

EQUAL ENDEAVOR: AN INTERRACIAL ALLIANCE'S POST-EMANCIPATION
PURSUIT OF COLORBLIND CITIZENSHIP IN THE US CAPITAL

by

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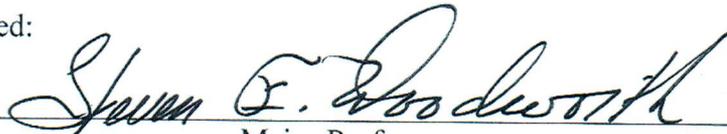
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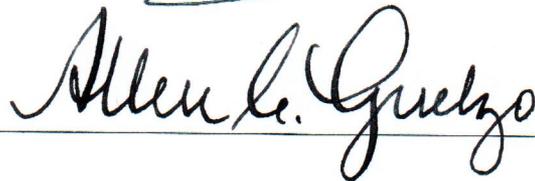
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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the Black pursuit of equality in the US capital during the postemancipation period. It places the interracial alliance developed by prewar political abolitionists in the Colored Conventions Movement and American Missionary Association at the center of the pursuit for a colorblind citizenry and traces this coalition's efforts into the Reconstruction era. I argue that these Black and white abolitionists formed a coalition premised on the shared belief in an equal colorblind citizenry, one which emphasized the New England values of settled living, industrious labor, and an embrace of a broadly defined Christian faith. During the Civil War and Reconstruction, a significant number of these advocates settled in Washington, DC, to petition Congress and the president to pass and support legislation aimed at a total transformation of society. Obstacles including the pervasiveness of white supremacy in both the North and South and resistance from liberated freedpeople, who had their own concepts of equality, weakened the alliance and paved the way for its ultimate decline and the entrenchment of Black second-class citizenship by the end of the nineteenth century. I base these conclusions on the analysis of convention and annual meeting minutes, letters, judicial rulings, and legislative action. I address the subject matter chronologically beginning with the start of this

interracial alliance in the antebellum era until it's fracturing during the latter years of Reconstruction. The dissertation challenges the typical timeline of Reconstruction and demonstrates both the potential and limits of interracial cooperation in the postemancipation era. Although these race progressives failed to achieve their vision in the nineteenth century, they helped lay the groundwork for future progress.

INTRODUCTION

On May 15, 1865, just over a month after General Robert E. Lee had surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Union General Ulysses S. Grant, Freedmen's Bureau Commissioner Oliver Otis Howard issued his first circular declaring that "the Negro should understand that he is really free"¹ Howard's declaration on the heels of the nation's costliest war spoke to a new social reality beginning to emerge across the defeated Confederacy, Black liberty. But what it tangibly meant for freedpeople to be "really free" remained undetermined at this early moment in Reconstruction. From President Andrew Johnson's perspective, it meant the end of slavery and included the expectation that freedpeople would quickly relieve themselves of government aid and assume productive employment. For southern whites, it involved freedpeople "freely" resuming their former positions as laborers under new contract terms that favored their former masters while also agreeing to uphold the region's societal norms of white supremacy. Within a relatively short period of time, the majority of northern whites came to accept white southerners' interpretation believing that bringing about the end of slavery and establishing freedom was an end in and of itself. Freedpeople, however, entered the postemancipation era with their own ideas of what it meant to be really free, and in their minds, it involved being placed on an equal footing with whites and included land-ownership, independence, and government protection of their rights as citizens. Finally, there existed a small but influential interracial alliance of former abolitionists determined to implement their prewar goals of equal citizenship to transform the country into a truly interracial Republic. Each of these

¹ Oliver Otis Howard, Circular Letter, May 15, 1865 in United States, Freedmen's Bureau, Records of the Commissioner, 1865-1872," Selected Series, Roll 7, Circulars issued, May 1865 - June 1869; Oliver O. Howard, *Autobiography*, vol. 2 vols. (New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, 1907), 2:207-08 and Leon F. Litwack, *Been In the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 382.

individuals and groups exerted themselves in the key postwar battleground of Washington DC intent on seeing their vision become a reality.

In the recent PBS documentary on Reconstruction, Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s defined the era as "one of the most important and consequential chapters in American history that is also among the most overlooked, misunderstood and misrepresented."² Historian James Kettner, in the epilogue of his incisive work, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1608-1870*, offers a possible framework and suggests that the Civil War and Reconstruction era should be analyzed in light of the nation's long-standing and sectionally divisive debates over citizenship.³ He sees the second half of the nineteenth century as the culmination of the struggle to definitively answer who formed the body politic, what were the terms of inclusion, and what rights necessarily followed. Over the course of the two centuries preceding the war, Americans had first thrown off their status of subjects to King George III and replaced that status with an ambiguously defined concept of national belonging rooted in more meaningful state citizenship. Attempts to control immigration and the entrenchment of slavery across the South left the enslaved and non-whites outside of the body politic. Despite the egalitarian language of the Declaration of Independence, by the first few decades of the nineteenth century, Indian removal and the rise of the American Colonization Society (ACS) suggested that the nation intended to become a white Republic.

The existence of a growing and increasingly activist free Black community in the North, however, complicated matters. Unequivocally dedicated to securing inclusion into the national body as equal citizens, free blacks employed history, the Bible, and the nation's founding documents to reprimand the nation's white Protestant majority for denying them the status and

² <http://www.pbs.org/about/blogs/news/pbs-announces-reconstruction-america-after-the-civil-war/>.

³ James H. Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1608-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 334-51.

rights they deserved and which they believed were justly owed. Northern Blacks' determination to remain in the country of their birth alongside their widespread rejection of the ACS's voluntary emigration scheme and demands for immediate abolition began to attract a growing number of sympathetic whites who had previously adhered to either emigration or gradual emancipation.

By the 1830s, interracial abolition societies were rapidly appearing across the North with a common goal – an immediate end to slavery and equal citizenship for Blacks. The American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), founded in 1833, stood at the forefront of these organizations and brought together prominent black and white abolitionists including William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Dwight Weld, Wendell Phillips, James G. Birney, and the New York City silk merchant, Lewis Tappan alongside Samuel Cornish, George T. Downing, Robert Purvis, James Forten, and Henry Highland Garnet. The association also attracted leading female activists including Lydia Maria Child, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Abby Kelley Foster, and Lucretia Mott, among others. Emerging simultaneously alongside these interracial alliances was the Black-led Colored Conventions Movement (CCM) consisting of state-level and national conventions held from 1829 throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. These conventions brought together Black elites from across the North and border region to strategize and petition states and the federal government for equal citizenship.

In 1840, a schism occurred within the abolitionist movement over the role of women and split the movement into two camps, the more socially progressive Garrisonian wing and the more traditional and largely evangelical Tappan wing with Blacks caught in the middle. While Garrison held onto the AASS, the Tappan wing formed the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS) in 1840 followed six years later by the more influential American Missionary

Association (AMA). From its founding, the AMA established itself as the leading interracial society of the prewar era by placing more Blacks in positions of authority than any other abolitionist society.⁴ The AMA's interracial makeup meant it shared key members with the CCM, and collectively they united around a common goal: a colorblind casteless citizenship comprised of virtuous citizens who were industrious, moral, educated, and broadly Protestant. This equal endeavor, consisting of a shared vision and pursuit for impartial citizenship, allowed the two groups to maintain an alliance into the Civil War and Reconstruction eras when they descended on the capital with the settled belief that the war and postwar years were a divinely ordained opportunity to actualize their goal of societal transformation.

This vision, a minority view among white northerners, stood in direct contrast to that of the South's slaveholding oligarchy which vehemently maintained a society grounded in white supremacy, a view articulated perhaps most clearly in Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephen's cornerstone speech of March 21, 1861 where he unapologetically defended both slavery and white supremacy. Secessionists preyed on the amalgamationist fears of their neighbors and argued that the Republicans desired to make the Black man their equal. Therefore, in the absence of a federal government dedicated to defending slavery and white southern values, secessionists employed states' rights doctrine to advocate for disunion, arguing that state sovereignty preceded national sovereignty.⁵ Thus Kettner notes that through combining these

⁴ Clara Merritt DeBoer, *His Truth Is Marching On: African Americans Who Taught the Freedmen for the American Missionary Association, 1861-1877* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 102-04 and Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York, N.Y: Da Capo Press, 1991), 79-80. See also Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626 – 1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 224 and Clara Merritt DeBoer, *Be Jubilant My Feet: African American Abolitionists in the American Missionary Association, 1839-1861* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 86-87. Prominent black leaders included: Theodore Sedgwick Ward (NY) and Samuel Ringgold Ward (NY) who both served as Vice Presidents while Charles Bennett Ray (NY) Samuel E. Cornish (NY) and James William Charles Pennington (NY) joined Theodore Sedgwick Ward on the Executive Committee.

⁵ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 240-46.

two ideas in the months before the war, the South's position had crystalized, "citizenship was properly defined with reference to the states and rightly confined to the white population." The North, however, in electing Republican Abraham Lincoln set the country on course to establish national authority as preeminent and from this would follow an opportunity to establish a new definition of citizenship. In the words of Lincoln in 1861, "The States have their status in the Union, and they have no other legal status. If they break from this, they can do so only against law and by revolution." In losing the war, white southerners lost the ability to maintain their localized and discriminatory view of citizenship. During Reconstruction, the victorious North strove to extend its ideas of national sovereignty over the South and "to resolve authoritatively the problems of citizenship that had plagued the Republic since its founding."⁶

According to Kettner's view then, the three Reconstruction amendments, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth, alongside the Civil Rights Acts of 1866 and 1875 should be understood in terms of establishing national citizenship and defining the rights or "privileges and immunities" it entailed. With the Thirteenth Amendment, Congress expunged the status of "slave" in the Constitution. The Fourteenth Amendment determined that one's national status was primary, granted at birth, and directly connected to loyalty. Finally, the Fifteenth Amendment established male enfranchisement as a political right associated with citizenship. For their part, the Civil Rights Acts of 1866 and 1875 intended to flesh out the civic and social rights connected with citizenship. Viewed in this way, the true failure of Reconstruction then becomes the reestablishment of states' rights doctrine which prevented Black Americans from attaining their rights as equal citizens leading to the rise of a second-class citizenship seen in the entrenchment of Jim Crow by the end of the century.

⁶ Kettner, *Development of American Citizenship*, 334, 338-39.

Only recently have scholars begun to explore the Reconstruction era in terms of citizenship and the religio-racial parameters governing national belonging that included debates not only about African Americans, but Native Americans and Chinese immigrants as well.⁷ And yet while each of these recent works recognize the importance of the executive, legislative, and judicial action that emerged from Washington, DC, none of them place the capital at the center of their narratives. This omission remains despite the fact that some of the most critical elements of citizen-related societal transformation were test-driven in this federally controlled territory including emancipation, free labor experiments, and black male enfranchisement. The neglect of the capital can be traced back to the publication of Constance Green's impressive and exhaustively researched two volume work on the region in the 1960s.⁸ Recently, however, scholars have begun to reexamine Washington DC as a critical region during Reconstruction.⁹

With Lincoln's victory in 1860, the city changed hands from the pro-slavery Democratic administration of James Buchanan to the non-expansionist view of the Republican Party. This reality portended significant changes for the capital, which had long established itself as friendly

⁷ Eric Foner, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019); Christopher James Bonner, *Remaking the Republic: Black Politics and the Creation of American Citizenship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); Erik Mathisen, *Loyal Republic: Traitors, Slaves, and the Remaking of Citizenship in Civil War America*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Elizabeth L. Jemison, *Christian Citizens: Reading the Bible in Black and White in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Jennifer Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2018); and Derek Chang, *Citizens of a Christian Nation: Evangelical Missions and the Problem of Race in the Nineteenth Century*, Politics and Culture in Modern America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

⁸ Constance Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962) and Constance Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967). Green, however, does not consider the District in terms of the debates over citizenship in the postwar era.

⁹ Robert Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction: Race and Radicalism* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Kate Masur, *Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle Over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013). While Harrison draws attention to how the capital transitioned from a southern city to a northern one during Abraham Lincoln's presidency and in the years after when freedpeople enjoyed increased civil rights, Masur explores the multifaceted ways in which the District's freedpeople fought for various forms of equality.

to slavery by embracing of the views of its southern neighbors in Maryland and Virginia. The onset of war hastened a transformation of the capital as the population doubled in the ensuing four years due to the presence of Union troops and the tens of thousands of self-liberating men and women who fled Maryland and Virginia.¹⁰ Additionally, secession brought about the departure of a large number of Democratic congressmen from the South and left Republicans in control of both chambers, an unprecedented reality that provided them the opportunity to alter both the political and social makeup of the city. Despite resistance from local whites, Congressional Republicans had by April 1862 implemented a loyalty oath for government workers, established an independent police force, and abolished slavery in the city. Two years later, they successfully amended the charter of Metropolitan Railroad to outlaw discrimination. As the Civil War came to a close in early 1865, Washington was poised to play, in the words of historian Robert Harrison, a “pivotal role in the articulation of the congressional program of Reconstruction.”¹¹

The transition from the pro-slavery administration of James Buchanan to the pro-freedom administration of Abraham Lincoln in early 1861 began to attract members and agents of the AMA and CCM into the city where they could better exert pressure on Congress and the president for action to establish equal citizenship. They also came with the intent to demonstrate the possibility and viability of a truly interracial Republic beginning with the establishment of free labor principles and the sending of missionaries and teachers to perform religious and educational uplift of the freedpeople. Members from these two groups were instrumental in the

¹⁰ Harrison, *Washington During Civil War*, 23, and 27-29. See also Allan John Johnston, “Surviving Freedom: The Black Community of Washington, D. C., 1860 – 1880,” PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1980. Johnston reveals that between the census years of 1860 and 1880, Washington’s black population grew from 10,983 to 48,377, and from 18 to 32.5 percent of the city’s total. That rate of growth was not equaled by any city of comparable size anywhere in the United States. Moreover, it soon gave Washington the largest black community in the country, 8.

¹¹ Harrison, *Washington During Civil War*, 13. For Metropolitan Railroad see Masur, *An Example for all the Land*, 106.

establishment of First Congregational Church and Howard University, models of the key social institutions of Congregationalism which were open to all regardless of race or gender.

While the dominant Protestant denominations, the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians and even the African Methodist Episcopal Church operated within the District decades before the war, Congregationalism, which traced its American history to seventeenth-century separatists, arrived to the city late but with much fanfare nonetheless. Congregationalists, who traced their history in North America to immigrating English Puritans in 1620, aligned themselves with John Winthrop's vision of establishing "a city on a hill." Twenty-eight years after their arrival, church leaders met and agreed upon the Cambridge Platform of 1648, which established a distinctive church polity that emphasized local church autonomy and a church membership limited to confessing believers and their children.¹² Of the principal Protestant denominations, New England Congregationalists witnessed the gradual decline of slavery in their respective states in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries emerged as the polity most open to anti-slavery sentiment. Indeed, while Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterian churches split in the 1840s over slavery, Congregationalists remained united around the ideal of ending slavery even if individual church autonomy precluded a unified approach and future vision of society.¹³ By the start of the Civil War, the majority of Congregationalists stood firmly in the abolitionist camp. At the 1865 National Congregational Council in Boston, the first in over two hundred years, Congregational polities were reevaluated and agreement on distinctives emerged that emphasized cooperation among Congregational churches despite individual church autonomy, ecclesiastic democracy in

¹² Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 38-44.

¹³ John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1984), 174-76. On church splits in the 1840s, see C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1985).

regard to leadership, and in what became a contentious issue at First Congregational in Washington D.C., membership was to be determined by “credible evidence of piety” alone.¹⁴

Congregationalism officially arrived in the capital during the waning years of the war, a few years removed from the Republican shift that had been brought about by Lincoln’s presidency, which saw a significant number of abolitionist-minded and Congregationalist-leaning cabinet members and federal employees come to the city. The arrival of these individuals marked a change in the fortunes for the denomination. Previously, Congregationalism had been limited to the New England states and the western frontier. Due to its antislavery leanings, it was unable to capitalize on the explosive religious growth that took place across the South during the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century.¹⁵ However, in November 1865, just three years after President Lincoln signed the bill to end slavery in the District, First Congregational was officially organized and began meeting.¹⁶

At the moment when their vision appeared on the cusp of reality, the unity that had marked the alliance between the AMA and CCM during the antebellum era and Civil War, however, began to fray in the postwar years as outside forces exerted their influence. During Reconstruction, unforeseen obstacles to the achievement of equal citizenship emerged in the form of national reunification grounded in white supremacy, Supreme Court rulings, the deaths of key AMA leaders alongside the AMA’s own growing disenchantment with the freedpeople who possessed their own conceptions of independence and citizenship. As a result, the alliance crumbled and by the end of the nineteenth century, discrimination and segregation stood in the

¹⁴ John Von Rohr, *The Shaping of American Congregationalism, 1620-1957* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1992), 291-98; see also Joe Martin Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), vii.

¹⁵ Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166.

¹⁶ Everett O. Alldredge, *Centennial History of First Congregational United Church of Christ, Washington, D.C., 1865-1965* (Baltimore: Port City Press, 1965), 1-10.

place of the long-sought dreams of equal citizenship. Before proceeding further, however, it is vital to understand the key developments surrounding the concept and meaning of American citizenship to appreciate the antebellum-era alliance that emerged between the CCM and the founders of the AMA. This background will also shed light on the arguments employed by these black and white political-abolitionists who agitated for a color-blind casteless citizenship inclusive of basic rights against the majority of the nation's whites who envisioned a white republic.

When English colonists arrived on North American shores, they did so not as citizens but as subjects of the King of England, a legal standing, which according to the preeminent English jurist, Sir Edward Coke, involved reciprocal obligations: "the subject oweth to the king his true and faithful ligeance and obedience, so the sovereign is to govern and protect his subjects."¹⁷ This relationship remained largely intact and unchanged until the eighteenth century when John Locke's theories on governance and social order gained popularity. Locke rejected Coke's hierarchical order of society and the "old notions of the divine or patriarchal right of kings." Locke instead articulated a view in which the structure of society and government took on the form of a "social compact in which free individuals voluntarily joined together to form communities." This social compact involved individuals freely setting aside their natural independence for a government that would promise to protect their most essential liberties. In this sort of community, "individual men submitted to majority rule and delegated power to government in order that they might better protect and enjoy the liberty that was their inherent,

¹⁷ Kettner, *Development of American Citizenship*, 18. For more on Coke's view of subjects, their responsibilities and privileges, see 17-28.

natural, and inalienable right.”¹⁸

At the moment when the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, a new era dawned, one that saw English colonists sever their allegiance to England as subjects of King George III and declare loyalty to individual and independent states. Following on the heels of the Declaration, new state constitutional conventions took place across the states and one of the key issues concerned outlining a framework for state citizenship including its privileges and responsibilities. Ultimately, the states adopted Lockean language and declared that “citizenship in the new republics would rest on individual consent.”¹⁹ In New England, Vermont copied Pennsylvania’s clause in their constitution of 1776 which allowed settlers “of good character” who took “an oath or affirmation of allegiance” to the state to acquire “land or other real estate.” After one year, a resident was to be deemed a “free denizen,” entitled to “all the rights of a natural born subject of this state, except that he shall not be capable of being elected a representative until after two years residence.”²⁰ The staunchly Congregationalist states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut all assumed the right to naturalize individuals in their respective states and included no racial qualifier.²¹ Even New York’s constitution of 1777, like that of Pennsylvania and Vermont, lacked a racial component and left naturalization in the hands of its legislature.²²

¹⁸ John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government: And, A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Dover Thrift Editions (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2002), 57-59; Kettner, *Development of American Citizenship*, 44. For more on Locke’s view of the social compact, see 44-64.

¹⁹ Kettner, *Development of American Citizenship*, 194.

²⁰ Pennsylvania constitution (Sept. 28, 1776), sec. 42, Francis Newton Thorpe, *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the State, Territories, and Colonies Now Or Heretofore Forming the United States of America*, 7 vols. (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1909)., 5:3,091; Vermont constitution (July 8, 1776), Art. XLIII, Thorpe, ed. and comp., *Constitutions, Charters, and Laws*, 6:3,748.

²¹ Kettner, *Development of American Citizenship*, 217.

²² New York constitution (Apr. 20, 1777), Art. XLII, Thorpe, ed. and comp., *Constitutions, Charters, and Laws*, 5: 2,637-2,638. Article XLII simply stated that those who wished “to settle in and become subjects of this State, shall take an oath of allegiance to this State, and abjure and renounce all allegiance and subjection to all and every foreign king, prince, potentate, and State in all matters, ecclesiastical as well as civil.”

Across the South, constitutional conventions proceeded along a similar timeline but when it came to the concept of citizenship, a key qualifier appeared. In 1779, Virginia declared: “Be it enacted by the General Assembly, That all *white persons* born within the territory of this commonwealth, and all who have resided therein two years next before the passing of this act . . . shall be deemed citizens of this commonwealth . . .”²³ Further south, in 1784, South Carolina passed “An Act to Confer the Rights of Citizenship on Aliens” in which it noted “that *all free white persons* (alien enemies, fugitives from justice, and persons banished from either of the United States excepted,) who now are, and subscribing the oath of affirmation of allegiance . . . be deemed citizens, and entitled to all the rights, privileges and immunities to the character belonging . . .”²⁴ Finally, in line with its neighbor to the north, Georgia reorganized its naturalization procedures in 1785 and pointed out the mode by which all “*free white persons*” might be admitted as citizens.²⁵ Despite the South’s racial disqualifiers, Black and white abolitionists would continue their appeals for full Black inclusion into the body politic. They based their claims on a variety of factors including the famous revolutionary language concerning the equality of man, Black support for the revolutionary cause, both on and off the battlefield, and Black admittance into the body politic in the majority of states in the late eighteenth century.

The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union, ratified by the states in 1781, complicated the situation by including an extensive initial statement on national citizenship, at least when compared to that contained in the Constitution seven years later, and declared:

The better to secure and perpetuate mutual friendship and intercourse among the people of the different states in this union, the free inhabitants of each of these states (paupers,

²³ Hening, ed., *Statutes of Va.*, X, 129-130.

²⁴ Act of March 26, 1784 in Thomas Cooper and David J. McCord, eds., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C., 1836-1841), IV, 600-601.

²⁵ Act of February 7, 1785, *Col. Recs. Ga.*, XIX, pt. ii, 375-378.

vagabonds, and fugitives from justice excepted) shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of free citizens in the several states; and the people of each state shall have free ingress and regress to and from any other state, and shall enjoy therein all the privileges of trade and commerce, subject to the same duties, impositions, and restrictions, as the inhabitants thereof respectively; provided, that such restrictions shall not extend so far as to prevent the removal of property imported into any state, to any other state of which the owner is an inhabitant; provided also, that no imposition, duties, or restrictions, shall be laid by any state on the property of the United States, or either of them.²⁶

When the Constitution was ratified in 1788, only two statements appeared which directly pertained to citizenship. The first from Article II, Sec I, stated that the President must be “a natural born Citizen,” lending weight to future arguments in favor of citizenship by national birthright. Secondly, in Article IV, a much condensed statement of citizenship appeared which simply stated: “The Citizens of each State shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States.”²⁷ Despite its brevity, the statement carried over the idea popularized during the Revolution in which state citizenship transcended the concept of national belonging which remained somewhat ethereal.²⁸ Critical to the future arguments of abolitionists, no racial qualifier appeared in either statement. In comparing these brief statements with that of the Articles of Confederation, legal scholars Randy Barnett and Evan Bernick observe a few important changes indicative of the emerging fight between slaveowners and the proponents of interracial liberty. ““Whereas all ‘free inhabitants’ could claim the privileges and immunities of free citizens” under the Articles, only citizens could do so under the Constitution. The change, in

²⁶ Articles of Confederation, Art. IV, Sec. II.

²⁷ US Constitution, Art. IV, Sec. II. At this stage, the important “privileges and immunities” clause focused on “intrastate equality,” but it would come to play an important role in the debates of civil rights in the nineteenth century. Barnett and Bernick observe, “For the most part, however, courts did not hold that the clause secured the enjoyment of a set of fundamental rights associated with national citizenship that states could not deny to citizens coming from other states.” Randy E. Barnett, Evan D. Bernick, *Original Meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment: Its Letter and Spirit* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021), 63. See also Kate Masur, *Until Justice Be Done: America’s First Civil Rights Movement, From the Revolution to Reconstruction*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021), 41, and 44-45.

²⁸ Kettner, *Development of American Citizenship*, 213-47; see also Van Gosse, *First Reconstruction: Black Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 36.

line with South Carolina's racial qualifier, was suggested by John Rutledge of South Carolina, the proslavery representative of the convention's most proslavery state delegation” For New Englanders, one benefit of the shortened statement, however, centered on the fact that the Constitution's language “removed the exclusion of “paupers and vagabonds,” thus ensuring that the enjoyment of the privileges and immunities of citizenship was not tied to financial status.”²⁹ This language, as will be seen, held important implications for freemen during the antebellum era which saw both proslavery and antislavery advocates argue over the status of the nation's growing Black population.

The final points of reference which informed citizenship debates in the years prior to the rise of immediatism include the Naturalization Act of 1790, wherein Congress assumed the right to naturalize foreigners, a right the Supreme Court affirmed in *Chirac v. Chirac* (1817), the controversy over Missouri's constitution in 1820-21, and the critically important case on the meaning of the “privileges and immunities” clause in *Corfield v. Coryell* (1825) which remained the established precedent until the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. During the Early Republic and into the Antebellum Era, states maintained control over the definition of citizenship within their borders, while the Constitution granted Congress the right to establish rules of naturalization for immigrants. When passed, the Naturalization Act of 1790 included several qualifications including race, time, morality, and allegiance indicating the ideal candidates for inclusion into the new American republic. The Act stated:

That any Alien being a free white person, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof on application to any common law Court . . . making proof to the satisfaction of such Court that he is a person of good character . . . and taking the oath

²⁹ Barnett and Bernick, *Original Meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment*, 55. For more on struggle between proslavery and anti-slavery forces during the Constitutional Convention, see Sean Wilentz, *No Property in Man: Slavery and Antislavery at the Nation's Founding* (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press, 2019), 58-114.

or affirmation prescribed by law to support the Constitution of the United States . . . thereupon such person shall be considered as a Citizen of the United States.³⁰

When combined with the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which included language that banned slavery from the territories, a power of Congress not relinquished in the Constitution, the right of naturalization strongly implied that Congress possessed the power to shape the national body politic despite state power to control definitions within its borders. What would happen when new states sought to join the Union remained to be seen as the nation's future shifted westward with the Louisiana Purchase.³¹

The issues of federalism and its corollary, intrastate equality, emerged most decisively in 1819-20 as Congress considered Missouri's constitution which sought to bar free Blacks from entering its borders, a seemingly clear violation of the "privileges and immunities" clause. As noted by one historian, the crisis "provided an arena for representatives of Upper New England to assert their region's nonracial citizenship . . . with black citizenship emerging as a centrifugal force that might split the nation." If Missouri refused to recognize black citizens of New England, it violated the power of these states to confer meaningful rights upon a portion of its political body. "Privately, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams told the Pennsylvania Republican Henry Baldwin that if Adams 'were a member of the Legislature' he would denaturalize Missourians, and make them 'aliens within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.'"³² It never came to this, however, as ultimately in early 1821, a compromise, put forth by Kentucky Congressman Henry Clay, passed. Under the terms of the compromise, Missouri would become a state as long as its legislature agreed to ignore the controversial part of

³⁰ United States Congress, "An act to establish a uniform Rule of Naturalization" (March 26, 1790).

³¹ Kettner, *Development of American Citizenship*, 238-39; despite passage of the Northwest Ordinance, slavery already existed in the territories along the Mississippi guaranteeing that the issue remained before the public. See Masur, *Until Justice Be Done*, 12-13.

³² Gosse, *First Reconstruction*, 191.

its state constitution and refused to enact any legislation based on it.³³ Outraged, Upper New England, now including Maine, “all affirmed color-blind citizenship.” Importantly, as Van Gosse notes, Congressional compromise did not indicate sectional compromise as “the Yankee Republic and like-minded expatriates across New York and the Midwest had not actually conceded to the South. In a guarded, half-conscious fashion, they had begun to fight.”³⁴

Two years after the “Missouri Compromise,” the most important legal case to address the rights of citizenship came before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in *Corfield v. Coryell* (1823). The case centered on both the commerce clause and privileges and immunities clause with the intention of clarifying what rights if any a non-resident had to collect oysters in New Jersey where state law prohibited non-residents from such activity. In his ruling, US Circuit Judge Bushrod Washington found in favor of New Jersey stating that in regard to the commerce clause, states had the right to “legislate upon all subjects of internal police within their territorial limits.” Next, he provided clarity to the rights connected with the heretofore ambiguous “privileges and immunities” clause. Judge Washington found that the “privileges and immunities” clause included the natural rights of “the enjoyment of life and liberty,” as well as the right to “pursue happiness and safety.” He also went on to add additional “fundamental” rights related to free movement, settlement, legal action, property ownership, the benefit of the writ of habeas corpus, and even nondiscriminatory taxation to the list but notably these rights did not include the right

³³ Masur, *Until Justice Be Done*, 46-56.

³⁴ Gosse, *First Reconstruction*, 190-95, for the split between Upper New England (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts) where black citizenship was affirmed during the Missouri crisis and Lower New England (Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York where blacks had been recently disenfranchised, see 160, 185, and 189. For more on the Missouri Crisis and its role in fueling further division between North and South, see Wilentz, *No Property in Man*, 152-205. Wilentz points out that the Missouri debates “opened a breach that had been developing since 1787. With their compromises over slavery, the framers had created their terrible paradox, writing a Constitution that protected slavery but did not sanction it,” 200.

to collect oysters.³⁵ As an increasing number of white allies from New England joined freemen in calling for immediate abolition in the following decade, they carried with them an awareness of these debates and rulings over the meaning of citizenship and the potential power of the federal government to effect change that could halt an increasingly anti-republican and uncivilized slavocracy to the South that appeared on the ascendency.

The roots of the interracial alliance that emerged between the AMA and CCM during the antebellum era are the focus of the first chapter. The coalition between the CCM and future founding members of the AMA began in 1830 at the first annual meeting of the CCM in Philadelphia. There, Lewis Tappan and Simeon S. Jocelyn, the white pastor of a black congregation in Connecticut, joined a handful of other whites in pitching the establishment of a college for the educational uplift of African Americans in Connecticut. The idea never took off, however, as white northerners, including those in Connecticut, joined with southern whites in expressing outrage at Nat Turner's 1831 revolt in Southampton, Virginia, and voted overwhelmingly against the idea. The hoped-for institution received a new lease on life a few years later from Congregationalist minister, Reverend John Jay Shipherd, who carried the idea to Ohio with him and made it the centerpiece of his progressive community at Oberlin. In 1835, with the financial backing of the Tappan brothers and an infusion of new students and faculty, advocates of abolitionism and integrationism from Lane Seminary known as the "Lane rebels," Oberlin College became the first educational institution in the nation to admit students irrespective of race.³⁶

³⁵ *Corfield v. Coryell*, 6 F. Cas. 546, (C.C.E.D. Pa. 1823) (No. 3230). See also, Masur, *Until Justice Be Done*, 146; Barnett and Bernick, *Original Meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment*, 61-65; Kettner, *Development of American Citizenship*, 259-60.

³⁶ J. Brent Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism: College, Community, and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 17 and 24-25. The "Lane rebels" led by Theodore Dwight Weld included white students George Whipple, John Alvord, and James Thome, and Henry Stanton, as well as Black student, James Bradley, listed as hailing from Guinea.

The connection between Oberlin, Ohio and New York continued throughout the 1830s through both the school and CCM with Black Oberlinites such as William Howard Day and John M. Langston playing prominent roles. When the AMA launched in 1846, graduates of Oberlin joined its cadre of early missionaries under the leadership of founding members including Lewis Tappan and Simeon S. Jocelyn as well as African American leaders J. W. C. Pennington, Charles B. Ray, and later Henry Highland Garnet. During the 1850s, their alliance grew stronger and their resolve hardened in the face of a series of setbacks including the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and most alarmingly, the *Dred Scott* decision of 1857. The key unifying factor that emerged during this period centered on political activism to achieve the goal of their Constitutional-abolitionism - a color-blind casteless citizenship made up of virtuous citizens who were industrious, moral, educated, and broadly Protestant. Following the failures of both the Liberty and Free Soil Parties, they finally achieved success with the victory of Republican Abraham Lincoln in 1860.

Two additional topics that arise from this chapter include the role of women and the connection between the AMA, CCM, and future Freedmen's Bureau Commissioner, Oliver Otis Howard, known simply as Otis to his family. Regarding the first, although neither the AMA nor CCM welcomed women into leadership roles, they emerge from the records of both movements as key supporters, providing financial, educational, and organizing support. Women were especially active as teachers within the AMA's common schools and even achieved positions of authority within Howard University in the postwar years. And second, discussion the New Englander Howard, who would emerge as a key ally of the AMA and CCM and come to play a key role in the postwar struggle for equal citizenship, provides insight into his nontraditional

path to embracing the vision of equal citizenship which took him from Maine through New York to Florida and back to New York on the eve of the war.

During the Civil War years, the focus of chapter two, the AMA and CCM sought to exploit the opportunity provided by southern secession and the war to usher in the national transformation they had pursued for decades. The federally controlled District of Columbia emerged as the key to these efforts where a Republican-controlled Congress finally possessed the power to implement change that could serve as an example for the rest of the nation after the war. Abolition in the District, Attorney General Edward Bates's official opinion on black citizenship, and the Emancipation Proclamation emerged as significant victories along the path toward equal citizenship, and the tens of thousands of self-liberating men and women from neighboring Maryland and Virginia offered the perfect opportunity to test their Congregationalist vision of citizenship. The AMA funded its first agent in the city, Danforth B. Nichols, in 1862 and followed up with a handful of male missionaries and mostly female teachers by 1864. Proselytizing and providing education consumed the time of these early AMA associates who emerged as key allies of the freedpeople, expressing enthusiasm about their capacity for educational and religious uplift. They also remarked on the industriousness of the freedpeople, most notably those living at the newly established Freedmen's Village which was formed out of a portion of Robert E. Lee's Arlington estate. For the AMA and CCM, the progress of the war years appeared as promising indicators of what lay in store for the future. With the support of the freedpeople, recently secured in their independence by the Thirteenth Amendment, they entered the postwar era united in their determination to be the vanguard of an era of transformation.

The immediate years after the war actually marked the early stages of the crumbling of the alliance between the AMA, CCM, and the freedpeople. Chapter three examines the

tumultuous Andrew Johnson presidency marked by promising legislation from Congress and Congregationalist-led interracial endeavors that helped mask some of the years' more serious setbacks. Upon President Lincoln's death, members of the AMA and CCM quickly discovered that President Andrew Johnson would not be an ally in their efforts to establish equal citizenship. In addition, the good feelings established between the AMA, CCM, and freedpeople during the Civil War years began to disappear in the face of the extreme hardships and limited opportunities they faced in postwar DC. In short, the AMA and CCM faced serious obstacles from both Johnson and the freedpeople who articulated different visions of postemancipation society that did not fully align with their own. The Freedmen's Bureau stood at the center of this complex struggle where Howard, underfunded and undersupported, sought to navigate the conflicting visions pressed upon him by Johnson, the freedpeople, and his allies in the AMA and CCM. By the end of the Johnson administration, which coincided with the Bureau's closure in DC and cessation of AMA schools, freedpeople felt abandoned by and had grown disenchanted with their supposed allies.

The AMA and CCM, however, pressed on with their vision and celebrated important victories that would far outlive the members of either organization. With Republicans still in control of Congress, they celebrated passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment which progressed further than the Thirteenth Amendment by establishing birthright citizenship and delineating the basic rights associated with national belonging and importantly backed it with Congressional powers of enforcement. In addition, Congress passed a bill granting DC male suffrage which resulted in the election of the District's first Republican mayor, Sayles J. Bowen, shortly thereafter. Alongside these victories, two new institutions appeared in the capital, the cornerstones of the Congregationalist vision for the nation, First Congregational

Church and Howard University. Both institutions received support from members of the AMA and CCM and both represented their shared vision of the future founded on a color-blind casteless citizenry. Established in a city that less than a decade prior was notorious for its slave pens, First Congregational and Howard University were unique structures that welcomed individuals as members or students regardless of gender or race. While the former experienced a schism over the issue of social equality, the later began to educate the next generation of Black leaders and advocates for equal citizenship.

The final chapter examines the years of the Ulysses S. Grant presidential administration which began with the AMA and CCM experiencing renewed hope in their pursuit of a color-blind casteless citizenship. With the election of Ulysses S. Grant, they once again had an ally in the executive who supported the Fifteenth Amendment and Senator Charles Sumner's later issued Civil Rights bill. In an attempt to leverage Grant's victory into tangible action, two key "colored conventions" took place during Grant's first year in office. The first focused on securing male suffrage but also included local items of concern such as jury service and the addition of Blacks to the position of justices of the peace, both of which Grant moved swiftly to fulfill. Later that year, in December 1869, Black delegates met once again in DC for a labor convention which sought to address the crisis of the landless freedpeople who remained unable to secure the postemancipation independence many had anticipated. They formed the short-lived National Labor Union (more commonly known as the Colored National Labor Union [CNLU]) which was intended to be an interracial organization to empower and educate laborers. They sought access to government lands for poor Black southerners, challenged discrimination, and pressed for reforms including granting Blacks access to trades and apprenticeships. By 1872, the CNLU had remained a segregated organization that had turned primarily into a political vehicle

for the Republican Party and consequently largely ceased any activity related to labor reform. Black delegates gathered just once more in DC during Grant's presidency in December 1873 to press Congress to pass Senator Sumner's Civil Rights bill. They failed to persuade members of Congress who ultimately passed a watered-down bill in 1875 despite the eloquent pleas of the nation's first Black congressmen.

Outside the Capitol, members of the AMA and CCM remained active in pursuing their goals of equal citizenship through industrial schooling and within the walls of both First Congregational and Howard University. Without land or a Freedmen's Bureau, progress on the labor front limited the AMA's activities toward educating workers and providing them with marketable trade skills at the Colfax Industrial Mission (later Lincoln Industrial Mission). The crisis at First Congregational over black membership ended with Howard's integrationist minority faction defeating Reverend Boynton's segregationists. Although the church lost over half its members as a result, the arrival of a new pastor, Jeremiah Rankin, an AMA member and race radical, helped the church reclaim its vision to become the only intentionally interracial church in the city. Membership grew as both blacks and whites embraced the new pastor and his vision. During the Rankin years (1869-1884), the church hosted political speakers including Frederick Douglass and John Mercer Langston. The politically outspoken Rankin delivered a famous sermon, "The Divinity of the Ballot" in the wake of the contested election of 1876 wherein he called the nation to secure equal rights-based citizenship for Blacks. Despite its prominent pastor and political guest speakers, First Congregational never attracted lower-class Blacks, who continued to prefer segregated congregations of their own.

At Howard University, Howard, for whom the institution was named, took over as president in 1869 and remained in the role until 1874, serving the last two years in absentia after

accepting a military commission to the West to manage Native American affairs. During his presidency, he oversaw the expansion of the university that opened its Law Department under the leadership of John Mercer Langston, who served as its first dean. The theology department also opened under the care of Reverend John B. Reeve, an active member of the CCM from New York who served as the second black dean of a department at Howard University. During the 1870s, the university graduated Black students who served in the District as teachers, lawyers, and pastors, representing the vanguard of what W. E. B. Du Bois later called the much needed “talented tenth.” Of the departments, the Law School especially distinguished itself sending graduates across the country armed with the skills to challenge discrimination and argue for equality. Although their efforts did not thwart the enshrinement of segregation and second-class citizenship seen in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896, from this same law school would emerge Thurgood Marshall, the lawyer who successfully argued the prosecution’s case in *Brown v. Board of Education* which effectively ending school segregation.

While many Reconstruction narratives end with Rutherford B. Hayes securing the presidency out of the contested election of 1877, the remnants of the interracial alliance between the AMA and CCM emerged once again in 1883 after the Supreme Court ruled the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional. Reverend Rankin voiced his disappointment in the Supreme Court which had failed once again to secure Blacks in their status as citizens of the Republic. His voice joined that of James Monroe Gregory who, in 1883, served as president of the last “Colored Convention” to meet in DC where collective black outrage arose in response to the Supreme Court’s decision. Despite this setback, First Congregational and Howard University continued to accept members and students regardless of race or gender and in this capacity, both institutions demonstrated their continued commitment to the equal endeavor that had unified the AMA and

CCM in the antebellum era. Although both the AMA and CCM ceased to operate in the city, the institutional legacy they left continues to serve as a reminder that the pursuit of equal citizenship remains a goal worth striving toward.

CHAPTER 1 – DEFINING CITIZENSHIP (1830-1860)

We “. . . recommend, that the Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States, be read in our Conventions; believing, that the truths contained in the former are incontrovertible and that the latter guarantees in letter and spirit to every freeman born in this country the rights and immunities of citizenship.

First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, 1831¹

The objects of the [New England Anti-Slavery] society shall be, to endeavour, by all means sanctioned by law, humanity and religion, to effect the abolition of slavery in the United States; to improve the character and condition of the free people of colour, to inform and correct public opinion in relation to their situation and rights, and obtain for them equal civil and political rights and privileges with the whites.

Constitution of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, 1833²

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1831

In early June 1831, Black delegates from across the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Upper South states of Maryland and Virginia gathered in Philadelphia at the Wesleyan Church on Lombard Street for the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour. Over the course of six days, from June 6th through the 11th, they discussed “the condition of the free people of colour throughout the United States.”³ The Committee on the Condition of the Free People of Colour called those in attendance to “reflect on the dissolute, intemperate, and ignorant condition of a large portion of the coloured population of United States,” noting that they as Black community leaders bore an “obligation as the true guardians of our interests” to give “wholesome advice and good counsel.” In addition to the concerns raised about their enslaved and impoverished brethren, they lamented the “oppressive, unjust and unconstitutional laws” which impeded their

¹ “Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, held by adjournments in the city of Philadelphia, from the sixth to the eleventh of June, inclusive, 1831,” 4-5. Members of the Committee on the Condition of the Free People of Colour of the United States included delegates Junius Morel (PA), Abraham D. Shad (DE), William Duncan (VA), Robert Crowley (MD), Henry Sipkins (NY), and Thomas L. Jennings (NY).

² “Constitution of the New England Anti-Slavery Society,” *Liberator*, February 9, 1833.

³ “Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, Philadelphia, 1831,” 4.

full enjoyment of rights while condemning the American Colonization Society (ACS) which sought to remove the nation's entire black populace through voluntary emigration to Africa.⁴

This meeting, part of the Colored Convention's Movement, formed an integral part of Black activism during the antebellum era. As noted by historian Eddie Glaude, these conventions were "the first national forum for civic activity" among free Blacks in the United States and "became the principle agency for black activism . . . up to the Civil War."⁵ Birthed in response to the Cincinnati race riots of 1829 and meeting for the first time in Philadelphia a year later, this movement brought together tens of thousands of freemen over the course of the nineteenth century. Delegates gathered in cities across New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest in both national- and state-level conventions to address the crises facing their communities including discrimination, disenfranchisement, and violence. United by their shared experiences of persecution and discrimination, "these once captive, already free, and recently freed Blacks" came together to strategize "about how to secure citizenship and civil rights."⁶

Gathering for their convention in Philadelphia, the birthplace of American liberty, must have seemed especially fitting for the Black delegates concerned about their status as second-class citizens. Here in 1775 emerged the nation's first abolition society, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS), whose white upper-class members pursued the end of slavery in hopes

⁴ "Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, Philadelphia, 1831," 4-5; Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 33-34.

⁵ Eddie S. Glaude, *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 113-14.

⁶ Carter G. Woodson, "The Negroes of Cincinnati Prior to the Civil War," *The Journal of Negro History* 1, no. 1 (1916): 1-7; P. Gabrielle Foreman, "Black Organizing, Print Advocacy, and Collective Authorship," P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Patterson, eds., *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 24. On importance of these conventions to establishing a virtuous citizenry and as a training ground for enacting citizenship, see Erica L. Ball, "Performing Politics, Creating Community: Antebellum Black Conventions as Political Rituals," in *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Patterson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 156-57.

of making liberty national. Here the Continental Congress met in 1776 to discuss revolution. Here Thomas Jefferson penned the famous words of the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” And finally, here delegates met in secret in 1787 to draft the US Constitution, including the vague and consequential language from Article IV, Section 2 that declared “the citizens of each state shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several states.” Not only did this language suggest that certain rights accompanied citizenship, it also revealed that at the founding, an individual’s status within their home state reigned supreme over any national concept of belonging.

During those hot summer days in June, this cross-regional gathering of prominent freemen considered an education proposal made by six white abolitionists. This group included the minister of Connecticut’s Black Dixwell Congregational Church, Rev. Simeon S. Jocelyn; New York silk merchant and Congregationalist, Arthur Tappan, and editor of the Massachusetts-based newspaper *Liberator*, William L. Garrison, who proposed to establish “a college for the education of Young Men of Colour, on such basis, as cannot but elevate the general character of the coloured population.” The school of higher education, which received the financial backing of both Arthur Tappan and his abolitionist brother Lewis, would be built in New Haven, Connecticut, in accordance with the “Manual Labour System, by which, in connection with a scientific education, Blacks may also obtain a useful Mechanical or Agricultural profession.” After a short period of debate, the delegates enthusiastically threw their support behind the endeavor under the condition that the trustees of the institution would consist of “a majority of

coloured persons; the number proposed is seven, three white, and four coloured.”⁷ Both of these statements capture key aspects of the early interracial abolitionist coalition which emphasized Black leadership, racial uplift, and Black inclusion into the body politic. Commenting on these goals of equality, historian James B. Stewart remarked that “Never before in the nation’s history had racial activists worked together so closely and enthusiastically on a project of such ambitious scope and in an alliance brought together young and old, black and white.”⁸

The white abolitionists who presented this educational proposal had each long been connected with the anti-slavery movement of the Early Republic but by the early 1830s, they formed a vanguard that drew an increasing number of white anti-slavery activists out of the ACS and into coalitions with black abolitionists and their goal of immediatism.⁹ Indeed, formed just one year after this convention, the New England Anti-Slavery Society (NEASS), of which Garrison and Jocelyn were co-founders and Arthur Tappan an honorary member, incorporated the language of black abolitionists as they expounded upon the meaning of immediatism and the ideas it entailed. First and foremost, it meant “that all title of property in the slaves shall instantly cease, because their Creator has never relinquished his claims of ownership, and because none have a right to sell their own bodies or buy those of their own species as cattle.” In addition, the statement went on to declare that immediate abolition aimed to restore to the enslaved legal protection of marriages and children, the right to trial, education, and just wages for labor rendered. Lastly, the NEASS declared “that right shall take the supremacy over wrong, principle over brute force, humanity over cruelty, honesty over theft, purity over lust, honor over baseness,

⁷ “Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, 1831,” 6-8; James Brewer Stewart, “The New Haven Negro College and the Meanings of Race in New England, 1776-1870,” *The New England Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2003): 324-25.

⁸ Stewart, “The New Haven Negro College,” 324-25.

⁹ Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 107-30; Goodman, *Of One Blood*, xv.

love over hatred, and religion over heathenism.”¹⁰ In short, the immediatism of the NEASS involved more than instant and uncompensated abolition. It also involved a vision for a civilized interracial Republic founded on free labor, education, and religion. Additionally, it unequivocally argued that slavery promoted a barbarism that dehumanized both blacks and whites and marked a regression in civilization of which citizenship was the highest attainment. Like the well-known Webster-Hayne debates of 1830, it revealed the increasingly sharp contrast between Congregational New England with its schoolhouses, anti-slavery churches, and free labor institutions, and the slaveholders’ oligarchy in the South marked by few schools, morally compromised churches, and slavery which denied an individual’s most basic right, the ownership of their labor.¹¹

Taken together, the stated goals of the Black delegates to the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour that met in Philadelphia and the printed resolutions of the NEASS issued by their white allies a year later reveal the impact and shared goals of interracial coalitions built during the Early Republic. They both found common ground for their views of equal citizenship through both religious and political arguments. This evangelical political-abolitionism rested on sacred truth and enlightenment values espoused in the Scriptures and the nation’s founding documents. In terms of religion, whereas southern society rested upon Ephesians 6:5, “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ,” political-abolitionists cited Acts 17:26, “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” Politically, where the South read the Declaration of Independence as implying “all *white* men are created equal,”

¹⁰ Board of Managers, New-England Anti-Slavery Society, *Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the New-England Anti-Slavery Society*, (Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 17-18.

¹¹ Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 230-33.

political-abolitionists believed the exclusion of any racial qualifier suggested that national aims bent toward the idea of “freedom national” which gave the statement its truly revolutionary feel at a time marked by widespread slavery. The term “freedom national” was first introduced by Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner in his 1856 speech before Congress, “Freedom National; Slavery Sectional,” although as historian James Oakes demonstrates, the ideology behind it harkened back to the famous *Somerset* ruling (1772) in England almost a century prior. In short, adherents of freedom national viewed slavery as backward, inefficient, and immoral, an institution doomed to extinction on the plane of irreversible human progress or civilization.¹²

Recently, historians of abolition have drawn attention to the importance of interracial coalitions within the abolitionist movement during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the nation’s first abolition society, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS), emerged and rose to prominence.¹³ The strategic alliances built between black abolitionists and their white allies in the Early Republic, or what Paul Polgar calls the first movement, included the shared commitment to “enforcing northern emancipation statutes, enlarging the elemental rights of people of color, the belief that free blacks were entitled to the rights of citizenship and could become virtuous members of the body politic, and the expectation that through black uplift and incorporation, white prejudice could be defeated.”¹⁴ Abolitionist agreement on a color-blind citizenry that rested on the revolutionary language of the Declaration of Independence, the verbiage incorporated into state constitutions during the Revolutionary War, and later the

¹² James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2013), x-xv.

¹³ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 34-64; Paul J. Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality: America’s First Abolition Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 4.

¹⁴ Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality*, 4.

Constitution, which led to the rise of political-abolitionism that paid dividends in the decades that followed.

According to abolitionist historian, Manisha Sinha, political-abolitionists believed the nation's founding documents supported the idea of "freedom national" and that slavery "was the creature of positive law and in contravention to the Constitution."¹⁵ This chapter argues that in addition to this, an important group of evangelical political-abolitionists, drawn in large part from the Congregationalist polity, added a belief in equal citizenship as well. However, for these white descendants of the Puritans, this equal citizenship was premised on African Americans rising to the standard of a virtuous citizenry, a concept which included settled living, industriousness, morality, and education, all undergirded by adherence to the Protestant faith.¹⁶ By the 1830s and the rise of immediatism, an increasing number of Congregational political-abolitionists came to agree with black abolitionists that colonization schemes and gradualist approaches must be replaced by calls for immediate abolition and equal citizenship. Conversely, black abolitionists, deeply concerned about the lack of education and immorality associated with the poorer members of their race, embraced the Congregationalists' standards of civilization and citizenship which stressed both industriousness and reforms in religion and education as the pathway to securing admittance into the body politic and challenging virulent northern racial

¹⁵ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 477, 182-91 and 475-78.

¹⁶ Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 14-15. For more on interracial coalitions and the pursuit of a color-blind citizenry during the Early Republic, see Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality*, 142-158. Polgar notes that during the Early Republic, "Free black activists and the abolition societies unequivocally conjoined the destruction of slavery and African American citizenship as the same project of reform," 142. See also Kate Masur, *Until Justice Be Done: America's First Civil Rights Movement, From the Revolution to Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021) and Van Gosse, *The First Reconstruction: Black Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

discrimination.¹⁷ Uniting the Black leaders of the Colored Conventions Movement, the gifted antislavery preaching of revivalist Charles G. Finney, the financial resources of New York silk merchants Arthur and Lewis Tappan, and the radical interracial community experiment at Oberlin, the movement ultimately supplanted the Garrisonians as the most interracial and prominent abolitionist coalition of the antebellum era.

Collectively, the shared belief in abolition and color-blind virtuous citizenry formed the foundation of the interracial alliance that allowed for effective collaboration during the antebellum period. During the 1840s and in the aftermath of the abolitionist split over direction and tactics, New York and Oberlin became the epicenter of this interracial coalition which united a significant number of Black and white activists under the banner of the Tappan-led evangelical, political, but less socially radical wing of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS), the forerunner of the American Missionary Association (AMA), against Garrison's socially progressive and apolitical American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS). Although Garrison had been celebrated as a champion of black liberty among Black abolitionists, these same Black abolitionists increasingly preferred to ally with the Congregationalist AFASS and AMA over the AASS, as the former organizations placed them in leadership positions and most importantly, championed a black future in America based on equal citizenship. In adhering to their radical apolitical stance, Garrisonians ultimately alienated themselves from Blacks dedicated to inclusion into the body politic by failing to offer a compelling vision for a Black future in America.

¹⁷ Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality*, 147, 150-55; see also Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 302 and Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 89-90.

During the 1850s, when the goals of abolitionists experienced a series of serious setbacks, this interracial movement of evangelical political-abolitionists energized societies, attended conventions, formed political parties, voted in blocs, actively petitioned politicians on the local, state, and national stage, and even turned to illegal action to secure freemen in their rights as citizens. The pursuit of abolition and equal citizenship that brought Black and white activists together early in the antebellum period had in the decade before the Civil War grown into a formidable alliance with increasing political influence evinced in the rise of the Republican Party and the election of Abraham Lincoln, whose constitutionally based antislavery views sparked the Civil War. With Lincoln's election, the AMA and their political-abolitionist allies turned their attention to Washington, DC, where they poured in resources and manpower in a determined effort to exploit the Republican victory and secure their longstanding goals of establishing a biracial republic grounded on a color-blind virtuous citizenship.

This chapter charts the rise of this interracial coalition premised on advocating for a color-blind virtuous citizenry and the road that ultimately led them to the capital. New York and Ohio receive particular attention since these two states demonstrated the strong bond that existed between these communities of Protestant political-abolitionists. In addition, other key events and individuals connected to the legal, political, and social events that influenced and informed the nature and direction of their activism will also be explored. Oliver Otis Howard emerges as perhaps the most prominent individual examined here who remained unconnected with this interracial coalition and its goals during this era. Due to the fact that he rose to play a key role in the implementation of the Congregationalist vision of a color-blind virtuous citizenry during the Reconstruction era, Howard's background, including his political and religious views, forms an essential part of this chapter.

From the very first Colored Convention that took place in September 1830 at Bishop Richard Allen's Bethel Church in Philadelphia, the gathered delegates referred to themselves as citizens. They employed the language of the Constitution and called their fellow brethren to join with them in agreeing that there should be "no invidious distinction of colour . . . but we shall be entitled to all the rights, privileges, and immunities of other citizens."¹⁸ This statement reflected not only the sentiments expressed in David Walker's sensational *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, published one year earlier in Boston, but also the ways in which freemen across the country lived. Regardless of state law, wherever a community of free blacks existed, they assumed the status of citizens as a birthright and as Martha Jones has argued, "before any judicial or legislative consensus granted their rights, free black men and women seized them."¹⁹ When an increasing number of interracial abolition societies sprang up in the early 1830s (NEASS in 1832, AASS in 1833, and MASS in 1835), their statements on citizenship reflected decades of cross-racial conversations and consensus.²⁰ Indeed in the inaugural issue of the *Liberator*, Garrison famously apologized to God, his country and fellow brethren, the poor slave, for previously holding a gradualist view. In converting to immediatism, he rejected his former

¹⁸ "Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour, for improving their condition in the United States; for purchasing lands; and for the establishment of a settlement in upper Canada, also, The Proceedings of the Convention with their Address to Free Persons of Colour in the United States," 1830, 1, and 10-11. See also Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 268-75.

¹⁹ David Walker, *Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829*; Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 16-17; Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 11. Jones' work explores the lived realities of Baltimore's free black population, the nation's largest with some 25,000 residents. For an example from New England, see Stephen David Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic, 1829-1889* (New York: Penguin books, 2013) which analyses Boston's free black population.

²⁰ Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 120. Newman notes that the NEASS and later the AASS were "integrated, dedicated to ending slavery immediately, and unafraid to publically condemn American racial attitudes." For more on the arguments made in favor of equal citizenship by interracial coalitions in the Early Republic, see Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality: America's First Abolition Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

position so full of “timidity, injustice, and absurdity,” and called for equality; his newfound position reflected the longstanding argument of black abolitionists.²¹ What changed in the early 1830s was that an increasing number of whites, of which Garrison was perhaps the most recognizable, chose to embrace the approach championed by black abolitionists from Richard Allen in the 1790s to David Walker and Maria Stewart in the 1820s and continued by the delegates to the Coloured Conventions Movement that emerged in 1830.²²

In the weeks that followed the 1831 Coloured Convention in Philadelphia, both Jocelyn and Arthur Tappan eagerly began preparations to implement what both its supporters and detractors dubbed the “Negro College.” The proponents of the plan possessed high expectations for this institute of higher education located close enough to Yale University to attract its professors who might donate time to the education of Black youth who would come from across the North, Midwest, and even the Caribbean. However, later that summer before building even began, a very different effort to secure Black liberty in Southampton County, Virginia grabbed the nation’s attention with devastating effects for New Haven’s “Negro College.”

On the evening of August 21, 1831, after having seen a sign earlier that year, the enslaved Black Baptist and self-proclaimed prophet, Nat Turner, and six associates launched their infamous slave revolt. Marauding from plantation to plantation over the next two days, Turner and his small army terrorized the region, killing white people and pillaging as they went. By August 23rd, local whites put down the revolt that had claimed the lives of over fifty whites, the largest loss of life due to a slave insurrection in American history.²³ Over the course of the

²¹ William L. Garrison, “To the Public,” *Liberator*, January 1, 1831.

²² Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 86-87. For more on interracial coalition-building in first movement abolitionism, see Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality*.

²³ Patrick H. Breen, *Land Shall Be Deluged in Blood: A New History of the Nat Turner Revolt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 37-72. For Baptist faith of Nat Turner, see Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin’ On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1979), 159-66.

ensuing days, enraged whites killed dozens of Blacks until Southampton County leaders successfully regained control. In the months that followed, trials took place for the forty-five slaves charged. Eighteen of the accused were hanged with others either pardoned or sold.²⁴ In November, authorities captured Turner. While awaiting trial, he sat for an interview with Thomas Ruffin Gray and provided a confession. Executed as a fanatic, Turner expressed no regrets for his failed attempt to claim liberty and overthrow the South's slave system, concluding his confession with determination, "I am here loaded with chains, and willing to suffer the fate that awaits me."²⁵

As a result of Turner's revolt, Virginia's General Assembly stiffened its laws related to both its enslaved and free black population. Virginia had passed an anti-literacy law in April 1831, in response to Black abolitionist David Walker's *Appeal*, and the new series of laws curtailed the other key elements of a free society including freedom of religion and freedom of the press. In place of the once hopeful trend toward manumission that swept across the Upper South in the years following the Revolution, Virginia led the charge in what abolitionists saw as a regression in civilization.²⁶ These new laws targeted religious gatherings, by barring Black ministers from preaching and slaves from attending. They also limited freedom of the press, by authorizing swift punishment for anyone who wrote, sold, or circulated "any book, pamphlet or other writing, advising persons of colour within this state to make insurrection, or to rebel"²⁷ Taken together with Virginia's anti-literacy law, the hardened stance of white southerners toward protecting and extending the life of slavery set them at direct odds with New England's

²⁴ Breen, *Land Shall Be Deluged in Blood*, 95-106; 120-125; Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 414-17.

²⁵ Thomas Ruffin Gray, *Confessions of Nat Turner, the Leader of the Late Insurrections in Southampton, Va.* (Baltimore, Maryland: Lucas & Deaver, 1831), 18.

²⁶ On manumission in Virginia after the Revolution War, see Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 35-42.

²⁷ *Acts Passed at a General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Begun and Held at the Capitol, in the City of Richmond* (Richmond: Thomas Ritchie, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1832), 20-22.

concepts of civilization marked by free labor and the twin Congregational pillars of society, the church and the schoolhouse, both of which rested upon the promises of free speech and a free press. In the years before the Civil War, as northern and southern societies drifted further apart, abolitionists found fuel for their condemnation of an increasingly regressive southern society.

The immediate reaction across the North and Midwest to Turner's revolt, however, saw a collective condemnation of both Turner and the abolitionists who many saw as culpable in the deadly insurrection. In New Haven, the timing could not have been worse. When locals gathered for New Haven's town meeting in late August to consider the "Negro College," they rejected the proposal in overwhelming numbers with townsmen voting 700 to 4 to condemn the college proposal.²⁸ And as if to show their solidarity with white Southamptonites, an angry mob formed to intimidate local Blacks before descending on New Haven's black community, a section of town racist whites nicknamed "New Liberia," to vandalize Black property. In the fallout, neither Yale University nor the state's Congregationalist pastors expressed support for the college or local black community. And with that, New Haven's "Negro College" died a quiet death but the idea of an institute for Black higher education was soon reborn in the West.²⁹

The shocking events in Southampton County and the episode of racist mob action that followed in New Haven coincided with the concluding months of the Great Rochester Revival in New York led by revivalist Charles Grandison Finney. Originally invited to salvage the "unpromising field" from worldliness and interdenominational squabbling, Finney had arrived in this region of northwestern New York in September 1830.³⁰ The transformation of Rochester

²⁸ Stewart, "The New Haven Negro College," 325.

