the North could transfer to the deep South.

**CONSEQUENTLY AND COMPASSIONATELY NOTHING.
 13. The “piney-woods country” is eminently
 healthy, and white men can work in the sun all
 summer.
 14. The country is abundantly watered. In...**

Figure 1.1: Clipping from “Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida,” *TPF* April 23, 1870, 122.

The *Prairie Farmer* clearly favored the farmers of the Midwest over those of other regions. Such a bias may have been the writers' and editors' pride in their locality. The booster article in Figure 1.1 wanted to vie for white people by appealing to the midwest farmers' sense of worth. Midwest agrarians puffed themselves up in the rhetoric of the *Prairie Farmer*, attributing the greatest whiteness to their way of life.

Another article only a few months later, Figure 1.2, argued that white men work just as well in Florida as in the Midwest. Southerners apparently sought to encourage white settlement southward during Reconstruction. Boosters such as these used white settlement as a way to undermine the African American quest for land ownership. A version of manifest destiny remained alive on the eastern seaboard when and where land became available for single-family settlement. This newspaper piece asks “Can white

men work there [central Florida] in the sun?" The author replied with a brief summary of the weather in one paragraph. A second paragraph then summarized the racial thought about climate and the area's suitability for white men. Supposedly, ten white men from the North worked farms in the area with as much success as those who had previously tilled them. Moreover, white men could work year-round in the South, allowing them to better fulfill their drive to be proper, hard-working farmers.

1. How hot is it in Florida? Can white men work there in the sun?

Answer: It is not as hot here in the summer as it is in the Northwest. The mercury here has not gone above 93 degrees until today at noon, when it rose to 96 degrees. It

* * *

The native white men work in the hottest suns known here. As a class, the white farmers work as well as farmers up north, though owing to the fact of their being able to work all the year, they are not in such a hurry all summer. There are ten Yankee farmers in this neighborhood; and they all work regularly in the fields, in the summer. They have done so for several years, and their health has not apparently suffered.

Figure 1.2: Clippings from William Birney, "Central Florida," *TPF* July 30, 1870, 233.

The obsession with white people's ability to work closer to the tropics was minor in the *Prairie Farmer*. Only a handful of articles cover that topic.¹⁴ Whether by the power of articles such as these or some other push and pull factors, the population of Florida boomed in the 1870s and 1880s. An 1889 article broke down the demographic statistics of southern and western Florida. The total population of both black and white

¹⁴See also "Agriculture South," *TPF*, June 1, 1878.

communities grew over those two decades due to settlement, but the white population grew at a much higher rate.¹⁵ The *Prairie Farmer* editor who summarized this news made the effort to point out that white people dominated the area. Just as with westward expansion, resettlement in the entire nation concerned those interested in whiteness. Writers shared this with magazine subscribers in order to propagate their ideal whiteness and white landownership throughout the nation.

The Genuine Aristocracy.—Until the war changed the whole order of things, there was no State in our Union, and no country abroad where there was so utter an aversion to labor by the leading classes white people, as in South Carolina. So, *Prairie Farmer* is gratified to read in a journal issued in that State, the S. C. "Spartan," such sensible statements as these: The young man who knows how to lay off corn rows and cotton rows, and to regulate the distances of the same so as to get the largest crops, is worth a cowpen full of nice, kid-gloved, fancy-over-coated fellows who may know how to lead the German or caper around at a fashionable waltz. Siding cotton, setting a plow just right, and adjusting gears so that shoulders and backs of horses will never hurt, are worth a thousandfold more to the country than knowing how to pose in a parlor or how to adjust the shade of the cravat to the complexion of the wearer.

Figure 1.3: "The Genuine Aristocracy," *TPF* May 30, 1885, 348.

The concern was acute in an era when Northerners still held contempt for the white planters of the South. Criticisms focused on how slavery distanced the landowner from actual labor. Slavery remained a trope as *Prairie Farmer* writers heaped criticisms on the white landowners who perpetuated the class system of slavery in the post-Civil

¹⁵Untitled, *TPF*, February 23, 1889, 113.

War system of sharecropping. That is, those white people in the South owned plantations that required hired labor. Planters ensured a labor force through the sharecropping system. In fact, an 1885 article—Figure 1.3—accused Southern white people of being lazy for having kept slaves. The “leading classes of white people” in contemporary South Carolina bore the brunt of the writer's contempt. Again, not all people of white skin fit into the agrarian ideal citizenry. People who knew how to run and maintain a working farm and performed the labor on that farm were far more valuable to the nation. Perhaps a motivated Southern farmer could redeem the South in the face of the white agrarian North. As it stood, Midwesterners viewed their system of landownership and farming methods as far superior.

1.2: The 1860s to the 1890: Manifest Destiny and a Race's Technological Advantage

Concurrently with *Prairie Farmer* interest in exporting their Midwestern version of agrarianism to reform and control the American South, they also looked around the country to places where white families could settle. Essentially, they saw filling in settlement gaps as part of realizing the Manifest Destiny of white America. *Prairie Farmer* authors cared more about production agriculture than civilization theory, but the concepts reinforced each other when talking about the land itself. Owning land was a central tenet of agrarianism. The *Prairie Farmer* frequently concerned itself with reporting on the white population of states and territories and the changes in the land brought about by white civilization. One piece of correspondence from 1874, Figure 1.4, describes recent development after major white settlement in Gratiot County, Michigan. After two decades of white settlement, the *Prairie Farmer* noted the development of the

county. Development, to these writers, meant that farmers cleared forests for fields and cleared strips for highways. Several other such articles report on changes in the land after white settlement. They treat white settlement as an indication of civilization in itself.

GRATIOT CO., MICH.—Gratiot county, Michigan, lies midway between the two great lakes, Huron and Michigan, in the latitude of Milwaukee. It is twenty-four miles square. Twenty years ago white men were scarce within its borders ; most of the improvements have been made this side of 1860. Stumps are plenty yet in every field, but a belt of land is cleared upon each side of nearly every public highway. The forests are mighty,

Figure 1.4: Clipping from “Record of the Season: Notes from Correspondents,” *TPF* October 10, 1874, 328.

When not discussing the “more civilized” white population, *Prairie Farmer* writers talked about the deficiencies of other races. Agrarianism provided a normative lifestyle. White Americans always found cross-cultural understanding difficult, and the farmers' view of the Native Americans was no different. From the beginning of European settlement on the American coast, the agricultural traditions of Natives contrasted with European culture, and led to confusion and animosity. Agrarians continued to believe that Native American groups should take up white style farming. An 1875 article mostly reprinted from the *New York Herald* summarized the thoughts of the current Indian commissioner (see Figure 1.5). Amidst attempts to integrate the Native Americans into United States society, people often believed it required making them white. Whiteness could be achieved partly through cultural immersion for any race. For the Natives, whose skin color was light enough to pass as white at times, it meant that they only needed to

learn white ways.

The Indian Commissioner issued a circular to the Sioux people, open to review by the *New York Herald*, from which *Prairie Farmer* editors picked it up, see Figure 1.10. He argued that “Indians” could learn the methods of settled agriculture and take part in the modern economy. He also believed that Native Americans could take part in something that unified “negroes, Chinamen and white people.” In an unusual bow to the abilities of non-whites, the author recognizes that African Americans and Chinese settlers took part in settled farming. The agrarian rhetoric of the late nineteenth century relied on the racial hierarchy with white America at the top. This style of settled farming, after all, was a white European invention perfected in the United States.

they earn them by labor. They will be encouraged to select land and erect houses upon it, and to conform as far as possible to the amenities, duties and responsibilities of civilization. This circular, our correspondent informs us, has been communicated to the Sioux. The experiment is a bold one. If by any process the Sioux can be brought within the range of civilization, it will go far toward solving this painful Indian problem. We never could see why the Indians should not work like negroes, Chinamen and white people. If they will not, then they must not complain of hunger or discomfort. The supreme commandment of modern civilization is “Root, hog, or die!”

Figure 1.5: Clipping from “Topics of the Day,” *TPF* May 1, 1875, 140.

To the agrarian mind, farming was the only way to be truly white, so making the Native Americans into landowning farmers would make sense. From the white perspective, “Indians” did not appear to work for their living. At this time, the federal government provided the nations with free-range reservation land and subsidized their

living with money, food, and household goods. Jealousy certainly played a role, and that feeling sprung from the cultural concept of work ethic and agrarian lifestyle. Groups of white people believed in reforming the Natives into whites. The problems between the indigenous populations and settlers was the drive to expand whiteness through agriculture. That is, from the agrarian perspective, the native peoples misunderstood the value of farming the white way.¹⁶ Good Americans could push entire populations along in the progression of civilization and shift them into their perceived white ideal.

A long-running apiary column also contributes to our understanding of the *Prairie Farmer's* take on white expansionism in the late nineteenth century. One of the repeated mentions of “white man” was in discussing apiary, the technical term for a bee house and beekeeping. Apiary articles discussed clover as an important nitrogen-fixing crop for the nutrition of the soil as well as beneficial for the honey bee population. White clover, at least, did not exist on the North American continent before white settlement. Breaking the time between Native rule and white settlement often included phrases such as “the coming of the white man.” Figure 1.6 shows a variation on the phrase. This syntax hearkens to perceptions of the pigeon languages exchanged between Native Americans and English-speaking white people. Only within the context of white settlement—something invasive from the perspective of Native Americans—did the white *Prairie Farmer* writers use “white man” to describe the race. In this case, “man” was used in the general sense: meaning “man-kind.” So the discussion of white people bringing non-native species to the Americas provides us with an interesting self-consciousness on the part of the white writers. On one hand, they affirm white superiority with the idea that they expand civilization with their introductions. On the other hand,

¹⁶See “Our Ancestors Were Honest,” *TPF*, March 23, 1901, 10.

they realize that they alter the ecology and not all of the invasive species are desirable.

This stachys is no new genus, and belongs to what used to be known as hedge nettles, of the family of labiates or the mint family, several of which are natives of this country, although some of them were introduced with the white man, either as plants for his use or as weeds.

Figure 1.6: Clipping from “Notes and Queries,” *TPF* December 13, 1890, 791.

Prairie Farmer writers constantly pointed out that Native Americans called clover “white man's foot.” No substantial reason exists to disbelieve that some Native people would assign such names to invasive species brought by European settlers. The clipping in Figure 1.3 shows one reference to clover as well as other species introduced that became flowers and weeds. The tale of the traveling apiarist in this piece may be less than believable, but it shows the racialized thinking of people writing for the *Prairie Farmer*.

Mrs. L. Harrison of Peoria, Illinois, wrote this and many other articles for “The Apiary” column. She mainly committed herself to providing simple and practical advice for keeping bees. Racialized language often accompanied her discussion of the benefits of having bees, introducing them to the continent, and especially propagating clover to produce the best honey. White people may have brought some weeds and altered the ecology of the Americas, but agrarian rhetoric portrayed all these as the side effects of civilization. Harrison's white race created a better environment for sedentary agriculture with clover that fixed nitrogen, fed bees, and looked “prettier” than other ground covers (see figure 1.7). The bees, in turn, could pollinate the clover and crops as well as produce wax and delicious honey.

full feather. The Indians call white clover "the white man's foot," and we've heard it said, that wherever there are Yankees, dandelions spring up. We've read of an apiarist that sowed white clover seed in his walks, and in a few years the roadsides were lined with it. It is a much prettier border for a highway than deg-fennel, and far more useful.

Figure 1.7: Clipping from Mrs. L. Harrison, "Local Record," *TPF* May 24, 1879, 163.

Harrison continued writing the apiary column for many years. A piece in 1892, Figure 1.8, describes the benefit of white people introducing honey bees and flies to the continent. Invasive species provided the land with greater harvests of fruit than before. This article gives scientific evidence to prove Harrison's point. During a rainy season, the introduced honey bees and flies could not travel the air well enough to fertilize all the fruit blooms. Therefore, uncontrollable climate jeopardized the harvest. Harrison's argument was faulty because if the rains were bad enough to discourage the species she wrote about, then native pollinators had no chance either. Further analysis of Harrison's claims would require extensive ecological research as suggested by William Cronon in his book *Changes in the Land*.¹⁷ However, no stretch of the evidence is required to understand that Harrison betrayed the hubris of white American agriculturalists in the late nineteenth century. Increasingly obsessed with high production, agrarians emphasized the ability of humans to improve upon nature, white people possessing the best methods of doing so. Harrison's latter article clearly shows she believed that the "white man" brought better fruiting plants and better pollinators.

¹⁷William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), xvi.

not need their agency, but when the white man came, bringing his little fruit trees and seeds with him, then the white man's fly appeared. There were a few insects that fertilized the bloom of wild apples and pines but they were few and far between. During the blooming of the fruit trees if there are no bees there will be but little fruit set. This was exemplified the past season, for during its bloom there were long continued rains, which washed off the pollen and confined the bees to their hives.

Figure 1.8: Clipping from Mrs. L. Harrison, "The Apiary: Bees and Fertilization," *TPF* October 29, 1892, 699.

Articles consistently praised the growth of efficient farming as white people settled in any area. Language about "the coming of the white man" frequently utilized agricultural language. They referred to the "first white man's plow," signaling not only the presence of white people or "discovery" by white people, but actual permanent settlement. Farmers also brought the aforementioned changes to ecology and civilization.

A centennial review of American advancement—Figure 1.9—did not mention farming at all. It began with the settlement of the Old West, now the Midwest and upland South. It then discussed the advancement of the United States as a Republic and the great improvements in technology and science. However, one may assume that the attention paid to all of the items and people specifically mentioned did not outweigh the advances of white settlement and agricultural technology. The magazine devoted itself to understanding new farming methods and machines. This article, though, shows the close bond between manifest destiny and technological determinism in the nation's mind. Expanding white settlement went hand-in-hand with technology that facilitated travel and exploitation of the land—agricultural or otherwise.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

One hundred and ten years ago there was not a single white man in what is now Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana or Illinois. Then what is now the most flourishing part of the United States, was as little known as the country in the heart of Africa itself. It was not till 1776 that Boone left his home in North Carolina to become the first settler in Kentucky. And the first pioneers of Ohio did not settle till twenty years later still. A hundred years ago Canada belonged to France, and Washington was a modest

* * *

A hundred years ago there were but four small papers in America; steam-engines had not been imagined, and locomotives, and steamboats, and railroads, and telegraphs, and postal-cards, friction matches, percussion caps, and

Figure 1.9: Clippings from “A Hundred Years Ago,” *TPF* September 11, 1875, 294, reprinted from the *Baltimore Herald*.

Nothing facilitated agricultural expansion in the Midwest and Great Plains as much as the railroad. Figure 1.10 shows a clipping from an article proclaiming the vitality of the “Anglo Saxon race” (a rare use of that term by *Prairie Farmer* editors) in populating the West. While the article emphasizes small-town settlement along rail lines—places closely linked to their agricultural hinterlands—it also praises whiteness and railroad technology. *Prairie Farmer* concern over white settlement more frequently dealt with farming as previously shown.

And now we enter the territory of Dakota soon to reach our journey's end, Sioux Falls. The city bearing this name is a wonderful example of the latent energy existing in the Anglo Saxon race. Twelve months ago the railroad entered the town to find it with some 700 inhabitants. There are now nearly 2,000, and to say these people are go-a-head in the strongest meaning of the word is a mere nothing to the ideas which I have carried away with me. The hotel, yclept Cata-

Figure 1.10: Clipping from K. H. B., "A Trip in the Director's Car," *TPF* July 26, 1879, 233.

The railroad also benefitted the agrarian mission of settling farmland in the Great Plains. J. Dunham wrote a small piece, shown in full as Figure 1.11, to boost the attractiveness of settling in the Sioux Falls area and the Great Plains eight years after the previous article. As William Cronon describes in *Nature's Metropolis*, the railroad made much of this area the hinterland of Chicago. While remaining rural- and agriculturally-focused, the people worked close to the tracks in order to sell to the urban exchange. The railroad could move people out to fulfill both the agrarian dream of landownership and the new American capitalist system. Looking at the *Prairie Farmer*, the rhetoric claims that both whiteness and civilization never before expanded so easily. They came along with the capitalism Cronon describes.

