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Little Rock's Unique Political Opportunities for Black Arkansans, 1865-1905

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LITTLE ROCK'S UNIQUE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR BLACK ARKANSANS, 1865 - 1905

By

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Abstract

Little Rock, Arkansas offered unique political opportunities in the late nineteenth century. Unlike the rest of the state, Little Rock housed a prominent middle-class black community that earned political office positions in local and state government. The current historical scholarship on the state's African American political power in these years lacks detailed treatment of the political power of black Arkansans in Little Rock. Using newspapers, census data, and local and state government documents, this thesis argues for the unique position of the state's capital for black Arkansans. In the late nineteenth century, the black middle class was especially strong in Little Rock, which helped the city's black community gain political influence. Black officeholding in Little Rock ad Pulaski County was strong enough not to have to rely on fusion tickets. Using the city's unique position, African Americans of Little Rock seized political opportunities at the local and state level throughout the latter nineteenth century.

Keywords: politics, Little Rock, African Americans

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I. Introduction

From 1865 to 1905, black Arkansans experienced significant growth in political participation, economic opportunities, social development, and legal protections. One of the most extraordinary and distinctive areas of change for black Arkansans was their increased involvement in political life, specifically office holding. After the Civil War, black Arkansans expanded their political opportunities in local elections, state positions, and federal appointments. However, this evolution did not provide equal opportunities to all black Arkansans. Urban areas of Arkansas experienced the most gains, for they contained significant pockets of middle-class black Arkansans able to take advantage of political opportunities. Cities in post-Civil War Arkansas showed promise as an area of substantial social mobility and political opportunity. According to U.S. Census Data from 1870, four Arkansas counties contained a population of 15,000 people or more.[1] Out of these four counties, three held significant urban centers hosting influential black communities. By 1900, all three of these counties had almost doubled in population, with a majority of growth in the urban centers: Helena in Phillips County, Pine Bluff in Jefferson County, and Little Rock in Pulaski County.[2] Each of these counties housed a politically active black community. However Little Rock in Pulaski County held unique opportunities for black Arkansans seeking political offices. Unlike the other two Arkansas cities, Little Rock experienced tremendous growth in population in the late nineteenth century, became the largest urban center of Arkansas, and included a vibrant black middle class that held a significant number of local offices, won state government and representative positions, and received political office appointments. In post-Civil War Arkansas, Little Rock became the prominent urban center for African Americans seeking political opportunity at the local and state levels.

[1] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.
[2] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.

The current scholarship regarding political life in Arkansas during this period either focuses on the African American experience in a specific area or offers a broad picture of changes in the lives of black Arkansans. Eric Foner, one of the nation's most prominent Reconstruction historians, has published a still-essential comprehensive study on what he calls America's "unfinished revolution." A National Book Award Finalist, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* chronicles how Americans responded to the unprecedented changes in post-Civil War America. In his study, Foner addresses the formerly enslaved people's quest for economic autonomy and political advancements, the remolding of Southern American society, the evolution of racial attitudes and patterns, and the emergence of an expanded national government.[3] However, Foner finds that Reconstruction ultimately failed to achieve the political and societal progress for African Americans, leaving the United States with an "unfinished revolution."[4]

A few books have been specifically published on Reconstruction in Arkansas, in which the authors have explored the political changes for black Arkansans. Powell Clayton, former Arkansas Governor from 1868 to 1871, published a book on post-Civil War Arkansans from the view of the Governor's Office. The book provides an account of Clayton's administration and the complex nature of Arkansas during that time. Focused on the activities and events of the Arkansas Governor's Office, Clayton's perspective is a significant piece of scholarship on Arkansas Reconstruction and the political work of Clayton and his administration.[5] Although Clayton neglected to explore the specific political landscape for black Arkansans during his term

[3] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2014) xxvii-xlii.
[4] Foner, *Reconstruction*.
[5] Clayton Powell, *The Aftermath of the Civil War, in Arkansas* (London, England: Forgotten Books, 2015) 9-11.

as Arkansas Governor in terms of office holding, he does discuss the overarching political challenges faced by Arkansans prior to the Arkansas Constitutional Convention of 1874.[6]

Joseph Hilaire also provides significant scholarship on the political experiences of black Arkansans in his study of the Arkansas Constitutional Convention of 1868. By researching the black delegation that attended the convention, Hilaire offered a comprehensive profile of each member of the delegation. The study further explored the voting patterns and influence the group maintained in the convention's decisions. Hilaire found that despite having little political experience before the convention, the African American delegation accomplished significant developments on behalf of their constituents.[7] The study added significant understanding to the legislative ability of this delegation and the power of the African American community across the state; however, lacked the key distinction of Little Rock that will be essential to the understanding black Arkansans' political office holding opportunities. As the evidence shows, the black community of Little Rock used their middle-class status as leverage to gain political opportunities unseen throughout the rest of the state.

Similar to Hilaire's discussion of the African American delegation of the Arkansas Constitutional Convention of 1868, two authors investigate black Arkansans in the Arkansas General Assembly in the late nineteenth century. Blake Wintory published a comprehensive biographical study into the black Arkansas legislators between 1868 and 1893. In this study, Wintory argues that these legislators provided opportunities and favorable political conditions for black Arkansans until the end of the nineteenth century with the domination of white Democratic leadership. The article includes three detailed charts that chronologically display African American legislators in the Arkansas State Senate and House of Representatives, as well as a

[6] Powell, *The Aftermath of the Civil War*.
[7] Joseph Hilaire, "The Negro Delegates in the Arkansas Constitutional Convention of 1868: A Group Profile," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1974) 66.

corresponding table of biographical information for each legislator.[8] According to Wintory, African American legislators in the Arkansas State Government maintained significant political power and influence that greatly benefited the people in their communities.

Building on the work of Wintory, Chris Branam explores the activities taken by black Arkansans in the state legislature during Arkansas Reconstruction. Narrowing his focus to only Arkansas Reconstruction African American legislators, Branam argues that although Wintory provided a wealth of biographical information on Arkansas African American legislators, little attention is given to their activities and work in the Arkansas State Legislature, as well as the issues that they attempted to address for their constituents. Branam states that they took an active part in the Reconstruction legislature. Black Arkansas legislators introduced bills that would become laws, made motions and points-of-order, served on legislative committees, proposed amendments, and even took the floor with their white colleagues for debates and speeches.[9] From Branam's research, it is clear that black Arkansans took an active role in the political complexities of the state government during Reconstruction.

Several articles focus on black Arkansans and their experiences within the changing society of the New South. Using the numerous 1930s Works Project Administration (WPA) interviews from Arkansas, Norace Nash explored the economic, political, and educational challenges black Arkansans faced during Reconstruction. Nash argued that these interviews provide an opportunity for historians to examine the accomplishments of black Arkansans during Reconstruction. He found that black Arkansans gained meaningful advancements in Arkansas

[8] Black Wintory, "African-American Legislators in the Arkansas General Assembly, 1868-1893," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (2006) 385-434.
[9] Chris Branam, "The Africans Have Taken Arkansas: Political Activities of African Americans in the Reconstruction Legislature," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2014) 234.

communities within a limited framework allowed by the post-Civil War governments.[10] Nash's study explores the gains black Arkansans made in political, educational, and social life.

In addition to Nash's study on black Arkansans during Reconstruction, Carl Moneyhon published one of the most significant studies of Arkansas in the New South society. Published in 1997, *Arkansas and the New South, 1874–1929* provides a comprehensive look into Arkansas's struggle to enter the economic and social mainstream of the United States after Reconstruction. The study examines the state's economic development and its ability to foster a population shift from rural to urban areas that changed the social institutions of Arkansas. He skillfully argues that Arkansas successfully integrated into the national economy and society through individual enterprise and activist government.[11] Moneyhon's study offers a broad look at Arkansas and the state's singular path during this era.

John Graves' book, *Town and Country: Race Relations in an Urban-Rural Context, Arkansas, 1865-1905*, is a significant piece of scholarship focused on the life of black communities in the city and country. Graves focused on Arkansas's agrarian influences on the state's cultural, societal, political, and economic growth and development. He argues that the state's rural areas dominated the development of racial traditions throughout the post-Civil War period. Graves discusses the "promise" of Arkansas urban centers and the state government's ability to withstand significant agrarian lobbying efforts to dominate the legislature.[12] *Town and Country* also provides a complex picture that explores the racial and cultural tensions between the rural and urban centers after the Civil War. However, while Graves focuses on the various tensions between the urban and rural areas of Arkansas, this thesis provides a detailed treatment

[10] Horace Nash, "Blacks in Arkansas during Reconstruction: The Ex-Slave Narratives," *The Arkansas History Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1989) 259.
[11] Carl Moneyhon, *Arkansas and the New South, 1874-1929* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 1997) xii.
[12] John William Graves, *Town and Country: Race Relations in an Urban-Rural Context, Arkansas, 1865-1905* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1990) 1.

on the unique and significant position the black community of Little Rock held in local and state politics.

In addition to his comprehensive study on the complex tensions between urban and rural communities of Arkansas, John Graves' article in the *Journal of Southern History* reexamines Arkansas urban centers in the post-Reconstruction South. Published in 1990, the piece argues that urbanization provided black Arkansans with new avenues of political, social, and economic growth. However, these advancements heightened racial tension and intensified prejudice in Arkansas, which led to the domination by Arkansas's agrarian Jim Crow elements.[13] As in his later study on Arkansas racial tensions in the urban-rural context, Graves claims that urban centers of Arkansas are unique and connected to the state's African American experiences in the post-Civil War period. Due to the urban centers' large black communities, Graves finds the state's cities provided numerous political, economic, and social opportunities that changed the Arkansas experience for many black Arkansans.

Equally important to the scholarship on the African American experiences in post-Civil War Arkansas are studies that focus on a specific aspect of black Arkansans' struggle for freedom. In his article "'Disband Him from the Church': African Americans and the Spiritual Politics of Disfranchisement in Post-Reconstruction Arkansas," John Giggie explores the spiritual politics of black Arkansans. Telling the story of nearly two dozen black Arkansans who were kicked out of their church communities for voting Democratic in the 1888 state elections, Giggie argued that black Arkansans in the late nineteenth century closely connected their political and religious lives in an effort to maintain their recently gained political power. Spiritual politics allowed church leaders to convince large numbers of black Arkansans to vote Republican or Democratic, based on the community's desires. Although they were unable to defend their

[13] John Graves, "Jim Crow in Arkansas: A Reconsideration of Urban Race Relations in the Post-Reconstruction South," *The Journal of Southern History* 55, no. 3 (1989) 447.

modicum of political power after the 1890 election, Giggie finds that black Arkansans managed to effectively use spiritual politics within the black community to postpone disfranchisement until white Democrats dominated Arkansas state and local elections.[14]

A Confused and Confusing Affair: Arkansas and Reconstruction, which includes Wintory's study on Arkansas African American legislators in the late nineteenth century, offers six articles by Kenneth Barnes, Jay Barth, Thomas DeBlack, Rodney Harris, Carl Moneyhon, and Blake Wintory, all of which explore the complex nature of Arkansas Reconstruction and focus on different components of the era. The collection provides significant information on the large picture of Arkansas Reconstruction, post-Civil War politics, Arkansas African American legislators, political violence, the Brooks-Baxter War, and the Arkansas Constitutional Convention of 1874 and its effects on Arkansas politics.[15] Within these articles on Reconstruction, an overarching theme is maintained that Arkansas Reconstruction is a complex story in the state's history and requires significant research into the various components for complete understanding.

Carl Moneyhon also offers a groundbreaking study on Arkansas Reconstruction. First published in 1994, Moneyhon draws on a wealth of primary research to examine Arkansas society before, during, and after the Civil War and the conflict's complex effects on Arkansas in the nineteenth century. According to Moneyhon, although the war devastated Arkansas' economy and society, white elites regained dominance over the state's political and economic arenas. Within the book, Moneyhon addresses the various debates of Arkansas Reconstruction's story of change and continuity and the state's persistence throughout these momentous years.[16] Like his

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[14] John Giggie, "'Disband Him from the Church': African Americans and the Spiritual Politics of Disfranchisement in Post-Reconstruction Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2001) 245.
[15] Mark K. Christ, *A Confused and Confusing Affair: Arkansas and Reconstruction* (Little Rock, AR: Butler Center Books, 2018) 12.
[16] Carl H. Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas: Persistence in the Midst of Ruin* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2002) xii.

later study on Arkansas entering the New South, the book provides key information about post-Civil War Arkansas and the societal changes the state underwent.

Other secondary literature on black Arkansans from 1865 to 1905 focuses on broad themes of the African American experience in Arkansas. Bobby Lovett published an article on the social, political, and religious changes black Arkansans experienced after the Civil War.[17] Story Matkin-Rawn provides a study on the migration into Arkansas during Reconstruction and the impacts of this movement on the political, economic, and social environment of the state.[18] Lisa Childs explores the origins of Arkansas's Republican Party and its effects on post-Civil War Arkansas in *Reexamining the Origins of Arkansas's Republican Party*.[19] All these pieces of scholarship add to the overall understanding of black Arkansans.

Despite the wealth of secondary literature on the state's African American experiences in post-Civil War Arkansas, there is no detailed treatment of black Arkansans of Little Rock. No historian has completed an investigation into the unique position of black Arkansans in the urban center of Little Rock, especially their significant ability to hold political offices at the local and state levels. With the lack of scholarship on Little Rock's political opportunities for black Arkansans after the Civil War, it is essential to investigate the distinction of Little Rock as a place of significant political advantages for black Arkansans. While some of the secondary literature examined above discusses Little Rock in a broad context and focus on the state's rural areas, this thesis offers a comprehensive look into office holding for black Arkansans of Little Rock. Although Arkansas remained largely rural and agrarian throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the state did contain significant urban communities of black Arkansans. These

[17] Bobby Lovett, "African Americans, Civil War, and Aftermath in Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (1995) 304-358.
[18] Story Matkin-Rawn, "'The Great Negro State of the Country': Arkansas's Reconstruction and the Other Great Migration," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2013) 1-41.
[19] Lisa Childs, "Reexamining the Origins of Arkansas's Republican Party," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (2020) 317-347.

urban centers included powerful middle-class African American communities that brought economic possibilities to Arkansas cities but also provided considerable political engagement to black Arkansans, leading to opportunities for local Little Rock elections, engagement in Arkansas state political offices, and appointments to represent their communities in various legal and state positions.

Chapter one, “Little Rock’s Opportunity of Progress,” begins the study by discussing the city’s demographic and political shifts and changes in the late nineteenth century. Little Rock experienced significant growth in its African American community during this time. The significant population growth of the city’s African American community is evidence of the political office holding opportunities and a tool for gaining important political offices. The black Arkansans of Little Rock also contained a large and growing middle-class community. The city’s booming middle class African American community used their influence, resources, and ability to gain political offices throughout the city, the county, and the state. It is essential to note the differences in Little Rock’s demographics and growth, for the city was unique compared to the rest of Arkansas. Building on these differences, black Arkansans could gain political offices at all levels of government unseen in the rest of the state. It is vital to note Little Rock's position as the state’s capital serving as one factor that influenced the political opportunities afforded black Arkansans; however, as the chapter will explore, the demographics, black middle class, and economic possibility of Little Rock created a unique place for black Arkansans seeking offices at the local and state level.

