Myth of Opportunity:
Economic and Educational Strivings in Black Baltimore, 1864-1884

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For my parents

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Introduction: Migration and Myth

*In most parts of the South the Negroes are still unable to become landowners or successful business men. Conditions and customs have reserved these spheres for whites. Generally speaking, the Negroes are still dependent on the white people for food and shelter. Although not exactly slaves, they are yet attached to the white people as tenants, servants, or dependents....The world has gone on but in their sequestered sphere, progress has passed them by.*

Carter G. Woodson, A Century of Negro Migration

The African-American experience has been and continues to be defined by migration. During the antebellum period, thousands of Southern slaves attempted to escape the oppressive bonds of their slave masters for the freedom which Northern lands promised. Then, during the First and Second Great Migrations of 1910 and 1940, millions of blacks, dissatisfied with the injustice of Southern courts, civil unrest, disenfranchisement, violence and unemployment, flocked to Northern cities on promises of equality and the opportunity to move from blue to white-collar professions. This pattern of migration continued through the 1960s into present day, with blacks attempting to move from the ghetto to the suburb, following the promise of safer neighborhoods, better school systems and valuable real estate. Blacks have often found themselves discontented with the lack of economic, educational and political opportunity available to them at their present location and, time and time again, migrated to new locations, hoping to better their lot in life. Maryland Negroes were no exception.

After the emancipation of Maryland’s black slave population by the State Constitution of 1864, blacks from all over the State flocked to Baltimore, believing it to be a city of unlimited
opportunity for the Negro. That this black migration occurred in 1864, immediately after the State Emancipation, is confirmed by various newspaper reports which referred to the “great influx of negroes in the city since emancipation.”\(^1\) Furthermore, U.S. Census Reports indicate a 42 percent growth in Baltimore’s black population between the years 1860 and 1870.\(^2\) During the same period, Census reports indicate a significant decline in the black populations of all but one of the six rural counties in southern Maryland and in four of eight on the Eastern Shore. Thus, the Census evidence seems to suggest that Baltimore’s black migrants came from the various counties of the State of Maryland. This observation is substantiated by reports of the Friend’s Association in Aid of the Freedmen, which observed that “the faces of the newly-freed population are turned toward the City of Baltimore,” and furthermore, by reports of the city’s Trustees of the Poor, saying “a large mass of colored persons…have been thrown from the several counties of the State upon the city of Baltimore.”\(^3\) Indeed, most of Baltimore’s black migrants were poor, newly freed slaves seeking the economic opportunity that the city promised.

While numerous newspapers wrote of the abundance of jobs and wealth that the Negro could acquire in Baltimore, the thousands of Negroes who migrated to the city after emancipation found this ‘promised opportunity’ to be mythic at best. Blacks were met with staunch racism by white employers and co-workers who, through the power of white unions, forced blacks out of skilled-labor occupations. The few jobs that blacks could find were almost exclusively of the laboring and domestic varieties, not the skilled and white-collar work that they hoped to acquire. And while some blacks found work, many did not. Jobless, some turned to


\(^3\) Report of the Trustees of the Poor, January, 1866. See: Fuke, p.112.
Myth of Opportunity

vices such as gambling and alcohol. Crime rates and homelessness within the black community were high and the police stations overcrowded with black criminals and paupers. Major health epidemics, such as cholera and smallpox outbreaks in 1866 and 1872, respectively, hit hardest the wards of Baltimore with the highest Negro populations. In the first twenty years after emancipation, Black Baltimoreans, old and new, did not find themselves overwhelmed by limitless opportunity, but battered by racism, poverty, disease and relative inopportunity.

Although very little has been written documenting the history of the Baltimore black community in the first twenty years of Maryland’s Negro emancipation, 1864-1884, the scholarship that does exist highlights the successes of a handful of prominent black Baltimoreans and ignores the misfortune of Baltimore’s massive black poor. While scholars discuss Isaac Myers, who in 1865 founded the first black corporation in Baltimore and turned a profit of $15,000 in his first year of operation, they do not mention the paucity and relative failure of black businesses within the city and the low employment/high poverty rates of Baltimore’s 40,000 blacks. While scholars discuss the 20,000 blacks that paraded through the City streets in May of 1870 to celebrate the passage of the 15th Amendment which guaranteed black males the right to vote, they do not mention the failure of the Republican Party to address the grievances of the Baltimore black community or endorse any of its political candidates for office, rendering black suffrage relatively useless. And while scholars discuss the admittance of blacks into the Baltimore Public School System after years of being denied access, they do not mention the failure of the school system to properly educate black children of the city and the violence perpetrated against black school-goers. The educational and political successes of black

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Baltimore were countered by institutionalized apathy to black concerns and educational advancement, and the wealth of a few prominent black Baltimoreans was by no means representative of the entire black populace. The myth of opportunity is not contained to the past, but continues to falsely inform the historical record, painting Baltimore as a city in which the Negro could thrive.

Most of the years that my thesis examines, 1864-1884, fall within the historical period of Reconstruction, the era from 1865-1877 when federal troops occupied the former Confederate States that had seceded from the Union. These troops were tasked with ensuring black economic, educational and political rights through equitable labor contracts between black laborers and white employers, through federal funding for black school initiatives, and through the protection of black suffrage from disenfranchisement at the polls. While much is written about the relative successes of blacks in the Confederate States during this Reconstruction period, little is written about blacks in the Border States which had never seceded from the Union and, as a result, were not subject to Reconstruction’s federal occupation. For me, the lingering question was after emancipation, what were the successes of blacks in the Border States, such as Maryland, where there was no federal occupation to ensure black rights? Were they able to secure freedom, equality and prosperity without a federal mandate on the State? And this general inquiry led me to the narrower question of what were the post-emancipation advances of blacks in Baltimore?

Baltimore proves a unique case study for two reasons: (1) Because it was located in a

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Border State which had not seceded from the Union, Baltimore was not subject to the Reconstruction laws and federal occupation seeking to guarantee black rights; most of the advances made for blacks would probably not be federally mandated but privately initiated and (2) Baltimore boasted the largest free black population in the country at the time of the Civil War; it has occupied historical memory as a place in which the Negro was guaranteed greater freedoms and could measurably advance his economic position. But was Baltimore truly a place of unlimited opportunity for the Negro? And without federal mandates for Black rights, how did the Negro get ahead? Concisely, it was not and he did not.

Yet blacks continued to pour into Baltimore throughout the period. Perhaps they did so in order to escape the violence of Maryland countryside. Perhaps living conditions were marginally better in the city of Baltimore than they were in Maryland’s various counties. But whatever adversity blacks escaped in moving to Baltimore, they did not reach opportunity. As one of Baltimore’s black residents argued, his people “would have been much further advanced, had the State [of Maryland] seceded and shared the fate of the more Southern states.” Indeed, federal troops occupying the city might have fought for black labor contracts to ensure profitable employment. They might have established and properly maintained schools for colored children throughout the city. However, in the absence of federal occupation, white labor unions organized to exclude blacks from skilled occupations and white employers often refused to hire black workers. White businesses denied black patronage. Although the City School Board

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5 For instance, newspapers reported churches which housed schools being burned. See: The Baltimore Sun (hereafter referred to as Sun). Dec. 21, 1865. In the countryside, “violent attacks on black people were frequently gratuitous and arbitrary,” that “black churches attracted violence as velvet attracts lint” and that “employers refused to pay them [blacks] as promised.” See: Fields, Barbara J. Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century. (Yale University Press: New Haven) pp. 143-146.

6 Brackett, Jeffrey R. The Negro in Maryland: Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War. (Johns Hopkins University: Baltimore, 1890.) p. 6.
eventually made provisions for black education in 1867, the schools they provided coloreds were
dilapidated, unsanitary and generally neglected. Further, the Board refused to hire black
teachers. Black children were often arrested on vague and trumped up charges and correctional
facilities were established in order to remove what whites perceived to be an immoral,
impoverished and unsanitary black population, out of the city. In the absence of federal
occupation, whites actively resisted black presence in Baltimore and did as little as possible to
provide for black social advance. It was in this racially charged environment that black attempts
at economic and educational advance writhed.

Much of what has been written about black Baltimore in the first twenty years of
emancipation are short sketches of the successes of one or two blacks and several black
organizations. These successes have been used to propagandistically paint the Baltimore black
community as prosperous and socio-politically advanced, when it was actually overwhelmed by
poverty, racism, disease, high crime rates, barriers to education, and political
disenfranchisement. In the chapters that follow, this paper will comprehensively examine the
economic and educational landscape of Baltimore’s black community during the first twenty
years of emancipation. Amidst a racially hostile society, Baltimorean black economic and
educational progress was limited.

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7 For activism of white labor unions, see Sun, Sept. 30,1865; For denial of black patronage, see Harriet A. Wales et al. vs. Douglass Institute of Baltimore City and John H. Butler, (hereafter referred to as Wales et al. vs. Institute) 1887. Maryland State Archives; For poor conditions of school and administrative neglect, See: “Public Commissioners Reports on Public Schools” and “Report of the Superintendent,” 1867-1884. Baltimore City Archives. (hereafter referred to as School Board Reports )
Chapter 1: Economic Strivings

When the Unionist party chose to free Maryland’s black slave population in 1864, they did so to “destroy the unfair competition slave labor presented to the free white workers and plain farmers of the state.”\textsuperscript{1} Indeed, with the large influx of German and Irish immigrants to Baltimore in the 1850s searching for work, the city’s abundance of black workers became competition to free white labor. Black emancipation, then, was effected for white economic liberty; in freeing the slaves, it was hoped that blacks would leave the State and no longer pose a threat to free white labor. What whites did not anticipate, however, were the thousands of Negroes who migrated to the city immediately after emancipation.

Massive black migration to the city only worsened racial tensions, for blackness came to be associated with criminality, poverty and vice. With this tawdry association, blacks became an unwanted element in Baltimore and white residents actively resisted their presence. Between the years 1864-1884, blacks would suffer numerous economic attacks, at the hands of white Baltimoreans, in the form of labor exclusion, inadequate wages, and discriminatory hiring policies. White labor unions actively organized to keep blacks out of semi-skilled trades, forcing them into unskilled, low-wage occupations. So hostile were whites to black residents, that police frequently arrested blacks on vague and trumped up charges of “incorrigibility” and removed these black “criminals” out of the city and onto plantations to work as farmhands without pay. Whites actively fought to remove blacks from Baltimore and forced them into low-paying menial labor occupations to maintain a lily-white city in which white economic security was of foremost concern. And while some blacks did find some degree of economic success, their numbers were small—just 1% of the black population held 25% of the community’s wealth and the few black

\textsuperscript{1} Callcott, Margaret Law, “The Negro in Maryland Politics, 1870-1912” (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1969)
businesses that were established, failed. Blacks struggled in their quest for economic advance in a city antagonistic towards black labor and black presence.

