

The Plain Dealer and the Home Defender: Nick Chiles, Carry A. Nation,
and *Smasher's Mail*

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In her short-lived newspaper *The Smasher's Mail*, Carry A. Nation included two accounts of how she began her business relationship with Nick Chiles, owner of the Topeka, Kansas, *Plaindealer* newspaper.¹ The inaugural issue of *Smasher's Mail* in March 1901 said when Nation started her campaign against the saloons of Topeka (called “joints” in the vernacular of 1901), Chiles took a “deep interest in her work.” When Nation was taken into custody on a charge of destroying private property and “the so-called Law and Order people” put her in the Shawnee County jail, Nation’s former friends deserted her. Nation, a white woman, contacted Chiles, an African American man, to request that he post her bond, and he complied. Subsequently, “Mrs. Nation, being a Christian woman and desiring to promote the best interests of the community, and also to manifest her appreciation of the kindly interest of Mr. Chiles, invited him to associate himself with her in the publication of *The Smasher's Mail*.” The second account, published five months later, had fewer details but more emotion:

We did not know this son of perdition when we gave him \$245 from an iron cell to print our paper, but to our sorrow and knowledge we find him a thief, a rascal in every respect. A sentence of life behind the bars would be nothing more than his desert.²

Given the context of the times and the strong personality Nation so often displayed, it is not surprising that this business relationship ended

¹Through most of her life, Nation used “Carrie” and “Carry” interchangeably. After she became a public figure, she preferred “Carry,” and this paper will use that spelling unless quoting from another source. The newspaper owned by Chiles is sometimes referred to as the *Plain Dealer*, but its masthead in 1901 specifies *Plaindealer*, and this paper will use that form of the title.

²“Nick Chiles,” *Smasher's Mail*, March 9, 1901; “Nick Chiles,” *Smasher's Mail*, August 1901.

badly. In the words of songwriter Cheryl Wheeler, “I don’t wonder why you left. I wonder why you stayed so long.”³

The relationship between Chiles and Nation was unexpected and unusual. Perhaps it could be attributed to the pragmatic business interests of two people, one who was diversifying and one who was operating a startup. The relationship, however, seems to have been something more than transactional. For Chiles, it reflected the thinking of some African Americans after Reconstruction; supporting and demonstrating temperance was one way of working toward racial uplift. This theme was particularly voiced by the black church, fraternal societies, and Colored Women’s Clubs, key audiences for the *Plaindealer*. In this way, Chiles reflected many of the interests and concerns of the Black Self Help Era. For Nation, the relationship meant transgressing the social norms of segregation. Her actions reflected what appeared to be a genuine interest in and concern for African Americans—albeit one that reflected both her white privilege and her Southern upbringing. Nation spoke like a Populist but pointed the way to the Progressive Era, convinced that God wanted to save black people but also that they needed special help from godly white people.

Nick Chiles was born in South Carolina in 1867. His parents were Moses and Winnie Chiles, at least one of whom was a slave. After a brief stay in Chicago, Chiles moved to Topeka in 1886, at a time when the black middle class was becoming part of the fabric of the community.⁴ He started in the grocery business and invested in farmland. He owned the Chiles Hotel, which is listed in a city directory from 1902 at 116 E. Seventh, and which some claimed served illicit beer and liquor. Chiles began the *Plaindealer* in January 1899, and the directory places it at the same address. An article that Chiles published, and probably wrote, said “the plant of the *Plaindealer* is valued at \$2,000 and is one of the best equipped Negro offices in the west.” The article noted that the printing and binding operations of the newspaper also produced the official publications of several of the African American civic organizations, such as the Colored Masons and Knights of Pythias, as well as minutes of

³ Cheryl Wheeler, “Sylvia Hotel,” Penrod and Higgins Music/Amachrist Music ACF Music Group, 1997.

⁴ *Smasher’s Mail*, March 9, 1901; Christy Davis, “Topeka Council of Colored Women’s Clubs Building,” nomination for National Register of Historic Places, last modified 2009, accessed October 22, 2015, www.kshs.org/resource/national_register/nominationsNRDB/Shawnee_TopekaCouncilofColoredWomensClubsBuildingNR.pdf.

several churches. The city directory from 1902 listed seventeen “Negro secret societies” and an additional eleven black Masonic clubs, so Chiles may well have captured considerable printing business. The article claimed that Chiles was “forging to the front” of business despite “intense opposition.” It is unclear if the opposition was inspired by business rivalry or racism, or both.⁵ When Carry Nation came to town in January 1901, Chiles was established, but he was trying to diversify his business interests with the addition of the *Plaindealer*. A newspaper was hardly a sure investment, and at two years old, its future was promising but still uncertain.