The first area of remarkable office holding ability was at the local level within the city and the county. “The ‘Island’ of Local Politics,” the second chapter of the thesis, explores the extraordinary ability of black Arkansans to win elections and appointments in local political offices. In post-Civil War Little Rock, black Arkansans held multiple offices in the city’s government, educational boards, business organizations, and the Pulaski County government.

Due to various reasons, Little Rock contained a vibrant African American community that gained the respect of their community and their white counterparts. However, when looking around the state, other black Arkansans did not achieve the same caliber of local offices as in Little Rock due to the "fusion principle." Unlike the rest of the state, Little Rock did not use a compromise ticket to win local elections, yet the city's black community was still able to win a multitude of local offices. Local elections provided a foundation for black Arkansans of Little Rock to gain political influence, which propelled them into political office holding opportunities at the state and federal levels.

The final chapter, "Moving Beyond the City," offers a study on the remarkable ability of Little Rock's African American community to gain significant political offices at the state level of government. In the late nineteenth century, black Arkansans of Little Rock had an impressive ability to use the political parties of Arkansas to their advantage, especially the state Republican Party. Using their influence within the state's political parties, they gained positions at the state level, as well as the Constitutional Conventions. Black Arkansans that attended the Constitutional Conventions of 1868 and 1874 used their influence to gain concessions for their constituents. In addition to those state positions, black Arkansans of Little Rock also won elections to the state legislature and gained appointments to the Arkansas State Governors Office. However, as the thesis will explore, these political office holding opportunities were not equal across the state, as Little Rock held a unique position as a place of opportunity for the state's African American community. The Little Rock African American experience in the late nineteenth century is significantly different compared to the rest of the state, especially other Arkansas urban centers.

By exploring the complex differences between Little Rock and other urban centers of Arkansas, we gain a more complete picture of black Arkansans' political opportunities. As John Graves states, there is a "tendency of historians to treat urban and rural racial developments as

discrete, separate phenomena."[20] Like Graves, this thesis understands those distinctions while exploring the importance of examining the connections of these areas to the African American experience in Arkansas political life. However, to understand Arkansas urban and rural political opportunities, it is essential to understand the distinction of Little Rock as the prominent urban center for black Arkansans seeking political offices. This thesis will significantly add to the current scholarship of post-Civil War Arkansas and the state's African American political experiences by providing an in-depth focus on Little Rock's political opportunities.

[20] Graves, *Town and Country*, 2.

II. Little Rock's Opportunity of Progress

Due to several factors, the United States experienced incredible population growth throughout the late nineteenth century. According to the 1900 Census, the United States population increased by 140.3 percent from 1860 to 1900.[21] After the Civil War, the United States became a major industrial world power, urbanizing at a rapid rate. While Arkansas experienced urbanization and population increases, it remained largely rural during the late nineteenth century. Due to the rapid increase of Arkansas's major urban population, Little Rock became a place of opportunities in all areas of life for both white and black Arkansans, especially in political office holding.

According to C. Vann Woodward, in the late nineteenth century, the New South maintained a static position in the United States, both in terms of manufacturing and urban growth. He observed that developments during this period frequently occurred in manufacturing areas with low wages for unskilled labor, thus contributing to the lack of extensive urban growth in the New South.[22] According to United States Census records, by 1900, urban centers only made up 11.1 percent of the South Central states' and only 17 percent in the South Atlantic states' populations.[23] In addition, Woodward asserted that many of these urban areas lacked significant manufacturing or economic development and only served as regional distribution centers for industries in the Northern states.[24] Nonetheless, as we will see, Little Rock was different. With its massive population shifts, growing middle class, and increasing economic development, Little Rock became an exception within the New South and the state of Arkansas.

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[21] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Population, Statistics of Population.
[22] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1951) 140.
[23] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Abstract.
[24] Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 140.

Despite its slow economic development, the New South grew in terms of the overall population. Like much of the United States, every state of the New South significantly increased its population and experienced population shifts to more urban areas. According to the US Census, between 1860 and 1900, Mississippi grew by 96 percent, Louisiana by 95.1 percent, and Alabama by 89.7 percent. Although some states increased at high rates than others, the New South maintained a large population increase throughout the nineteenth century. The African American communities of the New South also tended to show increases in population. In the states discussed above, the African American community of Mississippi increased by 107.5 percent, Louisiana by 85.7 percent, and Alabama by 89.1 percent. In terms of the total population, these states were similar to Arkansas. Compared to other states of the South Center Census division, these states, with Arkansas, held less than 2,000,000 people. Despite the similarities of Arkansas with other South Central states, Arkansas experienced a different situation in terms of population and population shifts.[25]

Between 1860 and 1900, the total population of Arkansas grew 201.2 percent, double the percentage compared to the states of the New South mentioned above. During the same period, the African American population of Arkansas grew from 111,259 to 366,856 people, a percentage increase of 229.7.[26] However, this population growth did not occur equally throughout the state. According to United States Census records, the three counties with significant urban centers experienced an average growth of 393 percent in their African American communities. Of these counties, Pulaski saw the greatest increase in the African American population, increasing by 729 percent between 1860 and 1900.[27] Other counties of Arkansas did not experience the same increase in the African American population compared to Phillips, Jefferson, and Pulaski County. The other counties of Arkansas, especially the rural majority African American communities like

[25] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population.
[26] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population.
[27] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population.

Arkansas County, which saw a decrease of 17.5 percent, either increased slightly or declined from 1860 to 1900. With significant population shifts in the African American communities, Arkansas counties would have an opportunity to gain or maintain political offices. No county in the state of Arkansas outpaced the growth in Pulaski County's African American community, which supported meaningful political opportunities in elections and office holding. The population trends of Little Rock also placed the capital of Arkansas in a unique position as the state's foremost urban center for African Americans' political life.

Table 1. African American Population of the State of Arkansas, 1860 to 1900

Year	Total Population	African American Population
1860	435,450	111,259
1870	484,471	122,169
1880	802,525	210,666
1890	1,128,211	309,117
1900	1,311,564	366,856

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.

As the state's African American communities increased during the late nineteenth century, in many areas of the state, black communities held the majority population status. According to the 1900 Census, fifteen Arkansas counties contained a majority African American population, which are Ashley, Chicot, Crittenden, Desha, Drew, Jefferson, Lafayette, Lee, Lincoln, Mississippi, Monroe, Ouachita, Phillips, St. Francis, and Woodruff.[28] With their

[28] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

majorities, many of these counties were able to use their population numbers to gain limited political office holding opportunities. These limited political positions came with significant challenges and many compromises with the white agrarian population of the counties. In addition to those challenges, only two counties contained an urban center with at least 5,000 people by 1900: Jefferson and Phillips County. Both of these counties contained a significant African American community that gained several political office positions through elections and appointments that are essential for comparison to Pulaski County and Little Rock.

Phillips County contained the growing urban center of Helena, Arkansas. From 1860 to 1900, Helena grew by 257.8 percent, from 1,551 to 5,550, which is a little higher than the growth rate of 201.2 percent for the state during that same time.[29] With this growth, Helena provided greater political, economic, and social opportunities to black Arkansans than the rural areas of Phillips County. Black residents of Phillips County moved into the city, which provided Helena with a majority African American community. By 1900, Phillips County's African American community enjoyed a 78.6 percent countywide majority, and 61.7 percent in Helena.[30] With their majorities at both the county and city level, black Arkansans of Helena were able to win votes to propel their interest and gain political offices. Although, unlike in the city of Little Rock, black Arkansans in Helena were forced to make political compromises using the "fusion principle" for limited offices, despite their majority population.

Like Phillips County and Helena, Pine Bluff in Jefferson County experienced a similar situation. By 1900, Pine Bluff grew by 723.5 percent, from 1,396 to 11,496, while the county grew by 316.5 percent during that same period.[31] Although the African American community held a majority of the county and city throughout post-Reconstruction Arkansas, it was but a slim

[29] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Population, Sex, General Nativity, and Color, Arkansas.
[30] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population, Sex, General Nativity, and Color, Arkansas.
[31] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population, Sex, General Nativity, and Color, Arkansas.

majority in Pine Bluff. Black Arkansans comprised 72.8 percent of Jefferson County's total population and 50.2 percent of Pine Bluff's.[32] Although only a small majority in the city of Pine Bluff, their majority at the county level allowed the African American community there to gain limited political opportunities, as in Helena. Pine Bluff and Jefferson County still needed to contend with the conservative white agrarian population of the county to grasp those limited opportunities. Without the support of the white population, black Arkansans of Pine Bluff could not win elections or appointments to political offices in the late nineteenth century.

The other thirteen counties that held a majority black population in Arkansas in this era remained largely rural and experienced mostly white political domination. These counties held a total population of fewer than 20,000 in 1900.[33] A few black communities with African American majorities, like Ashely, Chicot, and Desha were able to send a few members to the Arkansas State Government. However, due to their lack of significant urban centers, they gained a different caliber of political office holding opportunities than counties with urban centers, especially Little Rock and Pulaski County. Some of these counties with at least one city of over 2,000 people, like Camden (Ouachita County), contained a small majority African American population yet experienced even fewer political opportunities.[34] Ouachita did not send a single African American delegate to the Arkansas State Government between the years 1868 to 1893.[35] Little Rock's unique population gave its people a position to win elections and appointments in all areas of government.

[32] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population.
[33] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population.
[34] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population, Sex, General Nativity, and Color, Arkansas.
[35] Wintory, "African-American Legislators," 385-434.

Table 2. Population of Arkansas Counties with Majority African American Populations, 1860 to 1900

County	County Growth	City Growth*	County Population**	City Population**	Black City Population**
Jefferson	316.5%	723.5%	40,972	11,496	5,771
Phillips	133.4%	257.8%	26,561	5,550	3,400
Ouachita	61.5%	28%	20,892	2,840	1,422
Chicot	57.3%	N/A	14,528	N/A	N/A
Ashely	129.7%	N/A	19,734	N/A	N/A

** Received City Classification by US Census in 1900 **

*** Population in 1900 ***

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Population, Sex, General Nativity, and Color, Arkansas.

When comparing the population of the fifteen counties with Pulaski County and Little Rock, it is evident that Little Rock experienced unique population shifts that provided political advantages. Both in terms of population demographics and shifts, Little Rock is unlike anywhere in Arkansas. With the exception of 1880, Little Rock increased by at least 40 percent in every U.S. Census recording from 1860 to 1900.[36] These unique population figures place the state's capital on a fascinating platform of development and opportunity to all people, including black Arkansans. The city's demographic changes positioned its African American community to take advantage of a range of opportunities in both the economic and political arena.

[36] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population, Sex, General Nativity, and Color, Arkansas.

Unlike Helena and Pine Bluff, Little Rock's African American community made up a minority. The largest percentage Pulaski County African Americans achieved in the population in the late nineteenth century occurred in 1890, when they made up 46.3 percent of the county and 37.6 percent of the population of Little Rock.[37] In contrast, other urban centers of Arkansas that contained notable African American political engagement maintained large majorities in their counties. Phillips County contained a majority population of 78.6 percent, with Helena holding a 61.7 percent majority. Jefferson County experienced a like situation with a majority of 72.8 percent, and Pine Bluff with a very slight majority of 50.2 percent in 1900.[38] Both counties contained large African American majority populations yet did not see equal political growth and opportunity when compared with Little Rock in Pulaski County. Little Rock had the ability to gain political opportunities with a minority in both the city and county.

Table 3. African American Population of Pulaski County and Little Rock, 1860 to 1900

Year	Total City Population	Black City Population	Black County Percentage	Black City Percentage
1860	3,727	853	31.9%	22.9%
1870	12,380	5,274	42.7%	42.6%
1880	13,138	4,507	45.7%	34.3%
1890	25,874	9,739	46.3%	37.6%
1900	38,307	14,694	46.1%	38.4%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.

[37] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.
[38] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.

In addition to the ability of Little Rock's minority population to gain advantages in many areas of public life, it is significant to note that Little Rock grew faster than any other urban center of Arkansas in the late nineteenth century. From 1860 to 1900, Little Rock experienced a total growth of 927.8 percent, far outpacing the state of Arkansas or any other area of the state.[39] The Little Rock African American population also doubled, making it the largest black population increase in the state's urban centers. According to the US Census, black Arkansans of Little Rock increased every Census from 1870 to 1900, with the exception of 1880.[40] Their population in Little Rock increased at much higher rates than did the city's whites'. These Census records are evidence that black Arkansans move to Little Rock in massive numbers, as the city offered a series of advantages, including political office holding ability.

Table 4. African American Population of Growth Little Rock, 1860 to 1900

Year	Total City Population	Census City Growth	Census White Growth	Census Black Growth
1860	3,727	72%	77.3%	56.2%
1870	12,380	232.2%	147.1%	518.3%
1880	13,138	6.1%	21.3%	-14.5%
1890	25,874	96.9%	87.4%	116.1%
1900	38,307	48.1%	46.2%	50.9%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.

[39] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.
[40] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

Investigating the reasoning behind this movement into Arkansas and the shifts of rural to urban populations is essential. Black Arkansans moved to urban centers for various reasons, including economic opportunity and social community. With Little Rock being the Arkansas State Capital and the state's leading urban center, naturally, the city had plenty of opportunities. With the city's railroad development and new business enterprises, the city offered significant economic advantages to white and black Arkansans. In 1891, the Little Rock Board of Trade published a promotional brochure that emphasized the city's rapid growth in the economic sector, stating that 40 years ago, "Little Rock was a straggling village in the midst of a wilderness" and now "the locomotive and all the confused noises of the busy industries of a great city."[41] The city also offered a place of valuable social community through fraternal organizations and entertainment. Although Little Rock's city limits included some undeveloped portions, the intersection of Markham and Main streets became the heart of the city's downtown. Markham and Main streets were filled with social opportunities for all members of the community, including black Arkansans. Due to the city's favorable conditions for black Arkansans, they took advantage of all available economic and social opportunities.[42]

Little Rock experienced an influx of black Arkansans, as well as African Americans from other states seeking these advantages. Their significance to Little Rock is evident in advisements for immigration. During the late nineteenth century, Arkansas engaged in advisement strategies to promote and influence African Americans to move to the state, specifically Little Rock. Advertised in newspapers like *The Christian Recorder*, these articles discussed observations from out-of-state black professionals attempting to influence others to move to Arkansas, especially to the state's largest urban center. Titled "The Spirit of Arkansas," a letter by Reverend J.T. Jenifer, a local minister located in Pine Bluff, appeared in *The Christian Recorder* boasting the successes

[41] *Arkansas Democrat*, March 5, 1972.
[42] Henry Wellge & Co, and Beck & Pauli. *Perspective map of the city of Little Rock, Ark., State capital of Arkansas, county seat of Pulaski County*. [Milwaukee, 1887] Map.

of Little Rock black citizens. Jenifer stated that in the late 1860s, Little Rock contained a few unimproved streets and lacked significant economic development; however, Little Rock in the 1880s was a thriving city for both white and black Arkansans. Reverend Jenifer stated that due to the extensive accomplishments and successes of the city's black community, Little Rock was "attracting not only large white emigration, but colored people also."[43] Another article, titled "Echo from Arkansas," discussed the benefits of moving to Little Rock. The author stated that Little Rock contained "enterprising colored citizens" that took advantage of the promise of the city.[44] In an article titled "Items Paragraphically Noted," the author candidly stated that Little Rock is a place where "colored people now have a better start than any other State in the Union."[45] The article further stated that it was encouraging "to see [that] a colored judge, justice of the peace, member of the legislature, clerk of the court, sheriff, policeman and other high functionaries is an ordinary sight" within the city of Little Rock.[46] The *Christian Recorder* is filled with articles, reports, letters, and documents that discuss the opportunities of Arkansas, especially in Little Rock.