**The Negro’s Place in the Baltimore Economy.** Since the city’s founding in 1729, Baltimore has been economically defined by its geographic location. The city’s port was a natural haven for ships, there were numerous streams with enough fall for powerful turning mills, the region possessed an ideal agricultural climate with a variety of fertile soils, and there existed large deposits of iron ore. In the mid-18th Century, as planters in the surrounding Chesapeake region acquired great wealth from the production of tobacco and wheat and the mining of iron ore, Baltimore’s economy grew through the development of mills and iron refineries, and through the creation of a viable shipping trade for imports and exports. As an emerging port city, Baltimore established a strong presence in the shipbuilding industry, producing schooners navigably capable for trade on the war-ridden high seas. By the 1790s, Baltimore was a “knot in the world’s web of shipping, finance and communications.”

Throughout the first half of the 19th Century, Baltimore’s economy saw unprecedented expansion through the construction of valuable real estate, newly created businesses, corporations and collective enterprises, and a shift on the part of merchants into manufacturing in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. By the time of the Civil War, trade, manufacture and finance were the backbone of the Baltimore economy and labor market.

For much of the 17th and 18th Centuries, the Chesapeake region economy was centered around the production of tobacco. Because tobacco production did not necessitate a mercantile, industrial or shipping trade, until the 1750s, the city of Baltimore was relatively non-existent as an economic entity. Tobacco could be sold directly to the buyer by the planter without the aid of

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a middleman. Beginning in 1732, however, European tobacco markets entered a long period of depressed prices and tobacco cultivation proved unable to sustain the Chesapeake economy. At about the same time, a large number of German and Scotch-Irish immigrants, began settling the Chesapeake region and planting a variety of cereal grains, especially wheat. The wheat that these immigrants cultivated addressed the high demands of Europe and the West Indies in the mid-to-late 17th Century, but could not be sold directly to buyers. Grain trade required a centralized source for export, where farmers could mill and market their grain to merchants, who in turn could find buyers to store it until ready for shipment. It was because of Baltimore’s close proximity both to the Chesapeake’s wheat producing areas and to the bay, and the high demand for grains throughout Europe, that Baltimore grew to commercial importance. Indeed, by 1804, there were 50 flour mills in operation in an 18mi radius, over 150 warehouses lining the docks, and Baltimore was the fourth largest city in the country.  

What set Baltimore apart from the other counties of Maryland in the 18th and 19th Centuries was that its economy was not based on agriculture, but on trade, shipping, and eventually transportation and finance. Baltimore provided the market for import and export of various goods necessary for the financial vitality of the various counties. As a result, the slave labor that Baltimoreans employed was not that of the typical back-breaking agricultural variety. While many slaves were employed in menial occupational roles as day-laborers, cooks, house servants and domestics, a sizeable number were also employed in the shops of city tradespeople and manufacturers, most prominently in shipyards and shipbuilding industries; they were sailors,

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stevedores, carters and draymen. In fact, Baltimore’s black labor force was so heavily engaged in these particular semi-skilled and skilled occupations that they came to be seen as “black” occupations. In the caulking industry, for example, the Baltimore American assumed that black caulkers were the only caulkers in Baltimore. As these occupations became synonymous with black labor, native whites generally avoided them and blacks secured a niche within the semi-skilled labor market.

Baltimore’s economic growth and development never depended on slavery. Slaves were in high demand as part of the labor force, often not out of necessity, but as a means for the growing affluent urban class to increase personal comfort and assert their economic prosperity. When the cheaper labor of German and Irish immigrants presented itself to white business owners prior to 1810, those owners would often turn it away. At the turn of the century, one saddler, David Armour, advertised that his Irish indentured Servant Woman, who had upwards of two and one-half years remaining in her work contract, was for sale. The reason: “I have got a slave that I mean to put in her place.” Armour’s replacement of his indentured servant with a slave was not for any particular economic gain or advantage. Rather, it represented slave-ownership as an outward manifestation of economic well-being. Slavery was not an economic necessity, but an expression of social status. The desire of white Baltimoreans to express this “status” caused an increase in the demand for slaves and the slave population of Baltimore

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6 Reporters mention not realizing that there are white caulkers in the city until caulkers’ riots in 1858. The Baltimore American (hereafter referred to as American), July 8, 1858.

continued to grow through 1810, when it reached a high of 4,672 persons. Relative to the overall city population of 46,555 persons, slaves constituted 10% of the Baltimore population. But in the 50 years following 1810, although the total population increased substantially to 212,418 persons, the slave population decreased to 2,218 persons—just 1% of the population. What happened in the 50 years between 1810 and 1860 that led to slavery’s decline?\(^8\)

One explanation for slavery’s decline is that slaves were an economically inefficient labor force in Baltimore. Firstly, slaves were as expensive and, at times, more expensive than, free labor—the cost to insure a hired-out slave against injury proved particularly exorbitant. Secondly, because of Baltimore’s close proximity to the North, there was a greater risk that slaves might run away, causing the owner to lose the entire investment he had made in the slave. Thirdly, because there were many new businesses being subsidized through State charters, many white businessmen found new and more profitable outlets for investment.\(^9\) And fourthly, slave labor could never be essential to the Baltimore economy, because the labor that major city industries required (i.e. sailors, stevedores, carters, draymen) was highly seasonal and, to a large degree, casual; worker-demand was subject to the volatility of trade and weather.\(^10\)

A second explanation for slavery’s decline takes into account the fact that there was a growing free black population whose existence was caused by slavery’s inefficiency and the regular manumission of slaves. This free black population became a cheap competitor to slave labor as it did not have all of the economic risks associated with slaves. More importantly, this growing free black population provided a cheaper labor force that still maintained race-class

\(^8\) See Baltimore City Population Census in Phillips, p. 15.


\(^10\) Fields, p. 48.
occupational lines: blacks remained in, what the city considered, traditionally black labor roles as stevedores, caulkers, draymen and the like. As a result, although in 1790 slaves outnumbered free blacks nearly 4:1, by 1830, the free black population soared to 14,790 while slave population only numbered 1,255—a 12:1 ratio in favor of free blacks.\textsuperscript{11} It was the combination of slavery’s economic infeasibility and the ability to replace it with cheaper free-black labor that contributed to slavery’s decline in the City.

**Black Labor Exclusion.** In the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, the apprenticeship system greatly shaped the occupational endeavors of Baltimore’s growing free black population. In 1818, Baltimore law demanded that any free Negro child who was not at service or learning a trade, or in the service of their parents, was to be bound to learn a trade.\textsuperscript{12} This 1818 law, which conscripted free blacks to learn semi-skilled and skilled trades, further contributed to blackness becoming synonymous with those trades (i.e caulking, blacksmithing etc.). Certainly by 1840, the 1818-law had created an entire generation of blacks who, if not employed as general laborers or domestics, were heavily engaged in semi-skilled and skilled labor occupations as barbers, caulkers, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, brick makers, brick molders, carpenters, draymen, stevedores and other like professions.\textsuperscript{13} Black labor became synonymous with and overwhelmed these semi-skilled labor occupations.

Just as this class of skilled black laborers was emerging, however, job opportunities in Baltimore were tightening. Following the 1848 revolutions in the German states and the Great Irish Famine spanning 1845-1852, America saw a great influx of German and Irish immigrants


\textsuperscript{12} Gardner, p. 131.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 133.
to the United States in 1850s that were in search of work. Many came to Baltimore willing to work in the semi-skilled and skilled labor occupations that had traditionally been “black” occupations. As early as 1845, one white Baltimorean, John Carey, mentioned that the influx of Irish and German labor had already begun to drive blacks from several occupations, especially at the wharves and coal yards.\textsuperscript{14} A black drayman commented on the effects of German-Irish immigration, saying that “Irish and German workers were getting into his business, and the white employers no longer showed a preference for black drayman. Every year conditions had gotten worse for him and others.”\textsuperscript{15} In the past, when white employers had to choose between \textit{black-slave labor} and \textit{white labor}, they chose \textit{slave labor} as an expression of social status. When the choice was between \textit{black-slave labor} and \textit{free-black labor}, white employers chose \textit{free-black labor} because of the fewer economic risks associated with \textit{free-blacks}. But when the choice was between \textit{free-black} and \textit{free-white labor}, they chose \textit{white}.

In the late 1850s, labor riots broke out across the city between white and black workers among numerous professions including the brick-makers, caulkers, City Railways and in the shipyards. With the Depression of 1857, even more whites were willing to work in traditionally \textit{black} semi-skilled and skilled occupations.\textsuperscript{16} As whites and migrants occupied these trades, they excluded blacks from their labor unions and eventually the trades themselves. Unable to get jobs in the skilled-labor industries they once dominated, many blacks turned to unskilled and domestic-minded occupations.

\textbf{Wartime Gains.} Wartime demands necessitate economic reorganization, spurring the

\begin{footnotesize} 
\begin{enumerate} 
\item Ibid., p. 149. 
\item Ibid., p. 150. 
\item Ibid., pp. 150-160 
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growth of some industries and signaling the retardation of others. With the onset of the Civil War in 1861-Baltimore, construction of houses dropped to barely 100 dwellings per year, foreign immigration ceased, and the regular threat of invasion limited industrial development. Growth sectors in the Baltimore economy were tied to the city’s role as a strategic transportation center and to the production of materials necessary for war. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company was one of the nation’s essential rail lines, often handled massive troop movements and built sixty new heavy duty locomotives during the War. In the shipyards, over 500 feet of waterfront were built and, with the advent of steampower, 18 first class steamers were constructed for the purpose of shipping wartime supplies. The harnessing of steam power was also instrumental in the development of steam-powered-brickmaking factories and sawmills. Oyster and vegetable packers expanded, selling tinned food for the armies, and garment makers produced uniforms. Numerous businesses based in shipping, manufactures, transportation and trade industries cropped up and grew strong because of wartime demands.17

Baltimore became one of the nation’s most important transportation centers and commercially redefined itself as a supplier “subject to the wants of civilized men.”18 The city began making more furniture, stoves, underwear, boots and shoes. Food packing industries canned foods such as pickles, jam, corn and catsup. Maritime industries such as oyster shucking also grew. Shipping, railroads, manufacture and trade became the backbone of the City’s economy. It was those industries which had been demanded by the needs of war that saw the greatest growth.

While many men were made rich through the advent and growth of new businesses,

17 Olson, pp. 143-148.

18 Ibid., p. 149.
African-Americans played no role in this economic revolution. As William Paul observed, “Except for employment as foundry works and common laborers, Negroes found few opportunities in this mushrooming industrial complex.”

Black entrepreneurship was not a reality because of legal and social obstacles within the economic sector. Indeed, blacks could not obtain capital and were often denied credit by lending institutions, they faced low wages and job competition from immigrants, mob violence, exclusion from non-labor or domestic related occupations, and no legal recourse to defend business interests. The only opportunities afforded blacks during this period of economic growth was in low-paying common labor occupations.

