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*“Pap” Singleton, the Moses of the
Colored Exodus*

BY

WALTER L. FLEMING, PH. D.

Professor of History in Louisiana State University

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"PAP" SINGLETON, THE MOSES OF THE COLORED EXODUS *

PROFESSOR WALTER L. FLEMING
Louisiana State University

During an investigation of that movement of negroes from the South to Kansas in 1879-80, known as the "Colored Exodus," the writer of this sketch was impressed by the importance of the activity and influence of one man, an ignorant negro, who in himself seemed to embody the longings and the strivings of the bewildered negro race. His name was Benjamin Singleton, but on account of his advanced age and kindly disposition most people called him "Pap;" he himself later added and insisted upon the title, "The Moses of the Colored Exodus." He was born a slave in 1809 at Nashville, in middle Tennessee, and was by occupation a carpenter and cabinet maker. Evidently he was of a restless disposition, and probably his master considered him "trifling," for "Pap" asserted that although he was "sold a dozen times or more" to the Gulf States, yet he always ran away and came back to Tennessee. Finally he decided to strike for Canada and freedom, and after failing in three attempts he made his way over the "Underground Railway" to Ontario, opposite Detroit. Soon afterward he came back to Detroit where he worked, he says, until 1865 as a "scavenger," and also kept a "secret boarding-house for fugitive slaves."

Singleton was not of imposing appearance. From newspaper descriptions of him written during the 70's we learn that he was a slender man, below medium height, a light mulatto with long, wavy iron-gray hair, gray mustache, and thin chin whiskers.¹ His square jaw showed strength of character; he had "full quick

* This investigation was materially aided by a grant from the Carnegie Institution, Department of Economics and Sociology.

¹ In the *Kansas Historical Society Collections*, Vol. IX, p. 385, is a portrait of Singleton.

eyes and a general expression of honesty, courage, and modesty." He could not read. With all his later prominence Singleton remained frank, simple, and unspoiled.²

"After freedom cried out," Pap was not content to remain in the North and soon went back to his old home in Tennessee to work at his trade. His experience in the North had opened his eyes to the economic weaknesses and dangers of his race, and soon he began to complain that the blacks were profiting little by freedom. They had personal liberty but no homes, and they were often hungry, he says, and were frequently cheated. He then began his "mission," as he called it, urging the blacks to save their earnings and buy homes and little plots of land as a first step toward achieving industrial independence. His later career showed that he had little confidence in political measures as a means of elevating the race and it was always difficult for political agitators to get indorsement from him. His ideas and plans were chiefly about industrial matters and much of the criticism he received from his race was like that later directed at Booker T. Washington. He declared in 1868 when he began his "mission" that his people were being exploited for the benefit of the carpetbaggers, whose promises were always broken:

After the war [he said] my race willingly slipped a noose over their necks and knuckled to a bigger boss than the old ex-one. . . . Bimeby the fifteenth amendment came along and the carpetbaggers, and our poor people thought they was goin' to have Canaan right off. But I knowed better. . . . I said to 'em "Hy'ar you is a-potter'n' round in politics and tryin' to git in offices that aint fit, and you can't see that these white tramps from the North is simply usin' you for to line their pockets and when they git through they'll drop you and the rebels will come into power and then whar'll you be?"³

² St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, 1879; St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, 1883; Pap Singleton's *Scrapbook*, pp. 16, 18, 21, 55. Pap was proud of having his name in print, and kept in a scrapbook clippings that people gave him relating to himself. He exhibited the book with pride to the United States Senate Committee in 1880. It now belongs to the Kansas Historical Society, to the secretary of which, Hon. George W. Martin, I am indebted for the privilege of examining it and much other material relating to Benjamin Singleton.

³ Singleton's *Scrapbook*, p. 21—an interview with a reporter of a St. Louis newspaper. The arrangement or lack of arrangement of the clippings in the scrapbook seems to prove that Singleton could not read. So many circulars and addresses were sent out by him that some people thought him well educated. See *Kansas Historical Society Collections*, Vol. IX, p. 385.

For several years Singleton had but slight success in making converts to his plan of salvation for the blacks. But after the dream of "40 acres and a mule" had failed to materialize and after the negroes in Tennessee began to see that they were going to get few rewards from the politicians, they were willing to listen to other than political prophets, and Singleton at last found his opportunity. It was in 1869, he says, that he succeeded in inducing some negroes "to get it into their minds" that they ought to quit renting and farming on the credit system and endeavor to secure homes of their own. In order to direct their efforts he and others organized and incorporated at Nashville the Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association. The professed object of the organization was to assist Tennessee negroes to buy small tracts of farm land, or houses and lots in the towns to which so many negroes flocked after the war. All colored people were invited to join. Local societies were organized and incorporated under such names as the Edgefield Real Estate Association, in Davidson County, and these held frequent meetings in the negro churches and secret-society halls; committees were appointed by them to look out for land that was for sale, circulars of advice were scattered among the blacks, and speeches were made at the meetings by Singleton and others in regard to the economic situation of the negro race. Numbers of the whites favored the movement and gave assistance and encouragement to Singleton, while others opposed it. On the whole it was not successful in Tennessee. The real cause of failure was the inability of the negroes to purchase land at the high prices asked. The whites, hoping for better times, were still holding their lands at something like ante-bellum prices, notwithstanding the fact that the net income was yearly lessening. The only cheap lands were the worn-out lands, "where peas would not sprout."⁴