Although economic possibility and social growth are evident in these articles, the emphasis placed on the political engagement of Little Rock blacks is foundationally significant. These articles discussed prominent African American residents of Little Rock, their political influence, the freedom of these urban black Arkansans to vote, and the extensive political offices held by the city's black community in public view. In one of the articles, titled "Some of the Men and Institutions that are Making Race Progress," the author stated that "the elevation of the black" in political offices of the city was remarkable.[47] Dr. Derrick, local doctor and writer for *The Christian Recorder*, wrote about the political power of Little Rock citizens Judge Gibbs, Dr.

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[43] J. T. Jenifer, "The Spirit of Arkansas," *The Christian Recorder*, January 27, 1881.
[44] J. T. J., "Echo form Arkansas," *The Christian Recorder*, February 19, 1880.
[45] H.M.T., "Items Paragraphically Noted," *The Christian Recorder*, December 13, 1888.
[46] *The Christian Recorder*, December 13, 1888.
[47] William Kelley, "Reconstruction. Opinions of an Arkansas Lawyer," *The Christian Recorder*, May 27, 1865.

Wade, and Phillips. These individuals maintained great significance as some of the most respected Arkansans in the professional, business, and political world. Derrick not only discussed their economic prosperity but placed greater emphasis on their political achievements in Little Rock. The political opportunities Little Rock afforded black Arkansans contributed to its rapid population growth. [48]

Writers mentioned neither Pine Bluff nor Helena as often when exploring black Arkansans' political achievements. Pine Bluff in Jefferson County and Helena in Phillips County are mentioned only a handful of times. In a report by the *Christian Recorder,* for example, Jefferson and Phillips counties only appear in connection with Little Rock. The coverage also tends to focus on the economic possibility of those cities rather than their political potential.[49] A few other contemporary observations refer to Fort Smith but also in reference to the city of Little Rock. Fort Smith was home to a very small African American population, making up no more than one-fifth of the city's population throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, nationwide newspapers neglected the study of the small minority urban population like Fort Smith, choosing to follow Little Rock instead due to its size and position as the state capital.[50]

More is needed to explain the connection of these other urban centers to Little Rock. In these numerous newspaper advertisements, the authors always discussed more than one urban center in addition to Little Rock. While the authors focused on the economic possibility of other urban centers like Pine Bluff, the authors emphasized economic development and political opportunities when discussing Little Rock. It is clear that Little Rock received significant praise in politics due to the fact that the city held a unique position for black Arkansans seeking political opportunities.

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[48] Derrick, "Some of the Men and Institutions that are Making Race Progress," *The Christian Recorder*, August 20, 1891.
[49] *The Christian Recorder*, August 20, 1891.
[50] *The Christian Recorder*, August 20, 1891.

Included in their praise of political ability, Little Rock contained a prominent and influential middle class that gained significant political capability. In the late nineteenth century, the African American middle class of Little Rock experienced significant growth and development, both in terms of political life and economic possibility. Little Rock contained a large community of black professionals in the areas of medicine, law, business, and education. These members of society helped advance political opportunities for the Little Rock community and promoted the image and perspectives of black Arkansans, which resulted in an increased ability to win local and state political offices. Mifflin Gibbs and Dr. Smith, who will be discussed further, are prime examples of successful black Arkansans of Little Rock who commanded respect for the black community. To completely understand the political differences of Little Rock compared to other urban centers of the state, it is essential to understand the emergence and influence of the black middle-class in the city.

After the war, Little Rock boomed. Not only did Little Rock experience significant population growth, with 3,727 people in 1860 growing to 38,307 people in 1900, but the city also underwent extraordinary growth in business and economic prosperity.[51] Before the Civil War, Little Rock lacked significant infrastructure and extensive business connections. By the late nineteenth century, Little Rock was filled with opportunity. The 1901 Little Rock City directory shows this rapid growth of the city's business sector, which is prevalent in the post-war decades. Little Rock's retail businesses alone included forty-three restaurants, twenty-seven hotels, thirty-eight dry food firms, sixty-two saloons, and a brewery.[52] Due to the city's significant growth, organizations and institutions formed to help facilitate the economic prosperity of its businesses and citizens. For example, the city's leading merchants like Philip Pfeifer, Gus Blass, and Charles Stifft organized the Board of Trade in 1884. The Board of Trade assisted businesses with

[51] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population.
[52] Arkansas, Little Rock, *City Directory*, 1901.

networking and coordination, serving as the precursor to Little Rock's Chamber of Commerce. The Board of Trade also developed promotional brochures touting the advances of Little Rock and promoting the city's economic possibilities and political opportunities. With these developments, a middle-class society appears in Little Rock.[53]

According to Carl Moneyhon, Little Rock's middle class "represented a new group whose position in society was based on the knowledge and skills they possessed."[54] As Graves stated, the city offered "a beacon of opportunity and hope for Arkansans of all backgrounds."[55] The city's prosperous African American middle class and elite entrepreneurs challenged the racial status quo of the state. While the social society of Arkansas was racially segregated, the city's economic forces no longer followed the norm.[56] The white and black communities of Little Rock would participate in many things together, like the racetrack on the city's east side.[57] Within the city, Little Rock blacks attended the theater, ate in restaurants, stayed in hotels, and participated in many of the activities of their white counterparts. They leveraged economic and social status to challenge political discrimination.

Little Rock contained more numerous opportunities for political freedom for black Arkansans than anywhere else in the state. As John Graves stated, "examples of negro social mobility and progress were most pronounced in Little Rock."[58] African Americans of Helena and Pine Bluff did contain significant middle-class African Americans, like black Reconstruction leaders William Grey and James White of Helena, and politician Ferdinand Havis and proponent of African American education Monsignor Lucey of Pine Bluff.[59] However, as stated previously,

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[53] Graves, *Town and Country*, 101.
[54] Moneyhon, *Arkansas and the New South*, 44.
[55] Graves, *Town and Country*, 102.
[56] Moneyhon, *Arkansas and the New South*, 46.
[57] Ira Don Richards, *Story of a Rivertown; Little Rock in the Nineteenth Century* (Published by author, 1969).
[58] Graves, *Town and Country*, 121.
[59] Graves, *Town and Country*, 121.

the African American middle-class communities in these cities maintained a small percentage of the population. These cities also held less capital, paid lower wages, and produced less than Little Rock, thus displaying smaller economies that limited the abilities of middle-class African Americans. In 1870, when comparing Little Rock to the state of Arkansas, the city held 13.5 percent capital, 27.4 percent wages, 9.9 percent materials, and 14.9 percent products of the entire state, while Helena and Pine Bluff only held a fraction of those percentages in the listed areas.[60]

Table 5. Total Capital, Wages, Materials, and Products for Arkansas Counties with Urban Centers, 1870

County	Capital	Wages	Materials	Products
Pulaski	240, 135	184,524	250,880	688, 003
Phillips	57,100	29,021	66, 689	161, 201
Jefferson	97, 200	18, 630	123, 300	107, 710
Sebastian	91, 970	48, 262	106, 002	215, 381

Amounts in Dollars

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States*, 1870, Wealth and Statistics, Arkansas.

The city's average tax information is also evidence of the size and might of the black community in terms of wealth. With the exception of Phillips, the black communities of Pulaski County provided the state and local government with more taxable income per capita. When exploring taxes paid, excluding poll taxes, in 1896 the city's African American middle class paid large amounts of taxes when compared to the rest of the state.[61] It is interesting to note that Little Rock was one of the only places in the state with a minority black population to pay large

[60] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States*, 1870, Wealth and Statistics, Arkansas.
[61] Arkansas State Auditor, *Arkansas Biennial Report of the Auditor of State*, 1897-1898.

amounts of taxes. The reason for this to the ability and wealth growth of the city's middle class. The city's black middle class gained enough wealth to provide a significant amount of money to the governments of Arkansas. Other black Arkansans did not earn enough taxable wealth for the state and local government to report significant taxes.

Table 6. County Tax Information from White and Black Populations, 1896.

County	Percentage of Black Population	Paid Per Capita by Blacks	Total Taxes Paid, Black	Paid Per Capita by White	Total Taxes Paid, White
Pulaski	46.4	$0.30	$6,609.99	$10.87	$275,309.40
Phillips	78.6	$0.37	$7,186.54	$13.58	$77,361.02
Jefferson	73.2	$0.17	$4,982.51	$10.89	$119,269.16
Chicot	87.8	$0.13	$1,321.10	$21.12	$29,401.42
Desha	79.5	$0.12	$1,006.13	$13.11	$27,773.58
Lee	75.2	$0.29	$4,060.54	$7.43	$34,837.02

Source: Arkansas Biennial Report of the Auditor of State, 1897-1898.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.

Little Rock was filled with professional businesspeople who ran successful companies and developed valuable products. In the 1860 Census, Pulaski County and Little Rock only contained three boot and shoe shops, one carriage shop, two clothing stores, one iron casting establishment, one machinery and steam engine shop, one marble works, two saddlery and harness shops, and three tin, copper, and sheet-iron ware industries to serve the county and city.[62] The Census deemed only fourteen Little Rock industries significant enough for publication. The

[62] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860, Manufactures by Counties, Arkansas.

Census "selected statistics of manufactures, by counties, is intended to embrace only those industries which are so far considerable in amount as to justify space being given to them in the present publication."[63] By 1880, the US Census increased its publication to forty-eight Little Rock industries, showing the increase in Little Rock's influence in an economic market and building of wealth and class.[64] Before the Civil War, Little Rock contained less prominent position in the country that the US Census did not break down occupation statics to show the influence and size of the middle class. By 1900, Little Rock gained publication of its occupation statistics that display the size and might of the Little Rock middle class. By 1900, Little Rock held 7.6 percent of the state's entire professional service occupations.[65] When looking at careers of many of the city's middle-class Arkansans, Little Rock held around 5 to 15 percent of the state's professional services and careers sector of occupations, including lawyers, dentists, physicians, teachers, bankers, engineers, and brokers.[66] In a survey of the city's black community in 1898, a sizable list of black-owned businesses, which included eight wood and coal yards, ten blacksmiths, twenty-nine barber shops, two hotels, nine restaurants, two jewelry stores, three tailor shops, four newspapers, a drug store, and a mortuary. In that same year, the city's black community gained a variety of professional careers, naming fifty-five educators, thirty-eight ministers, six lawyers, five physicians, and one dentist.[67] Little Rock's black middle class produced individuals who would challenge the racial boundaries of white Democrats to gain political advantages and government offices through elections and appointments.

One such individual that challenged the status quo was Isaac T. Gillam, Sr. Gillam became one of the city's most respected citizens after serving in the Second Arkansas Regiment,

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[63] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States*, 1880, Manufactures by Counties, Arkansas.
[64] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Manufactures by Counties, Arkansas.
[65] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Occupations, Arkansas.
[66] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Occupations by City, Arkansas.
[67] David Blueford Gaines, *Racial Possibilities as Indicated by the Negroes of Arkansas* (Little Rock, AR: Philander Smith College, 1898) 173-184.

which became the 54th U.S. Colored Infantry, during the Civil War. His son, Isaac Gillam, Jr., attended Howard University and Yale, and his oldest daughter, Cora Alice, was one of the earliest graduates of Shorter College. As a successful blacksmith and property owner, Gillam was also able to participate in Little Rock and Arkansas politics. He served as a Little Rock city councilman during the 1870s, was elected as an Arkansas state representative in 1879, and was nominated and elected by Little Rock Democrats as the Pulaski County coroner. Due to his wealth and middle-class status, he was able to gain political opportunities that were not afforded to other areas of the state.[68]

Dr. J. H. Smith of Little Rock was another example of significant respect from the white and African American communities of Little Rock. Dr. Smith moved to Arkansas from Illinois and managed one of the city's most successful dentist practices. With his office on Main Street, Dr. Smith served both white and African American patients.[69] As Gaines, an author that provided a review of African American opportunities in Arkansas, stated, Dr. Smith had a large and lucrative practice that severed a wealthy white class.[70] He had the ability to gain the respect, as well as the patient base, from white citizens of Little Rock. Dr. Smith's prominence provided additional opportunities for Little Rock blacks through his success and respect within the white community. A leader of the city's African American population, Dr. Smith displayed a middle-class and successful image to Little Rock whites that assisted other African Americans in other areas of society, including politics. Due to his significant white patient base, Dr. Smith portrayed an image that influenced the perspectives held by Little Rock whites.

As one of the city's most influential black Reconstruction leaders, Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, used his status and influence to gain meaningful political opportunities and positions. During the late 1800s, he rose the social ladder to become one of Little Rock's most prominent African

[68] Graves, *Town and Country*, 118.
[69] Arkansas, Little Rock, *City Directory*, 1871.
[70] Gaines, *Racial Possibilities*.

American leaders in the economic and political areas of the city. After graduating from Oberlin Ohio Law School in 1870, he moved to Little Rock in 1871, excited "by new possibilities for African Americans in the United States after the Civil War."[71] Upon arrival, he gained instant recognition in politics. In 1873, he was elected the Pulaski County attorney and elected municipal judge of Little Rock. Due to his professionalism and success in those positions, he gained respect and admiration from both communities, including white Democratic antagonists, and gained the name "Judge Gibbs," which was known throughout the city of Little Rock.[72] Throughout his life, he gained political offices and rose to great significance in the city. He was appointed the federal land registrar in Little Rock, secretary of the Republican state central committee from 1887 to 1897, an Arkansas delegate to the Republican national conventions in 1880, 1884, 1892, and 1896, and became the chief lieutenant of Arkansas Republican Governor Powell Clayton.[73] In 1897, Gibbs gained recognition from President Williams McKinley for his political achievements. Reported in the *Arkansas Gazette*, the paper stated that the recognition was "a great compliment to Judge Gibbs and to the colored Republicans of Arkansas" and that "Judge Gibbs, as he is best known, is one of the leading colored men of Arkansas."[74] To sum up his political accomplishments, Judge Gibbs was a political star in not only Little Rock but the entire state of Arkansas.

Black Arkansans also gained significant respect and professional admiration in the state's education systems. Charlotte Stephens, the state's first African American teacher, provided quality education to thousands of Little Rock students and became one of the most respected educators of her time. She served as a Little Rock school teacher for seventy years, from 1869 to 1939. Although she started ill-equipped to deal with the educational struggles of the city's first

[71] Graves, *Town and Country*, 120.
[72] Graves, *Town and Country*, 120.
[73] Graves, *Town and Country*, 121.
[74] "Gibbs Rewarded," *Arkansas Gazette*, October 30, 1897.

