



# Historic Resource Study of African American Schools in the South, 1865–1900



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Interior Region 1—National Capital Region

Prepared under a cooperative agreement between  
The Organization of American Historians and The National Park Service

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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Professor Jacob's School, Columbus County, North Carolina, circa 1905.  
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# Executive Summary

**H**istoric Resource Study of African American Schools in the South, 1865–1900, examines the development of Black post-emancipation schools in the American South and identifies ten case studies that are representative of the types of historic buildings and sites the National Park Service (NPS) will encounter in and around their management areas. In this report, the American South includes all states where slavery remained legal prior to 1861, except for Texas, Missouri, and Arkansas. This study is divided into two sections. Section 1 places the postbellum (after 1865) rise of Black education in the broader context of American history and what historians now refer to as the long civil rights movement (c.1863–c.1968). During the antebellum period, enslaved people overcame enormous obstacles to learn to read and write. After emancipation, Black communities and their white allies collaborated to build a robust and effective network of public and private schools. Although the rise of racial segregation laws, known as Jim Crow, in the late 1890s sought to erase the progress that Black educational institutions had achieved, the legacy of those Reconstruction era (c.1863–c.1877) gains could not be dismantled. Alongside the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, the successful campaign to educate freedpeople remains one of the Reconstruction era’s most visible contributions to reshaping American society. NPS units can employ this material to contextualize the daily achievements and obstacles that Black postbellum communities in and around NPS-managed sites experienced. Section 2 provides a representative sampling of ten historic buildings and sites that convey the contextual history provided in Section 1. Black school buildings erected between 1865 and 1900 are among the rarest and most significant historic resources in the American South. Most school buildings from this period have been demolished. In many places, NPS will only be able to find the historic sites of non-extant school buildings or mid-century Black school buildings (known as equalization schools) that were erected on sites where older schools had been destroyed. In this case, equalization schools represent the last surviving vestige of the campaigns for Black education that spanned the long civil rights movement. This report encourages NPS staff to think broadly about how to apply place-based history to these rare historic resources. Meanwhile, this report urges NPS staff to rethink the relationship between standing mid-twentieth century Black schools and Black education in the long civil rights movement. Together, this report’s sections are intended to serve as resources to help NPS staff assess the story of Black education in and around their parks and identify potential places and interpretative strategies to convey that history to their visitors. The story of Black education in America is ubiquitous, yet NPS staff will have to dedicate additional research and community engagement to connect these stories to their managed resources.





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# Preface

## Historiographic Overview

**D**espite the work of late twentieth and early twenty-first century scholars, African American education remains an underappreciated and even misunderstood consequence of the Reconstruction era, 1865–1900. Myths of the white Yankee schoolmarm still resonate in the public consciousness. Laura Towne and other white northern educators persist as the face of this educational movement for southern freedpeople. These women traveled South during the Civil War but left rich archival records detailing their activities, the scholastic success of their students, and the expansion of African American education in the defeated former Confederate States of America. Black educators, such as Mary S. Peake, Charlotte Forten, and Susie King Taylor, are often presented as the exceptions instead of representative of the diverse men and women, white and Black, who laid the blueprint for southern state-funded public schools that persisted into the present.

African American education, according to Dunning scholars, was a mistake. William Archibald Dunning, a Columbia University historian, significantly influenced popular understandings of the Reconstruction era through his writings and training of professional historians. Under the guise of objectivity, the Dunning School characterized Reconstruction, and in turn all African American educational gains, as a mistake. Ill-prepared, uneducated, and corrupt African Americans brought havoc on the region and the nation while Southern white race traitors (labeled “scalawags”) and vengeful Northern white Americans (“carpetbaggers”) abetted them during the “tragic era” as one scholar titled his 1929 history.<sup>1</sup> This school of thought contributed to current misunderstandings and lack of public knowledge of African American educational developments of the period under review.

Henry Swint’s *The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862–1870* (1941) provided a comprehensive Dunning-esque examination of the Northern secular and religious societies and the teachers sent to teach in the Freedmen’s Schools from 1862 to 1870.<sup>2</sup> Swint argued that the teachers were vindictive religious fanatics. Rather than helping the region

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<sup>1</sup> Bradley D. Proctor, “White Supremacy in the Academy: The 1913 Meeting of the American Historical Association,” November 6, 2019, <https://activisthistory.com/2019/12/06/white-supremacy-in-the-academy-the-1913-meeting-of-the-american-historical-association/>; Claude G. Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1929).

<sup>2</sup> Henry Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862–1870* (New York: Octagon Books, 1941).

heal in the postwar period, these missionaries, who were often characterized as invaders, made conditions worse for the freedmen. The collective efforts of white northerners prematurely elevated African Americans outside of vocational professions, falsely promised middle-class attainment and equality, and provoked strong responses from white southerners. White southerners, Swint concluded, were not hostile to African American education but to the invasion by northern teachers who imposed a New England school system on the defeated and subjugated region. W. E. B. Du Bois, Horace Mann Bond, A. A. Taylor, and other African American scholars served as important vocal critics of the Dunning School canon. Contributing to the early Carter G. Woodson's Black History movement, these pre-1945 scholars countered the Dunning understandings until the work of revisionist scholars overturned dominant educational myths.<sup>3</sup>

Reflecting the gains achieved by the modern civil rights movement, diversification of the professoriate, and development of new fields including Black Studies, Women's History, and Ethnic Studies, revisionist scholars began to overturn previous Dunning School understandings of Reconstruction. They asked new questions of old and new sources, developed more nuanced understandings of the Reconstruction era, and trained a new generation of scholars seeking more diverse voices and interpretations devoid of the overtly politicized Lost Cause and Jim Crow era racial logics of the Dunning School. This study builds upon and extends the post-Revisionist School literature by recognizing the diverse motivations and backgrounds of the participants; assessing the successes, obstacles, and failures of the multidecade effort; and considering the complex legacies of the Jim Crow era of African American education.

In the early 1980s, three works encouraged a significant reassessment of African American education. Jacqueline Jones's *Soldiers of Light and Love* helped to revise the image of the Northern schoolteacher perpetuated by Swint and other early Reconstruction historians.<sup>4</sup> Her study focused primarily on the motivations and experiences of white Northern women who went to Georgia for the American Missionary Association from 1865 to 1873. Although focused on northern white women, she treated African Americans as active participants and highlighted emerging tensions between African Americans and white missionaries over the administration and daily operations of schools in Georgia. She concluded her study in 1873 when the transition from the AMA-sponsored Freedmen's Schools to public schools was completed and the AMA shifted its focus toward higher education. In *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction*, Ronald Butchart examined

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<sup>3</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935; New York: Free Press, 1994); Horace Mann Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1939); A. A. Taylor, "Solving the Problem of Education," *Journal of Negro History* 11, no. 2 (April 1926): 388; George Dewey Wilson, *A Century of Negro Education in Louisville, Kentucky* (Louisville: Municipal College, 1941).

<sup>4</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865–1873* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1980).

Northern ideas, visions, and goals for the freedmen's education, the conflicting vision between African Americans and Southern society, and the detrimental consequences of the contradictions for African Americans.<sup>5</sup> His regional examination focused primarily on northern associations. African Americans appeared as the objects of rather than partners in the Reconstruction educational efforts. Similarly, African Americans were missing as active participants in the cooperative educational venture from Robert Morris's analysis. He examined the collaborative educational efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau and Northern religious and secular associations from 1862 to 1870 in *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*, stressing the motivations, attitudes, aims, policies, and curriculum of the groups.<sup>6</sup> Both studies raised questions pertaining to agency and to the ongoing power struggles occurring between African Americans and the societies. Collectively, these three works facilitated the overturning of the Swint interpretation and opened up new research directions for understanding the motivations and expectations of the white educational reformers.

Heather A. Williams's *Self-Taught* extended the discussion by focusing on African American participation and agency in the creation of African American schools during Reconstruction. She demonstrated that the freedpeople's schools transformed public education in the South, benefiting both Blacks and whites.<sup>7</sup> She portrayed African Americans as initiators and active participants in the initial educational efforts and emphasized the obstacles they faced, including violence and a lack of funding. Like the other historians of African American education, Williams concluded her study with the ending of the Freedmen Bureau schools in 1870s. By ending with the Freedmen's Bureau era, her work inspired the work of Christopher Span, Hilary Green, and Reconstruction Studies scholars for exploring the continuities and changes during the initial years of state-funded public schools.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision also contributed to shaping popular understandings of African American education during Reconstruction. Jim Crow education did overturn the inclusive, democratic vision of the African American schoolhouse and dismantled the Reconstruction era gains of biracial citizenship in the reunited modern United States. By explaining the 1954 Supreme Court decision as the end

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<sup>5</sup> Ronald Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction: Freedmen's Education, 1862–1875* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), xi–xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861–1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse: African American Education in Mississippi, 1862–1875* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861–1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Hilary Green, *Educational Reconstruction: African American Schools in the Urban South* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); William A. Link, *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Daniel Thorp, *Facing Freedom: An African American Community from Reconstruction to Jim Crow* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017).

of the Jim Crow era schools, twentieth-century US history scholars adopted a backward gaze of the Jim Crow schoolhouse as an inevitable historical development. These works do not take into consideration the perspectives of African Americans who emerged out of the Civil War with a hope and urgency to define education as a central tenet of post-Civil War freedom. While these scholars have missed important opportunities to fully engage with the first two decades of public schools, they centered on the experience and activism of African Americans during the Jim Crow era and its demise.

James Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South* offered an important intervention for understanding African American education in the South from the end of the Civil War to the early twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> He argued that the structure, ideology, and content of African American education were a part of a larger scheme of Black subordination. Within this context, African Americans struggled to develop and maintain a system of education that justified their emancipation, first from slavery and later from second-class citizenship.<sup>10</sup> Due to his emphasis on the link between education and oppression, Anderson provided only a brief overview of the creation of the common schools under the auspices of the Freedmen's Bureau and northern missionary societies and focused his analysis on African American education during the Nadir and Jim Crow segregation. He paid little attention to the transition from the Freedmen's Bureau to state-controlled schools or to the early years of these public schools. Instead, he focused on the industrial school debate and the Hampton-Tuskegee model. This regional approach influenced scholars like Adam Fairclough but also shaped microhistorical research on African American education from the creation of state-funded schools to the emergence of Jim Crow education.<sup>11</sup>

This study seeks to provide an interpretive model for understanding African American education. It reorients popular understanding from the persistent Yankee schoolmarm myth to a more complex one of the era. Du Bois and other early African American scholars serve as important intellectual forefathers of the model. Instead of

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<sup>9</sup> James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1865–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2–3.

<sup>11</sup> See Adam Fairclough, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Christopher Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse: African American Education in Mississippi, 1862–1875* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861–1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); William A. Link, *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Hilary Green, *Educational Reconstruction: African American Schools in the Urban South* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Jay Winston Driskell Jr., *Schooling Jim Crow: The Fight For Atlanta's Booker T. Washington High School and the Roots of Black Protest Politics* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014); Sarah H. Case, *Leaders of Their Race: Educating Black and White Women in the New South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); and Daniel Thorp, *Facing Freedom: An African American Community from Reconstruction to Jim Crow* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017).

Dunning scholars, this study also draws on the work of James Anderson, Heather Williams, and other revisionist scholars who paved the way for current Reconstruction Studies and the Reconstruction era precursor sections in Jim Crow Studies. The historic survey section draws from this expansive scholarship, past and present.

## **Preserving Historic Sites Associated with Black Education**

This report began with an admission among National Park Service historians that their agency lacked sufficient knowledge of how the early history of Black education in America could be interpreted in their existing park units. Although historic sites such as Tuskegee University have been included among the National Park Service's interpretative units, many examples of post-emancipation school buildings used by Black teachers and students remain undocumented. Not surprisingly, many extant national park units are connected to historic sites associated with the early history of Black education, but those resources are either unknown or underused by cultural resource managers and interpreters. Park service personnel required additional documentation before their existing interpretative programs could be expanded to link individual stories of Black education with the history of a more significant national educational movement that played a central role in developing Black communities nationwide.

Our report provides an interpretative framework for park service personnel to connect local stories of Black education to a national context. The individual histories of early Black schools fit into broader developmental patterns that, when viewed as a whole, relay a powerful story of Black people building vibrant educational communities in the face of enormous obstacles and racial prejudice. Black schools were essential parts of Black communities and thus are critical to understanding and interpreting Black history in America.

In addition to providing park service personnel with an interpretative framework, our report includes a detailed analysis of ten Black schools. These case studies are intended to provide representative examples of Black historic resources that can be found nationwide. Although our study's geographic scope was limited to Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, similar early Black schools existed anywhere Black people formed communities. The case studies illustrate the types of primary and secondary source materials available to document individual schools. Each case study also evidences broader trends in the history of Black education discussed in this report's overview section. The case studies reveal both the opportunities and limitations as national park units seek to identify similar resources in their immediate area. Unfortunately, the dearth of



local, state, and national resources devoted to Black history during the advent of various American historic preservation movements has left us with diminished numbers of resources. Preservationists will need to adopt new methods and expand their local definitions of what constitutes a historic resource to better employ existing Black history resources in their existing interpretative programs.

In many cases, all that remains of the first generations of Black education in small communities are mid-twentieth-century school buildings. Those buildings serve as the last surviving vestige of all that preceded their operation. The fact that many earlier Black school buildings were demolished and lost to history serves as a constant reminder of the historic preservation movement's racial prejudices and the enormous impact that systemic racism and racial segregation had on our national landscape. We encourage park service personnel to make full use of whatever Black education resources remain in the communities inside and outside their park units. These extant communities and buildings can provide an essential lens into a much larger and longer Black education movement with some additional research.

## Historic Preservation Movements and Black American History

Traditionally, America's cultural resource managers have underrepresented Black history in national historic preservation movements and local, state, and national parks. Consequently, many historic sites associated with Black history have been lost or need identification, documentation, preservation, and interpretation.

The National Historic Preservation Act also failed to create job opportunities for Black Americans within the expanding National Park Service. During the late 1960s, only a small handful of Black Americans worked as NPS park rangers. By the 1980s, only a handful of Black superintendents managed park units, but the NPS's regional and national leadership remained exclusively white. Today, only 6 percent of the NPS's 20,000 employees identify as Black. However, despite the low percentage of Black employees, some Black professionals now hold regional and national leadership positions. Recently, NPS appointed the agency's first Black chief historian, Turkiya Lowe. Meanwhile, the number of Black park superintendents has risen nationwide.<sup>12</sup>

While the percentage of Black NPS personnel does not reflect America's racial diversity, several major national historic preservation initiatives have tried to identify, preserve, and interpret Black resources. The effort to preserve Black schools associated

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<sup>12</sup> "The Widespread Failure to Preserve African American History," Equal Justice Initiative, January 31, 2020, <https://eji.org/news/widespread-failure-to-preserve-african-american-history> (accessed by author September 5, 2021).



with the Julius Rosenwald Fund represents one of the best funded and most impactful of those various campaigns. In 2002, the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed Rosenwald Schools on its annual Places in Peril list. Between 1913 and 1936, the Rosenwald School Fund provided Black communities with \$4.7 million in financial support to aid in the erection of more than 5,000 Black school buildings. In most cases, Black communities had to provide matching funds to qualify for Rosenwald Fund support.

In many cases, these new Rosenwald Schools were the first new school buildings Black communities had since emancipation. However, the Trust recognized that many of the 5,200 plus Rosenwald Schools no longer existed and that those remaining buildings needed immediate identification and financial support. State historic trust offices and State historic preservation offices (SHPO) across the South launched initiatives to identify Rosenwald Schools. Major corporations, such as Lowes, sponsored “brick and mortar” grant programs for community organizations working to preserve Rosenwald Schools. Since 2002, the NPS has entered more than sixty Rosenwald School buildings onto the National Register of Historic Places.

Meanwhile, as SHPOs continued to document and preserve Rosenwald Schools, preservation experts encountered another set of historic buildings connected to Black education: equalization schools. Following the 1954 *Brown v. Board* US Supreme Court decision, white leaders in many southern communities sought to preserve racially segregated schools and stall federal racial integration efforts by building new school buildings for local Black students. White leaders hoped that these new Black schools would convince federal courts that separate schools had achieved equality in resources. White leaders also hoped that new school buildings might quell local Black demands for racial integration. The efforts to delay racial integration were aided by a series of new federally funded school building initiatives that modernized the nation’s public educational facilities. Although equalization schools were an improvement compared to previous local facilities used for Black schools, there was very little equality between white and Black school buildings and budgets. Black teachers continued to work for less pay than their white counterparts. Black schools lacked textbooks, laboratory equipment, and other critical educational supplies that local school boards regularly supplied to all-white schools. Tragically, white southern communities spent millions to build new Black schools that in many cases were only used for several years. In most southern communities, whenever the local school system integrated, Black students were forced to attend school in buildings that had previously been all-white schools. As a result, many Black equalization schools were either closed or turned into elementary or junior high schools. Today, numerous equalization school-era Black school buildings remain. They often represent the last surviving vestige of a long history of Black education.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Robert R. Weyeneth, “The Architecture of Racial Segregation: The Challenges of Preserving the Problematic Past,” *The Public Historian* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 11–44.

While national preservation movements have aided in identifying and preserving Rosenwald Schools and equalization schools, the first generation of Black schools that formed either during Reconstruction or in the final decades of the nineteenth century have received less attention. In most cases, these school buildings no longer exist. Many Black communities struggled to open and fund schools. Few new Black school buildings were erected. Most Black schools held classes in temporary buildings such as barns and workshops or Black churches. Many southern communities either lacked Black schools or had Black schools that operated sporadically. White terrorists often targeted Black churches and schools because both buildings represented Black demands for civil and racial equality and symbolized Black desires for social, economic, and political improvement. Terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and White League burned numerous Black churches and schools and assaulted Black teachers and students. During the turn of the twentieth century, a wave of lynchings murdered thousands of Black persons across the South. In many communities, brutal lynchings were accompanied by waves of racial violence as white mobs destroyed Black communities and their schools. The advent of the Rosenwald School program offered many Black communities an opportunity to rebuild their schools following decades of white on Black violence.

Future efforts to identify, preserve, and interpret the history of Black education must recognize and acknowledge the persistent racial violence that has limited the availability of surviving buildings connected to these stories. However, equalization schools often sit on the sites of prior Black schools. In most communities, multiple generations of Black schools occupied the same plot of land. Older school buildings were often destroyed to make room for new construction. While the Rosenwald School program built more than five thousand new school buildings, the fund also likely destroyed large numbers of standing older school buildings. Many of these buildings were in poor shape, but nonetheless, new Black schools tended to be built atop previous Black schools. Equalization schools were often built atop Rosenwald School buildings. Therefore, in many communities, the surviving equalization school building serves as the best extant resource for interpreters to convey the larger history of Black education.

# Introduction

Insisting on African American agency, W. E. B. Du Bois declared that African Americans' vision and partnerships with northern philanthropic organizations, the Freedmen's Bureau, and later local government officials contributed to the Reconstruction era's greatest legacy in his 1935 essential text *Black Reconstruction*. James Anderson echoed these sentiments over fifty years later when opening *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* with the provocative claim “Both schooling for democratic citizenship and the schooling for second-class citizenship . . . were fundamental American conceptions of society and progress, occupied the same time and space, were fostered by the same government, and usually were embraced by the same leaders.” Since Anderson, scholars have expanded on Du Bois's original assertion on the development of African American public schools during the long Reconstruction era.<sup>1</sup>

Building off the gains of the civil rights movement's expansion of the profession and understandings of American history, Revisionist scholars successfully overturned Dunning-school depictions of Yankee schoolmarm who invaded the region and imposed northern-style public schools. They have shown how wartime experimentation provided the blueprint for postwar African American education.<sup>2</sup> By the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, scholars have expanded the work of Revisionist scholars. The diverse African American participants and their white allies transformed the African American schoolhouse from an illegal and clandestine institution during slavery into a postbellum right of citizenship. Often ending with the creation of state constitutionally mandated public schools, scholars have deepened historical understandings of the Freedmen's Bureau school phase but did not fully interrogate African American education once state governments became full partners. By taking a long Reconstruction chronological approach, recent scholarship has pushed the field by considering the scope, participants,

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<sup>1</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935; New York: Free Press, 1994), 589, 637–67; James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Franklin; Jones, Butchart, Morris.

and major developments of the first two decades of African American public schools. These works fill a void by expanding scholarly understandings of a previously underdeveloped area of southern African American education during Reconstruction.<sup>3</sup>

This historical survey provides an overview of the accomplishment that “crowns the work of Reconstruction.” Despite antebellum antiliteracy efforts, enslaved and free African Americans’ shared communal desire to become educated proved widespread and enduring. The Civil War overturned the antebellum obstacles and encouraged experimentation in military-occupied areas. Confederate defeat allowed for action. African Americans struggled to define freedom and citizenship through educational attainment. Over the next twenty-five years, African Americans and their white allies cemented the African American public schoolhouse as a defining feature in the postwar landscape. After exploring the defining components of postwar southern African American education, the survey concludes with an examination of the processes of dismantling the Reconstruction era gains and facilitating Jim Crow public schools for African American education. Overall, the survey will reveal how Du Bois’s original assessment remains valid; however, its systematic destruction and history of Jim Crow schools have obscured general understanding of this important period in African American education during the long Reconstruction era.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Heather A. Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861–1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Christopher Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse: African American Education in Mississippi, 1862–1875* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Hilary Green, *Educational Reconstruction: African American Schools in the Urban South* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Jay Winston Driskell Jr., *Schooling Jim Crow: The Fight For Atlanta’s Booker T. Washington High School and the Roots of Black Protest Politics* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014); and Sarah H. Case, *Leaders of Their Race: Educating Black and White Women in the New South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 636.

## CHAPTER ONE

# Wartime Prelude: Schools within Refugee Camps

In her 1902 memoir, Susie King Taylor, an African American army nurse, reflected on her most successful endeavor at Camp Saxton, South Carolina: “I taught a great many of the comrades in Company E to read and write, when they were off duty. Nearly all were anxious to learn. My husband taught some also when it was convenient for him”<sup>1</sup> Camp Saxton and other slave refugee camps and military installations afforded freedom-seeking African Americans with the real opportunity to pursue an education. Slave refugees, USCT soldiers, and their families eagerly claimed education as an essential manifestation of their freedom. Schools emerged among USCT soldiers and refugee camps. These institutions received support from federal military officials and northern philanthropies. In the process, the early wartime efforts established a blueprint for post-emancipation expansion across the South.

This chapter explores the origins of the Reconstruction era African American schools. As federal military forces moved south, enslaved and free African Americans openly challenged antiliteracy and anti-Black schooling efforts and found liberation (physical and intellectual) within warzones. Their initiative in Virginia tidewater, South Carolina lowcountry, and eastern North Carolina facilitated a coordinated educational reform movement between African Americans, northern philanthropies, and federal forces. The military-school model provided a blueprint for the Freedmen’s School period. These wartime schools set the stage for the ongoing negotiations, compromises, and challenges over public schooling of African Americans as a right of citizenship in the postwar nation. These educational rehearsals provided the necessary blueprints for post-war African American public school education.

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<sup>1</sup> Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp 33d United States Colored Troops, Late 1<sup>st</sup> S.C. Volunteers* (Boston: Published by the Author, 1902), 22.

## Wartime Schools of Eastern Virginia and Washington, DC: Model Systems

The outbreak of the Civil War helped with the expansion of African American public school education. As Du Bois argued in *Black Reconstruction*, federal troops “became armies of emancipation” even though they originally never “planned to be.”<sup>2</sup> Early Union military occupation of eastern Virginia enabled the development of an educational model based upon common school ideology, changing definitions of citizenship, and wartime circumstances by Northern missionary educators, military officers, and newly freed African Americans. The wartime refugee school model, though, required cooperation between the groups for its success. The relationships fostered alongside the schools initially established in Eastern Virginia and perfected in New Orleans, Beaufort and the South Carolina lowcountry, and eastern North Carolina allowed for an army-school pattern to emerge. This army-school pattern was subsequently implemented in Savannah, Georgia, Roanoke Island, North Carolina, and other later areas occupied by the federal military occupation area Union areas. These early sites of wartime contraband schools firmly redefined the common school movement to include African Americans, and cemented the symbiotic relationship between African Americans, Northern missionary societies, and the federal government. Most importantly, these educational rehearsals proved the necessary blueprints for postwar African American public school education.<sup>3</sup>

African Americans initiated the educational revolution in eastern Virginia. The war opened unprecedented opportunities for self-emancipation. The actual fighting in the Virginia tidewater and slave owners abandoning plantations and farms created confusion within the state which enslaved African Americans used to their benefit. These self-emancipated African Americans “became prime movers in securing liberty” for themselves and the race. Their actions forced the federal government and Union Army to deal with their presence, the institution of slavery, and the status of African Americans in the nation.<sup>4</sup> Inconsistent enforcement of federal policy and clear directives from the Lincoln administration prompted General Benjamin Butler to take action. His pragmatic military decision on self-emancipated individuals, sometimes called fugitive slaves, entering federal lines facilitated the emergence of early African American educational efforts.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935; New York: Free Press, 1994), 55; Hilary Green, *Educational Reconstruction: African American Schools in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 2–9.

<sup>3</sup> Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsals For Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment. With An Introduction by C. Vann Woodward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), xi–xiv, 229–36.

<sup>4</sup> Ira Berlin, Leslie Rowlands et al., *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5–6.

<sup>5</sup> Berlin, *Slaves No More*, 19.



General Benjamin Butler served as the commander at Fortress Monroe in the Virginia tidewater region. Initially, Butler followed federal policy and returned fugitive slaves to loyal owners, but Butler changed his policy while at Fortress Monroe. On May 24, 1861, Butler decided not to return three fugitives slaves owned by Charles Mallory, Confederate commander in the Hampton district. Butler confiscated the enslaved property of Charles Mallory, Confederate commander in the Hampton district, as contrabands of war. In addition to encouraging enslaved people's resistance, Butler's actions contributed to the passage of the First and Second Confiscation Acts.<sup>6</sup>

Butler's actions also forced the government to deal with the status of self-emancipated African Americans and slavery. Emancipation was not a war aim of the Union, but it quickly became one with Butler's actions. Congress and Lincoln ultimately approved of Butler's policy toward contraband of war and expanded the policy through the enactment of the First Confiscation Act and Militia Act in June 1861. These legislative acts sanctioned the seizing of self-emancipated individuals as contrabands of war and then using them in the Union war effort. It was hoped that it would weaken the Confederacy by eliminating its enslaved workforce, who were instrumental in the Confederate war effort. As a result of this legislation, the Union Army quickly became an army of liberation, as it provided freedom and protection to the human contraband. Like the initial return policy, enforcement greatly depended upon Union officers, but not all were "friendly liberators of slaves."<sup>7</sup>

Free African Americans and "contrabands of war" exploited the wartime confusion with the creation of schools at Fortress Monroe and the surrounding Hampton Roads area. Schools sprung up in abandoned Confederate homes and buildings, free African American homes, sheds, existing churches, and the contraband camps. Mary S. Peake, a free African American teacher in Fortress Monroe, operated one such school. She had clandestinely taught enslaved and free African Americans in Norfolk and later Hampton. Enslaved and free African Americans greatly appreciated Peake's defiance of the law. William R. Davis, a free African American whom Mary Peake had taught prior to the war, recounted his experiences. He summarized the ideological obstacles toward African American education and the communal yearning to acquire literacy: "Some say we have not the same facilities and feelings with white folks. . . . We want to get wisdom. That is all we need. Let us get that, and we are made for time and eternity."<sup>8</sup> Peake and other African Americans established these schools prior to the arrival of outside Northern assistance. These schools often had poor facilities,

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Hutchinson, "'New Views Appear to be True Views': The Republican Press and the Confiscation Act of 1861" (Master's thesis, Tufts University, 2000), 9–11.

<sup>7</sup> Hutchinson, "New Views Appear to be True Views," 13; Berlin, *Slaves No More*, 41–42.

<sup>8</sup> Heather Andrea Williams, "'Clothing Themselves in Intelligence': The Freedpeople, Schooling and Northern Teachers, 1861–1871," *Journal of African American History* 87 (Autumn, 2002): 372; Quoted in Linda Bigger Brown, "Schooling for Blacks in Henrico County, Virginia, 1870–1933, with an Emphasis on the Contributions of Miss Virginia Estelle Randolph" (PhD diss., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1990), 50–51.

inadequate supplies, and few teachers, but a large number of eager students. The destruction of Hampton enabled Peake to later accept a position in the first American Missionary Association's school in Fortress Monroe. She had limited resources, and the American Missionary Association enabled her to continue her life's work of educating her race.<sup>9</sup>

Fortress Monroe and the Virginia Peninsula became the first area in which Northern philanthropic educational efforts began. The American Missionary Association was one of the earliest organizations to establish contraband camp schools in the region. Established in 1846, the American Missionary Association devoted its energies to the abolition of slavery and granting full citizenship to African Americans. The organization maintained that slavery and the secondary citizenship status of the free African American population contradicted the principles outlined in the Declaration of Independence and biblical teachings. This egalitarian abolitionism led the association to send teachers and agents into Eastern Virginia shortly after the area came under Union control. The association viewed the outbreak of the war and early success of the Union Army as bringing a violent but necessary end to slavery. The American Missionary Association used the contraband camps to fulfill the second part of their early mission, which entailed granting full citizenship to southern African Americans. Officials worked closely with Mary S. Peake until her death, beginning in September 1861.<sup>10</sup>

Mary Peake served as the first instructor in the American Missionary Association's school in Fortress Monroe. She taught day school for children and night school for adults. These classes were well-attended and the students demonstrated an eagerness and thirst for learning. Although Mary Peake died in February 1862, Peake's school was a success for the American Missionary Association. The school demonstrated that African Americans were capable of learning and desired to learn. This enthusiasm enabled the American Missionary Association to establish other schools in Eastern Virginia. Shortly after the creation of the first school, the American Missionary Association established schools in Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Newport News, Virginia. According to John Hope Franklin, there were over three thousand students in the Eastern Virginia contraband schools and fifty-two teachers by 1864. The success of the Peake school also enabled the American Missionary Association to establish other contraband schools based on the Fortress Monroe model in other Union-controlled enclaves in the South. It also attracted other Northern benevolent societies to the area.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861–1891* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, vii–ix, 4–6.

<sup>11</sup> Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 5–14.



In addition to working with southern African Americans, the Northern benevolent societies sent an army of teachers and missionaries, Black and white, male and female, to the areas surrounding Fortress Monroe. These teachers were diverse in their backgrounds, racial identity, and gender, yet they shared a common desire and motivation to educate formerly enslaved people. The Harris family best articulated the common motivation shared by the American Missionary Association teachers. William and Robert Harris, free African Americans from Ohio, had strong religious and humanitarian reasons and viewed their work as fulfilling their religious duty. William's letter of application expressed this religious mission by stating "it is the Spirit of the Saviour that influences me to engage in this work." Robert also shared his brother's religious zeal but also added his desire to uplift his race. He described his motivations as wanting to assist "in the noble work of elevating and evangelizing our oppressed and long abused race, and of promoting the interest of Christ's spirit and kingdom on Earth." This strong religious conviction and humanitarian interest characterized the motivations of the teachers in the Virginia educational experiment as well as future teachers in the postwar years.<sup>12</sup>

This army of teachers canvassed the area surrounding Fortress Monroe, bringing their message of education and citizenship. The teachers conducted day schools for children, night schools for adults, and Sabbath schools. Other educational duties included "gathering in," which was the recruiting of children not attending school, writing reports, and other basic administrative duties. However, the teachers' duties often expanded outside of the classroom to include social services to the contraband. Lucy Chase, a white missionary for the Boston Educational Commission, described her noneducational duties as visiting the sick, providing clothing and other materials to the contrabands, and other social welfare services. Despite the extensive duties, the teachers were proud of their work and their role in the contraband schools. William Harris exclaimed, "O! What a great and glorious work is here, would not angels, esteem it, a privilege to be engaged in it." Harris's pride was widely shared by other teachers.<sup>13</sup>

In Alexandria, Virginia, African American educators played a major role in shaping these early wartime schools. Although about a dozen schools operated in the city, African American abolitionist Harriet Jacobs and her daughter opened the Jacobs Free School in January 1864.<sup>14</sup> This tuition-free school quickly attracted students. Opening with 75 stu-

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<sup>12</sup> Earle H. West, "The Harris Brothers: Black Northern Teachers in the Reconstruction South," *Journal of Negro Education* 48 (1979): 129.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Harris to Reverend George Whipple, November 29, 1864, microfilm roll 3, Virginia records, American Missionary Association Archives, Armistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereafter AMA-VA); Lucy Chase, "Letter to Dear Ones at Home, September 30, 1863" in *Dear Ones at Home: Letters from Contraband Camps Selected and Edited by Henry L. Swint*, ed. Henry L. Swint (Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 1966), 91; William Harris to Reverend George Whipple, March 31, 1864, microfilm roll 3, AMA-VA.

<sup>14</sup> Paula Tarnapol Whitacre, "Harriet Jacobs: Working for Freedpeople in Civil War Alexandria," *Muster*, July 16, 2019, <https://www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/2019/07/harriet-jacobs-working-for-freedpeople-in-civil-war-alexandria>.

dents, enrollments swelled to 225 “fun and spirited” students within a few months. In a January 1865 letter later reprinted in *The Freedmen’s Record*, Jacobs reported: “The school is making progress under the charge of their teachers. It is the largest, and I am anxious it shall be the best.” She and her daughter tirelessly worked among the formerly enslaved during the remaining months of the Civil War.<sup>15</sup> Her efforts continued beyond the war and continued to secure praise by white American Freedmen’s Aid Commission allies for eliminating any skepticism regarding “the desire and capacity of the negro race for improvement.”<sup>16</sup> Harriet and Louisa Jacobs remained important advocates for Alexandria freedpeople’s vision for education as an essential component of the transition from slavery to freedom. As a result, the Jacobs Free School laid an important foundation for the city’s Freedmen’s Schools. Since African Americans “built their own school,” they made administrative decisions in “parliamentary style” meetings and exercised their freedom and rights of citizenship in determining the educational needs of the community.<sup>17</sup> As such, the Jacobs Free School “was not just about knowledge-building,” as suggested by Kabria Baumgartner; “it meant building freedom and uniting the community.” Thus the Jacobs Free School became a central fixture in the wartime rehearsal of Reconstruction.<sup>18</sup>

The Civil War expanded African American schooling in Washington, DC. Before the Civil War, Black Washingtonians had established a legacy of African American schools. The community financed and operated schools. They even petitioned for the admission of African American students into the city public schools. Even though the board of common council rejected their petition, the community responded by continuing existing schools and opening new ones such as the Miner’s Normal School for Colored Girls.<sup>19</sup> Following the Emancipation Act of 1862, African American public schools opened. The schools, however, received significantly less funding and support.<sup>20</sup> The African American community continued previous networks of funding and sustaining private schools in the wake. Following the 1864 death of its namesake, the Miner School continued as the Institution for the Education of Colored Youth and eventually received a federal charter before becoming affiliated with Howard University after the Civil War. By establishing a partner-

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<sup>15</sup> Kabria Baumgartner, “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Education and Abolition,” *Ethnic Studies Review* 32 (Winter 2009): 70; “Extracts of Letters from Teachers,” *The Freedmen’s Record* (January 1865), accessed at Accessible Archives database; “Jacobs School,” *The Freedmen’s Record* (March 1865), 41.

<sup>16</sup> “School at Alexandria,” *The Freedmen’s Record* (September 1865), accessed at Accessible Archives database; “Report of the Committee on Teachers,” *The Freedmen’s Record* (April 1865), accessed Accessible Archives database.

<sup>17</sup> Whitacre, “Harriet Jacobs”; Baumgartner, “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Education and Abolition,” 70.

<sup>18</sup> Baumgartner, “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Education and Abolition,” 68.

<sup>19</sup> Tamika Y. Nunley, *At the Threshold of Liberty: Women, Slavery, and Shifting Identities in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 98–125.

<sup>20</sup> J. Ormond Wilson, “Eighty Years of the Public Schools of Washington: 1805–1885,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 1 (1897): 138–40; Nunley, *At the Threshold of Liberty*, 125–26.

ship with the American Freedmen's Aid Commission, Miss Frances E. Perkins operated a successful school on Capitol Hill with two assistant teachers. Partially supported by African American residents, the school outgrew its building by the end of the Civil War. Plans for a new schoolhouse were underway.<sup>21</sup>

Although northern benevolent societies and African Americans collaborated in the operations of the slave refugee schools, this educational partnership was not idyllic. Competing ideologies and agendas led to struggles between Northern societies and African Americans for control over the schools. Each group desired to exercise greater control in order to have their goals met. However, each group recognized their need for each other for achieving success; thus an informal compromise was made due to the mutual goal of the organizations and African Americans. This compromise continued as this educational blueprint was applied to other Union-occupied regions.

The Federal government also viewed the experiment in Eastern Virginia with great interest. Lincoln and Congress began to think about the "Negro Question" during the war and its role in assisting the former slaves in their transition to freedom in the postwar years. The success of the Virginia educational experiment proved that education was a viable solution in assisting the former slaves in their transition from slavery to freedom. Although the military provided protection to contraband schools, the government and the army had an extremely limited role in the daily operation and administration of the contraband schools. Northern philanthropies and southern African Americans proved capable in the administration and operation of the schools. Their capable administration enabled the Union Army to devote energies to other concerns, including providing food, clothing, shelter, and other services to the contraband. The federal government also ensured the schools' enrollment by issuing special orders requiring contraband children to attend the schools. These special orders were designed to enable the continued success of the schools by providing the maximum number of students for the schools. This laissez-faire attitude would later be applied by the Freedmen's Bureau in the operation of the Freedmen's Schools during the initial years of Reconstruction.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Nunley, *At the Threshold of Liberty*, 126–27; "Report of the Committee on Teachers," *The Freedmen's Record* (April 1865), accessed Accessible Archives database.

<sup>22</sup> Wickham Hoffman, "Special Orders No. 59, 19 March 1865," in *Dear Ones at Home*, 147–48.

## Beyond Hampton Roads, Alexandria, and Washington, DC: The Carolinas and Kentucky

Eastern Virginia's educational experimentation profoundly influenced other educational efforts, specifically in Beaufort and the surrounding South Carolina/Georgia lowcountry, eastern North Carolina, and Camp Nelson in Jessamine County, Kentucky. These areas came under federal control in 1862 and 1863, respectively. The model established in Eastern Virginia was applied, modified for local dynamics, and further developed in these areas. The systems created in these non-eastern Virginian locales would then spread into surrounding areas as the Union Army conquered the Confederacy.<sup>23</sup> As in Fortress Monroe, African Americans neither waited for white Northern assistance nor were passive participants in their educational liberation. They developed a system of independent schools as an alternative to the aforementioned schools. Poorly funded, these private schools represented the inauguration of making freedom "even more substantive with education." The required tuition made the schools accessible only to wealthy free African Americans. The schools, however, show the African American community's desire to receive literacy on their own terms and remained, as Heather A. Williams's title suggested, "self-taught."<sup>24</sup>

Robert Morrow exemplified a self-emancipated educator working in the eastern North Carolina wartime schools in New Bern and later at the Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony. Of the sixty-six teachers who worked in the New Bern area schools, Robert Morrow was one of four African American educators who taught the newly freed. Morrow was the longtime personal servant of Confederate general and University of North Carolina alumnus James Johnston Pettigrew. Morrow had clandestinely acquired an education from the University of North Carolina and West Point while Pettigrew attended as a student. He successfully escaped during the Battle for New Bern, enlisted in the 1st North Carolina Heavy Artillery, and taught other self-emancipated individuals.<sup>25</sup> After a transfer to the Roanoke Island colony, he continued to educate newly freed individuals and recruit for the military. Although mysteriously dying in sleep in late 1864, Morrow contributed to the success of the eastern North Carolina schools but also demonstrated the

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<sup>23</sup> Rose, *Rehearsals For Reconstruction*, 229–34; Kurt J. Wolf, "Laura M. Towne and the Freed People of South Carolina, 1862–1901," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 98 (October 1997): 380–97; Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 17–33; Williams, *Self-Taught*, 30–44.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Self-Taught*, 44.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Army, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, Department of Negro Affairs, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina with an Appendix, Containing the History and Management of the Freedmen in This Department up to June 1<sup>st</sup>*, 1865 by Horace James, Superintendent, etc. (Boston: W. F. Brown and Co. Printers, 1865), 39–44; Patricia C. Click, *Time Full of Trial: The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony, 1862–1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 85.

army-school pattern essential to postwar educational advancements. As soon as the army secured an area, missionaries entered and established schools under a well-developed organizational structure.<sup>26</sup>

In the South Carolina and Georgia lowcountry, schools quickly emerged once Federal troops had secured Port Royal and surrounding areas. Reverend Solomon Peck opened a school in Beaufort, South Carolina, with sixty students in January 1862.<sup>27</sup> Laura Towne, a white missionary and educator, and Ellen Murray helped establish the Penn Missionary School on Saint Helena Island after arriving in 1862. Repurposing the Oaks Plantation House as a schoolhouse, nine students had enrolled initially. Skeptical of the white women's intentions, Towne and Murray had to establish trust with the formerly enslaved community. Towne and Murray also had to learn the Gullah language and enslaved people's expectations for education. After earning their trust within a month of the original school's opening, enrollment increased and the school relocated to the Brick Baptist Church. The routines of a school day and common school curriculum became normalized at the Penn School.<sup>28</sup> The arrival of African American educators, such as Charlotte Forten and Susie King Taylor, facilitated the spread of the wartime schools in the South Carolina and Georgia lowcountry. Forten also experienced a language barrier. Unlike Towne, this was the result of class and region rather than mere racial difference. As one of the few African American educators, she viewed her work as one of racial uplift and instilling racial pride in her classroom and in the larger African American community. Ultimately, her health ended her service after eighteen months. By 1864, the region had thirty schools for two thousand students in operation under the direction of about forty-five individuals. All educators reported scholastic progress and pride in their work. For their charges, African Americans saw education as essential for distancing themselves from their enslaved pasts. Northern missionary agencies and federal troops helped them in guaranteeing this right of freedom and claims of citizenship.<sup>29</sup>

Camp Nelson served in a similar capacity as the educational enclaves formed in eastern Virginia, the Freedmen's Colony, and the South Carolina/Georgia lowcountry. In nonseceding states, African Americans forced the issue of emancipation by entering the Federal quartermaster depots, recruitment centers, and hospital facilities as slave refugees who self-liberated and impressed laborers, such as Gabriel Burdett. The minister of the

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<sup>26</sup> Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Abbott, "The Freedmen's Bureau and Negro Schooling in South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 57 (April 1956): 67.

<sup>28</sup> Eric Sean Crawford, "The Penn School's Educational Curriculum: Its Effects on the Saint Helena Songs," *Journal of African American Studies* 17 (September 2013): 348–49.

<sup>29</sup> Kay Ann Taylor, "Mary S. Peake and Charlotte Forten: Black Teachers during the Civil War and Reconstruction," *Journal of Negro Education* 74 (Spring 2005): 133–35; Abbott, "The Freedmen's Bureau and Negro Schooling in South Carolina," 68.

enslaved Forks Church congregation entered Camp Nelson as the impressed slave of Hiram Burdett. He and others asserted their claims to freedom by educating one another while pressing military officials for their actual freedom.<sup>30</sup>

When Camp Nelson became Kentucky's largest recruitment and training center for Black troops, the men brought their families at the time of enlistment. The soldiers and their families sought freedom, education, and other protections as part of the soldiers' military service. Burdett eventually secured his actual freedom by enlisting during the summer of 1864. Early military recruitment service continued to split families and exposed women and children to violence, abuse, and even rape.<sup>31</sup> As shown by Amy Murrell Taylor, these individuals helped in the destruction of slavery and advancing notions of freedom and citizenship by reluctant Kentucky officials and military associations. Burdett and other enlisted men forced Camp Nelson to make a space for their wives and children. They succeeded with the formal creation of the "Home for Colored Refugees" in the southwestern corner of the camp in December 1864.<sup>32</sup> More importantly, the USCT soldiers became students.

The American Missionary Association expanded its efforts to Camp Nelson by sending educators and missionaries. The arrival of John G. Fee and other white American Missionary Association missionaries quickly expanded schools for the USCT soldiers. The AMA educational system allowed for Burdett to become a Camp Nelson educator until military service forced his departure. Fee considered Burdett to be a protégé. Together, Fee, Burdett, and other missionaries operated schools before formally creating the Camp Nelson School for Colored Soldiers in July 1864.<sup>33</sup> The school saw immediate success. By August 1864, seven hundred of the four thousand USCT soldiers enthusiastically flocked to the classrooms. Their enthusiasm and scholastic progress necessitated two daily sessions and additional classroom spaces as attendance exceed the capacity of the tents provided. The Camp Nelson schools exceeded other wartime schools in Hampton Roads, Virginia, Helena, Arkansas, Fort Donelson, Tennessee, and New Orleans, Louisiana.<sup>34</sup> It quickly became a regular sight for missionaries and military officials to witness USCT troops "pouring over their primers or first readers" while "resting from drill."<sup>35</sup> As Camp Nelson expanded the slave refugee camp, educational opportunities and schooling expanded to

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<sup>30</sup> Williams, "'Clothing Themselves in Intelligence,'" 373–74; Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 182–85.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 186–88.

<sup>32</sup> Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 202–4.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 188–93.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 193.

<sup>35</sup> Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 195–96.



include women and children and facilitated the construction of a schoolhouse “eighty feet long and thirty feet wide.”<sup>36</sup> This successful wartime rehearsal for African American education provided a model for the Ariel School and postwar education in Kentucky.

## Beyond Hampton Roads, Alexandria, and Washington, DC: Delaware

Delaware offers an interesting contrast to more successful wartime experimentations of the Hampton Roads, the Carolinas, and the Mississippi Valley. Although Delaware had public schools, they were for white children only in the slave state. An 1829 state law created the racial system of schools. When delegates convened in 1831 for amending the constitution, the racial disparity was not addressed. The 1831 constitutional convention reinforced the educational divide practiced in the state. One delegate argued that it was in the state’s best interest to provide “a system of free schools for our whole white population, that every child might have, as a matter of birth-right under our laws, a good primary education, and consequently the opportunity to become a useful member of society.”<sup>37</sup> African American children were shut out of the system, although white and Black residents contributed to the school fund. African American activists and religious leaders criticized the role of race in education and advocated for access to the state system. Religious organizations filled a necessary void. Free African Americans had access to seven schools in Delaware. The Society of Friends and the Methodist Episcopal Church organized the majority of the schools located in Wilmington, Camden, Newport, and Odessa. During the Civil War, enrollments increased in these existing schools. Emancipation resulted in an expansion in African American education but not immediate willingness of the state to provide for African American public schools. As one scholar would contend, African Americans “were left almost on their own.”<sup>38</sup> The antebellum blueprint of state neglect continued in the state while the army-school pattern encouraged growth in other southern communities.

By the last months of the war, newly freed African Americans, Northern missionary societies, and the federal government perfected the educational model first developed in eastern Virginia. This permitted the quick implementation of the schools in newly occupied areas. Shortly after the Union Army secured new areas, newly freed African

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<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 198.

<sup>37</sup> Bradley Skelcher, *African American Education in Delaware: A History through Photographs, 1865–1940* (Dover: Delaware Heritage Press, 2006), 1–3; *Debates of the Delaware Convention, for Revising the Constitution of the State, or Adopting a New One, Held at Dover, November, 1831* (Wilmington: Printed and published by S. Harker, 1831), 205.

<sup>38</sup> Skelcher, *African American Education in Delaware: A History through Photographs, 1865–1940* (Dover: Delaware Heritage Press, 2006), 1–5; Robert Taggart, “Philanthropy and Black Education in Delaware, 1918–1930,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 103 (October 1979): 467–68.

Americans and Northern missionary societies established schools and accompanying administration structure to which the Union army provided protection. These wartime educational efforts provided the blueprints for the Freedmen's School era, phase one of Educational Reconstruction. With Confederate defeat, the nascent system of African Americans quickly expanded and became entrenched in the former slave states. Education became a nonnegotiable term of freedom by formerly enslaved people for themselves and families. Their vision for education transformed the postwar landscape and notions of freedom at the local, state, and national levels.



## CHAPTER TWO

# Freedmen's Schools, 1865–1870

On April 23, 1865, African Americans crowded into the State Street Baptist Church. Eleven days after Confederates surrendered the city of Mobile, Alabama, to Union troops, African American organizers opened the mass meeting called to discuss their newfound freedom with the rousing song “The Song of the Black Republicans.” In their rendition, they proudly proclaimed their freedom in the second stanza:

Free workmen in the cotton-field,  
And in the sugar cane;  
Free children in the common school,  
With nevermore a chain.  
Then rally, Black Republicans---  
Aye, rally! We are free!  
We've waited long  
To sing the song---  
The song of liberty.<sup>1</sup>

As freedpersons, Mobile's African American community proclaimed their freedom with mass meetings and songs asserting their liberty. Their joy filled the air as noted by a correspondent for the *Black Republican*. The newspaper reported to its New Orleans readers, “There is at this moment great joy in the hearts of our poor brethren who are just out of slavery.” From this joy unleashed by their emancipation, they developed common schools. As suggested in the song's lyrics, “free children in the common schools” was a priority and it quickly became a reality for African Americans living in Mobile. The realization of African American common schools extended beyond this Gulf Coast city to include the entire region.<sup>2</sup>

Confederate defeat ushered in a revolution in African American education. Freedom brought new behaviors, new relationships, and new institutions. Schools and the educational relationships that sustained the schools became a postwar reality. White opposition and internal class strife tempered the African American community's expression of freedom and entry into the body politic through education, yet these forces also galvanized African Americans and their allies in protecting the newly established

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<sup>1</sup> “The Song of the Black Republicans,” *Black Republican* (New Orleans), April 29, 1865, 1.

<sup>2</sup> T. W. C., “Joy Among the Poor Colored People of Mobile,” *Black Republican* (New Orleans), April 29, 1865, 1.

institution. It also transformed their struggle of ensuring access to literacy and education into a fight for their very freedom. The struggle for Freedmen's Schools became a struggle for freedom, citizenship, and a new postwar social order.

This chapter explores the first African American schools organized under the supervision of the Freedmen's Bureau. Using the wartime educational blueprint, African Americans and their white allies quickly established a system of schools throughout the South. African Americans who had been barred from educational attainment previously enthusiastically embraced their efforts. Their interest and scholastic success convinced federal agents and the nation that the African American schoolhouse was a defining feature of the reconstructed region. Intense white opposition, however, solidified the movement toward creating a more sustainable school system as a right of citizenship later codified in the Reconstruction era state constitutions.

## A Vibrant African American Educational Network

The wartime prelude to southern African American education drew to a close following the formal surrenders of Confederate armies at Appomattox Courthouse and elsewhere. Encouraged by Union victory, African Americans quickly established schools amid the ruins of the failed Confederate nation. Freedpeople raised the necessary money to support school expenditures, pay teachers' salaries, and construct facilities. While some school systems lacked an efficient organization, others had clear bureaucratic organizations with trustees, administrators, and educators overseeing the educational attainment of newly freed African Americans. For instance, Julia and her husband left the Middleton Place Plantation, a large Dorchester County, South Carolina, plantation located on the Ashley River, for the possibility of educating their children in Charleston, South Carolina. These migrants encountered literate African Americans, such as Elijah and Henry Marrs in Shelby County, Kentucky, diligently instructing those desiring an education. Often predating the arrival of northern missionaries and philanthropies, newly emancipated southern African Americans inaugurated the Freedmen's School era.<sup>3</sup>

The arrival of northern benevolent societies accelerated the growth of the Freedmen's School system. While local African Americans did not request assistance, Black and white missionaries traveled to southern cities, towns, and rural areas as soon as transportation networks made it possible. Instead of finding a barren educational field, the

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse: African American Education in Mississippi, 1862–1875* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 32–38; Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (1978; repr., Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 18–22; Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 29–35; Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 151–53; Williams, *Self-Taught*, 97–105.

initial missionaries, like Hannah E. Stevenson, Lucy Chase, and Sarah Chase of the New England Freedmen's Aid Society, typically discovered a patchwork system of schools operated by local African Americans. They either established additional schools or joined/co-opted existing operations. Representing a diverse coalition of religious and secular interests, missionaries and their respective organizations hoped to transform and reconstruct the region according to postwar definitions of freedom and citizenship through education and the establishment of a permanent system of schools for African Americans. Missionaries represented but were not limited to the following organizations: American Baptist Home Mission Society, American Freedmen's Union Commission, American Missionary Association, Society of Friends, Freedmen's Aid Society of the M. E. Church, New York Friends' Freedmen's Association, Pennsylvania Freedmen's Relief Association, and Soldiers Memorial Society of Boston. Freedpeople's enthusiasm and the potential of remaking the former Confederate nation invigorated their efforts. Their encounters with literate African Americans and existing local educational movements revealed shared goals and facilitated the partnerships established between southern African Americans and northern benevolent organizations in the defeated South and former slave border South.<sup>4</sup>

The Catholic Church also participated in the postwar African American educational movement. Their participation illustrates the role of the Confederate defeat and emancipation in developing a concerted partnership in the regional Freedmen's School network. Owing to church doctrine and policies regarding slavery, the Catholic Church attracted a small number of African American members during the antebellum period. After the Civil War, the church reevaluated its position toward African Americans. In 1866, Reverend Martin John Spaulding issued a pastoral letter to clergy and laity working in education that reflected the church's new attitude to African American education.<sup>5</sup> "Wherever it seems advisable to erect separate churches and schools for Negro Catholics, it may be done," Spaulding informed members. "The ordinary must see to it that all causes for accusations against the Church be removed." With this proclamation, Catholics actively proselytized among African Americans. Education and the establishment of schools, according to Margaret Diggs, became an important means for the Catholic Church to

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<sup>4</sup> Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861–1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 19–20; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 6, 9–15; Robert C. Morris, ed., *Freedmen's Schools and Textbooks*, vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 2; Carol Faulkner, *Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 47–52; "New England Report of the Teacher's Committee," *American Freedmen* 1, no.2 (May 1866): 29, accessed at the MHS; Quoted in Peter Rachleff, *Black Labor in Richmond, 1865–1890* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 11; For African American education under slavery, see Williams, *Self-Taught*, 7–29.

<sup>5</sup> John T. Gillard, *The Catholic Church and the American Negro Being an Investigation of the Past and Present Activities of the Catholic Church in Behalf of the 12,000,000 Negroes in the United States, with an Examination of the Difficulties Which Affect the Work of the Colored Missions* (repr. 1968; Baltimore: St. Joseph's Society Press, 1929), 21–24, 41–54.

increase its African American membership. As a result, the Diocese opened several schools in Richmond, Virginia, Charleston, South Carolina, the Gulf South cities of Mobile, New Orleans, and Pensacola, among other major southern urban centers.<sup>6</sup>

African American religious denominations, specifically the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Colored Methodist Episcopal, also became important partners in the Freedmen's School era. Unlike their white counterparts, the three major denominations, as shown by historian Matthew Harper, applied Black eschatology for locating themselves “within God's plan for human history—past, present, and future.”<sup>7</sup> African American remembrances of emancipation served as evidence of “divine justices could descend upon a realm of earthly justice.”<sup>8</sup> Thus hope for both the end of racial discrimination and the “special role for the African race within Christian history” became defining features of the Black Protestant eschatology.<sup>9</sup> Black churches served as classrooms but also provided administration and teachers in communities underserved by white northern religious and secular organizations. More importantly, these African American denominational schools embraced empowerment and racial uplift as a core tenet of their educational philosophy. This spirit offered parents another choice for their children's schooling and a possible refuge from potential racism from white teachers working in the Freedmen's Schools.

During the summer of 1865, African Americans' educational network expanded to include the Freedmen's Bureau. Congress established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, simply known as the Freedmen's Bureau, on March 3, 1865. The temporary agency was charged with assisting former enslaved men, women, and children in their transition from slavery to freedom, dealing with wartime abandoned lands possessed by the federal government, and assisting the displaced wartime population. The Freedmen's Bureau Act of 1866 extended the agency's tenure and its powers. For African Americans, the Freedmen's Bureau became their government, their protector, and for some, especially those living in rural Virginia and Mississippi communities, the creator of the Freedmen's Schools.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret A. Diggs, *Catholic Negro Education in the United States* (Washington, DC: Margaret A. Diggs, 1936), 41–43.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Harper, *The End of Days: African American Religion and Politics in the Age of Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Harper, *End of Days*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Harper, *End of Days*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), 69; Randall M. Miller, “Introduction. The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction: An Overview,” *The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction: Reconsiderations*, ed. Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), xvii–xviii; Daniel Thorp, *Facing Freedom: An African American Community from Reconstruction to Jim Crow* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 121–29; Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse*, 68–70.

Moreover, African Americans found the federal agency's views on education as conducive to their interests. The most enduring responsibility of the Freedmen's Bureau lay in its educational efforts. The federal agency viewed education as a necessary component for the remaking of a slave society into a free one. According to historians John Cox and Wanda Cox, education served the purpose of encouraging freedpeople to develop "the habits, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for free men in a free society." The strong emphasis on education reflected the attitudes and beliefs of General O. O. Howard, the first and only Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau. His assembled team of Assistant Commissioners and Superintendents of Education typically shared his precepts. General Orlando Brown, Assistant Commissioner for Virginia, stressed the importance of education in a public address to a group of Virginia freedmen in July 1865. "Schools as far as possible will be established among you, under the protection of the Government," Brown informed the crowd. "You will remember, that in your condition as freemen education is of the highest importance, and it is hoped that you will avail yourselves, to the utmost of the opportunities offered you." With education, Brown argued that freed African Americans' "new career" included "shaping the destinies of his race" and being "peaceable, law abiding" citizens.<sup>11</sup> Education, according to Brown and other Freedmen's Bureau agents, was integral to the postwar definition of freedom and citizenship. As citizens, African Americans legitimately had a right to educational attainment. The Freedmen's Bureau made this aim one of its primary missions.

The educational division of the Freedmen's Bureau coordinated the Freedmen's School system through respective state Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents. Many of them were former military personnel who saw their service among the newly liberated as a continuation of their wartime service. For instance, Ralza Morse Manly, former chaplain of the First Colored Calvary, devoted his postwar labors toward African American education and played an active role in the Virginia system. On the other hand, Edwin Wheelock viewed his educational work as a hindrance to larger aims of economic recovery dictated by Assistant Commissioner E. M. Gregory in Texas. He did not take the same active role in the day-to-day operations as Manly. African Americans primarily self-sustained schools without much Bureau assistance. Gregory's replacement, on the other hand, prioritized African American education. Gregory's replacement, however, prioritized African American education. J. B. Kiddoo's arrival as Assistant Commissioner transformed the Texas Freedmen's School system from the "darkest field educationally in the United States" to one in which "the whole race went to school."<sup>12</sup> Samuel Stanford

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in John Cox and LaWanda Cox, "General O. O. Howard and the 'Misrepresented Bureau,'" *Journal of Southern History* 19, no. 4 (November 1953): 452.

<sup>12</sup> Green, *Educational Reconstruction*, 19–25; Alton Hornsby Jr., "The Freedmen's Bureau Schools in Texas, 1865–1870," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 76 (April, 1973): 399–401; Christopher B. Bean, *Too Great A Burden to Bear: The Struggle and Failure of the Freedmen's Bureau in Texas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 96.

Ashley, an Assistant Superintendent of Education in North Carolina, also had a more direct role in the Wilmington schools and eventually helped to craft the 1868 Constitution as an elected convention delegate. From Manly to Ashley, the strength of the regional Freedmen's School network varied, but all had a significant role in advancing educational opportunities for southern African Americans. All Superintendents of Education maintained a supervisory role over the entire state operations and provided the organizational framework for the Freedmen's School system. They visited the schools, regularly corresponded with African American community members, coordinated teacher placement, and even acted as the local agent for various northern benevolent associations operating within their district. In short, Superintendents of Education and the educational division of the Freedmen's Bureau served as important advocates for African American education.<sup>13</sup>

These relationships between freedpeople, missionaries, and Freedmen's Bureau agents produced interesting interactions resulting in negotiations concerning the development and control over the Freedmen's Schools. Each group contended with questions pertaining to the definition of an education most useful in the transition from slavery to freedom (such as vocational, liberal arts, or limited curriculum for low-skilled job training with a basic curriculum) and the role of African Americans in the process. As they navigated these questions, a more pressing concern of coping with local white hostility fostered their cooperation. Within this context, the Freedmen's Bureau, northern societies, and African Americans developed and sustained an educational system.

## Rapid Success but also Growing Pains

Beginning the 1865–66 academic year, African Americans and their allies developed a system of schools across the region. The Freedmen's Bureau assisted with the maintenance of day schools for children, night schools for adults, and Sabbath schools. Each school provided rudimentary education including reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography, but the schools also offered basic industrial and domestic education. Students learned sewing, cleanliness, punctuality, and other skills of self-sufficiency. The schools attracted a large number of African American students. John W. Alvord, a Freedmen's Bureau inspector, noted in his first semiannual report 90,589 students, 1,314 educators, and 740 schools in operation as evidence of the “natural thirst for knowledge common to all men.”<sup>14</sup>

Alvord's first semiannual report, moreover, offers a valuable window on the Freedmen's Schools. He reveals both growth and early challenges for the nascent school system. He also established four major trends that affected all southern schools. First,

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<sup>13</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 144–48.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South*, 15.



African Americans overwhelmingly supported the schools, and their enthusiasm contributed to the scholastic progress seen in the Freedmen's School system. Their support also encouraged the expansion through the southern states and opening up of financial support from northern organizational partners. Second, an urban-rural divide existed. Cities saw the most growth in comparison to the rural areas. Third, white opposition posed a major obstacle to the pace of expansion. Arson; violence directed toward teachers, administrators, and students; and rhetorical violence stalled expansion. Fourth, areas that had experienced wartime schooling experiments saw a diversity of curricular options, including normal schools, colleges, and professional schools, and well-equipped classroom spaces. Military protection, well-established networks among communities and northern philanthropic organizations, and a history of proven success benefitted these wartime schools. Despite white opposition, the other three trends facilitated growth, sustainability, and the ability to overcome the obstacles endured.

Alvord's inspections of schools in Virginia and the Carolinas open his report. The four major trends are evident, along with Alvord's bias toward independent African American schools and southern African American educators in comparison to schools led by northern organizations and white teachers. Hampton Roads had benefited from the wartime schooling options. He remained hopeful for their continued progress. Richmond, Petersburg, and other cities also had rapid growth, whereas the rural districts slowly added to the number of schools. As a result, Alvord reported 12,898 students attending the 90 schools under the direction of 195 teachers.<sup>15</sup> With the wartime eastern North Carolina schools, the state had 86 schools with 119 teachers and 8,506 students. The strong African American interest was not limited to urban centers or former wartime schools. One Halifax County school not only was supported by African Americans but had normalized the sight of African American children engaged in learning. One North Carolina resident told Alvord, "I constantly see in the streets, and on the doorsteps opposite my dwelling, groups of [children] studying their spelling-books."<sup>16</sup> For South Carolina, Alvord reported a rapid increase in the number of schools and high enrollments. Charleston had the best and largest schools. Two of which had over 800 enrolled students and expanded curricular options. While Charleston had the best schools and the highest number of enrolled students, Alvord noted that the "schools in the interior are in their first rude stage, and many are deficient."<sup>17</sup>

Georgia also had made progress, with the best schools located in Augusta, Macon, and Savannah. African Americans had sustained many of the schools without assistance. But the need for school buildings was a pressing concern. He reported 69 schools, 4,603

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<sup>15</sup> John W. Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools and Finances of Freedmen, January 1, 1866* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1868), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools*, 4.

students, and 69 teachers. Of the teachers, 43 out of 69 were African American. Violence directed toward the rural schools had meant slow growth because of the fear of violence directed toward the teachers.<sup>18</sup>

The Gulf Coast states experienced the slow expansion of the Freedmen's School system but also the role of wartime experimentation. Without a strong military presence, it proved difficult to sustain schools or attract teachers. Violence and the fear of violence by white opponents shaped how the schools developed. Florida lacked the growth and progress seen in other areas, except for the major cities and towns. Florida had 30 schools, 19 teachers, and about 1,900 students.<sup>19</sup> There was a concerted effort to expand throughout Alabama, but arson, violence toward teachers, and other tactics affected the spread of schools. In spite of intense white opposition, the cities and towns saw consistent schooling for African American children. Alvord reported that Mobile had the best schools in the state. North Alabama had eleven schools in operation. This region also saw significant white opposition.<sup>20</sup> White opposition also affected the Mississippi rural schools and districts without a strong military presence. As a result, there were 68 teachers, 34 schools, and 4,310 students in the system, which nonetheless marked considerable progress.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to other Gulf Coast states, the Louisiana schools benefitted from the wartime school system implemented by General Banks. In his first report, Alvord reported the existence of 150 schools staffed by 265 teachers with about 14,000 enrolled children and 5,000 enrolled adults.<sup>22</sup> New Orleans, in particular, had 19 schools staffed by 104 teachers. African American educational interest and expansion drew opposition from white Louisianians concerned about the funding of the schools.<sup>23</sup>

For the border South, the Freedmen's Schools saw significant growth and progress in the urban areas but also the continued role of white opposition. Texas had a system of self-sustained schools by African Americans. The need for classroom spaces, books, and teachers was dire. But, in Kentucky and Tennessee, the abandonment of the early wartime schools took a toll on the early movement. African Americans demanded schools as a right of citizenship, but white school commissioners proved reluctant to meet their demands. Opposition also affected expansion in rural areas. Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville were able to offer consistent educational efforts and expanded curriculum with a partnership between African American communities, northern associations, and the Freedmen's

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<sup>18</sup> Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools*, 4–5.

<sup>21</sup> Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools*, 5–6.

<sup>23</sup> Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools*, 6–7.



Bureau.<sup>24</sup> In Maryland, the Baltimore Association operated sixteen “flourishing schools” that were “taught and paid for by their own money.” The Quakers and American Missionary Association also maintained schools in the city and rural areas. Arson, the “stoning of children and teachers at Easton,” and other acts of violence, according to Alvord, showed “that negro hate is not by any means confined to low South.”<sup>25</sup> Opening in the shadow of federal victory at Antietam, African American children received their education at an American Union School held in Tolson’s Chapel. While not discussed specifically by Alvord, this Sharpsburg institution contributed to the statewide African American schooling effort. Washington, DC, also resembled other southern cities. It boasted 45 schools taught by 100 teachers for 5,191 students. With a large number of individuals who had secured some literacy before emancipation, Alvord noted a number of individuals taking advanced courses, the existence of industrial schools, and independent schools operating under a mutual improvement association similar to other border South groups.<sup>26</sup>

By the end of the 1865–66 academic year, the rapid growth, enthusiasm, and scholastic results had convinced Alvord that the future of southern African Americans had been “destined to rise,” owing to their “vitality and hope, coupled with patience and willingness to struggle, which foreshadows with certainty their higher condition as a people in the coming time.”<sup>27</sup> Alvord acknowledged that this success occurred but glossed over the various internal problems and other obstacles associated with the growing pains of building a system of African American schools from the ground up.

First among them, the American Missionary Association and other white organizations displaced existing grassroots efforts and demoted African American teachers in the Freedmen’s Schools. While well intentioned, racism shaped the early relationships. In late December 1864 and early January 1865, local African Americans organized the Savannah Education Association (SEA) in order to fund, establish, staff, and superintend the initial schools for the newly emancipated. Due to the former slaves’ desire to become a literate people, eager students filled the SEA schools. Consequently, the schools quickly outgrew the various facilities established throughout the city.<sup>28</sup> These early efforts and the former slaves’ thirst for knowledge attracted the attention of the American Missionary Association, an abolitionist and interdenominational organization that focused on assisting former slaves during and after the Civil War. Seeking to expand its efforts to include former

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<sup>24</sup> Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools*, 7–8.

<sup>25</sup> Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> National Park Service, “Tolson’s Chapel,” <https://www.nps.gov/places/tolson-s-chapel.htm>, accessed on October 1, 2021; Alvord, *First Semi-Annual Report of Schools*, 9–10.

<sup>27</sup> John W. Alvord, *Second Semi-Annual Report on Schools and Finances of Freedmen, July 1, 1866* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1868), 2, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Hilary Green, “The Beach Institute and the American Missionary Association,” in *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah*, ed. Leslie M. Harris and Daina Ramey Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 174.

slaves in Savannah, Reverend S. W. Magill, a native of Georgia and superintendent of the American Missionary Association schools, increased the number of and later co-opted the Savannah Education Association schools in mid-January 1865. Reverend Magill and teachers employed by the American Missionary Association first opened a school in the Methodist Church on South Broad Street before relocating to the larger Massie School on Gordon Street in order to accommodate a large number of interested students. Unable to keep up with rapidly increasing student enrollment, the American Missionary Association expanded its operations to the colored Methodist Church, the lecture rooms of First and Bryan Baptist Churches, Sturtevant Hall, and other locations formerly operated by the Savannah Education Association in 1866. The early educational efforts of the SEA, the arrival of the American Missionary Association to Savannah, and the inability to provide an adequate number of accommodations profoundly influenced the establishment of the Beach Institute.<sup>29</sup>

The Freedmen's School era also saw the closure of early slave refugee schools, most notably the Camp Nelson school. After the Civil War, the Camp Nelson school continued its educational mission and expanded to include newly emancipated students. John Fee, Gabriel Burdett, and other AMA missionaries continued teaching African American children until the Federal government officially closed and removed the buildings of the slave refugee camp. The June 1866 closure of Camp Nelson disrupted the educational efforts. Rev. John G. Fee, an AMA missionary, opened Ariel Academy on the purchased 130-acre section of the former refugee camp. As argued by Amy Murrell Taylor, part of Camp Nelson endured through Ariel Academy. Freedmen's Bureau and AMA funding allowed for the persistence of the school. It remained a site of education for African American children until the formal creation of state-funded public schools.<sup>30</sup>

The displacement of initial African American educators, administrators, and grassroots organizations like the SEA show how racial attitudes and stereotypes influenced the Freedmen's Schools and contributed to early tensions between northern missionaries and African Americans. While both had a shared belief in postemancipation education, the northern religious and secular organizations and their hired teachers often believed in and practiced an evangelical abolitionism. According to this ideology, slavery was a sin against God and mankind; it denied African Americans the ability to function as independent moral beings. Thus, to be truly free, African Americans as a race needed liberation from chains that bound them physically and spiritually. Therefore, education was to provide moral and intellectual growth as well as enable racial advancement to achieve the status of an independent moral being. Evangelical abolitionism also assumed that African Americans lacked morality as a result of their enslaved status. Thus the ideology

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<sup>29</sup> Green, "The Beach Institute and the American Missionary Association," 174.

