
THE NATIONAL CITIZEN'S RIGHTS ASSOCIATION:
PRECURSOR OF THE NAACP

CAROLYN L. KARCHER
PROFESSOR
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
CKARCHER@TEMPLE.EDU

The decade of the 1890s has gone down in public memory as a black hole in the history of interracial cooperation: a trough between the antislavery movement, which culminated in the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment enfranchising African American men in 1870, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (“NAACP”), which revived the aborted struggle for equality in 1909, when a new generation of white reformers joined with African Americans to combat new forms of racial oppression, including disfranchisement, legalized segregation, and lynching. The period surely deserves historian Rayford W. Logan’s designation as “the nadir of the Negro’s status in American society.”¹ Yet the 1890s also witnessed a forgotten venture at interracial organizing: the National Citizens’ Rights Association (“NCRA”), founded in October 1891 by Albion W. Tourgée (1838-1905).²

Despite its significance as a precursor that anticipated the NAACP by almost eighteen years and provided one of its models, the NCRA receives only passing mention in James M. McPherson’s important study, *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP*, which dismisses it as short-lived and ineffective. Nor does Tourgée himself figure more than fleetingly in McPherson’s book. Although no white

¹ RAYFORD W. LOGAN, *THE BETRAYAL OF THE NEGRO FROM RUTHERFORD B. HAYES TO WOODROW WILSON* 52 (FIRST Da Capo Press ed. 1997).

² *A Voice Against Segregation, Albion Tourgée!*, AFR. AM. REGISTRY, http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/voice-against-segregation-albion-tourgee (last visited July 31, 2012).

reformer of the nadir better exemplified the “abolitionist legacy”—the founders of the Niagara Movement, the immediate predecessor of the NAACP, hailed Tourgée as a forerunner alongside William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass—Tourgée did not qualify for inclusion in McPherson’s history because he was neither an abolitionist before 1860, nor a member of an abolitionist family.³ Nonetheless, the abolitionist movement profoundly influenced him, shaping his career long before engendering his conception of the NCRA as an interracial civil rights organization that would carry on the mission of antebellum anti-slavery societies, precisely the purpose the NAACP would later assert.

Born in Ohio’s Western Reserve, a region seething with abolitionist ferment, Tourgée underwent his conversion to the ideal of racial equality during the Civil War, when he fought in an “abolition regiment” and came into contact with fugitive slaves and black soldiers in Union army camps.⁴ Like many abolitionists, Tourgée went south after the war to aid in Reconstruction—the federal program aimed at transmuted an oligarchical society based on race and caste into one governed by democratic and republican precepts. Settling in Greensboro, North Carolina, in October 1865, he joined an interracial chapter of the Union League and soon gained a reputation as a fearless champion of both the black and the white poor, as well as an effective coalition-builder who succeeded in unifying Quakers, poor whites, upper-

³JAMES M. MCPHERSON, *THE ABOLITIONIST LEGACY: FROM RECONSTRUCTION TO THE NAACP* 317 (1975). McPherson defines “‘abolitionist’ as one who before the Civil War had agitated for the immediate, unconditional, and total abolition of slavery in the United States” and refers to the descendants who carried on their work for racial equality as “neo-abolitionists.” *Id.* at 4-5. Tourgée is not among the 284 people listed in the appendix who constitute the basis of McPherson’s study and who are “identifiable as abolitionists or the children or grandchildren of abolitionists.” *Id.* at 6. On the links between the NCRA, the Niagara Movement, and the NAACP, see MARK ELLIOTT, *COLOR-BLIND JUSTICE: ALBION TOURGÉE AND THE QUEST FOR RACIAL EQUALITY FROM THE CIVIL WAR TO PLESSY V. FERGUSON* 3, 13, 237, 313-14 (2006); OTTO H. OLSEN, *CARPETBAGGER’S CRUSADE: THE LIFE OF ALBION WINEGAR TOURGÉE* 312-31 (1965) [hereinafter OLSEN, *CARPETBAGGER’S CRUSADE*]; OTTO H. OLSEN, *Albion W. Tourgée and Negro Militants of the 1890’s: A Documentary Selection*, 28 *SCI. & SOC’Y* 183 (1964).

⁴For Tourgée’s own accounts of the experiences that led to his conversion, see ALBION WINEGAR TOURGÉE, *THE STORY OF A THOUSAND: BEING A HISTORY OF THE SERVICE OF THE 105TH OHIO VOLUNTEER INFANTRY, IN THE WAR FOR THE UNION FROM AUGUST 21, 1862 TO JUNE 6, 1865*, at 31-34, 83, 87-91, 106-07 (1895); and Albion W. Tourgée’s [hereinafter “AWT”] *Daily Pocket Remembrancer* (June 7, 22, and 23, 1863) (on file with the Chautauqua County Historical Society as Albion W. Tourgée Paper #577 [hereinafter “AWTP”]). For biographical accounts by modern scholars, see ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 73-100; OLSEN, *CARPETBAGGER’S CRUSADE*, *supra* note 3, at 12-25.

class recruits to radicalism, and African Americans under the umbrella of the Republican Party.

Tourgée played a key role in framing a democratic constitution for North Carolina in 1868 that bears his mark today. Having introduced the innovation of an elected judiciary, he won election as a state Superior Court judge and served until his defeat by white supremacists in 1874. Throughout his tenure, Tourgée maintained the principle “that justice should at least be ‘color blind.’”⁵ He also braved death threats to procure indictments and convictions of Ku Klux Klan terrorists and to prompt federal action against the group’s campaign of intimidation.

The abandonment of Reconstruction by Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1877, and the restoration of white supremacy that resulted from the new administration’s policy of letting the South manage its own internal affairs, ultimately forced Tourgée to leave North Carolina. Nevertheless, he continued to fight for implementation of the equal citizenship rights that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments had conferred on African Americans. Besides lobbying Republican Party leaders, he sought to arouse northern public opinion through novels, newspaper and magazine articles, and polemical works.

His most famous novel, *A Fool's Errand. By One of the Fools* (1879), hailed as the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of Reconstruction, sold 150,000 copies within a year and helped elect a president sympathetic to his views, James G. Garfield. Yet, Garfield’s assassination a few months after his inauguration left the reins of the Republican Party in the hands of conservatives intent on burying the divisive “Negro question” so they could fulfill their big business agenda.

By January 1891, Tourgée could no longer avoid recognizing that “lust of gain” had destroyed the Party’s commitment to racial justice and sapped it of vitality. “The vigor, persistence, determination of the Senate seem to be almost entirely on the other side,” that is, on the side of white supremacist Democrats, he observed in a letter to Marriott Brosius, a Republican congressman from Pennsylvania. “*They* mean business, and will do or sacrifice anything to carry their point.” In contrast, dissension, apathy, and timidity were eating away at the Republi-

⁵ Letter from AWT to the Editor of the Raleigh Standard 2 (Feb. 1, 1870) (on file as #1262, AWTP).

cans, while their leaders merely wanted “*power*” for the sake of controlling the government. “There must be a *revolution*” in Republican ranks, Tourgée concluded, to “bring to the front again the idea of personal liberty and the equal right of the citizen.” He was thinking “very strongly of inaugurating” such a revolutionary movement.⁶

Nine months would go by, however, before Tourgée took the plunge. The impetus came from the Afro-Creole⁷ community in New Orleans, whose spirited resistance to the passage of a law requiring people of color to travel in segregated railway cars inspired Tourgée to found the NCRA. Through this organization, he sought to forge African Americans and progressive whites into a united pressure group that could collect and disseminate information about violations of citizens’ rights and thereby influence public opinion, electoral politics, and judicial decisions. The main judicial decision Tourgée hoped the NCRA could sway was the case against “separate but equal” transportation that would become known as *Plessy v. Ferguson*,⁸ for which he had volunteered to serve *pro bono* as the lawyer for the African American plaintiffs.

Tourgée launched the NCRA in his widely read weekly column for the Chicago *Daily Inter Ocean*, “A Bystander’s Notes,” of 17 October 1891. Announcing that African Americans in New Orleans had collected over \$1400 “to test the constitutionality of the infamous ‘Jim Crow car’ law,” he commented:

By dimes and half-dimes an oppressed and impoverished race who are asserted to be incapable of self-government or co-operation are raising a fund to bring before the courts of the land the question of their rights as citizens of the United States A nobler instance of manly co-operation, worthy self-control, and voluntary self-sacrifice for the common good it would be hard to find in the history of any people!

⁶ Letter from AWT to Marriott Brosius (Jan. 24, 1891) (on file as #5256, AWTP) (emphasis in original). Brosius, whose name is misspelled in the index to the AWTP, was identified in Olsen’s *CARPETBAGGER’S CRUSADE*. See OLSEN, *CARPETBAGGER’S CRUSADE*, *supra* note 3, at 295 n.30. According to Wikipedia, he was a Civil War Union veteran from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and served in Congress from 1889 until his death in 1901. *Marriott Henry Brosius*, WIKIPEDIA, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriott_Henry_Brosius (last modified June 5, 2012).

⁷ I use this term to distinguish Creoles of mixed race from the elitist whites who also claimed the designation Creole in Louisiana. Both groups descended from French-speaking slaveholders, some of whom had moved to Louisiana from Haiti after the St. Domingue revolution.

⁸ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

Tourgée challenged his white readers and the U.S. courts to match the “civic instinct” displayed by the race they deemed “inferior.” Let them show “whether justice is still color-blind or National citizenship worth a rag for the defense of right or not.” He urged: “Will the people of the North stand by the colored citizen in his appeal to law?” If enough readers supported the project, he vowed, he would establish a “Citizens’ Equal Rights Association” (an expanded version of the short-lived American Citizens Equal Rights Association that African Americans of Creole and non-Creole ancestry had founded in 1890).⁹ Responses poured in by the thousands, and within a year, the renamed National Citizens’ Rights Association claimed over 100,000 members, ultimately peaking at 250,000—a membership roll that equals the American Anti-Slavery Society’s in the 1830s and dwarfs that of the NAACP in the 1910s.¹⁰

Its ranks encompassed Civil War Union veterans, scions of abolitionist families, African American intellectuals and activists, and barely literate plantation hands. Their letters detail methods of enlisting new recruits, offer opinions on how to achieve the NCRA’s aims, comment on political developments, express candid views on race, and apprise Tourgée of local atrocities unreported in the national press. In turn, Tourgée’s correspondence with them provides insight into relations between progressive whites and African Americans during the nadir, as well as into the obstacles that prevented the NCRA from fulfilling its ambitious goals.

No one expressed greater astonishment than Tourgée at the myriads who answered his call for an interracial solidarity movement: “I expected a few score of responses,” he confessed, but “300 or 400 applications” a day, along with “100 to 200 letters,” had inundated him.

⁹ Albion W. Tourgée, *A Bystander's Notes*, CHI. DAILY INTER OCEAN, Oct. 17, 1891, at 4. On the American Citizens Equal Rights Association, see ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 249-51, 275; and BLAIR L. M. KELLEY, RIGHT TO RIDE: STREETCAR BOYCOTTS AND AFRICAN AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP IN THE ERA OF PLESSY V. FERGUSON 62-70 (2010).

¹⁰ Five years after its founding in 1833, the American Anti-Slavery Society had 1,350 local chapters and approximately 250,000 members. *American Anti-Slavery Society*, WIKIPEDIA, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Anti-Slavery_Society (last modified July 20, 2012). By comparison, “the NAACP had only a few hundred members” during the “first three years of its existence.” McPHERSON, *supra* note 3, at 389. Moreover by 1919, NAACP membership was only around 90,000. *NAACP: 100 Years of History*, NAACP, <http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history> (last visited July 31, 2012). See also I CHARLES FLINT KELLOGG, NAACP: A HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE 91, 128, 133, 137 (1967).

At first I signed the certificates and numbered them. Then Mrs. T. helped me; then one of her sisters and her mother; then we had to hire a clerk. Now the whole household work at it, servants and all when they have any spare time. We procured a numbering machine. It only ran up to 100,000. We thought that enough. We have had to start a new series more than once.

The miraculous resurgence among both whites and blacks of a determination to fight side by side for equal rights—a shared militancy not seen since the abolitionist crusade—convinced Tourgée that God must be behind the phenomenon. “If the Lord must impose such work on one why did he not find a man not racked with pain or tired of vain attempts to accomplish good,” he grumped.¹¹

African American newspaper editors played the most visible role in publicizing the NCRA and shepherding their readers into it. Chief among them stood the Afro-Creole Louis A. Martinet, whose organ, the New Orleans *Crusader*, was spearheading the battle against Jim Crow transportation that had prompted Tourgée to start the NCRA. Tourgée had consulted with Martinet before proposing the idea of a “national organization, without the color or race line, to speak for the oppressed & defend their rights,” and Martinet had “heartily approve[d]” it. “[W]hen organized on the lines you indicate & for the purpose you name—which embrace those I had in mind—it will be a success, I firmly believe; *it will have influence, dignity & effectiveness*,” Martinet predicted. He proceeded to sketch out the complementary roles that he saw his associates in New Orleans and the NCRA as playing: “While we need resist the encroachment on our rights in the South, the North needs to be educated as to conditions in the South & its disloyalty & rebellious tendencies. And we need do the work soon.”¹²

A second early champion, Ida B. Wells, endorsed the NCRA in the Memphis *Free Speech* around November 1891. This was six months before she rose to national prominence, when a white mob destroyed her press and condemned her to exile for her fiery editorial denouncing the lynching of three African American grocery store owners.

¹¹ Quotations from this paragraph appear in Letter from AWT to Rev. Benton (ca. Nov. 1891) (on file as #5897, AWTP); and in Letter from AWT to Philip C. Garrett (circa Oct. 1892) (on file as #6439, AWTP).

¹² Letter from Louis A. Martinet to AWT (Oct. 5 1891) (on file as #5760, AWTP) (emphasis in original); *see also* Letter from Louis A. Martinet to AWT (Oct. 25, 1891) (on file as #5768, AWTP).

Wells also continued to promote the organization among the network of contacts she cultivated as she began lecturing against lynching.¹³

Other African American editors whose newspapers advertised the NCRA included: Harry C. Smith of the Cleveland *Gazette*, who as a state legislator later solicited Tourgée's help in passing Ohio's anti-lynching law, the first in the nation; Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of the Boston *Courant*, who would go on to found and preside over the Woman's Era Club, closely allied with Ida B. Wells' anti-lynching campaign; Ferdinand L. Barnett of the Chicago *Conservator*, a well-respected attorney who would marry Wells in 1895; and William A. Anderson of the Detroit *Plaindealer*, author of the anti-lynching novel *Appointed* (1894) and owner of a dry goods business.

While no files of the *Free Speech* or the *Conservator*, and only a few numbers of the *Crusader* or the *Courant* survive from this period, the *Plaindealer* and the *Gazette* amply convey the enthusiasm with which African American editors supported Tourgée and the NCRA. Both reprinted more than a year's worth of Tourgée's "Bystander" column, and did so frequently on the front page. Both conspicuously featured and warmly seconded "A Personal Letter to Afro-Americans, from Judge Tourgée," in which he defined the goals and methods of the NCRA and urged Blacks to unite behind it. Both devoted many editorials to praising "[t]he most popular white man in the country to-day with Afro-Americans . . . that staunch *friend* of the race, Judge Albion W. Tourgée," and to commending the NCRA as the organization best able to "arouse and obtain the sympathy of the whites." The *Plaindealer*, in particular, portrayed Tourgée as completing the work of abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and John Brown through the NCRA:

¹³ See Letter from Andrew J. Gholson to AWT (Nov. 19, 1891) (on file as #7614, ATWP) ("I here with enclose you a clipping from the ['Free Speech' a paper published in Memphis, Tenn - Being fully in sympathy with the contents contained therein which you will readily perceive by my having filled out the blanks [in the application form] as requested."); see also Letter from Ida B. Wells to Emma Kilbourne Tourgée [hereinafter EKT] (Nov. 3, 1892) (on file as #7614, ATWP) ("The ladies of New York and Brooklyn wish to know more about the National Citizens Rights Association," and Wells requests Emma to forward "all circulars pamphlets and other matter" to one of them). Most of Tourgée's correspondence with NCRA members is contained in #7614, ATWP, a massive file that fills three reels of microfilm. Unfortunately, individual documents are almost impossible to locate in this file because it is neither indexed nor organized chronologically. Dean Keller's "An Index To The Albion W. Tourgée Papers In The Chautauqua County Historical Society, Westfield, New York" does not include any of the letters in this file.

[He] tries to put himself in the place of an intelligent self-respecting Afro-American, and with a commendable degree of success he depicts [the Afro-American's] feelings and tells them to the world. He is gathering under the wings of the association all classes of citizens by the thousands, irrespective of race or party. . . . Oh! That there were more like him, ready to use their voice and pen for the preservation of the Nation's liberties!¹⁴

In addition, all of these newspapers printed copies of the same application for NCRA membership that Tourgée appended to his weekly “By-stander” column in the *Inter Ocean*, prefaced by notices like the following:

Judge Albion W. Tourgée, one of the best friends of the race, wishes to see if a Liberty League can be organized for the purpose of assisting Afro-Americans in the legal assertion of their rights.

If you want to help the colored race prove it by lending your aid to a great cause just inaugurated by our great friend Judge Tourgée. He wants the name of every person who is willing to join a ‘Citizen’s Equal Rights Association.’ The purpose of the organization is to secure equal and exact justice to all American citizens the colored citizens included . . . Let every colored person man and woman lend a hand.¹⁵

Attesting to the influence African American editors wielded, many of Tourgée’s correspondents specified from which newspapers they had clipped their enclosed membership applications, among which the *Crusader*, the *Conservator*, and the *Plaindealer* received most frequent mention.

Of the NCRA’s African American members, Southerners made up the largest contingent. Some identified themselves as longtime readers of Tourgée’s novels and “Bystander” articles. “Your last book ‘Pac-tolus Prime,’ I have read and reread with peculiar interest,” wrote Alexander S. Jackson, a minister in New Orleans. He added: “Your proposition to organize a National Citizens’ Equal Rights League brought joy and strength to my heart . . . looking as it does to unifying all classes—true white men and true colored men,” rather than perpetuating racial separatism.¹⁶ Likewise, based in New Orleans, the Illinois-born Baptist missionary S.T. Clanton echoed: “Your . . . ‘Bricks without

¹⁴ CLEVELAND GAZETTE, Nov. 21, 1891, at 2; CLEVELAND GAZETTE, June 4, 1892, at 2; DETROIT PLAINDALER, May 27, 1892; DETROIT PLAINDALER, June 3, 1892.