²⁹ Robert Austin Warner, *New Haven Negroes: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 50-55; Stewart, "The New Haven Negro College," 325.

³⁰ Charles Grandison Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney*. (New York: A. S. Barnes & Company, 1876), 284-86.

began with the conversion of “Mrs. M,” the upper-class wife of a prominent lawyer who initially regretted the revival of Finney for fear of him ruining her “gay” winter plans. The revival quickly spread among the upper-class, lawyers, physicians and merchants, who in increasing numbers responded to Finney’s deployment of “the anxious bench.” This novel tactic, designed to encourage would-be converts to public action, involved reserving a series of seats for them to publicly demonstrate their anxiousness for their own souls and seek forgiveness of sins in the same public fashion in which they had committed them.³¹ The leading Congregationalist minister of the era, Rev. Dr. Henry Ward Beecher later told Finney that his ministry in Rochester “was the greatest work of God, and the greatest revival of religion, that the world has ever seen in so short a time.”³² Evangelicals from across the Protestant spectrum took notice and sought to connect themselves with the religious awakening with some even traveling to see Finney’s ministry first-hand in what became known as the “Burnt over District.”³³

The Reverend John Jay Shipherd, a Congregationalist minister whose father, Troy lawyer Zebulun R. Shipherd, had followed Finney since the 1820s, traveled to hear Finney preach. Reverend Shipherd, who went on to found Oberlin three years later, found himself drawn to visit Finney in Rochester upon hearing the vivid accounts of his ministry.³⁴ Meeting and spending a few days together in October 1830, Shipherd filled in for Finney one evening at Second Presbyterian Church and later received Finney’s blessing for his planned mission to the West. Unable to convince Finney to join him, Shipherd headed toward the mission field of Ohio

³¹ Finney, *Memoirs*, 287-89.

³² Finney, *Memoirs*, 297-301.

³³ Finney, *Memoirs*, 291-301; Nathan O. Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).196-201. For more on the Great Rochester Revival, see Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millenium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 3-14.

³⁴ Robert Samuel Fletcher, *History of Oberlin College from Its Foundation through the Civil War* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1943), 17-24 and 58-69.

alone.³⁵ In May 1831, he arrived and assumed the pastorate of a small church in Elyria, Ohio.³⁶ After initiating a successful revival among the community in Loraine Township, Shipherd and his mentee, Philo Peniel Stewart, set out to achieve a grander vision of establishing a Christian colony they would christen Oberlin after French pastor John Frederic Oberlin, famed for his social work and Sabbath Schools.³⁷

Shipherd and Stewart established the town of Oberlin ten miles southwest of Elyria in 1833 on Puritan principles. Both men sought out a particular sort of settler, namely those who agreed to the town's covenant to "return to Gospel simplicity of dress, diet, houses, and furniture, all appertaining to him, & be industrious & economical with the view of earning & saving as much as possible, not to hoard up for old age, & for children, but to glorify God in the salvation of men."³⁸ Beyond an industrious community of Congregationalists, their vision of the town also included a school, initially named Oberlin Institute, which would stand at the center of this enterprise and be a place where teachers and ministers would be educated for the furtherance of Christian revival in the West. By August, sixty-one people organized Oberlin's church with membership ballooning to 232 by year's end. In the fall, townsfolk turned their attention to the school. The founders intended to educate the entire man and welcomed women alongside men when the school opened its doors on December 3, 1833, "making Oberlin the nation's first coeducational collegiate institution."³⁹ Unfortunately a shortage of funds, despite overwhelming interest in the small school, threatened to doom Oberlin Institute before it began. In an effort to

³⁵ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 13-14.

³⁶ Fletcher, *History of Oberlin College*, 70-84.

³⁷ Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 92; Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 16.

³⁸ "Covenant of the Oberlin Colony," RG 21, Oberlin File, Series 6, Box 1, Oberlin College Archives, hereafter OCA. On Puritan principles, see Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 63. Morris notes that Oberlin was a self-governing, self-selecting body committed to an explicit agenda in the form of a covenant to which all early settlers had to affix their names.

³⁹ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 17.

remedy the crisis, Shipherd set out on a last ditch effort to save the town's visionary school by going to New York City to solicit funds.

Upon arriving in New York, Shipherd reconnected with Finney, who had been brought to the city by Lewis Tappan to spark a revival similar to that which swept across Rochester three years prior. While Shipherd had been busying himself establishing the town of Oberlin, Finney had settled into the pastorate at a converted theater, now named Chatham Street Chapel.

Reflecting on his arrival in New York City in 1832, Finney remarked:

When I first went to New York, I had made up my mind on the question of slavery, and was exceedingly anxious to arouse public attention to the subject. I did not, however, turn aside to make it a hobby, or divert the attention of the people from the work of converting souls. Nevertheless, in my prayers and preaching, I so often alluded to slavery, and denounced it, that a considerable excitement came to exist among the people.⁴⁰

Soon after, local abolitionists gathered in the church and formed the New York City Anti-Slavery Society (NYCASS) with the intent to pursue the “speedy abolition of slavery.”

According to its constitution, the society based its existence “on the principle laid down in the Declaration of Independence, ‘that all mankind are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’” The framers, including both Tappan brothers, went on to declare that slavery violated “the principles of natural justice, our republican form of government, and the Christian religion.” In outlining their goals, the society determined “to take all lawful, moral, and religious means to effect a total and immediate abolition of slavery in the United States” and to embark upon the process of preparing the formerly enslaved for eventual citizenship by elevating “the character and condition of the people of color, by encouraging their intellectual, moral, and

⁴⁰ Finney, *Memoirs*, 324. In an 1834 sermon, Finney declared that “he could not recognize men as [Christians] who trafficked in the bodies and souls of fellow men,” see S. A. to Joshua Leavitt, n.d., in *New York Evangelist*, November 8, 1834, quoted in Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 18.

religious improvement, by correcting the prejudices of public opinion, and by endeavoring to obtain for our colored fellow citizens an equality with the whites of civil and religious privileges.”⁴¹

While Shipherd ingratiated himself with wealthy New York City abolitionists, back in Ohio, events transpired that would secure the future of Oberlin Institute. In February 1834, over two hundred miles south of Oberlin, near the Kentucky border, students at Cincinnati’s Lane Seminary gathered for a series of debates to consider immediate abolition versus the school’s gradualist stance and to question whether Christians should support the ACS. Led by fellow seminarian and abolitionist Theodore Weld, these debates ultimately created a schism within the conservative seminary that saw the student proponents of immediatism “expelled for their insistence on debating the merits of immediate emancipation, for the formation of their own antislavery society, and for integrating themselves into Cincinnati’s black community.”⁴² Cincinnati’s proximity to the slave state of Kentucky, along with the pro-southern sympathies of both the town and school, forced the abolitionists to seek an educational home elsewhere to complete their degrees. Shipherd, realizing the golden opportunity to save his educational vision, hurried back to Ohio to appeal and pitch Oberlin to Lane’s expelled students and sympathetic faculty. He met with the student-leaders of the movement including Weld, Henry Stanton, George Whipple of New York, who would become the corresponding secretary of the American Missionary Association just twelve years later, James Thome of Kentucky, and James Bradley, a black man from Guinea who had recently formed the students’ antislavery society, to pitch his idea.

⁴¹ “Anti-Slavery Society,” *Liberator*, October 19, 1833.

⁴² Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 24.

In January 1835, all interested parties agreed to meet in New York City for the purpose of finding a mutually beneficial solution. Arthur Tappan pledged \$10,000 to the Oberlin venture while his brother, Lewis, and other New York philanthropists agreed to fund the salaries of eight professors. To secure the funding, however, Shipherd needed to agree to the Lane rebels' demands which included freedom of speech, the admission of Black students, the appointment of former Lane trustee, Asa Mahan, as president, and former professor John Morgan to the same role in Oberlin. Finally, Finney also needed to agree to go to Oberlin as its professor of theology.⁴³ By a final vote of 4-3, the trustees of Oberlin Institute agreed to all the demands and "thus by 1835, many of America's more progressive students had enrolled at Oberlin." Between 1833 and 1835, Oberlin's student population grew by nearly 700 percent and those who lived in the town and attended the college became known as "radical racial egalitarians" due to their unwavering commitment to racial equality, rejection of prejudice based on color, and the desire to educate African Americans.⁴⁴ Thus the western bastion of abolitionism with deep ties to Congregationalists in New York had been born and its graduates would set out as missionaries and teachers carrying the progressive gospel of immediatism and social equality based on a color-blind virtuous citizenry.⁴⁵

The unique mission of Oberlin Institute to promote revivalism and convert the nation to abolitionism while demonstrating in their model town the possibility of interracial coexistence based on racial equality ensured that the school attracted the most radical faculty and student body. Upon their arrival in Oberlin, the Lane rebels, alongside Oberlin faculty and

⁴³ Joshua Leavitt, "Cheering Intelligence," *Liberator*, March 29, 1834; "Anti-Slavery Society in Lane," *Liberator*, April 5, 1834. See also, Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 23-27 and Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 142-166.

⁴⁴ Kornblith and Lasser, *Elusive Utopia*, 2.

⁴⁵ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 31, and 32-38.

administration, immediately founded, joined, and supported local- and state-level anti-slavery societies.⁴⁶ By late 1835, Oberlin had already established three anti-slavery societies with a combined membership of over 400.⁴⁷ Their dedication to equal citizenship and the goals of educational and religious uplift coincided with their goal of immediate abolition. In October 1835, delegates to the Ohio Anti-Slavery Convention met in Putnam, Ohio, to discuss the condition of the state's "people of color." In their report, the Committee on the Condition of the People of Color in the State of Ohio offered evidence from an assessment of Cincinnati's free black population. They noted from the interviews conducted of the city's free people, most of whom had paid for their own liberty, that they demonstrated intelligence, morality, and industry. In concluding their analysis, they returned to the oft-asked question, "Can slaves, if liberated, take care of themselves?" and quoting one of their interviewees, responded, "'We did take care of ourselves and our masters too, while we were in fetters. We dug our way out of slavery—and now that we are free, all we ask is a fair chance.'"⁴⁸ To pursue this end despite Ohio's discriminatory black laws, the committee of five, which included John Alvord, one of the Lane rebels and current Oberlin student, submitted the following resolution:

That in view of the needy circumstances of our free colored citizens, the influence which their elevation and good deportment would exert against slavery,-and the facility afforded for the introduction among them of education and religion, we earnestly commend this field to the charities of the good people of this state, as one in which their benevolence can be most efficiently expended.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ For revivalism, see Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 210-11, and for abolitionism, see 236-53.

⁴⁷ *Third annual report of the American Anti-Slavery Society : with the speeches delivered at the anniversary meeting, held in the city of New-York on the 10th May, 1836 : and the minutes of the meetings of the society for business* (New York, William S. Dorr, 1836), 98. The Oberlin Abolition Society formed in June 1835 with a membership of 300, the Oberlin Female Abolition Society in December with 48, and the Oberlin Young Ladies Abolition Society also in December with 86.

⁴⁸ *Report on the condition of the people of color in the state of Ohio: from the Proceedings of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Convention, held at Putnam, on the 22d, 23d, and 24th of April, 1835* (Boston, Isaac Knapp, 1836), 11.

⁴⁹ *Report on the condition of the people of color in the state of Ohio*, 12.

The combination of interracial education and cooperative protest that emerged out of Oberlin during the antebellum period “fostered a class of African American citizens that were able to stand as a rebuke to racist arguments claiming that they were incapable of fending for themselves in a modern society.”⁵⁰

Leeds, Maine

During the mid-1830s as new abolitionist organizations exploded across New England and the Midwest, in the small agricultural town of Leeds, Maine, roughly twenty miles west of the state’s capital, Augusta, Rowland Howard and his wife, Eliza, busied themselves running their small farm and raising their five-year-old son, Oliver Otis Howard, who would one day become a key player in the battle for Black equality as the first and only commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau.⁵¹ Howard reflected fondly on his typical New England childhood, one marked by hard work as well as weekly attendance at the local Baptist Church and instruction at the local schoolhouse. Although Howard lost his father when he was nine, several memories left an indelible mark on him, including his father’s musical talents; his love of horses which spawned a profitable side-business for the family; and a guest of the family who resided with them for four years.⁵² Howard remembered this peculiar guest brought home by his father after his father had passed through the city of Troy, New York on his way home from business:

For some benevolent reason he there [in Troy] befriended a little negro lad and brought him to our house in Leeds, Me. I remember well the night the boy first made his appearance in the household. His large eyes, white teeth, woolly head, and dark skin kept my eyes fixed upon him for some time, while my father was telling the story of his advent. This boy lived with us for four years. As he was vigorous and strong we had our plays together. The coasting, the skating, the ball playing, the games with marbles and with kites all such things found us adepts. Also in work, such as comes to every New

⁵⁰ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 72.

⁵¹ For a list of anti-slavery societies by state, see American Anti-Slavery Society, *Third Annual Report*, 1836, 89-99.

⁵² Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard*, 2 vols. (New York: The Baker & Taylor Company, 1907), 1:1-16. See also, John A. Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch: Oliver Otis Howard* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 1-2.

England farm lad, we toiled side by side, or at our respective stints in which we competed for success and finish. Edward Johnson, for that was his name, was always kind to me, and helpful. Indeed, I never remember quarreling with him, but he was never cringing or slavish. I have always believed it a providential circumstance that I had that early experience with a negro lad, for it relieved me from that feeling of prejudice which would have hindered me from doing the work for the freedmen which, years afterwards, was committed to my charge.⁵³

What became of young Edward Johnson is unknown, but based on the timeframe, it seems likely that upon Rowland's sudden and unexpected death in 1839, Eliza, left alone to raise their three young sons, sent Edward away. Just over a year after Rowland's death, Eliza remarried. Howard described his step-father, Colonel John Gilmore, a widow and prosperous farmer with a large family of his own as "very kind" and yet despite this fondness, an educational opportunity in the town of Hallowell where Howard's uncle, John Otis resided, brought an end to Howard's days in the Gilmore home.⁵⁴

New York, New York

Despite the shared goal of immediate abolition and equal citizenship which had united white and black activists in increasing numbers during the 1830s, at the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) held in New York in 1840, the gathered abolitionists split over a disagreement which centered on priorities and tactics. The famous split between the Garrison and Tappan factions emerged after "the election of a white woman, Abby Kelley, to the Business Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society." Garrison, who increasingly found himself drawn to the perfectionist teachings of John Humphrey Noyes, began promoting a societal transformation that included the rejection of religious and political structures as well as

⁵³ Howard, *Autobiography*, 1:12-13. See also, Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 1-2. According to the Sixth Census (1840), Maine had a population of just over 500,000 of which 1,300 were free blacks, see US. Bureau of the Census, *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, as Obtained at the Department of State, from the Returns of the Sixth Census* (Washington, D.C., Thomas Allen, 1841), 5.

⁵⁴ Howard, *Autobiography*, 1:16-18. See also, Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 2.

gender norms. For most of the conservative evangelical abolitionists, this move by Garrison proved unsettling. The election of Kelley provided the impetus for the split led by Congregationalist Lewis Tappan who walked out in protest. Over three hundred delegates joined him, and later that day they formed the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS).⁵⁵ Garrison's abhorrence for political action emerged as the second key issue of concern to many politically minded abolitionists, both black and white, who regularly employed the Early Republic's history, including state legislation and judicial rulings, to promote abolitionism. They touted Constitutional arguments for equal citizenship and the black franchise to dispute Congress's gag rule, postal censorship, and recent action by Pennsylvania and New York to restrict or eliminate the black vote. Under the Tappans' leadership, the socially conservative but politically active wing of the abolitionists separated itself from the socially progressive and radically nonpolitical wing under Garrison. The apolitical course chosen by Garrison had significant ramifications, as noted by historian James Oakes, who observed that while Garrison had in 1830 emerged as perhaps the best known abolitionist in the country, his rejection of political action in 1840, however, led to a marginalization of the Garrisonian camp by 1850.⁵⁶

The AFASS, formed in 1840 by the Tappan brothers and their supporters, served as the precursor to the interracial AMA founded six years later. While the AFASS ceased operations by the late 1850s, the AMA went on to take a leading role in the mission to elevate the formerly enslaved to the Congregationalist standard of citizenship during the Civil War and the years

⁵⁵ Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626 – 1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 219-22. Simeon Jocelyn and a number of Black New Yorkers joined Tappan in walking out including “Christopher Rush, Theodore Wright, and Henry Highland Garnet, but Garnet had supported women’s rights to greater participation in the convention the previous year,” 221. For more on the abolitionist schism, see Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 256-65 and James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

⁵⁶ Masur, *Until Justice be Done*, 209-10; see also, Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 222-24 and Oakes, *Freedom National*, 26-27.

immediately thereafter.⁵⁷ From its founding, the AFASS expressed its intention to pursue color-blind and equal citizenship based on birthright and grounded in familiar religious and political justifications. The preamble of its constitution asserted:

Whereas the Declaration of American Independence asserts, that it is a self-evident truth, “that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights—that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness ;” and whereas this political axiom is based upon the Holy Scriptures, which declare that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth,” and . . . whereas every man, irrespective of color, is entitled to equality of rights on the soil of his birth and residence; and whereas the prejudice against color, which exists in this country, is sinful in the sight of God, and should be immediately repented of ; and whereas no scheme of expatriation should be countenanced by any friend of man or God ; and whereas we owe it to the oppressed, to oppressors, to our country, to the world, and to GOD, to do all that is right and lawfully in our power, to bring about the extinction of Slavery and the slave-trade.

Article II declared that “The objects of this Society shall be the entire extinction of Slavery and the slave-trade; and the equal security, protection, and improvement of the people of color,” while Article III justified political involvement by stating, “it [the society] will urge on all the duty of exercising the political franchise against the election of any slaveholder, and in behalf of the enslaved; that the legislative action of governments should be invoked to abolish Slavery and the slave-trade, for the enfranchisement of free people of color . . .” And finally, while excluding women from leadership roles, Article IX expressed the society’s desire to “invite and encourage the formation of Women’s Auxiliary Anti-Slavery Societies, in furtherance of its objects . . .”⁵⁸

Oberlin, Ohio

Although the abolitionist schism of 1840 sent shockwaves across the Northeast, the abolitionist community in Oberlin refused to take sides. The issues that vexed easterners seemed

⁵⁷ DeBoer notes that the AFASS and AMA not only shared the same leaders but also offices in New York. See DeBoer, *Be Jubilant My Feet*, 26.

⁵⁸ Constitution of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. See also Resolution 4, “Resolutions of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society,” *Colored American*, June 27, 1840.

“happily laid aside” in Ohio. In response to a letter from Lewis Tappan explaining the schism, the Oberlin Anti-Slavery Society (OASS) resolved to withdraw from being an auxiliary to the AASS while “disclaim[ing] all intention of censuring the old organization.” Significantly, they also stopped short of approving the AFASS “or expressing any opinion on the merits of the controversy between them.”⁵⁹ However, unlike Garrison, who argued for disunion in 1844, rejected voting and office-holding, and famously burned a copy of the Constitution on July 4, 1854, Oberlinites, both black and white, joined the AFASS and remained politically engaged and committed to perfecting the admittedly flawed republic. This tactical decision meant that the AFASS emerged from the schism as the branch “more supportive of the political goals of blacks” and thus better positioned for interracial cooperation.⁶⁰ Indeed, Black Ohioans had argued for their rights and privileges as citizens since the 1830s and Black Oberlinites “treasured their town and school’s empathetic commitment to practical abolitionism and concern for the ends that must be met rather than the means used to achieve them.”⁶¹ When in February 1846, Garrisonian abolitionists, Stephen Foster and his wife, Abby Kelley Foster, arrived in Oberlin to argue against voting or any political action that gave credence to the “slaveholder’s Constitution,” they failed to persuade Oberlinites to their radical non-action. “As Oberlinites saw it, one of the Garrisonians’ chief argumentative flaws was their apparent lack of practical solutions to the problem of slavery.”⁶² For freemen across the North, the Garrisonian argument undid decades of Black activism during which they had unequivocally argued that the revolutionary human rights language of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution

⁵⁹ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 115.

⁶⁰ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 223; Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 118.

⁶¹ Masur, *Until Justice be Done*, 86-87; Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 122.

⁶² Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 126.

contained no racial qualifiers. Thus political activism remained a primary and necessary tool to reclaim what the South's slavocracy had illegitimately stolen.

New York, New York

The New York-based AMA, founded in the same year in which the Foster-Kelley talks took place in Oberlin, actually traced its history back to the *Amistad* case, the most famous slave mutiny of the antebellum era. In early July 1839 as fifty-three enslaved Mende onboard the Spanish slave ship, *Amistad* traveled, in violation of the international slave trade, toward their final destination in Cuba, their leader, Sengbe Pieh, also known as Joseph Cinqué, led a revolt against the Spanish crew of six. They killed the cook and captain while two others escaped in a canoe, leaving the final two crew members as captives of the Mende, who ordered them to set sail for the west coast of Africa (present day Sierra Leone) from which they had been taken. Over the ensuing weeks, the Spaniards steered the ship slowly northwest along the American coast, hoping for rescue. On August 26, 1839, the US Navy brig *Washington*, under the command of Lieutenant Thomas R. Gedney, discovered and boarded the suspicious schooner off the coast of Long Island. The African crew consisting of forty-two, three of whom were young girls, were subsequently arrested and imprisoned in New Haven, Connecticut, where they awaited trial on charges of murder.

New England's abolitionists, always eager for an opportunity to strike at the heart of slavery, looked to capitalize on the situation. The AFASS leadership including Lewis Tappan, Simeon Jocelyn, and Congregationalist minister, Joshua Leavitt, took the lead. They formed the Amistad Committee to investigate the case, provide legal counsel, and raise money for the defense. The case worked its way through the lower courts before ultimately arriving at the Supreme Court where seventy-four-year-old Massachusetts lawyer and former president, John Q.

Adams, represented the defendants in a trial from February to March 1841.⁶³ Declared free, the Mende sailed to Sierra Leone with three white missionaries in tow, under the auspices of the newly formed Connecticut Union Missionary Society (UMS). This society was created by African American minister, Rev. James W. C. Pennington of the First Colored Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut to promote the gospel in Africa. “The three missionaries, accompanied by the captives, founded a mission station at Kaw Mendi, West-Africa, where the Gospel was preached, a church organized, school established . . .”⁶⁴ Two years later and in recognition of their shared evangelistic missions, Pennington’s UMS partnered with the Oberlin-led Western Evangelical Missionary Society (WEMS). Lastly, the Committee for West India Missions, a gospel mission to the recently emancipated in Jamaica, and whose first missionary was Lane rebel and Oberlin student, Rev. David S. Ingraham, became the final organization that merged to create the AMA.⁶⁵ Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, the AMA and Oberlin remained strong partners with New York philanthropists providing funds and Oberlin leaders.⁶⁶

When formed in 1846, the AMA’s guiding principles, in relation to their North American mission, centered on color-blind and casteless equal citizenry, and “the brotherhood of man,” which “asks for equality of rights, for justice in all human relations; freedom for every soul to work out all that is possible in the way of human good and achievement.” In addition, “it

⁶³ For more on the *Amistad* case, see Marcus Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Viking, 2012). For its connection to the AMA, see 53.

⁶⁴ Lewis Tappan, *History of the American Missionary Association: Its Constitution and Principles* (New York, 1855), 3-7; *History of the American Missionary Association with Facts and Anecdotes Illustrating its Work in the South*, (New York: S. W. Green Printers, 1874), 4.

⁶⁵ Tappan, *History of the American Missionary Association*, 10-17. For the Oberlin-New York connection in the AMA, see Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 263.

⁶⁶ M. E. Strieby, *Oberlin and the American Missionary Association* (Oberlin, 1891); Roland M. Baumann, *Constructing Black Education at Oberlin College: A Documentary History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 50-51.

especially calls for the elevation of the moral, intellectual, and spiritual in man to the supreme place.”⁶⁷ Religiously, this meant “preaching of the Gospel, free from all complicity with slavery and caste.”⁶⁸ In light of the fact that the nation’s leading denominations had tainted themselves by compromising with slaveholders, Lewis Tappan, the AMA’s treasurer declared that “the time has come when the friends of an unadulterated gospel ought to rally, throughout the world, to rescue Christianity from perversion, and save the Missionary cause from ruin.”⁶⁹ The AMA drew extensively from Congregationalist circles in filling its leadership roles with its initial list of officers including Arthur Tappan as vice president, Lewis Tappan as treasurer, Simeon S. Jocelyn as recording secretary, and George Whipple as corresponding secretary. The AMA, with a broad Congregationalist support base, also prided itself on being a biracial organization where Blacks served in leadership roles. In the same list, Black men filled two of the five vice president roles and also four of the eleven seats on the executive committee. Historian Clara DeBoer notes that “Although the percentage of blacks to whites is lower in the new AMA than in the UMS (which began as an almost totally black society), the number of African Americans involved was not equaled by any other integrated anti-slavery organization.”⁷⁰ The monthly periodical, *American Missionary*, became the official mouthpiece of the AMA and “AMA officials

⁶⁷ Augustus Field Beard, *Crusade of Brotherhood: A History of the American Missionary Association* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1909), 226 and 230. See also Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 22.

⁶⁸ *History of the American Missionary Association*, 5.

⁶⁹ Tappan, *History of the American Missionary Association*, 19.

⁷⁰ DeBoer, *His Truth Is Marching On*, 102-04 and Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 224 and DeBoer, *Be Jubilant My Feet*, 86-87. Prominent black leaders included: Theodore Sedgwick Ward (NY) and Samuel Ringgold Ward (NY) who both served as Vice Presidents while Charles Bennett Ray (NY) Samuel E. Cornish (NY) and James William Charles Pennington (NY) joined Theodore Sedgwick Ward on the Executive Committee. For Arthur Tappan’s supporting role in AMA, see Lewis Tappan, *Life of Arthur Tappan* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), 317-36.

attributed 50 percent of the association's annual income to funds received in response to the *Missionary's* appeals.”⁷¹

During the remainder of the prewar years and in efforts to fulfill its American mission, the AMA focused on both maintaining a small ministry in the South and on political organizing. Despite its goal of abolition, the AMA's ministry in the South throughout the 1850s remained small and confined to efforts in Kentucky where the association in 1849 accepted as a missionary, John G. Fee, the son of a Kentucky slaveholder who had converted to abolitionism, as well as a single missionary in North Carolina.⁷² Politically, after the demise of the short-lived radical Liberty Party by 1848, the AFASS and AMA begrudgingly threw their support behind the newly established and less radical anti-slavery Free Soil Party arguing for the importance of voting against slavery. The equally short-lived Free Soil Party reached a larger anti-slavery constituency than the Liberty Party and served as the precursor to the Republican Party that emerged as a potent force in 1856 to advance anti-slavery constitutional politics.⁷³ Indeed, once the less radical wing of the Free Soil Party had secured Martin Van Buren on the top of the ticket, they allowed the abolitionists to craft a “national platform of freedom in opposition to the sectional platform of slavery.”⁷⁴ However, as historian Henry Mayer notes, to consider slavery bad policy because it threatened the prosperity of white workers was quite different from considering slavery a sin because it infringed upon God-given freedom. Nevertheless, although the logic of many Free Soilers smacked of the same spirit that sustained the Ohio Black Laws, it

⁷¹ Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 94.

⁷² Tappan, *History of the American Missionary Association*, 40-41; *Third Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1849), 22.

⁷³ *Address to the Friends of Liberty by the Executive Committee of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* (New York: The Society, 1848); Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 124-25.

⁷⁴ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 144

threatened the expansion of slavery and the reach of the slave-power at a critical junction in the nation's history.⁷⁵

Oberlin, Ohio

Just two months before the presidential election, Oberlin sent a proud delegation of its citizens, students, and alumni, including Sabram Cox, William Howard Day, and John Mercer Langston, to the National Colored Convention that met in Cleveland on September 6, 1848. Langston had arrived in Oberlin as a young man in 1844 to attend Oberlin College. Upon his arrival, he initially boarded with mathematics professor, George Whipple, who became a life-long friend.⁷⁶ At the convention, Oberlinites proved instrumental in crafting the language of the critical Declaration of Sentiments, which emphasized their twin goals of abolitionism and equal rights. The delegates referred to themselves as “citizens of America” and expressed confidence in “the ultimate elevation of the colored population, to all the social, intellectual, civil and religious rights and immunities, of a republican and Christian country.” They resolved to forever oppose every action “whether civil, political, social or religious, in any manner derogatory to the universal equality of man,” expressed their support of any political action that “shall best promote the cause of Liberty and Humanity,” and finally, recommended the Free-Soil movement to their people despite their determination “to maintain the higher standard and more liberal views which have heretofore characterized us as abolitionists.”⁷⁷

While the AMA and their friends in Oberlin united in supporting the Free-Soil Party in the 1848 presidential election, Howard neared completion of his second year at Bowdoin College

⁷⁵ Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 384.

⁷⁶ John Mercer Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol: Or the First and Only Negro Representative in Congress from the Old Dominion* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1894), 77-80.

⁷⁷ *Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention Held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday, September 6, 1848* (Rochester, 1848), 10-15.

in Brunswick, Maine. Known for his piety and temperance while at Bowdoin, Howard expressed little concern for national politics or interest in the increasingly divisive issue of slavery. The primary interest that consumed him outside of his studies centered on one Elizabeth (Lizzie) Van Waite, whom he later married upon graduation from West Point in 1855.⁷⁸ In a letter written to his mother one day after Whig Zachary Taylor's victory in the 1848 presidential election, Howard expressed his opposition to the Free-Soil Party, noting that three supporters of that party had recently failed to convince him of their position.⁷⁹ Although the Free Soil Party showed poorly in the election, the fact that a founder of the Democratic Party had run on a third-party ticket dedicated to the non-expansion of slavery revealed how divisive the issue was becoming as the nineteenth century neared its midpoint.⁸⁰

Despite the defeat, the Free Soil Party had forced the Whigs and Democrats to acknowledge its emerging influence in national politics, one which could impact the national course on the issue of slavery. Two months after the election, the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio took place at Columbus, Ohio. There John Mercer Langston, soon to graduate with his bachelors' degree from Oberlin, received special praise for an "eloquent and soul-stirring speech" and was selected to a leadership role within the convention.⁸¹ On the one hand, he expressed black nationalist ideals and courted voluntary emigration due to his doubts that Blacks would ever be allowed to enjoy their right to full social acceptance in America. On the other hand, however, he joined with the other gathered delegates to recommend that 500 copies of David Walker's 1829 "Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World" and Henry

⁷⁸ Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 3-5.

⁷⁹ O. O. Howard to Eliza Gilmore, November 8, 1848, Oliver Otis Howard Papers, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine. Hereafter referred to as Howard Papers.

⁸⁰ Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 153-54.

⁸¹ *Minutes and Address of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, Convened at Columbus, January 10th, 11th, 12th, & 13th, 1849* (Oberlin, 1849), 3.

Highland Garnet's 1843 "Address to the Slaves of the United States," arguably the two most famous Black addresses on the topics of immediatism and Black freedom of the antebellum period, be "gratuitously circulated."⁸² One year later at the annual State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, Langston seemed less interested in emigration and joined in support of his brother, Charles, William Howard Day, and Charles Yancey, who appealed to Ohio lawmakers to grant them the full citizenship to which they believed themselves entitled due to "their participation in every American war, legal opinions by prestigious jurists, as well as the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence."⁸³

As the nineteenth century drew towards its mid-point, political-abolitionists, including those connected to the AMA and Oberlin, demonstrated an increasing refusal to compromise with the South's "Slave Power" – a reference to the few hundred thousand slaveholders who exercised outsized power of national politics.⁸⁴ They did so in recognition of the fact that the fight for the nation's future involved more than a fight for free labor and free soil but also a fight over the very definition and meaning of citizenship. In the decade before the Civil War, two opposing views crystallized: the South's exclusive definition that incorporated whites only versus the political-abolitionist's vision of a more expansive citizenry with no regard for color. The primary fears expressed by political-abolitionists during these years centered on the uncivilized and barbaric course which the South's slavocracy threatened to take the nation and how that vision threatened to strip northern states of their inherent right to determine citizenship within their own boundaries.

⁸² *Minutes and Address of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio*, 18; William F Cheek and Aimee Lee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829-65* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 115.

⁸³ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 158.

⁸⁴ For more on the South's "Slave Power," see John Stauffer, *Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 21, 25-27, 31-32, 117-19, 180-81, and 189-90.

During the 1850s, these fears were actualized as the decade before the war witnessed the continued ascendancy of the South's "Slave Power" and left precious little hope for abolitionism. Indeed, political-abolitionists experienced a series of defeats that left them shaken and ultimately seething at the outsized influence of the South's slave-power in the national government that had resulted in the Fugitive Slave Bill of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, and finally the Supreme Court's decision in the *Dred Scott* case of 1857. In the first, the federal government undermined northern states' personal liberty laws and in theory required abolitionists to violate their consciences by helping to apprehend fugitive slaves under threat of fine or imprisonment. The Kansas-Nebraska Act four years later rendered the Missouri Compromise null and void and threatened to open more of the nation's western territory to slavery. Finally, in a direct attack on the status of northern freemen, Chief Justice Roger Taney ruled that African Americans were never intended to be nor ever could be citizens of the United States. The series of setbacks that undermined northern states' rights, opened the territories to slavery, and denied Black citizenship, led one historian to refer to this period as a time when the South's slave-power "was well-nigh supreme over politics, trade, the press, the pulpit, and the benevolent and missionary societies."⁸⁵ In the midst of these dark times, Congregationalists continued to promote the New England way and contest each ruling that eroded interracial demands for equal citizenship.

The AMA found the Fugitive-Slave Bill abhorrent from the moment it passed. Since the early nineteenth century, New England states had passed personal "liberty laws" to establish basic legal rights for fugitive slaves and those so accused, a move white southerners viewed as a direct challenge to the spirit, if not the letter, of the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act. Although the Supreme Court in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* (1842) upheld the constitutionality of the 1793 Fugitive

⁸⁵ *History of the American Missionary Association*, 3.

Slave Act, it importantly clarified that retrieval of fugitive slaves was the responsibility of federal officials alone.⁸⁶ In response, New England states passed laws prohibiting their state and local officials from assisting in the apprehension of fugitive slaves. The new Fugitive Slave law not only overturned *Prigg*, it also rendered New England's personal liberty laws null and void while also encouraging its judges to find in favor of interloping slavecatchers. In addition, it violated the basic concepts inherent in federalism which provided states with the power to grant rights to those residing within its borders while directly challenging the concept of freedom national. When the AMA delegates gathered at its Fourth Annual Meeting in October 1850, it issued its response to the new law and stated its members resolve to resist the law and "hide the outcasts . . . and extend aid to the fugitive from unrighteous oppression," a stance the AMA maintained until the Civil War in recognition of the fact that the evils attendant in the unjust Fugitive-Slave Bill "ruthlessly swept away compacts designed to secure freedom and its attendant blessings."⁸⁷

Abolitionist allies in both New York and Oberlin mobilized quickly, speaking out against the new law, reinvigorating Vigilance Committees, raising funds to provide legal support for fugitives, and preparing to resist with violence if necessary. In Oberlin, John Langston railed against the new law, telling a large gathering of African Americans that it "strips man of his manhood and liberty upon an ex-parte trial . . . declares that the decision of the commissioner, the lowest judicial officer known to the law, upon the matter of personal liberty—the gravest subject that can be submitted to any tribunal, shall be final and conclusive." He vehemently protested the fact that the law struck down "all the great bulwarks of Liberty" since it "kills alike,

⁸⁶ Masur, *Until Justice Be Done*, 232-35.

⁸⁷ *Fourth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association*, (New York, 1850), 11 and *Ninth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association*, (New York, 1855), 97.

the true spirit of the American Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the palladium of our liberties.”⁸⁸

The tumultuous nature of national politics in the decade before the war appeared to take a toll on Howard, then a student at West Point, who despite never joining an abolitionist society, twice referenced himself as an abolitionist during this period. However, as a military officer, he determined to avoid entanglement in politics declaring that “a soldier must have no politics of his own. It won’t do for him to slander the President. He must ever be the upholder & the servant of the party in power, i.e. hold his tongue & do as he is told.”⁸⁹

Three years after Langston’s stirring convention speech and two months before the Ohio Senate refused to hear his appeal for black male enfranchisement in Ohio, US Senator Stephen Douglas (D-IL) “created a political earthquake” when he introduced the Kansas-Nebraska bill and the concept of “popular sovereignty,” which opened up the entire West to slavery and repealed the Missouri Compromise, one of the few pieces of legislation revered by political-abolitionists. Its passage in May 1854 shocked not just abolitionists, but northerners of all political persuasions, and set off a fight for the West, marked the end of the Whig Party, and paved the way for the emergence of the antislavery Republican Party by the presidential election of 1856.⁹⁰ Observing the course of events from Cincinnati, Dr. Rev. Charles Brandon Boynton, a

⁸⁸ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 272; *Minutes of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, Convened at Columbus, Jan. 15th, 16th, 17th and 18, 1851*, 6-7; Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 173-74.

⁸⁹ O. O. Howard to Eliza Gilmore, September 27, 1851 and April 11, 1852, Howard Papers. In September of 1851, Howard told her, “If I had remained at home, I would very soon be a voter. Who knows what my politics might have been. Father may suggest an abolitionist.” And in April “found from my wonted frankness, to be somewhat of a Whig - somewhat of an abolitionist, rigid teetotaler &c.” See also, Howard, *Autobiography*, 49 and Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 8.

⁹⁰ Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 93-95 and 125-27; Masur, *Until Justice be Done*, 248-49; Address on the Negro and the elective franchise, (Columbus), Ohio, 1854, John Mercer Langston Papers, Box 2, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collections & Archives, Fisk University; “American Missionary Association,” *National Era*, October 10, 1850 and “Convention to Hasten the Extinction of Slavery,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, April 6, 1855; Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston*, 228-29.

devout abolitionist from Massachusetts, AMA lifetime member, and pastor of the Vine Street Congregational Church, sprang into action.⁹¹ Just one year after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Boynton co-authored a book, the shortened titled of which was, *Journey through Kansas, with Sketches of Nebraska*, which called for emigration to the territories by abolitionists, while detailing the threat that Missouri slaveholders posed, if, as rumors suggested, they crossed into Kansas to make it “a possession for slavery.”⁹² The AMA also quickly mobilized and commissioned three missionaries to Kansas in the summer of 1854. By year’s end, it had dozens in place, most of whom served as pastors of small churches preaching a gospel of “equal rights and brotherly love.”⁹³ In response to the calls of Boynton, the AMA, and others, thousands of abolitionists, including the fiery John Brown, immigrated to the region. Some of the first volunteers for the crusade were Oberlinites who sought to labor in the field where their influence would be “most felt for the cause of the Lord and the Slave” and in efforts to tip the west toward freedom and liberty.⁹⁴

West Point, New York

Howard, who graduated fourth in his class at West Point in the same year the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed, revealed how association with friends “drawn from the ranks of Northerners and Southerners alike” kept him from anti-slavery activism despite his earlier assessments of himself. Far from a political-abolitionist, he expressed support for Douglas’s

⁹¹ *Manual of the Vine Street Congregational Church and Society, Cincinnati, Ohio with a Catalogue of Members*, 1878, 8-11. Boynton served as pastor from 1846 to 1865.

⁹² Charles Brandon Boynton and T. B. Mason, *Journey through Kansas, with Sketches of Nebraska: Describing the Country, Climate, Soil, Mineral, Manufacturing, and Other Resources: The Results of a Tour made in the Autumn of 1854* (Cincinnati: Moore, Wiltach, Keys & Co., 1855), 131-32. Boynton and Mason put the matter plainly, “Kansas may easily be made a free State. It is now completely in the power of freedom’s friends. They can save it if they will, without unreasonable effort, and without even pecuniary sacrifice. But we desire to lift our voice in warning against the idea that it will be a free State now, as a matter of course. Every man whose circumstances will allow, should feel that he is personally called upon to go and aid in making it sure.”

⁹³ Tappan, *History of the American Missionary Association*, 42-44.

⁹⁴ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 173-74

Kansas-Nebraska Bill, advancing the argument that the Constitution sanctioned slavery.⁹⁵ He received resistance, however, to his view from his younger brother, Rowland, who informed him with a typical political antislavery response that although the “the constitution sanctions Slavery . . . this sanctioning is rather in the sense of tolerating than authorizing. The Constitution suffered Slavery to exist because its annihilation was, then impracticable.” Rowland asserted that “Our fathers never designed or framed that Instrument to perpetuate Servitude in any form. It is founded on principles diametrically opposed to Slavery, and whatever contends against Slavery is not at war with the Spirit of the American Constitution.”⁹⁶ While Rowland accepted that the government had no right to negate state rights and overturn slavery in the South, the territories were a different story. There, he argued, “The Constitution reserves to itself the guaranty of State Rights, but leaves to Congress the entire control of the public domain. Congress has the same right to legislate in regard to the Territories as the Legislature of Maine has to control her public lands.” Although there is no record of Howard’s response to his brother’s argument, he soon found himself confronting in person slavery and the barbarous society it spawned when ordered to Florida during the Seminole War in 1857.⁹⁷

When the AMA gathered for its Tenth Annual Meeting in Fulton, New York, William Weston Patton, pastor of the Fourth Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut delivered the annual discourse on the need for New England’s social institutions to pervade the nation. He drew his sermon from Matthew 5:14, “Ye are the light of the world.” The battle over Kansas and slavery’s expansion threatened the very future of the republic and informed the sermon’s application. In three points, Patton noted the uniqueness of the AMA and its civilizing mission of

⁹⁵ Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 9-10.

⁹⁶ Rowland Howard to O. O. Howard, April 10, 1854, Howard Papers.

⁹⁷ Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 11-12. While stationed in New York, the Howards attended the Episcopal Church in Troy, New York.

conversion, religion, and education, pillars of society which must spread their transformative influence across the country. He observed that the AMA “seeks and by God’s blessing accomplishes, the conversion of individuals from sin. Every such convert becomes a blazing torch in a region of darkness bringing to bear upon the surrounding gloom the light of a holy character, of an earnest proclamation of the truth, and of benevolent deeds.” Second, “it organizes *churches* which become centres of holy influence. As soon as a few converts are made, they are formed into a Christian church, and thus enabled to diffuse a brighter and more permanent radiance by the methods peculiar to such an organism. Finally, “through the influence of Christian institutions, thus introduced, a leaven of improvement is deposited in the bosom of society, which works day and night, until the community is pervaded with new ideas, and old habits of evil are exchanged for customs in harmony with the Bible and the highest civilization.”⁹⁸

As the new year of 1857 dawned, the AMA and its political-abolitionist allies received yet another shock, this one originating from the nation’s highest court, where Chief Justice Roger Taney specifically targeted and sought to eradicate northern abolitionists’ arguments in favor of Black citizenship and equal rights in his now infamous ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*. The case began in 1846, when Dred Scott, a slave from Virginia, and his enslaved wife, Harriet Robinson, applied for their freedom in Missouri after having resided in the free state of Illinois and free territory of Wisconsin. The case, which centered on the right of property in a slave, slowly worked its way through the state courts of Missouri before ending up at the US Supreme Court. In his far-reaching majority opinion, backed by all but two of the associate justices, Taney “pronounced the United States a white Republic,” declaring that the Constitution “distinctly and

⁹⁸ William W. Patton, “Christians the Light of the World. A Sermon, Preached Before the American Missionary Association in Fulton, N.Y.,” *Tenth Annual Report American Missionary Association* (New York, 1856).

expressly affirmed” the right of property in slaves while also asserting that the founders never intended to incorporate Blacks into the body politic. His view of history appeared to ignore the inclusive state constitutions created during the Revolutionary Era and stood at direct odds with the arguments made by political abolitionists for decades in which they contended that the founders intentionally avoided inserting any racial qualifier into the Constitution. His decision also held important implications for the upcoming 1860 presidential election which in the North pitted the Republican Party’s non-expansionist principles against Democratic Stephen Douglas’s compromise strategy of “popular sovereignty.” Taney’s ruling, which became a center-piece of the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates a year later, declared the Republican Party’s “cardinal political principle effectively unconstitutional” while making the idea of “popular sovereignty null and void.”⁹⁹

In the immediate wake of the decision, Congregationalists across the North and Midwest joined black activists and condemned the ruling as unconstitutional citing both the distorted reading of history and tortured reasoning which undergirded it.¹⁰⁰ They refused to accept Taney’s decision and to abandon their arguments. The ruling only made them more determined and bolder. Indeed, the day after the Supreme Court issued its ruling, the most prominent Congregationalist preacher in the country, Henry Ward Beecher of Brooklyn’s Plymouth Church, held a prayer meeting in response. He addressed those gathered to lament “the recent decision of the ‘unjust judges’ of the Supreme Court of the United States—disfranchising a citizen of the United States because his skin is black.” Emphasizing the implications for Black

⁹⁹ Richard D. Brown, *Self-Evident Truths: Contesting Equal Rights from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2017), 106; Wilentz, *No Property in Man*, 242-47.

¹⁰⁰ Berlin, *Long Emancipation*, 155-57; M. Thacher, “Church Action in Regard to Slavery.” *Congregationalist*, June 12, 1857; S. D., “Religious Intelligence: General Convention of Vermont, June 26, 1857,” *Congregationalist* (Boston, MA, United States) Volume: 9 , Issue: 26; J. C. H., “Correspondence: Letter from Iowa,” June 26, 1857, *Congregationalist* (Boston, MA, United States) Volume: 9 , Issue: 26; A. M. R. “Ohio Congregational Conference,” July 3, 1857, *Congregationalist* (Boston, MA, United States) Volume: 9 , Issue: 27.

citizenship, Beecher observed that the ruling not only disfranchised four million colored enslaved citizens but half a million of free colored persons besides. He concluded his remarks by quoting Psalm 2:9-10 in which the LORD, the Judge, promises to punish unjust judges: “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.”¹⁰¹

To defend Black rights to equal citizenship, Congregationalists quickly seized on the dissent by Massachusetts' native and Supreme Court Associate Justice Benjamin Curtis. Curtis premised his dissent on a national citizenship by birthright and the federalist concept that states possessed the right, within their borders, to determine those to whom the national rights of citizenship, i.e. the “privileges and immunities” belong. Citing Article IV, Section 2 of the Constitution, “The citizens of each State shall be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens of the several States,” Curtis reasoned that the “national rights of citizenship” are secured to “the citizens of each State.” States therefore possessed the authority to determine who held the status of citizen with its attendant privileges and immunities. “The qualification is not to be looked for in any provision of the Constitution or laws of the United States. They are to be citizens of the several States, and, as such, the privileges and immunities of general citizenship, derived from and guaranteed by the Constitution, are to be enjoyed by them.” And in accordance with the general reasoning of the day, Curtis disassociated the franchise with citizenship but acknowledged that “this right is decisive evidence of citizenship.”¹⁰²

Reverend William A. Larned, the Connecticut-born Congregationalist minister provided a political-abolitionist assessment of the *Dred Scott* decision to Congregationalist readers of the

¹⁰¹ “A Hymn for the Supreme Court of the U. S.,” *American Missionary*, Vol. 1, No. 4, April, 1857.

¹⁰² *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857); William A Larned, “Negro Citizenship,” *The New Englander*, Vol. 15, August 1857, 492.

New Englander. In his article “Negro Citizenship,” he relied heavily on Justice Curtis’s dissent. He praised Justice Curtis’s logical and historically informed dissent which demonstrated, from state’s constitutions of the late eighteenth century to the Articles of Confederation and ultimately the Constitution, that free Blacks had always been recognized by certain states as citizens with accompanying rights and privileges which in certain cases included the franchise. Larned excoriated Taney’s decision that rode roughshod over states’ rights, and he pointed out the logical inconsistencies that grounded the majority’s biased opinion: “But in case the power is left with the states to determine through their own citizens who shall be the native-born citizen of the United States, the country is protected from the hazard of a consolidated and arbitrary National Government.” In his distorted reasoning, Taney attempted to make the 1790 naturalization law in which Congress possessed the authority to naturalize immigrants determinative in native-born citizenship cases. Larned observed correctly that “attempts to prove that since states cannot make foreign born individuals citizens, a right reserved to the federal government by the naturalization law of 1790, then therefore they cannot make this other class (Black people) citizens does not follow.” Taney “has not proved — has not brought forward a single argument to prove — that native-born citizens are not thereby citizens of the United States. The two cases are different, and stand on different grounds.”¹⁰³ Perhaps most egregiously Larned declared, Taney’s ruling made a mockery of the revolutionary human rights language embedded in the Declaration of Independence and robbed it of its most noble truth and majestic sentence that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” There, the founders spoke “of man as man, a common nature—not as born subject or citizen, bond or free, now with respect to any of the

¹⁰³ Larned, “Negro Citizenship,” 499 and 501.

circumstances under which his birth may have taken place, but as a creature of God, and as such endowed with certain inalienable rights. This truth is the very foundation of man's hopes for universal freedom.”¹⁰⁴

When the Supreme Court handed down the *Dred Scott* decision, Howard was stationed at Fort Brook, the headquarters of the Department of Florida, near the small village of Tampa. Although he had noted his support for the Republican ticket in the 1856 election, he betrayed an ignorance of slavery's true realities, something not uncommon for northerners unacquainted with either slavery or abolitionist literature. While the AMA excluded slaveholders from its churches and spoke of its mission to slave states and the need to convert slaveholders to the “pure and free Gospel of Christ,” Howard viewed slaveholders in a positive light, thinking it unfair of abolitionists to refuse to attend church with them and unfair to view them as not “good Christians.”¹⁰⁵ As a New Englander, he had little first-hand interaction with or understanding of slavery. His first exposure to the “peculiar institution” came at this time when as Howard recalled, “I did not oppose slavery.” In a telling 1890 address to an audience in Massachusetts reflecting on his brief stint in Florida, Howard remembered meeting an “old colored ‘aunty’ who was always so happy, so jolly, it seemed as if she had not a care in the world. I said to her one day: ‘You seem to be happy as a slave.’ She replied: ‘Sir, you don’t know anything about it. We are praying night and day that God will set us free.’”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Larned, “Negro Citizenship,” 509.

¹⁰⁵ *Eleventh Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1857), 22 and 77; *Twelfth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1858), 10, American Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana. Hereafter noted as AMAA; O. O. Howard to Eliza Gilmore, January 4, 1857 and O. O. Howard to Eliza Gilmore, March 29, 1857, Howard Papers; see also Carpenter, *Sword and Oliver Branch*, 13-14.

¹⁰⁶ ADDRESS OF GEN. O. O. HOWARD. At Northampton, Mass., Oct. 23, 1890 Source: The American Advocate of Peace and Arbitration, Vol. 53, No. 1 (JANUARY, 1891), p. 9. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27898236> (accessed: 14-10-2016 02:11 UTC).

Although Howard's encounter with this black woman did not convert him to abolitionism, he underwent a different conversion, a spiritual one that would have far-reaching consequences for the remainder of his life, including altering his views on slavery and the status of African Americans in general. While both of his younger brothers, Charles and Rowland, had undergone spiritual awakenings in 1853 and 1857 respectively, Howard recalled his own conversion experience which occurred on the last night of May 1857 while he read his Bible and a book on the life of Captain Hedley Vicars of the British Army. As Howard remembered it, he "had the feeling of sudden relief from the depression that had been long upon me. The joy of that night was so great that it would be difficult to attempt in any way to describe it. The next morning everything appeared to me to be changed the sky was brighter, the trees more beautiful, and the songs of the birds were never before so sweet to my ears." A few days later, he publicly professed his newfound faith at a Methodist prayer meeting. His embrace of the Christian faith led him to question his future in the military and consider the ministry, something which weighed on his mind even as he received orders to return to West Point as a mathematics instructor in the fall. Upon his return, Howard and Lizzie, along with their two young children, entered a new season of life in New York where they attended the local Episcopal Church while Howard began a prayer meeting at West Point for cadets.¹⁰⁷

Oberlin, Ohio

Less than a year later, in early 1858, John Price, a Kentucky slave belonging to John Bacon of Mason County, made the dangerous decision to emancipate himself and flee to

¹⁰⁷ Howard, *Autobiography*, 1:81-83; Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 13-19; David Thomson, "Oliver Otis Howard: Reassessing the Legacy of the 'Christian General,'" *American Nineteenth Century History* 10, no. 3 (September 1, 2009), 280-82.

Oberlin.¹⁰⁸ When Kentucky slave hunter, Anderson Jennings, arrived in Oberlin to search for another escaped slave, he became aware of Price's presence in town and quickly orchestrated a plan with a few sympathetic whites, including the young son of a local farmer named Shakespeare, to capture Price and return him to Kentucky. The plan involved Shakespeare tricking Price into believing there was a job at his father's farm and then driving him out of town to be picked up by Jennings's agents, who could then safely and quietly ferry him back to Kentucky. To have any chance of success, the plot required great secrecy as Jennings and his agents were operating in "enemy" territory and could not risk alerting local abolitionists, who had been watching Jennings's every move since his arrival.

On the morning of September 13, 1858, Shakespeare successfully tricked Price into hopping onto the family buggy for the job just outside of town. Jennings's agents quickly overtook the buggy and captured Price. They transferred him to their wagon before speeding off to Wellington to await the evening train to Columbus. Along the road to Wellington, however, the wagon passed by two Oberlin students known to Price, and he cried out for help. The two students hurried back to town to report the kidnapping, and once alerted, the town's abolitionists rushed into action, securing every hack and the fastest horses to pursue the kidnappers. The determined rescuers, numbering in the hundreds by late afternoon, found Price with Jennings and his agents at the Wadsworth House in Wellington. A deputy US marshal from Columbus tried in vain to demand compliance with the 1850 Fugitive-Slave Bill as Oberlinites pressed against the door demanding the release of Price. When negotiations failed, they forced open the door to

¹⁰⁸ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 208; and Jacob R. Shipherd, *History of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue* (Boston: J. P. Jewett and Company, 1859), 2.

Jennings's room and grabbed Price, taking him to a waiting buggy that whisked him to Oberlin.¹⁰⁹

The driver of that getaway buggy was Orindatus Simon Bolivar Wall (more commonly referred to as O. S. B.), the once enslaved son of North Carolina slave owner Stephen R. Wall and one of his slaves, Priscilla Ely.¹¹⁰ After being sent north to freedom and settling in Oberlin, Wall turned to the leather trade and opened a shoemaking shop in town in 1852 while several of his siblings and half-siblings attended Oberlin College. In 1854, Wall's sister and Oberlin student, Caroline, married the future lawyer, John Mercer Langston, and Wall married Amanda Thomas, a teacher and former classmate of Caroline's.¹¹¹ Wall, an anti-slavery and equal rights activist, was a member of the Underground Railroad before his famous role in the Oberlin-Wellington rescue which resulted in charges and went to court months later. The direct violation of federal law by Oberlinites could not go unchallenged and the grand jury of the United States Court for the Northern District of Ohio ended up issuing thirty-seven indictments against prominent Oberlinites including Wall, Charles Langston, and ten other African Americans. As John Langston later described it, the case pitted the enforcement powers of the federal

¹⁰⁹ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 208-11.

¹¹⁰ Daniel J. Sharfstein, *Invisible Line: Three American Families and the Secret Journey from Black to White* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 29. Stephen R. Wall was never married and had a propensity to name his slave children after famous individuals (e. g. Napoleon, Benjamin Franklin, and Caroline Matilda, named for King George III's sister). Perhaps as some form of a cruel joke, Orindatus possessed as his middle names that of the great Latin American liberator, Simon Bolivar. After being sent north to freedom and settling in Oberlin, several of Wall's siblings and half-siblings attended Oberlin College, while he turned to the leather trade, opening a shoemaking shop in town in 1852. In 1854, Wall's sister and Oberlin student, Caroline, married the future lawyer, John Mercer Langston, and Wall married Amanda Thomas, a teacher and former classmate of Caroline's. For more on Wall's childhood and time in Oberlin, see Sharfstein, *Invisible Line*, 35-36, and 87-90.

¹¹¹ Fletcher, *History of Oberlin College*, 2:564; Sharfstein, *Invisible Line*, 34-38, 87-89; for Amanda as a teacher, see Sharfstein, *The Invisible Line*, 132, 158, 198-99. John Mercer Langston was born a freedman in Virginia in 1829, graduated from Oberlin College, and rose to prominence as an abolitionist, attorney, educator, and politician in the second half of the nineteenth century. He served as the first dean of Howard University's Law School and later became the first African American elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Virginia, serving in the 51st Congress (1889-1891). For more on John Mercer Langston, see his autobiography, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol; Or, the First and Only Negro Representative in Congress from the Old Dominion* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1894).

government against “the pledge of the community . . . that no fugitive slave should ever be taken from Oberlin and returned to his enslavement.”¹¹²

Illinois

Only days after from the rescue of John Price in Wellington, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, campaigning for the Illinois’ US Senate seat, met for their third and fourth debates in which competing views of Black citizenship and rights played a central role. In the previous month during the first debate in Ottawa, Douglas ridiculed Lincoln for objecting to the *Dred Scott* decision by asserting that Blacks possessed certain inherent rights based on the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. He painted Lincoln as one who favored granting the “negro the rights and privileges of citizenship,” including the rights “to settle in Illinois, to vote on an equality with whites, and to make them eligible to office, to serve on juries, and to adjudge your [white] rights.” If interested in such clearly preposterous ideas, Douglas continued, “then support Mr. Lincoln and the Black Republican party, who are in favor of the citizenship of the negro.” The gathered crowd replied, “Never, never.” Douglas affirmed his opposition to “negro citizenship” and support for keeping the government for whites: “I believe it was made by white men for the benefit of white men and their posterity for ever, and I am in favor of confining citizenship to white men, men of European birth and descent, instead of conferring it upon negroes, Indians, and other inferior races.”¹¹³ Lincoln responded to Douglas’s charge that he supported Black citizenship and equal rights in their fourth debate which took place at Charleston on September 18, 1858. Lincoln stated:

I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, [applause]-that I am not nor ever have

¹¹² Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 185. See also Sharfstein, *Invisible Line*, 85-102 and Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 210-224.

¹¹³ First Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858. See also third debate which took place in Jonesboro, September 15, 1858 where Douglas reiterated this view.

been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.¹¹⁴

Unwilling at this point in the heated environment of southern Illinois to speak affirmatively on Black citizenship, Lincoln limited himself to defending Black people's natural rights while aligning himself with the racist language of his listeners. Less than a month later, and in friendly territory in Quincy, Illinois, Lincoln agreed with Douglas that the black man was not his equal "in many respects" but also affirmed that he "is entitled to all the rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence" and "in the right to eat the bread without the leave of any body else . . . he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every other man."¹¹⁵ These remarks reveal the complex reasoning behind the future president's thinking as he begun wrestling with the idea of black citizenship. Indeed, in his famous "House Divided" speech earlier that year, Lincoln began to ponder more deeply the possibilities of racial equality. He fundamentally recognized that contrary to Republican principles, "the denial of black citizenship was part of an attempt to make slavery perpetual." In his rebuttals of Douglas, Lincoln correctly noted that *Dred Scott* rendered null and void Douglas' precious "popular sovereignty" which asserted that states possessed the authority to make citizens.¹¹⁶ Lincoln's issue with *Dred Scott*, as he expressed it at this time, rested on federalism, the right of new states

¹¹⁴ Fourth Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Charleston, Illinois, September 18, 1858.

¹¹⁵ Sixth Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Quincy, Illinois, October 13, 1858.

¹¹⁶ James Oakes, *Crooked Path to Abolition: Abraham Lincoln and the Antislavery Constitution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021), 112-17 and 123-24; Oakes, *Freedom National*, 356 and Wilentz, *No Property in Man*, 247-49.

formed out of the territories to determine their form of government and social institutions, not the Biblical, historic, or legal arguments of equality made by political-abolitionists.¹¹⁷

Cleveland, Ohio

The Oberlin-Wellington case finally went to court in Cleveland in April 1859 with Democrats manning every important role in the court. The rescuers determined to make the case an indictment of the nation's laws which denied Black men citizenship and equal rights with Charles Langston outdoing his brother for once and making the most famous speech. He remarked that his very indictment recognized him as a citizen and yet the court denied him a trial before "an impartial jury" of his peers instead placing his fate in the hands of those with "universal and deeply fixed prejudices."¹¹⁸ Despite thunderous applause from the crowd in response to his stirring speech, Langston and the others were found guilty and placed in the Cleveland prison. While the accomplices who did not reside in Oberlin gained early release, the Oberlin contingent remained in prison until July when Lorain County Court of Common Pleas reached an agreement for their release in lieu of not pursuing charges of kidnapping against the Kentucky slave catchers who had initially pursued John Price. Two months before the now nationally famous rescuers went home, however, a mass Republican convention took place on May 24 with the nation's most prominent antislavery advocates in attendance to offer support to the imprisoned and stirring speeches to a gathered crowd of over 12,000.¹¹⁹ The speakers railed against the Fugitive-Slave Bill, the *Dred Scott* decision, and the Democratic Party in general with one stating emphatically, "The Constitution gave us no right to make slaves of a part of our

¹¹⁷ Earl M. Maltz, *Civil Rights, the Constitution, and Congress, 1863-1869* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 1-2.

¹¹⁸ *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 216.

