The Greatest Legacy of Post-Civil War Reconstruction

The Origins of African American Education in the South and the Development of Southern Public Education, 1865-1870

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Contents
Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 3
Chapter 1: The Development of Freedmen Schools and the Free School System in the South . 7
Chapter 2: A Study of the Northern Benevolent Associations: Teachers, Moral Instruction, and Politics........................................................................................................................................ 21
Chapter 3: Ku Klux Klan Violence: Southern Opposition to Freedmen Schools and to Public Education........................................................................................................................................ 39
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 59
Bibliography ....................................................................................................................................... 62
Introduction

With the Civil War over and the North victorious, the Nation wrestled with a long period (1865-1877) of “Reconstruction.” Four million formally enslaved people in the South became free as a result of the emancipation proclamation, the confederate defeat in the Civil War, and the 13th Amendment. Reconstruction was the northern government’s attempt to fix the social, political, and economic problems that occurred when readmitting the Confederate states to the Union. Initially, the North saw the problem merely of one of passing laws and a constitutional amendment to assure a smooth transition to freedom for former slaves, but soon it became apparent that the North would have to support a fundamental political and social transformation of the South to obtain this goal.

Eric Foner, a historian of Reconstruction, outlines some of these questions: “On what terms should the defeated Confederacy be reunited with the Union? What should be the place of blacks in the political and social life of the South and of the nation at large?” The latter question was one that white southerners particularly struggled with because it had an immediate impact on their daily lives. The very people who were previously under their control were now free. As Foner demonstrates, white southerners were shocked that their former slaves displayed neither loyalty nor gratitude for what some whites considered the benevolent treatment they had received. There may have been fear as well, but it took whites awhile to imagine blacks as a threat, despite the slave revolts and armed military service of the recent past. In fact, African Americans seldom acted violently toward whites during Reconstruction, which was surprising because of the extreme violence whites used against the African Americans. Violence, in particular, was common. The Ku Klux Klan was a terrorist group made up of white men who

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opposed the Reconstruction governments. The Klan did their biddings at night; they rode through
towns on horses in disguise and terrorized white northerners. The type of violence the Klan
inflicted ranged from murders and lynching to physical intimidation, burning down buildings,
houses, and churches.

Southerners, black and white, did not know what would happen to their society. Southern
whites wanted to replicate a system that was extremely similar to slavery after the Civil War and
which would create the least amount of change possible: “Planters understood freedpeople would
be paid. Otherwise planters wanted as much of the old system as circumstances would allow…
Planters wanted men, women, and children to work, just as they had in the past.”2 The southern
white vision for the future of the South differed greatly from what the Reconstruction
governments were trying to achieve; for example, people in the South were not thinking of ways
to uplift the newly freed African Americans. The elevation of blacks was one of Reconstructions
primary goals. Northern benevolent associations became vital in the Reconstruction efforts to
counteract the efforts of white southerners who resisted change in the South. White southerners
wanted to have slavery but disguise it as something else. Because of this difference,
Reconstruction supporters and white southerners greatly opposed each other.

The question of where the newly freed black population would fit in society was in part
answered with education. Almost immediately following the war, northern whites established
schools to educate African Americans. Prior to the Civil War there was no system of public
education in the South. White children were educated at home by their parents or tutors, and
African Americans were not educated at all. Because of this, education was the reform that

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2 Michael W. Fitzgerald, Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee. Publisher, 2007), 50.
African Americans themselves and chased most feverishly in an attempt to improve themselves, their status in society, and to assert their independence from their former masters. How was education for the African Americans accomplished during Reconstruction? Historians like Jacqueline Jones and Heather Andrea Williams credit African Americans for taking the lead in educating themselves; however, Jones emphasizes the role too northern teachers. One would easily assume that African American education was accomplished primarily by whites because 90 percent of the black population was illiterate in 1860.\(^3\) Despite the large number of illiterate blacks, African Americans with the help of the Freedmen’s Bureau and northern benevolent societies were together responsible for the success of educating African Americans during Reconstruction.

In exploring African American education in the South, this paper will specifically look at Mississippi and Georgia. Georgia stands out as a state where African Americans made independent efforts to educate themselves. The American Missionary Association, the most prominent northern benevolent association, also had a significant impact on public education in Georgia and throughout the rest of the South. Some of the earliest efforts to educate blacks occurred in Savannah, Georgia. The state had both rural and urban schools. Mississippi stands out as the state where Klan violence was particularly extreme. Studying Mississippi allows us to explore different ways in which the Klan threatened the school system and its teachers. Because the two school systems were different, studying both Mississippi and Georgia allows us to get a fuller picture of schools in the Reconstruction South. This paper will explore why African Americans in Georgia were more active than they were in Mississippi, and furthermore explore why violence was harsher in Mississippi.

\(^3\)Foner, *Reconstruction*, 96.
While this paper will trace the efforts the African Americans, the northerners, and the Freedmen Bureau had in establishing education for the newly freed black population, it goes further to suggest that Reconstruction and the efforts to educate the African Americans created the public education system in the South for both white and black children. At the beginning of Reconstruction, educational efforts were solely focused on African Americans, but as states started adapting educational provisions into their constitutions, education became compulsory for all children in the South. Southern efforts, directed by northerners, produced a school system that resembled the northern public education system (although with fewer skilled teachers and more inadequate facilities). The personal impact the school system had on white children and white southern traditional way of life, which often included having their children balance work and schooling, added to the fierce opposition that southern whites had to education. Whites first had a problem with educating the African Americans at all because most believed it was a waste of time. All African Americans could ever do, whites felt, was be laborers. Education later encroached on their private life, by forcing their children to attend school. Most opposed was the school tax which whites had to pay.