¹⁵ Enclosures in Charles Whitefield to AWT (Sept. 13, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from George R. Nevels to AWT (Oct. 5, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from H.G. Newsom to AWT (on file as #7614, AWTP).

¹⁶ Letter from Alexander S. Jackson to AWT (Nov. 13, 1891) (on file as #5788, AWTP).

Straw,' 'Fool's Errand,' Pactolus Prime, Etc., I have read with delightful profit."¹⁷ Charles W. Cansler of Knoxville, Tennessee, recalled: "I read your great book, 'A Fool's Errand' when quite small and no other book save the Bible has impressed me as it did."¹⁸

The Land and Loan Company President J.M. Nimocks from Meridian, Mississippi, the "colored farmer" and schoolteacher Jonathan G. Monroe from Percy, Mississippi, and the deputy revenue collector A.M. Middlebrooks from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, all described themselves as "constant reader[s]" of Tourgée's "Bystander" column. "[W]ith what ability and sagacity you are battling for the rights of a race whose oppressions have increased despite the fact that we have reached a higher round in both the numerical and intellectual ladder," marveled Monroe.¹⁹

The ranks of the NCRA's educated black southern members also included: the Afro-Creole journalist Rodolphe L. Desdunes, a close associate of Martinet's on the *Crusader* and on the New Orleans Citizens Committee—the organization sponsoring the lawsuit against the Jim Crow law; the minister Thomas Griffin and his brother Charles, who had recently moved back to their native New Orleans from Chicago; and the school teachers F.B. Hood and his brother A.P. Hood, friends of Martinet's, both in Bolivar County, Mississippi. "I believe that in the course of a few years, you shall have changed the current of ideas in the Negro race," predicted Desdunes, as he rejoiced over the influence the "Bystander" and the *Crusader* exerted over delegates attending a recent state Republican convention, where "questions of right, of justice, of citizenship" gained a hearing for the first time.²⁰ Initiating his correspondence with Tourgée in 1890, Griffin noted that African Americans suffered from contemptuous treatment in the North as well as in the South and that the Republican party unfailingly relegated the "sacred question of *Human rights*" for citizens of color "to the rear of our platform" during election campaigns. "[B]ut I hasten to beg your pardon," he interjected, "[a] grateful people remembers that the eloquent pen of Heaven's inspired servant, Albion W. Tourgée has al-

¹⁷ Letter from S.T. Clanton to AWT, (Dec. 21, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

¹⁸ Letter from Charles W. Cansler to AWT (June 15, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

¹⁹ Letter from A.M. Middlebrooks to AWT (Jan. 24, 1891) (on file as #5255, AWTP); Letter from Jon G. Monroe to AWT (Nov. 26, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from Jon M. Nimocks to AWT (June 7, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

²⁰ Letter from Rodolphe L. Desdunes to AWT (Feb. 5, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

ready drawn attention to this fact.”²¹ Eager “to help along in the stupendous, yet noble work in which you and other humanitarians are engaged, in behalf of *Liberty*,” F.B. Hood introduced himself with a character sketch:

While I have a considerable sprinkling of the Anglo-Saxon’s much vaunted blue-blood, the major part of my make-up is of African lineage. That brand on my forehead, like Cain’s, forms an almost impassible barrier to the pursuit of happiness along the highway of liberty. I have always been an ardent and uncompromising lover of justice (of the heaven-like order) to all men—regardless of hue or conditions.

Articulate, highly qualified, yet barred from professional advancement and subjected to unremitting humiliation, this class of black southern NCRA members used their letters to Tourgée as outlets for their frustration and as opportunities to reach sympathetic whites.²²

Most of the NCRA’s black southern members came from less literate sectors of society, however. They often clustered in nodes, as if around a central recruiting point, suggesting that word of mouth may have supplemented local African American newspapers, such as the *Crusader* or the *Free Speech*, in spreading accounts of the NCRA. New Orleans and its environs, where the Afro-Creole elite predominated, doubtless boasted the largest NCRA enrollment, though no numbers are available. Pine Bluff, Arkansas, harbored 250 members, probably recruited by A.M. Middlebrooks, one of Tourgée’s most frequent correspondents since January 1891.²³ Bolivar County, Mississippi, held another 200 NCRA members, perhaps thanks to the Hood brothers’ efforts.²⁴ Adjoining Bolivar to the north, Coahoma, Mississippi, also showed a significant NCRA presence. Beyond these nodes, scattered correspondents mailed in applications from Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky.

The threat of deadly white supremacist reprisals imposed severe constraints on the activities of black southern NCRA members and forced them to operate in secrecy, whether canvassing, reporting incidents of violence against their fellows, or simply sending letters to Tourgée. They frequently reminded Tourgée of the need for the ut-

²¹ Letter from Thomas R. Griffin to AWT (May 5, 1890) (on file as #4726, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

²² Letter from F.B. Hood to AWT (Mar. 15, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

²³ See Letter from AWT to A.M. Middlebrooks (Dec. 19, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

²⁴ Letter from S.R. Kendrick to AWT (July 4, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

most discretion to protect them from martyrdom at the hands of lynch mobs, even as they risked their lives to supply him with material he could use to enlighten white Northerners about the plight of African Americans in the South.

Passing on information about a recent “outrage perpetrated upon Negro manhood” in Bolivar County—an anonymous warning to leave town or “be swung from a limb” that a school teacher had received for having published an article in an out-of-state newspaper exposing the “deplorable” oppression endured by Mississippi Blacks—A.P. Hood underscored that if Tourgée referred to the case in the “Bystander,” he should mention no names, lest it “endanger either one of us.” He also acknowledged that he had cancelled an engagement to speak about the NCRA to a “crowd of Negroes” for fear of sharing this teacher’s fate. “My God! how long will the Negro’s education be only a source of torture to him?” he exclaimed.²⁵ His brother F.B. Hood matter-of-factly remarked that he had “met with several reverses” for having agitated against the “‘Jim Crow’ car” and proceeded to explain what had caused so much unrest among southern blacks: “Wages are at starvation points, and increasing cruelties more atrocious.” As evidence, he enclosed an article from a white southern newspaper that justified the shooting in cold blood of a black man who had been caught “cursing” a white man’s children.²⁶

Two years later, F.B. Hood would meet his own death at the hands of a mob “variously estimated at from 150 to 300, if men they can be called,” reported his brother. “The ‘crime’ for which his life was forfeited consisted in” writing two letters to the county Superintendent of Education that were “construed . . . as insulting or, at least impudent.” Gunned down in his schoolhouse at noon, Hood fought back “as long as he could ‘use his right hand,’” and killed one of his assailants with his revolver. Although his brother took satisfaction in believing that F.B. Hood’s valiant self-defense “had the effect of breaking up white-capism” in the county, he curtailed his own canvassing to avoid a similar doom.²⁷

Another correspondent from Bolivar County, S.R. Kendrick, spelled out in equally graphic terms the price of defying white supremacy in the South:

²⁵ Letter from A.P. Hood to AWT (May 9, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

²⁶ Letter from F.B. Hood to AWT (Mar. 15, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

²⁷ Letter from A.P. Hood to AWT (Dec. 15, 1895) (on file as #8846, AWTP).

[T]he man or woman who attempts to Strike a Blow here for Freedom must be killed outright or he must be Exiled from all he possesses at once as Miss Ida B. Wells of the Memphis Free Speech have been . . . Do you know my Dear Sir, that there are Standing armies in every county in every Southern State called militia . . . who are negro haters and who are willing to Sacrafice everything even Life in order to give the negro to know that he *must* obey the white man.

Defeating the Confederates had required four years of war, hundreds of thousands of troops, “modern artilery,” and a vast treasury, Kendrick stressed. Thus, it was “simply absurd” to think that African Americans without arms, troops, or money could overthrow “these same men” who had regained power. Nevertheless, Kendrick told Tourgée that Bolivar County NCRA members had decided, in accordance with instructions in a recent “Bystander” column, to form “Local unions,” or cells, “even if we are exterminated.” Requesting fifty leaflets to distribute, and asking whether women could join the NCRA, Kendrick attached a page of signatures by ten men pledging to participate in a local union.²⁸

H.W. Winans of Lake Village, Arkansas, expressed the same resolve, despite having already been driven from his home in Gloster, Mississippi, because his leadership prevented whites from exerting their accustomed control over the black population. “I have not been silent!” he assured Tourgée. “[M]any a day have I walked streets expecting every moment to be shot down for the defense of my people’s rights . . . A free country is it! if so, God forbid that I shall ever live to see a slave country.” Few black NCRA members wanted to court death, however, and even the bold Kendrick objected acerbically: “[W]e are a little tired of having to show our corpse to prove to the world that the Laws of this Country is not sufficient to protect the Black man as well as the white.”²⁹

Elsewhere in the South, NCRA members admitted to finding the perils of canvassing more daunting than they could manage. “We Colored people in this part of North Georgia have to be very carefull about who we speak to about the association,” cautioned Henry A. Fowler from Raccoon Mills.

[T]he greater part of this section is White people Who are dead down on this association and I have to get a member here, and yonder . . . I am

²⁸ Letter from S.R. Kendrick to AWT (July 4, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

²⁹ Letter from S.R. Kendrick to AWT (July 4, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from H.W. Winans to AWT (Mar. 24, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

2013]

The National Citizen's Rights Association

119

Willing to do What I can in this Work. We Georgian Colored have to fear the mob for there is no protection for us here yet.³⁰

A.N. Jackson, a Methodist pastor in La Fayette, Alabama, concurred:

Under the present situation we down here can't be of *very* much help but we are in full sympathy with you and are ready to act in anything that we can with safety. Why, Sir, the Colored people in some localities are as slaves in this very state—they are knocked and cuffed and kicked around and are afraid to leave their houses to even come to town. They are simply not their own and if they resent this treatment the mob steps in and it's the end of that person. What is true of Alabama is true of every other Southern state.³¹

The draconian surveillance and ever-present danger of lynching hobbled NCRA recruitment, attested Jam[es?] Mosly of Spring Ridge, Louisiana:

Our people is very slow in giving there names on account of being interferred [interfered] with [by] the white people. Some of our letters has been open and our [enrollment] lists taken out before it left the office . . . & when we write to you we are questioned by the whites verry much i am satisfied that there will be agreat [sic] number of Colored people that will not Register on account of the white people is keeping it out of there reach.³²

Seeking to circumvent such obstacles, Jane and Minnie Evans of Waynesboro, Mississippi, announced that they were shielding their menfolk by testifying in their place:

[W]e are women of Wayne County Miss and we thought we would write and let you know what is going on as the men was afraid to do it for it would not be very good for them to let it be known we are continuly having some trouble the white people of this county are taking the colored men and beating them and putting them in Jail.³³

Other correspondents signed their communications only with their membership certificate numbers.

At least one, "John Branch" of Shreveport, Louisiana, assumed a pseudonym. To highlight the continuities with slavery times, he enclosed a poster paralleling the fugitive slave advertisements of the pre-Civil War era: "\$500 Reward! Will be paid for the capture and delivery of the negro, Henry Patterson." Patterson, an "industrious" tenant farmer who "attended to his own business," had the "manhood" to

³⁰ Letter from Henry A. Fowler to AWT (Dec. 28, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

³¹ Letter from A.N. Jackson to AWT (Mar. 23, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

³² Letter from J. Mosly to AWT (Feb. 24, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

³³ Letter from Jane and Minnie Evans to AWT (Dec. 17, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

“talk back” to a white man and to defend himself against a “crowd of six toughs” who had broken into his house at midnight. Recounted “Branch”:

[T]he negro leveled his double barrelled shot gun, killed one, and shot and [sic] arm off another. He made the battle so warm that the rest retreated. After trying to dislodge the negro for some time, in vain, they withdrew for reinforcement. When they returned the negro was gone.
He still goes—

While celebrating this act of heroic resistance and successful escape, “Branch” tallied its cost: Patterson had to leave behind his wife and possessions, including a “fine span of mules.” The rest of “Branch’s” letter described how a “howling mob of ‘white=Supremacist,’” attacked the “leading colored men of this city” for promoting the Republican ticket—the same tactics used to deter African Americans from voting in 1874 and 1876—the years of the Reconstruction era’s worst massacres. “Will the southern white man ever be emancipated from the spell of prejudice which has so ‘abnormalized’ his nature? What say you By-Stander?” “Branch” challenged Tourgée.³⁴

Although most black southern members appear to have joined the NCRA because they hoped it could spark a national campaign to end the white supremacist reign of terror under which they were living, some wanted the organization to provide military, financial, or legal assistance. Walter H. Griffin, belonging to a club in Panther Burn, Mississippi, that alternately called itself the “sons of liberty” and the “Friends of protection,” appealed to Tourgée to send arms: “Don’t certify what is in the Box Just say hard ware,” he directed.³⁵ Pliny J. Weels and A. A. Tompkins in Coahoma County requested confirmation of rumors that Tourgée was going to “furnish gun & Ammunition” for those who signed up for the NCRA “at reduce rates,” that Republican President Benjamin Harrison was going to intervene, and that “this country will soon belong to the North.” Weels’s NCRA chapter had been paying the fare “from one club to another” of an organizer who had been spreading these rumors. “[I]f he is humbug let us hear,” he wrote (he received an immediate answer, according to a notation at the top of the letter).³⁶ Willis Reese, representing a desperate group planning a mass exodus from Grand Lake, Arkansas, implored the

³⁴ Letter from “John Branch” to AWT (Mar. 28, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

³⁵ Letter from Walter H. Griffin to AWT (June 7, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

³⁶ Letter from Pliny J. Weels to AWT (Sept. 24, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

NCRA to “healp [sic] us out of the State.”³⁷ F. Bass, W.C. Freeman, and J.H. Johnson of Alligator Lake, Mississippi, asked whether “the constitution of the U.S. is at our Back” with “its written guarantee to protect us” if they were assailed by their enemies. “[W]e are half Living and do not want to Live Worst,” they explained:

We are in favor of Liberty, and will make abreak every time for Liberty
But we do not want to make abreak in vain . . . We do not want to engage
in athing that will cause a number of our people to get kill up as we feel
that there are enough of [us] being kill all ready . . . Therefore we want
to hear from you . . . If you mean Business.

They added that two of their comrades had already been “attacted by some of the leading white and for biden ever be caught on certain plantation any more Just for advocating the cause of association.”³⁸

NCRA members in other Mississippi towns reported being shot at, having their homes broken into at night, and being jailed or set at hard labor on the state farm for their outreach activities. “[I]s there any thing that is in your power that you can do, for we poor helpless people as a protection,” pleaded one. “I Want you to get me out of this fix” raged another from his prison cell, demanding that Tourgée send him a lawyer and warning that all the people working for the NCRA were “Waiting to see What you Will Do for me in this trubel.” He was eventually “rescued by the intervention of the NCRA,” according to Otto H. Olsen.³⁹ Several correspondents from Mississippi also inquired whether their NCRA membership certificates would enable them to vote, notwithstanding the 1890 state law that disfranchised African Americans.⁴⁰

Few of Tourgée’s replies to such letters survive, but one addressing the question about voting sums up both his aspirations for the NCRA and his view of how black Mississippians should conduct themselves while awaiting their delivery from oppression. NCRA membership certificates did “not confer any right to vote at state elections,”

³⁷ Letter from Willis Reese to AWT (Sept. 17, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

³⁸ Letter from F. Bass, W.C. Freeman, & J.H. Johnson to AWT (Apr. 21, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

³⁹ See Otto H. Olsen, *Albion W. Tourgée and Negro Militants of the 1890's*, 28 *Sci. & Soc'y* 183, 201 (Spring 1964) (reprinting several letters to AWT including Mason Woodard’s and Dudley Steuard’s); Letter from J.A. Swanson to AWT (Oct. 9, 1892).

⁴⁰ Letter from William Mayfield to AWT (June 10, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from M.M. Walker to AWT (June 13, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from Henry Williams to AWT (Aug. 10, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from an illegible author to AWT (Sept. 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

Tourgée clarified, but the organization did plan to challenge the constitutionality of the Mississippi election law in court, once it raised sufficient funds. Meanwhile, NCRA members could “serve the cause of liberty not less by submitting to law . . . than by doing all in [their] power to have it tested and overthrown by lawful means.”

Tourgée’s emphasis on “lawful means” implies that he discountenanced resorting to arms, contrary to the hopes of his correspondents in Panther Burn and Coahoma County. Indeed, he specifically asserted:

The colored citizens of Mississippi can now do little more than pray and wait for redemption from the bondage that has overwhelmed them until the conscience and patriotism of the Nation shall bring them relief. They should stand together; let their wrongs be known; raise what funds they can to carry the questions involved to the Supreme Court of the United States, and especially do nothing to destroy the confidence of the people of the North in their worthiness to enjoy the equal citizenship of which they have been deprived.

As slaves, black Mississippians had shown by “faith and self-restraint” that they deserved freedom, Tourgée continued: “The same qualities are now certain to win justice and equal right.” Tourgée did recognize the right to use violence in self-defense, however, and advised, “[D]efend your lives if attacked; your homes if invaded. Resist the mob—the lyncher and the ravisher and the Kuklux [sic], though you lose your lives—but bow always to the forms of law though it take away your dearest right. This is the duty of the citizen: the part of the patriot.”⁴¹

Tourgée’s advice to black Mississippians seemed to convey mixed messages: Were they entitled by the Constitution to equal citizenship, or must they prove themselves worthy of it? Would resisting oppression prove them worthy only if it cost them their lives? Did they depend as much on white Northerners for rescue as they had under slavery? Did white Northerners want them to do nothing but “pray and wait for redemption”? Or did these capricious rescuers require such proofs of “worthiness,” as the ability to raise funds and publicize “their wrongs,” as well as the willingness to die standing up to the “mob”? Perhaps Tourgée was expressing buried conflicts of his own about black rebellion and the capacity of the South’s black masses to exercise their citizenship rights effectively.

⁴¹ Letter from AWT to M.M. Walker (on file as #7614, AWTP).