<sup>30</sup> Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 235–38; Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 241.

discredited any religious instruction African Americans, formally or informally, had received as slaves. Unfortunately, these assumptions colored the associations' attitudes toward using African American teachers and determined the capacity in which they would be used.<sup>31</sup>

African American communities responded in four important ways. First, they demanded both expanded roles and treatment as equal partners in the educational movement. If not, they simply boycotted a school until conditions proved favorable. One Kentucky school closed for several days until the African American community felt that their demands for being included in the teacher selection process were heard.<sup>32</sup> The use of corporal punishment and lack of culturally appropriate teaching pedagogy also caused communities to end partnerships.<sup>33</sup>

In Washington, DC, for instance, the African American community had a more active role in the schools operated by northern philanthropic organizations outside of the public schools. Residents established a school fund where African American trustees paid incurring school expenses, such as construction costs for enlarging the school building, repairs, and fuel. They also partnered with the American Freedmen's Aid Commission, who provided teachers and paid their salaries. Miss Frances E. Perkins served as the principal of the school and led a staff of nine teachers. At the end of the 1865–66 academic year, discussions regarding the creation of a school with a more advanced curriculum had been underway.<sup>34</sup>

In Maryland, the American Freeman's Aid Commission reported the expansion of an "excellent school system throughout the State" during the 1865–66 academic year. The majority of the schools, moreover, had been financially sustained by African American community partners.<sup>35</sup> Under the control of African American trustees, Baltimore had the most comprehensive school system in terms of curricular options, student attendance, and scholastic progress. But, despite this success, white Marylanders did not fully embrace African American education. Arson and physical attacks on teachers affected the state schools. These examples of white opposition merely galvanized the resolve of African

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<sup>31</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865–1873* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 13–15.

<sup>32</sup> Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760–1891* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 2003), 230.

<sup>33</sup> Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People*, 127–49.

<sup>34</sup> "Report of the Committee on Teachers," *The Freedmen's Record* (May 1866), accessed Accessible Archives database.

<sup>35</sup> "Report of the Committee on Teachers," *The Freedmen's Record* (May 1866), accessed Accessible Archives database.

Americans and their white allies. One American Freedmen's Aid Commission missionary proclaimed that "the friends of the negro are brave and determined, and will secure him in all his legal rights."<sup>36</sup>

Owing to the success of the Jacobs School, Harriet Jacobs reported how the "freedmen of Alexandria had passed through their most trying period, and achieved a degree independence which would enable her leave them" at the end of the 66–1865 academic year. With three other teachers and African Americans paying all school expenses, including teacher salaries, the school would continue without its co-founder.<sup>37</sup>

Second, African American communities exploited the existing diverse landscape of educational options among the various northern religious and secular organizations. Most internal problems stemmed from competition for classroom space and retaining student enrollments. The partners attempted to establish schools in areas not in direct competition with another group. However, it proved too difficult. The lack of suitable school accommodations, and an unwillingness to expand into areas that could not guarantee adequate Freedmen's Bureau protection, was further compounded by the large number of partners involved in African American education. Competition for space also resulted in competition for student enrollment. Educational partners often gauged the success of a school by the number of enrolled students and average monthly attendance. Hence, direct competition exacerbated the internal problems. O. B. Frothingham, agent for the New York branch of the American Freedmen's Union Commission, complained that "so much competition among the different associations, especially in the large towns like Richmond, Petersburg, Norfolk, that the expediency of retiring from several points in that State has been suggested and casually entertained." While the New York organization remained, some left Richmond for other areas in Virginia. For instance, the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Relief Association briefly operated a school from May to July 1865. The spatial and enrollment competition, however, forced the society's departure during the 1865–66 academic year. Instead, the society concentrated its efforts in Petersburg, Lynchburg, Farmville, and Liberty. The departure of a few organizations never abated the problem, though. While some expanded operations to other areas, the remaining organizations still vied for space and autonomy.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "Report of the Committee on Teachers," *The Freedmen's Record* (May 1866), accessed Accessible Archives database.

<sup>37</sup> "Report of the Committee on Teachers," *The Freedmen's Record* (May 1866), accessed Accessible Archives database.

<sup>38</sup> O. B. Frothingham, "New York: Report of the Teacher's Committee," *American Freedmen* 1, no. 2 (May 1866): 31, accessed at the MHS; L. L. Seiler, "Richmond and Petersburg," *Pennsylvania Freedmen's Bulletin* 1, no. 8 (August 1865): 53; By the December 1865 edition of the *Pennsylvania Freedmen's Bulletin*, the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Relief no longer operated a school in Richmond. The organization concentrated its efforts in Petersburg, Lynchburg, Farmville, and Liberty. See *Pennsylvania Freedmen's Bulletin* 1, no. 12 (December 1865).

The Winder building, a confiscated Confederate property, prompted a major territorial debate in spring 1866. The property provided accommodations for several schools and teachers' lodging. Known as the Bakery, two factions within the New England Freedmen's Aid Society and the American Missionary Association desired the property. Andrew Washburn, a white missionary for the New England Freedmen's Aid Society, desired the property for the schools operated for white children by the organization. Washburn represented both a faction within the New England Freedmen's Aid Society and local whites who would benefit from the proposed schools. Another faction within the New England Freedmen's Aid Society desired the property for its African American schools. This group hired C. Thurston Chase as its agent for securing the property. American Missionary Association officials also wanted the property. The American Missionary Association saw the property as essential in the expansion of its educational efforts in the city, dominated by other organizations. Letters flooded the Freedmen's Bureau. In negotiating for the Bakery, the various groups placed the educational interests of African Americans and whites in direct competition. The fierce negotiations pitted one organization against another. From late April to July 1866, Washburn and his supporters sent eleven letters to the New England Freedmen's Aid Society and thirteen letters to American Missionary Association officials. Washburn also held several meetings with Freedmen's Bureau agents in order to secure the property for the white schools. Likewise, Chase and his supporters barraged members of the organization's Executive Board, American Missionary Association officials, and Freedmen's Bureau agents with correspondence on behalf of the African American schools. The New England Freedmen's Aid Society even met with Washburn in May 1866 but to no avail. Each refused to make any concessions on this matter. The incident made race a factor within the educational network and threatened the peaceful coexistence of white and African American schools sponsored under the Freedmen's School system.<sup>39</sup>

The extensive correspondence and meetings grated upon the Freedmen's Bureau agents' nerves. As the various parties conducted negotiations privately, several Freedmen's Bureau agents promised the Bakery buildings to both Washburn and Chase. The contradictory promises caused more problems. Ultimately, General Orlando Brown ordered that the white schools, under the direction of Andrew Washburn, occupy one of the Bakery buildings. The New England Freedmen's Aid Society retained control over the other Bakery building for their Freedmen's Schools. Embarrassed over the affair, several organizational officials attempted to make amends through meetings and letters of correspondence. Washburn resigned his commission from the New England Freedmen's Aid Society. He

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<sup>39</sup> Figures comes from manual computation of correspondence referencing the Bakery incident in AMA Papers, Virginia, April to July 1866 and NEFAS records, MHS, April–July 1865; For promises made to Washburn, see A. Merrill, Circular, June 2, 1866, AMA Papers, Virginia, and O. Brown, Circular, June 2, 1866, AMA Papers, Virginia; For promises made to Chase, see R. M. Manly to William G. Hawkins, June 9, 1866, microfilm roll 1, VA-BRFAL-ED.



became a missionary for the Soldiers' Memorial Society in Richmond and eventually the first superintendent of Richmond public schools in 1869. Most significantly, this resolution removed race as a factor within the Freedmen's School system, and the coexistence between white and African American schools returned.<sup>40</sup>

After the Bakery incident, the Freedmen's Bureau took a more active role in preventing occurrences of such incidents. The organization's handling of the American Baptist Home Mission Society's departure illuminated the Bureau's more active involvement. At its 1866 annual meeting, the American Baptist Home Mission Society decided against continuing its secular educational efforts. Organization officials deemed the training of African American ministers as more efficient and beneficial to Southern African Americans. The organization informed members in its annual report: "The most direct, accessible and effective way of teaching the mass of colored people is by EDUCATING THE COLORED MINISTRY." While the organization still supported missionaries to Richmond, the organization developed the Clover Institute (later renamed the Richmond Theological Institute and then Virginia Union University). The American Baptist Home Mission Society's decision created a major void. The organization had successfully maintained several Freedmen's Schools in Richmond. Moreover, their schools and administration proved extremely popular in the African American community. The fate of these schools became uncertain.<sup>41</sup>

Rather than have another Bakery incident, R. M. Manly developed a solution. He reorganized the Richmond schools into four districts. In a letter to John Walter, Manly explained that he wanted to minimize conflict between the northern organizations and the African American community. The district system, if properly executed, would make the school system distinct from the previous denominational-based system. With one exception, the African American churches remained as school locations. District one consisted of the schools at the Bakery buildings and all schools above 3rd Street. District two covered the area between 3rd and 12th Streets. The Navy Hill schools dominated this field. District three included the schools located between 12th and 23rd Streets. The district included the old

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<sup>40</sup> O. Brown to Reverend J. H. Chapin, July 4, 1866, microfilm roll 1, VA-BRFAL-ED; C. Thurston Chase to George Whipple, July 2, 1866, microfilm roll 7, AMA-Virginia; For Washburn's resignation, see June 4, 1866 entry, Letter from Andrew Washburn, Daily Record, 1865–1866, folder Daily Record, box 1, NEFAS Records; R. M. Manly to Hannah Stevenson, July 20, 1869, target 2, microfilm roll 1, VA-BRFAL-ED; "Soldier's Memorial Society," *Register*, clipping, circa 1869, scrapbook 4, folder 2, Caroline Dall Papers, MHS; Adams Ayer, "List of Teachers Commissioned and Employed in Virginia by the Soldiers Memorial Society, December 1, 1869," target 2, microfilm roll 1, VA-BRFAL-ED.

<sup>41</sup> American Baptist Home Mission Society, *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, Convened at Boston, Mass., May 17 and 18, 1866* (New York: American Baptist Home Mission Rooms, 1866), 17–18; For the rationale of the continued use of missionary educators, see American Baptist Home Mission Society, *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, Convened at Chicago, Ill., May 23 and 24, 1867* (New York: American Baptist Home Missions Rooms, 1867), 17–18; For the organization's education of ministers, see Charles H. Corey, *A History of the Richmond Theological Seminary, with Reminiscences of Thirty Year's Work among the Colored People of the South* (Richmond: J. W. Randolph Company, 1895), and Adolph H. Grundman, "Northern Baptists and the Founding of Virginia Union University: The Perils of Paternalism," *Journal of Negro History* 63, no. 1 (January 1978): 26–41.

First African Church schools. District four comprised the schools located below 23rd Street. Schools included Asbury Chapel, Union Hill, and Chimborazo. Manly then designated an organization for each district. He assigned the New England Freedmen's Aid Society to district one and the New York branch of the American Freedmen's Union Commission to district two. He then divided the other districts among the other organizations and community leaders. For instance, the New York Friends' Freedmen Association maintained the Chimborazo schools. This plan permitted greater efficiency by lessening conflict. The plan, moreover, allowed for expansion. Additional districts could be created as necessary.<sup>42</sup>

R. M. Manly's plan also addressed African American concerns over the American Baptist Home Mission Society's departure. African Americans had established beneficial relationships with the organization's teachers. With the organization's departure, they wanted the popular teachers to remain in the school system. Recognizing their concerns, Manly specifically wrote to the secretaries of the New England Freedmen's Aid Society and the New York branch of the American Freedmen's Union Commission. He hoped that either society would consider employing any of the three white teachers and six African American assistants from the First African Church school and three white teachers and one African American assistant from the Ebenezer Church school for their Bakery and Navy Hill schools, respectively. In his letter to Reverend Crammond Kennedy, Manly remarked that it would be "a great pity to not have Miss Knowles and her assistants returned." Manly's appeals found resonance within both organizations, as each employed the American Baptist Home Mission Society teachers. As a result, the American Baptist Home Mission Society continued sending missionaries to Richmond during the remaining years of the Freedmen's Schools. In retaining the African American churches formerly used by the organization, the community retained a sense of ownership over the schools. Church leaders remained active partners in the new district system. He also ensured that the churches continued receiving the school rental income generated by their property. His plan avoided alienating the African American community. As a result, Manly's plan averted a crisis. He thwarted another territorial debate. He placated the African American community by ensuring that the former American Baptist Home Mission Society's schools continued under new management. Furthermore, his plan made the overall educational system more efficient while minimizing territorial struggles. Manly restored African American education to the forefront of the educational partners' agenda and salvaged the

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<sup>42</sup> R. M. Manly to John Walter, October 10, 1866, printed pages 90–91, microfilm roll 1, VA-BRFAL-ED; R. M. Manly to Robert L. Murray, August 25, 1866, printed pages 75–76, microfilm roll 1, VA-BRFAL-ED; Elizabeth Cartland, "Chimborazo School," In *Virginia History Society: Occasional Bulletin* 43 (December 1981), 10, accessed at the VHS.



partnerships.<sup>43</sup> This incident also showcases the ways in which internal problems disrupted the entire Freedmen's School system and the necessity of strong Freedmen's Bureau agents to mediate potential problems. Otherwise, African American parents, leaders, and even students would be caught in the middle of the fray and their desire to make permanent schools as a state right of citizenship.

Long-standing debates over the Catholic Church and fears over a "Papal Threat" also embroiled the African American community, who sought suitable partners to help fulfill their educational vision. The widely accepted presumption that postwar African American education would be based upon Protestant values, according to historian Ward M. McAfee, aligned itself with Republican ideology and its postwar vision of reconstructing the South and nation through education and cultural standardization of the American citizenry. Protestantism was seen as the American standard. While African Americans achieved choice and educational access, the power struggles between Catholic and Protestant organizations threatened the Freedmen's School system. These internal fissures made the schools less efficient, as energies were diverted away from the schools.<sup>44</sup>

Third, African American parents and community leaders sustained an independent school system supported entirely by African American financial networks. The Freedmen's Bureau inspected the independent schools and reported the observations in their annual reports. These Inspector of Schools reports offer valuable insights. One Virginian inspector examined five independent schools in Norfolk and two in nearby Portsmouth. Of the schools receiving unfavorable reports, the inspector noted the inappropriate language and appearance of the teachers and poor classroom conditions. Chaplain Raymond remarked, "Teachers miserably incompetent" and "Tolerable appearance, but teacher language ungrammatical." Of the schools examined, Raymond singled out the Bute Street School as exemplary. He felt that Miss Skinner's school "compares favorably with schools of white teachers and is incomparably superior to all the other pay schools visited operating in Norfolk, Virginia."<sup>45</sup>

In the absence of the state, the African American community, with occasional assistance from the Freedmen's Bureau and northern philanthropies, filled in the gap in Kentucky. Although the state passed two important school laws, Black Kentuckians made use of churches as classroom spaces in both rural and urban areas. Louisville, Lexington, and other urban districts offered long school years, diverse curricular options, and

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<sup>43</sup> R. M. Manly to Hannah E. Stevenson, October 27, 1866, printed pages 103–5, microfilm roll 1, VA-BRFAL-ED; R. M. Manly to Reverend Crammond Kennedy, September 21, 1867, printed page 280, microfilm roll 1, VA-BRFAL-ED. American Baptist Home Mission Society, *Annual Reports, 1866–1870* (New York: American Baptist Reading Rooms, 1866–70).

<sup>44</sup> Ward McAfee, *Religion, Race and Reconstruction: The Public School in the Politics of the 1870s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 3–4, 18–22.

<sup>45</sup> Chaplain Raymond, "Tabular Statement of Private Schools for Colored Children in Norfolk and Portsmouth VA, March 1866," microfilm roll 13, VA-BRFAL-ED.

coordinated administrative structure over the system. Some even offered summer classes. Rural school years aligned with the agricultural season, as in other rural southern communities. While the Freedmen's Bureau and northern organizations offered some assistance with construction materials and teachers, the Kentucky system was self-sustained by African American contributions. They paid for teacher salaries, books, equipment, and the actual construction of schoolhouses. Black women's fundraising encouraged the opening of the Howard School, and the American Missionary Association supplied the teachers. The partnership continued the school until the passage of the 1874 school law forced the departure of both the Freedmen's Bureau and the American Missionary Association.<sup>46</sup> Without state support, the Kentucky schools show how African Americans overcame the odds and enacted education as a right of freedom and citizenship in the new nation. Their perseverance and drive allowed for breaking down white opposition and expansion more broadly.

Fourth, African American parents and communities even developed parallel educational associations for advancing autonomy and meaningful partnerships with the Freedmen's Bureau. In Baltimore, Maryland, African Americans organized the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People for advancing their educational vision of the postwar city. They found willing partners with white Marylanders and northern philanthropists. When the city took over the schools in 1868, the quality of the schools declined. As a result, they continued to sustain a system of private schools as an alternative to the unequal city school system.<sup>47</sup> Similar educational movements occurred in Delaware. Influential community leaders drew inspiration from the Baltimore movement and created the Delaware Association for the Moral Improvement and Education of the Colored People for advancing schooling. The organization constructed the Howard School through paid subscriptions and lumber provided by the Freedmen's Bureau. When the school building opened in 1869, four separate day schools moved into the new building. The association paid teacher salaries and board and other miscellaneous school expenses from paid subscriptions and nominal tuition fees. Beyond Wilmington, the association worked with the Freedmen's Bureau in opening other schools and developing a normal school program throughout the state as an equal partner.<sup>48</sup> John Alvord's reports paid attention to these parallel school systems and how they worked with any outside partners throughout the region. While often relying on local African American educators, some schools would approach existing societies for teacher recommendations.

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<sup>46</sup> Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 231–39.

<sup>47</sup> Dennis Patrick Halpin, *A Brotherhood of Liberty: Black Reconstruction and Its Legacies in Baltimore, 1865–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 27–31.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware, Bulletin, 1917, No. 18* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917), 99–100.

Thus the school trustees and parents ultimately decided who instructed the students without outside pressure and initiated such ventures, although not always recognized by northern philanthropies or the Freedmen's Bureau.

The internal power dynamics and sometimes imperfect nature of the educational networks, however, did not prevent either the growth or progress of the Freedmen's Schools. The networks of African Americans, northern associations, and the Bureau agents ensured that African American schools remained a post-emancipation right of citizenship. Ultimately, white opposition played a major role in solidifying the educational networks and encouraging the development of a unified response to this significant obstacle.

## White Southern Opposition as a Major Obstacle

The majority of white southerners opposed the post-emancipation expansion of African American education as a right of citizenship. Both Hilary Moss and Kabria Baumgartner have extensively discussed the violence directed toward African American scholars, teachers, and physical structures, whether with vandalism or arson, in the antebellum North. Baumgartner's "Appendix D: Physical Attacks on Black Schools in the Northeast, 1830–1845" is especially useful for showing the antebellum northern origins of this common strategy of white southern opposition to Black education in the post-emancipation South. The military defeat of the short-lived Confederate nation represents the major difference in the motivations for curtailing formal African American education before and after the Civil War. Though no longer enslaved, white southerners still did not believe that African Americans had the right to become educated and enjoy access to public funds and support as white children.<sup>49</sup>

The Freedmen's School system made visible white southerners' scars of Confederate defeat. These scars made white southerners "a bit defensive about their public image and more than a little anxious for reassurance."<sup>50</sup> Antebellum legislation and educational policies reinforced African Americans' noncitizenship status in the slave South.

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<sup>49</sup> See Hilary J. Moss, *Schooling Citizens, The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1–3, 72, 164–65, and Kabria Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge: Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 30–45, 223–24.

<sup>50</sup> Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865–1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 21, 31–33, 35.

Emancipation inverted previous hierarchies by placing African American children on an equal footing as white schoolchildren. White southerners' opposition to early African American schools afforded them a degree of power in shaping the postwar region.<sup>51</sup>

As African Americans expressed their freedom, white southerners coped with their defeat through violence directed at the initial schools. White elites deemed the initial teachers as outside agitators disrupting southern tradition. Following the directive of Dr. Josiah C. Nott, arsonists destroyed several churches engaged in the Freedmen's School system in Mobile.<sup>52</sup> In response, African Americans organized patrols around the Freedmen's Schools being conducted in the Medical College, rebuilt churches that served as classrooms, and proclaimed their right to an education in the Mobile Black newspaper. "If the theory of Dr. Nott is attempted to be carried out in any of its applications to the colored people of Alabama," one *Nationalist* article noted that there will be "a war of races at hand, compared to which Hayti was mere boy's play. The moment the attempt is made to put this people under, or to suppress their efforts are education and self-advancement, we shall dread the results, and the guilt and the entire responsibility of the whole thing will be upon the heads of the Dr. and his adjutors [sic]."<sup>53</sup> Their emboldened words did not stop the use of arson as a weapon of the opposition. Arson plagued schools located in Talledega, Alabama, Edgefield, Tennessee, Kaufman, Texas, and other districts across both the rural and urban South. "Terrorism through fire," one historian surmised, "was often effective in ending educational efforts and driving away teachers."<sup>54</sup> Drawing from newspaper reports, congressional testimony, and the archives of the Freedmen's Bureau, Campbell Scribner estimated 631 African American schoolhouses were destroyed between 1864 and 1876. The wanton destruction of these sites of education served as acts of rebellion that had the potential of shutting down educational efforts but also represented a loss of African American community wealth. With each destroyed school, African Americans suffered a loss of financial investment in the postwar efforts to build stable communities centered around African American education. African Americans had to reinvest their own money as well as rely on the goodwill of white partners to rebuild. Overall, African American parents and communities bore the brunt of these losses, financially and psychologically.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Holt, *Black Over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina during Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 23, 25; Karin L. Zipf, "'The Whites Shall Rule the Land or Die': Gender, Race, and Class in North Carolina Reconstruction Politics," *Journal of Southern History* 65, no. 3 (August 1999): 499–500, 506.

<sup>52</sup> Wager Swayne, Report to Major General O. O. Howard Concerning the Continued Occupancy of the Medical College in Mobile and the Reasons Therefore, January 24, 1866, microfilm roll 3, AL-BRFAL-ED; "The Recent Fires," *Nationalist*, March 18, 1866, 2.

<sup>53</sup> "Letter of J. C. Nott, M.D.," *Nationalist*, March 1, 1866, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People*, 165–66.

<sup>55</sup> Campbell F. Scribner, "Surveying the Destruction of the African American Schoolhouse, 1864–1876" *Journal of Civil War Era* 10 (December 2020): 472–75.

White southerners also intimidated, harassed, and ostracized enrolled students, parents, and teachers. Male teachers faced whippings and even banishment by local white southerners. Some, like Thomas Barton of Long Creek, North Carolina, and Edwin Barneston of Purdy, Tennessee, were targeted by armed men and eventually abandoned the Freedmen's Schools for their personal safety. Terrorists initially forced Daniel Broomfield to end his Warrenton, Georgia, school in 1866.<sup>56</sup> Unlike Barton and Barneston, Broomfield returned to teach in his former school in 1868. Several white and Black educators lost their lives because of their efforts to educate newly emancipated African Americans attending the Freedmen's Schools. The Klan and nightriders murdered Richard Burke of Sumter County, Alabama, James G. Patterson of Yazoo County, Mississippi, and William and Alzina Haffa of Hinds County, Mississippi. Female teachers and students often found themselves pelted by rock-throwing white youth while walking the city's streets. This behavior provided whites with a measure of racial control in a postwar society without slavery. The combined effects of this personal violence made it difficult to sustain schools in rural districts lacking a strong military presence.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, southern newspapers often published negative commentary on the Freedmen's School system. These articles often posited the schools as an institution imposed on the defeated region and did not recognize the independent schools created by African Americans. This commentary inferred that African Americans, with northern missionaries' help, stepped outside of their natural position in the social hierarchy and behaved audaciously. More importantly, the white conservative press encouraged ill behavior toward the schools, teachers, and students, as well as arson and vandalism against the physical school facilities. Through acts of violence, real and rhetorical, white southerners challenged African Americans' claims to freedom and citizenship.<sup>58</sup>

Over its tenure, the Freedmen's School system demonstrated that white opposition never dampened African Americans' desire for educational attainment. African American literacy increased significantly from the 5 percent national pre-Civil War levels. Over 11,600 educators taught in the various postwar schools across the region. According to a survey completed by scholar Ronald Butchart, those involved in this phase of African American education were not limited to white northern women. Rather, this population comprised a distinct minority of the teaching force. White southerners, northern African Americans, and southern African Americans comprised the bulk of the educators working in the Freedmen's Schools.<sup>59</sup> The scholastic success achieved by African Americans' robust

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<sup>56</sup> Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People*, 167–70.

<sup>57</sup> Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People*, 169; Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South*, 20–27; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 646–47.

<sup>58</sup> Green, *Educational Reconstruction*, 26–27.

<sup>59</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 638; Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People*, 19–20.

network of partners debunked the myths regarding African Americans' intellectual ability and capacity to transition from slavery to freedom. Indeed, African Americans' educational success contributed to the development of state-funded public schools for all children, irrespective of race, class, gender, and previous condition of servitude.<sup>60</sup>

As the Freedmen's Schools transitioned to the public schools, John Alvord published a pamphlet consisting of his letters to O. O. Howard during an 1870 inspection of schools in South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. Like his first report, Alvord highlighted several trends. First, African Americans' enthusiasm for education persisted. While concerned over the departure of the Freedmen's Bureau, they continued to see the benefits of education as essential in their claims of citizenship. He reported thriving schools that were taught by an increasingly southern educated African American teaching force. Professional schools, normal programs, and other advanced programs had made a significant impact on the various southern communities visited. In his interactions with students enrolled in the model school at an Atlanta normal program, one student commended O. O. Howard and the early educational network for affording her with the opportunity to "do much good among our people," while another felt encouraged as African Americans were "rising as a people" as a consequence of the Freedmen's Schools.<sup>61</sup>

Second, African Americans and their white allies felt concerned over whether the state, county, and local school officials would be co-partners. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, Alvord noted how parents, community leaders, and teachers were "worn by toil and anxiety" over the future of African American public schools in the state.<sup>62</sup> The transition from the Freedmen's Schools to state-funded African American public schools had produced anxiety over whether the state and county school officials would be good partners. Alvord remained confident that the "*people*, of both colors, will have schools [emphasis original]."<sup>63</sup> This anxiety was not limited to Chattanooga. Alvord reported this general undercurrent of anxiety and concern over the future of African American schooling after the Freedmen's Bureau. White southern opponents remained. Violence directed at teachers and educational reformers continued, representing a third trend within his letters.<sup>64</sup>

Yet Alvord remained optimistic over the future. The Louisville, Kentucky, schools gave him hope for "what the people *can do themselves*. What is here accomplished, may become universal as soon as the Freedmen have, from their own color, a sufficient number

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<sup>60</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 638; Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People*, 19–20.

<sup>61</sup> John W. Alvord, *Letters from the South, Relating to the Condition of Freedmen, Addressed to Major General O. O. Howard, Commissioner, Bureau R., F., and A. L.* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1870), 26.

<sup>62</sup> Alvord, *Letters from the South*, 29–31.

<sup>63</sup> Alvord, *Letters from the South*, 30.

<sup>64</sup> Alvord, *Letters from the South*, 20–31.



of competent teachers.”<sup>65</sup> The separate school system consisting of fifteen schools with African American teachers and an African American superintendent galvanized his hope, as had the statistics provided on the remaining Freedmen's Schools in the various southern states. Alvord reported 122,317 students enrolled in 2,571 schools, 3,834 enrolled students enrolled in one of the 33 normal schools and high schools, and 5,973 students enrolled in colleges, universities, and professional schools. He cautioned that “much more should be done” in terms of African American education in the conclusion, but provided specific evidence of success and the stable foundation laid for African American public schools during the Freedmen's School era.<sup>66</sup>

Alvord's cautious yet hopeful outlook outlined the contentious struggles and opportunities for the next two decades. Beyond a few districts, the implementation process typically occurred after the former Confederate states received Congressional approval for readmission. African Americans and their white allies now dealt with the competing visions for ensuring the meaningful implementation of state-funded public schools with their new state and local government partners as well as northern philanthropies who remained devoted to African American education. Moreover, African Americans needed to convince those white southerners who remained bitterly opposed to the new racially inclusive educational system. African Americans and their white allies understood that implementation required new partnerships, resilience, and revised protest strategies. Otherwise, the new rights of citizenship defined by the African American public schoolhouse would become a lost opportunity. The formal adoption of the public education measures in the Reconstruction era constitutions reveals that African Americans' struggle for education, citizenship, and a racially inclusive society did not end. Rather, it shifted, as the remaining chapters will demonstrate.

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<sup>65</sup> Alvord, *Letters from the South*, 33.

<sup>66</sup> Alvord, *Letters from the South*, 42.



## CHAPTER THREE

# State Constitutions and Public Schools

On May 16, 1867, Lawrence S. Berry, William V. Turner, and R. D. Wiggins made an appeal to Black Alabamians and the Republican Party in an open letter to the *Nationalist*. The respected African American leaders demanded the creation of a state-funded school system that included all citizens regardless of race as an outcome of the upcoming state constitutional convention. With “education secured to all,” Berry, Turner, and Wiggins concluded, “Alabama will commence a career of which she will have just cause to be proud.”<sup>1</sup> This boldness extended to the convention floors. In Arkansas, William H. Grey, an African American minister representing Phillips County, drew the ire of other white delegates when he proclaimed: “Give us the right of suffrage; establish a school system that will give us opportunities to educate our children; leave the door ajar that leads to peace and power; and if by the next generation we do not place ourselves beyond the reach of mortal men, why then take them away from us if not exercised properly. But, sir, we have no fears of failing to secure those rights.”<sup>2</sup> In compliance with the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, delegates convened throughout the eleven former Confederate states placed in one of the five military districts. Each drafted and adopted new constitutions that mandated the creation of free public schools for all citizens, regardless of race, class, caste, or former servitude.

This chapter explores the codification of African American education as a state right of citizenship. The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 initiated the process that radically shifted previous understandings of the role of education for promoting a healthy republican government to include African Americans as essential participants of the educated citizenry. African Americans and their white allies actively participated in the various conventions and served on the subcommittees that crafted the educational provisions. Their efforts enshrined public school education as the cornerstone of the new postwar South. Like the work done by W. E. B. Du Bois, Richard Hume, Eric Foner, and others, close attention is given to the actual ratified clauses and demonstrates a shared regional

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence S. Berry, William V. Turner, and R. D. Wiggins, “Untitled,” *The Nationalist*, May 16, 1867, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Arkansas Constitutional Convention (1868), *Debates and Proceedings of the Convention Which Assembled at Little Rock, January 7, 1868: Under the Provisions of the Act of Congress of March 24, 1867, and the Acts of March 23d and July 19th, 1867, Supplementary Thereto, to Form a Constitution for the State of Arkansas* (Little Rock: J. G. Price, 1868), 96.

understanding of African American education as an essential right of citizenship.<sup>3</sup> Despite establishing a common framework for state-funded public schools, the similarities and differences between the respective states are revealing. The varying ways in which constitutional convention delegates responded to the fundamental question of who was deemed worthy of access to public schooling in these Reconstruction era constitutions offer insights into the transition from the Freedmen's Bureau school and state-funded African American public school eras. While not perfect, these new educational articles defined the next two decades of African American public schools by introducing new partners, creating new opportunities for African American participation, and facilitating new challenges for sustaining the newly created schools. The most pressing issues generated by the new state mandates included: Who would teach African American students? Where will these students be educated—rural versus urban communities and whether in rented buildings or new school facilities? How would states, counties, and local communities pay for the new racially inclusive public school system?

## Creating State-Funded Public Schools

The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 proved to be an important milestone in African American education. This series of federal legislation created five military districts, defined the readmission process, and provided for Black suffrage. Tennessee, Missouri, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, and Kentucky were excluded from the military reconfiguration.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, it determined the parameters for a new phase in African American education as a vehicle for defining citizenship at the local, state, and national level, redefined the existing Freedmen's School system, and ensured that Black southerners would have a political voice in that process. Although previous scholars generally discussed the ways that the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 influenced African American education, a more precise reexamination is necessary.

The new state constitutions marked a major shift in previous notions of education, citizenship, and republicanism. Early state constitutions defined educational access to citizens as defined by their race, gender, and class. Public schooling, as shown by Sarah Hyde, did not include all. Rather, southern state governments used public funds to support private schools for white elite children primarily. Some white indigent children received

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<sup>3</sup> See W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935; New York: Free Press, 1994), 646–67; Richard L. Hume, “Carpetbaggers in the Reconstruction South: A Group Portrait of Outside Whites in the ‘Black and Tan’ Constitutional Conventions,” *Journal of American History* 64 (September 1977): 313–30; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), 276–77, 315–33; Allen C. Guezlo, *Reconstruction: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 40, 49–50.

<sup>4</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 276–77.

access in several states. These schools supplemented the instruction provided by mothers, relatives, and hired tutors.<sup>5</sup> With the rise of Jacksonian Democracy, southern governments embraced education reform through the common school movement. State-funded public schools for white children became essential for the success of republicanism, where an educated white population formed the basis of a healthy representative democracy. Moreover, white southerners viewed public schooling as the best means for social mobility, expansion of white male suffrage, and participation in government as politicians elected by engaged educated citizens. This brand of republicanism was racialized, gendered, and classist.<sup>6</sup> Unlike northern schools, as envisioned by Horace Mann, southern common schools reinforced racial norms and access to citizenship. Free and enslaved African Americans remained outside of the Republican body politic and, therefore, southern public schooling. At southern colleges, universities, and female academies, enslaved African Americans labored in and around classrooms while enrolled students became proslavery and anti-Black literacy defenders.<sup>7</sup> In the aftermath of the Civil War and slavery's destruction, biracial governance required new constitutions. As part of the reconstructed body politic, public schools for both white and Black children proved essential for sustaining an educated citizenry.

Reflecting post-Civil War realities and Reconstruction Acts of 1867 requirements for readmission, southern states convened constitutional conventions between November 1867 and February 1869.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to sentiments expressed in the white conservative press, these conventions could not be described as being dominated by African Americans. A total of 257 African American delegates worked alongside 754 white delegates in drafting constitutions compliant with the federal legislation across the former Confederate states. South Carolina, Louisiana, and Georgia had the largest number of African American delegates. Nor could white conservatives characterize the delegates as being depraved, ignorant, and/or social pariahs. Rather, the delegates were largely well-educated, literate, Union Army veterans, business professionals, Freedmen's School educators, and/or others

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<sup>5</sup> Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 3–74; Sarah Hyde, *Schooling in the Antebellum South: The Rise of Public and Private Education in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 4–5, 7–24.

<sup>6</sup> Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 75–135; Hyde, *Schooling in the Antebellum South*, 6; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 449–55, 622–27.

<sup>7</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 452–55; Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 172–81; Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 234–73; Alfred L. Brophy, *University, Court, and Slave: Pro-Slavery Thought in Southern Colleges and Courts and the Coming of Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 21–145, 146–56.

<sup>8</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 316–21; Hume, “Carpetbaggers in the Reconstruction South,” 313, 315; Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Reconstruction in Alabama: From Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 158; David Cecelski, *The Fire of Freedom: Abraham Galloway and the Slaves' Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 183–88.

invested in the Reconstruction project.<sup>9</sup> Of the seventeen African American delegates at the Alabama convention, six were of mixed ancestry, five had free status prior to the Civil War, several had significant property holdings, and only two “were reported to be illiterate.” At the North Carolina convention, James W. Hood, James H. Harris, and Abram H. Galloway were among the leading African American delegates of the thirteen in attendance. These men advanced the expansion of public education to include all children, irrespective of race, class, gender, and former servitude. Together, these biracial assemblages of delegates created democratic constitutions.<sup>10</sup>

All state conventions saw the creation of an inclusive state-funded educational system as a paramount goal from the outset. Most, if not all, of the delegates attending the convention had an awareness of the general enthusiasm and success of the Freedmen’s Bureau schools in both the large urban centers and rural communities. Indeed, John Carraway, a literate former enslaved person of Mobile, Alabama, proposed a resolution providing that the Committee of Public Instruction develop a special ordinance in which African American orphans were included in the new educational article. Robert Smalls of Beaufort, South Carolina, proposed the resolution, which was echoed by the other seventy African American delegates meeting in Charleston. Dr. Thomas Bayne of Norfolk, Virginia, led the failed effort to secure integrated public schools. John Carraway of Mobile, Alabama, Robert Smalls of Beaufort, South Carolina, and other African American delegates often led the effort in their respective conventions.<sup>11</sup>

While the conventions made their respective state legislatures responsible for resolving the details, all constitutions crafted and later adopted included a provision similar to Article Eleven of the 1868 Alabama Constitution, establishing “schools at which all children of the State, between the ages of five and twenty-one years, may attend free of charge.”<sup>12</sup> For most states, this clause offered straightforward language. North Carolina, Mississippi, and Arkansas, however, included more idealistic language in articulating the delegates’ lofty aims for the new school systems. North Carolina announced in the first clause of the educational article, “Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government, happiness of mankind, schools, and the means of education, shall forever be encouraged.” Mississippi delegates envisioned public schools as necessary for “the stability of a republican form of government” and encouraged “by all suitable means,

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<sup>9</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 316–21; Hume, “Carpetbaggers in the Reconstruction South,” 313, 315.

<sup>10</sup> Fitzgerald, *Reconstruction in Alabama*, 158; Cecelski, *The Fire of Freedom*, 183–88.

<sup>11</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 319–33; “Letter from Montgomery,” *Mobile Daily Register*, November 10, 1867, 2; Peggy Cooper, “Introducing Robert Smalls,” *Fordham Law Review* 69, no. 5 (2001): 1703–4; Ethan J. Kytte and Blain Roberts, *Denmark Vesey’s Garden: Slavery and Memory in the Cradle of the Confederacy* (New York: New Press, 2018), 69–73.

<sup>12</sup> Alabama Constitution (1868), Article 11, section 6, <http://www.legislature.state.al.us/aliswww/history/constitutions/1868/1868all.html>.

the promotion of intellectual, scientific, moral, and agricultural improvement.”<sup>13</sup> Arkansas’s clause proclaims “a general diffusion of knowledge and intelligence among all classes, being essential to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people.” Each new state constitutional article acknowledged the respective state government’s responsibility to educate children of all races and classes. Where the few antebellum southern public school systems had anti-African American literacy and schooling provisions, the former Confederate states and even several border states now had an obligation to financially support African American education as a state right of citizenship.<sup>14</sup> All states defined the bureaucratic framework for the state public school system, such as authorizing and/or clarifying the state superintendent of public instruction positions and respective duties, and reporting channels at the local, county, and state levels. All states made provisions for funding the schools, often including land sales, and taxes on real estate, alcohol, and other items. The other clauses varied by state. Some opted for compulsory attendance. Others prohibited the distribution of aid to religious schools.<sup>15</sup>

All states, except South Carolina and Louisiana, opted for segregated schools instead of integrated schools. The majority of the delegates felt that such a provision might block the ratification of the final document produced. They feared that tax-supported and integrated would have been simply too much for state residents to accept all at once.<sup>16</sup>

This did not prevent vocal minority factions from attempting to extend equality across the entire system. For instance, Dr. Thomas Bayne led a small faction, composed mainly of African American delegates and individuals with direct connections to the Freedmen’s Schools, at the Virginia convention. These delegates desired mixed schools as a means of ending discrimination more broadly in society. In their thinking, mixed schools and the lack of race-based distinctions in the constitution would have made a step toward achieving a harmonious postwar southern society without racial discrimination. Bayne, an African American dentist from Norfolk, passionately argued for integrated schools. “The free public schools of this state shall be open free to all classes, and no child, pubill [*sic*] or scholar, shall be ejected from said schools on account of race, color, or any other

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<sup>13</sup> Mississippi Constitution (1868), Article 8, section 1.

<sup>14</sup> Heather A. Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 203–13.

<sup>15</sup> David Tyack and Robert Lowe, “The Constitutional Moment: Reconstruction and Black Education in the South,” *American Journal of Education* 94 (February 1986): 245–46; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 663–64.

<sup>16</sup> Edgar W. Knight, *Reconstruction and Education in Virginia* (Syracuse: Gaylord Brothers, 1916), 6–7; “Letter from Montgomery,” *Mobile Daily Register*, November 8, 1867, 1; “Letter from Montgomery,” *Mobile Daily Register*, November 10, 1867, 2; “The Plot Thickens,” *Mobile Daily Register*, November 30, 1867, 2.



distinction,” Dr. Bayne contended, “and the general assembly shall [not] have pour [*sic*] to make any law that will admit of any invidious distinction in any public free schools in this state.” Bayne’s contingent proved unsuccessful in its efforts.<sup>17</sup>

The debate over mixed schools stalled the proceedings in the majority of the conventions until a compromise could be met. As with the funding debate, the conventions decided not to make racial distinctions in the newly created school system. Rather than follow the precedent set by Louisiana and South Carolina and forbid mixed schools, most conventions decided that their respective state legislatures should make the decision for either mixed or separate schools.<sup>18</sup>

Louisiana and South Carolina served as the exceptions. In antebellum Louisiana, New Orleans, as argued by Sarah Hyde, served as the “genesis of public schools” by offering primary, intermediate, and secondary education to a bilingual school population.<sup>19</sup> Thus the Reconstruction era constitution did not usher in free public schools. Rather, it expanded to include African American children. At the forefront of the southern public school movement, Louisiana again poised itself to be a leader by allowing all children irrespective of race to be educated in the same classroom. Thus the 1868 state constitution declared, “There shall be no separate schools or institutions of learning established exclusively for any race by the State of Louisiana.” New Orleans would be one of the few communities to actualize this controversial educational provision.<sup>20</sup>

South Carolina proved the most radical of all of the conventions. Its delegates required integration at all public schools, including its state colleges and universities. Article X, Section 10, specified, “All the public schools, colleges, and universities of this State supported in whole or in part by the public funds, shall be free and open to all children and youths of the State, without regard to race or color.”<sup>21</sup> This reorganization process effectively desegregated the University of South Carolina and made it a rarity among other postwar institutions of higher education. In the fall of 1873, the University of South Carolina admitted its first Black student and had its first African American faculty member.

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<sup>17</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 322; Quoted in Knight, *Reconstruction and Education in Virginia*, 10; A. A. Taylor, “Solving the Problem of Education,” *Journal of Negro History* 11, no. 2 (April 1926): 387–91; Virginia Constitutional Convention, *The Journal of Constitutional Convention of the State of Virginia, Convened in the City of Richmond December 3, 1867, by Order of General Schofield, Dated November 2, 1857, in Pursuance of the Act of Congress of March 23, 1867* (Richmond: New Nation, 1868), 335.

<sup>18</sup> Tyack and Lowe, “The Constitutional Moment,” 246–48.

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Hyde, *Schooling in the Antebellum South: The Rise of Private and Public Education in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 69, 76–77.

<sup>20</sup> Louisiana Constitutional Convention, *Constitution Adopted by the State Constitutional Convention of the State of Louisiana, March 7, 1868* (New Orleans: Republican Office, 1868), VII—Public Education, Art. 135; Tyack and Lowe, “The Constitutional Moment,” 248.

<sup>21</sup> South Carolina Constitutional Convention, *Constitution of the State of South Carolina with the Ordinances Thereunto Appended, Adopted by the Constitutional Convention, Which Was Held at Charleston, and Adjourned on the 17th March, 1868* (Charleston: Denny and Perry Printers, 1868), 28; Tyack and Lowe, “The Constitutional Moment,” 248.

When Democrats regained power four years later, this brief experiment drew to a close and Claflin College became the state college for Black South Carolinian residents. West Virginia initially did not specify segregation in its early Reconstruction public school system. Like South Carolina, convention delegates added race-based schooling in the 1872 West Virginia state constitution and amended the system by stating that “white and colored persons shall not be educated in the same building.”<sup>22</sup>

Overall, delegates opted for a set of clauses and provisions that they deemed best facilitated the schooling of white and Black children in rural and urban areas, at primary and collegiate levels, and those considered deaf, dumb, and blind. This resulted in variations across states, including neighboring states. In Alabama, Article Eleven provided the bureaucratic framework for the new state educational system, proposed the establishment of an agricultural school under the supervision of the University of Alabama regents, and funding through the creation of an education fund derived from the proceeds of land sales, liberal state budget appropriations (one-fifth of the total annual budget), and a series of new personal and corporate taxes.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the Mississippi educational clause focused primarily on providing fiscal support for the new system, including the sale of “swamp lands,” fines collected “for the break of penal laws,” and taxes on alcohol sales.<sup>24</sup>

The revolutionary nature of these constitutions, however, should not minimize key similarities and differences over how the conventions addressed the fundamental question of who was deemed worthy of access to public schooling. While some states such as Alabama, Virginia, South Carolina, and Louisiana receive much scholarly attention, the states at the fringes of the five military districts often fall out of view. By looking at Texas, Arkansas, and Florida, the revolutionary nature and in some instances the problematic nature of some educational provisions come into focus.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, Texas and Arkansas do not include any specific mention of race and/or the former servitude of the main beneficiaries of Confederate defeat in their final educational articles. Both states employed the vague language of “all the inhabitants of this

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<sup>22</sup> Allison Blakely, “Richard T. Greener and the ‘Talented Tenth’s’ Dilemma,” *Journal of Negro History* 59 (October 1974): 307–308; JBHE Foundation Inc., “Ben Tillman: Memories of an Agrarian Racist,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 32 (Summer 2001): 48–49; John Herbert Roper, “A Reconsideration: The University of South Carolina during Reconstruction (1974),” in *South Carolina in the Civil War and Reconstruction Eras: Essays from the Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, ed. by Bonner Michael Brem and Hamer Fritz (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016), 184–94; Douglass Terry, “Reading the *Storer Record*: Negotiating Industrial Education at Storer College During the Age of Jim Crow,” *West Virginia History* 11 (Fall 2017): 123–24.

<sup>23</sup> Alabama Constitution (1868), Article 11.

<sup>24</sup> Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse*, 121.

<sup>25</sup> 1868 Arkansas Constitution, <https://constitution.com/arkansas-state-constitution-1868/>; Florida Constitution of 1868, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/189095>; Constitution of the State of Texas (1869), Article IX Public Schools, <https://tarltonapps.law.utexas.edu/constitutions/texas1869/a9>.



State” and “all the children,” respectively.<sup>26</sup> However, race, African American freedpeople, and the meaning of freedom were at the very heart of the debates over the creation of tax-funded public school systems across their respective states. Serving on the committee responsible for crafting the final education article, William H. Grey, an outspoken Phillips County delegate, ultimately supported the race-neutral language adopted.<sup>27</sup> Florida, on the other hand, indirectly mentions race through the phrase “without distinction or preference” but instituted a minimum academic year length, as did Texas and Arkansas.<sup>28</sup> Even at the fringes of the five military districts, the creation of state-funded African American public schools still embodied the remaking of the postwar nation where African American inclusion in the body politic was its touchstone. As James T. White, African American delegate for Phillips County, eloquently stated after the delegates approved the final Arkansas constitution draft, “My race has waited with patience, and endured the afflictions of slavery of the most inhuman kind, for two hundred and fifty years, and today I find a majority of the Constitutional Convention that is willing to confer upon me what God intended that I should have.”<sup>29</sup>

Provisions creating minimum academic year lengths, however, demonstrate that not all children were worthy of education in the new public education systems. Created to ensure that children residing in poorer districts had access to education, these provisions unintentionally set a precedent for inequality in the system. Five of the eleven affected states mandated minimum academic year lengths (Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, Mississippi, and Texas).<sup>30</sup> From the beginning, citizenship, as defined by access to public schooling, would be shaped by race, class, and place. Districts that adhered to the minimum academic year length of three, four, or six months did not violate the new constitutional mandates. Those districts and the quality of instruction received by the students educated therein, therefore, would be placed at a disadvantage compared to more affluent urban districts that opted for a nine-month year. The school funding received, and therefore, the ability to complete repairs, require compulsory attendance, construct modern facilities, purchase textbooks, and pay employee salaries, would be less as well. Thus, these states, while creating public schools for all children, established varying degrees of

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<sup>26</sup> 1868 Arkansas Constitution, Article IX, section 1; Constitution of the State of Texas (1869), article IX, section 1.

<sup>27</sup> Arkansas Constitutional Convention (1868), *Debates and Proceedings of the Convention*, 666.

<sup>28</sup> Florida Constitution of 1868, Education article, section 1 and 8; Constitution of the State of Texas (1869), Article IX, section 5; 1868 Arkansas Constitution, section 6.

<sup>29</sup> Arkansas Constitutional Convention (1868), *Debates and Proceedings of the Convention*, 682.

<sup>30</sup> Arkansas Constitution, section 6; Florida Constitution of 1868, Education article, section 8; Constitution of North Carolina, 1868, section 3, [https://ncleg.net/library/Documents/Constitution\\_1868.pdf](https://ncleg.net/library/Documents/Constitution_1868.pdf); Mississippi Constitution of 1868, section 5, <http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/98/index.php?s=extra&id=269>; Constitution of the State of Texas (1869), Article IX, section 5.

citizenship and worthiness for full inclusion in the body politic. The post-“Redemption” and Jim Crow era constitutions would only exacerbate these inequitable conditions, as shown in Chapter 6 and by Jim Crow education era scholars.<sup>31</sup>

## Washington, DC, and the Border South

Washington, DC, and several border states fell outside of the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 provisions. Some states drafted new constitutions, while others did not.<sup>32</sup> While Black Washingtonians secured the franchise in the federal legislation, the nation’s capital did not undergo the same constitutional process as other southern freedpeople. African American public schools had been inaugurated in the city at the end of the Civil War. The schools were few in number, segregated, and closely administered by white city officials. Over time, the number of public schools increased as a result of the Freedmen’s Bureau, which actively assisted in the creation and incorporation of initially private schools into the city system. Congress and constitutional convention delegates chartered Howard University in 1867. Black Washingtonians benefited from sympathetic and racially progressive mayors and city councilmen, Freedmen’s Bureau agents, an educated Black elite, and white philanthropic allies against those who actively sought to limit African American education and freedom.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Delaware officially ended slavery in 1865 but did not craft a new state constitution. State officials did not extend its public schools to African American children. African American residents responded by organizing and operating a system of tuition-based schools. They pressured officials to pass a series of school laws embraced African American public schools. The 1897 constitution acknowledged African American public schools. But, like most northern public schools, African American parents opted for

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<sup>31</sup> See James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1930* (1935; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Clif Stratton, *Education for Empire: American Schools, Race, and the Paths of Good Citizenship* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016); Jay Winston Driskell Jr., *Schooling Jim Crow: The Fight for Atlanta’s Booker T. Washington High School and the Roots of Black Protest Politics* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 662.

<sup>33</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 661; Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: A History of the Capital, 1800–1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 304–11; Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation’s Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 131–32, 138–39.

private schools in order to minimize the effects of educational discrimination on their children. African American education would become more aligned with other southern states in the Jim Crow constitution.<sup>34</sup>

Kentucky underwent a period of “readjustment,” even though the Freedmen’s Bureau operated in the state.<sup>35</sup> African American Republicans employed their political power and support of the Freedmen’s Bureau for ensuring educational access, especially in the urban centers of Lexington, Louisville, and Frankfort, at Berea College, and at former Freedmen’s Bureau strongholds. They sustained a system of private schools funded by African American financial networks, the Freedmen’s Bureau, and northern philanthropies, while agitating for the extension of civil, social, and educational rights.<sup>36</sup> Part of Camp Nelson endured through Ariel Academy. The school established by John Fee persisted and educated African American children until the formal creation of state-funded public schools. The Kentucky legislature did not establish public schools until 1874, when the Freedmen’s Bureau officially ceased operations. The resulting African American schools were poorly funded and segregated.<sup>37</sup>

Tennessee and Maryland drafted constitutions. Due to the wartime actions of Andrew Johnson, Tennessee was exempt from the Reconstruction Acts. In 1870, however, delegates convened at a state constitutional convention and drafted a new constitution that acknowledged African American education as a right of citizenship.<sup>38</sup> Article XI, section 12, outlined the parameters of the school system, established annual appropriations by state legislature, and created a school fund and a series of taxation for funding public schools. But, in striking contrast with Louisiana and South Carolina, delegates strictly forbade integrated schools and declared that “[n]o school established or aided under this section shall allow white and negro children to be received as scholars together in the same

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<sup>34</sup> Delaware Constitutional Convention. *Debates of the Delaware Convention, for Revising the Constitution of the State, or Adopting a New One; Held at Dover, November, 1831* (Wilmington: Printed and published by S. Harker, 1831); Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 662; Tyack and Lowe, “The Constitutional Moment,” 251; Stephen Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware, Bulletin, 1917, No. 18* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917), 99–107.

<sup>35</sup> Anne E. Marshall, “‘The Rebel Spirit in Kentucky’: The Politics of Readjustment in a Border State, 1865–1868,” in *The Great Task Remaining before Us: Reconstruction as America’s Continuing Civil War*, ed. Paul A. Cimballa and Randall M. Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 59.

<sup>36</sup> Marshall, “The Rebel Spirit in Kentucky,” 65–66; Marion B. Lucas, “Kentucky Blacks: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom,” *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 91 (Autumn 1993): 407–10; William E. Willis, *A History of Education in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 71–76; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 660–61.

<sup>37</sup> Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War’s Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 235–38; Willis, *A History of Education in Kentucky*, 74.

<sup>38</sup> Sam Elliot, “The 1865 Constitutional Amendments and the Return of Civil Government in Tennessee,” *Tennessee Bar Association* 53 (December 2017), <https://www.tba.org/index.cfm?pg=LawBlog&blAction=showEntry&blogEntry=29528>; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 44–45, 413–14.

school.”<sup>39</sup> Ratified in September 1867, the Maryland constitution drafted one of the shortest education articles. The three clauses employed race-neutral language for the expansion of schools to all children, established a school fund, and provided guidance for the conversion of schools operating on the previous anti-Black state system to the new constitutional mandates. Unfortunately, the African American public schools remained underfunded, overcrowded, and in poor condition, in spite of the race-neutral language.<sup>40</sup>

By achieving statehood amid the Civil War, the Constitution of West Virginia declared freedom for all African Americans born after July 4, 1863. By war’s end, abolition had been established through legislative action in January 1865 and later ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment.<sup>41</sup> The state also had repealed former anti-African American literacy laws adopted in the Virginia Code of 1860, including penalties for white educators of Black children.<sup>42</sup> Legislative action, the Freedmen’s Bureau educational efforts, and independent African American schools extended public schooling to African American children as a right of citizenship.<sup>43</sup> The Constitution of 1872 began the retreat from Reconstruction era gains. While ensuring state-funded public schools for white and Black children, West Virginia followed Tennessee’s strict prohibition on integrated schools and declared that “white and colored persons shall not be taught in the same school.”<sup>44</sup> A State Superintendent of Education and a Board of Education administered the school system, distributed appropriate funding, made provisions for select disabled citizens, and supported teaching schools for the development of a teaching force.<sup>45</sup>

Although the new constitutions created a free school system and affirmed state support for African American education, several questions still remained concerning the funding, racial composition, and specifics of the new school system. The new state constitutions charged their respective legislatures with providing for a uniform system of public free schools, and for its gradual, equal, and full implementation by a given date or earlier, if possible. Moving the contentious issue of funding and integration to the legislature allowed

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<sup>39</sup> Tennessee Constitution, 1870, Article XI, section 12, <https://tsla.tnsosfiles.com/digital/teva/transcripts/39417.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Maryland Constitutional Convention, *The Constitution of the State of Maryland, Formed and Adopted by the Convention, Which Assembled at the City of Annapolis, May 8th, 1867, and Adjourned August 17th, 1867. Submitted for Adoption or Rejection by the People, on Wednesday, September 18th, 1867* (Annapolis: G. Colton, printer to the Convention, 1867), Article VIII; Dennis Patrick Halpin, *A Brotherhood of Liberty: Black Reconstruction and Its Legacies in Baltimore, 1865–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 76–77.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen D. Engle, “Mountaineer Reconstruction: Blacks in the Political Reconstruction of West Virginia,” *The Journal of Negro History* 78, No. 3 (Summer 1993): 140.

<sup>42</sup> Engle, “Mountaineer Reconstruction,” 141.

<sup>43</sup> Engle, “Mountaineer Reconstruction,” 147–48.

<sup>44</sup> Engle, “Mountaineer Reconstruction,” 154.

<sup>45</sup> West Virginia Constitution of 1872, Article 12, West Virginia Archives and History, <http://www.wvculture.org/history/government/1872constitution.html>.

for the gradual implementation of the statewide system. Alabama, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Louisiana adopted their respective school systems in 1868. In Virginia, the state system was successfully created and fully implemented on July 11, 1870, more than two years after the constitution was adopted by the convention, one year after it was ratified, and six months after readmission.<sup>46</sup>

During this interim period between ratification and implementation of the schools, local responses included resistance, negotiation, and accommodation. These responses sometimes resulted in experimentation in defining what the biracial system could look like in their respective communities. These variations resulted from specific local conditions and were not merely imposed by the state and federal political mandates.

Rather than signaling the demise of the African American schooling, the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 mandated constitutions that ushered in a new phase of African American education by creating new opportunities, new partners in state and local officials, and new challenges. The implementation process was no less contentious than the creation of the new constitutional mandates. African Americans and their white allies now dealt with competing visions for ensuring the meaningful implementation of state-funded public schools with their new state and local government partners as well as northern philanthropies who remained devoted to African American education. Moreover, African Americans needed to convince those white southerners who remained bitterly opposed to the new racially inclusive educational system. African Americans and their white allies understood that implementation required new partnerships, resilience, and revised protest strategies. Otherwise, the new rights of citizenship defined by the African American public schoolhouse would become a lost opportunity.

These Reconstruction Acts of 1867 constitutions created the pathways to state-funded public schools and set the tone for growth and activism. By understanding the initial provisions, this chapter provides a useful baseline for understanding this latter period culminating with the Blair Bill of 1890. The remaining chapters will critically assess the second phase of Reconstruction era schools for African American children.

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<sup>46</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 653–60; For a discussion of the state legislative debates in Richmond, see Knight, *Reconstruction and Education in Virginia*, 15; Taylor, “Solving the Problem of Education,” 388; William Preston Vaughn, *Schools for All: The Blacks and Public Education in the South, 1865–1877* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974), 73; J. N. Brenaman, *A History of Virginia Conventions* (Richmond: J. L. Hill Printing Company, 1902), 78–79; Charles William Dabney, *Universal Education in the South*, vol. 1 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 173–74, 318, 417.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# New Opportunities and Challenges: African American Educators and School Board Officials in State-Funded African American Public Schools

In 1887, Reverend George Elliott addressed an audience of African American educators in Selma, Alabama. He reminded them that “you are the shapers of thought and the molders of sentiment, not of this age and of this generation alone, but of ages and generations to come.”<sup>1</sup> Elliott recognized their role in the fight for quality public schools when reminding them, “You are making history by those you teach.” As the “few that are molding the masses,” Elliott praised them for their work and pushed them to continue teaching and helping sustain the educational advancement of African American children enrolled in public schools. African American teachers played a unique role in their respective communities; however, they remained at the heart of political debates over African American education since the creation of state-funded public schools.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the benefits of African American educators espoused by Elliott, southern white school boards determined their hiring, firing, and conditions under which they served. In the political fight over Black teachers in the public schools, Danial B. Williams got caught in the fray when he advocated for better treatment for the teachers and students from his white principal, who resented his placement as principal of an African American school and not a more prestigious white public school. The Richmond Colored Normal graduate faced “insubordination and mutinous conduct” charges that threatened the continuation of his employment. The Richmond School Board suspended Williams without pay, forced him to reapply for his teaching appointment, but never rehired him. A casualty of the Richmond School Board politics, Williams later trained future educators as a professor at Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute. African American parents and

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Fairclough, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Fairclough, *Teaching Equality*, 1–3.



activists saw Williams's removal from the Richmond Public Schools as another justification for their continued activism for African American teachers, principals, and African American representation on the Richmond School Board.<sup>3</sup>

These historical examples demonstrate the various forces shaping African American public schools and ongoing activism following the creation of state-funded public schools. The introduction of state and local governments as partners brought new opportunities and growth but also setbacks. By demanding quality public schools, African American parents, leaders, and activists advanced four demands: the hiring of African American teachers and administrators, school board representation, additional well-equipped accommodations, and equitable funding. In short, this multipronged effort sought sustainability so that future generations of African Americans would have access to the African American public schoolhouse, a direct role in the decision-making process regarding school operations, and robust educational offerings from primary to collegiate and professional schools. This chapter focuses on two components of the activism surrounding the early African American public schools: equitable hiring of African American teachers, with the goal of African American teaching staffs, and African American representation on local school boards.

## Implementing Normal School to Classroom Pipelines

African American communities capitalized on early normal schools (teacher training programs) and HBCUs in their campaign for employing African American teachers in the regional public schools. African Americans found success in this endeavor. The normal school to classroom pipeline addressed the teacher shortage crisis generated by the creation of state-funded public schools. Without enough qualified teachers, the system of white and African American public schools would flounder. As a result, the teacher pipeline expanded beyond private normal programs, independent African American sustained schools, and early HBCUs established during the Freedmen's Bureau school era to include an array of teacher training programs funded by private, city, state, and even federal sources by the turn of the twentieth century. As a result, African American schoolchildren benefited from African American teachers, increasing educational access, and expanded

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<sup>3</sup> February 26, 1883, Meeting, Minutes, printed pages 76–77, and March 5, 1883, Meeting, Minutes, printed page 87, Minutes of City School Board, box 1, Daniel Barclay Williams Papers, Special Collection & University Archives, Lindsay and Montague Hall, Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia; Daniel B. Williams, *Freedom and Progress and Other Choice Addresses on Practical, Scientific, Educational, Philosophic, Historic, and Religious Subjects* (Petersburg: Daniel B. Williams, 1890), 8.



socioeconomic opportunities. By persisting into the Jim Crow era, southern African American communities and their networks helped to cement African American public schools as a sustainable institution.

While African Americans had served in high administrative positions during the Freedmen's School era, African American activists and their white allies proved less successful in their fight for representation on local school boards. School boards wielded power over the hiring, distribution of funding, and prioritizing of repairs and school construction. Direct African American representation thus threatened the hardening racial hierarchies over the 1870s and 1880s. A few communities experienced brief success by having either integrated school board members or entire school boards and/or trustees responsible for decision-making in the schools. Most communities, however, remained shut out of these political positions. All developed alternate strategies for influencing school board affairs and the education of African American children.

The training and employment of African American teachers originated in the Freedmen's Bureau era. Several normal programs and colleges opened before southern states became partners in African American education. An 1867 Congressional charter established Howard University. Named after O. O. Howard, the institution offered normal training and additional advanced curricula. Students had the option to enter into collegiate, theological, law, medical, and/or agricultural departments according to the 1867 charter of the Washington, DC, institution. Howard University quickly became a "premier place" of higher education and encouraged the opening and growth of M Street High School in the city. When the M Street High School opened in 1870, the school attracted children from leading Black Washington families.<sup>4</sup> The Freedmen's Bureau had a more direct role in the opening of several schools. After Clinton B. Fisk of the Tennessee Freedmen's Bureau donated a former military barracks, the American Missionary Association opened the Fisk School in January 1866 before expanding to Fisk University in 1867. General Samuel Armstrong, a Freedmen's Bureau agent, and the American Missionary Association opened Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute. Armstrong's influence, educational philosophy, and curriculum attracted Booker T. Washington, who was among the school's early students.<sup>5</sup>

Churches and northern associations also played a significant role. For instance, North Carolina saw the opening of Shaw Collegiate Institute by the Baptist Church, St. Augustine Normal School by the Episcopal Church, and Biddle Memorial Institute

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<sup>4</sup> "An Act to Incorporate 'The Howard University' in the District of Columbia," Howard University Digital Collections, <https://www2.howard.edu/sites/default/files/howardu-consumerinfo-charter-140812.pdf>; Treva B. Lindsey, *Colored No More: Reinventing Black Womanhood in Washington, D.C.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 28–29; Kenneth Alphonso Mitchell, "The Story of Dunbar High School: How Students from the First Public High School for Black Students in the United States Influenced America," Master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2018, 5–7.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*, 36–44, 135; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 144–45.

(currently Johnson C. Smith University) by the Presbyterian Church between 1865 and 1870.<sup>6</sup> After teaching in the slave refugee camps of the South Carolina lowcountry and Freedmen's Bureau schools in Norfolk, Virginia, Harriet Buss, a white Massachusetts educator, taught at present-day Shaw University in its formative years. Based on her published letters of correspondence, Buss cultivated educated citizens and leaders from the wartime school era to early HBCUs, essential to sustaining the new system of state-funded public schools.<sup>7</sup>

African American religious denominations also established essential teaching programs. The African Methodist Episcopal Church, for instance, established Allen University in South Carolina, Payne College and Morris Brown University in Georgia, and others. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church opened Livingstone College in North Carolina. These early normal programs and colleges were an extension of the Freedmen's Schools. Northern religious and philanthropic organizations, Freedmen's Bureau agents, and African American communities sought the expansion and sustainability of African American education. With the creation of the state-funded public schools, these existing programs provided the early public schools with well-educated, qualified candidates who could serve throughout the region.

Mississippi offered an array of schools that contributed to the normal school classroom pipeline. A former plantation served as the campus for Tougaloo University. The American Missionary Association purchased five hundred acres of the former Boddie Plantation in 1869. Its normal department secured state recognition with a state charter in 1871, and the school supplied educators for the Mississippi public schools. Former Senator Hiram Revels served as the first president of Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College (currently Alcorn State University). This school also benefitted from the First Morrill Act funds in its establishment. Tougaloo, Alcorn, and other schools ensured expanded curricular options for African American children and ensured that qualified African American educators served in the public schools in the state.<sup>8</sup>

Two South Carolina institutions led the way in both teacher training but also integrated educational learning for a brief period before Jim Crow segregation ended the biracial educational experience until desegregation. From its founding, Claflin University educated men and women "regardless of race, complexion, or religious opinion." While African American students enrolled in greater numbers than their white counterparts, Claflin received state funding through the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 and represented

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<sup>6</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*, 36–44, 135; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 144–45.

<sup>7</sup> See Jonathan White and Lydia Davis, eds., *My Work Among the Freedmen: The Civil War and Reconstruction Letters of Harriet M. Buss* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Frederick Humphries, "1890 Land-Grant Institutions: Their Struggle for Survival and Equality," *Agricultural History* 65 (Spring 1991): 3; John W. Davis, "The Negro Land-Grant College," *Journal of Negro Education* 2 (July 1933): 314–15.

one of the few integrated teacher training programs until the rewriting of the Reconstruction era South Carolina constitution.<sup>9</sup> The University of South Carolina, as shown by historians Tyler Parry and Katherine Reynolds Chaddock, not only accepted Black students but employed Richard T. Greener as its first African American professor. The state constitution of 1868 mandated the desegregation of the flagship institution, but the implementation process of the new state constitutional mandates had been stalled until 1873. Between 1873 and 1877, white and Black men studied together at the South Carolina flagship institution. While Claflin and the University of South Carolina proved to be outliers, the enrolled students benefited from the education and obtained teaching positions throughout the state and region.<sup>10</sup>

These teacher-training institutions, such as these Fisk, Hampton, Storer, and Tougaloo, addressed a crucial question raised by the creation of public schools in the Reconstruction constitutions: Who will teach African American students in the new state system? The normal programs developed by these institutions prepared students to meet the stringent hiring requirements of the state school systems, such as educational degrees, annual tests, and character references. Teacher training programs also cultivated future educators who would join the ranks of postbellum African American leaders advocating for equality, educational opportunities, and civil rights. In turn, normal students accept the dual mission of their respective institutions through attendance, graduation, and teaching upon graduation, whether in public schools, private schools, or as missionaries abroad. They often accepted additional duties. Booker T. Washington discusses how early Tuskegee students built campus buildings, learned printmaking, and other self-sufficient skills that might be called upon in rural school districts. Fairfield Institute students embarked on an international fundraising tour by performing slave spirituals, selling a souvenir songbook, and even sitting for a professional Philadelphia photography studio for souvenir carte de visites. The proceeds greatly helped the Winnsboro, South Carolina, institution. Overall, normal students embraced the dual mission of the postbellum higher educational institutions and prepared for their entry into middle-class leadership that shaped both postbellum classrooms and communities.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> E. Horace Fitchett, "The Claflin College Graduate and the Community," *Negro History Bulletin* 8 (October 1944): 9–11; Davis, "The Negro Land-Grant College," 314–15, 317; JBHE Foundation Inc., "The Tradition of White Presidents at Black Colleges," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Summer 1997): 93–95.