Suggesting that education for African Americans created the public education system in the South is significant because first it showed the direct influence African Americans had in changing southern society, and that northerners used the African Americans as a tool to mold the South into a version of the North. The free school system in the South was a direct result of the efforts to educate the African Americans. The effort occurred despite the Ku Klux Klan’s attempts to stop the development of public education, suggesting that educational reforms during Reconstruction were a strong force that transformed traditional southern society.
Chapter 1:
The Development of Freedmen Schools and the Free School System in the South

Reconstruction was the period where the first real efforts to create a school system in the South were made. The first efforts were brought forth by northern benevolent associations and the Freedmen’s Bureau. Later on, state governments drafted legislation that permanently established a school system in the South. This chapter will explore the development of the school system in the South during Reconstruction by analyzing the nature of the northern benevolent associations and the Freedmen’s Bureau, by looking at the efforts of the African Americans to educate themselves independent of whites, and by evaluating the state constitution educational provisions in Georgia and Mississippi.

Educational efforts to assist blacks in the post-Civil War South were made possible by the northern benevolent associations. They were primarily responsible for raising funds to employ teachers and to obtain school buildings. The most prominent of these associations was the American Missionary Association (AMA). “The following associations patronize schools in the state: The American Missionary Association; this association has charge of and supports 70 schools. Union Education Society; this society has charge and support of one school. The New England Branch Commission has charge of and supports seven schools…”4 The missionary associations mostly hired teachers from the North and paid to bring them to the South, because northern teachers were willing to come to teach the freedmen and the northern teacher’s ideals matched the ideals of the association for which they worked. The associations, however, realized the desire white southerners had for southern teachers and the African Americans desire for black teachers, so when the qualifications were met, the northern societies would also hire southern whites and blacks to teach.

The northern missionary associations were instrumental to the school system during Reconstruction largely because of the financial help they provided. *The Daily News and Herald* a newspaper of Savannah, Georgia provides figures to show how northern societies helped schools in Georgia more than any other group: “There are schools in forty-six counties—there being from one to seventeen schools in each of that number of counties. The total cost of sustaining the schools during the month was $6,650. Of that amount the freedmen paid $2,000, the Bureau $810, and Northern Societies $3,840.” Northern societies helped with the bulk of the financial burden for the school system in Georgia. Without these societies, the school system most likely would not have flourished in the way that it did. The financial help the associations provided did not gain them complete black support; many times the freedmen and the northern benevolent societies, especially the AMA, would clash.

The southern education system during Reconstruction received further aid from the Freedmen’s Bureau. The Bureau was created during the war by an act of Congress on March 3, 1865, after months of disagreement between the House and Senate over its provisions. It was created to help place blacks on the road to self-reliance, which is why the bureau could not be passed as a permanent measure, seeing long-term guardianship over African Americans as a negative. The primary responsibilities of the Freedmen’s Bureau included, “supervision and management of all abandoned lands, and the control of all subjects relating to refugees, and freedmen.” The Bureau had the power to, “seize, hold, and, use, lease, or sell confederate

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7 Foner, Reconstruction, 69.
property for educational purposes.”9 The Bureau was mainly a supervisory agency that oversaw all educational endeavors for the freedmen in all of the former Confederate states.10 Because of the lack of help from the state, the Freedmen’s Bureau became very important in educating the freed people, “It sanctioned co-operation with private ‘benevolent associations, and with agents and teachers duly accredited by them;’ And also, that he should furnish such protection as might be required for the safe conduct of such schools.”11 At the beginning of Reconstruction in both Mississippi and in Georgia, the Freedmen’s Bureau and the northern aid societies provided the basis on which the beginning of the school system in the South was created, and most importantly provided the only means by which black people could obtain a quality education.

Georgia made some of the earliest efforts to create a school system, with some schools being established directly following the war, “In a very few days after the advent of General Sherman, there were 500 children under organized instruction under that city. This effort, in teaching and expense, was undertaken by the colored people themselves, they receiving from white friends only advice and encouragement.”12 In January of 1866, the Freedmen’s Bureau reported that there were 69 schools in operation with 69 teachers, of these 69 teachers, 43 were colored.13 The African American teachers dominated the Georgia school system. In other states, such as Mississippi, African Americans were not in a position to lead the educational effort as few had received any type of education before or during the war. Freedmen who were educated in the South during the war were those who served in the Union Army, “On the enlistment of colored troops chaplains became instructors, and with other officers detailed for this service, taught, in

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9 Morris, Introduction, 2.
10 Morris, Introduction, 2.
11 Alvord, Semi-annual Report, V, 8.
some regiments, the whole rank and file. In the campaigns of 1864 and 1865, the Christian Commission had 50 teachers employed during a large portion of their time in colored camps and regiments. It is supposed that at the close of the war 20,000 colored soldiers could read intelligently, and a much larger number were in the elements of learning.”¹⁴ This suggests that most of the African American teachers in the South were either from the North or were educated while serving in the Union Army. Charles Howard stated, for example, in his testimony: “The colored people of Georgia are receiving more educational advantages than the poor whites. For a time, they had the earnest assistance of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and since that time northern aid has been extended to them. We have always been so poor that it was a very hard matter to educate our own children, and we could not take care of the children of others.”¹⁵ The strong support of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the northern benevolent associations combined with the strong desire of Georgian African Americans to educate themselves provided the freedmen with more educational opportunities than were available to poor whites. Howard’s testimony shows the early success of the Georgian schools for freedmen.

As African Americans became educated, the poor whites of the South started to have the same desire, and wanted to be included in the efforts to provide formal education to the people of the South. This desire was shown in Howard’s testimony that was previously stated. Prior to Reconstruction, however, southern whites were inherently reluctant to a common school system. Heather Andrea Williams outlines in Self-taught the reasons why the South failed to create a publically financed school system, “… rural opposition to taxation, without which schools could not be properly funded; low population density, which made it difficult to build schools in

locations convenient to everyone; and reliance on a single crop in many parts of the
South…Additionally, white southerners’ antagonism toward the North in the 1850s may have
contributed to the failure to develop common school-systems, as some southerners denounced
the adaptation of northern models of school organization.”16 These factors that delayed the
creation of a common school system were also the basis of opposition to the school systems that
actually existed. Because of these reasons, without the efforts to educate the blacks, the southern
public school system may have developed at a much later time.