Minnehaha Co., Dak., June 9.—J. Dunham writes: A trip just made from Sioux Falls to Chicago and back over the Burlington Cedar Rapids & Northern, and the Rock Island & Pacific Railways, running through Southeastern Dakota, Northern Iowa and Illinois, reveals this fact: Never, in the history of the white man, did this portion of the country loom up with such a grand prospect for a bountiful harvest as now. The farther west, the better the average. No yellow and sickly blades, no burnt districts, no decayed areas, but everything and all things conspiring to show unexampled results.

Figure 1.11: Clipping from “Notes from the Country,” *TPF* June 18, 1887, 395

The presence of white people in Oklahoma excited the *Prairie Farmer*. Oklahoma had been “Indian Territory”—a semi-formal large-scale reservation, since the first half of the century. The Indian Appropriations Act of 1889 opened the lands to the general American population, causing a rush of settlement. Excluding specifics of farm development from the article indicates the understanding of a general pattern in westward expansion. White Americans would settle in an area, build farms and some cities, and civilization occurred thus. The *Prairie Farmer* editor only needed to mention the great leap in Oklahoma's white population to make it attractive to those wishing to go on a railroad “excursion” (see Figure 1.12). Hard-working, white agrarians did not simply holiday across several state lines. These railroad trips were for the young men who had no great expectations for owning land and could sell their skill and muscle as migrant workers. The Oklahoma farm owners almost certainly relied on migrants' labor to harvest wheat and corn each year.

The editor's encouragement for the excursions seems to draw such people away from Illinois. Whole families would occasionally move to a new land. But, more importantly, a long-established farming society existed in Illinois, and the state could

spare some of its native sons in the name of westward expansion and the agrarian dream. The article clearly indicates that the traveling worker may scout the land for permanent settlement.

HARVEST EXCURSIONS.

In reply to several inquiries asking dates of harvest excursions to the Southwest, especially to Oklahoma and northern Texas points, the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific railroad announces excursions on September 1 and September 15. These excursions will afford our readers an excellent opportunity for looking over that section. Oklahoma has a population of 400,000 white people, an increase of 500 per cent during the last ten years. The taxable value of the property is more than \$60,000,000. Last year it produced 20,000,000 bushels of wheat and 60,000,000 of corn.

Figure 1.12: "Harvest Excursions," *TPF* August 20, 1903, 15.

1.3: The 1890s to the 1920s: The Settled Farmer

The agrarians of the *Prairie Farmer* steered clear of American overseas imperialism, preferring to rework white supremacy on the North American continent. An 1899 article rejected the jingoistic atmosphere of the United States, at the time justifying its wars in Cuba and the Philippines. Rudyard Kipling's famous poem "The White Man's Burden" came out earlier that year. Kipling wrote about the folly of the United States and its white civilization mission. A land advertisement, shown as Figure 1.13, appropriated the phrase for the purpose of showing a different version of whiteness. The piece implies that no white person should have to carry the burden of renting a farm instead of owning one. C. E. Rollins, a Chicago land agent, sought to capitalize on the idea that whiteness required land ownership. He advertised land available in Wisconsin near the railroad. So,

it combined three aspects of the agrarian ideal: whiteness, landownership, and technology.

The White Man's Burden

Is paying rent for a poor farm. Now is the time to secure a good farm on the line of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway in Marinette County, Wisconsin, where the crops are of the best work plenty, fine markets, excellent climate, pure soft water, land sold cheap and on long time. Why rent a farm when you can buy one for less than you pay for rent? Address C. E. Rollins, Land Agent, 161 La Salle Street, Chicago, Ill.

Figure 1.13: "The White Man's Burden," *TPF* April 1, 1899, 7.

That land advertisement was placed on the same page as an article about livestock that also referred to a "burden to the white man." In this case, the white man's burden was maintaining livestock breed.¹⁸ Buying good breeding stock required large amounts of investment capital, possibly more than the average farmer could afford. It would seem that the independent white man could not bear the burden of raising beef for the world. Gosling pointed out that the large rancher may have to take over the responsibility of keeping American beef production ahead of other parts of the world, unless the present farmers purchased prime stock that day at the auction. Printing the speech as an article encouraged the readers to breed good livestock. This was one of the white man's burdens. The *Prairie Farmer* printed it again one month later.

Agrarianism, as an ideal, sought to eliminate the instability inherent in the lives of tenants, cowboys, and the like. One westward-looking *Prairie Farmer* writer hoped to

¹⁸John Gosling, "Hereford Conditions," *TPF*, April 1, 1899, 7. Gosling presented this as a paper "at the recent Hereford sale."

draw some lessons on large-scale production and the agglomerated production of dairy. His article criticized the “history of land kings, cattle kings, corn kings, wheat kings, and hog kings” in Kansas (see figure 1.14). Their farming ways created “a race of shifting tenants, cowboys, corn-huskers, harvest hands, and stock traders, all of whom were forced into an uncertain state of existence.” In a time of land consolidation, the *Prairie Farmer* worried about the future of the agrarian dream. This writer expressed concern that these large farms would cloud the “greatest desire” of a “permanent country life.” The magazine thus continued pushing its ruralist agenda even in a time when large farms appeared to answer the call for high production. This article calls for a renewal of interest in “country life” and “the small farm” that link to small, local processing facilities. So, the Midwest farmer could hope to teach something to the agriculturalists of Kansas and the West. The article also reaffirmed the methods of the small Midwestern farm, encouraging the *Prairie Farmer* readership to carry on their traditions with the assurance that they still provided nourishment for the nation.

You know well the history of land kings, cattle kings, corn kings, wheat kings, and hog kings, and you know that each has ruled long enough to satisfy everybody. They produced a race of shifting tenants, cowboys, corn-huskers, harvest hands, and stock traders, all of whom were forced into an uncertain state of existence. The time is now when real, permanent country life is the greatest desire, and the small farm with

its milch cows, its pigs and chickens must satisfy the longing.

*** * ***

There is only one thing toward which the Western dairyman can look for an improvement of his condition, and that is the intelligence with which he prosecutes his work. The creameries, as well managed as any on earth, are here; the skimming station is close at his door; the price paid for the product is all that the markets will justify; the cheap land and mild climate are at his disposal. If these are utilized with the degree

of business sense that the merchant uses, the dairy is sure to be a success.

Figure 1.14: Clippings from “Some Gleanings from Kansas Experience,” *TPF*, January 5, 1901, 5.

The idea of independent landownership tells more about whiteness than just having real estate. It also meant that white people were not to be taken advantage of. Sharecropping and tenant farming skimmed the fruits of the farmer's labor off the top. Landlords scalping the profits from the worker rendered the worker helpless to ever become independent, even after years of farming. White people—the ideal citizens—had to be able to rely on status and respect for their rights. Agrarians believed white people deserved special rights. A 1919 article notes that white tenants have neither the wealth nor the opportunity to live in a white manner. The *Prairie Farmer* writer opposed such a lifestyle since it violated their agrarian ideal for a white America. A farm wife from McLean County, Illinois, wrote a long letter to the *Prairie Farmer* protesting the conditions of tenant farming.¹⁹ Two aspects of that life she found unsuitable for white people. First, she complained that tenants are not treated civilly by the landlords. This means that she recognized a difference in the way white men should be treated from the

¹⁹Mrs. Robert Prahm(?), “The Hired Man's Wages,” *TPF*, July 12, 1919, 16.

way people of color could or should be treated. Second, she noted that the forty-five dollars per month was not enough to live “like white people.” Beyond civility, the wage issue indicates that whiteness relied on class status as well as color and culture. Being a white tenant violated whiteness. Being a black tenant became evidence of racial inferiority.

1.4: The 1890s to the 1920s: The Scientific Farmer

The *Prairie Farmer* took a great interest in making its readership scientifically minded starting in the 1890s. Instead of a race making the technology, the *Prairie Farmer* switched to believing that technology—and scientific knowledge in general—made the race. In 1891, the magazine published an article by Professor J. F. Elsom that heralded the use of the word “agriculture” as a reborn term for scientific farming.²⁰ The *Prairie Farmer* took the opportunity in 1894 to pat the United States on the back for its technological achievements. New binder machines were displayed for the World's Fair that year, and a Spanish ship captain stated that this engineering advancement “is without doubt the best example of the energy of the European races which people America today.”²¹ While the Spanish were considered to be dubiously white, they were European. The people of the United States could consequently take their racial complement seriously. *Prairie Farmer* minds already believed Americans—often called “the American race”—achieved superiority through their white European ancestry, they pointed increasingly to the merit of the United States republic, work ethic, science, and

20J. F. Elsom, “Farming as a Science,” *TPF*, April 11, 1891, 233.

21“Captain Concas Grows Poetical,” *TPF*, June 2, 1894, 5.

technology.

At its most basic level, agrarianism recognized the place of farming in the sustenance of human groups. A large portion of the uses of the term “race” spoke about the “human race” or just “the race,” often meaning the same. Many times, however, “race” referred to a specific human race, whether determined by skin color, country of citizenship, or culture. The more specific racial terminology allows comparison of Midwestern racial concepts to broader American history, namely Manifest Destiny. The *Prairie Farmer* editors interested themselves in the settlement of white people and other races in the Midwest and beyond. Their primary concern was sustaining the best nation for white farmers. Agrarian writers saw the *Prairie Farmer* as an outlet for the knowledge that would facilitate racial progress.

Over the course of this era, print media grew. The *Prairie Farmer* and its cousin papers such as *Wallace's Farmer* in Iowa and the *Missouri Farmer* gathered regional audiences.²² *Prairie Farmer* would report from neighboring states as well as the American South, the American West, and around the globe. The Midwest was not the only place they believed the agrarian ideal could exist, and they wished to find lessons from afar. Readers from states surrounding Illinois often wrote in to voice their opinions and tell their stories. They were interested in the agrarian community the paper formed and the information disseminated through it. They eagerly consumed information about the maturing capitalist market, scientific methods, and recent racial thought.

Plant and animal breeds were one way to advance races. Articles reflected on examples from the past, calling farming the profession foundational to successful

²²Fry, 65-88.

societies.²³ They either spoke in general terms or about specific crops or animals. For example, an article from 1899, shown in Figure 1.15, explains the importance of cattle from the beginning of humanity. The “bovine race,” as many writers referred to cattle, proved humans with the potential for numerous meat and dairy foodstuffs as well as leather and fertilizer. While accurate history would prove that not all human civilizations utilized cattle as did Europeans, the piece shows the perspective of the *Prairie Farmer* in the agrarian mission. Each crop and breed of livestock meant something more to the grower than the yearly payoff from its sale. The agriculturalist raised the human race with their farm produce.

**DEMAND FOR CALVES OF GOOD BEEFING
QUALITIES.**

From the earliest history of the human race, whether recorded, or a matter of mere tradition, the cow and her calf have been the almost indispensable companions of man. They have furnished him milk, butter, cheese, veal and beef and in addition, material for boots, shoes and robes. They have furnished

Figure 1.15: Clipping from “Demand for Calves of Good Beefing Qualities,” *TPF* September 2, 1899, 3.

One must keep in mind that modernist racial thinkers believed in linear development of civilization and used it as a basis for their hierarchical stratification of races. That is, these thinkers supposed that each group of people lay somewhere along a one-dimensional spectrum from total barbarism to civilization. The line actually

²³For example, see John Jackson “He’s Alright,” *The Prairie Farmer* February 10, 1900, 3. This article argues that the farmer is the foundation of any society’s sustenance. It also points out that the American farmer is generally the most educated and financially secure farmer in the world. Hereafter, *The Prairie Farmer* is abbreviated *TPF*.

represented development over time since modernism placed optimistic faith in the progress of groups that would all evolve naturally toward civilization. Any single writer would justify where on that spectrum any race or civilization fit and would provide evidence of their position.

In its effort to exalt contemporary American agriculture, the *Prairie Farmer* often reached backward in time to provide racial arguments for samples of how farm production affected human populations. Several articles conveyed information about how a food source became culturally significant and how it sustained human life specific to a racial group. In talking about the Hebrew race, one article recognized mutton as a factor in “the character of their civilization, and their persistence as a race,” and the author suggests the possibility of a farming future in sheep.²⁴

Branching often into the affairs of neighboring states, the *Prairie Farmer* published a summary article on a statewide Missouri horticultural meeting. Louis Erp of Cedar Gap, Missouri, said in a lecture that

As the progress of a race of people is indicated by the care for fruits and flowers, and the character and appearance of its apple growers,...so may we also judge of its taste, culture and refinement by its desire for apples as a food. Apples, when eaten in their raw or cooked state, or drank in the form of cider, have a civilizing and elevating influence on men's thought, actions and desires, and as people learn to eat more apples and less meat, drink more cider and less whiskey, crime will diminish, contention will cease and the rights of each become more and more respected.²⁵

²⁴“World's Declining Sheep Business,” *TPF*, October 5, 1905, 11.

²⁵Mrs. A. Z. Moore, “Missouri Horticultural Meeting,” *TPF*, June 15, 1908, 6. See also Parker Earle, “Apple and Pear Culture in New Mexico-II,” *TPF*, November 9, 1905, 5.

Mrs. A. Z. Moore, who wrote the article and quoted Erp, called these postulations “quaint fancies” as opposed to “hard facts.” Nevertheless, Erp demonstrates a medium between the simple praise of abundant nutrition and the civilizing effect of specific produce. Partly an act of boosterism for Missouri orchards and apple consumption in general, the lecture delivers to the historian a sense that people at least attempted to apply racial civilization theory to their livelihoods. Producing apples created a sustainable race.

Other products fit into theories of racial longevity. A recipe column attributes long life in “the Balkan race” to the “remedial effects of buttermilk” and then encourages its consumption.²⁶ Another article touted the importance of cheese to various races in history.²⁷ No matter the product, the authors of these articles placed a value other than economics on the food farmers created at the base level. Napoleon may have said something along the lines of “an army marches on its stomach” in order to note the importance of food in military logistics, but these articles at least implied that races succeed on their stomachs. The farmers had a mission of endowing their racial group with the best quality food. That is how they fit into the human race in general; that is also how they fit into a successful group of humans.

Much of the *Prairie Farmer's* interest in scientific agriculture focused on technology and its role improving a race. In 1901, an article titled “The Man and the Wheel” says, “the wheel in its various applications to the industrial arts, from the crude cartwheel of the ancients to the whirling shaft of the modern dynamo, has been one of the most important factors in the evolution of the race. Take away all the wheels of the twentieth century world and we would have very little civilization left.”²⁸ Racial success

²⁶“Healthful Cookery: Buttermilk Dishes,” *TPF*, August 15, 1913, 14.

²⁷“Cheese an Important Article of Diet,” *TPF* May 1, 1912, 17.

²⁸“The Man and the Wheel,” *TPF*, April 20, 1901, 15.

relied on embracing technological advances.

While race here probably stood for “human race,” articles such as these tacitly praise the white farming race. The cartoon accompanying the piece, shown as Figure 1.16, shows two white men, saying within the normative version of the ideal farmer: white males. It also shows that the farmer who employed modern technology such as the smaller metal wheels wore their trousers tucked into their boots and rolled their sleeves up for the hard work of implementing the technology. The “neighbor” wore a suit, cosmopolitan facial hair, and apparently needed to be told “No more High Wheels for me, Neighbor.”

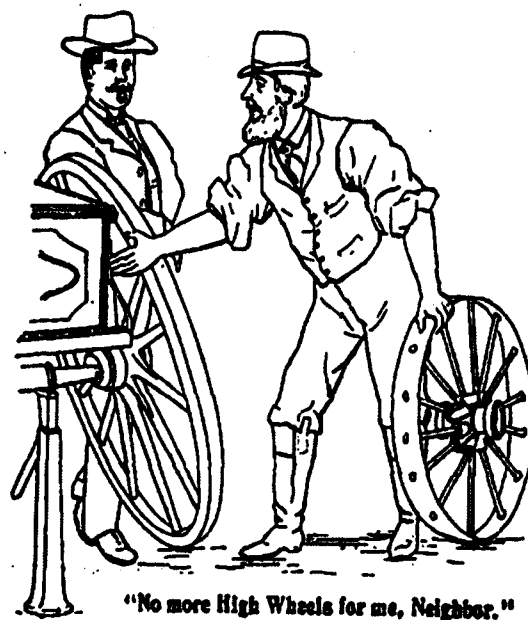


Figure 1.16: Clipping from “The Man and the Wheel,” *TPF*, April 20, 1901, 15.