The conviction grew upon Singleton that the negroes must be segregated from the whites. Whether they were friendly or unfriendly, he felt that they should be separated for the good of

⁴ Singleton's *Scrapbook*, p. 19; Singleton's testimony in *Senate Report No. 693*, Pt. 3, p. 379, 46th Congress, 2d session.

the blacks. In the South, after the failure to acquire land, the situation of the race was, he thought, precarious. He had no confidence in the new ruling class of whites that came after the carpetbaggers; they were not as friendly to the negroes as was the old master class which had been put out of politics after 1865; there was danger of helpless, hopeless serfdom. "Conditions might get better," said Pap, "a hundred years from now when all the present generation's dead and gone, but not afore, sir, not afore, an' what's agoin' to be a hundred years from now aint much account to us in this present o' de Lord." The only remedy, he decided, was for the blacks to quit the South and go to a new country where they would not have to compete with whites. "I had studied it all out," he said, "and it was clar as day to me. I dunno how it come to me; but I spec it was God's doin's. Anyhow I knowed my people couldn't live thar. . . . The whites had the lands and the sense an' the blacks had nothin' but their freedom, an' it was jest like a dream to them."⁵

Singleton now turned his thoughts to Kansas as the most promising place for the settlement of home-seeking blacks. There were several reasons for this choice. In the first place, the history of Kansas appealed powerfully to the negroes. Besides, railroad-building in Missouri, Arkansas, and Kansas had attracted numbers of Tennessee negroes as laborers and these sent back reports of the fine western lands open to settlement. Beginning with 1869 a few negroes went to Kansas each year to open small farms on the fertile prairies. In 1871, after finding that lands in Tennessee were too high priced for the blacks to purchase, Singleton's Real Estate and Homestead Association turned its attention to Kansas. An "exploring committee" was sent to "spy out" the land.⁶ A favorable report was made and a slight migration followed. In 1872 another committee sent to Kansas reported that negroes would do better to stay in Tennessee. Singleton then went himself to Kansas in 1873 as representative of the Tennes-

⁵ Interviews, in Singleton's *Scrapbook*, pp. 16, 21; *Senate Report No. 693*, Pt. 3, 46th Congress, 2d Session, p. 379.

⁶ In every southern state there was a similar movement among the negroes between 1870 and 1880.

see Real Estate and Homestead Association, of which he was president. He was favorably impressed with the country and, returning to Nashville, he took three hundred blacks to the public lands in Cherokee County in the southeastern part of Kansas and there founded "Singleton Colony."⁷ Prospects seemed good and Singleton went back to Tennessee to get more emigrants. For this purpose the organization of the Tennessee Real Estate Association was continued.⁸

From this time to 1879 Singleton was actively engaged in developing negro sentiment in Tennessee and Kentucky in favor of emigration or "exodus" to Kansas. The whites approved his policy, he says, aided him in various ways, told him that it "was better than politics," sat in his meetings, and in the Tennessee newspapers they published his notices and wrote up the movement for him. Every year with a few negroes he went to Kansas. Always upon his return he distributed circulars about "Sunny Kansas." He spent \$600 for circulars, he says. All his life Singleton well understood the value of advertising. His literature was given to preachers going into the interior districts, to porters on the railroads, and to employees on the steamboats to be scattered among the negroes farther south. But not until 1876 was there much response to these efforts. In that year the local organizations in Tennessee were active, and Singleton and Columbus Johnson, another shrewd Nashville negro, went to Kansas and looked up more good locations for settlements on the public lands. An arrangement was made by which Johnson was to stay in Topeka and from there direct the newly arriving blacks to the various colonies. A. D. DeFrantz, a Nashville barber, another lieutenant of Singleton's, assisted in working up the parties in Tennessee. Singleton had headquarters in Nashville, but traveled back and forth conducting immigrants to Topeka. The steamers from Nashville granted a special rate of \$10 to Topeka.⁹

⁷ Singleton's *Scrapbook*, pp. 13, 19; *Atchison Champion*, September, 1879.

⁸ Circulars of Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association, 1873 to 1879, in the archives of the Kansas Historical Society.

⁹ *Harper's Weekly*, May 17, 1879; Dunlap Colony circular, 1877; Singleton's *Scrapbook*, pp. 12, 17.