African American students, she quickly gained knowledge and expertise through hard work and dedication to her students. Through her successful educational practices, Stephens gained equal respect and admiration from both white and black communities of not only Little Rock but the entire state of Arkansas.[75] Black Arkansans like Charlotte Stephens gained professional level respect that assisted in the formation of a black middle-class society in Little Rock.

Other significant Little Rock blacks rose to middle-class status in the late nineteenth century. In addition to the individuals discussed above, the city was also home to Mosaic Templar leader John E. Bush, one of the city's leading attorneys Scipio A. Jones, school board member James E. Rector, veterinarian Benjamin McCoy, and contractor Asa L. Richmond; all of whom held significant influence in the political world of Little Rock.[76] The urban middle-class African American society of Little Rock facilitated black Arkansans' political opportunities.

As discussed above, "examples of negro social mobility and progress were most pronounced in Little Rock."[77] African Americans of Helena and Pine Bluff did contain an influential middle-class African American community; however, these communities were small and still had to contend with limited opportunities due to the agrarian white society. These cities contained smaller economies and fewer opportunities for wealth building, thus leading to limited political office holding ability. In addition to their more limited economic mobility, those cities only contained a few members of their communities in middle class careers, like occupations in the professional service industries. Due to their smaller middle-class African American populations, other urban centers of Arkansas did not achieve the same level of wealth, influence, and political opportunities when compared to Little Rock, making the city a truly remarkable and

[75] Adolphine Fletcher Terry, *Charlotte Stephens: Little Rock's First Black Teacher,* (Little Rock, AR: Academic Press of Arkansas, 1973) 128.
[76] Arkansas, Little Rock, *City Directory*, 1889.
[77] Graves, *Town and Country*, 121.

unique center of Arkansas. Little Rock becomes an island of prominent black Arkansans with significant political advancements.

III. The "Island" of Local Politics

Starting after the Civil War and up to the early 1900s, local offices were attainable for black Arkansans. In counties with a majority African American population, black voters managed to negotiate and leverage their size to win local political offices and serve their constituents. It is essential to understand that local political office opportunities were not equal in all Arkansas counties with a majority black Arkansan population. While many counties offered black Arkansans positions in political offices, some of these counties were still dominated by the white minority through compromises, as well as economic and political disadvantages for black Arkansans by the county leaders. Urban centers with majority populations fared better for the African American community due to their size and middle-class influence. The areas of Pine Bluff and Helena took many positions in the city and county government throughout the late nineteenth century. However, similar to rural areas of the state, these urban centers were forced to contend with compromises for their limited local political authority. This would result in extensive opportunity loss in the state's political arena.

Little Rock, on the other hand, experienced a very different situation. Many urban black Arkansans held local political offices throughout the nineteenth century. Black Arkansans of urban centers held positions as local sheriffs, police officers, city offices, county positions, and educational boards. Urban centers that contain a majority African American population tended to hold more city and county offices; however, black Little Rock residents enjoyed extensive opportunities for local elections and positions, while only holding a minority population of the city. According to the 1870 Census, at its highest percentage, the black population of the city of Little Rock made up only 42.6 percent of the total.[78] Despite its minority status, Little Rock's

[78] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

black population gained positions in local offices without using a compromise ticket, winning elections based on votes and influence.

As late as the 1890s, Little Rock and Pulaski County black leaders were able to stop significant support for the compromise tickets. While many of the city's Democratic and white Republican leaders supported the use of a compromised ticket, the African American community remained strong and held off the need for a compromised ticket until the early 1900s, after election "reform" had taken place.[79] In an 1890 edition of the *Arkansas Gazette*, a Pulaski County black representative reported that "no compromise ticket can be fairly elected in Pulaski County that has no negro upon it." The representative stated that the black community would not support a compromise ticket and that the Republican Party has been controlled by the consent of the city's black leaders.[80] This episode highlights the power and influence of the city's black community to dictate the political landscape of Little Rock. The city's black political leaders were able to postpone the usage of the compromised ticket, thus making the city one of the last areas of the state to implement such measures.

Without making compromises between political parties, counties would have experienced political showdowns and issues throughout the nineteenth century. Jerome Riley wrote a book on his observation to accurately account the African American situation across the United States in the late 1800s. Riley was an African American resident of Pine Bluff, an author, publisher, successful Arkansas politician, and physician. In his book, *The Philosophy of Negro Suffrage*, Riley discussed the political ramification of failing to appease white Democrats and black Republicans in local elections.[81] Shortly after winning the election for Arkansas Governor, Augustus Garland was called upon to remove a black Arkansan from a local office. Running as an independent, W. H. Furbush won the sheriff position in Lee County. Positioned in central

[79] *Arkansas Democrat*, March 19, 1890.
[80] *Arkansas Democrat*, May 29, 1890.
[81] Jerome R. Riley, *The Philosophy of Negro Suffrage* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1973) 19.

Arkansas on the Mississippi River, the county contained a black Arkansans majority of over two-thirds by 1880.[82] Although running as an independent, Furbush became a strong supporter of Garland and his administration, helping him secure Lee County for his bid for state Governor. After winning the election, a delegation of white Democrats from Lee County confronted the governor and urged him to remove Furbush from office due to political differences. After producing no evidence of issues in morality or capacity, Governor Garland stated, "I can't remove him; he was our staunch supporter, during our while trouble, he had, necessarily, to make some sacrifices and bear reproaches from him own people, I shall sustain him."[83] This situation did not occur in isolation, for many areas across the state experienced these issues in late Reconstruction and into the late 1800s. Due to these political and racial tensions, the governor encouraged white Democrats and black Republicans to share political offices using the "fusion principle."

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Arkansas had used the "fusion principle" in many elections, but it became widespread at the local level. In areas with significant African American populations, white Democratic leaders would actively seek to prevent large numbers of black Arkansans from taking positions in local offices. Rural and urban areas of Arkansas actively used these arrangements to win political offices and prevented the white Democratic party from accusing black Arkansans of political domination.[84] In these arrangements, the leaders of the local African American Republican Party and white Democratic Party would allot local offices for each side to retain. As former Governor Powell Clayton stated in his book, "the plan was to have the Republicans and Democrats hold their Conventions on the same day and each appoint a committee of conference to nominate a ticket which would divide the county offices equally

[82] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.
[83] Riley, *The Philosophy of Negro Suffrage*, 20.
[84] Powell, *The Aftermath of the Civil War*, 309.

between the two parties."[85] However, despite these communities holding majority African American populations, they would only be given lower local office positions. For a time, both parties upheld their agreements honorably for political peace in the counties. Nevertheless, once the state and federal government no longer protected African Americans' political freedoms, white Democrats used the situation to seize complete political control, pushing out all black Arkansan participation.

The cities and counties of Helena and Pine Bluff used these compromised tickets frequently throughout the late nineteenth century. These compromised tickets functioned similarly to the system employed in Pine Bluff in 1878. That agreement allotted the city and county elections of high offices for the white Democrats and the lower offices for black Republicans, despite the black community being in the majority. Once put in place in Pine Bluff, white Democrats retained political offices as county judge, state senator, city mayor, and county assessor. On the other hand, black Arkansas Republicans gained political offices as the county sheriff, circuit clerk, and the state representative seats in the Arkansas Legislature.[86] This system, as will be discussed, connected to the Pine Bluff African American community's ability to hold many seats in the state government only at the lower house level. The purpose of these compromised tickets were to maintain most of the high-level county and city local offices for the white Democrats, while the African American population gained only low-level local positions.[87] Throughout the nineteenth century, many Arkansas counties with African American majorities used the "fusion principle" to maintain political peace in terms of election results. According to Graves, compromised tickets were used, at some time or another, in Chicot, Crittenden, Desha, Jefferson, Lee, Lincoln, Monroe, Phillips, and St. Francis, which all contained majority black

[85] Powell, *The Aftermath of the Civil War*, 310.
[86] Joe Tolbert Segraves, "Arkansas Politics, 1874-1918," (Louisville, KY: Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1973) 115-116.
[87] Graves, *Town and Country*, 54.

Arkansans populations. Although black Arkansans could have dominated the elections of these areas, they entered compromised tickets due to, as Powell states, to avoid the "charge of negro domination and would have furnished them [whites] an excuse for Ku Klux depredations."[88]

Many black Arkansans praised the use of this "fusion principle" as a way for their communities to gain political influence in local elections. Jerome Riley admired Governor Garland's "desirous of aiding in and securing a proper basis in solving the problem of a harmonious and satisfactory."[89] He specially stated that through his support of compromised tickets used in these majority African American counties, black Arkansans gained opportunities and freedoms to gain political office. Mifflin Gibbs, as discussed previously, also commended Garland for supporting black Arkansans and the "fusion principle" in these counties. In his autobiography, when discussing Garland, he focused on the hallmarks of his administration and stated, "His friendship I highly esteemed."[90] In addition to their support of the political system, the "fusion principle" attracted significant notice across the nation, as well as the state, as a successful method of African American political mobility. A reporter from the New York *Herald*, Charles Nordhoff, traveled to Arkansas and discovered the successful development of political relations between white and black Arkansans.[91] The *Arkansas Gazette* frequently supported Arkansas Democrats and Republicans that used the compromised ticket for local and state elections. In an article from 1889, the *Arkansas Gazette* quoted the New York *World*, stating that "this is not a 'white man's government,' any more than it is a blue-eyed man's or a red-haired man's Government. It is a government by and for the people – all the people, without respect to race."[92] Like the *Arkansas Democrat*, many Democratic presses of Arkansas supported the idea of

[88] Powell, *The Aftermath of the Civil War*, 310.
[89] Riley, *The Philosophy of Negro Suffrage*, 20.
[90] Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, *Shadow and Light: An Autobiography, with Reminiscence of the Past and Present Century, with an Introduction by Brooker T. Washington* (Washington, D.C.: Published by Author, 1902) 159.
[91] "Letter of Charles Nordhoff in the New York Herald," *Arkansas Gazette*, April 17, 1875.
[92] "Quote from the New York World," *Arkansas Gazette,* February 28, 1889.

an equal political arena. These papers were extremely influential newspapers in the state and were primarily based in Little Rock. However, despite their admiration for the compromised ticket, it was designed to significantly lessen the influence of black Arkansans in the Arkansas political system. Due to these compromised tickets, black Arkansans of these counties were denied free elections, full political influence, and local authority. White Democrats used these elections to solidify their political dominance in areas African American Republican leaders should have controlled. Although functioning to avoid political fear and social ramifications, the "fusion principle" denied black Arkansans their most fundamental right, free political influence.

Remarkably, however, Little Rock did not participate in this compromised ticket. Unlike Helena and Pine Bluff, with their black majority populations, Little Rock retained many local city and county offices through fair and legal local elections. Little Rock was the only Arkansas city with a prominent African American community that did not use the compromised ticket throughout the late nineteenth century.[93] The African American community of Little Rock was able to gain these local offices due to its unique position in Arkansas as a place of significant political mobility for black Arkansans. With the growth of the middle class, the highly influential city press, and the rising business community, Republicans were able to gain strength with the African American vote. Because Little Rock contained a robust Republican Party due to its extraordinary middle and business classes, black Arkansans in the city were able to use their political influence to win several local elections.

The city also contained a distinctly unique urban culture that naturally fostered political opportunities for black Arkansans. After the Civil War, Little Rock became a small melting pot of different cultures and ethnicities. The city was home to a vibrant Irish population. The Irish of Little Rock arrived before the war in the early 1850s, hoping to find success in the young

[93] Graves, *Town and Country*, 54.

Arkansas city.[94] Although adapting to the dominant community of Little Rock, they were able to retain the leadership of an Arkansas Catholic Church, the Sons of Erin. German settlers also gained a significant population of Little Rock, arriving in the city around the same time as the Irish. By 1900, Little Rock Germans became the largest group of immigrants in the city.[95] Once arriving in the city, German immigrants also became politically active. They took advantage of political opportunities and gained positions on the city council and the city school board. Although commonly sticking to themselves, Little Rock Germans tended to create a peaceful environment for the people of the city.[96] In addition to these two groups, Little Rock contained a variety of smaller groups of immigrants, which included Jewish, Polish Catholic, Bohemians, Slavonians, Italians, Greeks, Syrians, and Chinese communities. Unlike the rest of the state, Little Rock's mixed cultured society created an environment of political cooperation and collaboration. The city's African American community "particularly benefited from this budding cosmopolitanism."[97]

While most of the state experienced a homogeneous community, Little Rock maintained a mixture of cultures and people, promoting a measure of tolerance for difference. Within the city, the people of Little Rock held a broadened perspective that significantly improved black Arkansans' opportunities in the city, especially regarding local politics. Black Arkansans were able to use the diverse Little Rock population to gain political and voting advantages and alliances with other groups. With the city's German community experiencing continued growth and local political authority, black Arkansans used partisan and personal relationships to gain meaningful concessions in local voting elections. For example, Little Rock Republican Mayor A. K. Hartman, a German immigrant, expressed a desire to create a political alliance between the

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[94] John Lucey, "The History of Immigration to Arkansas," *Publication of the Arkansas Historical Association*, III (1908) 217.
[95] James Jonathan Wolfe, "Background of German Immigration," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, xxv (1966), 377.
[96] Wolfe, "Background of German Immigration," 377-378.
[97] Graves, *Town and Country*, 106.

city's German and African American communities.[98] Black Arkansans and Little Rock's heterogeneous community worked together in a partisan relationship to gain local political opportunities, something that would not be found anywhere else in the state. In addition to partisan relationships, black Arkansans would also use personal ties to gain local political opportunities. Isaac T. Gillam, Jr., a teacher and principal in Little Rock, forged a relationship with his neighbors, a German immigrant family. Gilliam, Jr. was educated at Howard and Yale University. Being fluent in German, he was able to converse with his neighbors. After a short while, Gilliam, Jr. and the family became close friends, even exchanging books from each other's private libraries.[99] This episode displays the racial attitudes of Little Rock, which is evidence that the city contained a tolerance for differences. Black Arkansans will benefit from this open urban center, unlike the rest of the state.