One article from 1903 discusses advances in the production of maple sugar in New England (see Figure 1.17). The “age of civilization” and “the white man” came jointly. The “iron kettle” defined civilization in sugar production, and white people

continued improving maple produce with train transport and refinement technology. In comparison with Native American technology and methods, the white settlers could more efficiently tap sap and produce syrup or sugar from it.²⁹ From the white American perspective, this was praiseworthy; it showed their triumph over nature through agricultural technology. In the modern agrarian mind, this was also a triumph of the natural gifts of whiteness. A more advanced civilization—something produced through generations of good heredity and agglomerated knowledge—with more powerful technology created conditions for the further advancement of that civilization.

vessels. A rough gauge was made of stone with which they bored the trees, specimens of such having been found to-day which proves that the process of sugar making was known in the "stone age." With the age of civilization and the white man came the iron kettle which was at first placed between two logs, then followed the crotched sticks and a long pole on which to suspend it. A while later on a train

Figure 1.17: W. R. Hayward, "A Vermont Sugar Camp," *TPF*, March 26, 1903, 10.

By shifting the discourse from Manifest Destiny to the importance of scientific agriculture as a civilizing force, the *Prairie Farmer* advocated a functionalist version of race where good agricultural practices allowed for the development of great civilizations. In May of 1906, the newspaper summarized the words of Department of Agriculture Assistant Secretary W. M. Hays and quoted him as saying "The philosophy of society is, that by good food, clothing, and other favorable conditions, aided by education, all is

²⁹ For more on the difference between Native and white perspectives, see Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

done that may be done to elevate the race.”³⁰ While ultimately hinting at eugenics, Hays's clearer statements demonstrated a more universal opinion about food contributing to the well-being of a race. *Prairie Farmer* writers granted much attention to racial distinction according to agricultural practices.

Fredrick Jackson Turner proposed not two decades prior that the United States had expanded to its limits on the North American continent. The associate editors of the *Prairie Farmer* pushed divisive racialism to signify the white race as the benefactors of good farming. W. T. Davis, an associate editor, took a page from contemporary geography and anthropology in arguing the benefits of temperate climate on racial differentiation. In 1910, Davis wrote to readers in order to interest them in relocation within the Midwest. This climate lends itself to diverse crop sets and adaptation to numerous environmental conditions—namely with diverse crops and livestock—and the people therefore develop a better civilization. Thus, a superior race emerges from the human collective, and “the agriculturalist in this climate would derive most profitable results to himself and his family and to the race, to increase the variety of his products.”³¹ Davis wrote his article for “homeseekers,” whose movements could affect the health of the race based on the land and crops. Frank I. Mann wrote in 1911 that the Malthusian theory of races performing best on virgin land must be readjusted in a time of land scarcity. Mann realized that “high civilization” could no longer rely on simply broadening its borders to produce more food. The American race's needs required scientifically-increased production on the land they already possessed, not through imperialism.³² Therefore, whiteness became closely associated with the scientific

30“To Breed Good Blood,” *TPF*, May 31, 1906, 9.

31W. T. Davis, “Prairie Farmer Homeseekers' Department,” *TPF*, November 15, 1910, 28.

32Frank I. Mann, “Permanent Fertility by Scientific Soil Treatment,” *TPF*, May 15, 1911, 5.

knowledge necessary to run a modern farm.

Midwest agrarians concentrated most of their rhetoric on strategies to improve upon the fertile land already settled in the Midwest. After the close of the frontier, the *Prairie Farmer* transitioned to heavy emphasis on white settlement and work ethic and adopted a new pairing: scientific farming and work ethic. Emphasizing these two aspects of whiteness tempered the biological aspects of whiteness, but one must remember that race always incorporated cultural differences as well as obvious biological differences.³³ It also indicated that the *Prairie Farmer* agrarians took part in a discourse on the *ideal* white person, a specific whiteness and not a general whiteness. This version of whiteness incorporated morality and citizenship as well as skin color.

This meant transforming the ideal work ethic of the Midwest farmer. Not only would one have to labor fervently, but according to certain new methods. The rhetoric of science and moral work intertwined with each other and the agrarian concept of whiteness as well. “The Song of the Lazy Farmer” was a cartoon that ran beginning in the 1910s. It repeatedly chides the farmer for refusing to take his farm work seriously. By the appearance of the man in the cartoon he is a white man with a white beard and nice clothes. Education and practice marked the hard-working farmer. The February 10, 1917, edition of the cartoon—Figure 1.18—features the Lazy Farmer going to the land grant University of Illinois. The “short course” at the institution taught the Lazy Farmer how to tend the soil, plants, and animals on the farm, and he recognized the potential to turn it into cash profit and feed the “human race.” However, the last third of the poem is made up of complaints about how difficult scientific farming appeared. The Lazy Farmer would

³³Haney-Lopez, 20-24. Haney-Lopez writes about the racism that culminates the ideas about ethnicity that are forming around the turn of the twentieth century.

rather smoke a pipe—shown in the drawing—than “put rock phosphate on [his] soil.”

The Song of the Lazy Farmer

My neighbor talked me into it, he said that I'd learn quite a bit about how corn and chinch bugs grow, and how to make a tractor go, to feed a cow and judge a horse, if I would go to the short course. So not to let the good chance slip, I had Mirandy pack my grip, and started out upon the train, to see the short course at Champaign.

They told me how to fan my oats, and balance rations for my shotes, to test my corn and splice a rope, to make up hog grease into soap. They taught me how to plow the sod and fertilize it, every rod; to raise a hundred bushel yield of oats and corn in every field; to make the calves grow big and fat, and mix the rations for the cat. The things I learned while I was there would make of me a millionaire; if I'd just do them on my place, I'd raise food for the human race! But it's an awful lot of toil to put rock phosphate on my soil. I'd have to work and toil away to get a bumper yield of hay. I'd pay in labor and in sweat for every bushel I would get. These scientific ways may be all right for younger folks, by gee, but I would rather rest and smoke than work until my back was broke. I guess I'll do things my own way, and have a good rest every day!



Figure 1.18: “The Song of the Lazy Farmer,” *TPF*, February 10, 1917, 6.

Chapter 2

Blackness Defined: Cliche Niggers, Blackface Niggas, and Southern Information

The *Prairie Farmer* granted African Americans very few chances to define themselves. No evidence exists of a black correspondent, writer, or editor of the magazine. Booker T. Washington, renowned black agrarian, made headlines in the magazine. He attempted to reform his race within the white agrarian paradigm, and was therefore acceptable to some degree. Washington worked to bring whiteness to African Americans. His intellectual rival, W. E. B. DuBois, attempted to provide a meaningful definition to blackness from within the race. Not until the Harlem Renaissance would a strong contingent of black thinkers begin to replace derogatory versions from the white hegemony with positive versions from African Americans themselves.³⁴ For the time around the turn of the century, for the white people of the North, and especially for the writers of the *Prairie Farmer*, white people dominated the discourse of blackness. The white writers heaped similar characteristics on Asians, Middle Easterners, and Eastern Europeans as non-white groups, producing not only a unique blackness, but a set of non-white characteristics. Defining blackness, Chinese-ness, et cetera, positively translated into a negative definition of whiteness.

To understand exclusive whiteness, we must understand the *Prairie Farmer* version of blackness. This chapter is about what white agrarians wished to exclude from their ideal citizenship. They tied personality and culture to biological heritage among non-whites. The desire to exclude character traits perceived as undesirable then transferred into making races undesirable. First, the use of racial language appeared

³⁴For an early example, see W. E. B. DuBois *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1903).

casually in the magazine in the form of common phrases and clichés. These show how deeply ingrained racism was around the turn of the twentieth century. While often unwitting comments, they also betrayed underlying fears and prejudice evident in other, explicit sources.

Second, one of the more stunning manifestations of blackness came in the form of articles written by whites, but in language intended to be read as if it were by a black speaker. This “blackface nonfiction” thus conveyed certain versions of blackness that manipulated the readers' minds. The use of different racial terms also indicated permissions granted by the culture to different kinds of writers. Staff writers mostly used the terms “negro” and “colored person” to discuss African Americans. Authors of “blackface fiction” took the liberty of using the terms “nigger” or “nigga” within dialogue, but also adhered to the standards for news writers in story narration. These cultural guidelines indicate a divide between the formal word of the *Prairie Farmer* magazine and the thought patterns that published fiction conveyed.

Third, ordinary journalism provided the news and opinions that solidified the agrarian North against African Americans. News on racial topics almost exclusively reported on murders, lynchings, race riots and other violence. This contributed to the culture of fear surrounding the presence of black people. With the low African American population, though, white Northerners could only postulate so much. The *Prairie Farmer* turned to the thoughts of Southerners—supposedly expert because of their centuries of experience with black people, but more importantly for their recent struggles since emancipation—for deeper understanding. Thus, the racism of the South transferred intellectually to the North.

2.1 Common Word Usage: Work Ethic and Looks

No nonfiction works published in the *Prairie Farmer* referred to any specific African American person as “a nigger,” and few refer to the race in general.³⁵ The harsher racial terms were used by unmasked white writers mostly in the form of clichés and common phrases. In these cases, the racial terminology did not refer to any specific person. Common phrases that degraded black people included “nigger in the woodpile,” “nigger in the fence,” “work like a nigger,” and “holding onto a dead nigger.” They all conjure a fear or disgust within the white American imagination. Writers for the *Prairie Farmer* were not ashamed to use these phrases, but the editors did feel the need to explain them frequently. In doing so, they indicate actual belief in the stereotypes.

Common early racial clichés included “work like a nigger” and “holding onto a dead nigger” as well as their variants. Before the 1890s, “work like a nigger” was the most common. If a person “worked like a nigger,” it referred to the relentless, tiresome life of being a slave. Small farmers and people employed in nineteenth-century factories labored from dawn until dusk with occasional pause for food and water. An image of blackness centered on hard work seems to contradict the idea of black laziness apparent elsewhere in agrarian literature.³⁶ However, historical discourses thrived on multiple opinions, and discourses often contradict each other.³⁷ *Prairie Farmer* writers used the

³⁵For one of the few examples of the word “nigger” used to refer to the black racial group, see Peter Solkum “Corn Crib Letters-No. XXXIII: On Comets,” *TPF*, August 24, 1872, 268.

³⁶One example of the “lazy nigger” is an ambivalent representation of blackness. In a story, a black man is accused of being “the laziest nigger I eber see.” It portrays that individual in the superlative, implying that others are not as lazy. One interpretation would be how outstanding the character was amongst his race, all assumed to be lazy. Another would be how unusual it was for a black man to be lazy. Maggie Bolan, “Aunt Polly’s ‘George Washington,’” *TPF*, October 4, 1884, 635.

³⁷Joan Scott’s important historical theories on gender states that evidence of gender is found by the historian in “culturally available symbols that evoke multiple (and often contradictory) representations...but also, myths of light and dark, purification and pollution, innocence and corruption,” “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* (December 1986), 1067. The historian can look at the same cultural symbols and patterns for race instead of gender.

actual phrase less than they made reference to African American slavery and labor.

Blackness carried a bestial connotation in the phrase “work like a nigger.” Several pieces weighed in on the African American ability to work, drawing on the idea that they may be treated as beasts of burden even in a free labor market. For this sort of opinion, the magazine often turned to reprinting outside sources. For example, the *Prairie Farmer* reprinted a short section of *Ark of Elm Island* by Rev. Elijah Kellogg, a Maine novelist and Congregationalist minister.³⁸ As youth literature, the book sought to educate boys on the world. Kellogg posed that work songs “produced the most singular effect upon the negroes, insomuch that they seem hardly conscious of fatigue, even while exerting themselves to the utmost.”³⁹ Within the context of works such as this, “work like a nigger” cannot be considered a non-racial reference even as a cliché. Even in states with a long-standing tradition of anti-slavery before the Civil War, racial labor patterns existed. Kellogg wrote about free African Americans operating on the coast of New England, but they clearly operated differently than other races.

Using song to increase work potential fascinated the scientific agrarian mind to some degree as it did Kellogg. They already predicated whiteness on work ethic. Did the African American ability to work without fatigue threaten the posture of whiteness? The *Prairie Farmer* betrays no such thought. Any ability on the part of black people remained compartmentalized, separate from the realm of the working white man. It is evident in the cliché as well as in the portrayals of black labor. The simile “work *like* a nigger” did not blacken white people as if they used metaphor or metonymy, such as a white person hypothetically saying “I was a nigger in the field.” The cliché maintained racial distance.

³⁸Elijah Kellogg was a minor author of children's fiction in the late nineteenth century. For more information, begin with “Rev. Elijah Kellogg Dead” *New York Times*, March 18, 1901. The book is Elijah Kellogg, *The Ark of Elm Island* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1870).

³⁹“Songs and Labor” *TPF*, July 24, 1869, 237; see also, “Humorous,” *TPF*, March 8, 1879, 79.

This phrase only appeared a few times in the entire run of the magazine. But other pieces suggested the ability of African Americans to perform labor.⁴⁰ Authors deemed “work like a nigger” unfit for use in the formal articles of the *Prairie Farmer*, but many portrayed its regular usage in informal speech. It is important to not over-inflate the visibility of these clichés. “Work like a nigger” only appeared a handful of times in the *Prairie Farmer* magazine. However, the timing of its usage tells us something very important. Though the cliché did not disappear from the American vocabulary, it faded from usage in the *Prairie Farmer* over this period. No cases of the cliché appeared after 1894.

Over the course of the period covered by this study, “nigger in the woodpile” appears about twenty-three times, “nigger in the fence” appears about four times. The term “nigger” used to obviously describe the race of African Americans directly is very low. By volume, the occurrence of “nigger” or “darky” was far outweighed by the uses of “colored person” and its variants as well as “Negro.” Most cases of “nigger” in nonfiction were these clichés. *Prairie Farmer* editors tended to buffer themselves even in using these common terms. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 show two conscious explanations of “nigger in the woodpile” and “nigger in the fence.” The former reads as an apology with a less cruel, though racist and essentialist, alternative. No instances of “Ethiopian within the enclosure” or any near variation exists in the *Prairie Farmer*, showing the failure of the “softened” version.

⁴⁰For some examples in poetry, jokes, and stories, see: “Folly's Fandango,” *TPF*, August 5, 1871, 271; “Humorous,” *TPF*, March 8, 1879, 79; “Plunket's Widow,” *TPF*, December 22, 1894, 14.

“Nigger in the woodpile,” and “nigger in the fence,” to indicate some covert scheme, have been softened into “an Ethiopian within the enclosure.” “There is a screw loose somewhere” has

Figure 2.1: Clipping from “Slang,” *TPF* August 29, 1868, 69.

“Nigger in the Fence,” is a phrase aptly applied to some extremely low offers. It does not apply to the *Prairie Farmer Binder*, the regular price of which is \$1.25. We can supply it for 60 cents prepaid by express.

Figure 2.2: “Nigger in the Fence,” *TPF* February 25, 1888, 8.

The most common was “nigger in the woodpile.” Figure 2.1 represents the first of two usages of that phrase before 1910. From 1910 through 1923, writers placed the phrase into about twenty-one articles. Linguistically, “work like a nigger” fell out of use while “nigger in the woodpile” grew in use. This shift does not mean that one cliché simply replaced another; their meanings are not interchangeable. This shift instead means that the concept of a “nigger” changed: from a bestial worker to a lurking threat, not a worker at all.

Senate committees will be officially named tomorrow, but most of us know who will be it. Simon Lantz will run the agriculture committee again, Doc Wright of DeKalb gets appropriations, Dailey of Peoria lands judiciary, Meents of Iroquois, roads, etc. There is one nigger in the woodpile, though, and that is that almost every member of the senate wants on the committee on agriculture.

Figure 2.3: Clipping from Hiram Cornborer, “Everybody Wants to Drive the Flivver, but They Haven’t Got it Cranked Yet,” *TPF*, February 3, 1923, 4.