A Kentucky native born in 1846, Nation moved with her family to the Kansas City area during the Civil War. Nation divorced her first husband, a doctor in the war, because of his alcoholism and abusive behavior. A year after the divorce, he died of alcohol-related causes. Nation and her second husband, David, moved to Medicine Lodge, Kansas in 1890. Inspired in part by her own experiences, she became an officer in the local chapter of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. By the mid-1890s, she began a campaign against places that sold spirits, first by shaming them with prayer and hymn-singing, then with rocks. National media took notice in 1900 when she smashed fixtures, mirrors and bottles at the ritzy Hotel Carey bar and other downtown Wichita saloons. Nation’s activities briefly landed her in jail. Once freed, she made a two-day stop to confront joints in Enterprise, Kansas and then travelled to Topeka.⁶

Nation was campaigning for temperance in general and specifically for the enforcement of the state prohibitory laws, which were routinely ignored, circumvented, or used as a revenue stream for municipalities that collected saloon owners’ fines. The “liquor question” was central to Kansas politics since its territorial days; it perhaps generated more newspaper ink in those days than any other issue apart from slavery. Kansas passed its constitutional amendment banning the sale and manufacture of intoxicating liquor in 1880. Despite the legislation, “loopholes and lax enforcement of the law... actually led to an increase in the number of saloons in some towns.” Nation and her “Home Defenders Army” believed enforcement of these laws was not only possible but it was critical. They conducted their Topeka crusade at

⁵ *Radges’ 1902 Directory of Topeka and Shawnee County and Gazetteer of General Information* (Topeka, KS: Sam Radges, 1902), 115-116, 267-268.

⁶ Kansas Historical Society, “Carry A. Nation,” accessed March 16, 2016, kshs.org/kansapedia/carry-a-nation/15502.

fever pitch from Nation's arrival through February 1901. Their campaign waned a bit through March and all but stopped by the end of June.⁷

Nation did, in fact, inspire legislative action supporting the enforcement of the laws, but she did not have any great effect on the practice of the sale or consumption of liquor in Kansas. Not until the "bone dry" bill passed in 1917 did Kansas get noticeably dryer, and even that significant step did not make drinking impossible. As the entire country would learn from national Prohibition, people who wish to drink will find a way.

From the beginning, the association of Chiles and Nation received media attention—even beyond what they generated themselves. The (Topeka) *Kansas Semi Weekly Capital* called the incident of Chiles signing Nation's bond "decidedly unusual." The paper called Chiles a "notorious jointist," and used an exaggerated black dialect when quoting Nation's conversation with him:

The Home Defenders sang the Doxology and Chiles sat down to the desk and signed the bond.

'Now Mrs. Nashun, I doan' want yer to run away,' said Chiles.

'Don't you be afraid,' said Mrs. Nation. 'I'll not run away. I am going to stay right here and smash joints.'

'Well, I doan' want yer to smash no joint uv mine.'

'Well, I'm going to. Your signing the bond won't save the joint, and I'm going to smash it.'⁸

The *Kansas City Star* reported that Nation told "the negro jointist" Chiles that her followers believed he was "the devil's own scullion." "The people that say these things are not the people who feed me," replied Chiles. "Chiles...contented himself with an emphatic denial that he kept a joint and was gone."⁹ The (Kansas City, Kansas) *American Citizen*, an African American newspaper and a rival of *The Plaindealer*, claimed that the day after her release Nation dined at the Chiles Hotel and, after a wrong turn on the way to the dining room, found beer on tap

⁷ Kansas Historical Society, "Prohibition," accessed March 16, 2016, www.kshs.org/kansapedia/prohibition/14523.

⁸ "Mrs. Nation is Now Under \$2,000 Bond to Keep the Peace," *Kansas Semi Weekly Capital*, February 19, 1901.

⁹ "Topeka's Sunday Smashers," *Kansas City Star*, February 18, 1901.

at the hotel bar. “Brother Nick’s place will be the first one her hatchet will descend upon,” the paper said.¹⁰

The press followed the developments in the Chiles and Nation partnership. The *American Citizen* tut-tutted, “The latest news from Topeka is that Nick Chiles and Mrs. Nation are to engage in publishing a negro newspaper,” ending with a single word of analysis: “Well.” An article from an unidentified newspaper in the Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library clippings file provides details on the expected print run, 10,000 copies, and length, sixteen pages. The article also describes a conversation in which Chiles appeared to satisfy Nation that he did not operate—or was no longer operating—a saloon:

The editor and business manager of the *Smasher’s Mail* had a controversy yesterday afternoon which brought out some facts that will be new to the people of Topeka. ‘I believe, Nick,’ said Mrs. Nation, ‘that I have converted you. I believe you are going to forsake your evil ways.’ ‘I never had any evil ways,’ said Chiles. ‘I have always been a good citizen.’ ‘Didn’t you ever sell any whisky?’ ‘I never sold a drop of whisky in my life.’ ‘But,’ persisted the senior partner, ‘folks say you did, Nick.’ ‘Yes,’ said the junior, ‘and folks say you’re crazy, too. But I don’t believe every little bit of gossip I hear about you.’ After persistent questioning Mrs. Nation finally succeeded in securing the admission from Chiles that he had once, for a little while, owned a billiard table which he rented to a man.¹¹