There was more enthusiasm now at the meetings in Tennessee. At all of them Pap delivered addresses asking his people to stand together, to "consolidate the race," and to arouse themselves to their duty to the race. Most of these gatherings were called "investigating meetings"—to investigate conditions in Tennessee and Kansas by listening to the reports of the officials who had been there. Now was the time to go, the leaders urged, or as Pap in highflown language said, "Place and time have met and kissed each other."¹⁰ The leaders of this migration saw to it that a certain selection of the emigrants was made. None who were entirely without means were advised to go; "no political negroes" were wanted, for "they would want to pilfer and rob the cents before they got to the dollars;" "it was the muscle of the arm, the men that worked that we wanted;" it was "root hog or die."¹¹ One of the circulars entitled, *News from Kansas*, declared that there was "abundant room for all good citizens, but no room for loafers in Kansas."¹²

For educated negroes, Singleton had a profound and bitter contempt, perhaps because they generally opposed his movement. Most of the negroes in the North who were well situated wanted no more of their race to come; they feared that a negro migration to the North would make uncertain the position of those already there. For obvious reasons the negro politicians opposed it. Singleton asked his people not to believe in those who would keep the blacks in the South for selfish reasons.

The colored race [he said] is ignorant and altogether too simple, and invests too much confidence in Professor Tom Cat, or some of the imported slippery chaps from Washington, Oberlin, Chicago, or scores of places whence are sent intriguing reverends, deputy doorkeepers, military darkeys or teachers, to go often around the corrals and see that not an appearance of a hole exists through which the captives within can escape or even see through.¹³

¹⁰ Circular speech, Nashville, 1877.

¹¹ Singleton's testimony in *Senate Report No. 693*, Pt. 3, p. 379, 46th Congress, 2d session.

¹² Singleton's *Scrapbook*, p. 61.

¹³ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1879; *Nashville American*, August, 1877; Singleton's *Scrapbook*, pp. 24, 32. It is evident that Singleton's statements were sometimes revised by the reporters, but the sentiments were his own.

The "exodus" songs possess considerable interest and afford an insight into the feelings of the black people. At the meetings held to stimulate interest in the "exodus," as Singleton called it, it was the custom to sing songs composed for such occasions. Pamphlet copies of these, poorly printed by negro printers, were sold by Singleton at ten cents each. The money received helped to pay expenses. One of these songs was called "The Land That Gives Birth to Freedom." Some of the verses were as follows:

1. We have held meetings to ourselves to see if we can't plan some way to live.
(Repeat.)

Chorus—Marching along, yes, we are marching along,
To Kansas City we are bound. (Repeat.)

2. We have Mr. Singleton for our president. He will go on before us and lead us through. (Repeat.)
4. For Tennessee is a hard slavery state, and we find no friends in that country. (Repeat.)
6. We want peaceful homes and quiet firesides; no one to disturb us or turn us out. (Repeat.)

As soon as a party was enrolled Singleton would advertise that on a certain date the "Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association" would leave "for the Southwest in pursuit of homes."¹⁴ At the meetings before departure and at the start another "exodus" song was sung. This was called "Extending Our Voices to Heaven." Some lines were:

1. We are on our rapid march to Kansas, the land that gives birth to freedom. May God Almighty bless you all.

Chorus—Farewell, dear friends, farewell.

2. Many dear mothers are sleeping in the tomb of clay, have spent all their days in slavery in old Tennessee.
4. It seems to me that the year of jubilee has come; surely this is the time that is spoken of in history.

These songs indicate clearly the feelings of the negroes who were going on the new "Exodus from the land of Egypt." Another song sung on the way and after arrival, was altogether hopeful:

¹⁴ Circulars of the Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association, 1877, 1878; Singleton's *Scrapbook*, pp. 32, 49, 54.

In the midst of earth's dominion
 Christ has promised us a kingdom
 Not left to other nations
 And we've surely gained the day.

Three colonies were founded by Singleton, Johnson, and DeFrantz, and to these most of the negroes who went to Kansas in 1876-78 were conducted. Dunlap Colony was in the Neosho Valley in Morris and Lyon counties; Singleton Colony in Cherokee County in the southeastern corner of the state, and Nicodemus Colony in the northwestern part of the state in Graham County. Singleton Colony, already referred to as having been settled in 1874, was soonest in good condition. Here, by 1878 the negroes had paid for 1,000 acres of land, good cabins had been erected, cows and pigs were common, and shade trees and fruit trees were growing.¹⁵ The climate here was better suited to the negro than that of the other colonies. Dunlap Colony, also founded in 1874, grew slowly and was in good condition in 1878. In that year there were at Dunlap 200 negro families, two churches and a school, and the settlers had purchased 7,500 acres of government land.¹⁶ In all the colonies the negroes took up homesteads on government land or bought railroad and university lands on long credit at low prices.¹⁷

Nicodemus, the third colony and later the largest, was in less prosperous condition in 1878. Prominent Topeka negroes were promoting this colony, and in 1877 it was being "boomed" as a negro paradise. It was, the promoters claimed, "the largest colored colony in the United States." A town company was incorporated and a fee of five dollars entitled one to membership in the company and to a town lot. Churches were to be built by the company, and no saloons were tolerated. The promoters invited "our colored friends to come and join us in this beautiful Promised Land."¹⁸ But a migration of negroes reached Nicodemus in the fall of 1877 too late to make crops that year, and in consequence there was considerable suffering during the following winter. Most of the early settlers of Nicodemus were from Kentucky. They had a song all their own called "Nicodemus." The allusion is obscure, though it may be said that some ignorant negroes believed that the biblical character (Nicodemus) was "Nigger Demus," that is, a negro. The first verse and the chorus were:

Nicodemus was a slave of African birth,
 And was bought for a bag full of gold.
 He was reckoned a part of the salt of the earth,
 But he died years ago, very old.