The Civil War did secure for blacks one inestimable gain: emancipation. And in Baltimore that gain came early. Maryland slave owners, worried about the safety of their “slave investment”, would often allow their slaves to enlist in the army. In addition to their freedom, slaves who enlisted would receive $50 upon mustering in and $50 upon mustering out, while the owner would be compensated $300-$400 for each slave. The threat of losing one’s slave investment was quite real in the early 1860s. General Butler had declared the slaves of rebel states “contrabands of war”, his actions being supported by the Confiscation Acts of 1861 and 1862 which freed slaves in rebel territories into which Union soldiers progressed. Lincoln had issued his Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 freeing all of the slaves in rebel territories. And throughout the war, slaves were regularly fleeing into Union army lines for freedom; this was especially a problem for Maryland slaveholders, as many of their slaves fled nearby to

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21 Olson, p. 146.
Washington D.C. and other slave-free Northern territories. Federal emancipation appeared eminent, slaves were difficult to secure and many slave owners hoped to cash in their chips on the crumbling institution.

As the market for slaves began to fall and the maintenance of the institution of slavery in Maryland proved more and more difficult, the Maryland State legislature saw fit to emancipate all of its slaves in 1864, a year before slavery was abolished by the U.S. Congress with the 1865-passage of the 13th Amendment. The Civil War may have brought about an early emancipation to Baltimore, but it did little to change economic realities for blacks. Blacks had missed out on the economic revolution caused by the necessities of war and most remained trapped in unskilled and domestic occupations.

**Too Many Negroes.** The first ten years after emancipation, black migration to the city of Baltimore was so heavy that jobs became scarce, poverty spread wide, public health deteriorated and crime rates soared. Yet, blacks continued to move into the City. Comparisons of the United States Census for the Baltimore black population between 1860 and 1870 show that the black population of Baltimore grew from 27,898 to 39,558 persons, due to the migratory movements of blacks from all over the state of Maryland. These migrants came on the promise of better jobs and higher pay than could be found on the farms and plantations of the Maryland countryside. White Baltimoreans too believed this mythic promise: in 1864, the Baltimore American declared that “[t]hey have, or can have constant employment, for there is no lack of demand for the kind of labor which for the most part they [blacks] perform.” And although abolitionist, orator and statesman, Frederick Douglass, discouraged blacks from moving out of the various Maryland

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22 Fields.

23 *American*, October 9, 1865.
counties to the City, he did claim that higher wages were available in Baltimore for the Negro, saying “$150 in the country is better than $400 in the city”24 Indeed, black Marylanders moved to Baltimore on a promise of opportunity.

Just a year later in November of 1865, a prominent black Baltimorean minister, Reverend James Lynch, claimed to have observed a great deal of progress among his fellow black Baltimoreans, saying that they were “establishing themselves in business” and “purchasing real estate.”25 Reverend Lynch alluded to two black Baltimoreans in particular: Griffin, who kept “a large tobacconist establishment on Sharp street” and Bradford, of the firm of Banks & Bradford. Lynch further alleged that one-fifth of the depositors of the Old Town Savings Bank, in Baltimore, were colored. According to a later 1866 report by the Christian Recorder, Baltimore Negroes were said to have $600,000 invested in the Old Town Savings Bank, $300,000 in the Central Savings Bank and $100,000 in the Eutaw Savings Bank. And as if this $1,000,000 total were not ear-catching enough, it was further speculated that Baltimore Blacks had nearly $3,000,000 worth of capital in their possession.26

While such a lump sum sounds impressive, it fails to account for the nearly 40,000 blacks across which that $3,000,000 was spread. Equal distribution would put the average black in possession of $75 worth of capital, a respectable amount of capital for any individual to have in their possession at the time.27 But this estimation is skewed because wealth among the black population of Baltimore was far from equally distributed. The Assessment of Real Property for

24 Ibid., December 5, 1864, in Fuke, p. 115.
27 Estimated that blacks laborers made 50-75 cents/day. See Wright, James F. The Free Negro in Maryland, (Columbia University: New York, 1921) p. 162.
Blacks in Baltimore City in 1866, lists about 370 blacks owning roughly $600,000 worth of private property. And when examining the City’s Taxable Church Property Tables in 1866, the 18 black churches listed owned $136,517.87 worth of real estate. Wealth was far from equally distributed for these figures indicate that 1% of the black population owned 25% of the black population’s capital wealth in church and private property alone. And this still fails to account for other financial equity and debentures that this black elite held in their possession. It appears as though Baltimore possessed a relatively small black elite numbering a couple hundred individuals, and massive black poor that was nearly forty-thousand strong.

Still in need of questioning is whether or not the $3,000,000 capital figure that Rev. Lynch quoted is fact or conjectured exaggeration. As Gardner argues, “black workers in Baltimore sometimes…gave the impression to the foreign visitor that they were better off than they actually were” But regardless of whether Lynch’s estimate was correct, one fact that cannot be disputed is that the majority of Baltimore’s blacks were poor. Employment prospects had been limited for blacks as early as the 1840s when they were nearly-excluded from the higher-paying skilled and semi-skilled labor market because of the influx of German and Irish workers in the late and 1840s-50s. As a result, by the 1860s, blacks were already competing with one another for employment in the overburdened and low-paying unskilled-labor and domestic markets. And after 1864, with the 11,660 unskilled-agricultural laborers who migrated to the City from the many counties of Maryland, black job market competition tightened even further and most blacks were unable to find work. Emancipation brought freedom, but it also brought more labor than there was employment.

28 “Assessment of Real Property for Blacks in Baltimore City” and “City’s Taxable Church Property” tables as found in Thomas.

29 Gardner, pp. 147-148
While some blacks were able to find work as domestics and unskilled laborers, many were not. The black unemployed heavily frequented the city’s police stations and almshouses. By 1866, the City Trustees of the Poor found their resources overburdened and “exhausted, having expended for the month of January for groceries and fuel $7,150.31 for the relief of 2,698 families embracing 8,407 persons.”\textsuperscript{30} Unable to find employment or adequate relief in the almshouses, a portion of unemployed Negroes turned to the vices of gambling and alcohol. Within a year of their emancipation, the Baltimore Sun reported that “Many freedmen…are now loafing about the wharfs acquiring vicious habits or obtaining the means of a precarious existence only by the few jobs they procure.”\textsuperscript{31} In contrast to those who loafed about the streets at night, those who could find housing were cramped into tight apartments and alleyways. Poor sanitation in these locales caused them to be affected hardest by city-wide cholera and smallpox outbreaks in 1866 and 1872.\textsuperscript{32} Poverty-ridden Negroes had overrun the city of Baltimore, exhausted the charity of its almshouses, appeared to be of a low moral character, were wrought with disease and in the midst of all these factors, an underclass of black criminals emerged.

Between 1864 and 1870, more and more Negroes were being charged with petty theft, intoxication, disorderly conduct and assault, the most commonly arrested being black juveniles.\textsuperscript{33} Due to the high number of black arrests, most whites in the city perceived blacks as unwanted, hardened criminals who had flooded their city. However, the number of arrests by no means spoke to the criminal nature of black populace. As Fields argued, “the number of jailings cannot

\textsuperscript{30} Petition to the Baltimore City Council, February 18, 1867. Baltimore City Archives.

\textsuperscript{31} Sun, August 9, 1865.

\textsuperscript{32} Olson, p. 188.

\textsuperscript{33} Fuke, p. 127.
provide a reliable indicator of the seriousness of discipline problems."³⁴ In fact, much black crime was venial in nature. For example, in examining the crimes of the black minors sentenced to the House of Reformation, a work camp for Baltimore’s delinquent black children, most of the crimes that inmates committed were petty and highly subject to the discretion and temperament of the arresting officer. In 1875, while one child each was committed to the House for the hardcore crimes of burglary, arson and theft, forty-seven were committed for the vague and subjective crimes of “incorrigibility” and “vagrancy.”³⁵ A black child ‘mouthing-off’ an officer or staying out past a curfew certainly does not imply criminality of a mortal nature. With such broad standards for criminalization (i.e. “incorrigibility”), it seems as though black children were incarcerated for the pettiest of crimes as a means of removing blacks from the city’s streets: such was the ideology of the House of Reformation.

Threatened by the perceived presence of Negro crime, in 1870, a group of concerned white citizens, supported by Grand Juries, Judges and States’ Attorneys, founded the House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Children to “thus relieve the city from the support of colored juvenile offenders in the city jail.”³⁶ Within two years, the House had received $20,000 from the City Council to aid in purchasing a farm in the country, somewhat removed from the city, where convicted criminals could engage in “agriculturally and horticultural labor” and be “trained for usefulness”³⁷ The manner in which Baltimore hoped to deal with its “incorrigible” black populace was to remove these people from City confines entirely. While black loaferism,

³⁴ Fields, p. 52.


³⁶ “Third HOR Report.”

vice and crime rates had made blacks an unwanted element in Baltimore, removing blacks from the City to engage in the compulsory agricultural labor that blacks had endured as slaves seems much more prejudicial than reformative.

Blacks were an unwanted element in Baltimore, even before their characterization as a class of poor and vagrant criminals, largely because they posed a threat to free-white labor. When the Unconditional Unionist Party of Maryland decided to emancipate Maryland’s slaves in 1864, they did so to “destroy the unfair competition slave labor presented to the free white workers and plain farmers of the state.”

Black emancipation was not effected with the hope of securing equitable conditions for black labor, but to protect white labor interests. And while whites found black slave labor objectionable, free-black presence and labor was equally undesired. As Fields argues, the very existence of slavery made whites comfortable with the prevalence of free blacks in the City. The fact that a free black could once again be re-enslaved if he or she ever acted in a way that whites found disagreeable, allowed whites a great deal of social control over blacks and eased white racial tensions.

But slavery’s decline and end resulted in the loss of that social control. And with the availability of migrant white labor, blacks became an unwanted part of both the labor force and community. While Baltimore’s black population had been undesired for some time, the poverty, poor health, loaferism and crime that

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39 If Negroes were found guilty of crimes and could not pay exorbitant fines, they would be sold back into slavery. As a result of the enslavement-threat, the Maryland State Legislature was able to pass a number of laws to coercively restrict the action and mobility of free blacks. Non-resident blacks could not enter the state for more than two weeks, and resident blacks could not leave the state for more than 15 days. Blacks could not sell goods such as corn, wheat or tobacco without having first procured a license from a justice of the peace, stating that the Negro was “an orderly person of good character.” (97) In 1695, a law was passed barring the “frequent assembling of negroes” only to be followed by a 1723 Act authorizing constables to flog blacks who organized or attended such meetings without permission (120). And a Statute of 1783 barred blacks from office-holding, voting at elections and giving evidence against white persons. (119) For more legal restrictions at the threat of re-enslavement, See: Wright, James F. _The Free Negro in Maryland_. (Columbia University: New York, 1921) pp. 94-130.
accompanied the Black community after emancipation exacerbated white animosity towards black presence in the City.