The beginning of public education in Mississippi was not as successful as it was in Georgia.
It is, however, important to note that many schools were located on private plantations; so it was
believed that more schools were in operation then the Bureau was aware of. The slow start of
the school system came from the fierce opposition white people had towards it in Mississippi.
The opposition was said to be more common in Mississippi than elsewhere.17 Successful early
efforts were put forth in Columbus, Mississippi in 1865 and 1866 by the Quaker community.
“The Quakers demonstrated that not all northern whites coveted control over freed people’s
affairs. It appears that the freedpeople trusted the Quakers to teach them and their children. The
freedpeople participated and exerted their will in other ways, by giving money to start the school,
by paying tuition, by providing public transportations to the teachers…”18 Quaker involvement
in Mississippi showed that similarly to Georgia, the freedpeople wanted to be part of the effort to
educate themselves, and wanted to demonstrate some type of control over their education
independently of whites. The freedpeople’s effort in regards to their collaborative effort with the
Quakers was kept separate from the AMA which became a source of tension. The Quaker school

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16 Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill:
18 Williams, *Self-taught*, 94.
was short-lived, and was eventually burned down in 1867. At the beginning of Reconstruction in Mississippi, the strongest efforts for schooling were put forth by the Quakers. In this way, Mississippi differed from Georgia in its level of aid from the AMA which prevented Mississippi from being as successful as Georgia was in educating the freedmen at the beginning of Reconstruction. It could be that the AMA was blocked from reaching its full potential because of the strong opposition that was present in Mississippi.

The freedmen in both Mississippi and Georgia exhibited the desire to be active participants in their education. This claim was made most evident by the establishment of the Savannah Educational Association (SEA) in Georgia. The SEA was formed in 1865 with the help of Reverend James Lynch, a minister from Baltimore, and John W. Alvord. Alvord started his career in 1865 in Georgia by helping the African American’s in Savannah establish their own school system and as a result established the SEA. After this Alvord was appointed the Inspector of Schools and Finances for the Freedmen’s Bureau and later served as the Bureau’s only General Superintendent of Education. Alvord was instrumental in the efforts to educate the freedmen during Reconstruction. The SEA was run by a board entirely made up of African Americans, which was Alvord’s vision when he set out to create it. “Its constitution provided for the funding of elementary schools through voluntary subscriptions. By January 1, 1865, Savannah blacks had raised $800 dollars to support about five hundred children in school without charging any tuition fees.” This was an impressive effort. Along with the funds raised,

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19 Williams, *Self-taught*, 94.
20 Williams, *Self-taught*, 87.
the SEA hired fifteen African American teachers. Because of the lack of resources the African Americans had, the SEA needed the help of the AMA to raise funds and to establish schools. The control blacks wanted to have over their schools in Savannah was a source of tension with the AMA because they had their own views on how schools should be run and believed African Americans were not yet qualified to hold the power over their own education.

The tension between the SEA and the AMA was most clearly shown in the conflict with S.W. Magill, an employee of the AMA. His problem was not particularly with the qualification of black teachers, but with their ability to instruct students morally. Eventually Magill gained control of the schools and demoted the African American teachers and hired more white northern teachers. Magill gained this control “with the threat that the AMA would withhold all financial assistance from the organizations unless it made provisions for white teachers and administrators.” The freedmen in charge of the SEA did not lose control because of their poor managerial skills. They lost control because the SEA lacked sufficient funds. Even though the SEA was unable to keep control over their own schools, their success cannot be denied. The SEA, for example, was able to provide education to many children without having to charge tuition. The most remarkable part about the SEA was how early in Reconstruction the association was established. If blacks were not in a state of poverty following the war they would have most likely been able to keep control over the association. The SEA showed that African Americans in Georgia were striving to be independent of whites and wanted to have control over their own education.

24 Jones, Soldiers of Light and Love, 73.
25 Williams, Self-taught, 87.
26 Williams, Self-taught, 88.
27 Williams, Self-taught, 89.
28 Jones, Soldiers of Light and Love, 74.
As Reconstruction in the South progressed, so did the school systems. The state constitutions of 1868 in Georgia and Mississippi provided provisions for public education. Before the 1868 constitutions, there was no state mandated school system existing in the South; white children who were well-off received education at home. Reconstruction was the first time that a system resembling the system in the North came to fruition in the South for either white or black children. The state constitutions also marked the end of the educational efforts by the Freedmen’s Bureau and the missionary associations. Mississippi and Georgia’s educational provisions were not successful at first, and became a source of opposition on the part of the southern whites mainly because they did not want to have the burden of funding the schools through taxes. In this way, the constitutional provisions re-intensified the opposition to the schools because the state constitutions created a further economic struggle in the name of public education, directly impacting the daily lives of the southern whites. However, the provisions in the constitutions for public education were significant because they made a statement that education in the South for black children was going to be permanent.

Article six in Georgia’s new state constitution dealt with public education. This article stated that education would be provided free to all children, and would be funded through taxation; the article created the position of The Office of State School Commissioner. Most importantly, it outlined specifically how the state would fund the schools: through poll tax, and through special tax on liquor, shows and exhibitions. Furthermore, the state of Georgia was given the power to levy taxes on property if the tax was necessary to help build the school system. Lastly, Georgia’s constitution called for establishing at least one or more schools in each school district.