Chorus—Good time coming, good time coming,
 Long, long time on the way;
 Run and tell Elijah to hurry up Pomp
 To meet us under the cottonwood tree,
 In the Great Solomon Valley,
 At the first break of day.¹⁹

The year 1878 marks the close of the second period of Singleton's activity as a "Moses of the negro race." By the end of the year he had brought to Kansas, so he claimed, 7,432 negroes.²⁰ Nearly all of these were doing fairly well—certainly as well as could have been expected during a period of readjustment, and better than they would have done in Tennessee, because they worked harder and were more frugal. In addition to the colonies named above, there were many negroes about the larger towns; "Tennessee Town," the negro suburb of Topeka, was growing; a few had settled in Crawford County in southeastern Kansas, just above Cherokee; and numbers had stopped on the way, at Kansas City, St. Louis, and other Missouri towns.

In the early spring of 1879 began what the entire country soon knew as the "negro exodus" from the Egypt of the southern states to the Kansas Canaan. The remote but funda-

¹⁹ Singleton's *Scrapbook*, p. 28; pamphlet, July 2, 1877. Nicodemus was in the valley of the Great Solomon River. Most of the adult negroes of that time sang at their occupations or their pleasures.

²⁰ *Senate Report No. 693*, Pt. 3, p. 379.

¹⁵ Singleton's testimony in *Senate Report No. 693*, Pt. 3, 46th Congress, 2d session, p. 379. Dunlap was called "Singleton" Colony.

¹⁶ Dunlap Colony circular, 1878.

¹⁷ Circular, Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association, 1879; Topeka *Colored Citizen*, June 28, 1879.

¹⁸ Nicodemus circular, 1877; Singleton's *Scrapbook*, pp. 8, 28.

mental causes of the movement lay in the disturbed conditions in the South—social, economic, and political. The credit and crop-lien system which had been substituted for the slave-labor system had worked badly; the “40 acres and a mule” delusion, the Freedmen’s Bank failure, and educational disappointments had discouraged the race; the negro-republican governments in the South had all fallen, and now the blacks declared that legal protection was often denied them; the failure within ten years of all the plans for the immediate elevation of the blacks to the position of the whites had left the entire race restless and anxious for a change. The circulars sent out by Singleton had penetrated into all parts of the black South, and far and wide had spread exaggerated reports of his work. Speculators in western lands, agents for railroads and steamboat companies that were anxious for passenger traffic, negro preachers and white and black politicians, now out of jobs, took advantage of the uneasy feeling and stirred up the blacks of the far South to go to “Sunny Kansas.”

As a result there began in February, 1879, a heavy migration from the black districts bordering on the Mississippi River, which continued, with some interruptions, for two years. It was a surprise to the white South and even more of a surprise to Kansas. Pap Singleton, perhaps the immediate cause of the exodus, was for a while lost sight of in the excitement that arose in Kansas when the first boatloads of unexpected negroes arrived. The exodus from the lower South overshadowed the smaller one from Tennessee and Kentucky. However, Pap worked on as usual, carrying people from Tennessee to Dunlap, Nicodemus, and Singleton colonies. Circulars were sent among the Mississippi and Louisiana “exodusters”²¹ to herald the virtues of the several negro colonies. The name of Singleton is attached to all of them and he always signs himself as “Father of the Exodus,” or “Moses of the Colored Exodus.”²²

Not all of the negroes from Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louis-

²¹ This term was applied to the emigrants by themselves; the whites called them “refugees,” “exodites,” or “exodusters.”

²² Circulars of Nicodemus, Dunlap, Dodge City, etc., 1879; Singleton’s *Scrapbook*, pp. 18, 28, 41.

iana went directly to Kansas. Many of them stopped in St. Louis and waited to hear about conditions in Kansas before going farther. Others stopped because their funds gave out. But the whites and blacks of St. Louis were anxious to speed the “exodusters” on their way, and formed several aid societies to assist them to go farther west. One of these, “The Colored Men’s Land Association of St. Louis,” sent Singleton and DeFrantz as “land inspectors” to search out other suitable places for the settlement of “exodusters” in the western states.²³ All the colonizing societies had Singleton on their lists of officials, as president, “founder,” or “father of the exodus.” His fame had a cash value to them.