**Black Occupations, Black Business.** Apparently, by the mid-1870s, the Baltimore economy was able to absorb its large black population through employment as unskilled laborers, but higher paying skilled labor jobs were not available to the Negro: “To the extent that Baltimore’s economy had room for several thousand additional unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, rural black migrants shared in such growth. But they did not enjoy what the *Baltimore American* identified as the progress ‘commensurate with the demands of our rapid increasing business.’”\(^{40}\)

While Baltimore’s economy flourished in the post-war years with a proliferation of new businesses and hundreds of millions of dollars in market capitalization, blacks did not share in this wealth.\(^{41}\) Without the requisite wealth to establish new businesses, most blacks remained in menial labor roles. A survey of both the 1870 and 1880 censuses show that, while there were a handful of black professionals employed as barbers, preachers and small business owners, the overwhelming majority of black Baltimoreans were employed as laborers, seamstresses, cooks, draymen, and other like unskilled and domestic professions.

Despite black political agitation and the formation of numerous labor unions, by 1884, blacks could still not find employment in skilled labor professions, paying wages high enough to earn a decent living or purchase property. White employers and unions actively discriminated in hiring black skilled labor. Calbraith B. Perry, the “Priest in Charge” of Baltimore’s Mount Calvary Chapel of St. Mary the Virgin, documented the employment woes of Baltimore’s blacks in his 1884 memoir. Having spoken with a number of white employers throughout the city of

\(^{40}\)Fuke, p. 136.

\(^{41}\) In 1870, Baltimore City and County accounted for 47% of the State of Maryland’s total manufacturing establishments, and 77% of the State’s total product value. See Callcott, pp. 29.
Baltimore between the years 1872-1884, Perry wrote on white hostility toward blacks’ gainful employment in the City:

Nearly all other avenues of honorable advancement are closed against them. The jealousy of the “trades unions” prevents their learning or practicing mechanical pursuits. Trustworthy architects and contractors have told us that no builder would dare employ a colored carpenter no matter how satisfactory and respectable a workman he might be. Carpenters who have attempted to apprentice colored boys have been warned by the all-powerful “unions” that they must dismiss them.\(^\text{42}\)

Blacks struggled to find employment in any occupation beyond that of the domestic or common labor variety. No matter how stellar their qualifications or exemplary their work, white employers would not hire them. These employers consented to the demands of their unionized white laborers who, because they outnumbered blacks, were essential to business operations. Blacks were rejected by Baltimore’s white labor force and excluded from decent paying jobs.

Independent black business in Baltimore did not fare well either. While in 1870, the Baltimore City Business Directory lists *forty-one* black businesses, by 1880 the directory only listed *forty-six*.\(^\text{43}\) More than half of those listed were not black business ventures marketing a good, product or service, rather, they were churches. And of those 1870 businesses engaged in for-profit activity, virtually none of them appeared on the 1880 directory. Such shows the ephemeral nature of Baltimorean Black entrepreneurship; black businesses did not survive over extended periods, rather, they sprung up and died relatively quickly. Black business failure came against a backdrop of a thriving Baltimore economy of over 2,000 manufacturing businesses and

\(^{42}\) Perry, Calbraith B. Twelve Years Among the Colored People: A Record of the Work of Mount Calvary Chapel of S. Mary the Virgin, Baltimore. (James Pott&Co.: New York, 1884) Library of Congress. p. 119-120.

\(^{43}\) Baltimore City Business Directory. Maryland State Archives.
trade with England in excess of $40,000,000. While black churches—those institutions whose longevity depended upon the charitable donations of its attendants—survived, private black businesses—those institutions whose existence depended upon sound business management, a demanded product or service and a viable market—failed. The picture of Baltimore that forms is not one of unlimited African-American economic opportunity, but relegation of blacks to menial labor and domesticity, and black business failure.

**Black Workers’ Rights: Caulking, Corporations and Unions.** While unions have served as an effective organization to fight for workers’ rights, prior to their emancipation, Baltimore blacks could not “unionize or rebel in any effective way against white authority…the threat of slavery as a sanction imposed for the failure to comply.” The inability to unionize often adversely affected blacks’ ability to fight for workers rights and equal pay in various industries. The illegality of black unionization, however, did not discourage the Baltimore’s black caulkers from organizing an Association of Colored Caulkers in the 1850s. Although unsuccessfully, blacks demanded that they have a say in who was hired and that they receive higher wages—and they argued for higher wages when they were already being paid nearly 50% more than caulkers in other port cities. Indeed, black caulkers were sure of themselves, the value of their work, and were not afraid to demand more of their employers. With the appearance of immigrant German and Irish labor, white employers were given the option of a cheaper (and whiter) labor force that broke the demands of the Colored Caulkers Association.

By the 1860s, tensions were rising between Baltimore’s white and black caulkers. Just a

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44 See memoir: Fray, Jacob. *Reminiscences of Baltimore.* (Baltimore, 1893) Yale University Library.

45 Brackett, p.9.

46 At the time, Baltimore blacks received $1.75 a day while the caulkers in ports of other major cities were receiving $1.25. See: *American*, July, 7-8, 1858.
few weeks after Negro emancipation in 1864, white shipyard workers resolved to push proud and vocal blacks out of the lucrative caulking business. The City’s union of white ship laborers met and agreed to impose a $20 fine on each one of their members who went to work where colored caulkers were working. White ship workers across the City went on strike, demanding that the white-owned shipyards fire all their black caulkers. Baltimore’s shipyards effectively shut-down and shipyard owners feared that they might forever lose invaluable shipping business as a result of the strike: “if the necessary work cannot be performed in Baltimore it will, as a matter of course, be sought elsewhere.” Shipyard owners hoped to resolve the manner quickly and conceded to the demands of their white laborers, who where the backbone of the shipping industry. Black caulkers were excluded from all the white-owned shipping yards (the only shipping yards) of Baltimore. Almost as soon as blacks had been emancipated, they found themselves forced out of one of the few high-paying skilled labor occupations they could obtain.

The caulker strike spurred two major developments in the way of black business and labor rights. Baltimore labor-leader and Colored Caulkers Union president, Isaac Myers, founded the Chesapeake Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company (CMRDDC) in 1865, shortly after black workers had been excluded from the caulking industry. With the CMRDDC, Myers hoped to establish a shipyard that would employ the City’s colored caulkers. Aided by a number of black businessmen and ministers, Myers raised $40,000 worth of capital to get the company running in 1866; by 1868 the company was fully incorporated and had begun issuing stock. The company proved only relatively successful, its income usually surpassing liabilities by only several hundred dollars—nowhere near the multimillion-dollar successes of the aforementioned

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47 *Sun*, Sept. 30, 1865
white businesses of the Baltimore. But as the CMRDDC was the City’s first black corporation, and the only one in existence during the period, it received massive praise and support from the colored people of Baltimore and the country: “every colored citizen in the United States need be proud of this organization; it is the clearest and most positive demonstration on record, that the colored man is the equal of the white man.” Being managed exclusively by colored men, the CMRDDC represented black intellect, equality, business savvy and was often used to suggested growth and prosperity among the colored people of Baltimore. Yet while the company paid between $3-3.50/day at a time when most day laborers received only $1-2/day, it only employed anywhere from 150-250 white and colored mechanics. The company’s existence, however much hope it provided to colored people, only marginally bettered the lives of perhaps one or two-hundred of Baltimore’s blacks. In the first few years of emancipation, the vast majority of Baltimore’s 40,000 Negroes remained unemployed or underpaid, despite the relative successes of the CMRDDC.

A second organization which Isaac Myers organized in the aftermath of the caulkers’ strike, however, did offer hope for black employment and labor rights in Baltimore and across the country. In 1869, Myers organized the Colored National Labor Union (CNLU) to parallel the country’s all-white National Labor Union from which blacks had been barred. While smaller, less successful black labor unions had been formed around individual professions in Baltimore (i.e. hodcarriers, caulkers, stevedores), there was no labor union for the unskilled day laborer which comprised of bulk of Baltimore’s black work force. The common black laborer,

49 Ibid., Nov. 7, 1868.
being without a labor union, had no means by which to negotiate or collectively bargain for workers’ rights. The CNLU, however, hoped to nationally unify black laborers to make demands on labor employers across the country for equal opportunity employment and fair pay. Black union delegates enumerated their demands at their five-day CNLU Convention in December of 1869: “that for every day’s labor given we be paid full and fair remuneration, and that no avenue of honest industry be closed against us…that we may work in the printing office, in the factory, in the foundry, upon the railroad, the canal, the river, the steamboat…wherever labor is to be done and an able and faithful workman is wanted.”\(^{51}\) At the CNLU Convention, Myers further argued that there should be open dialogue between employee and employer for the purposes of safety and adequate wages. The CNLU appeared committed to an agenda of fighting for the rights and economic welfare of black workers. Yet, although the Convention organized a committee of five to promote and increase awareness of the union throughout the country, the CNLU took very little action in the way of organizing for black labor rights. The majority of resolutions adopted by the 1869-Convention were ideological in nature, arguing for the connection between education and economic uplift and to limit crime and vice among the colored population—no action for black workers’ rights took place.\(^{52}\) After the Convention, CNLU activity in the coming months was insignificant and received little mention in local and national newspapers. By 1872 the organization was defunct.\(^{53}\)

The collapse of the CNLU had left the common black laborer in Baltimore “without any

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\(^{52}\) CNLU Proceedings

\(^{53}\) Paul, p. 339.
national labor organization of his own."\textsuperscript{54} While small black attempts at unionization would arise around specific semi-skilled occupations such as caulkers and hod-carriers, they were unsuccessful in their demands for higher wages and their agenda did not fight for the unskilled black laborer.\textsuperscript{55} And although the Knights of Labor, one of the country’s largest labor organizations in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, would actively recruit Baltimorean black membership in Baltimore, the Knights would fall into decline after the Haymarket Square riot of that year.\textsuperscript{56} At no point between 1864 and 1884 did the unskilled black laborer—the most common black occupation—have a union to protect him from labor discrimination, inadequate pay and unequal employment.

\textbf{How much opportunity?} To be sure, there were a number of self help organizations in Baltimore.\textsuperscript{57} But when blacks migrated to Baltimore in 1864, their goal was not to be supported by some church or mutual aid society in hopes of scraping by. They came on the promise of jobs and opportunity, hoping to enter new and respected occupations and to acquire a degree of prosperity. These opportunities, however, were not there. Blacks may have been able to endeavor in semi-skilled and skilled labor occupations prior to Emancipation, but that was only in conjunction with the existence of slavery and the absence of an immigrant white labor force. Indeed, slavery had made whites comfortable with well-paid, skilled free-black laborers because the threat of re-enslavement allowed whites to exert a wide degree of social control over them. With slavery’s decline and end, however, white employers turned to cheap, white immigrant

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 344.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Sun}, May 4, 1880.

\textsuperscript{56} National suspicion of labor unions after violence at Haymarket Square labor riots.