No article actually covers an incident where a black person hid in a woodpile to avoid detection from a white person. It implied a covert scheme. But the phrase held power as an indication of a hidden fear. Writers used it in hidden costs or harms in legislation. For example, an article from 1923, Figure 2.3, Senator Hiram Cornborer—probably a fictional name—uses “nigger in the woodpile” to expose unjust political interest in controlling agricultural legislation. The *Prairie Farmer* actually used it as a column title twice in the 1910s, but more commonly used it in editorial pieces during that decade.⁴¹ So though the cliché did not refer directly to an incident, it relied upon a cultural understanding that white people should fear black people out to get them—“nigger,” in fact, could be defined as “black people out to get white people” by these

⁴¹For examples, see “Nigger in the woodpile” is used as the column or article title in “A Nigger in the Woodpile,” *TPF*, December 18, 1915, 8; “There’s a Nigger in the Woodpile,” *TPF* January 6, 1923, 15. The phrase is used within the context of articles “Who Gets the Milk Money?” *TPF*, June 15, 1912, 2; “A Matter of Trying,” *TPF*, November 1, 1912, 10; “Fruit Marketing Methods Discussed: Subject Creates Much Interest at State Horticultural Meeting,” *TPF*, January 1, 1914, 4, 19; “The Real Combination,” *TPF*, June 28, 1919, 12; W. T. Davis and Fayette S. Munro, “Guaranties,” *TPF*, December 27, 1919, 18; “Too Much Margin,” *TPF*, December 27, 1919, 32; Hiram Cornborer, “Everybody Wants to Drive the Flivver: But They Haven’t Got It Cranked Yet,” *TPF*, February 3, 1923, 4; “Well! Well!” *TPF*, February 24, 1923, 13. All except the Davis and Cornborer pieces were written by the editor, who is also responsible for the titles of the articles. Davis and Munro were staff writers. Hiram Cornborer was a state senator. None of the articles discussed race, they dealt with political issues that affected farmers or exposed underhanded trade practices that could harm various agricultural sectors.

early twentieth century sources—just as decent citizens must fear underhanded politicians and unfair market traders.

Similar to the cliches, racial language permeated the naming of pets, animal breeds, crop breeds, and some inanimate objects. The *Prairie Farmer* showed folksonomy at its best in these instances. The magazine often printed a children's column. Child readers could write in and have their letters published. Content often focused on school, farm work, play, and pets. If white people shied away from placing the word “nigger” into their own mouths or the mouths of fellow white people—fictional or real—then pet names show exactly the opposite. Farmers and farm children named dogs, cattle, cats, and horses “Nigger” without shame. Further contrasting the polite language about “negroes” and “colored people” even in crude jokes, it is difficult to conceive anyone naming a pet “negro” or “colored man/woman.” The *Prairie Farmer* readers did not restrain their language like the professional writers.

Between the Civil War and the Great Migration, children wrote in about their pets consistently, but the magazine printed more of their letters after the turn of the century. A flare of pets named “Nigger” appears probably because of editorial choice to include more children's content. However, the use of “nigger in the woodpile” also grew at the same time. Perhaps this indicates a laxity around harsh racial terminology. The *Prairie Farmer* children's column went through several phases, varying the amount of information printed from the pens of children. So, these sources cannot prove a rise in naming pets “nigger.” However, the prevalence of children reporting “nigger” as a pet name in the issues that included children's letters provides some clues.

Between 1906 and 1922, about seven letters from children included pets named

“Nigger.” None of these pet names show spite or fear toward the animals. The children, rather, show great fondness. One child only identified as Columbine from St. Joseph, Missouri, said of her cat named Nigger she “would not give her away for anything” (see figure 2.4). Another child, Lois Bennett of Michigan, described the “beautiful black fur” of their cat (see Figure 2.5). This second example indicates the reason people named their beloved animals. In these cases, “nigger” reduced that derogatory word to black skin. It carried no scary or ugly implications, only the color black. Whereas race in all other instances combines skin color with behavior, these pets only exhibited the black skin—or fur.⁴²

put some crochet patterns in for I like
to crochet very much. I like to hear
about the other children's pets. I have
two pets. One is a cat. I would not
give her away for anything. Her name is
Nigger. The other one is a little blind
chicken. It was bitten by something
when it was a little chicken, and it made
it blind in one eye. I call him Blindie.

Figure 2.4: Clipping from Columbine, “Columbine Joins,” *TPF*, March 22, 1906, 15.

⁴²See *TPF*, September 4, 1920, 10; Dorothy Schleich, “A Clever Dog,” *TPF*, January 22, 1921, 24; Paul Mason, “Whole Family Plays with Dog,” *TPF*, February 19, 1921, 28; “When Grown-Ups Play with Me Contest Pictures,” *TPF*, March 5, 1921, 6; J. Kenneth Bushman, “Names Them All,” *TPF*, April 8, 1922, 18.

Cat Opens Door

The most interesting thing I have ever saw an animal do is to see a cat open a door. It is a stair door and the cat stands on the second step and taps the latch. It sounds like a telegraph operator clicking off a message on his instrument. After tapping it a few times the door opens and down he comes. I have never seen him tap the latch, but I have heard it and seen the door open and him come down. He has beautiful black fur with only a few white spots. His name is Nigger. Lois Bennett.
Saugatuck, Mich.

Figure 2.5: Lois Bennett, "Cat Opens Door," *TPF*, June 1, 1914, 17.

There appeared similar usages of the word "nigger" to name grain varieties and livestock breeds. "Nigger wheat" breeds appeared in articles testing grains for hardiness and yield during the summer of 1886, 1892 through 1893, again in 1904 to 1905, in 1910, 1917, 1919, and 1920.⁴³ Figure 2.6 shows a 1917 article that indicates the folksonomy of "nigger wheat" in Coles County, Illinois. According to a U.S. Department of Agriculture bulletin from 1923, "nigger wheat" was the most common name for a breed also known as "Winter Green, Winter John, and Winter King."⁴⁴ So, farmers used the term "nigger wheat" well without the lines of Coles County. This calls the question, why did people call it "nigger wheat?" But no source positively indicates the answer. The bulletin associates its first planting with an African American farmer in Ohio. It would thus break with the pattern of naming because of color. Nevertheless, it still shows an easy way to add "nigger" as a differentiating title on anything.

⁴³See for examples: "Seed Wheat," *TPF*, July 31, 1886, 496; "Scab Cut Yields" *TPF*, August 23, 1919, 33; "Wheat Varieties: Southern Illinois," *TPF*, August 21, 1920, 35.

⁴⁴J. Allen Clark, "Classification of American Wheat Varieties" (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1923), 154.

seed bed was fine and compacc. In
 September it was seeded by disk
 drilling with 1½ bushels of what is
 known locally as "Nigger wheat," a
 bearded variety, very much like Turkey Red.

Figure 2.6: Clipping from Orion B. Goble, "Good Weather Helps," *TPF*, September 7, 1918, 9.

A final acceptable use of the word "nigger" appeared in the phrase "nigger head," which could be applied to stones, a part of a tractor, or geographic place names. A 1878 article explains this term best. A farmer trying to line drainage ditches on his farm wrote to ask how to do this with available resources. "Less that one mile form where I wish to make the drain is a creek, (now dry,) the bed of which is full of stone, such as we call 'nigger heads,' rough, unshapely things from as large as man wishes to lift down to pebbles. ...There are no flat ones among them."⁴⁵ It was common to refer to mid-size, irregular-shaped stones as "nigger heads."⁴⁶ Racialism thus extended to normative thinking about people's bodies, more than skin color. Those who called ugly things "nigger heads" presumed that black people were ugly. The linguistic equation is undeniable. Portraying African Americans as shifty, scary, bestial or lazy, reducing them to their skin color, or using them as a metaphor of physical distortion brought the race down in everyday speech. The *Prairie Farmer* writers stacked American vocabulary against black people.

45J. J., "Drainage," *TPF*, August 31, 1878, 274.

46"Agriculture South," *TPF*, August 16, 1879, 1, describes "nigger heads" as an integral part to good wheat soil in Michigan; "Water Supply on the Farm," *TPF*, September 16, 1899, 2; J. L. Graff, "Silos and Silage on Illinois Farms," *TPF*, June 20, 1907, 2. Other uses of "nigger head" include a folk name for a part of a mule-driven plow "Science vs Strength," *TPF*, June 19, 1869, 1; and an alternate name for a stove in a song criticism reprinted from the *San Francisco Figaro*: "A Musical Criticism," *TPF*, February 1, 1873, 39.

2.2 Blackface Writing

All of the writers for the *Prairie Farmer* were white. However, they masked themselves in blackness when they wrote “in character” of a black person sometimes for non-fiction, but often for fiction. The entire tone of a news article or the language of story dialogue changed to indicate race. While articles and narration were written in what can be called Standard American English, as if without accent and with very few colloquialisms, the speech of black characters stand out because of the written dialect. The white writers would spell words to make them read as if spoken in a black accent. This prejudice spans the entirety of the period from 1865 to 1923.

Likewise, articles supposed to be written by African American contributors demonstrated to the readers that black people had a different language, not a creole or pigeon as is the case for African American Vernacular English (AAVE, also known as Ebonics) or New Orleans creole, but a ill-spoken, poorly-spelt version of the same English. That is, while linguistic history must recognize that various English languages existed, these samples from the *Prairie Farmer* are not accurate portrayals of AAVE. These passages are white depictions of black English. The readers, based on their bias, could understand the race of the character, narrator, or supposed author based on the writing style.

This exposes two aspects of blackness as defined by the *Prairie Farmer*. First, readers supposedly were able to identify race according to speech patters. Second, white writers could effectively mask themselves behind black faces. Similar to stage performance in blackface, these writers portrayed real events as an idealized African American. Rather than accepting the pens and perspectives of black citizens, the *Prairie*

Farmer printed these works attributed to people like “Jeems Quarternag” or simply unattributed—both almost certain sign that the contributor was one of the editorial staff.

The first example of this masked writing phenomenon gives a mild form of faux black English. It mostly reads like the average *Prairie Farmer* report except for a few colloquialisms and a lax conversational tone. Looking at the sample shown as Figure 2.7, one can recognize “wimin” as another spelling to betray accent as well as the clause that word belongs to, “you better believe the wimin was thicker around them committees than,” as an indication of common speech. The entire article contrasts the formal or semi-formal countenance of the *Prairie Farmer*. The word “niggers” appears once, and does not describe an actual person. It compares how the committee women acted: as if they were “little niggers around an empty sugar hogshead, rolled out at the grocer's back door.” This creates an image of African American children loitering, hungry for the scraps of the wealthier, and each one ravenously vying for their chance at the sweet taste of charity.

miil.

Two separate committees, composed of about one-half dry goods merchants and the other half preachers, was a viewing, at the same time, patch-work quilts and canned fruits. You better believe the wimin was thicker around them committees than little niggers around an empty sugar hogshead, rolled out at the grocer's back door. Everything was lovely; forty wimins' tongues was a rattlin', and the preachers was a dippin' into the goodies clear up to the "seventeenthly" when the bell tapped on the track.

Figure 2.7: Clipping from “Slabtown Has a Fair,” *The Prairie Farmer (TPF)*, October 17, 1868, 1.

Many other clues from the article convey the blackness of the narrator, such as “hoss” instead of “horse,” but a word-by-word analysis would become tedious. One should, however, give special attention to the author's name. “Slabtown Has a Fair” is attributed to an author by the name of Jeems Quarternag. This is obviously a pseudonym for the purpose of racializing the article. “Jeems” is the name James phonically spelled to create an AAVE accent.⁴⁷ Quarternag is a sprint runner, referring specifically to a black runner.⁴⁸ Slabtown, Illinois, perhaps referred to a place that existed a few miles west of Champaign where a historic “Slabtown” school is preserved or maybe in Woodford County, Illinois, where is located a Slabtown Cemetery. At any rate, the illusion of blackness appears in this article for the purpose of conveying the report on the Slabtown fair.

Then there are blatant racial statements that cut to the core of society, culture, and morality. An article titled “Uncle Ike's Theory,” with unattributed author and speaker is a monologue from a black person about black people. The article casts a brief description of a working man who contemplates life and the situation of various races. He debases the moral and physical characteristics of black people together. At the beginning, shown here in Figure 2.8, Uncle Ike says he prefers the monogamous fidelity of white men. Later in the article, he complains about the nature of black peoples' hair, then he pointed out that the only ambition “niggers” have is to chase after treed racoons, and Uncle Ike concluded that God created the black race from creation's scraps.⁴⁹ *The Prairie Farmer*

⁴⁷For comparison, see Ellis Credel, *Little Jeemes Henry* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1936); Andre Norton *Raleston Luck* (Fairfield, IA: 1st World Library, 2007), 74-5. The spelling “Jeems” or “Jeemes” seems to have been adopted as a surname or given name, but this is extremely rare.

⁴⁸For comparison, see “A Tight Race Considerin” in *Traits of American Humor* (London: Colbuen and Company, 1852), 164. The first part of the word, “quarter,” may refer to the American breed of quarter horses, known for their sprinting abilities. The second part of the word, “nag,” refers to an old racehorse.

⁴⁹“Uncle Ike's Theory,” in *TPF*, October 12, 1882, 15.

condensed criticism of black society, physique, and place in hierarchy into a single article.

The fact that a black person supposedly spoke these words shields the magazine and allows for the harsh language, including using the word “nigger.” Since the *Prairie Farmer* was a respectable publication, it often used the terms “colored person” or “Negro.” This is not to say that the editors found any particular fault in putting down African Americans or other non-white races, but that using the harshest of terms required the mask of black authorship. So few articles actually contain “nigger” or are written in this masked non-fiction that no distinguishable pattern emerged. We must turn to fiction in order to really understand the blackface phenomena.

Uncle Ike's Theory.

“Yer wants to know Ise gittin along?” said Uncle Ike, as he leaned on his wood-saw against the lamp post. “Well, sir; times am plert enough wid me, but ebery day I goes along, ‘volvin’ in my mind how de nigger happens to git in dis world an’ what business he got bein’ hyar. I kin ‘spect a good nigger but the most ob dem I ‘spise because dey don’t try to act like white people. You take a white man an’ he am satisfied wid one wife, but de nigger he ain’t. Dar’s ‘er no count rascal I know named Lige Jackson, he ain’t got noffin’ in dis world but an old musket an’ ‘er yallar dog, an’ yet dat same nigger’s got four wives, an’ is pirootin’ ‘round huntin’ for mo’. You kin say what yer want, but de nig-

Figure 2.8: Clipping from “Uncle Ike's Theory,” *The Prairie Farmer*, October 14, 1882, 15.

It is important to recognize that the difference between articles such as “Uncle

Ike's Theory” and the fiction later described is in name only. The degree to which non-fiction columns such as “Uncle Ike's Theory” stereotype African Americans and portray their speech makes them untrue as nonfiction. However, they do report on actual events or on true white perceptions of black people, and therefore carried a certain legitimacy with them. Stories and jokes intended to amuse, but also conveyed these same racial stereotypes and perceptions. The status of non-fiction versus fiction does not fully separate these works.

The act of writing fiction provided an opportunity to white authors to offer their perspective on African Americans while somewhat obscuring themselves. Renowned author and literary critic Toni Morrison wrote several works on the use of black characters in white American fiction. She writes, “Certainly no American text of the sort I am discussing was ever written *for* black people—no more than *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written for Uncle Tom to read or be persuaded by. ... The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity.”⁵⁰ She argues that “Africanist” characters—black or African American characters—were objects of literature written by white people. The author created the character to fit whatever perception of blackness the author held true, making the characters objects of a white perspective.⁵¹

The *Prairie Farmer* expressed longing, terror, perplexity, shame, and magnanimity in their descriptions of African Americans in the magazine. Writers'

⁵⁰Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 17.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 21-2.

portrayal of the nature and condition of black people betray various and contradictory versions of blackness. They do so in the words used to name and describe the race or black individuals as well as in the actions and situations of black characters.