¹¹⁹ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 219-20.

citizens; on the contrary, it provided that all should have equal rights to citizenship.”¹²⁰ Upon their release in early July, the rescuers and their allies celebrated the triumph of “higher law” with John Langston thanking “all of those involved at all stages in the process, “in his character as a negro—as a white man—as one in whom the blood of both races joined—as a man—and as an American citizen.”¹²¹ Although as historian Stephen Kantrowitz notes, such cases of successful rescues were rare, the government’s response of overwhelming force, caused “even antiabolitionists to wonder whether the federal government had put the rights of slaveholders ahead of all other considerations, including white liberty.” He concludes, “Their real victory against the law [Fugitive-Slave Law] took form not in captives liberated but in the political backlash against federal enforcement by whites who once thought they had little stake in this fight.”¹²²

Chicago, Illinois

On October 19-20 1859, just days after from John Brown’s failed raid in Harpers’ Ferry, AMA delegates gathered at the First Congregational Church in Chicago, Illinois, for their Thirteenth Annual Meeting.¹²³ There they expressed their support for the Oberlin-Wellington Rescuers and emphasized the importance of their mission efforts across the South. They noted that “It has been one of the prominent aims of the Association, to bring its principles and influence to bear upon slavery for its extinction, and to give the largest increase possible to our force in the Slave States, as the men and the means are provided.” In replacing slavery, they proposed “to give a pure Gospel, freedom, all the blessings of salvation, and a true civilization to

¹²⁰ Shipherd, *History of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue*, 252. See also, Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 188-89.

¹²¹ Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 216-222.

¹²² Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom*, 184.

¹²³ The AMA also expressed their support for the Rescuers in the *Thirteenth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1859), 45, AMAA.

nearly one half of the States of this Union, who are groaning under the burdens and guilt of Slavery.”¹²⁴ As one historian has observed, during the 1850s, “Damningly critical analysis of Southern underdevelopment, ignorance, and general backwardness filled the Northern press . . . marked most notably by popular travel accounts written by Frederick Law Olmsted and William Cullen Bryant but also apparent in fictional works like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.” Collectively these works written by New Englanders combined various shades of truth with generalizations and oversimplifications to help convince northern public opinion of southern regression.¹²⁵ In embracing the communications, industrial, and reform revolutions of the era, the AMA and their political-abolitionist allies believed they had progressed further along the plane of civilization than their neighbors to the South and when they envisioned the nation’s future, it was one without slavery, where the hallmarks of their culture--free labor, free education, and congregational churches, all premised on the Biblical notion of the equality of man--reigned supreme.¹²⁶

Thus as the presidential election of 1860 neared, the AMA and their political-abolitionist allies threw their full support behind the Republican ticket, although in New England and Oberlin, they expressed more enthusiasm for Maine native, Hannibal Hamlin than for Abraham Lincoln. While the former seemed staunchly in the abolitionist camp, Lincoln received rebuke for his willingness to be a slave-driver and refusal to commit to the “unconditional repeal of the

¹²⁴ “Enlargement in the Slave States,” *Thirteenth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1859), 56, AMAA.

¹²⁵ Eric Michael Burke, “Egyptian Darkness: Antebellum Reconstruction, ‘Republicanization,’ and Southern Illinois in the Republican Imagination, 1854–61,” *Civil War History* 67, no. 3 (September 2021): 178. See also Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 40–72.

¹²⁶ Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 40-72 and David Morris Potter, *The Impending Crisis: America before the Civil War; 1848 - 1861*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), 30-32 and 34-35; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815 – 1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Fugitive Slave law.”¹²⁷ Speaking in June, Charles Sumner, the venerable Massachusetts US Senator and supporter of black equality, gave an eloquent speech he hoped would galvanize New England support for the Republican ticket. He argued that in electing Lincoln-Hamlin, political-abolitionists would achieve their goals and “put the National Government—at least in its Executive department—openly and actively on the side of Freedom; and this alone will be of incalculable influence—not only in itself, but as the harbinger of the future.” The immediate results of a Republican victory would “save the Territories from the five-headed barbarism of Slavery, save the country from the crying infamy of the slave-trade, save the Constitution . . . from outrage and perversion, save the Declaration of Independence, now dishonored and disowned in its essential life-giving truth—the *Equality of Man*, and finally, help to expel the Slave Oligarchy from all its seats of National power, and drive it back within the States.”¹²⁸ Four months later, New England and Ohio voted overwhelmingly for Lincoln-Hamlin with AMA lifetime member, Joshua Leavitt, declaring, “Thank God! Lincoln is chosen!”¹²⁹

With the election of Lincoln, political-abolitionists had finally placed in office a man dedicated to one of their long-standing principles: the non-expansion of slavery, a position that placed the nation on the course to “freedom national” as the territories would become states with constitutions without slavery. The seven states of the Deep South understood the implications of Lincoln’s election in regard to the future of slavery and starting with South Carolina, seceded

¹²⁷ “POLITICAL ANTI-SLAVERY CONVENTION,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, June 9, 1860. Although most attendees spoke in favor of the Republican ticket in the upcoming election, they had more faith in Hamlin than Lincoln. They expressed their concerns about Lincoln who declared his “willingness to be a “slave-driver” and noted his refusal to commit to the “unconditional repeal of the Fugitive Slave law.” See also Check and Check, *John Mercer Langston*, 370.

¹²⁸ THE REPUBLICAN PARTY: Its Origin, Necessity & Permanence. A SPEECH BY CHARLES SUMNER, Before the Young Men's Republican Union of New-York, at the Cooper Institute, July 11, 1860,” reprinted in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, July 7, 1860.

¹²⁹ James M. McPherson, *Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 25-27; Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism*, 232.

before Lincoln's inauguration in March, 1861. Although no proponent of equal citizenship, during his first term, Lincoln continued on the journey toward defeating slavery and defending the natural rights of African Americans to the promises of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In so doing, he repudiated *Dred Scott* and declared that fugitive slaves would not be deprived of "the privileges and immunities" that the Constitution promised to each citizen.¹³⁰

On the eve of the Civil War, when the AMA looked to the South, they saw an enormous mission field, one so blighted by the sin of slavery as to make democracy almost unrecognizable. Across this vast region of the country where the planter class ruled, Blacks and the majority of whites remained mired in heathenism and immorality due to a lack of pure religion and education. The barring of the staunchly abolitionist Congregationalist denomination revealed the lack of freedom of religion. The gag rule – a resolution first introduced by Representative James Hammond of South Carolina and passed in the House of Representatives which tabled without hearing petitions related to slavery – symbolized the South's willingness to stifle free speech, while the refusal to allow publication and delivery of anti-slavery materials violated freedom of the press. In short, slavery undermined democracy wherever it existed and dehumanized all those it touched. The coming of the Civil War not only offered an opportunity to end slavery, but to transform the South. The US capital, the seat of government which had since its founding been a friend to slaveholders and slave traders, quickly emerged as the key location to experiment locally what they hoped to achieve nationally.¹³¹

¹³⁰ James Oakes, *The Scorpion's Sting: Antislavery and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), 100.

¹³¹ Richard Lyle Power, "A Crusade to Extend Yankee Culture 1820-1865," *The New England Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1940): 638-53. This view by Congregationalists of the North and Midwest fits in the broader Republican Party's sentiments but admittedly few Republicans were willing to pursue the transformation of the South to the extent envisioned by leaders and members of the AMA. For more on this Republican ideology on the eve of war, see Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 52-54; Elizabeth Varon, *Armies of Deliverance: A New History of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2, 186-225, 268-71.

While political-abolitionists expressed their unwillingness to compromise with the South during the secession crisis, in a letter to his mother, Howard expressed his fears of war and hope for a peaceful resolution yet. In letters to his mother, he observed that two “fine young men” from Alabama had already left West Point before declaring that “a civil war is by far the most horrible for the officers of the Army. Associated together by education & so many social ties, they will either shrink away into some other profession or have to meet each other in deadly affray.” He concluded by expressing his hope that “the national fast, will not be in vain. If all would pause for the little space of one day & turn their thoughts to God, the result may be happy, for He is able & willing to bless.”¹³² When his brother, Rowland, wrote him a month later, five of the Deep South states had already seceded. Rowland took a hardened stance toward the secessionists, telling Howard, “I wouldn’t invade any part of the South - would not ‘coerce.’ But if they stole forts & supplies &c I would drive the thieves out and shoot if I couldn’t hang them . . . If attacked I would defend them [the forts] forever.” He added, “When the laws of the Land are violated, let the transgressors feel that the penalty is as sure as the pain that follows putting the hand in the fire. If the Laws are wrong, repeal them - if the Constitution unjust, alter it - but if we are to leave our children anything but anarchy, let us, for Heavens sake, maintain the supremacy of law.”¹³³ Despite an increasing number of southern states seceding, Howard still maintained his hope for peace and expressed his willingness to give the “Cotton States their walking papers,” stating that war would result in the waste of “an immense amount of treasure and blood” resulting in “irremediable hostility being established.”¹³⁴

¹³² O. O. Howard to Eliza Gilmore, December 31, 1860, Howard Papers. Two months later Howard still expressed his hopes for peace, see O. O. Howard to Eliza Gilmore, February 11, 1861, Howard Papers.

¹³³ Rowland Howard to O. O. Howard, January 20, 1861, Howard Papers.

¹³⁴ O. O. Howard to Eliza Gilmore, February 11, 1861, March 6, 1861, and March 30, 1861, Howard Papers. During this time, Howard was offered a professorship at Davidson College in North Carolina with C. P. Kingsbury “presuming Howard did not entertain any views on the ‘peculiar institution’ which would be objectionable to a

By late April, shock over the bombardment at Fort Sumter and treatment of Massachusetts' regiments in Baltimore outraged the family with Howard informing his mother that "it is with me war! war! I read of it, I think of it, I pray about it & dream of war." He added that he felt "abashed for his lukewarmness," despite his being "strong for the government." Although at one time prepared to leave the army for the ministry, he no longer felt that was an option, noting that his resignation would not be accepted anyway and as he expressed to Rowland, he feared that people "would suspect that he favored secession" if he tried. His attention quickly shifted to the capital and concerns about Maryland seceding, observing that "As soon as Maryland declares herself free from the Union, Washington will be attacked. Our troops at Washington are surrounded by enemies, and there are still plenty of lukewarm friends in the District of Columbia. The defense will be vigorous & probably Baltimore & other obstructions will be cleared away, but I think between enemies & friends our beloved Capital will be destroyed."¹³⁵ A month later, Howard accepted the colonelcy of the Third Maine regiment from Kennebec and committed himself to defending the Union.¹³⁶

southern community," see C. P. Kingsbury to O. O. Howard, February 23, 1861 and February 28, 1861, Howard Papers.

¹³⁵ Eliza Gilmore to O. O. Howard, April 21, 1861, O. O. Howard to Eliza Gilmore, April 25, 1861, and O. O. Howard to Rowland Howard, April 27, 1861, Howard Papers.

¹³⁶ Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 20-22.

CHAPTER 2 – REIMAGING CITIZENSHIP (1861-1865)

God has committed to us now this noblest mission of modern times. First to emancipate ourselves, and assume the leadership of the nation. Then to cover all that South with the free and Christian institutions of the North, and make the whole nation one in interest, spirit, and aims, and exhibit unto the world a perfected, free, and Christian Republic.
Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association¹

That the unquestioned patriotism and loyalty of the colored men of the United States [has] vindicated our manhood, commanded our respect, and claimed the attention and admiration of the civilized world . . . We believe this nation will ultimately concede us our just claims, accord us our rights, and grant us our full measure of citizenship, under the broad shield of the Constitution.
National Convention of Colored Men, 1864²

When President-elect Abraham Lincoln quietly and unceremoniously arrived in Washington, DC, on February 23 1861, he reacquainted himself with the dirty, unsanitary, and partially built city that remained a distorted image of Pierre Charles L’Enfant’s grand vision. As Lincoln returned for the first time in over a decade, the cold and foreboding weather matched the ominous mood of the local population, which remained on edge as talks of secession and war reverberated across town. Throughout March and early April, Congress and the new president worked feverishly to quell southern dissent and fears over the future of slavery, including attempts to pass the infamous Crittenden Compromise that would have guaranteed the future of slavery. All efforts, however, ultimately proved fruitless.³ Although the surrender of Fort Sumter on April 13, 1860 marked the loss of the Union’s last foothold in South Carolina, it coincided with an important victory for the political-abolitionists of the AMA and CCM. Republicans gained a firm control of Congress, and thus the District, with the mass departure of southern

¹ Charles B. Boynton, “The Spirit and Aim of the Gospel,” *Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1861), 80, AMAA.

² National Convention of Colored Men (1864: Syracuse, NY), “Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored Men; held in the City of Syracuse, N.Y.; October 4, 5, 6, and 7, 1864; with the Bill of Wrongs and Rights; and the Address to the American People,” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed January 17, 2022, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/282>, 33-34.

³ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 252-54.

legislators to the South, leaving Washington, DC, as the first piece of southern soil open to New England influence.

In the immediate wake of southern secession and the surrender of Fort Sumter, however, President Lincoln's and the Republican Party's primary focus centered not on the agenda of political-abolitionists but rather on securing the capital, a priority that required keeping Maryland safely in Union hands and funneling thousands of troops into the city to protect the government. Three days after the surrender of Fort Sumter, Lincoln issued his call for 75,000 militia volunteers who agreed to sign on for ninety days to suppress the rebellion. Lincoln's call for troops received the overwhelming support of northern states where governors rushed thousands of men to the capital even as the four Upper South states of Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina responded with their own declarations of secession.

On April 19th, when troops from Massachusetts passed through Baltimore on their way to the capital, an angry mob of southern sympathizers attacked them, prompting the Massachusetts troops to open fire. When the smoke cleared, four soldiers lay dead along with twelve civilians. The attack outraged northerners and led Lincoln a week later to approve the plan of Massachusetts Brigadier General Benjamin Butler to seize Maryland's capital of Annapolis. The Union occupation of Annapolis not only helped secure Washington's eastern border, it allowed free passage of troops into the District, thus avoiding another Baltimore fiasco, relieving the strain on loyal Governor Thomas Hicks, and perhaps most importantly in those early days, keeping the key border state securely in the Union.⁴ By late spring, Washington had undergone a radical physical transformation with thousands of troops garrisoned on the perimeter of the city,

⁴ Stephen Douglas Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation: Lincoln and the Union's War Governors* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 44-49 and 58-61.

old forts bolstered and new ones built, making the national capital, by the end of the war, one of the most fortified cities in the world.⁵

For Washingtonians, the tension during those early days of the war was palpable. Months prior, as the decisive election results from state of Pennsylvania came in during in the early morning hours of November 7, 1860, the majority of Washingtonians responded in disgust and anger at the election of the “Black Republican,” Abraham Lincoln, and his running mate, Hannibal Hamlin.⁶ The capital, irrespective of its proximity to the free states of the North and despite being home to congressmen from across the country with diverse political views, had, over the course of the nineteenth century assumed the character of its pro-southern and pro-slavery neighbors in the Chesapeake region. Like those in Maryland and Virginia, local legislators took a hardened stance on slavery in the immediate aftermath of Nat Turner’s 1831 slave revolt. A race riot four years later exposed the deep-seated hatred local whites held toward the city’s free Black population.⁷ While the capital provided opportunities for the emergence of an upper-class free Black population by the 1840s, the majority of the city’s 10,271 Blacks remained mired in poverty with 1,713 held in perpetual servitude.⁸

During the 1850s, local pro-slavery sentiment received support from the Democratic Party which controlled both the executive and legislative branches, ensuring that the District remained distinctly southern, thus simultaneously welcoming slaveholders, discouraging manumissions and in-migration, and discriminating against its free Black population.⁹ Although

⁵ Ernest B. Furgurson, *Freedom Rising: Washington in the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 74-77 and 80-84; Constance Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation’s Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 56-57.

⁶ Furgurson, *Freedom Rising*, 6-10 and Fergus M. Bordewich, *Congress at War: How Republican Reformers Fought the Civil War, Defied Lincoln, Ended Slavery, and Remade America*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2020), 41.

⁷ Green, *Secret City*, 35-37 and Jefferson Morley, *Snow-Storm in August: The Struggle for American Freedom and Washington’s Race Riot of 1835* (New York: Anchor Books, 2013).

⁸ Green, *Secret City*, 63.

⁹ Green, *Secret City*, 35-54.

slavery remained legally protected by the election of the nation's first Republican president, it continued to decline due to the consistent efforts made by abolitionists, freedpeople, and the enslaved over the previous decades.¹⁰ However, despite the steady decline in the city's enslaved population and the shift toward free labor in the North and Midwest, Congress continued to acquiesce to southern demands to keep the city distinctly "southern" and thus supportive of the peculiar institution.¹¹ With Lincoln's victory and the departure of the Democratic administration of James Buchanan, Republicans and their political-abolitionist supporters eagerly anticipated the opportunity to transform the city, a prospect celebrated by the city's Black population and widely feared by its white pro-southern inhabitants. Everyone understood that Lincoln's election had brought about a transformation. Simply put, in the words of one historian, "The old order was gone."¹²

The basic outline of the plan for the transformation of Washington appeared most recently in the platform of the Republican Party agreed to at its convention in Chicago on May 17, 1860. Delegates directly expressed their vehement opposition to the extension and existence of slavery in the territories, a region that included the District. In addition, they not only defended "the maintenance inviolate of the rights of the states . . . to control their own domestic institutions," which included laws surrounding citizenship, but more expressly challenged the racialized concept of citizenship enshrined in the recent *Dred Scott* decision. They responded to Chief Justice Taney's racialized parameters of citizenship by committing themselves to a color-

¹⁰ Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Anti-Slavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2003) and Harrison, *Washington During Civil War*, 7-8. Harrison notes that in 1860, there were roughly 11,000 blacks in the capital, 1,774 slaves and 9,209 freedpeople.

¹¹ For more on pre-war Washington D.C., see Harrold, *Subversives*, 2-12. Harrold notes that southerners demanded that slavery remain in the capital as a symbol of the nation's determination to protect the institution. Even though slavery was in decline in the capital, Harrold argues that "slavery was both weak and vicious in Washington" as the enslaved lived on the border of freedom but faced the daily threat of being sold further south, 5 and 11.

¹² Bordewich, *Congress at War*, 61.

blind citizenry by “the maintenance of the principles promulgated in the Declaration of Independence and embodied in the Federal Constitution.” They supported “giving a full and efficient protection to the rights of all classes of citizens, whether native or naturalized, both at home and abroad.”¹³ While the majority within the Republican Party interpreted this platform along conservative and thus racially discriminatory lines, political-abolitionists in the AMA and their supporters in New England and Oberlin saw the war as an opening to pursue their long-sought and broad legislative goals of securing equal citizenship and bringing the capital and western territories in line with freedom national. What under normal circumstances might have taken years, suddenly became possible within months. With the commencement of war and the departure of southern congressmen, Washington’s local slaveowners, legislators, and their white allies lost key Congressional supporters and found themselves at the mercy of the antislavery agenda of the Republican administration. The influx of an unprecedented number of self-liberating slaves over the ensuing years only served to hasten the city’s transformation. But in late spring of 1861, those realities still all lay in the future.

This chapter focuses on the transformation of Washington, DC, during the Civil War years, when the population of the nation’s capital doubled in size due in large part to the arrival of tens of thousands of self-liberating slaves who sought government protection to begin new lives as freedpeople. The Republican Party’s victory in the 1860 election and the war which followed brought a significant number of New England abolitionists to the city including agents of the AMA and members of the CCM. Collectively, this migration birthed both crisis and opportunity. On the one hand, it led to a growing humanitarian crisis the government was ill-prepared to address but for associates of the AMA and CCM, it appeared as the perfect

¹³ National Republican Platform as Adopted by the National Republican Convention, held in Chicago, May 17, 1860.

opportunity for them to secure their political-abolitionist goals including the reconstructing of Washington in accordance with Congregationalist ideals. While they witnessed significant victories on their political-abolitionist agenda including acts of emancipation on both the local and national level that ultimately culminated in passage of the Thirteenth Amendment and even a legal opinion supporting birthright citizenship, their goal of establishing an interracial community through transforming freedpeople into Congregationalist citizens largely failed. Although members of the AMA received support from elite black Washingtonians in their efforts to implement free labor principles alongside educational and religious uplift, they encountered numerous obstacles from unsupportive government officials, racist whites, paternalistic agents, and perhaps most surprisingly to the associates of the AMA, the freedpeople themselves. Through an analysis of Washington, DC, that centers on the fight for equal citizenship, this chapter significantly adds to the other important works on Washington, DC, during the war years by demonstrating that the war for the Union and the abolition of slavery also involved a critical struggle early on for the future place of freedpeople in the body politic, one contested by the government, agents of the AMA and their allies, as well as by the freedpeople themselves.¹⁴

Although the capital's labor market boomed during the Civil War and thus offered able-bodied African Americans a variety of both public and private employment, the government's failure to pay wages consistently, alongside the implementation of discriminatory taxes, created mistrust of the government and a sharp divide between local free Blacks and contrabands, a

¹⁴ Key works on Washington DC during the war period include Constance Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); Constance Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); Ernest B. Furgurson, *Freedom Rising: Washington in the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004); Robert Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction: Race and Radicalism* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

property term applied to self-liberating slaves early in the war. The term was first introduced into the Civil War vocabulary by Major General Benjamin Butler at Fortress Monroe, Virginia to allow the Union to protect the self-liberating from slaveholders seeking their return. Its usage employed the Confederates' logic of slaves as property against them but also left the status of the formerly enslaved in a legal limbo until ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment.¹⁵ The fact that the majority of contrabands could not read and fled to an urban setting possessing training only for agricultural labor served to complicate matters further.

Addressing the education crisis united the AMA, CCM, and local black elites, and the contrabands, but the sheer number of freedpeople needing schooling far outpaced the resources of the AMA and the other benevolent societies operating in the city. Overcrowding and the stigma attached to attending a free school like those established by the AMA caused Washington's upper-class black families to send their children to paid schools. Elite Black Washingtonians sought to avoid any situations in which their children would be further discriminated against included accusations of associating with the contrabands. This mentality proved persistent despite the fact that the AMA had the best cadre of teachers in the city and operated some of the District's best schools. The AMA's first schools in the District represented its vision of an interracial effort with one taught by William J. Wilson, a Black abolitionist and equal rights advocate from New York and the other taught by a young white woman, Laurie Gates, who had been influenced by abolitionist and women's rights advocate Anna Dickinson to aid the cause of racial uplift in the city.

Finally, in its goals of religious uplift, the AMA employed a pair of white male missionaries, William Coan and Isaac Cross, to proselytize the freedpeople. Although faithful to

¹⁵ Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 31-33; Varon, *Armies of Deliverance*, 32-33.

their duties, they failed to convince freedpeople of the superiority of the Congregationalist polity. Upon arrival into the city, those unable or unwilling to join the established black churches tended to quickly found churches of their own despite the efforts of the AMA's missionaries, who preached, baptized, and distributed tracts to tens of thousands. Despite these challenges, the AMA viewed Washington as critical to achieving its broader goals of national transformation. By the end of the war, AMA members felt encouraged by the progress made toward making Washington, DC, a model of Congregational goals for reconstruction of the South.

The onset of war hastened shifts in the capital as Republicans from New England and the Midwest assumed positions of power in Congress.¹⁶ Republican Congressmen received support from their allies, both resident and immigrant, black and white, who found numerous opportunities to aid the war effort in a plethora of new government and private-sector jobs. The unprecedented influence of political-abolitionists, buttressed by the arrival of tens of thousands of self-liberating slaves from Maryland and Virginia over the course of the war, ensured a hasty and volatile yet decisive social transformation that coincided with a doubling of the city's population.¹⁷ Northern Democrats, abandoned by their southern wing, found themselves powerless to thwart legislation and affect the course of events, with Republicans firmly in control of the White House and both chambers of Congress, a reality which allowed for the altering of the ideological, political, and social dynamics of the city. Finding themselves

¹⁶ Bordewich, *Congress at War*, 20-21 and 39-45. Bordewich notes that Republicans quickly assumed the following key positions. Pitt Fessenden of Maine became chairman of the Finance Committee; Charles Sumner of Massachusetts chairman of Foreign Affairs; Henry Wilson of Massachusetts chairman of Military Affairs; Zachariah Chandler of Michigan chairman of Commerce; Lyman Trumbull of Illinois chairman of Judiciary; John P. Hale of New Hampshire chairman of Naval Affairs; Ben Wade of Ohio chairman of the Committee on Territories. "All were self-described abolitionists except Fessenden and Trumbull, and they would soon be won over."

¹⁷ Harrison, *Washington During Civil War*, 23, and 27-29. Harrison states that the population of Washington jumped from 70,000 in 1860 to 140,000 by 1864 and the black population of 11,000 exploded to almost 40,000. See also Allan John Johnston, "Surviving Freedom: The Black Community of Washington, D.C., 1860-1880" (Unpublished dissertation, 1980), 161.

surrounded by an essentially hostile white populace, which included government workers, Congress quickly moved to enact bills that required an oath of loyalty from all those serving in government and established a local police force under the control of the federal government with the former bill resulting in the removal of DC Mayor James G. Barrett who refused to sign the oath.¹⁸

By the end of 1861 when the AMA gathered for its annual meeting in Norwich, Connecticut, the capital had been secured but the Union cause appeared on shaky ground with northern morale at an all-time low after the shocking defeat of Union forces under the command of General Irvin McDowell at Bull Run in late July and the recent humiliating defeat of General George McClellan's forces at Ball's Bluff.¹⁹ It was after the First Battle of Bull Run that Howard had his first opportunity to directly challenge the institution of slavery. Howard noted in his autobiography that one day, a self-liberating woman and her young child appeared in his camp just outside of Alexandria seeking protection. When her owner, a "sallow-complexioned, poorly clad white woman of middle age" appeared to claim her, Howard refused to aid the white woman telling her to "take her property if she could." Adhering to military directives which forbid him to harbor runaways, Howard recounted that this Black woman and her child soon "found their way eastward to Alexandria and thence to Washington where she and her child became free."²⁰ In the midst of the embarrassing military defeat, moral victories like this indicated that the war would be a transformational one. Military losses also forced the nation to reckon with the fact that the war would not be quickly won, but despite this reality, AMA attendees actively planned the nation's future, one in which they hoped to see Congregational ideals reign supreme.

¹⁸ Green, *Washington: Village and Capital*, 247-50.

¹⁹ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 339-45 and 362.

²⁰ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:165-66; Varon, *Armies of Deliverance*, 33.

A mere two days after the Union's defeat at the Battle of Ball's Bluff, a minor engagement that took place forty miles to the northwest of the capital and cost the Union over 1,000 casualties to the Confederates' 100, attendees at the AMA annual meeting gathered both to beseech God's favor for the Union cause and to discuss their future role in the necessary work of Reconstruction, a mission of religious and intellectual uplift just recently begun at Fortress Monroe, Virginia. Despite the recent military defeats, those in attendance passed the following resolutions aimed at the government, freedpeople, and their allies:

Resolved, That we cordially sympathize with our national government in its determination to put down the rebellion, a rebellion that imperils the missionary cause, our civil and religious liberties, and the precious rights of four millions of enslaved countrymen.

Resolved, That we recognize the overruling providence of God, in opening to the Association a new field of Missionary labor, in the State of Virginia, among the eighteen hundred colored brethren rescued from slavery, and now entitled to, if not fully enjoying the advantages of; compensated labor, intellectual and religious instruction, and the protection of government;

Resolved, That we deem it essential to the prosperity of the missionary cause, and of all institutions for the promotion of education, true religion, and general intelligence and virtue, that the pulpit and the press should do all they can to purify and elevate public sentiment, inculcate national and universal liberty, and bring the truths of the Gospel to bear upon the legislature, judiciary, and people of the States and nation, until they shall be universally recognized and obeyed.

Resolved, That we recommend to all the friends of missions, and of their country, to pray without ceasing, that the cause of Missions may be prospered, and the blessings of good government, of universal liberty, of sound knowledge, and of pure Christianity, may be the happy portion of the people of this and all lands.²¹

Each of these resolutions drew on long-established political-abolitionist language that recognized the Union's enemy as an uncivilized foe that opposed liberty and thus the founding principles of the republic. They also articulated themes common since the abolitionist split of 1840 in which the AFASS, AMA, and their allies expressed their goals for a postwar world based on Congregational principles of free labor, public education, and an uncompromised religion.

²¹ *Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1861), 7, AMAA.

The first resolution denoted that the Confederacy represented a regressive civilization and the slaveholders' rebellion had imperiled civil and religious liberties and the as yet undefined but "precious rights of four millions of enslaved countrymen." In the second, the delegates pointed to the key aspects of their mission of uplift, already underway in Virginia and led by the first teacher the AMA ever employed, Mrs. Mary Peake, the highly qualified daughter of a Black free woman and white man from Norfolk.²² The AMA went on to identify the benefits of compensated labor as well as intellectual and religious instruction now enjoyed by those recently liberated. The final two resolutions emphasized the national and universal aspirations of the AMA which intended to promote the schoolhouse and church as the cornerstones of a reconstructed South. Only this approach could secure "the blessings of good government, universal liberty, sound knowledge, and pure Christianity."²³

No clearer picture of the AMA's vision for its future, one in which Blacks lived as equal members of the body politic, could be painted than that presented by Reverend Charles B. Boynton of the Vine Street Congregational Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the meeting's annual discourse.²⁴ The key tenets of his message drew attention to the conflicting societies that had emerged in America, one tied to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the other tied to Satan. He spoke of the need for the North's need to defeat and remake the South. In contrasting the regions, Boynton defined the system of Christ that reigned, albeit imperfectly, in the North, as one "which proposes to instruct, and refine, and elevate all men, even the laboring classes, to lift

²² Lewis C. Lockwood, *Mary S. Peake, The Colored Teacher at Fortress Monroe* by Rev. Lewis C. Lockwood (Boston: American Tract Society, 186-), 5-17.

²³ *Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1861), 7, AMAA.

²⁴ *Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1861), 65-80, AMAA and *Manual of the Vine Street Congregational Church and Society, Cincinnati, Ohio with a Catalogue of Members*, 1878, 8-11

them to the highest level of humanity here, and then crown them with eternal life.” Christ’s system necessarily stood in direct conflict with that of Satan’s, the anti-Christ whose

civilization . . . dishonors and degrades humanity, because man is the image of God, and brother of his deadly foe, and his system tends ever to sink the masses of men to ignorance, poverty, and brutehood, to force them down to that last stage this side of the shame and ruin of hell, where every proud characteristic of manhood is stripped away, and they become human brutes, with no human rights, without citizenship, or property, or education, or homes, or marriage, or family, or family name, living in the legal status of the beasts, and leaving, like the brutes, no memorial when they die, so that the grave of Pomp, the man, has no more significance than that of Caesar, the dog.

The Civil War represented a new era in “God’s great march of events.” Indeed those gathered bore witnesses to “a great social and political revolution, that is sweeping toward a definite goal which we must reach or perish—the establishment of free institutions over all this land.” The AMA had a task to complete, namely “to re-shape the whole social and political structure of the country; to re-mold private opinions and public policy; . . . to save, in spite of herself, the blighted, maddened, almost demoniac South, bless her with the nobler life of Northern institutions, and make her the worthy, integral part of a great, free, and Christian nation.”

Boynton noted that from the first wave of English colonists who arrived in North America, the New England colonies stood in contrast to the colonies established further south. In his view, sectionalism first emerged not from the Constitutional convention of the late eighteenth century or even the contentious wrangling over slavery that dominated the first half of the nineteenth century but rather in the first half of the seventeenth. Puritans sought “to base a republic on the law of God, to frame a body of institutions which should fitly express the real spirit of Christ.” This included recognition of “the one blood relationship of the race, the worth and dignity of the individual man; which should regard all men as equal before God, and with equal rights and privileges before the law.” These beliefs led the Puritans and later the Congregationalists to pursue a mission to “educate every man and to honor and dignify labor; . . .

an attempt to express in a government the Christian idea of liberty, and to bind the whole population of a state into one free, intelligent, Christian brotherhood . . . with its free churches and free schools, and freemen, . . . a new and grand experiment in Christian civilization.” In New England “alone was found the true American idea . . . the true germ principles of the American nation.”

In closing, Boynton spoke of the great project of southern reconstruction that lay ahead, and he declared that the North must assume the role of master over the South. No other route existed for America to fulfill its mission for “a perfected religious, moral, or intellectual nation.” No longer a nation divided between free and enslaved, a new Christian state would emerge premised on a free, educated, and Christian populace or as Boynton expressed it, a society in which “every man [is] educated and free, and God recognized as supreme over all, this alone is the true American idea.”²⁵ It would not take long for the AMA to see new mission fields opened to them to begin this transformation. At a time when the Union grappled with stinging military defeats in the East, the AMA established footholds from which to pursue its goals of Black liberty and Congregational citizenship in Virginia and, by November, in the Sea Islands along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. Circumstances, both expected and unexpected, soon dictated that they turn their attention and resources toward the capital.

At the end of December 1861, radical abolitionist allies in Congress, Massachusetts’ Senator Henry Wilson and Pennsylvania Representative Thaddeus Stevens put forward a bill to emancipate the District’s slave population, a goal of political-abolitionists since the early nineteenth century. Debate on the bill began in mid-March 1862. During those debates, Representative John Bingham of Ohio delivered an eloquent speech on the greater purposes of

²⁵ *Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1861), 65-80, AMAA.

this legislation which was intended to provide relief and joy to those who have “too-long-endured captivity.” In an ultimately failed bid, he sought to incorporate into the bill a provision that “every human being, no matter what his complexion, here within the limits of the capital of the Republic, shall be secure in the enjoyment of his inherent rights; that the citizen is more than the State; that the protection of his rights is more concern than any or all mere State policies.”²⁶ Bingham’s language captured the vision of the AMA: not simply the abolition of slavery but also the granting of a rights-based citizenship regardless of race secured by the national government. Bingham’s provision, however, did not pass. Indeed, to secure moderate Republican votes, Congress ultimately embraced and passed the bill on April 15 with much more conservative language. As signed by President Lincoln on April 16, the bill declared that “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude . . . shall hereafter exist in said District. However, it also promised to compensate loyal owners up to “three hundred dollars for each person shown to have been so held by lawful claim.” And in addition, it provided up to “one hundred thousand dollars . . . to aid in the colonization and settlement of such free persons of African descent now residing in said District . . . as may desire to emigrate to the Republic of Hayti or Liberia or such other country beyond the limits of the United States . . .” Thus little more than a year to the day after US troops had surrendered Fort Sumter to the South’s slavocracy, the government, for the first time in history, took direct action against slavery.²⁷

Response to the legislation demonstrated the ideological war going on both in Congress and across the North. Democratic resistance and vehement opposition from local whites,

²⁶ Henry Wilson, *History of the Anti-Slavery Measures of the Thirty-Seventh and Thirty-Eighth Congress* (Boston: Walker, Wise, 1864), 68.

²⁷ *The Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America, from December 5, 1859, to March 3, 1863* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1863), 376-78; Wilson, *History of the Anti-Slavery Measures*, 38-78. See also, Guelzo, *Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation*, 91-99; Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 111-19 and Bordewich, *Congress at War*, 110-116.

including the numerous accounts of local slaveholders selling hundreds of enslaved men, women, and children further south days before the bill went into effect, demonstrated the level of opposition to this historic change.²⁸ Local Blacks and members of the AMA, however, celebrated the momentous occasion with great joy. The *American Missionary* published a report from a Washington-based correspondent of the *New York Tribune* who witnessed the local Black response to the bill. “In anticipation of the liberty-day that seems so near to them, the slaves all over the city, and the free negroes, who are connected with them by the ties of kindred and sympathy, are dressed in their best to-day and are assembled to celebrate this Sabbath as a day of praise and thanksgiving.” Attending service at the historic Black Israel Bethel Church, the correspondent reported, “Such a chorus of exultation I never heard before; such joyful gestures I never beheld – it was a spectacle for men and angels.”²⁹ Local and administration friendly DC paper, the *National Republican* captured the general Black consensus when it declared, “The National Capital is Free! “Glory to God!””³⁰ Blacks across the North joined with them in celebrating the first strike for liberty and the first step toward equal citizenship.³¹

Abolitionist publications across New England echoed those sentiments in their celebrations of the long-sought achievement. “LET anti-slavery men rejoice over the first step of the General government towards Universal Emancipation,” blared the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, “There is no longer slavery in the District of Columbia.”³² The nation’s most prominent Black newspaper, the Philadelphia-based *Christian Recorder*, added “All hail the sixteenth day of April, 1862! - the first day of freedom in the District of Columbia, in the Capital

²⁸ “Hurrying Them Off,” *National Republican*, April 18, 1862.

²⁹ “Emancipation in the District of Columbia: Thanksgiving by the Colored People,” *American Missionary*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1862, 104-05.

³⁰ “The Bill Signed,” *National Republican*, April 17, 1862.

³¹ “Emancipation Jubilee: Celebration by the Colored People of New York,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 17, 1862.

³² “Our Washington Correspondence,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, April 19, 1862.

of our Republic! All hail, with thanksgiving to God, and congratulations to mankind!”³³ It added that emancipation was “a great moral victory - worth more than a dozen bloody triumphs on the field. It does not take away the stigma of the past, but it does gild the future with hope. It denationalizes slavery . . . and makes the capital worthy of the twenty millions of free men, who revere it as the centre of their national life.”³⁴ Garrison’s *Liberator* observed momentarily, “For the first time in the history of this Government, the Capital stands upon free soil!”³⁵

For the AMA and its allies, abolition in the capital marked an initial step in a national goal to destroy every bastion of slavery and racial inequality. Reverend William Patton, the pastor of Chicago’s First Congregational Church and lifetime member of the AMA upon returning from a trip east determined to draft a memorial to the president that encouraged a general emancipation. Patton recounted the extraordinary story behind his meeting with President Lincoln days before he announced the preliminary emancipation proclamation in a brief booklet entitled, *President Lincoln and the Chicago Memorial on Emancipation*. Patton, like other the AMA’s political-abolitionists, quickly saw the Civil War as an opportunity to strike at the once-impenetrable bastion of slavery in the South. The Confederacy, “by invoking war in defence of their cherished institution,” had made national emancipation “feasible, under the war power, as an act of military necessity.”³⁶

On September 7, 1862, at a large gathering of abolitionists in Chicago’s Bryan Hall, the gathered attendees unanimously adopted Patton’s memorial and selected him and Rev. John Dempster, pastor of Clark Street Methodist Episcopal Church, to deliver the memorial to the

³³ Observer, “Freedom - All Hail!” *Christian Recorder*, April 26, 1862.

³⁴ “Freedom in the National Capital,” *Christian Recorder*, April 26, 1862.

³⁵ “Washington is Free,” *Liberator*, May 16, 1862.

³⁶ William W. Patton, *President Lincoln and the Chicago Memorial on Emancipation, a Paper Read before the Maryland Historical Society, December 12th, 1887* (Baltimore: Printed by John Murphy & Co, 1888), 7.

president. The two men met with President Lincoln on Saturday, September 13, 1862, after being introduced by Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles who expressed himself to be in full sympathy with the memorial. The memorial began by acknowledging the dire state of the nation in its “judgment-hour,” and the need to “acknowledge that the cry of the slave, unheeded by man, but heard by God and answered in this terrible visitation.” Action in the District was not enough, a national measure needed to follow in response to God’s command, “LET MY PEOPLE GO!” Citing the president’s war powers, the memorial declared him in possession of the authority to do all that was necessary “to preserve the very life of the nation.” In their rebellion, “The rebels have brought slavery under your control by their desperate attack upon the life of the republic. They have created a moral, political, and military necessity, which warrants the deed, and now God and a waiting world demand that the opportunity be used.” Just as Queen Esther of the Bible had been chosen to rescue her people during the moment of crisis, so had President Lincoln been placed in office by “Divine Providence” to “speak the word of justice and authority which shall free the bondman and save the nation.”³⁷

The ministers warned that the window of God’s patience would not remain forever but could close at any moment, making it a necessity that the president act on universal emancipation immediately. Lincoln listened to the memorial with great interest and responded to the Chicago pastors with several obstacles that appeared in his mind to prohibit such action. Lincoln questioned what good such a proclamation would do in light of his current inability to even enforce the Constitution across the southern half of the country. Patton responded, “The slaves will gradually hear of such a proclamation, from those near the borders and from the conversation of the whites, and it will fill them with hope, increase the earnestness of their

³⁷ Patton, *President Lincoln and the Chicago Memorial on Emancipation*, 13-14.

prayers in our behalf, and give them encouragement to escape to us when they can.” In response to Lincoln’s concerns about what to do with the liberated bound to rapidly increase under a general emancipation order, Patton outlined the government’s need to “receive and welcome them,” and “to feed them but also require them to work,” and finally “enlist and drill them to fight for their own liberty and for the Union which is to protect it.” As the meeting drew to a close, Lincoln rose and shook the pastors’ hands, expressing his gratitude to Patton and Dempster before stating, “You have done your duty; I will try to do mine.” Lincoln, who had been looking for a divine sign to settle the matter, assured the pastors as they exited his office, “Whatever shall appear to be God’s will, I will do.”³⁸

The sign Lincoln sought appeared four days later when Union and Confederates forces clashed at the bloody Battle of Antietam, a strategic Union victory that kept General Robert E. Lee’s forces from invading further North. Five days later on September 22, Lincoln issued the preliminary emancipation proclamation. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton later told a correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, “Tell those Chicago clergymen who waited on the President about the Proclamation of Emancipation that their interview finished the business.”³⁹ While emancipation, neither local nor national, did not secure Blacks the status and rights associated with citizenship, these bold and historic steps served to severely undermine the idea of slaves as property and, in the words of Reconstruction historian Eric Foner, “placed on the national agenda the question of the civil and political status of the emancipated slaves.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Patton, *President Lincoln and the Chicago Memorial on Emancipation*, 16-33.

³⁹ Cornelius H. Patton and Caroline Patton Hatch, *Honour Thy Father. A Sermon in Memory of William Weston Patton*, 1890, 25-26 and William W. Patton, *President Lincoln and the Chicago Memorial on Emancipation, a Paper Read before the Maryland Historical Society, December 12th, 1887* (Baltimore: Printed by John Murphy & Co, 1888), 35.

⁴⁰ Eric Foner, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 27; see also Oakes, *Freedom National*, 342.

In November 1862, advocates of Black citizenship received further good news, this time from the desk of US Attorney General Edward Bates. Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase, a staunch advocate of racial equality and outspoken antislavery politician from Ohio, asked Bates to consider the status of African American ship commanders who, according to a 1793 federal law, must be US citizens. David M. Selsey, the captain of a schooner detained in New Jersey, provided the perfect test case to challenge the infamous *Dred Scott* decision. Did Captain Selsey, in opposition to Taney's decision, actually possess rights "which the white man was bound to respect"? Bates, a Missourian who supported colonization and had helped draft the state's proslavery constitution, including the language which barred free Blacks from entry, was arguably the most conservative member of Lincoln's cabinet and thus appeared as an interesting choice to overturn legal precedent on black citizenship. After Bates initially trying to avoid involving himself in a case sure to inflame public opinion, Chase cornered him and directly asked in a letter dated September 24, just two days after Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, "Are colored men Citizens of the United States, and therefore Competent to command American vessels?"⁴¹

Bates mulled the decision and finally delivered his legal opinion to Chase in late November, just over a month before the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect.⁴² In his opinion, Bates recognized Black citizenship as a birthright, thus undermining the most egregious part of the *Dred Scott* decision. He argued, "Our nationality was created and our political government exists by written law, and inasmuch as that law does not exclude persons of that

⁴¹ James P. McClure, Leigh Johnsen, Kathleen Norman, and Michael Vanderlan. 1997. "Circumventing the Dred Scott Decision: Edward Bates, Salmon P. Chase, and the Citizenship of African Americans." *Civil War History* 43 (4) (12): 288.

⁴² *Opinion of Attorney General Bates on Citizenship*, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1862) and Bates, "Citizenship" (letter of November 29, 1862, to Salmon P. Chase), in *Official Opinions of the Attorneys General of the United States*, 10: 382-413. See also Masur, *Until Justice Be Done*, 280-86.

descent, and as its terms are manifestly broad enough to include them, it follows inevitably that such persons, born in the country, must be citizens.”⁴³ However, Bates held a very limited view of citizenship, one founded on mutual obligations of allegiance and protection and largely divorced from tangible rights, which resulted in a national belonging of largely “symbolic importance.”⁴⁴ As Bates surveyed the population, he recognized that both women and infants possessed the status of citizens yet held limited rights, and thus he articulated a position in which citizenship remained largely separated from meaningful legal and civic rights which made the basic rights of the Declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, attainable. In summarizing his view, Bates said:

In my opinion the Constitution uses the word citizen only to express the political quality of the individual in his relations to the nation; to declare that he is a member of the body politic, and bound to it by the reciprocal obligation of allegiance on the one side and protection on the other.⁴⁵

Despite the conservative opinion, Bates had significantly rejected the supremacy of state-controlled citizenship and argued that national citizenship, which the federal government controlled, settled the question and ipso facto made federally recognized citizens also citizens of the states in which they resided. In the words of one historian, “Bates explicitly disagreed with and disregarded the *Dred Scott* decision, accepting instead decades of arguments by free African Americans and their allies who had claimed citizenship as their birthright.”⁴⁶ Bates’s opinion, published across the country, received the praise of abolitionists who recognized the vast potential contained therein. The *Christian Recorder* responded to the news declaring that “Mr. Bates . . . pronounces the notorious *Dred Scott* opinions on this point [of Black citizenship] void.

⁴³ *Opinion of Attorney General Bates on Citizenship*, 15.

⁴⁴ Maltz, *Civil Rights, the Constitution, and Congress*, 8.

⁴⁵ *Opinion of Attorney General Bates on Citizenship*, 7.

⁴⁶ Masur, *Until Justice Be Done*, 284.

This is another unobtrusive but very important position in advance taken by the U.S. Government in favor of freedom.”⁴⁷ Frederick Douglass, speaking in Chicago a month later, introduced himself to “tremendous applause, and applause over and over again” saying, “Brothers and sisters, I formerly appeared among you as a colored man; I now stand before you as an equal, and address you as fellow American citizens.”⁴⁸ In New York, abolitionists gathered in Brooklyn’s Bridge Street African Methodist Wesleyan Episcopal Church, where New York lawyer, Edward Gilbert gave the primary address expounding upon the significance of Judge Bates’s opinion, an exposition the *Christian Recorder* labeled “a masterly effort.” Appearing alongside Gilbert and offering addresses of their own were two other “champions of freedom,” Theodore Tilton, Esq., and Rev. Simeon Jocelyn, the former a personal assistant of Rev. Henry Ward Beecher and the latter from the AMA’s executive committee.⁴⁹ Speaking at the thirtieth annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, which took place at the Church of the Puritans under Congregationalist minister and AMA lifetime member, Rev. George B. Cheever, Robert Purvis, the son of a free Black woman and a white British cotton merchant, delivered the following address:

Mr. Chairman, this is a proud day for the “colored” man. For the first time since this Society was organized, I stand before you a recognized citizen of the United States (applause). And let me add, for the first time since your government was a government is it an honor to be a citizen of the United States! Sir, old things are passing away, all things are becoming new. Now a black man has rights, under this government, which every white man, here and everywhere, is bound to respect (applause). The damnable doctrine of the detestable Taney is no longer the doctrine of the country. The Slave Power no longer rules at Washington. The slaveholders and their miserable allies are biting the

⁴⁷ “Domestic Items,” *Christian Recorder*, January 3, 1863.

⁴⁸ “Fred Douglass the Negro at Metropolitan Hall – An Amalgamated Audience – Noisy Proceedings, &c.,” *Douglass Monthly*, February 1863.

⁴⁹ “Brooklyn Correspondence,” *Christian Recorder*, March 14, 1863, pg.1. Mentions Jocelyn as well as Theodore Tilden and Edward Gilbert. Also mentioned in *Citizenship of Colored Persons, &c.*,” *Douglass Monthly*, March 1863. See also “Selections,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, March 28, 1863.

dust, and Copperhead Democracy has come to grief. The black man is a citizen, all honor to Secretary Bates, who has so pronounced him.⁵⁰

When the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1, 1863, abolitionists across the country celebrated the momentous event. AMA officers and members, including Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, Rev. Dr. George Cheever, and Lewis Tappan, on January 5 addressed the joyous crowd that had gathered at the New York's Cooper Institute to mark the occasion. The *American Missionary* published an account of the celebration and noted Dr. Cheever's call to action for the government and private citizens to step up and "care for these millions who are freed and citizens of the United States."⁵¹ In Oberlin, a similar "Jubilee Meeting" took place where those gathered rejected voluntary colonization schemes and observed that "the Nation owes them [freedpeople] its best endeavors for their comfort, elevation, and instruction in letters and Christianity." Shortly thereafter, locals established the Oberlin Freedmen's Relief Organization which partnered with the AMA in their mission of uplift.⁵² In Washington, DC, just a few days after general emancipation, Reverend Henry McNeal Turner, pastor of Israel Bethel Church, reported in an article for the *Christian Recorder* that the ladies at his church had organized a fair for the relief of contrabands and that a local convention of colored people meeting at Zion Wesley Church proposed to raise funds for a hospital. A month later, Turner provided an update and noted that although the hospital idea had come to naught, one of the most distinguished ladies of his church, Mrs. William Slade, had been working constantly and tirelessly among sick contrabands before concluding that "her name will stand gilded in letters of immortality for her invalid sympathy and great-hearted benevolence."⁵³

⁵⁰ "Speech of Robert Purvis," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 16, 1863.

⁵¹ "Emancipation Jubilee," *American Missionary*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1863, 27-29.

⁵² The Jubilee Meeting in Oberlin, *American Missionary*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1863, 35-36. See also Cheek and Cheek, *John Mercer Langston*, 389.

⁵³ Henry McNeal Turner, "Washington Correspondence," *Christian Recorder*, January 10, 1863 and Turner, "Washington Correspondence," *Christian Recorder*, February 21, 1863. See also, Andre E. Johnson, "Further

Over the course of the war's first two years, Howard's perspective and noted apathy regarding slavery had begun to shift, most clearly seen in his refusal to return the self-liberating woman and young child who appeared in his camp just outside of Alexandria in 1861, seeking protection. His wartime letters also reveal that he had come a long way from the naivety he had expressed back in the 1850s. In a letter to his mother in early December 1862, just months after having lost his right arm after the Battle of Fair Oaks, Howard declared that "Slavery, which has given us so much trouble must 'go by the board.'"⁵⁴ And just several weeks later, after the Battle of Fredericksburg in which the Confederates inflicted over 12,000 casualties on Union forces, the *New York Times* published a piece from Howard in which he chastised the northern spirit of apathy which appeared in numerous papers. He argued that there could be no peace without conquering slavery, an institution that at times he had apologized for despite feeling that "it was a blot upon us." No longer willing to compromise, Howard declared that slavery, the "persistent enemy of republican Government" must be "cut out" and "destroyed, root and branch."⁵⁵

Although the Union had precious little to celebrate in the Eastern theater throughout 1862, the AMA and its political-abolitionists allies could see the war to preserve the Union was fast delivering victories which it had pursued for decades. Taken together, compensated emancipation in Washington DC, Lincoln's preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, and Attorney General Bates's opinion on citizenship indicated the end of "slave" as a status of persons born in the United States. The series of events suggested further that although still an ambiguous concept, national belonging and the federal power necessary to guard it superseded

Silence upon Our Part Would Be an Outrage: Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and the Colored Conventions Movement," in *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Patterson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 301-02.

⁵⁴ Howard, *Autobiography*, 1:246-50 and Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 40.

⁵⁵ Oliver Otis Howard, "An Appeal from an Officer of the Army to the Country," *New York Times*, January 16, 1863. See also Howard, *Autobiography*, 1:255 and Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 41-42.

state-enforced definitions of citizenship. War and military necessity increasingly paved the way for government intervention and this reality afforded the opportunity for government to reach further and address rampant discrimination and defend Blacks as equal members of the body politic. This point proved critical as the war entered its midpoint, as it opened the door for African Americans to petition for government protection of their liberty and basic rights in return for their wartime loyalty and service. Less than a month after the Union's disastrous defeat at Fredericksburg, the Emancipation Proclamation officially went into effect, "settling forever the question of the safety of the fugitives." And while disillusionment and desertions hampered the Union army, the AMA noticed a sharp uptick in support and missionary applications.⁵⁶

Shortly after the implementation of the Emancipation Proclamation, James A. Thome, a former Lane rebel and AMA lifetime member who had completed his education at Oberlin, took up the most pressing social issue on the minds of many northerners in a short tract entitled, *The Future of the Freed People*. Thome employed Biblical imagery and observed that with the proclamation, the "exodus has begun." The nation now stands "at the dawn of a new era as millions of human chattels are passing from the red sea of battle to promised liberty." While militarily the nation appeared to be in its darkest hour, abolitionists saw a great and hopeful light. With slavery at an end, freedpeople had a future. "While slaves they had no prospects, no hopes, no inheritance, no posterity - were not a people. Freedom makes them men, sets them in families, raises them into a people, invests them with rights, starts them on a career, pledges them a future." With freedom set on course to reign nationally, a new work must commence to "change chattels, brutalized by ages of bondage, barter, and barbarity, into civilized and cultivated

⁵⁶ "Freedmen," *American Missionary*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1863, 35; *Twenty-second Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1868), 22, AMAA.

citizens.”⁵⁷ And with God’s blessing, Thome envisioned a future where Congregationalist ideals covered the nation. Those once reduced to property would become property-holders and those “denied the Word of God, the rights of conscience, the freedom of worship, the means of grace, the family altar, and the rite of marriage [will become] recipients of the benefits of education and the advantages of occupation unrestricted by prejudice, the spheres of usefulness, the endearments of home, the sanctities of religion, the liberties of society.”⁵⁸ He noted the great moral debt white Americans owed their black brethren and ultimately called for a shared future where both races would either rise or fall together:

The freed people are bound to us, and we to them. The question is not, Do we need their help? but, Do they not need our help? We have hitherto held them to service, and would not let them go; now they hold us to service, and God will not let us off. Because Ethiopia lives, we shall live also. Because her children among us have a future, we shall have a future. In exalting them, we shall magnify ourselves. In securing their liberties, we shall fortify our own.⁵⁹

AMA in Washington, DC

The AMA first entered the mission field of Washington, DC, in May 1862, just one month after the abolition of slavery had taken effect. The Reverend Danforth Nichols, a Methodist minister and Chicago reformer with an “unblemished abolitionist record,” who had recently arrived to see what assistance he could provide to the city’s rapidly growing contraband population, served as its agent.⁶⁰ As Nichols recounted to AMA Corresponding Secretary, George Whipple later that month, he began his ministry by meeting with local black religious leaders to gain an understanding of the situation and particular needs of the city’s freed people.⁶¹

⁵⁷ James A. Thome, *Future of the Freed People*, (Cincinnati, OH: American Reform Tract and Book Society, 1863), 1-5, 7. For AMA membership, see *Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1861), 96, AMAA.

⁵⁸ Thome, *Future of the Freed People*, 16 and 22.

⁵⁹ Thome, *Future of the Freed People*, 25 and 32.

⁶⁰ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 126.

⁶¹ Danforth B. Nichols to Rev. George Whipple and Rev. S. S. Jocelyn, May 29, 1862, AMAA. See also Harrold, *Subversives*, 226-27.

He soon met with the leadership of the local branch of the National Freedmen's Relief Association (NFRA), a society established one month earlier to cooperate with the federal government, so far as attainable, for "the relief and improvement of the freedmen of the colored race; to teach them civilization and Christianity; to imbue them with notions of order, industry, economy, and self-reliance; and to elevate them in the scale of humanity, by inspiring them with self-respect." Although early on the society principally focused on meeting the immediate physical needs of the contrabands including food, shelter, and clothing, they sought support and encouragement from northern friends as the formerly enslaved transitioned to "freedom with all its privileges and blessings and a higher place of civilization."⁶²

George F. Needham, a local white pastor and one of the officers of this local branch of the NFRA, introduced Nichols to the District's military governor, General James S. Wadsworth, who ultimately appointed Nichols as superintendent of contrabands in the District in June.⁶³ In July, the *American Missionary* introduced Nichols to its readers as one of its missionaries under appointment "among the colored people seeking refuge in the District of Columbia, where a missionary field of much importance is being opened."⁶⁴ By this point, contrabands had been moved from the unsanitary quarters at Duff Green's Row, due to an outbreak of smallpox that threatened to spread across the city, to newly vacated barracks at Camp Barker. In operation for just a year, Camp Barker acted as a registration depot for the self-liberating, who received "free papers" and basic aid including shelter, clothing, and food until they could find work. Those healthy and of working age moved out as quickly as employment could be secured leaving a

⁶² *First Annual Report of the National Freedmen's Relief Association* (Washington, DC: M'Gill & Witherow Printers, 1863), 3 and "National Freedmen's Relief Association," *American Missionary*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1862, 83-85.

⁶³ Elaine Cutler Everly, "The Freedmen's Bureau in the National Capital" (Ph.D., United States -- District of Columbia, The George Washington University), 34-36; DeBoer, *His Truth Is Marching On*, 85; and Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 36 and 39. Nichols would go on to play a key role in the founding of First Congregational Church and Howard University.

⁶⁴ *American Missionary*, vol. 6, no. 7, 1862, 147.

community of mostly young, elderly, and sick freedpeople that averaged around five hundred each month. This remained the case up through April 1863 at which point most remaining residents were removed to the newly established Freedmen's Village.⁶⁵ Throughout the remaining war years, the AMA laid the groundwork for achieving their goals of transforming freedpeople into Congregationalist citizens, a course that involved promoting free labor ideology alongside efforts at educational and religious uplift.

In his first published update dated August 7, 1862 Nichols provided readers of the *American Missionary* a glimpse into life at Camp Barker for the recently self-liberated. Now settled on the outskirts of the city, freedpeople escaped the rampant disease and death all too common at Duff Green's Row. Nichols noted that the American Tract Society (ATS) out of New York opened the first school for contraband children in Camp Barker and that the ATS remained the principal association in charge of contraband education in the city (this remained the case until the AMA began establishing schools of its own in February 1864). In terms of labor, Nichols observed that as "a general thing these people are anxious to work" and he oversaw the hiring out of able-bodied men and women to the government and local Washingtonians in need of servants and skilled labor. Additionally, he had a laundry established in camp so that women with children who were unable to accept positions outside of camp could provide for themselves and their families while remaining in the camp. Nichols concluded his update by addressing his observations concerning religion among the contrabands. Having attended several of their meetings and having preached to them, he was impressed by their faithfulness and sincerity.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Herbert H. Toler, "Nothin' but 'ligion: The American Missionary Association's Activities in the Nation's Capital, 1852 - 1875" (Ph.D dissertation, Columbia University, 2014), 132-33 and Freedmen and Southern Society Project, ed., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, vol. 2, I (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 247-48.

⁶⁶ Danforth Nichols, "District of Columbia," *American Missionary*, vol. 6, no. 9, 1862, 209-11; U.S. Congress. House. *Special Report of the Commissioner of Education on the Condition and Improvement of*

Free Labor: Camp Barker & Freedmen's Village

In their final report dated May 15, 1864, the commissioners of the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission stated that it would be essential for the government to "secure to them [freedpeople] the means of making their own way, offering them 'a fair chance,' which included equal treatment with whites and providing them the ability to be 'self-supporting,' with all those rights, civil and political, without which they are but laboring as a man labors with hands bound."⁶⁷ During the war, the AMA through its agent, Danforth Nichols, involved itself with free labor enterprises at both Camp Barker and Freedmen's Village. The former served as a transitional settlement which processed over 11,000 freedpeople during the war while the latter, intended to be a temporary settlement, became an agricultural free labor model community similar to what had been established in the Sea Islands of South Carolina. With the government in desperate need of soldiers and laborers, the AMA had little trouble promoting the benefits of free labor as able-bodied freedmen and freedwomen found paid employment in both private and public positions throughout the city and the surrounding area. Despite the hot labor market created by war, freedpeople faced numerous obstacles during this transitional phase, including government slowness in paying wages, discriminatory taxes, unsubstantiated charges of idleness from their enemies, manipulative employers, and even Nichols' own poor management.⁶⁸

In the early months of the war, the self-liberated were imprisoned at the Old Capitol Prison which aroused condemnation from Republicans and abolitionists alike. Upon passage of

Public Schools in the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1871), 223-35. For a glimpse into the harsh realities encountered at Duff Green's Row by the self-liberating, see Linda, "Life among the Contrabands," *Liberator*, September 5, 1862 and for a glimpse into life at Camp Barker from the perspective of a local reporter, see "Camp Barker," *Evening Star*, October 24, 1862.

⁶⁷ *Final Report of the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission to the Secretary of War* (June, 1864), 110.