\textsuperscript{57} Thomas mentions numerous mutual-aid societies in existence, such as the United Sons and Daughters of C.C. Fulton, Grand United Order of Nazarites, the Galilean Fisherman, Colored Free Masons and Oddfellows, et al. and the charitable efforts of Sharp Street Church, Bethel Church et. al. See: Thomas, pp. 139-179.
labor and black workers became an economic threat to whites.

The first twenty years of emancipation in Baltimore were a period of relative inopportunity for blacks. The few black business that existed did not flourish but floundered, black wealth was not equally distributed, and poverty, overcrowding and crime rates became significant social problems. And with the failure of the CNLU, Baltimore’s whites continued to discriminate against blacks with regard to equal employment and adequate pay, forcing them into low-wage, unskilled labor occupations. Perhaps if there had been a federal occupation of Maryland like the other southern states, black working rights would have been guaranteed by law. As one black Baltimorean observed, his people “would have been much further advanced had the State seceded and shared the fate of the more Southern States.” Federal occupation might have resulted in equitable labor contracts between white employers and black laborers. Federal officials might have fought for black civil and working rights. And perhaps blacks would not have been arrested on trivial charges and ousted from the City. However, the fight for black rights was not waged between a powerful federal government and Baltimore’s discriminatory white population, but between a relatively powerless black minority lacking unionization and a city that strongly resisted black presence and labor. In the absence of federal occupation, black employment remained unequal, black wages, low, and black economic progress, limited.

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58 Brackett, p. 6.
Chapter 2: Educational Strivings

Delegates to the 1869 Colored National Labor Convention, initiated by prominent black Baltimorean, Isaac Myers, acknowledged that “educated labor is more productive, is worth and commands higher rates of wages, is less dependent upon capital.”¹ In Baltimore, and across the country, blacks drew direct ties between educational acquisition and economic mobility. Not only was it believed that the educated laborer could command higher wages, but further, that the literate Negro could recognize and take full advantage of his American citizenship.

That the city of Baltimore took responsibility for the provision of black education in 1868 by establishing Colored Public Schools is particularly problematic. Indeed, when Maryland’s Unconditional Unionists argued for black emancipation in 1864, they did so on the grounds that emancipation would destroy the economic threat that black workers posed to free white labor. Essentially, it was hoped that black workers would leave the city, opening an array of jobs to whites. But if education was expected to provide economic mobility, job acquisition and higher wages, why did the Baltimore City Council fund black education? And if black workers posed a threat to free white labor, wouldn’t the provision of black education further heighten that threat? The actions of the Baltimore City Council seem to contradict the objective of curtailing black labor.

In providing black education, however, the city was not acting in support of black economic advance, but responding to arguments offered by Baltimore Quakers that black education would reduce crime and vice. Such arguments were appealing during a period when heavy black migration to the city had resulted in a high crime rates, widespread poverty, homelessness and the association of blackness with vices such as gambling and alcoholism.

¹ CNLC Proceedings
Creating colored schools that met several hours each day was a means of removing Baltimore’s impoverished and criminal black population from city streets. The colored schools which the school board provided, then, were funded and managed to the extent that they would serve this purpose of public order. So long as colored schools preserved order by removing Baltimore’s poor black population from city streets, little attention was given to them. Colored schoolhouses were dilapidated, sanitation was low, student performance went unscrutinized and black teachers were refused employment. Publically-funded black education did not seek to increase black economic welfare, but to reduce crime; it did not attempt to promote positive values of citizenship, but to remove black vice and poverty from city streets. White-controlled Colored Public Schools did not provide the economic and social uplift which blacks desired, as the city was interested in curtailing, not enhancing, black freedom. If blacks were to acquire an education that provided economic uplift and social awareness, they would have to do so through private initiative.

**Black Education, Pre-1864.** Historians Meier and Rudwick argue that black education prior to the Civil War could be divided into three distinct and overlapping stages: “white philanthropy, Negro self help and public support.” And while white philanthropy and Negro self help, in the way of black education, could be found during the Baltimore antebellum years, public support for black education would not be seen until several after Emancipation. Indeed, a great complaint waged by advocates for Negro education was that Baltimore law barred blacks from the Baltimore Public School System but, at the same time, compelled them to pay taxes in support of that System. Being denied access to the City’s public schools, Baltimore blacks

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formed private and extra-governmental organizations to provide for their education.

Baltimorean black education in the 19th Century was largely the result of their own effort, growing out of their religion and their churches, along with the help provided by the Quakers. In 1795 two Baltimore Quakers, William Thompson and Walter Pierpont, started a small club that conducted an evening school open to free blacks and slaves. After operating for only a few years, however, attendance and funding began to dwindle and the school was forced to close its doors. Individual Quakers began a number of black-education initiatives in the years prior to Emancipation, but most were met with the same dismal success as that of Thompson and Pierpont. The fact that these attempts at black education were individual initiatives and not pan-organizational undertakings may have been the cause of their failure—a concerted effort at black education with the financial and structural support of the entire Society of Friends may have seen more success. But such was not the case; as an organization, the Society placed its greatest funding and support towards the abolition of slavery. As Gregory argues, black education for the Quakers was merely a “reflective query.” When the issue of black education arose at the Quakers’ Yearly Meetings, it was discussed as an idea to be pondered, not a course demanding action: “should not we provide for the education of the negro? how much better would it be for him?” While the Quakers were interested in the notion of black education, it was by no means part of the Society’s agenda.

The Quakers being preoccupied with abolitionism, the task of black education rested largely with the black church and their weekly Sunday schools. Five of the major Christian

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4 Society of Friends synonymous with Quakers.

5 Gregory, p. 60-61.
denominations—Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Catholic—were all represented in the Baltimore black community, but the Methodists had the strongest appeal and following.\(^6\) So strong was the Methodist influence in Baltimore, that of the twenty known churches operating Sunday Schools, twelve were Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) or African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) and each educated around 200 scholars on average. By 1859, Sharp Street M.E. reported that it maintained 200 scholars, Dallas St. M.E., 250, Asbury M.E., 259 and Bethel A.M.E reported as many as 350 scholars.\(^7\) In all, Baltimore’s black churches educated some 2,665 scholars per annum, but the education they offered was quite limited in scope.\(^8\) Church-sponsored education focused mainly on congregants’ ability to read the Christian scriptures, discouraging black education in higher subjects such as mathematics, science and philosophy. And often times, clergy members themselves were illiterate: “Most of the founders were illiterate men who were strongly religious but unlettered. Many felt a great suspicion of learning and learned men.”\(^9\) Indeed, the goals of church-sponsored black schools were not to create a black populace equipped to endeavor in business, philosophy or literature, but to grow closer to their God through the study of Scripture—but perhaps such a focus was appropriate, given the limited economic opportunities of the period for blacks.

Churches found little success in their main focus of effectuating literacy enough for blacks to read the Bible. Take, for example, Sharp Street M.E., one of the three largest black churches in antebellum Baltimore. The church divided its Sunday School scholars across six classes: (1) those who are unacquainted with letters, (2) those who spell words of two or more

\(^6\) Gardner, p.49

\(^7\) Ibid., 114

\(^8\) Ibid., 110

\(^9\) Gregory, p. 70
letters, (3) those who spell words of two or more syllables, (4) those who read short sentences, (5) those who begin to read the New Testament, and (6) those who begin to read the Bible.¹⁰ That so many of the church’s classes were concerned with the most rudimentary literacy skills can only suggest that the vast majority of Baltimore’s blacks were illiterate. And to make any significant advance towards black literacy when Sunday schools convened only once per week, was wholly unfeasible. In an attempt to increase the frequency with which blacks received educational instruction—and also, the scope of subjects taught—some in the community opened day schools that would meet daily throughout the week’s course.

In 1812, Daniel Coker of the AME church began a day school that opened with 17 pupils, grew to 150 pupils, and continued for a number of years with great success. In 1825, William Lively advertised the opening of a Day and Night School open to male and female students that would instruct students in Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, English, Grammar, Geography, Geometry with the use of maps, Ancient and Modern History, Geometry, Composition, Natural Philosophy, Latin, French and Greek. The school, Union Seminary, operated out of the Rear of Sharp Street Church.¹¹ While Lively’s school was one of the most diversified of the period, it ultimately produced students who were “over-educated for the economic and social environment in which they moved.” In a city where the majority of work that blacks could find was as laborers or domestics, education in higher subjects such as Latin and French was often irrelevant, idealistic and useless; it did little to prepare blacks to earn a living in the trades that they would most likely find work.

It is one thing to complain about the black church depriving students of a holistic

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¹⁰ The Original Minutes of the Asbury Sunday School Society, 1816-1824. Lovely Lane Museum, Baltimore, Maryland. (as found in Gardner, p. 110.)

¹¹ The Genius of Universal Emancipation (Baltimore, Md.), Oct. 8, 1825, Feb. 25, 1826. (as in Gardner, p. 115)
education, but ventures like that of Lively attempted to do far too much. The Oblate Sisters, however, found a happy medium. The Oblate Sisters, an order of Catholic black nuns, came to Baltimore from San Domingo in the 1820s and opened an academy for black girls. While the Sisters instructed their girls in reading, writing and arithmetic, the objectives outlined in their Constitution indicate that the Sisters also prepared students for a life of domesticity: “as mothers these girls would be able to instill certain moral and religious principles in their children. Those who would become servants would reflect the religious principles and habits of modesty, honesty, and integrity in which they had been trained. How valuable [would] such servants be to their masters.”

It was not that the Sisters considered the intellectual capabilities of their black students, limited. It is not that the Sisters said you there, black girl, are only capable of being a cook or mammy. Rather, the Sisters recognized that those were the only opportunities open to black women in Baltimore during the antebellum years. They provided students with literacy and mathematical skills—the rudiments for intellectual thought—and at the same time trained them for the lives they would most likely lead. They provided their female students with a practical education. By 1856 the Sisters had under their tutelage 160 girls and the school’s doors remained open through the Civil War.

Well-rounded schools like those of the Oblate Sisters’, however, were few and far between and most black educational ventures folded within a few years. What blacks needed was a stable educational system with regular funding—they needed access to Baltimore Public School System. The fact that blacks contributed equally to the Public Schools should have guaranteed them that access, but their being denied was a great injustice. In February of 1844,

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13 Gardner, p. 121
Daniel Milbourn, Rev. Moses Clayton, Solomon McCabe, Rev. Levin Lee, Daniel Myers, Samuel Hines and several other black property holders petitions the Mayor to ask that the school tax exacted from blacks be used to establish and fund two black public schools. Although this request went ignored, blacks did not take an alternate route of requesting to be exempt from the public school tax—over the next few years, numerous petitions were sent to the City Council demanding that black education be provided for by the public school tax. They were not concerned about the loss of money, but more about the opportunity of an education. In 1850, the City Council’s Joint Standing Committee on Education responded to the petitions of the black property owners, saying that “the General Assembly of Maryland did not contemplate in granting the City of Baltimore a portion of the school fund…for support of black schools.” The City Council further reported that if the city of Baltimore was to use any of its State-allocated education funds for the purpose of educating blacks, the Maryland General Assembly would immediately withdraw the city’s portion of the education fund. The problem was not merely that the city of Baltimore was indifferent to the education of blacks, but further, the State of Maryland was adamantly opposed to black education—so opposed that it would deny the education of white children for black ignorance’s sake.