The *Prairie Farmer* did not call specific people niggers. The use of that word was limited to clichés referencing ambiguous situation or naming something non-human. No printed piece referred to any specific living African American person as a “nigger” or the slightly more polite “darky.” Even in fiction, the narrator and very few white characters called anyone a nigger. White people, including the authors, used the terms “negro” or “colored person/man/woman.” Black characters called themselves “nigger/nigga(h).” However, the authors and editors were all white. The fiction and the articles written as if by a black person were only masks for white writers. White people actually called black characters niggers; characters cannot do anything the author did not want. So the question is, why did white writers want their African American characters to identify as niggers.

Subjects of serial literature in the *Prairie Farmer* varied, but usually focused on a agricultural or rural story. Many stories, serial or single-issue, and jokes dealt with plantation life in the South. The authors then portrayed the lives of slaves and planters often. In so doing, they wore the proverbial blackface, fictionalizing African American life. The speech, values, morals, characteristics, and acts of any black character was the imagination of their white creator and, in turn, reader. The story “John Buttress—His Adventures” was a piece that ran for the majority of 1890. Rev. Edward B. Heaton, the author, included racial information about many of the characters and thus indicates the degree to which he and his contemporaries relied on race and ethnicity to understand each other.

The racial narration and dialogue makes “John Buttress” an excellent example for *Prairie Farmer* fiction. Within dialogue, the word “nigger” is uttered nine times, each time by the black character Mesheck. Mostly, he calls himself a nigger, but also refers to other black people. He also refers to “a darkey” in a puzzle he posed to some boys in the story.⁵² This represents one of the few times that a black person demonstrated intelligence—albeit a conniving intelligence—in the *Prairie Farmer*. However, the character of Mesheck is the object of white reflection because he is also the only character in the story who truly talked about race. He made the only reference to “white folks” in the entire story within a song (see Figure 2.9). As Morrison said, the black character provided a lens for white shame. Often, stories about plantation life also made room for ample white magnanimity

**In the cook's galley Mesheck was sing-
ing as he made ready for the table:
“De white folks dey sing, Home, sweet Home!
At niggers dey turn up de nose;
So what care I, what seas I roam,
Or what kind ob a win' dat blows!
Will dat day come,
When de nigger shall sing, Sweet home?
De good Lord only knows!**

Figure 2.9: Clipping from Edward B. Heaton, “John Buttress—His Adventures,” *TPF*, August 30, 1890, 558. This is the final line before the “conclusion” subchapter, all the men are returning home after a long adventure around the world. Mesheck is lamenting that he, like others of his race, have no real homes.

While the racial morality of the story stepped away from degrading black

⁵²Edward B. Heaton, “John Buttress—His Adventures,” *TPF*, May 31, 1890, 350. Many issues of the *Prairie Farmer* contained a word puzzle column with pieces like the one spoken by the character Mesheck. Some acrostics or crosswords also contained racial clues.

Americans as a whole, the heroics of a single black character acted only as a novelty for Heaton. White characters acted within their racial setting, but Mesheck acted outside of the character of his race. When Heaton labels him “the black” or “the negro,” it would not have been striking.⁵³ Using phrases such as “the intrepid negro” or “that worthy colored gentleman” completely changes the readers' perceptions of Mesheck.⁵⁴ The puzzle had already set him apart from the bumbling character that so many other African Americans played in the literature. Mesheck's heroics, though, required that his race—negro, black, colored—had to be qualified with positive terms.

In jokes, the humor most often comes at the expense of someone or something. The *Prairie Farmer* printed a humor column, and often included jokes reliant on stereotypes of African American lifestyle. Many of them make wordplay on the Standard American English of the *Prairie Farmer* versus the AAVE. Often, the African American character will have an accidental moment of wit or wisdom. It is important that these black characters accidentally get the best of their master, boss, or any white person. The *Prairie Farmer* took interest in portraying non-whites as unintelligent, lazy, and roundly inferior.

Jokes mainly hinged on a black character's inability to fully understand the situation or respond correctly to a white character. Instances where a black person delivered the punch line, it resulted from a mistake. That is, the only way a black person could best a white person was by mistake, so the humor arose from racial tension and still came at the expense of the African American character. The first example draws on a

⁵³Rev. Edward B. Heaton, “John Buttress—His Adventures: Chapter XII, Some Ocean Sport” *TPF*, May 31, 1890, 350; Heaton, “John Buttress—His Adventures: Chapter XIV, Mesheck Goes a Journey,” *TPF*, June 14, 1890, 382.

⁵⁴Heaton, “Chapter XII”; Heaton, “John Buttress—His Adventures: Chapter XIII, What Happened at Madras,” *TPF*, June 7, 1890, 366.

larger racial discussion. It goes, “A negro, after gazing at the Chinese, exclaimed, 'If de white folks is dark as dat out dere, I wonder what's de color ob de niggers?’”⁵⁵ The humor is in dramatic irony: the African American speaker's racial ignorance exposed in his speech. Note that the narration calls the two non-white people “a negro” and “the Chinese”, but the black character calls other black people “niggers.” The racial buffering is largely consistent through all forms of writing—masked nonfiction and blackface fiction.

A more complex joke from a decade later (Figure 2.10) shows no change in *Prairie Farmer* racial humor. This time the characters are named Sambo and Julius. In the words of historian Joel Williamson, “the Sambo of [white] imagination was a child adopted into the white family, an adult black body with a white child's mind and heart, simultaneously appealing and appalling, natively affectionate and unwittingly cruel, a social asset and a liability.”⁵⁶ Williamson goes on to show that acting as a “Sambo” by this definition might have been an effective way to survive periods of white hysteria due to perceptions of blackness, but the “Sambo” version of blackness was always “a creature purely of the white mind.”⁵⁷ Even though Sambo was a common name for black males during this time, the name meant something more in this literature produced by white writers.

Aside from the racial naming, the joke holds a double meaning. On the surface, Sambo argues that the character Goliath may have stood a better chance of surviving young David's stone in the famous *Bible* story if he had been “borned a nigger” because of the scientific belief that people of African descent had literally thicker skull bones.

⁵⁵“Humorous,” *TPF*, July 3, 1869, 215.

⁵⁶Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 15; for more on “Sambo,” see pages 15-29.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 16.

This translated into the perception that they had smaller brains and, thus, less mental capacity. It also plays on the double meaning of a “thick skull,” a phrase meaning that a person was slow to learn. It thus references the fascination of white people with black bodies, the biological differences on which racial thought was supposed to be predicated. However, the punch line also makes a commentary on African mental ability. The phrase “thick skull” refers to a person who is slow to learn, unintelligent. The *Prairie Farmer* editors obviously placed this joke in the paper with this hidden message of African American inferiority.

**“ Sambo ! ‘cordin’ to yo’ idee, which
one o’ dem Bible chaps made de greates
mistake ?” “ Dunno, Julius, less t was
G’ liah.” “ Wharfo’ G’ liah, Sambo ?’
“ Case, of he ‘d been smart ‘nuff ter bin
borne a nigger, dat are brickbat Dave
huv at ‘im nigher knocked at dat skull
o’ his’n all day and nebber got in.”**

Figure 2.10: Clipping from “Humorous,” *TPF*, July 12, 1879, 223.

In a paper dedicated to the education of a “farming race,” teaching the thick-skulled African American was a waste of time. Farming had already left that race far behind, and each advance in science and technology increased the gap.⁵⁸ If Sambo and the others in these news stories, fiction works, and jokes could hardly grasp their own existence or understand ubiquitous *Bible* lessons, then how could they get through their thick skulls the ideas of liquid commodities, animal genetics, or soil chemistry?

Jokes also provided an outlet for white people to simply criticize blackness (see Figure 2.11) and to use harsher racial language. The scene depicted two black characters,

⁵⁸Few pieces provided contrast to the prevailing opinion of black inferiority. See, for instance, “Agricultural College and Station Association,” *TPF*, December 1, 1894, 2.

one is another Sambo and the other is Clem. Without much explanation, Clem makes an observation that the whale from the Bible story of Jonah was selfish, just like “mean niggers.” The statements are not thought out well, which is a tacit commentary on the intelligence of African Americans, but the conclusion that human nature, especially among black people, tends toward greed. Without any particular cleverness, the author of this joke blatantly stated two negative aspects of blackness.

“Sambo, human natur am de same all froo. Dar’s mean whales jest de same as dar’s mean niggers!” “Wharfo’, Clem?” “Well, take, dat ar fish dat gulp Jonah! Dar was ‘freshments ‘nuff in dat ole man ter make a ‘spectable lunch fo’ seberal whales, but dat one hog fish preferred to cram hisself an’ git his stummick out o’ j’int, rudder’n ax his frien’s and diwide. Now, ain’t dat pruff dat we’s all furnished wid de same instinc’s?”

Figure 2.11: Clipping from “Humorous,” *TPF*, April 26, 1879, 135.

Jokes from the 1860s through the 1880s mainly made light of the perception of African American intellectual inferiority. Other themes included laziness and African American culture or folkways.⁵⁹ Later, in the 1880s into the twentieth century, the jokes moved toward emphasizing the threat of black Americans to the white population. A unique twist on the typical watermelon-based joke tells the story of “an old planter in the Arkansas bottoms” whose crop of enormous watermelons was consumed by “a lot of

⁵⁹For context of perceptions of African American laziness, see Saul Purdy, “Bill Harkley Leaves Off Bush-Whacking,” *TPF*, May 28, 1870, 166. In this story, Purdy writes that African Americans sought “to engage in any business that was not labor in the field.” To this end, the black character contented himself with wandering as a vagrant. For more information on black mobility, see James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 25-6.

refugee niggers from the bottom lands.”⁶⁰ Apparently a flood had driven the African Americans out of their homes and they imposed on the planter. The planter forgave them and recognized his duty to help them in their time of need, but still noted their inconsideration of his proceeds. So the humor of the story was light-hearted even though still racist.

Not all white characters in jokes were so understanding toward African Americans. *Prairie Farmer* editors reprinted a piece, Figure 2.12, from the *Washington Star* in 1896. It was among other musings about rural life in a column titled “Current Items” reveals what a white person may say to their African American hired help in a moment of anger. The unnamed white character starts off by saying, “Rastus, you infernal nigger.” The white man was obviously angry in the mule joke, and the phrase “infernal nigger” reveals his tone. The mule situation is one that a farmer might have faced in real life: being nearly kicked by a mule in a stable. The white farmer's reaction might then also be very realistic, denoting the tendency to call African Americans niggers in everyday speech or at least in the heat of anger.

“Rastus, you infernal nigger, you told me that mule was perfectly safe and when I went into the stable he nearly kicked the top of my head off.”
“Yes, sah, I sayed de mowl wuz safe, sar. But ef yo kin recollect, I didn't say nuffin' about wedder it was safe in his wicinity. Dat mowl is able enough to be safe anywhar.”—Washington Star.

Figure 2.12: Clippings from “Current Items,” *TPF*, July 14, 1896, 15.

⁶⁰“Some Big Melons,” *TPF*, July 14, 1883, 447.

A transition occurred around the 1880s in the humor columns. The ignorant black character took back seat to the threatening black character. One joke that made light of violence was in 1891, Figure 2.13. So in one case “a nigger” was in a fight with someone else, but the real joke was on the unknown speaker who misunderstood the term “aggressor” for “a gressor.” This possibly referred to the derogatory term “greaser” for a Mexican, making it a doubly racist joke. Fear of black men starting fights was not the greatest concern over violence due to interracial contact. The national memory contained slave rebellions, violence against slaves, murders lynchings, and rapes, as well as an inflated imagination of the bestial potential of black male sexuality and violent tendencies. The jokes never touched those topics, only the serious non-fiction did.

—“Which was aggressor?” asked the court of the witness of a fight. “One was a nigger, but I don’t know whether the other was a gressor or not.”

Figure 2.13: Clipping from “Humorous,” *TPF*, May 2, 1891, 287.

Aside from making fun of African Americans by putting them down as in the previous jokes, the *Prairie Farmer* also created and perpetuated the idea that black people were harmful to society. Specifically, African Americans threatened the premise of agrarianism. Property undergirded the whole system of independent farming. The perceived propensity of black people to rob their neighbors of chickens and hogs contained in numerous *Prairie Farmer* jokes demonstrate a humorous gloss over more troubling cultural beliefs. As was the case with the phrase “nigger in the woodpile,” the chicken thief trope implied the scheming or sinister nature to blackness.

Colored individual (recently engaged in stealing a watermelon, indignantly)--"Is you de gentleman dat fired dat bullet froo dis yer watermelon I hab under my arm?" Irate farmer: "Yes, I am." Colored individual: "Well, you clean done spilled de melon, an' come mighty nigh bittin' dis niggah shu! I isn't gwine to take de trouble to ca'y melons down to you' house no mo'."

Figure 2.14: Clipping from "Humorous: Thing Made, Improved, or Stolen," *TPF*, August 6, 1887, 514.

Within fiction and jokes, the threat was to property. Many discuss the petty theft of chickens, hogs, and watermelon. The majority of these pieces came out beginning in the 1880s and ran at least up to the Great Migration. African American men stole property in order to live, and that premise had to be widely understood for the joke to be amusing to any audience. The joke in Figure 2.14 contrasts the joke about the farmer in the Arkansas bottoms. The Arkansas joke may have appealed to the stereotype of African Americans' love for watermelon, but they were understandably hungry. This second joke from 1887 clearly shows that the "colored individual" had a record of stealing watermelons to satiate his desire for them. Watermelons became a lighthearted way to approach a perceived threat to securing white property among a black population.

The joke in Figure 2.15 would hardly make sense without the understanding that the "Southern darky" would steal a turkey in the night. A less implicit jest as Figure 2.16 gives the reader a greater clue as to the ubiquitous problem of "the negro" thief. In that case, the presence of African Americans threatened white livestock holding as well as the livelihood of any Northerner who wished to sell livestock to Southerners. When a

Northerner tried to sell hogs in North Carolina, a North Carolinian explained that any animal a white farmer wished to raise had to outrun black men. Otherwise, it was understood in the South that black men would steal the livestock. In the context of the joke, Northerners did not understand the threat African Americans posed to private property and the livelihoods of the honest farmer. They would therefore do best to listen to their Southern brethren for racial information. While the situation existed only as a joke, it demonstrates the kind of affect racial perceptions had on Americans' psyche.

The Southern darky says he has learned how to get answers to prayer: If I pray de Lord to send me a turkey, I doan get him; but if I ask Him to send dis nigger after 'em, I always get 'em 'fore daylite.

Figure 2.15: Clipping from "Humorous," *TPF*, October 31, 1885, 722.

back hogs. He said to a North Carolina farmer, "What is the matter with the people? You don't seem to look at my hogs at all." "Well, I reckon not, sir," said the North Carolina man. "What is the reason; don't you want this kind of hogs down here?" "Well, I reckon not, sir." "Why?" "Well, w'uns want the kind of hog that will outrun a nigger." If they don't outrun the negro the man don't own a hog you know.

Figure 2.16: Clipping from W. D. Hoard, "Principles of Breeding," *TPF*, October 11, 1890, 644. Hoard was governor of Wisconsin and included this joke in his presentation "before the Wisconsin Farmer's Institute."

A cartoon, Figure 2.17, that appeared in 1891 shows an even greater contrast between black and white in the United States. It shows a black man carrying a section of

plank sidewalk and a nicely-dressed white man stopping him. In this case, the black character attempted to rob society at large by taking a piece of public property. The caption dialogue is between a “citizen,” the white man, and the “colored person.” By definition, a citizen has a stake in the nation and derives protection of their rights from the government. Dividing these titles of the two characters by race as well as social status defined blackness against citizenship, as mutually exclusive.



**Citizen—What are you doing?
Colored Person—Jest taking a walk. sah!
Citizen—Yes, I see—a sidewalk, so to speak.**

Figure 2.17: Clipping from *TPF*, October 31, 1891, 704.

"Where did you get that chicken?"
 "Say, boss, you from the Norf—ain't
 yoh?"
 "Why do you ask that?"
 "Why, no Southern gen'eman would
 ask a pooh ole niggah whar he got his
 chickens fom."—Philadelphia Ledger.

Figure 2.18: Clipping from "Not a Proper Questions," *TPF*, August 18, 1904, 15. This same joke was reworked, lengthened, and printed again as "Was an Ungentlemanly Question," *TPF*, September 13, 1906, 16. It was also reprinted in its original form "No Questions Asked," *TPF*, April 1, 1922, 9.