29 Georgia Constitution (1868), art. 6, sec. 1.
30 Georgia Constitution, art. 6, sec. 3.
as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{31} Georgia’s constitutional provision regarding public education had some inherent problems. First, Charles Wallace Howard, former captain in the Confederate army and editor of the \textit{Plantation}, an agricultural newspaper, testifying in 1872 before the committee speculated that: “the sparseness of our population is the greatest drawback to a common school system.”\textsuperscript{32} The spread out population of Georgia caused problems, such as, where to place schools so the most children could attend. This meant that schools could be far from some children’s homes because there were not enough students to establish a school in local neighborhoods. As a result, attendance rates were poor. Georgia’s education provision had another problem which is stated in the \textit{Atlantic Daily Sun}, a newspaper from Atlanta, Georgia, “This act defeats itself by the very excess of the machinery which it attempts to put in operation. No such act should do more than outline the plan or system by the aid of a few bold strokes, and then leave it to the towns, cities, and counties to elaborate the details according to the necessity and means of each.”\textsuperscript{33} The \textit{Atlantic Daily Sun} expressed the concern that the counties would not be able to establish a school system alone. As the state tried to gain control of the educational system, the complications of establishing public schools was shown to be a harder task than previously imagined.

Mississippi had a similar provision in its constitution of 1868 which was outlined in article eight entitled “School Fund, Education and Science.” Mississippi’s article on education was far more comprehensive than Georgia’s. Mississippi’s constitution established, for example, a Superintendent of Public Education, a Board of Education, and a Superintendent of Public

\textsuperscript{31} Georgia Constitution, art. 6, sec. 3.
\textsuperscript{32} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, VII (Georgia), 831.
Education in each county. It also went in to detail about how long the schools should run for (at least four months a year). If a district did not maintain the four-months-a-year rule they would be deprived of the money from the school fund for the next year. The Mississippi school system would be funded through the establishment of the common school fund supported by taxes on land that belonged to the state, on liquor sales, and on dram shops, and the state had the power to issue a poll tax if it would help fund the school system. Interestingly, it was stated that no schools under the power of religious sects would be granted money from the state for their schools. This was significant because many schools were Sabbath schools during Reconstruction. Both Georgia and Mississippi’s state constitutions in 1868 set out to create a free public school system in their state.

The school tax created an immediate negative reaction from the white southern population. This reaction was exemplified in Charles Baskerville’s testimony where he described the tax system in the state of Mississippi. Baskerville had been a resident since 1851 of Noxubee County, Mississippi and a lieutenant colonel of cavalry in the Confederate Army. Baskerville outlined the heavy taxes that were imposed on the white people of Mississippi. He argued that the whole burden of the taxes fell on the white people, and the black people were completely exempt from paying any such taxes. In the state of Mississippi, “They tax your hogs, your cows, your furniture, your watches, your cups and saucers, your land, and everything else. Everything is subjected to that tax of one-half of one percent by the state…Then they have a right to levy a special tax for the purpose of building jails, bridges…Then the school tax…as I

34 Mississippi Constitution (1868), art. 8, sec. 2.
35 Mississippi Constitution, art. 8, sec. 5.
36 Mississippi Constitution, art. 8, sec. 7.
37 Mississippi’s Constitution, art. 8, sec. 9.
38 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi), 374.
39 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi), 384.
now estimate it, four percent upon the entire property of the State land, cultivated, uncultivated, and everything else.”  

Baskerville showed that the state tax in Mississippi was quite heavy before the school tax was implemented. The school tax added an extra one and a half percent on the people of the state. When the school system was taken over by the state, the white southerners started to feel the burden more heavily. When the Freedmen’s Bureau and the benevolent associations were taking care of the financial burden, less opposition existed. The state system occasioned more opposition and the violence of the Klan increased because of this, especially in Mississippi.

Baskerville testified that African Americans did not have to pay the taxes, and that the white people carried this burden for them. The rather loaded question was asked by Mr. Pool, a member of the joint select committee, “Then the entire tax to carry on the State government, and the county government, and the schools, is levied upon the white people of the county?” To which Mr. Baskerville responded, “I say unhesitatingly that it is.” His testimony has to be looked at skeptically because of Baskerville’s past in the Confederate Army and his Democratic Party loyalty. It is clear that Pool was trying to push Baskerville into saying that the white people paid for the education of the freedmen, and Baskerville completely cooperated. Baskerville’s testimony was an attempt to provide a reason why the school tax was causing an outrage: Baskerville concluded that the white people of Mississippi were being oppressed with taxes and did not want to carry the entire burden of educating the freedmen.

Hampton L. Jarnagin a lawyer from Macon, Mississippi highlighted in his testimony how heavy the taxes weighed on the white people of Mississippi and explained that the school tax

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40 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi), 384.
41 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi), 384.
opposition applied to both white and black schools.\textsuperscript{42} He stated that his taxes increased four times as a result of the school tax, “For instance, there is a farm I control up here for a gentleman in Alabama. I paid for the taxes of 1869 about $75. The taxes of 1870 were about $264.”\textsuperscript{43} This highlighted the substantial increase in taxes there was for the people of Mississippi. Any added taxation to support the schools (a system many southerners did not even see as necessary) was quite an economic burden. Jarnagin’s testimony is shaped to show how the opposition to the school tax was not an irrational opposition. Furthermore, Jarnagin believed that the opposition was not to the school system itself but only to the school tax, meaning that the schools for white people were just as opposed as the schools for black people. Opposing the tax, however, was the same as opposing the system because without the tax the schools would not be properly funded, and therefore could not be put into operation. Jarnagin explained, “I have heard of no opposition to Negro schools at all. There has been a question in regard to building the Negro school-house. Some portions of the community are opposed to taxation for the purpose of building school-houses. They say the neighborhoods ought to build their own houses, and tax to pay the teachers and expenses.”\textsuperscript{44} The school tax posed a huge road block in the development of the school system, most significantly because it generated the most opposition for the system. There was also the question of how much the school tax should cover and what individual towns should cover. Jarnagin believed that the tax should just pay for the teachers and the towns should build the schools with their own funds. Maybe this would reduce some of the tax burden on the southern whites, but it also could diminish the overall quality of the schools. Jarnagin’s testimony served the purpose of explaining the complications that arose from the state constitutional provisions.

