

CITIZENS UNDER THE LAW: AFRICAN AMERICANS CONFRONT
THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN KENTUCKY, MISSOURI, AND TEXAS, 1790 –

1877

Marlin Christopher Barber

Dr. Wilma King, Dissertation Advisor

ABSTRACT

During the nineteenth century, southern African Americans utilized various methods to secure what they believed to be their rights as citizens of the United States. One of their most effective means was the use of the justice system. Although they confronted conflicting concepts of citizenship, changing laws regarding blacks that continuously restricted their rights, and overt racism, black Americans petitioned courts, filed lawsuits, and expressed grievances to federal and local authorities as they fought to protect themselves, their families, and their property. Southern black Americans faced a different set of circumstances than their northern counterparts as they tried to carve out lives within the framework of slavery. In doing so they created a legacy of legal resistance, which in itself was quite radical.