Little Rock also contained a politically unique society compared to the rest of Arkansas. From the antebellum years, Arkansas remained a solidly conservative Democratic state. Compared to other southern states, Arkansas maintained a similar political ideology. From the time admitted to the Union to before the Civil War, Arkansas was controlled by Democratic governors and Democratic legislatures, with the exception of one Whig governor in 1847.[100] When looking at voting data before the Civil War, Arkansas faithfully voted for Democratic leaders for the federal government.[101] With the majority of Arkansas containing yeoman farmers and few plantation industries, the people of Arkansas voted for a government that would remain minimal and stay out of their way. However, Little Rock was the exception of the Democratic domination of Arkansas. The people of Little Rock, especially the city's business and merchant class, appreciated the platform of the Whig and Republican Parties. The Republican Whig Parties

[98] Richards, *Story of a Rivertown*, 87-89.
[99] Graves, *Town and County*, 107.
[100] J. H. Atkinson and John Ferguson, *Historic Arkansas* (Little Rock, AR: Arkansas History Commission, 1970) 64-65.
[101] Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, United States Historical Election Returns, 1824-1968, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1999-04-26.

focused on a nationalist agenda that promoted internal improvements and a more involved federal government in terms of higher tariffs and taxes. Internal improvements would connect business and trade markets to allow fast and more effective opportunities for economic growth. Railroads and improved roads opened new markets to explore for increased profits. Little Rock became a political island throughout the nineteenth century, devoted to the Republican Party and its platform. After the Civil War, "ex-Whigs, the dominant political faction in antebellum Little Rock, felt right at home in the party of Lincoln, Grant, and Hayes, a party that endorsed and enacted into law Clay's old American system."[102] The new Republican Party of the late nineteenth century attracted the Little Rock community for future elections and positions, gaining a margin of victory in most of the city's elections.[103]

Black Arkansans significantly benefited from and formed an essential pillar of the Republican influence in the city. Unlike other urban centers of Arkansas, Little Rock stood as a beacon for the Republican Party to win authority in Arkansas. Due to the city's "viable two-party system," Little Rock became the only place in the state for black Arkansans to use political competition to their advantage.[104] Arkansas Republicans naturally defended African American suffrage and actively fought election fraud issues not only within the city but the entire state, which lead to significant support from the African American community. Black leaders would frequently attend Republican speeches and events to provide the support needed to create a competitive election system in Little Rock. In 1870, Governor Powell Clayton gave a speech to over two hundred of the city's black leaders. In the speech, he discussed the values of the Republican Party and stated it would provide political and legal protection to the African American communities of Arkansas.[105] With real competition between the supportive African

[102] Richards, *Story of a Rivertown*, 89.
[103] Richards, *Story of a Rivertown*, 102.
[104] Graves, *Town and County*, 108.
[105] *Arkansas Gazette*, August 6, 1870.

American party and the white control compromise party, Little Rock was the only place in the state for black Arkansans to gain the power to produce a representative voice in local policy decision-making. Pine Bluff and Helena had to contend with compromised ticket elections that stole their political voice in many city and county decisions that would affect their constituents; however, that was not the case in Little Rock.

Due to the city's political environment, Little Rock offered extensive political opportunities for black Arkansans through local elections. Black Arkansans gained positions in the city and county government, educational boards, and business associations throughout the nineteenth century. In addition to their ability to avoid the compromised ticket for local elections, it is extraordinary that black Arkansans of Little Rock were able to do this with their minority status in the city. Throughout the nineteenth century, the city's African American community held no more than 40 percent of the population, yet still able to gain meaningful local political offices.[106] Little Rock was the only area of Arkansas with a significant African American community to win local elections without the "fusion principle," all while holding a minority position in the city and the county. Little Rock was a political island in Arkansas, supporting the business and political platform of the Republican Party. The middle class, the business community, Republican influence, and the heterogenous society of Little Rock all promoted opportunities for black Arkansans to gain significant local offices in the city and county.

Unlike Helena and Pine Bluff, with their black majority populations, Little Rock retained many local city offices through fair and legal local elections. Looking at only one political term of Little Rock in 1871, it is evident that black Arkansans gained political possibility through local elections. According to the 1871 city directory, Little Rock blacks retained high-level offices with the city's white officeholders. With other office holders, Winfield Scott was the city prison

[106] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

keeper, Calvin Sanders was a city alderman for the second ward, and Asa Richmond was a city alderman for the third ward.[107] Unlike Helena and Pine Bluff, who used the compromised ticket to retain local offices in 1870, these three city officials won their elections or were appointed without backlash from the Little Rock white community.[108] Throughout the late nineteenth century, Little Rock experienced similar local elections, where the city's black population won local positions without using the compromised ticket to win.

Little Rock blacks also held significant positions on the city council or as city aldermen. These political offices tended to be the local offices black Arkansans widely filled using elections. Throughout the late 1800s, the minority African American community held a force on the Little Rock City Council. Representing their interest on the Little Rock City Council, black Arkansans retained at least one position every term starting in 1869 to the 1880s, despite having a smaller population. Many of the city's most prominent African American leaders served on the city council during the late 1800s, including Isaac Gillam, Sr. Serving in the early 1870s, Gillam became one of the city's most prominent African American councilman and city leaders. The longest-serving city councilperson was Green Thompson, who owned a grocery store in the city.[109] He was elected in 1877 and served until his defeat in 1893.[110] Other Little Rock blacks that held a position on the city council include Asa Richmond, Calvin Sanders, and Thomas Johnson.[111] On the other hand, many city council terms of Helena and Pine Bluff contained one city council member, even though they held a large percentage of the population. Unlike Little Rock, the African American leaders of Helena and Pine Bluff only had the ability to focus on economic prosperity and neglected the political office holding of local elections. At least during Reconstruction and in the immediate years following the Reconstruction, the Little Rock City

[107] Arkansas, Little Rock, *City Directory*, 1871.
[108] Graves, *Town and Country*.
[109] Arkansas, Little Rock, "Little Rock City Minute books," 1877-1893.
[110] *Arkansas Democrat*, March 5, 1972.
[111] Graves, *Town and Country*, 121.

Council tended to reflect the population of the city, while Pine Bluff and Helena's City Councils displayed the dominance of the minority white population.[112]

In addition to holding positions on the Little Rock City Council, many of the city's black community served in the Pulaski County government. Black Arkansans would win elections and appointments as justices of the peace, county judges, legal professionals, and other county official positions. One such individual to gain significant influence in the county government is Thomas P. Johnson. Johnson received legal training from his enslaver prior to gaining his freedom, thus allowing him to pass the bar examination and gaining him the ability to practice law in Arkansas. After the Civil War, Johnson served as a Pulaski County Justice of the Peace for twelve years.[113] According to the 1870 census records, he reported significant wealth, which he used to gain these political and legal positions.[114] As Justice of the Peace and a Little Rock lawyer, he was well respected among the white and black communities of Little Rock as a professional. He would use this professional administration to gain advantages and privileges in the local city and county governments.

In 1873, the *Arkansas Gazette* reported on a situation between Johnson and Henry Beuse, a local bartender. Johnson, accompanied by two white citizens of Little Rock, was denied service based on his skin color. Johnson reported the issue to Squire McWhorter, the current black Justice of the Peace, and Beuse was arrested.[115] This episode displays two realities in Little Rock during the 1870s. First, the respect and power Johnson held as the former Justice of Peace and a current legal professional. But also, and perhaps the most important, the level of comfort the black community held in the local government. The black community of Little Rock had confidence in

[112] Arkansas, Little Rock, *City Directory*, 1881.
[113] Judith Kilpatrick, "Thomas P. Johnson," Thomas P. Johnson - Arkansas Black Lawyers (University of Arkansas), accessed March 30, 2023, https://arkansasblacklawyers.uark.edu/lawyers/tpjohnson.html.
[114] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Nineth Census of the United States*, 1870, Occupations, Little Rock, Arkansas.
[115] *Arkansas Gazette*, May 24, 1873.

their ability to bring issues to local courts and to gain favor because of the community's involvement in local politics. Nowhere else in the state allowed such legal power, and this legal power is a direct result of the political office holding opportunities of Little Rock. Without the black community's involvement in the local governments, the black community of Little Rock would not have maintained the comfort and confidence in terms of political and legal issues. Throughout the late nineteenth century, Little Rock was filled with instances that required black Arkansans to bring to the public view multiple issues. In just one issue of the *Arkansas Gazette*, they informed the public of several legal and political situations of the city's white and black community, displaying the prevalence of these situations in Little Rock.[116]

It is equally important to note that although Little Rock contained Republican influence, white Democrats tended to control the city administrations in the late nineteenth century. When looking at the mayors of Little Rock in the late nineteenth century, the majority that served were white Democrats.[117] Democrats also controlled many of the city's council terms during the same time. However, it is interesting that despite the extensive control of white Democrats in Little Rock's local elections, black Arkansans still were able to gain a powerful and influential voice in the city government. Once the Democrats took over the Little Rock City Council, they used their power to increase the city's ward districts from four to six to reduce the representation of black Arkansans on the council. The city council began limiting the number of wards with African American support and increasing the white majority's control over the city.[118] However, Little Rock party lines were subject to changes and influences. As stated before, "Little Rock maintained something approaching a viable two-party system," that allowed black Arkansans to gain political office positions with the controlling party.[119] In order to gain broader support in the

[116] *Arkansas Gazette*, December 6, 1874.
[117] "Mayors of Little Rock," Mayors of Little Rock | City of Little Rock, accessed January 27, 2023, https://www.littlerock.gov/city-administration/cityclerksoffice/mayors-of-little-rock/.
[118] Richards, *Story of a Rivertown*, 87.
[119] Graves, *Town and Country*, 108.

city, Democratic administrations continued to allow black Arkansans to hold positions in the city government. On the contrary, other urban centers of Arkansas did not experience a similar situation. Once white Democrats from these areas dominated local elections, they took complete control over local authority. Even before this period, Democrats would use the "fusion principle" to limit their influence as much as possible. On the other hand, Little Rock was still able to gain local election appointments and opportunities, even with Democratic control of the city's local government.

In addition to holding regular elections, Little Rock blacks even received appointments from white Democratic leaders of Little Rock and Pulaski County. The city appointed numerous black Arkansans to the city's law enforcement and fire departments. In 1871, Little Rock contained two police officers, three firefighters, a deputy constable, a city marshal, and a city jail guard.[120] By 1875, the city of Little Rock employed four to six African American police officers, appointed by city mayor John Gould Fletcher from 1875 to 1881. It is further significant that mayor Fletcher was not influenced by direct lobbying efforts from the city's black population and without the use of the "fusion principle."[121] Black Arkansans remained in the city's law enforcement agencies until the early 1900s, even throughout the period of white Democratic takeover of the city and the state.[122] The ability of Little Rock's black community to gain positions in law enforcement and city fire department shows the influence and opportunity afforded to the city's black populations. However, Helena and Pine Bluff did not retain many law enforcement positions. Although they could gain limited opportunities in sheriff's offices through a compromised ticket, the local offices tended not to reflect the county's population. Like the city councils of these urban centers, despite holding majority populations, they gained a limited number of low-level offices in these positions. On the other hand, Little Rock's fire departments

[120] Arkansas, Little Rock, *City Directory*, 1871.
[121] Graves, *Town and Country*.
[122] Arkansas, Little Rock, *City Directory*, 1901.

and law enforcement agencies tended to hold larger numbers of black Arkansans and better reflect the city's demographics.

The city's black community also secured appointments for the local government for positions as judges and legal professionals. Mifflin Gibbs, one of the most respected and admired black Arkansans in the late nineteenth century, gained a police court judge appointment. Serving as the current county attorney, Gibbs reported to the *Arkansas Gazette* that "he wants to be police judge."[123] It is interesting to note that Gibbs, a black Arkansan, already held a significant political and legal position in the local county government. However, like many other Little Rock black community leaders, Gibbs felt confident and comfortable exploring political opportunities without an insurmountable level of local criticism. Not only did Gibbs have the desire to win the judge positions, but he actually won the appointment from the Little Rock Mayor's Office. Little Rock Republican Mayor Frederick Kramer stated in 1875 that Gibbs "makes a faithful and efficient officer," displaying the respect he earned in the position.[124] It is fascinating that a black Arkansan could achieve such a well-respected and desirable position as a police court judge in the 1870s; however, Little Rock was unique. Unlike other areas of the state, individuals of the city's black community, like Mifflin Gibbs, could win positions in local government and muster the respect that accompanies the position.

Regular local elections with the city and county government became essential to Little Rock's African American community's influence. This community had the ability to use the city's party competition, middle-class perspectives, and business interests to promote political office holding opportunities to black Arkansans. It is important to note that Little Rock actively held positions in the city and county government in significant numbers without using a compromised ticket, all while maintaining a minority throughout the late nineteenth century.

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[123] *Arkansas Gazette*, October 10, 1873.
[124] *Arkansas Gazette*, February 4, 1875.

Other urban centers of Arkansas, like Pine Bluff and Helena, held majority populations yet still had to contend with the "fusion principle" to avoid large protests from their city and county's white rural agrarian community. Little Rock purely became an island in the middle of Arkansas, a place of political office holding for all people, including black Arkansans.

In addition to regular city and county government elections, political offices involving education institutions became a widely used platform for black Arkansans of Little Rock. Throughout the late nineteenth century, the city's black community were commonly found on school boards, city educational advisory boards, and other political institutions that influenced education in the city. These political opportunities provided new abilities to the Little Rock African American community, offered new mobility methods, and created a more vigorous educated middle-class population. Education provided both political and social opportunities for Little Rock black Arkansans that did not exist in other areas of the state.

It is essential to note that much of Little Rock's educational opportunities were because of the development of educational programs and institutions in the city that other areas of Arkansas did not experience. The majority of Arkansas school districts contained a few staff members, little financial support, and limited opportunities. A report published by the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the state of Arkansas provides a clear picture of the status of the state's school districts. Rural school districts usually operated for only a three-month school year, while Little Rock contained a full nine-month school term.[125] In 1892, the average state expenditure per enrolled student was $4.80, while Little Rock's expenditure was $11.32.[126] Little Rock also employed more teachers, both white and black, than any other school district in the state.[127] High schools across the state only taught students basic level courses in the "three

[125] Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Arkansas, 1891-1892*, 63.
[126] Office of Superintendent, *Biennial Report, 1891-1892*, 67.
[127] Office of Superintendent, *Biennial Report, 1891-1892*, 68.

R's," reading, writing, and arithmetic. Little Rock high schools, on the other hand, opened entire high school departments that provided a variety of educational topics for both white and African American students by the end of Arkansas Reconstruction.[128] Little Rock high school departments offered courses in foreign language, music, art, history, natural sciences, advanced mathematics, English, and literature. Like its political opportunity difference, Little Rock was an island of educational opportunities and offered all people of the state the ability to gain knowledge and social mobility. Due to its educational situation, Little Rock naturally offered black Arkansans political influence and authority over the city's school systems because they were more developed and prosperous. However, this fact does not decrease the city's ability to gain political positions in educational institutions, it further solidifies how different Little Rock was from the rest of the state.

When exploring school attendance of black Arkansans, it is evident the value the African American community of Little Rock held for education. Black Arkansans attended schools at equal, even sometimes higher, rates than their white counterparts. According to the 1900 Census, of Little Rock's population under 20 years of age, the percentage of black Arkansans that attended school was 38.8, while the city's white population percentage was 33 percent.[129] Due to the city's ability to educate its people, Little Rock school districts in the nineteenth century offered opportunities to both communities of the city, and each group equally took those opportunities. However, other areas of the state did not experience a similar situation. Coupled with the lack of educational development, white agrarian control of school systems, and limited school funding, school districts across the state did not have significant attendance from black Arkansans.

[128] Hobby Selma Ann Plowman, *The Little Rock Public Schools during Reconstruction, 1865-1874* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas, 1967) 85-93.
[129] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.

Table 7. Little Rock Population and School Attendance of People under 20 years by Race, 1900

	White	Black
Total Population	23,590	14,694
Population under 20	8,913	5,651
Percentage under 20	37.8%	38.5%
School Attendance	8,913	5,651
Percentage in School	33%	38.8%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, School Attendance, Arkansas.