Unlike African Americans in the South, those in the North could recruit openly for the NCRA without fear of retaliation. Yet to Tourgée's chagrin, Black Northerners, especially on the eastern seaboard, lagged far behind their southern counterparts on the NCRA's membership rolls, despite his allies' efforts to herald the organization in their newspapers. "The colored people of the South send me their piteous tear-stained appeals for aid. The colored people of the North remain indifferent, unresponsive,—doing nothing. . . . What does it mean?" Tourgée harangued the African American former abolitionist Charlotte Forten Grimke, whose church in Washington, DC, had hosted him as a lecturer in May 1892:

Do not the colored people [of the North] care for liberty and justice? Do they expect to wait like gaping young robins and have justice, equal right and equal opportunity dropped into their mouths? Or are they willing to sit still until bound hand and foot, as in Mississippi?

Worse yet, were they willing to lend credence to the racist theories of Kentucky-born, Harvard professor Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, who claimed that the Negro lacked "the capacity, the confidence and the devotion to a high purpose, necessary . . . to co-operate with others even for his own prime advantage"?

While rejecting Shaler's theories, which he had dismissed as "rot" in his "Bystander" column of 19 July 1890, Tourgée confessed that "the apathy, the indifference, the distrust, the selfish querulousness manifested by the most intelligent, the assumed 'leaders' [of the race], discourage[d] and depresse[d] [him] very greatly," giving him the impression that northern African Americans felt "very little the wrongs of the colored people of the South." If so, Tourgée underscored, they needed to realize they themselves held the key to ending racial oppression in the U.S.:

The colored people of the South *will never receive justice* nor enjoy equal rights before the law and equal opportunity in the industrial world, until the colored men and women of the North come to feel these wrongs so keenly that they think of them, pray for them, speak of them and labor for them, more earnestly, more continuously and more zealously than for anything else. It must become the *one* thought of the colored race before it will *become the purpose of God or the effectual desire of the American people*.⁴²

⁴² Letter from AWT to Charlotte Forten Grimke (on file as #6297, AWTP) (emphasis in original). Tourgée's letter references Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, *The Negro Problem*, 54 ATLANTIC MONTHLY 696-709 (Nov. 1884).

Forten Grimke might have been expected to take offense at Tourgée's tirade, especially since it came in response to her thanks for his "noble and powerful address" to her church, which had "stirred our souls to their depths, and made us feel, more strongly than ever before, that we, the colored people, *must* bestir ourselves, instantly and insistently, in this matter." Yet instead of retorting angrily, she arranged to have Tourgée's letter read aloud at a mass prayer meeting. Furthermore, she and her husband, the Rev. Francis Grimke, immediately set about circulating application forms. The reason so few black Washingtonians had joined the NCRA, she discovered, was that they had either not heard of the organization or had supposed it was intended only for whites. Once they understood that Tourgée was seeking to create an interracial movement for equal citizenship, they "entered heartily" into the endeavor, she affirmed.⁴³

Another correspondent to whom Tourgée grumbled about the slow pace of northern black recruitment, Florence A. Lewis of Philadelphia—the first "colored woman" to join the NCRA in November 1891—agreed that if African Americans of the "Eastern and Middle States" were not flocking to the association, it was mainly because "[t]hey have not heard of the movement." The *Inter Ocean* did not circulate in Philadelphia, she pointed out, offering to write an account of the NCRA for the *A.M.E. Review*, a periodical "seen by colored people in all sections of the United States." Although prevented by the flu from fulfilling her intention before the next issue went to press, she did publicize the NCRA among her contacts in Washington, Boston, and Philadelphia. She sent Tourgée a list of twenty-three Washingtonian recruits, including such prominent figures as: John R. Lynch, former congressman from Mississippi, who later became an auditor of the U.S. Treasury; Lewis H. Douglass, son of Frederick Douglass; and Robert H. Terrell, a Harvard and Howard-trained lawyer heading the Navy Pay Division.

More would join the organization, Lewis ventured, once Tourgée unveiled a "definite plan of work" for members. "*What* is to be done? *How?* These two queries meet me at every turn," she nudged. Indeed, many of Tourgée's correspondents, white as well as black, raised the

⁴³ Letter from Charlotte Forten Grimke to AWT (May 18, 1892) (on file as #6240, AWTP); Letter from Charlotte Forten Grimke to AWT (May 27, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from Charlotte Forten Grimke to AWT (June 7, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

same questions.⁴⁴ At Lewis's behest, the prominent African American doctor and community leader, Nathan F. Mossell, started a Philadelphia chapter of the NCRA, which he characterized as a reincarnation of the "old abolition movement" and "the most important [organization] that has been inaugurated since the war for the benefit of the colored people."⁴⁵ Perhaps because Mossell cautiously sought to keep "the political side of our fight . . . in the back ground," however contrary to Tourgée's advice, the Philadelphia chapter did not take off until October 1893, when the painter Henry O. Tanner, son of A.M.E. bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner, returned from art studies in Paris and energized his denomination's preachers.⁴⁶

Like Florence Lewis and Charlotte Forten Grimke, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin threw her support behind the NCRA almost at its inception, only to have Tourgée complain that she and other northern African Americans were not doing enough. While expressing "pleasure" at seeing "several notices in the 'Courant' of the National Citizens' Rights Association," along with complimentary references to himself, Tourgée stressed that enrollments mattered more than favorable publicity. "[D]o you realize that it is *your* cause much more than mine that I am fighting for? If so why don't you *do* something," he hectored Ruffin in a "personal" letter to the editor, whom he assumed to be a man: "What we want is men—men with souls—men who will stand up and be counted." If the NCRA could display a membership list of "a million white names and a million black ones—especially *men*," it could institute racial equality "without firing a gun." How many members could Ruffin furnish from Boston, Tourgée demanded, promising to send twenty lists for her to fill with signatures. "Dont wait to be carried over the

⁴⁴ Letter from AWT to Florence A. Lewis (on file as #5904, AWTP) (emphasis in original); Letter from AWT to Florence A. Lewis (Nov. 30, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from Florence A. Lewis to AWT (Dec. 2 1891) (on file as #5816); Letter from Florence A. Lewis to AWT (Jan. 1, 1892) (on file as #5904, AWTP); Letter from Florence A. Lewis to AWT (Feb. 25 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP). The A.M.E. Church Review has been identified as the "leading black thought journal of the day." KEVIN K. GAINES, UPLIFTING THE RACE: BLACK LEADERSHIP, POLITICS, AND CULTURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY 94 (Paperback ed. 1996). No article by Florence Lewis about the NCRA appears in any 1892 number.

⁴⁵ See Letter from Nathan F. Mossell to AWT (Nov. 18, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP) (Quotations from the 18 Nov. 1891 *Philadelphia Press* interview with Mossell that he enclosed in his letter to Tourgée of that date).

⁴⁶ *Id.*; Letter from AWT to Nathan F. Mossell (on file as #5904, AWTP) (emphasis in original); Letter from H.O. Tanner to AWT (July 31, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from H.O. Tanner to AWT (Aug. 3, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from H.O. Tanner to AWT (Oct. 10, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

hard places in the road. The manhood of your race never was on trial as it is now. Let us hear from it," he urged.⁴⁷

Less deferential than Lewis and Forten Grimke, Ruffin replied tartly that though she and her staff were not men but "only over-worked, anxious, women," they had the "requisite souls" to "help all we can in this discouraging effort to make white men feel and act that 'a man's a man for a that and a that,'" in the words of the Scottish poet Robert Burns. The chief obstacle lay in white men's racism rather than in black men's lack of manhood, she intimated. Nevertheless, she committed herself to recruiting for the NCRA.⁴⁸

Ruffin would remain a staunch ally of Tourgée's; yet, one wonders how she reacted to his long letter in answer to hers, in which he not only reiterated his aspersions on the "Northern colored man," but also assigned women a subordinate role in the NCRA. Ruffin should take it as a "great compliment" that he "mistook [her] sex." Tourgée told her, "since I knew you only by your work and when a woman's work is mistaken for a man's, it is a sure testimony that it is not inferior to a man's." Although both men and women were welcome to join the NCRA, he specified, "it is most desirable at this time not to have too great a proportion of women on our lists" because they could not vote in United States elections and thus critics might say "women do not count." African American women could best serve the cause by "acting as solicitors" for the NCRA, in which capacity they could "be the most efficient agents for promoting its spread among their people."

Ignoring Ruffin's pointed censure of white racism, Tourgée redirected responsibility for fighting racism back towards African Americans:

Of course, a race that will not work for its own rights and liberties does not deserve to have them and will not long retain them. The colored people of the South know this and they are alert to take advantage of anything that promises relief. The same is true of the masses of them in most of the cities of the [mid]West. At the East they are yet apathetic.

As he speculated about the reasons for this seeming apathy, Tourgée considered two possible explanations: was the educated "colored man of the North . . . ashamed of his poor relations" or, had the reigning scientific racism convinced him that "he is an ethnic inferior and will

⁴⁷ Letter from AWT to Ed Courant (Nov. 16, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

⁴⁸ Letter from Josephine S.P. Ruffin to AWT (Dec. 3, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

remain so until he is so bleached as to be undistinguishable from the Caucasian?" He was advancing these speculations privately, Tourgée emphasized in a lengthy postscript, because he felt he could "say . . . confidentially" to an African American supporter "what it might be inexpedient to publish." Besides, the *Courant* would more successfully mobilize readers in a campaign that required "earnest and universal co-operation" if it relied not on his words but on those of "its own best author" to win converts. "I am . . . willing to trust the advocacy of the N.C.R.A. to your woman's instinct and good sense," Tourgée assured Ruffin.⁴⁹

Whether through the *Courant* or through other channels, the NCRA gained adherents in the Boston area. For example, the Cambridge Afro-American League, numbering fifty or sixty members, decided to form itself into an NCRA chapter and change its name accordingly. As the League's secretary informed Tourgée, northern African Americans were not indifferent to the plight of their southern brothers and sisters—they simply did not know about either the extent of white supremacist repression beneath the Mason Dixon line, or the "good work" the NCRA was accomplishing in New Orleans, because local newspapers were not adequately covering these topics.⁵⁰

Of course, no reader of Tourgée's "Bystander" column could plead similar ignorance. Thus, Chicago, home of both the *Inter Ocean* and the *Conservator*, held the largest and most enthusiastic cohort of African American NCRA members in the North. Mack W. Caldwell, who had been corresponding with Tourgée since 1890, typified their spirit. Eager to share "equally" in sustaining the organization, he proclaimed:

Whenever money is needed count me, whenever a burden is to be borne count me, and whenever any fighting is to be done to vindicate the rights of the members of the association or those it aims to protect count me in as an able-bodied soldier ready and willing at all times to fall over and die in the interest of the *Right*.

He pledged to send "at least five names each week to add" to the NCRA's membership list, to sell fifty copies of Tourgée's pamphlet on

⁴⁹ Letter from AWT to *Courant* (on file as #5900, AWTP). For evidence of Ruffin's continuing support of Tourgée, see *Woman's Era*, May 1, 1894, at 13; see also Letter from Josephine S.P. Ruffin to AWT (Feb. 24, 1897) (on file as #9243, AWTP).

⁵⁰ Letter from Timothy G. Tynes to AWT (Feb. 27, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

citizenship, *Is Liberty Worth Preserving?*, and to “leave nothing undone . . . to advance the interest of the organization.”⁵¹

Another Black Chicagoan, William Lewis Martin, who identified himself as an Oberlin student slated to graduate with the class of 1892, greeted the NCRA as the “consummation of [his] fondest hopes and earnest prayers.” He volunteered to target ministers and teachers, through whom he hoped to recruit five-hundred members within two months. Martin suggested, “Tourgée should try to enlist the influential bishops of the A.M.E. church.” Although they “dislike to ‘mix politics and religion,’” they could be “aroused” because of their concern for the “wellfare [sic] of the race,” especially if Tourgée solicited them personally. Promising to devote all his spare time to building the organization, Martin wrote: “I want to see you get a million voters or members enlisted and shall do my part to swell the number.”⁵²

No less enterprising, Chicago Collector of Customs Robert McCoomer sent Tourgée a circular showing that he had called a mass meeting of African Americans in his congressional district, under the auspices of the Banneker League, of which he was the president. It exhorted those who “value the future welfare of our race” not only to come themselves, but also to “induce [their] friends to come.” “[T]he colored people of this district will do all they can for the citizens rights Association having profound Confidence in all of your works Consequently where you [l]ead we will follow,” McCoomer vowed to Tourgée.⁵³

Even the most energetic of the NCRA’s promoters never managed to generate notable grassroots participation in it among their fellow African Americans of the North, however. In a desperate bid to increase northern black NCRA enrollment, Tourgée finally addressed “A Personal Letter to Afro-Americans,” which the *Plaindealer*, the *Gazette*, and probably other “race journals” published in early June 1892. Perhaps acting on his allies’ promptings, Tourgée stressed the organization’s interracial character and elaborated on its methods: “It advocates prayers, petitions, argument, law, remonstrance, and if need be when all other means shall fail, resistance to oppression.” He then

⁵¹ Letter from Mack W. Caldwell to AWT (Feb. 14, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP) (emphasis in original); Letter from Mack W. Caldwell to AWT (May 1, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from Mack W. Caldwell to AWT (May 25, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

⁵² Letter from William Lewis Martin to AWT (Jan. 1, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

⁵³ Letter from Robert McCoomer to AWT (Mar. 19, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

warned that if educated black Northerners refused to join the NCRA, not only would they discourage the “hundreds of thousands of white men who have rallied as if by magic” to the cause of equal rights, but they would also fuel their enemies’ claims that African Americans were “not fit for self-government.” He climaxed his appeal by replying for the first time to critics of “Tourgeeism”—African Americans preaching accommodation to the racist status quo, a faction that would soon flock to the banner of Booker T. Washington: “The man who counsels voluntary submission to wrong rather than protest, remonstrances and peaceful united effort for its overthrow, is simply deficient in that manhood on which alone equal citizenship can be securely based.”⁵⁴

Two editorials in the *Plaindealer* seconded Tourgée’s appeal. The first urged readers to “see that every Afro-American is enrolled in this Grand Army of liberty,” so as to prove the charge of “apathy” unwarranted. “Judge Tourgée is so intense in his advocacy of freedom, that any thing less than a degree of intensity that approaches his own appears to him as apathy,” wrote editor William A. Anderson diplomatically. The second editorial emphasized the need for supplementing racial self-help with black-white collaboration. “It is time we must do for ourselves, but we must do it in connection with and when necessary under the leadership of just such able and true white friends as now proffer us aid,” argued Anderson, underscoring that “Judge Tourgée has done more for the cause of liberty than any Afro-American living outside of [Frederick] Douglass.”⁵⁵ Nonetheless, neither Tourgée’s “Letter to Afro-Americans,” nor Anderson’s endorsement, gained the NCRA its desired mass following.

What accounts for the failure of black Northerners to embrace the NCRA with the excitement their southern counterparts displayed? Did they feel less driven to clutch desperately at almost any solution to their predicament because white supremacy in the North took less virulent forms? Did they wish to know more about how and by whom the NCRA was going to be run and what plan of action it would propose

⁵⁴ Tourgée, “*Tourgeeism!*” *A Personal Letter to Afro-Americans, from Judge Tourgée*, DETROIT PLAINDEALER, June 3, 1892, at 1, 8; “*Tourgeeism.*” *What the National Citizens’ Rights Association Is. Why Every Afro-American Should Become a Member*, CLEVELAND GAZETTE, June 4, 1892, at 1. The *Conservator* and the *Courant* likely published this letter as well.

⁵⁵ “*Tourgeeism*” an untitled editorial, DETROIT PLAINDEALER, June 3, 1892, at 4. In a letter marked “Personal,” Tourgée objected: “Isn’t it unjust to your people to intimate that they favor the Association because a white man is the head of it?” The NCRA had “no ‘leader;’” he claimed. Letter from AWT to [William A.] Anderson (after June 3, 1892) (on file as #6485, ATWP).

before they committed themselves to working for it? Did their agenda differ from Tourgée's? Or as Tourgée suspected, did black Northerners, and especially their religious and political leaders, not "desire the cooperation of white people to secure" their rights?⁵⁶

NCRA archives furnish evidence partially supporting all of these explanations. The black Civil War veteran from Wisconsin, Arthur B. Lee, for example, echoed Florence Lewis: "I am met with the question on all sides . . . but what are you going to *do*."⁵⁷ Samuel G. Hicks of Clay City, Illinois, voiced dissatisfaction with signing up recruits merely to demonstrate the existence of broad public sentiment in favor of guaranteeing all Americans equal citizenship. "I sent you my name to be enrolled as a member of the National Citizens Equal Rights Association under the supposition that it was meant for an organization to do some real work," toward implementing "equal rights and opportunity," he complained, adding sharply: "I hope to hear of something which the association is doing."⁵⁸ Tourgée's reply must have disappointed him, since he did not pursue their correspondence.

Although Tourgée insisted that the NCRA was "designed to secure results, not merely to afford an opportunity for the display of buncombe," he argued that "enlist[ing] the support of some great national party [was] essential to secure legislation" for the protection of "free speech, equal rights, and a free ballot" throughout the United States, and that "[s]uch party support [could] only be obtained" if public sentiment demanded it vociferously enough—hence, NCRA members must concentrate on redoubling recruitment.⁵⁹ Still, many northern African Americans—like those in the South who besieged Tourgée with requests for arms, protection, emigration assistance, and access to voting—seem to have shared Hicks's desire for concrete action against the white racist practices that victimized them.

Topping the list of evils they wanted the NCRA to tackle was lynching. Calls for initiatives against this national crime grew to a crescendo

⁵⁶ Letter from AWT to Robert McCoomer (after Mar. 19, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP). For other views on why northern African Americans did not join the NCRA in greater numbers, see OLSEN, *CARPETBAGGER'S CRUSADE*, *supra* note 3, at 318-20; and ELLIOTT, *COLOR-BLIND JUSTICE*, *supra* note 3, at 273-76.

⁵⁷ Letter from Arthur B. Lee to AWT, (Dec. 19, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP) (emphasis in original); Letter from Florence Lewis to AWT (Jan. 1, 1892) (on file as #5940, AWTP).