⁶⁸ Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 34-47; for more on the Sea Island experiment off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, see Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction; the Port Royal Experiment* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).

the DC abolition bill, the government built tenements at Duff Green's Row just east of the Capitol to hold the contrabands. By the summer of 1862, unsanitary conditions and fears over the spread of smallpox instigated another move, this time to abandoned barracks, Camp Barker, at the outskirts of the city which remained the primary registration point until disbanded in December 1863. Once registered and given "freedom papers," the able-bodied were connected by Nichols with jobs in both the private and public sector. By the end of 1863, the NFRA noted that Nichols had found employment for over 3,000 of the 4,860 freedpeople who had come through the camp.⁶⁹

Nichols provided updates to both the government and AMA on his efforts to secure work for freedpeople, noting in contrast to the enemies of the freedpeople that the self-liberated eagerly sought work and proved themselves to be both industrious and loyal. In a September 1862 update, Nichols touted his success in hiring out able-bodied freedpeople and the opening of a laundry service in camp to provide work to mothers with children. He informed readers that "As a general thing these people are anxious to work; it is only in a few instances that we find 'shirks' among them." Freedpeople, however, encountered employers who had no trouble resorting to manipulative tactics to control their labor, which led the freedpeople to make complaints to the government.⁷⁰ In another report several months later, Nichols noted the large number of freedpeople who had found employment upon passing through Camp Barker and also expressed his hopes that the government might place some of them on a confiscated estate so that the large majority who remained in camp and possessed training in agricultural labor might also

⁶⁹ National Freedmen's Relief Association of the District of Columbia, *First Annual Report* (Washington, DC, 1863), 5; Johnston, "Surviving Freedom," 185-86; and *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, vol. 2, I, 325-36.

⁷⁰ Tamika Nunley, *At the Threshold of Liberty: Women, Slavery, and Shifting Identities in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 171-72.

find employment.⁷¹ In his lengthy testimony before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission in April 1863, Nichols emphasized both their willingness to work for wages and loyalty to the government, once again suggesting the idea of putting some to work on confiscated land.⁷² By the summer of 1863, Nichols's wish came to fruition as several dozen freedpeople received housing at Springdale Camp in Arlington with expectations that they would farm the land. Nichols expressed his excitement about the prospects of this community in the *American Missionary*, "We are trying to solve a great problem, that these people can labor hard and well, and need no lash either."⁷³

By the end of 1863, as winter settled in across the capital, overcrowding, disease, death, and a lack of clean water at Camp Barker precipitated the need to transfer the camp's inhabitants to a new settlement dubbed Freedmen's Village, which had been created on a portion of Robert E. Lee's confiscated Arlington estate and officially opened in December. The village, erected on some of the finest land outside the capital with an ample supply of clear air and water, mirrored a small New England town and consisted of one hundred homes, a hospital, church, and schoolhouse, all built with funds from a controversial five-dollar tax placed on Black employees within the city.⁷⁴ The goal of this model village "was a self-supporting community of freedpeople that would not pose an undue burden on the resources of the government and would form a launching-pad for their involvement in free society."⁷⁵

From its inception, the village, aided by its close proximity to the capital, attracted the attention of distinguished guests who came to observe the progress. Elizabeth Keckley, Mary

⁷¹ "District of Columbia," *American Missionary*, vol. 6, no. 9, 1862, 209-11; "Washington, D.C.," *American Missionary*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1863, 18.

⁷² *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, vol. 2, I, 287-294.

⁷³ "District of Columbia," *American Missionary*, vol. 7, no. 7, 1863, 158-59.

⁷⁴ Felix James, "The Establishment of Freedman's Village in Arlington, Virginia," *Negro History Bulletin* 33, no. 4 (1970): 90-93; *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, vol. 2, I, 38 and 42-47.

⁷⁵ Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 47.

Todd Lincoln's African American dressmaker, remarked that whoever visits the Freedmen's Village "will discover all of the evidences of prosperity and happiness." She added, "The schools are objects of much interest. Good teachers, white and colored, are employed, and whole brigades of bright-eyed dusky children are there taught the common branches of education."⁷⁶ In the words of one historian, "The symbolic value of the property made Freedmen's Village a national showcase from its earliest moments. Its physical layout and architecture were designed to create an atmosphere of order, sobriety, and industry consistent with the grand experiment of making former slaves self-supporting."⁷⁷ Secretary of State William H. Seward, one of the village's greatest boosters, came often, and he, his wife, and daughter Fannie "were constant visitors." In addition to his family, Seward also brought foreign ministers on occasion and "great public characters who visited the capital in those times, taking them into the school to show them a practical exemplification of the native powers of the negro in his most untutored condition." The school also attracted the attention of senators and representatives who went there to witness the "marvelous spectacle, and those who watched the school most carefully were the most surprised, so signal were the results."⁷⁸

Freedmen's Village proved to be a contested experiment from the moment it opened, pitting enemies of the freedpeople, including government officials, against the agents of benevolent societies and the freedpeople, determined to actualize their own concepts of independence and liberty. While the government intended the village to serve as a temporary resting place for freedpeople before they located new jobs, freedpeople successfully put down

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., Publishers, 1868), 143.

⁷⁷ Joseph P. Reidy, "'Coming from the Shadow of the Past': The Transition from Slavery to Freedom at Freedmen's Village, 1863-1900," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 95, no. 4 (1987), 411.

⁷⁸ U.S. Congress. House. *Special Report of the Commissioner of Education*, 224.

roots and made the settlement permanent against all odds.⁷⁹ They secured their victory despite efforts by rent collectors to evict them and the work of kidnappers who prowled the village looking to steal able-bodied men to fill the ranks of the Union army.⁸⁰ The community of freedpeople even weathered the crises inflicted upon it by the city's free Blacks who worked for the quartermaster's department and petitioned to bring an end to the discriminatory contraband tax which funded the village and later, the reports by government inspectors who deemed the project an utter and costly failure. With few friends and limited resources, the Black men, women, and children who settled near the seat of national power simply refused to be moved and through personal testimonies of abuse actually proved successful in getting Superintendent Nichols removed from his post by early 1864.

The discriminatory tax crisis arose in September 1862 when the government implemented a new tax on black employees of the quartermaster's department to establish a "Contraband Fund" intended to help cover the costs associated with housing and feeding the massive influx of contrabands, including those living at Freedmen's Village. The government's contingent of freeborn black workers, however, protested this onerous burden which hindered their own ability to provide for their families. In response, they submitted complaints to the US Assistant Quartermaster, Charles H. Tompkins, and, when they received no redress, to the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton. They distinguished themselves from contraband employees and argued that while it was fair for employed contrabands to be taxed for the upkeep and care of those living in the contraband camps, they as freemen should be exempt and not lumped together with them. In total, the freemen employed by the quartermaster's department submitted three

⁷⁹ *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, vol. 2, I, 256-58 and 315-25.

⁸⁰ On rents, see Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 44-45. On forced impressment, see *Freedom*, I, 2:332-36 and 347-48.

formal complaints to Secretary Stanton, all of which he ignored, and the tax to support Freedmen's Village remained in place until after the war.⁸¹

Another threat arose in July 1864, when two army inspectors, Major E. H. Ludington and Major C. E. Compton, submitted their report on Freedmen's Village to Inspector General Colonel James A. Hardee. On the positive side, they found that the controversial five-dollar tax funded the village, leaving the government off the hook. They also found freedpeople both industrious and intelligent, noting that five farms accounting for 1,270 acres were fully cultivated and the school run by the American Tract Society was excellent. However, in offering their final assessment and recommendations, they deemed the free labor experiment a failure, arguing that the farms would not turn a profit and that Freedmen's Village should be emptied of all able-bodied adults and transformed into a temporary settlement for the infirm and children only. They also recommended the removal of Nichols, who made an "unfavorable impression" on them. Two weeks later, Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs, who was responsible for Freedmen's Village, formally disputed those findings in a letter to Stanton, arguing that the farms were indeed profitable.⁸² While government officials considered the contrary recommendations, freedpeople continued to settle in Freedmen's Village. By August 1864, the population ballooned to some 5,000 under the care of Captain James Brown, who replaced Nichols in early 1864.⁸³

The end of Nichols's brief period of control over Freedmen's Village resulted from not only the recommendations of Majors Ludington and Compton but also testimonies submitted by village residents. In a testimony submitted in January 1864, former Maryland slave Lewis

⁸¹ *Freedom*, I, 2:296-97, 306-07, 313-14, and 353-55. See also, Reidy, "Coming from the Shadow of the Past," 409.

⁸² *Freedom*, I, 2:337-44.

⁸³ Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 45.

Johnson accused Nichols of intemperance and beating a black mother, forcing her out of camp for failing to give up her little child to go to work. He deemed Nichols a most unkind individual and stated that if his master was still alive, he'd prefer to live with him rather than under Nichols' care.⁸⁴ Another testimony, from Luisa Jane Barker, the wife of Rev. Stephen Barker, who served as the Chaplain of 1st Mass. Heavy Artillery, recounted Nichols's barbaric abuse of one freedwoman, Lucy Ellen Johnson, who upon failure to pay her board was supposedly strung up by her thumbs for nearly half an hour. Mrs. Barker added that another man, brought to tears by Nichols' "'tyranny,' cried 'I am going back to my old master – I never saw hard times till since I called myself a freeman.'"⁸⁵ Collectively, the testimonies painted a picture of Nichols as "better suited to be an overseer of a Southern Plantation," and when the government shut down Camp Barker, hundreds balked at moving to a new location under Nichols, with one saying, "they would rather starve in Washington than go to Arlington to be under Nichols." What Nichols failed to appreciate during his short, tumultuous, and abusive tenure, was that many of the self-liberated simply "did not want to be passive recipients of white benevolence—they wanted to control their own destinies in a postemancipation world."⁸⁶ Although never brought up on charges, Nichols ceased his work among the freedpeople and did not renew it until the postwar era when Congregationalists began planning the construction of Howard University.

Without Nichols's first-hand reports, the AMA turned to published correspondence from visiting newspaper reporters to keep its readers informed on events at Freedmen's Village. In August 1864, it published two noteworthy accounts, the first from a correspondent of the *New York Evening Post* and the second from *Friends' Review*. The former argued that the enterprise

⁸⁴ *Freedom*, I, 2:295-96 and 331-32.

⁸⁵ *Freedom*, I, 2:295-96 and 309-13.

⁸⁶ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 128.

at Freedmen's Village "has been more than self-supporting under the efficient management of Col. Elias Greene" while the later referred to the wisdom of those who wished the president to establish in Washington "a Bureau, subordinate to the War Department, part of whose business shall be the application of 'Greene's scheme' to the freed slaves throughout the United States." These published pieces shed light on the AMA's focus as the postwar era approached. The free labor experiment at Freedmen's Village had proven successful and deserved to be replicated throughout the country under the auspices of a bureau that would guarantee its implementation and protection.⁸⁷

As the war wound down in early 1865, the population of Freedmen's Village dwindled to 1,400 with an increasing number of freedpeople finding more lucrative employment outside the settlement. Despite the reduction in population, freedpeople at Freedmen's Village had demonstrated their industriousness and loyalty to the Union, sacrificing their lives and drawing upon their skills to aid the war effort to defeat the Confederacy. Upon implementation of the Emancipation Proclamation which allowed for the recruitment of black troops, African Americans began to eagerly join the military with Reverend Henry McNeal Turner helping to recruit. By 1865, over 3,000 black Washingtonians had served in two regiments, the majority of them drawn from the ranks of the recently self-liberated.⁸⁸ This service coupled with a long heritage of loyalty led 2,500 "colored men" in the spring of 1864 to petition Congress for the vote, a measure the AMA supported. They argued that as citizens and taxpayers who were of fair

⁸⁷ "Freedmen's Village at Arlington," *American Missionary*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1864, 31-32.

⁸⁸ On Freedmen's Village, see Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 46. On Black troops from Washington, see United States, War Department, *Annual Report of the Secretary of War* (Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1863), 55 and see United States, War Department, *Annual Report of the Secretary of War* (Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1865), 58; Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 132 and Green, *Washington: Village and Capital*, 283-84.

character and who sustain churches and educate their children and have never had their patriotism in question, suffrage was their right.⁸⁹

In September 1864, AMA agent Nichols submitted a new story to the *American Missionary*, one that served definitively to answer the question of whether or not the freedpeople would work in a free labor system. The story of “Aunt Mary” answered in the affirmative and highlighted the extraordinary industriousness of the freedpeople. Aunt Mary, the mother of twelve children, seven of whom were sold to the Deep South and never to be heard from again, had during her enslavement in Virginia walked miles to gather oysters for sale in town to raise enough money to purchase her five remaining children over the course of several years. Once she had redeemed them, she continued working and purchased “a cow, a pig, geese, turkeys, and chickens, hired ground and raised wheat and corn on shares.” Now in liberty with two children working in the North and one son serving “in the army, fighting for the freedom of her race,” Nichols questioned, who could argue that freedpeople “can not take care of themselves?”⁹⁰

One month after Nichols’s report, Black delegates from across the country gathered in Syracuse, New York, to plot their own plans for the fast-approaching postwar era. In attendance at this October gathering were Oberlinites William Howard Day and John M. Langston as well as AMA associates and DC residents, Henry Highland Garnet, J. Sella Martin, and William J. Wilson. Wilson, who had just recently begun teaching for the AMA in Washington, DC, earlier that year, joined Martin as vice presidents while Langston served as president.⁹¹ At their first

⁸⁹ Petition, S38A-H3, April 15, 1864; Bishop McIlvaine, “Negro Suffrage,” *American Missionary*, vol. 8, no. 8, 1864, 196. For more on loyalty as the key to new definitions of citizenship, see Erik Mathisen, *Loyal Republic: Traitors, Slaves, and the Remaking of Citizenship in Civil War America*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

⁹⁰ J. B. Nichols to George Whipple, September 27, 1864, AMAA; J. B. Nichols, “Aunt Mary,” *American Missionary*, vol. 8, no. 11, 1864, 264.

⁹¹ National Convention of Colored Men (1864: Syracuse, NY), “Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored Men; held in the City of Syracuse, N.Y.; October 4, 5, 6, and 7, 1864; with the Bill of Wrongs and Rights; and the Address to the American People,” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed January 17, 2022,

national convention in nine years, much had transpired to move African Americans toward equal citizenship. Langston applauded Bates's decision on citizenship referring to it as "a complete answer to the arguments and cavils against us."⁹² Delegates also expressed their belief that in light of the "unquestioned patriotism and loyalty of the colored men of the United States," the government "will ultimately concede us our just claims, accord us our rights, and grant us our full measure of citizenship, under the broad shield of the Constitution." Paramount among those rights was the franchise. They declared unequivocally in their "Address of the Colored National Convention to the People of the United States," that "we want the elective franchise in all the States now in the Union, and the same in all such States as may come into the Union hereafter" and added later, "If you need the elective franchise, we need it even more." Those gathered also discussed the hundreds of thousands of their brethren now free and the millions who would soon have their liberty actualized with Confederate surrender. They outlined their mission of uplift which like the AMA's focused on promoting among the freedpeople "frugality and the accumulation of property, and, above all, to leave untried no amount of effort and self-denial to acquire knowledge, and to secure a vigorous moral and religious growth." To pursue these ends for themselves and the freedpeople, they created the National Equal Rights League.⁹³

Education: Camp Barker and Lincoln Hospital Schools

Back in 1804, elite Washingtonians made the first push for a tax-payer funded public school system. The petitioners hoped to not only spark intellectual life in the city, but also realize the hope of a national university, something that former President George Washington had

<https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/282>. For attendees Garnet, Day, Martin, and Wilson, see 4, 14, 29, and 40. Langston served as president while both Martin and Wilson served as vice presidents, 29.

⁹² National Convention of Colored Men (1864: Syracuse, NY), 15.

⁹³ National Convention of Colored Men (1864: Syracuse, NY), 33-39, 55-61. For quotes, see 33-34, 55-56 and 60; Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 105-06.

provided for in his will where he set aside nineteen acres in the city and provided funds for its eventual construction. Congress failed to act on the measure, eventually leaving the municipal government on the hook for meeting local educational needs. Like most southern states, if children received any education in Washington at all during the antebellum period, they did so in the handful of private schools that dotted the District where only the wealthy could afford to send their children. Public schooling had failed to take root alongside slavery. A survey from 1839 showed that of the 5,200 white children in the city, 900 were enrolled in private schools, 293 in two pauper schools, and the remaining 4,000 left to learn what they could on their own.⁹⁴

In 1840, when Congress first began tracking rates of illiteracy with the Sixth US Census, many Americans expressed shock and alarm at a national illiteracy rate of 9 percent and the threat it posed to the republic. Both public and private officials determined to invest resources, both money and manpower, to correct the looming crisis. Over the course of the next two decades, the sectional nature of this problem continued to alarm New Englanders where illiteracy stood around 5 percent and was greatest among its foreign-born immigrant population. In New York and Ohio, the number stood only slightly higher at 6 and 7 percent respectively. However, in the South, the number of illiterate people among its free population stood at roughly 16 percent and when factoring in those states' slave populations, which the US Census counted as wholly illiterate, the number rose to a whopping 49 percent. In the capital, the number of illiterate adults stood at 22 percent, leading Mayor William Winston Seaton (serving from 1840-1850) to launch an ultimately failed effort to import the New England school model.⁹⁵ Local leaders finally implemented a poll tax in the District to fund public education under the city's

⁹⁴ Green, *Washington: Village and Capital*, 42-44; 91-93, 140, and 185.

⁹⁵ U.S. Congress. House. *Special Report of the Commissioner of Education*, 804, and 809-11; Green, *Washington: Village and Capital*, 161-62.

new charter in 1848. By the Civil War, however, only 29 percent of the District's 10,000 white children attended school, and illiteracy stood at an estimated 58 percent among the District's Black children, a number that sharply increased during the conflict as the self-liberating from Maryland and Virginia flooded the city.⁹⁶

When the AMA accepted the opportunity to take control of the ATS's school at Camp Barker in 1864, the first order of business involved securing a teacher. They received a recommendation from New York's black physician and well-known abolitionist James McCune Smith, who suggested William J. Wilson, the black principal of New York's Public School #1, for the post. Wilson had worked as a correspondent for Frederick Douglass' Paper under the pen name Ethiop and was known for his strong antislavery speeches, a trait which had gotten him in trouble in New York. The AMA hired Wilson as its first teacher in the District, and later his wife and daughter as assistants, and together, they operated the largest AMA school, which opened its doors in June 1864 and remained active until the camp ceased to exist in late 1865. At that point the school reopened at its new location on Third Street. Upon arriving in the city where he had many friends, Wilson and his family joined Rev. Henry Highland Garnet's 15th Street Presbyterian Church.⁹⁷

During the final year of the war, Wilson encountered numerous obstacles in his efforts to establish a model New England schoolhouse in the capital. He struggled to hire assistants, maintain order, and secure funds for necessary improvements from the already over-extended AMA. In addition, the extraordinary costs of living in the city left Wilson regularly asking for timely payment of wages or an increase of salary until he found himself forced to take a second

⁹⁶ Green, *Washington: Village and Capital*, 185 and 212-14.

⁹⁷ U.S. Congress. House. *Special Report of the Commissioner of Education*, 225; DeBoer, *His Truth Is Marching On*, 90-93; and William J. Wilson to George Whipple, April 28, 1864, AMAA. While the AMA sought to limit student body size to under 50, Wilson's school at Camp Barker regularly averaged more than 200.

job working for the Freedmen's Bank in 1865.⁹⁸ Despite the hardships, Wilson stuck with the Camp Barker and Third Street Schools, determined to demonstrate what both black teachers and scholars could achieve if given the chance. Wilson made clear to Whipple in an August 1864 letter the importance of maintaining the Camp Barker School as an all-black educational enterprise and also expressed his desire to hire more "colored teachers." In his appeal, he noted "the great need of inculcating in the minds of this special people the idea of our own ability for self-elevation." Additionally, having the largest Black school in the city run wholly by Black teachers would serve as an example to the local "colored citizens" who visited his school from time to time. Despite regularly failing to see the timely pay or support he requested, Wilson did see his request to maintain black teachers at Camp Barker honored by the AMA where another member of Garnet's church, Julia B. Landre, came to work alongside the Wilsons for a brief period.⁹⁹

The AMA's two white missionaries stationed in the capital, William L. Coan and Isaac Cross, regularly checked in on Wilson's school and wrote back to the home office in New York about their observations. In a letter to George Whipple on August 3, 1864 Coan noted that the school was too large to be effective and recommended either transferring fifty of its best scholars to a new school or adding a partition to divide the school in teaching and oration sections.¹⁰⁰ A month later, Coan's wife, Jane N. Coan, wrote the AMA to inquire about starting another school in Camp Barker due to the enormous need and the general poverty of those living there, most of

⁹⁸ DeBoer, *His Truth Is Marching On*, 350-55; and William J. Wilson to George Whipple, June 6, 1864, AMAA.

⁹⁹ William J. Wilson to George Whipple, August 30, 1864 and October 26, 1864, AMAA; Harrold, *Subversives*, 250-51 and Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 128. On wage increase request see Monthly Report from August 1864, and letters to George Whipple from October 1, October 12, October 24, and November 28, 1864, AMAA. On maintenance issues, see Monthly Report from August 1864 and letter to George Whipple on November 15, 1864, AMAA.

¹⁰⁰ William L. Coan to George Whipple, August 3, 1864, AMAA.

whom were unable to send their children anywhere other than a free school.¹⁰¹ In addition to the regular maintenance issues, a shortage of books kept the school from operating efficiently, something Coan noted in an October letter to Whipple observing that Wilson's school remained at a standstill for want of books.¹⁰² Cross appeared less critical than Coan in his letters, focusing primarily on updates including book deliveries, improvements made, and even petitioning for prompt payment of Wilson's salary.¹⁰³ The best evaluation Wilson received for his wartime work in DC came from a friend who published an article about the Camp Barker school in the February 20, 1865 edition of the *Brooklyn Union*. The author, simply referred to as 'W,' wished to draw attention to one doing "a great and glorious work without show or parade." In observing the operation of the school, the writer noted that the scholars appeared "well-dressed and intelligent-looking, attentive and studious, prompt and accurate in their recitations, well drilled in their evolutions and gave every appearance of a well-organized and thoroughly-conducted school." Wilson received praise for his "kind, systematic, and decided" demeanor and his ability to maintain discipline "without the aid of the rod."¹⁰⁴ Mission work in DC proved costly and the AMA could not afford failure lest its broader goals be brought into question. An article in the *American Missionary* noted that in view of the conspicuous position of the schools at Washington, and the influence which their success might have on future legislation for the Freedmen, it was critical that the experiment there have the best Evangelical Christian teachers.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Jane N. Coan to George Whipple, September 23, 1864, AMAA.

¹⁰² William L. Coan to George Whipple, October 13, 1864, AMAA.

¹⁰³ Isaac Cross to George Whipple, July 1, 1864, July 29, 1864, October 22, 1864, and October 29, 1864, AMAA.

¹⁰⁴ W, "Colored Schools in Washington and Vicinity," *Brooklyn Union*, February 20, 1865.

¹⁰⁵ "Freedmen," *American Missionary*, vol. 8, no. 12, 1864, 284. For costly nature of mission work in the District, see for example, William Tilden to George Whipple, May 25, 1865, AMAA.

Pennsylvanian Laurie C. Gates turned out to be one of those ideal evangelical Christian teachers who assumed responsibility of the AMA's school at the city's largest hospital, Lincoln General Hospital, in the summer of 1864.¹⁰⁶ In June, the hospital's chief surgeon, Dr. Lorenzo D. Johnson wrote to Simeon S. Jocelyn about the possibility of employing Gates, who possessed teaching experience and had already been volunteering her time there, to teach the contrabands and their children. Johnson described her as having a "settled Christian character combined with a fair share of energy and tact along with a countenance sanctified by the sweet influences of grace."¹⁰⁷ In her July letter to the AMA, Gates noted that she had been inspired by hearing a speech from abolitionist and women's suffragist Anna Dickinson, who told of the great needs among the city's "poor, oppressed, and downtrodden portion of humanity – the colored race," and determined to serve "the Master" in this field of labor. Although she departed the District due to health concerns just one year later, Gates represented the type of teacher the AMA sought: someone who had experience and passion, would embed themselves within the contraband community, and focused on educational and religious uplift. Over the course of her year teaching at the hospital, Gates averaged between thirty and forty students per day.¹⁰⁸ In her letters to the AMA home office in New York, she spoke of the need to not only educate the contrabands and their children but also the need "to teach them how to live, the way to heaven, and the way to God." To pursue this end, she started a Sabbath School at the hospital. When she faced obstacles of irregular attendance and lack of order and discipline, she spoke with parents and received aid from recovering soldiers who assisted her in the school. She also threw a Christmas party for her

¹⁰⁶ Laurie C. Gates to George Whipple and Simeon S. Jocelyn, July 1, 1864 and Laurie C. Gates, School Reports May/June 1864, AMAA. On Lincoln General Hospital, see *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion* (1861-1865), Part 3, Vol. 1, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1888), 960.

¹⁰⁷ L. D. Johnson to Simeon S. Jocelyn, June 13, 1864, AMAA. See also Toler, "Nothin' but 'ligion," 190-91.

¹⁰⁸ For number of students, see Laurie C. Gates monthly school reports to AMA, AMAA.

students and gave out Christmas gifts, telling the AMA that “such acts of kindness will be productive of good results.”¹⁰⁹

By the end of the war, “the AMA had in operation alongside the school at Camp Barker and Lincoln Hospital, a large school in Georgetown, another on the Island in Washington, and a fourth in the Soldiers’ Free Library. Collectively they employed 11 teachers and operated two evening schools, in all embracing around 1,000 scholars.” At the cessation of hostilities, the AMA schools lost their independence and came under the control of the recently established Freedmen’s Bureau with its headquarters in the capital and Civil War veteran and Congregationalist Oliver Howard serving as commissioner.¹¹⁰ However, the enormous need for education within the District overwhelmed the AMA and the dozens of other relief societies that sprang into action during the war. This reality led them to eagerly seek the establishment of a public school system impartially funded by local taxpayers. Indeed, such legislation became the number one priority of the local NFRA as the conflict drew to a close. Pointing out the crisis, the NFRA stated in its second annual report from 1864, “A system of education for the colored youth of this District should be established by law, as full and free as that already in operation for the training of white children, and under such law schools should be at once opened in suitable localities to be supported by a school tax, collected and distributed with impartial equity.” While public schools for whites had operated in the District since the early nineteenth century, white Washingtonians proved resistant to any efforts to establish a public school system for Blacks. Not until 1862 did Congress finally require Washington and Georgetown to open

¹⁰⁹ Laurie C. Gates to George Whipple, July 1, 1864, August 1, 1864, October 27, 1864, and December 31, 1864, AMAA. For health concerns, see Laurie C. Gates to George Whipple, October 27, 1864, AMAA. L. D. Johnson in a letter to George Whipple complimented the AMA for their mission of uplift noting that they are “taking a class of persons all unprepared from the stunting influences of slavery and preparing them for the responsibilities of freemen” and to “form a part of our social system.” - see L. D. Johnson to George Whipple, November 18, 1864, AMAA.

¹¹⁰ U.S. Congress. House. *Special Report of the Commissioner of Education*, 225.

public schools for the District's black children. Failure to properly fund Black education led Congress to beef-up the law by passing a second one in 1864. The new law was based on the city's proportion of black and white residents and proved much more effective despite complaints by local Washingtonians that Congress failed to financially support local education in the District as it did in the other territories, leaving an onerous burden on overwhelmed and unrepresented locals. The capital was especially important, "for in proportion as the colored people of Washington become intelligent, refined, virtuous, and elevated in thought, character and position, the National Government itself will be thereby honored . . ." ¹¹¹ At the dawn of the postwar era, the AMA and other benevolent societies joined with the capital's upper-class Blacks to push for the establishment of a permanent public school system that would educate their children and the thousands of others, recently arrived, who had under slavery been "forcibly deprived of education." ¹¹²

Religion

The upheaval of war prevented Congregationalists from planting a church in Washington, DC, during the Civil War years and so the AMA's missionaries primarily limited themselves to providing assessments of freedpeople's religious inclinations and shortcomings while also distributing tracts and preaching at the contraband camps and hospitals. However, by the end of 1864, Congregationalists announced their plans to plant their flag in the national capital. The absence of any Congregationalist religious institution left black Washingtonians and the daily arriving self-liberated to attend any one of the fifteen established black churches across the District that boasted a collective membership of 4,800. The Nineteenth Street Baptist Church,

¹¹¹ *Second Annual Report of the National Freedman's Relief Association* (Washington, D.C., M'Gill & Witherow, 1864), 7-8; Green, *Washington: Village and Capital*, 280-82.

¹¹² *Final Report of the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission to the Secretary of War* (June, 1864), 109.

pastored by Rev. Benjamin Tanner; the Israel Bethel Methodist Church, pastored by Rev. Henry McNeal Turner; and the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church, pastored by Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, distinguished themselves as the most prominent of these.¹¹³ As noted by the black suffrage petitioners in 1864, the upper-class black community prided itself on the churches it had established over the previous decades and like other black communities across the North, they refused to accept second-class treatment in white churches preferring to establish segregated institutions of their own in hopes of commanding “the respect of whites as well as their black brothers.”¹¹⁴ Over the course of the war, as freedpeople flooded into the District, their presence threatened the hard fought status of respectability black Washingtonians had achieved, with both upper-class whites and Blacks observing with significant regret freedpeople’s lack of refinement. Those unable to find a suitable church home upon arrival or ill-suited to incorporation into the elite black congregations quickly established segregated churches of their own, marking a clear distinction between native-born Washingtonians and the self-liberated.¹¹⁵

Although the AMA counted just three missionaries in Washington, DC, in 1863, a year later, that number of agents, including both missionaries and teachers, had grown to sixteen and, by the end of the war, the number stood at twenty-one. At its annual meeting in 1864, the AMA made note of the increased investment in the capital, stating, “This field is an important one. At the seat of Government, under the eye of the national legislature, a successful enterprise may

¹¹³ Toler, “*Nothin' but 'ligion*,” 155-168. See also Melvin R. Williams, “Blacks in Washington, D. C., 1860-1870” (The Johns Hopkins University, 1976), 233-34. For a history of Black churches in DC, see John W. Cromwell, “The First Negro Churches in the District of Columbia,” *The Journal of Negro History* 7, no. 1 (1922): 64–106.

¹¹⁴ Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 146.

¹¹⁵ Toler, “*Nothin' but 'ligion*,” 156-57. Founded by self-liberated slaves from Virginia in 1863, Shiloh Baptist Church became a popular church home for freedpeople flocking to the city during the war. See also, Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 127. On the importance of the Black Church in DC, see Johnston, “*Surviving Freedom*,” 128. On caste, see Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 513-14. Litwack notes that elite Black Washingtonians not only distanced themselves from freedpeople in their churches but also clubs such as the Lotus Club which excluded freedmen.

attract the attention of the members of Congress and officers of Government, and suggest to them things needed to be done for the permanent welfare of these people, and aid in the solution of the mighty problem now before the nation.”¹¹⁶ The AMA’s two primary missionaries, Isaac Cross and J. M. Mace, shouldered responsibility for evangelization and the organization’s goal of “religious uplift” during the closing years of the war. This mission of uplift bordered on the paternalistic and was intended to develop the “simple and childlike faith” of the freedpeople while simultaneously meeting their “great need of moral, intellectual and religious instruction to fit them for their new position as freedmen, and prepare them for lives of usefulness . . .”¹¹⁷ In these efforts, the AMA hoped to steer freedpeople toward the Congregationalist polity, but they soon discovered that the majority of freedpeople preferred their own pastors and intended to establish and maintain religious institutions of their own upon securing freedom.¹¹⁸

While the AMA struggled to convince freedpeople of the superiority of the Congregationalist polity, its first agent, Nichols, nevertheless spoke admiringly of the freedpeople’s general religiosity. In an 1862 report to the AMA and in his testimony before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission a year later, Nichols directly addressed the religious inclinations of the freedpeople. In the former he remarked, “Three times a week and oftener, these people have prayer meetings among themselves. I have attended many of them and have been impressed with their correctness and sincerity,” while observing that in the latter “They are the most religious people I have ever had anything to do with, and are Exceedingly devoted and

¹¹⁶ *American Missionary Association Seventeenth Annual Report* (New York, 1863), 32, AMAA; *American Missionary Association Eighteenth Annual Report* (New York, 1864), 11, AMAA and *American Missionary Association Nineteenth Annual Report* (New York, 1865), 16, AMAA.

¹¹⁷ “Letter from Chaplain Grant,” *American Missionary*, vol. 7, no. 6, 1863, 127; “The New Missionary Field,” *American Missionary*, vol. 7, no. 6, 1863, 130-31.

¹¹⁸ “Consequently it was a principle with them to maintain, as far as they rightfully could, all liberty necessary for the doing of these things; liberty of conscience, liberty of opinion, liberty of speech, liberty of the press, liberty of worship, all liberty necessary to obey God.” “Sources of our Free Institutions,” *Congregational Review*, Vol. IV, No. XX, 1864, 138-39.

fervent, as compared with the poor classes of white people.”¹¹⁹ During the final two years of the war, AMA missionaries, Cross and Mace, reported that they had collectively preached to tens of thousands of black troops and freedpeople as they traveled across the District to camps and hospitals. Mace, in an update to the AMA in December 1864, noted that just over the past few months, he had preached to “nearly 50,000 soldiers and distributed 50,000 papers, 10,000 small books and 3,000 gospels and testaments.”¹²⁰ Both men actively distributed tracts and new testaments and regularly sought replenishments of both from the New York office.¹²¹ In one letter to Simeon S. Jocelyn, Cross observed what appeared as a hopeful sign to the AMA. He wrote that as freedpeople became more educated, they tended to prefer an educated pastor over an uneducated black exhorter. Just over a month later, however, Cross quoted Mace in a report to the AMA office noting that when it came to religious influence, they “can’t make them [the freedpeople] anything but Baptists.”¹²² Despite the difficulties, these updates would not keep the AMA from promoting its polity and pursuing its goal of religious uplift in the postwar era.

When Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment, which outlawed slavery and involuntary servitude “except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted,” it received praise from the AMA and its political-abolitionist allies for taking the next step toward securing equal citizenship for African Americans by eliminating the status of “slave.”¹²³ The *National Anti-Slavery Standard* called its passage “A Triumph of Liberty” and approvingly quoted the *Tribune* which declared it “the most august and important event in

¹¹⁹ “District of Columbia,” *American Missionary*, vol. 6, no. 9, 1862, 210; *Freedom*: I, 2:291.

¹²⁰ Isaac Cross to George Whipple, July 1, 1863, June 2, 1864, August 5, 1864; J. M. Mace to George Whipple, September 21, 1864 and December 30, 1864, AMAA.

¹²¹ Isaac Cross to George Whipple, August 4, 1863, October 17, 1863; J. M. Mace to George Whipple, September 2, 1864, September 14, 1864, and March 16, 1865, AMAA.

¹²² Isaac Cross to Simeon S. Jocelyn, April 8, 1864; Isaac Cross to George Whipple, May 31, 1864, AMAA.

¹²³ Foner, *Second Founding*, 21-54.

American Legislation and American History since the Declaration of Independence.”¹²⁴ The *Christian Recorder* offered its praises to the Lord for this “great work of reformation” which caused the “bondman’s shackles to forever fall.”¹²⁵ When ratified, the *New York Herald*, commenting on section two shrewdly pointed out the true importance of the Thirteenth Amendment, which gave “Congress the power to arrange the new conditions of society in the South, especially so far as relations to the position of the negro race.” It not only secured the final abolition of slavery but also secured to Congress “more specific special power” to “so arrange Southern society as to carry out in letter and spirit the intention of the country, that the South should again stand on a level with the North only after its society was reorganized by a full revision of the position of the negro.”¹²⁶

On February 12, 1865, just a month after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, Rev. Henry Highland Garnet became the first Black man to address Congress. In his message to the nation’s legislators, one that reflected the time when the amendment remained unratified by the states and must have made many extremely uncomfortable, he chided them as “Scribes, and Pharisees, and hypocrites and white sepulchers.”¹²⁷ Whereas black people like Garnet saw emancipation “as just the first step toward becoming full citizens, most white Washingtonians viewed emancipation as the final destination, a ceiling for black aspiration.”¹²⁸ Garnet vehemently resisted those who thought the end of the fight drew near. In articulating the path forward in the new post-emancipation era, he exhorted the nation’s legislators to do their highest duty. Simply, he called on these gathered “favored men, and honored of God as his instruments,

¹²⁴ “A Triumph of Liberty,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 4, 1865.

¹²⁵ “Glorious News—Slavery Abolished from the Constitution,” *Christian Recorder*, February 4, 1865.

¹²⁶ “Reconstruction—The Real Force of the Constitutional Amendment,” *New York Herald*, January 12, 1866.

¹²⁷ Henry Highland Garnet, *A Memorial Discourse; by Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives, Washington City, D. C. on Sabbath, February 12, 1865 with an Introduction by James McCune Smith, M. D.* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1865), 80.

¹²⁸ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 132.

to speedily finish the work which he has given you to do,” namely to “*Emancipate, Enfranchise, Educate, and give the blessings of the gospel to every American citizen.*”¹²⁹ To emphasize that the fight for equality remained far from over even as the Confederacy crumbled, he declared:

It is often asked when and where will the demands of the reformers of this and coming ages end? It is a fair question, and I will answer. When all unjust and heavy burdens shall be removed from every man in the land. When all invidious and proscriptive distinctions shall be blotted out from our laws, whether they be constitutional, statute or municipal laws. When emancipation shall be followed by enfranchisement, and all men holding allegiance to the government shall enjoy every right of American citizenship. When our brave and gallant soldiers shall have justice done unto them. When the men who endure the sufferings and perils of the battlefield in the defense of their country, and in order to keep our rulers in their places, shall enjoy the well-earned privilege of voting for them. When in the army and navy, and in every legitimate and honorable occupation, promotion shall smile upon merit without the slightest regard to the complexion of a man’s face. When there shall be no more class legislation and no more trouble concerning the black man and his rights than there is in regard to other American citizens. When, in every respect, he shall be equal before the law, and shall be left to make his own way in the social walks of life.¹³⁰

Picking up on the themes expressed in Garnet’s historic speech, just one month after passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, an article entitled “The Negro a Man and a Citizen” appeared in the *American Missionary*. Its unnamed author began by asserting that the “Constitution of the United States recognizes him as a person” and his actions during the war demonstrated beyond all doubt that he is a “man.” The author then stated that “If the Negro is a man and a citizen, he is entitled to the treatment of a man and a citizen.” Finally, they concluded:

If the United States aims to be a righteous nation, and a power and example of civil and religious liberty to the nations of the earth; if its churches feel the obligation of christianizing its people, and aiding in the evangelization of the world; if the people expect the blessing of heaven upon their efforts to secure peace, respect, and honor to

¹²⁹ Garnet, *Memorial Discourse*, 89, emphasis in the original. See also Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 134-35 and Anna Mae Duane, *Educated for Freedom: The Incredible Story of Two Fugitive Schoolboys Who Grew Up to Change a Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 200-4.

¹³⁰ Garnet, *Memorial Discourse*, 85-86.

themselves and their posterity; let them first conquer themselves, and then award equity to those who are with themselves common inheritors of civilization and Christianity.¹³¹

In a similar strain, an article in the March edition of the *American Missionary* sought to answer the question which consumed the public mind as the end of the war approached, namely what to do with the freedpeople. The author responded that the question will “settle itself. Give them time and opportunity to vindicate their humanity, and they will prove their title to citizenship.”¹³²

And finally, toward the end of the year at the AMA’s Nineteenth Annual meeting held in Brooklyn, the delegates passed resolutions marking the importance of the Thirteenth Amendment. In particular, resolution 3 stated:

That the idea of emancipation which carries with it no protection of person and property, no advantage of the laws and institutions of the land—equal and impartial—is delusive and pernicious. In this age, and in this nation, there can be no meaning to liberty which leaves a man stripped of all civil rights, and free only as the beasts of the forest are free. Emancipation and liberty are but empty and mocking words if they do not convey the idea and rights of citizenship; and we protest against excluding men from the rights of citizenship, civil or political, on account of their color.¹³³

Thus, the nation entered the postwar era, the AMA expressed its intent and prepared itself to continue the fight for African American equality while pursuing its vision of raising freedpeople to the level of Congregational citizenship.

A long and unimaginably costly war in money, material, and manpower waged by the Union finally ended in the defeat of the Confederacy in the spring of 1865 as the Army of Northern Virginia under General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox to Union forces under General Ulysses S. Grant on April 12, 1865. One month later, General Joseph E. Johnston surrendered the Confederate Army of Tennessee to Union forces under the command of William T. Sherman. With the war’s end, the process of Reconstruction commenced and the question of

¹³¹ “The Negro a Man and a Citizen,” *American Missionary*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1865, 34-35.

¹³² “A Word for the Freedmen,” *American Missionary*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1865, 52.

¹³³ *Nineteenth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1865), 8, AMAA.

citizenship came front and center, due not only to the emancipation of four million formerly enslaved persons, but also in debates over the status of former rebels, traitors to the American republic. In those moments, all eyes turned to Washington, the city destined to play, in the words of historian Robert Harrison, a “pivotal role” in the “program of Reconstruction.”¹³⁴ The staunch abolitionist, Reverend Lyman Abbott, spoke for many within the AMA and CCM when he wrote of the need for southern evangelization, especially the need to advance the two conditions “essential to the perpetuity of republican institutions: popular intelligence and popular morality.” To achieve this end, Abbott declared two institutions essential: common schools and Christian churches. Along the lines long expressed by the AMA and CCM, he declared the day of redemption at hand, “Where we have destroyed slavery, we must organize liberty. Where we have destroyed the nation’s enemies, we must establish these national supports, - free schools and free churches.” As Reconstruction dawned, he rejoiced that the “heretofore impregnable Jericho is impregnable no longer,” and as the AMA eyed the key city of Washington, they determined to answer Abbott’s Biblical call to “Go ye in and possess the land.”¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Harrison, *Washington During Civil War*, 13.

¹³⁵ Lyman Abbott, “Southern Evangelization,” *New Englander* 23 (1864), 701, 703, and 708. See also, Ira V. Brown, “Lyman Abbott and Freedmen’s Aid, 1865-1869,” *The Journal of Southern History* 15, no. 1 (1949): 23 and Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*, 109-10.

CHAPTER 3 – CONTESTING CITIZENSHIP (1865-1868)

“Though the war is over the work is not; and while we look some to legislation, we must look more to moral forces to finish it. Nor ought the government with any hasty acts to withdraw its hands from this work. Having lifted up and set forward three millions into nominal freedom, it is obligated not only not to withdraw its hand, but to find and use legitimate means to make that freedom a reality.”¹

“I speak not as a politician, for I detest politics, I speak as an ecclesiastic when I say the cry of humanity is educate educate elevate! Elevate! This is not its cry only, it is its absolute want, but you can neither educate nor elevate humanity without the ballot. To defend one's life, liberty, property, is as inherent as the soul itself. In time of war the sword is the weapon of defense; in time of peace, the ballot. Therefore, he who deprives or attempts to deprive me of the one or of the other, is an enemy, an oppressor, a despot. This is true, whether he be called Democrat or Republican, aristocrat, king, or President.”²

In the immediate aftermath of the war, William Lloyd Garrison famously declared 1865 a “Year of Jubilee” with slavery now ended and the battle won. He also promptly announced his plans to shutter *Liberator*, the uncompromising mouthpiece of abolition, by the end of the year.³ For the AMA and the CCM, however, the struggle simply shifted to a new front. The long-sought goals of equal citizenship, Black enfranchisement, and the establishment of the institutions to form a virtuous citizenry remained unaccomplished by war’s end. When Congregationalists gathered in Boston for the National Council of Congregational Churches in June 1865, the attendees discussed their particular plan for Reconstruction. The Committee on the Evangelization in the West and South reported that “God has overturned society in the South for the crime of trampling on the rights of the negro, and let no one think to restore it without

¹ William Barrows, “After the War,” *Congregational Review* VI, no. XXXI (1866), 84.

² Letter from AME Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne to the gathered delegates at the 1867 National Equal Rights League which met in Washington DC on January 28, 1867, National Equal Rights League (1867: Washington, D.C.), “Report on the National Equal Rights League Convention held in Washington, D.C., January 28, 1867.” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/1059>. Note although the document lists the date as January 28, 1867, it actually took place on January 10-11, 1867 (see footnote 24 on pg. 11).

³ Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children*. 4 vols. (New York: Century Co., 1885-1889) 4:135-36.

fully recognizing his equal rights, with the white man to citizenship, both under our government and in the kingdom of God.”⁴ Later at the same meeting, Reverend James Thome, author of *Future of the Freedpeople* two years earlier, offered his thoughts and noted that it had been thirty years since he, as a young Kentuckian, “emancipated from the trammels of a slave-holding family,” last spoke in Boston on the issue of emancipation. Now, the pressing question before the churches consisted in how they could “disseminate our hallowed institutions - the church, the family, and society - in the South.” To aid the impoverished whites rendered doubly poor by slavery and the war and to elevate the recently liberated to the position of citizens and introduce them as rapidly as possible to the fullest privileges of citizenship required “a work of a religious and educational nature, which they are calling earnestly upon us to render to them.” Planting churches and supporting the work of the AMA were central, Thome argued, to reconstructing southern society along Congregational lines. In the former, poor blacks and whites would find “true Christian nurture, and a position of equality, if not in the State, at least in the church;” while the latter would “diffuse a true Christian polity and true Christian faith among the colored people of the South.”⁵

One year later, the Reverend William Barrows, pastor of the Congregationalist Old South Church in Reading, Massachusetts, and AMA lifetime member, argued in his brief article, “After the War,” that “the negro question . . . is not yet settled . . . the hearing is simply adjourned from Bull Run and Richmond to Washington.”⁶ The task now before the nation, after a devastating and costly war between rival civilizations, was reconstruction, and the epicenter of that effort

⁴ James Manning, Winchell Yerrinton, and Henry Martyn Parkhurst, *Debates and Proceedings of the National Council of Congregational Churches, Held at Boston, Mass., June 14-24, 1865* (Boston: American Congregational Association, 1866), 144.

⁵ Manning, et al., *Debates and Proceedings of the National Council of Congregational Churches*, 287-89.

⁶ Barrows, “After the War,” 84.

was Washington, DC. Many Congregationalists would have agreed with Barrows, who framed the bloody conflict between the North and South as that between “one civilization of the fourteenth and the other of the nineteenth century,” noting “two theories of government have been in conflict, the one feudal, the other democratic, the one despotic, the other free, the one aristocratic, the other republican.” States’ rights doctrine erroneously argued that “the power of repulsion was stronger than the power of attraction,” and in so doing challenged federal relations, “a notion vitiating to national citizenship . . .” As the country looked to the future, the southern civilization needed to be replaced by the northern, which sought “to popularize labor, enrich all classes, educate the populace and elevate all into the intelligent morality of the Gospel. So the nation would grow and develop in symmetry and strength and glory.”⁷ The enemy that appeared most threatening to a prosperous and glorious future for the nation concerned race relations between white and black, and the only solution, according to Barrows was time. In especially prescient remarks, he observed that this “problem of the last thirty years is likely to be the problem of the next thirty of this country,” and “what we will most need, and perhaps be least willing to give, will be time.” While “force had carried the freedmen forward to their nominal liberty, to maintain and enjoy that gift, social and moral forces must now have time to overtake the military and adjust the two parties to their new relations and duties.”⁸

As the Thirteenth Amendment passed Congress and the war neared its end, competing visions of citizenship emerged. The AMA and CCM embraced a national citizenship that would replace state discriminations while a majority of the nation, including former rebels, staunchly defended states’ rights to define the boundaries of citizenship. At the center of these debates in Congress stood the issues of the former rebels and the recently liberated freedpeople. Alternate

⁷ Barrows, “After the War,” 76 and 80.

⁸ Barrows, “After the War,” 83.

visions left Lincoln and later Johnson at odds with the Republican-controlled Congress, which faced pressure from across the spectrum on how to proceed with defining postwar citizenship and the privileges and immunities that national belonging entailed.⁹ On the one hand and much to the consternation of freedpeople, Congregationalists, southern Unionists, and radical Republicans in Congress, Johnson expressed an over-eagerness to welcome back former rebels while keeping Blacks, who had remained loyal and helped save the Union, in a subservient state. Just over a month after the Confederate Army of Tennessee had surrendered to Union forces, President Johnson pardoned hundreds of thousands of former rebels thus quickly bringing them back into the national fold. In accepting spurious oaths of loyalty from former rebels, Johnson granted them the cloak and protection of citizenship.

Concomitantly, Johnson and a significant number of congressmen resisted granting citizenship to vulnerable freedpeople who had demonstrated their loyalty, providing vital aid to the Union war effort by undermining slavery through self-liberation and reinvigorating the military effort through service both on and off the battlefield. With the status of “slave” removed from the national vernacular, a key issue of Reconstruction concerned the question of the permanent status of freedpeople in the postwar era. And related to this, to what extent did emancipation undermine the prewar social order? As seen from the above published sentiments, the AMA anticipated embarking upon an unprecedented mission to New Englandize the South by establishing an equal, colorblind citizenry founded on the church and schoolhouse and dedicated to free labor principles. The capital, a region held in common by all, provided the perfect location to experiment with models of their proposed vision. As the AMA began to pursue their ambitious goals there during the early years of Reconstruction, they quickly

⁹ Bordewich, *Congress at War*, 274-80.

encountered obstacles that threatened to derail this transformation, none larger than President Andrew Johnson.

Although radical Republicans in Congress had expressed their misgivings about Lincoln and raised objections to his generous terms for the readmission of southern states, they had grown to appreciate the workings of his shrewd political mind. His sudden death, combined with Lincoln's calculated move to replace the New Englander Hamlin with Johnson as vice president, soon emerged as one of the most tragic realities of the Civil War. As the wartime governor of Tennessee, Johnson had in 1864 referred to himself as the "Moses of the Colored People" but he quickly revealed himself to be a virulent racist more akin in the freedpeople's mind to Pharaoh. During his three years in office, Johnson joined with likeminded white supremacists to argue against granting immediate equal citizenship and instead suggest a gradualist rise to inclusion into the body politic for freedpeople, over an ambiguously defined but no doubt lengthy time period.¹⁰ With Johnson, then, the executive branch's stance on black citizenship stood at direct odds with that AMA's radical view of immediate equal citizenship. With Johnson in office, early Radical Republican hopes for creating an alliance with the present soon divulged into distrust and confrontation before culminating with the nation's first impeachment trial. Radical Republicans determined to buttress and build upon the Civil War milestones of emancipation and the Thirteenth Amendment which ended slavery and nullified the white southern ideology of "property in man." The immediate postwar years saw republicans move quickly to extend the Freedmen's Bureau and provide it with both funding and enforcement powers to continue aiding freedpeople in their transition out of slavery. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 which followed established birthright citizenship and outlined the basic civil rights associated with freedom but

¹⁰ Robert S. Levine, *Failed Promise: Reconstruction, Frederick Douglass, and the Impeachment of Andrew Johnson* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021), 19-23. On gradual citizenship, see 86-87.

the battle for enfranchisement remained. Looming fears about an unfriendly Congress sparked efforts to place the Civil Rights Act beyond the reach of Congress through a new constitutional amendment.

Politics

Both the District and nation entered a transformative era during the immediate postwar years, one in which the Republican-controlled Congress moved quickly to pass legislation to gain control over the course of Reconstruction, especially as concerns over President Johnson's amnesty policy and reports of violence against freedpeople across the South mounted. Upon returning to session in early January 1866, Republicans quickly pushed to extend the Freedmen's Bureau, secure freedpeople in their civil rights, and create national citizenship for all persons, minus Native Americans, born in the United States. At both its annual meetings and in its monthly organ, the *American Missionary*, the AMA made little official note of these historic pieces of legislation that garnered President Johnson's angst and vetoes while also laying the groundwork for his eventual impeachment two years later. Unlike the Emancipation Proclamation and passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, both of which had brought about widespread praise from the AMA and their allies, the extension of the Bureau as well as the Civil Rights Act and its corollary, the Fourteenth Amendment, passed with little fanfare due to the absence of a statement on enfranchisement despite the praise heaped upon them from most Republicans.¹¹ The AMA and its allies had long assumed a rights-based colorblind citizenship and in the postwar years, they remained focused on agitating for political equality through Black enfranchisement, a just compensation for Black loyalty and heroism, and the only means by

¹¹ Foner, *Second Founding*, 91; Douglas R Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2015), 202-06.

which Blacks could protect themselves in a nation filled with recalcitrant rebels and virulent racists.¹²

When Congress, in 1866, finally turned its attention to clarifying the meaning and rights associated with citizenship, the AMA and CCM had already been a part of a decades-long movement to usher in a rights-based colorblind citizenship. However, at the dawn of Reconstruction, as preeminent Reconstruction historian, Eric Foner, has pointed out, the idea of citizenship remained largely ambiguous with “no agreed-upon understanding of the rights it entailed and the role of the federal government in defining and guaranteeing those rights had developed.” He goes on to argue that “Reconstruction was a key moment in the process by which a hierarchical, locally based legal culture was transformed into one committed, at least ostensibly, to the equality of all Americans, protected by the national government.”¹³ Despite their historic nature, these two key pieces of legislation extending the Bureau and passing a civil rights bill, both of which passed over President Johnson’s vetoes, failed to assuage the AMA and African Americans who remained focused on the goal of Black enfranchisement.

In January 1866, the powerful yet conservative Republican Senator from Illinois, Lyman Trumbull, introduced two bills before Congress directly related to growing concerns about the hostility and discrimination faced by freedpeople in the South. The first, introduced on January 5 after Commissioner Howard had discussed with Trumbull concerns about ending the Bureau prematurely, sought an extension for the Freedmen’s Bureau. Trumbull’s extension bill provided government funding for the Bureau that no longer possessed lands with which to secure rents

¹² *Nineteenth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1865), 8, 11, 34, and 46, AMAA. Since at least July 1865, the AMA had called for Black suffrage, see Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 21 and Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*, 26.

¹³ Foner, *Second Founding*, 3 and 8. See also, Eric Foner, “Thaddeus Stevens and the Imperfect Republic.” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 60, no. 2 (1993), 146.

and, in an effort to secure the freedpeople in their newly granted liberty, added enforcement powers deemed vital to their attainment of equal rights.¹⁴ Much to the surprise of Republicans in Congress, President Johnson vetoed the seemingly conservative bill twice before Republicans ultimately passed it over his veto in July.¹⁵

The second bill introduced by Trumbull addressed long-standing AMA goals of national citizenship based on equality and inclusive of civil rights. As introduced, the Civil Rights Act of 1866 declared “That all persons born in the United States . . . excluding Indians not taxed, are hereby declared to be citizens of the United States.” And as such, they possessed “the same right, in every State and Territory in the United States . . . as is enjoyed by white citizens . . .” The bill’s language targeted Black Codes, laid the foundation for the Fourteenth Amendment, and secured national citizenship for the freedpeople while also outlining a series of basic rights including making contracts, bringing lawsuits, and enjoying “full and equal benefit of the laws and proceedings for the security of person and property.” Importantly, and to the bitter disappointment of the AMA and its allies, it made no mention of the franchise. As they did with the Freedmen’s Bureau bill in February and would again in July, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act over President Johnson’s veto in April and in so doing, infused the Thirteenth Amendment with tangible meaning.¹⁶ Later that month and in response to the amendment’s passage, Henry Highland Garnet addressed a large gathering of freedpeople and said, “I suppose it will no longer be presumption to call you fellow-citizens, since the Constitution has been so amended as forever to prohibit slavery and involuntary servitude, except in punishment for

¹⁴ Donald G. Nieman, “Andrew Johnson, the Freedmen’s Bureau and the Problem of Equal Rights, 1865-1866,” Donald G. Nieman, ed., *The Freedmen’s Bureau and Black Freedom*, vol. 2, 12 vols., (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 231-32; Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:280-82.

¹⁵ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 243-49.

¹⁶ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 243-49 and Foner, *Second Founding*, 63-64.

crime, and since the ‘Civil Rights bill’ has become a law of the land. To-day the principles of liberty are triumphant . . .”¹⁷ Garnet concluded his eloquent speech by reading some well-worded and touching resolutions, the last of which directly aligned with the AMA’s postwar vision for Black enfranchisement and the transformation of southern society:

RESOLVED: That we are sensible of the fact that we are engaged in a stubborn war with numerous and unrelenting foes, which, by the help of God, we mean to fight out to the end on our native soil, aiming to complete the establishment of our rights and liberties; and that our weapons are the spelling book, the Bible, the press, and the implements of industry; and our impregnable fortifications are schoolhouses and the Church of Christ; and our watchwords are UNCONDITIONAL LOYALTY TO GOD AND OUR COUNTRY.¹⁸

Meeting in Albany, New York in October 1866, the Convention of Colored Men, under the presidency of black abolitionist and Oberlin graduate, William Howard Day, captured the perspective of the nation’s Black community in the wake of Congress’s passage of these two bills. While they cheered the fact that they now “stand on a higher plane of life than formerly,” they were called to take front rank in the new battle, not only for freedom, but for full enfranchisement.” Those gathered declared in agreement, “We need the ballot, this truly American weapon, to equip us fully for battle.”¹⁹

As Republicans approached the mid-terms in 1866, fears over President Johnson’s outright resistance to their policies, coupled with concerns that the quick readmission of southern states that Johnson sought might render their actions null and void, led radical Republicans to move to assert control of Reconstruction. The means to this end involved passage of both the Reconstruction Acts aimed at thwarting the quick readmission of southern states and a new

¹⁷ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:321.

¹⁸ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:321-22.

¹⁹ New York State Convention of Colored Men (1866: Albany, NY), “New York State Convention of Colored Men, Albany, October 16, 1866,” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed January 2, 2022, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/529>; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 289 and 294-96.

Constitutional amendment intended to place the Civil Rights Act beyond the reach of a less-friendly future Congress. Indeed, since December 1865, Thaddeus Stevens, radical Republican and US Representative from Pennsylvania, had expressed the need for an amendment to assure equal application to all citizens of all national and state laws and brought the Fourteenth Amendment before the House in late April.²⁰ The amendment, ultimately passed in June 1866 and ratified on July 9, 1868, not only aimed to secure the freedpeople in the newfound status and rights, but according to Section 3 simultaneously sought to deny pardoned former rebels' access to political power.²¹ In short, the amendment reflected the emerging contest taking place in Washington, DC, over the course of Reconstruction and concerns about the exclusion of freedpeople from the attainment of a meaningful equal citizenship. And like the Thirteenth Amendment which preceded it, it granted Congress key enforcement powers. A month after Congress passed the amendment, John M. Langston told a black gathering in Cleveland, Ohio, "we are no longer colored people, but Americans," and now "a great whole of the mighty American people."²² Unfortunately, at the time, its weakest link "was the failure of the Amendment to specify just what was included in the "privileges and immunities" that the federal government now had authority to enforce.²³ The Supreme Court would ultimately step forward to settle this ambiguity in the ensuing years.

Unlike the Emancipation Proclamation and Thirteenth Amendment, the Fourteenth Amendment garnered little praise among the Blacks. In his remarks in the *National Anti-Slavery*

²⁰ Bruce C Levine, *Thaddeus Stevens: Civil War Revolutionary, Fighter for Racial Justice* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021), 202.

²¹ Foner, *Second Founding*, 55-92. On the problem posed by pardoned former rebels, see Caroline E. Janney, *Ends of War: The Unfinished Fight of Lee's Army after Appomattox* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 213-33, 247, and 253.

²² John M. Langston, "Interesting from Cleveland, Ohio. Speech of John M. Langston, Esq.," *Christian Recorder*, August 25, 1866.

²³ Allen C. Guelzo, *Reconstruction: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 92.

Standard, Frederick Douglass referred to citizenship without enfranchisement as both “empty” and an “insult.” Later in the *Atlantic*, Douglass pulled no punches in labeling the Fourteenth Amendment an “unfortunate blunder” that created an “emasculated citizenship.”²⁴ Several months later, John M. Langston announced the second annual meeting of the National Equal Rights League which would meet in DC on January 10-11, 1867. There, Langston and Wall joined other black delegates to press Congress for full black male enfranchisement. In addition, Judge Salmon P. Chase, Senator Charles Sumner, and Bishop Daniel A. Payne all sent letters of support. In addition, those gathered passed several resolutions including one which stated unequivocally, “the colored race have the right to the ballot because they are citizens, tax-payers, and patriots, and it is a natural and inherent right.” They also declared that they were “entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens in several States,” while seeking a “national standard of qualifications, which shall be uniform and universal.” Noting the importance of establishing an interracial coalition to achieve their ends, they created a list of “honorary members,” friends to be counted on including Senator Sumner, Chief Justice Chase, Rep. Thaddeus Stevens, Gen. James Garfield, Gen. O. O. Howard, DC Mayor Sayles J. Bowen, and renowned minister and Oberlinite Charles G. Finney.²⁵

Boston Congregationalist minister, Charles L. Woodworth, an AMA District secretary and lifetime member, agreed with these sentiments. In an article published in the *Congregational Review* entitled “The Full Enfranchisement of the Negro,” Woodworth aptly argued for

²⁴ “Letter from Frederick Douglass,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, July 7, 1866; Levine, *Failed Promise*, 134-35.

²⁵ John M. Langston, “Bureau National Equal Rights League,” *Christian Recorder*, December 15, 1866, “The National Equal Rights League,” *Evening Star*, January 11, 1867, and “The National Equal Rights League,” *Evening Star*, January 12, 1867. See also National Equal Rights League (1867: Washington, D.C.), “Report on the National Equal Rights League Convention held in Washington, D.C., January 28, 1867.,” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed January 18, 2022, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/1059>. Although this citation states the convention took place on January 28, 1867, it actually transpired on January 10-11, 1867 as noted in the *Evening Star*.