Most of the immigrants were destitute, and the whites of Kansas were forced to organize the “Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association” in order to save some of the needy blacks from starvation. Pap was now brought forward by them as an authority on exodus conditions, and for several years he was considered the leading negro of Kansas. At first he was inclined to glory in the movement as a result of his efforts and to say little about causes. However, the “exodus” soon became an issue in Kansas and national politics, and Singleton found that the past treatment of the negroes in the South rather than his own ideas of their future in the Northwest was what northern people, especially the radicals, wanted to know about. So for the first time he raises the familiar “southern outrage” issue, and describes the South as a horrible place where murder, outrage, theft, etc., were common crimes by whites against the negroes.²⁴ The Southern people were, he said, like “a muddy-faced bellowing bull,” and “Democratic threats were as thunder in a colored man’s ear,” and in consequence the negroes were “exodusting.”²⁵ However, he never went into particulars, and always preferred to talk about “consolidating the race” in a new country.

Singleton’s activity sometimes embarrassed the relief associa-

²³ *Topeka Colored Citizen*, May 24, 1879.

²⁴ *Topeka Capital*, June 19, 1879; *Topeka Commonwealth*, October 4, and 14, 1879; Singleton’s *Scrapbook*, p. 28.

²⁵ *Topeka Commonwealth*, June 18 and October 4, 1879; Singleton’s *Scrapbook*, p. 28; *Decatur (Ill.) Daily Republican*, July 30, 1880.

tion. He published frequent appeals in Kansas and eastern newspapers asking that aid be sent to the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association, not only for the relief of the refugees in Kansas, but also for the purpose of assisting more negroes from Egypt to Canaan. But the whites of Kansas wanted no more; the Democrats were accusing the Republicans of stirring up the migration for political purposes, that is, to lessen the southern representation in Congress and to make Kansas safely Republican; and the relief association was trying to close up its work. Hence the numerous appeals for assistance signed by Singleton, DeFrantz, and other negroes, were embarrassing, because it seemed that they were acting under authority.²⁶ The association on the contrary was doing all in its power to check the migration. The "exodus" was not well supported by public opinion in Kansas even among the blacks. The whites and resident blacks of Kansas helped the "exodusters" much, but they wanted no more of them; the laboring-class of whites threatened violence if more negroes should come.

This larger "exodus," like Singleton's original one, met opposition from the leading negroes like Fred Douglass, Pinchback, and Bruce, who objected to any scheme of moving masses of negroes into the North. Against these race leaders Singleton spoke with considerable feeling. "They had good luck," he said, "and now are listening to false prophets; they have boosted up and got their heads a whirlin', and now they think they must judge things from where they stand, when the fact is the possum is lower down the tree—down nigh to the roots;" they either "saw darkly" or were playing into the hands of the southern planters who feared a scarcity of labor. To those who objected that negroes without means should not come to Kansas he replied that "it is because they are poor that they want to get away. If they had plenty they wouldn't want to come. It's to better their condition that they are thinking of. That's what white men go to new countries for, isn't it? Who was the homestead law made for if it was not for poor men?"²⁷

²⁶ Topeka Capital, June 19, 1879.

²⁷ Singleton's *Scrapbook*, p. 21; interview with reporter of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 1879; Douglass, *Life and Times*.

However, Pap was finally made to see that popular opinion in Kansas was not in favor of encouraging further migration of "paupers," and through the influence of the whites he was brought to the point where he used his influence to discourage the exodus movement. But unwillingly did he come to this. In May, 1879, he had denounced in advance a meeting of the National Negro Convention soon to be held at Nashville for the purpose of considering the causes of the exodus and the condition of the blacks. He feared that the negroes like Douglass and Pinchback would control the convention and try to keep the blacks in the South. He wanted the Kansas Negro Convention, which was to be held about the same time, to inform southern negroes about Kansas and assist them to get there.²⁸ Soon, however, in order to relieve and reassure Kansas, he planned to divert the immigration to the states farther west, but only a few went to Nebraska and Colorado. His next plan, suggested by the whites, was to turn the migration to the states north of the Ohio. He visited Illinois and Indiana to investigate conditions, but received little encouragement. He then began to play upon the fear of the whites in those states about a possible "exodus," declaring that the "exodus was working," but that if the North would force the South to treat the negroes well, let them vote, sell land to them, etc., they would stay in the South.²⁹

The migration began to decrease in the summer of 1879 and Singleton busied himself in looking after the negroes in the colonies, and in the relief work. About 200 Tennessee negroes went to his colonies in 1879, besides those from the lower South.³⁰ When the exodus began afresh in the spring of 1880, the Kansas newspapers very willingly published statements from Singleton advising prospective "exodusters" either to stay at home or to scatter out into other northern states, for, as all maintained, Kansas had her share, there was no employment for more, and no more aid could be given to them.³¹ The southern

²⁸ *Scrapbook*, pp. 5, 6.

²⁹ Topeka *Commonwealth*, October 14, 1879.

³⁰ *Scrapbook*, pp. 6, 12.