It is likely that this article appeared in the *Topeka Daily Journal* and inspired this response from Chiles in the *Plaindealer*:

Phil Eastman, the owl-like reporter on the *Daily Journal*, has evidently had a raise in his salary from five to six dollars a week. We judge this for the method employed in

¹⁰ “She Thinks One Good Turn Deserves Another,” *American Citizen*, February 22, 1901.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

reporting the conversation between Nick Chiles and Mrs. Nation last Sunday. This paper will offer him enough to keep the grease off his clothes if he will agree to report the truth at all times.¹²

The first *Smasher's Mail* signaled a positive beginning to the Chiles and Nation partnership. The masthead listed Nation as editor and Chiles as publisher. Nation was well aware of Chiles's race and reputation, and she defended her choice of him: "I have no apologies to make in having Nick Chiles for the publisher of *The Smasher's Mail*. Our Saviour ate with publicans and sinners to do them good. The Servant is not above his Lord." The issue is dotted with advertisements for other business interests of the publisher, including the Chiles Hotel.¹³ The *Plaindealer* announced the new paper's release and defined its intended audience:

There seems to have been an erroneous impression sent out to the effect that the paper is published in the especial interest of Negroes. This is not true. *The Smasher's Mail* is published in the interest of all classes in general and the home in particular.¹⁴

Chiles pointed out the new paper's attempts to address "a depravity of morals hardly to be expected in this Christian nation" and cautioned those with "a disposition to treat this paper with some levity" to take the problem seriously.¹⁵ Certainly the *Kansas Semi Weekly Capital* treated the new publication with levity when it reviewed the first issue's "somewhat belated appearance... As yet no general conflagration has enveloped the earth's surface as a result." The review damned the effort with faint praise: "Typographically it is above the average, and manager Chiles has kept his word to print a picture of Mrs. Nation that resembles her."¹⁶

The second issue of *Smasher's Mail* showed a marked change. Gone were the ads for businesses in which Chiles had an interest, replaced with a large ad for Nation's signature water bottles. The

¹² Ibid.; Nick Chiles clippings files, Baker Genealogy Center, Topeka & Shawnee County Library; *Plaindealer*, February 22, 1901.

¹³ *Smasher's Mail*, March 9, 1901.

¹⁴ "The Smasher's Mail," *Plaindealer*, March 15, 1901.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Mrs. Nation's Paper," *Kansas Semi Weekly Capital*, March 12, 1901.

masthead listed Nation as editor and publisher, emphasized by this blurb in the next column: “In the initial number...I spoke of Mr. Chiles as my publisher, but he is only my partner and not in any way responsible for what goes on in the paper. I am my own editor and proprietor.” Elsewhere in the issue, Nation complained that some of her copy in the previous issue was distorted by Chiles and quipped, “the public might have confounded (my) lunacy with saloonacy.”¹⁷ The *Kansas Semi Weekly Capital* was even harsher in its review, noting that though it was half the number of pages,

If that were possible, the second issue is less interesting than the first...The balance of the contributions from the editor are devoted about equally to criticisms of saloons, Governor Stanley, tobacco, and the *Topeka Capital*.¹⁸

At the end of two issues, the partnership between Chiles and Nation was over, and she was looking for a new publisher. “Any good printer who doesn’t mind trouble can get the job,” said the *Kansas Semi Weekly Capital*, which wrote sympathetically that Chiles had protected Nation from being jailed for libel by excluding some of her articles. “Nick is a foxy lad, and he isn’t going to be mixed up in any libel suit—not if he knows it.” The *Capital* also said Chiles could not keep *Smasher’s Mail* at sixteen pages because it was not generating enough income. Nation, according to the *Capital*, took her business away because Chiles would not print everything she wrote and reduced her paper’s length. She reiterated these charges, and other complaints, in the next issue of *Smasher’s Mail*. Z.T. Hazen, the judge who jailed Nation in Topeka, wrote to Chiles to warn him that Chiles and Nation were dangerously close to a charge of libel. Nation replied in her usual flurry of angry words:

Why did you write to Nick Chiles? You might as well have written to this pencil I use. Nick is not the writer, no not the proof-reader, although he told me he would have one, but since he told me, he has never had one and of course he did not, else he would not have misrepresented me in the printing of my articles, especially the article.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Smasher’s Mail*, March 23, 1901.

