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Richard Davis' election to the National Executive Board of the UMW in 1896 and 1897 was not an isolated example of Negro participation in that union's leadership. Although Davis won the highest position a Negro held in the UMW's early history (and, probably, in any national union before 1900), other Negro miners held elected local, state, and regional offices in the 1890s.* John Mitchell advised the Industrial Commission in 1899 that native Alabama white and Negro miners cooperated in the union. Mitchell admitted that ethnic tensions existed but explained:

I will say there is no difference as far as our organization is concerned. They [the miners] recognize—as a matter of necessity they were forced to recognize—the identity of interest. I suppose among miners, the same as other white men in the South, there is [*sic*] the same class differences, but they have been forced down, so they must raise the colored man up or they go down, and they consequently have mixed together in their organization. There are cases where a colored man will be the officer of a local union—president of a local union.

A surprised commission investigator asked Mitchell: "With white members?" And Mitchell replied: "With white people

* Writing in 1909, William Scaife remembered that a Negro miner named Warner held national UMW office before the election of Davis in 1896. I have not uncovered further references to Warner. (*United Mine Workers' Journal*, Nov. 19, 1909.)

in the union.”⁵⁹ It was the same in other bituminous districts. Negro William Riley served as Secretary-Treasurer of the Tennessee district in the early 1890s and in those years F. A. Bannister was Vice-President in West Virginia.⁶⁰ In the competitive fields stretching west from Pittsburgh, Davis was only one of a good number of Negroes in office. Although the exact number cannot be determined, it is clear that Negro leadership was not simply a case of Negro miners electing Negro officers. A Grape Creek, Illinois, Negro miner, S. C. Armstrong, found less than one fourth of his district’s men Negroes, yet observed: “I think this one [district] very fair from the fact that our district vice-president, Henry Rector, is colored, and very deeply colored. . . . Not a local in the district is there but has colored local officers. As for myself, I have had more offices than I know what to do with.” Armstrong served as elected checkweighman in his mine, but only three of the three hundred men there were Negroes.⁶¹ In Mystic, Iowa, Negro miner O. H. Underwood boasted that “the chasm of prejudice has been bridged with the plank of common sense.” “Visit the different locals with me if you will,” Underwood insisted, “and [see] all the colored men presidents, secretaries, and members of the executive boards.”⁶² Milton Reed vigorously led the Kansas miners, and the *Journal* sadly and affectionately noted his premature death in 1901.⁶³ Two years earlier Thomas H. Rollins, born in Virginia in 1857 and a miner from the age of eleven, gained unanimous election as Vice-President of the new Saginaw, Michigan, district, and white Michigan miners boasted that Rollins had done much to dispel local racial mistrust.⁶⁴