“universal suffrage” and the “rights of full citizenship” as an act of long-overdue justice and the only means by which the black man could secure his protection. He dismissed the arguments common among conservative Republicans and their allies who used ignorance and fear of white manipulation of black votes as objections to black enfranchisement. If ignorance be a reason, “it should be enough to reply that he knew the right and stood for the right when all the intelligence and wealth and power of the South were in the wrong.” And if it be feared that he will become “a tool in the hands of these wicked men, let the answer be found in his record of the last six years when he has opposed these men even to death.”²⁶

Reverend Woodworth offered his own critical view of Reconstruction thus far and called on readers to support the AMA which desperately needed funds to continue its worthy mission across the South. Reconstruction thus far had been bungled, he argued: “we have been working at the wrong side of the problem, had we simply decided to protect our friends at the expense of our enemies, the way would have been plain.” Northerners “failed to rid ourselves of the slave oligarchy” and strip them of their “vast estates.” If given land, the black man would have provided for his own needs and relieved the government and benevolent associations of the present crisis.²⁷ Justice, their loyalty and heroism, and the nation’s very future demanded that the people of the United States do right by the black race which, recently granted citizenship, pointed the way forward as those from whom have yet “to produce its first traitor to the flag.”²⁸ The nation owed freedpeople “reparations,” a duty “binding and sacred” as national payment for

²⁶ Charles L. Woodworth, “The Full Enfranchisement of the Negro,” *Congregational Review*, Vol. VII, No. XXXVI, 1867, 259 and 261-62. On Woodworth as District secretary and AMA lifetime member, see *American Missionary*, vol. 13, no. 1, January 1869. Woodworth began serving as one of three District secretaries for the AMA in 1866. The announcement of his acceptance of the position in Boston took place in the *Twentieth Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1866), 10, AMAA; *Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1882), 102.

²⁷ Woodworth, “The Full Enfranchisement of the Negro,” 266-68.

²⁸ Woodworth, “The Full Enfranchisement of the Negro,” 254-58 and 261.

injuries done and just payments withheld. White Americans in both the North and the South had “unmanned, chattelized, and merchandized them,” while also “growing rich by robbing the poor.” Indeed, the earnings of the entire race for generations had gone into the hands of white men to make them wealthy.²⁹ At this critical juncture in American history, the present need involved spreading the “good seed of the New England school, and church, and culture.” At moments sounding patriarchal and others admiring, Woodworth praised the loyalty, heroism, industriousness, and religious sincerity of the freedpeople, while also noting that they were “lacking intelligence and skill, dull, plastic, and yielding, just waiting to be moulded to our purpose.”³⁰ To address the present crises, he called for more teachers and schools and religious provisions to be provided to the freedpeople. In concluding his appeal, he pointed his readers to the AMA, saying, “If we would save ourselves, we must save them. And, so far as our denomination is concerned, the instrument of their salvation is the American Missionary Association.”³¹

Labor: Freedmen’s Bureau

On the labor front, the postwar situation in the capital verged on a humanitarian crisis with the city unable to accommodate in employment, housing, or basic necessities the sharp rise in its population during the war years. After the war, employment opportunities for the city’s large number of black laborers dried up considerably and the lack of land for farming meant that the majority of them, most of whom had been trained in field labor, would need to find work outside the city, ostensibly back in the South or Midwest. The newly established Bureau of

²⁹ Woodworth, “The Full Enfranchisement of the Negro,” 256-57.

³⁰ Woodworth, “The Full Enfranchisement of the Negro,” 268-69.

³¹ Woodworth, “The Full Enfranchisement of the Negro,” 269-73; For similar sentiments, see also the *Twentieth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1866), 54-55 and E. B. Webb, “Annual Discourse,” *Twenty-first Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (Homer, New York, 1867), 9, AMAA.

Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau), with Howard as its first (and only) commissioner, took the lead in this mass movement of freedpeople which faced public critique from both Johnson and the freedpeople. The Bureau experienced more success, however, in responding to local freedpeople's demands for land by creating an establishment at Barry Farm where freedmen of good character purchased one-acre lots and began to establish a thriving community. The friendly relationship between the Bureau and Black Washingtonians did not outlast Johnson's tumultuous presidency, however, with its operations coming to an end in the District in 1868.

A month before the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, freedmen's aid societies from New England and Ohio had petitioned President Lincoln to advocate with Congress for "the immediate creation of a bureau of emancipation." The letter, signed by fifteen men including Congregationalist minister and AMA lifetime member, Henry Ward Beecher, recognized that the resources required to assist four million freedpeople in their transition from slaves to "citizens" went well beyond the capability of their associations.³² Even before the final guns fell silent, General Howard had caught the attention of President Lincoln as a possible candidate to lead the newly created yet temporary Freedmen's Bureau. Lincoln's assassination prevented him from making the final choice, leaving the leadership of the Bureau up to Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton. On May 3, 1865, Stanton received a letter from Beecher suggesting Howard for the position. He described Howard as "one who would command the entire confidence of the christian public, in the service" before closing with his assessment that "I do

³² Senate Executive Documents, 38th Congress, 1 Session, no. 1 (serial 1176); George R. Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), 30.

not know of any one who would also, to such a degree, unite the secular public.” A few days later, Stanton offered the Bureau to Howard.³³

In assuming the role of commissioner on May 12, 1865, Howard assumed responsibility for the freedpeople’s transition from slavery to a meaningful and productive state of liberty, or as he articulated it in his first circular, “the Negro should understand that he is really free but on no account should he harbor the thought that the government will support him in idleness.”³⁴

African American freedom, the ultimate goal of abolitionists since the start of the war, had cost billions of dollars and the lives of well over half a million men and now it would be up to Howard and the Bureau to secure whatever rights might accompany this newfound freedom. In the words of one historian, “The Bureau was the heart of Reconstruction, and Howard was the heart of the Bureau,” but it remained to be seen what Howard and the bureau, temporary, underfunded, and under-supported, could achieve.³⁵ The unenviable position led Howard to seek allies among northern “friends of the freedmen.” The AMA, the principle benevolent society of Reconstruction, entered the postwar years optimistic about the Bureau and looked to Howard to implement its goal of equal citizenship alongside its free labor ideology in the capital. Indeed, the association became Howard’s favorite benevolent society due in large part to the extent and direction of its work and also his growing friendship with George Whipple. Over the course of

³³ Beecher to Stanton, May 3, 1865, Howard Papers; also Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen’s Bureau*, 55. On temporary nature of Bureau, see Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen’s Bureau*, 49 and Bordewich, *Congress at War*, 293.

³⁴ Oliver Otis Howard, Circular Letter, May 15, 1865 in United States, Freedmen’s Bureau, Records of the Commissioner, 1865-1872,” Selected Series, Roll 7, Circulars issued, May 1865 - June 1869; Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:207-08 and Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 382.

³⁵ Gordon L. Weil, *The Good Man: The Civil War’s “Christian General” and His Fight for Racial Equality* (Maine: Arthur McAllister Publishers Inc., 2013), 68.

the Bureau's existence, the AMA received close to half a million dollars to sustain its efforts in Washington and across the South.³⁶

When Howard accepted the position as Bureau commissioner, he did so just months removed from his role as the commander of General Sherman's right wing during his famous March to the Sea, which had brought him into contact with the free labor experiment along the Sea Islands.³⁷ While there, he had visited Mrs. Towne's schoolhouse and observed the black pupils practicing their lessons. In a particularly memorable moment for Howard, he asked one of these pupils what message he should carry back to the North with him, and this young man replied, "Tell them we is rising."³⁸ Perhaps reflecting on that visit and his first year as commissioner, in an appearance before a freedmen's relief society in Maine in August 1866, Howard concluded, "I never could detect the shadow of a reason why the color of the skin should impair the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."³⁹ Largely apathetic to the plight of the northern freeman and southern slave during the prewar years, his religious conversion in Florida and wartime experiences left him a changed man, one who embarked on his postwar position as commissioner determined to elevate the freedpeople. His recent embrace of Congregationalism informed his actions which centered on introducing contract labor, establishing schools, and promoting morality among the freedpeople. From his headquarters in Washington, Howard found his efforts consistently limited by the Bureau's lack of resources including funds, land, and personnel. In addition, competing visions marred the Bureau's existence, with President Johnson joining racist and recalcitrant white southerners alongside

³⁶ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:220; Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 75-84. Richardson notes that "At least a dozen AMA principals and agents were appointed to minor Bureau positions. Others were made agents without pay, enabling them to travel on Bureau funds," 81. See also Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 477.

³⁷ Howard, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, 98; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 51-54. That Howard was strong influenced by his time in the Sea Islands is noted by historian Rose in *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 339-40.

³⁸ Elizabeth Hyde Botume, *First Days Among the Contrabands* (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1893), 112.

³⁹ "THE FREEDMEN." *New York Times* (1857-1922), Aug 20, 1865; Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:315.

some conservative republicans in seeking a quick end to the nation's first social welfare program while radical Republicans and their abolitionist allies fought for its continuance. While these groups leveraged their bases of support and sought to influence Congress, the freedpeople employed the Bureau in pursuit of their own version of a postemancipation future.

The tumultuous war years had provided African Americans with their best opportunity to take advantage of an artificially inflated labor market in the capital with large numbers of blacks finding employment in the military and war-related government jobs.⁴⁰ With the defeat of the Confederacy and demobilization, the government's need for soldiers and laborers rapidly disappeared, leaving the majority of freedpeople without the means to support themselves. Indeed, between 1860 and 1870, Washington's black population ballooned from 10,983 to 35,455, a 222.8 percent increase and a figure far beyond the capability of the city's labor and housing market to absorb.⁴¹ Thus the immediate years after the war found freedpeople at the center of a humanitarian crisis. Destitute, uneducated, and lacking the training and connections to secure what limited jobs existed, many found themselves on the verge of starvation, living in overpriced shanties and dependent on benevolent societies and the Freedmen's Bureau for clothing, rations, and any kind of employment aid. While the AMA and black elites in Washington pursued equal citizenship and civil rights, freedpeople simply fought to survive. Addressing this crisis became a primary goal for Howard, the Bureau, and the AMA. The AMA's efforts were complicated by the fact that their free labor ideology was more conducive to rural New England or a technically skilled labor force and less applicable in an urban setting like

⁴⁰ Johnston, "Surviving Freedom," 186, and 226-28.

⁴¹ US Secretary of the Interior, Ninth Census, Vol. 1, Statistics of the Population of the United States [Washington, DC, 1872], 97, 163, 278-281. Washington remained a mecca for emigrating blacks throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. By century's end, Washington, DC, had the largest black population of any city in the United States. See Johnston, "Surviving Freedom," 162.

Washington where a majority of the workforce possessed agricultural training. Although the Bureau held 20,000 acres in local abandoned and confiscated lands immediately after the war, President Johnson's amnesty proclamation and land restoration policy, announced on May 29, 1865, left them with nothing by 1867 outside of the few hundred acres under cultivation at Freedmen's Village where the AMA now operated the school.⁴² In the simplest of terms, the District could not support the 200 percent growth in its black population.

To address the problem of surplus laborers, the Freedmen's Bureau pursued two primary courses of action. The first involved establishing employment offices in DC and other cities across the North, East, and West with the goal of transporting as many freedpeople as possible to more viable labor markets. Second, in contrast to Freedmen's Village, which remained largely occupied by women with children, the elderly, and sick, Howard used Bureau funds to purchase 375 acres of land, just south of the Capitol and across the Anacostia River, to establish a model African American community at Barry Farm inhabited by industrious and self-supporting Blacks of good character. With the dearth of land and the implementation of its contract system, the Freedmen's Bureau also widely promoted the AMA's labor ideology centered on "frugality, temperance, honesty, and hard work."⁴³

Unlike his approach across the rest of the South, where Howard and the Bureau sought to convince freedpeople to stay where they were and seek employment terms with former masters, in DC, overcrowding and the related crises that followed including destitution, disease, and death resulted in an approach that focused primarily on finding "homes for freedpeople outside the

⁴² House Executive Documents, 39.1, No. 70: Reports of Assistant Commissioners (Serial 1256, Washington, DC, 1865), 378-86 C. H. Howard to O. O. Howard, October 10, 1867, LS, 3:758a, Reel 1; C. H. Howard to O. O., Howard October 10, 1868, LS, 4:1128, Reel 2, BRFAL-DC. For AMA control of Freedmen's Village school, see H. N. Howard to George Whipple on June 9, 1868, AMAA.

⁴³ Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 403.

District.” These efforts would not only relieve the government of the burden of providing for the thousands of freedpeople needing aid but also remove from public view the unflattering and embarrassing scenes of desperate freedpeople that would only reinforce racist whites’ preconceptions of African Americans.⁴⁴ Abolitionist and women’s suffragist, Josephine Griffing, who had arrived in DC in 1864 and began working with the Bureau as an assistant to assistant commissioner, Charles H. Howard, in the summer of 1865, became the leading proponent of the resettlement program. However, in contrast to Bureau officials who simply sought to send freedpeople wherever their labor was needed, Griffing intentionally directed the District’s freedpeople to the North and West where she believed they had the best chance to secure rights and education.⁴⁵ Charles Howard in his first report to Commissioner Howard in October 1866 noted that over the course of the previous year, the Bureau had transported or removed 5,192 Blacks from the District to locations across the country where their labor was needed. The following year--the final year the Bureau transported large numbers of freedpeople outside the District-- he reported another 4,279.⁴⁶ Of those numbers, roughly half had been assisted by Griffing, who worked tirelessly on their behalf.⁴⁷ While a variety of factors precipitated the end of the transportation program, including lack of funds and a slow shift in the Northeast toward Irish labor, resistance from President Johnson and the freedpeople proved most decisive.

As commissioner, Howard found himself between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, reports from the South, most famously that of Carl Schurz in December 1865, declared the

⁴⁴ Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 86-87.

⁴⁵ Keith E. Melder, “Angel of Mercy in Washington: Josephine Griffing and the Freedmen, 1864-1872,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 63/65 (1963), 251-52.

⁴⁶ House Executive Documents, 39.1, No. 70: Reports of Assistant Commissioners (Serial 1256, Washington, DC, 1865), 378-86 C. H. Howard to O. O. Howard, October 10, 1867, LS, 3:758a, Reel 1; C. H. Howard to O. O., Howard October 10, 1868, LS, 4:1128, Reel 2, BRFAL-DC; Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 89-90.

⁴⁷ Melder, “Angel of Mercy in Washington,” 259. Melder places the number between 3,000 and 5,000. O. S. B. Wall was also active in encouraging Blacks to emigrate out of the city, see Sharfstein, *The Invisible Line*, 157-58.

South unsafe for and hostile toward freedpeople. Instead of a repentant populace seeking peaceful relations with freedpeople, Schurz described a region filled with violent, racist, and recalcitrant former rebels eager to take vengeance on freedpeople.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the crisis of overcrowding in the capital required the removal of the surplus population of destitute freedpeople to places where their labor was needed and more often than not, that was in the South. Recognizing and seizing the opportunity to embarrass Howard and the Bureau, President Johnson shrewdly attacked the resettlement program, asking Howard why, if the South was such a horrible place for freedpeople, he expended Bureau funds to send them back to work on plantations there? Johnson likened the scheme to one “little better than slavery.”⁴⁹ The Democratic-leaning New York *Herald* picked up the story and accused the Bureau of “trafficking in negroes,” a charge the DC-based moderate-leaning *Evening Star* happily republished. Bad press combined with the high costs associated with transportation, estimated at roughly \$30,000 for 2,262 individuals, paused the program in April 1866. Writing in frustration to AMA treasurer, Lewis Tappan, shortly thereafter, Charles Howard lamented how the cessation of the program only compounded the ever-present problem of “relieving this District of the surplus freedpeople here.”⁵⁰

In addition to bad press, the reports from transported freedpeople served to further undermine the program and discourage other freedpeople from using it. In one report made to Charles Howard by a Mrs. Wright, she claimed that upon agreement on wages, she and those families that accompanied her to Boston arrived to find that their wages paid were less than

⁴⁸ Carl Schurz, “Report on the Condition of the South,” in *Speeches, Correspondences, and Political Papers of Carl Schurz*, ed. Frederic Bancroft, vol. 1, 5 vols. (New York: G. T. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), 279-374.

⁴⁹ Bentley, *History of the Freedmen’s Bureau*, 125.

⁵⁰ Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 88. On *Evening Star* political leanings, see Masur, *An Example for all the Land*, 134-35. Masur contrasts the *Evening Star* with the conservative *National Intelligencer*.

agreed to and that families were divided with one child sent thirty miles away from its parents. Charles Howard brought this to the attention of R. Haskins and noted that he was sending black agent, Madison Gaskins, to Boston to rectify the situation. Charles Howard complained that such experiences deterred freedpeople from leaving the city. A few months later, Howard received a letter from three freedmen who had been transported from DC to Peru, Illinois. They spoke of beatings and mistreatment at the hands of their new employer before closing with a plea not to send anyone else to the area. Reports like this spread quickly among the freedpeople. Indeed, in his 1867 annual report submitted to Howard a few months later, Charles Howard observed, “there seems to be great reluctance on the part of the majority to leave even the miserable homes they have established here and start forth, to parts of the country new and strange to them.” Collectively, bad press and reports by disenchanted freedpeople of mistreatment, beatings, family separation, and poor wages, when combined with the Bureau’s lack of funds, brought the transportation scheme to an end by October 1867.⁵¹

While Charles Howard sought to address employment fraud in Massachusetts in April 1867, Howard moved forward on the Bureau’s second program, the establishment of a model free labor community that would demonstrate to local observers the industriousness of the freedpeople. That month a local landowner, who possessed significant property holdings just north of the White House, pleaded with Howard to remove a community of squatting

⁵¹ C. H. Howard to R. Haskins, Boston, Mass., April 10, 1867, BRFAL-DC, Letters Sent, Vol. 8, p. 46., No. 87 and William Payn, John Smith, and Charles Harris, Peru, 111., July 16, 1867, BRFAL-DC, Letters Received, Box 9; Allan John Johnston, “Surviving Freedom: The Black Community of Washington, D. C., 1860 - 1880” (Ph.D., United States -- North Carolina, Duke University), 273-74; House Executive Documents, 39.1, No. 70: Reports of Assistant Commissioners (Serial 1256, Washington, DC, 1865), 378-86; C. H. Howard to O. O. Howard, October 10, 1867, LS, 3:758a, Reel 1. For more on the Bureau’s transportation program, see Robert Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction: Race and Radicalism* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 86-103. Circular 6 dated October 5, 1867 marked the official end of the transportation program. According to the circular, after October 31, 1867, only orphans and women with small children could be transported from DC to homes for freedwomen and children in the Northeast.

freedpeople who had built makeshift homes on his land during the war, leaving him unable to sell or rent it. Howard went to visit this black community and speak with the freedmen in hopes of arriving at an agreeable settlement. Howard asked what would make them self-supporting and they responded like many freedpeople across the South, “Land! Give us Land!” With no confiscated lands to offer, Howard used a portion of the Refugees and Freedmen’s Fund to purchase 375 acres from Mrs. Juliana Barry, a former District slaveholder who had received compensation for three slaves in 1862. He then divided this land into one-acre lots for more affluent Blacks who could secure title to the land at the reasonable rate of \$125 an acre over the course of two years. From the start, Howard and the superintendent of Barry Farm, J. B. Johnson, intended the community to stand in stark contrast to the largely impoverished black settlement at Freedmen’s Village. Howard sought those “reasonably educated, and of well-known good character and repute, to lead in the school and church work, and so I encouraged such to settle alongside the more destitute.”⁵² The *Evening Star* reported on the sale at Barry Farm, stating that it was to “test the capability of colored farmers to be self-sustaining, when offered the incentive of ultimate land-ownership.”⁵³ Located just southeast of the Capitol in the area now known as Anacostia, Barry Farm became home to 266 families in just two years.⁵⁴ Thanks to ongoing construction work near the Capitol Building, most of the residents found employment through the remainder of Johnson’s presidency, leading Howard to remark, “Everyone who visited the

⁵² Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:417-18. See also Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 106 and Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 400. J. B. Johnson’s wife worked as a teacher for the AMA and Johnson himself kept up a friendly correspondence with the association from 1864 to 1876, see AMAA.

⁵³ “Local News,” *Evening Star*, April 26, 1867.

⁵⁴ Alcione Amos, *Barry Farm-Hillsdale in Anacostia: A Historic African American Community* (Charleston: The History Press, 2021), 20; Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 75-76 and 105.

Barry Farm and saw the new hopefulness with which most of the dwellers there were inspired, could not fail to regard the entire enterprise as judicious and beneficent.”⁵⁵

By the end of 1868, the Bureau largely ceased its operations in the capital, thus bringing to a swift end the agency Senator Charles Sumner hoped would “secure to them [the freedpeople] and their posterity the blessings of liberty.”⁵⁶ In recollecting on its collective work, the historian of the AMA reflected fondly on Howard as commissioner stating, “We recognize the wise and kind orderings of Providence, in guiding to the fitting choice of Major General O. O. Howard, the Christian man, the indefatigable worker, and the impartial friend of white and black, as the Chief Commissioner.” Under his administration, the author observed, the Bureau was to the Freedmen “a wall of defense in danger, a source of prudent supply in time of fore need, and an efficient helper in the paths of knowledge; to the country, it was a wise expenditure in payment of the vast debt due to the colored man, and a needed provision for the culture of those now entrusted with the responsibilities of citizenship.”⁵⁷

This glowing report, however, did not necessarily align with the perspectives of the District’s freedpeople who found themselves too frequently during these years deprived of rations, work, and housing, rendering many unable to claim their postwar goals of liberty and independence. Despite its short lifespan, limited resources, and overwhelming opposition, the Bureau has drawn outsized criticism from historians, with W. E. B. Du Bois declaring it both “the most extraordinary and far-reaching institution of social uplift that America has ever attempted” and a failure for not securing freedom for Blacks.⁵⁸ William McFeely, writing in

⁵⁵ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:420; see also C. H. Howard to O. O. Howard, October 10, 1868, LS, 4:1128, Reel 2, BRFAL-DC.

⁵⁶ Bordewich, *Congress at War*, 344.

⁵⁷ *History of the American Missionary Association*, 17.

⁵⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860 to 1880* (New York: S. A. Russell Company, 1956), 219; W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of the Dawn of Freedom,” *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 13-39.

1968 at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, concluded that Commissioner Howard and the Bureau “served to preclude rather than promote Negro freedom” and ultimately “failed the freedmen.”⁵⁹ More recently however, a nuanced view of the Bureau has emerged with Eric Foner at the forefront of that shift. In his monumental tome, *Reconstruction*, he applauds the Bureau for laying the groundwork for public education in the postwar South, while in Washington, Robert Harrison concludes that the Bureau “alleviated overcrowding, provided relief for thousands, promoted black schools, and defended the rights of African Americans at a time when . . . they had few friends.”⁶⁰

Education – Howard University

Educationally, the AMA’s particular Congregationalist vision of citizenship was hampered by the widespread feelings of paternalism its missionaries and teachers exhibited toward the freedpeople. Although the freedpeople eagerly sought educational uplift, they possessed their own vision of equality that did not always align with that of the AMA. As one historian observed, AMA officers and their cadre of missionaries and teachers pursued the creation of “‘an educated, moral, and industrious black citizenry. Equality before the law was ‘the gospel rule.’ Unfortunately, the association sometimes failed to live up to its own lofty ideals.”⁶¹ At the close of the war, the AMA had just begun its educational mission in the District

⁵⁹ William S. McFeely, *Yankee Stepfather: General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 5 and 7.

⁶⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 144-70 and Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 106. See also John Cox and LaWanda Cox, “General O. O. Howard and the ‘Misrepresented Bureau,’” *The Journal of Southern History* 19, no. 4 (1953), 427–56 where the authors state, “The criticism of General Howard as administrator is contradicted by unmistakable evidence of his skill and wisdom,” and “The ends which Howard set for the Bureau were thoughtfully and clearly conceived, and the barriers he and his subordinates attempted to remove were neither ambiguous nor unmovable. The goal was the replacement of a slaveholding society by a free society, free without distinction as to color. If Howard be criticized as unrealistic or utopian or lacking in an “understanding of the South,” it is pertinent to recall that his objectives were formulated in a period when southern society was in process of fundamental change,” 432 and 450. On freedpeople’s goals of securing economic independence, see Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 399.

⁶¹ Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, viii-ix and 20; Hilary Green, *Educational Reconstruction: African American Schools in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 18; Jones, *Soldiers*

by taking over the school at Camp Barker. In the postwar years and in effort to help meet the tremendous need due to an overwhelmed and ineffective local school system, the AMA opened a handful of new schools with Bureau support, providing education to several hundred children. Despite these new schools and the countless others operated by the nearly two dozen benevolent societies working in the District, the need far outpaced the resources of these societies. Finally, thanks to legislation passed during the war years, money to establish a public school system in the District began to make an impact, leading the AMA and the other benevolent societies to abandon the expensive work by 1868. Although no longer providing teachers for classrooms, the AMA embarked on an even more ambitious project. The enormous educational needs in the capital caused the AMA, Oliver Howard, and like-minded Congregationalists to pursue the construction of a model university to train teachers and preachers, the beginnings of Howard University.

In the immediate postwar years, the AMA spread across the South, expanding its educational work in the former Confederacy as quickly as possible. Richardson notes that “In mid-1865 it had 250 teachers and missionaries in the field, the number grew to 353 in 1866, to 451 in 1867, and to 532 in 1868.” Although one of over twenty benevolent organizations serving in Washington, over the course of Reconstruction, “the AMA became the most significant of the many benevolent societies assisting blacks . . . and it came closer to a full recognition of black rights and needs than did most nineteenth-century Americans.”⁶² Richardson adds that the association’s goal aligned with that of the CCM and focused on the creation of “an educated,

of Light and Love, 109-10; Heather Andrea Williams, “‘Clothing Themselves in Intelligence’: The Freedpeople, Schooling, and Northern Teachers, 1861-1871,” *The Journal of African American History* 87 (2002), 372-73. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 452.

⁶² Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, ix and 37. On the primary benevolent societies operating in Washington DC during the late 1860s, see Emmett D. Preston, “The Development of Negro Education in the District of Columbia,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 9, no. 4 (1940), 597-98.

moral, and industrious black citizenry.”⁶³ At the start, the AMA’s home office expressed reluctance to expand the mission into DC, citing the high costs of doing ministry there, from securing housing for teachers to paying a living salary, not to mention streetcar tickets as well as costs associated with buying books, clothing, and furniture. However, superintendent of AMA schools in DC, William Tilden, wrote to Whipple reminding him of the importance of its DC mission:

Better do what is done thoroughly and then the enemies of our cause will not have occasion to say that schools for the negroes will never amount to anything. In Washington it would seem that there are many who are ready and anxious to say just that and say it too in a place where we should be anxious to have the impression produced by our schools as favorable as possible.⁶⁴

Over the course of the next few years, the AMA opened and operated several schools in the District but, like other benevolent organizations, eagerly sought the creation and implementation of a taxpayer-funded public school system which emerged in 1868.

At the start of Reconstruction, the AMA employed nineteen teachers in the District.⁶⁵ Over the course of a brief four-year window, the AMA pursued its goal of educational and religious uplift among the freedpeople to prepare them for citizenship, which not surprisingly aligned with the goals of former Lane rebel and Oberlinite, John Alvord, the Freedmen’s Bureau general superintendent of education. Alvord, a strong supporter of the AMA, believed the Bureau-supported schools should educate freedpeople to be equal citizens, “with rights and interests to be respected in common with those of other citizens; poor and dependent indeed, but no longer in any sense a servile caste.” He also believed in the importance of religious and

⁶³ Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, viii.

⁶⁴ William Tilden to George Whipple, May 25, 1865, AMAA. Another friend of the AMA operating in DC, John M. Perkins wrote to Whipple encouraging greater efforts in DC: “For all the freedmen’s interests in the South this will be the headquarters for here is the Freedmen’s Bureau, and here is the fountain head of the National Government,” John M. Perkins to George Whipple, June 16, 1865, AMAA.

⁶⁵ Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 53 and Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 110.

educational uplift for black students who had been left “untaught in habits of thinking, feeling, and acting.”⁶⁶ In an October update, Tilden informed Whipple that the AMA’s schools extended the blessings of liberty and civil rights to its students, and in an allusion to the franchise, stated, “We have taught him to draw the sword and he has used it to purpose: shall he not handle a mightier than the sword? He has tasted the cup of liberty: shall he not drink it after all? As surely as God lives we believe he shall” He added later that religious instruction formed the “true salt meant to permeate our intercourse with the scholars.” Indeed:

By making much of the devotional exercises we seek to inspire a feeling of due reverence for that Being whom we thus address in our singing of sacred words, in our explanations of Testament and other reading lessons we shall endeavor that the pupils may grow up with the knowledge of the great principles of the Gospel of Christ and of the consistencies and proprieties of Christian life.”⁶⁷

At Wilson’s school, the only one operated by a black principal and teachers, classes had been transferred from Camp Barker to a building on Third Street in October 1865. As the AMA’s largest school, Wilson’s Third Street school received more scrutiny than any other AMA school with Wilson navigating a large classroom while facing accusations of absenteeism, poor management, lack of discipline, and classism. Due to an inability to support himself and his family on his meager AMA salary, Wilson had taken a second job at the Freedmen’s Bank in late 1865. In his absence, school discipline and efficiency declined.⁶⁸ As early as November, Tilden suggested syphoning off some of Wilson’s better students and placing them in other AMA schools. He also complained that Wilson’s membership at Reverend Henry Highland Garnet’s Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church led Wilson to associate with the city’s black elite over the

⁶⁶ Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 43 and Kate Masur, *Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle Over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 66.

⁶⁷ William Tilden to George Whipple, October 12, 1865, AMAA.

⁶⁸ William Wilson to George Whipple, October 26, 1865 and William Tilden to George Whipple, October 26, 1865, AMAA. For more on Wilson as principal of 3rd St. School, see DeBoer, *His Truth Is Marching On*, 350-55.

freedpeople, leaving some black parents disgruntled. As Tilden saw it, this practice stood in direct conflict with the expectation that AMA teachers would seek to imbed themselves with their students by making house visits and familiarizing themselves with their living situations.⁶⁹

The AMA's most successful school opened at Judiciary Square in November 1865 under the able leadership of Sarah Vinton. Tilden praised the organization and discipline of Vinton's classroom and remarked that the most promising students from Wilson's Third Street School transferred there to further their education.⁷⁰ Despite having several schools under AMA operation in the city, Tilden complained of the struggle to overcome classism noting that wealthier blacks expressed their unwillingness to send their children to the AMA's free schools despite their quality and the excellence of their teachers. Upper-class black Washingtonians preferred to send their children to paid schools to distinguish their children from those of the freedpeople.⁷¹ Ultimately, the sheer numbers of black children needing education and the inability of the AMA and other benevolent societies to meet the need led to increasing pressure on Congress to establish and fund a public school system for the District. Although Congress had passed legislation to fund education for both Black and white children in 1862 and 1864, a special District census taken in 1867 revealed that less than 25 percent of the city's 21,447 white children attended school while 29 percent of the District's 10,246 Black children were enrolled in local schools. While these numbers were far below New England standards, the AMA and other benevolent societies felt that the groundwork had been laid for the future success of the District's school system.⁷² Indeed as Washington, DC, historian Constance Green points out, "By 1868 northern philanthropists concluded the Negro education program so well established that it

⁶⁹ William Tilden to George Whipple, November 20, 1865, November 28, 1865, and December 15, 1865, AMAA.

⁷⁰ William Tilden to George Whipple, December 2, 1865, December 13, 1865, and January 31, 1866, AMAA.

⁷¹ William Tilden to George Whipple, February 12, 1866, AMAA.

⁷² *Twenty-second Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1868), 31.

no longer needed their help,” thus bringing an official end to the AMA’s brief era of running District free schools.⁷³

Howard University

With the establishment of a local tax-payer funded public school system, the AMA quickly threw its support behind an ambitious Congregationalist-led effort to build a model university in the city to help meet the need for educational uplift among the District’s freedpeople. If the church and schoolhouse served to demonstrate the advancement of civilization among Congregationalists, the establishment of a university represented its apex. In New England, the renowned institutions of Harvard University (Massachusetts - 1636), Yale University (Connecticut - 1701), and Dartmouth University (New Hampshire - 1769) all had Puritan roots, yet Washington offered nothing in comparison. One month after the commencement of the new school term in 1866, roughly a dozen men, nearly all Congregationalists, gathered in the capital to discuss founding a theological school to train “colored preachers.” Two weeks later, those gathered determined to add normal and collegiate departments for the training of black teachers as well. Finally, in early January, Charles Howard recommended adding medical and law departments as well, and thus Howard University was born.⁷⁴ As articulated in its Articles of Incorporation on March 2, 1867, the trustees of Howard University aimed to establish departments, curriculum, and student expectations intended to demonstrate that the freedpeople were deserving of entry and advancement into the body politic as well as society more generally.⁷⁵ William Patton, one-time lecturer at Oberlin College who

⁷³ Green, *Washington: Village and Capital*, 280-82 and 305-9. For chart on District illiteracy, see 306. See also Preston, “The Development of Negro Education in the District of Columbia,” 600-01.

⁷⁴ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:390-401.

⁷⁵ “Howard University - Acts of Incorporation” (1867). Howard University. Book 1 in O. O. Howard Papers, Moorland-Spangarn Research Center (MSRC), Howard University, Washington D. C. Hereafter referred to as O. O. Howard Papers.

also served as the sixth president of Howard University from April 25, 1877 to December 31, 1889, remarked in his brief history of the university:

As Washington had represented in the past American slavery, by its slaves and slave-auctions and interstate slave trade, as well as by its governmental action in furtherance of the interests of slavery throughout the land, so it seemed well to plant here, on strictly national soil and under the auspices of the Federal Government, a noble University, as a monument of freedom, and as a token of national penitence for the sin of oppression practised toward the African race.⁷⁶

Opening in May 1867 for the explicit purpose of educating teachers for the “colored population,” Howard University appeared to one local Washington observer as “the most attractive feature in the surroundings of Washington, both by beauty of its design and its agreeable color; and from its commanding position it is, next to the Capitol, the most conspicuous building in the District.”⁷⁷ Its beauty was only surpassed by its uniqueness as the only university welcoming students without regard for race or gender with hopes of modeling the potential of an interracial society not unlike that begun at Oberlin three decades prior. In addition, the university offered a more comprehensive curriculum than any other predominantly Black university in the country.⁷⁸ The history of this educational institution provides a window into the grand interracial postwar vision of its Congregationalist incorporators and trustees. Although the original incorporators consisted entirely of white Protestants, primarily Congregationalists, its Board of Trustees reflected the interracial alliance that remained at the heart of the AMA during the postwar era.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ William W. Patton, *History of Howard University, Washington, D.C. : 1867 to 1888* (Washington D.C.: Industrial Department of Howard University, 1896), 4. For Patton’s term as president, see Walter Dyson, *Howard University, the Capstone of Negro Education: A History, 1867-1940* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1941), 386.

⁷⁷ “The Howard University,” *Evening Star*, Apr. 20, 1869.

⁷⁸ Dyson, *Founding of Howard University*, 41-43; Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 26. For influence of Oberlin on Howard University, see Patton, *History of Howard University*, 15.

⁷⁹ “Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University” (1896). Howard University Catalogs, 6-7, O. O. Howard Papers, and Logan, *Howard University*, 64-65. The AMA representatives on the Board of Trustees included Charles B. Boynton, George Whipple, E. P. Smith, and Henry Highland Garnet. Key African

From the start, the university intended not only to provide a distinctly Christian education, but with the expectation that the majority of its students would be drawn from freedpeople, it also sought to instill in them the responsibilities associated with citizenship. In filling both faculty and student openings, the trustees focused on an individual's Christian faith first and foremost.⁸⁰ With a cadre of Christian educators at the helm, Howard remarked, unsurprisingly, that, "The educators naturally wished to put a moral and Christian stamp upon their students, especially upon those who would become instructors of colored youth." Patton added in agreement, with emphasis on its student body, that "Howard University seeks to imbue its students with the principles of the gospel, and to surround them continually with a Christian atmosphere; believing that there can be no genuine success which does not include character, and that there is no such power to regenerate character as the gospel of Jesus Christ."⁸¹ In a Congregationalist society, the university stood at the peak of a society's civilization and graduated able scholar-citizens. By providing advanced degrees in education and later theology, law, and medicine, Howard University paid homage to the prestigious heritage of New England universities. It also helped fill the vital need for an educated Black leadership while simultaneously preparing the nation's newest citizens "to assume their responsible position, and to fill every post to which they might be called, from the lowest to the highest."⁸²

Beyond raising Black leaders, Howard University was founded to convert skeptical whites by demonstrating the academic ability and morality of the freedpeople as a means of affirming their fitness for citizenship.⁸³ The evidence reveals that they did so by offering a broad

Americans on the Board included D. W. Anderson, Bishop John M. Brown, Bishop Sampson Talbot, William J. Wilson, and Frederick Douglass.

⁸⁰ Dyson, *Founding of Howard University*, 90.

⁸¹ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:395; Patton, *Inaugural Address*, 17.

⁸² Patton, *Inaugural Address*, 3, 5-6, 11, and 13-17.

⁸³ Patton, *History of Howard University*, 13-14.

yet strategically designed academic program that produced graduates who fit the Anglo-Protestant standards of national belonging. Various departments offering degrees in education, theology, law, and medicine would demonstrate African American aptitude and respectability.⁸⁴ To meet Protestant expectations, the university declared in its founding documents that the word of God would be its “only authoritative and sufficient rule of human faith and practice . . .” The board of trustees also “adopted the fundamental regulation . . . that every person elected to any position in Howard University shall be a member of some Evangelical Church.”⁸⁵ Achieving success in educating Black scholars with Protestant leanings proved to be the easy part. Convincing skeptical whites of its importance was another story. In pursuit of that end, the university, on almost a daily basis, welcomed visitors from the District and around the country to observe the progress of its students in hopes of changing national perceptions one mind at a time.⁸⁶

During its first year, Howard University’s Normal Department, the first department to open, operated with the support and under the control of the AMA, which it continued to do until 1870. The university, which did not initially require its students to pay, opened with five scholars, all white girls, the daughters of trustees, Danforth Nichols and Ebenezer Robinson, who determined to set a progressive and almost unprecedented example of a truly interracial society in which white women and black men received education together. As word spread, enrollment rapidly increased to eighty-three students by the end of the term forcing the university to employ

⁸⁴ “Howard University - Acts of Incorporation” (1867). Howard University. Book 1, O. O. Howard Papers; The Military Dept., existed from 1869 to 1874 and was established at the behest of President Oliver Otis Howard. In his 1870 presidential report, he declared the objects of the Dept. as four-fold: “health of the body, neatness of person, habits of order, and good discipline generally.” For more information on this short-lived department, see Logan, *Howard University*, 53-54.

⁸⁵ *Annual Presidential Report of Howard University*, 1868, 10, O. O. Howard Papers.

⁸⁶ *Annual Report of Howard University*, 1869, 6, O. O. Howard Papers and “Howard University,” *American Missionary*, Vol. 13, no. 8, 1869, 169.

a second teacher, Julia A. Lord of Portland, Maine, to meet the demand. The department promoted a three-year program which focused on educating students in both what and how to teach. Although the special report on education in DC declared it “eminently successful,” according to university historian, Walter Dyson, over the course of the nineteenth century, the Normal Department remained “at best equivalent to a two-year high school.”⁸⁷

Although it struggled financially during the latter part of Reconstruction, a reality which hindered its ability to retain faculty and grow its student body as desired, Howard University succeeded in demonstrating the educational acumen of African Americans and providing freedpeople with leaders in professional fields that had previously been largely closed to them. The social implications were enormous. If given the chance to germinate and grow, the seed planted at Howard University could perhaps help destroy the very root of the nation’s race issues, prejudice. As Patton optimistically opined:

And when education shall have trained a numerous and thoroughly cultured class of Negroes, who shall be found in the ranks of teachers, editors, authors, lawyers, physicians, artists, members of legislative bodies, and holders of positions of honor, profit, and power, contact with the Negro, in public and in private, cannot possibly remain repulsive, as in the past. Under such influences, little by little, by no compulsion, through no artificial process, with slight or no strife or bitterness, prejudice will abate and mostly disappear, and the two races will find a gradual solution of the unhappy problem which now creates anxiety and unhappiness.⁸⁸

In this regard, Patton’s comments aligned with the sentiments expressed by historian, sociologist, and civil rights activist, W. E. B. Du Bois, who having been raised and educated in New England, went on to become the first Black man to earn a doctorate from Harvard University. In his essay, the *Talented Tenth*, written less than a decade after Patton’s *History of Howard University*, Du Bois recognized that “the Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its

⁸⁷ U.S. Congress. House. *Special Report of the Commissioner of Education*, 251; Logan, *Howard University*, 34-36; Dyson, *Howard University*, 195.

⁸⁸ Patton, *History of Howard University*, 11.

exceptional men,” and thus the most pressing problem facing African Americans centered on the need for education, to develop “the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races.”⁸⁹ He declared slavery and prejudice, the principle enemies long targeted by the AMA and its allies, to be the two “sole obstacles that nullified and retarded efforts” to raise an educated and intelligent Black leadership that could “pull all that are worth the saving up to their vantage ground.” Indeed, in listing the model institutions doing the work of raising this talented tenth, he included the AMA universities of Atlanta, Fisk, and Howard.⁹⁰

The trustees of Howard University determined to make the institutions more than one that simply educated Black leaders, they determined to represent the multiracial composition of the country there which could then serve as an example for all the land. Patton noted that the university’s “reception of all who come, irrespective of race, corresponds to the metropolitan position and national work of the University.” He noted that since “Washington city is the capital of the whole country, and our nation embraces all the races of the earth. Here, then, is already the nucleus of a truly national university, as regards the number of its departments and its relation to the entire population of the land.”⁹¹ Indeed, Howard put it succinctly when he reminisced on the school’s beginnings, “Almost from its inception I regarded that institution as of the first importance as an object lesson, a complete exhibit . . .” He added, “Here I tried to foster its life in the social as well as in the literary scale, recognizing as far as it could be done the manhood of the negro scholar, teacher, and professor.”⁹² Echoing those sentiments, in the first annual report

⁸⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Talented Tenth* (New York: James Pott and Company, 1903), 1.

⁹⁰ Du Bois, *Talented Tenth*, 5, 13, and 17

⁹¹ Patton, *History of Howard University*, 14-15. Patton noted that “in addition to Negroes,” Howard University had in attendance: North American Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Europeans of several nationalities, and white students from both northern and Southern States.”

⁹² Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:452-53.

of the president of Howard University, Rev. Byron Sunderland declared the vision of the university's trustees to establish an institution that "shall rival the proudest seats of learning in the world, and form another source of influence to extend and to perpetuate the civil and religious liberties of mankind."⁹³ In the following years, when the additional departments came online, the university's influence and reach only grew with the Law Department at the forefront under the leadership of Oberlin graduate turned Howard University Law School dean, John Mercer Langston.

Religion – Promoting Congregationalism

Religiously, the AMA continued its uplift efforts among the District's freedpeople, including conducting marriages, preaching temperance and observance of the Sabbath, and handing out religious materials. These efforts culminated in meetings and planning to finally construct in the capital, a Congregationalist church, the first church to model social equality in the house of God as an example for all the land. While its vision was grand and its doors open to all, the church attracted few congregants among the freedpeople, outside of the Sunday school class for black children, and appealed largely to upper-class Blacks in the city. As the white founders of the church soon discovered, the recently emancipated preferred to start churches of their own or join predominately black congregations already operating in the city. Ultimately, independence, preference, and concerns about paternalism kept the majority of freedpeople from joining First Congregational Church.⁹⁴ This, however, did not keep the church from controversy as a request for membership by leaders from the African American community spiraled into concerns about social equality that threatened to split the church by the end of 1868.

⁹³ *Annual Presidential Report of Howard University*, 1868, 11, O. O. Howard Papers.

⁹⁴ Jones, *Soldiers of Light of Love*, 156-57 observed a similar reality in Georgia where the freedpeople expressed little interest in the Congregationalist polity.

The AMA used their missionaries and teachers as the primary vehicles through which to promote “civilized worship” and Puritan morals among the freedpeople, including Sabbath-keeping, monogamy, and temperance.⁹⁵ The Bureau and AMA missionaries carried this message to the freedpeople in both their churches and communities. White missionaries, J. M. Mace and Isaac Cross, spearheaded the AMA’s evangelistic work in the capital, with Mace serving primarily among black troops stationed around the capital and Cross focusing on black hospitals. Both also visited members of the black community, providing valuable updates to the AMA on the conditions faced by the freedpeople. In updates throughout 1865, Mace informed Whipple of his actions distributing tracts and Bibles to the soldiers and their families.⁹⁶ And while the AMA did not found a church in any of the black communities, they sought to model a “civilized” service for freedpeople conducting a service open to both black and white believers in November 1865 “so as to show the colored people a better way.” Congregationalist minister, E. B. Webb put it succinctly in the Annual Discourse at the AMA’s Twenty-first Annual Meeting in Homer, New York, stating with paternalistic fervor that the freedpeople’s “grotesque exhibitions of animal emotions must give place to a perception and a piety which worships God in spirit and in truth.” He recommended the Puritan corrective, a program of religious uplift which included a “three-fold application of the doctrines and precepts of the gospel to the intellect, the affections, and the will of the individual man.”⁹⁷

In their early evaluation and dismissal of “slave religion,” Congregationalists like Webb failed to understand and appreciate the Afro-American faith tradition that had sustained these

⁹⁵ Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 240-41.

⁹⁶ J. M. Mace to George Whipple, May 5, 1865, June 16, 1865, and September 10, 1865, AMAA.

⁹⁷ William S. Tilden to George Whipple, November 25, 1865, AMAA; E. B. Webb, “Annual Discourse,” *Twenty-first Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (Homer, New York, 1867), 4, AMAA. For more the negative sentiments held by AMA missionaries and teachers toward the religion of the freedpeople, see Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long*, 458-60 and Hahn, *Nation under our Feet*, 230.

survivors of slavery. What they saw as erratic and emotionally driven ecstasy, freedpeople found to be a communal expression of deeply felt religious sentiment that involved call and response and formed a key cultural bridge “linking African past with American present.”⁹⁸ Spirituals (songs) were the primary outworking of this syncretism which blended African spiritualism and American evangelicalism to form the heart of Afro-American Christianity. Their faith tradition emphasized song and dance alongside visions and prophecies, all of which struck Congregationalists as markers of uncivilized worship.⁹⁹ This fusion had emerged from the revivals of the First and Second Great Awakenings which saw thousands of Blacks across the South embrace Protestantism, primarily the Baptist and Methodist traditions. The preference for these polities could be traced back to the revivals and circuit riders’ emphasis on autonomy and conversion experiences over doctrinal fidelity, which proved welcoming to the illiterate, both white and black.¹⁰⁰

Freedpeople carried these preferences for autonomous and segregated worship spaces into the postemancipation era, a period filled with hope. Historian Matthew Harper explains that freedpeople did not necessarily embrace the concepts of Reconstruction and Redemption but rather viewed the postwar era in apocalyptic terms. The postwar faith of freedpeople had been shaped by emancipation, a divine work of God that had ushered in a new era of black empowerment built on equal citizenship, a time “in which justice, peace, and equality would triumph over the plans of evildoers.”¹⁰¹ While Congregationalists in the AMA shared this vision

⁹⁸ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 4.

⁹⁹ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 35-38 and 68-74.

¹⁰⁰ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 243-50, Paul Harvey, *Through the Storm, through the Night: A History of African American Christianity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 58-59. On preference for Baptist and Methodist traditions, see Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 130-32, and 194-96 and also Sobel, *Trabelin’ On*, 182-83 and 201-03.

¹⁰¹ Matthew Harper, *End of Days: African American Religion and Politics in the Age of Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 4, 13, 17, and 51. For quote, see 4.

of the postwar era as the dawning of a new age, their polity failed to appeal to freedpeople despite Congregationalism's strict adherence to anti-slavery principles and embrace of interracial equality during the antebellum period. Instead of becoming an attractive draw to freedpeople, Congregationalism, largely unknown to them until the Civil War, appeared too structurally rigid and largely lifeless.

The AMA's low view of African American religious practices remained a theme throughout Reconstruction, but at various points, a reflective article in *The American Missionary* offered a positive view and suggested what Black faith might have to offer Congregationalists. In the March 1870 edition of *The American Missionary*, a brief article entitled "Emotional Religion" appeared. In it, the unnamed author noted that Congregationalism lacked the Psalmist's "joy of God," and the "spiritual happiness uttered by the New Testament saints." They remarked of African American religion that the AMA "must not go too far in repressing their emotions," noting that "there is no full-orbed religion without them." Indeed, the "defect of the piety of the white race is that it has so little emotion."¹⁰² Writing from Hampton, Virginia, a few months later, Samuel C. Armstrong pointed out that "all this excitement is not bad . . . and that wholesale condemnation of the negro ways of worship, is unjust." He went on to state that he admired their genuine religion, saying, "I believe it has been given to these people to enjoy a vividness of spiritual insight, a genuine and pure religious delight, making them at times inexpressibly happy, forgetful of trouble, such as perhaps we know very little about experimentally, and should judge very carefully."¹⁰³ Reconciling Congregationalism and African

¹⁰² "Emotional Religion," *American Missionary*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1870, 58-59.

¹⁰³ Samuel C. Armstrong, "Negro Worship: What is its Essential Character?" *American Missionary*, vol. 14, no. 10, 1870, 230.

American faith proved a difficult venture for the AMA as did the implementation of their Puritan moral codes.

Legally recognizing marriages formed a key aspect of the AMA and Bureau's moralizing efforts. Indeed, rental agreements for a tenement from the Bureau included a prohibition against cohabitation.¹⁰⁴ Isaac Cross received authorization from the Bureau to perform marriages and had already conducted several by November 1866 in addition to his preaching ministry and promotion of Sabbath-keeping.¹⁰⁵ In his 1867 report, Charles Howard noted that Reverend John Kimball, the superintendent of education who also served as the superintendent of marriages, issued 1,096 marriage certificates in the capital over the past year.¹⁰⁶ Temperance emerged as another key outreach effort among the freedpeople, with Isaac Cross and AMA advocate James B. Johnson serving as active promoters alongside Howard, who urged agents and benevolent societies to promote the Lincoln Temperance Society "because of the well-known character of the man and the love for him that the freedmen possess."¹⁰⁷

While freedpeople demonstrated a general eagerness to legalize their relationships, something disallowed under slavery, they often separated such actions from a full embrace of the Puritan moral code promoted by the Bureau and AMA. During slavery, theft, lying, and deceit had become virtues among slaves who sought out means of survival within an institution that sought to ground down their very person. Survival mechanisms were not easily discarded in the

¹⁰⁴ Green, *Secret City*, 84.

¹⁰⁵ Isaac Cross to George Whipple, November 29, 1866, AMAA. On Cross' preaching ministry, see updates to George Whipple on January 11, January 30, September 1, October 18, November 21, and November 29, 1866; also March 28, and May 8, 1867; on Sabbath-keeping, see update to George Whipple on November 29, 1866, AMAA.

¹⁰⁶ C. H. Howard to O. O. Howard, October 10, 1867, LS, 3:758a, Reel 1, BRFAL-DC; Elizabeth L. Jemison, *Christian Citizens: Reading the Bible in Black and White in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 64, 67, 84-85, 109-10, and 168-73; Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 86-87.

¹⁰⁷ James B. Johnson to George Whipple, September 30, 1866; Isaac Cross to George Whipple, November 29, 1866; O. O. Howard circular, May 15, 1867, AMAA.

postemancipation era, especially when discrimination and limited aid kept so many Black Washingtonians living on the verge of starvation.¹⁰⁸

First Congregational Church

Just two months after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Congregationalists gathered at their National Council in Boston, Massachusetts, to discuss present concerns and the future direction of the polity now that the South, for the first time in history, appeared as an open mission field.¹⁰⁹ Among the resolutions considered was one concerning Washington, where the trustees of the American Congregational Union advised and requested that consideration be given to the importance of a well-sustained Congregational Church in the city of Washington. Those gathered agreed to a resolution to further explore the "building or purchasing of a suitable edifice in the National Capital in which a Congregational Church may maintain the preaching of the gospel and public worship of God."¹¹⁰ The postwar era presented a unique opportunity for the expansion of Congregationalism into the South, where it had been barred throughout the antebellum era due to its antislavery leanings.¹¹¹ With slavery abolished, the polity that had largely proved uncompromising with slaveholders looked eagerly toward the South as a fertile mission field wherein to reassert itself. Despite having distinguished itself by rejecting any association with slaveholders, by the second half of the nineteenth century, Congregationalism was in decline when compared to the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. The Boston council was a "time to refit traditional Congregationalism for aggressive expansion into the

¹⁰⁸ Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 251. On eagerness to legalize their marriages, see Hahn, *A Nation under our Feet*, 166. On reluctance to embrace Puritan moral code, see Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 295-301 and Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 240-44.

¹⁰⁹ Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Last Puritans: Mainline Protestants and the Power of the Past* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 54.

¹¹⁰ James Manning et al., *Debates and Proceedings of the National Council of Congregational Churches*, 492.

¹¹¹ For example, at the 1852 denominational gathering in Albany New York, 463 delegates from seventeen different states agreed to a statement condemning slavery, see Bendroth, *Last Puritans*, 40-41.

South and West” even as it struggled to identify a clear and unifying path forward.¹¹² In “Congregationalism for America,” published two years later, author and Congregationalist minister E. Frank Howe concurred and declared Congregationalism to be “the only church polity which is fully in harmony with the American form of government.” It “mimicked the eventual form of American government which had been founded on individual liberty and equality” and here Howe quoted Thomas Jefferson, who once remarked that “Liberty and equality are the words which the Congregational churches taught the nation, and with all deference I say it, they are the only churches which do by their polity, i.e. by their practice, teach liberty and equality.”¹¹³

The pursuit of equality united the AMA, CCM, its allies, and the freedpeople in postwar Washington even as it divided members of Congress who debated the all-important issue of this notoriously vague term, equality, with its varying definitions among nineteenth-century Americans. Historian Kate Masur cites three categories of equality popular during this era — civic, political, and social — that collectively provide a helpful frame through which to understand equality’s range of meaning. Civic equality simply meant “laws must not discriminate” and there “must be no racial discrimination in access to legal proceedings.” The Thirteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1866 did much to help freedpeople secure civic equality. Political equality went further and centered on attainment of the franchise but also included jury service and holding political office. Finally, there was the ambiguous category of social equality, the extent of which was hotly contested by all parties. While whites emphasized

¹¹² Bendroth, *Last Puritans*, 51, and more generally 51-86; see also Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166. Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, Congregationalists planted churches in southern cities including: Charleston, SC, Nashville, TN, Atlanta, GA, Jacksonville, FL, Mobile, AL, New Orleans, LA, Columbus, MS, Corpus Christi, TX, and Hampton, VA but ultimately failed to claim ground from the region’s Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations. See *The Congregational Year-Book* (Boston: Congregational Publishing Society, 1879), 75-176.

¹¹³ E. Frank Howe, “Congregationalism for America,” *Congregational Quarterly*, July 1867, 257-58.

its limitations, Blacks championed a more expansive view despite internal disagreement of school integration.¹¹⁴ For its part, the AMA embraced civic and political equality, but disagreement over social equality ended up creating a crisis during the initial years of Washington DC's First Congregational Church.

In the field of Reconstruction literature, discussions of social equality emphasize the boycotts, lawsuits, and collective organizing efforts aimed at desegregating schools, streetcars, hotels, theaters, and other places of public amusement while ecclesiastical institutions remain underexplored. The absence of churches, premised on the widely acknowledged postwar rise of segregated congregations across the South, is unfortunate and fails to capture the importance placed on religion by nineteenth-century Americans and the existence of interracial congregations in the prewar era.¹¹⁵ The nineteenth-century church played a critical role as a social institution. C. C. Goen argues that during this period, "No other organization in the country was in closer direct touch with more people [more frequently] than American

¹¹⁴ Masur, *An Example for all the Land*, 9.

¹¹⁵ For leading studies on Reconstruction that do not take churches (outside of black southern churches) into account as important institutions that shaped period conversations on social equality, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. Updated. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014); and Douglas R. Egerton, *Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2014). The most comprehensive work on religion and Reconstruction is Daniel W. Stowell's, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). While Stowell addresses white churches in the North and South as well as black southern churches, he does not discuss Congregational churches and treats northern whites, southern whites, and southern blacks as distinct societal groups who approached Reconstruction autonomously. For black churches as places of organizing for political and social equality, see Nicole Myers Turner, *Soul Liberty: The Evolution of Black Religious Politics in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Kate Masur, *An Example for all the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle Over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 8; Robert Harrison, *Washington During Civil War and Reconstruction: Race and Radicalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 132, 146-47, and 197; and Foner, *Reconstruction*, 92-93. On interracial congregations in the prewar era, see Richard Boles, *Dividing the Faith: The Rise of Segregated Churches in the Early American North* (New York: New York University Press, 2020) and Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987), 178-213. As one example, Mechal discusses how the interracial congregations birthed out of the religious revivals of the eighteenth century threatened the South's social structure and were largely eliminated or replaced by services in which the enslaved occupied galleries, a visual indication of their racial inferiority.

churches.”¹¹⁶ Daniel Stowell adds that churches were the primary locations where the memories of the Civil War “coalesced into ideologies that helped determine the course of Reconstruction.”¹¹⁷ The contest of ideas that took place within churches reveals as much about the nation, perhaps even more so, than the politics playing out in the halls of Congress. In churches across the country, white northerners sought justification for the enormous sacrifices made to preserve the Union and free the slaves while white southerners found a safe haven for the myth of the “Lost Cause” to germinate. Among members of the AMA, sacred space was the principal place to establish a truly interracial society.

For black southerners, churches emerged from secrecy to become places of activism for both political and social ends but it also signified something more – soul liberty. In her recent work, Nicole Myers Turner reveals how “black Christians in the postemancipation era pursued soul liberty – a combination of religious freedom, righteousness, equity, and justice – through their churches, conventions, and seminary education.”¹¹⁸ Indeed, for southern blacks, the collective exodus was not simply about preference but political organizing and equality. Alongside the right to worship as they pleased existed a refusal to remain second-class parishioners in the galleries of white-led churches.¹¹⁹ While a majority of Black Washingtonians chose to join a racially segregated congregation upon settling in the city, Oberlin Congregationalists and black elites John H. Cook, O. S. B. Wall, and James Monroe Gregory pursued a different course. As educated and active members of the Colored Conventions Movement, these men quickly established themselves as respected leaders within the District’s

¹¹⁶ C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1985), 55 and 63.

¹¹⁷ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 7; see also Edward J. Blum and W. Scott Poole eds., *Vale of Tears: New Essays on Religion and Reconstruction* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 2005), viii-ix.

¹¹⁸ Turner, *Soul Liberty*, 2.

¹¹⁹ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 80-99.

African American community and refused to accept second-class status.¹²⁰ They saw the right to attend as equal members of the predominantly white First Congregational Church as an important step in overturning generations of inequality fostered by the American church. While successful, their battle at First Congregational Church proved costly and appeared as a foreboding sign of things to come. Indeed, the coordinated resistance to social equality, even among so-called “friends of the freed people,” ultimately foreshadowed the limits of societal transformation emblematic of Reconstruction.

To those newly arriving to the capital, putting down roots involved not simply securing employment and housing but community as well, which often involved joining a local church. The religious needs of Washington’s post-war population of well over 100,000 were provided for by a total of seventy-eight houses of worship, including thirteen “colored churches” that focused on meeting the needs of local African Americans in segregated spaces that followed the national trend.¹²¹ While numerous denominations dotted the capital’s landscape, Congregationalism remained officially unrepresented in the city until the waning years of the war. First Congregational Church organized officially in November 1865 and initially met in a variety of locations including a local Unitarian church, the great hall of the US House of Representatives,

¹²⁰ All three of these men worked alongside Howard and were among the earliest graduates of Howard University (Cook – Law Department, 1871; Wall – Law Department, 1872, Gregory – Collegiate Department, 1872), see *Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University* (Washington DC: Howard University, 1896), 26-27, and 34. John H. Cook began as a clerk at the Freedmen’s Bureau headquarters before rising to the position of Howard’s personal clerk, see “John H. Cook Esq.,” Oberlin College Archives and Scott L. Stabler, “Race, Reaction, Policy and Perception: A Tri-Cultural Study of Postbellum America through the Life of General O. O. Howard,” PhD dissertation, Arizona State University, 2005, 193-94; O. S. B. Wall also worked for the Bureau as an employment agent, see Fletcher, *History of Oberlin College*, 2:913. James Monroe Gregory, who was refused a cadetship at West Point by President Andrew Johnson, arrived in DC anyway and took up a position of instructor in Howard University’s preparatory department later becoming dean of the Collegiate Department, William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (New York: Arno Press, 1887), 633-34.

¹²¹ William Henry Boyd, *Boyd's Business Directory and Guide to the Cities of Washington, Georgetown and Alexandria 1867*, (Washington: Boyd’s Directory Co., 1867), 77-79. The list includes a total of 78 churches: 6 Baptist, 7 Catholic, 1 Congregational, 9 Episcopalian, 2 Quaker, 1 synagogue, 4 Lutheran, 13 Methodist-Episcopalian, 3 Methodist-protestant, 1 New Jerusalem, 10 Presbyterian, 1 Unitarian and 13 “Colored” churches.

and even a building on the property of the Law School of Columbia from December 1865 until May 1868.¹²² Finally, in October 1866, several blocks away from construction at the yet unfinished Capitol, on the corner of Tenth and G Streets, members and friends witnessed the laying of the cornerstone of First Congregational Church. With construction underway, many, especially among the capital's Congregationalists and black elite, looked to the future with feelings of pride, hope, and promise.