\textsuperscript{42} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, XI (Mississippi), 513.
\textsuperscript{43} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, XI (Mississippi), 528.
\textsuperscript{44} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, XI (Mississippi), 528.
There were complications with the establishment of the state-mandated school system in Georgia. John L. Conley, an attorney-at-law from Fulton County, Georgia, explained in his testimony that the tax collected for the schools was never used for school purposes, and some people were relieved of having to pay the taxes at all.\(^{45}\) First, Conley showed that there was corruption in the Georgia government that resulted in misapplying the school fund. The school tax was collected and paid into the treasury but instead of using it for school purposes it was used to pay the members of the legislature.\(^ {46}\) Conley further explained, “inasmuch as that portion of the constitution had not been carried out by the legislature requiring the establishment of a general school system free to all the children of the State, the legislature saw fit to remit the poll-tax for two years back.”\(^ {47}\) Conley stated that the school tax was never collected, showing the illegitimacy of the school law in Georgia. The early efforts by the state to provide a free public school system did not seem successful because of the unwillingness of the members of the government and of the people to create a school system.

Linton Stephens, a lawyer from Georgia, claimed that the school tax was not collected.\(^ {48}\) Stephens stated that the poll-tax which went to the school fund was not collected because people claimed there was no school system being implemented, “the reason they gave why the poll-tax was void was that there had been no school-system organized, and yet these other taxes were not declared void…while the act of 1870 declared the tax raised from the poll to be void, it did not declare void the taxes raised from shows and from the sale of liquors.”\(^ {49}\) The tax from shows and liquor sales also went into the school fund, so why was only the poll tax not collected? Possibly,

\(^{45}\) Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, VII (Georgia), 928.
\(^{46}\) Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, VII (Georgia), 927.
\(^{47}\) Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, VII (Georgia), 928.
\(^{48}\) Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, VII (Georgia), 974.
\(^{49}\) Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, VII (Georgia), 978.
the reason was to provide temporary relief to the people of Georgia. Since there was not a school system being set in place yet, it might have made sense to collect fewer taxes for the school fund until the implementation of the state-mandated schools began. However, this is all speculation. The most important question raised was why was there not a state mandated school system being put into place in Georgia, especially since it was required by law to do so? Because of the opposition to the school tax and the general resentment to the state-mandated school system the implementation of schools was hindered. In Georgia, the Freedmen’s Bureau and the northern benevolent associations continued to be the main providers of public education.

The transition of control from the Freedmen’s Bureau and the northern benevolent associations to the state governments showed the progress in the southern public education system. The school system, however, faced much opposition when under the control of both. Northern benevolent associations had direct problems with the African Americans in Georgia and did not have enough presence in Mississippi at the beginning. Funding, buildings, and teachers were always issues throughout the creation of the public school system. Under state control problems were raised with the implementation of taxes which increased public opposition. Regardless of the problems, the educational system was established because of the desire blacks had to be educated.
Chapter 2:
A Study of the Northern Benevolent Associations: Teachers, Moral Instruction, and Politics

This chapter will analyze the three different types of teachers that worked in the South during Reconstruction: northerners, southerners, and African Americans. The most prominent were the northern teachers who were hired by the northern benevolent associations and the Freedmen’s Bureau. Through the study of the teachers, the mission and objectives of the northern benevolent associations and Freedmen’s Bureau will be exemplified. This will show how moral teachings, politics, and temperance shaped the appearance of and opposition to public education in the South during Reconstruction.

The “typical” teacher in Georgia was a northern woman in her twenties who received some formal education from a normal school or academy and had a strong missionary spirit. A normal school was a school that trained its students to become teachers. The majority of men who taught eventually became the superintendents or principals of these schools. Jacqueline Jones in her book Soldiers of Light and Love does an excellent job of conveying what the northern benevolent associations were looking for when hiring teachers, (specifically the AMA and the American Federal Union Commission (AFUC)): “General requirements differed little between the two organizations. The AMA called for experienced teachers with missionary spirit, a lack of “romantic or mercenary motives,” physical health, “culture and common sense,” and “benevolence, gravity, and earnestness.” Furthermore, denominational affiliation was extremely important. The AMA was affiliated with the Congregational church, but missionary associations differed in their beliefs, for example, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians were

50 Jones, Soldiers of Light and Love, 30.
51 Alvord, Semi-annual Report, III, 36.
52 Jones, Soldiers of Light and Love, 33.
53 Jones, Soldiers of Light and Love, 35.
54 Jones, Soldiers of Light and Love, 35.
all represented by different missionary associations. An overwhelming number of teachers were also evangelical Protestants. Most northern benevolent association teachers regardless of their religion were evangelical abolitionists, which was the belief that “slavery was a sin against God and man; it denied the black person the ability to function as an independent moral being.” Denominational affiliation was important in the hiring process of the benevolent association teachers because the associations wanted to hire teachers who shared the same beliefs so their specific religious morality would be spread to the African Americans. In essence, these associations were on a mission to reform, and they each believed their religion was what would inspire the blacks to be elevated. The missionary spirit of the teachers in the AMA was illustrated by the fact that some forfeited their salaries and took on the entire expense of the school operation. Obviously, these teachers were the exception, but the fact that some did showed the dedication AMA teachers had to the cause of educating the African Americans in the South. Jones suggests that there indeed was a typical teacher with a specific set of characteristics that the northern missionary associations employed. Jones perspective on the typical northern benevolent association teacher emphasized the power the association had in determining the classification of teachers in the South. For the northern missionary associations, the missionary spirit and denominational beliefs were vital factors in the teacher selection process.

