

Oklahoma AN ALL-BLACK STATE?

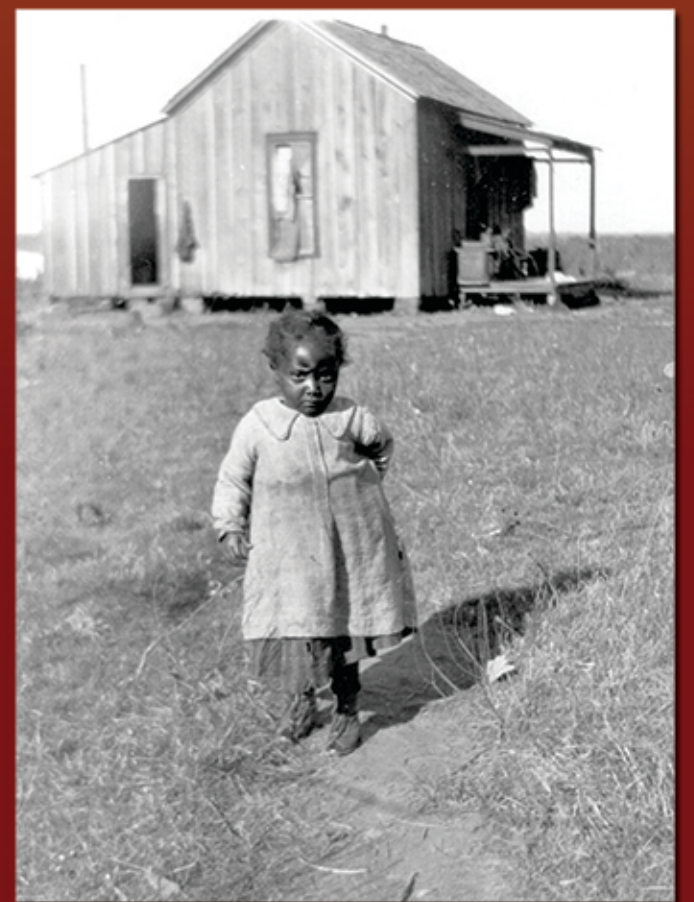
As early as 1882, African Americans had an ambitious vision for the land that would later become Oklahoma. The vision was to create an all-Black state. In a society where Jim Crow was king, making segregation of African Americans separate and unequal, the idea of an all-Black state seemed like paradise. In Oklahoma, African American advocates believed they could peacefully coexist with American Indians.

The vision gained greater support after the influential Edward Preston McCabe took up the cause. After he served two terms as Kansas's first African American state auditor, E.P. McCabe came to Oklahoma during the 1889 Land Run.