<sup>10</sup> Tyler D. Parry, "The Radical Experiment of South Carolina: The History and Legacy of a Reconstructed University," *Journal of African American History* 105 (September 2020): 543–59; Katherine Reynolds Chaddock, *Uncompromising Activist: Richard Greener, First Black Graduate of Harvard College* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017), 46–63.

<sup>11</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1901), 106–76; Christine Rutledge, *Spirituelle: Unwritten Songs of South Carolina, Sung by the Carolina Singers during the Campaigns in the North, 1872–1873* (Philadelphia: L. Acker, Printer, 1873); Hovey, Carolina Singers (Fairfield Normal Institute), carte-de-visite, 1873.

This activist spirit as well as corps of trained African American educators dovetailed with the grassroots and regionwide “Colored Teachers for Colored Schools” campaigns. The employment of African American teachers arose out of district hiring practices following the closure of the Freedmen’s Schools. Urban districts saw the displacement, the firing of, and other restrictions placed on the employment of African American teachers. The majority of urban school districts required that all applicants, regardless of race, take a placement exam. Instead of hiring qualified African Americans, school boards filled most, if not all, of the schools with white applicants whose test scores disqualified them for a position in a white public school. Qualified African Americans then competed for positions at a few schools and/or to become assistants to the principal white teacher employed. These common employment policies made race and not testing aptitude the main prerequisite for teaching in the public schools. In most instances, officials maintained a degree of transparency in the process. Board members published announcements regarding the annual examinations, lists of the candidates selected, and the final appointments in the city’s newspapers. In rural districts, nepotism, patronage, and the whims of local elites led to the hiring of unqualified white educators who had close ties with local authorities over qualified African American applicants. Displaced from urban school districts, many African Americans educators endured low pay, poor facilities, limited classroom materials, and difficult racial climates. Death, the marriage of female educators, or voluntary resignations during and at the end of the school year yielded some opportunities for the hiring of additional African American teachers. For the majority of African American children attending the public schools, however, these hiring practices meant that they were more likely to be educated by a white teacher rather than an African American teacher.<sup>12</sup>

The placement of white teachers in the African American schools contributed to varying school experiences. Some schools had former Freedmen’s School educators who remained committed to African American education. In Mississippi, the significant lack of educators meant that state and local government officials continued to employ white and Black educators from northern philanthropies who operated schools during the Freedmen’s School era. Some of the white educators proved to be effective teachers. While these individuals may not have been racial progressives as the former Freedmen’s School educators, they took their job seriously in order to obtain subsequent placement in a white public school. Students, parents, and community leaders had few complaints about hiring practices but still desired African American teachers so that children could benefit from seeing teaching as a viable career from African American role models.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 173–75; Link, *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 31–34.

<sup>13</sup> Richmond, Virginia, *Annual Statistical Reports of the City of Richmond, 1872–1877*, Richmond Public Library, Richmond, Virginia; Maria Waterbury, *Seven Years among the Freedmen* (Chicago: T. B. Arnold, 1893), 93–98; Kurt J. Wolf, “Laura M. Towne and the Freed People of South Carolina, 1862–1901,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 98 (October 1997): 399–404, Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse*, 131–32.

Unfortunately, many African American communities endured inferior and often hostile white teachers. Since these individuals initially did not qualify for teaching positions in the white public schools, they often resented their students and any complaints received from parents and community leaders. Under these educators, student scholastic success, as measured by semiannual test scores and promotion rates, was lower than in classrooms staffed by African American teachers and white educators who viewed their classroom duties as more than collecting a paycheck. As a result, the timing and nature of the activism of African American schoolteachers depended on their experiences in the schools. The eradication of inferior white teachers and fairer hiring policies were initial campaign goals. Scholar Adam Fairclough has characterized their campaign as a forerunner to the twentieth-century community control campaigns by insisting on African American educators and local normal training options to serve their communities.<sup>14</sup>

African American activists employed petitioning over boycotts and other more aggressive protest strategies in their “Colored Teachers for Colored Schools” campaigns. Recognizing the need to maintain white recognition as well as school funding, African Americans crafted petitions in mass meetings that began with elaborate statements in which individuals thanked the school officials for their generosity in sustaining the public schools before listing their demands. In Richmond, several African American ministers presented a petition asking “as a matter of justice to us, as citizens of this Commonwealth to give us a more equitable proportion of teachers and principals in the colored schools of the city of Richmond.” Beyond Richmond, African Americans petitioned school board officials in Mobile, Atlanta, and throughout the entire urban South. Their pleas initially went unheard. As the number of normal school graduates increased, African American activists received their support and crafted convincing arguments that slowly swayed obstinate school politicians.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, African American activists paved the way for the employment of Spelman College graduates in rural and urban schools across Georgia and the entire South. Over 80 percent of the school’s early graduates found employment at public schools and state normal schools. In Atlanta, community activism over the 1870s facilitated the employment of many Spelman College graduates. Irrespective of locality, Spelman-trained educators

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<sup>14</sup> Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 173–74; Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse*, 132–33; Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 65–67; Adam Fairclough, *Teaching Equality*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Howard Rabinowitz, “Half a Loaf: The Shift from White to Black Teachers in the Negro Schools of the Urban South, 1865–1890,” *Journal of Southern History* 40, no. 4 (November 1974): 579–80; September 18, 1878, Meeting Minutes, *Records of the Board of School Commissioners for Mobile County, Minutes, 1871–1887*, Mobile County Public School System, Barton Academy, Mobile, Alabama.



brought the “Spelman Ideal” of Christian respectability into rural and urban classrooms. They viewed their promotion of “moral education as part of their work for social welfare, community uplift, and ultimately, social justice.”<sup>16</sup>

The regional success of the early normal programs and direct action convinced state public school administrators to establish and fund teacher pipelines in their respective states. Kentucky State Normal for Colored Persons is one example. Efforts began in Louisville. Ely Normal School in Louisville attempted to ensure a qualified teacher to classroom pipeline. It was a collaborative effort of northern missionary associations, the Freedmen’s Bureau, and the African American community in Louisville. The two-story structure was constructed in 1867, dedicated in 1868, and staffed by African American teachers.<sup>17</sup> Despite the existence of the successful Ely Normal, Kentucky Colored State Teachers Association members, Baptist churches, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction campaigned for the creation of a state-funded normal school. Instead of state government officials, African American Baptists heeded their call and opened the Kentucky Normal and Theological Institute in 1879. Changing its name to the State Colored Baptist University in 1884, the Louisville school guaranteed “each state senator to send one ‘proper equipped student’ from his district at state expense.”<sup>18</sup> In 1886, these private efforts prompted the formal creation of the Kentucky State Normal School (currently Kentucky State University) in Frankfort. Similar activism and an encouraging political climate contributed to the opening of the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (currently Virginia State University) in Petersburg. Alabama legislators established the State Normal School in Huntsville in 1874 and Tuskegee Institute in 1881. Louisiana legislators established Southern University in 1881. The passage of the Second Morrill Act solidified the grassroots efforts at the federal level. The majority of the African American colleges and universities created from this federal legislation included teacher programs whose graduates found employment in southern public schools. In short, the normal school to public school classroom pipeline helped cement the African American public schools into the lasting legacy of Reconstruction.<sup>19</sup>

The Second Morrill Act of 1890 had a major impact in states without strong grassroots activism, significant Black politicians, or state support. The federal legislation contributed to the opening of West Virginia Colored Institute (currently West Virginia State

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<sup>16</sup> Sarah H. Case, *Leaders of Their Race: Educating Black and White Women in the New South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 109, 111–12.

<sup>17</sup> Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760–1891* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 2003), 238–239.

<sup>18</sup> John A. Hardin, *Fifty Years of Segregation: Black Higher Education in Kentucky, 1904–1954* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 3–4.

<sup>19</sup> Hardin, *Fifty Years of Segregation*, 5; Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 68–69; Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 140–42.



University) in 1891 and Bluefield Colored Institute (1895). Without this funding, Storer College would have remained the only teacher training option in the state for several years. The curriculum fully prepared students to teach or pursue advanced degrees at another institution.<sup>20</sup> In Delaware, the State College for Colored Students (currently Delaware State University) opened for the training of African American teachers in 1891. Prior to the creation of this program, African American students enrolled in the normal programs offered at the Howard School in Wilmington or left the state for training at regional HBCUs. Upon its opening in 1887, the State Normal College for Colored Students (currently Florida A&M University) received federal funding and became a Florida land-grant institution for African American children. Georgia State Industrial College (currently Savannah State University) opened in 1891 with five professors and eight students. North Carolina A&T University accompanied other state normal programs established in Elizabeth City, Winston Salem, and Fayetteville, along with other private existing programs throughout the state. These new teacher-certificate programs ensured that African American children received an education from African American educators.<sup>21</sup>

Several existing schools were converted into land-grant schools. Maryland devised a unique contract between the eastern shore Princess Anne Academy and Morgan College in Baltimore as its land-grant institution for African American students. The Tennessee state legislature paid its federal monies to Knoxville College, a private school, until creating an African American school in Nashville during the Jim Crow school era.<sup>22</sup> In many instances, these schools neither received the total amount of the federal appropriations nor experienced equitable funding as their white counterparts. Yet, these schools predominantly supplied teachers for southern public schools. The pipeline to segregated public schools remained critical. Graduates of these land-grant institutions, like other institutions, easily secured employment once attaining normal school certificates.<sup>23</sup>

The pipeline existed in every southern state. This brief survey demonstrates the scope of diversity of institutions and how African American public schools benefited from the employment the qualified teachers. Some of these institutions remain important sites of

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<sup>20</sup> John D. Sink, "Public Policy and America's Land-Grant Educational Enterprise: The Unique West Virginia Experience," *Journal of Negro Education* 64 (Winter 1995): 10–12; Vivian Verdell Gordon, "A History of Storer College, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia," *Journal of Negro Education* 30 (Autumn 1961): 445–49; Terry, "Reading the *Storer Record*," 123–30.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware, Bulletin, 1917, No. 18* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917), 104; John R. Wennersten, "The Travail of Black Land-Grant Schools in the South, 1890–1917," *Agricultural History* 65 (Spring 1991): 54, 59; United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1902* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1903), 2090; "The Tradition of White Presidents at Black Colleges," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 16 (Summer 1997): 95.

<sup>22</sup> Davis, "The Negro Land-Grant College," 315; Wennersten, "The Travail of Black Land-Grant Schools in the South, 1890–1917," 56.

<sup>23</sup> Wennersten, "The Travail of Black Land-Grant Schools in the South, 1890–1917," 58–62; Carolyn B. Brooks and Alan I. Marcus, "The Morrill Mandate and a New Moral Mandate," *Agricultural History* 89 (Spring 2015): 248–49.

higher education in the present; others have since closed. Their historic impact is noteworthy. This public school pipeline, moreover, survived the Jim Crow era school changes. These normal schools, colleges, and universities remained the main source of teachers serving the African American public schools.<sup>24</sup> James Anderson has characterized the schools into four categories: land-grant and state normal schools; public high schools and city normal schools; private colleges; and private institutions providing secondary and normal curriculum. Without these schools, the state-funded system could not be sustained or expanded. While the administrators, legislators, and philanthropists quibbled over the curriculum, they knew that African American schools could not exist without this essential pipeline created and sustained throughout Reconstruction. Educators continued to retain community influence and accounted for a significant portion of the professions represented in the African American middle class until the end of the Jim Crow school era.<sup>25</sup>

## The Fight for School Board Representation

School board representation was another concern addressed. From the start of state-funded public schools, southern African Americans struggled to have an active role in the decision-making process regarding the city schools. While nepotism and political patronage had a role, the power wielded by school board officials made it extremely difficult for African Americans who sought school governance reform. Owing to a lack of direct representation, African Americans heavily relied upon their networks with white allies during the course of the decade. For instance, Ralza M. Manly, the former Superintendent of Education of the Freedmen's Bureau in Virginia, served as an essential ally by ensuring that the African American community's specific educational concerns and petitions received the school board's full attention rather than being dismissed outright. Charles Schaeffer, a former Freedmen's Bureau agent in Montgomery County, Virginia, continued to advocate for African American public schools with local school boards and northern philanthropists. Through these relationships, African Americans secured a voice in shaping decisions pertaining to school operations. Yet they still sought more agency.<sup>26</sup>

Activists also turned to a cadre of local African-American politicians. Using their electoral power, they encouraged individuals to campaign during school board elections. In Mobile, Alabama, residents hoped that Lawrence S. Berry and John Carraway, senior African American politicians active following the passage of the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, would run during the 1871 school board elections. However, both men died before

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<sup>24</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*, 110–12.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*, 113–15; Fairclough, *Teaching Equality*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Brooks Smith and Wayne Dementi, *Facts and Legends of the Hills of Richmond* (Manakin-Sabot, VA: Dement Publishing, 2008), 18–20; Thorp, *Facing Freedom*, 141.

the election. During the 1873 school board elections, they tried encouraging educator W. Irving Squire and others to run for office but to no avail. Some communities proved more successful in locating willing candidates in other southern districts. Their efforts often came to naught. African American electoral power often proved insufficient in bringing radical change. School board members “were carefully chosen” among local elites whose influence—race, class, family, political affiliation, and religious denomination—mattered.<sup>27</sup>

Few districts secured direct African American school board representation through either elections or patronage appointments. From 1868 to 1871, James W. Hood oversaw the state operations as the Assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction for North Carolina. Charleston proved to be the exception in regularly employing African American school commissioners until the 1876 election of Wade Hampton. Alfred Menefre served on the Nashville School Board in 1868. Holland Thompson represented African American educational interests from 1870 to 1873. William Syphax and George F. T. Cook ensured the M Street Preparatory School and other city schools retained their reputation for excellence. The Readjuster movement contributed to brief success in Richmond and other districts across Virginia. For a brief period, African Americans living in the former capital of the Confederacy had Richard Forrester and Captain Robert A. Paul directly representing their educational interests in 1883. Limited to primarily urban school districts, these political victories encouraged African Americans to persist in their efforts.<sup>28</sup>

Delaware state officials’ creation of a separate, segregated school for African American children yielded unique opportunities for African American control over day-to-day school operations. Through legislative acts in 1873 and 1875, the Delaware Association for the Moral Improvement and Education of the Colored People served as an independent Board of Education, with its actuary’s powers and activities mirroring the role of the white Superintendent of Education in charge over the entire statewide system. Local communities devised parallel school board trustees for maintaining the schools, received funds from the Delaware Education Association, and submitted regular reports. The actuary submitted annual reports of enrollments and other statistical information captured in the US Department of Education and Delaware State Board of Education until the state formally incorporated the African American schools within one single system. Since the state did not prioritize African American public schools, the Delaware Association and local

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<sup>27</sup> Fitzgerald, *Urban Emancipation*, 129, 169; W. Irving Squire to E. M. Cravath, December 16, 1872, microfilm roll 3, AMA Papers-Alabama; Link, *A Hard Country*, 27, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 529–30; Bernard Powers Jr., “Community Evolution and Race Relations in Reconstruction Charleston, South Carolina,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 101 (July 2000): 227–29; Mitchell, “The Story of Dunbar High,” 5–11; Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 178.

communities wielded incredible power unparalleled elsewhere in the region. African Americans had direct control and representation over the state and local school boards for the public schools.<sup>29</sup>

Between 1876 and 1891, Mr. Henry C. Conrad oversaw the entire state system of African American schools. His annual reports make it possible “to trace the steps by which the work was gradually taken over by the State.”<sup>30</sup> During his tenure, the number of schools increased across the state from twenty-five to almost one hundred schools. He coordinated the hiring of teachers and fundraising efforts to address the expenses not covered by the limited state funding received for teacher salaries and repairs while urging the state for additional funding. He inspected the various schools as would white Superintendents of Education. The power wielded by Conrad placed the schools on firm footing but also contributed to his elimination and closure of the Education Association.<sup>31</sup> As the state increased its funding, white county school boards complained over the power and autonomy of Conrad and the members of separate Black school boards. They resented having to work with African American school board members and the actuary as co-educational partners. By placing the “entire management, control, and supervision of the colored schools” under the control of country superintendents, the 1891 school law ended this monument of community control and African American leadership at the state and local school boards.<sup>32</sup>

The political climate encouraged the existence of African American school board trustees in Kentucky. African American activists secured a victory in terms of direct African American representation in the day-to-day operations of the public schools. The 1874 school law “instructed white county school commissioners to draw educational districts and to appoint three Black trustees with nominal administrative powers in each district, but it left ‘final’ authority with county officials.”<sup>33</sup> This provision formalized previous work of grassroots organizations and empowered African American communities who felt ignored by the state by giving them a seat at the table. Their activism succeeded by normalizing the presence of African Americans administrators in the day-to-day operations of the

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<sup>29</sup> Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware*, 99–102.

<sup>30</sup> Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware*, 102–3.

<sup>31</sup> Delaware Department of Instruction, *Superintendent of Free Schools for the Year Ending December 31, 1886* (Middletown: Freeman and Weber, 1887), 57–58; Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware*, 103–4.

<sup>32</sup> Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware*, 105–6.

<sup>33</sup> Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 255.

African American public schools.<sup>34</sup> In each district, the three African American school trustees maintained the same role and power as white school board trustees. They selected educators, submitted annual reports and other records, and oversaw the African American school in their respective school district. In short, the 1874 school law created a parallel system that yielded additional opportunities for African Americans as in Delaware and Richmond, Virginia. In their capacity, the number of schools, teachers, and enrollments increased, as did the geographic spread of the school system under the leadership of three African American trustees. They also sustained the efforts for securing additional funding and other reforms in their reports. Building on pre-1874 school activism, school trustees in urban areas, such as Louisville, Lexington, Covington, Maysville, and Catlettsburg, became important allies in subsequent struggles for quality and equitable public schools.<sup>35</sup>

Overall, African Americans proved less successful in obtaining school board positions across the region. While African Americans regularly sought appointments to the school board, racial fears thwarted their efforts. For white southerners, it proved too much to have African American men in control over decisions pertaining to the education of white children, the employment of white teachers, and distributing white taxpayers' contributions to their respective public schools. As a result, African American parents, community leaders, and activists relied on their white allies on the school board. They employed petitioning and other strategies honed since emancipation. They even used their electoral power to secure more racially progressive school officials until local political conditions proved more advantageous. Unfortunately, these gains would not occur until after the modern civil rights movement.

The public school system created opportunities for stable economic futures and expanded curricular options. African American educators' presence in the classroom became normalized as a consequence of the state constitutional mandates. Since their employment did not disrupt power relations, African Americans were tolerated in these positions. In contrast, administrative and school board positions proved too much across the region. African Americans saw little growth in this regard. Thus they collectively celebrated the few gains achieved while hoping for future possibilities.

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<sup>34</sup> Marion B. Lucas, "Kentucky Blacks: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 91 (Autumn 1993): 407–10, 415; Anne E. Marshall, "'The Rebel Spirit in Kentucky': The Politics of Readjustment in a Border State, 1865–1868," in *The Great Task Remaining Before Us: Reconstruction as America's Continuing Civil War*, ed. Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 65–66; William E. Willis, *A History of Education in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 71–76.

<sup>35</sup> Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 232–35, 241–42, 255.





## CHAPTER FIVE

# New Opportunities and Continued Challenges: Accommodations, Funding, and Quality Public Schools

**I**n the 1886 annual report for the Department of Education, a common refrain appeared throughout the reprinted reports received from school commissioners working in southern states. In discussing the African American schools, a Delaware official noted, “Complaint is still heard of opposition to the school tax in many localities, and every tax is promptly collected the funds are not equal to the necessities of the case.”<sup>1</sup> From Delaware to Virginia to Georgia, the state school funds created for the maintenance of the African American public schools remained inadequate. Moreover, the reports revealed a need for well-equipped schoolhouses. While the cities and towns met this challenge, the federal educational commissioner concluded that the combined effect of poor funding and lack of facilities made it difficult to attract African American teachers in the rural school districts “which, with their short terms, miserable schoolhouses, and utter lack of appliances, offer no inducement to competent teachers.”<sup>2</sup> From funding to school accommodations, the federal report showed the progress made but also the ongoing problems affecting the southern African American public schools.

This chapter explores African American activism for well-resourced facilities and equitable and sufficient funding necessary for the operating of quality African American public schools over the first two decades of state-funded public schools. The expansion of educational access required the construction of new facilities for white and Black children. Since African American children utilized the public schools more than their white counterparts, they had to cope with overcrowding, half-day sessions, and even limited to no access to public schooling on account of a lack of actual seats. African Americans and their remaining white allies demanded additional and well-resourced facilities located within their respective neighborhoods. As tax-paying citizens, they used a variety of strategies and tactics to secure equitable salaries, the construction of new fully equipped facilities and repairs, but also the pragmatic recognition that all of their demands required funding. With

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1884–1885* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1886), 75.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1884–1885*, 75.

the national economic crises, southern African Americans and their allies increasingly turned to the federal government for relief. The failed passage of the Blair Educational Bill, however, forced them to reassess the previous twenty-five years of growth in African American education and contend with the new realities posed by the emergence of Jim Crow segregation.

## Constructing Well-Equipped School Facilities

School accommodations were another aspect of the quality campaign objective. The campaign centered upon several realities. First, the system lacked a sufficient number of schools to accommodate the African-American school-aged population, especially in cities. The 1870 Federal Census reported a large number of African Americans between the ages of ten and twenty-one years who could not write. Since these individuals were unable to write, theoretically they did not attend the public schools. Throughout the decade, average school attendance increased but failed to capture the majority of the school census population. While some parents enrolled their children in private schools, the existing African American public schools simply could not handle the school census population across the entire region, both in the urban and rural South. Activists focused their energies on decreasing rates of illiteracy by increasing the number of seats in the classrooms and actual physical facilities.<sup>3</sup>

At the start of the decade, African Americans began petitioning the school board for schools within or easily accessible to their residential neighborhoods. When their petitions went unfulfilled, residents often established private schools sustained by tuition dollars and community funds. To be sure, private schools offered an alternative to the public schools. During the 1870s, ministers, married female educators, and even public schoolteachers wishing to supplement their household incomes operated schools out of their homes or local churches. The schools operated by African Americans thrived as parents sought less crowded school accommodations, advanced curriculum, and African American teachers. The American Missionary Association and other former Freedmen's School agencies also maintained private schools. Tuition costs, however, prevented private schools from being a viable option for the majority of African Americans not enrolled in the public schools.<sup>4</sup> Recognizing that private schools could not address the needs of the majority, parents, community leaders, and other activists pointed to these schools as indicative of the school district officials' negligence in providing school accommodations. If the district provided a sufficient number of schools, they reasoned that the private

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<sup>3</sup> US Census Bureau, *Ninth Census, Volume 1: The Statistics of the Population of the United States, June 1, 1870* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), 443; Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 170–72; Green, *Educational Reconstruction*, 116–18.

schools would no longer be necessary and public school enrollment would increase. Rather than thwarting their efforts, African Americans used the private schools in their arguments for expanding and improving the conditions of the public schools.

School board policies also influenced the campaign. The early years of African American public schools saw the phasing out of African American churches as public schools in the urban South. Instead of renting Ebenezer Church, Asbury Chapel, and other churches in Richmond, school officials converted the older Lancasterian School and other school buildings formerly used for the education of white children for African American children.<sup>5</sup> This policy posed several problems. Older facilities were located in preexisting neighborhoods that were not always accessible to the targeted populations. The buildings also had a set limit on the number of students who could possibly enroll. Some schools, especially in Mississippi, proved unsalvageable for use as African American schools. The problems associated with the use of older accommodations influenced the activism of African Americans living in Richmond, Raleigh, Montgomery, Nashville, and Atlanta. Their efforts, as noted by one scholar, entailed a “second-taxing.” Rather than waiting, African Americans paid “for the construction of their own school buildings.”<sup>6</sup> New school construction proved costly and subsequently slow to occur in small towns and rural districts. These school districts, such as Montgomery, Pittsylvania, and Prince William Counties, Virginia, and Montgomery, Alabama, continued their reliance on rentals and retrofitting until new facilities could be constructed or purchased in order to educate the increasing number of children attending the public schools.<sup>7</sup> These policies never alleviated the problem. Classrooms overflowed with students as existing buildings barely accommodated the African American students who regularly attended. This reality forced administrators to turn away potential public school students.

While the Superintendents of Education and administrators regularly recommended additional school accommodations, financial difficulties rendered promises of new school facilities into empty statements. African American children received buildings formerly occupied by the white schools while the white children received new school facilities. African American children were subjected to controversial half-day sessions as a response to African American activism for increased school accommodations and accessibility. While increasing access, this district-wide policy shortened the school day, increased the workloads of teachers and principals, and primarily affected African American children

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<sup>5</sup> Green, *Educational Reconstruction*, 115.

<sup>6</sup> Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 108–11; Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse*, 128–29; Driskell, *Schooling Jim Crow*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Thorp, *Facing Freedom*, 142–44; Link, *A Hard Country*, 28–29; Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 167.

and not white children attending the public schools.<sup>8</sup> These policy attempts never fully addressed the lack of accessible public schools. The capacity of school facilities remained inadequate in accommodating the number of students seeking a public school education. Enrolled public school students still endured overcrowded conditions. In addition to shortened school days, rural districts often experienced shortened school years. Such promises, policy attempts, and racial disparities demonstrated to African American activists that neither their desires for quality African American public schools nor their desires to increase educational access after the Freedmen's Schools were a priority to their new government partners. Hence, African American activism continued in earnest.<sup>9</sup>

The struggle for school accommodations reflects the strength of African American educational networks and financial capacity to persist without strong local and state government partners in Delaware. State officials were not committed to African American public schools as a right of citizenship. As will be discussed later in this chapter, no state funding was allocated in the early 1880s. Yet this did not stop African Americans from using private homes, churches, community spaces, and schoolhouses constructed by the community. The payment of rentals, repairs, and construction came directly from African Americans organized in the Delaware Association for the Moral Improvement and Education of the Colored People. Following the departure of the Freedmen's Bureau, African Americans initially operated eighteen schools in 1872. The number of schools gradually increased to twenty-five schools across the state by 1876.<sup>10</sup> Within a decade, seventy-three schools operated across the state. State appropriations contributed to additional schoolhouses, but African Americans still contributed additional money for repairs and equipping the schools with appropriate school supplies. The 1891 school law ended the need for African Americans to secure their own schoolhouses by placing the "entire management, control, and supervision of the colored schools" under the control of country superintendents.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, African American activists achieved greater educational access with the additional public schools and better school accommodations. African American parents and community leaders effectively used petitions, student withdrawal, and community support of the private schools as strategies. Over the second full decade of public schools, improvements occurred with the opening of new school facilities. Alabama saw the

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<sup>8</sup> For African-American responses, see "New Private Schools to be Established," *Virginia Star*, September 8, 1877, 3; "The City School Board and Marshall Ward," *Virginia Star*, September 8, 1877, 3; "Navy Hill School," *Virginia Star*, September 8, 1877, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Link, *A Hard Country*, 39–40; Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse*, 128–29, 134–46, 164.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware, Bulletin, 1917, No. 18* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917), 99–101.

<sup>11</sup> Delaware Department of Instruction, *Report of the Superintendent of Free Schools For the Year Ending December 31, 1886* (Middletown: Freeman and Weber, 1887), 57; Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware*, 57, 106.

opening of Broad Street Academy in Mobile, the Houston Street and Gray Street schools in Atlanta, and the Lawrence School in Nashville.<sup>12</sup> Rural school districts also saw the opening of schools but at a much slower pace. By the late 1880s, for instance, 20 percent of the Kentucky schools remained in churches while brick schoolhouses were common in the cities. Henry Laine characterized one Madison County school as an “old slave cabin” with a fireplace, split log benches, and slates.<sup>13</sup> Rural districts operated schools in churches, community social halls, and private homes until the state formally constructed facilities in the late 1880s and early 1890s, respectively.

African Americans and their white allies succeeded in expanding access to public school education by ensuring that adequate facilities existed. By 1900, southern public schools boasted 253,110 students ages 5–14 years in the primary grades. Children ages 5–9 represented the majority of public primary school attendees. In terms of advanced curriculum, few African Americans had access to high school curriculum. According to the 1890 federal education report, only 958 African Americans attended public high schools primarily located in the urban South. African American private high schools educated the majority of high school students. These gains, though, represent a fraction of the school-age census of children. Access increased over the 1870s and 1880s, but it proved insufficient to educate all African American children.<sup>14</sup>

Despite their concerted efforts, a rural-urban divide persisted. An entrenched white planter elite and a more parochial form of politics stymied the expansion of African American public schoolhouses. This resistance meant that access and attendance for African American children were “slight improved over their condition” since the creation of public schools. These white elites, however, recognized that any attempts to reverse these gains in access and schoolhouses could possibly encourage federal intervention.<sup>15</sup> Child labor and seasonal agricultural labor demands also influenced attendance, accessibility, and securing the meaningful development of additional African American public schoolhouses. For rural school districts, Booker T. Washington’s advocacy of rural public school education to Julius Rosenwald contributed to the post-Reconstruction erasure of the urban-rural accessibility divide.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Green, *Educational Reconstruction*, 179–81; Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 71.

<sup>13</sup> Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760–1891* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 2003), 257.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson, *Education of the Blacks*, 151, 189.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South*, 23, 31; Span, *From Cotton Field to Schoolhouse*, 153–58; Thorp, *Facing Freedom*, 159–60.

<sup>16</sup> Link, *A Hard Country*, 51–52; Stephanie Deutsch, *You Need A Schoolhouse: Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald, and the Building of Schools for the Segregated South* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 112–20; Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South*, 160, 174, 180.

## Funding: An Ongoing Problem

African Americans and their white allies prioritized funding in their respective quality school campaigns. They recognized the importance of funding to the success of the public schools and their other campaigns for fully resourced public schools. Inadequate funding often thwarted African American efforts in securing school accommodations, better school conditions, and African American teachers. Funding was essential to the success of the public schools as well as the various campaigns. However, it was an issue that African Americans had the least control over. Local, state, and national forces impinged upon African Americans and their allies' efforts to secure adequate funding. As a result, they sought as much money as possible for the schools and equity in the distribution of said school funds. Ultimately, the financial difficulties of the 1870s posed the greatest obstacle to their efforts.

All school districts, rural and urban, suffered from a lack of funding necessary to adequately support the public schools. Urban districts fared better in the face of these fiscal challenges than their rural counterparts by contributing city funds in addition to the monies received from the state school fund. They also sought external financial sources of funding and employed other fiscal creativity in supporting the public schools. These districts often attempted to maintain a fair and consistent distribution policy during the first two decades.<sup>17</sup>

Rural districts adopted race-based policies. These school boards often diverted monies for African American schools to the white public schools. These districts expected African American communities to cope with the shortfall in school funding with in-kind labor, church offerings, fundraising events, and even by soliciting donations from northern philanthropies. African Americans, therefore, advocated for more funding, fairer distribution policies, and ensuring their rights to state-funded public schools as tax-paying citizens.<sup>18</sup> They, too, relied on external sources of funding.

Delaware is particularly noteworthy. The first state appropriation to African American public schools did not occur until 1881. While state contributions increased over the decade, state financial commitment lagged behind the majority of southern states and the District of Columbia. School funding primarily came from the Delaware Association for the Education of Colored People, various Howard Associations, other grassroots African American organizations, and in some instances, annual appropriations from

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<sup>17</sup> Table IX, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report*, 40–41.

<sup>18</sup> Table IX, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report*, 40–41; “The Necessity of Organization to Promote Our Educational Interest—An Address Delivered before the Virginia Educational and Historical Association by Its President J. W. Cromwell,” *People’s Advocate*, September 2, 1876, 2–3; Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 179–81.



officials in Wilmington. This reality and grassroots activism demonstrate how much African American parents, leaders, and activists pushed the state to recognize African American education as a right of state citizenship.<sup>19</sup>

After the Freedmen's Bureau ended operations, African Americans remained the principal financiers of African American public schools. They operated tuition-based schools until 1875, when the state took more direct action. The state legislature created a second educational system where the Delaware Association managed the operations, teacher selection, and repairs between 1876 and 1891.<sup>20</sup> Delaware officials, however, did not provide any financial support. The Delaware Association managed the state schools while regularly demanding state financial support. An 1881 school law finally authorized state financial support, and the state gave its first \$2,400 appropriation for African American public schools. Subsequent school laws increased state support but diminished the role of the Delaware Association in the process. The 1883 school law permitted the distribution equally among the counties.<sup>21</sup> Even when the state became a financial partner, the meager support resulted in three- to four-month academic years throughout rural communities, six months in larger towns, and ten months in Wilmington. The work of the Delaware Association continued to raise additional money through subscriptions and external partners and distribute the funds to the state school. Both the state superintendent and Delaware Association representative asked for additional public school support from the state legislature in their 1886 annual reports.<sup>22</sup>

In 1891, funding equalized. African American schools were moved into a single system controlled by the various County Superintendents who had controlled white public schools. Funding between white and Black schools were to be equal in amounts and distribution. The Delaware Association, however, no longer had control over the schools, and as a consequence, the organization ended its administrative role. By 1893, all schools had been incorporated into the single state system. Without grassroots activism, African American children would not have had educational access. African American parents and community leaders filled an important void when the Freedmen's Bureau and other northern philanthropies left the state by the early 1870s. These activists' persistence and resiliency compelled the state to recognize African American schooling as a right of citizenship by funding it accordingly.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Delaware Department of Instruction, *Report of the Superintendent of Free Schools for the Year Ending December 31, 1886*, 57; Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware* by Stephen Weeks, 99–103.

<sup>20</sup> Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware*, 102.

<sup>21</sup> Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware*, 103–4.

<sup>22</sup> Delaware Department of Instruction, *Report of the Superintendent of Free Schools for the Year Ending December 31, 1886* (Middletown: Freeman and Weber, 1887), 17, 57–58.

<sup>23</sup> Delaware Department of Instruction, *Report of the Superintendent of Free Schools for the Year Ending December 31, 1886*, 16–17, 58–62; Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware*, 103–4.

The Peabody Education Fund and other external funding agencies proved critical in the continued growth of African American education. From the beginning of public schools, the Peabody Education Fund offered an essential financial stream for both rural and urban African American public schools. Created in 1867, George Peabody created the fund using a one million dollar gift received from Robert Winthrop for the promotion of southern education to white and African American children.<sup>24</sup> Barnas Sears administered the fund and based funding decisions on need, usefulness, ability to advance education, and other criteria. Initially, the philanthropic organization awarded funding to select cities and towns “likely to influence other areas.”<sup>25</sup> Mobile, Huntsville, and Montgomery, Alabama, were among the earliest districts to receive money for both its white and African American schools. But over the 1870s and 1880s, the Peabody Education Fund proved to be an essential source of external funding for the public schools and teacher training programs across the region.<sup>26</sup>

**Table 5.1. Peabody Education Funds Received for African American Schools**

State	1868	1869	1870	1871	1872	1873
Alabama	1,000	5,700	5,950	5,800	9,900	6,000
Arkansas	0	4,300	11,050	9,200	12,250	11,400
Florida	0	1,850	6,950	6,550	6,200	7,700
Georgia	8,562	9,000	6,000	3,800	6,000	13,750
Louisiana	8,700	10,500	5,000	12,400	11,500	0
Mississippi	1,338	9,000	5,600	3,250	4,550	6,800
North Carolina	2,700	6,350	7,650	8,750	8,250	9,750
South Carolina	3,550	7,800	3,050	2,500	500	1,500
Tennessee	4,800	11,900	15,050	22,650	23,250	27,800
Texas	0	0	1,000	0	0	0
Virginia	4,750	12,700	10,300	15,950	29,700	36,700
West Virginia	0	10,900	13,000	9,150	17,900	15,750
<b>Total</b>	<b>35,400</b>	<b>90,000</b>	<b>90,600</b>	<b>100,000</b>	<b>130,000</b>	<b>137,150</b>

Source: US Department of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1884–1885* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1886), 79.

<sup>24</sup> Earle H. West, “Peabody Education Fund and Negro Education, 1867–1880,” *History of Education Quarterly* 6 (Summer 1966): 3–4.

<sup>25</sup> West, “Peabody Education Fund and Negro Education,” 4–8.

<sup>26</sup> West, “Peabody Education Fund and Negro Education,” 11–13.

Urban school politics occasionally influenced access to this supplemental funding. Local political decisions could have detrimental effects, as demonstrated in the Mobile, Alabama, schools. The city schools overcame their funding challenges with the assistance of the Peabody Education Fund until the 1871–72 academic year. A protracted debate over the school board composition, legal challenges, and a partisan March 1871 school election caused the Peabody Education Fund to withdraw its financial support. Dr. Barnas Sears, agent for the organization, and trustees cited divisive school board politics as evidence of poor governance, deeming the schools undeserving of support. Dr. Sears reported the organization’s decision in his annual report: “In Mobile, there has been a litigation about the jurisdiction of the State and city officers, which has had the effect to nullify the agreement previously made by us with the city School Board.” Dr. Sears deemed that future financial support, if reinstated, would be contingent upon reapplication and a stable city administrative structure “to renew engagement.” Putnam’s removal also resulted in the withdrawal of the American Missionary Association’s financial support from the Mobile schools. The organization had financially supported Emerson Institute under Putnam’s administration. The events leading up to Putnam’s removal convinced organization officials of the impossibility of working with Mobile’s school officials. The withdrawal of these financial sources resulted in the city’s heavy reliance upon taxation, the state’s school fund, and deficit spending.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 5.2. Peabody Education Funds Received for African American Schools**

State	1875	1876	1877	1878	1879	1880
Alabama	2,200	5,500	3,700	1,100	3,600	1,200
Arkansas	1,500	1,000	6,300	6,000	5,600	7,200
Florida	1,800	1,000	6,500	3,900	3,000	2,600
Georgia	9,750	3,700	4,000	6,000	6,500	5,800
Louisiana	1,000	2,000	2,000	8,000	7,650	4,200
Mississippi	5,400	9,950	5,990	600	4,000	4,200
North Carolina	16,900	8,050	4,900	4,500	6,700	3,050
South Carolina	100	4,150	4,300	3,600	4,250	2,700
Tennessee	27,150	10,100	15,850	14,600	12,000	10,900
Texas	1,350	4,450	10,800	8,550	7,700	27,500
Virginia	23,350	17,800	18,250	15,350	9,850	6,800
West Virginia	10,500	8,600	6,810	5,050	4,000	2,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>101,000</b>	<b>76,300</b>	<b>89,400</b>	<b>77,250</b>	<b>74,850</b>	<b>78,150</b>

Source: US Department of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1884–1885* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1886), 79.

<sup>27</sup> Peabody Education Fund, *Proceedings of the Trustees Meeting, Held at Philadelphia, 15 February 1871* (Cambridge: Press of John Wilson and Son, 1871), p. 34, file 2, box 11, Peabody Education Fund Collection, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee; Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 111–13.

The withdrawal of these supplemental financial sources had significant consequences. Nearly bankrupt by the public schools, Mobile faced another crisis on the Board of School Commissioners in 1878. School officials disagreed over the financing of the school system and the powers of the School Superintendent. As in the previous crisis, state officials acted as mediators. Leroy Box, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, reorganized the Mobile school system by ordering new elections and redefining the powers of the board according to mandates established under the 1875 Alabama constitution. Compliance with the new constitution and a subsequent 1877 state law made a significant change to the city's school appropriations. New state mandates established a loophole in which funding would no longer be equitable between African American and white schools. County Superintendents now had the discretion of not using the state school census when making appropriations to the public schools. Instead, they could make appropriations based upon "the number of children of his district. . . who will probably attend each school, and apportion the district fund to the several schools of his district as nearly per capita as practicable." With this authority, County Superintendents ensured "that all children who attend the public schools established for them shall receive equal benefit from such fund." Prior state laws had not given any school official the authority to "discriminate racially for or against either racial group." This act made race a factor in school funding. Reorganization made the school board compliant. As a result, school officials changed their system of allocations to public schools, including the monies derived from the state and local taxation.<sup>28</sup> While not immune to the funding challenge, Mobile still spent more money on its African American schools than other districts in Alabama. The loss of the external source of funding, though, had significant and lasting consequences.

Locality also influenced access to external funding sources. Border South states found themselves excluded from the Peabody Education Fund. The African American community took up the burden of financing the public schools with the consistent support of external funding. The Delaware Association proved especially resourceful in funding the state public schools until the state accepted its responsibility to African American children.<sup>29</sup> Maryland saw a similar organization emerge. The Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of Colored People and the Mutual United Brotherhood of Liberty pushed both city and state officials into fully financing African American public

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<sup>28</sup> Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*, 149; Report of Leroy Box, Superintendent of Education for the State of Alabama, for the Scholastic Year Ending 30th September 1878, with Tabular Statistics of 1876–1877, Containing Also the Laws Relating to the Public School System of the State with an Appendix of Forms (Montgomery: Barrett and Brown, 1879) in Superintendent of Education, *Annals and Other Reports, 1868–1879*, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

<sup>29</sup> Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Delaware* by Stephen Weeks, 99–107.

schools as equal institutions. With increased funding, these organizations secured salary equalization, new buildings, and other reforms. With or without external funding, the reality of inadequate school funding plagued all school districts.<sup>30</sup>

The 1873 Financial Panic and other national economic developments further exacerbated the already financially-strained African American public school systems. In September 1873, Jay Cooke and Company collapsed. The company's failure sparked a financial panic throughout the nation. The credit system, banks, and financial institutions failed across the world. Nationwide, employers laid off workers. Personal debt skyrocketed. In a letter to E. M. Cravath, Edward P. Lord hoped that the financial difficulties would not be long-lasting and the impact on the African American schools would be minimal: "I trust the clouds are to be blown away soon." The financial woes were not "blown away soon," as Lord hoped.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, the Financial Panic of 1873 initiated an economic depression that would last "with intermittent periods of recovery" until the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> The financial crisis sparked by the Panic of 1873 and the periods of intermittent recessions, depressions, and recoveries renewed attacks on the necessity of state-funded public schools, specifically those that educated African American children.<sup>33</sup>

Even students, like James H. Johnston, entered the fray. The future president of Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (presently Virginia State University) crafted arguments for sustaining robust funding against prominent white critics. In addressing the critiques of Reverend Robert L. Dabney, who deemed the African American schoolhouse as a "Pandora's Box," Johnston attributed the intellectual advance made since emancipation to more than merely divine intervention but the natural strivings of a people long denied formal education under slavery.<sup>34</sup> He argued: "*Bread for the body, knowledge for the soul*. A half a loaf for the body is better than no bread; and a little knowledge is better than intellectual death [emphasis original]." Johnston regarded Dabney and other white public school critics as being misguided. The benefits unleashed by Confederate defeat and the early years of African American public education could not be stopped as a consequence of

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<sup>30</sup> Dennis Patrick Halpin, *A Brotherhood of Liberty: Black Reconstruction and Its Legacies in Baltimore, 1865–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 30–31, 78–80.

<sup>31</sup> Edward P. Lord to E. M. Cravath, October 7, 1873, microfilm roll 3, AMA Papers, Alabama; Superintendent of Education, Annual and Other Reports, 1868–1879, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

<sup>32</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 512.

<sup>33</sup> Civis, "The Public School in Its Relation to the Negro," *Southern Planter and Farmer* 36, no. 4 (December 1875): 707–11, Civis, "The Public School in Its Relation to the Negro, No. II," *Southern Planter and Farmer* 37, no. 1 (January 1876): 35–42, and Civis, "The Public School in Its Relation to the Negro, No. III," *Southern Planter and Farmer* 37, no. 2 (February 1876): 108–16.

<sup>34</sup> R. L. Dabney, "The Negro and the Common School," *Southern Planter and Farmer* 37, no. 4 (April 1876): 252–54, 260–62; James Hugo Johnston, "The Public Schools," speech, June 1876, box 3, folder 1, James Hugo Johnston Sr. Papers, 1865–1914, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia.

the national financial crisis. He reasoned that the “mischief is done, we have already gone too far. . . . Our souls have fed with glad delight wonder and love upon the revelations of God in the things we have learned.” Public schools had made them want to aspire to “honorable ambition to be wise and better . . . for our opportunities.”<sup>35</sup> For Johnston and others of the emancipation generation, they sought better opportunities for themselves, the students in their classrooms, and the respective communities in which they served. Their long view of emancipation and the African American schoolhouse enabled them to actively refute public school detractors, seek robust funding, and fight for the educational opportunities of future generations.

**Table 5.3. Comparative Statistics of Richmond African American Public School Funding, 1869–1890**

Session	State Funds (White and Black)	City Funds (White and Black)	Other Funding Sources (White and Black)
1869–70		15,000.00	15,000.00
1870–71		42,625.00	2,155.79
1871–72	18,251.10	32,500.00	2,651.49
1872–73	16,512.90	43,000.00	5,853.49
1873–74	15,071.66	44,752.60	2,000.00
1874–75	18,215.11	45,915.11	500.00
1875–76	18,753.00	50,429.50	205.73
1876–77	20,754.00	53,551.09	889.86
1877–78	16,603.20	53,903.99	3,262.05
1878–79	5,188.50	50,961.66	8,119.33
1879–80	24,904.80	49,929.99	913.84
1880–81	22,784.79	49,650.22	414.47
1881–82	23,280.42	51,480.85	766.26
1882–83	28,250.92	52,696.71	679.12
1883–84	28,858.24	50,535.59	922.98
1884–85	29,006.83	69,875.12	1,204.76
1885–86	30,710.33	64,962.46	1,507.93
1886–87	28,876.43	76,050.86	1,239.41
1887–88	28,854.05	86,100.21	3,137.96
1888–89	29,752.26	100,039.59	3,279.52
1889–90	30,242.20	106,865.67	2,719.22

Source: Table IX: Comparative Statistics, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools of the City of Richmond, VA, for the Scholastic Year Ending July 31st, 1893* (Richmond: C. N. Williams, City Printers, 1894), 40–41. Accessed at the Library of Virginia, Richmond.

<sup>35</sup> Johnston, “The Public Schools.”



Richmond and other large urban districts weathered the financial crisis better than other districts. Richmond city officials appropriated between \$49,000 and \$53,000 in addition to state and outside funding received after Dabney's critique. With the Readjuster revolution of the 1880s across the state, Richmond city appropriations for African American public schools remained among the highest in the state.

Hence, school officials remained committed to African American education despite the financial difficulties.<sup>36</sup> These expenditures matched those of northern, midwestern, and mid-Atlantic school districts. As a result, these districts maintained full academic years and diverse course offerings from primary to high school, facilitated the educated middle-class pipeline, and ensured modern school facilities.<sup>37</sup>

Kentucky also experienced a significant increase in its funding of African American public schools in the 1880s. African American activism and legal challenges brought about change to how the state funded its African American public schools. Within a year of the emergence of state-funded public schools, African Americans and their white allies recognized that state appropriations would sustain an unequal system of schools. Like Delaware, African American public schools were not a priority until African American activists and their white allies made them one.<sup>38</sup>

In 1875, African American leaders, parents, and activists began their fight for additional financial support for teacher salaries, facilities, and parity between white and Black schooling. Activists organized mass meetings and drafted petitions for increases in city and state funding.<sup>39</sup> Unlike previous efforts, activists used all possible tools in their disposable. The president and faculty of Berea College employed the press for their school funding campaign. Formed in 1877, the Colored Teachers' State Association also sought parity and reform. Association members demanded equal funding, an increase in age eligibility for accessing the public schools from sixteen to eighteen years, and the establishment of a state normal school. Collectively, Black Kentuckians and their white allies demanded equal funding in an unequal and segregated school system.<sup>40</sup>

Ultimately, the courts brought the desired reform. In *Kentucky v. Jesse Ellis*, the federal court ruled the separate school funding unconstitutional on April 4, 1882. This federal court ruling forced the passage of equal funding for the segregated school. While it passed, true equalization did not occur consistently. Local districts attempted to avoid the judicial mandate on funding equalization. Paducah and Louisville school districts

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<sup>36</sup> Table IX, *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report*, 40–41.

<sup>37</sup> Green, *Educational Reconstruction*, 170.

<sup>38</sup> Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760–1891* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 2003), 255.

<sup>39</sup> Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 258.

<sup>40</sup> Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 260.

saw a more immediate upholding of the decision. Owensboro school district did not. When petitioning failed, African Americans sued and won against reluctant city officials. Direct action and legal challenges brought more equitable funding and distribution to the state public schools.<sup>41</sup>

**Table 5.4. Kentucky State Funding for African American Schools, 1875–1891**

Year	Eligible Students	School Fund	Per Child Spending
1875	37,414	18,707.00	0.50
1876	50,602	15,180.60	0.30
1877	53,176	29,219.30	0.55
1878	59,839	31,116.28	0.52
1879	62,973	31,486.50	0.50
1880	66,564	31,950.72	0.48
1881	70,234	40,733.98	0.58
1882	74,432	37,216.00	0.50
1883	87,640	113,932.00	1.30
1884	92,530	129,542.00	1.40
1885	97,894	151,735.70	1.55
1886	99,799	164,668.35	1.65
1887	102,754	169,544.10	1.65
1888	107,170	203,623.00	1.90
1889	109,158	223,773.90	2.05
1890	111,400	239,510.00	2.15
1891	112,818	253,840.50	2.25

Source: Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760–1891* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 2003), 256.

Equitable funding had immediate consequences for the state African American public schools. More children had access to the public schools. New facilities entered the educational landscape. Older facilities received necessary repairs. African American activism brought necessary relief until the Kentucky Constitution of 1891 introduced Jim Crow schooling.

Beyond Virginia and Kentucky, other districts simply could not overcome the financial crisis. School officials created inequitable distribution policies for the limited funds. In rural areas, education remained a part-time endeavor, with shortened school years, limited facilities, and few curricular offerings. Though some districts creatively met the financial challenges, others heavily relied on the African American community's financial support and their ability to secure outside philanthropic funds from the Peabody

<sup>41</sup> Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 261–62.

Education Fund, John F. Slater Fund, and later the post-Reconstruction era General Education Board and Rosenwald Fund. Such disparities prompted national discussions proposing public school funding legislation.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 5.5. Peabody Education Funds Received for African American Schools**

State	1881	1882	1883	1884	1885	Total (1868–1885)
Alabama	1,800	5,075	5,775	5,000	5,300	84,300
Arkansas	4,000	5,075	4,050	2,950	3,100	98,575
Florida	2,000	3,725	2,925	2,100	2,375	71,075
Georgia	5,300	8,590	5,900	4,900	4,175	118,227
Louisiana	1,700	5,900	2,125	2,645	1,800	89,870
Mississippi	3,950	4,275	4,400	3,650	2,250	85,903
North Carolina	4,125	6,485	8,350	6,075	5,430	132,315
South Carolina	4,050	5,375	4,225	4,400	5,000	61,250
Tennessee	5,500	12,800	12,600	13,475	11,850	285,375
Texas	10,800	17,500	13,600	5,750	7,150	117,150
Virginia	5,150	3,234	4,125	6,200	6,775	258,734
West Virginia	2,000	2,300	3,100	2,850	2,500	131,510
<b>Total</b>	<b>50,375</b>	<b>80,334</b>	<b>71,175</b>	<b>59,995</b>	<b>57,705</b>	<b>1,534,284</b>

Source: US Department of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1884–1885* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1886), 79.

The regional school funding issue dominated the annual reports of the Commissioner of Education over the 1880s. The 1884–85 federal report made apparent that states and school districts had increased their appropriations, except for Delaware; however, it was sufficient to accommodate the number of African Americans enrolled in the schools.<sup>43</sup> All state systems relied on external agencies for supplemental funding. In addition to the Peabody Education Fund, the Slater Fund also contributed to the school districts starting in 1883. Washington, DC, received \$2,000 over two years. Overall, the 1885 distribution doubled the 1883 and 1884 awards distributed to the various southern states.<sup>44</sup> The report made the case for additional funding. In short, the report concluded that the “school fund is not sufficient to maintain schools for more than two months. Under these circumstances the white people often manage to prolong their schools by voluntary contributions; this the colored people are unable to do, and unless missionary

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, *Education of the Blacks*, 85–87.

<sup>43</sup> US Department of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1884–1885* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1886), 75.

<sup>44</sup> US Department of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1884–1885*, 80.

society or some other charitable organizations come to their help, their children are turned adrift for nine or ten months, to forget amid ignorant parents and companions the little they have managed to learn in the brief school term.”<sup>45</sup>

The insufficient state school funds accounted for the average school year of 99 days in all former slave states, except Arkansas, Delaware, Missouri, and Washington, DC, while the national average held steady at 146 days. While the normal school to classroom pipeline still produced qualified educators, “only a small portion of the well-trained teachers go into the rural districts, which, with their short terms, miserable school-houses, and utter lack of appliances, offer no inducement to competent teachers.”<sup>46</sup> Without national funding reform and continued external philanthropic support, African American public schools would remain strained. The rural-urban educational divide would persist. Federal intervention was necessary. Activists and their allies remained committed to the African American schoolhouse and sustaining educational opportunities for future generations.

By the 1887–88 annual report, the commissioner fully acknowledged that African American education was a collaborative effort between “the Southern States themselves, religious associations of the North, and the Peabody and Slater Funds.”<sup>47</sup> The latter funds had shifted toward teacher training and curriculum devoted to industrial and professional training.<sup>48</sup>

Monthly teacher salaries remained consistent among the states that reported and Washington, DC. In Kentucky, the average monthly teacher salary in African Americans schools was slightly higher than in white schools. Washington, DC, Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi saw educators in African American schools earning less than those in white public schools. Florida saw the same monthly average salary.<sup>49</sup> The ongoing funding woes necessitated such collaboration. Without it, the schools, as reported, could not have achieved this gradual progress.

As the 1880s progressed, activists, reformers, and administrators became increasingly convinced that national intervention would topple the greatest obstacle to quality public schools—funding. As argued in this chapter, African American communities and their white allies felt that federal intervention and oversight would ensure the securing of public school facilities for every school-age child desiring an education. The discrepancy between enrolled students and non-attending would be greatly decreased. Federal funding would also ensure that enrolled students had access to quality conditions and quality

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<sup>45</sup> US Department of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1884–1885*, 75.

<sup>46</sup> US Department of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1884–1885*, 75.

<sup>47</sup> US Department of Education. *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1887–1888* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1889), 988.

<sup>48</sup> US Department of Education. *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1887–1888*, 988, 994–98.

<sup>49</sup> US Department of Education. *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1887–1888*, 989.

teachers. Hence, African American activists hoped for the passage of the Blair Education Bill while striving for additional success in their respective quality campaigns. The nature of the federal legislation, as the next chapter will show, offered hope to those deeply invested in the future of African American public schools as a right of citizenship. Instead of federal legislation, African American education suffered another setback in the form of retrenchment and the systematic overturning of previous educational gains with new state constitutions and legislation. The Jim Crow era would begin in earnest.





## CHAPTER SIX

# The Emergence of Jim Crow Public Schools

**W**. E. B. Du Bois commented on the retreat from the educational gains made by African Americans following emancipation in his “Of the Training of Black Men” chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The first African American Harvard University doctoral graduate questioned why conditions had deteriorated since Mississippi and other former states drafted new constitutions and educational reforms in the late nineteenth century. He observed that the “years of constructive definite effort toward the building of complete school systems” crumbled as a result of “new obstacles.” He reasoned: “In the midst, then, of the larger problems of Negro education sprang up the more practical question of work, the inevitable economic quandary that faces a people in the transition from slavery to freedom, and especially those who make that change amid hate and prejudice, lawlessness and ruthless competition.” Hence, Du Bois concluded that these new obstacles, specifically the rise of industrial education, attacks on the liberal arts tradition instituted in the postwar African American public schools, and worsening race relations, permitted the deteriorating conditions.<sup>1</sup>

The retreat from the African American educational gains was complex, violent, and multipronged, and its consequences reverberated across diverse southern localities and nationally. Newspaper reports, the Ku Klux Klan hearings, and other sources detailing the violent suppression of white and Black Republicans reveal some uncomfortable truths about Redemption (the intentional overturning of Reconstruction era gains by southern governments) and the emergence of Jim Crow education.<sup>2</sup> For every revolution, there is a

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<sup>1</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: A. C. McClure and Co., 1903), 92–93.

<sup>2</sup> See Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Ku Klux: The Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), chapters 4 and 5; Kidada E. Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me: African American Testimonies of Racial Violence from Emancipation to World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), chapter 2.

counterrevolution. Redemption was neither heroic nor peaceful. It was also not limited to the actions of a few individuals who removed Black Americans from political life and implemented racial segregation.<sup>3</sup>

Several US Supreme Court decisions facilitated the process. These federal cases narrowly defined the application of the Reconstruction amendments. The *United States v. Reese* decision maintained that the Fifteenth Amendment did not grant the right of suffrage, but only prohibited the exclusion from voting on racial grounds. The court also limited the federal enforcement of the Fourteenth Amendment for protecting individuals from racial terror by the Ku Klux Klan and other groups in *United States v. Cruikshank*.<sup>4</sup> The 1883 *Civil Rights Cases* decision not only ruled the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional but Joseph Bradley in his majority opinion wrote: “When a man has emerged from slavery, and by the aid of beneficent legislation has shaken off the inseparable concomitants of that state, there must be some stage in the progress of his elevation when he takes the rank of a mere citizen, and ceases to be the special favorite of the laws, and when his rights as a citizen, or a man, are to be protected in the ordinary modes by which other men’s rights are protected.”<sup>5</sup> *Plessy v. Ferguson* signaled, for many, a death knell over the objections of Justice John Marshall Harlan, the lone dissenter. Collectively, these decisions allowed for the overturning of the racially inclusive democratic society forged during Reconstruction.<sup>6</sup>

Economically, the Panic of 1873 and the intermittent periods of recession and depression allowed white Americans to see the issues experienced by formerly enslaved people as a southern problem. The national complicity not only encouraged violence but also forced some Black southerners’ adoption of an approach best articulated in Booker T. Washington’s 1895 Atlanta Exposition Address in a concerted effort to preserve Black life and rights.<sup>7</sup> Though the Readjusters in Virginia and the fusion governments in Louisiana and North Carolina offered alternatives to these national trends, they were ultimately

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<sup>3</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper’s and Row, 1988), chapter 12; Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888–1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 9–17; Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy and the Rise of Jim Crow* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 29–38.

<sup>4</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 530–31; W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*, with an introduction by David Levering Lewis (New York: The Free Press, 1935; 1992), 690.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Bradley and the Supreme Court of the United States, *The Civil Rights Cases (1883)*, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/109/3>.

<sup>6</sup> Supreme Court of the United States, *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)*, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/163/537>; Gates, *Stony the Road*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 595–97; Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1901), 217–25, in *Documenting the American South*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/washington/washing.html>, accessed July 1, 2020.

brutally suppressed by lynching, racial massacres, voter fraud, and other extralegal means.<sup>8</sup> But, in terms of African American education, the failure of a national educational legislation encouraged Mississippi and other states to draft new constitutions that curtailed African American educational achievement. In terms of education, the Blair Education Bill and not the creation of the state-funded public schools is an appropriate ending point.

Following the defeat of the Blair Education Bill, this chapter explores the post-Redemption constructions and the new constitutional mandates shaping African American public schools. Unlike the post-Reconstruction Acts constitutions, discussed in Chapter 3, a less diverse delegation curtailed previous gains and exacerbated previous funding models and the resulting constitutional mandates that cemented a racial divide. A Washingtonian approach combined with white supremacy had significant consequences.

## The Blair Bill and the End of the Reconstruction Era in African American Education

Influenced by postwar African American educational developments, Senator Henry Blair of New Hampshire embarked on a multiyear fight for “the creation of a permanent, uniform, national, public school system in America supported with federal funds.”<sup>9</sup> The Blair Education Bill not only required shifting public school operations from the states to the federal government, but it also attempted to complete the postwar vision of Black southerners and their white allies. With roughly 75 percent of federal funds designated for southern public schools, the federal legislation would have eliminated the financial difficulties endured by Black southerners in their quest for quality public schools. Their respective state and local government partners would have been able to fully fund the educational systems created in the Reconstruction era constitutions without difficulty and fulfill their obligation to citizens, white and Black. Most importantly, federal oversight would have prevented any distribution irregularities and ensured a degree of protection similar to the initial Freedmen’s Bureau school era.<sup>10</sup>

While it was not the only educational bill under consideration at the time, the Blair Bill received the most serious attention as a feasible solution. Unlike the other pieces of legislation, Blair crafted his around strong qualitative and statistical data collected by J. L.

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<sup>8</sup> Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 76–86, 119–31; Hilary Green, *Educational Reconstruction: African American Schools in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 157–73; 185–99; Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 124–47, 150–72.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Upchurch, *Legislating Racism: The Billion Dollar Congress and the Birth of Jim Crow* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 47.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel W. Crofts, “The Black Response to the Blair Education Bill,” *Journal of Southern History* 37 (February 1971): 42.

M. Curry of the Peabody Education Fund, John Eaton of the National Educational Assembly, local and state government reports, and the 1880 US census.<sup>11</sup> Using this research, Blair held formal hearings with members of the House of Representatives and Senate education committees, personally answered any questions received, but actively defended the bill and its constitutionality in such a manner that his critics could not easily dismiss the legislation outright, as had been done with the other bills. As a result, his seemingly sensible plan easily passed in the Senate in 1884 and 1886 but passed only narrowly a third time in 1888. Unfortunately, it stalled in the House of Representatives each time.<sup>12</sup>

By 1890, Blair, Black urban southerners, and other educational proponents felt that the Fifty-First Congress, better known as the Billion-Dollar Congress, was their last best chance. The political demographics of Washington, DC, changed as a consequence of the 1888 elections. Republicans now controlled the House of Representatives, Senate, and the White House. Most significantly, the 1890 Congressional agenda centered on questions of race, the status of southern African Americans, and race relations with debates on the Butler Emigration Bill and Federal Elections Bill. Unlike previous attempts, Blair and his proponents had every reason to believe that the Fifty-First Congress would ensure the bill's passage.<sup>13</sup>

The nature of the Blair Education Bill debate, national support, and the political reality convinced southern African Americans that success would be forthcoming. Black newspapers, such as the *Huntsville Gazette* and *Richmond Planet*, contributed to their optimism.<sup>14</sup> The Richmond newspaper, in particular, pursued a more aggressive campaign for coalescing white and Black support. John Mitchell Jr., Richmond Colored Normal graduate and editor, and his staff reminded readers of Senator Blair's support during the concluding years of the Readjuster moment in the city and state, whose "intelligent opinion" could be trusted in order to secure a unified voice behind the Blair Bill. As a personal friend of the editor and city, the *Richmond Planet* openly endorsed the legislation and the man.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon B. McKinney, *Henry W. Blair's Campaign to Reform America: From the Civil War to the U.S. Senate* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 87–88.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Henry Bayley Browne, Resolution for Special Order to Consider Bill on Federal Aid to Common Schools, Blair Educational Bill, July 9, 1888, H. Misc. Doc. 515, Serial Volume 2570, Sessional Volume 6, *LexisNexis US Serial Set Digital Collection*; Resolution for Special Order to Consider Bill on Federal Aid to Common Schools, Blair Educational Bill, May 28, 1888, H. Misc. Doc. 413, Serial Volume 2570, Sessional Volume 4, *LexisNexis US Serial Set Digital Collection*; Upchurch, *Legislating Racism*, 47–48.

<sup>13</sup> Upchurch, *Legislating Racism*, 2–3, 48.

<sup>14</sup> "Congress. Fortieth Day," *Huntsville Gazette*, February 8, 1890, 2, and "Untitled," *Huntsville Gazette*, March 1, 1890, 2.

<sup>15</sup> "Hon. Perry Carson Speaks, the Founder of the American Citizens Equal Rights Association, Expresses His Appreciation," *Richmond Planet*, March 8, 1890, 1; "Various Causes of the Republic Defeat," *Richmond Planet*, November 16, 1889, 3.

More importantly, the seemingly imminent Blair Bill emboldened Mitchell and his staff in challenging local white opposition. Less than three weeks before the final vote, a *Richmond Planet* article targeted Frank G. Ruffin, a Confederate veteran and the second Auditor of Virginia. Using the successful Richmond public schools as evidence, the unknown author, presumably Mitchell, charged that the underlying purpose of Ruffin and his colleagues in using state appropriations for African American education was “not to make a better citizen of him, but to make him a willing tool—a Democrat. And in a failure to bring about this result, he would declare the money expended wasted.”<sup>16</sup> He immediately followed this assertion by attacking Ruffin’s loyalty to the state: “We veil our eyes in shame and beg the world not to look upon the denegation of a Virginia citizen. The shades of WASHINGTON and JEFFERSON stand aghast [emphasis original].”<sup>17</sup> The author’s brazen questioning showed Mitchell’s and Black Richmonders’ firm belief in the Blair Bill passage. This strong faith in the political moment and Senator Blair’s abilities empowered Mitchell and his staff as the Readjusters had done a few years earlier with the appointment of two African American school board members. African Americans, especially members of the educated southern middle class, felt that the political landscape was on their side.

The March 20th vote revealed otherwise. In a thirty-one to thirty-seven vote, African American public schools simply failed to unite Congress and the nation, as they had in 1865 and after the departure of the Freedmen’s Bureau.<sup>18</sup> The African American press reflected the range of emotions experienced. The *Huntsville Gazette* offered gratitude to Senator Blair for “his able and manly fight in behalf of Education,” but offered no real recourse other than hope for the revival attempts and perseverance.<sup>19</sup> T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the *New York Age*, viewed the defeat as a “wake up call for self-help.” He urged readers “not to wait for the federal government to endow them with education, but to educate themselves the best way they could.”<sup>20</sup> In a speech at the Annual Conference of the National Education Association, J. C. Price, a Livingstone College educator, echoed Fortune’s sentiments: “I do not argue that increased intelligence, or multiplied facilities for education, will, by some magic spell, transform the negro into the symmetry, grace, and beauty of a Grecian embodiment of excellence.” Rather, he concluded that African Americans “can be and do what any other race can be and do.”<sup>21</sup> After a brief hiatus, the *Richmond Planet* pressed readers into preventing the Republican majority from failing

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<sup>16</sup> “Col. Ruffin Assertions,” *Richmond Planet*, March 1, 1890, 1.

<sup>17</sup> “Col. Ruffin Assertions.”

<sup>18</sup> McKinney, *Henry W. Blair’s Campaign to Reform America*, 129; Upchurch, *Legislating Racism*, 64–65; Crofts, “The Black Response,” 59–63.

<sup>19</sup> “Untitled,” *Huntsville Gazette*, March 22, 1890, 2; “The Race Problem Solving Itself,” *Huntsville Gazette*, May 17, 1890, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Upchurch, *Legislating Racism*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> Upchurch, *Legislating Racism*, 64–65.

them again with the national election bill while simultaneously urging readers to remain hopeful for a Blair Bill revival in July 1890.<sup>22</sup> By November, Black southerners realized that they could no longer rely on the federal government to intervene on behalf of African American education. The Fifty-First Congress and the party of Lincoln had betrayed them. This national betrayal encouraged the systematic dismantling of the public schools created in the Reconstruction era constitutions. These constitutions and a new wave of state legislation set the tone of Jim Crow education schooling, along with the activism culminating in *Brown v. Board of Education* and post-*Brown* decision desegregation processes.<sup>23</sup>

## The Emergence of Jim Crow Public Schools

The emergence of Jim Crow public schools reflected the final aspect of the systematic dismantling of the Reconstruction era social, political, and economic gains made by southern African Americans. Its emergence coincided with lynchings that removed the threat of public dissent by African Americans and their white allies. This system of terror secured southern African American complicity and prevented the adoption of strategies affirming Black life. Convict leasing and myths of Black criminality permitted the exploitation of the Fifteenth Amendment loophole of voter exclusion. If convicted of a crime, the numbers of eligible African American voters could be controlled. Reconstruction era public schools, however, significantly contributed to the growth of an educated African American citizenry eligible for full participation in the body politic. The removal of African Americans from the body politic, therefore, required the brutal suppression of African American education. Otherwise, a sizeable educated African American citizenship posed a threat to the larger political, social, and economic aims of southern Jim Crow architects. When coupled with literacy tests, understanding clauses, and other means codified in new state constitutions and legislation, southern governments ushered in another revolution. Unlike with the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 and accompanying state constitutions and legislation, African American education and public schooling suffered a major setback.

Amid this backdrop, the state of Mississippi offered the opening salvo in overturning their Reconstruction era constitution for one grounded in white supremacy. All but one delegate was white. Delegates drafted and adopted Article 12, which established a residency requirement, poll tax, literacy and understanding clauses, and more arbitrary

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<sup>22</sup> "Washington Letter; the Lodge Federal Election Bill," *Richmond Planet*, July 5, 1890, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Crofts, "The Black Response," 59–63.



registration processes.<sup>24</sup> As a mayor of an all-Black town, Isaiah T. Montgomery served as the sole African American delegate at the Mississippi convention. He supported the measure “consenting and assisting to strike down the rights and liberties of 123,000 freemen.”<sup>25</sup> While Mound Bayou residents maintained high levels of voting, the number of African American voters declined from a political majority at the height of the Reconstruction era to a negligible percentage of the Mississippi electorate.<sup>26</sup>

For education, the Mississippi convention delegates curtailed African American educational mandates with almost surgical precision. The legislature had been granted more power in the development and maintenance of the public schools. The legislative body determined the hiring and firing of state and county school superintendents. They reserved the right to abolish any position and take over the school district if necessary. The convention outlined the required members of the state board of education. The Mississippi secretary of state, the attorney general, and the superintendent of public education managed the use of school funds and operations of the state schools for all Mississippi children.