⁵⁸ Letter from Samuel G. Hicks to AWT (Mar. 10, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

⁵⁹ Letter from AWT to Samuel J. [sic] Hicks (Mar. 12, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

after Ida B. Wells launched her international anti-lynching campaign with a lecture tour of the British Isles in Spring 1893. That July, when C.J. Miller of Springfield, Illinois, was lynched in Bardwell, Kentucky, for a crime he did not commit, the New Orleans *Crusader* erroneously announced that the NCRA was collecting contributions to help Miller's widow sue for damages. Picked up by the *Philadelphia Evening Herald*, the announcement triggered a spurt of new NCRA enrollments. Among them, D.D. Weaver of Philadelphia eloquently articulated his reasons for waiting until this moment to send in the application for NCRA membership that he had left blank on his desk for many months. He had involved himself in so many "schemes . . . inaugurated to protect and defend" his race, only to see them "defeated," that he had "almost lost courage" and decided to leave the "wrongs done [his] people for time to rectify," he confided, but the inaccurate news that the NCRA was raising funds to take a lynching case to court had encouraged him to join the organization and begin recruiting for it.⁶⁰

Tourgée had in fact been speaking out forcefully against lynching in his "Bystander" column since December 1888, when he first advocated the passage of anti-lynching legislation, and he had been collaborating with Wells for over a year by the time the Miller lynching occurred.⁶¹ Nevertheless, he resisted shouldering the Miller case because he saw it as a distraction from the NCRA's mission, which he defined as, "manufacturing right sentiment until it ripens into just deeds." Thus, he answered Weaver by claiming that the NCRA could take credit for a considerable transformation in public opinion "when the lynching of a colored man excites this widespread condemnation and anger among the white citizenship of the North"—a phenomenon "wholly unknown before the Association was organized." The NCRA had "no funds to carry on" a lawsuit for a lynching victim, he pointed out, and it was "useless to take any steps whatever until a sufficient sum to pay the recoverable expenses of such [a lawsuit was] secured." Ap-

⁶⁰ Letter from D.D. Weaver to AWT (July 15, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from AWT to D.D. Weaver (July 15, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP); see also Letters from C.M. Tanner & H.O. Tanner to AWT (July 14, 15, & 31, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from Thomas Green to AWT (July 19, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

⁶¹ See Albion W. Tourgée, *A Bystander's Notes*, CHI. DAILY INTER OCEAN, Dec. 15, 1888, at 4, reprinted in UNDAUNTED RADICAL: THE SELECTED WRITINGS AND SPEECHES OF ALBION W. TOURGÉE 237-39 (2010). For the two most detailed accounts of Tourgée's collaboration with Wells in her campaign against lynching, see Carolyn L. Karcher, *Ida B. Wells and her allies against lynching: A transnational perspective*, 3.2 COMP. AM. STUDS. 131-51 (2005); Carolyn L. Karcher, *The White 'Bystander' and the Black Journalist 'Abroad': Albion W. Tourgée and Ida B. Wells as Allies Against Lynching*, in 29 PROSPECTS 85-119 (2005).

parently because he had been “so widely importuned to take action,” however, Tourgée reversed himself in the postscript and agreed to “act as trustee of such funds as may be contributed and if enough is received within a reasonable time to employ counsel” for litigation. In the end, as Tourgée had anticipated, the amount of money collected proved entirely inadequate, and he returned it to the donors.⁶²

Perhaps the chief factor impeding the large-scale recruitment of black Northerners lay in the deep chasm that had opened up between the races since the demise of the abolitionist movement after the collapse of Reconstruction. Before the war, the struggle against slavery had brought whites and African Americans together for the first time, and participants like the young Charlotte Forten had succeeded in bridging the black and white worlds and cultivating cross-racial friendships. Even at the height of the abolitionist movement, however, only a handful of whites had shown themselves immune to the dominant assumptions of their culture. Black abolitionists had frequently charged their white collaborators with arrogance and condescension and complained of being excluded from leadership roles. In response, white abolitionists had charged blacks with disloyalty or ingratitude. Differing priorities had also provoked racial tensions.⁶³

Mutual distrust had greatly increased by the 1890s, when few survived who had experienced the freedom of socializing across the color line and working in integrated activist groups to eradicate racism. The tide of reaction that had swept the country in the wake of Reconstruction had all but erased the abolitionist movement from general public memory, repudiated its ideals of racial equality and impartial justice, and substituted white supremacy in its place.⁶⁴ Disillusioned by the impotence of their staunchest white allies to stem this tide, and by the defection of all too many who succumbed to white southern propaganda and who concluded that legislation could not raise the status of

⁶² Letter from AWT to D.D. Weaver (after July 15, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

⁶³ For discussions of these disputes, see LAWRENCE J. FRIEDMAN, *GREGARIOUS SAINTS: SELF AND COMMUNITY IN AMERICAN ABOLITIONISM, 1830-1870* ch.6 (1982); VINCENT HARDING, *THERE IS A RIVER: THE BLACK STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN AMERICA* 124-28 (1983); JANE H. PEASE & WILLIAM H. PEASE, *THEY WHO WOULD BE FREE: BLACKS' SEARCH FOR FREEDOM, 1830-1861* ch. 1 & 5 (1990); BENJAMIN QUARLES, *BLACK ABOLITIONISTS* at ix, 49-56 (Oxford Univ. Press 1969).

⁶⁴ See DAVID W. BLIGHT, *RACE AND REUNION: THE CIVIL WAR IN AMERICAN MEMORY* (2001); EDWARD J. BLUM, *REFORGING THE WHITE REPUBLIC: RACE, RELIGION, AND AMERICAN NATIONALISM, 1865-1898* (La. State Univ. Press 2005); LOGAN, *supra* note 1.

a race branded by nature as inferior,⁶⁵ African Americans devoted themselves to building their own institutions. Black churches, newspapers, religious periodicals, and self-help organizations flourished as never before. A vastly expanded black middle class supported these institutions, its intelligentsia emerging from the colleges and universities established for African Americans during and after Reconstruction, as well as from the rare white schools that admitted African Americans, such as abolitionist-founded Oberlin.⁶⁶

Two developments exemplify the trend among African Americans toward separatism as a strategy for countering white supremacy: first, the formation in 1890 of the all-black National Afro-American League to fight against disfranchisement, lynching, virtual re-enslavement under the southern penitentiary system, discriminatory education, and segregation, an initiative led by the militant journalist T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the *New York Age*; second, the creation in 1893 of the International Migration Society to promote the return of blacks to Africa, sponsored by A.M.E. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, who had begun his career as a Radical Republican but had abandoned hope that African Americans would ever achieve justice in the United States.⁶⁷

Tourgée had warmly supported the founding of the Afro-American League and devoted his “Bystander” column of 2 November 1889 to celebrating the announcement of the national League’s forthcoming inaugural convention, to be held in Chicago on 18 January 1890. “It is high time the colored man took up the cudgels for the assertion of his rights himself. There will never be any more Garrisons or Philipses to fight his battles for him,” he editorialized. Two requisites for

⁶⁵ See McPherson, *supra* note 3, at 312-14 (mentioning some of the defectors, but concluding that, “the surprise is not that some old and more young crusaders fell by the wayside, but that so many kept pressing on”); see also Blum, *supra* note 64, at ch. 3 (detailing the role Henry Ward Beecher and, to a lesser extent, his sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, played in influencing the northern public to accept second-class citizenship for African Americans as the price for sectional harmony).

⁶⁶ See GAINES, *supra* note 44.

⁶⁷ See Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The National Afro-American League, 1887-1908*, in 27 J. S. HIST. 494-512 (1861). According to Thornbrough, “Fortune’s plan was to organize local and state leagues before attempting to effect a national organization. In the months following his initial proposal [of 28 May 1887], local leagues of varying size and strength were formed—in New England, Pennsylvania, New York, Illinois, Minnesota, and even in distant San Francisco. In the South organizations were attempted in Virginia, Texas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia” *Id.* at 498. On the International Migration Society, see Edwin S. Redkey, *Bishop Turner’s African Dream*, 54 J. AM. HIST. 271-90 (1967).

the success of this enterprise, Tourgée contended, were “martyrs . . . brave enough to die . . . in every county of the South to secure their liberty,” and a leader with the “nerve and power and self-forgetfulness . . . to ruthlessly put down the horde of self-seekers who always spring to the front in such a movement,” at the same time with “tact enough to make them all work toward one end.”

Tourgée had also sent a letter to be read at the convention, listing the objectives toward which he believed the association should strive: to organize African Americans into a united pressure group; to collect information on the disabilities and abuses they endured throughout the United States; and to agitate for just laws and fair administration of those laws—objectives remarkably similar to those he would soon lay out for the NCRA, but tamer than those Fortune had announced for the League.⁶⁸ To Tourgée’s outrage, some members of the League, not including Fortune, had wanted to return the letter unopened, but the newly elected president of the group, Joseph C. Price, president of Livingston College in North Carolina, had prevailed on his colleagues to acknowledge it politely. “I would thank you . . . were it not a matter of far more importance to the race than to me,” Tourgée told Price:

[T]he colored people of the United States cannot afford to allow its representative men to offer the almost unprecedented insult of returning the letter of a man who has published half a dozen volumes in advocacy of their rights, which have been read by ten millions of American citizens. Of course, the hope of the colored people depends on their receiving the support and approval of a majority because majorities rule. So it will not pay to kick a faithful champion because he is white.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ AWT, *supra* note 61, at 246-51; T. Thomas Fortune, Speech Detailing the Objectives of the League Convention, *reprinted in* THE LEAGUE CONVENTION: A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION PERFECTED AT CHICAGO 1-2 (New York *Age* 1890); undated fragment of letter (on file as #4408, AWTP).

⁶⁹ Letter from J.C. Price to AWT (Mar. 18, 1890) (on file as #4568, AWTP); Letter from AWT to J.C. Price (after Mar. 18, 1890) (on file as #11043, AWTP). For detailed reports on the convention, see THE LEAGUE CONVENTION 1-3 (New York *Age*, Jan. 25, 1890); and A GRATIFYING SUCCESS. AFRO-AMERICANS IN NATIONAL CONVENTION ORGANIZE A NATIONAL LEAGUE 1 (Detroit *Plaindealer*, 1890). The *Age* does not mention the debate over returning Tourgée’s letter and simply reports that it was received, but an editorial note on p. 2 comments: “The letter of Judge Albion W. Tourgee, to the League Convention, was worthy of the man, who has never wavered in his fight for a square deal for Afro-Americans.” According to the *Plaindealer*, the two convention members who wanted the letter returned unread were Rev. J. E. Haynes of South Carolina and Rev. J. A. Brockett of Massachusetts. In addition to Price, Rev. W. H. Heard of Pennsylvania defended Tourgée. Fortune apparently did not participate in the discussion, perhaps because he wasn’t on the committee handling messages.

Initially Tourgée rejoiced that Price had been chosen to head the League, rather than Fortune, whom he then distrusted as a “self-seeking, ambitious demagogue.” Congratulating Price on his accession, Tourgée wrote:

Only once in an age is such a chance to flex the world's thought and destiny made possible to *any individual*. It is not your race alone but the world's civilization and political systems and the quality of Christian thought that is liable to be affected by the operations of the League, if skilfully and wisely directed.

He went on to warn Price against letting Fortune sow dissension in the League and derail the fledgling organization through “indiscretion.”⁷⁰ Tourgée quickly soured on Price, however, whom he accused of scattering his energies by starting a literary magazine instead of educating the white northern public about the brute force that kept African Americans in neo-slavery. “It will hurt his work in the League. The man at its head should know no other interest—worship no other God but liberty until his race is free,” Tourgée opined to the *Plaindealer's* Anderson, who headed a local chapter of the League.⁷¹ The disappointment he met in his efforts to form a broad alliance with members of separatist organizations would seem to justify Tourgée's suspicion that black Northerners, or at least some of their leaders, did not “desire the cooperation of white people to secure” their rights.⁷²

Although the trend toward black separatism may have played a role in hampering the NCRA's growth, the Afro-American League did not succeed any better than the NCRA in inspiring a grassroots movement among black Northerners, and may actually have fallen short of

⁷⁰ Letter from AWT to J.C. Price (after Mar. 18, 1890) (on file as #11043, AWTP) (emphasis in original). Interestingly, Emma noted in her diary that she “did not approve” of this letter and forced him to “modif[y]” it “so it is not so objectionable.” See AWTP #9906, entries for Jan. 25 & 26, 1890.

⁷¹ See Letter from Mack W. Caldwell to AWT (May 29, 1890) (on file as #5147, AWTP); Letter from AWT to William H. Anderson (after Apr. 18, 1890) (on file as #5147, AWTP).

⁷² Letter from AWT to Robert McCoomer (Mar. 19, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP). See also G. Herbert Renfro, *Is the Afro-American League a Failure*, A.M.E. CHURCH REVIEW, July 1892, at 9-18. Renfro explicitly argues against allowing whites to participate in the Afro-American League: “Our experience with white men all along has taught us to observe that no matter how friendly, and brotherly, and Christian-like they may be, when Caucasians come into an Ethiopian assembly, like a band of conquerors they seize upon the highest seats, or are elevated by the servility and pusillanimity of the dark-hued followers Let the League discard the reliance upon the arm and heart of any save its own proud Afro-American. Let it avoid an association that cannot be beneficial.” *Id.* at 13.

the NCRA's recruitment of black Southerners. Indeed, the League's racial exclusivity alienated the Afro-Creoles who so enthusiastically promoted the NCRA. Refusing to affiliate with an organization whose very title drew the "color line" they were seeking to eliminate through their defiance of the Jim Crow car, they had patronized an alternative organization in July 1890 called the American Citizens Equal Rights Association, but it had turned into nothing more than a "political resolution machine," according to Martinet, and had lasted only a year.⁷³ As for the League, already "languishing" by the time Tourgée founded the NCRA, it dissolved in August 1893, and Fortune blamed its dissolution on the same problems Tourgée lamented: "fail[ure] to win a following among the Negro masses" and "lack of support from race leaders."⁷⁴

Whatever the reason for which "race leaders" kept aloof from the Afro-American League (which leaders Fortune meant and why they did not patronize the League remain unclear), Tourgée attributed their coolness toward the NCRA to political ambition, petty jealousy, and resentment at a white man's having presumed to launch a civil rights organization without seeking their endorsement. "[A] lot of the so-called 'leaders' are going to make a kick because they are not consulted," he confided to Martinet, who shared his disdain for them. "They are so intoxicated with the idea of being 'leaders' that I fear they are willing to sell their brethren into Egypt for the tinsel of a cheap notoriety."⁷⁵

The "so-called 'leaders'" Tourgée perhaps had in mind may have been such politicians as John M. Langston, Blanche K. Bruce, and P.B.S. Pinchback—men dependent for their positions on Republican party bosses, and thus reluctant to associate themselves with a radical movement steered by a political gadfly. Like Martinet, he may even have numbered Frederick Douglass among those who "have grown rich in fighting the race's battles," but who "never make the slightest sacrifice, or do anything to help unless it benefits them."⁷⁶ Tourgée

⁷³ Letter from Louis A. Martinet to AWT (Oct. 5 1891) (on file as #5760, AWTP). For further details on the ACERA, see ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 249-52; KELLEY, *supra* note 9, at 62-69.

⁷⁴ Thornbrough, *supra* note 67, at 500-01.

⁷⁵ Letter from AWT to Louis A. Martinet, n.d. (on file as #5673, AWTP). This undated letter has been miscataloged among letters of late 1892. Martinet's reply of Dec. 7, 1891 establishes its probable date. Letter from Lois A. Martinet to AWT (Dec. 7, 1891) (on file as #5837, AWTP).

⁷⁶ Letter from Louis A. Martinet to AWT (July 4, 1892) (on file as #6377, AWTP) (Martinet specifically mentions "Douglas, Pinchback, & the like"). For analogous criti-

may also have been targeting editors of the more conservative race papers. As reported in the *Plaindealer* and the *Conservator*, for example, Edwin H. Hackley, editor of the Denver *Statesman*, “spen[t] much of his spare time in writing harsh criticisms of Judge Tourgée, the best friend to-day that the colored man has in this country.”⁷⁷ Hackley insisted that “‘no white man’ could ‘lead or direct’ the colored population and specifically repudiat[ed] agitation, political action, and remedial legislation” because he believed such methods only worsened “race hatred.”⁷⁸ The editor of the Indianapolis *Freeman*, Edward E. Cooper, attacked “Tourgeeism” even more vituperatively, calling Tourgée a “blatherskite,” deriding his “ill-seasoned vaporings,” and rejecting his “inflamable . . . advice to the colored people.”⁷⁹

cisms by Wells, see PAULA J. GIDDINGS, *IDA: A SWORD AMONG LIONS* 204 (2008) (“‘Where are our leaders when the race is being burnt, shot and hanged?’ the *Free Speech* taunted. . . . No doubt thinking of the likes of John Langston, Blanche K. Bruce, and P. B. S. Pinchback, all maneuvering in a presidential election year, Wells concluded, ‘A few big offices and the control of a little Federal patronage is not sufficient recompense for the lives lost, the blood shed, and the rights denied the race.’”). For further speculation about which leaders Tourgée had in mind, see ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 273-75. Elliott shows that Tourgée tried in vain to obtain Douglass’s endorsement of the NCRA.

⁷⁷ George Arnold, Letter to the Editor, *In Tourgée’s Defense*, *PLAINDEALER*, May 6, 1892, at 4. Arnold identified himself as having known Tourgée since his days in North Carolina and said that Tourgée “was then the same upright, brave, bold, courageous, outspoken friend of humanity, that he has shown to be as ‘Bystander.’” He added: “For God’s sake don’t mention it that there is on this green earth an Afro-American who does not honor and value Judge Tourgée.” The paragraph about Hackley in the *Plaindealer*, to which Arnold refers in his letter, was reprinted from the *Conservator* on May 29, 1892 under the “Current Comment” column, which typically published extracts from African American and some white newspapers. Edwin H. Hackley, *Current Comment*, *CONSERVATOR* (Chicago), May 29, 1892, at 4. The May 6 “Current Comment” column also included an extract from the Boston *Republican*: “It sounds exceedingly strange to the colored men in sections of the country that have produced some of the strongest and most devoted white friends of our people, to hear other colored men speak in a belittling way of such individuals.” The *Republican* praised Tourgée as a “noble and worthy” successor of Garrison and Phillips and credited him with “working harder for the colored people than we are doing for ourselves.” It concluded: “We pray for more Tourgees Long live ‘Tourgeeism,’ and may it find its way into every home and hamlet in the world.” *Id.*

⁷⁸ OLSEN, *CARPETBAGGER’S CRUSADE*, *supra* note 3, at 318-19. Hackley’s views are summarized and criticized in the Detroit *PLAINDEALER*, Apr. 15, 1892, at 4. Edwin H. Hackley, *Open Letter*, *PLAINDEALER*, June 3, 1892, at 8, also allowed Hackley to make his own case in his “Open Letter” replying to George Arnold and other critics.