As the schools system during Reconstruction grew, white southerners began to enter the classroom. Southern whites occupied a much smaller segment of the teacher population in the South compared to the northern teachers. Southern whites who began teaching in the freedmen schools did so to directly challenge the northern teacher in their mission to morally and

56 Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love*, 16.
intellectually elevate the African race. The opposition to northern teachers political and social agenda was what inspired southern whites to become teachers. In this way, the northern teachers created opposition to the schools while simultaneously gaining southern white participation. As a way to get northerners to relinquish control of the education system, the white southerners decided to seek employment as teachers. Other factors existed, such as, financial need, but the main reason was to push the northerners out of the schools. In *The Daily News and Herald*, a Savannah, Georgia newspaper, there was a plea to encourage southerners to take hold of the public education system, “Such being the ties between us, it is evident that we alone ought to undertake the Negro’s education. It will be both for his advantage and our own that we should do so. We shall teach him better because we know him better than his Northern school-masters…Yankee lessons serve but to fill his mind with pernicious ideas, and to make him ambitious beyond his capacity and sphere; our lessons will render him a useful, contented, and truly intelligent man.”59 White southerners accepted the inevitability of public education, however, the passage further shows that white southerners still did not believe that African Americans could be elevated to the intellectual level of a white person. They believed that Yankee education gave the freedmen false hope in their mental capacity which would eventually lead to the freedmen’s disappointment. This article suggests that the southerners wanted to educate the freedmen because they wanted to educate them back into being “slaves” which is what the author meant by giving them lessons to “render him useful and contented.” White southerners wanted to mold the freed population into a working class by using the school system as a way to show the freedmen that laborers were all they would ever be because of their limited mental capacity.

Another incentive for the southerners to get involved in public education was to maintain peace between the races, “They wanted friendly relations established, and mutual affection to exist between the two races, and they knew this could never be found around New England schoolmarm...The advantage of the system is the proper education of the Freedmen, the teaching him that his future must be identified with the southerner and that the kindest feeling should exist between the former master and slave.” Southerners believed northerners taught the freedmen to despise their former masters. If southerners were the educators they could manipulate the African Americans into thinking their masters were their friends, therefore creating a peaceful coexistence between the two races. The language that white southerners used to explain why they wanted to enter freedmen education is significant; for example, this article says that “proper education” would be given by the white southerners to the freedmen not by the northerners. Proper education suggests that white southerners believed educating African Americans was only useful if it reinforced positive relations with their old masters and persuaded their former slaves to continue to do the work they performed as slaves. The acceptance of the school system by white southerners derived from the realization that they could use this system to keep the freedmen in a low intellectual state, so the African Americans would not become their competition and would continue to be their workers. White southerners wanted to manipulate their former slaves to their advantage, which could not happen when Yankees educated the freedmen.

The last important group of teachers in the South was the freedmen themselves. As previously mentioned, the black teachers were most active in Georgia. In Georgia in 1867, for

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example, there were 138 teachers, of whom 70 were white and 68 were black.\textsuperscript{61} In comparison, in Mississippi there were 59 teachers, of whom 49 were white and only 10 were black.\textsuperscript{62} The African American teachers were to be found more often in Georgia because there were efforts on behalf of the black population for self-supporting their own education and there may have been a large, unknown pre-war free black population. African American teachers stood as a symbol for their independence from white people. Normal schools became increasingly important in the freedmen’s effort to educate themselves, and for the long-term effort to provide qualified black teachers. Despite the SEA’s effort to put the education of freedmen in the hands of blacks, they were unable to gain control. The black people were still vulnerable in financial and educational terms which prevented them from being completely successful. The freedmen, for example, did not have the money to establish schools on their own accord, so they had to rely on whites for the money. Because whites had to be involved in this way, black people were forced to be dependent on white people. The black teachers themselves were indicative of the freedmen’s desire for independence in the post-Civil War South, and further showed that the blacks had an unyielding desire to be educated.

Georgia blacks provided the Freedmen Bureau with the most teacher reports in comparison to other southern states. This is important because these reports came from both the urban and rural areas of Georgia which means that Georgia is a perfect state to study when trying to decipher the typical character of African American teachers in all southern states.\textsuperscript{63} African Americans wanted to exert their independence from white people by teaching in the schools for freedmen and in some cases by controlling the school entirely, however, African Americans

\textsuperscript{63} Williams, \textit{Self-taught}, 99.
were aware of their limitations and in many instances asked for the help of white people. These calls for help came from schools that were completely under the control of blacks (these schools were found in Georgia not Mississippi). Williams addresses the limitations freedmen had in running their own schools: “Limited education, poverty, a decrepit schoolhouse, a lack of books, and hostility from local whites circumscribed freed people’s education.”  

Williams cites two examples where black teachers wrote to the Superintendent for Freedmen’s Education in Georgia, Gilbert L. Eberhart, asking for the aid of a white person to help them advance their learning. This showed that blacks were aware of their limitations and were willing in some instances to put their pride aside and ask for the help of white people; this suggests that even though blacks wanted to be independent of whites, they knew that obtaining the best education would provide them with the best opportunity for future success and social improvement. African American teachers did not make a good income, and in many instances their salary barely was enough to make a living. For schools that were either run by African Americans or had African American teachers, tuition was required, and many times parents of the children paid for the schools utilities in order to keep the school in operation. The low salary of the black teacher, and their student’s aid in funding the school shows how important black run schools were to freedmen exerting their independence.

A black teacher in the South during Reconstruction was typically a person who had received some kind of education before the war or had acquired an education in the army. As Reconstruction progressed, many improved their education and became significantly more qualified as they received more education. Jones argues that the freedmen’s effort to educate

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64 Williams, Self-taught, 101.  
65 Williams, Self-taught, 100-101.  
66 Williams, Self-taught, 105.
themselves independent of their benevolent associations was viewed as African Americans being ungrateful for all that the northerners had done for them, “They condemned rival black-operated schools as evidence of the race’s ignorance and ingratitude toward its white benefactors. Indeed, no matter how radical their political beliefs, northerners in Georgia failed to appreciate the blacks’ desire to control their own lives as much as possible, including what and by whom their children were taught.”⁶⁷ African American teachers were wanted by African American students but northern associations did not think this was the best route to successfully educate the black population. The use of white teachers was more of a matter of control than a matter of African Americans being unfit to teach. If freedmen had the qualifications to teach, northern teachers and missionary associations should have looked at this as a sign that there mission was successful, and allowed it to happen more often.