Beyond the four-month minimum, the convention specified that districts could levy additional taxation for sustaining schools for school years exceeding “the term of four months.” But state funding would only cover the four-month minimum. Since the legislature controlled the hiring and firing of superintendents, the convention rendered this possibility moot for African American public schools. Since African American schools relied on the American Missionary Association and other religious philanthropies for supplemental funding, the convention delegates ended this possibility in section 208. African American free public schools would lose their status and ability to draw on state funds if “any funds be appropriated towards the support of any sectarian school; or to any school that at the time of receiving such appropriation is not conducted as a free school.” Decisions regarding textbooks, school furniture, and other educational equipment also remained the domain of the state legislature and legislature-approved state board of education. If a district defied this state provision, the new constitution promised fines and other penalties for any individual or district violating this constitutional mandate.

Since the state received First and Second Morrill Act appropriations for Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College, the 1890 constitution promised to “sacredly carry out the conditions of the act of Congress, upon the subject, approved July 2d, A.D., 1862, and the legislature shall preserve intact the endowments to, and support, said colleges.”

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<sup>24</sup> Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 74–90; John Ray Skates, “Mississippi Convention of 1890,” *Mississippi History Now*, <http://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/articles/103/mississippi-constitution-of-1890>; “Mississippi Constitution of 1890 as Originally Adopted,” *Mississippi History Now*, <http://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/articles/103/index.php?s=extra&id=270>.

<sup>25</sup> Janet Sharp Hermann, “Isaiah T. Montgomery’s Balancing Act,” in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Leon Litwack and August Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 291–93, 296–304; “Mr. Montgomery’s Address,” *New York World*, September 27, 1890, 1–2.

<sup>26</sup> V. O. Key Jr., *Southern Politics in State and America* (New York: Vintage Books 1949), 560–63.

But, other than this provision advancing Black education, the 1890 convention and resulting constitution dismantled previous mandates that ensured the growth of an educated state populace and created the educational conditions necessary to uphold white supremacy and Jim Crow segregation until the modern civil rights movement. The Mississippi Plan both removed African Americans from the body politic politically and thwarted the continued growth of an educated middle class, African American schooling, and socioeconomic opportunities made possible by the Reconstruction educational developments.

Following the Mississippi Plan, several states, including those who formerly comprised the Confederacy, crafted new constitutions that overturned Black political rights by adopting literacy tests, poll taxes, and other measures. Several border states attempted but failed to pass similar measures.<sup>27</sup> While the US Supreme Court deemed Grandfather clauses unconstitutional in *Guinn v. United States* (1915), the other measures effectively created a system of racial apartheid. “Colored Only” signs, segregated shopping districts and public accommodations, Confederate Monuments in public squares and courthouses, and other geographical markers defined the new political order. In terms of education, the constitutions had a chilling effect. Here the debates and proceedings of the constitutional conventions marked an end to the revolutionary changes wrought by Confederate defeat. Their prescient gaze on African American education becomes magnified, especially in Alabama and Virginia.<sup>28</sup>

Alabama closely aligned its 1901 constitution with its neighbor. John B. Knox of Calhoun County praised Mississippi for providing the foundational model for Alabama and other southern states rewriting their constitutions.<sup>29</sup> As the convention chairman, Knox reminded the convention delegates that Alabama would adopt a constitution rooted in white supremacy. “But if we would have white supremacy, we must establish it by law—not by force or fraud.”<sup>30</sup> In order to craft a white supremacist government, Knox drew a parallel between disfranchisement and significant reform to African American education. Without reform, African Americans could overcome any literacy test, understanding clause, and/or poll tax measure. As a result, Knox encouraged delegates to not allow the educational gains to continue into the next generation of African American children:

There is a strong reason why those who have fought the battles of the State—those who have been trained in the duties of citizenship, and possess character, judgment and intelligence which enables them to

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<sup>27</sup> Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 322–28.

<sup>28</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 179–97.

<sup>29</sup> 1901 Alabama Convention, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Alabama, Held in the City of Montgomery, Commencing May 21st, 1901* (Montgomery: Brown Printing Company, 1901), 13–14.

<sup>30</sup> 1901 Alabama Convention, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Alabama*, 12.

appreciate the responsibility it imposes, should not be denied the right to vote, even though they may lack the elements of and education, but it does not follow that it is to the interest of the State that the indulgence should be extended to the second generation—especially so when learning to read and write are within reach and so easy to obtain!<sup>31</sup>

Knox set the tone for the convention work. African American schools could not continue to be a source of empowerment and potential challenge to the new government. The educated Black middle class could not grow any further.

In the debates, the white convention delegates followed Knox's directive. Delegates linked education reform, disenfranchisement, and white supremacy as they finalized the 1901 state constitution. They paid heed. "It is the policy of the state of Alabama to foster and promote the education of its citizens in a manner and extent consistent with its available resources, and the willingness and ability of the individual student," Article XIV, section 256, outlined.<sup>32</sup> Delegates clarified that public schools did not mean equality or a guaranteed right of citizenship as defined in the 1868 constitution by including in the final article, "but nothing in this Constitution shall be construed as creating or recognizing any right to education or training at public expense, nor as limiting the authority and duty of the legislature, in furthering or providing for education, to require or impose conditions or procedures deemed necessary to the preservation of peace and order."<sup>33</sup> Public schools would exist but no longer as an equal right of citizenship for state residents. Black children and other nonwhite children would not have the same guarantees as white children. The final article also outlined teachers' salaries and closed the loophole for the possibility of the American Missionary Association and other religious philanthropies supplementing state-funded African American public schools. The delegates easily restricted African American state public schools because no African American delegates were involved in the process.<sup>34</sup>

Without any delegates, Black Alabamians had been shut out of the process. Booker T. Washington and other leaders avoided offering any commentary. In a state with a high lynching rate, they chose the life and protection of their respective communities' schools, colleges, and universities. A group led by the *Mobile Press* editor did voice their anger at the convention proceedings but felt their "utter powerlessness to affect the result."<sup>35</sup> Unlike the 1868 convention, African Americans, including educated leaders, could not shape public school education. As convention delegates eroded the progressive educational reforms,

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<sup>31</sup> 1901 Alabama Convention, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Alabama*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Alabama Constitution of 1901, <https://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/constitutions/id/111>.

<sup>33</sup> Alabama Constitution of 1901.

<sup>34</sup> Alabama Constitution of 1901.

<sup>35</sup> Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 181, 191–93.

African Americans had few options at their disposal to counter the proceedings and ratification of the constitution. They promised legal challenges and a willingness to fight up to the Supreme Court. If the courts failed, they threatened migration. Without strong public schools and the franchise, African Americans understood that the effects would be immediate and dire. Indeed, they were correct. The effects were immediate. According to Michael Perman, only 1,081 African Americans remained on the voter rolls of the fourteen majority African American Black Belt counties. By the end of the mandated registration, Alabama had only 2,980 registered voters. The school population remained significant. Tuskegee and other HBCUs continued to produce graduates. Yet even educated African Americans remained shut out of the new political processes to influence the Jim Crow public schools, school boards, and state politics more broadly.<sup>36</sup>

In Richmond, Virginia, the convention delegates set their sights on Black education. Governor and former Confederate William Mahone's biracial, cross-class, and unifier of urban African American electorate and more rural white western constituents had brought the last significant changes to African American education during the second decade of public schools. Richmond School Board saw the appointment of two African American members who had full rights and privileges designated to that body. In this position, the city residents saw success with the hiring of Black principals and Black teachers as the majority of the teaching force in the public schools. This significant reform remained following the shift in state politics. Virginia State University, a public HBCU, received its charter, first African American president John Mercer Langston, and African American teaching force who had been trained in local, state, and regional normal schools. More importantly, an educated middle class continued to grow, influence both educational and noneducational policies, and defied the racial terrain following the decline of the Readjusters moment. The threats posed by the educated Black middle class drew the ire of members of the May Movement, whose elections as the political majority determined the contours of the 1902 Virginia Constitution.<sup>37</sup>

Governor-elect Andrew Jackson Montague understood the necessity of dismantling the educational gains achieved by African Americans in the constitution mandated by the Reconstruction Acts of 1867. The former state Attorney General disagreed with the provisions issued in the Reconstruction constitution. Public schools as a form of citizenship drew his ire. Montague implored convention delegates: "But what of education? This is a momentous question for Southern States. Republican government founded upon an

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<sup>36</sup> Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 193–94.

<sup>37</sup> Green, *Educational Reconstruction*, 158–73; Nicole Myers Turner, *Soul Liberty: The Evolution of Black Religious Politics in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 106–43; Wythe W. Holt Jr., "The Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1910–1902: A Reform Movement Which Lacked Substance," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 76, no. 1 (January 1968), 70–76.

electorate without intelligence is a house whose foundation is sand.”<sup>38</sup> He rewrote the past in order to dismantle these Reconstruction era gains created in the Reconstruction constitution. He, therefore, justified the creation of a racialized educational system where African American students would no longer have access to the full curriculum slate and therefore economic possibilities afforded by the previous constitution. For the modern industrial machine age of the twentieth century, Montague remarked: “The age of hand is past and the age of the machine is come. Its mighty power is at play in the modern industrial progress. What shall we do with this force? Shall we observe its march with unconcern, or shall we command it to our uplifting?”<sup>39</sup> In response, he implored the delegates that “some forms of industrial and mechanical education” must be included for African American children and other marginalized Virginians deemed ineligible for the pursuit of “the learned professions, state-craft, science and philosophy.”<sup>40</sup>

In the subsequent debates, Virginian delegates intentionally advanced myths of African American ignorance and lack of educational progress made through the public schools. Abraham Pedigo of Henry County stated during the April 3, 1902, session: “In order that I may not be misunderstood I will here state that I do not consider the negro as being equal or anything near equal to the white man intelligence, or learning, or capacity for self-government. I do not believe that they, if left to themselves, could carry on a free government.”<sup>41</sup> By advancing the myths of African American education, the convention delegates crafted a new educational system. They listened to Montague’s charge. Not only had they designed a new constitution that disenfranchised African Americans and poor, illiterate white Virginians, but they had designed a state system of schools that thwarted any possible resistance. Education had been the pathway toward the middle class and leadership. By restricting educational access, the convention delegates effectively thwarted future growth.

Other states also revised their state systems by adopting Jim Crow school measures. Following Ben Tillman’s directives, South Carolina delegates effectively neutralized the six African American convention delegates from Beaufort and Georgetown counties.<sup>42</sup> Of the conventions, South Carolina had the largest Black delegation. The men raised objections and sponsored motions but could not prevent the adoption of “Separate schools shall be provided for children of the white and colored races, and no child of either race shall ever

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<sup>38</sup> 1901–1902 Constitutional Convention of Virginia, *Report of the Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention of Virginia, Held in the City of Richmond June 12, 1901 to June 26, 1902, Volume II* (Richmond: Hermitage Press, 1906), 1710.

<sup>39</sup> 1901–1902 Constitutional Convention of Virginia, *Report of the Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention of Virginia*, 1710.

<sup>40</sup> 1901–1902 Constitutional Convention of Virginia, *Report of the Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention of Virginia*, 1710.

<sup>41</sup> 1901–1902 Constitutional Convention of Virginia, *Report of the Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention of Virginia*, 3047.

<sup>42</sup> Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 103.



be permitted to attend a school provided for children of the other race.”<sup>43</sup> The men also could not stop the restructuring of Claflin University from an integrated institution to a strictly HBCU with an African American teaching force. The new constitution ended the Reconstruction experiment of integration at Claflin University and foreclosed the resurrection of the desegregated University of South Carolina until the civil rights movement.<sup>44</sup>

From the Deep South to border states, Jim Crow public schools emerged in the new constitutions. Convention delegates viewed the African American schools as a direct threat to white supremacy governments. They, therefore, crafted new state constitutional mandates that removed African American public schools “from their roots in denominational and freedmen’s schools,” restricted access to previous financial networks, and implemented an industrial education curriculum.<sup>45</sup> In Louisiana, the adoption of literacy tests provided white residents’ motivation for limiting African American educational gains in the 1898 constitution. Recalling the initial Reconstruction era integrated schools, convention delegates dictated “free public schools for the white and colored races, separately established by the General Assembly” in Article 248.<sup>46</sup> As in Alabama, African Americans tried to influence the plan from outside of the convention. Some leaders even adopted Isaiah T. Montgomery–style language in their appeal; however, they failed to mount a substantive resistance to the eroding of African American schools.<sup>47</sup> Under local and special legislation, Kentucky convention delegates intentionally drafted a vague provision regarding public schools. The constitution of 1891 promised to “provide for the management of public schools” and authorized the General Assembly to draft appropriate legislation.<sup>48</sup> Delaware, in contrast, specified segregated schools in section 2 of Article X in the 1897 constitution. While promising “no distinction shall be made on account of race or color” in state funding, the constitution specified that “separate schools for white and

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<sup>43</sup> Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 106–14; South Carolina Convention, *Journal of the Constitutional Convention of the State of South Carolina. Begun to be Holden at Columbia, S.C., on Tuesday, the Tenth Day of September, Anno Domini Eighteen Hundred and Ninety-Five, and Continued with Diverse Adjournments Until Wednesday, the Fourth Day of December, Anno Domini Eighteen Hundred and Ninety-Five, When Finally Adjourned* (Columbia, SC: C. A. Calvo Jr., State Printer, 1895). 55.

<sup>44</sup> Tyler Parry, “The Radical Experiment of South Carolina: The History and Legacy of a Reconstructed University,” *Journal of African American History* 105 (Fall 2020): 539–66.

<sup>45</sup> Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 15–19.

<sup>46</sup> *Constitution of the State of Louisiana: Adopted in Convention at the City of New Orleans, May 12, 1898* (New Orleans: H. J. Hearsey, convention printer, 1898), 97.

<sup>47</sup> Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 139.

<sup>48</sup> *Constitution of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Adopted by the Constitutional Convention, April 11, 1891, and Submitted to a Vote of the People at the August Election, 1891* (Louisville: Press of Courier-Journal Printing Co., 1891), 15.



colored children shall be maintained.”<sup>49</sup> These constitutions finetuned the Mississippi plan for their respective states. In the process, these state officials remade “Black education from ground up” and created a new system aligned with the desired Jim Crow racial, social, and political order.<sup>50</sup>

Instead of drafting new constitutions, several states enacted new legislation curtailing African American public schools. Tennessee passed several educational statutes that reinforced race and second-class citizenship status in public schools. The 1901 law, however, made the education of white and Black children in an integrated school or college into a punishable offense with the possibility of a fine, a thirty- to sixty-day jail sentence, or both.<sup>51</sup> While the 1870 constitution specified that “white and colored persons shall not be taught in the same school,” West Virginia amended its 1872 constitution in 1902. The “Irreducible School Fund Amendment” refined how the School Fund could be used. The segregated school mandate remained unchanged until a 1994 legislative act repealed and removed the language from the constitution.<sup>52</sup> After the failure of the national Blair and Lodge Bills, Arkansas passed William’s Bill, although George Bell, the only African American senator, dissented. By introducing the secret ballot, the disenfranchisement measure coincided with the attacks on Black education in the state in terms of access, funding, and support. It became an additional obstacle for illiterate and poorly educated African Americans. While the calls for a new constitution failed in 1888 and 1890, the Arkansas state legislature designed similar educational measures based on the Mississippi plan.<sup>53</sup> White Marylanders also failed to bring Jim Crow segregation with a new constitution. Black Marylanders successfully fought against three attempts to disenfranchise them between 1904 and 1911. Black Baltimoreans and other African Americans positioned themselves as the “safeguard against political corruption, oppression and disorder.”<sup>54</sup> They not only blocked the constitutional convention movement but also proved instrumental in defeating the Poe, Straus, and Diggs Amendments, which intended to disfranchise African American voters without rewriting the state constitution. Maryland legislators, however,

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<sup>49</sup> *Constitution of the State of Delaware, Adopted in Convention, June 4th, A.D. 1897. Published by the Secretary of State, by Authority of a Resolution of the Constitutional Convention* (Wilmington: Press of Mercantile Printing Company, 1897), 38–39.

<sup>50</sup> Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> “Jim Crow Laws: Tennessee,” *Americans All*, <https://americansall.org/legacy-story-group/jim-crow-laws-tennessee>.

<sup>52</sup> Constitution of West Virginia, [https://www.wvlegislature.gov/WVCODE/WV\\_CON.cfm](https://www.wvlegislature.gov/WVCODE/WV_CON.cfm).

<sup>53</sup> Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 63–67.

<sup>54</sup> Dennis Patrick Halpin, *A Brotherhood of Liberty: Black Reconstruction and Its Legacies in Baltimore, 1865–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 115.

succeeded in upholding separate schools until desegregation occurred in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> Even without rewriting their constitutions, these states hollowed out African American education in their respective states and the District of Columbia.

In addition to these concerted efforts, new obstacles emerged. Booker T. Washington and his industrial education model provided individuals with an alternative model in the wake of the Blair Education Bill. Following the 1895 Atlanta Exposition Address, Washington and his educational model represented the future. Long-standing white partners of African American public schools abandoned their previous Black urban southern proponents for Washington. By switching focus, the Peabody Educational Fund and other philanthropists could maintain their commitment to African American education without any guilt.<sup>56</sup> Even Henry Blair openly courted Washington's support instead of his previous African American allies for a modified Blair Bill.<sup>57</sup> Non-aligned Black southerners found themselves excluded from the national educational debate in which the tenets of the Washingtonian industrial education model dominated. Coupled with the Blair Bill defeat, the consequences of this shift ultimately closed the door on the revolutionary moment in African American education.

The combined consequences were apparent in the 1902 annual report of the Commissioner of Education. The US Department of Education official reported that southern states and the District of Columbia devoted no more than 20 percent of the annual regional expenditures on African American public schools during the 1901–2 academic year. The fifteen tables contained in the annual report demonstrate that the disenfranchisement measures and the new Jim Crow educational provisions, whether legislatively or constitutionally, resulted in the massive divestment of Black education.

For the 1901–2 year, the commissioner reported that 56.97 percent of school-aged children enrolled in the African American schools. In comparison, only 32.85 percent attended during the 1889–90 academic year. The number of teachers, however, remained relatively stagnant. 28,705 African American teachers taught in 1901–2, while 24,072 African American teachers found employment in the public schools on the eve of the Blair Bill and the drafting of the 1890 Mississippi state constitution.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Halpin, *A Brotherhood of Liberty*, 127–37, 148–75.

<sup>56</sup> James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1865–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 245–47; Stephanie Deutsch, *You Need a Schoolhouse: Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald, and the Building of Schools for the Segregated South* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 50–59.

<sup>57</sup> Henry William Blair to Booker T. Washington, February 21, 1896, in *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, ed. Louis R. Harlan, vol. 4, 1895–98 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 120.

<sup>58</sup> United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1902* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1903), 2064.

**Table 6.1. Consequences of Jim Crow Measures of African American Enrollments**

State	School Census of Black Children Ages 5–18	Enrolled Black Students in Public Schools	% of Enrolled Students
Alabama	295,250	126,116	42.71
Arkansas	127,120	90,109	70.88
Delaware	8,888	6,141	69.09
District of Columbia	20,428	15,914	77.9
Florida	75,160	42,843	57
Georgia	363,053	204,706	56.39
Kentucky	87,654	62,975	71.84
Louisiana	227,500	73,624	32.36
Maryland	70,120	48,257	68.82
Mississippi	322,070	208,346	64.69
Missouri	45,971	31,360	68.22
North Carolina	225,900	149,798	66.31
South Carolina	292,000	144,786	49.58
Tennessee	157,885	106,747	67.61
Texas	227,660	144,362	63.41
Virginia	227,940	123,339	54.11
West Virginia	11,487	7,886	68.65

Source: “Table 2: Common School Statistics of the South, 1901–2,” in US Department of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1902* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1903), 2064.

Public high schools proved rarer for Black children. For the 99 public high schools across the nation and Washington, DC, 623 teachers provided instruction. Women served as the predominant teaching forces in these high schools. Alabama, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia offered high school curriculum for some students residing primarily in urban districts.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the majority of African American secondary education advanced industrial education training as its dominant curricular design for African American schoolchildren. Few received normal school and traditional high school courses. High school curriculum was not seen as a priority for African American children in the new Jim Crow era schools. As a result, the pipeline toward the colleges and normal degree programs and classroom instruction was disrupted. This prompted a future crisis as Reconstruction era educators aged out of the school system and either retired or died.<sup>60</sup> As shown in the report’s tables 9 and 10, pipeline

<sup>59</sup> United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1902*, 2065, 2072–77.

<sup>60</sup> United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1902*, 2067, 2078–93.

disruption extended to other professional training, such as theology, law, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and nursing. For professional training and graduates, theology and nursing remained significant fields for African American students. Washington, DC, Georgia Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia had the majority of the students and graduates.<sup>61</sup>

**Table 6.2. African American Student Enrollments in Higher Grades**

State	Students Enrolled in Normal Courses	High School Graduates	Normal Graduates	Collegiate Graduates	Students Enrolled in Professional Courses	Professional Graduates
Alabama	788	40	57	1	120	0
Arkansas	82	4	14	6	0	0
Delaware	3	0	0	1	0	0
District of Columbia	204	15	116	9	408	92
Florida	109	10	11	0	3	0
Georgia	234	70	41	18	158	27
Kentucky	198	4	12	0	20	0
Louisiana	44	47	22	6	65	0
Maryland	85	3	10	5	8	0
Mississippi	518	263	62	22	69	11
Missouri	179	0	171	8	0	0
North Carolina	925	93	279	20	201	0
South Carolina	281	54	141	10	82	0
Tennessee	604	15	53	59	364	0
Texas	155	9	14	22	35	2
Virginia	214	117	84	22	95	51
West Virginia	88	0	34	0	0	0

Source: US Department of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1902* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1903), 2068.

Industrial education increasingly became the predominant education style available to African American children. This training limited their economic opportunities but also promoted the formation of a working laboring class without the franchise and ability to directly shape political affairs and legislation in the state.<sup>62</sup> Funding was significantly slashed across the region. African American education was not prioritized in the southern states that saw segregated schools as essential for sustaining the white supremacy

<sup>61</sup> United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1902*, 2068.

<sup>62</sup> United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1902*, 2069, 2086–95.

governments.<sup>63</sup> Private schools offered an alternative option for parents. However, most Black children suffered from these new education reforms and saw a stalling of the upward progress achieved since 1865.

African American responses varied to the emergence of Jim Crow public schools and realities as disenfranchised, second-class citizens of their respective states. As some Black Alabamians warned during the convention proceedings, African Americans migrated to areas that promised the franchise, good schools, and full socioeconomic benefits made possible by education. Some escaped to all-Black towns and enclaves in the South. Others migrated outside the region and even the United States. Using their feet, they claimed their humanity, dignity, and full citizenship. In short, they rejected the Jim Crow schools offered by southern states and the District of Columbia.<sup>64</sup>

For the majority who remained, they maintained hope for a better political, social, and economic future. After all, Reconstruction embodied the realization of African Americans' antebellum rhetoric of hope for abolition. This reality and the revolutionary opportunities achieved with three constitutional amendments, the expansion of state and national citizenship, the development of a Black professional middle class, and the creation of community institutions continued to inspire individuals to persevere, fight, and create meaningful lives. They did not and could not predict the future. The rhetoric of hope allowed for their perseverance, survival, and activism. Drawing on the history of their racial past, these African Americans imagined and strove for inclusive and democratic futures.<sup>65</sup> They actively rejected the regional and national premise of citizenship and public education thrust on southern African Americans. They refused to see the public schools as vehicles for placing them "beneath the threshold of humanistic potentiality."<sup>66</sup>

African Americans, especially urban southerners, responded to these new setbacks by shifting strategies. Since Confederate defeat, they had used education as a means to position themselves as leaders who could uplift the race but also the post-Civil War nation. As race relations worsened, individuals educated in the Reconstruction era schools prepared a new generation for future challenges and access to social mobility. They refined older strategies and adopted new tactics, such as the embrace of the ASNLH (Association for the Study of the Negro Life and History, the present-day Association of the Study of African American Life and History) and the black history movement advanced by Carter

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<sup>63</sup> United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1902*, 2069–70.

<sup>64</sup> See Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 481–96, and Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 326–403; Gates, *Stony the Road*, 186–203.

<sup>66</sup> Jarvis R. Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021), 13.

G. Woodson.<sup>67</sup> Woodson offered them a fugitive pedagogy, new networks of teachers and reformers, alternative curricula, and other tools. During the Jim Crow education era, according to historian Jarvis Givens, students, parents, community leaders, and "educators wore a mask of compliance in order to appease the white power structure, while simultaneously working to subvert it."<sup>68</sup>

African Americans also sought new nondenominational partners with the Rosenwald school program; the Jeanes Foundation, which found teachers in rural communities; and the General Education Fund sponsored by John Rockefeller Sr. These non-religious partners complied with the new constitutional provisions.<sup>69</sup> They made full use of the educated professional middle class and educator-activists who received their training in the public schools, teacher-training institutions, and HBCUs as they advanced into the next phase of African American education. They expected that these HBCUs, especially the post-Second Morrill Act institutions, would continue educating and empowering the next generation. They also maintained an unwavering support for interracial cooperation, the transformative nature of education, racial uplift via education, and their full citizenship status. This long Reconstruction era of African American education, therefore, embodies one of the Reconstruction era successes. The emergence of the Jim Crow era represented a setback but not an insurmountable one. The legacy of the Reconstruction era helped in the struggle for African American education, civil rights, and social justice.

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<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Aaron Snyder, *Making Black History: The Color Line, Culture, and Race in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 19–21, 33–39; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 166–77.

<sup>68</sup> Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 4. Givens offers a comprehensive treatment on how African American educators, students, and communities responded using Woodson's framework and ASNLH networks. See chapters 3–6 of Givens's *Fugitive Pedagogy*.

<sup>69</sup> Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*, 85–88, 153–72; Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, 19–24, 26–47; Deutsch, *You Need a Schoolhouse*, 118–53; William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865–1954* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 81–135.



# Glossary of Key Terms, People, and Organizations

**American Missionary Association:** Established in 1846, this abolitionist organization promoted the growth of African American schools in the slave refugee camps and across the region during Reconstruction. Working with African Americans, the organization created and sponsored numerous primary and secondary schools, and colleges and universities, and paid teachers' salaries.

**Samuel C. Armstrong (1839–1893):** Born to missionary parents in Maui, Hawaii, this Civil War veteran of the 125th New York and Ninth United States Colored Infantry became commander of the Eighth United States Colored Infantry. After the Civil War, he joined the Freedmen's Bureau and helped establish Hampton University. While at Hampton, he promoted an educational model that combined vocational learning with traditional liberal arts. He also became a mentor of Booker T. Washington as a student and in his role as the head of Tuskegee Institute. He is buried on the Hampton University campus.

**Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH):** Created by Carter G. Woodson in 1915, this organization devoted its effort to the promotion, research, preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of the history and scholarship about Black life, history, and culture to the global community. Its publications, conferences, and publishing house showcased the work of African Americans and white scholarly allies and directly challenged Dunning School interpretations of Reconstruction. Negro History Week brought this Black History project into K–12 classrooms and communities across the Jim Crow South. The organization is presently known as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

**Blair Education Bill:** Spearheaded by Senator Henry Blair of New Hampshire, the proposed federal legislation would have created a national public school system supported by federal funds. The proposed ten-year program would have distributed federal funds based on illiteracy rates, which would have resulted in 75 percent of the benefits going to southern states. The proposed legislation also included federal oversight. Congress failed to pass the legislation after several attempts. After the last attempt in 1890, southern states began to design and implement new constitutions and legislative measures curtailing African American education.

**Lucy Chase:** With her sister Sarah Chase, Lucy Chase taught newly emancipated African Americans during and immediately after the Civil War. Her letters and published articles provide insights into wartime schools and early Freedmen's Schools.

**Congressional Reconstruction:** Starting in 1867, this phase of federal policy represents Congressional Republicans' vision for Reconstruction that limited the power of white southerners who opposed the expansion of southern Black economic, educational, and political gains; promoted biracial governance in the region; and increased protections and rights for African Americans in shaping the reconstructed South.

**Contrabands/slave refugees:** Formerly known as *contrabands*, these self-liberating African Americans fled to federal lines during the Civil War and forced military generals, Congress, and the Lincoln administration to create policies recognizing their status and rights. Their actions also prompted the creation of the first wartime schools for African Americans and helped establish African American education as a postwar right of citizenship and freedom.

**W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963):** Born in Massachusetts to a Civil War veteran father, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois received his doctorate from Harvard University and wrote numerous publications challenging Dunning School scholars' interpretation of African American life and history. The African American scholar also clashed with Booker T. Washington over the best type of education suitable for sustaining African American progress and racial uplift. His book *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* remains a classic work for understanding southern Black education during Reconstruction.

**Dunning school of thought:** William Archibald Dunning and a group of scholars promoted the characterization of Reconstruction as a mistake; codified the stereotypes of white northerners and white southerners; portrayed African Americans as carpetbaggers, scalawags, and corrupt childlike individuals ill-prepared for freedom; and justified the necessity of the violence and fraud in the historic period. Presented as truth, this interpretative framework dominated late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth-century scholarship and still shapes popular understandings.

**Freedmen/freedpeople:** Former enslaved African Americans who received their freedom and rights of citizenship after the Civil War.

**Freedmen's Bureau:** In March 1865, Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (better known as the Freedmen's Bureau). The commissioner, assistant commissioners, and field agents proved beneficial in the first phase of post-Civil War schools for African Americans. The federal agency facilitated the efforts of African Americans and northern societies in meeting the demand for education by renting school facilities, providing books and transportation for teachers, assessing the schools' progress with monthly reports, and providing military protection against opponents of Black education.

**Freedmen's schools:** After the Civil War, these schools represented the first major phase in African American education. African Americans developed and sustained a system of schools, supported by the financial and administrative support of African Americans, northern religious and secular philanthropies, and the Freedmen's Bureau.

**Charlotte Forten (1837–1914):** Born to elite Black Philadelphian parents, Forten received her education at the Salem State Normal School in Massachusetts. During the Civil War, Forten taught newly freed African Americans in the Union-occupied South Carolina lowcountry. After the Civil War, she taught in Boston and Charleston, South Carolina, before becoming a teacher in Washington, DC. Her diaries, letters of correspondence, and poetry offer insights on African American education during and after the Civil War.

**Oliver Otis Howard (1830–1909):** Born in Leeds, Maine, Howard served in the Civil War in the Third Maine before joining the Army of Potomac and then the Army of Tennessee. From May 1865 to July 1874, the Civil War veteran served as the commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau. He was responsible for assisting white refugees, restoring abandoned lands, and assisting southern African Americans in their transition from slavery to freedom. Howard developed comprehensive programs, including courts, hospitals, food ration distribution, and schooling. In terms of education, Howard helped in the development of the first phase of African American southern schools and coordinated the efforts of secular organizations, religious organizations, and freedpeople. He played a role in the founding of and became the namesake of Howard University.

**Harriet Jacobs:** Born into slavery in Edenton, North Carolina, the self-emancipated abolitionist spent almost seven years in a small attic space in order to ensure the freedom and safety of her children. She published *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which offered an unvarnished examination of the plight of enslaved women. During the Civil War, Harriet Jacobs opened and taught newly freed African Americans alongside her daughter in Alexandria, Virginia, and Savannah, Georgia.

**Louisa Matilda Jacobs:** Born into slavery in Edenton, North Carolina, the daughter of Harriet Jacobs taught newly emancipated African Americans in Alexandria, Virginia, and Savannah, Georgia, alongside her mother. She eventually becomes the matron at Howard University. The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers offer valuable insights into these early African American schools.

**Jacobs Free School:** Black abolitionist Harriet Jacobs established this tuition-free school in Alexandria, Virginia. Jacobs's daughter Louisa Jacobs and another African American woman taught the students and sustained the day-to-day operations. Instead of white administrators, the African American community served as the administrators.

**Mississippi Plan of 1890:** This plan constitutionally disfranchised African Americans and severely curtailed African American public schools. The combined effect allowed for the overthrow of Reconstruction gains made by African Americans and the emergence of Jim Crow. Other southern states followed the model established by Mississippi through new constitutions and state legislative measures.

**Morrill Act of 1862:** Passed on July 2, 1862, this federal legislation provided federal funds from the sale of public land and that of dispossessed Indigenous communities to support the creation and funding of land-grant colleges. While the majority of the funding supported the education of white Americans, several southern HBCUs received financial support: Kentucky State (originally called Kentucky State Industrial College), Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College in Mississippi, Claflin College (originally The Colored Normal, Agricultural, and Mechanical College of South Carolina), and Virginia State University.

**Morrill Act of 1890:** Passed on August 30, 1890, this federal legislation extended the use of federal funds from the sale of public lands to include African American education. This act required each state to show that race was not a factor in the land-grant school or to create a separate land-grant institution for African Americans.

**Nat Turner's Slave Rebellion in 1831:** Led by a literate minister in Southampton County, Virginia, Nat Turner and his co-patriots attacked and killed white participants in the institution of slavery and any African Americans who attempted to stop their rebellion using axes, machetes, knives, and other blunt instruments. This uprising resulted in the death of roughly sixty white southerners and an unknown number of African Americans, and led to increased slave patrols in surrounding North Carolina and Virginia counties. After being captured following a manhunt, Thomas R. Gray recorded and published "Turner's Confessions." Authorities convicted and hung Turner. In the aftermath of the rebellion, southern states passed new anti-Black literacy restrictions on the education of free and enslaved African Americans, such as increased fines and punishments for anyone in violation, closure of existing schools, and restricted meeting sizes for African Americans.

**Mary S. Peake (1823–1862):** Born free in Norfolk, Virginia, Peake received her education in Alexandria, Virginia, and returned to operate a clandestine school for African American children. During the Civil War, she operated a school for self-liberated individuals before being hired by the American Missionary Association. She died from disease during the Civil War.

**Presidential Reconstruction:** From 1865 to 1866, this phase of federal policy represents President Andrew Johnson's vision for Reconstruction that provided leniency to white southerners, restored political rights and power to former Confederate generals and

leaders for regulating state affairs, and afforded limited rights for African Americans in shaping the reconstructed South. In this phase, Johnson vetoed the continuation of the Freedmen's Bureau. Congress overrode his veto and extended the agency's tenure.

**Reconstruction Acts of 1867:** The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 defined the terms for readmission of former Confederate states to full representation in the nation. The bill divided the former Confederate states, except for Tennessee, into five military districts. Each state was required to register all eligible white and Black voters, write a new constitution that ratified the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, ratify the document, and apply for readmission. Subsequent acts clarified the terms.

**Revisionist school of thought:** Reflecting the gains of the civil rights movement and diversification of the academy, this group of scholars revised Dunning School interpretations of Reconstruction, including African American education characterized by Henry Swint. By asking new questions of old and new sources, these scholars provided more nuanced understandings of the motivations for diverse teachers and educational partners, assessment of the schools, setbacks, and successes, and confirmed Du Bois's earlier assessment of Black schools as a lasting successful aspect of the Reconstruction era.

**Willie Lee Rose (1927–2018):** American historian who wrote *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, which documented the growth of African American schools and labor experimentation in the Port Royal, South Carolina, area.

**Rosenwald schools:** During Jim Crow, Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald advanced the spread of African American schools in the rural South. This educational partnership led to the creation of more than five thousand schools and the employment of African American teachers in the respective schools.

**Susie King Taylor (1848–1912):** Born into slavery outside of Savannah, Georgia, Susie King Taylor secretly learned how to read and write while still enslaved. During the Civil War, she became attached to the First South Carolina Volunteers, an African American regiment, and served as a teacher, nurse, and laundress before marrying Sergeant Edwin King. She continued to teach both soldiers and newly emancipated African Americans in the South Carolina and Georgia lowcountry until the end of the Civil War. She then operated a private school in Savannah, Georgia, before her husband's death and the opening of state-funded public schools caused its closure. Taylor's memoirs offer valuable insights on the wartime educational efforts of southern African Americans.

**Wartime educational blueprint:** The movement and occupation of federal troops allowed African American schools to emerge within days of an area becoming secure for the opening of schools and transportation of teachers. As the Civil War progressed, the pattern persisted and contributed to the expansion of wartime schools in slave refugee camps.

**Booker T. Washington (1856–1915):** Born into slavery in Hale’s Ford, Virginia, Booker T. Washington received his formal education at Hampton University and became the mentee of Samuel C. Armstrong. Washington taught both African American and Native American students before becoming the head of Tuskegee Institute. Under his direction, Tuskegee went from a handful of buildings to a leader in African American education using a vocational curriculum modeled after Hampton University. Jim Crow school architects and funders embraced the Hampton-Tuskegee model after the Reconstruction era schools. After the death of Frederick Douglass, Washington is seen as a leader of African Americans, using his money, power, and influence to shape African American education and neutralize his critics. Washington is buried on the Tuskegee University campus.

**Carter G. Woodson (1875–1950):** Born in Virginia to formerly enslaved parents, Woodson delayed his education by working in the coal mines in West Virginia. He received his education from Berea College, the University of Chicago, and Harvard University. He taught at Howard University and West Virginia University, educated Filipino children during the Spanish American War, and also taught in Washington, DC, before founding the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), *Journal of Negro History*, *Negro History Bulletin*, and Negro History Week. His role in establishing Black History Month provided Jim Crow era educators with the necessary tools to overcome the racial logics of the public schools operated for African American children.



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# Case Studies

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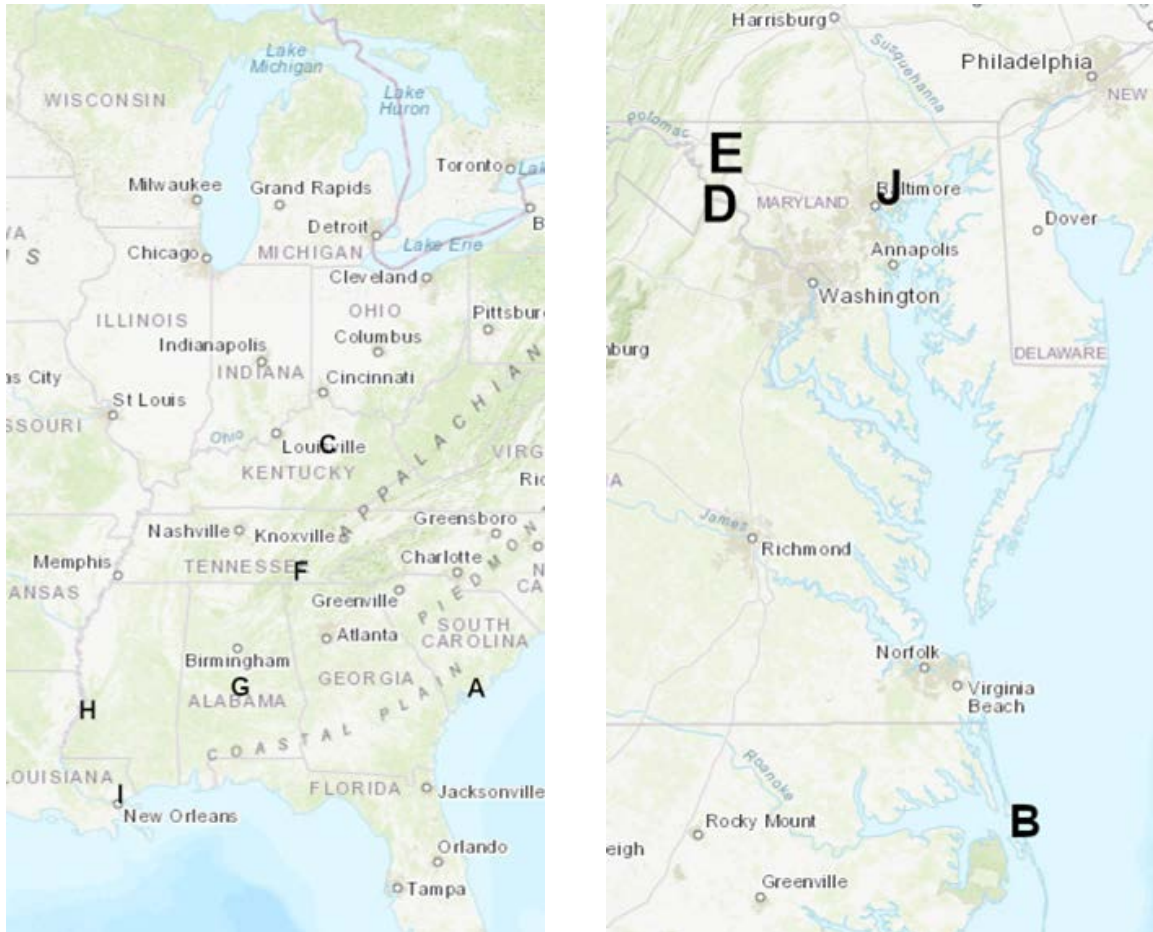


**Top left:** Alcorn State University, Lorman, MS; **Top right:** Peale Museum, Baltimore, MD

**Bottom left:** McDonogh School No. 6, New Orleans, LA; **Bottom right:** Brick Church, Saint Helena Island, SC



## Historic Resource Map: African American Schools in the South, 1865–1900, Case Studies



### HISTORIC RESOURCE MAP KEY

- A** Penn School, Reconstruction Era National Historical Park, South Carolina
- B** Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony, Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, North Carolina
- C** Camp Nelson, Camp Nelson National Monument, Kentucky
- D** Lockwood House and Storer College, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, West Virginia
- E** Tolson's Chapel, Antietam National Battlefield, Maryland
- F** Howard School, Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, Tennessee
- G** Burrell Academy and Clark School, Selma to Montgomery National Voting Rights Trail, Alabama
- H** Alcorn State University, Natchez Trace Parkway, Mississippi
- I** McDonogh School No. 6, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, Louisiana
- J** Peale Museum and Frederick Douglass High School, Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, Maryland



# Case Studies Introduction

Keith S. Hébert

*Education means emancipation. It means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man into the glorious light of truth, the light by which men can only be made free.*

—FREDERICK DOUGLASS, *BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY AND EDUCATION*, 1894

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The American Civil War emancipated over four million Black enslaved laborers. Thousands of African American schools formed in response to freedpeople's demands for education. Few of those school buildings remain. No national historic resource survey of Civil War and Reconstruction era African American schools exists. This report examines the history of ten representative historic sites and presents a methodology for identifying additional historic resources.

## American Civil War and Reconstruction Era African American School Case Studies

School Name	Location	Nearest National Park Unit
Penn School	Saint Helena Island, South Carolina	Reconstruction Era National Historical Park
Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony	Roanoke Island, North Carolina	Fort Raleigh National Historic Site
Camp Nelson	Jessamine County, Kentucky	Camp Nelson Heritage National Monument
Lockwood School and Storer College	Harpers Ferry, West Virginia	Harpers Ferry National Historical Park
Tolson's Chapel	Sharpsburg, Maryland	Antietam National Battlefield
Howard School	Chattanooga, Tennessee	Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Battlefield
Burrell School	Selma, Alabama	Selma to Montgomery National Voting Rights Trail
Alcorn State University	Lorman, Mississippi	Natchez Trace Parkway
McDonogh School No. 6	New Orleans, Louisiana	Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve
Frederick Douglass High School	Baltimore, Maryland	Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine

## Methodology

Several factors have limited the number of extant African American Civil War and Reconstruction era school buildings. Educators organized most of the first Black schools in temporary locations in repurposed buildings or in American military camps located in occupied areas of the Confederate States of America. At Camp Nelson, Kentucky, the American Army and the American Missionary Association opened a large school to educate Black soldiers and their families. Many Black schools opened in churches. Some of these examples have survived, such as Tolson's Chapel, Maryland, or the Brick Church, South Carolina, while some historic Black church buildings have either been replaced with newer buildings by their congregations or were destroyed by white domestic terrorists seeking to undermine Black civil equality. In fact, numerous Black school buildings were burned between 1865 and the late 1960s. Across the South, many of the region's first public schools, Black and white, were opened in poorly built buildings such as log houses, barns, and warehouses. In most cases, communities eventually built permanent architect-designed school buildings for white students but neglected to erect similar quality buildings for Black students. Many counties across the South lacked a public high school for African Americans until the early twentieth century. In most southern communities, extant public schools located in predominately Black neighborhoods have existed on the same plot of land for generations. Originally, the school might have been a log house built during Reconstruction. Usually, this building was replaced by the Black community decades later. During the early twentieth century, Black southern communities who benefited from the Rosenwald school building program often replaced their older buildings with new architect-designed buildings located on the same plot of land. In many cases, Black school advocates tore down the older building to make room for the new Rosenwald school. During the 1950s and 1960s, a new wave of Black school construction, known as equalization schools, spread across the South in response to the *Brown v. Board* decision. White communities sought to stall racial integration by building new Black schools that were proclaimed to be equal to their white counterparts. School boards built numerous equalization schools on sites previously occupied by a Rosenwald school. Today, in many Black communities, those mid-twentieth-century equalization school buildings remain standing and in use. Those modern buildings, such as Howard High School, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Clark Elementary School, Selma, Alabama, represent the last surviving vestige of a long lineage of buildings associated with the history of postbellum Black education in America. Thousands of these mid-twentieth-century historic resources exist

across the South, but few have been preserved or interpreted by cultural resource professionals. The connections between these modern buildings and the region's first Black schools have often been forgotten.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the oldest examples of Black schools included in this study were architect-designed buildings built by local public school boards in major cities with large Black populations, such as New Orleans, Louisiana, and Baltimore, Maryland. In those cities, African Americans held enormous political power during the postbellum period and maintained significant economic and political influence despite the inequalities created by subsequent decades of Jim Crow racial segregation. Black schools in urban racially segregated school systems faced numerous challenges. Built during the last throes of Reconstruction, New Orleans's McDonogh School No. 5 and No. 6 were on par with the city's new white school buildings. However, their adequate facilities drew the attention of white communities who constantly sought to relocate the schools' Black students to temporary rental buildings, such as warehouses, to make additional room for white students.



**Figure 1.** McDonogh School No. 6, New Orleans, Louisiana.  
Today, this historic Black school building is the home of St. George's Episcopal School.

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<sup>1</sup> Also, many historic Black buildings were lost in the 1950s and 1960s during the construction of the federal interstate system. In Montgomery, Alabama, for example, the construction of Interstate 85 destroyed most of the city's largest and most affluent Black neighborhoods.

Usually white school boards choose to open urban Black schools in repurposed buildings. In Baltimore, Maryland, the city's first Black high school operated in the former city hall. In these situations, overcrowding often became an issue as white school boards consolidated Black schools into single locations to reduce expenditures. Several schools operated simultaneously at the former city hall. A building designed to accommodate four hundred students soon swelled to over seven hundred students. Eventually the school board built a new high school building after Black activists successfully lobbied for improved facilities. Throughout this report's ten case studies, the fruits of Black activism can be observed as Black communities across the South demanded civil equality. Although Black schools always received less funding and were housed in poorer buildings, the region's Black schools owed their existence to the constant demands and protests launched by community-level Black activists. Their activism produced incremental improvements in Black education that laid a foundation of community support that continued throughout the twentieth century.



**Figure 2.** The Peale Center building in Baltimore, Maryland, has been used as a museum, city hall, school, residence, and commercial storefront throughout its long history. From 1878 to 1889, this building hosted several schools, including the city's first grammar and high school. Today, the Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture uses the building as a headquarters for its community heritage documentation and interpretative programs.



This project identifies historic sites and buildings located within a few miles of extant National Park Service units. Throughout its history, new units have been added to the National Park Service through a complex system of political lobbying by state and local officials. When the National Park Service formed in 1916, the American South, as well as much of America, remained racially segregated and most Black citizens had been disfranchised by their state and local governments. Consequently, preserving Black history was neither part of the National Park Service's early history nor a concern across the national historic preservation movement. Many historic Black school buildings were ignored by cultural resource managers in an era when numerous examples of all-white school buildings were listed in the National Register of Historic Places and preserved by local governments. For example, in New Orleans, the National Park Service removed the Black community of Fazendeville from the Battle of New Orleans battlefield to restore the site to its early nineteenth-century appearance. During the community's removal, numerous historic resources, including a Black school building, were destroyed as the National Park Service and New Orleans officials privileged the history of General Andrew Jackson's victory over a historic Black community. Until recently, the racial prejudice found within the study of history and the historic preservation movement has limited the identification, preservation, and interpretation of historic Black school buildings. This project seeks to assist National Park Service units to expand their existing interpretative programs to include a broader discussion of Black education history.

Identifying extant Black school buildings located within a few miles of National Park Service units in select southern states requires a specific methodology. Surviving historic primary source material is abundant for the Civil War and Reconstruction period, but connecting the schools described in those documents with contemporary buildings and sites is an arduous process. Foremost, outside of urban areas, primary sources, even annual public school reports, rarely identify specific addresses for school buildings. Most schools are identified by names such as "School No. 1" or "Mr. Edwards School," which offer few clues about their location. Listings are often created at the county level. Those often do not identify the specific locations of rural schools. Therefore, in most cases, researchers had to start with an area's extant historic resources, often identified in state and local historic resource surveys conducted by historic preservation offices and universities, to locate historic Black schools. Surveys of an area's Black churches, community buildings, such as fraternal lodges, and businesses, such as funeral homes, often helped identify the locations of historic Black neighborhoods. Usually there are modern racially integrated public schools in those neighborhoods. Researching the history of those extant schools often revealed detailed information about former segregated schools. School histories also revealed important local dates such as when racial integration occurred and

when the local school system consolidated its rural schools into a more centralized system. In most southern communities, racial integration and school consolidation shared a common timeline.

Whenever possible, our researchers contacted African American educators and community leaders for information. These conversations often revealed important stories about a family's education. They also tended to confirm that older school buildings had been replaced by modern facilities or that many Black schools, especially in rural areas, were demolished or collapsed due to neglect after area schools consolidated. In most cases, researcher investigations led to a mid-twentieth-century building that had once been a racially segregated school located on a site within the local Black community that had served as the school grounds for over a century. Most of those sites had a history connected to freedpeople pooling their limited financial resources together to erect a school building when the local government refused to use community tax revenues to do so. Those Black land purchases were later transferred or donated to the white-dominated local school boards. Until the Rosenwald school building program, outside of major southern cities, local public school boards rarely built new Black school buildings on par with white schools, if they built any Black schools at all. Sadly, researchers confirmed that many rural counties in the South lacked any African American publicly funded schools until the late nineteenth century.

This report does not present an exhaustive listing of extant postbellum Black school buildings in the American South. The ten sites included in this report are intended to serve as representative case studies of the types of resources that might exist elsewhere either in or nearby extant National Park Service units. By including schools in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, Maryland, and West Virginia, our report strove to provide a diverse geographic range. Although all sites could be included in a broad discussion of the history of postbellum Black education in the South, the histories of Baltimore and New Orleans, for example, vary widely compared to Selma or Roanoke Island. In every case, local factors shaped a school's development.

Cultural resource managers interested in compiling a comprehensive list of extant postbellum Black school buildings should focus attention on potential resources located in or nearby US National Forest Service properties. During our research, we uncovered several examples of historic Black school buildings located on or near forest service land. The properties of other federal agencies such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Department of Defense should also be researched. Several state parks appeared to own buildings connected to this study. Hopefully, these case studies can provide some clues for the types of historic Black school buildings that might exist across the region.

Also, this study argues that cultural resource managers should consider whether a modern Black school building is the last surviving vestige of a much longer history of Black education in that community. Due to the long-standing racial inequalities and prejudice



among cultural resource managers and throughout American history, these last surviving vestiges deserve to be interpreted as evidence of a longer sustained history. In many cases, these mid-twentieth-century school buildings are all that remain. For example, both Frederick Douglass High School in Baltimore and Howard School in Chattanooga remain pillars of those Black communities and operate as modern-day schools. In both cases, those schools were relocated several times between the time they were created in the late nineteenth century and today. Few of their former buildings remain standing. However, there is a strong history and community identity connecting those contemporary school buildings with their earliest locations. In those cases, these extant buildings should represent that earlier history and serve as a testament to the successes Black activists achieved in pursuit of civil equality. Their students are the fruits of generations of Black activism that paved the way for academic achievement.

## Historic Resource Typology

Surveys of postemancipation Black school buildings in this report's study area have revealed several broad types of historic resources. These types might aid in the future identification and classification of potential historic resources connected to postemancipation Black school buildings. The types included in this report are not intended to be an exhaustive grouping of these resources. Additional historical research may reveal additional types. However, after conducting a thorough search of extant historic resources associated with the history of postemancipation Black schools in Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, the types listed below represent the most commonly affiliated resources.

The following historic resource types are listed in order of the frequency in which they are likely to appear in communities throughout our project region.

### *Type A: Historic Site without a Building*

Few extant postemancipation period buildings remain that once housed Black schools. In most communities, historic Black schools are no longer standing and no longer contain buildings connected to the broader theme of Black education in American history. Among the ten case studies included in this report, the following sites represent this type of historic resource:

1. Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony
2. Camp Nelson
3. Burrell Academy

### *Type B: Descendant School Building*

In many communities, several iterations of Black school buildings have been constructed on the same site. New construction often demolished existing buildings. Today, many communities have historic equalization school buildings, the last iteration of newly constructed Black school buildings in the South, which are the descendants of prior Black schools. Although most equalization school buildings were constructed nearly a century after emancipation, they remain an excellent historic resource capable of conveying the broader history of Black education in the South. In southern urban centers, such as Baltimore, Maryland, early-twentieth-century Black school buildings remain as part of contemporary school campuses. The ever-changing needs of the community and the evolution in school architecture have often led to significant changes in these buildings' appearance and use. Among the ten case studies included in this report, the following sites represent this type of historic resource:

1. Clark Elementary School
2. Frederick Douglass High School
3. Howard High School

### *Type C: Historic Period Building*

Few extant postemancipation period buildings that housed Black schools remain. However, it is critical that NPS units conduct extensive research to locate potential buildings. Often these buildings have undergone substantial renovations and relocations or have lost their connection to Black communities and their memory. It is possible that modern-day Black communities no longer remember or share stories about extant Black school buildings. In some cases, NPS units have been able to locate extant Black school buildings in and around their managed areas, especially in parks located in major southern cities. Among the ten case studies included in this report, the following sites represent this type of historic resource:

1. Penn School
2. Lockwood House and Storer College
3. Alcorn State University
4. Peale Museum
5. Tolson's Chapel and School
6. McDonogh School No. 5



**Figure 3.** Howard School students celebrate at the school's 2019 graduation ceremony in Chattanooga, Tennessee.  
*Chattanooga Times Free Press.*

# Penn School

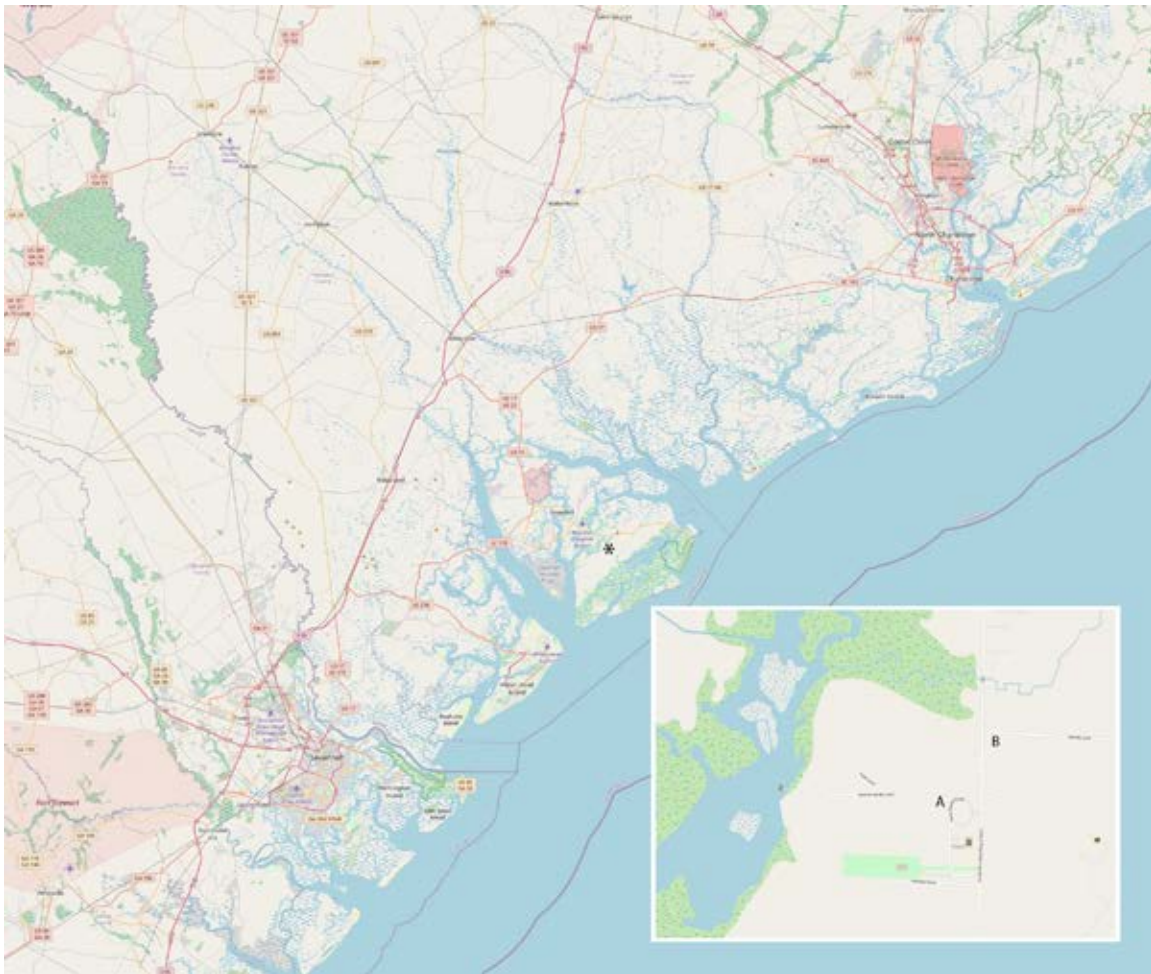
## Reconstruction Era National Historical Park

Daniel Cone

### *Extant Historic Resources and Dates of Construction*

- Penn Center (1855), 16 Penn Center Circle W, Saint Helena Island, South Carolina
- Old Brick Church (1855), 85 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Saint Helena Island, South Carolina

### Historic Resource Map: Reconstruction Era National Historical Park, South Carolina



**A** Penn School, 16 Penn Center Circle W, Saint Helena Island, South Carolina

**B** Old Brick Church, 85 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Saint Helena Island, South Carolina

Penn Center (formerly Penn School), on Saint Helena Island, South Carolina, is one of the last remnants of a nineteenth-century attempt to offer social equality for all Americans regardless of race. Built during the American Civil War, Penn offered education to formerly enslaved African Americans, once forbidden the right to learn by the legal scaffolding that upheld the antebellum southern plantation economy. Beset by monetary shortages, war-time conditions, white hostility, and (often) government indifference, the school, its teachers, and its students persevered, laying the groundwork for an institution that to the present day still provides autonomy, self-improvement, and self-respect for the Black communities of the “Sea Islands.”<sup>1</sup>

When United States army and naval forces captured Saint Helena in the late fall of 1861, driving the island’s wealthy planter class into a panicked retreat, the thousands of enslaved laborers left behind appeared to be a wild card. Not yet legally emancipated, they were nonetheless a key demographic to the plans of both the federal government and northern abolitionist and charitable societies and philanthropists. Treasury agents wanted them to keep harvesting Saint Helena’s cotton crop to cover war effort expenditures. Antislavery advocates on the other hand believed that they could be integrated into free society as faithful wage laborers and productive small landowners, thereby obliterating slavery while disproving the racist canard that Blacks, being naturally inferior, were unfit for participation in a democratic society. If this “rehearsal for Reconstruction” was successful, it might serve as a model for reconstructing the rest of the Southern Confederacy.<sup>2</sup>

Believing that education was the bedrock of civil society, these northern activists recruited men and women to teach and instruct Saint Helena Blacks. Many answered the call, including Charlotte Forten, daughter of a renowned Philadelphia Black abolitionist family, and Laura M. Towne, a committed antislavery activist from Pennsylvania with extensive experience in “charity” schools and training in homeopathy. More than most, Towne gave herself to this unproven endeavor. Born in 1825, she would live out her long life on Saint Helena, teaching, caring for, working with, and learning from her African American neighbors long after other bright-eyed compatriots had grown disillusioned and returned home.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Orville Vernon Burton, with Wilbur Cross, *Penn Center: A History Preserved* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>3</sup> Laura M. Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne; Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina, 1862–1884*, Rupert Holland Sargent, ed. (Cambridge: 1912); Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*.





**Figure 4.** Charlotte Forten Grimke. National Park Service.

There was plenty of potential school housing in the island capital of Beaufort and its many plantation buildings. Towne and her fellow instructors, Ellen and Nancy Murray and Eliza Hunn, appropriated a few outbuildings on the Oaks and Frogmore plantations and set up classes in the summer of 1862. Eventually they co-opted the “Old Brick Church,” a Baptist worship center built by enslaved laborers for the island’s planters in 1855. When the church opened its doors as a classroom in September 1862 with “forty-one scholars” and Towne serving as principal, it became the first location of Penn School.<sup>4</sup>

The early curriculum at Penn followed the rote recitation style and broad survey of the antebellum northern common school movement. As Orville Vernon Burton’s study of Penn School contends, learning under “Yankee schoolmarms” like Towne and the Murrays

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<sup>4</sup> Towne, *Letters*; Burton, *Penn Center*, 15–16.



was a “rigorous . . . no-nonsense practice” that taught students “reading, spelling, writing, grammar, diction, history, geography, arithmetic, and music.” Those who could not keep up were forced to repeat a year.<sup>5</sup>

Given the instability of the Sea Islands, on the frontier zone between American- and Confederate-occupied territory, African American education was subjected to fits and starts. Raids and counterraid prompted United States military officers to forcibly conscript African American men as soldiers and laborers, which upset their families’ careful plans. Treasury-appointed tax commissioners, with one eye on profit margins, saw little value in educating “field hands” and thwarted the teachers at nearly every turn. In urban areas, under the watchful eyes of government administrators, schools seemed to be better established. By early 1863, for example, four separate schools were operating in downtown Beaufort. According to a newspaper survey of the town, one school was held in the “Praise House” on “New St.” (today, First African Baptist), a second in “the Methodist Chapel” (today, Wesley United Methodist), and two more in “the Tabernacle and an adjoining building,” which corresponds with present-day Tabernacle Baptist Church. In the countryside, it was often a different matter. Miss Hunn’s eighty-student school at Frogmore had to decamp into a “well-fitted up cotton house” when several tax commissioners made life difficult for them. In consequence, half of Hunn’s student body melted away.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 5.** Old Brick Church, Saint Helena Island, South Carolina. National Park Service.

<sup>5</sup> Burton, *Penn School*, 21; *The Pennsylvania Freedmen’s Bulletin*, April 1867.

<sup>6</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction; The Free South*, January 17, 1863; Email, Chris Barr, Reconstruction Era National Historical Park, August 17, 2020; “Schools a Sea Islands,” *The Pennsylvania Freedmen’s Bulletin*, No 2. (April 1865). According to Towne, northern-born migrants managing the plantations “object to schools and refuse to have them on their plantations, less they kept the children from the cotton field,” *American Freedman* 1, no. 5 (August 1866).



Figure 6. Penn School, Saint Helena Island, South Carolina

Although the Old Brick Church had been sufficient at first, it was invariably overcrowded, underequipped, and unsuitable over the long term. “We cannot make the school convenient for writing [or Blackboards,” Towne forthrightly noted, and because “we have the noise of three large schools in one room. . . it is trying to voice and strength, and not conducive to good order.” Bored and distracted students filtered in and out of their classes at will to pick blackberries or rest. The Pennsylvania Freedmen’s Aid Society came to the teachers’ rescue, shipping a prefabricated schoolhouse to Saint Helena Island early in January 1865. The new Penn School building, established on a fifty-acre grant from freedmen civic leader Hastings Gantt, was quickly assembled and equipped with a bell donated by Towne’s family.<sup>7</sup>

In their quarterly reports to donors and supporters, Penn teachers emphasized growth, both in class size and in students’ learning capacities. Towne tallied 436 students enrolled in four schools as of February 1865. After Appomattox, Penn offered adult evening classes which added sixty to seventy to the rolls, including several veterans of United States Colored Troops (USCT) regiments. Each student received a reading book, a Bible, and a hymnal for evening prayers. While lower-form classes worked on rudiments, the upper levels handled more complicated problems. As part of one end-of-year recitation exercise, Towne gave her students a scenario in practical arithmetic: “[They] ciphred out on the Blackboard the price of two bales of cotton sold here at the market price per pound, and then took two bales to New York, deducting expenses, commission, &c, to find the

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<sup>7</sup> Burton, *Penn Center*, 24–25.

advantage of disadvantage of the two plans.” This exercise was, Towne recalled, “very interesting to the parents.” Visibly proud of their children’s progress, they rewarded the teachers with a steady supply of watermelons and sweet potatoes.<sup>8</sup>

But not all was joy and smiles. There were disruptive students in every class, whom the teachers typically punished “by [having] the offenders [stand] up by the platform.” Boys from Georgia refugee families that had fled to Saint Helena on the heels of General William T. Sherman’s “March to the Sea” (November–December 1864) were more fractious. Almost half a year after their escape from plantation slavery, “[They] are still very passionate and quarrelsome,” Towne reported, “in more than one instance. . . draw[ing] their pocket knives to settle a quarrel [or] us[ing] bricks for missiles.” On the other hand, Ellen Murray saw discernible improvement in her students’ “moral tone” as they brought lost-and-found articles into the schoolhouse rather than pocketing them. Generally, there was little need to keep order through corporal punishment; as Towne admitted, “we succeed without the whip, even for the smallest, though [we are] tempted sometimes to use it.”<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, the teachers realized the burdens resting on the shoulders of Saint Helena’s African American students. They typically woke up early (that is, before sunrise) to hoe the quarter acre that was their responsibility as farming children. After cooking a pot of hominy for lunch, they started out for the schoolhouses, which could be up to six miles away from their cabins. There, they studied from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. in hot, stuffy classrooms scarcely tempered by occasional sea breezes. At the end of the day, it was back home to help with other agricultural tasks before tumbling into bed. Consequently, students had to snatch fitful naps where they could; often, the teachers winked at their school day slumbers.<sup>10</sup>

It is regrettable that we know so few of these hard-pressed students’ names. Thankfully, a couple of star students made it into the historical records. One, Abraham Bacon, was a Georgia refugee who entered Penn in the last few days of the war. Towne was pleasantly surprised that after “about forty day’s teaching,” the eleven-year-old Bacon had “learned in 20 days to read pretty fluently in Wilson’s First Reader,” a common grammar school primer. Another was a USCT veteran of the Battle of Olustee, Florida (February 1864), named Toby Aiken, who attended Penn School after the war. Aiken towered over his much-younger classmates, but due to his military service, he had less formal schooling than them. Nevertheless, according to Towne, Aiken was by the fall of 1867 ready to move into the intermediate division.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Report for February,” *The Pennsylvania Freedmen’s Bulletin* 2 (April 1865); “A Visitor’s Account of Our Sea Island Schools,” *ibid.*, October 1866; “Schools in South Carolina,” *ibid.* 4 (December 15, 1865).

<sup>9</sup> “Report for February,” *The Pennsylvania Freedmen’s Bulletin* 2 (April 1865); “South Carolina,” *ibid.* 3 (August 1, 1865); “Schools at Sea Islands.”

<sup>10</sup> “A Visitor’s Account of Our Sea Islands.”

<sup>11</sup> “South Carolina”; *Ibid.* (October 1867). Towne believed that refugee children learned more quickly than the island’s native children; “Schools at Sea Island.”



**Figure 7.** Laura Matilda Towne (1825–1901). National Park Service.

“Success” for Penn School in the year of Reconstruction had to be measured in tiny increments. Some parents were displeased that their children were kept away from home learning what they considered arcane, impractical subjects instead of helping in the fields. There were continual calls to convert Penn into a pay school or turn it over to the South Carolina public school system—both of which Towne fought against. She feared that should these measures pass, parents would upend the curriculum, most would withdraw their children, and northern supporters would cut off their contributions. Indeed, money was the never-ending bugbear; besides salaries (which were often done without in a pinch), Penn always needed allocations for repairs and upkeep—for example, \$5 for sewing school expenses, \$16 for rent, and \$21.36 for books in the spring of 1885. Only the heroic efforts of benevolent organizations such as the Benezet Association and the Freedmen’s Relief Association of Pennsylvania kept the little school afloat.<sup>12</sup>

More ominously, Penn School was looked askance at by the island’s few white residents and the white supremacist forces opposing Reconstruction. Towne had no illusions about her pro-Confederate neighbors’ future plans: “If voting is ever to be the reward for education, they shall take care there shall be no education for the Blacks.” Although the Ku Klux Klan held little power on the majority-Black Sea Island settlements, Black families

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<sup>12</sup> “Pay Schools,” *ibid.* 4 (December 15, 1865); Towne to “Nell,” February 23, 1885, Series 1, General Materials, 1863–1951, Penn School Papers, The Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.



were still subjected to intermittent harassment and abuse.<sup>13</sup> Similar measures during the Reconstruction insurgency—and worse—shuttered the other island schools, to say nothing of most educational institutions for African Americans in the South, by the end of the 1870s.<sup>14</sup>

A. 1		34	U.S.C.T.
Toby Aiken			
, Co. B, 34 Reg't U.S. Col'd Inf.			
Appears on			
Company Descriptive Book			
of the organization named above.			
DESCRIPTION.			
Age	18	years;	height 5 feet 6 inches.
Complexion	Blk		
Eyes	Blk	; hair	Blk
Where born	Pnt. Royal S. Carolina		
Occupation	Laborer		
ENLISTMENT.			
When	April 15, 1863.		
Where	Beaufort S. Carolina		
By whom	Capt. A. Thompson; term 3 y'rs.		
Remarks:			
Thompson			
(383g)			Copyist.