¹⁸ “Nick is Out of It,” *Kansas Semi Weekly Capital*, March 26, 1901.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

She added that the judge needed time “to repent of his drunken energies and infidelity.”²⁰

Through the rest of 1901, Chiles joined Stanley and Hazen as frequent targets of Nation’s ire in her increasingly sporadic publication. By the final issue, Chiles had been reduced in Nation’s accounts to:

A negro who had a printing press. I paid him 247 dollars to print my paper for two issues. Did not expect for him to otherwise have anything to do with it except to send out the papers. I was a stranger to almost everyone in Topeka. Did not know of the disreputable character of this negro. After I left jail I was told by Mr. Nation to draw up an instrument of writing with this negro and Mr. Nation drew up one that made this miserable criminal my partner... This negro robbed me of everything he could. I had to dissolve business relations.²¹

Nation, of course, had a penchant for hyperbole, so it is likely Chiles would have told the story of the dissolution differently. The newspapers of the time do not record a defense from him; neither do they explain his reasons for joining Nation in the first place. It is possible that Chiles simply saw the opportunity as a way to make a quick buck. By the time Chiles signed her bond, Nation was receiving national media attention. Newspapers from other parts of the country were sending reporters to follow her, and she was getting requests for speaking engagements from out of state. Chiles may have known that Nation was getting letters of support daily, and the Kansas governor was also getting letters urging him to support Nation’s cause and, when she was jailed, to free her. Chiles may have seen Nation as a star to which he could hitch his wagon, and he may have seen the supporters who stood with her in the streets and wrote to her from their homes as potential advertisers. At the very least, Nation represented a potential income source from beyond the minority community Chiles typically relied on for customers; before 1910, Topeka had fewer than 5,000 black residents. Chiles had already

²⁰ “Nick is Out Of It” and “Trouble Goes With It,” *Kansas Semi Weekly Capital*, March 26, 1901; *Smasher’s Mail*, March 30, 1901.

²¹ “The Emergency of the Smasher’s Mail,” *Smasher’s Mail*, December 1901.

demonstrated an effort to diversify his business lines. Nation represented a chance to expand his market share, too.²²

Beyond whatever self-interest Chiles may have been serving by working with Nation, a more compelling interpretation is that he saw temperance as a key issue for African-Americans. Chiles wished to support Nation's cause, and in this wish he reflected the thinking of many African Americans of his time. In the antebellum United States, some African Americans were suspicious of alcohol because of its effect on slave owners. Frederick Douglass, returning to a slaveholding family he had been sent away from, discerned a great difference in the family members after only a few years: "The influence of brandy on him and of slavery on her had effected a disastrous change in the characters of both." Douglass also viewed recreational alcohol as a tool used by slave owners to diminish initiative in slaves, providing "liberty" in the form of drinking games.

Their object seems to be to disgust the slaves with freedom by plunging them in the lowest depths of dissipation. For instance, the slave owners not only like to see the slave drink of his own accord but will adopt various plans to make him drunk. One plan is to make bets on their slaves as to who can drink the most whisky without getting drunk; and in this way to succeed in getting whole multitudes to drink to excess.²³

Around the same time Douglass was writing his narrative, black Philadelphians were actively crusading for temperance, associating it "with respectability and racial progress." The local Daughters of Temperance chapters invited the Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, known as an abolitionist, to deliver an address on the scourge of drunkenness.²⁴

As African Americans were negotiating the post-Reconstruction nadir, the temperance cause became one way of promoting racial uplift. It was an important cause for some African Americans for two reasons. One was the perception, fair or not, that black people were especially

²² Emma Lou Thornbrough, "American Negro Newspapers, 1880-1914," *Business History Review* 40, no. 4 (1966): 480.

²³ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), in *The Classic Slave Narratives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates (New York: New American Library, 2002), 350, 368.

²⁴ John Hope Franklin and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2011), 172.

susceptible to alcohol abuse and that it was linked to poverty, crime, and self-destructive behaviors. “Racists, including the Ku Klux Klan, used the stereotype of the ‘drunken Negro’ to demonize African Americans and protect their own power.”²⁵ The Klan, in fact, dressed up its racist core in a costume of temperance and moral reform, also speaking out against gambling and prostitution.²⁶

African Americans working toward racial uplift black were all too aware of the negative stereotypes linking blacks to drunkenness. Ida B. Wells-Barnett said, “the belief is widespread that our people will patronize the saloon as they do no other enterprise.” In his landmark sociological study, *The Philadelphia Negro* in 1899, W.E.B. DuBois dedicated an entire chapter to what he called “Pauperism and Alcoholism.” Crime statistics from 1910 show that, depending on geographic region, black Americans were between a third more likely and five times more likely than white Americans to be arrested for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. Promoting temperance was viewed as a way to save African Americans from their own drinking—and from its legal and economic consequences.²⁷

The second reason that temperance was important to many African Americans is that limiting or eliminating alcohol from black family and social life might improve the image they projected to themselves and especially to white Americans. Bookerites and Niagarites may have disagreed about the best strategies for improving conditions for African Americans, but they could all see the way blacks were viewed in the dominant culture. “Negro women evidence more nearly the popular idea of total depravity than the men do,” wrote one white woman to a newspaper in 1904. “I cannot imagine such a creation as a virtuous white woman.” Wells-Barnett said that blackness was viewed as “weakness,

²⁵ National Constitution Center and Mid-America Arts Alliance, “Racists” in *Spirited: Prohibition in America*, viewed September 5, 2015, Sedgwick County Historical Society, Wichita, Kansas.