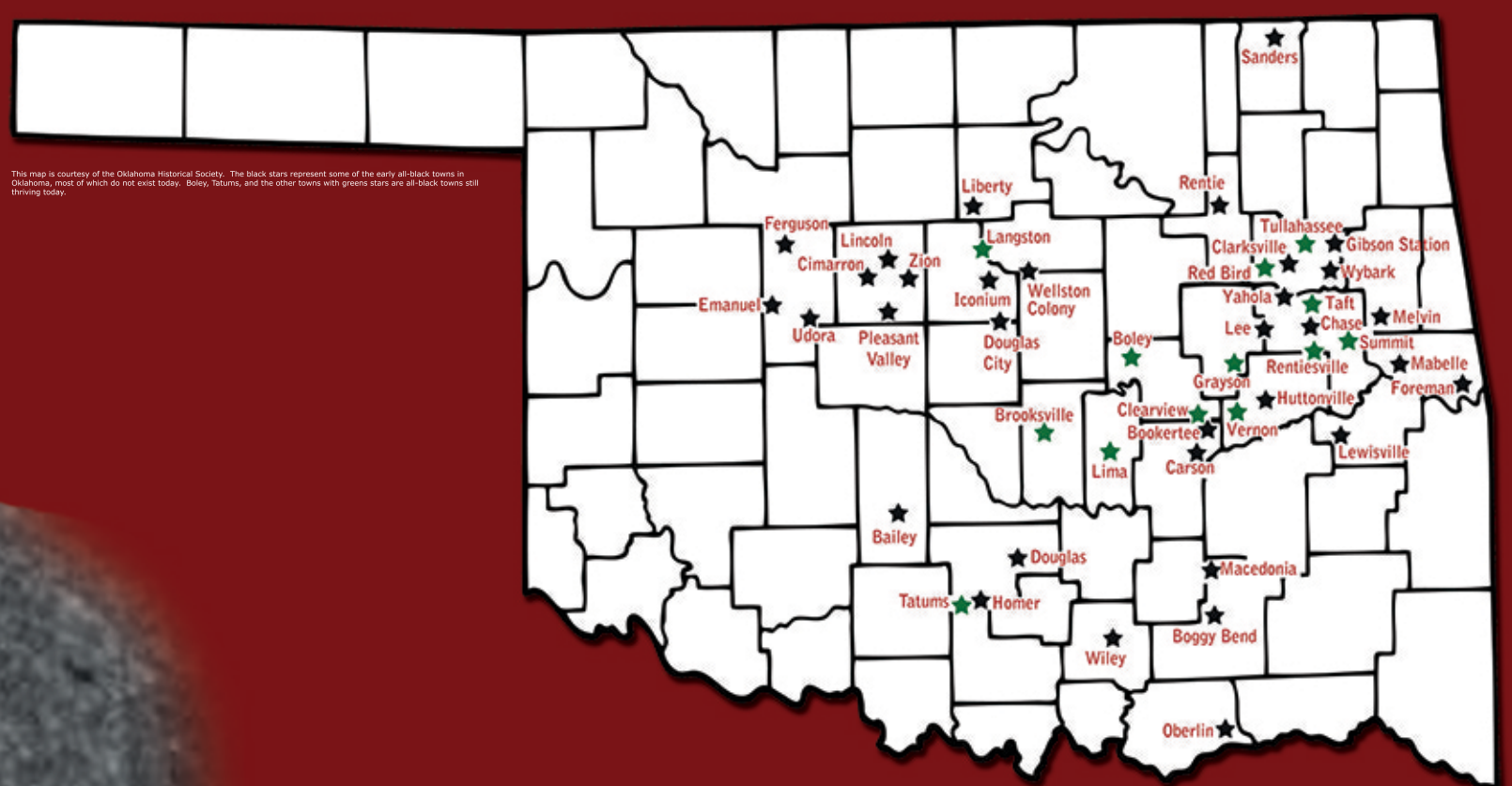
McCabe adopted the dream of those before him and moved to make an all-Black state a reality in Oklahoma Territory. When President Benjamin Harrison asked him why African Americans chose Oklahoma, McCabe replied, "We desire to get away from the associations that cluster about us in the Southern states. We wish to remove from the disgraceful surroundings that so degraded my people, and in the new territory in Oklahoma show the people of the United States and of the world that we are not only loyal citizens, but that we are capable of advancement."

Despite attempts to form an all-Black state, McCabe and his supporters were ultimately unsuccessful, largely because of the same racism that brought African Americans to Oklahoma. On the prospect of an all-Black Oklahoma, an 1890 article in the *New York Times* read, "If the Black population could be distributed evenly over the United States it would not constitute a social or political danger. But an exclusively or overwhelmingly Negro settlement in any part of the country is, to all intents and purposes, a camp of savages." Additionally, because cheap African American labor was still a vital cog in the post-Civil War southern economy, many white plantation owners did everything in their power to prevent African Americans from relocating.

Although an all-Black state never materialized, McCabe and others succeeded in establishing small all-Black settlements, some of which became towns. All-Black towns are a crucial but often ignored part of US history. Nowhere else, neither in the Deep South nor in the Far West, did so many African American men and women come together to create, occupy, and govern their own communities. Most Americans are unaware that all-Black towns ever existed, let alone recognize that they still exist as vibrant communities. Towns such as Langston (founded by McCabe), Boley, Taft, and Clearview have long histories that predate statehood. Today, thirteen historic all-Black towns still exist in Oklahoma, along with others that emerged over time. This exhibit pays homage to all-Black towns that existed and those that survive today.



Girl in front of residence, c. 1900. Photograph courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division.



This map is courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society. The black stars represent some of the early all-Black towns in Oklahoma, most of which do not exist today. Boley, Tulsa, and the other towns with green stars are all-Black towns still thriving today.

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ALL BLACK TOWNS OF OKLAHOMA