White southerners oddly welcomed African Americans to teach in the freedmen schools. Alvord explained, “It is evident that the freedmen are to have teachers of their own color. Many such are already employed. The rural districts and plantations give them preference, even when inferior in qualifications. The planters promise protection and help in their work…From a number of states, officers of this bureau ask us to send teachers of this description.”⁶⁸ It is important to note that African Americans were said to be “inferior in qualifications” but were still sought after, specifically by white planters and white plantation owners. Southerner’s seemed to prefer unqualified African American teachers over qualified northern teachers. Why did these southern whites embrace the unqualified black teachers? It was essentially because of their lack of qualifications. African Americans would be prevented from being elevated to the intellectual level of a white person in the hands of another African American. Southern whites

⁶⁷ Jones, Soldiers of Light and Love, 50.
were less threatened by the African American teachers than they were of the northern teacher, because white southerners believed that the African Americans had genuinely good feelings in regards to their former masters. They believed the northerners were responsible for any bad feelings Africans had towards them. The African American teacher was beneficial to the southerner because it removed northern teachers from the classroom and would leave blacks with a lesser quality education.

In terms of the gender of teachers, the feminization of the teacher profession had yet to happen during the time of Reconstruction. Men were just as likely as women to seek employment as a teacher. The main difference between men and women teachers was that men were more likely to be advocates for education and heavily involved in politics while they were in the South. Many men were also ministers or very active in their churches. I found no account of women becoming principals or superintendents of education, so it can be concluded that men were more likely to use their teaching job as a stepping stone for promotion in to a more prominent position in the education system. Women mostly focused on teaching in the classroom while men were more active outside the classroom.

A study of the teachers during Reconstruction cannot be separated from the study of the missionary associations that hired them because these associations attracted and hired teachers whose beliefs aligned with their own. The teachers in the schools for the African Americans thought their duty was beyond just teaching their students how to read, write, and do arithmetic. Northern teachers saw their jobs as instructing their pupils academically and morally. Because the freed people were previously in bondage, their new freedom could be seen as a threat if not

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69 Williams, Self-taught, 111.  
70 Williams, Self-taught, 113.  
properly instructed on how to use their freedom responsibly. For example, people thought that the freedmen would easily succumb to vices such as liquor usage. *The Semi-annual Report on Schools for Freedmen noted* that because at the beginning of their freedom, most African Americans couldn’t read or write, the teachers had to teach by example, “At present few of the colored people can read on these subjects, and therefore must be taught a better way by example and oral precept. Every teacher and agent among them should be a lecturer on the pernicious influence on intoxicating liquors and tobacco.”72 Education for the African Americans was largely in the hands of northern benevolent associations and the moral teachings derived from the mission of these associations themselves.

Missionary associations tried to instill their ideals in their students. The northern missionary associations saw the freedmen as a people who can be molded into northerners: “The Northern societies thus defined “education” in its broadest sense. Schooling for the freed people included training in literacy skills, moral instruction, and for a very few, higher education. The intention was to create a comprehensive system of newspapers and labor contracts and write letters; provide them with rudimentary lessons in moral behavior; and insure a steady reliable supply of teachers of their own race in the years to come.”73 By defining education broadly, missionary associations were able to justify moral instruction in the freedmen schools. Teaching the importance of morality was a necessary part of the freedmen schools because northern missionary associations thought it would encourage stability in the years following the war. Moral teachings served as a way to protect the southern whites from their former slaves. Northern societies attempted to gain support from the southern whites by emphasizing the benefits the education of the freedmen would have on them specifically. The protection of the

southern whites, however, was not the reason why northern societies wanted to instruct blacks morally; this was just a convenient excuse.

For the northern benevolent associations, the Freedmen’s Bureau, and white southerners in support of education the importance of moral education derived from their belief in the church and the teachings of God. Republican Governor James L. Alcorn of Mississippi stated, “Strictly secular education may develop one part of the mind, but leaves to nature the better, the nobler part. And we would make a dangerous mistake by forgetting that it requires, also something of the sobering of the religion sense. The vast majority of our people is Protestant; and as such hold it a solemn duty to train their children in the teachings of the word of God.” Governor Alcorn believed it impossible to completely separate religion and morality from public education, similar to the northern benevolent associations. Many of the northern teachers believed it was their Christian duty to help elevate the black race, so it made sense that religion was a vital component in their moral teachings. During the 19th century, religion was such a significant component in society that it mingled in every aspect of life, especially in politics and education. Public school teachers were preachers of the word of God, as preachers often took on political roles. In William Jennings testimony he stated, “I have talked with many persons here who are strong members of certain churches, and among the pillars of the church, and they would frequently speak of northern preachers mingling in politics. It has been claimed here, universally, that nearly all the New England preachers are politicians.” Jennings believed that many northerners in the South had a strong connection to the church, but speculated that the church also preached politics. During Reconstruction, in Mississippi and Georgia separating religion,

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74 Foner, Reconstruction, 14.
75 “Governor Alcorn on the Bible in Public Schools,” The Natchez Courier, February 1, 1871, Natchez, Mississippi edition.
76 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, VII (Georgia), 1139.
politics, and academics was almost impossible. Thus school teachers were frequently accused of teaching politics and morality. Because northern associations took charge of education in the South they had control over the teachers who were hired and therefore sponsored teachers who shared similar religious and political beliefs, which often differed from southerners beliefs.