²⁶ Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 2-3.

²⁷ Ida B. Wells, “All Things Considered,” *AME Church Review* (April 1891) in *We Must Be Up and Doing: A Reader in Early African American Feminists*, ed. Teresa Zackodnik (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2010), 349-350; W.E.B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (New York: Schocken Books, 1899), 277-282; United States Bureau of the Census, “Black/White Differences in Commitments Excluding Drunkenness and Disorderly Conduct, by Geographic Division, c. 1910,” in *Historical Statistics of Black America*, vol. 1, eds. Jessie Carney Smith and Carrell Peterson Horton (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 1995), 538.

poverty, and ignorance. It says to other nationalities, "This man belongs to a race possessing little of the power or influence which comes through riches, intellect, or even organization. We may proscribe, insult, ignore, and oppress him as we please." Reformer William Washington Browne often claimed in his temperance speeches that alcohol led to 5,000 blacks each year losing the right to vote. From the 1880s through the 1910s "African Americans clung tenaciously to a race-conscious ideology of self help," which was both a practical philosophy for getting by and an idealistic philosophy that pointed to a better, more fair future. Temperance was one strand of the rope African Americans were using to "lift as they climbed" in the self help era. Chiles, who moved from the South and, according to his own story, started a successful business with five dollars and a commitment to hard work, reflected this ideology.²⁸

Black churches influenced and were influenced by black self help ideology. It is consistent with "a black prophetic tradition . . . in evidence from the slavery era through the contemporary civil rights era," including "a theology of national redemption emphasizing social transformation through moral reform."²⁹ As a printer of church publications, Chiles was at the very least aware of this and likely influenced by church teachings himself. At the time of Nation's activism, many Christian churches, white and black, were involved in a range of social welfare programs. This approach to ministry was a major component of the Social Gospel movement, which linked the traditional Christian theology of individual salvation to wider ethical concerns for reforming poverty, immigrant adjustment, slums, racism, alcohol, and other perceived problems. It intertwined almost imperceptibly with the ideology of racial self-help voiced by black religious progressives.³⁰ Interestingly, Topeka minister Charles Sheldon was one of the most prominent figures associated with the Social Gospel. Wells-Barnett, known for her outspoken opposition to lynching and the society that allowed it, also supported temperance. She said building "a good character" went along with building a home and business and urged African Americans to set a strong example for young people: "There is no stronger illustration of the truths we would teach,

²⁸ James D. Watkinson, "William Washington Browne and the True Reformers of Richmond, Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 97, no. 3 (July 1989): 377; Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 288, 318; Smasher's *Mail*, March 9, 1901.

²⁹ Marcia Y. Riggs, ed., *Can I Get a Witness: Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women, An Anthology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), vii-viii.

³⁰ Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 314-315.

the paths we would have mankind follow, than that our own lives represent the standards of sobriety.” Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, the highest-ranking African American of her time in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, urged black Christians to “join with the great army who are on the side of our God and His Christ. Let your homes be the best places where you may plant your batteries against the rum traffic. Teach your children to hate intoxicating drinks with a deadly hatred.”³¹

It would be irresponsible to address this stand by the church without acknowledging what historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham called “the politics of respectability.” Higginbotham coined the term in her analysis of the significant role black women played in the Baptist Church from the Civil War into the post-Reconstruction nadir. Higginbotham used the term to refer to black Baptist women’s rejection of white supremacist symbols and social structures. “The politics of respectability emphasized reform of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations.” In contemporary discourse, in scholarly articles and grassroots blog posts, Higginbotham’s useful term has sometimes been incorrectly used as a label for accommodationist stances toward white expectations for behavior. Higginbotham’s work is too important not to mention, but the current contested state of the concept of “politics of respectability” makes it difficult to do more than note a connection between the idea and the era of black self-help.³²

Another institution of the black community that promoted temperance was the network of fraternal organizations and “secret” societies. A prominent example was the True Reformers, founded by the Rev. William Washington Browne, a Union army veteran, teacher, and pastor. Browne spoke out against alcohol from the 1870s until his death in 1897. Browne attributed a loss of earning power, a disproportionate amount of time in prison, and loss of the franchise to blacks’ drinking habits. He attempted to align with the Grand Lodge of Good Templars, a white temperance organization in Alabama; rebuffed, he borrowed their structure and quickly established a parallel organization with more than

³¹ Ida B. Wells, “The Requisites of True Leadership,” *Journal of the Proceedings of the American Association of Colored Youth: The Session of 1891, Held in Nashville, Tenn., December 29th to 31st, 1891* (1892), in *Can I Get a Witness*, ed. Riggs, 63, 66; Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, “The Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Colored Woman,” *AME Church Review* 12 (1888), in *We Must Be Up and Doing*, ed. Zackodnik, 348.

³² Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 185-188.

fifty chapters, or “fountains.” He also followed their requirement for all new members, which was a pledge of sobriety. For Browne, temperance became a starting place for an array of enterprises and institutions promoting racial uplift, including a life insurance company and a bank. Other black fraternal societies, including versions of the Masons, Odd Fellows, and Knights of Pythias, were less likely to be explicitly anti-alcohol but served as peer influences to promote respectable behavior. In addition, these societies often had a mutual aid component; Chiles would likely have known them as an avenue to access life insurance.³³

The network of women’s organizations known as Colored Women’s Clubs was even more zealous in its promotion of temperance. “Like the white women’s clubs, colored women’s clubs were interested in Victorian ideals of self expression and morality, from temperance to needlepoint.” One was the Ne Plus Ultra Colored Women’s Club, founded in 1899 in Topeka. By 1900, there were six more such clubs in town, and the *Plaindealer* routinely published their activities. Mary Eliza Church Terrell, the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, said:

Creating a healthful, wholesome, public opinion in every community in which we are represented is one of the greatest services we can render. The duty of setting a high moral standard and living up to it devolves upon us as colored women in a peculiar way.³⁴

Terrell acknowledged that this onus of wholesomeness was created by the moral degradation, not of black women, but of slaveholders and their descendants. Still, she insisted to her fellow association members, “The purification of the home must be our first consideration and care.”³⁵ The Constitution of the Kansas Association of

³³ Watkinson, “William Washington Browne and the True Reformers of Richmond, Virginia,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 97, no. 3 (July 1989): 378-382; David T. Beito, “To Advance the ‘Practice of Thrift and Economy’: Fraternal Societies and Social Capital, 1890-1920,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29, no. 4 (Spring 1999): 586, 602.

³⁴ Mary Elizabeth Church Terrell, “The Duty of the National Association of Colored Women,” *AME Church Review* 16, no. 3 (January 1900), in *Can I Get a Witness*, ed. Riggs, 72.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 76; Davis, “Topeka Council of Colored Women’s Clubs Building,” Nomination for National Register of Historic Places; Sherrita Camp, *African American Topeka* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2013), 37-41.

Colored Women's Clubs was revised in 1977, but its section on the purposes of the organization appears to be the same as when the organization was founded 81 years before: "To raise the Standard of the Home...To work for the Social, Moral, Economic and Religious Welfare of Women and Children."³⁶

Nick Chiles allied himself with *Nation* because he believed that temperance was good for African Americans and for their image. It might be expected that Chiles would have tried harder to extend his partnership with *Nation*. It might even be expected that there would be more black Topekan in *Nation*'s public raids and demonstrations, when accounts suggest there were only a few. The reality was that temperance was an important issue for African Americans in the post-Reconstruction nadir, but it was a largely symbolic one. Next to existential concerns such as lynching and economic opportunity, temperance was for most black institutions a nicety instead of a necessity. The Constitution of the Kansas Association of Colored Women's Clubs, for instance, stated that the purposes of the clubs included protecting the rights of women and children who work and "to secure and enforce Civil and Political rights of our Group." Wells-Barnett promoted temperance, but she crusaded against lynching. Black churches participated in efforts to provide banking and insurance services, health care, kindergartens, and opportunities for higher education.³⁷

Naturally, many Americans, black and white, did not view temperance as a priority at all. They opposed it, or thought it was only necessary among certain classes, or specifically disapproved of the methods *Nation* and her *Home Defenders* used. The *American Citizen*, which competed with the *Plaindealer* for African American readers, focused on what was humorous or sensational about *Nation* without appearing to take a stand on temperance. In March 1901 it ran an item on a copycat barroom smashing in Michigan and one about *Nation* allegedly bringing suit against an Indianapolis zoo for naming a baby elephant after her. In April it published another Indianapolis item, this one about a man who committed suicide in a hotel room and left a note to "tell *Nation* that rum and cigarettes are a damnation." In August, the *American Citizen* asked about *Nation*'s whereabouts, commenting that she was very much missed in "these hot days." In a September item, as

³⁶ *Constitution and By-Laws of the Kansas Association of Colored Women*, 1977, in Cornelia Bolden Collection, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries.

³⁷ *Ibid.*; Franklin and Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 299-300, 315.