Figure 8. Toby Aiken, USCT Military Service Record. National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>13</sup> "South Carolina"; Towne to Francis R. Cope Jr., July 12, 1874, November 12, 1877, Penn School Papers.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865–1873* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

Ultimately Penn survived by playing it safe. Toward the end of their careers, Towne and Murray formed a close relationship with the Hampton Institute, a successful educational center for Blacks in Virginia, entrusting Hampton's administrators with oversight at Penn. An act of incorporation, approved by South Carolina's legislature on January 15, 1901, created the Penn Normal, Industrial & Agricultural School. This transfer kept Penn from falling under the state school system (which would almost certainly have closed it down), but it also inaugurated a half-century of changes in mission and approach. Hampton administrators replaced the northern recitation style at Penn with their own hands-on practical curriculum, de-emphasizing civic and political awareness among students. Many Penn graduates became teachers; most left Saint Helena Island as part of the twentieth century "Great Migration" of African Americans to northern cities.<sup>15</sup>

And so, Penn operated in the "Hampton Tuskegee mold" until after World War II, when the growth of the South Carolina school system and the building of infrastructure ended the Sea Islands' isolation. Faced with rising tuition, many African American parents on Saint Helena sent their children to cheaper schools on the mainland. After 1948, Penn School shed its formal educational apparatus, becoming Penn Center. Under this new name, Penn adopted a different vision, as "a community agency to promote, stimulate and cooperate in programs designed to provide guidance, mobile library service, recreation and social welfare programs and adult education in [the] area." Penn Center served as a nexus for social and political reform movements, hosting civil rights leaders in the 1960s and 1970s, and since then it has also spearheaded the preservation of the Sea Islands' "Gullah-Geechee" culture and legal protections for African American land owners.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Burton, *Penn Center*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.



# Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony

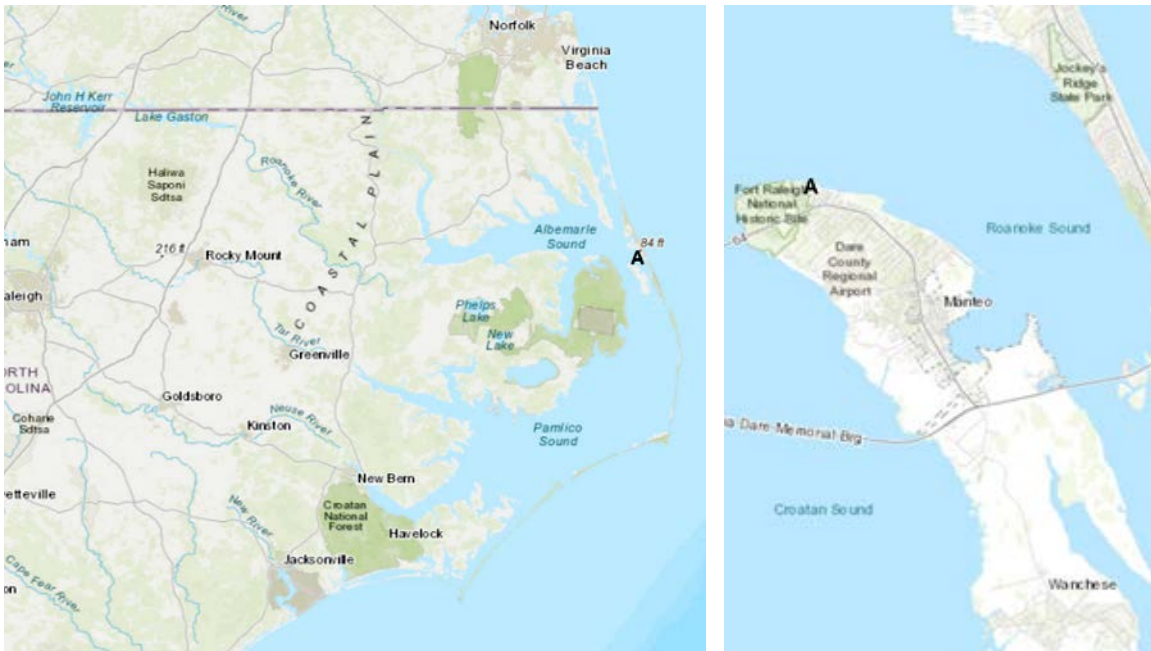
Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, NPS

Keith S. Hébert and Daniel Cone

## *Extant Historic Resources and Dates of Construction*

- Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, Archaeological Investigations of Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony
- First Light of Freedom Monument, Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, Commemorative Monument Erected by Roanoke Island's Black Descendant Community

## Historic Resource Map: Roanoke Island, North Carolina



**A** Fort Raleigh National Historic Site

The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony was the first contraband camp for Black enslaved laborers created in North Carolina. Located between the mainland and the barrier islands of the Outer Banks, the colony was intended to be a permanent self-sustaining and self-governed model Black community. Between 1862 and 1867, the colony's Black population swelled to more than 3,500 residents. Reverend Horace James, an American army chaplain assigned to oversee the colony, believed the colony would prove that freedpeople could thrive without white supervision. The island's Black community in turn believed that free public education and industrial training would preserve their autonomy. Tragically, the federal government disbanded the colony in 1865, and white landowners, with federal assistance, reclaimed the land and evicted most Black inhabitants. The few freedpeople

who remained formed the nucleus of Roanoke Island's extant Black community, "California." In 1991, the National Park Service purchased property believed to be the freedmen's colony site as they expanded the Fort Raleigh National Historic Site in Manteo.<sup>1</sup> Although the exact location is unknown, and none of the colony's buildings remain, streets and street names provide important clues about its whereabouts. The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony is a recognized historic resource on the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.<sup>2</sup>

Roanoke Island's antebellum history reflected the diverse experiences of white and Black people in an expanding slave society.<sup>3</sup> Before the Civil War, there had been few Black enslaved laborers on Roanoke because its soils were unsuitable for plantation agriculture. Many laborers worked either as domestic servants or in the local fishing industry. A small community of free Blacks living on the island had similar jobs.<sup>4</sup> Once the war began, Confederates transported additional laborers from other places to the island to build fortifications and place obstructions in the adjoining waterways.

On February 8, 1862, American military forces commanded by General Ambrose Burnside overwhelmed Confederate defenders and captured Roanoke Island. This invasion was part of a larger campaign to capture and control the Confederacy's Atlantic coastal territories. Previously, in December 1861, American forces had established a base of operations on nearby Cape Hatteras Island, and Black enslaved laborers from Roanoke had flocked to the island seeking freedom. By the end of March 1862, most of North Carolina's sea islands and the city of New Bern were under American military control.<sup>5</sup>

During the battle on Roanoke, Burnside's army captured more than two hundred Black enslaved laborers, who welcomed the American soldiers as liberators.<sup>6</sup> Following an earlier policy begun at Fort Monroe, Virginia, by General Benjamin Butler, Burnside classified Black enslaved laborers as "contraband"—property that could be confiscated to hinder the Confederacy's war-making capacity. At the time, the abolition of slavery was less of a concern to Burnside than military necessity. Like Cape Hatteras Island, Roanoke

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<sup>1</sup> Gerrie Ferris, "Descendants of the Freedmen's Colony Are Piecing Together Their Ancestors' History," *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 30, 1996, D7.

<sup>2</sup> Lou Ellen Groh, "Searching for the Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony: An Archeological and Historical Assessment," Master's thesis, Florida State University, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Click, *Time Full of Trial: The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony, 1862–1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 24.

<sup>5</sup> Michael P. Zatarga, *The Battle of Roanoke Island: Burnside and the Fight for North Carolina* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Vincent Colyer, *Report of the Services Rendered by the Freedpeople to the United States Army, in North Carolina, in the Springs of 1862, after the Battle of Newbern* (New York: Vincent Colyer, 1864), 1; Report of Lieutenant Charles W. Tillotson, Company B, Ninety-Ninth New York Infantry, "Battle of Roanoke Island, N.C.," February 10, 1862, *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, Ser. 107, p. 57.

became a beacon for Black enslaved laborers on the mainland, many of whom were relatives of the Roanoke laborers.<sup>7</sup> Over 250 enslaved laborers escaped across Croatan Sound to the island between February and April, prompting white enslavers to relocate others further westward beyond reach.<sup>8</sup>

Initially, freedpeople lived in a temporary, unsanitary tent village near the American military camps. As their numbers increased, American officers worried that diseases might spread to white soldiers. On March 12, 1862, seeking greater control over the island's Black refugees, the military officially recognized the refugee settlement as the contraband Camp Foster.<sup>9</sup> Mainly the reorganization allowed Burnside to exploit refugee labor for the construction of fortifications, bridges, warehouses, and cargo docks to make Roanoke an important supply depot for American naval patrols. Burnside also sought literate freedpeople to serve as spies, scouts, and guides.

More importantly, Burnside also appointed New York-born Quaker Vincent Coyler as superintendent of the island's poor. A founding member of the United States Christian Commission, Coyler coordinated civilian-led relief efforts to provide for the spiritual and physical needs of freedpeople. He supported the creation of Black schools, encouraged northern teachers and missionaries to come to Roanoke Island, and took American military leaders to task over their inadequate support for freedpeople.<sup>10</sup>

Black colonists devoted their meager resources to start churches and schools. Less than one month after the start of the American occupation, Martha Culling, a former enslaved laborer, opened the first freedpeople school in a dilapidated building on Pork Point near army headquarters.<sup>11</sup> Within a few weeks, Culling's school drew more than 122 students per day, squeezing her limited resources. A Boston journalist on Roanoke reported that "what [freedpeople] need most are school-books—primers, spelling-books, and easy readers," and urged donors to send books, writing instruments, and slates to Culling's assistant, the chaplain of the 24th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment.<sup>12</sup> Freedpeople's efforts to erect a more substantial schoolhouse ran headlong against the priorities of the American

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<sup>7</sup> R. Wayne Gray and Nancy Beach Gray, *Manteo* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2020), 20.

<sup>8</sup> "National Freedman's Relief Association," *The Liberator*, March 7, 1862, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2016), 71.

<sup>10</sup> David Silkenat, *Driven from Home: North Carolina's Civil War Refugee Crisis* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 28.

<sup>11</sup> Silkenat, *Driven from Home: North Carolina's Civil War Refugee Crisis*, 45.

<sup>12</sup> "National Freedman's Relief Association," *The Liberator*, March 7, 1862, 3.

military, which monopolized materials and labor for its own purposes. In addition, the federal government's failure to regularly pay Black laborers or deliver supplies forced Black students to skip class and forage and fish to feed their families.<sup>13</sup>

In the spring of 1863, plans for the refugee camp changed as Reverend Horace James replaced Colyer. The Massachusetts-born James was a Congregational minister, a chaplain in the 25th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, and, at first, a reluctant abolitionist who had once urged compensation to enslavers for the loss of their laborers. Now devoted to eradicating slavery, James labored to improve the physical, moral, and intellectual condition of freedpeople. Under James's supervision, Roanoke Island's temporary refugee camp transformed into a permanent colony. On September 10, 1863, American General William Peck, commander of the Army and District of North Carolina, issued General Orders No. 12 from his New Berne headquarters. The order placed James in "charge of the colonization of Roanoke Island with negroes." As Superintendent of Blacks for the District of North Carolina, James's orders allowed him to "take possession of all un occupied lands upon the island, and lay them out, and assign them, according to his own discretion, to the families of colored soldiers, to invalids, and other Blacks in employ of the Government, giving them full possession." Peck gave James full authority to be "respected in all matters relating to the welfare of the colony."<sup>14</sup>

The colony's primary purpose was to care for the families of Black American soldiers during their deployments, thereby encouraging future enlistments.<sup>15</sup> James's vision, however, went further; he dreamt of establishing a permanent Black community that would equip freedpeople for "the exercise of civil functions, the care of the poor, and the intelligent discharge of the duties of free citizens, under municipal law enacted and executed by themselves."<sup>16</sup> The foundations of this community were to be Black land ownership and Black education.

American General William Peck's September 1863 General Order No. 12 did provide "full possession" of small colony lots "until annulled by the Government or by due process of United States law." These were not confiscated lands, as James worried that freedpeople would not appreciate something given to them by the federal government. Instead, James urged freedpeople to purchase the land from white owners. Nor did James want the land turned into farms; rather, he hoped Black homesteaders would support

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<sup>13</sup> Colyer, *Report of the Services Rendered by the Freedpeople to the United States Army, in North Carolina, in the Springs of 1862*, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Horace James, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina, 1864* (Boston: W. F. Brown & Company, 1865), 24.

<sup>15</sup> Christine Trebellas and William Chapmen, *Fort Raleigh National Historic Site: Historic Resource Study* (Atlanta: Southeast Regional Office, National Park Service, US Department of the Interior: 1999), 44.

<sup>16</sup> Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 72; *The Friend: A Religious and Literary Journal* 37 (1864), 135.

themselves through home manufacturing and fishing industries.<sup>17</sup> James also believed that freedpeople “will do better in the society of whites than in separate communities.”<sup>18</sup> He encouraged Roanoke's remaining white inhabitants to stay on the island and help forge a biracial self-sufficient community of industrious, collaborative landowning citizens.

Despite encountering numerous obstacles, James, assisted by Black carpenters working day and night, managed to establish six Black schools on Roanoke Island within a few months of his arrival.<sup>19</sup> With more than 1,200 children as well as a large number of adult learners, these schools could not teach everyone. James's solution was to bring in outside help. “The first want of the negroes,” he observed, “is instruction by devoted and cultured teachers.” James proposed that northern philanthropic societies assist northern war widows by sending them to Roanoke to work as educators.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, in October 1863, the American Missionary Association stationed Elizabeth James, Horace James's niece, on Roanoke Island. A few months later, three additional white teachers arrived: Ella Roper, S. S. Nickerson, and Mary Burnap. Eventually, the colony supported seven northern teachers, but this was never enough to satisfy demand. In fact, James struggled to recruit white northern women teachers because he could offer them neither separate housing nor adequate classroom supplies.

Short resources hampered Black education efforts on Roanoke. Lumber for additional schoolhouses was scarce because the military delayed constructing a sawmill. The island's largest school had to shut down in December 1863 to house new refugees during a particularly bitter winter. Weeks later, teaching halted again when students lacked winter clothing to attend their unheated classrooms. Rarely did the island's schools operate uninterrupted for more than a few weeks at a time.<sup>21</sup> To alleviate the crowding, James convinced several Black families to relocate to the refugee camp at James City near New Bern, where there were more teachers, classrooms, and jobs.<sup>22</sup>

James himself contributed to some of the problems. Although federal commanders viewed the superintendent as an advocate for freedpeople, many Black people blamed James for the island's supply shortages. James did purposely keep the colony

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<sup>17</sup> Groh, “Searching for the Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony,” 9.

<sup>18</sup> James, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina*, 45.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Horace James, New Bern, North Carolina, June 6, 1863, in New England Educational Commission for Freedmen, *Extracts from Letters of Teachers & Superintendents of the New-England Educational Commission for Freedmen* (Boston: David Clapp, 1864), 7.

<sup>20</sup> James, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina*, 47.

<sup>21</sup> Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 73.

<sup>22</sup> James, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina*, 29; Judkin Browning, “Bringing Light to our Land... When She as Dark as Night”: Northerners, Freedpeople, and Education during Military Occupation in North Carolina, 1862–1865,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 9, no. 1 (2008), 7.



undersupplied to convince northern philanthropists that freedpeople could provide for themselves. His methods unfortunately left many Black families in need of rations, improved housing, and basic goods such as soap.<sup>23</sup>

Education for Black soldiers from Roanoke dealt with similar challenges. Informal regimental schools prepared Black noncommissioned officers for their routine duties and reporting requirements. The frequency of Black soldiers' communications with Washington, DC, as for example a petition to General O. O. Howard, commander of the Freedmen's Bureau, to improve living conditions on Roanoke, attests to their growing literacy.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Black soldiers faced enormous obstacles in the face of the prevailing racial prejudices of their white officers. They not only fought their former enslavers on the battlefield but struggled to earn equal treatment from their own government.

Several Black soldiers stationed on Roanoke Island, among them Robert Morrow, opened temporary schools. Once held in bondage by Confederate General John J. Pettigrew, Morrow had spent several years at the United States Military Academy at West Point attending to Pettigrew, meanwhile learning how to read, write, and solve mathematical problems—without Pettigrew's knowledge. During the Battle of New Bern, Morrow fled to the safety of the American army. He taught at Camp Totten Freedmen's School, in New Bern, and later enlisted. In 1864, Morrow was stationed on Roanoke Island and there taught in an unidentified Black school for several months until his sudden death.<sup>25</sup>

Ironically, Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston's surrender on April 26, 1865, of all forces in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida complicated matters for both American military commanders and educators on Roanoke. Within days of the surrender, hundreds of additional refugees arrived on the island, worsening the colony's supply shortages and threatening to overwhelm the schools. "The colored people greatly desire to learn," reported James. "They are enthusiastic and persevering in their efforts in this behalf. They have an idea that knowledge is power. . . . The boon they crave above all others, is knowledge."<sup>26</sup>

The era of Reconstruction brought its own troubles. North Carolina's white citizens opposed Black education, burned Black schools, and harassed northern teachers to attempt to re-subordinate Black labor. White property owners soon returned with signed

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<sup>23</sup> Joe A. Mobley, "Horace James," NCpedia, <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/james-horace> (accessed June 5, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Unsigned to unidentified, 18 Oct. 1864, A-400 1864, Letters Received, ser. 360, Colored Troops Division, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives; Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 141.

<sup>25</sup> James, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina, 1864*, 42–43; Robert A. Morrow, Confidential Lists for the Identification of Claimants, North Carolina, 1873–74, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, DC; *Records of the Field Offices of the Freedmen's Branch, Office of the Adjutant General, 1872–1878*, Series Number: M2029, NARA Roll#: 18.

<sup>26</sup> James, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina, 1864*, 42–43.



federal oaths of allegiances, demanding that their land be returned.<sup>27</sup> The Freedmen's Bureau agreed and, as a first step to reducing Black resistance, cut the Freedmen Colony's rations. James, who previously applauded the colony's entrepreneurial spirit, now told federal officials that the island could not support a self-sufficient community without permanent government assistance. He and W. H. Doherty, US Sanitary Inspector of the District of Eastern North Carolina, who visited the island in July 1866, hoped that government and private contributors might purchase land for the colony.

Doherty's report emphasized the colony's successes, while worrying about the future of the colonists. Despite lacking adequate clothing and rations, "8 schools, supported by charitable Societies in the Northern States. . . taught by 13 ladies" remained open. The island's educational opportunities had expanded to include an Industrial School that taught women and girls to knit, sew, and make dresses. Few if any of the 1,400 freedpeople wanted to relocate to the mainland, where they would be forced to work for their former enslavers. "They fear the oppression and injustice of their old masters," wrote Doherty, "and they also complain, that their employers seek to charge them exorbitant rents for house and gardens and thus endeavor to avoid paying them any wages for their labor."<sup>28</sup>

Roanoke's white property owners would not sell, however, and the federal government refused to intervene on behalf of the freedpeople. By the fall of 1866, the Freedmen's Bureau and northern missionary societies had reduced their operations on the island, leaving only one or two white teachers to continue the work teaching on Roanoke Island. The New York branch of the National Freedmen's Relief Association inspected the island and pledged to support any Black schools that remained.<sup>29</sup> The Freedmen's Bureau encouraged Roanoke's freedpeople to relocate to farmlands in Texas.<sup>30</sup> Freedpeople signed a petition urging the government to allow them "to remain on the land they are now occupying by paying a reasonable rent to the owner of said property." They reminded the bureau that they were not farmers, but fishermen and froggers who made their living from the sea,

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<sup>27</sup> "North Carolina, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1863–1872," images, *FamilySearch*, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-89ZP-5SP1?cc=2143119&wc=9HQ6-FMG%3A1067905604%2C1067905603>, 21 May 2014, Roanoke Island > Roll 53, Letters and orders received, reports, and supply request, Oct 1865-Feb 1868 > image 90 of 228; citing NARA microfilm publication M1909 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>28</sup> Reports of Sanitary Conditions, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Eastern North Carolina, RG# 105, Roll# 22, NARA-Washington, DC.

<sup>29</sup> "North Carolina, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1863–1872," images, *FamilySearch*, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9ZP-5SKQ?cc=2143119&wc=9HQ6-FMG%3A1067905604%2C1067905603>, 21 May 2014, Roanoke Island > Roll 53, Letters and orders received, reports, and supply request, Oct 1865-Feb 1868 > image 65 of 228; citing NARA microfilm publication M1909 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>30</sup> "North Carolina, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1863–1872," images, *FamilySearch*, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9ZP-5SXZ?cc=2143119&wc=9HQ6-FMG%3A1067905604%2C1067905603>, 21 May 2014, Roanoke Island > Roll 53, Letters and orders received, reports, and supply request, Oct 1865-Feb 1868 > image 71 of 228; citing NARA microfilm publication M1909 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

not the soil. They only wanted “justice [to] protect them in everything they may do in a lawful manner. . . [to] be permitted to reside where it is their wish to spend their days.” The bureau denied their request, citing that no Black settlement could sustain itself on the island. The government either failed to recognize that freedpeople could provide for themselves doing something other than farming or bowed to pressure from former Confederates who demanded their lands returned and cleared of Black colonists. Either way, the colony's days were numbered.<sup>31</sup>

By early 1867, the Freedmen's Bureau reported that only a handful of Black families remained, most of them dependents of Black American soldiers. Eleven Black families did scrape together \$500 to purchase 200 acres of land from the estate of Thomas Dough, and subsequent generations divided the property into eleven tracts that became the community of “California.” By 1870, the island no longer had a Black school, and over 80 percent of the remaining Black residents could neither read nor write. Because Roanoke Island did not develop a public school until decades later, some Black families sent their children to New Bern and Elizabeth City to attend school. Despite enduring numerous hardships and geographic isolation, Roanoke Island's Black community managed to achieve the original colony's goals of supporting Black land ownership and economic self-sufficiency.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “North Carolina, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1863–1872,” images, *FamilySearch*, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q57-L9ZP-5SG7?cc=2143119&wc=9HQ6-FMG%3A1067905604%2C1067905603>, 21 May 2014, Roanoke Island > Roll 53, Letters and orders received, reports, and supply request, Oct 1865-Feb 1868 > image 100 of 228; citing NARA microfilm publication M1909 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>32</sup> Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 197–98; Gray, *Manteo*, 36.

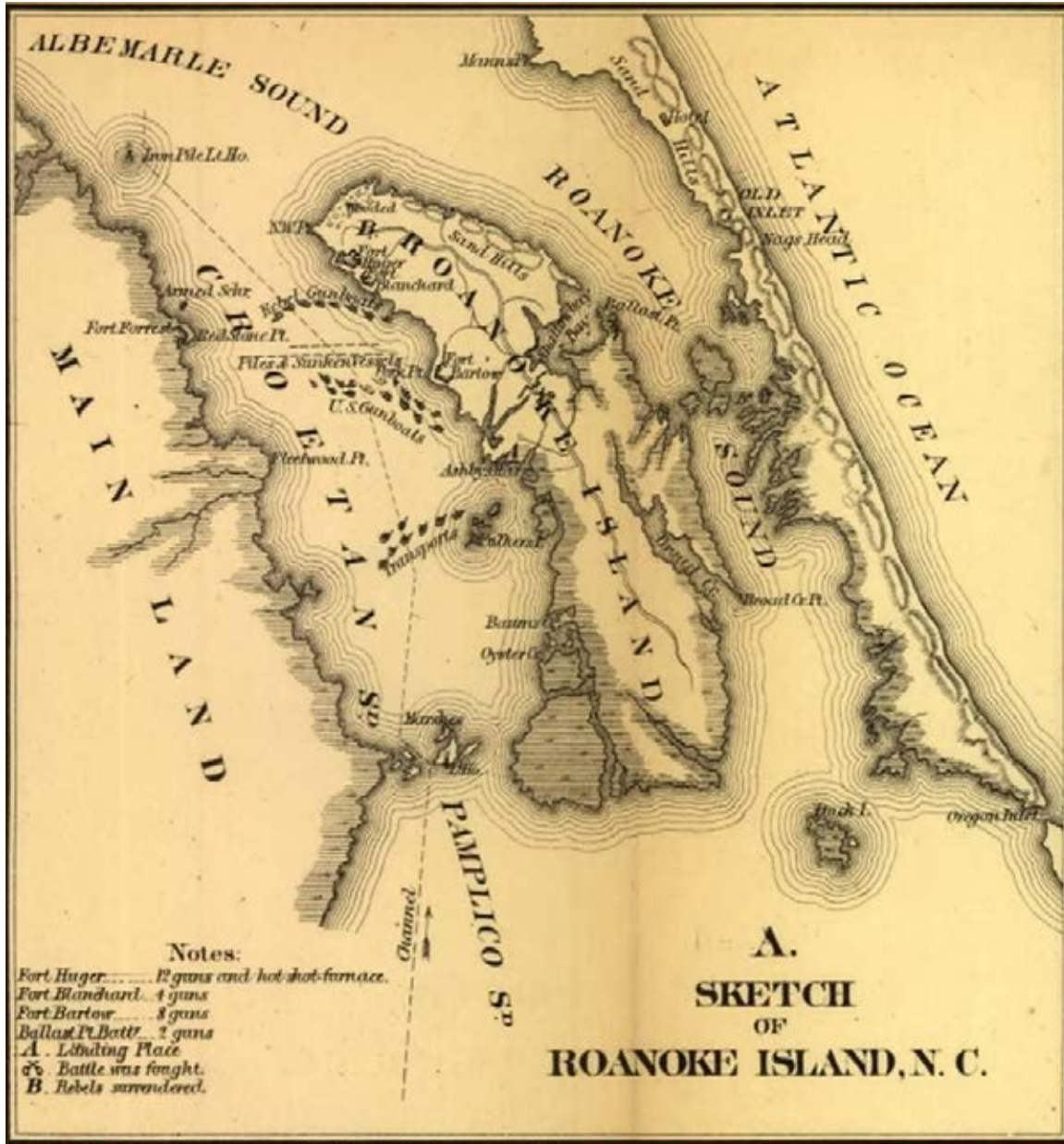


Figure 9. Map of Roanoke Island





Figure 10. Map of Roanoke Island





**Figure 11.** Confederate prisoners of war awaiting transport at Roanoke Island. Many of the wooden buildings seen in this drawing later sheltered freedpeople refugees.



## Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony

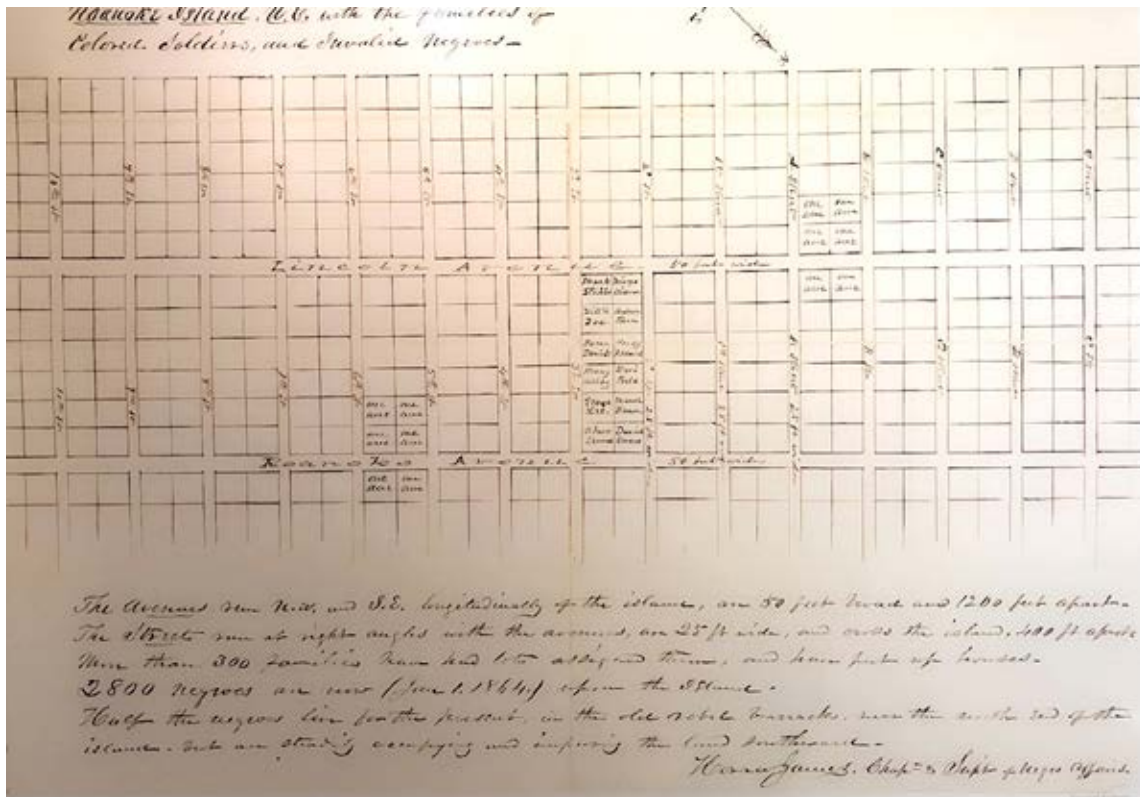


Figure 12. Roanoke Colony Layout. Horace James.

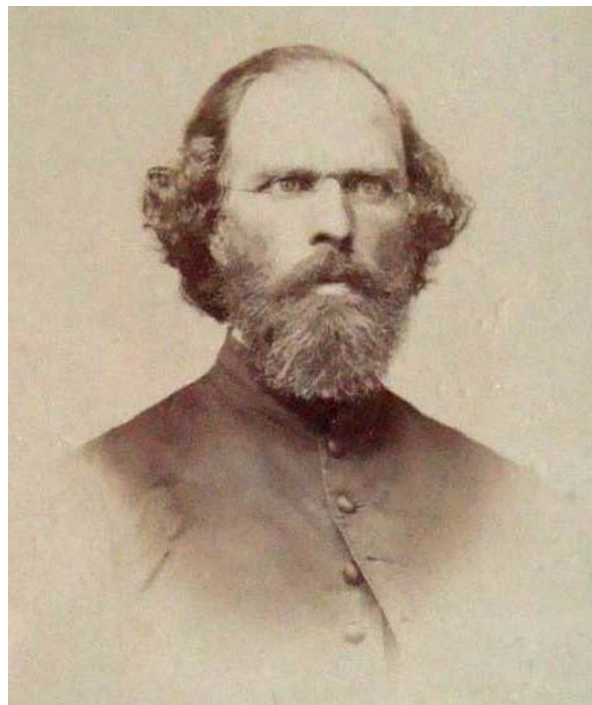
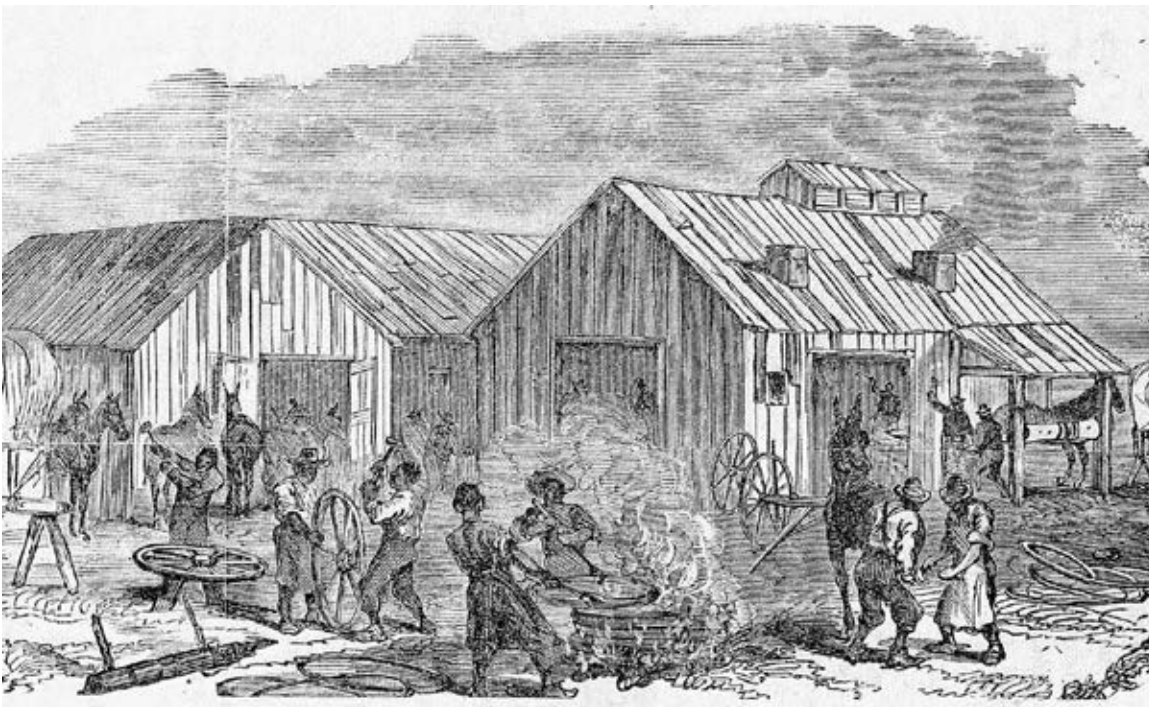


Figure 13. Horace James. Library of Congress.





**Figure 14.** Vincent Colyer, Report of the Services Rendered by the Freedpeople to the United States Army, in North Carolina, in the Springs of 1862, after the Battle of Newbern (New York: Vincent Colyer, 1864).



**Figure 15.** Vincent Colyer, Report of the Services Rendered by the Freedpeople to the United States Army, in North Carolina, in the Springs of 1862, after the Battle of Newbern (New York: Vincent Colyer, 1864).





**Figure 16.** Vincent Colyer, Report of the Services Rendered by the Freedpeople to the United States Army, in North Carolina, in the Springs of 1862, after the Battle of Newbern (New York: Vincent Colyer, 1864).

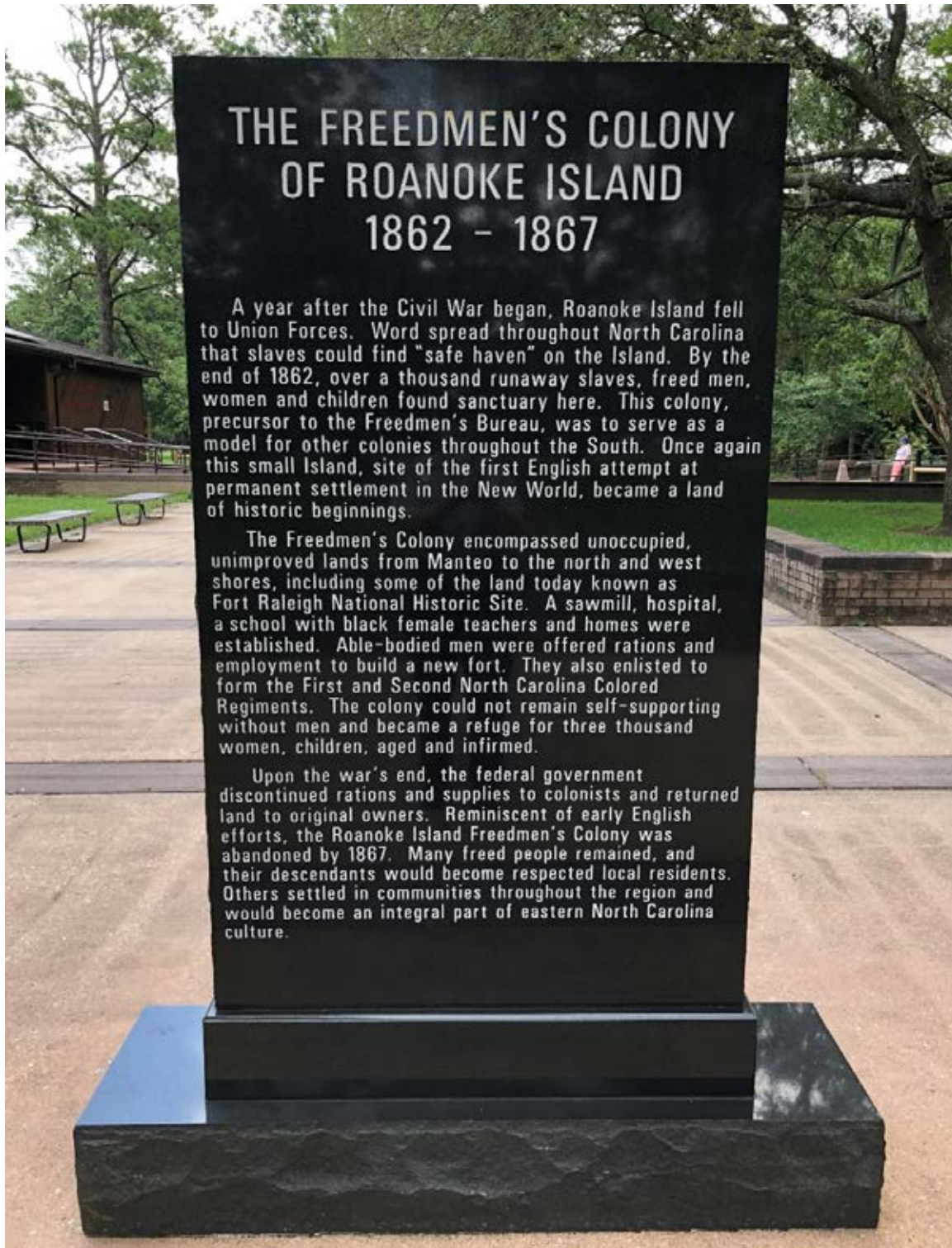


**Figure 17.** Slate and chalk used at Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony School. National Park Service.



**Figure 18.** First Light of Freedom Monument, Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, Roanoke Island, North Carolina. National Park Service.





**Figure 19.** First Light of Freedom Monument, Fort Raleigh National Historic Site, Roanoke Island, North Carolina. National Park Service.





# Camp Nelson, Kentucky

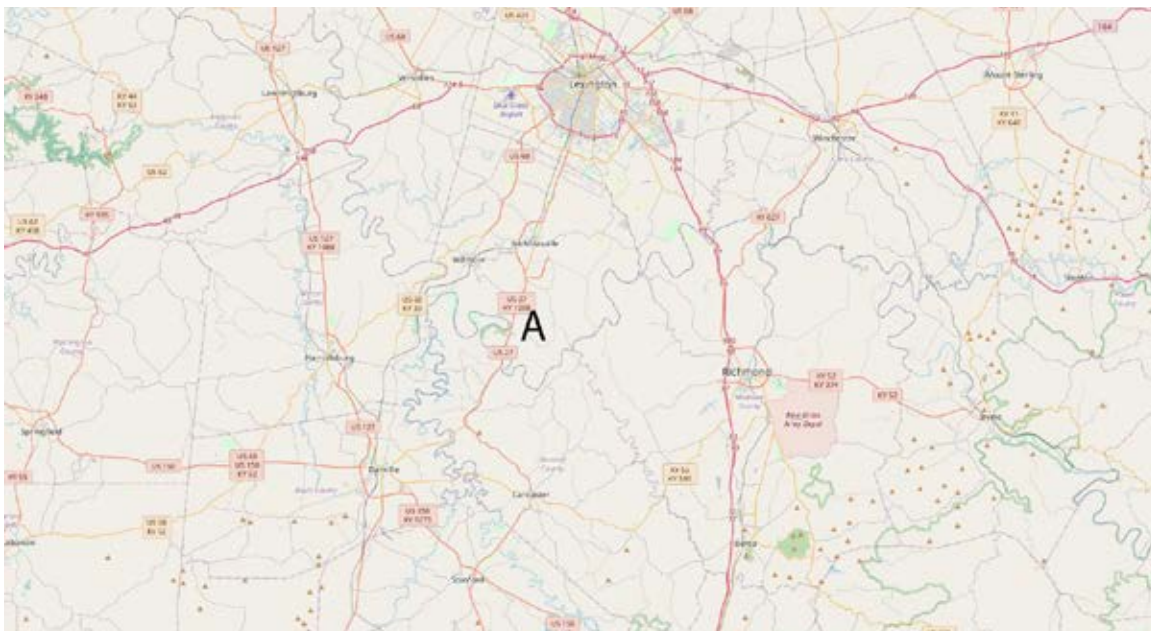
## Camp Nelson Heritage National Monument, NPS

Peter Thomas Jr. and Keith S. Hébert

### *Extant Historic Resources and Dates of Construction*

- Camp Nelson Heritage National Monument, Black Refugee Camp Property
- Oliver Perry House (1846), Camp Nelson Heritage National Monument
- Camp Nelson National Cemetery (1863), Camp Nelson Heritage National Monument

### Historic Resource Map: Camp Nelson, Kentucky



- A** Camp Nelson Heritage National Monument
- B** Oliver Perry House
- C** Camp Nelson National Cemetery



Established in the summer of 1863 by the American Army as a supply depot for a planned invasion of East Tennessee, Camp Nelson, Kentucky, evolved into the largest recruitment center for African American soldiers in the state of Kentucky, and it was the third-largest in the nation.<sup>1</sup> Situated in southern Jessamine County, on a high bluff overlooking the Kentucky River, over ten thousand Black soldiers enlisted and trained at Camp Nelson.<sup>2</sup> Most of those soldiers were Black enslaved laborers who had fled from bondage to the camp to secure their freedom. Soon thousands of Black women and children arrived at the site as refugee camps formed in and around Camp Nelson. The legal status of Black enslaved laborers in Kentucky was complicated by the Emancipation Proclamation's failure to emancipate any slaves in states that had remained in the Union. Only areas in rebellion against the federal government were included in the Emancipation Proclamation. Most Kentucky enslavers either advocated for slavery's continuation or sought federal compensation in exchange for freeing Black enslaved laborers. Consequently, Black people at Camp Nelson faced an ever-changing situation as the nation debated slavery's future. Meanwhile, the large number of Black refugees at Camp Nelson attracted support from organizations such as the American Missionary Association and Western Freedmen's Aid Society, who saw the camp as an opportunity to proselytize and educate freedpeople. Through the combined efforts of Rev. John Fee and freedpeople, thousands of former Black enslaved laborers received their first access to formal schooling. Camp Nelson's wartime activities laid a foundation for Black education upon which later educational initiatives were built. After the war, the Freedmen's Bureau provided temporary support for the site's Black community. However, the federal government removed that support, forcing Fee and the Black community to find new means of subsistence. As Camp Nelson closed, Fee raised funds to purchase the property where he planned to create a free Black community of independent landowners. The Black communities of Hall and Ariel formed despite the opposition of the local white population. Under Fee's leadership, the Camp Nelson Academy provided low-cost primary school training for the region's Black children. Despite receiving minimal support from Kentucky's public-school fund, the academy remained in operation until the early twentieth century. Today, little remains of those Black rural communities. Nevertheless, the National Park Service preserves the site at the Camp Nelson National Monument.

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 193.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Sears, *Camp Nelson: A Civil War Study* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), xxx, xxxv–xxxix.

### *Camp Nelson and the United States Army, 1863–1864*

The formation of Camp Nelson in the summer of 1863 provided an advanced staging area for troops and supplies of the American Army. Military officials in Washington, DC, worried about Kentucky's vulnerability to a Confederate invasion from east Tennessee or southwestern Virginia. Military leaders encouraged Gen. Ambrose Burnside, commander of the Department of the Ohio, to develop a plan to invade east Tennessee to counter any possible attack from the enemy. A location in central Kentucky seemed advantageous to conduct this operation since several of Kentucky's main thoroughfares were concentrated there.<sup>3</sup>

Confederate forces already had a formidable presence in central Kentucky, so it was imperative Burnside establish a place of operation to train soldiers and build fortifications. Between April 27th and 29th, 1863, American engineers found a suitable location in southern Jessamine County, Kentucky, overlooking the Kentucky River. The site would be called Camp Nelson.<sup>4</sup>

As operations began at Camp Nelson, Burnside and the Department of the Ohio had their hands full. While also preparing for an attack on east Tennessee, Burnside's generals were chasing Confederate forces under the command of Gen. John Hunt Morgan. Morgan's cavalry was moving through Kentucky toward Ohio and Indiana. It was critical that Camp Nelson develop quickly.

Army officials looked to a growing population of runaway slaves, who had sought refuge at Camp Nelson, as a source of labor. Between May and August 1863, thousands of Black refugee laborers worked on buildings, campsites, a waterworks system, fortifications, and roads. American officials also ordered that 14,000 enslaved Black laborers be impressed from Tennessee and Kentucky to construct a railroad into east Tennessee. Camp Nelson served as the main camp for the enslaved population, providing food, clothing, shelter, and training.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Sears, *Camp Nelson: A Civil War Study*, xx. A note on sources: Richard Sears's *Camp Nelson: A Civil War Study* has been an invaluable resource during the research of this project. In its introduction, a concise history of the military base is provided. Subsequent chapters consist of a collection of primary documents related to Camp Nelson activities and is organized both thematically and chronologically. These sources include personal correspondences such as letters between benevolent and missionary association employees; the Official Records of the Civil War; government records such as the Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861–79; Civil War pension folders; US Sanitary Commission reports; and periodicals. Where sources are used directly from Sears's book, we have noted and also provided as much source detail as possible. The Adam Matthew Digital database titled *Slavery, Abolition, and Social Justice, 1490–2007* also has been a valuable resource in helping compile sources. We were able to access documents related to Camp Nelson held within the Berea College Special Collections through this digital database.

<sup>4</sup> The site is named for United States General William Nelson; Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, xxii, 21–23.

<sup>5</sup> August 10, 1863, Brig. Gen. Jeremiah Boyle passed General Orders No. 41 impressing "male negroes ages sixteen to forty-five" from the surrounding counties. They were to be "concentrated" at Camp Nelson; in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, xxiii, xxxiv, 9–10; also refer to Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., "The Destruction of Slavery," ser. 1, vol. 1, of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 585–86.

On the backs of the work done by these African Americans, Camp Nelson expanded significantly. However, the importance of Camp Nelson to the American Army fluctuated. Ultimately, the success of American operations in east Tennessee during the fall of 1863 happened despite Camp Nelson's involvement. Due to environmental conditions such as harsh weather and terrain, moving men, horses, and supplies from Camp Nelson to east Tennessee placed an enormous burden on military operations. This left American military leaders pondering Camp Nelson's utility.<sup>6</sup>

### *Black Education at Camp Nelson, 1864–1866*

Although some questioned Camp Nelson's relevance, it remained a supply depot throughout the war and became a site for enslaved Black laborers to escape their enslavers. Following Kentucky's decision to enlist Black soldiers into the American Army, it evolved into the largest recruitment center for Black soldiers in the state of Kentucky and the third-largest in the United States. This had massive consequences for the refugee community emerging within the camp, one of the most significant being education.

At first, Black men comprised the majority of refugees, but they were soon joined by a growing number of women and children. The legal status of slavery in Kentucky complicated Black life at Camp Nelson. As a slave state that had remained in the Union, Kentucky's leaders remained steadfast in their support for slavery. Reluctant to do anything that might push the Bluegrass State toward secession, President Abraham Lincoln and the American Army largely recognized and protected slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 failed to free any of Kentucky's Black enslaved laborers. Nonetheless, as the American Army's presence in Kentucky expanded following the Confederate Army's defeat at Perryville on October 8, 1862, thousands of Black enslaved laborers took matters into their own hands by running away to wherever American soldiers were stationed. Although the proclamation had left slavery in Kentucky intact, the act authorized the recruitment of Black infantry regiments, thus further encouraging Black men to run away from their enslavers to enlist. In Kentucky, the American Army often returned escaped slaves to their enslavers to avoid inflaming sectional tensions. By the summer of 1863, however, Black military-aged men were received into the army while the status of their family members remained in question. Sometimes enslavers traveled to Camp Nelson demanding the forced return of their human property. Sometimes enslavers evicted Black enslaved laborers from their property, forcing them to seek refuge at Camp Nelson. Meanwhile, the American Army balked at the time and expense required to provide supplies and security for Black

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<sup>6</sup> American Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman both suggested closing Camp Nelson due to the drawbacks it had in providing logistical support. Sherman, however, believed Nelson showed promise in becoming a site to train Black refugees. A period of unrest emerged across East Tennessee and Kentucky from military operations between 1863 and 1864. Thousands of citizens were displaced. White and Black refugees fled north in search of food and shelter. For African Americans, Camp Nelson became a critical landing spot; Sears, lxii, xxiv–xxx, 28.

civilians despite their loved one's military service. On several occasions, American commanders evicted Camp Nelson's Black civilians, exposing them to violence perpetrated by the region's proslavery vigilantes. For most of Camp Nelson's Black civilians, their legal status and personal security remained in doubt throughout the Civil War.

In June 1864, Simeon S. Jocelyn, an abolitionist and social activist associated with the American Missionary Association (AMA), wrote Rev. John G. Fee to visit the "Camps of Colored soldiers." In Kentucky, John Fee played an instrumental role in promoting Black education. A Bluegrass State native, Fee's abolitionist ministry and advocacy for racially integrated education attracted much criticism. In 1858, Fee founded Berea College. The school became a center for antislavery rhetoric in Kentucky. Local enslavers strongly opposed Berea's existence. Due to persistent mob violence, Fee closed the school and sought exile in neighboring Ohio.<sup>7</sup>

When Fee returned to Kentucky after his exile, he expressed concern about the treatment of contrabands in his home state. Fee favored immediate emancipation but feared many in his state would resist ending slavery altogether. As such, he endeavored to work on behalf of the freedpeople. Fee felt "encouragement and instruction" were necessary in addition to preaching.



Figure 21. Reverend John Fee

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<sup>7</sup> "Simeon Jocelyn to John G. Fee, June 6, 1864, Berea Collection Archives," in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, xliii-xliv, 66; for more on the life of John G. Fee, refer to John Gregg Fee, *Autobiography of John Fee, Berea, Kentucky* (Chicago: National Christian Association, 1891), which is available electronically through the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's digital project *Documenting the American South* and Richard D. Sears, "John G. Fee, Camp Nelson, and Kentucky Blacks, 1864–1864," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* (Winter 1987): 29–45.

With the support of the AMA, on July 4, 1864, John Fee and his eldest sons, Burritt and Howard, traveled to Camp Nelson. Fee referred to Camp Nelson as “the cradle of liberty to central Kentucky.” Their primary mission was to preach the gospel among Black men transitioning into soldiers, but he stressed the need for Black education. He urged the AMA to provide teachers and books for Camp Nelson.<sup>8</sup>

Fee himself organized a school and began teaching freedpeople. Most students were indeed Black soldiers, who Fee believed were critical to America’s post-emancipation society. He used tents as classrooms but hoped government buildings would be converted to schoolrooms. Within weeks, Fee had recruited more than a dozen Black and white “volunteer assistants” who taught “the colored troops.” Excited about the progress, Fee wrote, “Perhaps no slaves in the nation are superior to the intellectual development to these Kentucky ex slaves.”<sup>9</sup>

Two of the first teachers at Camp Nelson were brothers from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, named William L. and John B. Lowrey. They arrived on August 19, 1864. According to William, religious enthusiasm was high throughout camp among both the Black and white soldiers, but he admitted school attendance was low due to the requirements of soldiering. Nevertheless, the brothers expressed excitement at the prospect of new recruits arriving. By the time of the monthly report, there were two sessions daily and class sizes ranged from 50 to 150 students. Some students studied reading and spelling, and others concentrated on writing. Rev. J. A. R. Rogers reported that he had “never seen more rapid progress made by any persons than by” the camp’s Black soldiers.<sup>10</sup>

American military support for Black education was tenuous. Sometimes commanders provided the resources necessary to encourage the operation of Black schools within their encampments. However, when resources were needed elsewhere, commanders often closed Black schools. At Camp Nelson, Fee and other Black education advocates experienced both support and resistance. With the assistance of Captain Theron E. Hall, a Massachusetts-born quartermaster who shared Fee’s abolitionist zeal, Fee organized classes for noncommissioned Black officers who needed to be able to read and write to prepare necessary military reports. Camp Nelson’s commanding officer, General Speed Smith Fry, authorized Black refugee laborers to mill and erect “a school-room thirty feet wide and a hundred feet long, furnished with writing tables.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “John Fee to Simeon Jocelyn, June 6, 1864, American Missionary Association (hereafter AMA),” in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, xliii–xlv, 66.

<sup>9</sup> “John Fee to Simeon Jocelyn, July 12, 1864, AMA,” and “John Fee to Simeon Jocelyn, July 18, 1864,” in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, xlii–xlv, 97–98, 101–2.

<sup>10</sup> “William Lowrey to Brother Whipple, August 27, 1864, AMA,” and “Rev. J.A.R. Rogers to American Missionary Association, August 27, 1864,” in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, xlv–xlvi; *American Missionary*, vol. 8, November 1864.

<sup>11</sup> Fee, *Autobiography*, 175–76; John G. Fee to Bros. Jocelyn, August 1, 1864, in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, 107. Ibid., “Fee to Brother Jocelyn, August 1, 1864, AMA.”



Fee used his influence with the AMA and Western Freedmen's Aid Commission (WFAC) to secure teachers. WFAC had also involved itself in the educational pursuits of Kentucky's growing population of freedpeople. Organized by former members of the AMA, WFAC considered itself a benevolent organization rather than a missionary operation such as AMA. This never sat well with John Fee, who constantly expressed concern about WFAC involvement with the school, because he believed it sought only to bolster its reputation and benefit financially.<sup>12</sup>

Gabriel Burdett came to Camp Nelson seeking freedom and would make a profound impact on the development of education across the region. Born into slavery in Garrard County, Kentucky, Burdett became a Baptist minister at a segregated Black congregation at Forks of Dix River. During the summer of 1864, Burdett, along with his wife and several children, came to Camp Nelson where he enlisted as a private in Company I, 114th US Colored Infantry Volunteers. Burdett met Fee, who became his teacher, mentor, and lifelong friend. Together they lobbied military leaders to improve conditions for Black civilians at the camp. Fee was so impressed by Burdett's abilities that he invited him to serve as a trustee at Berea College. While serving in the military, Burdett taught many of his comrades how to read and write in addition to his ministry.<sup>13</sup>

As Camp Nelson's Black school gained momentum, lackluster military resources and institutional racism thwarted progress. As the weather turned colder, Fee struggled to heat the school. Unable to secure a stove and wood from the military, Fee and his supporters located an old abandoned stove in a neighboring building and began procuring wood in the surrounding forests. Cutting wood outside of the camp was a dangerous activity, as pro-Confederate guerrillas operated in the countryside. By the end of October 1864, the Black school ceased operations as new recruits turned the building into temporary barracks. Informal teaching, however, remained commonplace at Camp Nelson as Union soldiers often taught Black men and women how to read and write.

Fee also grew frustrated that the camp's school did nothing to support the four hundred Black civilian refugees who had flocked to the area. There was no clear policy for managing women and children refugees. On nine occasions, Black civilians were expelled from the camp. On the morning of November 23, 1864, American soldiers evicted the refugees at gunpoint. Commanders loaded most of the refugees on military wagons and sent them to the nearby town of Nicholasville, six miles away. Gen. Fry sought to relocate

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<sup>12</sup> The WFAC and AMA both were heavily involved with the affairs of Black refugees during the war and then freedpeople's population at Camp Nelson following the war. The AMA considered itself a missionary association dedicated strictly to promoting religious-based principles in its teaching and preaching. Conversely, the WFAC was a benevolent association dedicated to reforming society. Even though both societies sought to assist and help the African American population at Camp Nelson, John Fee and his AMA colleagues were skeptical of the WFAC's intentions. Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*, 159–60.

<sup>13</sup> Richard D. Sears, "Gabriel Burdett," in Gerald L. Smith, Karen Cotton McDaniel, and John A. Hardin, eds., *The Kentucky African American Encyclopedia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015).

the refugees beyond the army's picket lines, where they would be forced to defend themselves against Confederate guerrillas. To prevent their return, American soldiers torched the refugee camp's buildings.<sup>14</sup>

Some American officers publicly criticized the expulsion. At the urging of several freedpeople, Capt. Hall chastised Gen. Fry's actions and contacted Ohio Sen. Benjamin Wade and Gen. Stephen Burbridge, Fry's superior officer, seeking the refugees' immediate return. As news of the military's misconduct spread, Sec. of War Edwin Stanton and Gen. Burbridge issued orders creating a permanent refugee settlement at Camp Nelson. Months later, Congress passed legislation that encouraged additional freedmen military enlistments by declaring all wives and children of Black soldiers "forever free." As Black refugees returned to Camp Nelson, the camp's formal schools resumed operation with Fee at the helm.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout 1865, disagreements between American authorities, John Fee, and members of the WFAC over issues such as management and the school's direction created controversy. John Fee believed the AMA should control the school due to its devotion to religion and missionary principles. However, at a time when the school and the refugee community needed supplies and resources, Captain Hall, Fee's usual ally, believed it suitable to employ the aid of the WFAC. It could provide teachers and material items necessary for the camp. Hall also believed large barracks with a mess hall and large workshop were needed. He believed more than being taught to read, refugees needed to be taught how to take care of themselves. Fee disagreed with this approach. Rather than being quartered like soldiers with proportioned rations and instruction from white officers, the refugee community needed the necessary setting to do it on their own. Cottages were more appropriate since families were used to a cabin-like setting, and education provided the necessary training to teach each and help the community become self-sufficient. It took action from Gen. Clinton Fisk with the Freedmen's Bureau to control the quarreling between the two sides. Fisk decided it best to put everything under the authority of the military.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Fee, *Autobiography*, 178–79; "Cruel Treatment of the Wives and Children of US Colored Soldiers," *New York Tribune*, November 28, 1864; Kim A. McBride and Stephen W. McBride, "Seizing Freedom: Archaeology of Escaped Slaves at Camp Nelson, Kentucky," part 1, in *African Diaspora Archaeology Network* (March 2011), 4; Affidavit of Joseph Miller, November 26, 1864, in Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *The Black Military Experience*. Ser. 2 of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 269–71. "John Fee to Simeon Jocelyn, August 8, 1864, AMA" and "General Orders No. 19," in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, 106–7, 110–11.

<sup>15</sup> Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 202–3.

<sup>16</sup> Kim A. McBride and Stephen W. McBride, "Seizing Freedom: Archaeology of Escaped Slaves at Camp Nelson, Kentucky," part 2, in *African Diaspora Archaeology Network* (March 2011), 16–17; Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, liii–lvi.

Compromise came when the government set aside land for school space, wards, a workshop, garden, living barracks, and ninety-seven cottages. Officials stressed the need to set aside as much land as possible for farming and gardening to support the growing population of freedpeople. This all but guaranteed promises made to shelter and feed women and children, which was paramount in the eyes of all. Cottages were built for living quarters, which opened space for school rooms and other jobs. By April 1865, the Refugee Home as it would be called housed over one thousand women and children.<sup>17</sup>

Several new teachers also arrived at Camp Nelson in April 1865, all of whom were women. Some were married to American officials and others were widowed. All were eager and willing to stay if necessary. Their reports convey a strong sense of optimism toward both the progress already made at the school and the passion and intelligence of their students.<sup>18</sup>

John Fee also encouraged hiring Black teachers. In his eyes, this would “put down the spirit of the cast [caste],” which he believed was the scourge of not only Kentucky’s society but of society collectively. Like his vision of integrated education, he wanted both Black and white teachers to work together. This vision of social equality embodied his preaching and teaching. Fee advocated it at Berea College as well as Camp Nelson.<sup>19</sup>

When Belle Mitchell, an African American from Kentucky, who had been a teacher in Ohio, was hired, Fee felt, “it was right to encourage such & that the precedent would be stimulating to others.” But an incident occurred when she sat at the same table as several white administrators and officials. One of these administrators was Rev. Lester Williams, an agent with the WFAC. Along with Williams, those men opposed to the actions of Miss Mitchell asked that she immediately leave. Fee refused to obey, but against his own wishes, Miss Mitchell eventually was expelled.<sup>20</sup> This reaction to Miss Mitchell is representative of not only the fundamental disagreements Fee and the AMA had with benevolent societies, but also how this sort of institutional racism and prejudice undermined efforts at Camp Nelson.

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<sup>17</sup> McBride and McBride, *African Diaspora Archaeology Network*, part 2, 17; “John Fee to George Whipple, February 8, 1865, AMA,” in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, 169–70. Ibid., “E. Davis to the Executive Committee of the AMA, April 28, 1865,” 197–98.

<sup>18</sup> Teachers’ names, Ann E. W. Williams, Caroline Daimon, “Lester Williams to M. E. Streiby, May 18, 1865, AMA,” in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, 206; for more on the self-education of African Americans, refer to Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> “John Fee to M.E. Streiby, May 30, 1865, AMA,” in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, 207–8; for more on this topic, refer to Victor B. Howard, *The Evangelical War against Slavery and Caste: The Life and Times of John G. Fee* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Belle Mitchell would go on and teach at Lexington’s first freedmen’s school, further her education at Berea College, and co-found Lexington’s Orphan Home. Sears, “Lester Williams to John Fee, [n.d.], AMA,” and “W. W. Wheeler to George Whipple, August 31, 1865, AMA,” in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, lxxvii, 245–48; “John Fee to Clinton Fisk, September 4, 1865,” Record Group 105: Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1861–1879, M999:7, 187–189, RG 105, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, in Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, 250.

The final months of the Civil War brought hope and despair to the Refugee Home and school. Camp Nelson had grown to encompass four thousand acres, with a significant space belonging to the community of the Refugee Home. The school, which had grown in attendance, now was supported by a large staff of volunteers and teachers. Then in April 1865, when the Civil War ended, the American Army chose to shut everything down, including the Refugee Home. Most AMA and WFAC employees left for other teaching and missionary assignments, and the future of not just the school but also the community was in jeopardy.

Despite the government's actions, the community of former enslaved men and women opted not to leave. To force the community's relocation, the Freedmen's Bureau ended aid so people would starve. With mortality rates rising and supplies running out, many abandoned their homes. Teachers empathized with the freedpeople. In some cases, these teachers even traveled with the refugee parties, paying for meals and shelter along the way.<sup>21</sup> By March 1866, the efforts of the federal government and Freedmen's Bureau to rid Camp Nelson of its inhabitants had worked. Most freedpeople had left the area and the school had been closed.

### *Ariel Academy, 1866–1884*

Camp Nelson's closure failed to deter John Fee's vision of educating African American Kentuckians.<sup>22</sup> In September 1866, Rev. Abisha Scofield, who arrived at Camp Nelson in 1864, Gabriel Burdett, John Fee, the AMA, and others helped reestablish the Camp Nelson school. They sought to establish a school fitting the Christian model and catering to both Black and white students. Advertising primary, normal, and industrial education, they trained students for the practical duties of life. Then, in January 1867, Fee used his own money to purchase the land where the Refugee Home had existed. It was divided into lots and sold for about one-fifth of what it was worth to the freedpeople who lived there. The Black community of Ariel emerged around the school.<sup>23</sup>

White residents of Jessamine County opposed the Ariel community's development. In addition to enduring the pressures from the federal government to shut down, white vigilantes threatened the community's safety. "Bands of armed ruffians" pillaged the area, stealing money, food, and weapons. Abisha Scofield and his family encountered a local

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<sup>21</sup> Sears, *Camp Nelson, Kentucky*, lvii–lviii.

<sup>22</sup> "Some Thoughts Concerning Normal Schools for the Freedmen," *American Missionary*, January 1867.

<sup>23</sup> Sears, "Scofield to Strieby and Whipple, Dec. 14, 1866, AMA," lx, 354–58; John Fee, *An Appeal*, Adam Matthew Database; McBride and McBride, *African Diaspora Archaeology Network*, 23.

group of white vigilantes, who threatened to arrest and even kill him if he did not vacate the area in ten days. This raised quite a stir in the community and threatened initial efforts to reopen the school. The violence hampered efforts to staff the school.<sup>24</sup>

Gabriel Burdett became an Ariel Community leader who served as a teacher and administrator at the school. He eventually served on the Camp Nelson Academy Board of Trustees. He also spent time traveling and establishing schools in the area to advocate for the importance of education.<sup>25</sup>

By April 1868, the school had been named Ariel Academy and had grown to 106 students. Teachers held classes in a large two-story building. Students came from as far away as Louisville, Kentucky. John Fee at this time was busy caring for his son, Burritt, who had fallen ill while helping his father organize the Camp Nelson school. This left a window for the WFAC to involve itself with the school without Fee's resistance. Both the AMA and WFAC thus supported the school in some capacity during this period by providing teachers and material.<sup>26</sup>

The 1870 Jessamine County Federal Census indicates that between thirty and fifty families with heads of household being described either as "Black" or "mulatto" lived in the Ariel community. Most were farm hands or farmers, but there is also a tanner, butcher, carpenter, and several teachers and ministers. Almost all the children in these families are listed as "at school."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Sears, "Merrel to Ely, 20 Dec. 1866; volumes 1–9, 1866 L–R, Box No.5, Kentucky Assistant Commissioner, Letters Received, Entry 1068; RG 105," 358–61; "Scofield to Strieby and Whipple, Dec. 14, 1866, AMA," 354–58. Details of this occurring near Berea College appear in an *American Missionary* entry from 1881, "Kentucky: The Work At Berea," *American Missionary*, October 1881.

<sup>25</sup> Sears, lxi.

<sup>26</sup> Sears, "*Freedmen's Affairs in Kentucky and Tennessee*. Letter from Secretary of War (Washington, DC, GPO, 1868)," 373–74. McBride and McBride, *African Diaspora Archaeology Network*, 23. Burritt died October 1, 1876, after a long period of suffering due to tuberculosis. He taught off and on at Camp Nelson/Ariel along with others for most of his life, but due to his sickness had to stop; Marion B. Lucas, "'Dear Pa Is in a Worry': The Life and Death of Burritt Hamilton Fee," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 105, no. 4 (Autumn 2007): 617–56.

<sup>27</sup> To identify the community around Ariel, we used Gabriel Burdett. He appears as a resident of "District 1" in Jessamine County. An archivist at Berea College named Sharyn Mitchell confirmed this method. She said that where Burdett's name appears in the census is the location of the Ariel community. Descriptions notate B for "Black" and M for "mulatto." Most homes in this district are either B or M with several wealthy, white landowners dispersed; *Ninth Manuscript Census of the United States* (1870), Population Schedule, Kentucky, Jessamine County, District 1 (accessed via Ancestry.com).



The Ariel Academy provided a high-quality education despite funding shortages and various controversies. At an 1874 AMA “Teacher’s institute,” Ariel Community teachers complained that deteriorating buildings and funding problems hampered efforts. Some accused local whites of undermining the school.<sup>28</sup> Others blamed community vices such as alcoholism and gambling.<sup>29</sup>

Educating future teachers to embark on their own evangelical missions became a significant goal at Ariel. This is clearly represented by the efforts of one of its most popular teachers, Howard Fee. Since his time at Camp Nelson during the school’s inception in 1864, Howard had attended Berea College and taught at other schools. Like all of John Fee’s children, Howard shared his father’s utopian vision that integrated education could establish a precedent for all of Kentucky society. When Howard became the principal of Ariel in 1876, he worked to promote this mission. He also advertised Ariel as specializing in “the Normal department,” meaning training teachers. He wanted to motivate students to become teachers and missionaries themselves. This way they too could become pillars in changing Kentucky.<sup>30</sup>

Howard’s vision coincided with the AMA’s belief that normal and missionary schools were critical to establishing a public-school system in the South. Where “competent” Black teachers were sent, whites favored the establishment of a common (public) school system, according to the AMA. This became the mission for Ariel Academy in its final decades as it desired to operate a school “especially” to train “the colored youth of Kentucky . . . to take charge of schools . . . among their own race.”<sup>31</sup> However, when Gabriel Burdett, who had been a resident in Ariel for over decade, decided to leave in 1877, the school suffered. Howard Fee only stayed another year, leaving John Fee as the only original disciple to plead on behalf of the school.

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<sup>28</sup> “Letter from a Berea Student: A Teacher’s Institute in the Mountains,” *American Missionary*, February 1874.

<sup>29</sup> “Revivals,” *American Missionary*, November 1875; “Kentucky: Temperance and Evangelistic Work,” *American Missionary*, May 1878; Howard Fee to John Fee, November 23, 1874, Adam Matthew Digital Database; Sears, lxi; “Seales, Daniel, Jr.,” *Notable African American Database*, University of Kentucky; “Kentucky,” *The Elevator*, vol. 3, no. 26, September 27, 1867.

<sup>30</sup> Sears, “Ariel Academy Leaflet, 10 August 1875, AMA,” lxi, lxxviii; Richard Sears, *A Utopian Experiment in Kentucky: Integration and Social Equality at Berea, 1866–1904*.

<sup>31</sup> “Our Schools and the Common School System,” *American Missionary*, October 1880; “Normal Schools: To the Friends of Christian Education,” Adam Matthew Digital Database.