If the establishment of First Congregational Church marked a significant milestone for the nation's Congregationalists, the church's mission, both bold and far-reaching, announced its distinctiveness among the city's dozens of churches. On October 4, 1866 Rev. Edwin Johnson of Baltimore delivered the primary address at the cornerstone laying ceremony and fairly captured the hopes for the new church. Despite the fact that Congregationalism recognized no national church and exulted in individual church rights and responsibilities, Johnson pointed out that in "an important sense this First Congregational Church of Washington is national." He encouraged the church to be political and emphasized that it had been planted in a District which all the states hold in common, with the hope that the efforts toward equality and fraternity would radiate out all over the land. Indeed the church structure that Johnson referenced was intended to accommodate 1,500 people on a weekly basis, a capacity far beyond its membership but reflective of its goal to be the preeminent church in the nation's capital. Howard also addressed the crowd that day and provided a history of the events which had led up to this moment. He expressed the importance of founding a Puritan church in the capital and prayed that "God may

¹²² Everett O. Alldredge, *Centennial History of First Congregational United Church of Christ, Washington, D.C., 1865–1965* (Baltimore: Port City Press, 1965), 1-10.

see fit to pour out untold blessings upon Washington and upon the nation of which it is the head, in answer to our united prayers.”¹²³

The leadership called prewar abolitionist and AMA lifetime member Rev. Dr. Charles Brandon Boynton from Cincinnati to be its first pastor. Boynton, who had recently arrived in the city upon being commissioned to write a history of the US Navy during the Civil War, readily accepted.¹²⁴ In addition to serving as the pastor at First Congregational, Boynton also received the distinct honor of becoming the first Congregationalist chaplain of the House of Representatives, serving both the 39th and 40th Congresses.¹²⁵ As he settled his wife, Maria, and youngest daughter, Mary, in the capital, they reconnected with their eldest son, Henry Van Ness, a Civil War hero and Medal of Honor recipient, who happened to be employed as the local correspondent for the Cincinnati *Gazette*. Over the course of its relatively uneventful first two years, First Congregational doubled its membership from 104 to 200 while meeting the religious needs of countless locals and visitors.¹²⁶

The battle at First Congregational Church that would make headlines across the country began in May 1867 when both Boynton and Howard appeared at the Brooklyn church of famed

¹²³ *Addresses by Major-General O. O. Howard and Rev. Edwin Johnson at the Laying of the Corner-Stone of the First Congregational Church, Washington, D. C.*, (Boston: Theoph G. Wadman, Commercial Printing House, 1867), O. O. Howard Papers; see also Alldredge, *Centennial History*, 10 and 14. In the preface to Albert Elijah Dunning, *Congregationalists in America: A Popular History of their Origin, Belief, Polity, Growth and Work* (New York: J. A. Hill Publishers, 1894), xv-xviii, Howard writes that shortly after his conversion, he was initially drawn to the Catholic faith but that upon “further reading of the Scriptures, study and thought brought the writer back to his proper home in the Congregational household, and there he was committed and confirmed with his family.” Howard would add that the Congregational Church best represented the republican form of our government making it “near and dear to patriotic hearts.”

¹²⁴ *Fifteenth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1861), 83, AMAA. For Boynton’s prewar abolitionist involvement, see “American Missionary Association,” *National Era*, October 10, 1850; “Convention to Hasten the Extinction of Slavery,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, April 6, 1855; and the *Manual of the Vine Street Congregational Church*, 8-11.

¹²⁵ Alldredge, *Centennial History*, 3-10; see also Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:426 and Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen’s Bureau*, 206.

¹²⁶ Walter L. Clift, *History of the First Congregational Church in Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding of the First Congregational Church* (Washington D. C., 1915), 90-93.

Rev. Henry Ward Beecher to make a plea for funds from the Congregational Union, a society dedicated to church building. Howard noted in his autobiography the evening was a general success except that Boynton took offense from an off-handed remark Howard made in jest about receiving gifts for a personal monument, a remark that raised concerns in Boynton's mind about Howard's designs for and influence within the church. These concerns led Boynton and his friends to print and release a pamphlet citing grievances against Howard, a publication Howard viewed as intended to rectify the incident from May and "put the sister churches over the country right concerning our Washington enterprise."¹²⁷ The strained relationship between the two ultimately ruptured a few months later when Howard offered to reward the five pupils in his Sunday school class who invited the most guests the following Sunday, an offer made while Boynton vacationed out of town. Nearly 100 children came, most of them black, which caused outrage among a significant number of church members. The reaction from a large portion of the congregation led Boynton to cut his vacation short to return and address the situation.¹²⁸

Later that summer, Howard received a letter from one of his Sunday school students, Miss Mary Boynton, the reverend's teenage daughter. Addressed to her "Dear Teacher," the letter provides a fascinating glimpse into the emerging dispute. Mary informed Howard that she was withdrawing from his class and sincerely regretted any pain the decision might cause him. She expressed her belief that Howard would understand her need to withdraw citing that in "any difficulty between my father and another, it is perfectly natural of course that I should side with

¹²⁷ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:430; see also Alldredge, *Centennial History*, 21-22. The most detailed accounts of the church crisis appear in Alldredge, *Centennial History*, 21-28; Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 191-208; and Thomas Reed Johnson, "The City on the Hill: Race Relations in Washington, D.C., 1865-1885," PhD dissertation, University of Maryland, 1975), 139-42. Significantly, neither Alldredge nor Johnson name the black men involved while Carpenter names just one, accidentally referring to him as John A. Cook instead of John H. Cook.

¹²⁸ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:431; see also Alldredge, *Centennial History*, 23. To provide a bit of perspective, the church at this time, had a membership of just over 200 despite a weekly attendance figure of 2,000 during the time it met at the Capitol.

my father.” At the heart of the letter, Mary expressed more than personal sentiments. She articulated the cultural and societal beliefs of her father and a majority within the church who were wholly uncomfortable with the presence of a large number of African Americans in this sacred and predominantly white social space. She expressed hope for reconciliation, however, noting that “the whole trouble existing between you and father is so unfortunate and apparently so unnecessary, that it has grieved us all.”¹²⁹

For Cook and Wall, who would pursue membership at First Congregational in the coming months, Mary’s assessment of the situation as an “unnecessary trouble” belied its true significance. As Masur points out, one of the great questions pressing northerners after the war was, “In what areas of life should black and white people interact as equals, and where should inequalities be preserved?”¹³⁰ A week after Howard received Mary’s letter, the *Christian Recorder*, published a celebratory article on First Congregational from a visitor who noted, in sharp contrast to the sentiments expressed in Mary’s letter, that in regard to the question of race, the church was “the only institution of the kind south of the old line-Mason and Dixon’s,” thanks to the “moral and courageous workers in the cause of Christianity and progress.” The author, identified only as Tohapitoulas, added that Wall was the first African American to attend the church and suggested that “This church is bound to live, and it is calculated to be the church of Washington; and we say, all praises to these noble men who have thus in the face of strong opposition, dared to erect a church and allow negroes to worship on the same floor with white men.”¹³¹

¹²⁹ Mary E. Boynton to Oliver Otis Howard, July 9, 1867, Howard Papers.

¹³⁰ Masur, *Example for All the Land*, 2.

¹³¹ Tohapitoulas, “Congregationalist Church, Washington,” *Christian Recorder*, July 13, 1867. Interesting, this article also notes that former Secretary of the Treasury and Supreme Court Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase was in attendance.

On the face of it, Cook, Wall, and Gregory's attendance at First Congregational appears as a postwar anomaly out of step with the general trajectory of Black preference for segregated worship space. However, their actions are reflective of their past experiences and future aspirations. All three had spent significant time in Oberlin. While Wall received fame for his role in the Oberlin-Wellington case, Cook and Gregory graduated from Oberlin College and pursued teaching positions under the auspices of the Freedmen's Bureau in Kentucky and the Chesapeake region respectively.¹³² As former residents and graduates of Oberlin, each had attached themselves to Congregationalism, and like Howard, they looked with fondness upon the establishment of First Congregational and what its promise entailed. For these black leaders, the integrationist efforts that Howard began in the spring were indicative of the church's intention to embrace social equality, which surely influenced Cook's and Wall's requests for membership that fall. However, before either of them achieved membership, Boynton, possibly alarmed at comments made by Cook during his membership interview, preached a "remarkable" sermon on Sunday, November 17 on the place of African Americans in postwar America.¹³³ Interestingly, just as Boynton had been away when Howard issued his Sunday school challenge, so too, was Howard away at the delivery of this controversial sermon.¹³⁴ Boynton's message, entitled "The Duty Which the Colored People Owe Themselves," offered his take on the well-known Exodus

¹³² Oberlin College, *General Catalogue of Oberlin College, 1833-1908* (United States: 1909), 215 and 393. For Bureau teaching, see records of the field offices for the state of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (BRFAL), Monthly school reports, Apr.-June 1866, Sept. 1866-Nov. 1868, M1904 roll 119; and William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 633. For more on Cook, see "John H. Cook Esq.," Oberlin College Archives; see also "The Cook Family in History," 195-215 and Stabler, "Race, Reaction, Policy, and Perception," 194. For more on Gregory, see Simmons *Men of Mark*, 631-46.

¹³³ An article in New York *Tribune* on December 17, 1868 by William R. Hooper entitled, "The Congregational Church at Washington," cites testimony made by John H. Cook in which he stated that during his interview, Boynton asked him about what would happen if all barriers were removed for colored admission. Cook stated that he believed ultimately the races would be united to which Boynton supposedly responded that their [black's] highest interests would best be served in organizations of their own.

¹³⁴ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:431-32. Howard was in St. Louis at the time, seeking to raise building funds from Congregational churches there.

narrative and throughout, he argued that African Americans should identify not with the enslaved Israelites but rather with Moses, who separated himself from the culturally and racially distinct Egyptians. Thus the inescapable application that African Americans should draw from the book of Exodus is not its story of liberation, but of racial separation.

The reverend's nontraditional exposition of Exodus included a second interpretive switch. This one concerned the identification of the Egyptians, which also had important social implications. While African Americans, enslaved and free alike, had long viewed the South's slaveholding class as their present-day embodiment of the Egyptians who had enslaved the Israelites for over four hundred years, Boynton used the Egyptians as an analogy that spoke instead to the postwar goal of northern and southern white unity. He singled out black congregants and said, "Refuse, like Moses, to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and give yourselves to the welfare of your own people and race."¹³⁵ The message could not be missed. Just over two years after the Civil War, Boynton declared that northern whites had more in common with southern whites than with freedpeople, thus necessitating perpetual separation. With words eerily prophetic of *Plessy v. Ferguson* two decades later, Boynton reinterpreted and reduced one of the most deeply meaningful Biblical stories in African American communities to one profound point: just as ancient Israelites and Egyptians maintained separate societies, so too should nineteenth-century black and white Americans. Despite the deaths of three quarters of a million men, white hegemony remained a powerful unifying factor, even for an avowed abolitionist who fancied himself a race radical.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Charles B. Boynton sermon, "The Duty which the Colored People Owe to Themselves," November 17, 1867, O. O. Howard Papers.

¹³⁶ Boynton, "The Duty which the Colored People Owe to Themselves" November 17, 1867. For African American views of Exodus, Moses, and the Egyptians, see Harper, *The End of Days*, 65-97; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 252-55; Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 67, 69 and 150; and Drew Gilpin Faust, "Without Pilot or Campus: Elite Women and Religion in the Civil War

Boynton concluded his message with a racially charged and politically driven application that contained enormous implications for the church's handful of black congregants. He challenged black congregants, including Cook and Wall, to "Dare to be black men," and to "Have faith in your race, in its capability and in its future." And later, "We can afford to have you with us, but you cannot afford to come." Boynton then closed with a disturbing yet vivid admonition: "I cannot conscientiously as a friend to the blacks advise them to avoid these organizations of their own, and bury themselves in a living grave, an unheeded little company in the larger masses of the whites."¹³⁷ Both Cook and Wall responded to the message by immediately withdrawing their requests for membership, which Boynton saw as a move initiated by Howard.¹³⁸

The pastor's message and the decision by Cook and Wall to withdraw their applications led to an immediate escalation of the situation. Eight days later, select members of the church leadership met to discuss the matter. According to the church meeting minutes, those gathered issued a preamble that recognized the church needed to release a clear statement on its position in relation to the reception of black members. The importance of the question at hand grew out of the church's "special mission," which included "the work of illustrating in this city the real and equal brotherhood in Christ of all his true followers." The gathered leadership then created two resolutions ultimately combined into one and provided to both Cook and Wall. The agreed-upon resolution was intended to distance the emerging minority faction from Boynton's position while affirming their personal willingness to accept both men as members. In short, those gathered that

South" in *Religion and the American Civil War*, eds., Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 251.

¹³⁷ Boynton, "The Duty which the Colored People Owe to Themselves," O. O. Howard Papers. See also Alldredge, *Centennial History*, 23 and Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:432.

¹³⁸ Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 195; Alldredge, *Centennial History*, 24. Alldredge quotes Boynton as saying the membership withdrawals of Cook and Wall were a "put-up job" by Howard.

night declared that “the doors of the Church were open to all true believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ . . . without distinction of race or color.”¹³⁹

Less than a week after receiving these resolutions from the church, Cook expressed the sentiments of his fellow African American congregants in a fascinating letter to Howard.¹⁴⁰ Cook spoke to the importance of this new church being built and Howard’s influence within it:

No class, perhaps, all things considered, has a greater love for, and interest in such a cause . . . From our views therefore of your influence in this great undertaking and because of your long and tiring and consistent course as the practical Christian advocate of the rights of all humanity and especially the negro may we not still hope and expect much from you . . . May we not hear your voice in favor of gathering in from the highways and bi-ways and welcoming untrammelled any and all of God’s creatures of whatever nationality needing salvation!

Cook reminded Howard that in the nation’s past, religion and the direction of the churches, North and South, had followed the sentiments of the parishioners. “In short in whatever direction the selfish desires or prejudices of the people have led them, they have always twisted their religion accordingly.” He asked Howard:

Shall there be another great temple reared here to continue such a state of things in this country? This is a grand opportunity to begin right, to practically adopt in all respects the teachings of our Savior as the foundation [and] principles of this Church to which every man and woman shall subscribe. Here shall we have a Church composed of members whose lives will be molded by their religion and not their religion by their lives.

By framing the issue this way, Cook emphasized the biblical justification for social equality.

While Masur ties concepts of equality to the Ancient Greeks and then the Enlightenment, for

¹³⁹ First Congregational Church, Book 1: “Minutes and Record of the First Congregational Church of Washington, (1865-1887),” November 25, 1867.

¹⁴⁰ John H. Cook to Oliver Otis Howard, December 1, 1867, Howard Papers. It is worth noting that John W. Alvord, who was the Sunday School class teacher referenced in Cook’s letter, was a former Lane Rebel, Oberlinite, and also a member at First Congregational, who served in the Freedmen’s Bureau as the general superintendent of schools, Clift, “History of the First Congregational Church,” 93; also Fletcher, *History of Oberlin*, 2:913.

many nineteenth-century Americans, those roots were often secondary to the Judeo-Christian foundations of biblical equality.¹⁴¹ His comments also alluded to broader concerns.

For Cook and his fellow black congregants, the developing fight at First Congregational Church was not a simply personal or local matter. It held national implications as well. He informed Howard that Boynton's sermon and his refusal to accept him and Wall as equal members in the church caused repercussions across the country as "the public mind gladly seizes anything looking towards a sanction of the old state of things." In the capital, the impact of such discrimination was amplified. Their backgrounds had taught both Cook and Wall "that the best interest of humanity would be furthered by comingling of the races in State and Church," a position clearly rejected by Boynton, who preferred a separate but equal concept of church membership. Historian Robert Harrison articulates what Cook and Wall intimately understood, "Separation was in truth a 'mark of exclusion,' a 'badge of inferiority,' and therefore contrary to the basic principles of American government enunciated in the Declaration of Independence. It confirmed racial prejudice."¹⁴² In closing, Cook expressed faith in Howard, as an ally and fearless advocate of equality, to address the issue. The stakes could not be higher, Cook pointed out, for the future status of African Americans in this country weighed in the balance:

Since we are in the wilderness of ignorance and degradation we would to God that we could have had the benefit of the doubt rather than our enemies. Such an argument as was presented to our oppressors and equivocal friends that is best for colored people to seek separate organizations can only put off the day of our deliverance from the heavy burden of prejudice or inequality. We venture the assertion that the noted Hume in his celebrated argument to sap the foundation of the miracles of Jesus Christ did no more to injure the cause of Christianity than such an argument will do to retard the cause of humanity in this country.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Masur, *Example for All the Land*, 4. For the Judeo-Christian roots of equality, see for example Genesis 1:26-27, Mark 12:21, Acts 17:26, and Galatians 3:28.

¹⁴² Harrison, *Washington During Civil War and Reconstruction*, 139.

¹⁴³ Cook to Howard, Dec. 1, 1867, Howard Papers.

Cook was not alone in raising concern about the ramifications of Boynton's message. As word spread beyond the capital, it sent shockwaves throughout the Congregational community.

The reverberations of Boynton's sermon quickly spread to Oberlin and across New England, Congregationalist regions that had responded to Howard's numerous requests for church building funds. Letters of anger and disappointment rolled into Howard's office in the months after the sermon from Edward Henry Fairchild, the principal of Oberlin College's preparatory department, and pastors in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire.¹⁴⁴ They had their effect. By February, Howard, along with fifty other members of the minority party from the church, published their response and officially distanced themselves from Boynton's position. In a document entitled, "First Congregational Church, Washington, D.C. - True Position 1868," they emphasized their disagreement with the pastor's opinion: "We have quite a large number of colored people in our Sunday-school, and we earnestly desire that they

¹⁴⁴ E. H. Fairchild to O.O. Howard, January 24, 1868, Howard Papers. Fairchild opened by saying he had just been "startled, grieved, shocked, and astounded" by Boynton's sermon "in opposition to the union of white and colored people in the same church." He asked, "Is the Dr. opposed to negro voting, sitting on juries, holding office, being members of Constitutional conventions, legislatures, Congress, riding the streetcars as well? All these things must stand or fall together." He went on to say, "I had supposed our beloved Congregational Church of Washington had a pastor too firmly established in principle to be taken by the spirit and customs of southern society. What does it mean? Have we given money to strengthen prejudice and caste?" He did not mince words in closing when he said, "I would rather see the church sink or be scattered to the winds than such a principle prosper." In a pastoral letter from Moses Smith (CT) to Howard on January 27, 1868, Howard Papers. Smith said the "statement respecting Dr. Boynton calumniates the Congregational Church of Washington before the country and the world." The inference of the reverend's sermon surely is that the wicked sentiment, "a white man's Government" is to prevail in that church which represents Gospel freedom in our nation's capital." He tells Howard that this is unacceptable and asks for a few words from him clarifying the facts. On the same day, Howard received another letter, this one from Pastor S. Hine (CT). In it, Hine tells Howard that his church and many other likeminded Congregational churches in the North and West will not aid the church in Washington if the position of the church is that of Boynton. Again on the same day, Howard received a letter from D. B. Rockwood (MA). The letter included a small donation and closed with "May God bless the labours in bringing down wickedness in high places." A week later, on February 4, 1868, Howard received a letter from Pastor Abel Manning (NH). He expressed surprise and sorrow at the report by the *Congregationalist*, Boston, that Dr. Boynton refused the request of two respectable colored persons to unite with the church under his care. He informed Howard that he had been in the ministry 50 years and most of that time had labored and prayed for the abolition of slavery with some success. He added that he would not send one farthing to the church as its recent actions were a "blow against suffrage, Congress, reconstruction, and the liberty of the negro." In closing, he let Howard know that he was disappointed that the church was not the example that it had set out to be.

shall not only be welcome to the Church on profession of faith, but that the same reasonable inducements and advice shall be extended to them as to other people to become followers of Christ, and members of the First Congregational Church of this city.” In recognition of the tenuous status of African Americans in the nation, they added, “We have a great work to perform, to overcome the spirit of caste and of slavery; and unless we make our doctrine of ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself’ as broad as humanity, we cannot succeed.”¹⁴⁵

The struggle at First Congregational might have remained contained within Congregationalist circles, but due to the efforts of Henry Boynton, son of the pastor, the story went national. The Civil War, unlike any previous event in the nineteenth century, had demonstrated the power of the highly politicized press to shape narratives of national events and as the nation entered the postwar period, their importance remained unchanged. Indeed, Reconstruction historian, Heather Cox Richardson, notes that Congressmen regularly brought newspaper articles to Congress and cited them as authoritative in their arguments.¹⁴⁶ The power of the press and sensitivity of the topic, combined with Henry’s military service record, guaranteed him a broad and sympathetic audience. His background as a professor before the war provided him with the rhetoric skills to sensationalize the situation, framing the debate in a way that was most sympathetic to his father’s view. As early as January 1868, when Howard was

¹⁴⁵ “First Congregational Church, Washington, D.C. - True Position 1868” (1868), O. O. Howard Papers. A portion of this statement was printed in the *Washington Star* on February 10, 1868 and reproduced in the *Cincinnati Gazette* on February 13, 1868 under the title “Congregationalism in Washington: The Question of Colored Church Membership,” which also drew attention to the national implications of this issue.

¹⁴⁶ Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), xi. For a further example of the press’s postwar influence and ability to shape public opinion, see Elaine Frantz Parsons’ *Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 2015).

receiving alarming letters from pastors across New England, Henry Boynton began publishing articles in defense of his father.¹⁴⁷

The first article on the church conflict appeared in the *Cincinnati Gazette* under the provocative title, “Amalgamation in Washington Churches” and sought to exonerate both his father and Howard by placing the blame for the church trouble on radical black congregants. Henry’s efforts to project a unified front headlined by his father and Howard became increasingly untenable as the deep-rooted nature of their differences came to light. In this early moment, Henry warned Democrats not to celebrate the news of conflict at First Congregational. He praised Howard for raising a significant amount of the funds for the church building and introduced his father as one “tinctured with radicalism, having grown gray as an Abolitionist before the war began . . .” Although he did not identify Howard with the “far more radical” minority at this point, he presented the first articulation of what exactly his father opposed – black involvement in “social parties, family intercourse, and even intermarriages,” in short, amalgamation. In addition, he pointed to another possible threat, namely too many blacks becoming members, something Henry referred to as a “plot” to control the church which was in line with a defense of his position Rev. Boynton wrote to Howard around the same time.¹⁴⁸

In his attempt to exonerate Howard, Henry also included a defense the Freedmen’s Bureau, which from its inception, faced Democratic attacks that it was nothing more than a

¹⁴⁷ American Civil War Research Database, Henry Van Ness Boynton. Henry enlisted in the 35th Ohio Infantry at the rank of Major on July 29, 1861. He was 26 years old at the time. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for action as a Lieutenant Colonel “For leading his regiment at Missionary Ridge, Tenn., on November 25, 1864, in the face of a severe fire of the enemy, where he was severely wounded.” He resigned due to his injuries on September 8, 1864. On March 13, 1865, he was promoted to Brigadier General. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, VA.

¹⁴⁸ Charles Boynton to Oliver Howard, undated, O. O. Howard Papers. This is important because in an undated letter to Howard, most likely at the end of 1867 or the beginning of 1868, Rev. Boynton provided a clarification of his position and stated that blacks should not be excluded from “business pursuits or places of amusement, nor from our schools, or colleges, or theological seminaries, or our churches, or our benevolent societies.”

vehicle for amalgamation. He pointed the finger away from Howard and toward a pair of his employees (read Cook and Wall here) who were truly to blame for the church trouble. Henry closed by affirming that his father opposed “full social equality” and it was this that led “these men [Cook and Wall] to indignantly withdraw their membership applications.” To allay any unnecessary fear, Henry assured his readers that the excitement surrounding the crisis was in reality tied to “an insignificant number of truly insignificant men.”¹⁴⁹ At the time Henry published this article, the “insignificant men” he referred to were busy on a different front, an academic one equally important to their cause. The 1868-1869 catalog of officers and students of Howard University, the recently opened institute of higher education which accepted applicants regardless of race or gender, lists both Cook and Wall as students in the school’s law department.¹⁵⁰

Cook and Wall’s pursuit of law degrees coincided with an era of Black political activism in the District. Armed with the franchise since early 1867 when Congress passed H. R. 1 over President Johnson’s veto and local white resistance, African Americans in the District approached the 1868 elections with optimism and a determination to not simply make their voices heard but to attain office as well. In anticipation of the presidential election later that year, Wall served on the executive committee of the Grant Club, a recently formed group dedicated to promoting the Republican Party’s candidate for president, who represented for blacks the best hope for the continued advancement of civil rights. Before the November election, local black men went to the polls to elect the city mayor. In June 1868, the African American vote proved critical to the election of abolitionist and Radical Republican Sayles J. Bowen to the city’s top

¹⁴⁹ Henry Van Ness Boynton, “Amalgamation in Washington Churches,” *Cincinnati Gazette*, January 28, 1868. On white fears of amalgamation, see Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long*, 265.

¹⁵⁰ 1868-69: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University (1868). Howard University Catalogs, 2, 15.

office. By uniting with local white Republicans, African Americans had created what one pair of historians described as “an interracial, cross-class coalition that promised to be a political juggernaut.”¹⁵¹ Unfortunately, this potentially promising interracial coalition was short-circuited by Bowen’s tumultuous two-year stint as mayor which fractured the alliance.

In regard to the church matter, the stalemate that the opposing parties had entered into by early 1868 endured throughout the remainder of the year. The minority party refused to compromise their stated position while the majority refused to call a mutual council that would have placed both parties on equal footing to present their grievances to a select committee of Congregationalist pastors. By autumn, the minority successfully called an *ex parte* council that met from November 18 to 20.¹⁵² At the council, a mix of nine pastors and lay leaders presided and heard testimony, mainly from the minority, as Boynton and the majority ultimately refused to recognize the authority of the council in this matter. After hearing testimony, the council published their findings which included a full vindication of Howard and the minority’s position. In particular, they drew attention to the “repellant attitude in which the church was placed toward our Christian brethren of the colored race . . .” They noted that the pastor’s position was “in serious conflict with the expectation of the congregational churches at large” and, in regard to the pastor, they expressed their desire for a mutual council to take place but based on the preliminary information received, thought it best that Rev. Boynton resign.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 119-151, quote, 148; Johnson, “The City on the Hill,” 70-91. “Officers of the Grant Club,” *The National Republican*, March 21, 1868.

¹⁵² William R. Hooper, “The Church at Washington,” *The Congregationalist and Boston Recorder*, November 5, 1868. Hooper who had aligned himself with Howard’s faction in the matter stated that the continual rejection of a mutual council by the pastor and the majority along with the tactics used by the pastor to avoid intervention, including suggesting the church leave the Congregational fold and become independent, left the minority with no other choice but to call for an *ex parte* council.

¹⁵³ “Proceeding of an Ex Parte Council Held at the First Congregational Church November 1, 1868,” O. O. Howard Papers; see also Alldredge, *Centennial History*, 25-26.

Newspapers across the country followed the proceedings. Some simply reprinted reports from other papers while others offered relatively full and neutral accounts. Still others took pains to intentionally frame the matter in accordance with their paper's distinct political views and readers in mind. Papers from across Congregationalist New England, took a variety of stances. The *Boston Daily Advertiser* published an article that stated the quarrel was "one of the most bitter and disgraceful ever known in the country."¹⁵⁴ The Democratic-leaning *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* referred to Cook and Wall as Howard's "negro pets" in their discussion of the *ex parte* council's meeting, while Vermont's *Green-Mountain Freeman* was obviously misinformed and incorrectly indicated that Dr. Boynton's position had been sustained by the *ex parte* council and in their conclusion noted that members of the majority would rather have a church rupture than admit colored people to fellowship, a sentiment closer to the truth but still not quite accurate.¹⁵⁵ One of the fullest accounts of the affair came from William R. Hooper in the Republican friendly *New York Tribune*. Hooper mentioned that John H. Cook was one of the applicants for admission and accurately outlined the proceedings and results of the *ex parte* council. A detailed account of the majority view appeared including their accusations that Howard was trying to take over the church and make it a political platform for his supposed candidacy as either US president or vice president, a charge Howard vehemently denied.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ "The Howard-Boynton Quarrel," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 21, 1868.

¹⁵⁵ *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, November 25, 1868; *Green-Mountain Freeman*, November 25, 1868; *Memphis Daily Avalanche* also incorrectly stated that the pastor was vindicated by the *ex parte* council in their December 15, 1868 article, "The Late Tilt of the Radical Hot Gospellers in Washington."

¹⁵⁶ "The Congregational Church of Washington and Negro Equality," *Baltimore Sun*, November 20, 1868. Interestingly, in a previous article in the *Sun* on September 9, 1868, an author identified by the initials O. K. wrote in support of Boynton in an article entitled, "Letter from Washington." The author applauded Boynton for refusing to go so far as to support a clique that "wanted a church which recognized a perfect social equality without distinction of race, color, or condition"; see William R. Hooper, "The Congregational Church at Washington," *New York Tribune*, December 17, 1868 for Howard's denial of the pursuit of the candidacy for either President or Vice President. See also "The Mutual Council of the Congregational Church," *Evening Star*, January 15, 1869 and Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 198 and 201.

Papers outside of New England tended to sift through the minutia and get rather quickly to the crux of the matter, the postwar social implications of the battle at First Congregational Church. Just to the northwest of the capital, in Pennsylvania, an informative piece appeared in the *Clearfield Republican*. It brought attention to the complexity of the issue and provided the observation that as far as the postwar era was concerned, both Boynton and Howard could rightly be identified as race radicals. Its author avoided any attempt at parsing the term and instead defaulted to presenting the dispute as one representative of the degrading effects of radicalism, which shows hostility for the South while expressing “all regard for the black man.”¹⁵⁷ In Baltimore, the *Sun* offered its readers an informative and neutral account of the proceedings of the *ex parte* council and concluded correctly that the underlying issue at First Congregational centered on whether the church “should be a predominantly white church or equally mixed.” Much further south in New Orleans, the *Crescent Sun* got closer to the truth in their observation that the issue at the church was about introducing social equality and that Howard was a closet amalgamationist, a charge he had publicly addressed in the church early that same year in an affirmative yet nuanced way.¹⁵⁸

Howard’s position as Bureau commissioner, coupled with his unflinching support of Cook and Wall, meant that numerous newspapers viewed him as the primary protagonist in the crisis and, based on their political leanings, offered either condemnations or support to the beleaguered general. The *Nashville Union and American* suggested that Howard sought “to build a temple to himself and God” in Washington and claimed that he “was at fault from the

¹⁵⁷ “Dr. Boynton and General Howard,” Pennsylvania’s *Clearfield Republican* on January 14, 1869.

¹⁵⁸ *New Orleans Crescent Sun*, November 29, 1868; for more on Howard and his views on amalgamation, see Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:433-34 and also Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 198. For other general accounts of the proceedings see “Church Difficulties,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 20, 1868 and “The Congregational Church Affair at Washington,” *Boston Journal*, November 21, 1868.

beginning.” It painted Howard as one who had become rich and arrogant in Washington, and worse, he had become a “negrohobbist,” one who sought “the absolute social equality of white and black.” Along a similar line, the *Galveston Daily News* joined in and referred to Howard as a “negrophilist.”¹⁵⁹ In the Midwest, the Republican-leaning *Chicago Tribune* stepped in to defend Howard and asserted unequivocally that the general was not a tyrant in church matters, nor was he building a temple to himself. Ohio’s *Fremont Weekly Journal* also showed its support for him and declared that victory at First Congregational was sought like an object of attainment on par with the capture of the Holy Land by the Crusaders. Indeed, all eyes were “upon this church as Mohammedans turn toward Mecca and Catholics to St. Peters.”¹⁶⁰

By the end of the year, Henry’s tone on Howard had soured. With Howard no longer viewed as an ally of his father, Henry joined with and added to the negative press on Howard by issuing his own blistering attack, a necessary corrective, as he saw it, in light of the attention paid to the matter and owing to the publicity generated by the *Associated Press* which sent its reports “to all parts of the country.” In a new piece for the *Cincinnati Gazette*, Henry attacked the authority of the *ex parte* council, noting that only fourteen of thirty pastors invited to attend came and notably, Rev. Henry Ward Beecher had refused. Interestingly, he also stated that members of the minority, which had called the council, rushed to the papers after the decision was reached in their favor to suppress accounts from the defense, a statement that seems at odds with Henry’s use of the *Cincinnati Gazette* and the prevalence of pro-Boynton articles cited above. Henry provided insight into his father’s actual sentiments when he informed his readers that his father

¹⁵⁹ “A Radical Feud,” *Nashville Union and American*, December 3, 1868; “The Row Between Gen. Howard and Chaplain Boynton,” *Galveston Daily News* December 3, 1868. Other negative representations of Howard and the feud include “A Row in a Church,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 24, 1868; “Christianity Controlling Radicalism,” *Leavenworth Daily Commercial*, December 4, 1868; and “The Loyal at Loggerheads,” *Spirit of Jefferson* (Charles Town, West Virginia), December 8, 1868.

¹⁶⁰ One Who Knows, “The Howard-Boynton Feud,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 14, 1868; “The Metropolitan Church Difficulty, General Howard vs. Dr. Boynton,” *Fremont Weekly Journal*, January 15, 1869.

ultimately opposed a church that had equal membership, equal officeholders, and equal Sunday school attendance.¹⁶¹ With the New Year approaching, both sides waited for resolution.

As the election of 1868 neared, key vehicles of social transformation in the District were already on the path to extinction with the AMA's free schools set to close and the Freedmen's Bureau winding down its activities. The AMA and its Congregationalist allies, however, continued their investment in the capital through the new ventures of First Congregational Church and Howard University. They intended for these institutions to model an interracial republic which they hoped would sweep across the land and supplant the prewar society premised on racial hierarchy. In terms of Black progress, the years of the Johnson administration are rightly recognized as an era of declension and yet it also coincided with some of the most profound efforts to achieve colorblind citizenship and circumvent reunion through a national embrace of white supremacy. Black progress was undeniable at Freedmen's Village, Barry Farm, and across the AMA's schools which dotted the local landscape. And at both First Congregational Church and Howard University, these Congregationalist-funded institutions challenged conventional social norms by demonstrating that white and black could both worship and learn together. These efforts suggested that integration was possible in the church and university, two institutions which had long been bastions of discrimination, and more importantly that hope existed for establishing a new nation with racial equality as the standard.

¹⁶¹ Henry Van Ness Boynton, "Letter from Washington: A Queer Trial—The Prosecution Presented as a Complete Defense—No Defense Heard—The Defendants Sustained," Cincinnati *Gazette*, November 25, 1868.

CHAPTER 4 – MAINTAINING CITIZENSHIP (1869-1877)

The South, as it is, is a cancer on the body politic, which will not be long in eating its way to the vitals. And if we fill the whole South with honest, earnest efforts for the salvation of the black man, we shall not fail in that at which we aim. We shall succeed in planting the seeds of Christian institutions and Christian influences, which will save the South and save the nation . . . Let us not deceive ourselves; liberty can not live in this country without Christian morality; Christian morality can not live without Christian faith.¹

Education, Morality and Wealth. These three great fundamentals, upon which the whites have arisen to such a high degree of social eminence, are those which we must build our social superstructure, to be their equals.²

In the wake of Grant's victory in the 1868 presidential election, both the AMA and CCM celebrated what they believed would be an era marked by a renewed commitment to their goals of equal citizenship. Indeed, prior to his election, Grant expressed support for outlawing racial discrimination in voting and for securing legal protection of African Americans in the exercise of their civil rights. His support of Black rights was a marked departure from that of his predecessor who had displayed contempt for Blacks and proved recalcitrant toward securing their rights.³ Grant's first term saw clear progress on the AMA's and CCM's goals of establishing a colorblind casteless citizenry but by his second term, the window for social transformation quickly closed. Although the Republican Party won handily in 1872, it had already begun to fracture and the lack of party unity on the issue of equal citizenship in the prewar years proved detrimental in the postwar era. To many, the Thirteenth Amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and the Fourteenth Amendment appeared as the only necessary steps to complete Reconstruction. The key legislation passed during Grant's presidency, the Fifteenth Amendment

¹ Julian M. Sturtevant, "The Crisis of the Hour," *Twenty-third Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1869), 81.

² *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Colored Men of America, held in Washington, D. C., on January 13, 14, 15, and 16, 1869* (Washington, DC, Great Republic Book and Newspaper Printing Establishment, 1869), 41.

³ Charles W. Calhoun, *Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 63.

and the Civil Rights Act of 1875 revealed how little agreement existed on the extent of societal transformation to be pursued. It also exposed deep fractures within the Republican Party among radicals and moderates seen most clearly in the racist language employed by some of its members in defense of limiting the extent of the franchise and the reach of civil rights. In an era marked by increasing concerns about government tyranny amplified by troop deployments in the South, accusations of corruption, and a national economic depression, many Americans expressed their support for a strengthening of states' rights. Indeed, the Supreme Court would in key decisions during this era provided critical support for states' rights proponents and in so doing, curtail federal power. Thus over the course of Grant's second term, the advocates of equal citizenship not only lost key leaders in Lewis Tappan, George Whipple, and E. P. Smith to untimely deaths, but also key support in each branch of government, the Supreme Court in 1873 and 1874, the Legislature in the 1874 mid-terms, and finally the Presidency to a moderate Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, whose views mirrored broad national sentiment that by 1877 had little interest in securing equal citizenship for Blacks.⁴

For its part, the AMA continued to pursue its goals of establishing a colorblind casteless citizenship at Washington, DC, through both of its flagship institutions: First Congregational Church and Howard University. With birthright citizenship secured through ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment, the AMA focused on achieving political equality for adult Black males through enfranchisement and modeling the Oberlin community's racially progressive social equality. In terms of labor, with the Bureau ending its operations in the District in 1868, the AMA promoted migration to regions offering cheap land while also supporting the Colfax Industrial Mission (later Lincoln Industrial Mission) on the corner of Eleventh Street NW to

⁴ Foner, *Second Founding*, 99-104 and Brooks D. Simpson, *Reconstruction Presidents* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 158-62.

create an educated laboring class among the freedpeople so they could better negotiate labor contracts and secure skills-based employment. Neither of these efforts, however, provided relief within the labor environment in DC which saw Blacks stuck in low-paying jobs that kept most in poverty. On the education front and in recognition of its inability to cover the South with missionaries and teachers, the AMA invested in establishing colleges and universities to graduate black leaders who were educated, pious, and industrious to do the work for them while modeling these key hallmarks of Congregational citizenship within their communities. In Washington, DC, Congregationalists and members of the AMA threw their support behind Howard University which, over these years, graduated a cadre of gifted and accomplished Black men and women. Finally, at First Congregational Church, the struggle between segregationists and integrationists reached its conclusion ending with a church schism and investigation into Howard. Determined to reestablish themselves as the city's only interracial church after Boynton's resignation in April 1869, the minority faction called Rev. Jeremiah Rankin, an ardent prewar abolitionist and Congregationalist minister from New Hampshire, to serve as the church's second pastor, a position he held from 1869 to 1884. Under his care, First Congregational experienced a season of growth marked by an increase in Black membership and an intentional effort to engage in the highly controversial issues of the day. While maintaining a membership of black elites that ran into the dozens during these years, the church never held a broad appeal among the freedpeople who continued to prefer worshipping in segregated religious spaces of their own making rather than embracing the strictures of the Congregationalist polity.⁵

⁵ For information on the Rankin years at First Congregational, see Alldredge, *Centennial History of First Congregational*, 29-36. Rankin first appears in the AMA records as a lifetime member in the *Twelfth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1858), 104, AMAA.

The CCM also remained active in Washington during these years, holding several conventions to strategize and seek redress from both Congress and President Grant. Local goals of the National Convention that met in January 1869 included adding black justices of the peace and permitting blacks to serve on juries, both of which they achieved during Grant's first term. In December 1869, the Colored Labor Convention met in DC to address the pressing issue of how impoverished and landless black laborers might secure true freedom. Delegates expressed their desire for government lands, hope of establishing an interracial alliance of workers to achieve financial independence, and aspiration to access trades and industries that largely excluded them. These demands remained elusive for the majority of Blacks, including those in Washington, who failed to climb the occupational ladder. Finally, in December 1873, the Equal Rights Convention gathered in DC to petition Congress and the president to secure passage of Senator Sumner's Civil Rights bill. Although it ultimately passed in 1875, the watered-down bill failed to achieve Black goals of equal citizenship. Despite its limited reach, the Supreme Court ruled the bill unconstitutional just eight years later.

Politics

As Howard prepared to attend the mutual council slated to take place at First Congregational Church in mid-January 1869, Cook and Wall attended to other critically important matters across town. Meeting from January 13-16, Cook and Wall joined other Oberlinites, including James Monroe Gregory, William Howard Day, and the Langston brothers, just blocks away at the Israel Bethel Church for the National Convention of Colored Men. There, as delegates representing Ohio, they joined with other leading African American men from across the country to discuss the vital issues facing African Americans in the postemancipation era. Both Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet presided over the meeting with

Douglass leaving after the second day due to a prior speaking engagement in New York, leaving Garnet to oversee the majority of the convention.⁶ Knowing the importance of this meeting, AMA Vice President John Sella Martin attended as a representative of the AMA.⁷ Once gathered together, the delegates from seventeen states and the District expressed their collective concern about “the partial or total exclusion of colored citizens from the exercise of the elective franchise and other citizen rights, in so many States of the Union . . .,” something that appeared to stand in direct violation of the recently ratified Fourteenth Amendment. A voice in politics, as Pennsylvania delegate William Nesbit saw it, “will necessarily restore to us other rights of which we are now deprived.” With the new and supposedly supportive administration of Grant and Colfax on the verge of taking charge, delegates discussed the next steps in their pursuit of equal citizenship and specifically their intention to employ every lever at their disposal to secure the franchise including “petition, personal appeals, and protest . . . until justice be done.”⁸

While the strategy for achieving universal male suffrage occupied the lion’s share of the convention, additional issues concerning the uplift of those recently incorporated into the national body also surfaced. The revered African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) Rev. Bishop Daniel A. Payne, who was also president of Wilberforce University, told the delegates that while he appreciated the benevolence of northern societies, Blacks must ultimately seek improvement not from those outside but from within, where manhood originates. Payne declared that the “Lords of the Lash had invaded and broken up the domestic relations of colored

⁶ *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Colored Men of America, held in Washington, D. C.*, 8-10 and 23-24.

⁷ J Sella Martin to George Whipple, January 7, 1869, AMAA; *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Colored Men of America, held in Washington, D. C.*, 6, 8, and 35. For more on J. Sella Martin, see William Wells Brown, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (Boston: Thomas Hamilton, 1863), 241-45 and DeBoer, *His Truth Is Marching On*, 127-38.

⁸ *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Colored Men of America, held in Washington, D. C.*, 1-2, 8, and Appendix II.

Americans depriving them of the ability to train sons and daughters into a noble manhood and womanhood. Slavery had left many both ignorant and impoverished.” To address this, he promoted a threefold approach that aligned with the AMA’s postwar vision: education, piety, and wealth. Payne, like the AMA, viewed public schools as critical and argued that their establishment must be demanded from all levels of Black society to educate the masses. Through science and philosophy, freedpeople could embrace self-culture until radical change occurred in their “thinking, speaking, and acting.” Piety, the second key to racial uplift, involved learning the fear of God and the keeping of his commandments. This would demonstrate to skeptics the uprightness of the Black race. Finally, Black children must be taught thrift because securing property was the means to power. However, community wealth, not personal wealth, was the goal. With this wealth, Blacks would have the ability to build halls of science, colleges and universities as well as send missionaries into heathen lands to demonstrate that the Black race was a civilizing power in the Republic and an enlightening force in the world.⁹

Although President Johnson had been unresponsive, patriarchal, and at times even hostile to Black demands for equal citizenship and the franchise, with a new Republican administration, Blacks had reason to believe that their voices would be heard. Indeed, the 1868 election had been closer than many expected, and Grant owed his election victory in part to Black votes.¹⁰ This reality and the recognized need for constant agitation on these fronts led the delegates at the National Convention of the Coloured Men of American held in Washington, DC, to acknowledge the centrality of the capital in their plans. They endeavored to meet annually in the capital until every state in the Republic would be compelled to change its organic law to “honor

⁹ *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Colored Men of America held in Washington, D. C.*, 13-15; see also Foner, *Second Founding*, 100.

¹⁰ On Johnson and Blacks, see Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents*, 70-79; on Grant’s 1868 victory and the Black vote, see Calhoun, *The Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant*, 54-55 and Foner, *Reconstruction*, 343.

God in the person of man, because he is made in the image of God.” But to ensure progress on their goals, they also established an executive committee headquartered in the capital for the purposes of “carrying out with Congress, as far as they can, the objects of this convention . . .” Speaking in the language of privileges and responsibilities, they sought homes and a “full enjoyment of privileges” from the government in recognition that they were asked to aid in bearing the burdens of government. Interestingly, in what could have possibly been a not-so-veiled reference to the battle at First Congregational, those gathered resolved, “That the pulpit is a mighty power in controlling minds on the questions of reform, and it is the opinion of this Convention that it is the duty of every minister of the Gospel to urge from the pulpit the reforms now going forward in favor of universal liberty and equal rights of all men.” Beyond this broad vision of equal citizenship and accompanying rights, including male enfranchisement, these objects also included a number of local issues listed under the heading “Memorial for Equal Privileges in the District of Columbia.” Specifically, the delegates sought the appointment of two African American justices of the peace and trials before a jury of their own color to address the disproportionate imprisonment of blacks in the city.¹¹

As the convention wound to a close, delegates looked to their white allies, “friends of the freemen and freedpeople,” as key figures to help them achieve their goals. These powerful white friends, who wielded varying degrees of power to aid them in their pursuit of equality, consisted of a handful of faithful prewar abolitionists as well as local and strategically positioned individuals identified by the convention as “honorary members.” The list included current members of Congress and supporters of both the CCM and AMA including Henry Wilson and

¹¹ *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Colored Men of America held in Washington, D. C.*, 14, 19-21. On disproportionate imprisonment of blacks, see also Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 68 and Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 282-88.

Commissioner Howard. Although absent from the proceedings “owing to the trial going on in the Congregational Church,” John M. Langston made a point to announce that General Howard “was in full sympathy with this Convention” and therefore moved to honor the “many good deeds done by the General and have his name be added to the list of honorary members,” a motion which was carried. The convention ended with a visit to newly elected President Grant and Vice President Colfax. Taking place three days after the convention, the appointed delegates, twelve men including Wall, spoke to Grant and Colfax. They congratulating them on their recent victory and expressing confidence that they would move to defend and enact laws that would serve to protect their lives, liberty, and rights. The visit also served as a not-so-subtle reminder that Grant and Colfax owed their election victory to African Americans and they anticipated continued progress toward the achievement of the goals clearly laid out by the convention.¹²

Before even entering office, President-elect Grant had followed the long and tortured proceedings in Congress on the Fifteenth Amendment. Despite the efforts of radical Republicans like Henry Wilson, the final language of the amendment concerning the right to vote represented the more moderate wing of the Republican Party, as had the Fourteenth Amendment.¹³ While securing the most fundamental goal of black male enfranchisement, the amendment failed to address office-holding and the ability of states to determine its own qualifications for voting, loopholes which southern states fully exploited in years ahead. And beyond its well-known failure to grant women’s suffrage, fears of former rebel and Chinese enfranchisement in the South and West respectively led to the exclusion of more racially inclusive language.¹⁴

¹² *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Colored Men of America held in Washington, D. C.*, 17, 41, and Appendix, IX-XI. On AMA leadership, see *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1871), 1 where the Honorable Henry Wilson (Mass.) is listed as a Vice President. Howard is first listed as a Vice President of the AMA in the *Twenty-third Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1869), 1, AMAA.

¹³ Simpson, *Reconstruction Presidents*, 102-08.

¹⁴ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 446-47.

Regardless, upon its passage in Congress in February 1869 and ratification one year later, African Americans across the country erupted in celebration of their hard-fought victory with Douglass leading the charge.¹⁵

The AMA joined with African Americans in celebrating the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. In the April 1870 edition of the *American Missionary*, the editors deemed it “not only a flag planted on the line of the march of progress, but a fort built to secure the advance.”¹⁶ One month later, in a longer piece, the editors declared that “The rapid march of liberty and enfranchisement, in the last seven years, is in gratifying contrast with the tardiness of the seventy years after the Revolution.” They also noted with satisfaction that the black man “is not content with the honor, he tries to become an intelligent voter. His endeavors in this regard are worthy of all commendation and encouragement . . .”¹⁷ Upon ratification, President Grant took the unusual step of issuing a proclamation of the Fifteenth Amendment to mark the historic occasion. While noting the importance of African Americans pursuing education “to make themselves worthy of their new privilege,” he declared with much pride that this “measure which makes at once four millions of people voters . . . is indeed a measure of grander importance than any one other act of the kind from the foundation of our free Government to the present time.”¹⁸

At Howard University, Howard, who had become president, and in 1868, became, among radicals anyway, a late convert to the cause of Black male enfranchisement. Howard, like many Republicans of the era, feared placing the franchise in the hands of an uneducated, propertyless, and illiterate portion of the population he viewed as open to easy manipulation by powerful

¹⁵ Foner, *Second Founding*, 112.

¹⁶ “Fifteenth Amendment,” *American Missionary*, vol. 14 no. 4, 1870, 82.

¹⁷ “Fifteenth Amendment,” *American Missionary*, vol. 14 no. 5, 1870, 109.

¹⁸ “Proclamation of the Fifteenth Amendment. The President’s Message,” *American Missionary*, vol. 14 no. 5, 1870, 109-10; see also Beard, *A Crusade of Brotherhood*, 188-94.

white southerners who were in many instances their employers. On a trip to New England in 1866, Howard avoided discussion of the franchise and instead emphasized the Bureau's critical work of education as the true key to southern transformation and sought the aid of benevolent societies to help continue it. He told a friendly audience in Maine that he could not countenance "why the color of the skin should impair the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Indeed, he hoped one day to tell his children's children how the American people "put forth their strength and saved a Republic, broke the chains of four millions of slaves, and inaugurated genuine, universal, unqualified liberty." Upon completion of this tour and his arrival back in Washington, Howard received a visit from Black leaders, including Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, J. Sella Martin, and John M. Langston. They had arrived from across the country armed with newspaper accounts of Howard's speeches and were desirous to feel out his views on black male enfranchisement. In response to their inquiries, Howard expressed his desire to have their support in all Bureau matters but at that time emphasized securing legal equality for Blacks which he believed would eventually lead to enfranchisement.¹⁹

However, over a year later, reports of widespread violence across the South coupled with military demobilization, the AMA's ongoing educational efforts, and his own belief in a short-term Bureau altered Howard's views. In an 1867 letter to George Whipple, in which he praised the AMA for its "wonderful work," and its excellent schools, he expressed support for the movement among public officials toward granting political power to the poor and downtrodden. He believed that, armed with the franchise, they would accomplish what white southerners thus far refused to do, namely establish the common schools and institutions that had distinguished

¹⁹ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:315-17; For Howard's fears about an uneducated Black voter, see Howard, "Education of the Colored Man," 111-13, Howard Papers and Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 146-47. On broad desire for educated voters, see Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 533-34.

New England from the rest of the country and “elevated the masses of the people to a higher degree of civilization.” Several months later, in a letter to prewar abolitionist J. M. McKim, he envisioned enfranchisement of Black men which would allow them to not only establish common schools but also grant them the power to secure the equal rights denied them across the South.²⁰

While Howard had been won over more recently to the idea of black male enfranchisement, the university’s most prominent African American faculty member and dean of its Law Department, John M. Langston, had been a long-time champion of it since his days in Ohio in connection with the state’s Colored Convention’s movement.²¹ In May 1870, Langston delivered one of the addresses to commemorate ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in nearby Baltimore. He saw the Fifteenth Amendment, when coupled with the Fourteenth, as “signifying the possession of all civil rights and the enjoyment of all political powers.” In one of the more powerful lines of his speech, he declared:

We celebrate the triumph of that democracy which, forgetful of nationality unmindful of birth-place, oblivious of complexional peculiarities or former condition of servitude, sees in every son of humanity a child of God and imposes by a stern decree, with solemn sanctions, the obligation and the duty of recognizing and respecting this sonship and fatherhood. [Applause.]²²

The enfranchisement of African American men marked a high point in the understanding and definition of citizenship in the postwar era. Not only had slavery been eliminated, African Americans had been incorporated into the body politic through birthright citizenship and finally

²⁰ Howard to George Whipple, May 25, 1867 and Howard to J. Miller McKim, January 4, 1868, Howard Papers. See also Cox and Cox, “General O. O. Howard and the ‘Misrepresented Bureau,’” 444. The AMA received similar praise for its work from even disinterested southern whites, see *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1875), 86. For more on J. M. McKim, see Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 23, 126.

²¹ See for example, John Mercer Langston, “Address on the Negro and the Elective Franchise,” March 25, 1854, John Mercer Langston Papers, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collections & Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, TN, Box 2, Folder 2.

²² John Mercer Langston, “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *New Era*, May 26, 1870.

secured political equality with the ballot. The remainder of Grant's presidency, however, revealed that while constitutional amendments could provide the language of equality and rights, they could not implement the social transformation implied therein. For that to occur, freedpeople would require the aid of a vigilant federal government, bent on enforcement and backed by the judiciary, as well as northern willpower and resources. Tragically, all of these failed to materialize by the second term of the Grant administration.

For the AMA and CCM, 1869 and 1870 appeared promising with the Republican victory and progress toward their goals of equal citizenship founded on industry, and education and religious uplift. Passage of the Fifteenth Amendment coincided with the attainment of the key requests made by the delegation of the National Convention of Colored Men to President-elect Grant. Upon entering office, Grant moved quickly to fulfill the DC-related motions that had emerged from the convention, namely the nomination of two or more African American justices of the peace and the admittance of black men to jury service. In early April, Grant nominated convention delegates, Rev. Duke W. Anderson, pastor of the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church and Howard University trustee, alongside O. S. B. Wall to serve as District justices of the peace, positions Congress confirmed shortly thereafter. The securing of these positions represented a key tactic of black politics in the postwar era, namely the patronage system, which aimed to leverage black votes into positions of power that would amplify the voice of their communities to better address concerns of racism and unequal justice.²³

During the early years of Grant's first term, Black Washingtonians not only enjoyed having the ear of the nation's chief executive but also that of local mayor, Sayles Bowen, who

²³ *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Colored Men of America held in Washington, D. C.*, 19; Masur, *Example for All the Land*, 158-59; "Nominations," *Evening Star*, April 1, 1869; "Confirmations," *National Republican*, April 7, 1869; and "Justices Confirmed," *National Republican*, April 10, 1869.

during his brief and turbulent term in office used his power and the city's resources to pursue civil rights and public works advancements. This brief window of promise, however, preceded a much longer period of declension which saw Washington DC embroiled in financial ruin and its populace disenfranchised. In the election of 1867, the first in which local black men possessed the vote, Bowen received overwhelming support from the Black community for his radical views on civil rights. This support proved key in securing him a close victory over his Democratic opponent, John T. Given.²⁴ At the center of this victory stood a tenuous interracial alliance that had the potential to maintain political power in the District. This promising interracial coalition proved short-lived, however, as Bowen's tumultuous two-year stint as mayor ultimately fractured the party. In addition, local whites who felt threatened by black enfranchisement subsequently pushed Congress to take power back from District voters.²⁵

In February 1871, Congress consented and created a single territorial government for a consolidated District of Columbia. As a result, although "District voters could still elect some officials, most of the power in the new territorial government now rested in the presidential appointees, particularly the Board of Public Works, which controlled the distribution of contracts and patronage."²⁶ In the waning days of local empowerment before the consolidated territorial government model took effect in June, Cook and Wall joined other elite blacks and remained active in local Republican Party politics, which had been reduced to electing delegates to "the lower house of the territorial legislature (the House of Delegates) and a nonvoting representative

²⁴ William Tindall, "A Sketch of Mayor Sayles J. Bowen," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 18 (1915): 29-30.

²⁵ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 148; Johnson, "City on the Hill," 70-91. For more on Mayor Sayles and his turbulent one-term in office, see William Tindall, "A Sketch of Mayor Sayles J. Bowen," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 18 (1915): 25-43.

²⁶ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 160. For Bowen's term as mayor, see 156-160.

in the US House of Representatives.”²⁷ Excessive spending under Bowen’s administration coupled with the financial panic of 1873 crippled the city’s finances, leaving its coffers empty and its citizens enraged. In June 1874, of the following year, Congress moved swiftly to end the short-lived territorial government and place the District under a presidentially appointed board of three commissioners, a situation made permanent in 1878. Historians Asch and Musgrove observe that in light of this congressional action, “District men, white and black, rich and poor, lost their right to vote. They would not cast another meaningful ballot for nearly a century.”²⁸ This localized shift toward increased federal authority and the loss of voting privileges for Washingtonians occurred concomitantly with a national shift led by the Supreme Court that curtailed the reach of federal power to secure Black citizens in their rights.

The historic and progressive legislation that had poured forth from the Republican-dominated 39th and 40th Congresses began to face judicial scrutiny in the 1870s with landmark cases originating out of Louisiana that threatened both the AMA’s and CCM’s goals of societal transformation. Civil War and Reconstruction historian Allen Guelzo has rightly observed that too little attention has been paid to the important role played by the Supreme Court in defining the rights of citizenship and the extent of federal power to secure them.²⁹ While the Supreme Court remained largely muted during the Civil War as President Lincoln exercised “war powers,” under Chief Justice Morrison Waite, who received his appointment to the top judicial office after the death of Salmon Chase in 1873, the Court quickly moved to assert itself once again. The Waite Court’s decisions would have enormous implications for the postwar definition and understanding of citizenship and its accompanying “privileges and immunities.” From

²⁷ Masur, *Example for All the Land*, 207; “Republican Convention,” *Evening Star*, March 29, 1871, and “District of Columbia,” *Evening Star*, April 18, 1871.

²⁸ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 161-68, quote on 165.

²⁹ Guelzo, *Reconstruction*, 84-89.

Louisiana in 1873 and 1874, the *Slaughterhouse Cases* and *US v. Cruikshank*, respectively emerged as the two key cases which ultimately proved devastating to the AMA's and CCM's interracial goals of an equal, colorblind, and casteless citizenship.

New Orleans, which had been under federal control since late April 1862 when Admiral David Farragut led an armada of Union gunboats past the city's forts and captured it, originated the first postwar case to have significant implications for understanding the privileges and immunities clause associated with the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1869, the state's Republican governor, Henry Clay Warmoth, signed legislation intended to address the significant health hazard associated with the unscrupulous dumping of butcher offal into the Mississippi River. The new legislation required all butchers to use a single "grand slaughterhouse" to process their meat, a decision that the Butcher Benevolent Association argued violated their rights under the Fourteenth Amendment. Argued before the Supreme Court in 1872, the case centered on city health wound up having significant implications for the era's understanding of civil rights. In a 5-4 decision issued in 1873, the Supreme Court established and legitimized both federal and state citizenship while providing a context for their attendant rights. Justice Samuel F. Miller, who issued the majority opinion, wished to avoid the Supreme Court regulating state legislatures and argued that the Fourteenth Amendment protects only the "privileges and immunities" associated with federal citizenship, and he limited those rights to access to ports and navigable waterways, the ability to run for federal office, travel to the seat of government, and protection on the high seas and abroad. Not only were these rights of little concern to the majority of freedpeople, the regressive ruling represented a severe curtailing of the more expansive rights suggested in Justice Washington's ruling in *Corfield v. Coryell* fifty years earlier.³⁰ Just two months after the

³⁰ Guelzo, *Reconstruction*, 94-95; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 529-30; see also Melvin I. Urofsky, *Supreme Decisions: Great Constitutional Cases and Their Impact* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012), 123-26.

Supreme Court issued its ruling in the *Slaughterhouse Cases*, Lewis Tappan, the driving force behind the AMA and an uncompromising advocate for equal citizenship, died.³¹ In memorializing him at their annual meeting later that year in Newark, New Jersey, the AMA delegates celebrated Tappan stating, “To him, more than to any other man, does the Association owe its existence.” They described him as “a man of positive opinions, and fearless in their advocacy, having far more reverence for truth than for men; . . . and “undaunted by opposition.”³² As the decade wound to close, they would sorely miss his guiding and progressive spirit.

One day before the Supreme Court issued its ruling in the *Slaughterhouse Cases*, the nation’s deadliest incident of racial violence took place just north of New Orleans in the recently established Grant Parish. There, black Republicans in March occupied the county courthouse in Colfax to ensure that newly appointed officials were sworn in without incident. After a six-week siege, a white militia which included members of the Knights of the White Camellia and the Old Time Ku Klux Klan numbering 140-strong determined to regain control of the courthouse. On Easter Sunday, April 13, 1873, whites attacked the courthouse, setting it on fire and brutally murdering Blacks who ran out to escape the flames. They left the bodies, estimates varied from 70 to 165, to rot where they had fallen as a lesson to local Blacks.³³ In response, under the Enforcement Acts, the government indicted ninety-eight white men, including ringleaders Christopher Columbus Nash, James and John Hadnot, William Irwin, and William Cruikshank.