Due to the city's educational opportunities, Little Rock also employed more white and African American teachers than other areas of the state. According to the report by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Little Rock employed a total of 42 white teachers and 20 African American teachers, which is twice as many African American teachers than any other school district, even those with African American majority populations, in the state at this time.[130] The report also shows that Little Rock school districts on average spend more money on education with higher teacher salaries than anywhere else in the state.[131] The reason for such a high number of African American teachers in Little Rock schools with high salaries is due to influence and authority of black Arkansans on the Little Rock school boards. With black Arkansans on the city's school boards, these boards were able to accurately represent their

[130] Office of Superintendent, *Biennial Report, 1891-1892*, 68.
[131] Office of Superintendent, *Biennial Report, 1891-1892*, 84-86.

constituents, unlike other areas of Arkansas that had to contend with white agrarian domination that did not allow equal political influence and opportunity for black Arkansans.

Black women of Little Rock remained the state's education employment leaders. Women of Little Rock's black public education system held more jobs as teachers in the late nineteenth century than black men. Women of the city's black community earned the ability to act as educators for one of the state's most developed education systems. Charlotte Stephens, Arkansas's first black educator, started teaching in the city after the Civil War. Although underfunded and ill-equipped, Stephens learned and developed as an educator, quickly becoming the most prominent black educator in the state. She is reported and cited multiple times in Little Rock newspapers, like the *Arkansas Democrat*, as a significant figure in black education for not only the city but also the state.[132] She was well-respected by Little Rock's white and black community as an educator with "a record for continuous service in the school room that can not be duplicated in her race, and only in rare instances in any race."[133] Despite the numerous opportunities education provided black women, black Arkansas women did not hold political offices. Political offices were dominated and controlled by men in the late nineteenth century. For the purpose of this research, the focus is on the formal political power of office holding. However, black women of Little Rock still found opportunities to use their influence to challenge the political norm of Arkansas, thus creating a unique place for all African Americans.

With Little Rock's educational opportunities, the city's black population had the ability to take many positions on the Little Rock school boards and organizations. One of the most prominent educational boards, the Board of Visitors, contained African American representatives. The Board of Visitors was tasked to make annual reports of the Little Rock public school system and propose adjustments to both white and black education systems.[134] According to the Little

[132] *Arkansas Democrat*, August 28, 1905.
[133] *Arkansas Democrat*, May 1, 1909.
[134] Graves, *Town and Country*, 109.

Rock School District archives, the city elected at least one black Arkansans representative to serve the African American community on the Board of Visitors in 1869 to 1886.[135] Among them includes James E. Rector, who also served as the United States Superintendent of Mints for fourteen years.[136] Serving on the board, Rector used his influence and power to shape the urban education systems of Arkansas, showing their tremendous opportunities and ability in the city's local political world.

The city also contained the state's most prominent African American higher education institutions. Black Arkansans had the opportunity to attend one of the three African American colleges in the Arkansas capital. Originally named Walden Seminary, Philander Smith College was renamed after a resident of Oak Park, Illinois, the widow of Philander Smith, provided the college a $10,500 donation for the construction of the first building in 1883.[137] In addition to financial assistance through various funds, it is extraordinary that Philander Smith College gained a significant amount of funding from local whites of Little Rock. Due to the support from the white community of Little Rock, it is evident the ability of the city's black population to solicit support and funding from the white community for a college that would not educate their children. By 1910, the college educated over seven thousand African Americans from not only the city but also the state and nation.[138]

Religious denominations organized and formed the other two Little Rock African American colleges. The city's African American Baptists began the Arkansas Baptist College in 1884 and the black Arkansans of the African Methodist Episcopal Church founded Bethel University in 1886, which was renamed Shorter University in 1892.[139] Shorter University moved

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[135] "Little Rock School District School Board Members 1869-1886," *Little Rock School District Archives*, Little Rock, Arkansas.
[136] Graves, *Town and Country*, 111.
[137] De Lois Gibson, "A Historical Study of Philander Smith College, 1877 to 1969." (Fayetteville, ARL EdD thesis, University of Arkansas, 1972) 17-79.
[138] Gibson, "A Historical Study of Philander Smith College," 17-79.
[139] Graves, *Town and County*, 111.

to Arkadelphia briefly in 1891, then relocated back to Little Rock in 1897.[140] All of these African American colleges provided standard liberal-arts curriculum and a few vocational courses. These higher learning institutions provided black Arkansans of Little Rock with decisive advantages in wealth, employment, social mobility, and political opportunities.

The African American colleges of Little Rock provided black Arkansans with local political opportunities through access and employment. In the late nineteenth century, the city's education system became a source of political office holding positions and authority for black Arkansans. Once the city's African American community gained positions in Little Rock's education institutions, black Arkansans gained knowledge that provided advantages for political office and employment that proved to hold influence over political matters in the city and state. Shorter University and Arkansas Baptist College always employed African American administrators, and Philander Smith College received its first African American president, James M. Cox, in 1897.[141] These higher education institutions also employed a number of black Arkansans in the schools as teachers and staff members. Together, school administrators and staff members held considerable political authority with school boards and the Little Rock school superintendents. J. R. Rightsell, Little Rock's school superintendent for most of the nineteenth century, was known for his sincere desire to improve African American students' education quality. Both Rightsell and Board of Education president Frederick Kraemer promote the need for increased funding to the city's African American schools in their annual reports.[142] Black Arkansans of Little Rock used education to gain political influence, hold office positions, and receive knowledge for social betterment and political opportunities.

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[140] Graves, *Town and County*, 111.
[141] Ellis Greenlee Mosley, "The History of Higher Education for Negroes in Arkansas," (Austin, TX: MA Thesis, University of Texas, 1944) 48-50.
[142] Arkansas, Little Rock, *Annual Report of the Public Schools of Little Rock*, 1880, 1896.

Local offices provided black Arkansans of Little Rock with opportunities to influence their communities. Despite a white majority, the city's African American population still gained meaningful advantages in local office positions in the city and county government, law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and educational boards. These opportunities proved valuable to the African American community in shaping the city in their interest. On the other hand, other urban black Arkansans did not gain equal opportunities at the local level. The only local-level offices gained by black Arkansans from other urban centers were due to the "fusion principle," which provided white minorities methods to retain the majority power in their counties. With local political opportunities, Little Rock blacks would prove to extend their political island to all levels of government, including the state government.

IV. Moving Beyond the City

In addition to their impressive grasp of local offices, Little Rock blacks took advantage of opportunities to seize state-level posts and influence. The city's African American population took elected positions in the state government, held cabinet-level and advisory-level posts under the governor, and represented the state's African American communities in both the 1868 and 1874 Arkansas Constitutional Conventions. As mentioned above, although Helena and Pine Bluff boasted high numbers of delegates in the Arkansas House of Representatives, they achieved this via the "fusion principle." Little Rock's black residents, on the other hand, without the use of compromise tickets, still won many state government elections, gained high advisory positions in the governor's office, and seated delegates to conventions and conferences. One reason for the lack of black Arkansans in many state positions was the lack of access to the state capital, but also due to the lack of equal political opportunities. Other urban black Arkansans did not receive the same benefits that Little Rock blacks gained in the state government. Little Rock was the premiere city for black Arkansans seeking political opportunities in government offices. Using its unique position, the city's African American leaders gained significant state government privileges that would benefit Little Rock and the entire state.

Before the Civil War, African American leaders across the North assembled to discuss voting, equal protection under the law, education, and economic opportunities. Throughout the northern states, these leaders of the "Conventions of Colored Citizens" were made up of leaders of significant political, economic, and social influence within both the African American and white communities, including "activists who led churches and newspapers, those who were both nameless and well known, those whose travels took them to Canada, the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe, and those who only became active well after the Civil War."[143] Significantly, these

[143] Judith Giesberg, "The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century," *Civil War History* 69, no. 1 (2023) 108-110.

conventions were called, led, and intended to benefit the nation's African American community. These conventions became common in northern states, becoming a movement in a pre-Civil War nation.

Once these conventions gained momentum during the Civil War, the first National Convention of Colored Men was called and held in Syracuse, New York, in October 1864. Like the state conventions, the National Convention was called to form a commitment to gain political freedoms, economic opportunities, and educational access in post-Civil War America. The convention's leaders represented an intellectual and moral power not only in the African American community but also in the white community. The leaders of the convention included a plethora of the nation's high profile African Americans, like Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Henry Highland Garnet, and John Mercer Langston, to name only a tiny fraction of the leaders and delegates of the National Convention of Colored Men. The convention forged a national alliance of African Americans to push for education, politics, and economic prosperity throughout the United States.[144]

In the post-Civil War South, southern states began to hold their own conventions to discuss the same issues in their states. The African American community of Arkansas held a three-day "Convention of Colored Citizens" in Little Rock, starting on November 30th, 1865.[145] The purpose of this convention was to provide a unified commitment to fight for the state's African American community and to address the "duties and rights of full citizenship known to white political and economic leaders."[146] The convention discussed issues that might face black Arkansans in a post-war society. As the chairman, J. T. White, stated in his first address to the

[144] Giesberg, "The Colored Conventions Movement," 108-110.
[145] *Proceedings of the Convention of Colored Citizens of the State of Arkansas: Held in Little Rock* (Helena, AR: Clarion Office Print, 1866) 1.
[146] "Little Rock Convention of Colored Citizens (1865)," accessed March 31, 2023, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/little-rock-convention-of-colored-citizens-8747/.

convention, “we had met for the purpose of conferring with each other, as to our best interest and future prosperity.”[147]

Although this convention was entirely open to all male black Arkansans, some areas lacked the ability and opportunity to attend the convention; however, Little Rock took full advantage of the convention. To fully understand the opportunities of black Arkansans in Little Rock, it is essential to note the make-up of the convention and the positions held by the delegates. Of the delegates who attended the convention, the state’s most prominent urban center of Little Rock contained the largest representation base, making up seven of the fourteen total representatives. Phillips, Chicot, Dallas, and Sebastian County shared the other seven delegates. In addition to providing a higher number of delegates, it is also significant to note that Little Rock and Pulaski County held a minority of the population, only holding 42.7 percent of the total county in 1870.[148] In contrast, the delegates that held other significant positions in the convention represented countries with black majorities. Unlike Little Rock, the other two counties with minority African American communities maintained an observational position during the convention, declining opportunities to take leadership or speaking roles. Throughout the convention, the delegates from Little Rock undertook significant leadership roles in the convention and steered committees, displaying the ability of the city to gain political opportunities.

[147] *Proceedings of the Convention of Colored Citizens*, 1.
[148] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

Table 8. African American Population of Represented Counties in 1870

County	Total Population	Black Population	Black Percentage	Number of Delegates	Persons to Delegate
Pulaski	32,066	13,708	42.7%	7	1,958
Phillips	15,372	10,501	68.3%	3	3,500
Chicot	7,214	5,393	74.8%	1	5,393
Dallas	5,707	1,751	30.7%	2	875
Sebastian	12,940	1,354	10.5%	1	1,354

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

Proceedings of the Convention of Colored Citizens of the State of Arkansas: Held in Little Rock. Helena, AR: Clarion Office Print, 1866.

During the first Arkansas Constitutional Convention of 1868, urban African Americans exercised significant political influence and power within the state to gain meaningful concessions from their democratic opponents and advantages for the state's black communities. Eight of the delegates were African American: William H. Grey of Phillips County, Monroe Hawkins of Lafayette County, Thomas P. Johnson of Pulaski County, James W. Mason of Chicot County, William Murphy of Jefferson County, Henry Rector of Pulaski County, Richard Samuels of Hempstead County, and James T. White of Phillips County.[149] Although the combined populations of Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and Helena only made up 28.1 percent of the total African American population of the state, these urban centers had the ability to send five of the eight delegates to the Convention.[150] Two of the black delegates came from the prominent Arkansas

[149] Arkansas State Constitution, Signatures Page.
[150] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

city of Little Rock: Thomas P. Johnson and Henry Rector. Johnson and Rector were two of the four Constitutional Convention representatives for Pulaski County in 1868.[151]

Born in 1813, Thomas P. Johnson was a native of North Carolina. Before the Civil War, Johnson was transported to Little Rock in 1860 as an enslaved person.[152] He served in the 54th U.S. Colored Infantry in Arkansas during the Civil War, later becoming a minister and Little Rock's veteran lawyer. Married to a Tennessee native, Johnson had three children, all born in Arkansas. He was one of the four delegates representing Pulaski County in the constitutional convention. Johnson served an active role with William H. Grey of Phillips County to gain constitutional concessions for his constituency, like stopping resolutions that would deny black Arkansans the ability to gain voting and political rights. Like most of the other African American delegates of the convention, Johnson voted with Grey on almost every resolution.[153]

Although he played a minor role in the constitutional convention, Henry Rector was the second black delegate representing Pulaski County and Little Rock. Rector, an Arkansas native, was born in 1846. Like Johnson, he had been enslaved, later moving to Little Rock after the war. A planter and farmer, he married a woman from South Carolina, but they had no children. Rector played a relatively subtle role in the constitutional convention, speaking only three times. However, he did follow the lead of Grey and Johnson on almost all resolutions presented during the convention.[154]

The record of the convention's resolutions displays the influence of the black delegates. For example, when Jesse N. Cypert, one of the seventeen southern white Conservatives that attended the convention, proposed a resolution to adopt the previous Arkansas Constitution of 1864 and end the convention. The eight black delegates jumped into action. Cypert claimed the

[151] Hilaire, "The Negro Delegates," 38-69.
[152] Kilpatrick, "Johnson," accessed March 30, 2023.
[153] Hilaire, "The Negro Delegates," 44.
[154] Hilaire, "The Negro Delegates," 45.

1864 document had been created by loyal representatives of Arkansas and was approved by President Abraham Lincoln. However, he neglected to note the document's failure to enfranchise Arkansas's African Americans. William Grey spoke for his colleagues representing those "whose rights are not secured by the Ordinance offered by the gentleman [Cypert]."[155] Grey and Johnson led the Republican opposition to Cypert's resolution. The African American delegates of the convention voted against the resolution and influenced the voting of other representatives. After three days of fighting, the resolution was put to a vote and rejected by a vote of fifty-three to ten.[156]

This episode of the convention was only one of the many events that displayed the political influence of the black delegation. Their votes demonstrate their desire for the new state constitution to secure the enfranchisement of black Arkansans. The African American delegates, especially William Grey, James White, James Mason, and Thomas Johnson gave speeches, lobbied other members, played active roles on committees, and provided a strong front at the convention, only having three other votes throughout the convention. According to Joseph Hilaire, the African American delegation of the convention proved "successful in their efforts to defend the newly gained political rights of their black Arkansas constituents."[157]

Although the eight delegates showed many similarities, it is essential to note the differences between the Little Rock delegates and the other representatives. The first area of difference is in the constituents they represent. With the exception of Hempstead County, Little Rock and Pulaski County was the only minority African American population who sent a delegation of black Arkansans to the convention.[158] Pulaski County had the smallest percentage

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[155] Arkansas Constitution Convention, *Debates and Proceedings of the Convention: Which Assembled at Little Rock January 7th, 1868, Under the Provision of the Act of Congress of March 2d, 1867, and the Acts If March 23d and July 19th, 1867, Supplementary Thereto, to Form a Constitution for the State of Arkansas* (London, England: Forgotten Books, 2018) 91.
[156] Convention, *Debates and Proceedings of the Convention*, 91.
[157] Hilaire, "The Negro Delegates," 65.
[158] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

of black Arkansan population compared to the other counties represented, with the city of Little Rock containing a smaller percentage than the county. Even though Little Rock contained only 38.5 percent of Pulaski County's black population, both African American delegates were elected from the city.[159] Three counties with African American majority populations did not even send African American delegates to the convention to represent the county.[160] Except for Hempstead County, no Arkansas county with a minority African American population sent a delegation of black Arkansans to the convention. Yet, despite their minority position in the city, Little Rock's black community still had the opportunity to send these delegates to the convention, thus displaying their unique position as a place of significant political opportunities for black Arkansans.