Some attempts at educational evenhandedness were made two years later in 1852, when the City Council issued an Ordinance stating that “All property held by any colored person was to be exempted from taxation so far as the tax for the support of the public schools was

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14 Baltimore City Records, “Petition of James Corner and Others, Praying that Colored Persons may be Exempted from the Payment of the Public School Tax,” Jan. 28, 1839. Archives, City Hall, Baltimore, Md.

The City Collector was further instructed not to include colored persons on the public school tax lists. Fair educational-tax assessment, however, was not the qualm that blacks sought to resolve. They were not looking to be reimbursed for the educational taxes they had paid. Rather, they wanted those taxes to be utilized in the provision of an education for their children.  

With the lack of a formal public schooling structure, the inadequacies of schooling offered by the black church, and the relative unsuccessfulness of black Day Schools, most “successful” education for blacks in Maryland was a private initiative. Consider the manner in which several of the country’s most prominent antebellum blacks—all from Baltimore—acquired education. Benjamin Banneker, the mathematician and astronomer who accurately predicted solar and lunar eclipses in his almanacs and journals, was taught to read and write by his grandmother. Frederick Douglass, the most respected and outspoken black abolitionist of the 19th Century, learned to read and write by covertly tricking white school boys to instruct him. Joshua Johnston, one of the great black portrait painters of the 19th Century, was self-taught—his style is said to imitate that of the Peale family, suggesting that he learned to paint through mimicry, not instruction. And in the 1820s, Lewis G. Wells M.D., although denied from the medical schools of Baltimore City, secured a job as a custodian at of one of the City’s medical schools and sought private medical tutoring from others in the school. Wells set up his own practice in the City shortly thereafter. Many of Baltimore’s most successful blacks, unable to acquire an education through their churches or public schools, acquired it through non-traditional means.

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16 Ibid.


18 Wells M.D. example found in Gregory, p.94
means. For the antebellum black population of Baltimore, education became a private initiative dependent upon the will and resourcefulness of black students.

**What Education Meant.** Before delving into the extensive efforts made by Baltimore’s blacks to secure access to education, it would do well to examine why blacks so passionately desired education to begin with. No such examination goes without mention of Bostonian abolitionist David Walker and his anti-slavery pamphlet, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. In the appeal, Walker criticized the white Christian nation for directly and indirectly supporting the immoral institution of slavery. Further, Walker incendiarily pointed to black illiteracy as a perpetuator of black enslavement, declared whites to be the natural enemies of blacks, and urged warfare as the solution for slavery’s dissolution. After its 1830 publication, the pamphlet quickly spread to the South and, as literate blacks read its contents to illiterates, white slave owners feared that the tracts might encourage slave rebellions throughout the region. Their fears were not misplaced. Within a year of the pamphlet’s circulation, a Virginian slave, Nathaniel Turner, organized a massive slave rebellion in Southampton County. Nat Turner’s Rebellion, as it is commonly known, was by no means an isolated event—it was rumored to have insurrectionary cells throughout major slaveholding regions of the South. In the aftermath of Nat Turner, Southern whites were terrified that at any moment their slaves might take up arms in rebellion. In reaction, Southern State Legislatures began illegalizing black literacy and education, in hopes of preventing any future slave insurrection.19

In the historical moment of David Walker and Nat Turner, blacks and whites alike recognized literacy as an agent to freedom. And while literacy aided in the mobilization of slave rebellion, it also liberated the slave mind. Consider former slave Frederick Douglass, who in his

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19 In the aftermath of David Walker, literacy restrictions passed in Georgia, Louisiana and North Carolina within a year. See: Williams, p. 13-15.
autobiography, mentioned that literacy opened his eyes to the degradable condition of slavery in which he found himself: “[I understood] the white man’s power to enslave the black man…I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom…I set out with high hope…to learn how to read.”

For Douglass, literacy ignited a desire to escape slavery and actively fight against it. Such was the case for many slaves, for it was “in the bible, books and newspapers, [that] literate slaves found a language of liberation that augmented what they learned in slave quarters.”

Literacy became the means through which African-Americans found the language to develop arguments against the injustice of slavery. Upon further examination, literacy also had very practical uses in the agency of freedom. Literate slaves were often able to forge passes stating that their master had, for a period of time, allowed them to leave the plantation on which they resided. Such became an opportunity to escape to the North for freedom. One Tennessee slave, James Fisher, recognized this use-value of literacy for he “quickly decided that he must learn to write in case he ever had the opportunity to forge a pass and escape.”

For slaves, education had real, tangible value in that it could be used subversively to escape the captivity of their masters. Literacy represented the possibility of both mental and physical freedom.

In Baltimore, slavery had been in decline since 1810 and was ultimately abolished by the Maryland State Constitution of 1864. If black education were to remain relevant and desirable for the Negro, it had to confer advantage other than the ability to lead to freedom. But confer non-emancipatory advantages, it did. In 1863, the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission concluded that “one of the first acts of the Negroes when they found themselves free was to

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21 Williams, p.24.

22 Ibid., p. 22.
establish schools at their own expense.”

Soldiers touring the South wrote of how eager slaves were to acquire an education. And Baltimore’s black citizens contributed whatever little they had to the construction and maintenance of black schools in the City. That there was such enthusiastic support for education, even in the absence of slavery, can be understood in light of the three use-values of education which Heather Andrea-Williams outlines. For some, education held religious application in the ability to read the Bible. Christianity was the cornerstone of the African-American community and, in keeping with a priesthood-of-believers mentality, the ability to read the Bible was thought to lead to a closer and more personal relationship with God. For some, education held practical application, such as being able to record the birth of a child. But most important, education was a “coveted possession”—it was an opportunity to accrue the privileges of whiteness that Blacks had been denied:

“…they had seen the impact of education first hand. They had carried their young masters’ and mistresses’ books to school, then seen some of them off to college. Upon their return, educated young masters and mistresses moved into positions within the white gentry while poor whites and blacks, with little or no education, remained poor and powerless. After emancipation, many freed people were anxious for education precisely because of its direct relationship to power within the society.”

Blacks had observed white Southerners who went off to Northern colleges and returned home, able to demand highly respected and well-paying jobs. Baltimore blacks definitely drew a connection between education and socio-economic ascension; at their Colored National Labor Convention in 1869, they acknowledged that “educated labor is more productive, is worth and

23 Ibid., p. 36.

24 Ibid., pp. 41–42.
commands, higher rates of wages, is less dependent upon capital.”\textsuperscript{25} For Baltimore blacks, education was tied directly to economic advance and social mobility. Furthermore, they venerated education as “one of the strongest safeguards of republican institutions, the bulwark of American citizenship, and a defense against the invasion of the rights of man.”\textsuperscript{26} Indeed, an educated American had full recognition of his citizenship, the rights that that citizenship conferred, and the ability to defend those rights against discrimination and fully engage in the American system of democracy. In the years following 1864, Baltimore’s black community was especially desirous of an education; it represented both an opportunity for social mobility and wealth acquisition, and served as an evocation of their newly acquired American citizenship.

**Support and Indifference: 1865-1867.** Negroes across the country, and most certainly in the state of Maryland, had drawn a connection between education and socio-economic mobility. When blacks migrated to Baltimore in search of economic opportunity, they migrated in search of an educational opportunity. In the first three years of their arrival, their cause, Negro education, would receive extensive support from the City’s Quakers. However, this cause was met by great indifference on the part of the City’s business, church and government organizations—an indifference that nearly threatened the prospect of black education.

The year 1865 marked the beginning of a new era for black education in Baltimore. Emancipation having been secured for the Negro, the Society of Friends began focusing its efforts on ensuring that all blacks were able to acquire an education. In the moment of Emancipation, the Quakers estimated that *seven-tenths* of the country’s manumitted colored


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
people were under twenty-one years of age. With such a large, uneducated black youth population, the Society believed it “obvious that one of the first and most important steps for their improvement is education.”

Nationally, Quakers saw education as the means through which the Negro would be able to take greatest advantage of his newly acquired freedom and Societies of Friends across the country began mobilizing around an active interest in black education. In Maryland, Quakers took note of the destitute position in which the newly freed, uneducated Negro found himself, arguing that “it should be constantly borne in mind that the destitution and sufferings of the freedpeople in Maryland...are not to be attributed to freedom, but belong to their transition state....”

Blacks in Baltimore were indeed in a transition state of destitution. With the massive Negro migration to the City in 1864 had come homelessness, crime, insanitation, vagrancy and vice. Education would become the means of social uplift to aid blacks through their transition state from poverty to economic stability, from joblessness to employment, and from criminality to morality.

In 1865, a group of prominent Quakers aided by businessmen, lawyers and clergymen, founded the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People. The Baltimore Association was committed to provide education for the black people of Baltimore and various counties of the State of Maryland. Their stated purpose:

> The New Constitution [of Maryland] has added to the eighty thousand free colored people of our state, eighty-seven thousand others, recently slaves. For the most part, they are ignorant.... Thrown upon their own resources, they cannot be expected to know the necessity of industry, or how to seek permanent occupation and employment. We think it is the duty of every citizen of Maryland...to make this population most useful to the State...[and to] instruct them in their


28 Ibid., March 25, 1865.
industry…that they may rise in the scale of being, and be better fitted for the varied duties they are called upon to perform.

The Association echoed the ideologies and objectives of Societies of Friends at-large; they hoped that education would lift Baltimore and the State’s black population out of poverty towards economic stability and moral behavior.

The Baltimore Association’s plan of action was to build schools throughout the City of Baltimore and across the State. To accomplish this goal, the Association petitioned the City Council for funding and received a $10,000 appropriation in 1866. They also received sizeable charitable contributions from Northern societies such as the Freedmen’s Relief Association, American Missionary Association and the Pennsylvania Freedman’s Aid Association. In 1867, contributions of private organizations amounted to just a little over $42,000.29 The greatest support the Association received, though, was from the *Bureau of Refuges, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands*. Established in 1865 by the Freedmen’s Bureau Bill, the Bureau’s main purpose was to aid the welfare of newly freed slaves through its provision of food rations, helping them find employment and establishing schools for black education. The Bureau came to the assistance of the Baltimore Association in the acquisition of land and property for schools, providing lumber to build those schools and underwriting the rent for schools already established in Baltimore.30 With the support of the Bureau, by 1867, the Association had established *twenty-two* schools in Baltimore and *fifty-one* more throughout the State.