The last joke about the chicken thief betrays more than the "watchdog" role of the press. The joke came to the *Prairie Farmer* from the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, but the wisdom was not of the North. Whether the head of this joke was a Northerner or a Southerner, the moral ran deeper than a fear of African Americans. It shows a man of the North's disadvantage in knowledge about the character of black men. That is, the *Prairie Farmer* included this in order to call attention to a perceived knowledge gap. It seems that the editors were self-conscious in knowing that their knowledge put into stories and jokes relied on information out of the South. The relative absence of black individuals in the North, especially the rural North, supposedly placed white Northerners at a disadvantage. Therefore, they turned to their Southern brethren for understanding. They thus inherited a racial thought of the South.

"Mrs. Jones, you were a slave, weren't you?"
 "Yes, marm," replied Mrs. Jones. "I belonged to Mars Robert Howell."
 "I suppose he never invited you to eat at his table?" remarked the Boston lady.
 "No, honey, dat he ain't," replied Mrs. Jones. "My marster was a gentleman. He ain't never let no nigger set at the table longside er him."

Figure 2.19: The North may have even looked to the South for guidance on manners surrounding race and the household. Clipping from "Her Master Was a Gentleman," *TPF*, February 15, 1906, 16.

2.3 Racial Lessons from the South: Unmasked Nonfiction and Racial Opinions

Unmasked nonfiction here refers mostly to the news reports of race riots and other incidents that brought a sense of the reality of race relations to *Prairie Farmer* subscribers. The paper's editors consolidated headline news into very short paragraphs or single sentences. This magazine intended to convey information and opinions about agriculture, after all. Readers would have to get in-depth coverage of other topics from other papers such as the *Chicago Tribune* or the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*. Looking at the portrayal of news within the *Prairie Farmer*, though, it becomes apparent that what a great deal of writers called "the race problem" or "the Negro problem" occupied their minds. African Americans may have been a small population in the Midwest, but their presence in the South greatly affected the thoughts of Northerners as well as Southerners.

Fear of violence crowded the white imagination long before the Civil War. Richard Dunn's book *Sugar and Slaves* describes how violence against black people became part of white culture as a necessary part of slave society. Jordan Winthrop's *White Over Black* takes on similar issues in tracing the course of racism through the entirety of

North American slavery. Racial categories—black and white—became synonymous with slave and free, submission and paternalism, resistance and repression. These perceptions shaped American whiteness at least up to the Civil War.

During the era of slavery in the United States, the white population also developed a culture of fear that lie beneath the necessity of restriction and violence. If slaveowners and their proponents believed that slaves might break into revolt at any time, then this heightened the need for violence against them. After the war, when African Americans lived with freedoms of property and mobility, the fear of black-on-white violence did not diminish, thus the reality of white-on-black violence did not cease. Joel Williamson in *A Rage for Order* argues that race and slavery somewhat reversed roles from the eras that Dunn and Jordan discuss. Instead of using race to reinforce slavery, slavery reinforced race. The system of slavery in the American South had, by the time of the Civil War, become a mechanism of racial control as much or more than an economic institution.⁶¹ Coerced labor no longer an option, Southerners maintained their control of the black population with traditional means: distrust and violence. White America knew no other ways to deal with the specter of black freedom. Newspapers and magazines carried these attitudes toward blackness around the nation.

Based on information from the *Prairie Farmer*, racial news nearly always involved violence. White Southerners feared race riots and race wars, and the magazine published on the growing fear of such violence. *Prairie Farmer* editors grew prone to printing brash exaggerations of racial problems. Such was the case of a “terrible race riot” in 1888 in Wahalak, Mississippi, shown in Figure 2.20. The first report noted

⁶¹Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 44.

“twelve whites and 150 negroes” dead. The second report from a week later, Figure 2.21, states that only two people died. The retraction piece remained racially neutral. As a news medium, the magazine naturally relied on grabbing attention, and a “terrible race riot” would do just that. Even though the race riot still occurred, the low body count in the second report certainly deflates some of the “terror.” Nonetheless, the *Prairie Farmer* continued including reports about African American-led violence in the South.

sane....During a terrible race riot at Wahalak, Miss., on Dec. 17, it is reported that twelve whites and 150 negroes were killed....Mrs. Lucy Parsons,

Figure 2.20: Clipping from “This Week's News Boiled Down for Busy People,” *TPF*, December 22, 1888, 838.

Later reports about the race riot at Wahalak, Miss., show that two men were killed and six wounded....

Figure 2.21: Clipping from “This Week's News Boiled Down for Busy People,” *TPF*, December 29, 1888, 854.

More common than actual race riots, or episodes of a hot “race war,” were alarming reports regarding preparations for a race war. Figure 2.22 shows a clipping of the weekly condensed news column with three racial stories. The first lent credibility to the fear of a race war in Amite, Louisiana. *Prairie Farmer* editors apparently believed that substantial evidence existed of African American residents storing up arms for a war. Unlike the jokes, the white population feared for more than property. A fear of black-on-white violence grew over this first period of freedom and mobility for African Americans.

The reports from Amite, La., are to the effect that the statement that colored people are arming themselves for a race war are not without foundation.

In Germany they are making tea from strawberry leaves. Somebody says it closely approaches the Chinese article.

The Chinese population of San Francisco is, according to the census, 20,000, an increase of only 2,000 in ten years.

Figure 2.22: Clipping from “The Week's News Boiled Down for Busy People,” *TPF*, July 5, 1890, 432.

White concerns must have appeared justified at times when violence erupted. Earlier in the period, very little racial violence appeared in the *Prairie Farmer*. In 1871, in fact, the magazine printed an article about a riot in New York led by the Orange Association—a group in support of the United Kingdom's control of Ireland.⁶² Beginning around 1890, riots and race war concerned violence caused by African Americans, mostly in the South.

Black people did not commit all of the acts of violence, but the portrayal of race warfare often placed the initial blame on a black person or group. Figure 2.23 provides a rather sterile report of a riot. Figure 2.24, however, provides an example of white violence supposedly caused by the action of an African American man. Murdering a white man led to a war against black people. By the time of the report, “seven negroes” suffered at the hands of a vengeful whiteness. So, the concept of blackness as naturally violent developed in the minds of white people and these agrarian publications. As in slavery, the racial dynamic in the United States required violence, and the white imagination could conceive of little else. Keeping the black population under control

⁶²“The New York Riot,” *TPF*, July 22, 1871, 229.

required paranoia, firearms, and the will to retaliate. If Illinois farmers believed any of the racial rhetoric as it appeared in the *Prairie Farmer*, then no surprise that they would wish to avoid this entire situation by excluding black people from their society.

A riot occurred at Star's Millpond, Ga., recently, in which eighteen men were killed and wounded. Four negroes are reported dead.

Figure 2.23: Clipping from “The Week's News Boiled Down for Busy People,” *TPF*, July 19, 1890, 464.

The killing of a white man near Quitman, Ga., has led to a race war in which seven negroes have already been shot.

Figure 2.24: Clipping from “Monday's News,” *TPF*, December 29, 1894, 16.

Nevertheless, African Americans migrated to the North, albeit the urban North. Race riots occurred in several cities after 1890. A race riot occurred in 1908 in Springfield, Illinois, in response to a murder by African American resident Joe James. Mobs lynched several innocent people, and in an editorial (see Figure 2.25) the *Prairie Farmer* condemned the fact that those lawbreakers “escaped conviction.” Thus, the fears and reality of the South reached the North, and the people of Illinois responded the same as their Southern role models. Prejudice toward their black neighbors led white Northerners to commit such atrocities. The *Prairie Farmer* appeared ambivalent in propagating such fear and then condemning its violent outcome.

This is surprising considering that race riots sprung up in the midst of the

magazine's readership. Many mass white-black race riots were fresh in the American memory including Omaha (1891), Wilmington (1898), Little Rock (1906), Atlanta (1906), East St. Louis (1917), several others in 1917, and many in the "Red Summer" of 1919 including Chicago, Omaha, Washington, D.C., and Knoxville. Many others emerged from conflict between native white populations and immigrant groups from around the world. And even though the *Prairie Farmer* was edited and printed in Chicago, even that riot failed to stir editorial attention. Most of these were incited by the white population concerned over floods of immigrant labor—relocated African Americans or any sort of immigrant. But the riots also occurred in urban areas, dealing with industrial jobs. The contemporary pull factors for urbanization somewhat buffered the agrarian community from having to worry about such large-scale conflicts first-hand. Even so, it is curious what the *Prairie Farmer* chose to print or not print during the Jim Crow era.

Laggard Springfield Justice

Joe James, the negro slayer of Clergy A., Ballard, in Springfield, Ill., has been convicted of murder and will be hanged. It was this killing which led indirectly to the bloody race rioting in Springfield and the lynching of innocent people. Meanwhile one of the leaders of the rioters accused of murder has had a trial and escaped conviction. The chances seem to be that justice will not be meted out to those who were guilty of outrages almost incredible in a civilized community—an unfortunate thing for Springfield and Illinois.

Figure 2.25: Stanley Waterloo, "Laggard Springfield Justice," *TPF*, October 1, 1908, 12.

The *Prairie Farmer's* main concern appeared most clearly in a short 1919 article that referred back to the Chicago Race Riot. This came in the midst of a labor crunch due

to the Great War and also a time of a boom in the power of labor unions. The *Prairie Farmer* took great interest in what tended to be urban affairs because these were factors in the price of and market for farm produce. Very soon after the riot, the magazine was concerned about the organization of farmers into a union-like group to vie for influence just like wage laborers. From the farmer's perspective, the danger of the race riot was at least partially economic. "When the Chicago race riots tied up the stockyards by preventing the negro laborers from getting to work...shipments were withheld or diverted to other markets," and the author attributed this good to the Illinois Agricultural Association (see figure 2.26).

This was a happy ending for the Illinois farmers who the association empowered to sell elsewhere while the race riot shut down Chicago. It also indicates something about the Midwest agrarian view of blackness. Just like the cursory follow-up to the Springfield riot in 1908, the *Prairie Farmer* paid nearly no attention to the Chicago riot. At times, the race threat to the farming community had nothing to do with integration in agriculture, but with the possibility of disrupting the market.

Quick Action

When the Chicago race riots tied up the stockyards by preventing the negro laborers from getting to work. Sec. Thompson of the Illinois Agricultural Association wired every county agent in the state advising that livestock shipments be suspended temporarily. The county agents notified shippers by telephone in most cases, and shipments were withheld or diverted to other markets. This is one more example of the value of a live organization that is on guard constantly over the farmers' interests.

Figure 2.26: "Quick Action," *TPF*, August 9, 1919, 64.

Even when there appeared to be no danger of violence, whites feared an overwhelming black population. In 1890, the *Prairie Farmer* printed a concern from Supreme Court Justice Lucius Lamar that his home state of Mississippi “will eventually be a negro State and that the whites will be forced to emigrate.”⁶³ Very respectable people in American society—Lamar was a plantation owner and prominent legal mind—felt that even if a hot race war would not occur the naturally repellant races would push each other out of the way. Most horrifying to him was the loss of his plantation, which he planned to sell in order to avoid future eviction. To the agrarian, all of one's value rests in the land and one's ability to work it. While agrarianism did not favor the plantation model, slave or free, it would quiver at the possibility of white American families being forced off by African Americans. This is because of the racial prejudice.

Few articles directly address the role of black people in farm roles. In the article “A Southerner on the Negro,” the *Prairie Farmer* digested Harry S. Edwards's words previously printed in the *June Century*. This Southerner argued that the African American population in the South posed a threat to the United States and should be deported.⁶⁴ The editor of the *Prairie Farmer* argued against deportation, but not in the most progressive of ways. “The negro” remained a distinct race that could raise itself through farm labor, and the point of the article maintained that whites would have no suitable replacement for African Americans if deportation occurred.⁶⁵ This is consistent with the contemporary views on whiteness in the *Prairie Farmer*. Whiteness required owning land and operating a farm. White people would apparently not fill the lower rungs of agriculture, in the editor's argument. In carving out a place in farming below that of whites outside of the

⁶³Untitled, *TPF*, June 14, 1890, 1.

⁶⁴“A Southerner on the Negro,” *TPF*, June 21, 1906, 9.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

Midwest, the *Prairie Farmer* also made a basis for excluding black people from farming within the Midwest. Opinions such as this dominated in a system of white landownership and black tenancy and sharecropping in the South. In the Midwest, it demonstrated that African Americans should not be allowed on farms even as labor.

Chapter 3

Few Gray Zones: Segregation, Exclusive Education, Good Breeding, and Eugenics

Perceptions of whiteness and blackness only mean so much without action upon them. How did the *Prairie Farmer* intend race relations to play out in the day-to-day life of the rural Midwest? This chapter explores how *Prairie Farmer* writers believed African Americans should have been left out of the farming society and what readers could do to maintain the whiteness of the Midwest farming community. The *Prairie Farmer* editors gave little indication of segregation on the ground, but inundated readers with ideals.

Evidence from the *Prairie Farmer* indicated a confusing circular logic in regards to race and agriculture. Depending on the author, the article emphasized the role of farming in creating whiteness or the article insisted on the role of whiteness in creating the farmer. These do not contradict each other as much as represent two sides of the same argument. Likewise, blackness and being a poor farmer became linked. We can reconcile these ideas by recognizing the complex and often contradictory nature of racial thought. Perhaps racist agriculturalism relied on a mutually causal relationship of whiteness and ideal farming.

Maintaining a tranquil rural society required exclusive whiteness. *Prairie Farmer* editors looked to the examples and supposed expertise of white observers outside of Illinois and the Midwest to demonstrate the ineligibility of black farmers. While dispelling the inherency of black inferiority, the *Prairie Farmer* printed no call for equality among the races. Rather, they sidestepped “the race problem” by keeping it at arm's length in their rhetoric. Their rhetoric made racism appear to be a problem of the South and California, not really an issue within the Midwest. From that perspective, they

could build a ideal of exclusive whiteness that ignored the fact that African Americans resided within their region.

Writers featured in the *Prairie Farmer* in the early twentieth century that compared human breeding to animal breeding. Comparisons between the two allowed the farming population to grasp eugenics at the fundamental level. Just like producing a thoroughbred population of livestock or high-yield crops, those interested in good breeding desired to produce the best white race possible. Eventually, the magazine would publish strong eugenics rhetoric, though the editors actually published their disagreement with eugenics on the same pages.

Childrearing at home and in the community, which can be called informal education, also instilled exclusive racial ideas in white children. Writers aimed most of this rhetoric toward farmwives, the mothers that would instill morals in growing agrarians. But many articles turned toward the biological side of race. Women were encouraged to breed well. Choosing the correct husband meant finding a hard-working white man.

3.1: Segregated Labor and Living

Even though few African Americans lived in the rural Midwest, the *Prairie Farmer* encouraged segregation.⁶⁶ Considering the news and opinions of black people printed in the magazine, segregation sounded like a logical plan to the writers. That is, if people perceived racial mixing to result in violence or poor farming, then morality demanded separation. The writers established the idea that white people created the best

⁶⁶In 1900, 1,486 farms in Illinois were operated by African Americans, with only 12,255 black-owned farms in the entire Midwest as compared to 2,179,667 white-owned farms in the Midwest; see Table 7.1 in Reid, "Land Ownership," 160-1.

farming population (and vice versa) and that black people made poor farmers because they were naturally lax and unintelligent. News stories emphasized the violent tendencies of the African American populations and the violence that white people committed against people of color in order to preserve white dominance in the South and in the urban North. The *Prairie Farmer* associated maintaining a tranquil agrarian society with keeping it white.

One must understand the milieu of these *Prairie Farmer* writers in order to know why they found their rhetoric pertinent. Historian Mark Shultz pointed out differences between Southern and Northern racial segregation during this period. In the South, black and white Americans lived together in mixed communities. Interracial contact was not unusual. In the North, African Americans formed small island communities, and white people ghettoized racial minorities in cities. This physically separated reality was consistent with the agrarian views on whiteness and blackness. It also fed into agrarian interest in white domination elsewhere in the nation. The *Prairie Farmer* not only hoped that whiteness could spread across the continent according to Manifest Destiny, but also fill in the gaps in settlement within the Midwest, the eastern seaboard, and the South.

