

Eugene H. Berwanger, The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy[1967]
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Ironic point, the book reveals that anti-black prejudice was a factor in the development of antislavery feelings in the ante-bellum US.

In his first chapter dealing with the Old NW territory up to 1824 B points out that there were settlers in the territories of Indiana and Illinois who wanted to introduce bonded slavery into these territories despite the NW Ordinance.

Not altogether clear just what were the provisions of the NW Ordinance in regard to slavery. Did the ban apply only to new slaves being brought in and sanction those already there. . . It appears as though that is the way it was interpreted from 1787 to the time of the state organizations in Illinois and Indiana.

B points out the anti-Negro prejudice in these territories was the strong force in defeating the attempts of the slave forces from introducing a slave-constitutional arrangement. It was the sheer numbers of the anti-slave population filing into the NW territories--from south and north--that finally ended the threat of slavery in these new states.

Chapter 2 deals with the NW during the period of intense anti-black sentiment(1824-1860)

Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois adopted almost identical statutes restricting free Negroes by the 1830s. Each state excluded Negroes from the militia, denied them the ballot, and forbade them to give testimony in court cases involving whites.

Ohio required that incoming blacks have certificates of freedom and should be able to post a \$500 bond. This practice was copied in the territories of Michigan and Iowa. Iowa banned interracial marriage in 1840.

The reasons for this racial antipathy were complex:

B cites the economic rivalry between skilled & unskilled blacks and white laborers in urban areas. In Cincinnati these strains produced urban race riots in 1830 and again in 1841. The black section of Cincinnati called "little Africa" was a refuge for escaped slaves. . . The state placed pressure on the blacks in the center ghetto and forced half of them out of the city. . .

He cites other factors--the fear of miscegenation. The reason why these states banned interracial marriages. These states also feared that they might become the dumping grounds for southerners who were freeing their blacks. . .

B in examining the reconstituted state constitutions in the latter 1840s through 1857 notes that the anti-Negro provisions were even more stringent than before. . . .

Bans of equal suffrage were common Defeated in all the old NW states Iowa in 1851 passed an exclusion law similar to the one in the Missouri state constitution that excluded blacks from the state. This pattern was followed in other states. After the Congress permitted Florida to enter the Union without opposition despite the state's constitution provision excluding free blacks from the state, this set off a pattern in the Old NW. Illinois and Indiana adopted exclusion clauses like Florida's in 1847 and 1850. Apparently the bonds provision was not keeping free blacks out of these states. Their black populations were increasing So they went to exclusion

Lincoln's state of Illinois had one of the harshest anti-Negro statutes or complex of prohibitions of any of the Old NW states:

Any person bringing into the state a black or mulatto (other than someone travelling through) was subject to a fine of \$100 to \$500 and a one-year prison sentence. Blacks entering and remaining in the state for more than 10 days were to be tried for a high misdemeanor. Conviction meant a fine of \$50. If the fine could not be paid it would be worked off by the negro publicly auctioned off and the period of labor to be determined at the time of auction.

Illinois in the 1850s had a population of about 7-8000 blacks. . . . It was not the standing numbers it was the fear of the future and the imagined influx of great numbers of blacks. . . . These laws were preventative medicine. . . .

B discusses the efforts of colonization society in the Old NW states. . . . The colonization society made inroads into this northern enclave. . . . But it achieved only minor successes in getting blacks to move to Africa. B concludes this section on Negroe prejudice in the NW with the observation that it was this area that provided the settlers for the Great Plains states and the Pacific NW. They absorbed and transferred midwestern ideals and racial attitudes. Bombarded with antagonistic statements about Negroes from lawmakers and editors, requested to vote for or against restrictive measures, and faced with almost constant agitation against the expansion of slavery, these pioneers pushed westward with an increased determination to keep the Negro, free and slave, out of the new lands.

3. In Eldorado

The California situation is discussed. . . . B notes that anti-black sentiment was strong in the territory as soon as the wave of white settlers began pouring in attracted by the promise of get-rich-quick in the gold mines.