³¹ *Scrapbook*, p. 32, November 18, 1880; Topeka *Daily Capital*, March 28, 1880.

newspapers gave wide circulation to this advice, for the planters wanted to keep the negro labor, and soon the exodus was checked. After this, Singleton moderated his activity as an organizer of immigration to the North and West. The scattering of circulars was stopped and he now always advised that none come north unless with enough money to last one year.³²

In 1880 we hear Singleton and others complaining that certain funds raised by the relief societies for the needy "exodusters" had been turned over to a negro school. This, they protested, was not right; the money should be divided among those for whom it was raised—the "exodusters"—and not given to a school. Singleton cared little for schools and disliked educated negroes, for, as a matter of fact, the educated blacks then best known to the race had not been good examples of the benefits of education.

Singleton was called before the exodus committee of the U. S. Senate in 1880 and in his testimony explained at length his plans and methods. After describing the "real estate" companies, his Kansas colonies, and his method of advertising, he spoke of the causes of the movement which, in his opinion, were mainly social and economic: the negro was helpless in the South, which was "all out of joint;" the only way "to bring the South to her senses" was for the negroes to leave in large numbers, and thus force a reorganization of industry and a bettering of the condition of the laborers who remained in the South. He scored a point on the Democratic majority of the committee when he pointed out the fact that they had selected their witnesses from a class of negroes who were prosperous and who knew little of the conditions surrounding the average black. As to himself, he declared "the blood of a white man runs through my veins"—hence he could understand both races. "I am the father of the exodus . . . the whole cause of the Kansas migration," he boasted and looked upon the attempt of the Democrats to place responsibility for the movement upon Kansas Republicans as a scheme to defraud him of due credit.³³

³² *Scrapbook*, p. 17.

³³ *Senate Report No. 693*, Pt. 3, p. 379, 46th Congress, 2d session.

When in the fall of 1880 Singleton went to Illinois and Indiana he had a double mission: to see if there was room for "exodusters," and to deliver Republican speeches in favor of Garfield. As to the first he received no encouragement, but he delivered several speeches on conditions in the South and notified Illinois and Indiana that unless conditions were bettered and a Republican president elected a great migration across the Ohio might be expected.³⁴ In November after the Republican victory, Singleton declared that to him was due the credit for making Indiana safe for Garfield. He explained it by saying that after he learned that the Democrats feared colonization of negroes by the Republicans, he had gone to their leaders and told them that "unless they allowed the state to go Republican he would import 250,000 negroes into the state." They were so impressed, he says, that several thousand failed to vote, and thus the state was saved to the Republicans.³⁵ In spite of the vivid imagination shown by these incidents, they indicate that Pap had learned that neither Republican nor Democrat in the North would welcome an exodus of negroes.

After the exodus ceased the negroes who had come to Kansas felt that they needed race organization and a settled policy in order to enable them to do their best. Almost at once they had become of importance as voters and as laborers. So in January, 1881, Singleton called and presided over a colored convention in Topeka, which considered means of bettering the condition of the race. A result of this meeting was the organization on March 4, 1881, in "Tennessee Town," Topeka, of the "Colored United Links," Singleton being the "founder and president."³⁶ The objects were to "consolidate the race as a band of brethren," and to "harmonize together," to keep the race out of labor disputes, to care for the sick and the destitute, and to provide for training the children in trades from which they were now excluded by the jealousy of the white laborers. "In unity there is strength," and "United we stand, divided we fall" were the

³⁴ Danville (Ill.) *Republican*, July 30, 1880.

³⁵ *Scrapbook*, p. 35.

³⁶ *Scrapbook*, p. 15.

favorite mottoes on the circulars sent out to advertise the "United Links."³⁷ Local orders of the "Links" were formed in each Kansas town that had a negro population, and for several years an annual convention was held at Topeka. The first convention in 1881 showed a body of fairly prosperous negroes. At the conventions the opening song was always "John Brown's Body."

For various reasons some of the negroes, especially the ex-politicians from Louisiana and Mississippi, were dissatisfied with the "lily white" policy of the white Republicans, and their restlessness invited an attempt by the "Greenbackers" to capture the organization of the "Links." Singleton himself began to talk as an "independent," and declared that the Kansas Democrats had treated the negroes as well as the Republicans had. The "Links" and the "Greenbackers" had meetings on the same day at Topeka, and had a joint barbecue, but no fusion was effected. However for several years the Republicans were not certain of the entire negro vote.³⁸ The "Links" flourished for some years and in 1887 Pap declared that the body had done much good in uniting the race and that the "hand of the Lord must of been upon him" when he organized that society.³⁹

The "exodusters" soon met opposition in labor matters. The migration caused a lowering of wages and the poorer whites became incensed against the blacks in the parts of the state where the "exodusters" were more numerous. One of the professed objects of the "United Links" was to avoid trouble by trying to regulate wages. The negroes were willing to work for less than white laborers, and on this account white employers and white laborers were divided in their opinion as to what the negroes should do. The latter were inclined to take the advice of the employers. There was complaint that negro youths were not admitted to the trades.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Scrapbook*, pp. 3, 10, 15.