### *Camp Nelson Academy, 1884–1902*

On March 11, 1884, the school changed names from Ariel Academy to Camp Nelson Academy after it was incorporated by the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Based on existing records, support for the school declined.<sup>32</sup> Support from the American Missionary Association ceased around 1885. Within volumes of the *American Missionary* between 1865 and 1885, Camp Nelson appears in “The Field,” which is a report of how many employees either preaching or teaching were located at each AMA school. After 1885, Camp Nelson no longer appears.

Based on the *Berea College Reporter*, the college provided the school with its teachers. One of the school’s final principals was an African American named W. S. Overstreet, who had graduated from Berea. Unfortunately, the Berea and Camp Nelson connection, which for decades had been instrumental to both schools, deteriorated. This is evident in a response John Fee published in the *Berea Evangelist* that questioned Berea’s response to sectarianism and caste.<sup>33</sup>

Camp Nelson Academy’s finances continued to decline. Conversations between Mrs. Mary M. Robe, a school administrator, and Fee between January and May 1889 highlight the uncertainty among teachers employed there. Unrest over the start date of school (presumably delayed for funding reasons) made Robe concerned about whether teachers would remain. One of the school’s primary teachers at the time, Miss Etta V. Stewart, also suffered an injury forcing her absence. This concerned students’ parents, who were pleased with their children’s progress under her tutelage. Miss Stewart as a teacher had embodied the school’s education mission, focusing on the practical duties of life like needlework and cooking.<sup>34</sup>

The struggles at Camp Nelson undoubtedly frustrated all who watched and experienced the climactic years of the school. What grew out of the ruins of a supply depot became what one Louisville newspaper described as “the most important negro educational institution in the South.” Even amid its struggles, the school still managed to make an impact. The Camp Nelson Jubilee Singers emerged as a branch of the Salvation Army. They performed concerts in front of large crowds in New York and Ohio, and even sang for President William McKinley.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “Laws of Kentucky: Chapter 373, AN ACT To incorporate Camp Nelson Academy,” *Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky...*, vol. 1 (Frankfort, KY: S.I.M. Major, public printer, 1884), 680–81 (accessed through Google Books).

<sup>33</sup> *Berea College Reporter*, 1889 and 1892; “A Letter from John Fee to a Friend,” *Berea Evangelist*, August 1885; “A Look at Camp Dick Robinson and Camp Nelson,” *Courier-Journal*, 1895.

<sup>34</sup> Miss Mary M. Robe to John Fee, January and May 1889, Adam Matthew Database.

<sup>35</sup> “Kentucky Jubilee Singers Join the Salvation Army,” *Courier-Journal*, December 12, 1897.

By 1898, reports surfaced that a Christian church had bought the school. Then, in 1902, the school made one last call for financial support and enrollment through an attempted merge with Berea College. This stalled over administrative concerns that students might think Camp Nelson was the African American part of Berea. Administrators feared this would unintentionally segregate the two schools. However, when the Commonwealth of Kentucky signed into effect the Day Law of 1904, prohibiting white and Black students from attending college together, Berea was segregated. Camp Nelson Academy closed that same year.<sup>36</sup>

Today, nothing remains of the refugee camp buildings and postbellum community structures associated with either Camp Nelson's Black inhabitants or the Ariel community. Across the dozens of historic contraband camps scattered throughout the American southeast, no buildings or structures remain that were built to house and educate Black families. Most of these original buildings were temporary in nature. Also, after the war, local whites often evicted Black refugees from the contraband camp lands and many Black refugees struck out on the road in search of missing family members. The sole historic building remaining at Camp Nelson Heritage National Monument is the 1846 Oliver Perry House, used as an officers' headquarters during the Civil War. From this building, important American Army policies would have been debated and implemented at Camp Nelson, including the treatment of the camp's large Black refugee community. Documents fail to show whether any classroom instruction ever happened in the Oliver Perry House, but the American military officers operating there certainly impacted the camp's educational activities and resources. Therefore, given the nationally significant role that Camp Nelson played in the history of Black emancipation in America, the Oliver Perry House should be recognized as the last surviving vestige of an important story that otherwise lacks extant historic buildings and structures.

Likewise, the Camp Nelson National Cemetery should also be considered a last surviving vestige of the Black refugee camp. In 1863, the American Army began burying the dead at Camp Nelson in plots that eventually expanded into the current National Cemetery grounds. Significant numbers of USCT soldiers are buried in the cemetery. Most of those individuals would have received some form of educational instruction during their time at Camp Nelson. The cemetery serves as a stark reminder of the enormous personal risk and sacrifice self-emancipated Black families took when they fled bondage and arrived at Camp Nelson.

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<sup>36</sup> "Berea and Ariol Schools," *New York Times*, June 21, 1898; Sears, lxiii.

Camp Nelson, Kentucky



**Figure 22.** Camp Nelson, Kentucky, 1864. National Park Service.



**Figure 23.** Camp Nelson, Kentucky, US Sanitary Commission, 1864. National Park Service.



**Figure 24.** Camp Nelson Academy, Kentucky, 1864. National Park Service.



# Lockwood House and Storer College

## Harpers Ferry National Historical Park

Daniel Cone

### *Extant Historic Resources and Dates of Construction*

- Storer College (18XX), 37 Washington Court, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia
- Lockwood House (1847–1848), 360 Fillmore Street, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

### Historic Resource Map: Harpers Ferry National Park, West Virginia



**A** Storer College, 37 Washington Court, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

**B** Lockwood House, 360 Fillmore Street, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

Harpers Ferry, in Jefferson County, West Virginia, is a crossroads in antebellum and Civil War history. By an accident of geography, it has alternately been a passageway, a fortress, and a target. It has provided both connection points between different groups in American society and an outpost against those designated as unwanted outsiders. While the political and military history of Harpers Ferry is fairly well known, its significance as a node point for postbellum African American education in the Border States has until now received less consideration. This oversight is peculiar, given that it was here, at the Lockwood House—later part of Storer College—that one of the first African American colleges (and once the



only one available in West Virginia) was established in the early days of Reconstruction. Although Storer College itself passed into history during the civil rights movement, many of its buildings remain as a testimony to African American resilience.

The natural features at Harpers Ferry stood out to early Virginia entrepreneurs and industrialists. Located at the juncture of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, and bounded on three sides by ridges of the Appalachian Mountains, it controlled access west to the Ohio River, east to the upper Potomac, and north and south along the corridor of the Shenandoah Valley. Noting the site's strategic significance, in 1796 the federal government erected an arsenal there for the War Department. The arrival of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in the 1830s further stimulated settlement. By 1859, more than three thousand people lived in the town, named for its original developer, Robert Harper.<sup>1</sup>

Hostile attention focused on Harpers Ferry as national disputes over the expansion of chattel slavery reached a breaking point. Militant antislavery activist John Brown put the spot at the center of American consciousness when in October 1859 he and a tiny abolitionist band seized the arsenal to arm enslaved freedom fighters. Although the rebellion failed and its leader was tried and executed for treason, Brown's Harpers Ferry Raid illuminated sectional divisions over the slave states' "peculiar institution." While northern abolitionists lauded and deified Brown's motives (if not his actions), southern state leaders—appalled by such adulation and fearing more uprisings—increased their defense spending, expanded their militias, and finally attempted to found an independent slave-holding republic, the Confederacy.<sup>2</sup>

Emulating Brown's actions (if not his motives), Virginia's leaders, seeking arms and manufacturing equipment for the Confederate Army, seized the arsenal in April 1861 after their state had seceded. Four months later, US military commanders recaptured Harpers Ferry to execute their strategy of overrunning the agriculturally rich Shenandoah Valley and, at the same time, protecting the loyal counties of western Virginia, which had nullified secession. This began a shuttlecock game that played out over the next four years as the town changed hands no fewer than fourteen times. Yet over the long term, Harpers Ferry became a relatively secure headquarters for the United States Army.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Barry, *The Annals of Harper's Ferry, from the Establishment of the National Armory in 1794 to the Present Time, 1869* (Hagerstown, MD: Dechert, 1869); "Harpers Ferry National Historic Park," National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, last updated May 20, 2020, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/hafe/index.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005); Steven A. Channing, *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), esp. chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> Chester G. Hearn, *Six Years of Hell: Harpers Ferry during the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999).

Given its status as an all-points thoroughfare, Harpers Ferry quickly attracted formerly enslaved refugees. Whereas about 150 Black enslaved laborers and 150 free Blacks had lived there in 1860, many more arrived during the war years, having fled bondage on Virginia farms and plantations.<sup>4</sup> Refugees at Harpers Ferry sought life's necessities, but more than that they sought education, long forbidden them by law as part of the southern racial caste system. Northern aid workers such as hospital chaplain Charles M. Blake recognized as early as the summer of 1862 that "the colored people are very anxious for a school. And [we] now propose to open one as soon as books can be obtained."<sup>5</sup> The records, however, do not indicate whether Blake was able to carry out his plans.

Although African Americans had likely established some informal schooling at Harpers Ferry in the antebellum period, regular education for freedpeople had to wait for the Emancipation Proclamation (issued September 1862, effective January 1, 1863), the whole-sale mobilization of northern philanthropic support, and the stabilization of the military situation in the Shenandoah Valley. In the interim, the numerous arsenal and armory buildings provided makeshift schools. Sizeable among these was the Lockwood House, built in 1848 on Camp Hill as a home for the armory paymaster. An army headquarters and hospital, the two-story stone and brick house was used hard during the war. Northern mission teachers arriving there in the winter of 1865 found it in a state of "war-torn disfigurement," with an "opening in the roof where a shell had unceremoniously entered."<sup>6</sup>

The mission teachers had been sent by the Free Will Baptist Home Mission Society. More than any other private philanthropic group, the New England-based Free Will Baptists advanced freedpeople's education at Harpers Ferry. An Arminian branch of nineteenth-century American Protestantism, the Baptists grounded salvation in individual choice and personal improvement. They were also noted for staunch, uncompromising opposition to slavery and passion for domestic mission work. After the defeat of the Confederacy in 1865, the denomination partnered with the Congregationalist American Missionary Association (AMA) and the newly established Freedmen's Bureau to plant

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<sup>4</sup> "Stories," Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, <https://www.nps.gov/hafe/learn/historyculture/stories.htm>, accessed by the author July 4, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Charles M. Blake to Rev. S. S. Jocelyn, June 30, 1862, MS American Missionary Association Archives, 1839–1882 H1–4478 (hereafter cited as AMAA), Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereafter cited as Amistad-Tulane).

<sup>6</sup> Ronald E. Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction: Freedmen's Education, 1862–1875* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Dawne Raines Burke, *An American Phoenix: A History of Storer College from Slavery to Desegregation, 1865–1955* (Morgantown, WV: Storer College Books, 2015), 21; "Lockwood House," Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, last updated April 22, 2016, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/hafe/learn/historyculture/lockwood-house.htm>. An early-twentieth-century New York county history claimed that "Henry Emerson Smith, Colonel [139th New York Infantry Regiment], established the first freedmen's school in Harpers Ferry"; Charles Nutt, A.B., *History of Worcester and Its People*, Vol. III (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1919), 131–32.

schools for freedpeople. Ultimately the denomination's mission leadership settled on Harpers Ferry because its gateway geographical setting made it "a natural gathering place for [former] slaves" moving on.<sup>7</sup>

Little information is available on the format of education offered at the Lockwood House. Presumably teachers there followed general practices among AMA- and Bureau-supported freedpeople's schools, with individual and group learning by recitation on English literature, American history, orthography, and arithmetic, among other subjects, interspersed with religious teaching. One instructor who taught at both Lockwood and a school in Charlestown, West Virginia, claimed that "the great thing needed is, that [students] may receive grace to bring the heart and life in obedience to the precepts of the Bible."<sup>8</sup>

As a Freedmen's Bureau superintendent noted, there was "a good deal of enthusiasm" on "the subject of [children's] education" among African Americans at Harpers Ferry in the immediate postbellum period. Indeed, they were "besieging" the Free Will Baptists' representatives to provide adult night schools as well. The problem was that the Lockwood House, besides being severely damaged, was too small to accommodate demand. It was, according to a bureau officer's report, so "cut up into small rooms" that only a wholesale interior alteration (knocking down all partitions) would suffice. To provide extra space, the Home Mission Society bought from farmer William Smallwood 150 acres on Bolivar Heights, just outside town, and seriously considered renovating a nearby African American church to double as a schoolhouse (a common practice).<sup>9</sup> Yet, as with other freedpeople's school programs, the chief difficulty was finding money for housing, teacher salaries, and supplies.

Timely contributions from the federal government and a wealthy northern benefactor helped the Free Will Baptists think big. John Storer, a well-to-do businessman from Maine, announced in early 1867 that he would contribute \$10,000 toward higher education for African Americans in West Virginia, provided that the Baptists matched his gift no later than the following January. Generous gifts from various contributors narrowly raised the necessary amount to meet the deadline. With Storer's bequest in hand, as well as more than \$16,000 in supplementary grants from the Freedmen's Bureau, a Baptist Commission

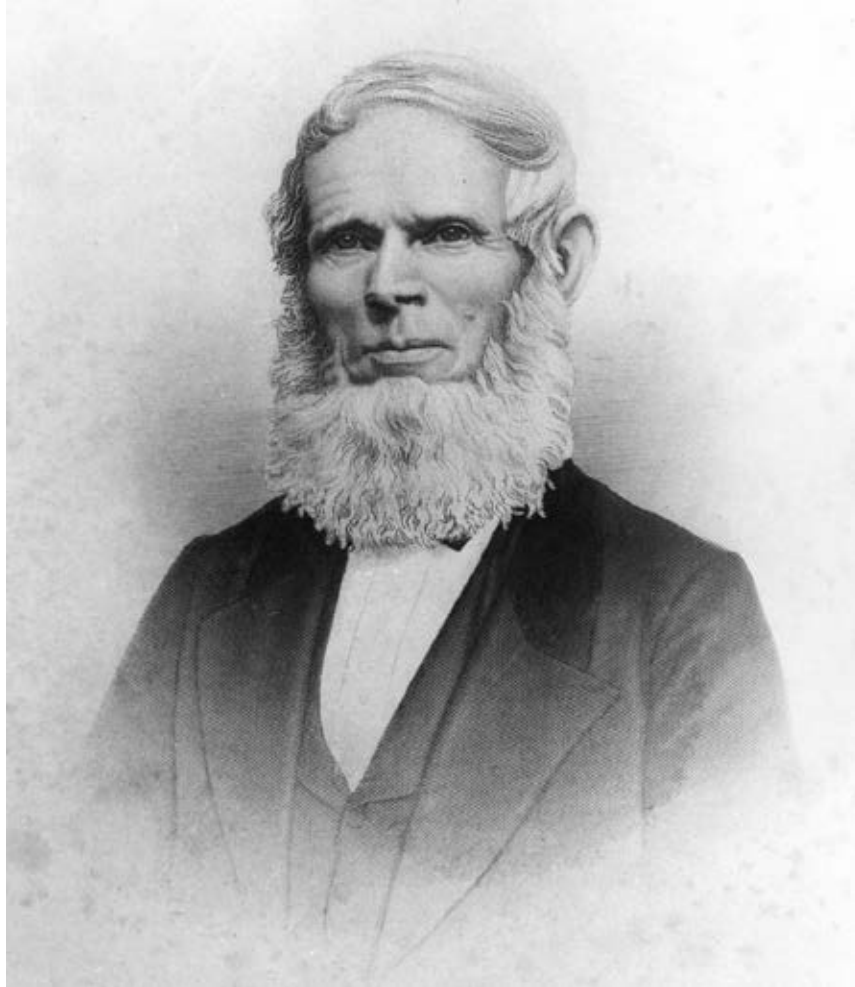
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<sup>7</sup> Dawne Raines Burke, *An American Phoenix: A History of Storer College from Slavery to Desegregation, 1865–1955* (Morgantown, WV: Storer College Books, 2015), 19–20. As many as 2,500 pupils were reportedly enrolled in the Free Baptists' "Shenandoah Mission" in 1865; Rev. G. A. Burgess and Rev. J. T. Ward, *Free Baptist Cyclopedia, Historical and Biographical* (Chicago: The Women's Temperance Publication Association, 1889).

<sup>8</sup> C. W. Sharpe to Whipple, July 1, 1867, AMAA, Amistad-Tulane. Butchart, *Northern Schools and Schooling the Freed People*, asserts that African American students, already well-versed in biblical teachings, needed little religious instruction.

<sup>9</sup> J. W. Alvord, *Fourth Semi-Annual Report on Schools for Freedmen, July 1, 1867* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1867), 10; Joseph Barry, *The Strange Story of Harper's Ferry, with Legends of the Surrounding Country* (Shepherdstown, WV: The Shepherdstown Register, 1903); Lt. A. F. Higgs to Maj. J. H. Remington, September 30, 1866, W. W. Wheeler to George Whipple, March 30, 1867, AMAA, Amistad-Tulane.

appealed to the West Virginia state legislature in March 1868 to charter a college at Harpers Ferry. Storer's wish "that the institution should...be operated as a normal school...and that it be open to both sexes without distinction of race or color" did not square with many lawmakers' conservatism. Due to the "intense and violent opposition" in the legislature over the charter, commission member and state senator Joseph T. Hoke had to resign from the commission to cast the tie-breaking vote in favor. Thankfully for its African American students, Storer College had been open since October 1867.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 25.** John Storer, 1796–1867. National Park Service.

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<sup>10</sup> Burgess and Ward, *Free Baptist Cyclopedia*, 625; Burke, *American Phoenix*, 57; *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1898–1899*, Vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900).



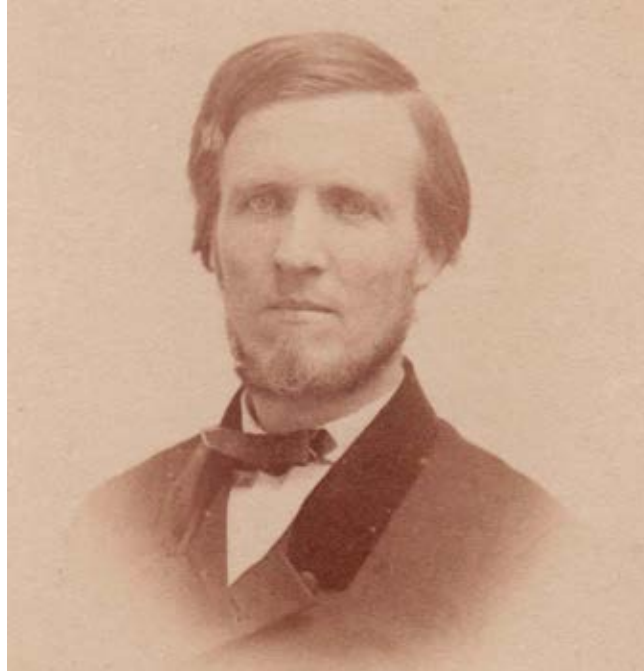
Figure 26. Storer College. National Park Service.

Thanks to the Storer bequest, the college expanded. Initially, a congressional draft bill only turned over the Lockwood House, but with the connivance of Republican Senator William P. Fessenden, Freedmen’s Bureau Superintendent of Schools for the Shenandoah Valley, Nathan Brackett, rewrote this draft to provide four additional lots on Camp Hill. Another three buildings from the War Department armory complex, Anthony House, Brackett House, and Morrell House (later Memorial Hall), became part of the Storer College campus. The boys’ (Lincoln Hall) and girls’ (Myrtle Hall) dormitories were completed and dedicated in 1870 and 1876, respectively. And beginning in 1910, the arsenal engine house where Brown’s Raiders had once holed up (known locally as “Brown’s Fort”) was relocated to the campus.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Burke, *American Phoenix*; N. C. Brackett to Rev. E. P. Smith, May 8, 1869, AMAA, Amistad-Tulane; Emeline Bulingame-Cheney, *The Story of the Life and Work of Oren B. Cheney, Founder and First President of Bates College* (Boston: Morning Star, 1907).





**Figure 27.** Nathan Brackett was a Free Will Baptist minister who served as Superintendent of the Freedmen's Bureau Schools in the Shenandoah Valley.

Initially white residents were at best displeased, and at worse hostile, toward educational programs for freedpeople. In one wartime incident, white boys stoned some of the Lockwood House students along with several members of a local African American congregation. Occasionally landowners turned their bloodhounds loose on the scholars, wounding several. Nor were white teachers exempt from the ill feeling: early mission instructor Anne L. Dudley remembered that “the [white] people are . . . opposed to the school, and regard me only with contempt,” promising “‘bloody heads’ and ‘broken windows.’” The Lockwood staff hesitated to celebrate Independence Day, 1867, “with the present state of feeling toward them, in the town.” Recounting numerous “threats of ‘burning of school houses,’ ‘tarring & feathering,’” and sundry “petty insults and indignities” suffered in the late 1860s, an administrator at the school concluded that “the presence of [the United States] military alone makes it *safe* or *possible* to [carry on with] our work . . . but how long before its protection may safely be withdrawn is quite doubtful.”<sup>12</sup> White teacher Sarah Jane Foster played an important role in guiding the school and its students during this tumultuous period. She maintained a diary and wrote numerous letters to friends, family, and supporters that provide detailed accounts of life at Storer.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Wheeler to Whipple, June 22, 1864, Anne L. Dudley to Samuel Hunt, December 29, 1865, N. C. Brackett to Hunt, February 28, 1866, Sharpe to Whipple, July 1, 1867, M. L. Evans to Rev. S. Manley, n.d., AMAA, Amistad-Tulane.

<sup>13</sup> Jacqueline Jones, ed., *Sarah Jane Foster, Teacher of the Freedmen* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).



**Figure 28.** Lockwood House. National Park Service.

Elsewhere, the white backlash against Reconstruction, backed up by terrorism, forced many schools for freedpeople to close. For a time, Storer College seemed likely to suffer the same fate, for “when [it] was set in their midst,” a historian of the school reported, “[white] prejudice and opposition intensified to fever heat” as “unceasing endeavors were made to prevent the bestowing of charter or government property” and “almost any expedients were adopted to wrest them from us.” Threats of visitation from the Ku Klux Klan were not uncommon. Even as late as 1891, southern congressional opponents of the college kept it from receiving a promised \$3,000 grant as part of the national Industrial Education Fund.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kate J. Anthony, *Storer College, Harper’s Ferry, W.V.; Brief Historical Sketch, 1867–1891* (Boston: Morning Star, 1891), 10–11.



**Figure 29.** Storer College Students and Faculty, circa 1880. Harpers Ferry NHP Museum Collection, Catalog #4952, National Park Service.

Yet somehow Storer College persevered, graduating more than three hundred teachers (most of whom taught in either West Virginia or the Midwest) and more than thirty ministers (including several missionaries to Africa) by the late nineteenth century. Its athletics and musical programs became renowned among African American institutions of higher learning. Moreover, it hosted in 1906 the first American conference of what would become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Regrettably, crippling budget shortfalls became perennial in the first half of the twentieth century, and after the 1954–55 term, the school suspended operations. With the legal end of school segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* that same year, Storer also came to an end as it was merged with Virginia Union University. However, since 1960 the former campus has been part of the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, thereby embodying the juncture between abolition and African American intellectual achievement.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Burke, *American Phoenix*.



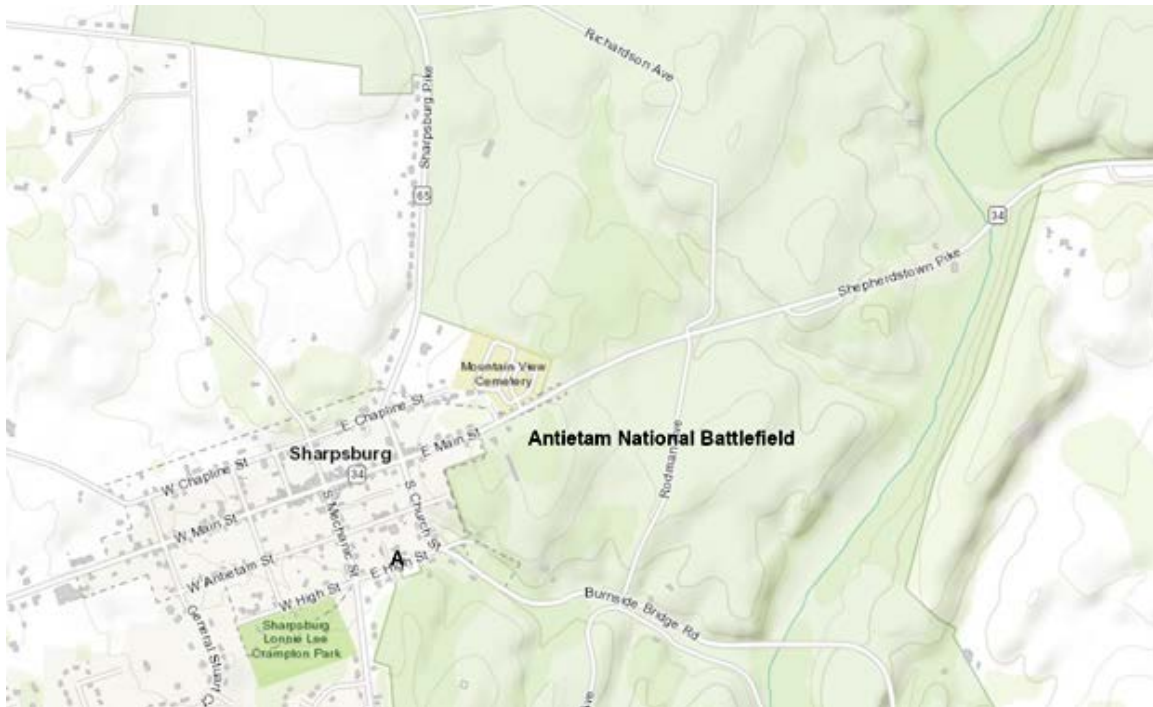
# Tolson's Chapel and School

## Antietam National Battlefield

### *Extant Historic Resource and Date of Construction*

- Tolson's Chapel (1866), 111 E High Street, Sharpsburg, Maryland

### Historic Resource Map: Sharpsburg, Maryland



**A** Tolson's Chapel, 111 E High Street, Sharpsburg, Maryland

In 2021, historian Evelyn D. Causey prepared a successful National Historic Landmark nomination for Tolson's Chapel and School. The following case study is based on Causey's prior research and analysis. Entire sections of Causey's work were incorporated into this case study. For additional information about Tolson's Chapel and School, please consult: Evelyn D. Causey, "Tolson's Chapel and School," National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2021).

According to historian Evelyn Causey, Tolson's Chapel testifies to the postbellum determination of African Americans in the former slave-holding states to build their own free and independent institutions. Erected in 1866 on the field of a decisive battle in the American Civil War, the modest log-and-frame church served as a springboard for freed-people's political organization and educational initiatives.

Like other African American churches, Tolson's Chapel and School aided efforts to improve congregants' economic fortunes, supported their participation in civic life, and supported their declarations of autonomy from whites. Moreover, it laid the foundation for post-Reconstruction multiracial public education (separate and unequal) throughout the southern and border states. In 2021, the National Park Service designated Tolson's Chapel as a National Historic Landmark.

The 1,677 free Blacks and 1,435 Black enslaved laborers living in Washington County at the beginning of the war were legally inconsequential residents of a slave-holding state. Denied all US citizenship rights, they suffered numerous and severe restrictions on economic and employment opportunities, ownership of firearms or dogs, ability to purchase property, and, more pertinently, religious gatherings. Moreover, the initial war aims of the United States government did not encompass any changes to their degraded status.<sup>1</sup>

Soon, however, dogged Confederate resistance—exemplified by General Robert E. Lee's invasion of Maryland—encouraged deliberate targeting of slavery as a military necessity. The costly but indecisive Battle of Antietam/Sharpsburg (September 17, 1862), which compelled Lee to withdraw from the state, gave President Abraham Lincoln a sufficient pretext to issue the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Under that proclamation, made effective January 1, 1863, all enslaved people in the Confederate states “henceforth shall be free,” and thereby eligible for a very limited range of benefits and responsibilities in the United States' war effort.<sup>2</sup>

Although excluded from the Proclamation's directives because it had never seceded, Maryland became free through the inexorable course of the war. United States military camps in the state sheltered fugitives from slavery and ultimately normalized the recruitment of African American soldiers. Due to environmental and agricultural practices, the institution had always been marginal in Washington and the other western counties. Unionists had gained and kept control of the government in late 1861, and by 1864, thanks in part to votes from Maryland soldiers in the field, voters narrowly approved a new constitution abolishing slavery.<sup>3</sup>

Yet de facto emancipation proceeded slowly even after Confederate surrender, as much hindered by white prejudices as it was aided by new organizations such as the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (more commonly known as the Freedmen's Bureau), established to assist freedpeople with labor mediations, marriage arrangements,

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn D. Causey, “Tolson's Chapel and School,” National Landmark Nomination (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2021), 4; Edith B. Wallace, *Reclaiming Forgotten History: Preserving Rural African-American Cultural Resources in Washington County, Maryland* (Master's thesis, Goucher College, 2003), 10-19; Dean Herring, “Antietam Rising: The Civil War and Its Legacy in Sharpsburg, Maryland, 1860-1900” (prepared for National Park Service, Antietam Battlefield Park, March 2002), 58.

<sup>2</sup> Causey, “Tolson's Chapel,” 5; Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 117–30.

<sup>3</sup> Causey, “Tolson's Chapel,” 7.



charity, legal resources, and schooling. Washington County African Americans certainly wanted the underfunded, under-staffed Bureau's assistance but did not feel compelled to wait for it. Meanwhile, Black congregants in white-led churches, such as the Methodist Episcopal Church, strove to balance the benefits of preserving established interracial social, economic, and political networks gained by remaining in established white churches with pushing white leaders to recognize and consult Black agency. In 1864, the Methodist Episcopal Church responded to Black Methodist calls for expanded leadership opportunities by establishing two conferences of "colored members": Delaware (July 28) and Washington (October 27).<sup>4</sup>

Appointed by the Washington Conference to the Hagerstown circuit (at the time including Sharpsburg), minister John R. Tolson organized a Black Methodist congregation in Sharpsburg in 1865. The following year, Tolson oversaw the construction of a church building on East High Street, at the corner of a quarter-acre lot donated by antebellum freedpeople Samuel and Cassey Craig. By 1875, the congregation, averaging thirty to sixty regular attendees, had named the church after Tolson, recently deceased.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 30.** Tolson's Chapel, Sharpsburg, Maryland. National Park Service.

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<sup>4</sup> Causey, "Tolson's Chapel," 7.

<sup>5</sup> Edie Wallace and Paula S. Reed, *Tolson's Chapel*, National Register of Historic Places Nomination (2008), Section 8: 3–9.



**Figure 31.** Tolson's Chapel, pulpit. National Park Service.

Besides being a place of worship, Tolson's Chapel figured as a social, cultural, and recreational venue, a political gathering place, and an educational center. During Reconstruction, African Americans in Sharpsburg, like others throughout the South, were zealous in acquiring and spreading education, rightfully connecting it to their larger pursuit of social equality. Learning to read, write, and cipher fostered dignity and a sense of self-worth. On a more practical level, education improved the lives of African Americans: it helped them read their Bibles, apply for skilled technical jobs, and thwart racist whites' attempts to defraud and shortchange them in the public sphere.<sup>6</sup>

Rather than expend funds for a separate school building, African Americans in Sharpsburg used Tolson's Chapel for that purpose. The church's straightforward internal layout doubled well as a school room, and the installation of liquid slate—an economical blackboard substitute—met the basic needs for instruction. The first two teachers, Pennsylvanians Ezra Johnson and John J. Carter, were appointed by the Freedmen's Bureau, funded by northern benevolent associations, and drew room and board from residents. Neither man lasted long: Johnson quit after two months (April–June 1868) due to “a little friction” with the freedpeople over tuition and support, and Carter, an African American, stuck around for a year through limited enrollments before moving on to a larger Freedmen's school in Virginia. Thereafter, the chapel's school faculty was drawn

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<sup>6</sup> Causey, “Tolson's Chapel,” 10.

from the Black community in Sharpsburg. Although this ensured local control, it also produced a sporadic academic calendar, given the generally low level of literacy and teachers' need to supplement their meager incomes.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 32.** David B. and Margaret Simons. David Simons is buried in the Tolson's Chapel cemetery and was probably involved in the decision to allow the teachers from the Freedmen's Bureau to use the church as a schoolhouse in 1868 and 1869. National Park Service, courtesy of the Sharpsburg Museum of History.

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<sup>7</sup> Causey, "Tolson's Chapel," 12-13; Teacher's Monthly Reports, April and May 1868 (Roll #17) and July and August 1869 (Roll #20), Samuel H. Ferguson to Captain Brubaker, May 8, 1869, May 18, 1869, and June 2, 1869 (Roll #6), E. F. Hatfield to John Kimball, June 2, 1869 and July 31, 1869 (Roll #7), Kimball to Ferguson, August 13, 1869 (Roll #6), Records of the Superintendent of Education, Freedmen's Bureau, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, DC; Werner Lapsansky and Margaret Hope Bacon, eds., *Back to Africa: Benjamin Coats and the Colonization Movement in America, 1858-1880* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 230-31, 237-39.

Apart from the superiority that Johnson and Carter exuded—and which students and parents found off-putting—a starvation budget and hostility from local whites made it difficult for out-of-state teachers to succeed at Tolson's Chapel. For example, shortly after arriving in Sharpsburg, Johnson wrote, “the [white] citizens would allow a coloured [sic] man to teach here, but if possible, they won't allow a white teacher to come here and teach the coloured [sic] people, and they have made up their minds to freeze me out with cold shoulders.” Prior to Johnson's arrival, African Americans in Sharpsburg persuaded a local white family to board the teacher, only for the hosts to rescind their offer at the last moment. In the end, local Black families had to provide Johnson lodging and meals.<sup>8</sup>

The student body proved a bit more stable. At least eighteen students attended school in Tolson's Chapel in the spring of 1868; most were former slaves. The following summer, attendance ranged from fifteen to twenty-five; of these, between eleven and sixteen were “always present.” This represented a significant proportion of the school-aged African American population in the area. According to Causey, “distance and poverty were among the greatest obstacles to school attendance for African Americans in the late 1860s.” The school did as well as might be reasonably expected. In addition, there was a demand for adult night classes. In the fall of 1869, local freedman Samuel Ferguson requested an additional teacher and resources to provide training for twenty-six “young men and married men.” Curriculum varied by teacher, but as with other African American schools in the late 1860s, it included reading, writing, spelling, grammar, mathematics, and geography.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Causey, “Tolson's Chapel,” 13; Kimball to Maj. Stuart Eldridge, March 31, 1868 (Roll #1), Ezra A. Johnson to John Kimball, April 6, 1868 (Roll #70), Johnson to Brubaker, April 3, 1868 (Roll #5), Johnson to Coates, April 7, 1868 (Roll #6), Records of the Superintendent of Education, Freedmen's Bureau, NARA; Buchart, *Schooling the Freed People*.

<sup>9</sup> Causey, “Tolson's Chapel,” 15, 16; Teacher's Monthly School Reports, April and May 1868 (Roll #17) and July and August 1869 (Roll #20), Samuel Ferguson to Swain, November 2, 1869 (Roll #6), *ibid.*; Sharpsburg District, Washington County, Maryland, in <http://www.ancestry.com>, 1870 United States Federal Census; William Frank Troost, “Accomplishment and Abandonment: A History of the Freedmen's Bureau Schools” (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2007).



**PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF HOME MISSIONS.**

**Monthly Report of FREEDMEN'S SCHOOL at Sharpsburg.**

*For the Month of July 1869*

**13** To contain one Calendar Month, and to be forwarded as soon as possible after the close of the month.

**14** A school under the distinct control of one teacher, or of a teacher with assistants, provided the school is graded, is to be reported as one school.

Location of your School?	Sharpsburg Washington Co. Md.		
Name of Principal?	John J. Carter		
When did your present session commence?	June 21st.		
How many teachers in the school?	White.	1	Colored.
No. pupils enrolled?	Male.	8	Female. 7
No. enrolled last report?	Male.		Female.
No. new pupils this month?	Male.		Female.
No. left school this month?	Male.		Female.
Average daily attendance?	13		
No. always present?	13		
No. always punctual?	13		
Average age?	12		
No. over 16?	5		
No. in Alphabet and Primer?	2		
No. in First Reader?			
No. in Second Reader?			
No. in Third Reader?			
No. in Fourth Reader?			
No. in Fifth Reader?			
No. in First Lessons of Geography?			
No. in Primary Geography?			
No. in Second Part Geography?			
No. in Third Part Geography?			
No. in Mental Arithmetic?			
No. in Written Arithmetic?			
No. in Grammar?			
No. in Algebra?			
No. in Penmanship?			
No. in Composition?			
No. in Drawing?			
No. in Needle-work?			
Amt. paid by Bureau?	Nothing		
Grand total of expense to all parties?	\$12 per month for boarding Teacher		
No. Night Pupils?			
Average attendance of Night Pupils?			
Sabbath Schools?	20		

**REMARKS.**

As to order, morals, and prospects of the School.

*Order is good, moral prospects somewhat encouraging*

Teachers J. J. Carter Pupils 20

Dated at Sharpsburg July 21st. 1869.

John J. Carter Principal.

} Assistants.

**Figure 33.** July 1869 Report of the Freedmen's School at Sharpsburg, Maryland. Indicates fifteen pupils, with an average age of twelve, and the principal as John J. Carter. National Archives and Records Administration.



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According to Causey, "African Americans' enthusiasm for education and aptitude for learning challenged preconceived notions that Blacks were intellectually inferior." Both Ezra Johnson and John J. Carter were generally pleased with their students' progress. Toward the end of his single term, Johnson boasted about a six-year-old boy who had started out knowing only three letters but was reading and spelling three-letter words after just one month in school. The more taciturn John J. Carter simply remarked, "They learn very fast." At least one student who attended school in Tolson's Chapel in the late 1860s, James F. Simons, went on to become a teacher himself, returning to Tolson's Chapel during the 1878–79 school year when it was a racially segregated public school.<sup>10</sup>

Never well-supported by the state, the school at Tolson's Chapel nevertheless derived some benefit from political agitation over the stark contrast between prevalent public schools for whites and a dearth of public schools for Blacks. When the Maryland legislature convened in 1872 with a mix of Republicans and Democrats, it passed a law requiring that counties provide one Black school in each election district. The effects of this law quickly became evident in Sharpsburg: Washington County school commissioners appointed three Black men (T. H. Sliner, George Hopewell, and Nathan Keller) as trustees for a Black school in the Sharpsburg district. With no other available institutions, Tolson's Chapel became the Sharpsburg Colored School—and would remain so until 1899.<sup>11</sup>

Between 1872 and 1899, average attendance at Tolson's Chapel/Sharpsburg Colored School ranged from ten to twenty students, with between twenty and thirty-five different pupils attending the school in any given year.<sup>12</sup> Chapel clergy did their part to keep the school running. Minister Jacob Gross, for example, taught in 1873–74 and was appointed a trustee in 1874, while another trustee David Simons took over teaching in 1874 and was later succeeded by his son James.<sup>13</sup>

Losing their school at the turn of the century did not cripple the congregation of Tolson's Chapel. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the church remained vibrant, adding improvements to the building, holding revivals and fairs, and establishing a chapter of the Epworth League (a Methodist youth group). Starting in the 1950s, however, the African American population of Sharpsburg—and the membership at

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<sup>10</sup> Causey, "Tolson's Chapel," 17; Johnston to Coates, April 7, 1868 (Roll #6), Teachers Monthly Reports, April and May 186 (Roll #17), August 1869 (Roll #20), *ibid.*; Wallace and Reed, *Tolson's Chapel; Report of the State Board of Education, Shewing the Condition of Public Schools of Maryland for the Year Ending September 30, 1879* (Annapolis: W. T. Iglehart, 1880), 268–69.

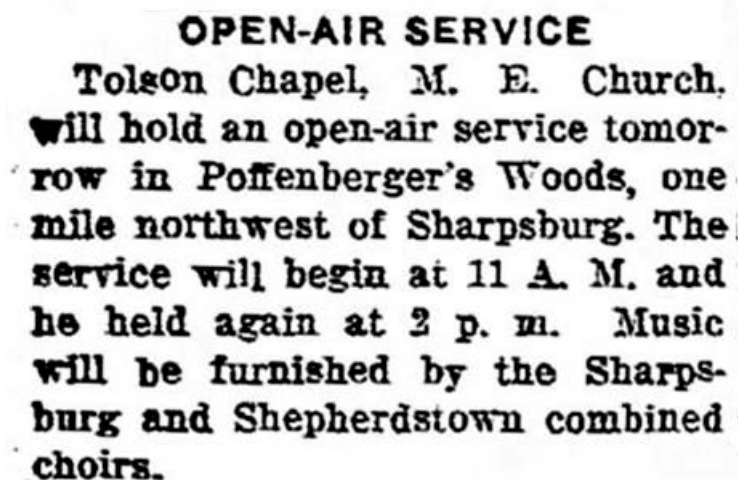
<sup>11</sup> Causey, "Tolson's Chapel," 18; *Report of the State Board of Education...1872; Report of the State Board of Education, Showing the Condition of the Public Schools of Maryland...for Year Ending September 30, 1873* (Annapolis: S. S. Mills & L. F. Colton, 1874); Wallace and Reed, *Tolson's Chapel*.

<sup>12</sup> Causey, "Tolson's Chapel," 18; *Report of the State Board of Education...for the Year Ending September 30, 1879*; Wallace and Reed, *Tolson's Chapel*.

<sup>13</sup> Causey, "Tolson's Chapel," 18; This information was gathered from annual reports of the Maryland State Board of Education for the years 1872 to 1900. Electronic editions of these reports are available at [hathitrust.org](http://hathitrust.org) and [archive.org](http://archive.org).

the chapel—went into decline. By 1976, the church had only three members: Frances and Clarence Monroe and their sexagenarian niece, Virginia Cook. The United Methodist Church closed the church in 1994 and deconsecrated the building in 1998, two years after Virginia Cook's death.<sup>14</sup>

Thankfully, the Save Historic Antietam Foundation (SHAF) accepted ownership of the building from the United Methodist Church. Operating as a committee within the SHAF, the Friends of Tolson's Chapel documented and stabilized the building and cemetery. In 2008, the Friends, established as a separate nonprofit organization, purchased the property. Welcome as the Friends' support has been, the real triumph of Tolson's Chapel and School belongs to its original congregation. In 2021, the National Park Service designated Tolson's Chapel as a National Historic Landmark. Such African American schools nurtured the beginnings of an educated Black professional class and led directly to the establishment of Black universities, colleges, and normal schools.<sup>15</sup>



**OPEN-AIR SERVICE**  
**Tolson Chapel, M. E. Church.**  
**Will hold an open-air service tomorrow in Poffenberger's Woods, one mile northwest of Sharpsburg. The service will begin at 11 A. M. and be held again at 2 p. m. Music will be furnished by the Sharpsburg and Shepherdstown combined choirs.**

Figure 35. *The Daily Mail* (Hagerstown, Maryland), August 14, 1937.

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<sup>14</sup> Wallace and Reed, *Tolson's Chapel*; Friends of Tolson's Chapel, "Timeline," <http://www.tolsons chapel.org/history/timeline>, accessed June 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, *Self-Taught*; Anderson, *Education of Blacks*.



# Howard High School

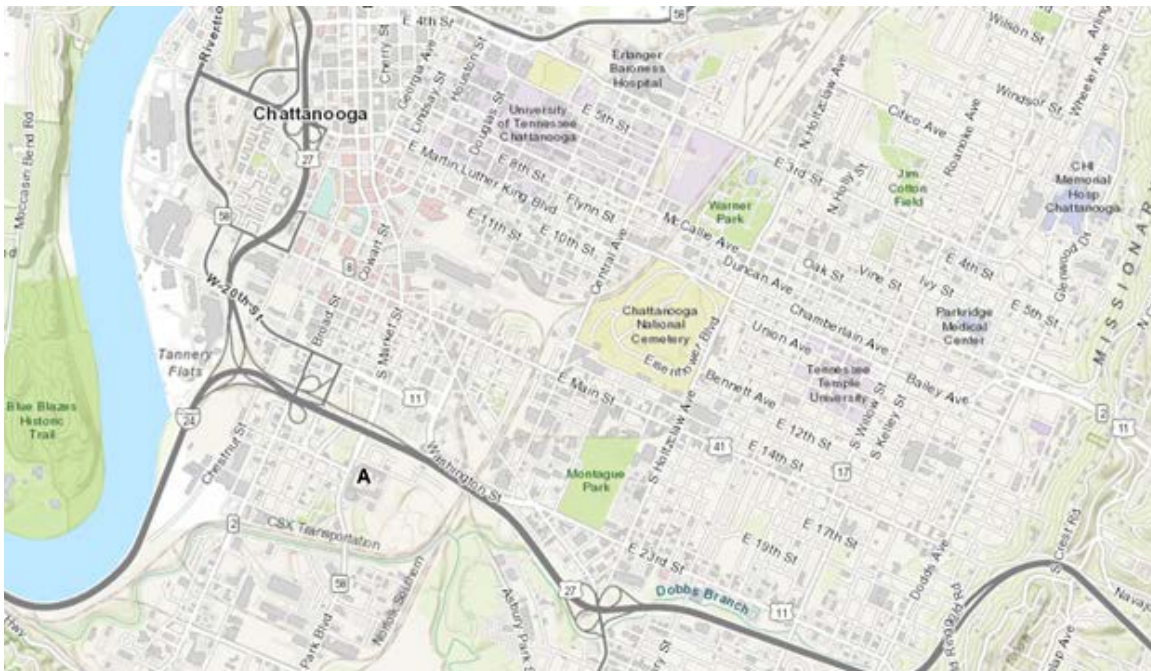
## Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park

Peter R. Thomas

### *Extant Historic Resources and Dates of Construction*

- Howard School (circa 1952), 2500 Market Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee

### Historic Resource Map: Chattanooga, Tennessee



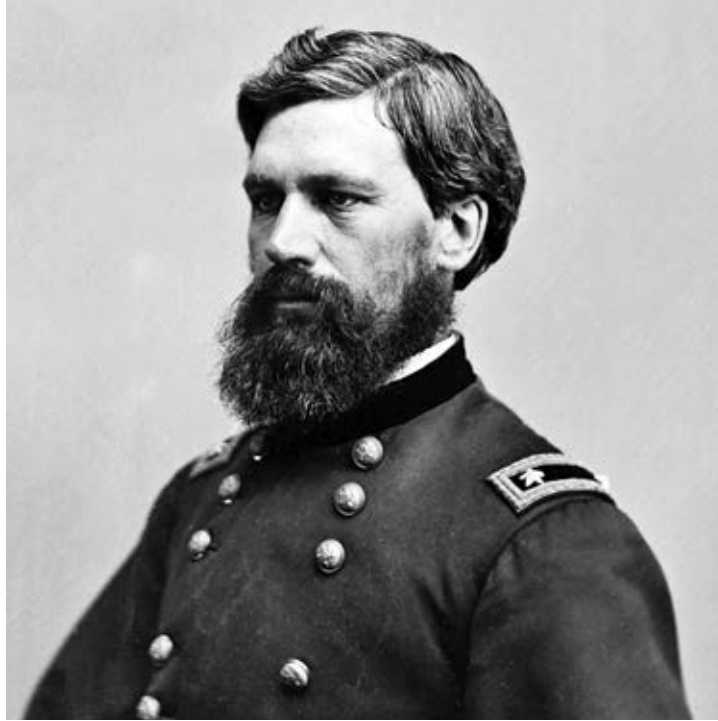
**A** Howard School (circa 1952), 2500 S Market Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee

Established in December 1866, Howard High School was central to the development of modern education in Chattanooga, Tennessee.<sup>1</sup> Originally meant to assist formerly enslaved people in contraband camps outside the city, it became the first free public school in Hamilton County. Between the end of the American Civil War and 1900, Howard moved its facilities repeatedly, each time leading to disruptions in attendance and finances.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, due to the tireless efforts of its teachers and administrators and African American community leaders, Howard established a sure foundation that carried it through the many travails of Reconstruction, Jim Crow segregation, and the civil rights era.

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest mention of “Howard School” appears in a December 6, 1866, American Missionary Association report written by Ewing Ogden Tade.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the sources used to identify the locations of the school, refer to the Howard High School Collection, Local History Department, Chattanooga Public Library, Chattanooga, Tennessee (hereafter HHSC-CPL).



**Figure 36.** General Oliver Otis Howard, 1830–1909.

The city where Howard High School arose had been a desired prize for Civil War military leaders on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. Ensconced in a natural gateway between the Tennessee River and the rugged Cumberland Plateau, Chattanooga in Confederate hands protected the Deep South, and its iron industries and railroads equipped and transported Confederate forces. To breach this mountain fastness, United States commanders launched several military operations against Chattanooga. Their final success came in the autumn of 1863, when forces commanded by Generals William Rosecrans and Ulysses S. Grant successively captured Chattanooga and held it against Confederate General Braxton Bragg's besieging army. The Chattanooga Campaign secured the city (and the state) for the US Army and inflicted serious damage on the Southern Confederacy.<sup>3</sup>

During the campaign, many enslaved laborers in east Tennessee had taken advantage of their enslavers' absences in Confederate service and fled to Chattanooga, hoping to find freedom under US military protection. Once the city was secured, it attracted more Black refugees seeking assistance or the chance to join Black regiments of the United States Colored Troops (USCT). By December 1865, nearly six thousand Black refugees at Chattanooga were crowded into what became known as "Camp Contraband," a collection

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); James L. McDonough, *Chattanooga: A Death Grip on the Confederacy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), Steven E. Woodworth, *This Grand Spectacle: The Battle of Chattanooga* (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation, 1999).



of makeshift huts and shanties where disease and hunger ran rampant. Disturbed by conditions in the camp, northern philanthropic organizations such as the Freedmen's Bureau and the American Missionary Association (AMA) requested assistance.<sup>4</sup>

Reverend Ewing Ogden Tade answered the call. Born in 1828, Tade, an Illinois Congregationalist minister, abhorred alcohol, tobacco, and slavery. He was also overflowing with the desire to be a "[pioneer] in [the] work of benevolence." Undaunted by the squalor of "Camp Contraband," Tade set to work establishing religious, educational, and economic instruction almost as soon as he arrived. With the assistance of the AMA, the Freedmen's Bureau, and the Western Freedmen's Aid Commission (WFAC), Tade took over a former Confederate medical facility on the corner of 6th and Pine streets known as Bragg Hospital. Renaming it for United State Army General and Freedmen's Bureau Director Oliver O. Howard, Tade opened his school in December 1866.<sup>5</sup>

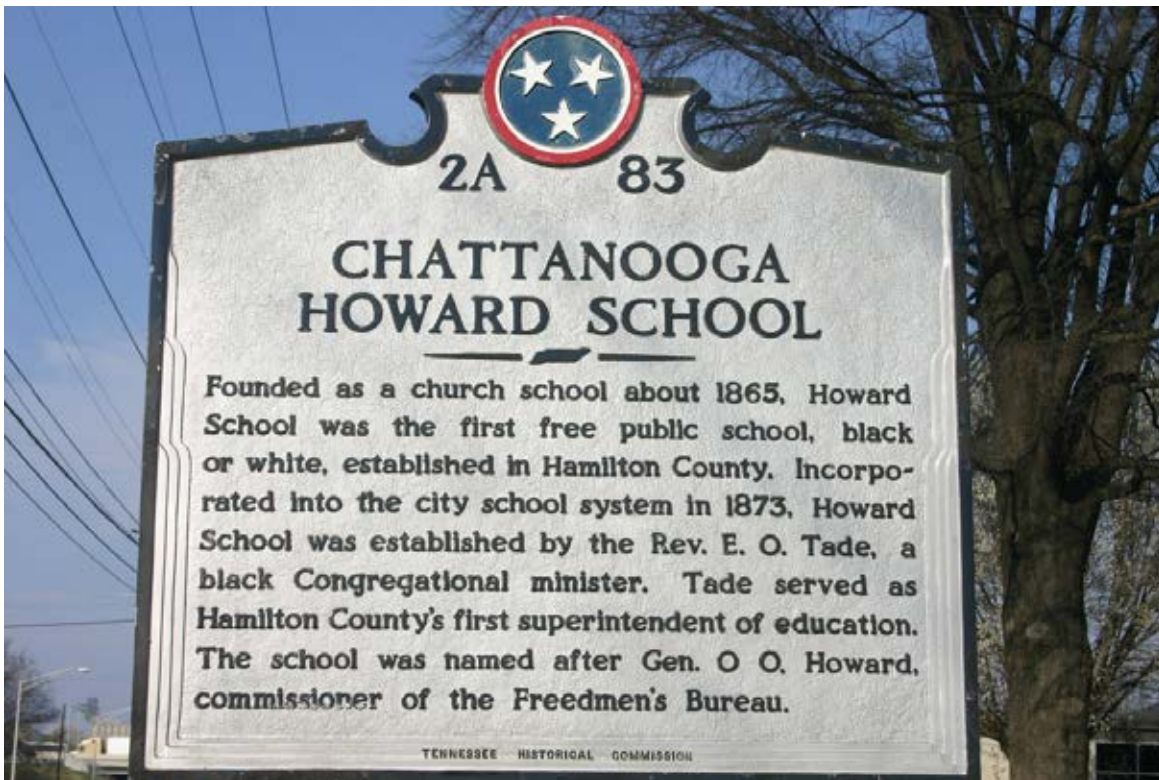


Figure 37. Howard School Historical Marker

<sup>4</sup> Chuck Hamilton, "Chattanooga's Black Community from the Civil War through Jim Crow," *The Chattanooga*, June 22, 2012; Michelle R. Scott, *Blues Empress in Black Chattanooga: Bessie Smith and the Emerging Urban South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> C. Stuart McGehee, "E. O. Tade, Freedmen's Education, and the Failure of Reconstruction in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (Winter 1984): 377–78; A. P. Whitaker, "The Public School System of Tennessee, 1834–1860," *The Tennessee Historical Magazine* 2, no. 1 (March 1916): 1–30; E. O. Tade to E. P. Smith, December 6, 1866, and March 12, 1867, Tade to E. P. Smith, December 6, 1866, American Missionary Association (AMA) Archives, HHSC-CPL.



**Figure 38.** Ewing Ogden Tade, 1828–1919.

A slight growth in Howard School's attendance was one of few successes in its first few years of operation. Generally lacking job opportunities in postbellum Chattanooga, many African American students had to withdraw when tuition money dried up. Then, an 1867 flood swelled the Tennessee River well above its normal level, leaving many freedpeople, according to Tade, "cut off from all the world out of Chattanooga- no bridges, no telegraph- water from 4 to 6 feet deep in all the stores on Market Street"—and homeless. Although Howard's teachers stepped up, becoming makeshift aid workers, the school struggled. "[It] seems to be going down hill," Tade confessed to an AMA official. "More than 100 colored families have left here since last fall & they are leaving now almost daily."<sup>6</sup>

Even when the river remained docile, difficulties abounded for Howard's students. The simple fact for many was that they enjoyed little more than legal freedom. Soliciting funds and supplies from friends and benefactors, Tade regularly described families of students living in windowless rooms and sleeping on cold, damp, and dirty floors, without furniture, firewood, adequate food, or medicines. Given the general condition of African American communities across the southern states in the early years of Reconstruction, it is

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<sup>6</sup> "Underground City Beneath Chattanooga Is More Than a Curiosity," *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, February 12, 2012; E. O. Tade to E. P. Smith, March 12, 1867, AMA archives, HHSC-CPL; E. O. Tade to E. P. Smith, May 15, 1867, AMA archives, HHSC-CPL.

doubtful that Tade magnified these sufferings simply to get what he wanted. And on the other side, he often noted, Howard students and their parents, whatever their material and physical wants, remained upbeat about the future.<sup>7</sup>

Bit by bit, the school persevered. Outside parties certainly did their part, as for example E. P. Smith, cofounder of Fisk University in Nashville, who offered guidance on curricula and schoolbooks. Tade, too, put his own means on the line in the service of Howard by chartering the National Freedmen's Savings and Trust Bank (which in 1870 reported a balance of more than \$20,000) and the Second National Bank of Chattanooga, purchasing land for Black settlement, and covering improvements and expenses at the school. Recognizing his commitment, the city's Reconstruction government named Tade school commissioner in 1867 and superintendent of education one year later.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the key to Howard's survival was the gritty determination of the community that it served. One visitor observed that the African American spirit at Chattanooga was "far more zealous in the cause of education than the whites. They will starve themselves and go without clothes, in order to send their children to school." A total of 625 day students and 190 night students regularly attended daily prayer meetings, a Sabbath school, and prayer services. Observers noticed a "tidy" school with "well-behaved" students and "progress" exceeding expectations. Students mastered arithmetic, grammar, and even public speaking (with an emphasis on pronunciation) far better than expected. Between 1869 and 1870, Howard's student body grew to 855 and its land value more than doubled.<sup>9</sup>

In the end, the school was able to carry on despite losing its founder and falling victim to a white supremacist backlash. To conservative whites, Tade's efforts to radically reform education in Chattanooga could not be long endured. Already resentful at what they perceived to be northern industrial exploitation of the city's resources, white Chattanoogans looked askance at the "carpetbagger's" missionary zeal and had no patience with his dream of providing free education to all African Americans. When the Democratic Party took back Tennessee in 1870, many Republican educational reforms—such as the state public school law—were repealed, and education fell completely under

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<sup>7</sup> McGehee, "E. O. Tade, Freedmen's Education, and the Failure of Reconstruction in Tennessee," 379–80; "Tennessee- Howard School," *American Missionary*, April 1867; E. O. Tade to E. P. Smith, April 1867, October 4, 1867, and December 7, 1867, AMA archives, HHSC-CPL.

<sup>8</sup> E. O. Tade to E. P. Smith, February 15, 1867, and February 19, 1870, AMA Archives, HHSC-CPL; McGehee, "Tade, Freedmen's Education," 379–81.

<sup>9</sup> McGehee, "E. O. Tade, Freedmen's Education, and the Failure of Reconstruction in Tennessee," 380; N. B. Lucas to Major Cochran, October 30, 1865, Telegrams Received and Sent, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1866, Freedmen's Bureau Records, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, DC; "The Twenty-Third Annual Report of the American Missionary Association," 45–46, and "The Twenty Fourth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association," 42, HHSC-CPL; "Howard's Hundred Years Helped Mold Community," *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, May 5, 1974; "List of Missionaries in Chattanooga, Tennessee," *American Missionary*, April 1867; "Tennessee-Howard School," *American Missionary*, April 1867; McGehee, "Tade, Freedmen's Education," 380–381; "Reports from Educational Agents of the Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee, 1865–1870," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 1 (March 1942): 71–74.

local control. Howard School itself, sited on federally confiscated land, was evicted and forced to move to a new location on Georgia Avenue and East 9th Street. Moreover, funding for Black schools was cut to the bone and the savings shifted to Hamilton County's white schools. A dispirited Tade left Chattanooga for good in 1873.<sup>10</sup>

He was certainly not alone. As before, many African American families, desperately searching for constant, reliable employment, were forced to withdraw their children from Howard, pull up stakes, and relocate. To help them, the school's administration reorganized its eight grades into four departments, with each teacher leading two classes or "years of advancement." This lessened students' workloads, allowed teachers to concentrate on grading, and expedited class progress.<sup>11</sup>

A larger issue for Howard concerned who ought to control and regulate it. Once the Chattanooga Board of Education (CBE) formed in 1873, it began contesting the AMA's titular authority over the school. Eventually, the two organizations worked out an agreement in which the missionary association supplied the teachers while the board took over the title to the building. More important yet was the composition of the teaching staff—for until 1881 only white teachers were employed there. Above all, Howard continued to migrate, shifting in 1883 to a new location on the corner of East 8th and Douglas Streets, where it was augmented with additional rooms and a high school curriculum.<sup>12</sup>

Now Howard High, the school was moved a fourth time in 1884 to the corner of D and Gilmer Streets. An expanding student body soon began to spill out of Howard's inadequate facilities. Accordingly, a new building of larger dimensions—87 feet high, with seating for 624 students on the main floors and 150 in the basement, with ventilators and heating—was constructed for Howard, at a cost to taxpayers of \$14,000. Along with the new building there came a new head of staff, James A. Henry. A graduate of Atlanta University, Henry was Howard's first African American principal, a position he would hold for almost thirty years. Two years after Henry's arrival, the school awarded its first diploma to Miss Belle Washington. As the first African American high school graduate in Chattanooga, Belle took up teaching in the city's schools.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Howard's Hundred Years Helped Mold Community," *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, May 5, 1974; Tade to John Ogden, March 22, 1867, AMA archives, HHSC-CPL; McGehee, "Tade, Freedmen's Education," 384, 386.

<sup>11</sup> "Chattanooga-Howard School," *American Missionary*, October 1873.

<sup>12</sup> Howard's Hundred Years Helped Mold Community," *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, May 5, 1974; Commissioner Greg Beck, "The Proud Heritage of Howard High School," *The Chattanooga*, April 17, 2016; E. J. Henry, "A Brief History of Howard High School," HHSC-CPL.

<sup>13</sup> "Splendid Structure: The Colored School Building on Gilmer Street," *Chattanooga Times* (renamed *Chattanooga Times Free Press*), February 21, 1884; "Howard's Hundred Years Helped Mold Community," *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, May 5, 1974; Henry, "A Brief History of Howard High School."





**Figure 39.** James A. Henry and Howard School Class of 1901. Middle Tennessee State University.



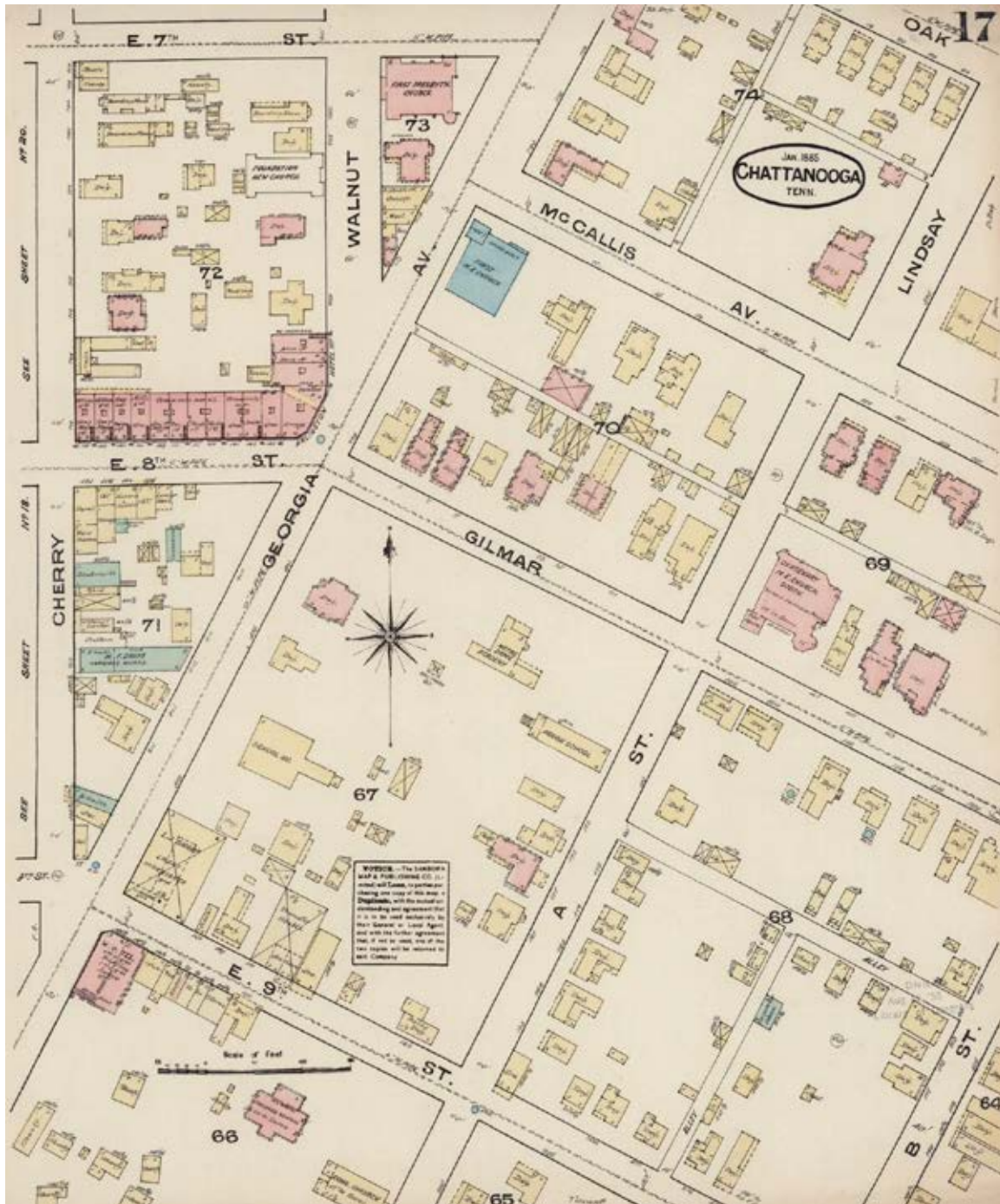
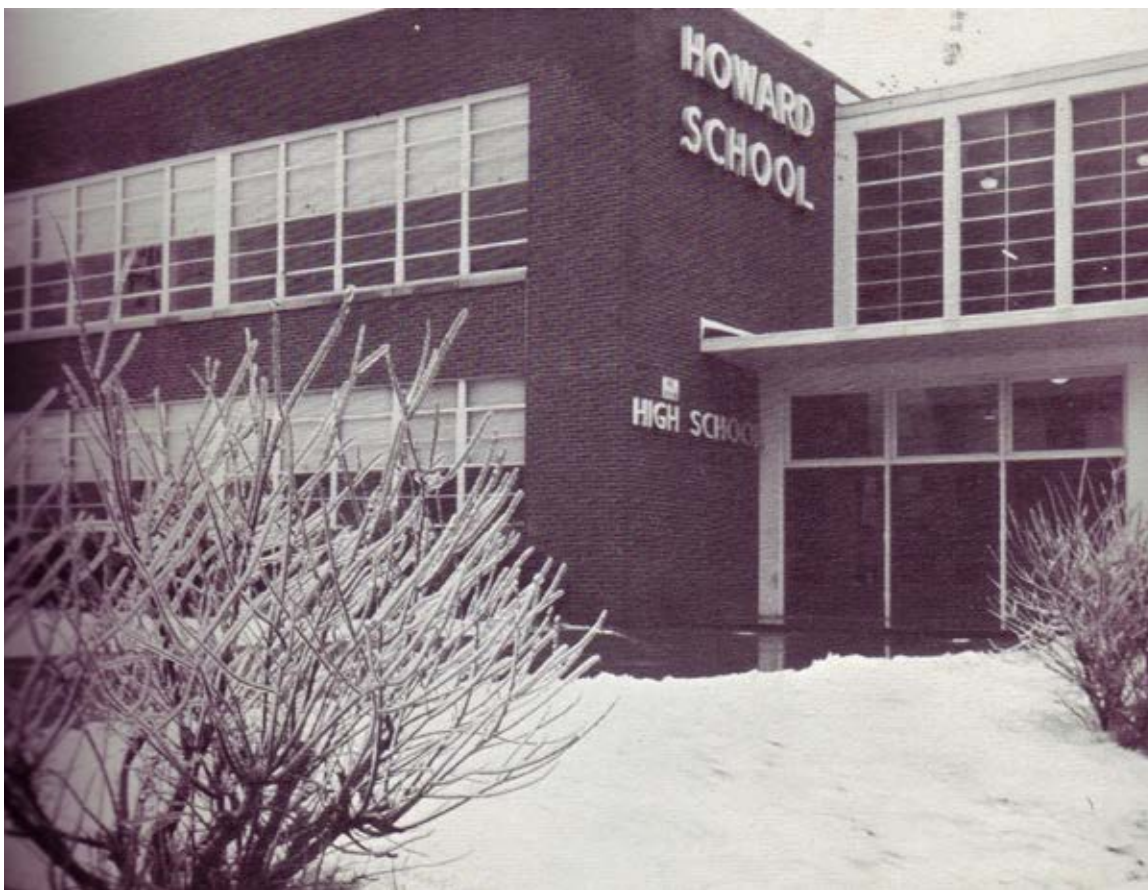


Figure 40. Howard School, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1885.

By the time Belle graduated from Howard, Reconstruction was a dead letter and African Americans had been relegated to second-class citizenship, denied equality, opportunity, or a voice in white-dominated society. A significant number of schools established for southern Black students in the aftermath of the Civil War had been shut down or silenced. Yet in the face of separate-but-unequal treatment, discrimination, and lynch law,

Howard High School persevered. Between 1900 and 1952, it “granted approximately forty-five hundred diplomas” and furnished high school training for an estimated 75 percent of all Black teachers and principals in Chattanooga. As E. O. Tade had discovered earlier, nothing on earth could quench the desire among African Americans to sow diligence in learning and reap the fruits of self-respect. And by the early twentieth century, Howard’s students were beginning to push back against the system of Jim Crow. In February 1960, several of them began the long drawn-out yet ultimately successful campaign for desegregation in Chattanooga, staging sit-ins in downtown stores.<sup>14</sup> More than a century and half since it was established, Howard School of Academics and Technology remains a leader in African American education, currently with more than a thousand students and seventy teachers.



**Figure 41.** Howard School, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

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<sup>14</sup> “The Howard Story: History of Howard School,” HHSC-CPL; Yolanda Putnam, “Making History: Howard’s Class of 1960 Recognized for Civil Rights Sit-Ins,” *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, n.d.





**Figure 42.** Howard School Alumni Reunion, 2013. The Howard School Alumni Association holds annual class reunions and has documented the school's extensive history.