The blacks were also in the state. In some cases southerners brought their slaves to work the mines. He notes that southerners were already alert to the fact that black labor in mining was an area of slave exploitation that pointed to a new future. It argues that by the 1850s the institution was not really self-contained.

Notes the miners agitation and opposition to be mining gold along side black labor. . .

By the time of the constitutional convention in preparation for statehood the slave issue and Negro issue was intense. The feeling was that California should come in as a free state and that it should follow the pattern of the Midwestern states and exclude all blacks, free and slave. The anti-black elements argued that if there was no ban that the state would be inundated with blacks. Southerners would bring in their slaves, work them in the mines, get rich, and then manumit there blacks and turn loose in the community.

Once again when the state constitutional delegates drafted the state constitution slavery was banned. . . But no exclusion laws were passed and incorporated into the constitution at that time. But after California entered the Union agitation for exclusion legislation picked up. . .

B deals with the restrictive laws aimed at the free blacks in the California state during the 1850s. He shows how stringent they were.

But racial exclusion and restrictive legislation was repealed after the Civil War largely because the population of California was truly polyglot. The Negro scare was diluted by the influx of Chinese and Latin Americans. . . The state's racial composition was simply too varied to enforce white exclusion laws. The color line was too blurred by the 1860s to really enforce laws aimed at restriction. . .

4. Beyond the Cascades

In Oregon the same attitudes prevailed against slavery and even more intensely against the free black man. He notes that Oregon's territorial population was made up of large elements of pioneers from the Old Northwest.

The exclusion laws of the territorial government were carbon copies of the statutes of states like Illinois.

The heated discussions about slavery and the Negro were as prevalent in Oregon as they had been in the Old NW states. Despite the fact that by 1850 there were only about 55 blacks in the Oregon territory. The vote for the state constitution on the eve of entering as a state in the Union (1857) the people of Oregon voted against slavery and against the admittance of free negroes into the state. . .

The attitude of Oregonians was anti-black. They opposed slavery and free Negroes because whites in Oregon saw blacks and slavery as the same thing.

5. On the High Plains

He deals with the Kansas situation. . . Once again the white settlers regardless of their point of origin were anxious to have a free state. The conventional wisdom in these matters of state settlement on the frontier was that slavery was simply the precursor for blacks.

He notes that most of the Missouri settlers were interested in land than they were in ideology of the slave question. Most Missourians were antislavery. . . .They were also anti-black. They wanted Kansas a free state with exclusion of all blacks, slaves and free.

The eastern press was mostly responsible for setting the issue in the context of a cold war between slave power and freedom, etc. . . .

Berwanger discusses the antislavery forces in Kansas. They were composed of the elements financed and supported by the New England Immigrant Aid Society. These elements(a definite minority)stood for antislavery and for the admittance and full equality for the blackman. . . .They were persuaded by the abolitionist sentiment. The others were the southerners from Missouri and other parts of the South who came to Kansas to be rid of slavery and all contacts with the Negro. And the greatest numbers were former settlers in the Old North West who carried their anti-Negro sentiments with them. They were against slavery--not on an ideological or moral basis--but they were even more against the Negro.

The only thing these elements had in common was their opposition to the "bogus" legislature and the Lecompton party that was made up of proslavery Missourians and slave-holding southerners. . . .

The upshot of this struggle was the final triumph of the free forces. But the introduction of an anti-slavery and ban on all Negroes in the state constitution of Kansas. . . .

He notes that all during the Kansas crisis there were no more than 55 blacks in the territory. . . .

When the final constitutional document was ready to be submitted to the US Congress the drafting committee or convention excluded the ban on free blacks on the state. They feared that Congress might reject the constitution and statehood would fail. But the Kansas state constitution did include all those features of the NW constitutions that militated against blacks--ban on suffrage, militia service. . . .

He notes that reactions against Negroes of free status in Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Nebraska were similar to restrictions found in the NW. All the territories barred Negroes from voting, from testifying against a white person; and New Mexico and Colorado barred marriage between blacks and whites.