³⁸ *Topeka Commonwealth*, July 23 and August 2, 1881; *Scrapbook*, pp. 3, 6; the *Topeka Tribune* (negro paper), 1881.

³⁹ *Scrapbook*, September 10, 1887.

⁴⁰ *Scrapbook*, p. 15, January 26 and March 4, 1881; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1885; letters from Kansas negroes to the writer.

The matters that came up in the public meetings of the negroes showed that social and political agitators were attempting to use the race to further their own ends. Some rather noisy ones complained that the whites of Kansas kept them apart, treated them as a separate people, refused to accommodate them in hotels, etc. About the earliest and loudest complaint was that of J. M. Langston, who was refused admission to an ice-cream parlor in 1881.⁴¹ This was disappointing conduct from the white people of Kansas, the state of John Brown. The Mississippi and Louisiana ex-politicians, of whom there were many, began to talk about a proper division of offices. The Kansas whites were willing that the blacks should vote, but nominated none of them for office. The blacks were divided on the question as to whether an organization should be maintained for the purpose of bargaining with the Democratic and Republican parties for the disposal of the negro vote. Singleton cared little about these questions except as indicating the attitude of the whites toward his race. However, though a Republican always, he favored bargaining with both political parties, not so much for office, but to secure consideration for the race.

Under such circumstances, more and more did Kansas prove disappointing to "the father of the exodus." Too many of those who came insisted on staying about the towns and living as they had lived in the South; lands and homes were as far off as ever; competition with the whites was keener than in the South; the whites were distinctly business-like in their treatment of the blacks, and some were unfriendly; little sentiment was allowed to interfere in relations between races, and most threatening of all, thousands of European immigrants were coming every year to the prairie lands of Kansas and thus decreasing the opportunities of the blacks.

So Singleton looked about for another "Promised Land." Remembering Canada as a haven for runaway slaves, he suggested an exodus to that place. The British government, he believed, would assist the blacks. It was objected that Canada was too cold. He then suggested Liberia, began to preach a new

⁴¹ *Topeka Commonwealth*, August 2, 1881.

exodus, and in September, 1883, issued an address to the blacks of the South declaring that since they had refused to come to Kansas in sufficient numbers to accomplish good results, the best that they could now do was to go to Canada under the protection of the British government or go to Liberia where they could have a government of their own. He advised them to leave the South at once, and said that in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia 27,000 blacks had enrolled and were ready to go. There was no hope he thought, for political and economic independence in the South, and conditions were but little better in the North.⁴²

Some person who objected to Canada and also to Liberia proposed Cyprus as a substitute and wrote a long description of it for a St. Louis newspaper. He stated that England no doubt would willingly grant the negroes permission to settle there. Singleton had not the slightest idea as to where and what Cyprus was but eagerly accepted the suggestion and for about two years tried to work up a migration to that place. He was, in his disappointed old age, more credulous and visionary. Finally he started to Cyprus to investigate and went as far as St. Louis where he stopped, probably because of lack of funds.

Pap was now about seventy-five years old and somewhat feeble, but he kept up his "mission." He could with difficulty speak above a hoarse whisper and was accompanied by a smooth-tongued preacher, who did most of the talking and drew his income from the results of Singleton's popularity. Singleton declared that the blacks were unable to compete with the whites, and must make "a fresh start where the color line is not too rigid;"⁴³ there was no hope for final success in America, for here "there can't be no transmogrification of the races;" foreigners had many advantages over negroes and were welcomed; but not even by his friends was the negro wanted, and foreign immigration "would shortly prove the uprooting of our race."⁴⁴

⁴² Topeka Times, September 28, 1883; Scrapbook, pp. 48, 55.

⁴³ Scrapbook, pp. 36, 55.

⁴⁴ St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 1885; Scrapbook, pp. 36, 55, et passim.

After the Cyprus disappointment Singleton was again attracted by the Liberian or Ethiopian movement which was being agitated in the lower South by Bishop Turner and other southern negroes. In furtherance of this movement in January, 1885, Singleton organized the "United Transatlantic Society" for the "great and grand purpose of migration to Africa."⁴⁵ All over the South the negroes were thinking of "Ethiopia" as a refuge that might soon be needed. The election of Cleveland in 1884 had caused uneasy feelings among the southern blacks, in spite of the fact that he had sent personal messages to them to assure them that slavery was not to be re-established.⁴⁶ Some waves of this uneasiness reached the Kansas negroes and many of them enrolled in the United Transatlantic Society. According to the official papers of the society the movement was the result of the conviction that the relations between whites and blacks would continue to be unsatisfactory and that negroes could not expect to reach "perfect manhood" in America; for it was clear that ex-slaves would never be accorded important positions in political or social life, and that fewer and fewer opportunities would be open to them. The negro could not accept such a condition; therefore, the only solution was "a national existence" apart from the whites.⁴⁷ The society evidently intended to deal with foreign powers, for in the constitution there is a curious clause providing that "No persons shall hold any communications with any foreign power . . . without the authority of this organization . . . and the Father of this organization, Benjamin (*alias*) Pap Singleton, if he be alive and sane."⁴⁸

Singleton in his addresses and proclamations as "father" of the United Transatlantic Society, went to the root of the trouble. The negroes must be a separate "nation," he said; in no other way can they survive. They had been able to secure no stronghold in America, for after emancipation "we were turned loose like so many cattle with nothing to live on," and all efforts at

⁴⁵ Circular, 1886.