⁷⁹ For editorials attacking Tourgée in *The Freeman*, *An Illustrated Colored Newspaper* (Indianapolis), see “The Colored Ministry,” 31 Oct. 1891, 4; “Negroes as Partisans,” 9 Apr. 1892, 4; and “Judge Tourgée’s Ill-Seasoned Vaporings,” 25 June 1892, 4. The *Freeman* of 19 Mar. 1892 did, however, publish on its front page a eulogistic article sent from Chicago: “Negro Oppression. The National Citizen’s Rights Association—Its Mission.”

Tourgée would continue to carp about “ill-natured, little flings” from “colored editors” as late as 1895.⁸⁰ He could conceivably have avoided antagonizing these leaders by inviting them to join the NCRA’s Administrative Council, but he opted instead “to disarm them by appointing colored men and women who are representatives but *not* ‘leaders,’” among them Charles W. Chesnutt, Rodolphe Desdunes, Ida B. Wells, and Florence Lewis. As he explained to Martinet, if African American leaders were “thrust forward, the white people [would] draw out,” and the NCRA would lose its character as an interracial organization modeled on the abolitionist movement: “[W]hite men will not join a colored League, to any extent that is. Yet it is white votes and sentiment we must rely on at the North.”⁸¹

When Tourgée sent out his call in the *Inter Ocean* for a “Citizens Equal Rights Association,” he had expected to have far more trouble attracting whites than African Americans to such an organization. After all, the white northern public had acquiesced with dismayingly little protest in President Hayes’s dismantling of Reconstruction and the subsequent rollback by Congress and the Supreme Court of equal rights legislation that represented the fruits of a forty-year antislavery struggle and a murderous Civil War. To Tourgée’s astonishment, however, white Northerners initially outnumbered African Americans ten-to-one on the NCRA’s enrollment lists and eventually constituted 200,000 of the association’s 250,000 members.⁸²

It was this gaping disparity that spurred him to badger his northern black supporters to increase the rate of recruitment in their communities. As he admitted to Forten Grimke, he worried that if the “hundreds of thousands of white voters who [had] pledged themselves to demand justice and equality for the colored man” realized African Americans were not doing their share of the NCRA’s work, they would soon cease their own efforts, finding it useless to “force liberty and

⁸⁰ Albion W. Tourgée, Editorial, *THE BASIS*, June 29, 1895, at 388.

⁸¹ Letter from AWT to Louis A. Martinet (on file as #6473, AWTP) (emphasis in original). Tourgée asked Martinet whether he agreed with the choice of Desdunes or would like the position himself. According to Mark Elliott, the names of Administrative Council members appeared on the NCRA’s official letterhead. See ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 255.

⁸² Letter from AWT to Charlotte Forten Grimke (on file as #6297, AWTP) (“[T]he National Citizens’ Rights Association has on its roll today ten white names for one colored.”); Letter from AWT to Hon. Phillip C. Garret (on file as #6439, AWTP) (“We have 250,000, or thereabouts; probably 200,000 of them white and about that number at the North.”).

equality upon a people who are indifferent” to their rights.⁸³ The conundrum Tourgée thought he faced was that whites would neither join a black-led or black-dominated civil rights organization, nor make sacrifices blacks themselves seemed unwilling to make in the battle against racial oppression.

Yet white Northerners responded in such overwhelming numbers to Tourgée’s appeal that we may well wonder whether he underestimated the legacy the abolitionist movement had left (as McPherson’s research would suggest). Hundreds identified themselves as children of abolitionists or Civil War Union veterans who, like Tourgée himself, had fought in abolitionist regiments dedicated to freeing African Americans from bondage, and who had remained faithful to their ideals despite the nation’s betrayal of them. H. Farmer of Jefferson County, Illinois, a former Captain in the Wisconsin infantry, offers a typical example. His abolitionist father, he proudly recalled, had sent him to war when General John C. Frémont issued the first emancipation proclamation of 30 August 1861 (countermanded by Lincoln to the disgust of abolitionists): “[H]e Said to me now is the time to go & I went.” Disabled in combat and living on a “pittance,” Farmer nevertheless asked for NCRA circulars and a copy of *Is Liberty Worth Preserving?* to distribute. He ended his letter: “[M]ay the Spirit of John Brown help you.”⁸⁴

Another representative Civil War veteran, A. Ryall from South Haven, Michigan, wrote that he had been “watching the progress of the ‘National Citizens Rights Association’” with emotions he could not “fully express.” He elaborated: “It seems superfluous for an old Soldier to have to say [why] he went down to and through the Sunny South and with a Million Comrades set himself up three years for a target for rebel bullets,” to overthrow “an institution whose mission on earth was only to curse and to deprave humanity to the level of the brute.” Be-

⁸³ Letter from AWT to Charlotte Forten Grimke (on file as #6297, AWTP). *See also* Letter from AWT to Eds. Boston Courant (on file as #5900, AWTP) (“I dread to see the intelligent colored man of the North behind the white people and his less intelligent fellows of the South, in what is of such vital import to the colored citizen everywhere.”).

⁸⁴ Letter from H. Farmer to AWT (Feb. 12, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP). *See also* Letter from Adrian Reynolds to AWT (Oct. 19 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP) (mentioning that he has read *A Fool’s Errand* and *Bricks Without Straw*, that as a boy, he studied with David Hodgkin, one of Tourgée’s Quaker allies during his years in Guilford County, and that “[his] father was an abolitionist as long ago as 1820 in Guilford County, N.C. where he was born and lived until 1856”).

cause the slave system he had risked life and limb to eradicate persisted in other guises, he felt:

[I]n Common with every lover of Justice and freedom throughout our broad land today that we cannot as a people afford to longer ignore certain Conditions which Cry aloud for redress and which may if not & speedily redressed bring to our ears a cry for vengeance the mere imaginary contemplation of which makes one shudder.⁸⁵

J.H. Wimpey from Splitlog, Missouri, similarly described his enlistment in the NCRA as an extension of his Union army service and a fulfillment of its mission. He wanted to pass his NCRA membership certificate down to his grandchildren along with his military discharge and:

[S]how them that, in the conflict for Nationality and freedom, I stood on the right side, and to show them that my gratitude or manhood was not so shriveled up . . . as to oppose extending equal rights and protection to my colored comrades in arms that stood beside me when rebel cannon was hurling missiles of death into our ranks.

In Wimpey's opinion, guaranteeing citizens' rights and "extending full protection to all loyal men and women, whether white or colored" deserved even higher priority than obtaining pensions for old and disabled Civil War veterans—a cause Tourgée had been agitating in his "Bystander" column to great applause among former soldiers.⁸⁶

The ranks of northern white NCRA members also included women of abolitionist background, like Jannice Page of Blue Springs, Nebraska, who had long ago subscribed to Tourgée's defunct literary magazine, *The Continent*, and who now cherished his "Bystander" column. "My blood boils with indignation and my nerves quiver in sympathy when I read of the indignities, cruelties, and sufferings to which this slave born people are subjected," she wrote. Although uncertain about whether the NCRA accepted women, she sent in her application less than a week after Tourgée launched his challenge to "Bystander" readers. Women in "isolated farm houses and quiet homes" appreciated the "valiant strokes of [Tourgée's] pen" as much as men did, Page assured him, aware that "each encouraging voice" would fortify his "sword, which it almost seems is the only defence the black man has in this unequal battle."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Letter from A. Ryall to AWT (Dec. 18, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

⁸⁶ Letter from J.H. Wimpey to AWT (Nov. 20, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

⁸⁷ Letter from Jannice Page to AWT (Oct. 22, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

The NCRA appears to have aroused particular enthusiasm on college campuses as hotbeds of progressive activism. In his lecture tours, Tourgée regularly included college towns where he “always manage[d] to spend an hour . . . with the students.”⁸⁸ The personal interest he took in them won him both their adulation and their support for the NCRA. Announcing that he was “thoroughly in sympathy with the cause for which you are doing such heroic and effective work,” Fred Meyers, a student at the University of Iowa, asked Tourgée for a letter he could read at an organizing meeting he planned to hold with the aim of starting a campus NCRA chapter. “[H]undreds of young men here . . . would be willing to join the Citizens Rights Assoc. if the matter was properly presented to them,” he declared. Tourgée obliged with a powerful statement characterizing the NCRA as “a new Army of Liberty” whose, “purpose [was] to substitute public opinion for armed strife; prevention for cure; the ballot for the bullet.” By contributing two cents each to cover the cost of mailing a certificate of membership, Tourgée told Iowa students, they could show whether they “care[d] as much as two cents for the maintenance of liberty and justice and the equal rights of American Citizens.”⁸⁹

Students at Grinnell College, also in Iowa, were already deeply engaged in advocating equal rights for African Americans when Tourgée started the NCRA. The leaders of Grinnell’s debate team, Charles L. Fitch and Charles D. Seaton, had asked Tourgée to send them material they could use to defend the propriety of “Federal Interference in the Negro Problem,” and he had treated them “magnificently.” After two and a half months of study, during which they had “prepared digests of arguments” from Tourgée’s *Bricks Without Straw, A Fool’s Errand*, and *An Appeal to Caesar*, they handily won their debate. They now proposed to canvass for the NCRA, requesting fifty membership forms and paying for them with the same number of two-cent stamps. Many students at Grinnell “would be anxious to join,” they predicted.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Obituary clippings from THE AMERICAN (May 21, 1905) (on file as #9907, AWTP) (“As a lecturer Judge Tourgée has in one or two brief tours won a popularity second to none. Especially in the West is he a prime favorite. Fond of young people and the best of storytellers, he always manages to spend an hour when in a college town with the students.”).

⁸⁹ Letter from F. W. Meyers to AWT (Mar. 6, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); AWT to Students of the State Univ. of Iowa (after 6 Mar. 1892).

⁹⁰ Letter from Charles L. Fitch & Charles D. Seaton to AWT (May 7, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

However much white northern NCRA members may have outnumbered their African American counterparts, they shared the same belief that they could recruit more sympathizers if Tourgée could formulate the organization's agenda, plan of action, and structure with greater clarity. As the war veteran from Michigan, A. Ryall put it, "[T]hus far I am unable to gain from the 'Bystanders Notes'. . . the precise line of action in view in order to make the 'Association' effect the desired purpose." He was writing on behalf of the "*few pronounced friends*" of the NCRA in his community, who had deputed him to ask whether the organization was supposed to "take the form of a party—with a platform of principles—requiring certain actions be taken by the legislative or Executive power of the Nation," or whether it aimed to collect and present the signatures of all "lover[s] of Justice & freedom in the land . . . in one monster petition and remonstrance to Congress or the Executive—with an ultimatum."

His comrades also wanted to know whether Tourgée favored having "each local Community giv[e] the question publicity by notices from friends of the movement in the local press and by statements of the objects of the association to 'Citizens Meetings' called for that purpose." They all agreed that "*very many* friends of the cause of National Justice and honor" would be "ready to declare themselves should any feasible [sic] practical way of reaching the difficulty be evolved."⁹¹

White NCRA members, like Ryall, probably found Tourgée's vague answers to their inquiries as frustrating as did Black NCRA members, like Samuel Hicks. So far the organization had only two purposes, he replied: "(1) To get as many names of the liberty-lovers of the land on its rolls as can be found by its active and earnest members. (2) To be ready to do whatever may require to be done to promote the desires of its members and secure equal rights for all citizens." Neither he nor his Administrative Council wanted to "prescribe any specific method" or course for local communities to adopt, Tourgée indicated. Instead, leaving each free to act as it deemed best would encourage participation by those who quailed at being stigmatized as a beleaguered minority of "pioneers." It would additionally avoid the "bickerings, jealousy, distrust and excess of machinery" to which Tourgée attributed the failure of analogous enterprises attempted by African

⁹¹ Letter from A. Ryall to AWT (Dec. 18, 1891) (on file as #7614, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

Americans (an oblique reference to the Afro-American League and the American Citizens Equal Rights Association).

On the one hand, the system of enrollment lists and circulars allowed “every one an opportunity to work according to his own inclination and capability and in his own way.” On the other hand, the requirement that “the names of all members secured be sent to headquarters for registration” made “every member directly accessible for consultation on information of any sort” and thus facilitated “unity and harmony of action.” Tourgée did not say so, but the combination of decentralized local action and centralized control at “headquarters” prevented divisiveness by blocking direct communication between the various NCRA chapters and channeling it through him. He may not have been able to admit to himself that he was acting like a possessive father, unwilling to let his son grow up, and that the NCRA could never flourish as a grassroots organization if he treated it as his personal preserve. He simply convinced himself that he alone could keep the NCRA unified. As far as publicity and public meetings were concerned, Tourgée warned that “a good cause is sometimes ‘talked to death’ before it is fairly on its feet.”⁹²

Tourgée more explicitly spelled out his reasons for shrinking from publicity to Nathan Mossell. Previous organizations, he claimed, had generated “[w]ind enough to make a cyclone and eloquence enough to move a gate post” through their “meetings and speeches,” yet had not produced “tangible” results. Moreover, “hunting game with a bass-drum” tended to scare off “shy” quarry. Rather than chase away indecisive recruits through vain boasts, he urged, “Let us land our catch and ‘holler’ afterwards.”⁹³

Even when NCRA members agreed that quiet personal solicitation proved more effective than press coverage and mass meetings in building the organization, they often seemed to have felt a need for more

⁹² Letter from AWT to A. Royall (Feb. 14, 1892) (on file as #6025, AWTP). *See also* McPherson, *supra* note 3, at 317 (citing Olsen, *Carpetbagger's Crusade*, McPherson blames the collapse of the NCRA on “Tourgée’s autocratic insistence on running the whole show himself”); OLSEN, *CARPETBAGGER'S CRUSADE*, *supra* note 3, at 324 (“Altogether, the simplicity of the N.C.R.A. and its domination by the Judge had been both a source of its rapid growth and strength and of its weakness. It had never been much more than a list of names, a personal possession of Tourgée’s that added to, but was also dependent upon, his prestige and power.”).

⁹³ Letter from AWT to Nathan F. Mossell (after Nov. 18, 1891) (on file as #5814, AWTP).

structure than Tourgée favored. They may not have known that the Administrative Council, whose authority Tourgée frequently invoked, consisted only of hand-picked appointees with no responsibilities, but they persistently requested copies of the NCRA's non-existent constitution, "rules and regulations," bylaws, and minutes. Perhaps harking back to such precedents as the abolitionist societies of the antebellum era, or the Afro-American League and American Citizens Equal Rights Association of the recent past, some also advocated collecting dues, holding monthly meetings, and planning a national convention.⁹⁴

Tourgée, on the contrary, viewed the NCRA's lack of structure as one of its chief strengths. Both his observation of the Afro-American League's internal conflicts, and his cognizance of the political schisms and power struggles that had bedeviled the abolitionist movement, convinced him that introducing such "machinery" as formal codes, procedures, elected officers, regular meetings, and annual conventions would open the door to factional disputes. Because the NCRA had no "leaders," but only "members and a servant" (himself), it could neither be torn apart by rivalry, nor manipulated by outsiders seeking to create "disaffection," he argued, "for there is nothing to act on." A convention, by contrast, would "yield 200 speeches and twenty factions."⁹⁵

Tourgée especially feared racial strife, which would doom joint efforts to end systemic discrimination—an enterprise "[n]o one should ask or expect" African Americans to carry out successfully on their own. "[M]eetings, speeches talk and clamor" would inevitably breed "dissension between black and white," and "all jarring on the question of color . . . *must be avoided*, until the sentiment of duty and the policy of justice become sufficiently well established to override the sin and crime of prejudice and caste," he emphasized to the successive heads

⁹⁴ See Letter from J. J. Jones to AWT (July 27, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from J.W. Shavers to AWT (July 16, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from Timothy G. Tynes to AWT (Feb. 27, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from Henry O. Tanner to AWT (Aug. 3, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from Henry Williams to AWT (Aug. 10, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP). On the Administrative Council's lack of responsibilities, see Letter from AWT to Hon. Phillip C. Garrett (Oct. 1892) (on file as #6439, AWTP); Letter from George W. Cable to AWT (Dec. 3, 1891) (on file as #5818, AWTP); Letter from George W. Cable to AWT (Dec. 19, 1891) (on file as #5862, AWTP).

⁹⁵ Letter from AWT to William A. Anderson (after June 3, 1892) (on file as #6495, AWTP); Letter from AWT to A. Royal (Feb. 14, 1892) (on file as #6025, AWTP); Letter from AWT to Nathan F. Mossell (after Nov. 18, 1891) (on file as #5814, AWTP); Letter from AWT to "Gentlemen" [Henry O. Tanner et al.] (after Oct. 10, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

of the Philadelphia NCRA chapter, Nathan Mossell and Henry O. Tanner.⁹⁶ He unburdened himself most frankly on this issue to the white Quaker Phillip C. Garrett: "Very many [white] people who believe in justice are very shy of practicing it and thousands who say they are willing the colored citizen should have equal rights, would abandon all idea of it, if they had to attend a public meeting and accord it to him" by sitting and dining side by side, giving African American speakers the same prominence as their white counterparts, or electing African American officers. "This is foolish and wrong *but true*," Tourgée underscored, reminding Garrett of how the philanthropists who had organized the 1890 and 1891 Lake Mohonk Conferences on the Negro Question had excluded African Americans, but invited white Southerners.

African Americans, for their part, were "very jealous" of their independence and sensitive to anything that smacked of white domineering. Rather than confront the problem of race relations head on and "endanger good results by trying to compell compliance with my notions," Tourgée confided to Garrett, he was seeking to "walk around it." That was why he was responding to the widespread demand for more structure by recommending the establishment of "local 'Unions'" or "Liberty Leagues" of about thirty members who should meet weekly at each other's homes, and why he was leaving these small groups free to decide for themselves whether their membership should be integrated or segregated.