On final summing up, the Negro issue in the territories received less attention after 1857 because pioneers realized that without legislation to protect the institution large numbers of slaveholders would not migrate into the territories. The situation in the western states was as Stephen Douglas has privately admitted--under popular sovereignty arrangement the pioneers from the NW and border states who opposed slavery would out number the proslavery settlers ; would control the territorial legislatures and thereby jeopardized the possibility of slaveholders from gaining control of the law process. Without this certainty that would provide them protection for their property the proslavery elements were at an absolute disadvantage. . . .

Since the connection between slavery and free blacks was generally shared by the settlers from the Old NW and border states once the institution of slavery was ruled against the fear of a large population of free blacks diminished. . .

In general, these states remained relatively free of black farmers and artisans. . . .Until the Civil War period and Reconstruction when a more liberal attitude prevailed in Congress. After this the statutory prohibitions against blacks were gradually lifted. . . .Except for Oregon where the ignored ban on blacks in the state constitution was not removed formally until 1927. And the provision in the Indianan constitution disbarring blacks from service in the state militia was not stricken from the books until 1927. . . .

6. Western Politicians and the Negro Question

He points out that GOP politicians in the 1850s reflected the attitudes of their constituents. . . .They campaigned on an antislavery and anti-extension platform. . . .But at the same time they were never allowed themselves to appear "soft" on the Negro issue. They shunned any idea of black equality. . . .They severed any Democratic-inspired attempts to link with with abolitionist ideology.

In general the big wheels of the GOP operationally adopted Senatro Douglas' popular sovereignty thesis when it came to the right of white citizens to discriminate against the Negro. This was strictly a decision that had to be left to the white majorities. Douglas was an extreme advocate of popular decision on this matter. . . .Coming from a state like Illionis that bordered on slave states he held that his native state had the right to prevent the state from becoming an "asylum for the old and decrepit and broken-down negroes who might migrate to Illinois or be sent to it."

The irony was that as the issue of slavery in the territories became a national concern the level of racial resistance to blacks among northerners increased proportionally. They regarded slavery extension as an evil but they regarded the prospect of free blacks in the same area as whites as a disaster. Black labor would reduce white labor and white freedom, etc. . . . Free soilers were not advocates of freedom and equality for blacks. . . . Just the reverse was true. . . .

Democrat David Wilmot in his Provision did not want to open the new territories for the black man. . . .Just the reverse. He wanted to keep these territories open to free whites only and by blocking the entry of slavery bar the admittance of the Negro. . . .

Berwanger develops the point that the GOP fought savagely the allusions by the Democrats that the party was the "Nigger Party," the party of suffrage for the blacks, for miscegenation. . . .

Republicans emphasized they were only against the extension of slavery and pointed that this was the certain way of keeping the blacks out of the territories and leaving the territories open to free whites.

They planned up the idea of colonization. They denied any abolitionizing tendencies in their party.

The emphasis, especially as the 1860 election grew near, on colonization was to emphasize the party's attachment to the white man and the racial supremacy of the republicans. The Republicans were safe on the racial issue and did everything possible to throw off the stigma of abolitionism. The party was for free soil, free labor, and anti-extension of slavery. And it was Negrophobe. . . .

The chapter is useful for it shows these strong anti-Negro statements by the so-called Radicals of the Reconstruction period. . .

He ends this chapter by citing the Republicans choice of a presidential nominee in Lincoln who met all the requirements to gain the antislavery and Negrophobe vote in the Midwest. . . Lincoln stood with his party against the extension of slavery; not to interfere with it where it already existed; and opposed the raising of the black man to a social and political equality with whites,

He ends with the observation made in the beginning that racial enmity and deep prejudice by the 1850s (with the issue of slavery in the territories) was a significant factor in the support for the Republicans and for the Republicans platform of nonextension of slavery. The link between anti-Negro sentiment and prejudice and antislavery and anti-extension was direct. . .