The Baltimore Association had been incredibly successful in creating a network of schools for blacks throughout the City, but it struggled in its ability to raise funds enough to

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30 Fuke, p. 90.
maintain those schools and in its ability to further expand. Despite the fact that by 1866 the Association had established sixteen schools in Baltimore, they were all one-room schoolhouses and expected to accommodate over 1,200 students. Black schools grew crowded beyond capacity and resources were strained. When the Association turned to others in the City for financial support, it found Baltimore’s municipal government, business organizations and churches—even the black ones—indifferent to the cause of black education.

Baltimore’s white businesses and rental halls refused to allow their facilities to be utilized for the purpose of educating Negroes.31 When the Association turned to the City’s Black churches for additional space to host their schools, they were met with indifference. While Black Churches did allow some of their facilities to be used for schools, Association members found that “their [the Church’s] trustees seem unwilling to give or hire us [their facilities], deeming their night meetings more essential than schools.”32 Perhaps black ministers saw the cultivation of a black populace more literate than themselves as a threat to their power and position within the black community. Perhaps ministers and church parishioners saw the grave dangers associated with using church facilities to house black schools—indeed, a number of churches that housed black schools were burnt down by angered white Baltimoreans between the years 1865-67.33 Whatever the explanation, because of the unwillingness of black clergy to lease out additional rooms for the purpose of black education, black schools remained crowded beyond capacity.

When the Baltimore Association sought the financial support of white organizations


32 Ibid.

33 Sun, Dec. 21, 1865.
throughout the City, the cause for black education was again met with indifference. In 1866, the Association sent 250 letters to Baltimore’s white churches, asking that they support their “cause which so commands itself to every Christian man’s benevolence.” Despite requesting that these churches “acknowledge the receipt of [the] note and oblige”, only twenty-three responded and just two donated, the sum total of their donations being a meager $49. With a 23/250 response rate, it appears as though most of Baltimore’s white residents cared little about the cause of black education. Those that did respond argued that it was not the responsibility of private citizens to ensure education for blacks. One church executive, J.K. Nichols, for example, wrote that “the State having emancipated without remuneration; ought, in my judge, to make provision for their education, without further loss to those who have suffered.” For the many Baltimoreans who were of Nichols’ opinion, it was the government that had chosen to liberate the slaves, and that decision had resulted in Negro destitution and great financial loss to white slaveholders. If the financial responsibility of ensuring Negro welfare lay with anyone, it lay with those who had most immediately caused Negro destitution—the government.

The Association did in fact turn to the government, requesting support from the Baltimore City Council. Although the 1865 City Council appropriated $10,000 to aid in the Association’s provision of an education for blacks, it would not take an active role in providing for that education—it would not secure teachers, acquire property or take responsibility for Negro school maintenance and operations. The City Council implied that if the people deemed black education important, then black education was the responsibility of private citizens, not the government; black educational welfare was not a municipal concern. What resulted was a

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34 Third Annual BAMEICP Report.
35 Ibid.
cyclical finger-pointing of whose charge Negro education was. Baltimore’s churches and businesses provided little to no support for black schools because they believed it to be the City’s responsibility. The City provided little support for black schools because they believed black education to be the responsibility of private individuals. And while the private and public sectors pointed fingers at one another, Baltimore’s black children continued to suffer with overcrowded and inadequate school facilities.

Within a year, the Baltimore Association would voice its opinion on whether Negro education was a private or public responsibility. In 1866, the Association Secretary John T. Graham had asked “will the people of Maryland do this work, which is of personal interest to each individual, or will they quietly submit to have it done by men who have no pecuniary interest in the State?” Indeed, the bulk of the funding that the Association had received for the purpose of Negro education came from extra-Baltimorean sources such as the Freedmen’s Bureau and private Northern organizations. Yet the education of Baltimore’s blacks was not a Northern responsibility or even of benefit to Northerners. The education of Baltimore’s colored populace, however, was of benefit to the City and State of Baltimore. Black education, the Association argued, would reduce crime and vice while increasing morality and productivity among the colored people, economically and socially benefiting the City. It was natural, then, that the State should assume full responsibility for Negro education—to do so was a matter of public interest. Towards the end of 1867, the Association took a clear stand on the issue: “We labor on in the hope that the State will speedily assume this duty of education the Colored People within its borders; a duty which properly belongs to the state…We work now, only because the work must be done and no others seem inclined to do it.”

36 CNLC Proceedings.
the field of black education, they only did so because no one else would. Negro education was not the responsibility of the Baltimore Association, or Baltimore’s private sector at large. Negro education was the responsibility of the government—it was the responsibility of the Baltimore City Council.

In 1867, the Baltimore Association ran into a nearly $25,000 deficit. Over the course of the year, after tireless petitioning of the local government to fund, organize and run a Public School System for Negroes, the Baltimore City Council conceded to the Association’s demands. School Board President Thomas I. Pitt wrote: “it is true that education is given the white, partly that he may be better fitted for his public duties as a citizen, which reason is happily inapplicable in Maryland to the colored race. But in so far as public education tends to diminish crime, to promote order, no good reason can be given why the good of society will be less advanced by instructing the colored than the white race.”37 Baltimore accepted Negro education as a matter of social and economic public interest and was ready to provide in support of that interest. In the summer of 1867, the schools begun by the Baltimore Association were taken over and reorganized under the direction of the Baltimore City School Board.

In the first three years after Emancipation, as the Negro struggled to secure an education, he encountered opposition from both the government and private sector. Although free, the Baltimore Negro was not guaranteed the right to a publically-funded education that his white counterparts received. If not for the activism and ardent petitioning of the Quakers between 1865 and 1867, the Negro might not have received the right of a publically funded education for some time. But now having gained admittance to the Baltimore Public School System, would the Negro be met with educational success and a better quality of life?

Obstacles: 1867-1884. When blacks were admitted to the Baltimore Public School System, they were admitted reluctantly. Since the establishment of the public school system in 1829, blacks had been denied on the belief that attempting to educate them was a waste of the City’s effort, money and resources: “The opposition to black education was based on a belief in the inadequacy of black intelligence. If this charge was soundly based, then equitable distribution of funds, equipment, the building of schools, buying of books, and establishing libraries was a colossal waste.”

Baltimoreans were suspicious of black intellect and the attempts at black education were considered experimental and a great risk. Admittance to the public school system meant that the Negro would no longer be educated by a religious society committed to his intellectual and socio-economic growth; rather, he was to be educated by a school system that questioned his competency, and cared little for his welfare or socio-economic advance. And while the public school system did offer blacks a course of study well-suited to black occupational endeavor in Baltimore, obstacles of violence, neglect and poverty prevented them from receiving that education.

In July 1867, Baltimore’s Board of School Commissioners was authorized to “proceed at once to establish schools for the education of colored children under the same rules and regulations governing the public school for the education of white children.” As such, provisions were made for primary and grammar schools to be established for blacks. Each being divided among five grade levels, the primary and grammar schools covered an array of rudimentary subjects such as spelling, reading, mental arithmetic, weights and federal money, partitive proportions, geography, and Maryland State history. The education blacks were slated

38 Gregory, p. 265.

39 Ordinance No. 45 authorizes the establishment of colored schools. Found in City Council Records, Resolutions, November 26, 1867. Baltimore City Archives.
to receive was a highly practical one that would give them a sense of world geography so they might know how to get about, mathematical and monetary proficiency to equip them in the handling and management of money, familiarity with letters so that they might grow literate and able to think critically, and historical knowledge that might give them a sense of the world and its politics. Although Negroes would have to remain wary of racial bias and Confederate sympathies in their lesson plans and textbooks, the practical knowledge they were to receive had much potential in enhancing black physical mobility, business savvy, and political assertion.\(^{40}\)

With the reorganization of the Baltimore Association’s colored schools under the Baltimore Public School System, three changes were immediately implemented: (1) Superintendent, J.M. Fulton recognized that the current colored schools were in locations that were of great inconvenience to the pupils who lived far distances from them. To remedy this problem, Fulton divided the City into two districts, placed one centrally located colored grammar school in each district and colored primary schools in whatever regions demanded them most.\(^{41}\) This was done in hopes of increasing the average school attendance of black pupils. (2) The legislature passed a General School Law that immediately appropriated was $15,000 for colored schools, followed by an additional $3,750 for the payment of teachers. It was also determined that any taxes that the colored people paid for education were to be used exclusively for black

\(^{40}\) Blacks had to be wary of Confederate sympathizing textbooks which demeaned the black race, discussing the slothful nature of African peoples or the redeeming qualities of slavery for civilizing the African mind. See: Williams, 133. Given that the Democratic government of Baltimore was filled with Confederate sympathizers, it is within reason that Baltimore’s public schools may have used confederate sympathizing textbooks. See Calcott, 21. Also, Fuke, Richard Paul. “The Break-Up of the Maryland Union party, 1866.” (M.A. thesis: University of Maryland, 1965). This assumption is further supported by the fact that the Baltimore Normal School, a school for black teachers, often discussed that the books it provided students were carefully scrutinized before by the school faculty before being used. See: “Baltimore Normal School Committee, Meeting Minute Books” 1867-1874. Maryland Historical Society.

\(^{41}\) Letter by Superintendent of Public Schools, City Council Records, WPA#1132 , October 1, 1867.
education.\textsuperscript{42} (3) The School Commissioners immediately dismissed all of the colored teachers that the Association had employed in their schools, believing black teachers to be less qualified than whites.\textsuperscript{43} Although the reorganization hoped to make schools more accessible to blacks and created a steady flow of funding for black education, the removal of black teachers was a removal of learned black role-models and represented yet another high-paying, skilled occupation to which Baltimore’s blacks did not have access.\textsuperscript{44}

A stated objective of school reorganization had been to increase Negro school attendance by placing schools in Baltimore’s most heavily black populated areas. Yet despite having made colored schools more accessible to the black populace, fewer black children attended than had when the schools were being run, in less accessible locations, by the Baltimore Association.\textsuperscript{45} By the 1870s, school commissioners began questioning whether the “colored people, as a whole,…[were] not yet sufficiently aroused to the importance of Education for their children.”\textsuperscript{46} Yet such seems unlikely, given the ardent efforts blacks had made for the former half of the century to secure education for themselves and their children. Blacks indisputably recognized the value of education for its ability to spur and enhance mental and physical liberation, religious devotion, practical life application and socio-economic mobility. Black school attendance dwindled, not because blacks did not value the education offered them, but because they faced

\textsuperscript{42} School Board Reports, January 1868.

\textsuperscript{43} City Council Records, Resolutions, November 26, 1867. Baltimore City Archives.

\textsuperscript{44}Salary of black teachers and principals at the Baltimore Normal School, a school to train black teachers in Baltimore, ranged $60-$120/month. Black teachers trained in Baltimore would leave the city in search of employment. Baltimore Normal School Minutes Book, 1867-1908. Maryland Historical Society.

\textsuperscript{45} Third Annual BAMEICP Report, 1867, shows 1,756 black students in attendance. School Board Reports, 1869, show 1,222 blacks in attendance. With fewer resources, the BAMEICP served more students.

\textsuperscript{46} School Board Reports, 1871.
obstacles of violence, fear, neglect, mistrust and poverty.

