

What's the matter with Kansas?

Born in Emporia, Kansas in 1868, William Allen White grew up in El Dorado, attended the College of Emporia and the University of Kansas and worked on newspapers in Topeka and Kansas City before buying The Emporia Gazette in 1895. In 1896, White wrote a forceful conservative editorial aimed at the Populist party. The editorial, "What's the Matter With Kansas?", was widely distributed by the Republican campaign, launching White into the national spotlight.

Creator: White, William Allen, 1868-1944

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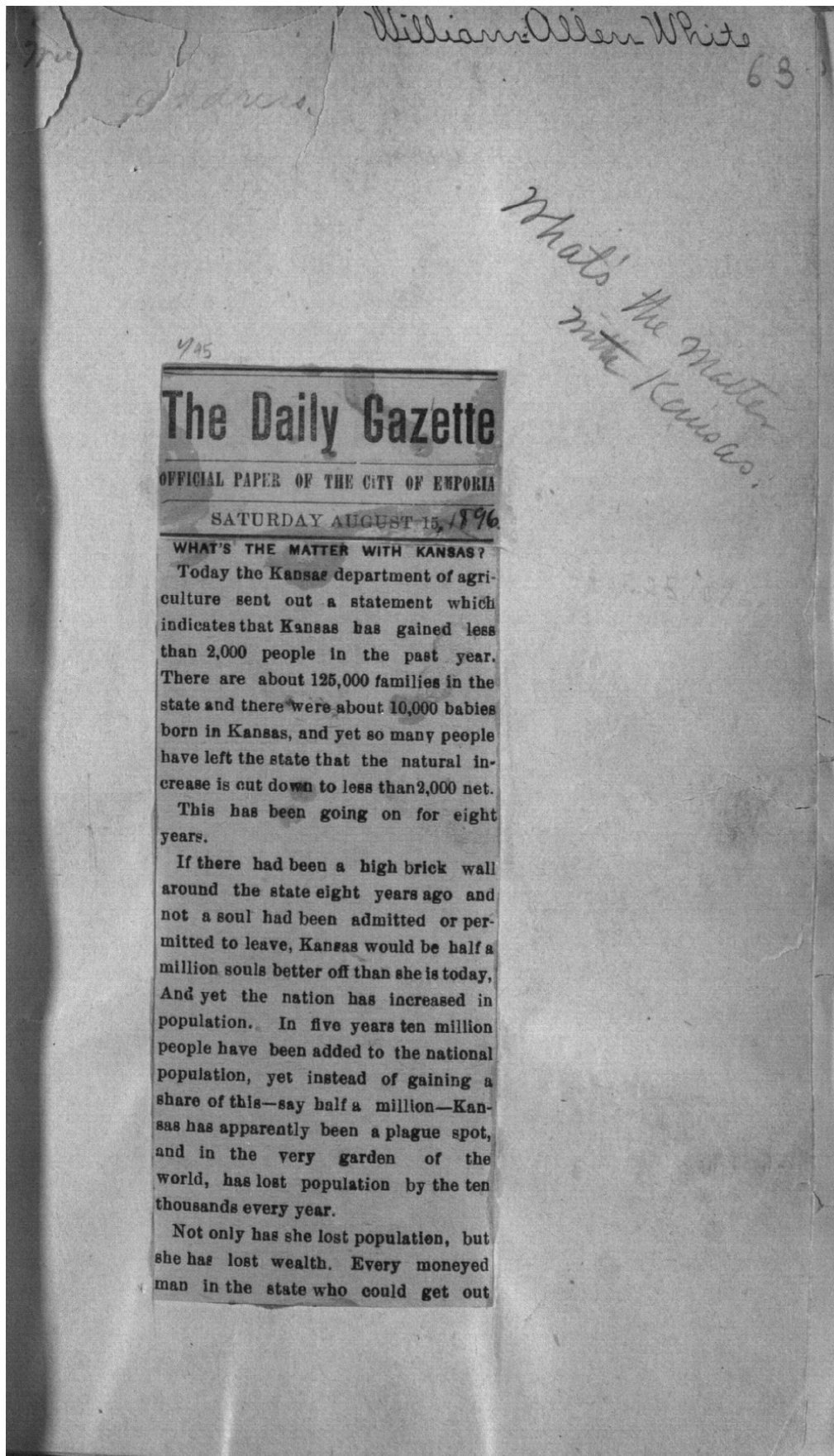
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without great loss, has gone. Every month in every community sees some one who has a little money pick up and leave the state. This has been going on for eight years. Money is being drained out all the time. In towns where ten years ago there were three or four or half a dozen money lending concerns stimulating industry by furnishing capital there is now none or one or two that are looking after the interest and principal already out standing.