Nation's divorce from her second husband was in the news, the newspaper ran this zinger: "Mrs. Nation says that the first time she met David Nation she had a premonition that he would be her husband. David is sorry now that he did not have some kind of a premonition of what was in store for him." David Nation divorced his wife on grounds of desertion, asserting that she was too busy with her various causes to fulfill her household responsibilities.³⁸ Even Chiles allowed other writers to publish critiques of Carry Nation or her methods, though he seemed more inclined to do so when a larger point could be made. For example, he published an item by a correspondent from Atchison that commented about the tendency of African Americans to draw more criticism for outlandish behavior than white Americans:

Mrs. Nation was here Saturday evening acting what would be called by the white people 'very silly' had she been a colored woman. The Negroes have white instructors for every ignorant and silly act, and they blame a few for acting.³⁹

On the whole, though, Chiles was sincerely supportive of Nation. In the early days of her Topeka campaign, he published a notice that she would speak at the St. John AME church and "a full attendance of our people is requested." Chiles ran a letter from Nation to African Americans in the *Plaindealer* in addition to *Smasher's Mail*, asking

The Negroes of Topeka and Kansas to suspend their judgment. Our people need all the friends we can get. A woman believing as firmly as does Mrs. Nation in right and justice is bound to influence public sentiment for the better.⁴⁰

Months after their business relationship was over, Chiles referred to Nation in articles that were pro-temperance, such as an undercover investigation by the *Plaindealer* into whiskey being sold in Topeka hidden in loaves of bread: "Well, if Mrs. Nation could only find these places, she will soon demolish them." Even in his obituary, the "Carrie Nation fight"

³⁸ *American Citizen*, March 22, 1901, March 29, 1901, April 2, 1901, August 16, 1901, September 6, 1901.

³⁹ "From Our Correspondents," *Plaindealer*, March 29, 1901.

⁴⁰ *Plaindealer*, February 22, 1901.

was listed among his greatest accomplishments, along with recognition by the Pope, candidacy for the United States Senate and “his constant fight for the Negro.”

Chiles also insisted that others covering Nation provide what he viewed as an accurate account, particularly when there were racial implications. He wrote a blistering story about the way the *Topeka Daily Capital* covered one of Nation’s raids, complaining about its factual errors and obvious racebaiting. As it happened, the *Capital* had recently given editorial control for a week to the Rev. Charles Sheldon, who was closely associated with the Social Gospel movement and the guiding question “What Would Jesus Do?”

We thought when Rev. Dr. Sheldon was elevated to the editorial chair of the *Topeka Capital* for one week, to demonstrate to the world how Jesus would run a daily, that the *Capital* from that time on would be one of the most substantial, reliable and exemplary newspapers in the country. Instead, it’s becoming one of the most malicious, vicious and unreliable journals in the west... From the tone of the paper one would think that the *Daily Capital* was published in Texas or Mississippi. Last Sunday’s issue purported to give out information in big scare headlines concerning Mrs. Nation. In this it tried to inflame the minds of the white citizens against the colored, by stating that the jointists had employed ‘big, burly, tough Negroes, to strip white women and to tar and feather them.’ This was done for no other purpose than to create race prejudice. No colored man had been employed to do anything of thee sort or thought of such . . . Not one colored person was seen in the crowd that opposed Mrs. Nation and her band of crusaders. On the other hand, when she came to attack the joints, she was repulsed by a crowd of big, burly white men.⁴¹

Chiles partnered with Nation because it was an opportunity to advocate for a policy that he believed was a benefit to African Americans. It is possible that Nation’s invitation to Chiles was less noble. Perhaps

⁴¹ *Plaindealer*, February 1, 1901, February 9, 1901, February 22, 1901, June 7, 1901, November 1, 1929.

she was simply making a pragmatic business choice. Nation was effectively operating a startup business. In the weeks leading up to Chiles signing her bond, Nation had captured a whole country's attention; Nation had gone 'viral.' Now, like a contemporary YouTube sensation, she had to monetize her image in order to make her campaign sustainable and to allow her to operate independently of her frequently absent husband. While Nation demonstrated remarkable intuition at manipulating the media, she was a business novice. She may have seen in Chiles someone who could provide a business service she needed and knew little about without putting her in an inferior position; a novice white woman starting a newspaper still held social status with which a black man could not compete, even if he was an experienced publisher. Certainly Nation was a self-promoter and opportunist. After the heyday of her smashing campaigns, she spent much of the rest of her life on the chautauqua and vaudeville circuits, increasingly becoming a parody of herself as she sold water bottles, books, and miniature souvenir hatchets.