³¹ Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 20.

³² *Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1873), 18-19; see also Beard, *A Crusade of Brotherhood*, 210-11.

³³ LeeAnna Keith, *Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror and the Death of Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 87-110.

The case finally came before the Supreme Court in March 1875 after an initial in-state trial ended in deadlock and a second found only three of the accused guilty of the lesser charge of conspiracy. As historian LeeAnna Keith argues, “The charges in the Colfax case addressed the most fundamental issues of federalism and human rights. What were the privileges and immunities guaranteed by the Constitution and which agency of government, federal or state, bore the chief responsibility to protect them?” The prosecution, led by James Roswell Beckwith, who lacked both the finances and resources from the government necessary to effectively fulfill his duties, argued that the federal government had responsibility to protect an individual’s Constitutional rights while the well-funded defense argued that the protection of these rights ultimately rested with the states.³⁴ In another 5-4 ruling, Chief Justice Waite agreed with the defense and ruled that the crimes committed at Colfax were “committed by private individuals against other private individuals and involved local Louisiana issues.”³⁵ Further, the Constitution, including the Bill of Rights and the recently passed Reconstruction Amendments, protected the privileges and immunities of people against state violations only. In its decision, the court’s ruling “spelled the end of federal intervention in southern civil rights and voting rights abuses.”³⁶ Writing roughly fifty years later, Du Bois concluded that this decision made both the Fourteenth and later Fifteenth Amendment “innocuous” to Blacks.³⁷

Although both rulings failed to spark immediate backlash from the CCM, within a few short years when it became obvious how these decisions undergirded the Supreme Court’s 1883 ruling that found the 1875 Civil Rights Act unconstitutional, its anger turned toward this third branch of the government that impeded their attainment of equal citizenship. Speaking to the

³⁴ Keith, *Colfax Massacre*, 132-33. For more on the case, see Keith, *Colfax Massacre*, 140-152.

³⁵ Guelzo, *Reconstruction*, 95.

³⁶ Keith, *Colfax Massacre*, 157.

³⁷ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 691.

grievous wrongs done to them by the Supreme Court during this era, Langston and Douglass were infuriated to find “the Supreme Court . . . desirous of remanding us back to that old passed condition . . . How long must we wait for State action to give us our rights?”³⁸ An article appearing in the *Christian Recorder* observed that “The judges have deliberately refused the sanction of their authority to the security of the civil rights of the colored people of the Union. They have thrown the power of the third branch of the National Government against that equality of rights which belongs to every American citizen.” The author went on to note that “Rarely in the history of free institutions has a body of men so utterly sacrificed substance to form, humanity and justice to legal precedent and popular prejudice.”³⁹ As Guelzo surmised, with these decisions, the Waite Court “created the beginnings of an arc that successor courts in the 1880s and 1890s, under Chief Justice Melville Fuller, would use to abandon civil rights protections for African Americans entirely.”⁴⁰

Since 1870, Senator Charles Sumner had sought a more expansive civil rights bill. In light of the limited protections offered by the 1866 Civil Rights Act and the Fourteenth Amendment, Sumner argued for passage of a more comprehensive bill aimed at providing social equality by guaranteeing “all citizens equal access to public accommodations, common carriers, public schools, churches, cemeteries, and jury service.” Relying on the language in the Declaration of Independence and the Sermon on the Mount as justification, Sumner intended his bill to provide the “equal rights promised by just citizenship.”⁴¹ Howard University’s president, faculty and student-body turned out during the congressional debates to express their support of

³⁸ Quoted in Guelzo, *Reconstruction*, 96.

³⁹ “Opinions of the Press,” *Christian Recorder*, October 25, 1883.

⁴⁰ Guelzo, *Reconstruction*, 96.

⁴¹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Civil Rights Act of 1875,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1965), 767. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 504.

the bill. A committee, which included Howard, delivered a published address to Sumner that urged the Senate and House to pass the bill. In their argument for passage, they declared that the bill “will guarantee us the rights to which we are entitled under the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the Constitution and the civil rights bill,” and “is essential to all classes of citizens.” And in a broad appeal to the public, they further declared:

We pray the American people through their Congress, that if it is now too late to be first just, and afterward generous, that they be at least just and generous at the same time, now that an opportunity presents itself. We have forfeited no rights, we have broken no laws, we have never rebelled against what we yet hope will be the best government the world has ever seen. On the contrary we have given our lives and our treasures unstintingly. In the Revolutionary war, in the war of 1812, and in the suppression of the great slaveholder’s rebellion, and that too for a land in which until recently, it has been our only privilege to fertilize it with our labor and bedew it with our tears. Are we, then, asking too much when we petition the Congress of the United States to give to us the same rights they propose to give to traitors and rebels? We cannot abate our efforts in this matter. Nay, we will not.⁴²

Despite possessing an overwhelming majority in Congress, the nation’s legislators, like the public, largely agreed that indeed too much was being asked of them and the country. As Congress debated the bill, Democrats unified their resistance to the bill and centered their arguments on concerns over federal overreach while also stoking fears of amalgamation. They were joined in their resistance by a number of conservative Republicans, including Senators Lot Morrill (R-ME) and Lyman Trumbull (R-IL), who questioned the constitutionality of the far-reaching bill. Sumner refused to back down, however, and shortly after Congress returned to session after the sweeping Republican victory in the 1872 election, he offered his most elaborate speech for the bill, telling his colleagues, “There is true grandeur in an example of justice, making the rights of all the same as our own, and beating down prejudice, like Satan, under our

⁴² “The Civil Rights Bill, Action at the Howard University,” *New National Era*, Jan. 18, 1872 and “Howard University and the Civil Rights Bill,” *Evening Star*, Jan. 15, 1872.

feet. Humbly do I pray that the republic may not lose this great prize, or postpone its enjoyment.” Illness would keep Sumner from maintaining pressure on his colleagues to see the bill pass throughout the remainder of 1872 until his death on March 11, 1874.⁴³

Just months before Sumner passed, Black leaders gathered in the capital for the Equal Rights Convention to apply their own pressure on Congress and President Grant to support Sumner’s bill. According to the local *National New Era* which covered the event, black delegates from twenty-five states and territories were present, making it the largest black convention ever held. The list of “ablest speakers” included Sella Martin, John M. Langston, and D. A. Straker, the latter two of Howard University.⁴⁴ They called on Congress “for a redress of many grievances,” and, employing the language of the Fourteenth Amendment, pressed for legislative action on discrimination in public education and jury boxes. In addition, they sought action that would allow them to enjoy equally “common carriers, hotels, and other public places of amusement.” Their request also included a demand for a civil rights bill “with such penalties as will teach humanity to the imbruted and compel the tyrant to lose his hold on the poor.” To the American public they delivered “a pungent and manly address” which stated in part that their “grievances are many; their inconveniences through the denial of rights great.” Finally, they marched 175-strong to the White House to speak with President Grant, who cordially received them and upon hearing them out, replied, “I have always believed that enfranchisement and equal rights should accompany emancipation. I hope the present Congress will give the relief you seek.”⁴⁵ To achieve their ends required unity and persistence. In pursuit of the former, they

⁴³ Wyatt-Brown, “The Civil Rights Act of 1875,” 766-69; Edward Lillie Pierce, *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 4 vols. (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1893), 4:500.

⁴⁴ “The National Convention,” *New National Era*, December 18, 1873.

⁴⁵ L. N. B., “The National Convention,” *Christian Recorder*, December 18, 1873; “The work of the Civil Right Convention which has just adjourned,” *Christian Recorder*, December 18, 1873; “Declaration of Principles,” *National New Era*, December 18, 1873 and “Visit to the Executive,” *New National Era*, December 18, 1873.

called on Blacks from across the country to join them in the struggle: “Come in force from every State. Come, determined on a purpose. Come, resolved that freedom shall not be only in name, but that the practical exercise of the freedmen’s right shall not be limited to the white man, who pays no more taxes, bears no more responsibilities, endures no more hardships, runs no greater risks, and is no more patriotic and brave than the black.” And in pursuit of the latter, they formed an executive committee stationed in the District to keep constant pressure on Congress and the president.⁴⁶

Despite this appeal, Sumner’s passion, and even President Grant’s endorsement, by the 1874 midterms, Sumner lay dead and the bill remained mired in congressional debate. Once again, questions about the rights associated with citizenship stood at the center of the debate with Sumner’s expansive view in the minority. Democrats who vehemently opposed the bill seized on the recent *Slaughterhouse* decision to argue against the bill’s constitutionality while all seven Black Congressmen spoke in support, citing personal accounts of discrimination and outrage.⁴⁷ Rep. Josiah Walls of Florida said that he spoke for all the “colored people” when he declared that “we demand that our lives, our liberties, and our property shall be protected by the strong arm of the Government, that gives us the same citizenship that it gives to those who it seems would, if it were possible, sink our every hope for peace, prosperity, and happiness into the great sea of oblivion.”⁴⁸ Rep. Robert Elliot of South Carolina gave perhaps the most powerful speech in response to white Georgia Rep. Alexander Stephen’s speech in opposition to the bill the previous day. Elliot declared with conviction that “The passage of this bill will determine the civil status,

⁴⁶ William Nesbit, “Call for a National Convention,” *Christian Recorder*, December 11, 1873, “Fourth Day’s Proceedings,” *New National Era*, December 18, 1873.

⁴⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 532-34. On Grant’s support of civil rights legislation, see Calhoun, *Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant*, 453.

⁴⁸ United States Congress, *Congressional Record: Containing the Proceedings and Debates of the Forty-Third Congress, Second Session*, 3 vols. (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1875), 3:167.

not only of the negro, but of any other class of citizens who may feel themselves discriminated against.” He added, “It will form the cap-stone of that temple of liberty. . . . [W]e are at last politically free. The last vestiture only is needed—civil rights.”⁴⁹

During Congress’s lame duck session in early 1875, US Representative Benjamin Butler (R-MA) finally succeeded in pushing the bill through the House as a tribute to its original author with the Senate passing the bill on February 27th and President Grant signing it into law on March 1, 1875. The landslide victory by Democrats in the 1874 midterms had exposed the eroding support for radical Reconstruction across the North. This precipitated a last ditch effort by Republicans to salvage the gains of Reconstruction with a now watered down civil rights bill stripped of the most controversial element calling for integrated schools. Although passed just before Republicans officially handed back control of Congress to the Democrats, the bill failed to secure equal citizenship for Blacks. In his assessment of the bill’s shortcomings, Bertram Wyatt-Brown concludes, “Northerners and Southerners had come to agree, as they had in the 1830’s, that basically the Negroes were undeserving of first class citizenship.” In addition, “the method of enforcement was defective. Negroes were not prepared financially or psychologically to carry their rights vigorously through the national judiciary nor was the government prepared to act for them.” When the Supreme Court ruled the act unconstitutional just eight years later, it affirmed second-class citizenship for Blacks and paved the way for Jim Crow and the entrenchment of segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson* by the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ United States Congress, *Congressional Record*, House, 43rd Congress, 1st sess. (January 6, 1874): 409–410.

⁵⁰ Wyatt-Brown, “The Civil Rights Act of 1875,” 771-74, quote on 774. See also Foner, *Reconstruction*, 553-56; Johnston, “Surviving Freedom,” 256. Johnston notes that radicals in Congress were increasingly forced to recognize during this time that, “in the absence of a firmer resolve to enforce a “social revolution”, they would have to bow, to some extent, to popular opinion.”

Labor: Land, Industrial Mission, and Interracial Organizing

The cessation of operations by the Bureau in the District in 1868 coincided with the AMA's closure of its common schools. No longer connected with the experiments at Freedmen's Village and Barry Farm or transportation of black laborers to other regions, the AMA primarily focused on supplying teachers for the night and industrial schools connected with the Colfax Industrial Mission, which changed its name to the Lincoln Mission in 1869. Initially opened in 1866, the Colfax Industrial Mission provided the AMA space to operate four day-schools for children and one night-school for adults with the former reaching around 300 children before they closed two years later. The extreme need for garments, especially during the winter season of 1867, led to the establishment in November of a sewing-school which quickly grew in size from 22 students and a few teachers to 225 students and thirteen teachers who converted 350 yards of cloth into life-saving garments. Commissioner Howard supplied the industrial school with a new building in 1868 and the AMA continued operations there until 1871.⁵¹ Elevation to the realm of proper citizenship stood at the center of this missionary effort that sought to instill a Puritan work ethic through educational and religious uplift.⁵²

In 1869, Rev. George Marden (who was white) assumed charge of the religious work at the Lincoln Mission. An informative update from him appears in the minutes of the AMA's Twenty-third Annual Meeting. After providing a brief history of the mission, Marden spoke to the difficulties he experienced in maintaining a Congregational church among Black laborers while noting their preference for any one of "the three noisy, wild and almost barbarous colored

⁵¹ *Twenty-second Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1868), 31; *Twenty-third Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1869), 17-18. According to the report, the AMA employed 15 teachers in this mission. See also "The Colfax Industrial Mission," *American Missionary*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1869, 50-52.

⁵² On industrial schools and preparation for citizenship, see Masur, *Example for All the Land*, 63-65 and Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 42 and 240-42.

church-gatherings within three square miles of this chapel.” He experienced more success with his Sabbath-school, which grew rapidly until it numbered nearly one thousand. Students from Howard University maintained the night school while Ella A. Cole ran the Industrial School made up of largely impoverished women. Marden offered a description of the “mushroom shanties” in which these women lived, comparing them to “Jonah’s gourd.” In an attempt to help delegates visualize the crisis, he told them to “Imagine ‘A building log and low, with windows all in a row, like the port-holes of a hulk,’ and divided into twelve rooms, each room having one door, and that leading out of doors.” If this image failed to impress upon them the true nature of the situation, he provided the story of Mary Rideout, a black woman age sixty on the verge of starvation. When Marden asked her, “How do you live without eating?” she replied, “Oh! I gets kind o’ used to it.” Mary’s husband, an old man, quite infirm, says, “Sometimes I goes twenty-four hours, and has nothing but water. Sometimes my daughter earns a little, and goes out and brings ten cents’ worth o’ meal, and we has a corn-cake; or she picks up rags and bones, an’ so earns a little. Any way to get along honestly, for I think I’d perish dead afore I’d steal.”⁵³ In 1870, the AMA replaced Marden with George Collins, a black graduate of Oberlin College and Princeton Theological Seminary who unexpectedly died in June 1871, bringing an end to the AMA’s involvement with the school. In memorializing Collins, the AMA referred to him as “a young man of unusual promise, and his death is a great loss to the cause of Christian education.” He was also a man of character, “one of the few colored men of the country who have an education so thorough and liberal, and a character so stable and Christian, as to qualify them for

⁵³ *Twenty-third Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1869), 18-19 and George Marden, “Washington D. C.,” *American Missionary*, vol. 14, no.1, 1870, 8-9. On the difficulties of starting a church among those at the mission, see also George Marden to E. P. Smith, December 14, 1869, AMAA. For more on the AMA’s Industrial Mission, see U.S. Congress. House, *Special Report of the Commissioner of Education*, 241-42. On shanties in DC, see also Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 62.

the duties of instructors in the growing colleges and universities established to promote impartial Christian education in the South.”⁵⁴

Just a few months after Marden’s first report on the industrial training at the Lincoln School, from December 6-10, 1869, Black leaders from across the country once again descended on Washington, DC, to discuss the matter of labor, an issue of grave importance to their community. At the Colored National Labor Convention (CNLC), Black delegates expressed their “respect and support” for the Republican Party in liberating them but drew on the Exodus narrative in noting that it had fallen short of providing “quail and manna, homes and the letter,” – a reference to political voice and office. In short, Republicans should have secured Blacks “in the soil, which we have enriched with our toil and blood, to which we have a double entitlement.”⁵⁵

While the Reconstruction amendments had secured him in life and liberty, happiness, the issue of labor remained unresolved:

The colored man’s struggle until now has been for naked existence, for the right to life and liberty; with the fifteenth amendment, henceforth his struggle will be in- pursuit of happiness; in this instance, it is to turn his labor to the most effective account, to be respected therein; this is a great problem; it is racking the brains of the ablest economists; the most we can hope to effect, at this, gathering, is a crude organization; the formation of a labor bureau to send out agents, to organize colored labor throughout the land, to effect a union with laborers without regard to color.⁵⁶

As he had earlier in the year, Reverend J. Sella Martin represented the AMA while also serving as a vice president. Lewis Douglass, son of Frederick Douglass, assisted as one of the secretaries while the Honorable James H. Harris of North Carolina served as president.⁵⁷ The delegates

⁵⁴ *Twenty-fourth Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1870), 32 and *Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1871), 23.

⁵⁵ *Proceedings of the Colored National Labor Convention Held in Washington, D. C. on December 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1869* (Washington D. C.: New Era, 1870), 3. For more on this convention, see Sumner Eliot Matison, “The Labor Movement and The Negro During Reconstruction.,” *The Journal of Negro History* 33, no. 4 (1948), 454-64.

⁵⁶ *Proceedings of the Colored National Labor Convention*, 4.

⁵⁷ “National Labor Convention,” *American Missionary*, Vol. 14, no. 2, 1870, 39.

hoped to form an interracial alliance to address the concerns of labor and in that vein, invited Republican Mayor Sayles J. Bowen and other sympathetic whites to address the convention. In his remarks, Bowen expressed his appreciation for those who gathered in what was once “the stronghold of the enemy.” He noted his support for the expressed goals of the convention, declaring that for the nation to be truly free, happy, and prosperous, its workers, the industrial class, must be free and happy.⁵⁸

As the delegates debated the issues and best path forward, they came to a consensus on several resolutions intended to secure rights and equal access to jobs for Black laborers, resolutions which aligned very closely with those of the AMA. They resolved that Black laborers possessed the “right to labor in the field of industry which they are capacitated and the right to receive an equivalent for labor done.” They encouraged temperance and noted the great need for education, “the bulwark of American citizenship” that needed to be liberally disbursed without regard to race, creed or sex.” They sought equal access for freedpeople to learning the trades as both a means of education and a way to impress upon them the honorable nature of labor habits of economy which stood as the safeguard of free republican institutions. Indeed, exclusion by trade unions were “an insult to God, injury to us, disgrace to humanity.” Some progress had been made and they expressed thanks to Howard and Bureau for key educational advances and the widespread promotion of free schools across the South.⁵⁹

John Langston addressed the delegates and noted that while the Black laborer in the South possessed a unique and unequalled skillset to work the soil and raise both sugar and cotton,

⁵⁸ *Proceedings of the Colored National Labor Convention*, 4-7.

⁵⁹ *Proceedings of the Colored National Labor Convention*, 10-12; see Henry Martyn Scudder, “Annual Sermon,” *Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1871), 81-88 and Edward J Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 55-56.

they sought something more. “We seek a better and broader opportunity to gain knowledge in the fields of agricultural, mechanical, commercial, artistic and professional labor, and this knowledge we would energise, direct, and make more largely effective through the enlightening and sanctifying influence of education.” He argued for the opening of trades and apprenticeships to black children with fair and full remuneration. He also expressed his support for a color-blind National Bureau of Industry with the goal of establishing a fair working relationship between capital and labor.⁶⁰ White allies Senator Henry Wilson, Josephine Griffing, and Howard followed Langston with Griffing speaking on women’s suffrage and labor discrimination against women while Howard spoke in support of a co-operative system between labor and capital.⁶¹ George Vashon, the first African American graduate of Oberlin and a tutor at Howard University, spoke next and praised the AMA as an ally for their efforts in educating labor before and during the war and also expressed gratitude for Howard and the Bureau for promoting and funding education. At the behest of J. Sella Martin, the Convention passed resolutions thanking the AMA for leading the educational work in the South and called on all able blacks to support it.⁶²

Delegates then turned their attention to Congress and in a Memorial stated the problems faced by the black laborer in the South. They needed land and regretted that they did not receive it as expected after the war. The South remained a “land monopoly” that needed to be overthrown as it “impoverishes the freedman.” They recommended a special tax on large estates to force white southerners to sell parcels so that freedmen might be able to secure this most

⁶⁰ *Proceedings of the Colored National Labor Convention*, 17-21.

⁶¹ *Proceedings of the Colored National Labor Convention*, 21-22.

⁶² *Proceedings of the Colored National Labor Convention*, 28-29, 33. For Black laborers as unrivaled cultivators, see also Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 353. For Langston’s work at Howard University, see Dyson, *Howard University*, 348-53.

treasured goal. They also noted that the black laborer sought protection of his civil rights.⁶³ Finally, delegates formed the Colored National Labor Union (CNLU) and in its Prospectus declared the question of the hour: “How can the working man best improve his condition?” The “Aim of every man to become a capitalist; that is, every man should try and receive an exchange for his labor.” Black laborers, like their white counterparts, aspired to become owners of their own homes and place themselves “beyond the reach of want and poverty.” The goal of the CNLU was to advise the fastest means to better the workers’ condition in the United States. To achieve this, they recommended the organizing of workers, trade unions, and building and land associations. The benefits brought by organizing would allow them to “have the command of capital, the key to everything including the enjoyment of all the rights of American citizenship.”⁶⁴ The new mouthpiece for their campaign and labor issues would be a newspaper, the *New Era*, edited and published by J. Sella Martin and Frederick Douglass.⁶⁵ Several delegates met with President Grant in DC and the story was carried in the *Christian Recorder*. In the productive interview, Grant said, “I am very glad to meet a delegation from the working men of the country. I heartily sympathize with the movements now generally in progress to secure their rights. . . . So far as in my power I will endeavor to secure ample protection for them, and for all classes. The time has passed when the persons and property of citizens can be endangered by their loyalty to the Government.”⁶⁶ Despite the enthusiasm expressed for an interracial CNLU, the union failed to attract white members. By 1872, it ceased functioning as a labor

⁶³ *Proceedings of the Colored National Labor Convention*, 23-24 and 29-33.

⁶⁴ *Proceedings of the Colored National Labor Convention*, 16 and 41-45.

⁶⁵ *Proceedings of the Colored National Labor Convention*, 16.

⁶⁶ “Visit of a Delegation of the Colored National Convention to the President on Saturday,” *Christian Recorder*, January 1, 1870.

organization altogether and became a wing of the Republican Party under the leadership of Frederick Douglass.⁶⁷

In DC, an urban setting where precious little farm land existed, pursuing equality in labor proved especially difficult. During these years, the AMA promoted migration to regions with cheap land but in the capital primarily involved themselves with educating the black laborer so he or she could negotiate contracts or, with industrial training, secure a job that could support a family.⁶⁸ Despite the efforts of both the AMA, CCM, and CNLU, Black Washingtonians by and large remained locked in low-wage jobs throughout the 1870s. Part of the problem was tied to the contract system that had been introduced by the Freedmen's Bureau to aid the freedpeople in receiving fair remuneration for their labor. As historian Amy Dru Stanley notes, nineteenth-century wage labor often rested on verbal agreements and not signed contracts. Often no paperwork existed for those hired as day laborers or for short-term contracts, and in some cases, laborers did not even negotiate with their employer but perhaps with a foreman. The informal nature of labor agreements in an urban setting like Washington DC left Black Washingtonians with a veneer of protection that for all practical purposes did little to advance them out of grinding poverty.⁶⁹ To achieve upward mobility, historian Allan Johnston argues, required either "acquiring skills, gaining recognition for existing skills, or acquiring wealth" to attain personal independence or establish a business but "all three avenues were blocked for blacks in Washington in the 1870s." With widespread discrimination, the US government provided the

⁶⁷ Matison, "The Labor Movement and The Negro During Reconstruction," 466-67.

⁶⁸ For AMA promotions of land ownership, see "Lands for the Freedmen," *American Missionary*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1869, 110-11; "Iowa Lands Offered for Sale," *American Missionary*, vol. 14, no. 9, 1870, 202-03; Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*, 26-27. For industrial school training, see Colfax Industrial Mission (later Lincoln Industrial School) under Education.

⁶⁹ Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 36-37, 55-56, and 63-68. On postwar problems with contracts, see also Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 413-14.

best chance for Blacks to secure a living wage but out of 12,690 jobs, only 822 went to Blacks and of those, almost half were simple laborers. Johnston concludes that blacks in Washington remained occupationally locked, demonstrating “very little tendency to move up or down the occupational ladder.”⁷⁰

Education – Integrated Public Schools and Howard University

In the immediate years after the war, the AMA and other benevolent organizations had poured resources and manpower into establishing common schools for Blacks across the District, an effort close to Howard’s heart and one that received the full support of the Bureau he led.⁷¹ With the establishment of a segregated public school system in 1868 and the subsequent closure of these common schools, a drop-off in Black education occurred. One year later, concerns about the lack of educational facilities in the sparsely populated Fourth ward led a rare interracial alliance of white and black residents to push for one integrated school to serve the region’s 100 children. While Mayor Bowen and other city officials debated the request, Rev. J. Sella Martin, now pastor of Fifteenth St. Presbyterian Church, “chose to test public opinion and clarify the situation by sending his fair-skinned nine-year-old daughter to a white school.” This school, Franklin School, had just opened and was considered the most prominent white school in the District. Although the principal accepted the child, things turned ugly when several white parents discovered the girl’s racial background and withdrew their children.

The February edition of the *American Missionary* carried the story and reproduced William Patton’s article in the *Advance* (Chicago) which rebuked the city for excluding Martin’s daughter “on account of a slight tinge of colored blood.” Patton, a friend of Martin’s who had traveled with him in Europe in 1865 on behalf of the AMA, detailed the reception Martin

⁷⁰ Johnston, “Surviving Freedom,” 254 and 313-20. For quote, see 320 and 316.

⁷¹ Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 67.

received in Great Britain where he had been welcomed into the highest of social circles including a private interview with Queen Victoria. He concluded his rebuke of white Washingtonians by noting the irony that those who rejected having Martin's daughter educated alongside their own were the very same who "if visiting Great Britain, could not obtain admittance into good society, where Mr. Martin was an ever welcome guest."⁷² The hot topic left city officials on edge and they ultimately determined to let its resolution rest with Congress, which they hoped would move on the question quickly.⁷³

A few months after this incident, in February 1870, US Representative George Frisbie Hoar (R-MA) introduced the first bill to establish a national system of education. However, concerns about federal overreach, corruption, and the poor performance of District schools sparked resistance to the bill from both sides of the aisle, with legislators preferring that schools remain the concern of local entities.⁷⁴ Although, as historian Ward McAfee notes, "Mixed schools were both the logical extension of the common school idea and the Republican civil rights movement, the overwhelming majority of whites at that time refused to consider sending their children to schools with significant numbers of black children."⁷⁵ As the House debated Hoar's bill, Senator Charles Sumner introduced a bill in the Senate to establish a mixed school system in Washington, DC, a move supported by a number of prominent blacks, including Martin. Republicans, eager to avoid charges of encouraging amalgamation, failed to convince Sumner to shelve the bill. Once out in the open, the national implications of Sumner's bill became visible for all to see.⁷⁶

⁷² "Caste in Washington," *American Missionary*, vol. 14 no. 2, 1870, 38-39.

⁷³ Green, *The Secret City*, 97-100, quote on 100; see also DeBoer, *His Truth Is Marching On*, 136; Masur, *Example for All the Land*, 168-70.

⁷⁴ Ward McAfee, *Religion, Race, and Reconstruction: The Public School in the Politics of the 1870s*, SUNY Series, Religion and American Public Life (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 106.

⁷⁵ McAfee, *Religion, Race, and Reconstruction*, 85-86, 111.

⁷⁶ McAfee, *Religion, Race, and Reconstruction*, 110-24.

In DC, whites as well as a significant number of blacks expressed opposition to the bill with the former fearing race mixing and the latter the elimination of black teachers and a palpable environment of discrimination which would impede their children's education. These lower-class Blacks received support for their concerns from former Brown University president and the general agent of the Peabody Education Fund, Barnas Sears, who prized the advancement of education over integration, arguing that integration at this moment in time would only alienate the white support needed to establish public education across the South.⁷⁷ Although the issue technically remained alive in Sumner's Civil Rights Act, the reorganization of the capital's structure of governance, the Panic of 1873 and the Republican Party's crushing defeat in the 1874 midterms buried the issue. Political losses and concerns about the financial crisis combined to erode remaining House Republicans' support for a measure that required a massive influx of federal funds.⁷⁸ The District's schools would continue to struggle for financial resources until 1878, when they finally received the proper funding to meet local educational needs.⁷⁹

Howard University

When politicians, residents, and visitors traversed the bumpy dirt roads on their way to Washington, DC, in 1869, two recently completed buildings dominated the skyline, and both represented the early societal transformation that sparked hope in the AMA and their allies. The first, the US Capitol building, housed members of Congress, including seven Black men who had

⁷⁷ McAfee, *Religion, Race, and Reconstruction*, 128. McAfee notes that sociologists and historians, W. E. B. DuBois and John Hope Franklin, both acknowledged the importance of maintaining separate schools in this era if black children were to receive the education they needed. On beauty of Howard University, see "Howard University," *American Missionary*, vol. 13, no. 6, 1869, 131.

⁷⁸ Masur, *Example for All the Land*, 167-71 and 188-94.

⁷⁹ Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 137.

won seats to legislate alongside some of the most powerful white men from across the country.⁸⁰ These men collectively bore great responsibility for the course of Reconstruction, a process of transformation or reunification depending on whom one asked. The second, Howard University, prepared for the third year to welcome another class of students to its growing campus. While the congressmen who conducted the nation's business in the Capitol represented the most powerful segment of American society, the majority of those attending Howard University were both impoverished and underprivileged, with many having been classified as property and thus devoid of any of the rights and protections of citizenship just a few years prior.⁸¹ This fact was not lost on the university's trustees nor the students who entered within its walls.

From its inception, Howard University intended to graduate model citizens who possessed the academic credentials and respectability to educate and lead the fight for equality and civil rights. Alongside this goal, the university also sought to serve as a beacon drawing in curious parties, including politicians and philanthropists, to have their prejudices challenged. In his autobiography, Howard recalled, in the year after the war, escorting former Congressman Kenneth Rayner of North Carolina through the capital's Wayland Seminary, an institution dedicated to educating African Americans. After observing the students, Howard noted with pride that Rayner had changed his mind about the educational abilities of African Americans. Whereas before entering the school Rayner had declared, "General Howard, do you not know that you are educating the colored youth above their business? You will only destroy them." After the visit, however, he experienced a change of heart and stated, "General, you have

⁸⁰ The nation's first seven Black Congressmen were: Senator Hiram Revels (MS), Representatives Benjamin Turner (AL), Robert DeLarge (SC), Josiah Walls (FL), Jefferson Long (GA), Joseph Rainey (SC), and Robert Elliott (SC). For more on these men, see Philip Dray, *Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction through the Lives of the First Black Congressmen* (Boston: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Co., 2010).

⁸¹ Urofsky, *Supreme Decisions*, 85-87.

converted me!” Howard hoped Howard University would convert many more skeptics like Rayner.⁸² Three years later when he took over as president of the university, he referenced in his first annual report that the institution hosted between thirty and forty visitors a day.⁸³ The board of trustees hoped that the guests and the graduates who emerged from Howard University would unequivocally proclaim to a skeptical and deeply prejudiced American public that race did not inhibit freedpeople from the full attainment of citizenship.

For their part, the African American students, who formed the majority of the student body, left Howard University determined to show the nation that they intended to enter all levels of society. In this regard, the students’ radical goals matched that of the university’s trustees and Howard, who served as president from 1869 to 1873.⁸⁴ Although Howard biographer, William McFeely, has in his evaluation of him as Bureau commissioner discounted and even dismissed any discussion of Howard as a race radical, Howard’s vision for the university that bears his name, the over half a million in Freedmen’s Bureau funds that he issued to help establish it, and his leadership while president, undermine those conclusions. As president, Howard threw his support behind the university’s radical hope for Reconstruction, a mission to train up a hard-working, Protestant-leaning, and educated citizenry in a coeducational environment.⁸⁵ However, instead of its graduates dramatically altering white society’s perspective on African Americans

⁸² Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:391-93. For more on Kenneth Rayner, see Gregg Cantrell, *Kenneth and John B. Rayner and the Limits of Southern Dissent* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). Interestingly, this same Kenneth Rayner surrendered the city of Raleigh to Gen. Hugh Judson Kilpatrick on April 13, 1865, see “The North Carolina Campaign: Occupation of Smithville and Capture of Raleigh,” *New York Times*, Apr. 30, 1865.

⁸³ *Annual Report of Howard University*, 1869, 6, O. O. Howard Papers and “Address of General Howard on Second Anniversary of Howard University,” quoted in the *American Missionary*, Vol. 13, no. 8, 1869.

⁸⁴ Technically Howard served as President of Howard University until 1874, but for that final year, he did so in absentia as Vice President John Mercer Langston ran the day-to-day operations, see Logan, *Howard University*, 59-63.

⁸⁵ In William S. McFeely’s negative assessment of Howard, he concluded that both “Howard and his faith failed the freedmen.” William S. McFeely, *Yankee Stepfather: General O. O. Howard and the Freedmen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 7. For Bureau funds directed toward Howard University, see Logan, *Howard University*, 60 and 63. For Howard’s hopes for Reconstruction, see Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 92-93.

as he had hoped, the students who emerged from Howard University during the postwar years of Grant's presidency served only to expose the entrenched racism that ultimately undermined the postwar civil rights movement and paved the way for Jim Crow.

The earliest graduates of Howard University not only provided undeniable evidence that they were the intellectual equal of whites but they also refused to acquiesce in the face of discrimination and remained active in the postwar fight for a colorblind casteless citizenship. The motto of the 1874 graduating class of teachers, "Acorns before Oaks," aptly captures the prevailing sentiment of the university's earliest graduates. Douglass's *New National Era* remarked that it was a fitting motto as members of this graduating class who had entered the university under Howard's presidency "seemed acorns, but were now oaks that would require much to uproot, and can now defy all winds."⁸⁶

Operating in the heart of the capital, Congregationalists, including members of the AMA, implemented their postwar vision for societal transformation through this co-educational university that offered a high-quality education in a colorblind casteless setting. In so doing, it borrowed not only Oberlin's educational model but also its leaders, who filled important roles within the university during these years that were intended to establish a new foundation for the nation's future, an interracial one based on equality. Over the course of the 1870s, the graduates of Howard University, both men and women, proved significant beyond their numbers, a true representation of Du Bois's "Talented Tenth." And although he was derided as a "negrohobbist" and "negrophilist," Howard, alongside the university's black student body, refused to accept anything less than equal citizenship. Collectively, they engaged in political activism and challenged societal norms, all the while facing the ridicule, discrimination, and violence of a

⁸⁶ Rhoderice, "Annual Commencement of the Normal Department of Howard University," *New National Era*, Jun. 6, 1874.

nation more willing, even desirous, to accept former rebels back into the national fold than those who had always proven themselves loyal.⁸⁷

When Howard accepted the presidency of Howard University in April 1869, the Normal and Preparatory Department for training teachers had already been going for two years.⁸⁸ During his tenure, the Normal School, attended largely by women since teaching was considered women's work, granted diplomas to thirty-three graduates while the Preparatory Department, largely male since college training was considered men's work, had fifty-four graduates.⁸⁹ The focus on training teachers stood at the forefront in Howard's mind, second only to training pastors. He believed that education would provide relief for the freedpeople from "beggary and dependence." In his autobiography, he declared schools for the training of black teachers a "plain necessity" and added that his "own strong wish was ever to lay permanent substructures and build thereon as rapidly as possible, in order to give as many good teachers, professional men, and leaders to the rising generation of freedmen as we could, during the few years of Governmental control."⁹⁰ Howard's dedication to this vision led him to speak on the need for a cabinet-level Department of Education, one stronger than the War or Navy Department, at the 1870 annual meeting of the American Missionary Association. He believed it should incorporate not just African Americans, but Native Americans and Chinese immigrants, who also stood on

⁸⁷ "A Radical Feud," Nashville *Union and American*, Dec. 3, 1868; "The Row Between Gen. Howard and Chaplain Boynton," Galveston *Daily News*, Dec. 3, 1868. Other negative representations of Howard and the feud include "A Row in a Church," Chicago *Tribune*, November 24, 1868; "Christianity Controlling Radicalism," Leavenworth *Daily Commercial*, Dec. 4, 1868; and "The Loyal at Loggerheads," *Spirit of Jefferson* (Charles Town, West Virginia), Dec. 8, 1868. On Oberlin connection and social equality, see Strieby, *Oberlin and the American Missionary Association* (Oberlin, 1891) and Logan, *Howard University*, 67.

⁸⁸ Board of Trustees to Oliver Otis Howard, Apr. 1, 1869, O. O. Howard Papers. For more on the early years of the Normal and Preparatory departments at Howard University, see Logan, *Howard University*, 33-39. Logan notes that the Normal Department consisted primarily of women while the preparatory department consisted primarily of men reflecting the gendered expectations of the day in which women taught in the schools and men prepared students for college, 37.

⁸⁹ Logan, *Howard University*, 36-37.

⁹⁰ Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:390-391 and 2:395.

the periphery of the body politic. Concerns about an overpowering federal government alongside the sheer enormity and cost of such a task stirred up formidable opposition, but Howard held firm, arguing it would be money well spent and a better plan than building more prisons.⁹¹ Some of the distinguished individuals connected with the university's Normal and Collegiate Departments include Inman Page, Martha B. Briggs, and Oberlin's own James Monroe Gregory.

Inman Page, who graduated from the Normal Department in 1873, had been born a slave in Warrenton, Virginia, in 1853. He escaped, along with his parents, Horace and Elizabeth, to Washington, DC, in 1862. Once in the District, Inman attended a private school run by George F. T. Cook before continuing his education in Professor George B. Vashon's night school. Shortly after Howard University opened, he determined to attend but, unable to pay, began working on the grounds to pay for his education there. Noted for his temperance and somberness, Page graduated from Howard University in 1873 and thereafter entered Brown University, the first black student to attend the prestigious institution. Despite the discrimination he faced, Page revealed himself to be a gifted orator. He graduated from Brown in 1877 with a Masters of Arts degree and took a position at Natchez Seminary in Mississippi and later at Lincoln Institute in Jefferson City, Missouri, where he won praise for his efforts to "elevate the colored race."⁹²

Martha B. Briggs, the daughter of black abolitionists from New Bedford, Massachusetts, John Briggs and Fannie Bassett Briggs, was the first black female to graduate from New Bedford High School. Upon completing her studies, she began teaching the self-liberated, who had arrived in New Bedford on the Underground Railroad, in her father's home. She moved to Washington, DC, in 1869 to accept a teaching position in one of the local public schools for

⁹¹ "American Missionary Association. Last Day's Session at Lawrence," Boston *Daily Journal*, Nov. 11, 1870.

⁹² William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 474-80; "Local News," *Evening Star*, October 9, 1876; Logan, *Howard University*, 37.

black children. The excellent reputation she earned in DC's public school system earned her the praise of the board of trustees and the attention of officials of Howard University, who hired her to teach in its Normal Department in 1873. Alongside her responsibilities training teachers, Briggs ran the city's Monday Night Literary Club and served as the president of the Industrial Institute Association of Washington, DC, where she focused on providing Blacks with the tools and training needed to find work. She remained in the District serving its African American community until her death in 1889.⁹³

James Monroe Gregory had been born free in Lexington, Virginia, in 1849 to Henry L. and Maria A. Gregory. At the age of ten, the family moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where Gregory began his education. In 1865, after having returned to Ohio, he enrolled in Oberlin College's Preparatory Department, calling the college the only such institution in the North that went beyond merely accommodating African Americans but truly welcoming them with "officers and students heartily enlisted in the anti-slavery cause."⁹⁴ While there, he established life-long friendships with gentlemen now all residing in Washington including John M. Langston, Charles B. Purvis, John H. Cook, O. S. B. Wall, George W. Mitchell, and George Collins. Denied a cadetship at West Point by President Johnson, Gregory instead accepted an offer from Howard to complete his studies at Howard University, whereupon he was granted a position as instructor in the Preparatory Department. In 1872, he graduated as class valedictorian and was made tutor of Latin and mathematics in the Preparatory Department. Three years later, he received an appointment as professor of Latin in the College Department. In Washington, he took up church membership at First Congregational Church and involved himself in the key political and social

⁹³ Logan, *Howard University*, 57; "Public School Examinations," *Evening Star*, June 03, 1873 and "Howard University," *New National Era*, August 27, 1874. See also Lawson A. Scruggs, *Women of Distinction* (Raleigh NC, 1893), 345-51.

⁹⁴ Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 632.

debates of the time, including protesting against the establishment of segregated schools in the District. A gifted orator, Gregory made numerous speeches throughout his career on topics ranging from the Republican Party to the advent of Black Troops during the Civil War to the DC Emancipation Day Anniversary. In one particular address entitled “New Leaders,” he declared, “We want, we demand leaders, first of all, who are not ashamed of the race; who are possessed of brains, character, courage, zeal and tact. We want leaders who know the history of the race’s trials, struggles, and achievements, and who can from that history draw inspiration for the great work to be accomplished.”⁹⁵

Education, Congregationalists like Howard believed, could unite and equip African Americans and poor whites to be virtuous citizens. The declaration in the university’s catalog from Howard’s first year as president captured the school’s vision: “Every teacher trained, is the nucleus of a school, more or less numerous; every school carries the lamp of civilization into the homes that make up a community; and every community thus blessed contributes largely to the general peace and welfare of the land.”⁹⁶ The challenge proved daunting and yet Howard saw promising results from the very beginning. In an article for the *American Missionary*, he noted that “History fails to furnish us an example of a race elevated from such a degree of degradation to citizenship, with but four years of education, quietly exercising the rights and privileges of freemen, without arrogance or presumption.”⁹⁷ Although just recently converted from slaves into citizens, freedpeople had, in Howard’s mind, demonstrated their fitness for equal citizenship through academic achievement and the all-important signs of societal respectability. Nowhere

⁹⁵ Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 631-46. For quotation, see 641.

⁹⁶ “1869-70: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University,” Howard University Catalogs, 4 and 90, O. Howard Papers.

⁹⁷ Oliver Otis Howard, “The Black Scholar,” *American Missionary*, Vol. 13, 1869.

did this appear more evident than in the university's law department, which John Mercer Langston agreed to organize in October 1868.

When he accepted the role of dean of Howard University's Law Department, Langston became the first and only black administrator on campus and solidified his reputation as the second most influential African American of the era next to Frederick Douglass.⁹⁸ Langston had begun his legal career in Ohio in 1854 and during the Civil War also recruited African American troops, helping to fill the ranks of both the black Massachusetts' regiments and the newly created US Colored Troops.⁹⁹ When it first opened its doors in September 1869, the department had just a handful of students but under Langston's care, that number quickly grew. Albert Gallatin Riddle, a local white lawyer who before the war supported abolition and provided the defense for Charles Langston, O. S. B. Wall, and the other men connected to the Oberlin-Wellington trial, taught alongside Langston in the department.¹⁰⁰ During the war, Riddle helped with the enlistment of African American troops and shortly after was retrained by the State Department for the prosecution of John H. Surratt in connection with the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Langston referred to Riddle as "a lawyer of first-class ability, accomplishment and influence, possessing national name, and as being a lecturer of rare qualities of learning and effective address."¹⁰¹ Collectively, both Langston and Riddle challenged societal norms and pushed for equal citizenship.

In March 1869, a local correspondent for the Cincinnati *Daily Gazette* published a report on the law lectures given at Howard University by Professor Riddle. The writer drew particular

⁹⁸ Logan, *Howard University*, 48 and 64. President Howard invited its second, Rev. John Reeve (Theological Dept.), in 1871.

⁹⁹ Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 198-217; see also Douglas R. Egerton, *Thunder at the Gates: The Black Civil War Regiments that Redeemed America* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 72, 82, 180-81.

¹⁰⁰ Shipherd, *History of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue*, 4, 14.

¹⁰¹ Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 303.

attention to Riddle's controversial remarks on women's rights. Riddle declared that "young women, like young men, should have the right at full age to govern themselves." Despite the fact that society appeared unprepared for this change, he cited the example of labor disputes and petitions for an eight-hour work day as evidence of the progress being made for readjustment in that sector. He emphasized that "The relation of the sexes are to be so readjusted that the disabilities of women will disappear."¹⁰² Two years later and in alignment with the arguments of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Riddle employed the recently passed Fourteenth Amendment in defense of women's suffrage in a speech at the Suffrage Convention in Washington. There he argued that the right to self-governance is inherent in the people and since women form a portion of the people, the right resides in them. He added that "The only means placed in the hands of the individual citizen by which he may accomplish his portion of this great task [self-governance] is the ballot. . . ." Citing the "privileges and immunities" clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, Riddle determined that such "privileges and immunities" of necessity include the elective franchise.¹⁰³

Several months later, Riddle took this argument before the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia on behalf of two female plaintiffs who sought to register to vote. The Court rejected their suit, however, and defaulted to local law which specifically excluded women from the franchise. In addressing Riddle's "ingenious" Fourteenth Amendment argument, the justices determined that citizenship does not necessarily include the right of franchise. According to the

¹⁰² "Howard University Law Lectures," Cincinnati *Daily Gazette*, March 24, 1869. See also, Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 98-100.

¹⁰³ Albert G. Riddle, *The right of women to exercise the elective franchise under the Fourteenth Article of the Constitution: speech of A.G. Riddle, in the suffrage convention at Washington, the argument was made in support of the Woodhull memorial, before the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives, and reproduced in the convention* (Washington, D.C.: Judd & Detweiler Printers, 1871). Web: <https://lccn.loc.gov/91898426>. Riddle's speech in the suffrage convention at Washington took place on Jan. 11, 1871.

official record, upon hearing the decision of the Court, Mr. Riddle in open court, “prayed an appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States.”¹⁰⁴ The answer to those prayers would be delayed for almost fifty years.

In October 1868 and at Howard’s behest, the board of trustees tasked Langston with organizing the law department, an endeavor of immense importance. According to historian John Clay Smith, from the outset, “The aim of Howard University’s law school was to train predominantly black male and female students in the principles of law, to aid these men and women in the law knowledge that would allow them to lead the freedmen out from under laws, rules, regulations, and human conduct that denied, negated, or restrained the virtue of liberty.”¹⁰⁵ Starting with just six students who could barely read or write, the program grew to forty-six within a year. Langston proved immensely successful in convincing African Americans of the vital importance of breaking into the ranks of a predominantly white field of study for the purpose of protecting black rights in light of the recent ratification of both the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments.¹⁰⁶

During Howard’s presidency, the Langston-led law department graduated thirty-eight lawyers.¹⁰⁷ Langston wrote that “the commencement exercises were of a very high order, and drew large audiences of the very best people, white and colored, of Washington to the First Congregational Church, where they were always held.”¹⁰⁸ Howard spoke at the first graduation

¹⁰⁴ *Sara J. Spencer v. The Board of Registration, and Sarah E. Webster v. The Judges of Election*: argument of the counsel for the plaintiffs: with the opinions of the court. Reported by J. O. Clephane (Washington, D.C.: Judd & Detweiler, Printers and Publishers), 1871.

¹⁰⁵ Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 180; J. Clay Smith, *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844-1944* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 43.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *Emancipation*, 43. For more on Langston’s leadership at Howard University, see Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 296-317 and Maxwell Bloomfield, “John Mercer Langston and the Rise of Howard Law School.” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Washington, D.C 71/72, (1971): 421-438.

¹⁰⁷ Logan, *Howard University*, 49-50.

¹⁰⁸ Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 304.

ceremony in 1871 and outlined the significance of students' achievement which had been done despite "the bitter prejudice and hostility of those who would condemn them unless they fall in with their own preconceived notions." The thirteen graduates, Howard observed, "occupy necessarily a more prominent position than is usual, because the University is located at this focus of observation [Washington]." He ended his remarks by offering the benediction which entailed a call to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all they soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength and Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Senator Sumner, who withdrew from his previous commitment to speak at Columbia's Law School graduation to address this graduation class, took the stage next and delivered a powerful address on the important role he expected Howard's inaugural law graduates to play in society. He reminded them that "they belong to a race which for long generations has been oppressed and despoiled of rights" and such realization demands that they be "vigilant and sensitive defenders of all who suffer in any way from wrong." Later he called them to be "faithful, constant, and brave in the sacred cause of justice." He closed by drawing their attention to a fact no doubt uppermost in their minds: "You are free, God be praised! But you are still shut out from the rights that are justly yours. You yourselves must strike the blow, not by violence, but by every mode known to the Constitution and the law." In his final words, he told them to "insist upon equal rights everywhere; and make others insist upon them. I hold you to this allegiance; first, by the race from which you are sprung; and secondly, by the profession by which you now espouse."¹⁰⁹ At a time when African Americans desperately needed educated

¹⁰⁹ "Address of Gen. O. O. Howard and Hon. Chas. Sumner at the Exercises of the Howard University Law Class," *New National Era*, Feb. 9, 1871. On Sumner passing on the opportunity to speak at Columbia's Law School graduation, see Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 304. For list of graduates, see *Directory of Graduates: Howard University, Washington D. C. 1870-1963*, (Washington D. C. Howard University Press, 1965), 507. According to Logan, *Howard University*, 48-49, Charles Howard expressed similar sentiments about the purpose of the Law Department.

leaders, especially those trained in law, early graduates like George L. Mabson, John H. Cook, Charles N. Thomas, John H. Cook, O. S. B. Wall, Charlotte Ray, John A. Moss, D. Augustus Straker, John Henry Smythe, and John Wesley Cromwell went on to become distinguished leaders in their community.

Admittedly, the records of some of Howard University's earliest graduates are difficult to trace, but small sampling of graduates that follows reveals the level of success the institution achieved in equipping students for careers that had been largely off-limits to them less than a decade earlier. The university's records also speaks to the progressive nature of the school that placed both men and women, black and white, in leadership positions. Collectively, the actions of the students, faculty, and administration demonstrate the myriad of ways in which these individuals challenged the nation's prejudice and discrimination while providing an example of a harmonious and interracial society for all Washingtonians to see. To the African American community, the Black graduates who emerged from Howard University attained local and national recognition and became celebrated heroes, men and women who embodied the potential of their race.

George L. Mabson, a member of Howard University's inaugural law class, was graduating that night and he represented the exact type of individual the university hoped would challenge societal perceptions of and discrimination against African Americans. Mabson was a Civil War veteran who had enlisted into Company G of the Massachusetts 5th Cavalry on March 4, 1864 and had been mustered out on Oct 31, 1865. He enrolled in Howard University's Law School in 1869 and two years later passed the bar in Washington, DC, before returning to his native North Carolina. He became the first black lawyer in North Carolina and successfully

defended two clients charged with murder, winning acquittals for both.¹¹⁰ An article on Mabson in the *New National Era* referenced the fact that Mabson was active in North Carolina politics and his Baptist church. He also served as president of the State Labor Bureau and provided leadership to African Americans across the state, many of whom looked to him for guidance during the difficult days of Reconstruction.¹¹¹

Charles N. Thomas, a classmate of Mabson, graduated the same evening and then “handled claims before the Southern Claims Commission, representing ‘Southern loyalists against the government for . . . supplies taken or furnished the U.S. Army during the rebellion.’”¹¹² According to San Francisco’s *Daily Bulletin*, Thomas distinguished himself in the local courts by “making the first plea ever made by one of his race in the criminal courts of Washington in defense of a negro who was on trial for killing his wife.”¹¹³ Graduating in the same class as Thomas, John H. Cook and 1872 graduate O. S. B. Wall distinguished themselves in the District’s courtrooms as well, but are perhaps most notable for leading the effort to integrate First Congregational Church.¹¹⁴

In 1872, the Law School recorded a significant milestone when it graduated its first black female lawyer, Charlotte E. Ray, the daughter of AMA founding member, Charles Bennett Ray,

¹¹⁰ “Personal Items,” San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, Jan. 28, 1871; Smith, *Emancipation*, 201-02; for his military record, see The American Civil War Research Database: George Mabson, <https://asp6new-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/cwdb/cwdb.object.details.aspx?handle=person&id=100085552>.

¹¹¹ “Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University” (1896), 26, O. O. Howard Papers. Catalogs, 26; “Sketch of the Hon. Geo. L. Mabson, of North Carolina,” *New National Era*, Jun. 29, 1871.

¹¹² “Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University” (1896), 26, O. O. Howard Papers; Smith, *Emancipation*, 130.

¹¹³ “Latest News Items,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, Oct. 16 1872.

¹¹⁴ First Congregational Church, Book 1: “Minutes and Record of the First Congregational Church of Washington, (1865-1887),” November 25, 1867. The church split is also discussed in Alldredge, *Centennial History of First Congregational*, 21-28 and Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 191-208. While Alldredge does not provide the name of either men, Carpenter notes just John H. Cook’s involvement but mistakenly refers to him as John F. Cook. For more on Cook’s legal legacy, see *Evening Star*, Mar. 10, 1879 and *National Republican*, Mar. 13, 1879. For Wall, see Sharfstein, *The Invisible Line*, 151-79 and “Death of a Leading Colored Citizen, Who was a Distinguished Solider,” *Washington Post*, Apr. 28, 1891.

a famed New York abolitionist, preacher, and editor of the *Colored American*.¹¹⁵ The admittance of Charlotte Ray along with former abolitionist Mary Ann Shadd Cary made national headlines, even more so when Ray successfully passed the bar and became the first woman in the District to do so. Despite the *Boston Daily Advertiser* suggesting Ray lacked the proper comportment to practice law, she nevertheless began a legal career that spanned over twenty years.¹¹⁶ In 1893, Ray, now well-known for her eloquence, received recognition as one of the best corporate layers in the city. Unfortunately, prejudice impeded her ability to maintain a successful practice and by the end of the century, she moved to Brooklyn, New York, married, and started teaching school. In spite of this transition, Ray had blazed a trail for other women, some of whom used her example to argue for their own admittance to the bar in other states.¹¹⁷

Born free in 1842 in Barbados to John and Margaret Straker, D. Augustus Straker received his education on the island before rising to the position of principal at Codrington College in Barbados. In 1868, he accepted an invitation to come to America and help educate the freedpeople under the auspices of the Protestant Church of America. Upon arrival, he began teaching classes for the Episcopal Church and Freedmen's Bureau in Kentucky. When Langston toured the South in 1868, he promoted the nascent Law School at Howard University to those he met. Upon hearing him, Straker determined to pursue his degree there.¹¹⁸ While in the District,

¹¹⁵ "Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University" (1896). Howard University Catalogs, 27; Smith, *Emancipation*, 55.

¹¹⁶ "A Young Colored Lady Named Charlotte E. Ray, Daughter of Rev. Charles B. Ray, Has Commenced the Study of Law in the Law Department of Howard University, Washington, D. C." Lowell *Daily Citizen and News*, Feb. 23, 1870 and "The First Colored Woman to Enter upon the Study of Law in the United States is Miss Charlotte E. Ray, daughter of Rev. Charles B. Ray." Bangor *Daily Whig & Courier*, Feb. 25, 1870. On passing the bar, see "First Women admitted to the bar in Washington DC: Political and Personal," Bangor *Daily Whig & Courier*, Mar. 12, 1872 and "The Female World Moves," *Times-Picayune* (Louisiana), Mar. 13, 1872. For Miss Carey, see "Persons and Things," Milwaukee *Daily Sentinel*, Mar. 14, 1870; "A Washington paper give the following account of the initiation into practice of the first female lawyer in the District of Columbia," Boston *Daily Advertiser*, Apr. 27, 1872; and Smith, *Emancipation*, 18, 55, and 141.

¹¹⁷ Smith, *Emancipation*, 18 and 141.

¹¹⁸ "Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University" (1896). Howard University Catalogs, 27; Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 744-46.

he worked for Howard as a stenographer and taught in the Howard Normal and Preparatory Departments. He also published an editorial in the *New National Era* which challenged those who argued that the Chinese, by virtue of their creed and worship, were unfit to become American citizens. Straker pointed to the example of three contemporary Chinese students attending Howard University as a testament to the fact that the Chinese could cross from the status of alien infidels to Christian citizens.¹¹⁹ Upon completing his degree in 1871, Straker worked as a clerk in the United States Treasury Department and later as inspector of customs at the port of Charleston, South Carolina. He was elected to the South Carolina state legislature three times during the late 1870s but was ejected each time during this era of Democratic restoration. He returned to law and gained recognition for his publication of articles dealing with black education and labor. In language similar to that of Booker T. Washington, Straker promoted the benefits of industrial education noting the impracticality of blacks pursuing advanced degrees when white Americans would not hire them to do the work.¹²⁰

In 1844, John Henry Smythe was born to free parents, Sully and Ann Eliza Smythe, in Virginia. They sent him to Philadelphia to be educated by Quakers when he was eight or nine years old. Noted for his artistic skills, he traveled to London to pursue a career on stage but ultimately could not secure the financial assistance to stay. He returned to America and in 1869 entered Howard University's Law Department, where he graduated in 1870. He also served as a clerk for the Freedmen's Bureau before taking on roles within the US Interior Department and Treasury Department. He later worked for the Freedmen's Bank in both Washington, DC, and Wilmington, North Carolina. From 1878 to 1882, he served as minister resident and consul-

¹¹⁹ D. Augustus Straker, "The Chinese Question," *New National Era*, Jul. 23, 1870. For more on Straker, see Howard University, *Directory of Graduates*, 354 and Dorothy Drinkard Hawkshawe, "David Augustus Straker, Black Lawyer and Reconstruction Politician, 1842-1908" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University, 1974), 10-18.

¹²⁰ Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 747-51.

general to Liberia at the request of President Rutherford B. Hayes. Upon his return, he practiced law in Washington and like Straker, threw his support behind industrial education. He died in Richmond in 1908.¹²¹

The final law class under Howard's presidency featured another graduate who distinguished himself, John A. Moss, who remained in the capital upon passing the bar. Moss "became known as 'common law John' because of his litigation skills and his familiarity with legal principles in the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia." He received an appointment to serve as justice of the peace during President Hayes' administration and received reappointment to the post from both Presidents James A. Garfield and Grover Cleveland.¹²² A year later, John Wesley Cromwell, who had been born a slave in Virginia to Willis and Elizabeth Carney Cromwell, graduated from Howard Law School. His father had secured the family's freedom in 1851 and moved to West Philadelphia, where John received his schooling. Cromwell graduated in 1864 and taught in Columbia, Pennsylvania and Virginia before taking a teaching position in Baltimore in 1866. In March, he was shot and had his schoolhouse burned to the ground. He returned to Virginia under the employment of the American Missionary Association in Norfolk. He arrived in Washington to attend Howard University's Law School in 1871, graduated in 1874, and received admittance to the bar before the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia. He also worked for the Treasury Department and in the city's public schools. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, he remained active in supporting the Republican Party, speaking on the educational needs of Blacks, and printing a newspaper.¹²³

¹²¹ "Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University" (1896). Howard University Catalogs, 27; Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 872-77.

¹²² "Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University" (1896). Howard University Catalogs, 27; Smith, *Emancipation*, 130.

¹²³ "Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University" (1896). Howard University Catalogs, 27; Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 898-907.

Although smaller and less well-known, the Medical Department under Dr. Alexander Thomas Augusta also distinguished itself during this era. Augusta, a freeman born in Norfolk, Virginia in 1825 received a secret and rare education in the South under the tutelage of Daniel Payne, the future bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and president of Wilberforce University in Ohio. Augusta traveled to California in the 1840s and later to Canada, where he received medical training at Trinity College in Toronto. On the heels of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Augusta applied to join the US Army. He was commissioned as a surgeon on April 14, 1863, with the rank of major.¹²⁴ He served with the 7th Infantry (U.S. Colored Troops) out of Maryland from November 12, 1863 until mustered out on November 16, 1866.¹²⁵ In February 1864, and while in uniform on official business, Augusta was denied a seat on a Washington streetcar due to his color. The rain coming down that day meant that Major Augusta showed up soaking wet to his meeting in Washington. Outraged, Augusta "outlined the incident in a letter to the military judge advocate and forwarded a copy to Senator Charles Sumner." Senator Sumner used the incident to help pass legislation to prohibit exclusion on the Metropolitan Railroad Company in 1864 and all Washington area streetcars in 1865.¹²⁶ The local streetcar victory, however, belied the realities that persisted across the country where African Americans faced inequality, discrimination, and eviction on conveyances.¹²⁷ For his part, Howard stood in solidarity on the issue with African Americans and even noted in an 1869

¹²⁴ Gerald S. Henig "The Indomitable Dr. Augusta: The First Black Physician in the U. S. Army," *Army History*, no. 87 (2013): 22-31.

¹²⁵ The American Civil War Research Database: Alexander Augusta, <https://asp6new-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/cwdb/cwdb.object.details.aspx?handle=person&id=100744113>.

¹²⁶ Henig, "The Indomitable Dr. Augusta," 28-29; Harrison, *Washington during Civil War and Reconstruction*, 119 and Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 101-12.