No one brings any money into Kansas any more. What community knows over one or two men who have moved in with more than \$5,000 in the past three years. And what community cannot count half a score of men in that time who have left, taking all the money they could scrape together.

Yet the nation has grown rich. Other states have increased in population and wealth—other neighboring states. Missouri has gained nearly two million while Kansas has been losing a half a million. Nebraska has gained in wealth and in population while Kansas has gone down hill. Colorado has gained in every way while Kansas has lost in every way since 1888.

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There is no substantial city in the state. Every big town save one has lost in population. Yet Kansas City, Omaha, Lincoln, St. Louis, Denver, Colorado Springs, Sedalia, Des Moines, the cities of the Dakotas, St. Paul and Minneapolis—all cities and towns in the West, have steadily grown.

Take up the Government Blue Book and you will see that Kansas is virtually off the map. Two or three little scabby consular places in yellow fever stricken communities that do not aggre-

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gate \$10,000 a year, is all the recognition Kansas has. Nebraska draws about \$100,000; little old North Dakota draws \$50,000; Oklahoma doubles Kansas; Missouri leaves her a thousand miles behind; Colorado is almost seven times greater than Kansas— the whole West is ahead of Kansas.

Take it by any standard you please, Kansas is not in it.

Go east and you hear them laugh at Kansas, go west and they sneer at her, go south and they "cuss" her, go north and they have forgotten her. Go into any crowd of intelligent people gathered anywhere on the globe and you will find the Kansas man on the defensive. The newspaper columns and magazine pages once devoted to praise of the state, to boastful facts and startling figures concerning her resources, now are filled with cartoons, jibes and Pefferian speeches. Kansas just naturally isn't in the civilized world. She has traded places with Arkansaw and Timbuctoo.

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We all know; yet here we are at it again. We have an old moss-back Jacksonian who snorts and howls because there is a bath-tub in the State house; we are running that old jay for governor. We have another shabby, wild-eyed, rattle-brained fanatic who has said openly in a dozen speeches that "the rights of the user are paramount to the rights of the owner;" we are running him for chief justice, so that capital will come tumbling over itself to get into the state. We have raked the ash-heap of human failure in the state and have found an old hoop skirt of a man who has failed as a business man, who has failed as an editor, who has

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failed as a preacher, and we are going to run him for congressman-at-large. He will help the looks of the Kansas delegation in Washington. Then we have discovered a kid without a law practice, and have decided to vote for him as attorney general. Then for fear some hint that the state had become respectable might percolate through the civilized portions of the nation, we have decided to send three or four harpies out lecturing, telling the people that Kansas is raising hell and letting corn go to weeds.

Oh, this is a state to be proud of! We are a people who can hold up our heads. What we need here is less money, less capital, fewer white shirts and brains, fewer men with business judgment, and more of these fellows who boast that they are "just ordinary old clodhoppers, but that they know more in a minute about finance than John Sherman;" we need more men who are "posted," who can bellow about the crime of '73, who hate prosperity, and who think that because a man believes in national honor, that he is a tool of Wall street. We have had a few of them; some 150,000—but we want more. We need several thousand gibbering idiots to scream about the "Great Red Dragon" of Lombard street. We don't need population, we don't need wealth, we don't need well dressed men on the streets; we don't need standing in the nation; we don't need cities on these fertile prairies; you bet we don't. What we are after is the money power. Because we have become poorer and ornier and meaner than a spayined, dis-tempered mule, we, the people of Kansas, propose to kick; we don't care to

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build up, we wish to tear down.

"There are two ideas of government," said our noble Bryan at Chicago. "There are those who believe that if you just legislate to make the well-to-do prosperous their prosperity will leak through on those below. The Democratic idea has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous their prosperity will find its way up and through every class and rest upon us."

That's the stuff. Give the prosperous man the dickens. Legislate the thriftless into ease, whack the stuffing out of the creditors, and tell the debtor who borrowed money five years ago when the money in circulation was more general than it is now, that the contraction of the currency gives him a right to repudiate.

Whoop it up for the ragged trousers; put the lazy, greasy fizzle, who can't pay his debts on an altar and bow down and worship him. Let the state ideal be high. What we need is not the respect of our fellow men, but a chance to get something for nothing.

Oh yes, Kansas is a great state. Here are people fleeing from it by the score every day, capital going out of the state by the hundreds of dollars; and every industry except farming paralyzed, and that crippled because its products have to go across the ocean before they can find a laboring man at work who can afford to buy them. Let's don't stop this year. Let's drive all the decent, self respecting men out of the state. Let's keep the old clodhoppers who know it all. Let's encourage the man who is "posted." He can talk, and what we need is not mill hands to eat our meat, nor factory hands to eat our wheat, nor cities to oppress the farmer by consuming his butter and eggs and chickens and produce; what

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