After working separately toward the same goal for several years, African Americans and whites would develop a "common interest" and be ready to "act with each other without friction," Tourgée believed.

Indeed, some groups had already formed local Advisory Committees consisting of "white and black, male and female" members, who seemed to "work heartily together." Once interracial cooperation became more general, the chances of organizing successfully on a national scale would be greater, if such an endeavor proved necessary. Meanwhile, however, local Unions should concentrate on arousing

⁹⁶ Letter from AWT to Nathan F. Mossell (Nov. 18, 1891) (on file as #5814, AWTP); Letter from AWT to Henry O. Tanner et al. (Oct. 10, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

“the public conscience in that part of our country where men are free and votes are counted.”⁹⁷

Two models apparently suggested the idea of local Unions or Liberty Leagues to Tourgée: the Union Leagues of the Reconstruction era, like the interracial one he had joined in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1867, and the Chautauqua Circles of the 1880s and 1890s, originating in the Lake Chautauqua region of upstate New York, where he had lived for the past decade. Both empowered the masses to educate themselves, whether politically, as had the Union Leagues, or culturally and spiritually, as did the Chautauqua Circles. Thus, Tourgée conceived of his local Unions or Liberty Leagues as enabling participants to learn citizenship through study and practice.

Just as members of Union Leagues had conned the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence, read Republican newspapers together, and debated how to stand up to exploitative employers and defend themselves against Klan attacks, members of NCRA local unions would read and discuss Tourgée’s “Bystander” articles and his pamphlet *Is Liberty Worth Preserving?*, delve into the history of slavery, and try to determine “*how* justice may be done and equal right and adequate security be peacefully obtained for all.” In the process, they would turn the NCRA into a “great popular School of Liberty,” a gigantic Chautauqua for training citizens in self-government.⁹⁸ Many such groups, often calling themselves Tourgée Clubs, were already functioning in Louisiana and other southern states, and two existed in Chicago.⁹⁹

Unlike their prototypes of the Reconstruction era, however, Tourgée’s local Unions, at least as he described them, seem oriented more toward the study than the practice of citizenship. Granted, in the South, actions such as striking for higher wages or collectively defying white mobs, had become even more dangerous than during Reconstruction, when African Americans could hope for at least some federal protection. Yet in the North, local Unions could have targeted such

⁹⁷ Letter from AWT to Hon. Phillip C. Garret[t] (Oct. 1892) (on file as #6439, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

⁹⁸ Albion W. Tourgée, *A Bystander’s Notes*, CHI. DAILY INTER OCEAN, June 4, 1892; Letter from AWT (on file as #6362, AWTP) (emphasis in original); Letter from AWT to Hon. Phillip C. Garret[t] (Oct. 1892) (on file as #6439, AWTP); On the Union Leagues of the Reconstruction era, see ERIC FONER, *RECONSTRUCTION: AMERICA’S UNFINISHED REVOLUTION, 1863-1877*, 283-85 (1988).

⁹⁹ Letter from AWT to unknown addressee (on file as #6492, AWTP).

prevalent instances of discrimination and segregation as the refusal of restaurants and hotels to serve African Americans. If they did, they left no record of it. When NCRA members sued discriminatory establishments, as did Tourgée's ardent champion Mack Caldwell, they acted as individuals, not as representatives of either the national association or its chapters.¹⁰⁰ Tourgée himself never provided guidelines on how to apply the lessons on citizenship his followers might glean from his writings.

Even the manifesto that presents the fullest statement of the NCRA's principles, *Is Liberty Worth Preserving?* (1892), devotes twenty-five out of twenty-nine pages to detailing the formidable threats to liberty the nation faced: southern states' "wholesale nullification" of African Americans' constitutional rights; the consequent subjection of Black laborers to "starvation wages" and of all Blacks who dared resist to murder or lynching; and the disproportionate representation southern whites acquired in Congress by disfranchising African Americans while counting them in their total population base. In comparison, it devotes only four pages to sketching the NCRA's proposed methods of tackling these threats.

Indeed, Tourgée admitted that the NCRA had "no specific remedy for the evils it desire[d] to ameliorate." It sought simply to maximize its membership, and thus its leverage on public opinion; to procure and publish "reliable information" on "political and economic conditions at the South," as "regarded from the standpoint of those who suffer injustice"; to challenge discriminatory state laws in federal court, especially Louisiana's Separate Car Act and Mississippi's constitution disfranchising African Americans; and to "urge by every means in its power, the enactment and enforcement of National legislation intended to promote and secure to every citizen of the United States, the just and equal and untrammelled exercise of all the rights of citizenship in every State of the Union."¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ See Letter from Mack W. Caldwell to AWT (Feb. 14, 1892) (on file with the NCRA as #7614, AWTP) ("I am deeply involved in two lawsuits now. One because a restaurant keeper refused to serve me a glass of milk and a piece of apple pie on account of my color and another because my wife and three babies was made to ride 476 miles in a smoking car on the East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia Ry when they had paid first class fare.")

¹⁰¹ ALBION W. TOURGÉE, *IS LIBERTY WORTH PRESERVING?* (1892), *reprinted in UNDAUNTED RADICAL: THE SELECTED WRITINGS AND SPEECHES OF ALBION W. TOURGÉE* 252-75 (2010).

Though unwilling to outline a concrete plan of action, a constitution, or a structure for the organization, Tourgée did articulate a remarkably modern twofold vision of the NCRA that we can recognize as anticipating both the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and today's email lists. At times, he characterized the NCRA as a mass mobilization "applying the moral force" of "millions" of committed participants to individuals, parties, elected officials, society at large, and "the world." "Put 2,000,000 Northern freemen in front of Southern prejudice demanding justice and a million [southern] colored men *who know they have friends* behind it, and the South will listen to reason very quickly," he told Mossell. Of course, Tourgée was wildly optimistic in claiming that the "Negro Problem [could] be settled" almost overnight by an army of peaceful citizens numbering "as many as it required soldiers to put down the [Confederate] rebellion." Still, he dimly foresaw the collapse of southern segregation, albeit seven decades later, under the onslaught of black and white protesters relying on marches, sit-ins, boycotts, and civil disobedience in lieu of weapons.¹⁰²

Tourgée's own métier lay not in the tactics of mass mobilization, but rather in writing and political lobbying. Hence, he more often envisaged the NCRA as a precursor of MoveOn.org and its ilk. The mere existence of a roster of "people who actually believe[d] in the maintenance and enforcement of the rights of citizenship," he asserted, would serve as a "potent force" for shaping national policy through the Republican Party. If Republican leaders and "weak-kneed members of Congress" knew that he could "reach by mail tomorrow and every day 100,000 or 200,000 or more voters all of whom [were] more or less in accord with the sentiments [he] advocate[d]," they would realize that they could not afford to alienate such a sizable block of adherents.¹⁰³ This was the vision Tourgée held out to the countless NCRA members who pressed him to supply them with clearer goals and strategies.

This was also the vision that prompted him to attend the June 1892 Republican national nominating convention, with the aim of brandishing the NCRA membership list to show that the association held "the balance of power in seven northern states."¹⁰⁴ Such a demon-

¹⁰² Letter from AWT to Nathan F. Mossell (Nov. 18, 1891) (on file as #5814, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

¹⁰³ Letter from AWT to A. Royall (Feb. 14, 1892) (on file as #6025, AWTP).

¹⁰⁴ OLSEN, CARPETBAGGER'S CRUSADE, *supra* note 3, at 320; Letter from AWT to Thomas B. Reed (June 1892) (on file as #6500, AWTP).

stration of electoral strength, he hoped, would earn the NCRA a role in selecting the party's presidential candidate and framing its platform. NCRA members supported House Speaker Thomas B. Reed of Maine, a consistent defender of African American rights, but the convention re-nominated President Benjamin Harrison, who had not only angered African Americans by declaring himself helpless to act against lynching, but was secretly conspiring with other Republican power brokers to redefine theirs as a "White Man's Party," according to rumors Tourgée had heard.¹⁰⁵ To the dismay of African American NCRA members, one of whom had written to the convention's black delegates exhorting them to convey "the feeling of our people" that they would bolt the party if it continued to flout their concerns, even some of these men had voted for Harrison.¹⁰⁶

Adding insult to injury, the convention approved a platform that unmistakably announced the party's fealty to big business and its indifference to racial justice. Nine planks upheld the main Republican priorities: protecting manufactures through tariffs, expanding trade and commerce, and maintaining the value of "standard money." In contrast, only two affirmed the principle of a "free and unrestricted ballot in all public elections" and denounced the "inhuman outrages perpetrated upon American citizens for political reasons in certain Southern States of the Union"—"statements carefully formulated to dodge the divisive "race question" and avoid mention of legal remedies. Moreover, all but two white Republican newspapers refused to print the NCRA's "respectful protest to the convention"—a snub the *Inter Ocean's* publisher compounded by accusing Tourgée of having "become soured at everybody except the members of the National Rights Association."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Albion W. Tourgée, *A Bystander's Notes*, CHI. DAILY INTER OCEAN, May 7, 1892; Letter from John Hammon (May 13, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP); Letter from AWT to William Penn Nixon (Feb. 4, 1892) (on file as #6009, AWTP).

¹⁰⁶ Letter from John Hammon (May 13, 1892) (on file as #7614, AWTP). Hammon had asked Tourgée to supply him with the names of the African American delegates. See also Letter from George W. Gaines to AWT (June 22, 1892) (on file as #6341, AWTP); Letter from AWT to Rev. George W. Gaines (June 24, 1892) (on file as #6350, AWTP). Tourgée defended the African American delegates to Gaines, on the grounds that they were not voting against Reed but against Harrison's main rival, James G. Blaine, whose record on African American rights was far worse than Harrison's.

¹⁰⁷ OLSEN, CARPETBAGGER'S CRUSADE, *supra* note 3, at 321; Letter from William Penn Nixon to AWT (July 7, 1892) (on file as #6383, AWTP); Letter from AWT to William Penn Nixon (July 9, 1892) (on file as #6379, AWTP). For the 1892 Republican party

The negligible outcome of Tourgée's lobbying at the 1892 convention bitterly disappointed his followers. Replying to one complainant, he insisted that had he not pushed so hard, "no allusion to a free ballot or outrages on citizenship would have been found in the platform at all,"¹⁰⁸ but he knew very well how little such a plea would satisfy NCRA members. Many of them had tried to persuade Tourgée to emulate the abolitionists who had founded the Liberty Party in 1840, which by 1854 had evolved from a fringe group into the Republican Party.¹⁰⁹

At least one, the Chicago lawyer George R. Gaines, had floated the idea of encouraging his fellow African Americans to form a party of their own, so that Republicans could no longer take the black vote for granted. A white correspondent had also suggested exploring the merits of teaming up with the Farmers' Alliance, or Populist Party, which was gathering strength in the South and West. Tourgée balked at all these proposals. Aware that the Liberty Party and its Free Soil successor had siphoned off antislavery voters, thereby helping to elect rabidly proslavery Democrats several times before the Republicans' first victory in 1860, Tourgée did not relish the prospect of repeating the cycle. Nor did he think the country could afford to wait so long to do justice for African Americans, as he feared a massive uprising. He never dreamed that almost three quarters of a century would elapse before the U.S. Congress passed a Voting Rights Act like the one for which he had been agitating.

Tourgée reacted even less sympathetically to the alternatives of black political separatism or partnership with the Populists. "Any distinctively *colored* political movement will alienate every white friend of equal rights and protected citizenship in the country," and will "generally be regarded as a blackmailing, selling out movement," he warned Gaines, reminding him that "it is to the conscience, the humanity and the patriotism of the *Northern white voter alone*, that the colored citizen can look for justice." Instead of inciting the Republican Party to guarantee the exercise of equal rights, a mass defection by African Ameri-

platform, see The American Presidency Project. THE AM. PRESIDENCY PROJECT (last visited Aug. 18, 2012), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from AWT to E.H. Bowman (on file as #6360, AWTP).

¹⁰⁹ Letter from AWT to William Penn Nixon (July 9, 1892) (on file as #6379, AWTP). On the history of the Liberty, Free Soil, and Republican Parties, see LOUIS FILLER, *THE CRUSADE AGAINST SLAVERY, 1830-1860*, 137-91 (1960); and ERIC FONER, *FREE SOIL, FREE LABOR, FREE MEN: THE IDEOLOGY OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR* (1970).

cans might have the “contrary effect” of strengthening the faction calling for “the repeal of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments” and “the disfranchisement of the colored man” throughout the nation. “You must remember that the power to defeat a party does not imply the power to control its subsequent action,” Tourgée added.

He did, however, endorse another tactic Gaines was considering—interrogating candidates and voting only for those who pledged “in writing to support the proper legislation,” (a classic abolitionist tactic)—as long as it was carried out by “*citizens* without regard to color” and was done “without clamor” to avoid backfiring against progressive candidates. If Gaines went ahead with the African American mass meeting he had called, Tourgée advised, the most expedient course would be for the participants to ask the NCRA to “hold a council” for the purpose of ascertaining members’ “general sentiments” on how best to achieve the association’s goals under current conditions.¹¹⁰

As for the Populists, Tourgée gave them short shrift. Though he “quite agree[d]” with several items on their platform, he had “no hope of any good” from their party, because he had seen its southern members in action during his long sojourn in North Carolina and knew them to be “the worst enemies labor ever had,” especially black labor. At best, the Populists could “encourage free speech and independence of thought among Southern whites,” and perhaps, “lessen Southern intolerance.” Competition from the Populists might also “spur the Republican party up to its duty”; progressive Republicans could better accomplish this, however, by working within the party, rather than by deserting it.¹¹¹

Tourgée gave cogent reasons for opposing the various third party initiatives his followers were calling for, but in truth, his loyalty to the Republican Party did not allow him to contemplate breaking with it. He had joined it to campaign for John C. Frémont in 1856 and fought for it during Reconstruction. To him, it would always be the party that had abolished slavery and amended the Constitution to mandate equal citizenship rights. Furthermore, he depended on the party for his livelihood. As a columnist for the solidly Republican *Inter Ocean*, he could

¹¹⁰ Letter from AWT to Rev. George W. Gaines (June 24, 1892) (on file as #6350, AWTP) (emphasis in original). Although Tourgée addresses him as Reverend, Gaines is identified in his first letter to Tourgée as a member of the law firm of Ferdinand L. Barnett and S. Laing Williams. Letter from George W. Gaines to AWT (Mar. 18, 1892) (on file as #6123, AWTP).

¹¹¹ Letter from AWT to W.E. Turner (June 1892) (on file as #6366, AWTP).

chastise the party for policies he deemed self-defeating, but he could not abandon it for a rival without forfeiting any possibility of ever again writing for a Republican publication. Over the years, Tourgée had also applied for a number of patronage positions—so far unsuccessfully. He did not want to close the door to such an opportunity to escape from his increasingly precarious financial circumstances. Thus, he remained within the fold and counseled NCRA members to vote for Harrison, as the lesser of the two evils. Though the NCRA proved ineffectual as a vehicle for influencing electoral politics, Tourgée did not limit it to this purpose. As president of the association and spokesman of its 250,000 members, he addressed letters to key opinion makers and religious bodies, in which he refuted racist ideology and demanded justice for African Americans. For example, when press dispatches summarized a lecture by Cornell University Professor of Political Economy Jeremiah W. Jenks, alleging that “history and science” revealed the Negro to be “of an inferior race and incapable of advanced civilization,” Tourgée fired off an immediate response on NCRA stationery.

“I know of no scientific formula by which superiority and inferiority may be determined,” he asserted, pointing out that science had previously justified slavery and was now “voluntarily harnessing itself to the same Juggernaut car of oppression and declaring that . . . because the Negro is black, the white Caucassian [sic] has the right to rule over him.” Tourgée vigorously contested the southern-derived myths about Black misrule during Reconstruction that Jenks cited as his main proof of the race’s inferiority. “Does financial mismanagement of public affairs imply racial inferiority?” asked Tourgée. “If so what shall be said of the people of New York who during those very years lost more by Tweed and Tammany than any Southern State by ‘Negro’ government.” He flatly denied that the so-called “Negro governments,” in most of which African Americans were in the minority, ever “passed ‘shameful and oppressive laws against the whites,’” unless Jenks, like southern whites, considered “the grant of equal privileges to colored citizens to be ‘shameful’ and the taxation ‘oppressive.’”