Blacks attempting to acquire an education encountered their fair share of oppositional violence. In the early years after emancipation, while many schools were still being run out of churches, several black churches were burnt to the ground. By April of 1866, the Christian Advocate reported that John Wesley Church and Holding Church in the nearby Kent and Queen Anne’s Counties had been burnt to the ground for instructing black students. Damages were estimated between $2,500 and $3,500 dollars. The violence being perpetrated against organizations and individuals in support of black education caused many blacks and white educators to weigh black education against their lives, safety and property: “it is impossible to insure these places of worship…consider whether the colored people had not better ‘ignorantly’ worship than not worship at all.”

Blacks had to question whether the acquisition of an education was worth risking the little wealth they possessed and had invested in personal property. And the violence was not just directed towards their belongings, but their persons as well: “Its scholars have been beaten on the county roads, their books and clothing taken from them…few where these things have been done, can be encouraged to attend school at all.” In many respects, the choice to receive an education was a choice between physical and mental well-being. The choice to go to school may have been deterred by the threat of violence black students could have encountered on the way.

Violence proved one obstacle, neglect another. In 1869, Baltimore Superintendent of Schools, William Creery, observed that “there exists a notion that the schools are not in the

47 Christian Advocate (newspaper), April 5, 1866.

48 Independent (newspaper), Dec. 21, 1865
hands of those who will do the best for them.”

His observation was probably not far from the truth as black students were neglected in numerous ways that deterred them from attending publically-funded schools. These schools that Baltimore’s black parents sent their children to had far from adequate provisions, were unsanitary and located in unsightly dilapidated buildings. In 1871, the School Commissioners agreed that “the great difficulty has been all along to provide suitable accommodations for them...the buildings we have been obliged to occupy have not been desirable in any respect—low, dark and badly ventilated apartments, such as we now use, have been very disadvantageous to their success.” Poor ventilation and damp, moldy black schoolhouses made the acquisition of an education a dire health risk. And even though the School Board made regular resolutions to remedy these health risks through the building of new, sanitary schools, they neglected to do so. Most children remained in the same ramshackle buildings for the bulk of the period. Indeed in 1876, School Board President John T. Morris remarked that one of their buildings would “undoubtedly be condemned by any Board of Health as unfit for occupation for school purposes.”

School administrators not only neglected black students’ health, but their schools in general. In 1875 although Superintendent Henry E. Shepherd mentioned that he had made numerous visits to the City’s white public schools, he had been “able to observe the workings of the Colored Schools only to a limited extent.” Rarely was it that the school administration checked to see that its black schools were functioning properly. It further seemed that the schools were “not in the hands of those who would do best”


50 Despite numerous plans to build new, sanitary schools at their annual school board meetings, these schools were never built. School Board Reports, 1874-80.

51 School Board Reports, 1876.

52 Ibid., 1875.
for black people because of the Board’s refusal to hire black teachers. After the dismissal of black teachers in 1867, the School Board would not entertain the notion of hiring them until 1880: “if the opening of another school was a necessity, they would favor the employment of colored teachers.” Yet when a new school was opened in 1883, the Board was still not satisfied that hiring colored teachers would be in the “best interest of the schools.” The entire concept of hiring black teachers was regarded as some sort of experiment. If the school administration thought so lowly of black competency, would this not be reflected in the way white teachers instructed their black students? Parents were reluctant to send their children to a school that cared little about their children’s health, neglected the welfare of their schools and questioned the measure of their intellect.

But perhaps the most persuasive argument for low black school attendance rates is that blacks were poor and children had to work to support their families. As early as 1869, Superintendent William Creery observed that black parents were “so largely engaged in pursuits which require the assistance of their children, that lateness and frequent absence are the consequence, and it has been found extremely difficult to direct them.” ‘Providing for today’ prevented students from acquiring an education that might help them ‘provide for tomorrow’. Children were often absent from school because they had to earn a living to meet their and their family’s immediate economic needs. As Creery later argued, it was “difficult to induce the colored people to keep their children regularly at school during the busy seasons of our large packing house. Argument is vain, when compared with the positive values of a day’s wages.”

53 Ibid., 1883.
54 Ibid., 1869.
55 Ibid., 1873.
Issues of lateness and absence continued well into the 1880s, by which time, school commissioners began considering closing some of the City’s colored public schools.  

**Measuring Success.** If the goal of education was to economically uplift the colored people, then the Baltimore Public School System utterly failed. The constant threat of violence in combination with the failure of school administrators to maintain safe, sanitary school houses and check academic progress fostered poor test results among colored students. In 1877, despite the fact that 4,000 colored children regularly attended the Colored Public Schools, only 103 passed their final examinations at the end of the year. Similar test results were recorded over the next few years. Blacks would not experience economic uplift through the education provided by the Baltimore Public School System, for according to their test scores, they had not received one.  

That the Baltimore Public School Commissioners were so concerned with increasing black attendance paints a false picture of school administrators concerned with maximizing black educational acquisition in Baltimore. The Baltimore School Board did not provide blacks a publically funded education in an attempt to socio-economically better the black race, but to appease the demands of Baltimore’s Quakers who fought on their behalf and to remove poor, criminal blacks from the streets of Baltimore. Once a colored school system was in place, Baltimore’s School Board did little to maintain it, as evidenced by their neglect of the health conditions and academic rigor of those schools. Black attempts at education were further complicated by threats of violence and pressing labor demands. Between 1864 and 1884, black education became a choice between violence and safety, sickness and health, and economic well-

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56 Ibid., 1880.  
57 Ibid., 1877.
being and lost wages. The failure of white school administrators to provide a safe, sanitary and comprehensive education for blacks combined with heavy work demands on African-American children meant that, come 1884, black education remained a “coveted possession” and its acquisition a private initiative.
Epilogue: Tolerance

The Douglass Institute was founded in 1865 by a number of prominent black Baltimoreans as a philanthropic rental hall for African-American activity in Baltimore. Formerly owned by Newton University, the building contained a fire hall for lectures and exhibitions, a library, a musical department and several school rooms. \(^1\) Its stated purpose was to “furnish to the colored people of Baltimore, at a reasonable and fair rental, halls for holding public meetings and entertainments, which at the time of the found of the said corporation were not opened to the colored people.”\(^2\) Black Baltimoreans needed spaces where their labor unions could organize, schools could meet, and political agendas could be determined but, in 1865, virtually all of Baltimore’s rental spaces were white-owned and did not allow black patronage.\(^3\) The establishment of the Douglass Institute gave Baltimore’s black organizations a home. The Chesapeake Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company held its Board and Shareholders meetings at the Institute. Black labor unions such as those of the Hod-Carriers, Caulkers, and Stevedores regularly organized, recruited and fundraised there. Several of the City’s Negro Public Schools were run out of the Institute. And virtually every Black Republican meeting and convention of the period was held here.\(^4\) The Douglass Institute, during the 1864-1884 period, acted as hub for black political, educational and economic activity.

On October 8, 1887, however, fifteen Douglass Institute shareholders, owning 1,050 of 2,000 shares, banded together to move for the dissolution of the Institute, complaining that it no

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2. Douglass Institute Constitution found in *Wales et al. vs. Institute*.
3. *Wales et al. vs. Institute*.
4. Various newspaper articles between 1865-1887 for Douglass Institute activities. Some major ones: *Sun*, 10/7/65, 8/5-6/68, 2/16/69, 3/2/71, 7/18/72, 6/17/73, 10/31/76, 10/28/79, 8/18/82.
longer fulfilled the object and purposes for which it was founded. According to the shareholders, the Institute had been under-patronized and losing money for several years because, surprisingly, there were a number of similar public buildings which had opened their doors to black patronage. Why had white businesses begun allowing black patronage after years of exclusion? Had a spirit of racial harmony been effected by 1884? Was the white populace no longer opposed to black presence in the City?

Baltimore’s racial animus of white opposition to black presence, though, had not changed. In 1884, Calbraith Perry, priest in charge of S. Mary’s Church, reported that white employers would not employ black labor, regardless of how skilled or efficient those black workers were. In his own congregation, Perry mentioned that some whites showed “annoyance when colored people, in their own chapel, [took] seats next to them, and taking no pains to conceal their displeasure, [changed] their seats.” Whites were opposed to black presence as late as 1884 and attempted to disassociate with blacks both physically and economically. It was believed that blacks posed a threat to white labor in the city and, further, that blacks were an immoral and destitute people.

Blacks were not ignorant of the racial discrimination and hostility directed towards them by Baltimore’s white populace, nor did they shy away from speaking out against that discrimination. In 1882, a small group of African Americans met at the Douglass Institute for an open forum on “The Present Needs of the Negro to Entitle Him to a Place in the Highest Realms of Civilization.” They met for the purpose of discussing the “grievances of the colored people of Maryland, to put them on guard against the tricksters who have duped them for twenty years

5 Ibid.
6 Perry
Blacks were fatigued by the economic and educational discrimination which white “tricksters” had committed against them in the way of labor exclusion, inadequate pay, and educational inequity. Listed among their grievances was the prohibition of blacks from the State bar, the absence of blacks on city juries, the non-protection of colored women by the bastardy laws, and the non-employment of black teachers in the public schools. At this open forum, blacks attempted to organize a grassroots awareness campaign to resist the discriminatory practices of whites in the city. And although these attempts seem to have been more talk than action, one fact cannot be disputed: in 1884, whites still forced blacks out of occupations, the courts ignored their pleas for justice, and black presence was generally undesired and actively resisted by the white populace.

The fact that white businesses had begun allowing black patronage in the 1880s is not an indicator of racial harmony, but can perhaps be attributed to troublesome economic times. Bank failures caused by the Panic of 1873 resulted in a large number of business failures and high unemployment rates across the country. Baltimore mirrored the rest of the country during the Panic—businesses failed, unions were suppressed, wages cut, work hours shortened and police stations were once again occupied with residents unable to find work. As white business owners struggled to turn profits, perhaps they looked to blacks as a new economic market and allowed blacks to patronize their businesses. Indeed, during times of economic crisis gold and silver must have trumped black and white. And although racial harmony would not come for some time, the beginnings of racial tolerance were not far off. In 1885, Everett J. Waring would

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7 Sun, May 23, 1882.
8 Ibid.
9 Olson, pp.191-194.
become the first African American lawyer admitted to the bar of the Supreme Bench in Baltimore. In 1888, the Baltimore Public School System would hire its first black teacher, Roberta Sheridan. In 1890, Harry S. Cummings would be the first African-American elected to the Baltimore City Council.¹⁰ That whites would be willing to allow blacks into the occupations they dominated and the election black officials, however few, suggests that by the 1890s whites were beginning to tolerate black residence in Baltimore. In the twenty year period immediately following emancipation, however, Baltimore’s white residents actively resisted black presence in the City as a threat to white labor, civility and social order.

¹⁰ Road From Frederick to Thurgood.
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Myth of Opportunity


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