The *Prairie Farmer* looked to other states in the Midwest and outside the region repeatedly for examples of how to or how not to handle whiteness and blackness. Agricultural white supremacy in the South meant that lesser races would perform the stoop labor while whites continued to own the land itself. At the same time that Southerners looked to reduce dependence on and even replace their African American population, some agriculturalists looked to circumvent the white-black binary with non-white groups from Eastern Europe. The early twentieth century saw waves of

immigration from Europe and Asia into the United States. Communities of immigrants also moved into urban centers due to the promise of manufacturing jobs. Some of them settled in rural areas with intent to farm, but more spent their lives in seasonal and migrant work. These people could perform menial farm labor in the place of African Americans, thereby reducing white reliance on black labor. One Maryland immigration official travelled through Europe to find groups of such people because he found the work ethic of black people to be lacking since emancipation.⁶⁷

Concern over race in agriculture often rested on delineating the “American race” and threaten to its purity and health caused by immigrant invasion or perceived black intrusion.⁶⁸ White agrarians looked out from the Midwest. *Prairie Farmer* writers observed within and without the Midwestern United States with the intent to understand if mixed labor was acceptable and beneficial. By the turn of the century, many people supported a diverse labor pool in light of the wage demands of many white men.⁶⁹

The *Prairie Farmer* printed an editorial that year on the the “race problem”—a phrase used to summarize all issues that arose from the racial dynamic of America for several decades after the Civil War. Senator Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina believed no integration was possible. The *Prairie Farmer* editor dashed Tillman's assessment as unscientific, citing a notion that African people may evolve naturally toward civilization.⁷⁰ So the magazine's editors hoped for a future where African Americans could be full-fledged members of American society, however distant in the future that would be.

⁶⁷August F. Trappe, “Importing Aliens for Farm Work,” *TPF*, September 5, 1907, 2.

⁶⁸See, for example, “Farmers and Immigration,” *TPF*, February 2, 1905, 6; “Studying the Alien at Home,” *TPF*, September 1, 1908, 3.

⁶⁹See George H. Hoadley, “The Problem of Farm Help,” *TPF*, August 3, 1901, 2.

⁷⁰“Tillman and the Race Problem,” *TPF* December 6, 1906, 10-1.

The editors provided no roadmap for the raising of the black race. Without a proscriptive text, no evidence exists showing how African Americans could achieve this agrarian version of civilization. Despite the editors' modernist faith in the progression of humanity, the staff's attitude in this case perpetuated discrimination against black people. The *Prairie Farmer* still sought a solution to the "race problem" that allowed African Americans the chance to evolve toward civilization. However, it meant in this case that black people had to become more in tune with the agrarian notion of whiteness. Unfortunately, even from that perspective, the *Prairie Farmer* did not lay out a method for black transcendence of their hereditary inferiority.

But the magazine editors' fascination with studying the "race problem" in the South endured. They thought of themselves as the eyes of the Midwest farmer who sought seasonal work. They questioned if white Midwesterners should accept black people into their labor pool. When Southern planters faced labor shortages in the years after the Civil War and again as a result of early Great Migration patterns, it sought labor sources aside from the present African American population. Perceptions of the lazy or violent black man dominated the Southern mind for sure. A combination of the cost of wages and a labor shortage led Southerners to seek new, whiter labor. South Carolina's government studied the possibility of encouraging immigration from Europe to their state in order to meet the farm labor demand.

In this mindset, white expansion was more than simply spreading civilization for the sake of spreading civilization, it was also reserving land from the grasp of other racial groups. One solution to the "race problem" was allowing the black population to die out.⁷¹ This was an extreme version of the obsession over white-to-black population counts

⁷¹See "Topics of the Day," *TPF*, July 25, 1874, 236.

as described in the first chapter. In 1907, the *Prairie Farmer* published a short article summarizing the comments of Rudyard Kipling after his visit to Canada (see Figure 3.1). Not only did the Canadians need labor in the western sections of that country, but Kipling made it clear that they desired only white people to fill the role.

Kipling on the "Yellow Peril"

With common sense well to the fore Rudyard Kipling, who has arrived in Toronto after a visit to the Canadian northwest, suggests to the Canadians as a solution of their labor question, "Pump in the emigrants from the old country. Pump them in."

"Western Canada wants immigration; it must have laborers," says Mr. Kipling. "The way to keep the yellow man out is to get the white man in. England has 5,000,000 people to spare."

"Of course the labor party in England is opposed to immigration," he continued, "because it would remove their great grievance, with regard to the unemployed."

The English labor party seems to be a good deal like the American labor party, when it comes to real things.

Figure 3.1: "Kipling on the 'Yellow Peril,'" *TPF*, October 31, 1907, 15.

People concerned themselves over the color of labor even when white people owned the land and managed the farm. One article studying rice growing highlighted the opinion that "Stuttgart [Arkansas] has little use for the African."⁷² Rice only required the work of white men, so stoop labor by another race was unnecessary. Because there were no benefits to the presence of black people, the whites could feel comfortable not having non-whites to fill menial roles. *Prairie Farmer* writers observed within and without the

⁷²"Rice Growing in Arkansas," *TPF*, September 15, 1909, 11. This article also claims that the Arkansas land was more versatile than Illinois because the same crops could be grown either place except for rice, which could not be grown on the Grand Prairie.

Midwestern United States with the intent to understand if mixed labor was acceptable and beneficial.

By the turn of the century, many farmers used a diverse labor pool in light of the wage demands of many white men. A 1906 article examined the composition of the labor force harvesting wheat in Kansas and found that young college men—assumably white—worked well alongside “hobos, negroes, and the local hands.”⁷³ Labor was not race-less in this article, but differentiation mattered little in light of the simple stoop labor tasks the hired hands performed. But not all articles treated the mixing of races and classes with such a matter-of-fact tone.

The editors printed a section from a correspondent's time spent in the “black belt.” Ray Stannard Baker wrote for the *American Magazine* about the miserable situation of African American sharecroppers in the South. Among the basic information the piece presented, Baker inserted comments such as one about the black tenants squandering their Christmas bonuses. It ends with the fact that sharecroppers sometime came out of the year in deeper debt to the landlord (see Figure 3.2). The article emphasized the industriousness and frugality of the farmer as well as the landownership system and environmental factors in farm production and profitability.

It also exposed the systemic problem of black sharecropping. The editor pointed out the company town-like conditions of black sharecroppers. First, by not acknowledging the fact that white sharecroppers also struggled to thrive in the South, the piece skewed the racial reality. The *Prairie Farmer* hardly recognized the poverty of white people, preferring to demonstrate their industriousness and ingenuity. “The negro,” on the other hand, became a subject of study to understand lesser roles such as

⁷³“Harvest Hands in the Wheat Belt,” *TPF*, September 13, 1906, 1.

sharecropping. Second, this article shows that the *Prairie Farmer* had shifted toward a nurture-based version of racial hierarchy. The editors clearly sympathize with the poor African Americans caught in the sharecropping system of the South. While not offering a path out of the situation—and certainly not inviting people of color into the Midwest —“The Negro in the Midwest” identifies white landlords as the cause of the poverty of blackness.

The negro is credited with the amount of cotton he brings in and he is charged with all the supplies he has had, and interest, together with the rent of his 30 acres of land. If the season has been good and he has been industrious, he will often have a nice profit in cash, but sometimes he not only does not come out even, but closes his year of work actually in deeper debt to the landlord.

Figure 3.2: Clipping from “The Negro Farmer in the South,” *TPF*, September 26, 1907, 11.

Even so, the *Prairie Farmer* printed information degrading black workers in Southern agriculture. H. B. Gurlier wrote a piece of correspondence to the magazine from Mississippi. He had moved there from Illinois several years earlier, not expecting to find prairie land in the region.⁷⁴ Finding just that, he took to farming with a mixture of Northern methods and Southern crop culture. The article acknowledged that Northerners knew very little about handling black people—a consistent theme of blackness in the magazine, reemphasizing the necessity of information from outside the Midwest. Gurlier tainted his gleaming review of farming in Mississippi with information on “negro labor,”

⁷⁴ H. B. Gurlier, “How Gurlier likes Mississippi Farming,” *TPF*, April 1, 1910, 5.

(see figure 3.3).

Gurler's assessment of using "negro labor" was ambivalent at best. Saying, "they are not such great thieves as they have the reputation of being," cannot reassure a readership against a longstanding tradition of portraying black men as chicken and hog thieves. Such words may have seemed magnanimous to the author, but he then implied that the black workers stole one hog of his farm.

USING NEGRO LABOR SUCCESSFULLY
 A person has much to learn in a new country, always, and I have not been an exception.
 Labor on the farm is the key to the situation north and south. Here it is the darkey whom I knew nothing about before coming here. I am handling this property with southern young men who have had experience with the blacks and know how to handle them.
 I find that when they are intelligently superintended the negroes are cheap labor. They are good imitators, learning readily as many whites do. They are not such great thieves as they have the reputation of being.
 We turned 80 hogs and pigs into the woods to live on mast last fall and they lived there for three months, and when we gathered them this spring we were only one short in count having found 79 of them.

Figure 3.3: H. B. Gurler, "How Gurler likes Mississippi Farming," *TPF*, April 1, 1910, 5.

Just as white people celebrated the increase in the white population of areas of the country, they were also concerned about the black population. Places advertising open land for settlement occasionally expressed the exclusion of African American people. Magazine article writers even worried about the mixing of colors in the temporary labor necessary to harvest crops on large farms. Landowning farmers often needed help

completing tasks throughout the year, especially at harvest time. Farm men and boys often worked for each other within their immediate area. Ease of transport in the era of burgeoning rail travel changed the labor dynamic. During this time of urbanization from and gentrification of the farming community, farm owners turned to migrant and wage labor out of economic necessity.

A few exceptions existed to the rule of the racial binary, and the *Prairie Farmer* often turned to Booker T. Washington as an example of their editors' perception of an exceptional African American. Washington believed in accommodating the demands of whiteness on black people in order to integrate and raise the African American population. His Tuskegee Institute brought higher education to many gifted people of color while segregation barred black people from Southern land grant institutions. He wished to bring scientific agriculture to black farmers—to make them whiter in a way. If the *Prairie Farmer* considered any black man to have become white in some ways, Washington was the one. Figure 3.4 shows a clipping from a 1908 article on his speaking engagements. Apparently he did not fit into the magazine's stereotype of black dialect and intelligence.

The remarkable man spoke well, not with the excited, misunderstanding eloquence of the negro preacher, but with the keen, unimpassioned and quiet logic of the best among white reasoners. His

Figure 3.4: Clipping from Stanley Waterloo, “The Negroes' Great Champion,” *TPF*, April 15, 1908, 20.

The magazine positioned Washington as exceptional to their version of blackness,

and he became the exception that proved the rule in their minds. That is, if they placed Washington on a pedestal above all other black men, then they have eliminated the chance for readers to equate him and other African Americans. Agrarian writers used this single black man to further put down the rest of the race. The writer uses the example of preachers, who spoke irrationally because of their African American roots despite their higher level of education. The magazine set Washington apart from even these, making him a singularity among, not a representation of, the African American population.

So one African American reached respectability among this circle of northern agrarians. A follow-up editorial in the next issue reaffirmed the usefulness of black people in farm production.⁷⁵ At the same time that the editor suggested that black people could succeed on farms, he also noted that they need not move to the North. He argued that black people needed to stay where they were and make farming their road to success in the South. While probably not an attempt to exclude African Americans from the Northern farming community, the *Prairie Farmer* editor's comments did not suggest rescuing the black farmers from the oppressive sharecropping or tenancy situations of the South.

White supremacy played out differently in the Midwest, where the agrarian ideal did not encourage farmers to seek out any non-white ethnic group to exploit. Still, the place of the white race lay in the successful advancement of the white race. Fundamental to this was the idea that the white race (or white races) farmed properly, whereas the colored races could only perform menial tasks. The previously-mentioned article on the successful German family in Cook County emphasized the role of German heritage in the family, thus exemplifying the white ability to succeed in farming more or less by just

⁷⁵“Increase in Negro Prosperity,” *TPF*, May 1, 1908, 3.

being white. However, while the white-black divide appeared in the *Prairie Farmer*, Midwesterners fully rejected the possibility of non-whites being useful to Midwest agriculture at all.

The *Prairie Farmer* articles thus took up more than the need of a labor force. Pieces published in this magazine demonstrate that white people intentionally excluded African Americans from specific farming communities. During the twentieth century, advertisements for land turned from encouraging white people to move to specific places. Instead, the boosters relied on exclusive communities to sell land to people. An advertisement in the July 15, 1913, issue of the *Prairie Farmer* notes that the Fruitdale District was “composed of white northern people—no negroes” (see Figure 3.5). Here, the combination of these two racial terms conveniently provides the reader with the poles of the racial spectrum. Placing “white northern people” against “negroes” in the context of the South indicates the power of these racial categories to the *Prairie Farmer* audience.

Appeals to physical separation outside of Illinois and the Midwest justified the same in Illinois. The land agent, George L. Colburn, advertised many properties and developments in the magazine. This part of Arkansas was unusual for his advertisements. Colburn only occasionally mentioned race at all, but all of those cases were for exclusively white areas. Appealing to the northerners' agrarian sense of whiteness aided these advertisements in selling land.

Come South

The Fruitdale District is 50 miles north from Mobile on M. & O. Ry. Composed of white northern people—no negroes—has been established 18 years. One of the large truck shipping stations of the South. Good water, good health, good schools, good churches and educated, wholesome, neighborly people. Tell me what you want to buy; I have a dozen bargains for quick purchasers. One little truck farm, no buildings, priced at \$150. Write for map. Geo. L. Colburn, Box 13, Fruitdale, Ala.

Figure 3.5: “Come South,” *TPF*, July 15, 1913, 13.

World War I brought about labor shortages, and consequently a reconsideration about the racial structure plugged into farming roles. Even so, the *Prairie Farmer* did not move its views on using non-white labor within the Midwest. One article weighed the possibility of importing Chinese people after the California model to satisfy its labor demand. Based on the magazine's previous analysis of “the race problem,” the author argues that “to bring in Chinamen to the Middle West would be to saddle upon us the race problem that has shackled the South for so long.”⁷⁶ The editor here frames the place of white race in all facets of the agricultural ladder in the context of the Midwest. Apparently free from a race mixture, the agrarian model works to raise the monolithic white race. The Chinese race had nothing but problems to contribute in Midwestern farming according to these thinkers.

The United States's enemies in war, on the other hand, could fit well into the white racial order of agriculture in the Midwest. On the same page as rejecting Chinese immigrants, *The Prairie Farmer* advocated using German POWs as temporary labor. It even goes so far as to say, “many of them—probably the majority—will never go back to Germany. They will gradually become Americanized and civilized, and being of the same

⁷⁶“Bringing in Chinamen,” *TPF*, July 13, 1918, 10.

race, we can assimilate them in a way that we could never assimilate the Chinaman.”⁷⁷

Clearly the white race unified in its ability to work effectively in the American Midwest and raise individuals to the level of “civilization.”

Thus, the place of farming in race becomes more clear by looking at the place of race in farming.

In the era following the armistice in November 1918, racial negativity against Eastern Europeans and Asians continued. Farming intellectuals rejected groups of people based on perceived racial ability to farm, claiming that the “backward races of Europe and Asia” were too backward to fit into labor needs and threatened the racial morality of American farming.⁷⁸ The *Prairie Farmer* strongly opposed immigration, or at least non-white immigrants settling on farm land.⁷⁹ This contributes to understanding why technology such as tractors made sense instead of hiring labor.⁸⁰ Among the reasons for owning this technology, not dealing with inferior races and the burdens they were to white society benefitted farmers and their ideal white United States.

Racial discourse in the *Prairie Farmer* turned to the traditional black-white racial binary of the United States, including appeals to Anglo-Saxonism and Arianism. Historian William W. Giffin suggests that Anglo-Saxonism boomed as a nation-wide reason for segregation during and after World War I.⁸¹ Research in the *Prairie Farmer* reveals that white supremacy relied on such racial theories even before the war, but these

⁷⁷“German Prisoners,” *TPF*, July 13, 1918, 10.