[159] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.
[160] Graves, *Town and Country*.

Table 9. Black Population of Counties Represented, 1870 Census

County	Black Population	Total Population	Black Percentage of Total Population	Delegates in 1868 Constitutional Convention
Pulaski	13,708	32,066	42.7%	2
Phillips	10,501	15,372	68.3%	2
Lafayette	5,158	9,139	56.4%	1
Jefferson	10,167	15,733	64.6%	1
Hempstead	6,329	13,768	46%	1
Chicot	5,393	7,214	74.5%	1

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States*, 1870, Population, Arkansas.

Arkansas Constitution Convention. *Debates and Proceedings of the Convention: Which Assembled at Little Rock January 7th, 1868, Under the Provision of the Act of Congress of March 2d, 1867, and the Acts If March 23d and July 19th, 1867, Supplementary Thereto, to Form a Constitution for the State of Arkansas*. London, England: Forgotten Books, 2018.

As Little Rock's delegates, Johnson and Rector also held a unique position among the eight African American representatives of the convention. Interestingly, both Johnson and Rector left the realm of state politics and became Justices of the Peace in Little Rock. Unlike Johnson and Rector, the other African American delegates won elections in state and high-level local offices. The reason for this simple difference is the fact of need. Unlike the other counties of Arkansas, African American political representation from Little Rock in state government was already significant.[161] Little Rock already provided opportunities for political positions. Due to this fact, other black Arkansans took advantage of Little Rock's political opportunities, like Judge Gibbs and Isaac Gilliam. However, other areas of Arkansas, like Pine Bluff and Helena, did not

[161] Graves, *Town and Country*, 14-27.

provide those opportunities. For example, every African American delegate from other Arkansas counties of the convention were either a minister or a farmer. That is to say, less politically connected. On the other hand, the two Little Rock delegates served as Justices of the Peace, and Johnson also served as a lawyer. Based on these facts, Little Rock already provided rare political opportunities than the remainder of the state.

After the convention, black Arkansans gained many opportunities in politics until the Brook-Baxter War transformed the political landscape. After Arkansas Governor Powell Clayton resigned from office to accept an appointment to the United States Senate, contention began between gubernatorial hopefuls Elisha Baxter and Joseph Brooks, both Republicans. The conflict became violent and changed the Arkansas political platform of the Republican party, allowing the Democratic Party to retake certain areas of politics. When the conflict resolved to secure the claim of Elisha Baxter, the candidate for universal suffrage, as Arkansas Governor, the supporters of Brooks receded, leaving ex-Confederate and southern Democrats to take important positions in the Arkansas State Government. A new constitutional convention was called, leading to the creation of the Arkansas Constitution of 1874 and the reinstatement of white conservative power, paving the way for the disfranchisement of many black Arkansans with the election "reforms" that whites would initiate in the 1890s. However, it is essential to note that the ability of Little Rock blacks to hold political office persisted for some time. When looking at state and local offices, the city's black community held onto a number of political offices. Unlike Pine Bluff and Helena, who experienced the effects of the political change almost immediately, Little Rock's political activities remained vital for black Arkansans.[162]

The black delegation of the Arkansas Constitutional Convention of 1874 experienced a very different situation compared to the Convention of 1868. Towards the end of Reconstruction,

[162] Graves, *Town and Country*, 41-50.

the white agrarian population of the state began to dominate state politics. As a result, in 1874, Republicans no longer controlled the convention and could no longer use their influence to lobby their interest and the desires of black Arkansans. As Walter Nunn described them, the "delegates elected to the convention were on the whole a homogeneous group."[163] Unlike 1868, this convention was filled with former Confederate, Democrat, white farmers or lawyers with significant connections to the white rural interest and committed to African American disfranchisement. According to the *Arkansas Gazette*, the convention was made up of thirty-seven farmers, thirty-two lawyers, eight doctors, two ministers, one merchant, one trader, and ten delegates unaccounted.[164] However, once again, black Arkansans of Little Rock managed to gain some representation in the Arkansas Constitutional Convention of 1874.

Black Arkansans made up eight of the convention's delegates (with one delegate from Crittenden, two from Jefferson, two from Phillips, two from Pulaski, and one from Randolph).[165] Like the convention of 1868, it is noteworthy that Little Rock (on behalf of Pulaski County), with its minority African American population, sent the same number of delegates to the convention as the areas with super majority black populations. Little Rock also sent the same representatives as the city in 1868. The city's ability to hold representation, with a minority population in the city and county and in the aftermath of the Brook-Baxter War, in the constitutional conventions is evidence of the sustained influence held by the African American community of Little Rock.

When Arkansas Governor Elisha Baxter called for the constitutional convention to be held in Little Rock, he reported the number of delegates each county would receive. Pulaski County received the greatest number of delegates, holding four delegate positions.[166] It is interesting that Pulaski County, holding 42.7 percent of the population, won half of the positions

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[163] Walter Nunn, "The Constitutional Convention of 1874," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1968) 186.
[164] *Arkansas Gazette*, August 4, 1874.
[165] Nunn, "The Constitutional Convention of 1874," 188.
[166] *Arkansas Gazette,* June 2, 1874.

in the convention, resulting in the city's black population representing half of the county at the convention. Interestingly, Pulaski County was one of the only counties to provide a delegation that matched the demographics of the population. With the black and white population close to a 50-50 split in the 1870s, the convention delegation closely resembled the population they represented. However, other counties of Arkansas did not display this same picture. For example, Chicot County was allowed to send one representative to the convention.[167] However, Chicot County sent a white delegate to the convention, despite the fact the black community held a majority in the county.[168] Little Rock and Pulaski County were one of the only delegations that represented the demographics of their constituents.

Table 10. Black Arkansans Population of Counties Represented, 1880

County	Total Population	Black Population	Black Percentage	Number of Delegates
Jefferson	15,733	10,167	64.6%	2
Phillips	15,372	10,501	68.3%	2
Pulaski	32,066	13,708	42.7%	2
Crittenden	9,415	7,516	79.8%	1
Randolph	11,742	627	5.3%	1

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States*, 1870, Population, Arkansas.

Arkansas State Constitution. Signatures Page.

However, the Arkansas Constitutional Convention of 1874 faced a larger threat that significantly reduced their ability to represent their constituents: the domination of white rural delegates. The white Democrats of Arkansas dominated the Convention of 1874, thus leaving

[167] *Arkansas Gazette*, June 2, 1874.
[168] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

black Arkansans of the convention to contend with changes unfavorable to their interests. As the *Gazette* stated in the aftermath of the convention, "neither having any particular points worthy of mention" and failed to gain a public ability to gain concessions.[169] The leader of the African American delegation, James T. White of Phillips County, played the most prominent role, but still lacked the ability to gain meaningful compromises for the state's African American population. One of the black delegates was not a determined Republican. Due to his decision to not ally with the Republican Party, he gained representation in a county with a minority African American population. This would further harm the unified ability of the black delegation. While the other members were Clayton Republicans, the black delegate from Randolph was undetermined and often voted more with the white Democratic majority.[170] These new factors complicated the ability of black Arkansans to gain meaningful concessions from conservatives in the Arkansas Constitutional Convention of 1874.

Many counties with significant African American populations did not send black representatives to the convention, some of whom had been represented in the Convention of 1868. Chicot, Hempstead, and Lafayette County all sent a delegate to the Convention of 1868; however, by 1874, the African American communities in these counties failed to replicate their representation. By the 1880s, twelve Arkansas counties had majority African American populations. However, only three of these counties sent representatives to the convention: Crittenden, Phillips, and Jefferson. The counties held significant population advantages in their communities, providing them opportunities to gain positions at the convention. However, Little Rock was the only urban center that contained a minority African American population that sent delegates to the convention. Randolph County, located in northeast Arkansas, contained a limited minority African American community; however, the county lacked any significant urban

[169] *Arkansas Gazette*, July 7, 1874.
[170] Nunn, "The Constitutional Convention of 1874," 188.

development during the late nineteenth century. Little Rock was also the only urban center not to lose any representation at the Arkansas Constitutional Convention from 1868 to 1874. The city's black community sent two delegates to both conventions, despite the changes of the 1874 Convention in the political domination of white Democrats. Although Jefferson and Phillips County held representation in the convention, it is noteworthy that the delegates from these counties primarily represented the county's rural areas due to its significant population majority. On the other hand, Little Rock was different. The city had the ability to hold its representation at the convention, despite its minority position in the city.

The party makeup of the Constitutional Convention of 1874 is also clear evidence of the influence and power of Little Rock on the political system of Arkansas. Little Rock contained a major difference in total representation to the Constitutional Convention of 1874. The county or city did not send one white rural Democrat to the convention.[171] Unlike other counties with significant African American majorities, Little Rock did not have to contend with white rural Democrats, for the city and county only sent Republican white and black Arkansans to the convention. In the delegation from the counties that sent black Arkansans to the convention, Phillips and Randolph County sent one democrat.[172] Many of the counties with African American majorities did not even gain the opportunity to send a single black Arkansan to the convention, resulting in white Democrats that aligned with the state's white agrarian communities. On the other hand, the African American community of Little Rock did not contend with the white agrarian interest in gaining positions on the Constitutional Conventions. They received positions based on the Little Rock people, which included black Arkansans.

It is important to note the lack of scholarship on Little Rock's position in the 1874 Arkansas Constitutional Convention. While both Walter Nunn and Rodney Harris provided

[171] Rodney Waymon Harris, "Arkansas's Divided Democracy: The Making of the Constitution of 1874," (Fayetteville, AR: MA Thesis, University of Arkansas, 2017) 15-25.
[172] Harris, "Arkansas's Divided Democracy," 15-25.

significant explanations on the overall representation and accomplishments of the convention, they neglected to explore the significance of the city's involvement. It is also important to note the unique position Little Rock held in both conventions. Little Rock was able to hold its representation in the conventions while holding a minority position, gain influence in the committees and general voting, and impact the Arkansas Constitution for its constituents. Although they lost influence and political impact in the Convention of 1874, Little Rock still used its unique position in Arkansas as a place with significant political opportunities for the black community.

Exploring the state's constitutional conventions in the late nineteenth century reveals two very different situations. The Convention of 1868 displays the influence of the Republican party in Arkansas in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. Due to the influence and power of the Republican party in the convention, black Arkansans took opportunities to gain meaningful advantages for the constituents they represented. On the other hand, the Constitutional Convention of 1874 was dominated by white rural Democrats that strived to create a stricter Arkansas Constitution that would prove difficult for black Arkansans to overcome in the state's political, economic, and social sectors. However, in both conventions, one thing remains, the might, influence, and political opportunities of Little Rock's African American community. In both conventions, the city's African American community held their representation in the convention, fought for their constituents, and gained influence, sometimes more limited, on the Arkansas Constitution, all while holding a minority. Little Rock was indeed a unique place for black Arkansans, a place of significant opportunities for those seeking political offices and positions at all levels of government.

In the Arkansas State government, Little Rock blacks took advantage of opportunities to seize state offices and state influence. Members of the city's black community were elected to the state government, served cabinet-level and advisory-level positions to the state governor, and

represented the state's African American communities. Although Helena and Pine Bluff had high numbers of delegates in the Arkansas House of Representatives, Little Rock still won many state government elections and gained high advisory positions with the Arkansas Governor's Office. One reason for the lack of high advisory positions to the governor was the lack of access to the state capital and the lack of equal political opportunities. Other urban black Arkansans did not receive the same benefits that Little Rock blacks gained in the state government, thus displaying the unique position of Little Rock as the premiere city for black Arkansans seeking political opportunities. Using its unique position, the city's black leaders gained significant state government privileges that would benefit Little Rock and the entire state.

With many of the city's black leaders rising to prominence in the white and African American communities, these individuals gained advisory and cabinet-level positions with the Arkansas Governor's Office. Using their prestige and political power, they were able to influence the Arkansas State Government at its highest level. As mentioned earlier, Mifflin Gibbs was one of the most respected African American leaders of Little Rock. In addition to his various positions on the local level, he gained the position as the chief black lieutenant of Arkansas to Republican Governor Powell Clayton.[173] As the chief black lieutenant, Gibbs retained a significant high-ranking position, as well as worked with Governor Clayton in multiple situations, including situations that involved the African American communities of Arkansas. His ability to gain these high offices with the Arkansas Governor's Office provides a clear picture of the influence of Little Rock blacks in the state government.

Before exploring Little Rock's black representation in the Arkansas Legislation, comparing the size of the African American populations of Phillips, Pulaski, and Jefferson County is essential. The population data of Arkansas shows that Pulaski County did not contain

[173] Powell, *The Aftermath of the Civil War*.

the most prominent black population, except for 1870.[174] Pulaski County's black population percentage in the 1880s and 1890s lagged significantly behind Jefferson County, the county with the most representation in the Arkansas House of Representatives. When reviewing the number of Arkansas House of Representatives and Senators, it is essential to understand the makeup of the state's African American population and compare the representation level provided by the state government. It is also important to note where the representatives lived in the county, as many of Phillips and Jefferson County's representatives were farmers who lived in rural areas.[175]

Table 11. African American Population of Arkansas Counties, 1860-1900 Census

Year	Jefferson	Phillips	Pulaski	Total State
1860	7,158	8,945	8, 512	111,259
1870	10,167	10,501	13,708	122,169
1880	17,011	15,809	14, 921	210,666
1890	29, 908	19,640	21, 935	309, 117
1900	29, 812	20, 877	29, 116	366, 856

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.

Arkansas elected many urban delegates to the State Senate and House of Representatives in the nineteenth century. The Senate included eight African Americans throughout the late nineteenth century, five of whom were elected from counties with significant urban populations: Pulaski, Jefferson, and Phillips. The State's House of Representatives included eighty African American members: fourteen from Phillips County, twenty-two from Jefferson County, and eight

[174] U.S. Census, *Tenth Census*, 1880, Population, Arkansas.
[175] U.S. Census, *Twelfth Census*, 1900, Population, Arkansas.

from Pulaski County.[176] These representatives significantly influenced legislation. Anderson L. Rush, an Arkansas House of Representative member from Pulaski County, introduced a bill in 1868 that would allow black Arkansans to serve on juries. James T. White from Helena (Phillips County) introduced a bill to change the restrictions on black Arkansans in public areas that would allow more equal public access to the city's black community but narrowly failed in the Arkansas legislature.[177] However, it is interesting to note the differences in the representation of these counties and their urban centers.