Unlike the white governments both before and after Reconstruction, Tourgée emphasized, African Americans had never passed a “scrap of legislation” discriminating against another racial group, nor had they “deprived” anyone of “life, liberty or property through oppressive laws or oppressive conduct of public officials.” He went on to list six examples of “beneficent legislation” by Reconstruction governments, including: the “establishment of free public schools,” hitherto

unknown in the South; “[t]he abolition of whipping, branding, clipping, maiming and other barbarous forms of punishment”; “[t]he reduction of the number of capital crimes from *SEVENTEEN* to two or three”; and “[t]he abolition of property-qualifications” for voters, office-holders, and jurors. Jenks had damaged the “repute of a great university” by teaching bad history and bad science, Tourgée charged. He concluded with the hope that those who formed the minds of students might learn to recognize “justice, equal right and equal opportunity for all the children of our common Father” as higher truths than “the survival of the fittest.”¹¹²

Tourgée also replied in the name of the NCRA to the manager of the *Atlanta Times*, who based his allegations of African American inferiority on the race’s current condition and who lamented that southern states could do nothing to change it. “The colored man has little responsibility for his present condition,” countered Tourgée, reminding the Georgia newspaperman that the master class, the church, and the nation had all failed to educate and equip the slaves for citizenship, and that “[t]he colored man is not equal before the law with the white man of Georgia, because the law is not enforced to secure his rights or redress his wrongs.” Despite these disadvantages, he noted, African Americans had progressed more since the Civil War than had poor whites in “intelligence, enterprise and accumulation” of property. They were now “awakening to a sense of [their] wrongs,” which would make them “desperate” if not redressed. “The only remedy for injustice is *justice*,” stressed Tourgée, “and the people who will not grant it must suffer for their own neglect.” He ended:

God save our land and nation from further crime and oppression of the weak, but if that cannot be God grant that justice may come whoever may suffer. One thing is certain: No evil was ever cured by letting it alone or apologizing for its existence, nor was any people’s right ever obtained by abandoning the claim of justice and asking favor instead.¹¹³

The most fruitful of the letters Tourgée wrote as NCRA president was the one he addressed to the Methodist Episcopal General Confer-

¹¹² Letter from AWT to Professor Jencks (May 26, 1892) (on file as #6273, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

¹¹³ Letter from AWT to C. Spalding, Manager, *Atlanta Times* (after June 6, 1892) (on file as #6364, AWTP) (emphasis in original). In a July 8, 1892 “Bystander” column that the *Chicago Inter Ocean* refused to publish, Tourgée refers to this correspondence and identifies Spalding (without naming him) as a well-intentioned southern Democrat. See Albion Winegar Tourgée (July 8, 1892) (unpublished column) (on file as #6386, AWTP).

ence meeting in Omaha in May 1892, to which he gave special prominence by publishing it in his “Bystander” column. It opened by alerting the church to the upcoming day of “fasting and prayer” that African Americans had set aside (at Tourgée’s suggestion) “for the deliverance of their race from the oppression and injustice which they experience at the hands of the white Christians of the great Republic.” Would the bishops of the church take time out from their proceedings to join with African Americans in this fast and prayer, Tourgée demanded. Would they direct “churches throughout the land [to] echo the prayer of the oppressed: ‘Oh, God, if the fault is in us, show us the evil, and give us wisdom to remove it?’” Were the “white Christians of America willing to indorse the petitions of our colored fellow Christians for justice”—not mercy? Shifting from “they” to “we” and speaking as a longstanding member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Tourgée underscored: “There is no middle ground. We must either join in the prayer for justice or pray for the continuance of injustice. To be silent is to ask God to perpetuate wrong and prosper oppression.”¹¹⁴ In what many contemporaries hailed as a triumph for both Tourgée and the NCRA, the Methodist General Conference unanimously “approved a strong resolution denouncing prejudice and segregation and calling for remedial action by churches, the press, and all levels of government.”¹¹⁵ At the request of Charlotte Forten Grimke, Tourgée addressed a similar letter to the Presbyterian General Assembly—her own denomination—which approved a weaker resolution.¹¹⁶

These achievements notwithstanding, Tourgée faced an impasse at the end of the NCRA’s first year. Not only did the organization fail to stem the Republican party’s rightward march, but the election of November 1892 also resulted in a Democratic victory. Moreover, Tourgée’s use of the *Inter Ocean* to promote the NCRA had increasingly strained his relations with its owner and publisher, William Penn Nixon. Nixon’s displeasure intensified as Tourgée stepped up his criticism of the party during the 1892 nominating convention and as he continued during the electoral campaign to agitate the racial justice issues Republican leaders had chosen to mute.

¹¹⁴ Albion Tourgée, *A Bystander’s Notes*, CHI. DAILY INTER OCEAN, May 21, 1892, at 4.

¹¹⁵ OLSEN, CARPETBAGGER’S CRUSADE, *supra* note 3, at 321.

¹¹⁶ *Id.*; Letter from Charlotte Forten Grimke to AWT (May 18, 1892) (on file as #6240, AWTP); Letter from AWT to Charlotte Forten Grimke (after May 18, 1892) (on file as #6297, AWTP).

The dispute with Nixon and the repudiation of the NCRA by Republican leaders led Tourgée to pursue an alternative avenue for advancing the organization's aims: founding a journal that would serve as the NCRA's organ, just as the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* had served as the organ of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Martinet had in fact advocated such an organ from the very beginning. "It occurred to me," he had written in his earliest extant letter to Tourgée,

[T]hat if we had a newspaper (even a good well edited weekly) whose business would be to disseminate information of happenings, events & outrages gathered all over the South by our own trusty correspondents—as we get no just reports from the Southern press, telegraph operators, or other correspondents—such a paper under the auspices of men of national reputation, & with no color line about it but colored men as editors, or among the editors, would be a powerful lever in educating the North as to conditions & affairs in the South & creating a public sentiment that might ultimately manifest itself by remedial national legislation.¹¹⁷

Tourgée had "carefully considered," but not acted on Martinet's suggestion at the time, because he wanted to wait "until the necessity shall be apparent and undeniable and the way open for carrying it into effect."¹¹⁸

That moment arrived in August 1893, when the *Inter Ocean* suspended his "Bystander" column on the plea of financial exigency. In what proved to be his next-to-last column for nine months, Tourgée quoted a correspondent he described as voicing a widespread sentiment:

We think the time has come for the more effective organization of the National Citizens' Rights association. The war for justice is on and it can no more be shirked than could the war for liberty. We need . . . provision for county and district associations, and an official organ that shall express our views and put the cause of the rights of the citizen clearly before the people of the country in more available and more effective form.¹¹⁹

Metinet immediately reminded Tourgée that he had "often urged" precisely the same course.¹²⁰

Impelled by the loss of the imperfect vehicle the *Inter Ocean* had furnished, and excited by prospects that enough NCRA members

¹¹⁷ Letter from Louis A. Martinet to AWT (Oct. 5, 1891) (on file as #5760, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

¹¹⁸ Letter from AWT to Louis A. Martinet (after Oct. 5, 1891) (on file as #5813, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

¹¹⁹ Albion Tourgée, *A Bystander's Notes*, CHI. DAILY INTER OCEAN, July 29, 1893, at 12.

¹²⁰ Letter from Louis A. Martinet to AWT (Aug. 4, 1893) (on file as #7197, AWTP).

would subscribe to an organ of their own to make it self-supporting, Tourgée threw himself into the project with enthusiasm. He had already settled on a title for the journal—the *National Citizen*—when Martinet first broached the subject. Now he embraced a movement organ as the best solution to the problem that he had wrestled with when he had decided against holding a convention, lest the NCRA fall prey to racial strife. Elaborating on the vision his friend had originally held out to him, he wrote Martinet:

[W]e must have a *great journal* which shall voice the needs of your people, the duty of mine and the obligations and interests of both with authority. It must be great enough to be heard by all the world and strong enough to defy clamor and party. Such a journal should be in the control of both white and colored men, in order that it may speak with confidence to and for both races and illustrate the truths it advocates . . . It will bring those elements of both races which are in sympathy on these great questions into substantial and intelligent harmony.

The journal he proposed to create, Tourgée specified, would fill a niche that neither the mainstream media nor the black press had so far managed to fill—the former because white-run newspapers and wire services either ignored outrages against African Americans, or covered them in biased and stereotyped ways—the latter because black newspapers rarely if ever entered white homes. As a result of this lacuna, the northern white public “had to take the testimony of the oppressors in relation to the oppressed.”

Mindful of Martinet’s able editorship of the *Crusader*, which Tourgée had praised in his “Bystander” column, he tactfully explained why no black newspaper could accomplish the purpose he thought the *National Citizen* could: “The mere race-journal, however well conducted, desirable and brave it may be, is *necessarily restricted* in its influence and circulation by the fact that it is a race-journal.” Yet, rather than compete with or eliminate the need for race journals, Tourgée hastened to add, an “organ of human rights” under biracial editorship, would “greatly enlarge the circulation and enhance the influence of the colored press” by attracting readers who would not normally subscribe to a race journal and by reprinting articles from black newspapers, thus “sending [their] utterances into white homes they [could] never reach otherwise.”¹²¹

¹²¹ Letter from AWT to Louis A. Martinet, (after Oct. 5, 1891) (on file as #5813, AWTP) (emphasis in original); Letter from AWT to Louis A. Martinet (Oct. 31, 1893) (on file as #7438, AWTP) (emphasis in original). Tourgée praises Martinet’s editorship

Tourgée wanted the *National Citizen* to model the ideal of racial integration at every level—its joint white-black editorship, its juxtaposition of black- and white-authored articles, and its financial ownership—so that it would serve as “a practical exponent” of the views the NCRA promulgated. By “accustoming the people to the idea of white and colored working together on the most advanced plane of human action,” Tourgée believed, a high-quality integrated journal would counteract racial prejudice and promote racial equality far more efficaciously than any open attempt to challenge deeply-rooted habits of white entitlement and black resentment that led both peoples toward separatism.¹²²

For Associate Editor, Tourgée wooed Charles Chesnutt, whom he had hailed in a “Bystander” column of 8 April 1893 as the most distinguished African American writer to appear on the literary scene. Chesnutt had as yet published only a half dozen stories in the *Atlantic Monthly* and other periodicals and was then concentrating on his legal stenography business in the hope of accumulating enough money to support a full-time literary career. Chesnutt responded with cautious interest. “I am free to say that I should like” the position of Associate Editor, he wrote, “I have always looked forward to the literary life, although not specially in the direction of journalism.”

However, he set several conditions for accepting the offer. First, he wanted Tourgée’s assurances that the two would share responsibilities on an equal footing: “I certainly would not care to be a mere figurehead in such an enterprise, even for the honor of having my name coupled with such a distinguished one as your own,” he stipulated. Second, he would not be ready to undertake the job for the next eight months, being in the midst of his busiest season. Third, he could invest, at most, \$500 in the journal, payable in several installments—far short of the \$2,500 Tourgée was seeking from a partner who could contribute part of the capital needed to start the journal. Chesnutt also expressed reservations about whether the *National Citizen* could succeed. While he “recognize[d] the need of such a journal,” in common with “colored people who think at all,” he “would doubt the existence” of sufficient demand among white readers to sustain it, “were it not for the large roll of the Citizens’ Rights Association.”

of the *Crusader* in Albion Tourgée, *A Bystander's Notes*, CHI. INTER OCEAN, Sept. 12, 1891, at 4; Albion Tourgée, *A Bystander's Notes*, CHI. INTER OCEAN, Jan. 17, 1893, at 4.

¹²² Letter from AWT to F.J. Loudin (before Nov. 27, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP).

If Tourgée thought it useful, Chesnutt volunteered, they could discuss the matter in person at Tourgée's home in Mayville, New York—an easy train ride from Chesnutt's home in Cleveland.¹²³ "I should be glad to have you come down [Saturday, as Chesnutt proposed,] and stay over Sunday with me," Tourgée replied. They could "talk business" on Saturday evening, because Tourgée never did so on the Sabbath, "no matter how pressing" the need, and Chesnutt could read through "some thousands of letters" from NCRA members that might resolve his doubts about whether the *National Citizen* would find a large enough white audience.

Meanwhile, Tourgée addressed Chesnutt's concerns at length. He gave a number of reasons for his confidence that the venture could succeed, among them his "own power to command and hold the attention of the public;" the new African American consensus that the only hope of abolishing racial oppression lay in educating and mobilizing sympathetic whites, and "the wide spread [sic] alarm" that "the best classes of white people" were already feeling about the South's addiction to disfranchisement, lynching, and mob violence. Tourgée then unveiled his plans for financing the journal.

He hoped to form a joint stock company in which African Americans would take half the promoter's stock, "1,000 shares of \$5. each for \$25,000." He wanted to be able to announce, both to the upcoming "colored convention" in Cincinnati and to white NCRA members, that African Americans "were the first to act" in providing the capital needed to launch the *National Citizen*. The directorate of the company would reflect African Americans' approximate share of the investment, with three out of seven directorships going to them. Tourgée was asking Chesnutt to help round up African American investors, with the option of becoming Associate Editor once he accomplished this task. For the first year, he need only "write something every now and then to let the readers get acquainted with him." After that the job would "require his whole time."¹²⁴ Chesnutt apparently never made the trip to Mayville. He remained skeptical that the *National Citizen* would find as large a white audience as Tourgée believed. "While you have infinitely

¹²³ Letter from Charles W. Chesnutt to AWT (Nov. 21, 1893) (on file as #7513, AWTP) (reprinted in CHARLES W. CHESNUTT, "TO BE AN AUTHOR": LETTERS OF CHARLES W. CHESNUTT, 1889-1905, at 79-80 (Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. & Robert C. Leitz, III eds., 1997)); Albion Tourgée, *A Bystander's Notes*, CHI. INTER OCEAN, Apr. 8, 1893, at 4. The letter from Tourgée to which Chesnutt is replying has been lost.

¹²⁴ Letter from AWT to Charles W. Chesnutt (Nov. 23, 1893) (on file as #7527, AWTP).

2013]

The National Citizen's Rights Association

159

better opportunities for feeling the public pulse than I have," Chesnutt countered,

[Y]et in my intercourse with the best white people of one of the most advanced communities of the United States, with whom my business brings me in daily contact, I do not remember but once of hearing the subject of the wrongs of the Negro brought up, except by myself; and when brought up by me, as it has often been, I have observed that it is dismissed as quickly as politeness will permit. They admit that the present situation is all wrong, but they do not regard it as their personal concern, and do not see how they can remedy it. They might subscribe to such a journal, if personally solicited, a number of them, but I fear that a publication devoted entirely to a discussion of one topic, so to speak, even so important a one as citizenship, would have a tendency to repel the average white man rather than attract him.

Chesnutt conceded that Tourgée "could make such a venture successful, if any one could," but he clearly did not think anyone could.

Aside from the racial politics involved, Chesnutt deemed a "newspaper venture, even under the most favorable auspices" to be "always a speculation." Though "willing to risk something" in a worthy cause, he "would regard it as a risk and would prefer to confine [his] investment to what [he] could afford to lose." He was currently too busy to commit himself to raising \$2,500, "especially in view of the present 'hard times,'" but he promised to write to two wealthy friends who were "constant reader[s] and admirer[s]" of Tourgée's articles and could probably be "induced to subscribe for stock" if Tourgée contacted them. Chesnutt ended by expressing his regret that he could not "immediately and fully accept" Tourgée's "very flattering offer . . . for I consider it a great honor to be asked to co-operate with you so closely," and by pledging to do everything he could to help Tourgée "without assuming any burdensome responsibility."¹²⁵ Chesnutt's reference to "hard times" points to a major obstacle Tourgée faced as he tried to line up investors in the *National Citizen*. The Panic of 1893, which began in May, was in full swing at the very time he decided to go ahead with plans for founding the journal. In fact, it had played a role in the *Inter Ocean's* suspension of Tourgée's "Bystander" column in August. The economic crisis almost guaranteed that Tourgée would not be

¹²⁵ Letter from Charles W. Chesnutt to AWT (Nov. 27, 1893) (on file as #7537, AWTP) (reprinted in CHARLES W. CHESNUTT, "TO BE AN AUTHOR": LETTERS OF CHARLES W. CHESNUTT, 1889-1905, at 79-80 (Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. & Robert C. Leitz, III eds., 1997)). McElrath and Leitz note that in light of this letter, "it appears that Chesnutt did not visit Mayville in November, despite Tourgée's 23 November invitation to do so." *Id.* at 80 n.5. In *Color-Blind Justice*, however, Elliott contends that Chesnutt did travel to Mayville "to discuss the position with Tourgée in person." ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 258.

able to secure sufficient capital to build the *National Citizen* on a firm foundation.

The case of F. J. Loudin, one of the two men Chesnutt had recommended that Tourgée contact, vividly illustrates the impact of the panic. As manager of the Fisk Jubilee Singers and proprietor of a shoe manufactory, Loudin had amassed a small fortune, but he lost \$50,000 in bank failures and tens of thousands more through the bankruptcies of his customers and of other firms in which he owned stock. Now he could barely keep his head above water. Thus, though he “ardently desire[d]” to invest \$500 to \$1,000 in the *National Citizen*, which met with his “hearty approval” and was just the sort of endeavor he had “longed to see,” he could no longer afford to. At best, he could subscribe to the journal himself and distribute circulars advertising it at Fisk Jubilee Singers’ concerts outside of the South.¹²⁶

Two weeks before Tourgée heard from Loudin, and in the midst of his fruitless courtship of Chesnutt, he received an astounding proposal from T. Thomas Fortune that might have solved the problem of financing the *National Citizen*, had he been willing to consider it. By now, Tourgée had completely reversed his previous low opinion of Fortune and had come to have the “firmest confidence in [his] high purpose and sincere conviction.” Accordingly, he had apprised Fortune of his plans for the *National Citizen* and appealed to him, too, for help in procuring enough African American investors to make the journal truly a joint racial enterprise. “I am anxious to unite the forces of liberty—not have them dissipated,” Tourgée explained in his long letter to Fortune. “The colored man’s cause is not now his cause alone; it is the cause of American citizenship; American Christianity and American civilization. All of these are doomed unless he is made secure as a citizen. This fact must be impressed on American consciousness” through a “great journal . . . recognized as the authoritative exponent and advocate” of both races.¹²⁷

Fortune responded the same day. Unlike Chesnutt, he thought the *National Citizen* “ought to succeed,” as long as the “literary and busi-

¹²⁶ Letter from F. J. Loudin to AWT (Nov. 27, 1893) (on file as #7614, AWTP). According to Olsen, House Speaker Thomas B. Reed of Maine, the most prominent political backer of the NCRA, had suffered equally “heavy depression losses,” making it impossible for him to pledge to support the *National Citizen*. OLSEN, CARPETBAGGER’S CRUSADE, *supra* note 3, at 323.

¹²⁷ Letter from AWT to T. Thomas Fortune (Nov. 14, 1893) (on file as #7552, AWTP) (emphasis in original).

ness management” were “in the control of not more than three persons, every one of whom” was “thoroughly experienced in newspaper management.” To help the journal get off the ground, Fortune suggested “it would be good business policy to absorb an established newspaper.” He offered Tourgée the *New York Age*. Its advantages included location in New York, “the publication field of the newspaper”; “a plant capable of sending out an eight page paper,” the size Tourgée contemplated for the *National Citizen*; “a standing of thirteen years’ continuous publication,” during which it had won “the confidence of the colored people and the respect of the leading editors of the country”; a subscription list of 5,000, which the “addition of [Tourgée’s] prestige and influence would undoubtedly double . . . within a reasonable time”; “a fair advertising constituency”; and Fortune’s own expertise as editor of the nation’s top-ranking African American newspaper, which made him an ideal candidate for Associate Editor of the *National Citizen* (though he modestly refrained from including this). If Tourgée agreed, Fortune would “devote [his] best efforts to placing the \$5,000 of stock . . . apportioned as the share of Afro-Americans.”¹²⁸

Tourgée turned down Fortune the same day he wrote to Chesnut asking for an “immediate” reply to the tender of the Associate Editorship.¹²⁹ Why Tourgée preferred an emerging fiction writer to a seasoned newspaper editor at first seems mysterious, but his answer to Fortune sheds some light on his rationale. The *National Citizen* would “not be a *newspaper* in any sense except with regard to events bearing on” equal rights and racial justice, Tourgée indicated. Rather, he seems to have conceived of it as a cross between a literary magazine and a vehicle of political advocacy:

It must be of the highest literary tone and quality, so as to command a hearing. It cannot accomplish results either by antagonizing those to whom it must appeal or assuming that what it desires to accomplish already exists. It must be wise as well as firm in its treatment of [racial] prejudice which however deplorable is still a fact and like all prejudice

¹²⁸ Letter from T. Thomas Fortune to AWT (Nov. 16, 1893) (on file as #7499, AWTP). Fortune indicates that he is replying to Tourgée’s “important favor of the 14th instant . . . received today.”