¹²⁷ For more on streetcar discrimination during this period, see Blair Murphy Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 15-50.

speech that when he had traveled from Washington to Maine in company with three colored men, “he had to fight his way over every railroad line to get seats for the black men.”¹²⁸

Augusta joined the Medical Department at Howard University in 1868 as the first black man to teach medicine on the university level. During Howard’s presidency, medical graduates garnered public interest on a level second only to that of its law graduates.¹²⁹ The influx of freedpeople into the capital during the war had created an enormous strain on the city’s medical facilities, resulting in the creation of a Freedmen’s Hospital. In 1869, the hospital moved onto the grounds of Howard University under the auspices of the Medical Department. The hospital and a local orphan’s asylum provided excellent opportunities for the university’s medical students to hone their skills under the watchful eyes of Augusta who trained and helped graduate twenty doctors from 1871 to 1873.¹³⁰ Despite their academic achievements and demonstration of good moral character, a stated requirement for all medical graduates, discrimination within the broader field dominated by whites proved insurmountable.¹³¹

The Medical Society of the District of Columbia, the local governing body of District practitioners established in 1817 due to the “prevalence of quackery in this District,” led the earliest efforts to ostracize and delegitimize Howard University’s medical graduates.¹³² In 1869, when the body refused membership to black doctors, a publicized debate took place between the association and the professors at Howard University, leading to Congressional action. In late 1869, Senator Sumner once again took up the cause of his friend, Augusta, and suggested a

¹²⁸ “General Howard,” *American Missionary*, Vol. 13, July, 1869.

¹²⁹ Logan, *Howard University*, 39-50.

¹³⁰ *Annual Presidential Report of Howard University*, 1870, 8-10, O. O. Howard Papers; Patton, *History of Howard University*, 38-39 and Logan, *Howard University*, 40-44.

¹³¹ “1869-70: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University” (1869). Howard University Catalogs. 4, 62, O. O. Howard Papers.

¹³² *History of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia: 1817-1909*, (United States: The Society, 1909), 46 and 100-04.

repeal of the Society's charter unless it accepted black doctors. His efforts over the course of the following two years proved fruitless, however, and black medical professionals decided to start their own organization in 1870, the National Medical Society.¹³³ Discrimination from white medical societies and potential colleagues who filled the ranks of their membership was just one of the barriers facing Howard University's medical faculty and graduates. On at least one occasion, the attacks turned personal as evidenced in the case of Medical Department Professor Charles Burleigh Purvis who, as a light-skinned African American, was derided for encouraging miscegenation by marrying a white woman in 1871.¹³⁴

Howard University's Medical Department not only provided an educational opportunity for Black men, but also empowered women of all colors. A New Englander, Isabel Chapin Barrows as a young child had assisted her father, Dr. Henry Hayes of Vermont, in his medical practice. Her father, an acting assistant surgeon in the Union Army, died during the Civil War. At eighteen, Isabel married William Wilberforce Chapin, and together they moved to India as missionaries. William unexpectedly died one year later leaving Isabel a widow at nineteen. She promptly returned to America and three years later married Samuel J. Barrows. Isabel maintained her interests in medicine and pursued her medical degree at the Woman's Medical College, New York City, graduating in 1869 before moving to Vienna for a year of post-graduate study. Upon her return to Washington, DC, she opened her own medical practice and became the first female ophthalmologist in the city. Between 1870 and 1873, "she had charge of all the eye

¹³³ Logan, *Howard University*, 45-46. Newspaper articles on the racial discrimination against Howard University professors and graduates include Thomas, "Our Washington Letter," *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, May 11, 1870 and "The American Medical Association," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, May 13, 1870. Kate Masur's work on Washington during Reconstruction notes that the American Medical Association's refusal to accept black members remained in place until after WWII, Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 164-65, see also Logan, *Howard University*, 46-47.

¹³⁴ "Miscegenation in High Life," *New York Herald*, Feb. 20, 1871 and "Personal," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Feb. 27, 1871. For more on this, see Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: the Black Elite 1880-1920* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1990), 167-168.

and ear cases at Freedmen's Hospital, and lectured on these subjects in the Howard University Medical College." On February 7, 1871, the medical faculty at Howard appointed her as assistant to the chair of surgery and, one year later, a lecturer on diseases of the eye. In addition to this work, she served briefly as assistant stenographer at the US Capitol, and during her husband's two-month illness, served as a private secretary to Secretary of State William H. Seward. In both roles, she became the first woman to serve in such capacity and "probably the only one who has ever drawn the same pay as a man." Barrows resigned from Howard University on January 1, 1873, and in 1876 she and her husband moved to Massachusetts where he took up the pastorate at the First Unitarian Church in Dorchester.¹³⁵

Although a theology department had been part of the earliest discussions concerning the founding of Howard University, it did not officially open its doors until 1870 when John B. Reeve, a Presbyterian minister from New York and active member of the CCM, accepted the position of dean and professor of Biblical theology. The school began with twelve students, including five from DC. From its inception, the AMA strongly supported the theology department and funded Reeve's salary as well as the expenses of needy students.¹³⁶ Professor Reeve was invited and attended the AMA's annual meeting in Hartford, Connecticut the following year to provide an update on the theology department at Howard University. Although the contents of his speech were not recorded, the meeting minutes listed him as a new lifetime

¹³⁵ Logan, *Howard University*, 42; see also Daniel Smith Lamb, *Howard University Medical Department: A Historical, Biographical and Statistical Souvenir* (Washington D. C.: Howard University Press, 1900), 23, 28 and 117.

¹³⁶ Logan, *Howard University*, 51; John Louis Ewell, *History of the Theological Department of Howard University* (Washington D. C.: Howard University Press, 1906), 13. For Reeve's involvement with the CCM, see National Convention of Colored Men (1864: Syracuse, NY), "Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored Men; held in the City of Syracuse, N.Y.; October 4, 5, 6, and 7, 1864; with the Bill of Wrongs and Rights; and the Address to the American People," *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed January 17, 2022, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/282>, 5. Prior to Rev. Reeve's appointment, it appears that George Collins helped instruct local black ministers at the Lincoln Industrial Mission, see his letter to E. P. Smith, June 21, 1870, AMAA.

member of the AMA and noted that he, alongside Rev. Dr. Bascom, officiated at the Lord's Supper.¹³⁷ In an article published in the *American Missionary* in 1872, Prof. E. Whittlesey of the theological department commented on the great need to train black preachers. He quoted from Langston's tour of the South, where he found black preachers absorbed in intemperance and licentiousness and, "simply excited in no good sense and to no good purpose," calling for "an earnest, intelligent and pious clergy" to meet the needs of the people.¹³⁸ Both the *American Missionary* and the AMA's annual reports included updates on the theological department.

In an update published in the *American Missionary* in 1872, Reeve reported eighteen students taking classes including four "colored" Methodist Episcopal preachers of the city who attend on Monday mornings.¹³⁹ Over the summer, he expressed his intention to travel north to promote the school and seek scholarships for worthy students. Later that same year, in updates to E. M. Cravath, Reeve noted that the department was growing and had seven local pastors in attendance among other promising students, some of whom also preached locally. He also praised women "of the colored churches" who were "the true support" of black congregations.¹⁴⁰ One year later, the AMA in its annual report provided a more comprehensive update on Prof. Reeve and the theological department at Howard University. It quoted from Reeve's report, which noted the great need for theological training among the students. Reeve also emphasized how active the students were in ministry, with some serving at the Lincoln Mission Sunday School. In Reeve's mind, what set his department apart from all others across the country was its nondenominational character where students "go behind the men whose names have been battle-

¹³⁷ *Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1871), 6, and 10. The same meeting listed Howard as a lifetime member as well, see pg. 6.

¹³⁸ E. Whittlesey, "Negro Preachers," *American Missionary*, vol. 17, no. 7, 1873, 154.

¹³⁹ "Howard University," *American Missionary*, vol. 16, no. 6, 1872, 128.

¹⁴⁰ John B. Reeve to E. M. Cravath, May 31, 1872, AMAA and John B. Reeve to E. M. Cravath, June 29, 1872, September 30, 1872, October 31, 1872, and November 30, 1872, AMAA.

cries for centuries, and rest on the sure word of God.” However, much to the chagrin of the gathered Congregationalists, Reeve noted that the department’s prayer meetings were “often pentecostal sessions where every man seems to hear all others speaking in his own language, namely, that of the Spirit.”¹⁴¹

One of the more exciting stories emanating out of the theological department was the establishment of an interracial church on campus in January 1872. The *American Missionary* provided a brief article on the story noting that in attendance were “Chinese, a native African, a Creek Indian, a Freedman, a white man, and the daughter of a deceased missionary in Africa.” On the day of this visit, Dr. Rankin gave the message and also baptized two Chinese students.¹⁴² The following year, however, the nation was hit with the Panic of 1873, which greatly hindered the AMA’s ability to continue funding both missionaries and schools. Indeed, the majority of Reeve’s letters to the AMA from 1873 until he resigned in June 1875 consisted of regular appeals for prompt payment of his salary and requests for assistance to the theological department’s needy and shrinking student-body.¹⁴³

In 1874, the AMA noted that the department comprised thirty students making “a fair degree of success” in coursework that has seen its standard raised. Assisting Prof. Reeve was a collection of local ministers including Rev. Jeremiah Rankin of First Congregational Church. Although the students belonged to five different denominations, they remained in harmony and active in department, university, and other prayer-meetings, as well as in Sunday-school. Importantly, they noted that several local pastors attended lectures and “in this way, the

¹⁴¹ *Twenty-seventh Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1874), 26-27.

¹⁴² D. Nichols, “Church Formed—Interesting Ceremonies—Caste Obliterated—All One in Christ,” *American Missionary*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1873, 1.

¹⁴³ John B. Reeve to E. M. Cravath, October 2, 1873, November 1, 1873, December 1, 1873, March 2, 1874, April 2, 1874, October 1, 1874, January 1, 1875, and June 18, 1875, AMAA.

department exerts a steady though indirect influence on churches which represent an aggregate membership of three thousand souls.”¹⁴⁴ Reeve resigned in June 1875 and returned to the pastorate in New York. Two years later, the AMA reached an agreement with the Presbytery of Washington, a regional association of Presbyterian Churches, to jointly support the theological department.¹⁴⁵

Across the South, white southerners employed various tactics including discrimination, intimidation, and violence to limit the reach and influence of the university’s alumni. A full twenty years before John Mercer Langston won office as the US Representative from Virginia to the 51st Congress, he campaigned on behalf of James H. Platt Jr., the Republican candidate from Virginia’s second District who was running for reelection in 1870. His speech for Congressman Platt, a radical from Canada who spent time in Vermont before moving to Virginia, caused a riot among whites in the crowd. Shots rang out with “many whites and blacks wounded.” While Langston escaped injury, John Daniel, a well-known local white-citizen and leading Republican, was wounded in the head by a bullet. And the following morning, the papers reported that “a negro, badly cut, was found dead in an alley a few squares from the scene of last night’s row.”¹⁴⁶

One year later, Walthal G. Wynn, a member of Howard University’s inaugural law class, paid the ultimate price for his attempt to challenge the norms of white southern society. During the Civil War, Wynn had served as the quartermaster sergeant to the 102nd Infantry (US Colored

¹⁴⁴ *Twenty-eighth Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1874), 27; see also “Howard University,” *American Missionary*, vol. 18, no. 7, 150.

¹⁴⁵ Dyson, *Howard University*, 211-12; Logan, *Howard University*, 51 and 82; *Thirty-first Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1877), 72.

¹⁴⁶ “From Virginia,” *North American and United States Gazette* [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania] Nov. 3, 1870. See also, “Fatal Political Riot in Norfolk,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Nov. 3, 1870 and “A Disgraceful Riot in Norfolk, Va.,” *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier* [Bangor, Maine] Nov. 3, 1870. For Langston’s time as a US Representative, see Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 474-520. On targeted violence from southern whites toward black leaders like Howard University alumni, see Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 278-79.

Troops).¹⁴⁷ In 1869, he enrolled in Howard University's Law Department and graduated two years later before setting off for Arkansas to begin his law career.¹⁴⁸ The *New National Era* published a letter written by friends of Wynn from Arkansas to the state's newly elected Radical Republican US Senator Powell Clayton, who had previously served three years as governor. Wynn's friends shared that immediately after graduation, he had come south to Arkansas to practice law. Tragically, just eight months later, he was dead. He had traveled to the southeastern corner of the state, to the town of Lake Village, where he was killed in broad daylight by the local Ku Klux Klan. These friends fought for justice for Wynn and referenced the fact that his "generosity and frankness of character had won him the esteem of all good citizens, and had gained him many true friends. The poor and downtrodden looked up to him as one of their protectors, their advisor, their counsellor." It was an outrage that his "warm life has been poured out upon the altar of liberty." The "terrible deed has revealed to us the devilish and malignant spirit that pervades a certain class of society in the South." As Congress prepared to consider the Amnesty Bill, Wynn's friends called on Senator Clayton to help defeat the measure and resist enfranchising those "who still cherish the 'Lost Cause' and aid, abet, counsel, or sympathize in the perpetuation of such dark and damning crimes."¹⁴⁹ In a rare incident of black mob

¹⁴⁷ American Civil War Research Database: Walthal G. Wynn, <https://asp6new-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/cwdb/cwdb.object.details.aspx?handle=person&id=102834984>. See also George H. Turner and Adjutant-General's Dept, *Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers in the Civil War, 1861-1865* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Ihling Bros. & Everard Printers, 1909), 3-4, and 114. According to Wynn's service record, he enlisted in Detroit for three years on Sept. 22, 1863 at the age of 25. He mustered on Oct. 3, 1863 and was mustered out at Charleston on Sept. 30, 1865. According to the regimental record, the 102nd had engagements with the enemy in South Carolina and Florida. Of the 1,673 enrolled, 5 were killed in action, 7 died of wounds, 116 of disease and another 114 were discharged for wither wounds or disease.

¹⁴⁸ Howard University, *Directory of Graduates*, 507.

¹⁴⁹ "Arkansas Assassination," *New National Era*, Dec. 28, 1871.

vengeance, the three white men implicated in the crime were apparently seized from the jail and killed.¹⁵⁰

The following year, news out of the South referenced 1871 law graduate, Moses Wensleydale Moore, who had recently passed the bar in Alabama.¹⁵¹ The *New National Era* published an account of what happened next. In a “Letter from Mississippi,” the author identified as simply Loyal, wrote that “The Northern mind cannot form the slightest conception of the horror of Ku-Kluxism, not the extent to which it has been carried. Nor will it be known until that day shall come when things will be revealed by Him from whose sight there can be nothing hid.” The piece turned political and warned that “Unless we have the full protection of the Government in the coming Presidential election, you will hear of a great many more loyal citizens being forced to make their exit from these regions . . .” Moore was among those forced to leave. He fled back to Washington after Ku Klux Klan members had planned his death.¹⁵² Two years later, two other Howard University Law School graduates working in the Deep South made the news. In 1873, A. W. Shadd and Louis A. Bell, graduates from the class of 1871, sought admittance to the bar in Louisiana. When the state denied them in what appeared to be a clear case of discrimination, Professor Riddle went after the State of Louisiana. In retaliation for their discrimination, he successfully moved DC’s Supreme Court to not admit lawyers from Louisiana.¹⁵³

In March 1873, the final year of Howard’s presidency for which he was personally present, Douglass’s *New National Era* ran a letter to the editor on Howard entitled, “Does His

¹⁵⁰ Smith, *Emancipation*, 322-23 and Thomas Starling Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1862-1874* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923), 366-67.

¹⁵¹ “Alabama News,” *Selma Alabama Morning Times*, Nov. 28, 1872. Smith, *Emancipation*, 271 and 300.

¹⁵² Loyal, “Letter From Mississippi,” *New National Era*, Mar. 14, 1872.

¹⁵³ Smith, *Emancipation*, 76 n.122.

Country Owe Him a Debt of Gratitude?” The ongoing Congressional investigation into Howard’s management of Bureau funds provided the context for the piece intended to vindicate the man who had, in the author’s opinion, accomplished so much for the freedpeople. The author, identified only as Justitia, wrote that the Civil War had granted more than four million African Americans “political equality with any and all other citizens.” Preparing them for the proper exercise of those newly conferred rights fell upon Howard, who “correctly and successfully solved the problem by establishing normal schools, colleges, and universities . . . at the head of which is the Howard University.” According to Justitia, Howard’s greatest achievement was using Bureau funds to advance an educational agenda that incorporated “good Christian and moral training . . .”¹⁵⁴ The piece accurately captured a key aspect of Howard’s legacy as president of Howard University. And yet that story is incomplete without acknowledging his active support for faculty and student-led initiatives that represented the model citizenry he sought to form within its walls. His pride in and expectations for the many graduates he watched receive their diplomas is accurately captured in his comments about the actions taken to teach the freedpeople to understand and protect the citizenship that they received. At Howard University in the nation’s capital, freedmen “will show to be false all prognostications respecting his failure to become a man among men and to meet his responsibilities as an integral part of the republic.”¹⁵⁵ In alignment with the AMA’s postwar vision, Howard University stood as “a grand promise of the future.” It did not just produce teachers, doctors, and lawyers. They graduated as integral members of the republic, men and

¹⁵⁴ Justitia, “Does His Country Owe Him a Debt of Gratitude,” *New National Era*, March 13, 1873. Oliver O. Howard served as president of Howard University from 1869 to June 1875 but served in absentia from December 1873 to June 1875 when he went west as a peace commissioner by order of President Ulysses S. Grant. See Dyson, *Howard University*, 6.

¹⁵⁵ “The Nation’s Capital” (No. 7), Box 41, Folder 90, 12-13, Howard Papers.

women who fought for civil rights, resisted discrimination, and modeled to a generation of former slaves, the path to national belonging.¹⁵⁶

When Howard received an indefinite leave of absence in December 1873 to serve in the West, university vice president, John M. Langston, at age thirty-six, became acting president. Langston, who had received Howard's support to assume the role of acting president, remained in the position until June 1875. Unfortunately, his term as acting president coincided with the Panic of 1873, a six-year long national depression that proved devastating for the country and hit Black Americans particularly hard. Although Howard University had been the recipient of over half a million dollars in Freedmen's Bureau funds, more than any other Bureau-supported institution, and had the added benefit of increased funds from land sales adjacent to the campus which allowed it to enter the period debt free, the depression stifled growth. As a result, the university saw a decline in donations resulting in slashed salaries and faculty resignations. Despite this, and as Howard University historian Rayford Logan correctly notes, the doors remained open under Langston's leadership as he provided a stabilizing force during those early years of financial struggle and helped keep the university afloat and students funded.¹⁵⁷

In June 1875, a bitter dispute arose over who would be selected as president resulted in Langston's resignation and entrance into Virginia politics. As Langston told the story, when the board of trustees met that June to determine who would serve as president, the Black members all supported Langston who also had the backing of Washington's local Black population and particularly the students of the Law School, while the white members of the board all chose George Whipple of the AMA, who was white. Langston believed that there was an AMA

¹⁵⁶ "Boston Anniversary," *American Missionary*, vol. 13, no. 7, 1869, 158; Beard, *Crusade of Brotherhood*, 189.

¹⁵⁷ Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 309, 313-14; Logan, *Howard University*, 64, 80-81. On Freedmen's Bureau funds directed toward Howard University, see Logan, *Howard University*, 60 and 63.

conspiracy afoot that intended to close the medical and law departments and turn the university into an institute strictly for the training of teachers and preachers. Frederick Douglass, one of the trustees, published an article on the dispute that noted Langston's concerns and expressed misgivings about any religious organization taking control, but he also did not substantiate Langston's most extreme claims about the AMA's designs for the university. Black physician and Howard University Medical Department professor, Charles B. Purvis stepped up to defend the board on the matter, arguing that the city's Congregationalists and the AMA did not intend to scuttle any departments and had in fact done more than anyone to support the educational advancements of Black people. Purvis suggested that Langston's true anger centered on not being selected as president. The board declined further comment on the matter and Langston promptly resigned to enter into politics in Virginia.¹⁵⁸ Despite being passed over, Langston recalled his days at Howard University as the happiest days of his professional labor, where he "started the foremost colored youth of the country upon those lofty dignified ways of the law, of which they and their fathers had known nothing in their experience."¹⁵⁹

After Langston's resignation, William Bascom took over the Law Department for a year followed by John H. Cook who stepped in as Professor of Law from 1875 to 1879.¹⁶⁰ As for the role of president, after Langston departed, there were a series of acting presidents selected including Edward Parmelee Smith, field agent of the AMA who had most recently served as the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Unfortunately, Smith while on mission for the AMA in Africa, died from malaria before he could assume the position. George Whipple also died in 1876 making the AMA's annual meeting in Fitchburg, Massachusetts an especially

¹⁵⁸ Dyson, *Howard University*, 55-60 and Logan, *Howard University*, 78-79.

¹⁵⁹ Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 309, 312-13.

¹⁶⁰ "Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University" (1896). Howard University Catalogs, 9; Logan, *Howard University*, 81.

somber one. In recognition of their deaths, the delegates devoted the first two hours of the meeting to commemorate them.¹⁶¹ They unanimously adopted a report which expressed their love and appreciation for these faithful servants who had gone on to their reward. They noted that Whipple had been the key support of the AMA and that “Whatever it has accomplished it owes very largely to his wisdom, carefulness, firmness, administrative ability and religious consecration.” To Lincoln, he had been “a trusted counsellor, in the trying times of emancipation” and to the freedmen, “a sleepless friend.” The death of Rev. E. P. Smith they called a loss that “cannot be easily measured or readily repaired.” Both men had faithfully served the AMA and its mission of equal citizenship leading those gathered to conclude, “Their unfinished work, speaks but one language. Close up the depleted ranks, and in the name of our great Captain, march on to victory.”¹⁶² At Howard University, leading that charge would fall first to Frederic Wyatt Fairfield, a white man who graduate from Oberlin College in 1868 and served as acting president of the University from September 1, 1875, to December 16, 1875, and then again from January 20, 1876, to June 30, 1877. Finally, in April 1877 and in effort to stabilizing the university’s leadership, the board of trustees chose another white Oberlinite, William Weston Patton, to serve as the sixth president of Howard University, a position he held until 1889.¹⁶³

Religion: First Congregational Church

Between January 13-17, 1869, a last ditch effort to resolve the crisis over Black membership at First Congregational Church took place when a mutual council met to hear testimony from both sides, something the *ex parte* council had encouraged. Washington’s *Daily*

¹⁶¹ *Thirtieth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1876), 5.

¹⁶² *Thirtieth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1876), 16-17.

¹⁶³ Dyson, *Howard University*, 376, 383-385; Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*, 316-17. “Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University” (1896). Howard University Catalogs, 7.

National Intelligencer reported that this council was necessary because, “this church, situated at the national capital, has had the attention of the country directed to it, and we have, in a measure, been put on trial before the country.”¹⁶⁴ Over the course of the proceedings which included testimony from both sides, Howard and the minority were once again vindicated although the mutual council expressed disappointment in the behavior of both parties.¹⁶⁵ Ultimately in regard to the question of racial equality and black church membership, the council affirmed “not the color of the skin, but the character of the heart, is the only test. There is neither white nor black; - only redeemed souls. And the question of color ought not to be known in the church.”¹⁶⁶ The statement was an unequivocal affirmation of the resolution issued by select members of the church, the emerging minority faction including Howard, over a year prior. Left with no further recourse, Boynton resigned as pastor from First Congregational Church, effective in April, and along with his supporters hoped to start another Congregational church but were denied recognition. Consequently, Boynton took over the pastorate at Assembly Presbyterian Church, where he was joined by his followers.¹⁶⁷ The *New York Herald* reported the resignation and concluded that despite Boynton’s radical past, he was apparently “not radical enough for a portion of his congregation, led by Howard.”¹⁶⁸

In the months following Boynton’s resignation, Cook and Wall joined other local blacks in proudly adding their names to the membership roll at First Congregational Church. In June, a total of thirty-two new members were accepted into First Congregational Church – the largest

¹⁶⁴ “The Mutual Council of the Congregational Church,” Washington’s *Daily National Intelligencer* January 15, 1869.

¹⁶⁵ Johnson, “City on the Hill,” 141-42; Alldredge, *Centennial History of First Congregational*, 26; “The Council at Washington,” *The Congregationalist and Boston Recorder*, January 21, 1869.

¹⁶⁶ “The Council at Washington,” *The Congregationalist and Boston Recorder*, January 21, 1869.

¹⁶⁷ Alldredge, *Centennial History of First Congregational*, 26-27; Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 200-01; “The Congregational Church Difficulty Adjusted,” *New York Herald*, April 24, 1869; Spectator, “The Congregational Church,” *Congregationalist and Boston Recorder*, April 29, 1869.

¹⁶⁸ “The Congregational Church Difficulty Adjusted,” *New York Herald*, April 24, 1869.

number ever to join the church at one time. Among that group was John H. Cook and several other Black people, including George and Caroline Brown, Hiram and Harriet Brown, and James M. Gregory. An article in the *Congregationalist and Boston Recorder* celebrated the historic occasion two years in the making. The author reminded readers that “the Congregational church at Washington is the only one in that city that knows no distinction of color or race . . .” The piece closed with a picturesque anecdote that must have been as pleasing to Cook and Wall as it was to Howard.

Last Saturday was the anniversary of these Sabbath schools [at First Congregational], and the children, after parading through the streets, enjoyed for two hours the beautiful green of the Presidential Mansion. Generals Sherman, Schofield, Howard and others were on the portico of the White House, when the keen eyes of Gen. Sherman detected the difference of color, “Why, there are black children” exclaimed he, “to what church do they belong?” “To mine,” replied Gen. Howard, “the Congregational church.” “Hm,—might have known that” responded Sherman.¹⁶⁹

Howard was only partially correct, however, as First Congregational Church now equally belonged to Cook and the other black members. The admission into membership at First Congregational coincided with another milestone in the city, and that was President Ulysses S. Grant’s signing of legislation that opened the way for African Americans to serve on juries and hold political office.¹⁷⁰ A few months later, Wall also became a member, by which time the new pastor at First Congregational, Rev. Jeremiah Eames Rankin, had been installed. Wall was the first individual baptized by Rankin at the church, something the one-time slave turned radical advocate of social equality took great pride in.¹⁷¹ And in a move that was both fitting in light of their victory at First Congregational and representative of their broader aims for social equality

¹⁶⁹ *Congregationalist and Boston Recorder*, June 10, 1869. See also, Clift, “History of the First Congregational Church,” 95-96.

¹⁷⁰ Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 158.

¹⁷¹ Clift, “History of the First Congregational Church,” 96; “Capt. O. S. B. Wall: Death of a leading colored citizen, who was a distinguished soldier,” *Washington Post*, April 28, 1891.

as delegates to the National Convention of Colored Men, Cook and Wall pushed to make their church a center of organizing for black civil rights in the ensuing decade. Over the course of the late nineteenth century, the church hosted famous fiery black leaders such as Frederick Douglass and John Mercer Langston who continued to keep the important issues of discrimination in public accommodations and on public conveyances in front of the congregation, reminding Black attendees that the fight for the rights of equal citizenship must continue.¹⁷²

For Howard, the victory at First Congregational came at great personal and professional cost. In the immediate aftermath, he found himself embroiled in a scandal that threatened to destroy his reputation and the future of the Bureau. Indeed, just a few weeks after the *ex parte* council's favorable conclusion, Howard requested that the House of Representatives appoint a committee to investigate the administration of the Bureau. He pursued this course in light of the public accusations against him in regard to the quality of the bricks used for the construction of Howard University and insinuations of impropriety concerning the handling of government monies. The questions concerning the bricks appeared credible when the walls supporting the structure came crashing down in late December 1868. For Howard, addressing the quality of the bricks was a separate issue, however, and in calling forth the Congressional investigation, first and foremost in his mind was having his name vindicated from attacks that had originated with Henry Boynton, who had moved on from the church dispute to an all-out attack on the Bureau.¹⁷³

On January 9, 1869, just days before the colored convention and mutual council's vindication of Howard and the minority party at the church, Henry Boynton published another scathing attack on Howard in the *Cincinnati Gazette*. This one drew attention to the use of

¹⁷² Masur, *Example for all the Land*, 226.

¹⁷³ "Freedmen's Bureau Investigation," New York *Herald*, December 10, 1868; Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 203.

substandard bricks with allegations that a financially lucrative relationship existed between Howard and Washington's Building Block Company. Boynton acknowledged that his article could be perceived as a smear tactic targeting Howard based on his father's recent defeat at First Congregational but he assured his readers that such was not the case. Rather, he was simply drawing attention to impropriety and fraud. Realizing the awkward scenario, the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* published their own defense of their Washington correspondent and informed their readers that Henry Boynton was only interested in the facts regarding the poor bricks used in Howard University and the potential cost to the government of \$250,000 if the buildings were found to be unsound. They further stated that a powerful ring existed in Washington made up of numerous individuals intent on scapegoating Boynton to save themselves, and with Grant's recent election and a motto of "Honesty and Economy," the time had arrived to drive out "corrupt lobby rings." Editorials in Washington's *The Evening Star* and Massachusetts's *The Congregationalist and Boston Recorder*, however, hit closer to the truth when they tied the investigation to the unpleasantness at First Congregational and noted that after "the examination of experts . . . hopefully there would be a lull in the ecclesiastical storm-winds." As 1868 rolled into 1869, Henry Boynton's effort to destroy Howard and derail the Bureau while vindicating his father led him to turn to an unlikely ally, US Representative Fernando Wood (D-NY).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Henry Van Ness Boynton, "Letter from Washington: The Washington Building Block Company and its Operations—Concerning Statements which have been Dispatched—Facts, Figures, Names, and Dates," *Cincinnati Gazette*, January 8, 1869; "Howard University," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, January 9, 1869; "The Howard University," *The Evening Star*, April 20, 1869 and "We find it stated in the Washington papers that the careful examination by experts," *The Congregationalist and Boston Recorder*, May 6, 1869; see also Alldredge, *Centennial History of First Congregational*, 27; Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 202-04. Howard and the Bureau were not the only targets of Henry Boynton and Fernando Wood. They also targeted Samuel Clarke Pomeroy, the radical Republican Congressman from Kansas who also happened to be a congregant and supporter of Howard and the minority's position. Pomeroy was targeted for his supposed connection to railroad funding bills. On January 15, 1869, an author with the initials E. H. G. published in the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* a defense of Pomeroy entitled, "Reply to H. V. Boynton on Senator Pomeroy." In it, the author noted that the attacks on Senator Pomeroy stem from Henry Van Ness Boynton's anger that Pomeroy united with General Howard in the recent church dispute and concluded that Henry Boynton's accusations against Pomeroy of seeking to personally benefit from railroad

The infamous congressman from New York, Fernando Wood, entered politics in 1855 as the mayor of New York City, a position he held until 1858 and then again from 1860 to 1862. In February 1860, he gained fame for an anti-abolitionist speech he delivered at the Syracuse Democratic Convention where he derogatorily referred to the opposition as the “Black Republican Party of the North.” His pro-southern and pro-slavery speech earned him the right to represent New York as a delegate to the Democratic Convention in Charleston, South Carolina. According to one historian, his strong support for the South led to “The most colorful episode connected with his career, a facetious proposal in 1861 to have New York become an independent city.” Despite his failure to bring about the secession of New York City, he continued his resistance to the war effort, becoming a Copperhead and supporter of the Democratic Party’s staunch peace platform which went down in defeat in the decisive election of 1864. To further solidify his position in the annals of Congressional villains, he vehemently opposed the Thirteenth Amendment which abolished slavery across the nation.¹⁷⁵

By April 1870, Congressman Wood had read enough of Henry Boynton’s articles and been sufficiently intrigued to request a personal meeting with the reporter. Historian John Carpenter notes that several additional meetings took place before Congress opened an official investigation at the behest of both Howard and Wood. The ten member committee, consisting of eight Republicans and two Democrats, met from April until June to consider Howard’s actions as Bureau commissioner and the bricks used in the construction of Howard University. Ultimately,

bills as he is supposed invested in those railroads are nothing more than malicious slander as The Congressional Records reveal.

¹⁷⁵ “THE SYRACUSE CONVENTION.” *New York Times*, February 08, 1860; see also Foner, *Reconstruction*, 32; Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*; McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, 274; Michael Vorenberg, *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 43.

the Republican-led committee vindicated Howard with members' opinions falling along party lines:

Resolved, That the policy pursued by the United States toward four and a half millions of its people suddenly enfranchised by the events of a great civil war, in seeking to provide for them education, to render them independent and self-supporting, and in extending to them civil and political equality, is a source of just national pride; and that the House hereby acquits Major General Oliver O. Howard of the groundless and causeless charges lately preferred against him, and does hereby declare and record its judgment, that in successfully organizing and administering with fidelity, integrity, and ability the Freedmen's Bureau, which has contributed so much to the accomplishment of the first two of these great ends, he is deserving of the gratitude of the American people.¹⁷⁶

Although Howard celebrated the findings, Carpenter, in summarizing the affair, concluded that the attacks permanently damaged both Howard and the Bureau. Indeed, "Despite his tactical defeat, Wood had succeeded in stamping on the public mind an impression of Howard and the Bureau which would outlast his own lifetime." He had successfully tied another episode of corruption to the Grant administration, something that would dog the latter years of his presidency and remain an enduring legacy. Within a few short years, Howard requested and received a military post in the West to escape further scrutiny.¹⁷⁷

In the wake of Boynton's resignation and the loss of over one hundred members who followed him, the selection of Rankin as First Congregational Church's second pastor brought them a man who would be a true advocate for a color-blind church membership. A Congregationalist from New Hampshire who graduated from Middlebury College in 1848 and completed his seminary training at Andover Theological Seminary in 1854, Rankin had served in churches across New England before filling the pastorate at First Congregational Church.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ *Howard Investigation*, 21.

¹⁷⁷ Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch*, 202-04, 205-209; Howard, *Autobiography*, 2:436-37; Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau*, 207-09; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 565-66.

¹⁷⁸ Alldredge, *Centennial History of First Congregational*, 29-36.

Rankin maintained close friendships with both Howard and Frederick Douglass and proved himself a strong advocate of equal citizenship. In a significant departure from Boynton's agenda, he actively sought to grow the church's Black membership. Over the course of his fifteen-year ministry, the church maintained a black membership of between thirty and fifty people and during the years when Howard served as president of the university, many of the students regularly worshipped there. Reflecting on that time, Rankin recalled how the spirit of Oberlin permeated the church: "These people were not here as colored people, but as belonging to the one family, which God has made of one blood, to dwell on all the face of the earth! They were here, because they had been brought up Congregationalists or felt drawn to Congregationalism, that Mother of some of the noblest of children, not a few from Oberlin, where they had been educated." His political and racially progressive sermons proved popular with not only Vice President Henry Wilson but also the city's leading blacks including Douglass, Langston, Blanche Kelso Bruce, James M. Gregory, and William T. Mitchell, and their families, who regularly attended.¹⁷⁹ In 1871, Frederick Douglass was quoted in the *American Missionary* as stating, "In the capital of the United States there was but one church over whose portals was inscribed the glorious motto, "Freedom to worship God without distinction of color;" and that church was the Congregational"¹⁸⁰ In addition to his responsibilities at the church, Rankin also served as chaplain for the US House of Representatives and was active as a professor in the theological department at Howard University.¹⁸¹

Less than two years into Reverend Rankin's ministry at First Congregational Church, a new crisis emerged that threatened to embroil the church in yet another controversy over race. In

¹⁷⁹ Alldredge, *Centennial History of First Congregational*, 30-33.

¹⁸⁰ *American Missionary*, vol. 15, no. 7, 1871, 163 and Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 156.

¹⁸¹ "Alumni 1867-96: Catalog of the Officers and Students of Howard University" (1896). Howard University Catalogs, 8.

December 1870, George Collins, the AMA's Black missionary at the Lincoln Industrial School, announced his plans to move forward with planting a Black Congregational church for those who attended his popular weekly prayer meetings and Sunday school class. Collins had first mentioned this idea earlier that summer to Rankin, who promised to discuss it with friends and see how best to proceed.¹⁸² In a December letter to the AMA's corresponding secretary, E. M. Cravath, Collins observed that the delay in forming the church was not his fault and that he remained hopeful. He stated, "I have had a sufficient number of members ready for some weeks with which to start. We are now however fairly started. A meeting has been called . . . to adopt the necessary articles and perfect our organization. God willing my next shall tell you of a church established here." A month later, however, the whole project had been scuttled. In Collins' update to Cravath on January 10, 1871, he explained that "a strong opposition" developed from both white and Black leaders at First Congregational including Danforth B. Nichols, Oliver Howard, and Jeremiah Rankin (all white), as well as John H. Cook (Black) and others, who argued that it would be "inexpedient for us to form a colored Congregational Church." Those opposed informed Collins that "the Congregationalists of this city could not afford to have it said that they after fighting against caste as they did in the First Church had undertaken to build up a colored Congregational Church." For his part, Collins only cared that those under his care and tutelage have a place to worship and it appears they preferred their own church as opposed to attending the prominent First Congregational Church. The dispute over a black Congregational Church reveals the complex reality facing both the advocates of interracial worship and freedpeople who preferred autonomy. Although Collins's sudden death five months

¹⁸² George Collins to George Whipple, May 9, 1870, George Collins to E. P. Smith, June 11, 1870, July 8, 1870, and September 24, 1870, and George Collins to E. M. Cravath, December 12, 1870, and January 10, 1871, AMAA. Marden had also made mention of what he called "evident disinclination" to support the founding of a church in his letter to E. P. Smith back in December 1869, see George Marden to E. P. Smith, December 14, 1869, AMAA.

later ended debate over the proposed first black Congregational Church in the District, it did little to assuage freedpeople's preference for their own houses of worship.¹⁸³

On Thanksgiving Day in 1876, as the nation navigated an especially contentious election, Rankin delivered a sermon at First Congregational Church titled, "The Divinity of the Ballot." The sermon captured the precarious state of a nation on edge with its very future in the balance and proved so popular that it was printed and sent across the country. As charges of "bribery, fraud, and intimidation," spewed from both sides, Rankin encouraged Christians to patiently trust God, the One who rights all wrongs and who in a "little while shall come and not tarry."¹⁸⁴ He embraced a providential view of God's work in history arguing that "when a nation, through its established constitutional forms, has given its voice for a ruler, that ruler is of God." The nation may not get the leader it needs—here Rankin cited the example of James Buchanan who led the nation into war—but each elected president represented the voice of the people and thus was "God's choice." Despite this trust in God, Rankin expressed great concern over charges of white southern intimidation of Black voters. He employed the sentiments which undergirded the AMA and CCM's concept of national citizenship and argued that "when our Government gave the colored man the right of suffrage it took upon itself the solemn obligations to protect him in the exercise of this right by law; if need be, by army and navy." Rankin expressed disgust at white southern Democrats who "trampled upon the constitutional rights of their fellow-citizens" while crying out over the "tyranny of the bayonet!"

Rankin, an unflinching advocate of colorblind citizenship, discussed the importance of human rights, an issue neglected by members of Congress who failed to grasp their true and

¹⁸³ *Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1871), 23.

¹⁸⁴ Jeremiah Rankin, "The Divinity of the Ballot," November 23, 1876, O. O. Howard Papers; Alldredge, *Centennial History of First Congregational*, 30.

indeed divine origin and significance. “When God incarnated himself in humanity He put Himself into this problem . . . So long as men are wronged their wrongs must be righted.” While many in the North including those who considered themselves abolitionists before the war viewed the Thirteenth Amendment as the final victory, Rankin called it just the beginning of a new war to transform race relations across the nation. If only white southerners had sought forgiveness from the freedmen and recognized his citizenship and right to “himself, his wife and children and home,” and joined in the work of uplift “the work would have been done.” Instead, they became “vipers who bit the file that severed the chains of the bondman,” and like the Egyptians, looked across the Red Sea and pondered how they might re-enslave those God had miraculously delivered. Returning to the antebellum arguments of both the AMA and CCM, he implored white southerners and indeed all Americans to wrestle with the preamble of the Declaration of Independence which proclaimed human equality. The struggle for human rights must necessarily continue as long as “any class of our citizens are not protected in their enjoyment “of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”” The great failure of the Republican Party and indeed the Grant administration in its second term was that it got caught up in secondary issues of “third terms, paper currency, and civil service reform” and neglected the most pivotal issues of securing the ballot for the freedmen thus leaving him “to the tender mercies of Southern barbarism.” Despite passage of the Reconstruction Amendments which marked for many whites the end of the social revolution, Rankin knew more remained to be done and therefore he closed his message by calling on Christians to both cry out to God and trust Him knowing that it was safe to leave the evil doers to “the Judge of all the earth.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Rankin, “The Divinity of the Ballot,” November 23, 1876, O. O. Howard Papers.

For many historians, the Compromise of 1877 marks the end Reconstruction as former rebels “redeemed” their states from Republican rule and, through a reassertion of states’ rights, implemented the laws that enshrined racial inequality and paved the way for the rise of the Jim Crow across the South. Black Washingtonians, although stripped of the vote, avoided the harshest realities of Jim Crow under the watchful eye of the federal government but, like their brethren in the South, remained locked in a second-class citizenship far removed from the AMA and CCM’s postwar vision. The deaths of radical Republicans like Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens coincided with the Democrats sweeping victory in the 1874 midterms which left them with precious few allies in Congress to petition for equal citizenship. In the executive branch, President Rutherford B. Hayes, who opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and proved more interested in being the “Great Pacificator” over the “Great Defender” of Black rights replaced President Grant who supported the civil rights bill.¹⁸⁶ And finally in the judiciary, key Supreme Court rulings in the *Slaughterhouse Cases* and *US v. Cruikshank* gutted the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of their intent, leaving little room for legal wrangling.

The most loyal friends of Black Washingtonians, the AMA and CCM, proved apathetic and powerless, respectively, to alter the national sentiment toward reunification premised on white supremacy and second-class citizenship for Blacks. For the AMA, the deaths of Lewis Tappan, George Whipple, and E. P. Smith resulted in the loss of key egalitarian-minded allies in the fight for equal citizenship. In addition, a lack of funds forced the AMA to reevaluate its commitments.¹⁸⁷ Finally, resistance to the patriarchal approaches of missionaries and teachers, combined with black determination to pursue autonomy, left many within the AMA

¹⁸⁶ Simpson, *Reconstruction Presidents*, 199-201.

¹⁸⁷ Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 100. For reunification and white supremacy, see Blum, *Reforging the White Republic* and Blight, *Race and Reunion*.

disenchanted. Granting blacks the franchise had placed them in positions of power across the South for a brief moment but it had led to widespread charges of corruption and mismanagement, not all of which were unjustified.¹⁸⁸ By the end of the decade, black failure to embrace Congregational citizenship birthed a collective frustration that boiled over into uncharacteristic attacks on the freedpeople. In 1875, in a widely disbursed pamphlet, the AMA depicted blacks as “disgracefully immoral and degraded” and three years later announced that it “no longer affirmed that races any more than individuals, are equal in physical and moral fibre and development.” However, the hope for reestablishing the alliance remained if blacks simply embraced the Congregationalist’ definition of citizenship.¹⁸⁹

The CCM, which continued to meet across the country during the 1870s and 1880s did not hold another convention in Washington DC until 1883, a decade after their efforts to agitate for the passage of Senator Sumner’s Civil Rights Act. And yet key leaders remained in the capital and continued their active involvement in the institutions they and the AMA had established as models to transform society. Although First Congregational failed in its efforts to attract large numbers of African Americans, it continued to maintain its reputation as the city’s one interracial church, marking it as an anomaly within the national trend of segregated worship space that mirrored societal norms.¹⁹⁰ At Howard University, faculty members continued to provide Blacks with the key tools and resources with which to achieve their goals. And it was from within its Law Department that eventually emerged the impetus of societal transformation.

¹⁸⁸ Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 87 and Foner, *Reconstruction*, 388-89.

¹⁸⁹ Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 250-55; Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*, 107-08.

¹⁹⁰ Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 158-59.

CONCLUSION

The final decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the nation reunite along the lines of white supremacy, a reality which coincided with the relegation of Blacks to a second-class citizenship with discrimination, segregation, and disenfranchisement entrenched as societal norms. Despite having a friend in the executive branch during the early 1880s, neither the AMA nor CCM could alter the regressive course of events underscored by the Supreme Court's decision in 1883 which ruled the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional. The decision drew immediate rebuke from President Chester Arthur, leaders within the CCM, and First Congregational Church's Reverend Rankin, due to the fact that it stripped the federal government of any power to establish a truly interracial society based on equal citizenship. By elevating states' rights over federal authority, it guaranteed that the achievement of equal citizenship for Blacks would remain impossible. Although the AMA and CCM proved powerless in the face of a national majority that preferred reunion based on white supremacy, their postwar efforts in the capital laid the groundwork for the social transformation that occurred almost a century later.

In the presidential election of 1880, Ohio Republican, Civil War veteran, and friend of the AMA, James Garfield eked out a victory over fellow Civil War veteran and Democratic candidate from Pennsylvania, Winfield S. Hancock. Members of both the AMA and CCM had reason to be hopeful that an ally now occupied the most powerful office in the country. However, less than a year into his administration, Garfield died at the hand of an assassin. Once again, a friend of the freedpeople had unexpectedly passed, leaving his running mate, New Englander Chester A. Arthur, to finish his term. Two years after assuming office, President Arthur turned his attention toward the Supreme Court, which was in the midst of hearing

arguments covering five civil rights cases. Their decision would prove to be the most important one made in relation to equal citizenship since *United States v. Cruikshank* the previous decade.¹

On October 15, 1883, the Supreme Court issued its ruling on the collection of cases designed to test the extent to which the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1875 could be employed to address discrimination and violation of citizenship rights by individual actors. The Waite court, in an 8-1 decision issued by Associate Justice Joseph P. Bradley, struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875 as a violation of the Tenth Amendment which reserved “powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution . . . to the States respectively, or to the people.” In the majority ruling, Justice Bradley found that the key Reconstruction amendments applied only to state action only leaving states with the responsibility to address cases of individual discrimination within their borders. For southern states intent on locking Blacks into second-class citizenship, the ruling was a godsend while for the Black pursuit of equal citizenship, the ruling was nothing short of betrayal. In his third annual message to Congress on December 4, 1883, the racially progressive President Arthur bemoaned the ruling which declared unconstitutional “certain statutory provisions” of the Fourteenth Amendment intended to confer “the rights of citizenship upon all persons born or naturalized in the United States” and “insure to members of the colored race the full enjoyment of civil and political rights.” He informed members of Congress that “any legislation whereby Congress may lawfully supplement the guaranties which the Constitution affords for the equal enjoyment by all the citizens of the United States of every right, privilege, and immunity of citizenship will

¹ James A. Garfield to George Whipple, April 26, 1871, AMAA. In this letter, Garfield wrote that “the nation owes a debt of gratitude to the American Missionary Association for its energy and benevolence.” For AMA lifetime membership of Mrs. Lucretia Garfield (James Garfield’s wife), see *Thirty-fifth Annual Report of the American Missionary Association* (New York, 1881), 110.

receive my unhesitating approval.”² The 48th Congress, however, lacked radical Republican voices and the party control so critical to change in the previous decade, and thus no legislation emerged. The Supreme Court’s ruling in the civil rights cases of 1883 paved the way for the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling just over a decade later which led to the entrenchment of Jim Crow marked by Black disenfranchisement, segregation, and inequality; in short, a second-class citizenship that remained for almost a century.³

While most histories of Reconstruction end with the compromise of 1877, when viewing the era through the lens of the interracial pursuit of equal citizenship, 1883 offers a more appropriate conclusion. Indeed, just one week after the court issued its ruling, black delegates gathered once more in Washington, DC, for a Civil Rights Convention to consider the next steps and issue their collective response to the recent ruling. Howard University professor, James M. Gregory, served as president with Frederick Douglass and New York lawyer, Robert G. Ingersoll, delivering the key addresses. Those in attendance passed a series of resolutions that called on “all friends of justice” to “see to it that the full and equal protection of the laws are afforded every citizen, without respect to race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” They identified the Democratic Party as the enemy of equal rights and thus held the Republican Party responsible to secure and maintain what the Supreme Court had failed to do, namely “complete liberty and exact equality in the enjoyment of all civil, political, and public rights . . . throughout

² Wyatt-Brown, “The Civil Rights Act of 1875”, 774; Chester A. Arthur, Third Annual Message Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/203861>; Scott S Greenberger, *The Unexpected President: The Life and Times of Chester A. Arthur*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2019), 222-24. Given the climate of the times, President Arthur’s actions toward Blacks including pushing for federal funds for black education, contributing privately to a black church, inviting the all Black Fisk Jubilee Singers to the White House, and personally handing out diplomas to Black high school graduates made him a race progressive, see Greenberger, *The Unexpected President*, 223.

³ Michael A. Bellesiles, *Inventing Equality: Reconstructing the Constitution in the Aftermath of the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2020), 257-65 and Eric Foner and Joshua Brown, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 208, 214-25.

the Union by efficient and appropriate State and Federal legislation.” Employing language long held in common between the AMA and CCM, they declared that “the progress of the colored American citizen in morals, education, frugality, industry, and general usefulness, as a man and as a citizen, makes it the part of sound policy and wisdom to maintain and protect him in the enjoyment of the fullest and most complete rights of citizenship.” And finally, pointing toward the need for interracial cooperation, they called upon “all good men and women” to establish civil rights associations across the country to agitate until Blacks attained equal citizenship.⁴

In Douglass’s brief remarks, he emphasized that the recent Supreme Court decision had “inflicted a heavy calamity upon seven millions of the people of this country.” The ruling had granted states more power than the federal government and brought him “more sorrow than anger, more regret than bitterness” as any “deed done for slavery, caste, and oppression is a blow struck at human progress.” He agreed with Associate Justice John Marshall Harlan’s dissent that the majority ruling utterly ignored the intent of the Fourteenth Amendment and thus disregarded the historical moment in which it had been passed. While Taney’s decision in 1858 had sought to establish slavery national, the Civil War and Reconstruction amendments had settled the matter and established liberty as the new baseline. The great failure of the Court, in Douglass’s eyes, centered on its unwillingness to defend freedom national as strongly as it once defended slavery.⁵

The main address at the gathering in Lincoln Hall came from Robert Ingersoll. In what was perhaps another sign of the weakening relationship between what once was a largely Protestant coalition, Ingersoll, an outspoken agnostic, took the stage to offer his critique of the recent Supreme Court ruling. Ingersoll excoriated the Supreme Court’s decision which robbed

⁴ Frederick Douglass, “Proceedings of the Civil Rights Mass-Meeting held at Lincoln Hall, October 22, 1883. Speeches of Hon. Frederick Douglass and Robert G. Ingersoll.,” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed January 24, 2022, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/1194>, 1-3.

⁵ Douglass, “Proceedings of the Civil Rights Mass-Meeting held at Lincoln Hall,” 5, 7-12. Quotes on pg. 7.

Blacks of equal citizenship by undermining the Reconstruction Amendments which he referred to as “the Trinity of Liberty.”⁶ Now, the Black man was left to depend upon a conductor for the preservation of his privileges instead of the Constitution thus leaving him in a condition of involuntary servitude. It also rendered both the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments null and void by ignoring the reciprocal responsibilities stated in contract form whereby “the citizen promises allegiance, and the nation promises protection.” With the Fourteenth Amendment, the federal government had adopted all as its children, the Supreme Court’s ruling rendered them abandoned.⁷ In short, Ingersoll demonstrated the regressive nature of the ruling that ignored history and severed “the tie that binds the citizen to the nation, gave “new life to the serpent of State sovereignty,” and left “Congress suddenly powerless to protect rights conferred by the Constitution.”⁸ The only response to such an egregious decision, Ingersoll concluded, was to push for passage of additional amendments “until the Constitution shall become a perfect shield for every right, of every human being, beneath the flag.”⁹

A few weeks after the equal rights convention and the day before Thanksgiving, Rev. Rankin delivered a special message at First Congregational Church entitled, “The State and the Citizen of the State,” with Romans 13, the principal Biblical text on civil government, as the sermon’s primary passage.¹⁰ Despite the postwar retreat of the AMA in the fight for equal citizenship, Rankin, an AMA lifetime member, remained steadfastly committed to the cause. He declared that next to God, the state was the most powerful entity on earth and that “tyranny, unjust laws, unfair interpretations, or unequal execution of them are a betrayal of government’s

⁶ Ingersoll, “Proceedings of the Civil Rights Mass-Meeting held at Lincoln Hall,” 19.

⁷ Ingersoll “Proceedings of the Civil Rights Mass-Meeting held at Lincoln Hall,” 23-24, 26 and 31.

⁸ Ingersoll, “Proceedings of the Civil Rights Mass-Meeting held at Lincoln Hall,” 42, 45, and 47.

⁹ Ingersoll, “Proceedings of the Civil Rights Mass-Meeting held at Lincoln Hall,” 53.

¹⁰ Jeremiah E. Rankin, *The State and the Citizen of the State: A Sermon in the First Congregational Church on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 28, 1883* (Washington D. C.: Pilgrim Press, 1883), O. O. Howard Papers.

most sacred function” and must be met with godly resistance. For those unsure of the context of his message, he specifically called out the Supreme Court and their recent decision in the civil rights cases stating that “whatever the grounds of the decision of a majority of the Supreme Court with regard to the civil rights of the colored people, no man can say, “it conforms to the law of natural freedom and equity.””¹¹

Using as his primary illustration the recent story of a Black Mississippi man who was shot for voting, Rankin railed against the injustice of the event that “was telegraphed from one end of the land to the other, but American justice has not yet discovered it.” Despite the passage of the Reconstruction amendments, it was clear to Rankin that “we have the old Constitution still!” and that Black citizens were “more out of her [the government’s] power than if they were in a foreign land.” In agreement with both Douglass and Ingersoll, he drew attention to the irony that in their decision, the Supreme Court had vindicated States’ rights over federal authority, thus undermining “the idea of freedom national” which had cost the lives of so many during the war. And where the Court said Congress had no constitutional authority to legislate, he pointed to section 8 of article I and noted the inconsistency that empowered Congress to legislate within states over commerce traveling on the rails but when it came to people, seemingly much more valuable, it had been rendered powerless. The not-so-subtle irony beneath his critique was that Blacks had a better chance of being protected in their rights as “traveling commodities” than they did as persons.¹²

In concluding his message, Rankin harkened back to the Lockean concept of mutual obligation that governs the relationship between citizens and the state, a theory of government then over a century old. Pointing to the nation’s history during the Revolutionary War, he

¹¹ Rankin, *State and the Citizen of the State*, 8-9 and 14.

¹² Rankin, *State and the Citizen of the State*, 10-13.

rebuked those who “think the agitation of the colored people ill-timed.” For his part, Rankin honored them and wished to see their leaders stand as Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry had stood noting that “There is not an Anglo-Saxon who hears my voice who has not, in the loins of his ancestors, been stirred to mutiny by wrongs that had not half the dignity or importance.” He reminded whites that it would be ridiculous to think one could “make a good citizen out of man who is not honored and respected by his government; against whom the law, or the administration of the law discriminates”¹³ In especially provocative language, he called into question the right to tax Blacks or call on them to bear arms in defense of a nation that “cannot protect them” nor punish the citizen who commits a crime against him. The recent Supreme Court ruling had come from eight white men “but who among us believes that eight colored men would ever have come to such a decision? I do not.”

Rankin chastised the nation that owed much to these seven million of citizens and yet clearly had in this decision declared itself “insolvent and unable to pay” and utterly bankrupt in its willingness to fulfill promises made. He called upon the nation to rise up and “enable the black race to take the rank of mere citizens” stating that the very character of the State was at stake in the matter. Although Rankin would continue to dream of and imagine equal citizenship on earth, he looked toward the perfect government coming down out of Heaven from God where equal citizenship truly exists. In a final appeal to white Americans, he said, “To have followed in the footsteps of those who prophesied of it, and died expecting it; to have believed in it as God’s idea, in giving man the power of self-government; in giving His Son to be man’s elder brother, this it is to have been an American!”¹⁴

¹³ Rankin, *State and the Citizen of the State*, 15.

¹⁴ Rankin, *State and the Citizen of the State*, 16-18.

Despite the prominent voices calling the nation to honor its promises and obligations to the Black man by securing him in his rights as an equal citizen, their few voices were drowned out by a cacophony of others who preferred reunion under the auspices of white supremacy. The collective resistance proved to be more than the AMA's and CCM's interracial alliance could withstand. With the return of southern congressmen and the national resolve for social transformation rapidly fading, the capital, once a potential model for an interracial society, increasingly returned to its southern roots. As one historian as observed, the need for agitation, combined with the desire to conciliate whites, including their allies, ultimately doomed the CCM whose members tragically miscalculated the extent of white racism and resistance to social transformation.¹⁵ Further complicating matters was the level of naivety demonstrated by the advocates of Congregational citizenship, like those in the AMA, who believed that freedpeople would adhere to New England concepts of citizenship and that such adherence would naturally elevate them into white society as equals. Although the Union had won the war and the North had rallied around the demand for liberty, there had never been a majority consensus on equality. In assessing the collective Black response during the late nineteenth century to this injustice and the widespread embrace of agricultural uplift in lieu of equal rights championed by Booker T. Washington, Stephen Hahn concludes:

It was not that they accepted the destruction of the civil and political rights . . . nor did they accept or seek accommodation with the official public segregation then being imposed. They regarded all of these developments as despicable indignities and humiliations. It was rather that they saw their survival and growth as families, as communities, and as a people best served by turning inward by pursuing self-reliance. To this extent, Booker T. Washington articulated a particular version—one designed to gain the financial help and protection of white conservatives, North and South—of sensibilities and goals shared by most African Americans in the countryside, never more so than in the 1890s.¹⁶

¹⁵ Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 520-22, 542-44, and 256; Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 254.

¹⁶ Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 452.

Thus a new hierarchical alliance emerged, one premised on white superiority and black deference. Conservative white southerners would provide a modicum of security to Blacks as long as they maintained their place as second-class citizens and white northerners promised to long longer interfere in “southern matters.” In Washington, where farm land was in short supply, Black Washingtonians found themselves locked into the “lowest rungs of the occupational and economic ladder” and in this regard mirrored their brethren across the South. While the absence of industry and discrimination played an important role, Johnston pinned the failure of Black elevation on the “size and nature” of the postwar migration into the capital and the inability of the freedpeople’s friends to understand the true reality and extent of the needs facing this impoverished group of new citizens. He concluded, that minus substantive opportunities for equal employment, “the members of Washington’s black community were self-reliant in the truest sense. Left to fend for themselves, they survived Freedom as best they could in the alleys and shanties of Washington . . . in search of a dimly remembered promise.”¹⁷

By the late nineteenth century, the AMA, critically short of funds, was no longer the standard-bearer of that once brightly lit promise now dimmed. Toler correctly notes that by the final decades of the nineteenth century, the AMA’s attention had shifted from the capital and the pursuit of equal citizenship to an emphasis on foreign missions and westward expansion with a particular focus on Native American revivals. However, his conclusion that the AMA abandoned its benevolent mission in the District of Columbia and left “the masses of freedpeople yearning to be free were left with “nothin’ but ‘ligion,” is a bit disingenuous.¹⁸ From their arrival in the capital, freedpeople never expressed a desire to join the Congregationalist polity. And while this proved to be both a surprise and constant irritant to the AMA, it did not prevent the AMA from

¹⁷ Johnston, “Surviving Freedom,” 328-30.

¹⁸ Toler, “Nothin’ but ‘ligion,” 23-24. On funds, see Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction*, 100.

pursuing its goal of equal citizenship, which primarily took place through Howard University and received reinforcement in the messages coming out of Rev. Rankin's pulpit at First Congregational Church. Indeed, during his pastorate, which lasted from August 1869 to June 1884, Rankin not only stabilized the church, but significantly increased its attendance and membership among both Blacks and whites. Unfortunately, his example and appeals in the early 1880s for the nation to honor its commitment to the Black man was lost within the burgeoning ministry of Dwight L. Moody, who despite being apolitical, had helped unite the nation through messages of reconciliation that minimized the further need for social and political issues for spiritual conversions and personal piety.¹⁹

The AMA did, however, establish through their Washington institutions, First Congregational Church and Howard University, experiments in interracial community that not only outlived its mission of uplift in the city, but also provided the impetus for change. Through education at Howard University, Black students received the tools to fight injustice and the ability to achieve upward mobility and independence.²⁰ W. E. B. DuBois concluded that the AMA's "saintly souls" were New England's gift to freedmen. They brought "not alms, but a friend; not cash, but character." The education crusade, he added, was the "finest thing in American history, and one of the few things untainted by sordid greed and cheap vainglory."²¹ Although southern states had quickly moved to destroy the progress made on social transformation by the AMA and CCM, they could never quite achieve their goal of reestablishing the prewar society they cherished.

¹⁹ Allredge, *Centennial History of First Congregational*, 29; Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*, 123.

²⁰ Toler, "Nothin' but 'ligion," 290.

²¹ Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 96.

In the wake of the 1883 Supreme Court ruling, southern states quickly moved to ban intermarriage and enshrine segregation in local laws. They received the backing of the Supreme Court in this effort thirteen years later in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which established separate but equal as the national standard within American society.²² Once again, Associate Justice John Marshall Harlan delivered the lone dissent, stating in part that “The arbitrary separation of citizens, on the basis of race, while they are on a public highway, is a badge of servitude wholly inconsistent with the civil freedom and the equality before the law established by the Constitution. It cannot be justified upon any legal grounds.” The majority within the Court and indeed the nation disagreed. However, from within the Law Department of Howard University, Langston’s pride and joy, would spring a cadre of lawyers who became powerful currents of change some sixty years later, none more so than Thurgood Marshall who graduated from Howard Law School in 1933 and went on to become the key prosecutor in *Brown v. Board of Education* which began to dismantle the foundations of second-class citizenship.

²² Guelzo, *Reconstruction*, 118. See also Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 261-65.

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