The content of *Smasher's Mail* provides ample evidence that, even allowing for Nation's penchant for self-promotion, Nation genuinely believed that African Americans were people of worth and wanted their support. Working with Chiles was, for Nation, one way to embody this message. Furthermore, as Chiles did, Nation believed that it would help African Americans if they lived temperate lives in communities where the prohibitory laws were enforced. In the first issue of *Smasher's Mail* Nation recounted that a white woman had asked how she could help Nation's cause. Nation told the woman she had laundry that badly needed washing. The woman had not returned the clothes in more than a week. "A colored woman came and got my clothes to wash and brought them back next day, first class. Oh, these niggers," she sarcastically offered, "you can't trust them." In another issue, Nation published a letter comparing her to John Brown—a frequent comparison then as now—and asking whether Brown was too extreme. "Go ask eight millions of free blacks in our cotton fields, workshops, schools, and streets." *Smasher's Mail* reprinted a poem from the (Washington, D.C.) *Colored American*, a paper largely supported by Booker T. Washington's empire: "No male man yet has risen who can stay/The arm that wields the ax and whacks away." Nation printed letters of support from other white women who were concerned for African Americans: "I am also delighted to see that the interest you have in the colored people has established among them a good feeling, out of which prayers for the success of your mission continually will rise to God." Nation's cause inspired letters from

black readers, too, including one who identified herself as “a mulatto negro girl, 19 years old, and with few privileges and no education, but I write this letter and hope you can read it with little trouble.” Another letter said “I am a poor colored woman, nearly 55 years old, and have been trying to serve the Lord for thirty-seven years, and have been praying against and wishing for some one or some way to crush the hell-holes into which our husbands delight to go.” The choice of Chiles, in particular, drew a response: “I trust that your publisher may be like Simon of old who helped the Blessed Savior to carry his cross...M.F. Driskell, A Negro.”⁴²

While Nation’s support of and concern for African Americans was consistent and authentic, it also showed that Nation was a product of her time and upbringing. Nation literally viewed herself as an agent of God, who provided her specific direction on such matters as what to include in what the *Plaindealer* called “an interesting letter to the colored people.” In it, she claimed “your redemption draweth nigh, because Carrie Nation, the colored man’s friend, is in Topeka and she is here for your good, and He will see it.” In her autobiography, serialized in the later issues of *Smasher’s Mail*, Nation made much of her childhood playtime with children of slaves and her close relationship with the slave who cooked for her family, suggesting that these experiences testified to her character. In printing the item originally from the *Colored American*, Nation added a title that employed a stereotypical dialect (“Dat Female ’Ooman Wid de Ax”); the original, while a terrible poem, was written in standard English. Nation’s concern for African Americans was genuine, but her understanding of race was hardly enlightened.⁴³

Whereas Chiles fits neatly in the context of the era of black self-help, Nation is harder to place in historical context. Nation’s methods recalled Kansas Populists in Topeka ten years prior, urged by “Sockless” Jerry Simpson to take over the Capitol and not to “let the technicalities of the law stand in the way. Call this revolution if you will.”⁴⁴ Initially, however, Nation was trying to shake up Republicans whose policies agreed with her but whose practices did not. In many ways, Nation was a

⁴² *Smasher’s Mail*, March 9, 1901, March 23, 1901, March 30, 1901, April 20, 1901, May 18, July 1901.

⁴³ *Plaindealer*, Feb. 22, 1901; *Smasher’s Mail*, March 30, 1901, October 1901, December 1901.

⁴⁴ Louise Barr, “The Beginnings of the West,” *Annals of the Kansas Gateway to the American West, 1540-1854* (Topeka, KS: Kansas Historical Society, 1972) in *Kansas: A History*, ed. Kenneth S. Davis (New York: Norton, 1984), 156-157.

proto-Progressive, a coarse Kansas cousin to a Jane Addams or Ida Tarbel. Nation relied on faith and emotion rather than science and education, but she shared with Progressives the conviction that progress on daunting social challenges could be made and the audacity that she knew more about what to do than the people affected by the problems did.

Carry Nation lived well into her sixties and, despite the demise of the *Smasher's Mail*, stayed in business and true to her message until her death in 1911. Chiles continued the *Plaindealer*, proving that he could make a go of it without Nation's notoriety. Unlike some African American publishers, he also continued with minimal support from Booker T. Washington, complaining that Tuskegee money only purchased a token amount of advertising from him each year. In 1932, after Chiles died, the *Plaindealer* moved to Kansas City. It continued publication until 1958, making it the longest-running black newspaper in the United States.⁴⁵ Chiles was a significant figure in the business, political, and African-American history of Kansas, and he lived in the state far longer than Nation did. It says a lot about the star power Nation possessed that a man as accomplished as Chiles is most often remembered for the two wild months in which they were in business together.

⁴⁵ Thornbrough, "American Negro Newspapers, 1880-1914," 483; "African American Newspapers, 1827-1998," in America's Historical Newspapers, accessed November 26, 2015, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.wichita.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive?p_product=EANX&p_action=timeframes&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=M58J4ECJMTQ2MDYxMjk4OC4zNDM1ODE6MT0xMT0xNTYyMjYyMS4yMg&p_clear_search=yes&d_refprod=EANX&&d_collections=EANAAA.