⁷⁸Dr. G. F. Warren, “Some After-the-War Problems in Agriculture: Not Cheap Food, But Enough Food, In the Question that Should Concern the Nation,” *TPF*, February 22, 1919, 11.

⁷⁹See, “While We Are At It,” *TPF*, July 3, 1920, 8. Another article argues that races cannot mix in the rural setting because insufficient population exists in agriculture to maintain necessarily segregated institutions, see “Farmers Problems,” *TPF*, March 22, 1919, 87; this is one theme in Midwest segregation noted in Giffin, 38-44.

⁸⁰Again, see “The Tractor Question,” *TPF*, January 12, 1918, 23.

⁸¹William W. Giffin, *African Americans and the Color Line in Ohio, 1915-1930* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 33-4.

ideas swelled in the context of the war. The editor summarized a 1913 lecturer at the state agricultural institute, and noted an imperative to increase production,

“the Aryan race has always gone down before this problem that now confronts the American people....There are more people hungry in India than live in the United States. Ten million people have been known to starve to death there in nine months. The other branch of the Aryan race developed a great civilization around the Mediterranean Sea, the greatest the world has ever known in many respects....Our civilization exceeds that of the Romans chiefly in the control of mechanical power....They had the art but not the science of agriculture.”⁸²

Reaching into the past provided more than precedent of success and failure for racial thought in the early 1900s. It helped white Americans distinguish themselves from non-Aryans in this instance. The lecturer shows faith in the United States's ability to overcome the challenges that destroyed earlier Aryan groups. The white American race stood poised to succeed on the back of scientific farming; the mission of the farmers was to raise the white race.

3.2: Breeding and Eugenics

The *Prairie Farmer*, as an advocate of science, strayed into theories of human breeding and social darwinism. Ultimately, those interested in “good breeding” fit well into a broad category of eugenicists. While the magazine strayed from the most atrocious aspects of eugenics, it certainly advocated the betterment of the human gene pool.

⁸²“Notable Address at Illinois Farmers' Institute: Farmers at 19th Annual Meeting Discuss Many Agricultural Topics and Pass Important Resolutions,” *TPF*, March 1, 1913, 5. The lecturer is only noted as Dr. Hopkins, who was a researcher at the University of Illinois and lectured frequently at the Illinois Farmers' Institute meetings.

Prairie Farmer editors spent time discussing evolutionary science and theories for their audience. It seems that the readers took great interest in understanding race from a scientific standpoint.

One reader wrote in asking about the origin of “the colored race,” ultimately calling non-whites “mongrel” races in the same way as mules—a commonly-used farm animal that was a sterile hybrid.⁸³ The *Prairie Farmer* writer replied to that, denying that black people were mongrels in the way mules are because black people were able to procreate. The magazine thereby removed the nature aspect of African American inferiority. N. H. Paaren, a U.S. Veterinary Inspector, even chided the reader for his misunderstanding of Darwin's ideas. Nevertheless, the fact that both the writers and the subscribers took interest in the hereditary evolution of species and races tells us that contemporary science spread throughout the nation and people recognized the *Prairie Farmer* as a source for such information.

Many mentions of human breeding praise the contributions of large families to the white race and the farming “race.” One large “German” farm family in Cook County received praise for their prodigious breeding and successful farming.⁸⁴ Another article humorously commented that “race suicide seems not to exist in Mahaska county [sic.], Iowa,” when one hundred fourteen babies appeared in a county baby show.⁸⁵ These cases represent minor stories in the attention the writers and readers paid to their place in the white race. Nevertheless, giving some attention to breeding as a racial act contributes another layer to the simple story that farming couples produced many children either for labor or because of a high childhood mortality rate.

⁸³“A Hybrid Animal,” *TPF*, December 4, 1886, 795.

⁸⁴J. L. Graff, “Tell This to Roosevelt,” *TPF*, March 15, 1912, 14.

⁸⁵“114 Babies at Institute Baby Show,” *TPF*, February 15, 1914, 13.

The attention paid to human pedigree within the *Prairie Farmer* strayed little into straightforward eugenics. Even in the height of the era when eugenics laws were in effect—Indiana passed the first in 1907—Illinois never instituted sterilization of groups perceived to be undesirable. Instead, people trying to better the race genetically waged a cultural war. The term “eugenics” appears very few time in the period this project covers. Some writers hint at eugenic logic such as Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Hays's statements in 1906.⁸⁶ However, the place of the farmer in maintaining the race seldom moved past encouraging consciousness to breeding within one's color group. It would seem that the theorists in *The Prairie Farmer* believed the white race was strong enough to take care of itself with its farming population intact. Attention to human breeding appeared very little in the *Prairie Farmer* after 1914. Despite the potential power of this form of racial thought in the farming community, controlled breeding never dominated discussion in the *Prairie Farmer*, and certainly strayed little into radicalism.

Nevertheless, the concern about racial purity drove thinking. The *Prairie Farmer* editors strenuously advocated a new Illinois state constitution in the December 9, 1922, issue. The voters ultimately rejected the new constitution. In an article called “Some Objections Answered,” the editors answered the concern over mixed-race marriages (see Figure 3.6). No language forbade interracial marriage, it rather reaffirmed equal protection under the law. The white population of Illinois worried about interracial marriage harming future generations of Americans, especially agrarians concerned over good breeding in their professions and families. The editors' response was matter-of-fact and put the blame for possible mixed marriages on the federal, not state, constitution.

⁸⁶“To Breed Good Blood,” *TPF*, May 31, 1906, 9.

3. "The new constitution permits negroes and whites to intermarry."
 Ans. It makes no change from the present constitution in that respect. The United States constitution guarantees equality under the law to negroes.

Figure 3.6: Clipping from "Some Objections Answered," *TPF*, December 9, 1922, 9.

These white agrarians clearly took great interest in the genetic purity of their race. From their understanding of plants and animals in the farm setting, they had a basis for eugenics. Contemporary scientific thought bolstered belief in inherited physical and personality traits. White perceptions of African Americans as lazy, unintelligent, promiscuous, and/or violent provided a racial threat to American civilization. At the same time, demand for land and maximizing production left black farmers (and poor whites) far behind the landed elites. The early twentieth century saw parallel modernization of agriculture and racial thought. These agrarian writers believed that the sanity and betterment of the American nation and the white race required people who believed in the linear progress of human civilization and thus support discrimination in landowning, human reproduction, and education.

3.3: Education & Childrearing

Proper education preoccupied childrearing in an era when race equality initiatives and the draw of urban employment threatened the future of white agriculturalism. A cosmopolitan education with "enough theoretical stuff into his head to make him a butterfly chaser in a city," threatened the child's chance to perpetuate his or her best racial

destiny.⁸⁷ Once again, the *Prairie Farmer* relied on examples from other places in order to justify fear of white agrarian decline in the Midwest. The author of that article, the Honorable E. J. Watson, Commissioner of Agriculture for South Carolina, made statements about the white race previously being drawn to urban manufacturing jobs because of their economic promise. However, the members of “the inferior race” ruined the labor markets, making agriculture the best option for white people once again. Therefore, agrarians believed that education should provide children with the practical skills of farming.

To an agrarian, the farm life would always be superior to an urban career and lifestyle. But the writers for the *Prairie Farmer* made terrifying remarks about city life. One such article says that the urban setting leads to too much socialization and “not the least of all the various causes that result in race suicide is the extreme social activity of our urban populations.”⁸⁸ Thus, agriculturalism established itself with claims against crowded city life. Given the duty of the farmer to the race—whether human race or white race—the writer used the term race suicide to invoke fear and to encourage farmers to keep their families within rural life. So agriculturalists insisted upon the correct upbringing of children to appreciate rural life and work effectively on a farm. Education factored greatly into prescribed upbringing in the agrarian image.⁸⁹

Following the version of blackness prescribed by the *Prairie Farmer* as described in chapter two lent little credibility to the intelligence of non-white people. The education of African American population received attention, but invited criticism. A story in the “Reader’s Corner” titled “How He Educated Him,” began “there is sometimes something

⁸⁷Hon. E. J. Watson, “The Farm Boy in the South,” *TPF*, December 12, 1907, 4.

⁸⁸Robert Findley, “Schooling,” *TPF*, April 1, 1909, 16. See also “Prairie Farmer’s Annual Picnic,” *TPF*, July 31, 1915, 16-7.

⁸⁹See Mrs. William C. Downey, “All About the Baby Contest,” *TPF*, March 11, 1916, 27.

laughably pitiable in an old negro's estimate of education."⁹⁰ One joke included in the story involves the "old negro" searching for the grave of "dead languages" such as Greek or Latin. The story also follows the pattern of writing in supposed African American dialect and the use of the term "nigger" by another black character. The main point of the author, as he began the story, was to show the folly of education for African Americans.

Prairie Farmer writers portrayed African Americans as unteachable. However, other articles insisted on the correct education of white boys and girls. Each individual's potential did not rely solely on racial heritage. White children had to be raised to understand the best ways of running a farm and to appreciate rural life. Not quite *tabula rasa* arguments, white supremacist ideas clung onto raising children to appreciate the innate racial history in their genetics while realizing that the best racial benefit came from upbringing too. This was especially important since those people who were white in color but failed to run modernized farms became excluded from the agrarian version of whiteness.

Proper childrearing began immediately after birth with the intent of building a "better race of Americans."⁹¹ Articles argued about the natural curiosity of children, paradigms of education, the diversity of household guests, and appropriate social groups.⁹² As one advice columnist put it, "You have already furnished [your child] with heredity: those strong and weak tendencies which are born with the child. These tendencies are not yet characteristics.... You know what happens to a garden which is left to its own devices."⁹³ The racial future rest in the hands of parent who bred and raised

⁹⁰Opie Read, "How He Educated Him," *TPF*, April 4, 1907, 16.

⁹¹Mrs. William C. Downey, "All About the Baby Contest," *TPF*, March 11, 1916, 27.

⁹²See Augusts M Swan, "Training Our Children: Nature Study," *TPF*, September 23, 1922, 20; Naomi Gordon, "The Little Red Schoolhouse," *TPF*, October 15, 1910, 20; Mrs. Newton Ashby, "Some Interesting Suggestions," *TPF*, August 28, 1915, 12.

⁹³Zahrah E. Preble, "Burbanking Your Child," *TPF*, May 26, 1923, 12.

children correctly, and arguments always led back to agrarian morality and rural living.

Many thinkers blatantly argued that farming made up the superior white race. Some articles clearly stated or at least hinted at the place of the farmer in the white American race. In a letter to the newspaper, B. F. Harris wrote in sacred terms about Midwest farm land, and American farmers' ability to "feed and fight and finance the war [World War I]."⁹⁴ Harris, a well-off Champaign County agrarian, commits readers to their national duty and a fraternity of farmers through racial terms. But does the *Prairie Farmer* and its readers necessarily see American nationalism with a tint of white supremacy?

This is a question that thinkers and intellectuals openly considered contemporary to Harris. In 1919, the newspaper announced that a large sociological study was under way to determine the best kind of farming family and that "race elements" were to be considered.⁹⁵ While the editors made no clear follow-up to that story, the piece fits the trend toward understanding the social importance of race in farming. By 1923, one article argued the inevitability of the white race's land domination due to "its superior religious ideals and its superior civilization."⁹⁶ And an extreme example came out in the claim that a handful of people in Texas formed "a race of men whose superior does not exist."⁹⁷ Such a claim exemplifies promotional journalism, but also plays on the racial attitude of the article's context. Observers from the Midwest travelled to Texas to observe Hereford cattle ranching. The techniques employed by the ranchers made them "superior," not

94B. F. Harris, "Equal to Their Task and Time," *TPF*, June 29, 1918, 20.

95"For Better Rural Life," *TPF*, June 14, 1919, 55.

96Dr. C. W. McCaskill, "The Religious Future of Palestine: America Can Make it a Christian Country," *TPF*, September 8, 1923, 5.

97Harvey J. Sconce, "The Heart of the Texas Feeder Country: The Story of Our Quest for Good Cattle," *TPF*, November 10, 1923, 6.

merely that their skin was white.⁹⁸ The *Prairie Farmer* brought such reconnaissance to their readers to boast the successes of white people and to educate Midwesterners on how to continue raising the white race.

98 Ibid.

Conclusion

Farming was—and is—“among the whitest of occupations” according to demographic statistics analyzed by John C. Hudson in the late twentieth century.⁹⁹ While he wrote several decades after the era this thesis analyses, Hudson describes an outcome that racist agrarians helped produce. Ideologically, agrarians should have sought to improve the entire nation by extending land ownership and agricultural knowledge to the entire population of the United States. If they truly believed in the modernist concept of progress that white Americans rested at the pinnacle of a linear progression, then they may have lent charity to peoples perceived as lesser. Raising African Americans and other non-whites from economic, genetic, and cultural poverty was only a matter of allowing them access to land and education. Prejudice, however, stood as a formidable block to realizing such a goal. The circular logic of turn-of-the-century civilization theory further entrenched racial thought in agrarian minds. Even as science and technology offered the opportunity for all farmers to maximize their production, white people blocked the entry of African Americans into scientific agriculture. Their justifications lay in their versions of whiteness and blackness.

Agrarian concepts of good citizenship formed their ideas of whiteness. Whiteness, reflexively, formed the agrarian concepts of good citizenship. Regarding the rhetoric as displayed in the *Prairie Farmer* magazine, the preexisting versions of the good life trickled into the newer, reflective look at whiteness. The authors never used the term “whiteness” nor did they explicitly reflect on the “white man” as frequently as they wrote at length on the problems of other racial groups. They transposed their ideas of whiteness

⁹⁹ John C. Hudson, “The Other America: Changes in Rural America During the Twentieth Century,” in *North America: The Historical Geography of a Changing Continent*, ed. Thomas F. McIlwraith and Edward K. Muller (2nd edition) (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 419, quoted in Reid, “The Whitest of Occupations?,” 212.

upon the framework of their ideal farmer and vice versa, making the two terms equate. Agrarians recoiled in response to black freedom in the United States and an uncertain time for the independent farmer of the agrarian vision.

The Midwest agrarian perception of blackness relied on the derogations of the contemporary white American mind. It derived many of its prejudices from the South in an era still reeling from the loss of the slave system. *Prairie Farmer* writers comfortably wrote about African Americans and blackness as objects of discussion. White people used epithets such as “nigger” brazenly in everyday speech, as shown by the printing of various cliches. White people could also put on a metaphorical mask of blackness in their fictional accounts of African American life and culture. More journalistic or academic articles used the terms “negro” or “colored person,” but did not mean to portray black people in any better light than those blackface authors. Furthermore, the *Prairie Farmer* often turned to the opinions of people who sought to marginalize African Americans to the maximum extent. They obviously wished to convey ill feelings about black people to their readership.

Understanding these intellectual fundamentals of Midwest race relations expands our knowledge to make useful regional comparisons as well as comparisons between the urban and rural Midwest. Just as this thesis began as a project to locate a sub-narrative of the Great Migration, it provides a starting point for looking at the previous analysis of race relations in that slightly later era in a new way. This thesis desires to accompany the historical work that tell the story of life as it occurred: the actual events of racial violence and the actual policies of racial exclusion. Previous historians have created admirable work on the challenges facing black, white, and other Americans during a time of

immigration and relocation. But they have mostly focused on the resulting tensions in industrial centers.

Even Loewen's *Sundown Towns* looks at the small urban dots on the map, not at the actual agricultural population. One place to start for further analysis would be to recognize the ties between the rural and small-town agrarians to provide intellectual underpinning to contextualize the sundown towns on which Loewen's work focuses. Similar applications can aid historians such as Reid understand why such a small number of black Americans settled as farmers in the Midwest. From there she and others may be able to explain why that already small population dropped at a disproportionate rate. After all, some *Prairie Farmer* writers were very happy that white populations grew disproportionately in certain locations during the 1870s and 1880s. By looking at the history of race rhetoric in agrarian journalism, we see that agrarians subscribed to certain ideas that required them to reject African Americans as a group from the farming community.

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