# Burrell Academy and Clark School

## Selma to Montgomery National Voting Rights Trail

Keith S. Hébert and Daniel Cone

### *Extant Historic Resources and Dates of Construction*

- Clark Elementary School (1965), 405 Lawrence Street, Selma, Alabama

### Historic Resource Map: Selma, Alabama



**A** Burrell Academy, Maxey Street, Selma, Alabama

**B** Clark Elementary School, 405 Lawrence Street, Selma, Alabama

Founded in 1869, the Burrell Academy is one of the oldest Black public schools in Alabama and the first Black public school in Selma. Operated through the combined support of the American Missionary Association (AMA) and the Selma Board of Education, Burrell provided all levels of education from grade school to industrial and teacher training. In 1889, the AMA reasserted direct control over Burrell. The AMA and Black community wanted greater control over the selection of teachers, principals, and curriculum. The following year, Selma's school board created the Clark School (now Clark Elementary School) to serve Black students without the AMA's support. Although fire destroyed the original Burrell in 1900, the AMA continued the school's legacy through the Burrell

Normal School (1903–69) in Florence. Several mid-nineteenth-century buildings that once housed Burrell faculty and students have survived, and Clark remains a central component of Selma’s African American community.

Situated on a bluff above the Alabama River in the “Black Belt” region, Selma was the regional center of an antebellum economic and social order dependent on Black enslaved laborers and cotton cultivation. During the Civil War, the Confederate government relocated war industries to Selma for protection, but in March 1865, during the final weeks of the war, the American army captured and destroyed most of the city.

War-ravaged Selma had no African American schools. Therefore, on December 30, 1865, Selma’s freedpeople published an appeal to the city’s white community to support Black education. They urged wounded Confederate veterans and widows to put aside their prejudices and teach the city’s large illiterate Black community, while warning that failure to act would play into the hands of hated outsiders like the Radical Republicans. “If you stand back,” the appeal cautioned, “strangers [northerners] will come in and take the money from under your hands and carry it away to build up their own country. They are not ashamed to make money from any class of men.”<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, Selma’s Black community turned to the federally supported Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (better known as the Freedmen’s Bureau) for assistance. Headquartered in Montgomery under the command of General Wager Swayne, the Alabama branch of the Bureau kept an office in Selma to coordinate operations west of the capital. Although schools were an important part of the Bureau’s operations—it organized numerous Black school boards, stimulated fundraising campaigns, and provided limited external funds—its agents oversaw a large area with limited resources, poor roads, and slow communications.<sup>2</sup> The Selma office had to devote most of its time to mitigating labor disputes between freedpeople and white landowners and investigating outbreaks of interracial violence. Consequently, the Bureau often tried to shift the burdens of funding new schools and hiring teachers to local communities of freedpeople.

Apart from private homes and churches, the Freedmen’s Bureau attempted to create temporary schools in vacant properties. Regrettably, most abandoned buildings in Selma were in severe disrepair and lacked proper lighting. In one instance, while investigating the old “Confederate Carriage Shop,” American officer Captain Joseph Groves reported that before it could be used as a schoolhouse, the roof, doors, flooring, and rafters would have to be replaced and a new stove installed—for which funds were sparse. Reasoning that an imperfect building was better than none, the Bureau patched up the carriage shop’s worst areas, sealing

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<sup>1</sup> *Selma Times-Journal*, December 30, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> “Alabama, Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records, 1865–1872,” images, *FamilySearch*, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-99LD-CGP9?cc=2333770&wc=9GCK-4WG%3A1078464902%2C1078466901>, 2 July 2014, Selma (subassistant commissioner) > Roll 29, Letters received, Sep 6, 1865–Nov 29, 1867 > image 786 of 927; citing NARA microfilm publication M1900 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).



leaks and patching large cracks in the siding, then opened it for classes. On the other hand, only after freedpeople had purchased “little Zion Church” in 1866 did military carpenters report that the Bureau’s \$150 budget for repairs was insufficient, which scuttled plans to use the church as a schoolhouse and community center.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, restoring vacant buildings often proved risky when owners returned to reclaim their properties, although in the case of the carriage shop, local courts determined that no one held a property title.<sup>4</sup>

Renting housing for teachers was no less challenging. Initially, the Bureau provided salaries and rental stipends, but for every dozen teachers it supported there was less money available to build new schools for freedpeople. Starting in the summer of 1867, the Bureau began to shift rental expenses onto “Benevolent Societies.” By the same token, inadequate or nonexistent teacher housing slowed the development of schools. Informed of the difficulties, some teachers delayed moving to Selma for months; others asked the Bureau to send them home.<sup>5</sup>

One success for the Bureau and the Black community was the creation of Selma’s first Black school in the basement of the First Baptist Church. In 1866, African American deacon Alex Goldsby received permission from the church’s white pastor to open a school for children. At that time, the First Baptist Church had a biracial congregation.<sup>6</sup> Joseph Sears, a twenty-eight-year-old American army veteran, Yale graduate, and AMA member, was hired to manage the school, assisted by teachers H. C. Coe, Carrie E. Smith, and Marietta Morrill.<sup>7</sup> Monthly funding from the Bureau for what newspapers called “Mr.

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<sup>3</sup> “Alabama, Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records, 1865–1872,” images, *FamilySearch*, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q57-99LD-CGJ8?cc=2333770&wc=9GCK-4WG%3A1078464902%2C1078466901>, 2 July 2014, Selma (subassistant commissioner) > Roll 29, Letters received, Sep 6, 1865–Nov 29, 1867 > image 60 of 927; citing NARA microfilm publication M1900 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> “Alabama, Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records, 1865–1872,” images, *FamilySearch*, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q57-99LD-CPZY?cc=2333770&wc=9GCK-4WG%3A1078464902%2C1078466901>, 2 July 2014, Selma (subassistant commissioner) > Roll 29, Letters received, Sep 6, 1865–Nov 29, 1867 > image 58 of 927; citing NARA microfilm publication M1900 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> “Alabama, Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records, 1865–1872,” images, *FamilySearch*, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q57-99LD-CLBT?cc=2333770&wc=9GCK-4WG%3A1078464902%2C1078466901>, 2 July 2014, Selma (subassistant commissioner) > Roll 29, Letters received, Sep 6, 1865–Nov 29, 1867 > image 744 of 927; citing NARA microfilm publication M1900 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>6</sup> A few months after the creation of Selma’s first Black school in the First Baptist Church basement, African Americans left that congregation to form a new independent church. The First Baptist Church’s white congregation raised \$2,000 to assist with the construction of a new Black Baptist Church building. “Our History,” First Baptist Church Selma, Alabama, <https://fbcselma.org/about/history/>; Joshua Shiver, “First Baptist Church of Selma,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-4091>.

<sup>7</sup> “Alabama, Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records, 1865–1872,” images, *FamilySearch*, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q57-L9LD-HJKC?cc=2333770&wc=9GCK-PTL%3A1078464902%2C1078464706>, 2 July 2014, Selma (subassistant commissioner) > Roll 28, Letters sent, vol 1–4, Mar 1866–Dec 1868 > image 264 of 782; citing NARA microfilm publication M1900 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

Sears's Colored School" amounted to \$50 per teacher and \$40 per rented classroom.<sup>8</sup> Unhappy with the superintendent's credentials, white church members suspended operations and asked Sears to leave; freedpeople in turn left the church and formed an independent congregation.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, three additional privately funded schools opened in Selma: freedwoman Lucy Gee held classes in a tent, a white woman named Hubbard taught in an abandoned Confederate building, and New England-born Congregationalist clergyman John Silsby organized a classroom in a Black church member's carpentry shop.<sup>10</sup>

Sears and Silsby in fact were central to the development of Black public education in Alabama. At the 1867 state constitutional convention, Silsby successfully lobbied to fund public schools and create a state school board, while Sears served on the state board of education, helped establish the Lincoln Normal College in Marion (now Alabama State University in Montgomery), the state's first public Black university, and served as Selma's first superintendent of public schools.<sup>11</sup>

For Selma, Silsby and Sears pulled out all the stops, soliciting financial support from the AMA's largest donor, Jabez Burrell of Ohio. Against the few hundred dollars donated by the Freedmen's Bureau and a committee of white citizens led by Confederate General Edmund Pettus, Burrell donated a princely sum—\$10,000—to the construction of the school that bore his name. The Burrell Academy was certainly one of the largest buildings in Selma: according to resident John Hardy, it stood "two stories high, with dimensions of 50x64 feet, contain[ing] five school-rooms, one recitation room, and a chapel capable of seating 350."<sup>12</sup> On Friday, April 9, 1869, African American children announced the school's grand opening with a triumphal procession from downtown to the front doors.<sup>13</sup> The city's school board reluctantly agreed to fund the academy but harbored distrust toward its northern faculty and administrators—especially because Sears was the principal. Between 1869 and 1875, the AMA and local school board shared control over Burrell Academy operations.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *The Selma Times and Messenger* (Selma, Alabama), July 28, 1867, 3.

<sup>9</sup> "Alabama, Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, 1865–1872," images, *FamilySearch*, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-L9LD-HN6P?cc=2333770&wc=9GCK-PTL%3A1078464902%2C1078464706>, 2 July 2014, Selma (subassistant commissioner) > Roll 28, Letters sent, vol 1–4, Mar 1866–Dec 1868 > image 258 of 782; citing NARA microfilm publication M1900 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Bailey, *Neither Carpetbaggers nor Scalawags*, 100–101.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Sears, 1870; Census Place: *Selma, Dallas, Alabama*; Roll: M593\_14; Page: 678B; Family History Library Film: 545513.

<sup>12</sup> John Hardy, *Selma: Her Institutions and Her Men* (Selma: Times Book and Job Office, 1879), 163.

<sup>13</sup> "The Dedication," *Selma Morning Times* (Selma, Alabama), April 10, 1869, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Hardy, *Selma: Her Institutions and Her Men*, 163.

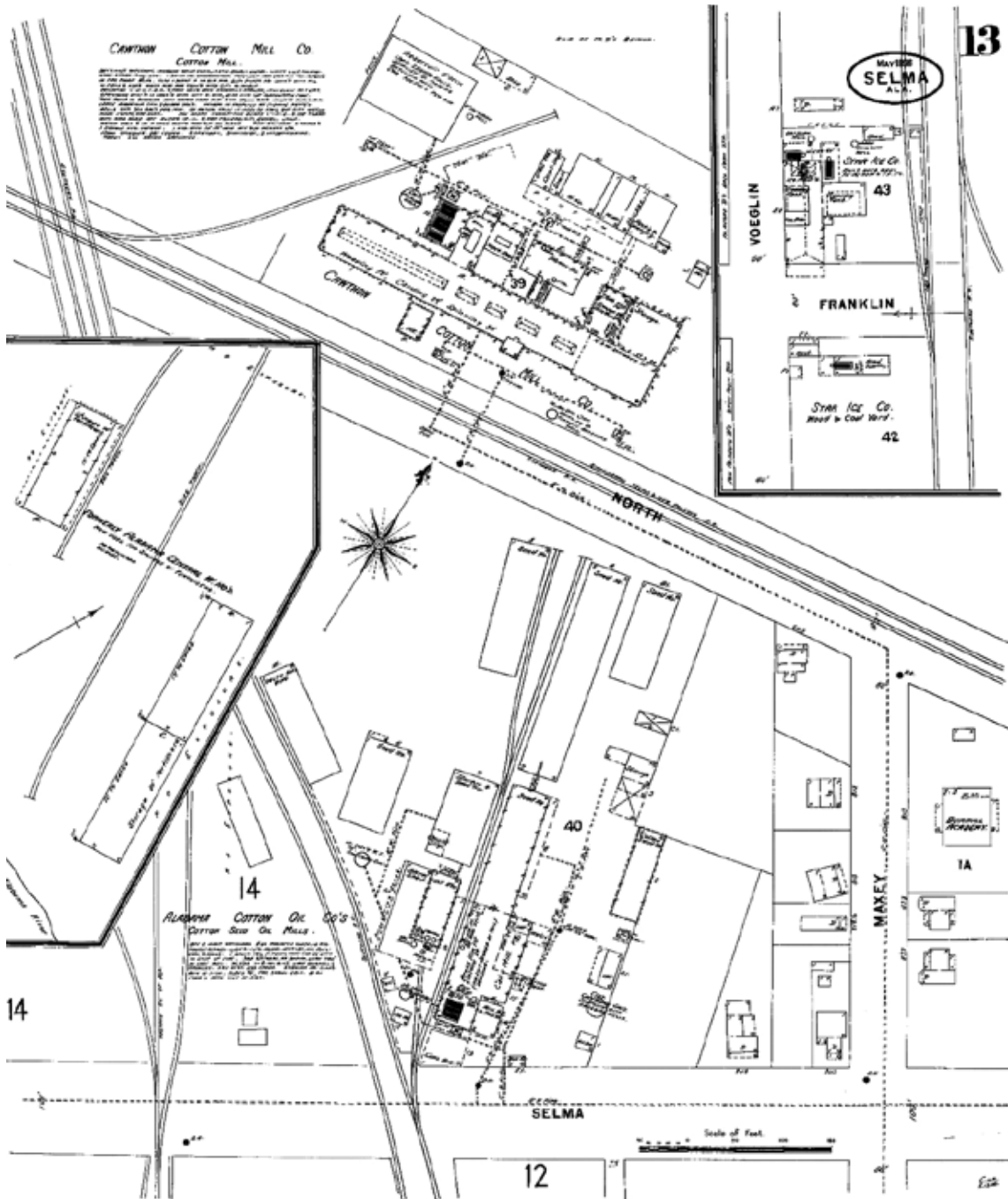


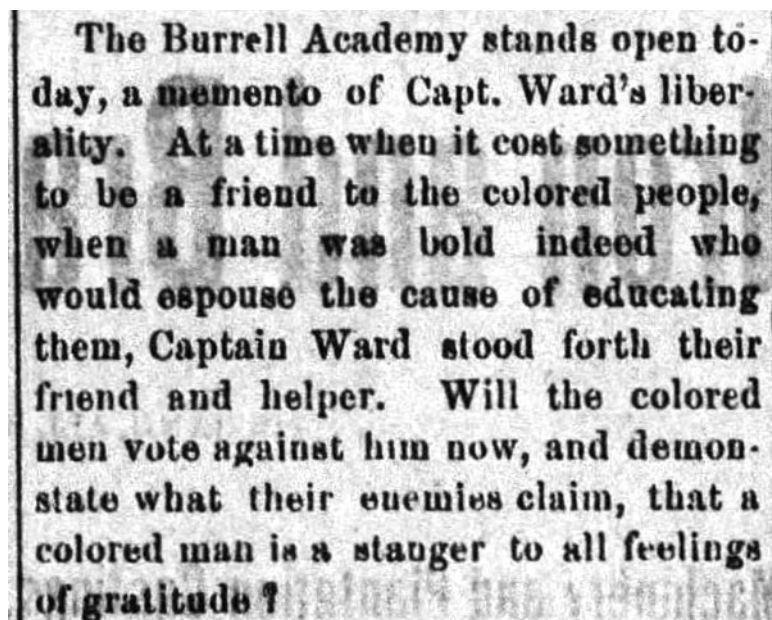
Figure 43. 1893 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Selma, Alabama, Burrell Academy

Burrell, which included one of the few Black high schools in Alabama, became the pride and joy of Selma's African American community, particularly its middle class. Approximately 35 percent of all Black students in Dallas County attended the academy, as did hundreds of Black boarding students from across the state.<sup>15</sup> Two years into its

<sup>15</sup> 1870 US Compiled Census, Dallas County, Alabama.

operation, the Selma board of education reported, “In the Burrell schools eight teachers are employed for eight months, at a cost of five hundred and fifty-five dollars per month, and about four hundred and seventy-five scholars” attended.<sup>16</sup> The Burrell Academy had an impact outside Selma, for in the first ten years of operations, more than thirty graduates taught in local Black schools. The school also trained Black clergy, especially Congregationalist ministers. Several graduates became foreign missionaries for the AMA across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.<sup>17</sup>

More than an educational center, Burrell hosted visiting lecturers, ministers, elected officials, government officers, and the city’s Black temperance society and business club. Although primarily meant to serve the Black community, the academy also became an inviting cultural venue for white citizens. During the 1870s and 1880s, Burrell sponsored a student symphony orchestra and an annual commencement program that often included recitations, choral performances, and craft and mechanical demonstrations, all of which drew large multiracial crowds. In addition, academy principals, teachers, and students often courted white support for Black education by holding demonstrations of their students’ intellectual performance at the city’s largest auditorium, Gillman’s Hall.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 44.** Selma Times, April 25, 1877. The issue of publicly funded Black schools generated heated political debates as some white conservative Democrats attempted to gain Black voter support by advocating for Black schools. By the late 1870s, the few remaining Black voters in Selma who had avoided disfranchisement gained access to the ballot box by collaborating with conservative Democratic candidates.

<sup>16</sup> “City Board of Education,” *Selma Morning Times* (Selma, Alabama), April 1, 1871, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Alston Fitts, *Selma: A Bicentennial History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017), 92.

<sup>18</sup> *The Selma Times* (Selma, Alabama), June 1, 1881, 4.



Yet white residents' support for Burrell had its limits. Publicly, the all-white city board of education applauded the quality of its curriculum and the fiscal responsibility of its administration.<sup>19</sup> Privately, however, many white residents opposed Burrell, spread slander that African American politicians and community leaders used the school as a front to steal public tax dollars, and harassed the northern women who taught there. Nor did critics approve of the academy's ties to the Congregationalist Church or its faculty and supervisors, who hailed from Pennsylvania, Maine, Ohio, New Hampshire, and Connecticut. In 1875, unidentified white men "accused [Burrell Academy teachers] of proselytizing the children; running the school in the interest of the Congregational Church; lecturing and even punishing pupils for not attending the Sabbath-school."<sup>20</sup> Strangely, in 1875 when the school board seized complete control of Burrell from the AMA, it retained the academy's "carpetbagger" staff but dramatically decreased its budget and programs.

Years later, the AMA struck back: in 1889, after hearing complaints from Black parents, the organization ended its lease agreement with Selma and restructured the Burrell Academy as a private school funded by northern donations and tuition fees. Unfortunately, the transition ended up costing Selma's Black children an entire year of schooling. The next year, a new Black public school, Clark, opened a few blocks west of Burrell. Unlike the academy, the Clark School's teachers and administrators were predominately southern-born African Americans without connections to the AMA.<sup>21</sup>

By this time, Jim Crow segregation was in full swing in Alabama. State legislation permitted local school boards to allocate most funds to white schools. Although Black schools had been economically starved for decades, the new laws further reduced operating expenses and salaries; teachers at Clark, for instance, now earned 25 percent less than their white counterparts, and the board all but eliminated Black industrial training and high school programs. Nevertheless, Selma's Black community rallied in support of the school through their own means. During the early twentieth century, under the leadership of Principal Richard B. Hudson, Clark did regain some funding, as its programs emphasized vocational training that did not openly contest segregation.<sup>22</sup>

From 1889 to 1900, the Clark School and Burrell Academy operated simultaneously. Burrell Academy Black students tended to be more affluent than their Clark School counterparts. Also, Black students from the surrounding countryside often attended Burrell Academy where boarding houses were available for select students. Meanwhile, Clark School students suffered from overcrowded classrooms and inadequate classroom

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<sup>19</sup> "City Board of Education," *Selma Morning Times* (Selma, Alabama), April 1, 1871, 2.

<sup>20</sup> American Missionary Association, *The Thirtieth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York: American Missionary Association, 1876), 71–72.

<sup>21</sup> "Manual Training in Negro School," *The Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, Alabama), April 30, 1904, 7.

<sup>22</sup> *The Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, Alabama), June 2, 1901, 5.



materials. Black parents and educators had to constantly lobby the school board for improvements. The board typically ignored those requests.<sup>23</sup> In 1898, white supremacists attempted to burn down the Clark School.<sup>24</sup> Two years later, a suspicious fire destroyed the Burrell Academy building. Today, only a handful of its late-nineteenth-century teachers' houses remain in the area where Burrell stood. Today, Clark Elementary School occupies the Clark School's original location. New school buildings were erected in 1965 and 1982.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Willis G. Clark, *History of Education in Alabama, 1702–1889* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1889); Richard Bailey, *They Too Call Alabama Home: African American Profiles, 1800–1999* (Madison, WS: Pyramid Publishing, 1999), 35, 76, 89.

<sup>24</sup> *The Selma Times*, 16 January 1898, 4.

<sup>25</sup> *The Selma Times-Journal* (Selma, Alabama), April 11, 1982, 25.



Figure 45. Clark Elementary School, Selma, Alabama, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1913



**Figure 46.** Maxey Street, Selma, Alabama. Several historic late-nineteenth-century homes are located on Maxey Street near the Burrell School's former location. Some of these homes may have been used by boarders attending the Burrell School. The Burrell Academy burned in 1900.

After the loss in Selma, the AMA donated a new Burrell Normal School to Florence, Alabama, in 1903, which it operated for thirty-four years until handing the school over to the Florence City Board of Education. Renamed Burrell High, the school was combined with Slater Elementary in 1951 to become Burrell-Slater High School. When Florence schools integrated in 1969, Burrell-Slater High closed as Black students were sent to the city's existing high school. Today, a 1960 school building is all that survives of Florence's Burrell Normal School.

**Burrell School Teachers**

1869–1870	E. C. Stickel, Principal; S. O. Ostrander; E. Wheeler; Francis Littlefield; Josephine Pierce; Mary Atwater; L. Garnder; E. L. Benton; Helen Eaton
1870–1871	E. C. Stickel, Principal; Mrs. E. C. Stickel; Mr. H. W. Carles; S. O. Ostrander; A. M. Nourse; M. S. Pond; L. Garnder; L. S. Alvord
1871–1872	H. W. Carter, Principal; L. A. Darling; Anna Haylor; L. S. Alvord; L. M. Fay; M. A. Carter; S. L. Emerson; M. P. Stewart
1872–1873	H. W. Carter, Principal; L. M. Fay; M. A. Carter; S. L. Emerson; M. P. Stewart
1873–1874	John M. Cummings, Principal; G. S. Pope, Principal; A. Haylor; S. L. Emerson; S. C. Williams; M. E. Wilcox; A. B. Fay; L. M. Fay
1874–1875	N. Messer, Principal; S. C. Williams; S. L. Emerson; M. E. Miller; M. E. Wilcox; E. E. Hersey; C. A. Benton; M. E. H. Pope
1876–1877	E. C. Silsby, Principal; S. C. Williams; Anna Coffin; M. E. Wilcox; Nettie Brewster; Mrs. M. G. Hardwick; M. B. Flack
1877–1878	E. C. Silsby, Principal; S. C. Williams; M. E. Wilcox; H. S. Smith;
1878–1879	Mrs. M. G. Hardwick; Mrs. A. E. Walker; P. F. Child; M. B. Flack

**Burrell School Enrollment Numbers**

1869–1870	397
1870–1871	315
1871–1872	500
1872–1873	478
1873–1874	460
1874–1875	402
1875–1876	430
1876–1877	421
1877–1878	478
1878–1879	332

**Selma Public School Enrollment**

	Black	White	Black School Budget	White School Budget
1895	467	636		
1897 <sup>26</sup>	457	645		
1901	439	628		
1914 <sup>27</sup>	600	1,082	\$8,000	\$93,000

<sup>26</sup> Alabama Department of Education, *Biennial Report of the Department of Education of the State of Alabama* (Montgomery: State Printer, 1898).

<sup>27</sup> Alabama Department of Education, *Biennial Report of the Department of Education of the State of Alabama* (Montgomery: State Printer, 1915).

# Alcorn State University

Natchez Trace Parkway

Trinity Jones and Keith S. Hébert

## *Extant Historic Resources with Date of Construction*

- Alcorn State University (1838), 1000 Alcorn State University Drive, Lorman, Mississippi

## Historic Resource Map: Mississippi



**A** Alcorn State University, 1000 Alcorn State University Drive, Lorman, Mississippi

Founded on May 13, 1871, Alcorn State University is the nation's oldest public historically Black land grant college. The school laid a foundation of excellence in Black collegiate education that dispelled prejudiced opinions that African American colleges should focus solely on vocational training. By the early twentieth century, Alcorn State University had produced graduates who excelled in the fields of education, law, medicine, and business. The university's early history is a story of perseverance in the face of racial prejudice and crippling budget shortages. Despite numerous obstacles, Alcorn State University's founders kept the doors open while maintaining high standards that enabled subsequent generations



of Black college students to thrive. In 1938, Rev. William Mercer Green, an Alcorn State University trustee, proclaimed the university's accomplishments: "It is our one state-supported institution of Higher learning and of teaching training for the one million Negroes which make up more than fifty percent of the population of our State. We should take pride in making it the best College of its kind in the United States. Our Negro people have proved their worthiness of such an institution. . . . [T]his splendid school in particular. . . should form the capstone of an educational system for our Negro people of which Mississippi may be justly proud."<sup>1</sup>

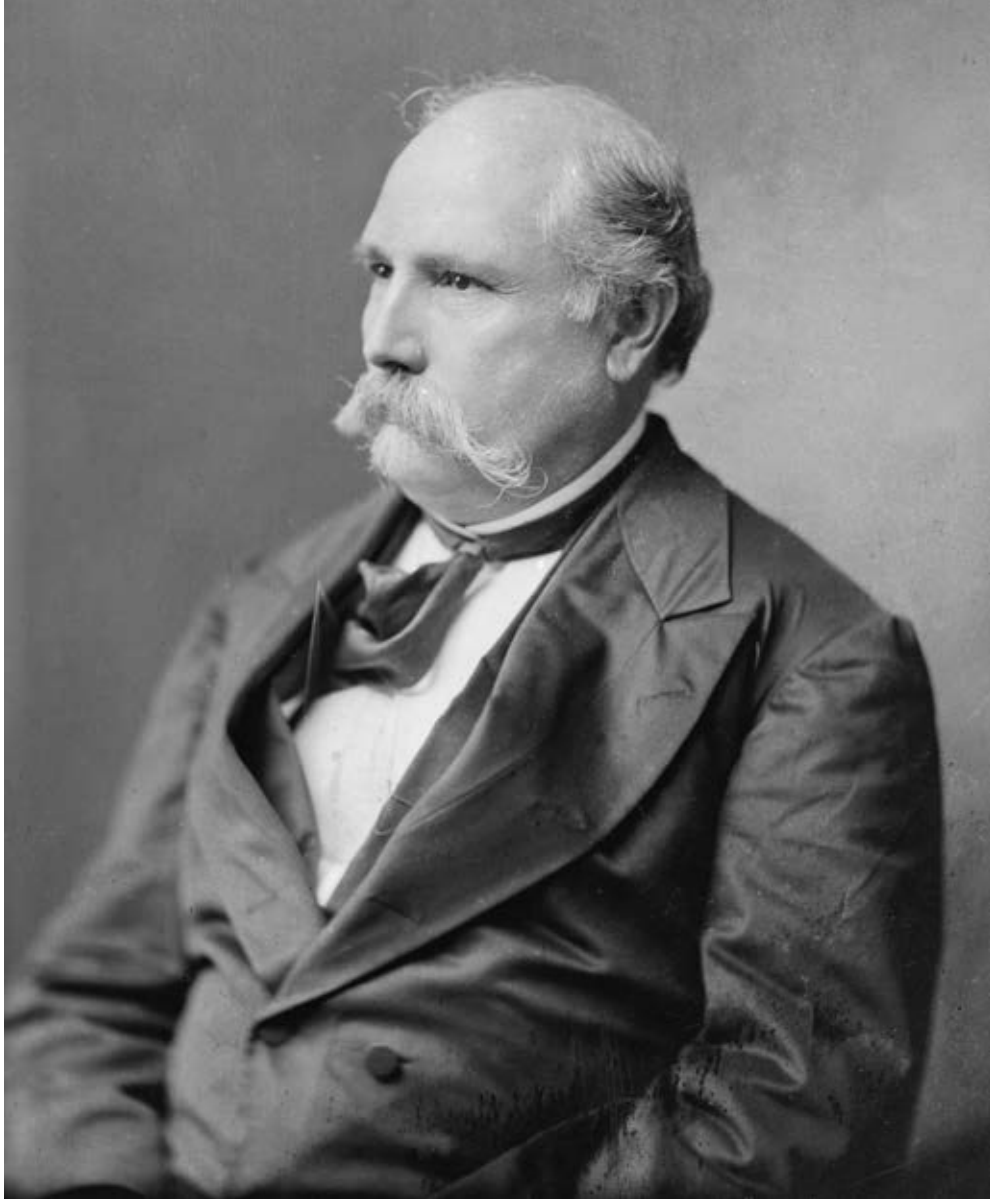
The university bears the name of its founder James L. Alcorn. Prior to the Civil War, the Illinois native had relocated to Mississippi, where he established a lucrative legal career that enabled him to purchase large land holdings and eighty-three Black enslaved laborers.<sup>2</sup> Alcorn opposed secession but served in the Confederate Army, rising to the rank of general. After the war, Alcorn joined the Republican Party and in 1869 successfully ran for governor following Mississippi's readmission to the Union. He advocated for full civil rights for freedpeople, but also supported the creation of a racially segregated state public school system.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walker Milan Davis, *Pushing Forward: A History of Alcorn A. & M. College and Portraits of Some of Its Successful Graduates* (Okolona, MS: Okolona Industrial School, 1938), vi–vii; George A. Sewell, "Alcorn A&M: Pioneer in Black Pride," *The Crisis* (April 1972), 121–26. Alcorn State University's name has evolved since its 1871 founding. In 1871, the college was known as Alcorn University. In 1878, the school's name was changed to Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College of the State of Mississippi. The school was renamed Alcorn State University in 1974. Throughout this case study, the college is referred to as Alcorn University, except in the introduction.

<sup>2</sup> J. L. Alcorn, 1860 US Federal Census, Slave Schedules, Caohoma County, Mississippi.

<sup>3</sup> Lillian A. Pereyra, *James L. Alcorn: Persistent Whig* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966); Josephine McCann Posey, *Against Great Odds: The History of Alcorn State University* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 12. Posey's history is the standard published source on the university.



**Figure 47.** Mississippi Governor James L. Alcorn (1816–1894)

During Presidential Reconstruction, Mississippi's white conservative-led legislature enacted a series of Black Codes that sought to replace slavery with a series of laws that significantly restricted freedpeople's civil liberties. The state made no effort to establish publicly funded Black schools. In 1867, thanks to the actions of the Republican-led US Congress, Republicans, a majority of whom were Black, seized control of the state government and successfully elected at least 226 Black men to public office—more than any state in the nation. The 1869 Mississippi Constitution, drafted by the “Black and Tan Convention,” established a uniform system of free public school for the benefit of all children. Most of the state's first Black publicly funded schools began with either the assistance of government agencies such as the Freedmen's Bureau or philanthropic

organizations such as the American Missionary Association. Most of those schools, however, were in Black communities along the Mississippi River (where the state's largest Black populations existed). Few Black communities outside that region had access to schools prior to the fall of 1870, when Mississippi launched its statewide system.<sup>4</sup>

In 1870, a Republican coalition of northern-born “carpetbaggers” and freedmen elected James Alcorn governor. The Republican-led state senate also elected Hiram Revels, a free Black educator, to fill one of Mississippi's two vacant US Senate seats. Revels became the first African American US Senator in American history. Under Alcorn's leadership, the Republican-led legislature established a state public school system and investigated options for creating an institution for higher learning for African American men.<sup>5</sup>

The establishment of a freedman college in Mississippi had much to do with conservative white opposition to racially integrated schools. The state constitution prohibited racial discrimination. When African American leaders threatened to integrate the University of Mississippi, white conservatives struck a bargain with Alcorn to support the creation of a state-funded freedmen university. White conservatives had accused Alcorn of using “Black Republican rule...to mongrelized that noble institution.”<sup>6</sup> On May 13, 1871, the legislature approved the creation of Alcorn University and appropriated funds to provide a campus. Plus, legislators provided the school with an annual \$50,000 budget using state tax revenues for a fixed period of ten years.

In addition to becoming Mississippi's first state-funded Black college, Alcorn University also became the first Black public institution of higher learning to receive support from the Morrill Land Grant College Act of 1862. Passed during the Civil War, the act set aside federal lands to create colleges to “benefit the agricultural and mechanical arts.” Initially, each state received 30,000 acres of western land to be sold to fund the construction of agricultural and mechanical schools.<sup>7</sup> When Mississippi rejoined the Union in 1870, legislators debated how to use the state's allocated Morrill funds. Some proposed investing the funds in the existing University of Mississippi to expand its curriculum and avoid the expense of building and operating a new university. However, white conservatives worried that the use of federal funds might provide Radical Republicans (those who advocated for Black civil equality and racial integration) in Mississippi and

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<sup>4</sup> Stuart G. Noble, *Forty Years of the Public Schools in Mississippi* (New York: Columbia University, 1918), 7.

<sup>5</sup> “Public Education,” *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), 7 April 1870. Many northern Republicans distrusted Alcorn's leadership. Some accused the governor of secretly aiding Mississippi Democrats by removing Radical Republicans from local offices and replacing them with white conservatives. Radical Republicans in Congress believed that Alcorn could have done more to racially integrate the University of Mississippi. Alcorn University did not admit women until 1902.

<sup>6</sup> *The Semi-Weekly Clarion* (Jackson, Mississippi), 16 September 1870, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Act of July 2, 1862 (Morrill Act), Public Law 37–108, which established land grant colleges, 07/02/1862, Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789–1996, Record Group 11, General Records of the United States Government, National Archives. In 1878, the Agricultural and Mechanical College of the State of Mississippi (now Mississippi State University) was established as the state's all-white land grant school.

Washington, DC, a means to force the University of Mississippi's eventual racial integration. In need of a new Black university to persuade African American legislators to abandon demands for school integration and seeking to preserve the University of Mississippi as an all-white college, Mississippi took the unprecedented step of allocating its Morrill funds to support Black higher education. Legislators allocated three-fifths of the proceeds of the sale of the state's allotted western lands. (The remaining proceeds were given to the University of Mississippi.) The \$113,400 received from Morrill funds was specifically allocated for the development and maintenance of Alcorn's agricultural and mechanical departments. Rather than receive the funds in one lump sum, Mississippi advanced the university \$13,000 and deposited the rest of the money into its state treasury, where it was invested in bonds. After a period of three years, legislators predicted that Alcorn University would receive an annual 8 percent return on that investment. Unfortunately, Alcorn University struggled to receive its promised allocations and often relied on the meager funds provided by the state and whatever private donations it could raise to keep the doors open. Nonetheless, during the spring of 1871, Alcorn University became the nation's first public Black land grant university.<sup>8</sup>

Initially, the university lacked a campus. Months passed as legislators entertained various proposals. In the fall of 1871, however, Oakland College, a private Presbyterian college near Lorman, closed after trustees declared the institution bankrupt.<sup>9</sup> Located forty miles northwest of Natchez near the Mississippi River, Oakland College's large classroom and dormitory buildings made it an ideal location for a freedmen college. "Far removed from the contaminating influence of town or city life," the rural campus drew less attention than a similar Black college might have attracted in either Jackson or Natchez. Black leaders believed that "in the country, in the midst of a moral and highly cultivated community, the student is continually surrounded by all those influences which tend to develop his moral character during the period of his intellectual training."<sup>10</sup> After brief negotiations, in 1872, the Mississippi legislature purchased Oakland College for \$30,000. The 235-acre campus "consist[ed] of a chapel, three brick dormitories, and a number of frame cottages. . . , two college literary society halls, a President's house, and refectory with all

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<sup>8</sup> Alcorn University, *General Catalog, 1872–1873*, 25; Survey of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, Bulletin 1838, no. 9, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, Office of Education, 1872), 838.

<sup>9</sup> Oakland College opened in 1830 as a Presbyterian college for white men. Campus buildings were built by Black enslaved laborers. The school closed during the Civil War. The college resumed instruction in 1865 but permanently closed following spring 1871 commencement. Oakland College was the oldest college in Mississippi.

<sup>10</sup> Alcorn University, *General Catalog, 1872–1873*, 22.

necessary outbuildings.”<sup>11</sup> Surrounded by former plantations, planners believed the college had ample room to expand if necessary to accommodate large numbers of Black male students. Alcorn University had found a home.<sup>12</sup>

Form No. 10-300a  
(Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

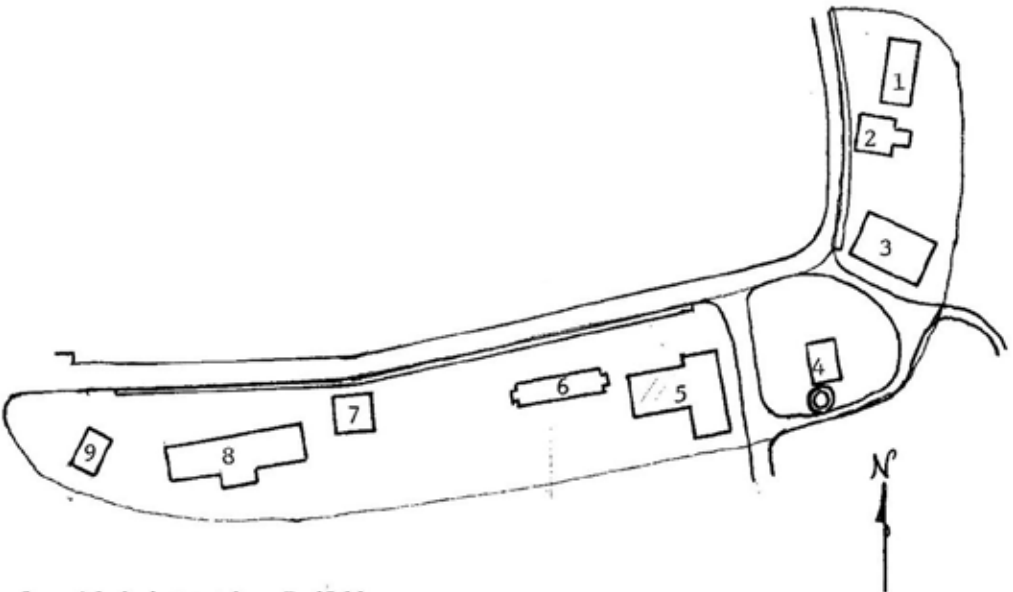
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Alcorn State University Historic District  
Claiborne County, Mississippi

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET      ITEM NUMBER 10      PAGE 5

ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY HISTORIC DISTRICT



1. Administration Building
2. Dormitory #2
3. Oakland Chapel
4. President's House
5. Library and Science Building
6. Harmon Hall
7. Dormitory #3
8. Lanier Hall
9. Belles Lettres

Figure 48. National Register of Historic Places, Alcorn State University, Historic District

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> *Natchez Democrat* (Mississippi), December 23, 1871, 2; *The Weekly Democrat* (Natchez, Mississippi), January 10, 1872.





**Figure 49.** Oakland Memorial Chapel, Alcorn State University, built in 1828



**Figure 50.** Literary Society Building, Alcorn State University, built in 1855



**Figure 51.** Dormitory #2, Alcorn State University, built in 1855



**Figure 52.** Dormitory #3, Alcorn State University, built in 1855



**Figure 53.** US Senator Hiram Revels (1827–1901)

From its inception, Alcorn University faced enormous resistance from Mississippi's white conservatives who opposed Black education. Opponents of Black education declared, "We will not educate our children under the withering influence and blighting curse of Black Republican tyranny."<sup>13</sup> Critics blasted Alcorn's "scheme of Alcorn University...[when] there are not half a dozen colored boys, natives of the State, who are prepared to enter the freshman class in any college."<sup>14</sup> Conservatives accused Republicans of trying to attract northern Black students to Mississippi to bolster their party's future. White conservatives urged the state legislature to pass a law prohibiting the use of public

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<sup>13</sup> *The Semi-Weekly Clarion* (Jackson, Mississippi), September 16, 1870, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), August 10, 1871.



funds for Black higher education. Alcorn University's Republican supporters believed the institution required a strong leader with prior experience as a school administrator who possessed the national connections to defend the college against its local enemies.

Republicans turned to US Senator Hiram Revels, whose term had ended in 1871. Previously, some Republicans had proposed naming the new college Revels University to honor the senator—he politely declined. Revel's journey to Alcorn University had been an exceptional tale of a free Black man navigating freedom within a slave society. Born as a free man in North Carolina, Revels's education began in clandestine schools organized under the cover of darkness to circumvent state laws prohibiting Black instruction. Years later, Revels attended several northern universities and became an ordained minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church. After leading Black congregations in southern Indiana, Revels migrated to St. Louis, Missouri, despite that state's ban on free Black settlement. After being arrested for illegally preaching to Black enslaved laborers, Revels relocated to Baltimore, where he opened several Black schools. During the Civil War, Revels recruited two Black regiments in Maryland and served as a regimental chaplain during their campaigns in Mississippi. By the end of the war, Revels had started several Black schools in Missouri, Kansas, Kentucky, and Louisiana.<sup>15</sup>

In 1866, he moved to Natchez, Mississippi, to teach and minister among freedpeople. Three years later, Natchez Republicans elected Revels to serve in the Mississippi state senate, where he became one of the most vocal advocates for Black civil equality. In 1870, the legislature selected Revels to complete the remaining US Senate term that Albert Brown had resigned from during the secession crisis. Republicans saw Revels as a strong voice for Black education and voting rights. White conservatives, despite their opposition to Revels's views, also supported Revels's appointment because they believed that a Black man would perform so poorly in elected office that no future Mississippian, Black or white, would again elect a Black politician. When Revels arrived in Washington, DC, white conservative senators opposed his appointment, claiming that he was not an American citizen. Republicans rallied behind Revels, convinced that the appointment of a Black man to represent Mississippi in the US Senate undermined the legitimacy of the South's defeated planter class. Although Revels's time in the senate was brief, he emerged as a vigorous advocate for freedpeople and national reconciliation. At a time when many moderate Republicans failed to support Black civil equality, Revels reminded them "that the people

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<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Lawson, *The Gentleman From Mississippi: Our First Negro Representative, Hiram R. Revels* (New York: Elizabeth Lawson, 1960).



of the North owe to the colored race a deep obligation which is no easy matter to fulfill.” When most Americans chose to ignore the invaluable contributions made by freedpeople to help secure the Confederacy’s defeat, Revels tried to stoke their memories.<sup>16</sup>

Hiram Revels played a central role in Alcorn University’s development. Behind the scenes, Revels had lobbied Alcorn to establish a state-funded Black college. Revels sought to build a university that served a broad range of male students. Although the legislature designated the university as a Black school, Revels insisted that “no discrimination is recognized by the Institution on account of color, caste, religion or other class distinctions.” Revels acknowledged that many prospective Mississippi students lacked adequate preparation for collegiate-level instruction. To remedy those deficiencies, Revels established a college preparatory program that enrolled fourteen-year-old students who could provide “a certificate of good moral character” and “sustain a creditable examination in orthography, reading, writing, the fundamental rules of arithmetic, and the general outlines of the geography of the United States.” Preparatory students also completed introductory courses in Latin and history. Upon completion of the school’s preparatory program, students could apply to enroll in collegiate-level coursework with a faculty member’s endorsement. Even supporters of Black education in Mississippi tended to have low expectations for Black achievement. Most expected the university to prepare students to be farmers and mechanics. Revels expected far more from his students. Alcorn University’s collegiate curriculum contained a broad range of subjects beyond the confines of agriculture and mechanics. The school’s classical department taught students Greek and Latin and advanced English composition, in addition to algebra and quadratic equations. First-year students, for example, read Herodotus’s history of the Persian War in Greek and received instruction to improve their written and oral rhetorical skills. Second-year students completed coursework in trigonometry, surveying, and navigation, alongside transcribing Greek editions of Homer’s *Iliad*. Students also received military instruction. Revels hoped to provide students with enough training to either pass any number of examinations required for federal employment or gain admission into new Black universities training physicians, lawyers, and other professionals. Under Revels’s leadership, Alcorn University students were introduced to a rigorous curriculum that compared favorably to courses offered at the University of Mississippi.

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<sup>16</sup> Gerald Everett Wheeler, *Hiram R. Revels, Negro Educator and Statesman* (1949); *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 2nd sess. (May 17, 1870): 3520; *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 41st Cong., 3rd sess. (February 8, 1871): 1059–60; “Hiram R. Revels, U.S. Senator-Elect from Mississippi,” *Frank Leslie’s Weekly*, February 26, 1870; “The Rev. Hiram Revels, Late U.S. Senator, and Now President,” *The Christian Recorder*, October 14, 1880; Hiram Revels, “The North Owes the Colored Race a Deep Obligation,” March 16, 1870, in Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 125; Maddie Weissman, “Volume 2: Postwar: Politics of Race and Reconstruction: ‘The North Owes the Colored Race a Deep Obligation,’” *Defining Documents: The Civil War (1860–1865)*, January 2014, 642–48.

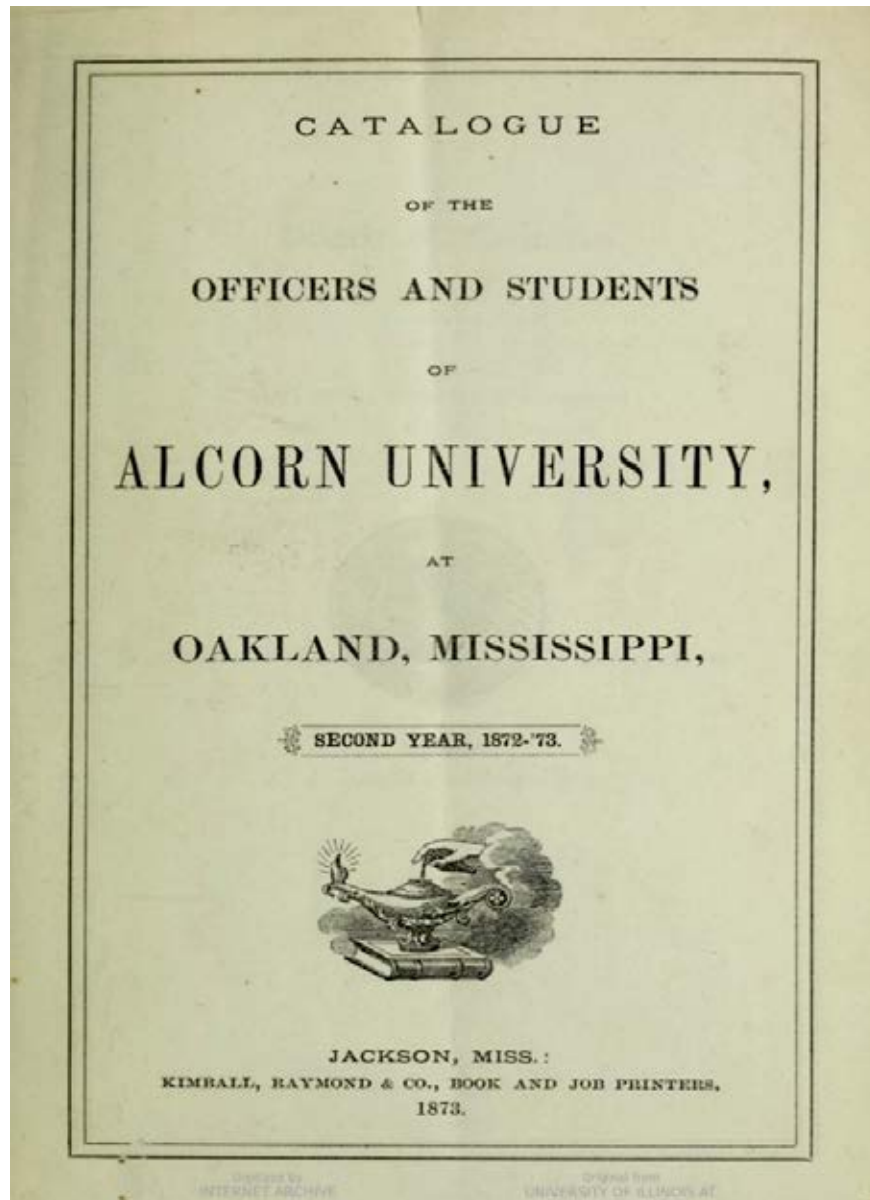
In subsequent decades, Mississippi officials often tried to restrict courses offered at Alcorn University to those pertaining to farming and mechanics. White officials, who generally remained apathetic toward Black higher education, often complained that Alcorn University's curriculum had exceeded its mandate. Such accusations were often used to reduce the university's state budget allocation. Despite criticism, Alcorn University remained committed to Revels's goal of providing students with a robust liberal arts education in addition to their vocational coursework.<sup>17</sup>

Revels feared that many talented poor Black students would never have access to a college education. Despite Revels's insistence that state funds should be used to provide free college tuition for all students, Black and white, legislators ignored those requests. Nonetheless, at Alcorn University, "no charge is made for tuition to students coming from this state." Out-of-state students paid a \$15 matriculation fee. Students had to pay \$10 per month for their room and board, but Revels made every effort to find external donors to cover those fees for indigent students. Between 1872 and 1878, Mississippi provided four-year scholarships for one student from each district in the state. Seeking to generate additional income, Revels successfully lobbied the legislature to purchase an additional forty-acre farm that served as a student laboratory for their agricultural training and produced an annual crop sold to support school programs. In addition to taking classes, students were expected to work to support the university. Revels also used his national network of educational philanthropists to build an endowment to improve the school's laboratories and library collections.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Davis, *Pushing Forward*.

<sup>18</sup> Alcorn University, *General Catalog, 1872–1873*, 18; Gerald Everett Wheeler, *Hiram R. Revels, Negro Educator and Statesman* (1949).

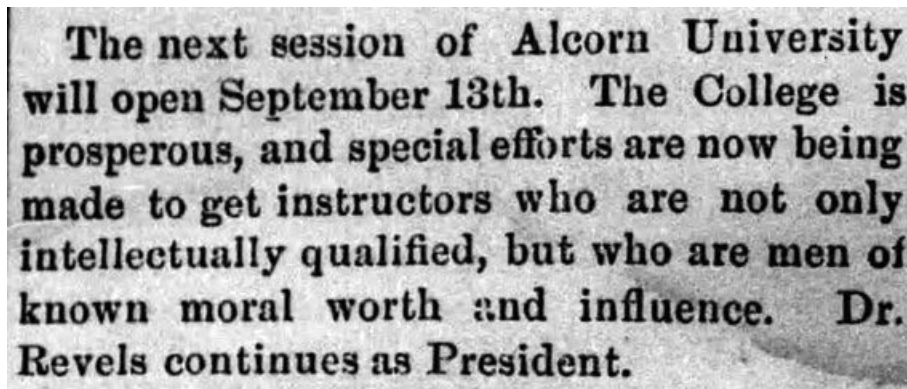


**Figure 54.** Alcorn University, Catalogue of the Officers and Students, 1873

In 1872, Alcorn University enrolled 117 students during its inaugural year. None of those students completed the university's four-year degree program. The university did not produce its first graduate class until 1883. Many of Alcorn's initial students were enrolled in the school's college preparatory program, which served as one of the few high schools available to African American men in the Deep South. Several Black students, for example, came from New Orleans and Memphis, cities that lacked Black high schools until the early twentieth century. A survey of the university's initial class reveals that dire poverty made it extraordinarily difficult to complete the university's degree program. Roughly 80 percent of the school's inaugural class hailed from tenant and sharecropper households. About half of the students were raised by illiterate freedpeople who lacked access to public schools.

Most likely struggled to complete Revels's rigorous preparatory curriculum. The demands expected of them to help support their families led many to drop out. Most of those former students remained in the area and continued working as their parents did on farms owned by white landowners. However, several Alcorn students successfully applied for federal bureaucratic positions across the region.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the financial challenges that confronted its students, Alcorn University's leaders constantly fought with the state legislature to secure much-needed public funding. Throughout the school's history, its annual funding allocation has always lagged behind the state's other land grant school, Mississippi State University. State officials, driven by a desire to undermine Black education to preserve the state's white supremacist social order, made every excuse to obstruct the university's management. Despite those enormous challenges, by the early twentieth century, Alcorn University had built a substantial private endowment thanks to its growing base of affluent alumni who achieved great success in the fields of medicine, law, business, education, and more. Thanks to their steadfast support, Alcorn University survived the racist public policies that sought to limit Black education. Today, Alcorn State University remains a critical part of Mississippi's college system. Serving more than three thousand students who hail from across the nation and the world, Alcorn State University carries on an important legacy as the nation's first Black land grant school.



**The next session of Alcorn University will open September 13th. The College is prosperous, and special efforts are now being made to get instructors who are not only intellectually qualified, but who are men of known moral worth and influence. Dr. Revels continues as President.**

**Figure 55.** Clarion-Ledger (Jackson, Mississippi), July 12, 1882

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<sup>19</sup> Alcorn University records listed a total of 275 students enrolled between 1872 and 1874. Using the 1870 US Census, I identified the socioeconomic origins of approximately 125 students. Tracking those students in the 1880 census proved more difficult. I was only able to locate about 50 students in the counties immediately surrounding Alcorn University. In 1938, an Alcorn University alumnus published an extensive history of the school's notable graduates. None of those notable graduates attended the school prior to the late 1880s. School tradition, however, claims that a significant number of the school's early students left the university to fill federal positions across the South.



Figure 56. Alcorn State University, Lorman, Mississippi



# McDonogh School No. 6

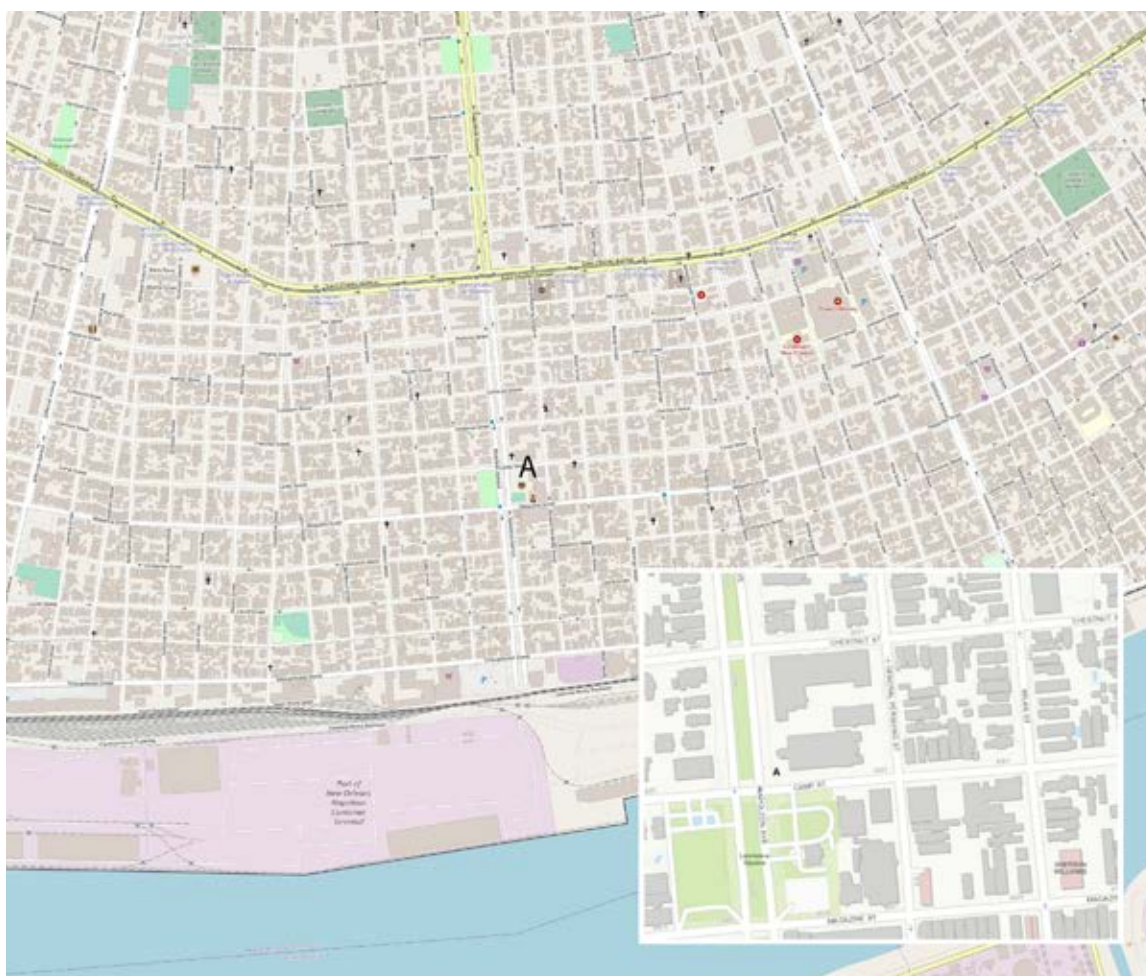
Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

Jakyra Gardner and Keith S. Hébert

## *Extant Historic Resources*

- McDonogh School No. 6, Camp Street at Napoleon Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana

## Historic Resource Map: New Orleans, Louisiana



**A** McDonogh School No. 6, Camp Street at Napoleon Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana

McDonogh School No. 6 is the oldest extant African American public school building in New Orleans. Built in 1876, the school is in the Eleventh Ward on Camp Street, several blocks north of the Mississippi River. Since 1977, the building has been owned by St. George's Episcopal School. In 1982, the National Park Service listed the building in the

National Register of Historic Places. McDonogh School No. 6 is a significant example of a postbellum African American school established in an ethnically diverse southern urban landscape.

Although New Orleans established a public school system in 1841, no provisions were made for the education of neither the city's free persons of color nor Black enslaved laborers.<sup>1</sup> At least eight schools for free persons of color operated in the city during the 1840s and 1850s but none received public funding. Some free people of color received religious and educational instruction at schools operated by the Institution Catholique des Orphelins Indigents, Carmelite nuns, and the Sisters of the Holy Family. However, many local whites strongly opposed the efforts of some Catholics to minister among and educate free people of color and Black enslaved laborers.<sup>2</sup>

The McDonogh School Fund played a central role in the development of New Orleans's public schools. According to historian Walter C. Stern, "Were it not for the bequest of John McDonogh, a wealthy slaveholder who died in 1850 and left his estate for the education of children in New Orleans and his native Baltimore, [public education in New Orleans] may very well have collapsed."<sup>3</sup> Baltimore native John McDonogh came to New Orleans in 1800, where he established a lucrative merchant shipping business. McDonogh invested his fortune in Black enslaved laborers and real estate. Many locals disliked McDonogh's manipulative real estate practices. He often bought homes in affluent neighborhoods to rent to brothel operators to lower the surrounding area's property values. McDonogh would purchase the properties at depressed prices and then evict the brothel tenants to amass huge profits as values rebounded.<sup>4</sup>

McDonogh also speculated in New Orleans's booming slave trade industry. New Orleans was the nation's largest slave market. McDonogh used his wealth to purchase Black enslaved laborers at auction and then transport the slaves to other western markets to be sold for a quick profit. Like some American enslavers, McDonogh supported the American Colonization Society—an organization that raised donations to purchase and relocate Black enslaved laborers to the African colony of Liberia. When McDonogh died in

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<sup>1</sup> New Orleans had the only public school system in antebellum Louisiana.

<sup>2</sup> Donald E. DeVore, "Race Relations and Community Development: The Education of Blacks in New Orleans, 1862–1960" (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1989), vii; Walter C. Stern, *Race & Education in New Orleans: Creating the Segregated City, 1764–1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018), 35–37. During the American Civil War, American commanders who occupied New Orleans reported that some mixed-race children obtained "occasional admission to the [antebellum and wartime] white schools." Department of the Gulf, *Report of the Board of Education for Freedmen for the Year 1864*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Walter C. Stern, *Race & Education in New Orleans: Creating the Segregated City, 1764–1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018), 46–47.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis E. Atherton, "John McDonogh—New Orleans Mercantile Capitalist," *Journal of Southern History* 7, no. 4 (1941): 460.

1850, his will stipulated that some of his Black enslaved laborers should be freed and relocated to Liberia. Despite his enormous financial success, locals remembered McDonogh as a disreputable hermit, slumlord, and slave trader.<sup>5</sup>

John McDonogh's will also deposited \$2 million into a public school fund for the benefit of Baltimore and New Orleans. McDonogh stipulated that funds be used "for the establishment and support of Free Schools. . . wherein the poor (and the poor only) of both sexes of all Castes and Colors, shall have admittance, free of expense for the purpose of being instructed." For eight years, lawsuits prevented McDonogh's executors from dispersing funds. The US Supreme Court's ruling in *McDonogh's Executors v. Murdoch* finally sanctioned the estate's intended use. In 1858, New Orleans used McDonogh School Funds to build its first new public school buildings. Many light-skinned free people of color enrolled in New Orleans's late antebellum public school system. The city created four school districts that allowed neighborhoods to determine enrollment policies. However, white officials enforced a de facto racially segregated system that denied dark-skinned free Blacks and Black enslaved laborers access. Ultimately, New Orleans received \$704,440 in McDonogh funds to build thirty postbellum schools.

The American Civil War accelerated the development of public education in New Orleans. On January 26, 1861, Louisiana seceded from the United States and subsequently joined the Confederate States of America. As one of the most important commercial centers in the Western Hemisphere, the capture of New Orleans was among the American military's initial wartime objectives. On April 26, 1862, American forces under the command of General Benjamin Butler captured New Orleans. Black enslaved laborers in New Orleans cheered the conquering American army as liberators. "Thousands of negroes," wrote an American soldier, "welcome us with various demonstrations of pleasure."<sup>6</sup>

The American recapture of New Orleans ended the exclusion of Black enslaved laborers from public education. A few weeks after American forces arrived, Robert H. Isabelle, a free Black New Orleans resident, established a freedpeople school at Camp Parapet, part of the Confederate network of fortifications that surrounded the Crescent City. Camp Parapet's commanding officer, Brig. Gen. John Wolcott Phelps, an abolitionist from Vermont, ignored his commanding officer's orders and encouraged runaway slaves to join his camp. During the summer of 1862, Isabelle taught over a thousand freedpeople.<sup>7</sup> The Camp Parapet school only lasted for a few months. When Phelps's commanding

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<sup>5</sup> "Sketch of the Life of John McDonogh, the Millionaire," *The Sun* (New Orleans), November 5, 1850.

<sup>6</sup> David C. Rankin, *Diary of a Christian Soldier: Rufus Kinsley and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 92.

<sup>7</sup> Robert H. Isabelle, "Domestic Correspondence," *Anglo-African*, June 13, 1863. Isabelle's article also thanks Clara Hyde, a white woman from the North, for teaching at Camp Parapet.

officers ordered him to return many of the runaway slaves to their enslavers, Phelps resigned. The new commander closed the school. Undeterred, Isabelle opened a school in New Orleans at Wesleyan Chapel—the city’s first Protestant school for people of color.<sup>8</sup>

For over a year, the American military failed to produce any organized Black education program. American soldiers, such as army chaplain and future Louisiana superintendent of public education Thomas W. Conway, collaborated with Black citizens to open temporary schools. Together they successfully lobbied the American government to support the creation of a permanent Black education initiative. In September 1863, the American government began its direct involvement in Black education in New Orleans when Congress allocated \$3,000 to educate 250 indigent students. The following month, Union commander Nathaniel P. Banks authorized the creation of permanent Black schools. For the rest of the war, Black schools sanctioned by the American army functioned as the Black public school system, as the existing city school system refused to fund freed-people education. The American Missionary Association opened its first Black school in New Orleans in January 1864.<sup>9</sup> By the close of 1864, New Orleans had “95 [Black] schools, with 192 teachers and 9,571 pupils.” Most of those students attended schools held in rented rooms. The schools usually bore the name of the school’s teacher: Miss Strong’s School, Miss Buggie’s School, Miss Clarkson’s School, or Mr. Williams’s School. The city’s growing Black education system attracted experienced northern-born free Black educators such as George T. Ruby of New York. By the end of the war, Ruby had opened a widely attended adult night school at the Crescent City Church.<sup>10</sup>

Most of New Orleans’s white population opposed using public taxes to support freedpeople education. In 1864, the Louisiana state constitutional convention authorized the creation of Black public schools but failed to finance them. Using funds raised almost entirely from northern donors and freedpeople, New Orleans’s Black community managed to open seven all-Black schools.<sup>11</sup> Slavery’s end heightened local fears of racial miscegenation that might result from mixed-race schools. During the war, some people of color enrolled in all-white schools. A Miss Snyder passed as white and briefly taught at an all-white school. According to historian Donald DeVore, as the war ended, “White New

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<sup>8</sup> Mishio Yamanaka, “‘Separation Is Not Equality’: The Racial Desegregation Movement of Creoles of Color in New Orleans, 1862–1900,” PhD dissertation (University of North Carolina: 2018), 60.

<sup>9</sup> Jacquelyn Slaughter Haywood, “The American Missionary Association in Louisiana during Reconstruction” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1974), 97; Patricia Brady, “Trials and Tribulations: American Missionary Association Teachers and Black Education in Occupied New Orleans, 1863–1864,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 31, no. 1 (1990): 5–20.

<sup>10</sup> Donald E. DeVore, “Race Relations and Community Development: The Education of Blacks in New Orleans, 1862–1960” (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1989), 6; Barry A. Crouch, “Black Education in Civil War and Reconstruction Louisiana: George T. Ruby, the Army, and the Freedmen’s Bureau,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 38, no. 3 (1997): 287–308.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Beabout and Kyshun Webster, “New Orleans Public Schools: An Unrealized Democratic Ideal,” Data Center Research.org (2018), <https://s3.amazonaws.com/gnocdc/reports/prosperity-brief-brian-beabout-et-al.pdf>.



Orleanians felt compelled to tighten the color line in order to keep the privileged whites-only public schools for themselves.”<sup>12</sup> Black schools remained dependent on northern philanthropists and the federal government for support. Those external sources declined after the Civil War.

During Presidential Reconstruction, New Orleans’s Black schools nearly collapsed. Freedpeople remained dependent on federal-government-sponsored schools. Meanwhile, light-skinned antebellum-era free people of color regularly accessed the city-funded public schools that had opened in 1858 using McDonogh funds. The federal government never wholly invested in Black education. President Andrew Johnson rejected the Freedmen’s Bureau’s proposed school budget. In January 1866, the Bureau temporarily closed Black schools. That summer, New Orleans police and a posse of armed white citizens murdered thirty-four African American Republican Party supporters during a peaceful political demonstration. In the aftermath of that violence, white citizens burned four Black school buildings and assaulted several Black educators.<sup>13</sup> One year later, only 2,713 Black children (approximately 1 out of every 10 school-aged Black child in the city) remained in school. In 1867, 7,000 fewer Black children attended school compared to 1864.<sup>14</sup>

The 1868 Louisiana Constitution brought some improvement to New Orleans’s Black schools. Forced upon Louisiana by Republicans in the US Congress, the constitution required parishes to establish “at least one Free Public School in every parish” and recommended that Black and white students should “attend school in the same school houses.”<sup>15</sup> The New Orleans *Times* voiced white opposition to mixed-race public schools. “The schools now established in this city have been founded by white people for white children.”<sup>16</sup> Letters to the newspaper complained that it was “unjust to us poor people who cannot afford to send our children to private schools” to either accept integration or boycott racially mixed schools.<sup>17</sup> Initially, the white-conservative-led school board obstructed integration, but an 1870 state court ruling replaced its members with integrationists. Some African American leaders also opposed integration on the grounds that white opposition to racially mixed schools posed a threat to the entire system of public

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<sup>12</sup> Donald E. DeVore, “Race Relations and Community Development: The Education of Blacks in New Orleans, 1862–1960” (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1989), 61.

<sup>13</sup> Donald E. Reynolds, “The New Orleans Riot of 1866, Reconsidered,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 5, no. 1 (1964): 5–27.

<sup>14</sup> “Two Hundred and Thirty Schools about to Be Closed,” *New Orleans Tribune*, November 3, 1865; “Superintendent of Education, Louisiana, School Report, 1865–1868,” in Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands Records, RG 105.

<sup>15</sup> *Journal of the Convention for the Framing of a Constitution for the State of Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1867–68), 16–17.

<sup>16</sup> *New Orleans Times*, September 1, 1867.

<sup>17</sup> *New Orleans Times*, September 19, 1867.



education. They worried that white conservatives might abolish public education rather than provide tax-funded mixed-race systems. Nevertheless, most Black leaders supported integration and saw equal access to schools as a critical step toward civil equality.

Between 1871 and 1877, New Orleans operated a mixed-race school system with racially integrated classrooms. According to historian Walter Stern, “with one-third of its schools racially mixed, New Orleans may very well have had the most integrated system in the country.”<sup>18</sup> Although the exact number of Black students enrolled in mixed-race classrooms is unknown, scholars estimate that as many as one-third of the city’s Black students attended integrated schools. Approximately 11 percent of the city’s teachers were Black.<sup>19</sup> White opposition remained, however. In 1874, a white riot expelled Black students from mixed-race schools and murdered at least one Black parent and Black student. The riot failed to end integration but discouraged Black students from attending white schools.

The New Orleans school board and African American leaders collaborated to devise plans that would ensure that Black education survived segregation. After the 1874 violence, most African American leaders demanded that local white officials erect new school buildings for Black students that were on par with extant white schools. The city’s Black public schools were housed in substandard rented buildings or churches. As the prospect of continued racial violence threatened to destroy the city’s public schools, a coalition of white and Black leaders agreed to build two new Black schools. Although Black leaders continued to view racial segregation as a deterrent to their community’s advancement, they reasoned that segregated schools were better than nothing.