Pulaski County's delegates to the Arkansas State Legislature between 1868-1893 came from Little Rock. Most of the nine black representatives from Little Rock came from the city's African American middle class. The Little Rock members included a lawyer, constable, coroner, landlord, two ministers, and two teachers.[178] The city of Little Rock was also able to send a larger number of delegates to the legislature to influence political policy than other Arkansas towns. Phillips County only sent five urban representatives, and Jefferson County sent seven representatives. The rest of the electors from these areas were from the rural regions of the county. The members of these other two counties also showed a larger number of farmers compared to the African American middle class of the cities. However, Little Rock dominated the politics of Pulaski County due to its significant ability to use the political opportunities of the city.[179]

Many of the representatives from Little Rock held significant positions in the Arkansas State Government, introducing bills, lobbying their peers, and serving on committees. Anderson L. Rush, for example, used his influence to provide opportunities for black Arkansans in all areas of society, including political and legal equality. Becoming one of the first six African American

[176] Christ, *A Confused and Confusing* Affair, 108-137.
[177] Branam, "The Africans Have Taken Arkansas," 233-67.
[178] Christ, *A Confused and Confusing Affair*, 108-137.
[179] Christ, *A Confused and Confusing Affair*, 126.

representatives of the Arkansas House of Representatives, Rush served as a representative from 1868 to 1870. In his fight for equal protection and opportunities for the black communities of Arkansas, Rush introduced many bills that would become important civil rights laws in the state. Reported in the *Arkansas Gazette*, Rush was accredited with a bill that defined the qualifications of jurors "and confining that high privilege to the qualified voters of the state."[180] His bill, like others he proposed, was passed without a dissenting voice. It is amazing that bills were introduced and passed by Little Rock black representatives, like Rush, without significant dissent from the white rural delegation.

Although Phillips and Jefferson Counties sent a significant number of representatives to the Arkansas Government, most came from those counties' rural areas. When comparing the urban centers of Little Rock, Helena, and Pine Bluff, Little Rock blacks held more state positions in the legislature, despite the smaller population. While many representatives of Phillips (Helena) and Jefferson (Pine Bluff) came from the county's rural areas, Pulaski delegates came from the urban center of Little Rock. Little Rock blacks were also able to influence the political policy of Arkansas, sponsoring many passable bills through the Arkansas State Government.[181] Little Rock's ability to take offices in the state government, hold advisory positions with the governor's office, and push significant bills through the government is a clear picture of the city's significant position as the prominent center of political opportunities for black Arkansans.

Unlike Little Rock, delegates from Phillips and Jefferson County grasped their seats in Arkansas's state government using the "fusion principle." Both counties gained numerous representatives due to the wide use of the compromised ticket. In Jefferson County, black Arkansans used the compromised ticket to achieve at least one political office in the Arkansas General Assembly from 1868 to the early 1890s.[182] This is indicative of the Arkansas political

[180] *Arkansas Gazette*, June 16, 1868.
[181] Branam, "The Africans Have Taken Arkansas," 233-67.
[182] Christ, *A Confused and Confusing* Affair, 108-137.

system in the late nineteenth century. When looking at the African American legislators of the late nineteenth century, most of the counties that sent representatives to the Arkansas General Assembly used the "fusion principle," which provided opportunities for black Arkansans to win elections in the state government, except for one county. Jefferson, Phillips, Chicot, Crittenden, Desha, Lee, Lincoln, Monroe, St. Francis, and others continually used the compromised ticket, which provided black communities opportunities to gain positions in the state government.[183] Their limited number of political offices is in large part due to the compromised ticket, which allotted these elections for the African American community. However, once the state began to enact laws designed to limit the political opportunities of black Arkansans in the early 1890s, the compromised ticket no longer provided the few political state office holding positions, for the rural areas of Arkansas dominated the state's political system. After the "fusion principle" declined in usage in Jim Crow Arkansas, the state's African American communities lost significant elections and political offices in the state government.

On the other hand, Pulaski County was the only county to send significant numbers of African American legislators to the Arkansas General Assembly without using a compromised ticket. As stated before, Little Rock did not use the "fusion principle" and sent numerous representatives to the state government despite having a minority population in the city. The city held a unique position in state government, electing multiple leaders of the African American community to the Arkansas General Assembly and holding advisory positions in the Arkansas State Governors' Office. Other areas of the state did not have these equal opportunities, for Little Rock was a political island.

Little Rock held a unique position in Arkansas. It provided opportunities for black Arkansans to gain economic prosperity, social mobility, and political influence. However, it is

[183] Graves, *Town and Country*, 54.

significant to explore the political opportunities of Little Rock as it held a prominent position for black Arkansans seeking those advantages. Unlike other urban areas of Arkansas, Little Rock contained a significant African American middle-class community that penetrated the state's political world. With their prominent middle-class community, Little Rock blacks were able to influence the major political parties of Arkansas and gain positions in the state government. However, the other urban centers of Arkansas, like Helena and Pine Bluff, did not gain equal political opportunities to Little Rock. Helena and Pine Bluff had to contend with political state offices acquired by a compromised ticket and share state offices with their rural counterparts. Due to the situations of other urban centers of Arkansas, black Arkansans had to take the political opportunities available to them. However, due to its unique position, Little Rock became a beacon of political possibility to black Arkansans in the state government.

V. Conclusion

Throughout the late nineteenth century, the black community of Little Rock shaped the opportunities of all Arkansans. The city's African Americans gained advantages and opportunities in economic prosperity, social mobility, and political influence. However, it is significant to explore the hitherto unappreciated unique political opportunities of Little Rock as it held a prominent position for black Arkansans seeking those advantages. Unlike other urban areas of Arkansas, Little Rock contained a significant African American middle-class community that penetrated the state's political world. With their prominent middle-class community, black Arkansans were able to gain positions in local offices, seize opportunities in the state government, and influence the Constitutional Conventions of 1868 and 1874, all while holding a minority position in Little Rock and Pulaski County. However, the other urban centers of Arkansas, like Helena and Pine Bluff, did not gain equal political opportunities to Little Rock. Other areas of the state had to contend with local offices acquired by a compromised ticket, share state offices with their rural counterparts, only gain a few pockets of middle-class society, and sacrifice other freedoms for the limited political power. Due to the situations of other urban centers of Arkansas, black Arkansans had to gain the political opportunities available to them. On the other hand, Little Rock became a beacon of political possibility to black Arkansans.

Despite the numerous opportunities Little Rock provided to black Arkansans, the state began to experience a political change in the late 1880s. The state's local governments and the Arkansas State Legislature followed the lead of other southern states to pass Jim Crow laws. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the United States Constitutional amendments of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth provided some legal protection for African American communities across the South. However, these amendments provided space for interpretation that would result in legal

segregation, which formed these Jim Crow laws.[184] It is interesting to note that Arkansas legislators were reluctant to adopt legal segregation prior to the 1890s. While many other southern states of the deep south passed extensive segregation laws before Arkansas, the state waited until the early 1890s to pass such legislation. According to Graves, Arkansas Jim Crow laws were adopted due to agrarian revolts in the late 1880s, thus leading to a weak Republican Party and a stronger Democratic Party.[185]

While the black community in Little Rock achieved significant economic prosperity and political influence, many rural whites declined in wealth and power, despite the increase in productive land and crops. Between 1880 and 1900, Arkansas's improved acres nearly doubled from 3,595,603 to 6,953,735 acres.[186] In connection to the advancements of the state's railroad system, the farmland development allowed Arkansas's agricultural economy to boom.[187] One of the most promising developments in the state's agricultural production was the resurgence of cotton. After the Civil War, cotton production increased tremendously throughout the South. Between 1860 and 1910, cotton production in the United States increased from 3,841,000 to 11,609,000 bales.[188] Cotton production increase was a direct connection to the development of the railroads. With the transportation and infrastructure of the railroads, Arkansas farmers gained access to national and international markets. In addition to the railroads, cotton prices in the immediate aftermath seemed to stabilize.[189]

However, the optimistic outlook on the state's agrarian economy was short-lived. By the 1870s, the economic prosperity began its rollercoaster of heights and dips that would characterize

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[184] "Jim Crow Laws," Encyclopedia of Arkansas, November 14, 2022, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/jim-crow-laws-4577/.
[185] Graves, *Town and Country*, 134-149.
[186] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Agriculture, Arkansas.
[187] Moneyhon, *Arkansas and the New South,* 62.
[188] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, 1900, Volume IX, Manufactures, Part 3. Special Reports on Selected Industries.
U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States*, 1860, Agriculture of the United States.
[189] Moneyhon, *Arkansas and the New South,* 62.

the remainder of the nineteenth century. The uncertainty was owed both to the speculation of the Gilded Age and the federal government's financial policies that resulted in a currency contraction and severe deflation. Like those across the country, Arkansas farmers experienced a demoralizing economic and financial crisis.[190] The overuse of productive land also led to soil exhaustion and decreased crop production. Arkansas farmers continued to require cash to produce enough crop yield for economic stability. This resulted in declined farm size, total wealth, and economic profitability for many white Arkansans. From the 1870s to the end of the nineteenth century, white Arkansas farmers found themselves in a severely weakened economic position that added significant stress to their daily lives. These stresses and economic issues led to rural white Democratic domination of local and state governments. These governments would use their renewed political power to take influence from black communities of Arkansas, including Little Rock.[191]

In the late 1880s, white Democratic leaders obtained some hope of gaining black voters after a racial fight within the Republican Party of Arkansas. For example, in 1888, a fight in the Arkansas Republican Party Convention broke out between Powell Clayton's Republicans and a group of young black Republicans over the chairmanship of the convention. Although the black representatives lost the chairmanship, the group believed they were mistreated.[192] When the convention convened in August, another group of black delegates, with the leaders of white Republicans, staged a walkout to protest the convention's nominations for various state and local political positions.[193] In additional to other internal fighting, the Democratic Party began to make concessions to the state's African American community. In Little Rock, the city's Old Hickory Club, a stronghold for Democratic leadership, began to allow membership to the city's most

[190] Graves, *Town and Country*, 134.
[191] Graves, *Town and Country*, 200-214.
[192] *Arkansas Gazette,* April 11, 1888.
[193] *Arkansas Gazette,* August 17, 1888.

prominent and successful black leaders.[194] During a convention of the state's Democratic Clubs in 1888, Thomas Morgan of Woodruff earned the opportunity to give a speech and stated "the first ballot he ever cast was for a democrat and he would die before he would vote for a republican ticket."[195] Interestingly, Democrats began to gain some black Arkansans support; however, it is important to note that Democrats made it clear that the party did not support racial equality. In the *Pine Bluff Press-Eagle*, the Democratic Party stated that they welcome African American votes but would not promote "social equality" in all areas of life.[196] Despite the issues within the Republican Party, Little Rock largely supported the Republican Party and its candidates. In the rest of the state, the Democratic Party was able to gain a margin of support from black communities, while Little Rock remained loyal to the Republican Party, which still supported black political opportunities.

By the 1890 election, rural white Democrats began to take complete control of the state government and local authorities. From the first action of the Arkansas House of Representatives, it was clear that the state government had significantly changed, which would harm black Arkansans' political rights. As soon as the new Arkansas House took their position, they voted and passed a measure to remove the portrait of George Washington hanging behind the Speaker's seat and replace it with Jefferson Davis, the former President of the Confederacy.[197] This simple act was a message to the state that a new party was in charge, one that would push an agenda harmful to the African American community. Once taking power, the rural white Democratic Party of Arkansas began to introduce and pass laws that would actively seek to take advantages and power gained by black Arkansans throughout the late nineteenth century. The Arkansas

[194] *Arkansas Gazette,* July 15, 1888.
[195] *Arkansas Gazette,* August 18, 1888.
[196] Pine Bluff *Press-Eagle*, July 24, 1888.
[197] Arkadelphia *Southern Standard*, April 17, 1891.

General Assembly of 1891 would reverse the success of the state's African American community, thus changing the political reality of Arkansas, including Little Rock, for years to come.

The first action by this new government was a statutory measure that would require the segregation of passengers on the railroads. Senator J. N. Tillman of Washington County introduced a proposal that would achieve segregation in public transportation. The Separate-Coach Law of 1891 was supported by most members of the Arkansas Senate, with only two Senators voting against the measure.[198] Throughout the state, the media echoed the beliefs of the white Democrats in supporting the measure. These news outlets would state that black Arkansans were unclean and wild when riding on railroads and thus needed to be separate from civilized white society. The *Fort Smith Daily Times* cited the representatives that the Arkansans "have borne with this negro nuisance on railroads a long time."[199] According to Graves, the primary purpose of the bill was not avoidance of physical contact with Arkansas's black communities, "but instead resentment against Negro social mobility."[200] Once the bill passed, the rural white celebrate the first successful passage of the Jim Crow agenda.

However, Little Rock remained the principal opposition to these Jim Crow laws, including the Separate-Coach Law of 1891. Only days after the introduction of Senator Tillman's bill, a meeting of six hundred black Arkansans convened in Little Rock to adopt a public resolution. Some of Little Rock's most prominent black leaders attended the meeting, including co-founder of the Mosaic Templars of America John Bush, Little Rock attorney George Perkins, landowner and former city councilperson W. H. Scott, pastor of First Congregationalist Church Y. B. Sims, and Little Rock dentist Dr. J. H. Smith.[201] Reported in the *Arkansas Gazette*, the committee formed a resolution that stated "bills in any form whatever, should any one of them

[198] *Arkansas Gazette*, January 30, 1891.
[199] *Fort Smith Daily Times*, January 26, 1891.
[200] Graves, *Town and County*, 159.
[201] Graves, *Town and County*, 153.

become a law, would operate with great discrimination against and injustice to the colored citizens of this State."[202] The committee denounced the legislation and warned that it would cause significant harm to the black communities of Arkansas. It is essential to note the confidence and comfortability of Little Rock's black community to publish dissent of Jim Crow laws in Arkansas. While other areas of the state remained quiet about segregation, Little Rock led the charge against the rural white Democratic interest.

It is also interesting to note that Little Rock based newspapers discussed the issues of the Separate-Coach Law of 1891. The *Arkansas Gazette* cited multiple issues of the bill, ranging from crowded segregated railcars to unfair practices towards black Arkansans. In the *Arkansas Gazette*, they would publish observations that would criticize the effectiveness of the bill, sometimes citing the harm the bill did to both races in many urban centers of Arkansas.[203] Other newspapers of the state may have discussed minor issues of the bill but would overall support the effectiveness of the bill and portray the bill as successful. Little Rock, on the other hand, would provide information on the issues and challenges the bill caused to the white and black communities of the state.

However, despite their efforts, the city's African American leaders were unable to stop the bill from passing the state government and becoming law. In addition, the African American community of Little Rock would be unable to further stop Jim Crow legislation in Arkansas. The Arkansas State Government would continue introducing and passing bills to discriminate against black Arkansans, like the Election Law of 1891 and the Poll-Tax Amendment of 1891. Controlled by the white agrarian population of the state, the Arkansas Legislature would force the state's African American population out of the picture, changing the future of Arkansas until the Civil Rights era of the 1960s.

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[202] *Arkansas Gazette*, January 20, 1891.
[203] *Arkansas Gazette*, September 7, 1891.

Little Rock was one of the only areas of Arkansas to fight segregation legislation despite their futile efforts to stop such bills. However, this episode of Arkansas politics displays the influence and power of Little Rock's black community. Although only holding a minority of the city's population, Little Rock blacks were able to earn significant political influence through their middle-class gains. They were able to win elections in city and county offices, local positions, state government offices, and Governor's Office appointments. While the rest of the state lacked the ability to win such advantages, Little Rock held a unique position in the state for Arkansas African Americans seeking political offices.

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