⁴⁶ See Douglass, *Life and Times*, p. 651.

⁴⁷ North Topeka *Benevolent Banner*, September 24, 1887; Scrapbook, p. 61.

⁴⁸ Constitution of the United Transatlantic Society, 1885.

economic independence had failed. Now the "scum of foreign powers emigrate to America and put their feet on our necks;" and they could live and work where a negro would starve. This was shown by conditions in Kansas, he said, where "three thousand women and children once fully engaged in washing and ironing are now forced into idleness and hundreds of them into base prostitution through the steam laundries and Chinamen;" the races were bound to be separate from the cradle to the grave, and "prejudice will follow you to the days of your offspring twenty generations ahead of this."⁴⁹ For these reasons he advocated colonization in Africa, though he acknowledged that the average "exoduster" who had stayed in Kansas was doing fairly well. The United Transatlantic Society had considerable strength for several years; it held regular meetings and always passed resolutions in favor of negro "national existence" in Liberia, but it sent out no organized body of emigrants. Possibly individuals from Kansas joined the parties from the South that went, but they were few. For better or for worse the movement for a "national existence" failed.

The last years of Pap's life were not spent in obscurity as might have been expected. He was ignorant, he had no property, no home, no family, and it was suspected that smart rascals made use of him in his old age to get money from the generous blacks. But he himself was always popular with both races. In all the mass of material relating to Pap and his schemes there is no hint that he was not just what he professed to be; no doubt is manifested of his honesty and sincerity. Wherever he went the negroes welcomed him as the "father of the exodus." All his savings he spent on his schemes, and by 1881, in his seventy-third year, he was in want. So he proceeded to announce through the Topeka newspapers that he would accept donations if sent to a certain warehouse. The Topeka *Commonwealth* indorsed his character and motives; and the donations received kept him from want for a time.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Circular, United Transatlantic Society, 1886; *Scrapbook*, pp. 32, 41, 59, 61; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1889.

⁵⁰ Topeka *Commonwealth*, January 27, 1881.

A year later the blacks at Topeka planned a birthday party for the old man. The celebration was to be held in a park and five cents admission fee charged. Pap at once announced that all who desired to assist him entertain his friends on his birthday might send donations—"anything in the way of eatables," he said, "will be kindly received." He invited the higher government officials at Washington to attend his party, and some of them sent polite regrets which he had printed in the local newspapers. He made out a programme and put the Kansas notables—governor, mayors, preachers—down for speeches. They did not come, but the party was a success. One hundred guns were fired at sunrise and a hundred more at sunset; "John Brown's Body" was sung, everybody had a good time, and Pap made \$50 clear.⁵¹ The next year a barbecue on his birthday netted him \$274.25. In 1884 the negroes of St. Louis gave him a celebration, and so it was until he died at Topeka in 1892 at the age of eighty-three. At all of his celebrations Singleton gloried in his title of "father (or Moses) of the exodus," and as the years passed his achievements were greatly magnified by himself and others. For instance, the St. Louis and Topeka newspapers in the late 80's declared that Singleton brought 82,000 negroes out of the South; this was about ten times the actual number.

It is usually asserted that the "exodus" failed. But did it really fail? Most of the negroes were discouraged and returned to the South. The weak ones who remained in Kansas went to the wall, the stronger ones who remained did well, as negroes usually do when in small numbers surrounded by whites and incited by white example, competition, and public opinion to exertions not known in the "black belt." Kansas, too, was on a business basis; the "black belt" was not so and could not be; the industrious negro in the "black belt" would be "eaten up" by visiting friends and relations, while in Kansas he might hope to enjoy more of the fruits of his labor. The negroes certainly had to work harder in Kansas, but that was what they needed, and some succeeded because they had to work who would have been loafers in Mississippi. Then, too, on the race question a radical state became

⁵¹ Circular, 1882; *Scrapbook*, pp. 41, 43, 45.

moderate; the change, if correctly illustrated by newspaper comment, was ludicrously sudden. Could Singleton and others have succeeded in bringing a large portion of the blacks to the North and thus have somewhat equalized conditions and nationalized the negro problem, it might have had some far-reaching good effects, political, social, and economic; it certainly would have relieved the "southern situation." Meanwhile, one fact was again proven by the Kansas experiment—individual negroes could succeed under severe conditions, even though the mass might fail.

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