¹²⁹ See Letter from Charles W. Chesnut to AWT, *supra* note 123. “I am also in receipt of your note this morning requesting an immediate answer.” McElrath and Leitz’s footnote specifies that “[o]n 20 November 1893, Tourgée indicated that he had not received a reply to his ‘letter of some days ago.’ He urged Chesnut to respond: ‘You are my first choice as associate editor on account of your literary ability’” *Id.* at 80.

must be overcome by patience and example quite as much as by argument.¹³⁰

The model he had in mind, Tourgée intimated, was Gamaliel Bailey's *National Era*, the antislavery weekly that had serialized Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and was widely recognized as the most literarily distinguished abolitionist organ, thanks to its Associate Editor, the poet John Greenleaf Whittier. Tourgée's ambition was to make the *National Citizen* be to the present struggle "what the old '*National Era*' was to the conflict for liberty—a journal so strongly edited as to command not only the respect but the attention both of those opposed and those indifferent."¹³¹

In view of this description, Tourgée's choice of Chesnutt makes perfect sense. Chesnutt's stories appealed to a broad spectrum of white readers, as their publication in such journals as the *Atlantic Monthly* and the praise they received from bellwethers of the literary establishment, such as William Dean Howells, attested. Their light touch and deft use of humor and pathos undermined readers' prejudices instead of openly attacking them. Indeed, Chesnutt had deliberately adopted this strategy, as he had confided to his journal long before publishing his first story:

The object of my writings would be not so much the elevation of the colored people as the elevation of the whites,—for I consider the unjust spirit of caste which is so insidious as to pervade a whole nation, and so powerful as to subject a whole race and all connected with it to scorn and social ostracism—I consider this a barrier to the moral progress of the American people But the subtle almost indefinable feeling of repul-

¹³⁰ Letter from AWT to T. Thomas Fortune (Nov. 20, 1893) (on file as #7510, AWTP) (emphasis in original). Tourgée's biographers both attribute his refusal partly to lingering distrust of Fortune. ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 277; OLSEN, *CARPETBAGGER'S CRUSADE*, *supra* note 3, at 322. Yet the avowal Tourgée crossed out in the draft of his November 14th letter to Fortune—"I once had a certain distrust of you, but your course for the past few years has not only removed it, but given me the firmest confidence in your high purpose and sincere conviction"—strikes me as conclusively disproving this explanation. Letter from AWT to T. Thomas Fortune, *supra* note 127. Had Tourgée not excised the sentence, one might interpret it as an attempt to flatter Fortune. Because he did excise it, probably out of concern lest it sound offensive, we can safely read it as a sincere expression of his revised estimate of Fortune.

¹³¹ Letter from AWT to T. Thomas Fortune, *supra* note 130; Letter from AWT to Bishop Henry McNeal Turner (on file as #7433, AWTP). Tourgée mentions the *National Era* in his letter to Fortune, but elaborates on why he regards it as a model in his letter to Turner. Fortune reprinted Tourgée's letter to Turner in the *New York Age*, as he informed Tourgée in his November 23rd letter. Letter from T. Thomas Fortune to AWT (Nov. 23, 1893) (on file as #7522, AWTP).

sion toward the negro, which is common to most Americans—and easily enough accounted for—cannot be stormed and taken by assault; the garrison will not capitulate: so their position must be mined, and we will find ourselves in their midst before they think it.¹³²

Tourgée, of course, did not have access to the ruminations in Chesnutt's journal that tallied so closely with his own designs for the *National Citizen*, but as a fellow fiction writer animated by very similar aims, he surely recognized the thrust of the stories in which Chesnutt "mined" the "garrison" of white prejudice.

In contrast to Chesnutt, Fortune practiced a militant, hard-hitting style of journalism much like that of Tourgée's "Bystander" column. The two would have reinforced—not complemented—each other, and Tourgée may have feared that Fortune's strident tone would alienate the white readers who needed to be won over. The reason he gave Fortune for refusing a merger with the *Age*, however, was that he did not want the *National Citizen* to be perceived as a "race journal" because that would "defeat its own purpose" and end up "spoiling both" papers. He elaborated:

THE AGE has its own field; and a most necessary one it is. Race-journalism is the only effective substitute for a race religion. As long as the colored man is distinguished against in any way, he must keep up his distinctive sentiment, organization, [and] speciality [sic] of interest in sheer self-defense . . . This can only be done through the race-journal. The limitation of the race journal lies in the fact that it cannot reach those it is desirable to touch until the evil they represent has been overcome or greatly ameliorated.

Tourgée realized that race journals performed the vital function of defending African Americans against the relentless defamation of a hostile white society by fostering collective resistance and affirming pride in their cultural identity. Nevertheless, he saw the mission of the African American press as different from the one he envisaged for the *National Citizen*: "[T]he race journal must stand especially for equal rights and integral unity of the colored man upon all questions of right, opportunity and advantage to them, as a distinct class." The *National Citizen*, on the other hand, "must be a journal of equal citizenship without regard to color."¹³³

¹³² CHARLES W. CHESNUTT, *THE JOURNALS OF CHARLES W. CHESNUTT 139-40* (Richard H. Brodhead ed., 1993).

¹³³ Letter from AWT to T. Thomas Fortune, *supra* note 130 (emphasis in original). Elliott comments, "Thus, somewhat paradoxically, Tourgée seemed to conclude that only with a white man as general editor could his publication truly be viewed as 'a journal of citizenship without regard to color.'" ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 277.

Both Tourgée and Fortune felt it would be worthwhile to continue their discussion in person. Fortune, who had “become dissatisfied with race journalism” precisely because it could not reach a white audience, hoped to convince Tourgée that a merger with the *Age* would benefit the *National Citizen*. “We so fully agree upon so many points,” he urged, that “a good talk over the matter” would bring them to an understanding. Tourgée hoped to retain Fortune’s support for his project and thought that if Fortune could come to Mayville, each would quickly “get a just comprehension of the other’s notions.”¹³⁴ But Fortune could not make time for the visit before Tourgée left for a lecture tour of the Midwest, and they went their separate ways.

Turning down Fortune’s offer proved to be a colossal mistake. It cost Tourgée the only chance he ever received to enter into a partnership with an African American as a co-editor and investor, and ultimately, it doomed the enterprise of endowing the NCRA with a genuinely biracial organ through which to make the case for equal citizenship to the American people. As Tourgée’s biographers Otto H. Olsen and Mark Elliott conclude:

White participation was undoubtedly of central importance to the cause of civil rights, but the only practical possibility existing at that time may have been the more effective organization of the Negro. By his decision Tourgée surrendered a substantial basis for operation and a rare opportunity to secure support in the vital Northeast, where his influence was weak.

Tourgée’s most recent biographer, Mark Elliott, agrees, “It might have been wiser to exchange his vague hope of capturing the moderate white audience for uniting Northern black leadership behind the NCRA.”¹³⁵

Why did Tourgée throw away the extraordinary opportunity Fortune held out to him? As convincing as his offered explanations so may sound, unconscious motives may have impelled him. Did Tourgée’s commitment to forging an abolitionist-style interracial movement (by definition, white-dominated) prevent him from realizing that he faced a trade-off between courting moderate whites and gaining a solid base in the northern black community? Did he fear that he would lose caste and forfeit his influence over whites if he al-

¹³⁴ Letter from T. Thomas Fortune to AWT (Nov. 23, 1893) (on file as #7522, AWTP); Letter from AWT to T. Thomas Fortune (Nov. 20, 1893) (on file as #7510, AWTP).

¹³⁵ ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 277; OLSEN, CARPETBAGGER’S CRUSADE, *supra* note 3, at 322.

igned himself with a controversial black editor? Did he simply feel less confident of being able to work harmoniously with the truculent Fortune than he would have with the younger Chesnutt, whom he may have perceived as more amenable to guidance – or with Martinet, whom he regarded as a soul mate? While we can only speculate about the causes of Tourgée's wrongheaded decision, we know that it speeded the demise of the NCRA.

December 1893 found Tourgée in dire straits. The *National Citizen* still lacked both an Associate Editor and African American business partners—the prerequisites for fulfilling his vision of a journal that would embody, as well as preach, equal citizenship. At home Tourgée confronted an equally serious threat to his project. His wife Emma, who had been handling his vast NCRA correspondence since 1891, as well as his communications with editors, publishers, and lecture bureaus, and who had been managing the couple's finances to boot, no longer approved of his work. Tourgée should be concentrating on earning enough money to keep his family solvent, she felt, not “wasting” so much of his time on activities that brought in no revenue.

For months, she had been recording in her diary her mental “distress” at the diminution in Tourgée's royalties, his dispute with Nixon, the suspension of the “Bystander” column that provided his only reliable income, and her unavailing endeavors to bring her husband around to her point of view. Emma adamantly opposed Tourgée's starting the *National Citizen*, “seeing nothing but disaster in the scheme if he attempts it alone.”

She had good grounds for her premonitions, having lived through the debacle of his previous effort to run a magazine without adequate financial backing—the ill-fated *Our Continent* (1882-84), whose bankruptcy had saddled him with \$100,000 of debt that he was still straining to pay off. As Emma lamented in her diary, however, Tourgée would “listen to no reason or persuasion on [her] part,” leaving her with little choice but to copy and send out circulars advertising the *National Citizen*.¹³⁶ She could hardly have been reassured by Chesnutt's warning that a “newspaper venture, even under the most favorable auspices, is

¹³⁶ I am indebted to conversations with Mark Elliott for drawing my attention to Emma's diary. See ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 272-73 (“Conflict with Emma ate away at Albion's commitment to the NCRA.”); see also EKT's 1983 Diary Entries (July 7, 14, 15, 28, Aug. 31, Sept. 1, 4, Nov. 7, and Dec. 25, 1983) (on file as #9906, AWTP); Letter from EKT to Adelbert Moot, family lawyer (June 17, 1905) (on file as #9772, AWTP) (giving the fullest account of the *Continent* debacle and its financial impact on the Tourgées).

always a speculation.” The opinion of the *Inter Ocean’s* Managing Editor must have fortified her doubts. “If I was asked to advise the Judge about the new paper ‘The National Citizen’ I would be against it,” he wrote:

It is a bad time to start any new venture in journalism. If the parties interested would guarantee the necessary capital, and guarantee a good salary to the man who would do the work the case would be different, but I do not believe that the Judge ought to sacrifice himself in a cause in which he already has made so many sacrifices.¹³⁷

In April 1894, Emma at last got her way, “much to [her] gratification.” After suffering a serious illness, Tourgée agreed to return all the subscriptions to *National Citizen* stock that he had received to date and to defer publishing the journal—a deferral he extended indefinitely several months later.¹³⁸ The resumption of the “Bystander” in May helped soften the blow, but did not resolve the need Tourgée saw for an NCRA organ.

Unwilling to renounce his dream completely, Tourgée eventually settled on a “compromise” with Emma by founding a journal that operated on a shoestring budget and thus avoided driving him further into debt.¹³⁹ *The Basis: A Journal of Citizenship*, which debuted on 20 March 1895 and lasted until April 1896, proved no substitute for the *National Citizen* and achieved almost none of the aims Tourgée had described so eloquently to his African American correspondents. The small group of investors who laid out the four thousand dollars needed to start the journal included no African Americans, nor did the editorial staff. Tourgée wrote most of each 32-page number himself. Supplementing his editorial matter and pseudonymous fiction, his daughter Aimée furnished a column titled “In a Lighter Vein”; the popular white writer Ada Sweet, an associate of Jane Addams’ in Chicago, took

¹³⁷ Letter from Charles W. Chesnutt to AWT (Nov. 27, 1893) (on file as #7537, AWTP) (reprinted in “TO BE AN AUTHOR,” *supra* note 123, at 81); Letter from William H. Busbey to Mrs. A.W. Tourgée (Nov. 17, 1893) (Emma had apparently written to ask Busbey what the chances were that the “Bystander” column might be restored).

¹³⁸ ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 277; EKT Diary Entry (Apr. 5, 7, 1894) (on file as #9906, AWTP); Letter from AWT to McGerald & Sons (Aug. 1894) (on file as #8235, AWTP); *see also* AWT, *Bystander*, BASIS 9 (Mar. 20, 1895) (“Before arrangements could be completed for its [the *National Citizen’s*] publication, the *Bystander* was prostrated with what was supposed to be a fatal illness. . . . The *Bystander* . . . returned the money subscribed for stock, notified those who had subscribed for the journal that it would not be published, folded his arms and prepared for the end. There were months of doubt, but in the end, health came instead of death.”).

¹³⁹ ELLIOTT, *supra* note 3, at 294-95.

charge of the department for "Our Women Citizens"; and the white minister Thomas Slicer, one of the investors, contributed a weekly lesson on citizenship.

Issued from Buffalo by an obscure publisher, McGerald & Son, the *Basis* could never have reached a national audience; in fact, although such loyal African American supporters as Martinet, the Griffin brothers, Wells, and Chesnutt went out of their way to promote the journal, its subscription list barely reached 1,200, which fell below the level of most antebellum abolitionist organs and many current African American newspapers. As a result, the *Basis* could not have significantly increased the white public's exposure to race journalism. Even more disappointingly, little or nothing came of the prizes the *Basis* offered for "sketches and stories by colored writers" illustrating the "common life of the colored people," perhaps because eligibility to compete depended on procuring "five yearly subscribers to THE BASIS."

Despite these shortcomings, the *Basis* offered much of value. Its prime attraction, of course, was Tourgée's "Bystander" column, which remained as incisive as ever. In addition, it featured a monthly Mob Record, tabulating by race and sex the people hanged, shot to death, burned, beaten, raped, or threatened by mobs and listing their names and the locales when available. It also printed extracts from African American newspapers and communications from African American correspondents—among them one who suggested that "while you are giving the depressing facts concerning lynching and wrongs, past and present endured, give us also some facts concerning the progress of the colored race so as to give them a new inspiration to work for a better tomorrow."¹⁴⁰

Finally, the *Basis* not only provided extensive coverage of race matters, but also highlighted aspects of them rarely treated with sensitivity in the white press, such as: the struggle over the "color question" in the women's club movement; the demeaning use of the term "Negresses" to "sneer at" the "conference of colored women's clubs" that represented a milestone for the race; the racial segregation practiced by white churches, which Tourgée advised African Americans to combat by periodically attending them; and the refusal of hotels in Boston and Connecticut to lodge visiting African American dignitaries, which

¹⁴⁰ Letter from "A Colored Farmer," BASIS 233 (May 25, 1895).

prompted Tourgée to proclaim that these hotels should be “blacklisted in every religious paper in the United States.”¹⁴¹

Tourgée had founded the NCRA, and its organ the *Basis*, with one overriding goal: to arouse public sentiment against Jim Crow while the Supreme Court was considering the *Plessy*¹⁴² case. “The court has always been the foe of liberty until forced to move on by public opinion,” Tourgée pointed out to Martinet. “[I]f we can get the ear of the Country, and argue the matter fully *before the people first*, we may incline the wavering [justices] to fall on our side when the matter comes up.”¹⁴³ However, during the five years since he had called on “Bystander” readers to show their solidarity with the New Orleans citizens who were challenging the Jim Crow car, racial attitudes had hardened rather than softened. Meanwhile, far from building into a counter-movement powerful enough to sway both “the people” and their judicial arbiters, the NCRA had petered out as an activist organization, and the intended trumpet blast of the *National Citizen* had devolved into the impotent squeak of the *Basis*. Now the *Plessy* case was about to be taken up by the Supreme Court in a political climate that augured the worst.

Clearly, Tourgée lacked two of the main requisites for realizing the potential of the NCRA: organizing skills and access to capital. He was a visionary, not a grassroots mobilizer or fundraiser, and conditions may not yet have been ripe for the broad interracial alliance he envisioned. Only in 1909—eighteen years after the founding of the NCRA, thirteen years after the *Plessy* verdict, and four years after Tourgée’s death—would African American and white reformers jointly establish the NAACP—an effective, well-funded, and lasting association dedicated to achieving racial justice and equality.

The NAACP’s organ, *The Crisis*, would boast an African American as chief—not associate—editor: W.E.B. Du Bois. Nevertheless, its inaugural convention would not escape the racial conflicts Tourgée had tried to evade by not letting the NCRA hold a convention.¹⁴⁴ Like the

¹⁴¹ “*The Federation of Women’s Clubs*,” *BASIS* 10 (Apr. 20, 1895); “*A Meeting of Negresses*,” *BASIS* 555 (Aug. 10 1895); “*The Color Line in Boston*” & “*Race Prejudice in Connecticut*,” *BASIS* 191-92 (Mar. 1896).

¹⁴² *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

¹⁴³ Letter from AWT to Louis A. Martinet (Oct. 31, 1893) (on file as #7438, AWTP); *see also* Letter from AWT to Bishop [Henry McNeal] Turner (Oct. 30, 1893) (noting that Tourgée makes the same point).

¹⁴⁴ For accounts of these racial conflicts, *see* PAULA J. GIDDINGS, *IDA: A SWORD AMONG LIONS*, 473-80 (2009); CHARLES FLINT KELLOGG, *NAACP: A HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE, VOLUME 1*, 21-23 (1973);

2013]

The National Citizen's Rights Association

169

NCRA, moreover, the NAACP would fail ever to win passage of a national anti-lynching law. Another forty-five years would elapse before it at last achieved the objective that eluded Tourgée and the NCRA—a Supreme Court verdict¹⁴⁵ declaring segregation unconstitutional.

DAVID LEVERING LEWIS, W.E.B. DU BOIS, 1868-1919: BIOGRAPHY OF A RACE (1993); IDA B. WELLS, CRUSADE FOR JUSTICE: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF IDA B. WELLS (1970).

¹⁴⁵ Brown v. Bd. of Educ., 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

