

Here's an interesting piece I thought you might enjoy.

It's from the Illinois Writers' Project/The Negro in Illinois chapter titled "Rising" on education.

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In October 1870 School District No. 2 of Champaign held a meeting to consider the question of admitting colored children into the public schools. One of the colored speakers vainly protested the right of the meeting to take a vote to determine whether Negro children should be excluded from the schools.

The law knows no color, and there is no use talking, we are determined to insist upon our rights....

The vote, cast by ballot, resulted in excluding colored children from the school by eighty-five to five. After this action the colored people met and passed a series of resolutions to the effect that they did have a right to send their children to the public schools:

... our children were turned away from the school in District No. 2 on the third day of October, A.D. 1870, and as believe this to be an act in defiance of the constitutional laws of this State, we resolve to test this act before the Circuit Court of the District, and if justice cannot be obtained there, we will then appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States.

In October 1870 the Champaign Gazette editorialized on "The Colored People and the Public Schools":

... when the question they raise is viewed abstractly, we cannot help but say: the child of every American citizen has an undoubted right to the benefits of the free school system. Our colored citizens demand and abstract rights, but in point of fact, would their children not be better off, less hampered and embarrassed by invidious comparisons in a school established for their special benefit, than in the public school room? If Prompted by the welfare of their children, they will admit the point, if guided by common sense, they will accept the offer of the direction and lend every assistance to the establishment of a first-class school for the colored children of the city.

Some of them may say: "This would be a reflection upon us." Not a bit of it. No more than the building up here of churches for colored people is a reflection upon the whites; no more than a Methodist Church is a reflection upon the Baptists; no more than a German school is a reflection upon the Irish; no more than an institution for the education of men exclusively is a reflection upon the honor of the young women....