McDonogh School No. 5 was the first new school building erected for Black students in New Orleans. Located in a predominately white immigrant working-class section of the Algiers neighborhood on the south bank of the Mississippi River, the school enrolled more than five hundred Black students in its first session.<sup>20</sup> Unlike most white public schools, New Orleans’s Black schools taught both boys and girls in the same classrooms. McDonogh School No. 5 operated as a Black school from 1875 to 1905. In 1904, white citizens petitioned the board of education to build a new school for African Americans so the McDonogh School No. 5 building could be used to relieve the reported overcrowded conditions in the local all-white school. Even though more than six hundred Black students attended the school, petitioners claimed that few African Americans lived near McDonogh

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<sup>18</sup> Stern, *Race and Education in New Orleans*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Beabout and Kyshun Webster, “New Orleans Public Schools: An Unrealized Democratic Ideal,” Data Center Research.org (2018), <https://s3.amazonaws.com/gnocdc/reports/prosperity-brief-brian-beabout-et-al.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> “McDonogh School No. 5,” *The Louisiana Journal of Education*, 120.

School No. 5.<sup>21</sup> White petitioners recommended building a new schoolhouse in the district's Black neighborhood.<sup>22</sup> Today, the Berhman School's gymnasium is located at the former McDonogh School No. 5 site.<sup>23</sup>

In 1876, the city opened McDonogh School No. 6 in a predominately white middle-class neighborhood in the Eleventh Ward. Black leaders carefully selected the site. They believed that Black schools could not survive if they were located among white homes. According to Black leaders, "the site was selected with great care as one less likely to be discriminated against than any other in the district, being bounded by a public square, public market, and streets, thus permitting no private dwellings near it."<sup>24</sup> Previously, several Black schools had operated in the district in temporary rented buildings. Black leaders believed that it was necessary to consolidate those smaller schools into one central facility to maximize their limited resources.

The school's location created subsequent problems for New Orleans's African American community. Black community leaders were often men who belonged to the city's growing Black middle class. During Reconstruction, people of color lived scattered across many city neighborhoods rather than in concentrated racially segregated zones. Black middle-class leaders wanted Black schools to be built close to their homes and businesses that were often far removed from working-class Black neighborhoods where most of the city's Black population lived. Likewise, white school board members also represented their race's middle and elite class interests. Most lived in households that employed multiple persons of color as domestic servants, gardeners, drivers, and carpenters. White school board members worried that building Black schools in Black working-class neighborhoods would deprive the city's white upper- and middle-class neighborhoods of their domestic servant labor pool. Consequently, the city's white and Black leaders located McDonogh School No. 6 in a predominately white middle-class residential district.

McDonogh School No. 6's student population mirrored New Orleans's Black household demographics. Most students lived in working-class households that included multiple generations of extended family. Siblings Jesse Conaway, age nine, and Olivia Conaway, age seven, were typical students. Their mother, Sarah Conaway, worked as a domestic servant for a neighborhood merchant. As a household headed by a single female, the Conaways struggled to survive. In addition to providing for her three children, Sarah Conaway also cared for her elderly mother.<sup>25</sup> Siblings Eliza Williams, age fourteen, and Cora Williams, age sixteen, were among the oldest students to attend McDonogh School No. 6.

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<sup>21</sup> Superintendent's Annual Report, New Orleans Public Schools (United States: n.p., 1904).

<sup>22</sup> "Algiers Wants New House," *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans), November 12, 1904, 10.

<sup>23</sup> McDonogh School No. 5 was in Algiers on Verret Street between Opelousas Avenue and Slidell Street.

<sup>24</sup> *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans), November 9, 1889, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Conaway Household, 1880 United States Federal Census, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, 083, 13.

New Orleans lacked a public high school for African Americans until the early twentieth century. They likely left their parent's household to live with their recently married older sister, Rose Poplis, to attend McDonogh School No. 6. Supported by their brother-in-law, a twenty-seven-year-old slater, the sisters lived within a few blocks of the school.<sup>26</sup>

McDonogh School No. 6's Black students lived in mixed-race working-class sections of the predominately white middle-class Eleventh Ward. Peter Persia's father, for example, was an illiterate Mexican-born plasterer who married an illiterate South Carolina freedwoman employed as a washerwoman. Approximately half of the school's students were raised by illiterate parents.<sup>27</sup> The Persia family's white neighbors worked as deckhands, painters, wagon drivers, and housekeepers who sent their children to one of the neighborhood's multiple white schools. Unlike Black students, white students in the Eleventh Ward had access to a high school education. Most white students lived close to their schools, whereas McDonogh School No. 6 students often traveled from across the city because most areas lacked Black schools. New Orleans's open enrollment policies enabled Black students from anywhere in the city to attend McDonogh School No. 6. Those policies also discouraged Black communities from demanding new schools in their neighborhoods. School board members often told petitioners that new facilities were unnecessary since everyone could attend one of the extant Black schools.

The 1876 presidential election toppled what remained of Louisiana's Reconstruction era Republican governments. In New Orleans, when conservative Democratic Party officials seized control of the city's school board, they prohibited racial integration. In addition to creating an unequal racially segregated public school system, Louisiana conservatives also reduced public school funding by 80 percent. The reductions created enormous budget shortages across the state that resulted in numerous teachers being laid off and school closures. Despite supporting a segregated school system, New Orleans's conservative school board generally supported Black education and scrambled to find tax revenues to cover their mounting debts. Unfortunately, the sole tax source allocated to public schools was the poll tax, and many New Orleans residents, white and Black, were too poor to afford to vote and thus rarely paid the tax.

In 1877, without state funds or the willingness to issue new forms of school tax revenues, New Orleans slashed 40 percent of its annual school budget. Rather than close its schools, African American communities raised private funds to cover school costs. The city's Black communities solicited donations from across the nation and received some financial support from affluent white locals.<sup>28</sup> The Yellow Fever epidemic of 1878 exacted a heavy toll on New Orleans. More than four thousand residents perished. African

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<sup>26</sup> Leon Poplis Household, 1880 United States Federal Census, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, 083, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Persia Household, 1880 United States Federal Census, Orleans Parish, Louisiana, 009, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Louisiana Board of Health, *Annual Report* (New Orleans: Office of the Democrats, 1878), 18.

Americans accounted for more than half of the epidemic's victims. The epidemic further plunged New Orleans's economy into a deep recession as tax revenues fell across the board.<sup>29</sup> Budget cuts ravaged the entire system. Among Black schools, the cuts forced many qualified educators to relocate. Without funds, Black schools were often forced to hire inexperienced or unqualified educators to fill the void. Meanwhile, critical supplies and building maintenance went unfilled for years. According to historian Walter Stern, "By 1883, the system had so little money that it closed for nearly half a year to all except those who could pay tuition."<sup>30</sup>

Despite numerous obstacles, McDonogh School No. 6 continued operations. The average enrollment hovered around six hundred boys and girls ranging from age four to fourteen. City officials expressed conflicting views about the state of Black education in New Orleans. On one hand, officials praised Black educators for the significant progress that African Americans had made since emancipation. The Black community's ability to raise private donations to keep their schools afloat impressed school officials who witnessed some white schools close due to a lack of public support.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, school officials argued that the lower per capita percentage of Black students enrolled in the city's public schools compared to their white counterparts evidenced a lack of concern for education within the Black households. Officials launched various campaigns to improve enrollment by hosting public exhibitions that highlighted the accomplishments of Black students and educators. However, the resistance of state and local officials to create new sources of funding for public education prevented Black schools from achieving their maximum potential. Without new funds, Black schools remained understaffed and struggled to retain qualified educators. Overcrowded classrooms that usually included younger and older students discouraged weaker students from attending. Plus, free schools often resorted to asking parents for tuition when city funds vanished. Meanwhile, the city lacked neither the funds nor the will to establish any compulsory attendance laws. Large numbers of young Black children went to work rather than attend school to help support their working-class families.<sup>32</sup>

Inadequate funding impacted McDonogh School No. 6 and other Black schools as struggling white schools sought additional resources. Like other American communities, New Orleans's racially segregated school system never sought to create equal educational opportunities for people of color. In New Orleans, however, white public schools also faced numerous funding challenges. Without new taxes to build additional schools or hire more

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<sup>29</sup> Deanne Stephens Nuwer, *Plague among the Magnolias: The 1878 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Mississippi* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Stern, *Race & Education in New Orleans*, 46.

<sup>31</sup> "Something More About Schools—Legacies to the City," *The New Orleans Daily Democrat* (New Orleans), July 2, 1877.

<sup>32</sup> Louisiana Department of Education, *Annual Report* (Baton Rouge: State Printer, 1878).

teachers, white schools looked for ways to claim city funds or assets that had been allocated to their Black counterparts. In 1889, white residents of the Eleventh Ward complained to the school board about the district's overcrowded all-white McDonogh School No. 7. Petitioners urged officials to redesignate McDonogh School No. 6 as an all-white school and find an alternative location for its six hundred Black students. The board considered relocating the Black school into a rented building far removed from its current location. The white petitioners argued that most of the school's Black students lived outside of the Eleventh Ward. Initially, the board agreed with the white petitioners and began planning for the Black school's relocation. The decision surprised Black parents, who were unaware of the petition. Word spread across the Eleventh Ward that the school's Black students would be evicted without notice. Meanwhile, across the city, other white communities launched similar efforts to reallocate all-Black school buildings.<sup>33</sup>

Black communities across New Orleans organized protests in response to the school board's actions. In the Eleventh Ward, Rev. Ernest A. Lyons, a Methodist Episcopal Church minister whose young children attended McDonogh School No. 6, organized a mass meeting at Simpson's Chapel "for the purpose of emphatically protesting against the wrong and indignity heaped upon us by the action of the public school director." The protestors argued that "the colored people have learned to look upon it as one especially set apart for the education of their children. They have early and cherished associations connected with this building which they can have for no other." Black protests revealed the community's awareness of the massive inequities and racial discrimination that had negatively impacted them since emancipation. "Because the lamentable facts exists," spoke Lyons, "that the colored children of the city have been woefully discriminated against in the matter of McDonogh buildings for out of some twenty-three on this side of the river only McDonogh No. 6 was occupied by colored children. In every instance they have had to occupy the buildings vacated by the white children and now we are envied the possession of even this." Lyons also accused the Eleventh Ward's white residents of misleading the school board about their support for the addition of an alternative Black school site. Recognizing that the Eleventh Ward's demographics had shifted more in favor of its white upper-middle-class residents, Lyons claimed that the area's affluent white residents planned to use this scheme to clear the district of its Black inhabitants. Moved by coordinated protests of the Eleventh Ward's Black parents, the school board agreed to appoint a special committee to investigate the matter. Black opposition forced the school board to abandon its planned reallocation. Afterward, Black parents continued to meet, fearing that

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<sup>33</sup> "City Jottings," *Lake Charles Echo* (Louisiana), 15 November 1889. In New Orleans's Sixth District, white residents petitioned the city school board to remove "colored children" from McDonogh School No. 23 to "make place for white pupils." *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans), November 9, 1889.



the city's all-white school board would renew efforts to claim the school for white students. Eventually, Black parents started the McDonogh No. 6 Co-Operative Club to organize fundraising efforts and lobbying campaigns.<sup>34</sup>

In 1900, the New Orleans Board of Education limited public education for African Americans to the first five grades. "During the first decades of the 1900s, the average amount spent on building Black public schools in New Orleans was \$21,500; for white schools, it was \$42,500."<sup>35</sup>

Unfortunately, 1889 was not the last time that the Eleventh Ward's affluent white residents sought to oust the McDonogh School's Black students to make room for a new all-white school. In 1923, New Orleans School Superintendent Fannie Baumgartner reported during a board meeting that McDonogh School No. 6 "was badly located in that it was situated in a strictly white section." By 1923, the school was surrounded by many large homes and wealthy white residents who had relocated along Napoleon Avenue's fashionable boulevard. Two years earlier, after years of failed requests for improvements to the aging building, the city had agreed to fund a four-room addition onto McDonogh School No. 6 to accommodate the school's expanding curriculum. The renovations rekindled white interests in the property and made it a more attractive option for the creation of a new all-white school. Affluent white residents claimed that the nearby all-white Sophie B. Wright High School, located five blocks away, needed to acquire the McDonogh School building as an annex to relieve overcrowding. They proposed relocating the area's Black students into a smaller and former all-white school, McDonogh Memorial. The all-white school board supported the initiative and allocated additional funds to renovate the McDonogh School No. 6 building. The McDonogh School Co-Operative Club failed to convince the board to reverse its decisions. In 1926, the school board voted to turn the school into a new commercial high school for white girls. Fifty years after its creation, Black students could no longer attend McDonogh School No. 6.<sup>36</sup>

Today, the St. George's Episcopal School occupies the historic McDonogh School No. 6 building. In 1982, the City of New Orleans successfully listed the school in the National Register of Historic Places.

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<sup>34</sup> *The Times-Democrat* (New Orleans), November 9, 1889. A full transcription of Rev. Ernest A. Lyons's speech is included in the November 9, 1889, edition of *The Times-Democrat*. Lyons later served as US Minister to Liberia during President Theodore Roosevelt's administration.

<sup>35</sup> Kristen L. Buras, *Charter Schools, Race, and Urban Space: Where the Market Meets Grassroots Resistance* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2014), 19.

<sup>36</sup> Stern, *Race & Education in New Orleans*, 140–41.

Public School Enrollment, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1877–1900<sup>37</sup>

Year	Black	White
1877	4,338	15,169
1878	6,856	17,294
1879	6,654	17,670
1880	5,595	15,316
1881	5,473	18,928
1882	5,540	19,427
1883	4,511	17,130
1884	4,955	18,227
1885	4,752	19,579
1886	5,306	19,555
1887	6,029	19,620
1888	6,042	20,930
1889	4,858	16,278
1890	5,426	17,974
1891	5,592	17,617
1892	5,436	18,454
1893	4,929	18,559
1894	5,441	19,829
1895	6,126	21,274
1896	5,855	22,673
1897	6,117	23,597
1898	6,013	23,509
1899	6,221	24,549
1900	6,662	24,859

Estimated or Actual Expenditures for Selected Years,  
Public School System, New Orleans, Louisiana<sup>38</sup>

Year	Expenditure
1874	479,554
1877	303,687
1882	279,316
1886	305,536

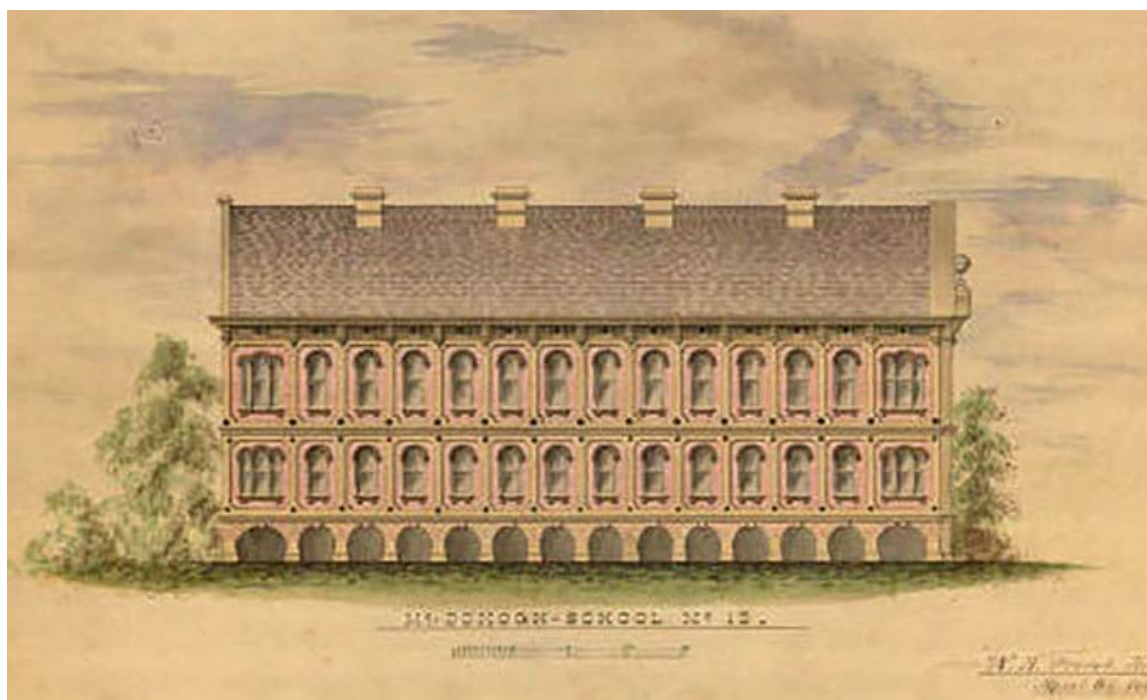
<sup>37</sup> DeVore, 80.<sup>38</sup> DeVore.

**New Orleans, Louisiana, African American McDonogh Schools, 1876–1892<sup>39</sup>**

McDonogh School No. 5	1875	Grammar and Primary	Verret Street	Boys and Girls/Colored 356 students
McDonogh School No. 6	1876	Grammar and Primary	Camp and Berlin Streets	Boys and Girls/Colored 650 students
McDonogh School No. 24	1889	Grammar and Primary	Adams Street	Boys and Girls/Colored 539 students
McDonogh School No. 27	1891–1892	Grammar and Primary	McDonoghville	Boys and Girls/Colored 210 students

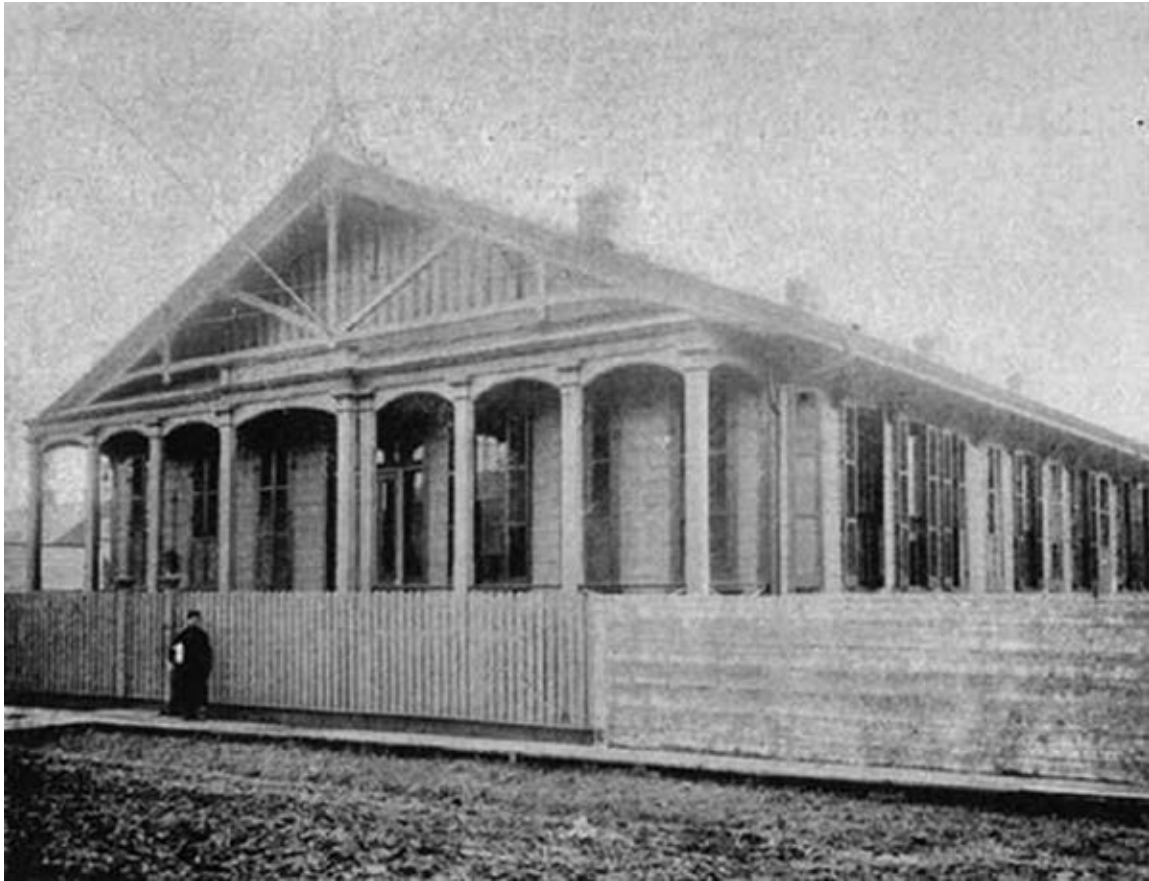
**City of New Orleans, Louisiana, McDonogh Schools, 1892**

No. of White Schools	No. of Colored Schools	White Students	Colored Students
26	4	15,114	1,546



**Figure 57.** McDonogh School No. 5, Algiers, New Orleans, Louisiana. This building has been demolished.

<sup>39</sup> Reports of the Boards of Commissioners of McDonogh School Fund, Fink Asylum Fund, Touro Almshouse Fund, Sickles Legacy Fund, from January 1st, 1892, to December 31st, 1895 (United States: L. Graham & Son, 1898).



**Figure 58.** McDonogh School No. 5, circa 1900, Algiers, New Orleans, Louisiana. This building has been demolished.



**Figure 59.** Former Site of McDonogh School No. 5 (nonextant), Algiers, New Orleans, Louisiana



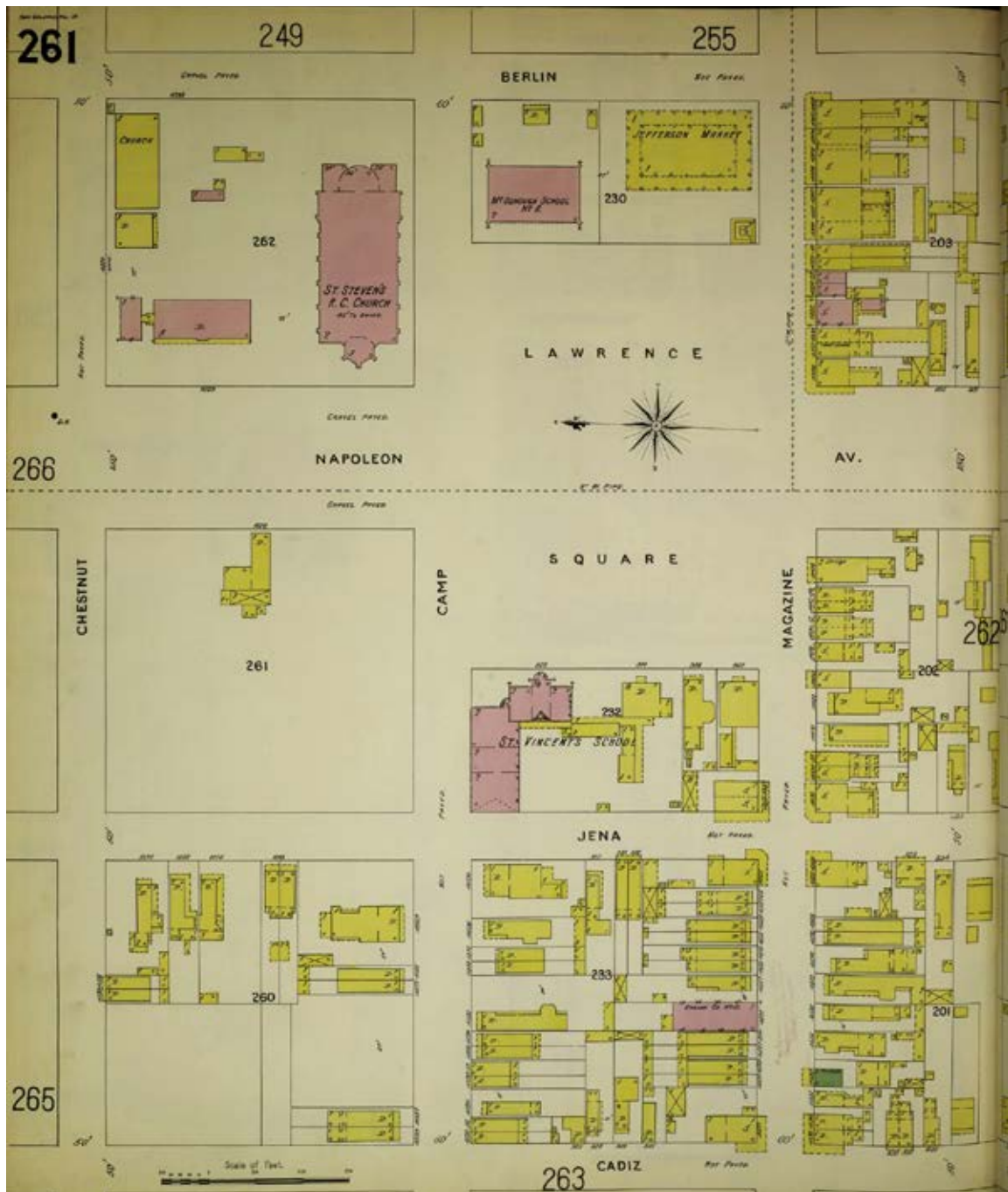
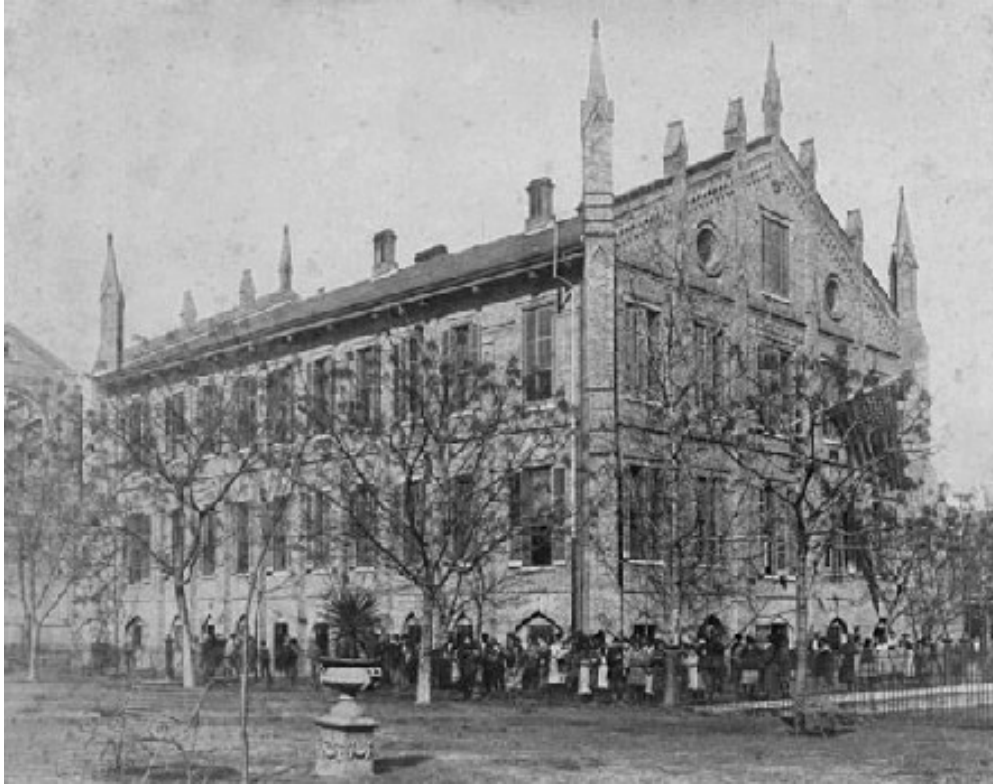
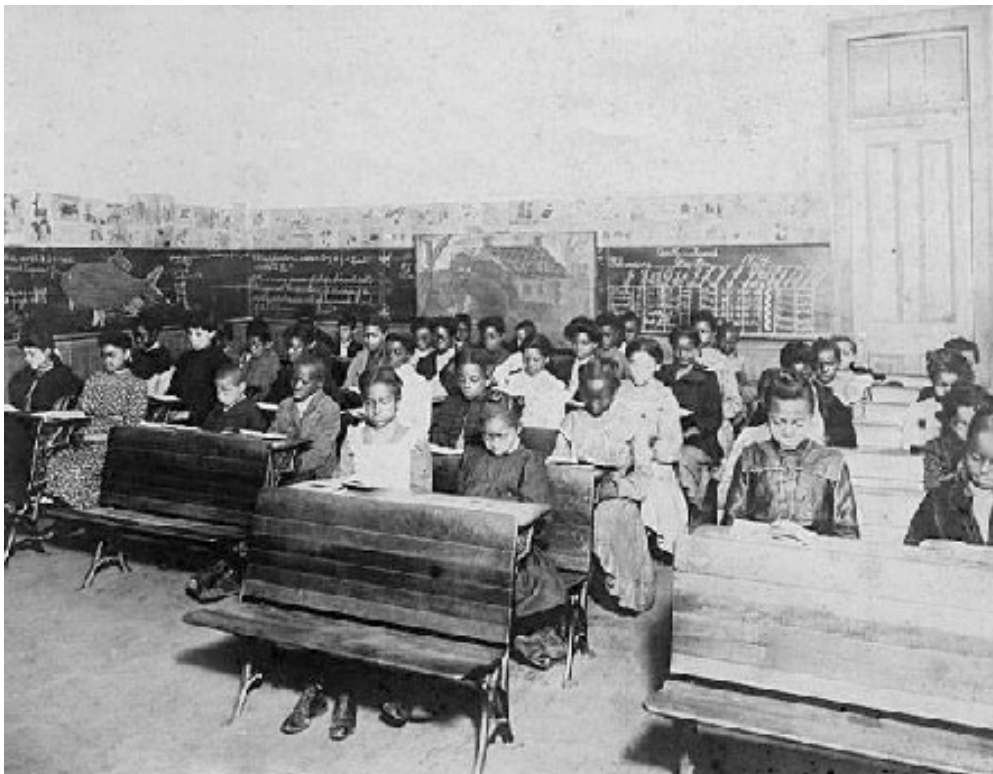


Figure 60. St. George's Episcopal School / McDonogh School No. 6, Eleventh Ward, New Orleans, Louisiana, Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, 1896





**Figure 61.** McDonogh School No. 6, circa 1900, Eleventh Ward, New Orleans, Louisiana



**Figure 62.** McDonogh School No. 6, circa 1913, Eleventh Ward, New Orleans, Louisiana



**Figure 63.** McDonogh School No. 6, circa 1913, Eleventh Ward, New Orleans, Louisiana



**Figure 64.** McDonogh School No. 6, circa 1913, Eleventh Ward, New Orleans, Louisiana



**Figure 65.** St. George's Episcopal School, McDonogh School No. 6, Eleventh Ward, New Orleans, Louisiana



**Figure 66.** St. George's Episcopal School, McDonogh School No. 6, Eleventh Ward, New Orleans, Louisiana



# Peale Museum & Frederick Douglass High School

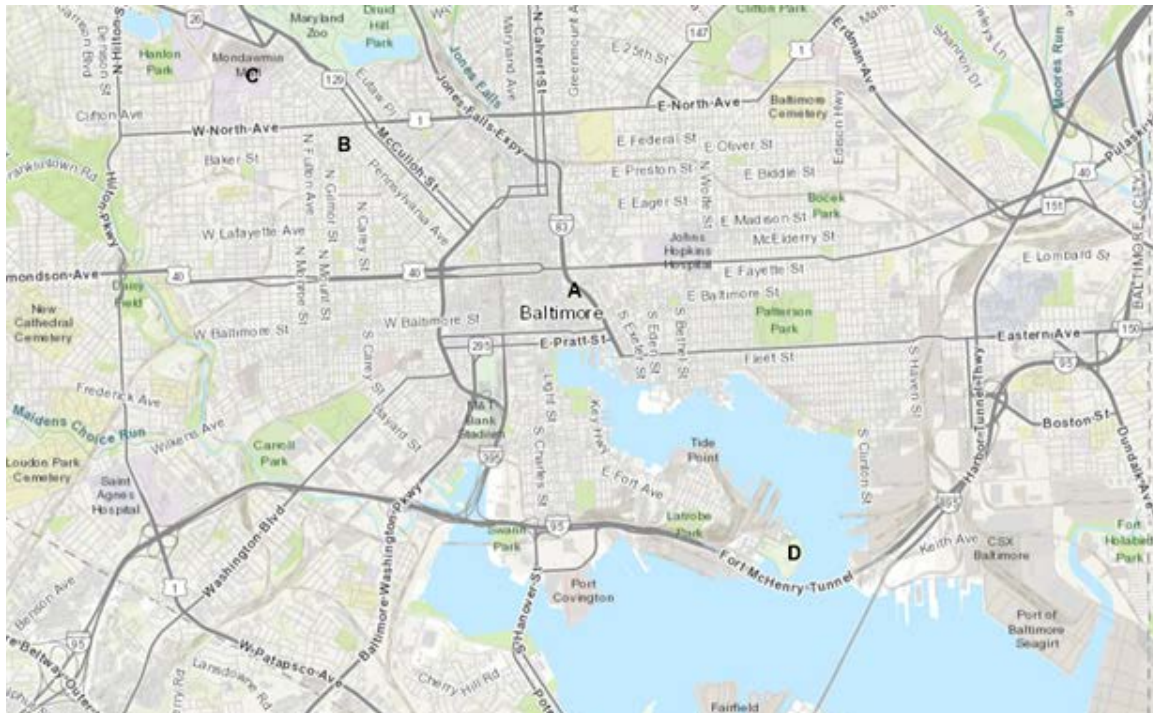
## Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine

Keith S. Hébert and Daniel Cone

### *Extant Historic Resources, Dates of Construction, and Dates and Names of Schools:*

- Peale Museum (1814), 224 Holliday Street, Baltimore, Maryland
  - ◇ Male and Female Colored School No. 1 (1878–1887)
  - ◇ Male Grammar School No. 1 (1879–1882)
  - ◇ Colored High School No. 1 (1882–1888)
- Frederick Douglass High School (1925), North Calhoun and Baker Streets, Baltimore, Maryland
- Frederick Douglass High School (1954), 2301 Gwynns Falls Parkway, Baltimore, Maryland

### Historic Resource Map: Baltimore, Maryland



- A** Peale Museum, 224 Holliday Street
- B** Frederick Douglass High School, North Calhoun and Baker Streets
- C** Frederick Douglass High School, 2301 Gwynns Falls Parkway
- D** Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine

Several postbellum primary and secondary schools for African Americans in Baltimore began in the former Peale Museum building (224 Holliday Street). Once the site of Peale's Museum and Gallery of Fine Arts (1814–29) and City Hall (1830–75), the three-story brick building housed the Male and Female Colored School No. 1 from 1878 to 1887. From 1879 to 1882, Male Grammar School No. 1 also held classes at the Peale building. In 1882, following the successful lobbying efforts of Black activists, Baltimore opened its first Black public high school at the Peale building. Facing overcrowded classrooms and a deteriorating building, Colored High School No. 1 relocated in 1888 to a new building on Saratoga Street. In 1900, Colored High School No. 1 relocated again to the corner of Dolphin Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. In 1920 it was renamed in honor of Frederick Douglass, noted abolitionist and champion of Black civil rights. Douglass High School moved again in 1925 to the corner of Calhoun and Baker Streets. In 1954, Douglass High School relocated for a third and final time. Today, Frederick Douglass High School (2301 Gwynns Falls Parkway) is a surviving vestige of what is believed to be the second oldest Black high school in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture (244 Holliday Street) provides “a showcase for the city’s storytellers that honors their important and historical value. . .to ensure the whole story of the city is told, and, by amplifying its communities’ voices, to help people everywhere see Baltimore in a new light.”<sup>2</sup> These community institutions of learning embody the long-standing successful lobbying efforts of Black Baltimore citizens and leaders whose activism demanded improved access to public education. During a period when Baltimore’s white conservative leaders strongly opposed the development of a robust system of Black public schools, local leaders, such as Isaac Myers and George A. Hackett, used every ounce of community support and fiscal and political pressure to create and expand those opportunities. Through numerous petitions, mass meetings, fundraising campaigns, and demonstrations, Black Baltimoreans forced the city’s white leaders to incrementally respond to their demands for civil equality. The Peale Museum and Frederick Douglass High School symbolize the strength, commitment, and effectiveness of Black activism in late-nineteenth-century Baltimore in the face of racial inequality and segregation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The historic Colored High School No. 1 buildings at Saratoga Street and on the corner of Dolphin Street and Pennsylvania Avenue no longer exist. The properties are owned by the City of Baltimore. Both sites host contemporary schools whose buildings were erected in the late twentieth century.

<sup>2</sup> “No. 1” is a geographic designation; these were not the first Black public schools in Baltimore; The Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture, [www.thepealecenter.org](http://www.thepealecenter.org), accessed by the author July 1, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> This case study does not argue that either the Peale Museum or Frederick Douglass High School are the best or most significant examples of Black public education history in Baltimore. However, other significant historic sites, such as P.S. 103 (1315 Division Street) and Dunbar High School (1400 Orleans Street), developed as Black schools decades after schools founded at the Peale Museum and Frederick Douglass High School. The Black activism that enabled the development of Frederick Douglass High School is representative of decades of community-led protests citywide that sought to improve city schools. This case study focuses on extant historic resources connected to nineteenth-century Black schools in Baltimore.





**Figure 67.** Isaac Myers (1835–1891). Born a free man in Baltimore, Myers apprenticed as a caulker and later played a central role in the development of the city’s Black caulker’s union and the State Labor Convention of the Colored Men of Maryland in Baltimore. Under Myers’s leadership, Black dock workers pooled their resources to form the Chesapeake Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company. This company became one of the largest Black-owned businesses in postbellum America, employing more than three hundred Black workers. As an active member of Bethel AME Church, Myers helped found several church schools and served as superintendent for the Bethel Black school. Myers used his wealth and influence to champion the cause of Black public education. He regularly lobbied local officials for additional resources and organized Black protests. For several years, a Black school operated in the Caulkers Union Hall, a building owned by Myers.

Baltimore’s Free Black antebellum community created a robust network of privately funded schools. By 1790, the city’s Free Black population was twice as large as the total number of Black enslaved laborers. Free Blacks had established several independent church congregations. In 1802, Black members of Sharp Street Methodist Episcopal Church began the Free African School. Several additional Free Black schools opened in the decades that followed. Black leaders such as the reverends Daniel Coker and William Watkins Sr. had managed, with the consent of self-interested enslavers, to create educational opportunities that benefitted some of the city’s free and enslaved Black community. Local Black schools had an average annual enrollment of 150 students taught by a biracial group of teachers. Black education in Baltimore became synonymous with the goals of attaining freedom and equality. Privately supported antebellum-era schools laid a foundation for postemancipation educational developments. Black men who attended these schools, such as Isaac Myers, later emerged as vocal advocates for the city’s Black public schools.<sup>4</sup>

During the American Civil War, slave-holding Maryland remained loyal to the United States and, in 1864, adopted a new constitution abolishing slavery. The 1864 constitution also established Maryland’s first statewide public school system, but Baltimore did not open a Black public school until 1867. Two organizations played central roles in the establishment of postbellum Black privately funded schools. During the war, Maryland

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<sup>4</sup> Bettye J. Gardner, “William Watkins: Antebellum Black Teacher and Anti-Slavery Writer,” *Negro History Bulletin* 39, no. 6 (1976): 623–25, and “Antebellum Black Education in Baltimore,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 71 (1976): 365–66; W. Ashbie Hawkins, “The Education of Colored Youth in Baltimore Prior to the Inauguration of the Public School System,” *American Association of Educators of Colored Youth*, July 24, 1894, 2–3, Daniel Alexander Payne Murray Collection, 1818–1907, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Christopher Phillips, *Freedom’s Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790–1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 169; Jessie Carney Smith, ed., “Isaac Myers,” *Encyclopedia of African American Business*, vol. 1 (New York: Greenwood, 2006), 551.

Unionists founded the Gailbraith Lyceum to raise funds for the creation of Black schools across the state. Black Baltimorean William E. Matthews served as the organization's agent. Matthews raised funds and opened Black schools statewide.<sup>5</sup> Free Black Christian Fleetwood, a Baltimore native and sugar industry executive, established a weekly newsletter to raise funds for Black schools.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, a group of white Baltimore leaders formed the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People. With funds raised from Quakers, New England abolitionists, European donors, Black business leaders, and Black churches, the Baltimore Association paid teacher salaries, rented buildings, and provided textbooks for indigent students. Like the Gailbraith Lyceum, the Baltimore Association established and supported schools across Maryland. Nelson Wells, a free person of color born in Maryland who died in 1850, bequeathed his estate to the education of Black children. Black citizens across Maryland raised and donated funds for the Baltimore Association. In 1867, Black donations amounted to \$23,371.14 in funding. Black donors represented the association's single largest source of financial support.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790–1860*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Paul Fike, *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the Confines of White Racial Attitudes in Post-Emancipation Maryland* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790–1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 169.



**Figure 68.** Christian Fleetwood, circa 1865. Born a free man, Fleetwood spent his childhood being groomed to become the principal house butler for a prominent Baltimore family. Through a combination of formal education and extensive reading in his employer's library, Fleetwood was handpicked to supervise the family's lucrative sugar industry dealings in Liberia. In 1863, Fleetwood volunteered to serve in the 4th USCT Infantry Regiment. He later earned a Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery at the Battle of Chaffin's Farm. Although Fleetwood did not return to Baltimore after the war, his wartime fundraising and organizational efforts to create Black schools helped lay the foundation for subsequent educational developments.

On January 9, 1865, the Baltimore Association opened Colored Elementary School No. 1 in the African Baptist Church at the corner of Calvert and Saratoga streets—the group’s first Black elementary school. Some sources identify the Crane Building, at the corner of Calvert and Saratoga, as the site of the association’s first Black elementary school. By 1866, the Baltimore Association had established twenty-two privately funded Black schools citywide and dozens more statewide. Funding supported several existing antebellum Free Black schools, such as Sharp Street Methodist Church. The association purchased a few school buildings using small grants received from the Freedmen’s Bureau. The city’s Black schools taught more than 2,800 students annually.<sup>8</sup> “These schools,” announced Baltimore Association Secretary John T. Graham, “are open to all sexes and to all ages above 6 years old. The night school will be open at 8 o’clock for men and women. Parents are invited to send their children to these schools.”<sup>9</sup> The association hired Black educators who often worked alongside white northern missionaries in overcrowded makeshift classrooms. Educators used classrooms day and night to accommodate the large demand. Black businessman Isaac Myers donated the use of a dock workers’ meeting hall for classrooms to provide much-needed space. Most schools either met in local churches, homes, and abandoned warehouses and workshops.<sup>10</sup>

The demand for trained Black educators far outpaced the existing supply. On June 16, 1866, the Baltimore Association opened a Normal School at Colored Elementary School No. 1 to train teachers. By the start of the 1867 school year, four Black educators worked in the Baltimore Association’s schools and an additional twenty-two Black teachers taught in church-funded schools. In 1867, the Baltimore Association used \$3,500 received from Nelson Wells’s estate to create the Baltimore Colored Normal School at Sarasota and Courtland Streets. Modern-day Bowie State University traces its origins to the city’s first Black Normal School. Black school organizers believed that within a few years of normal school operations, Baltimore’s Black schools could be operated entirely by trained and qualified Black educators.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Angela D. Johnson, “The Strayer Survey and the Colored Schools of Baltimore City, 1923–1943” (Master’s thesis, Morgan State University, 2012), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in “Male and Female Colored School No. 1,” The Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture, <https://www.thepealecenter.org/male-and-female-colored-school-no-1-timeline>, accessed by the author, March 5, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Fuke, *Imperfect Equality*, chapter 1.

<sup>11</sup> 1864 Maryland Constitution; Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People, “First Annual Report of the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People,” Anti-Slavery Collection, Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH; William Blair, *The Debates of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Maryland* (Annapolis: R. P. Bayly, 1864), 1251–52. The Baltimore Association struggled to maintain adequate fundraising to support its Black schools. Plus, racial divisions within the organization, as well as racial prejudices held by many white teachers working in Black schools, hampered the organization’s support within Baltimore’s Black community.



Public support for Black education remained nonexistent until 1867. In 1865, Maryland's first State Superintendent of Public Instruction organized a centralized state education system that determined curriculum, selected textbooks, certified teachers, and distributed funds. Maryland made tax revenues received from Black citizens available to local governments for the creation of Black schools. Few local governments took the money, preferring to not create Black schools.<sup>12</sup> Because the constitution offered neither the franchise nor education to freedpeople, private and philanthropic groups stepped in to fill these gaps.

Although many white Baltimoreans opposed Black public schools, John Nelson McJilton, a successful banker who served as the city's first superintendent of public instruction, wholeheartedly endorsed Black public education initiatives. In 1866 and 1867, McJilton moved to establish two publicly funded Black schools in Baltimore despite intense opposition from city school board members. McJilton urged school leaders to consider the long-term benefits that Black public schools offered all Baltimoreans. When McJilton proceeded to open two Black schools without authorization, school board members unanimously voted to oust him from office.

*Colored Children in the City.*—The Rev. Dr. McJilton, city superintendent of public schools, yesterday afternoon presented a communication to the board of school commissioners, giving a statement of the colored children of the city between the ages of 10 and 19 years, as compiled from the books of enrollment of the children generally of the several wards, as follows:

Wards.	Males.	Females.	Total
1st.....	10	16	26
2d.....	129	124	253
3d.....	216	272	488
4th.....	85	115	200
5th.....	407	531	938
6th.....	242	266	508
7th.....	71	106	177
8th.....	35	43	78
9th.....	115	173	288
10th.....	289	403	692
11th.....	253	354	617
12th.....	92	149	241
13th.....	159	197	356
14th.....	130	230	360
15th.....	326	393	719
16th.....	316	395	706
17th.....	44	41	85
18th.....	171	209	380
19th.....	149	259	408
20th.....	248	323	571
<b>Total...</b>	<b>3,482</b>	<b>4,609</b>	<b>8,091</b>

**Figure 69.** Baltimore Superintendent of Public Instruction John McJilton compiled a census of Black children between the ages of 10 and 19 as evidence supporting the dire need for publicly funded Black city schools.

<sup>12</sup> "State Department of Education," *Maryland Manual Online: A Guide to Maryland and Its Government*, <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/13sdoe/html/sdoef.html>, accessed by the author, May 15, 2021; Dennis Patrick Halpin, *A Brotherhood of Liberty: Black Reconstruction and Its Legacies in Baltimore, 1865–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 27.



In 1867, the City of Baltimore took control of the Baltimore Association's Black schools. The move came at the request of Baltimore Association leaders. Despite their advocacy for Black education, the Baltimore Association's expenses far exceeded its members' fundraising capacity. City school officials immediately reduced the amount of time students spent in class daily by half.<sup>13</sup> The all-white school board promptly fired most Black teachers. Hoping to encourage the remaining Black teachers to resign, the city often withheld their pay for months or drastically reduced their salaries. At an 1868 city council meeting, Colored Primary School No. 2 educator Henry Wilson demanded his backpay. When the city delayed payment, Wilson and other Black educators hired an attorney and pursued the matter in state courts.<sup>14</sup> By the end of the 1868 school year, only whites taught in Baltimore's racially segregated school system. From 1868 to 1888, no Black educators worked in the Baltimore city school system. Baltimore's discriminatory hiring policies robbed the city's Black middle class of hundreds of potential public school teaching positions and damaged Black neighborhood economic growth. Black Baltimoreans protested these discriminatory policies regularly over the next twenty years.<sup>15</sup>

Political struggles complicated the protest strategies employed by Black activists and communities. Baltimore's city government remained in the hands of white conservative Democrats who maintained local and state political power and opposed Black civil equality. They perceived Black schools as a threat to their political dominance because most Black men supported the Republican Party. Initially, the city school board did not provide facilities for African American students, and although Black households paid education and property taxes, their contributions went exclusively to the support of white schools. Despite the granting of Black suffrage in 1870, African American leaders struggled to overcome conservative Democratic resistance to Black education. Conservative Democrats relocated schools, removed teachers, and altered start dates without notice. Changes happened without advanced notice. Black students would show up to empty buildings where classes had been held days earlier. Teachers would be laid off in the middle of a school week. Adequate school buildings that had been previously acquired through Black donations and Baltimore Association support were suddenly handed over to white students. The collective impact of these disruptions demoralized some Black parents and students. Some Black students stopped attending school. While the city's Black public schools provided 22 locations for 2,500 students, there were 106 schools—and a city

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<sup>13</sup> Richard P. Fuke, "The Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People, 1864–1870," *Maryland Historical Magazine* (1971), 399–400.

<sup>14</sup> "Proceedings of the City Council," *Baltimore Sun*, January 28, 1868, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Betty C. Thomas, "Public Education and Black Protest in Baltimore, 1865–1900," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 71, no. 3 (1976): 383; Howell S. Baum, *Brown in Baltimore: School Desegregation and the Limits of Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 26. Although no Black teachers worked in the city schools for nearly two decades, many Black educators worked in privately funded Black schools across the city. Most teachers in church-sponsored Black schools were Black.

university—for whites only. The superintendent was not exaggerating much when he noted in the 1867 annual report that “nothing has yet been done for . . . [the education of] colored people . . . by the State.”<sup>16</sup>

As Baltimore’s Black public schools struggled, African American community civic and religious leaders continued to fund a robust network of private and parochial schools across the city. For several years, William Augustine Williams, a Black Catholic educator, operated a “flourishing school in the basement” of the St. Francis Xavier Church (1501 East Oliver Street).<sup>17</sup> During the antebellum period, Jesuit priests in Baltimore sent Williams, a Free Black, to Rome, Italy, to attend seminary at Urban College. In 1862, Williams dropped out of seminary and returned to Baltimore where he became a publisher and vocal supporter of Black emancipation. Williams’s journal, *Truth Communicator*, urged Free Blacks to aid in the emancipation of Black enslaved laborers. A talented writer and gifted teacher, Williams played a central role in the 1863 creation of St. Francis Xavier Church—the first all-Black Catholic Church in America. Williams became a strong advocate for the training and employment of Black educators in Baltimore. When local public schools prohibited the hiring of Black educators, Williams urged Black citizens to enroll their children in private schools staffed by Black teachers to protest that discriminatory policy. Williams launched fundraising campaigns to raise money to support scholarships and tuition waivers for less affluent Black children enrolled in private schools.<sup>18</sup>

In 1868, Black Baltimore residents organized demonstrations and mass meetings to protest the city school system’s refusal to hire Black teachers. At a Douglass Hall mass meeting, organizers George A. Hackett, Dr. H. J. Brown, S. W. Chase, Robert Deaver, and A. W. Handy gathered the concerns of Black parents who “solemnly [protested] against the injustice of the school commissioners in excluding colored teachers and limiting the colored schools to primary education.” By 1870, when Baltimore’s Republican Party failed to produce results, Black leaders considered whether they should throw their newfound voting power behind conservative Democrats in the hopes of attracting more financial support for

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<sup>16</sup> 1867 Maryland Constitution; “Thirty-Ninth Report of the School Commissioners,” 258, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore, MD; School Board Minutes, 1866–1867, Record Group 31, Series 1A, December 3, 1867, Baltimore City Archives; Maryland State Department of Education, *First Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction* (Annapolis: Henry A. Lucas, 1867), 64.

<sup>17</sup> Baltimore’s St. Francis Xavier Church has operated in three different locations since its founding in 1863. The church was located “on the southeast corner of Calvert and Pleasant Streets” when it was created in 1863. In 1932, the church relocated to Eager and Caroline Streets. Today, the church is located at 1501 East Oliver Street. Agnes Kane Callum, “Our Story: A Short History of Historic St. Francis Xavier Church,” Internet Archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120124161603/http://www.josephite.com/parish/md/sfx/page2.html>, accessed by the author, May 12, 2021; Cecelia Gutierrez Venable, “Saint Francis Xavier Catholic Church, Baltimore, Maryland,” *BlackPast*, January 14, 2014, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/saint-francis-xavier-catholic-church>, accessed by the author, May 12, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> T.W.C., “Impressions of Baltimore, No. 3,” *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia), November 10, 1866; Shannen Dee Williams, “Black History Is Catholic History,” *Catholic Review*, February 6, 2020, <https://catholicreview.org/black-history-is-catholic-history>, accessed by the author May 15, 2021; Cyprian Davis, *History of Black Catholics in the United States* (Herder & Herder, 1995), 60, 97.

schools. Robert Deaver, a local Black Republican leader and lawyer, told Black families that local Democrats might trade increased expenditures for Black education in exchange for Black votes. Black leaders routinely mobilized Black communities to form protests and mass meetings to vocalize their dissatisfaction with the city school system. Black activists such as Robert Deaver, Isaac Myers, and George A. Hackett attended numerous school board meetings to present their petitions and make a case for increased funding. The constant pressure applied by Black leaders kept the fight for Black education reform at the forefront of local politics and likely prevented further reductions in resources.<sup>19</sup>

Several issues rose to the forefront throughout these Black community-led protests. First, Black parents wanted additional school buildings erected near their communities. Many Black students had to travel great distances across the city to attend school. Second, Black leaders wanted the city to hire Black educators to teach in Black schools. They did not oppose the hiring of white teachers for Black classrooms but demanded that the city end its discriminatory hiring practices. Black parents also petitioned for the addition of grammar and high school classes to enhance the existing elementary school programs. Activists also urged the city to offer some industrial and vocational training and apprenticeships for Black students.

Petitions from Black leaders Isaac Myers and George A. Hackett urging the board to add new grammar schools (grades 5–8) were met with a half-hearted compromise: the schools were established but, at first, without new buildings to house them. Black leaders remained determined to lobby the city for the creation of new school buildings and more grade levels. In 1869, a committee of Black activists led by Hackett urged city leaders to establish a colored high school and hire Black teachers. Despite Hackett's efforts, the city council tabled the request and indefinitely postponed any further discussion of erecting a Black high school. The council falsely claimed there were too few academically qualified students to justify one. Nonetheless, behind the scenes, the board invited Hackett and Myers to join a biracial committee to investigate suitable buildings.<sup>20</sup> The city's white leaders, however, ignored the committee's recommendations for potential Black high school locations. Fourteen years would pass before Baltimore opened its first Black high school.

Black leaders remained determined in their fight to establish a colored high school. In 1875, another committee of Black leaders, including Rev. J. H. D. Johnson, Henry Jakes, and Henry Bradshaw, gathered names on a petition recommending the city purchase the vacant college building (53 St. Paul Street) for a high school. After a brief investigation, the

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<sup>19</sup> "Colored Mass Meeting," *Baltimore Sun*, July 1, 1868, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Among the petitions was one from "four female pupils of the highest class" at the grammar school, "asking for the creation of a class of higher grade, and stating that the pupils hope the board will 'give them a higher class that they may be an ornament to society.'" "School Board of Baltimore City," *Baltimore Sun*, October 23, 1878.

city council denied the petition's request, citing that existing schools satisfied the needs of local Black students. Prior to 1878, Black leaders filed numerous petitions urging the construction of new school buildings and the expansion of grades without success.

In 1878, a special committee established by the school board recommended the purchase of Old City Hall, also known as the Peale Museum building, for the creation of a new colored school. The new school would combine several existing Black schools into a single location. Although the city spent funds to refurbish the building, the new school was part of a continual effort by the all-white school board to cut spending on Black education. Baltimore's Old City Hall had already become a city landmark. Built in 1814 by Rembrandt Peale, son of famed American portrait artist Charles Willson Peale, the Peale building, a Federal-style townhouse, had operated as one of the nation's first public museums until it closed in 1829 and was purchased by the city government the next year. For forty-five years, the Peale building served as Baltimore's city hall. By 1875, municipal bureaus had outgrown the Peale building, and as soon as \$50 million was allocated for a newer, larger city hall, it was abandoned. To a discerning eye, the property had little to recommend it as an educational facility; assessors noted that it was "too long and narrow...to be properly lighted," and that "no fires could be put up [in] it...until chimney caps are put up." To the all-white school board, who on one hand did not want to finance the construction of new school buildings for Black students and on the other hand faced constant petitions and pressure from Black leaders for new classrooms, the Peale building made for an ideal compromise.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Local Matters," *Baltimore Sun*, September 18, 1878; "School Board of Baltimore City," *Baltimore Sun*, April 23, 1879; Francis F. Beirne, *Baltimore, A Picture History, 1858–1958* (New York: Hastings House, 1957), 39; *City Hall: History of Construction and Dedication* (Baltimore: City Council, 1878); John Dorsey and James D. Dilts, *A Guide to Baltimore Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Centreville, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1981), 86–87; Wilbur Harvey Hunter, *The Peale Museum 1814–1964: The Story of America's Oldest Museum Building* (Baltimore: The Peale Museum, 1964), and *The Peale Family and Peale's Baltimore Museum 1814–1830* (Baltimore: Peale Museum, 1965).





**Figure 70.** Peale Museum / Old City Hall / Male and Female Primary School No. 1, circa 1877



On September 2, 1878, after several months and a \$5,000 renovation, classes for Male and Female Primary School No. 1 opened in the Peale building. Soon, enrollment swelled to over five hundred students, far exceeding classroom capacity. Despite receiving a pittance from public funds, most of the school's students paid a few dollars annually in tuition and book fees. Technically available to all public school students, tuition and fee waivers tended to be reserved for indigent white immigrants' children. With a heavier financial burden already on the families of its students, Male and Female Primary School No. 1 also had to continually justify its existence to a doubtful city government. School board inspectors often underreported the number of Black students enrolled. Armed with those low numbers, inspectors recommended a reduction in the school's staff and funding, citing a lack of commitment by Black parents to their children's education. Black leaders such as Henry Jakes and Henry Bradshaw challenged those reports before the school boards. They painted a different picture as they campaigned for increased allocations.<sup>22</sup> Public funds generously offered to white schools—at a rate nearly five times that of Black schools—were suddenly nonexistent when talk turned to creating more advanced curricula for African American schools in Baltimore. Even the creation of Male and Female Colored School No. 1 in 1878 owed mainly to the consolidation of several smaller schools and the dismissal of excess pupils.<sup>23</sup>

Despite city reports claiming that the Peale building schools “are now occupying their new apartments with better light and ventilation and more comfort than they have ever had since their organization,” overcrowding forced teachers to combine grades. Some students dropped out in frustration. The night school option was also shut off from African Americans when, in March 1878, the city government closed all of them, citing a funding shortfall for teachers' salaries.<sup>24</sup>

Black leaders such as George A. Hackett refused to concede the issue of a publicly supported grammar and high schools for their children. In May 1879, advocates for Black education successfully persuaded the city school board to add a grammar school to the Male and Female Primary School No. 1. The council paid for the refurbishment of three empty rooms at Old City Hall. In the late spring of 1879, Male Grammar School No. 1, colored, opened at Old City Hall. Black parents immediately requested that the new grammar school hire Black teachers or Black assistant teachers to help the school's white educators. Richard Grady, the grammar school's white principal, rejected their request despite white teacher support for the proposal. Two years later, in 1881, Black parents successfully persuaded the city school board to relocate Female Primary School No. 1 from Old City

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<sup>22</sup> “Meeting of the School Board,” *Baltimore Sun*, February 25, 1880, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Maryland State Board of Education, *Report of the Board of State School Commissioners, Shewing the Condition of the Public Schools of Maryland* (Annapolis: S. S. Mills & L. F. Colton, 1872), 6–7.

<sup>24</sup> In 1878, Baltimore spent \$734,548 on white schools and \$59,254 on Black schools. Baltimore Board of Commissioners, Annual Report, 1878, Baltimore City Archives.

Hall to a new location at 61 Saratoga Street. Although the move temporarily helped ease overcrowding, Black activists lobbied to transform the available space at Old City Hall into the city's first Black high school. Throughout 1882, Black leaders pushed school board members to present resolutions for the creation of a Black high school. Finally, on November 1, 1882, the city council adopted a resolution to establish "a high school class" in "connection with colored grammar school No. 1." The new school would be called Colored High and Grammar School. By the end of the 1883 school year, eighteen Black students had enrolled at Colored High and Grammar School.

As the only Black public high school in Baltimore, Colored High and Grammar School attracted Black students citywide. By 1885, Dr. G. L. Staley, school principal, reported the building "totally unfitted to accommodate so many pupils as are crowded into it." More than 650 students had been crammed into 12 classrooms designed to accommodate about 375 students. Staley warned that hundreds of students might die if a fire broke out.

As calls for improved facilities fell upon deaf ears, Colored High and Grammar School students and educators labored to convince white school board members that investments in Black education were worthwhile. The school often invited city and state leaders to tour their classrooms. Black students often performed recitals or participated in demonstrations of their academic skills to impress upon white leaders of their ability to learn. The city newspaper routinely included reports of high numbers of Black students passing exams to be promoted to a higher grade. Reports offered favorable comparisons between white and Black students that displayed similar rates of academic success. Most programs drew rave reviews from white audiences but garnered little additional financial support. To appeal to their white observers, white teachers at Black schools often asked their students to perform patriotic songs to demonstrate their national pride. In April 1885, Colored High and Grammar School students wrote a letter to Baltimore Mayor Ferdinand Latrobe protesting a planned performance of the song "Dixie." Adopted by the Confederate States of America as a national anthem, "Dixie" had remained popular in postbellum America and was often performed as a public declaration of continued support for the defeated Confederacy and the white supremacist ideals it espoused. Black students complained of "the indignity about being heaped upon us by our teachers in compelling us to sing 'Dixie.'" Black students especially complained about the song's lyrics: "I'll live and die in Dixie." Despite their protests, the Colored High and Grammar School performed "Dixie" during that year's Easter Sunday program. White audience members applauded the performance. Meanwhile, Black parents and community members emerged from that performance determined to push for more Black teachers and principals in city Black schools.



**Figure 71.** Brotherhood of Liberty, circa 1900

A few weeks later, six Baltimore Black ministers founded the Brotherhood of Liberty. In the fall of 1885, their organization invited famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass to rally Black communities behind a coordinated campaign for civil equality. The Brotherhood of Liberty demanded statewide improvements in Black education funding

and facilities. Their organization attracted the support of several prominent white Baltimore leaders: G. S. Griffith, Charles W. Slagle, and Francis O. Stevens. Together, they formed a biracial campaign to build a new Black high school. On April 21, 1886, the Brotherhood of Liberty persuaded the Baltimore city council to allocate \$32,000 for the construction of a new Black high and grammar school. Black parents successfully lobbied to locate the school on Saratoga Street so more Black students could attend from the city's far-flung Black neighborhoods. Two years later, their efforts convinced the city school board to end its total prohibition against the hiring of Black teachers. On October 5, 1888, the city school board hired Roberta Sheridan to fill a position at Waverly public school. Sheridan became the first Black teacher hired in Baltimore's public schools since 1868.<sup>25</sup>



**Figure 72.** Peale Museum / Old City Hall / Colored Grammar School No. 1, circa 1930

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<sup>25</sup> Baltimore Board of Commissioners, Annual Report, 1888, Baltimore City Archives.





**Figure 73.** Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture.  
This extant historic building is located at 224 Holliday Street.

On October 10, 1888, Black community leaders and the city school board dedicated the “New Colored High School.” Classes began two months later. The Saratoga Street building was significantly larger than Old City Hall, with twenty-four classrooms and separate offices for teachers. Improved ventilation also ensured that Black students would have a fresh supply of air and adequate heating during cold winter months. The new building could hold 1,200 students. Although Black leaders welcomed the high school’s improvements, complaints remained about severely overcrowded Black classrooms city-wide. After Colored High and Grammar School No. 1 opened, Black leaders called for the creation of a second public high school as well as the addition of new vocational training schools. Black leaders never stopped lobbying for school improvements.

On June 29, 1889, Colored High School No. 1 held its first graduation ceremony conferring degrees to nine students. Among those graduates was Gertrude Deaver, the daughter of Black activist Robert Deaver. In 1890, the city school board approved a plan to allow graduates of the city’s sole public Black high school to apply for teaching positions at



city Black schools. By the early 1900s, Colored High School No. 1 graduates could be found in classrooms across the city. In the decades that followed, Colored High School No. 1 helped lay the foundation for the future expansion of Black public education in Baltimore.

Eight years after its first move, the high school played host to the most renowned Black Marylander, abolitionist and civil activist Frederick Douglass. Speaking at the 1894 commencement ceremonies, Douglass evinced unabashed pride in what the institution stood for. According to the *Baltimore Sun*, he declared that “the Colored High School. . . proves that Baltimore is fully abreast of the chief cities of the American Union. All America,” Douglass hoped, would “imitate [it] in giving education to the colored man.” And to those who doubted whether the school was worth the time, trouble, and expense that had gone into it, he offered a prophecy. “Happily for us,” Douglas intoned, “the [academic] upstarts of today will be the elite tomorrow.”<sup>26</sup>

Male and Female School No. 1 remained at Old City Hall until the fall of 1889. Unfortunately, the city school board relocated the students to the new Colored High School No. 1 building. Overcrowding again became an issue as the high school campus’s total enrollment far exceeded its previous maximum capacity of 1,200. The school board ignored calls for building a second Black high school. Colored High No. 1 remained on Saratoga Street until 1900, when it relocated to the corner of Dolphin Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. In 1920, the school was renamed in honor of abolitionist Frederick Douglass.<sup>27</sup>

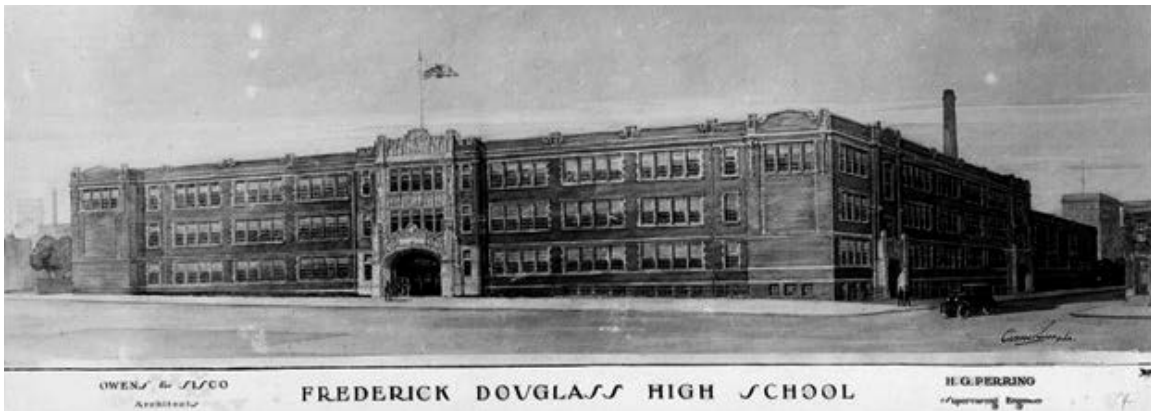
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<sup>26</sup> “Frederick Douglass,” *Baltimore Sun*, June 23, 1894.

<sup>27</sup> “Douglass, Dunbar, Coppin Trace Back Roots,” *Baltimore Sun*, October 12, 1983, 62. While at the formal dedication the mayor focused on the building itself, “a credit to the city and the contractor” and an “excellent location,” African American spokesmen emphasized the impending new opportunities for Black educators, “Colored High School,” *Baltimore Sun*, October 11, 1888. Today, the Samuel Coleridge Taylor Elementary School occupies the site of the second Colored High School location.



**Figure 74.** From 1900 to 1925, the Colored High School was located in this building on the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Dolphin Street. In 1925, the high school relocated to Calhoun and Baker Street. The building no longer exists. Today, the Furman Templeton Elementary School occupies this site. School #450-A. Pennsylvania Avenue and Dolphin Street. 1893, Baltimore City Buildings Photograph Collection, PP236.1462, Maryland Historical Society.



**Figure 75.** Frederick Douglass High School, circa 1925. This extant historic building is located at North Calhoun and Baker Streets in Baltimore, Maryland. The school operated here from 1925 to 1954. Today, Frederick Douglass High School is located at 2301 Gwynns Falls Parkway. Enoch Pratt Free Library / State Library Resource Center.



**Figure 76.** Frederick Douglass High School, Calhoun and Baker Streets. This extant historic building has been converted into a residential apartment complex.

Colored High School No. 1 relocated again in 1925 to the corner of Calhoun and Baker Streets. Frederick Douglass High School had both white and Black superintendents and included advanced facilities such as a gymnasium, library, cafeteria, and restrooms. Thurgood Marshall, future civil rights litigator and the first Black justice of the United States Supreme Court, was among Frederick Douglass High School's inaugural graduating class. The sole Black public high school in Baltimore until 1940 (when Paul Dunbar High opened), Douglass High School moved to its current location in 1954 when the city's school system integrated. Today, 99.9 percent of the student body identifies as African American.

From its inception at the Peale Museum / Old City Hall to its multiple relocations across Baltimore, Frederick Douglass High School embodies the hard-fought victories of the city's Black community to secure publicly funded schools. According to Baltimore historian Brian C. Morrison, the Peale building "is a symbol of progress towards the African American community's struggle to gain full access to the city's public schools. Serving as the location for the first colored high school in the city, a major victory and milestone for Baltimore's African American community."<sup>28</sup> Douglass High School's founding owed everything to late-nineteenth-century Black activists such as Isaac Myers, Robert

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<sup>28</sup> Brian C. Morrison, "The Legacy of the Peale Building and African-American Education," The Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture, <https://www.thepealecenter.org/19th-c-african-american-education-in-baltimore>, accessed by the author, July 1, 2021.

Deaver, and George A. Hackett, and organizations such as the Brotherhood of Liberty, who overcame enormous racial discrimination to persuade the city's white-dominated government to invest in Black education.



**Figure 77.** Frederick Douglass High School, 2302 Gwynns Falls Parkway, Baltimore, Maryland





**Figure 78.** Frederick Douglass High School Alumni Association, Baltimore, Maryland



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