Part of the mission to educate the African Americans for the Freedmen’s Bureau and the northern benevolent associations was to promote social stability and to construct a morally respectable class of African Americans. As part of this mission, many temperance organizations formed among the freedmen to prevent immoral behavior with the objective of elevating the black class. Temperance organizations were formed for young children who were in school, “A new temperance and reform organization called the ‘Vanguard of Freedom,’ has been introduced among the pupils of the colored schools… We learn that this pledge is having a marked and salutary effect in the schools where it has been introduced, both in restraining from the use of intoxicating liquors and tobacco—to which, however, comparatively few of the pupils have been addicted—but especially in the suppression of angry and objectionable speech among the scholars.” 77 Educating young students on the importance of temperance has two purposes: first to prevent the students themselves from exhibiting any of the behaviors that the temperance movement disdains such as drinking, tobacco usage, and foul language. Second, the students can take what they have learned and use it to bring out these same behaviors in their parents. 78 The Temperance Movement for children was very popular among the Sabbath and Sunday school teachers. “Teachers and Superintendents of Sunday-Schools will find it adapted to the work of educating the youth in the doctrines of total abstinence…Its object is to make the temperance movement for children.

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77 Alvord, Semi-annual Report, IV, 89.
78 Alvord, Semi-annual Report, IV, 89.
work and education a part of the religious culture and training of the Sabbath school.” As a result, the Temperance Movement education initiative was based on the religious beliefs that resisting base desires was crucial to building character. The National Temperance Society and Publication House printed an Almanac for children that included stories, and illustrations to gear the ideas of the Temperance society toward children, and make it easy for students to learn these ideas. The actions of the temperance associations, missionary associations, and the Freedmen’s Bureau all showed that they believed that moral education for the African Americans was essential to their success. By uplifting the character of the African Americans, social relations in the South would improve.

Because one of the objectives of moral teachings in the freedmen’s schools was to promote social harmony, educating the freedmen was portrayed as beneficial to the southern whites, but southern whites as a general rule opposed the education of the freed people. “Obedience to law, respect for personal and property rights, honesty, industry, economy, sectional and racial harmony—all are mentioned as desirable objectives. Taken together they constitute the bureau school system’s formula for a peaceful and orderly transition from slavery to freedom.” Both the Freedmen’s Bureau and the northern missionary associations promoted the idea of moral teaching as beneficial to the white southerner in hopes of gaining support for their educational efforts. The northern teachers wanted to educate the freedmen in order to help protect the southern whites from their former slaves. Many southern whites did not see it this way; they saw it as the northerners trying to force their own beliefs onto their former slaves. The main fear was

that the moral teachings included teaching their African American students the ideas of the Republican Party, and trying to inspire the freedmen to vote Republican. “For the vast majority of freedmen’s teachers more direct participation in partisan politics was discouraged. Convinced that party rivalry intensified opposition to Negro education, bureau and aid society officials frequently advised instructors to avoid open involvement in politics.”82 The Bureau and the missionary associations wanted the teachers to be portrayed as people who were preaching morality; they did not want teachers to be thought of as spreading political beliefs; this was an important distinction that the Bureau wanted to make clear to the southerner. The northern societies failed at gaining support for African American education through moral teaching. The southerners actually feared the moral teachings because of political differences and fear that northerners were trying to make the South a replica of the North. So instead of gaining support, the northern teacher’s curriculum created more opposition.

The AFUC was one of the most active northern missionary associations working in the South comparable to the AMA. The constitution of the AFUC is interesting to look at because the constitution shed light on the mission of the AFUC but also of the AMA and other northern benevolent associations that were working in the South at this time. Their constitution called for them to “aid and cooperate with the people of the South without distinction of race or color, in the improvement of their condition …through education, freedom, and Christian morality.”83 For the northern missionary associations it was extremely hard to separate moral doctrines from standard education as it was their moral doctrine that essentially brought many of the northern teachers to the South. This is, in part, why northern women and men endured the threats and

82 Morris, Reading, ‘Riting, and Reconstruction, 164.
social ostracism they received from the southern white population. In this sense, it is important to look at the northern teacher’s perspective. A northern teacher wrote to *The Hinds County Gazette*, a Raymond, Mississippi newspaper, to express his sentiments on the issue of northerners being opposed in the South: “Now though I am a Northern man, and a “Radical,” as I understand it, yet I am no “carpet-bagger,” nor thief. I have come to the Southern country to pursue an upright and useful business in an honorable way… If Northern men have “designs” upon the Southern country, I at least have none, except indeed to earn my own bread honestly and quietly, and sincerely to promote harmony and good feeling, and to assist in restoring the prosperity of the country.”

This teacher made it clear that he had no hidden plan to instruct the freedmen in a way that would disrupt southern society. This northern teacher explained that he just wanted to improve the conditions in the South, and aid in the Reconstruction efforts. It is important, however, to take in to account that what a northerner believed would promote harmony and good will differed from what a southerner thought. This difference in opinion on how harmony should be obtained created tension between the northern teacher and the white southerner which led to the social ostracism of northerners in the South. Similarly, Julia B Sherman, a northern teacher in Georgia, says in a letter, “All men are created equal and therefore they should be friends…Let us not look on any man, or rather on any set of men, as our enemy. Now the white people in the South say the Yankees are no friend to the southern people… If you say the Yankee is no friend, how is it that the ladies from the North have left their homes and came down here. Why are they laboring day and night to elevate the colored people? Why are they shut out of the society in the South?”

Sherman writes a plea to the southern whites to stop treating the northern teachers as enemies. She said that the northern teachers are only there to

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84 “A card from one of our teachers,” *Hinds County Gazette*, Sept. 4 1872, Raymond MS edition.
help otherwise they would not have left their home. Sherman was an example of a teacher who did not understand the southerner’s attitude towards the northern teacher. Northern teachers thought themselves as in the South to teach for a higher purpose. It was hard for them to understand that doing the work of God to elevate a set of people would be intensely opposed. For the most part the teachers connected to the northern benevolent societies were not there for a political purpose, but their goal was more than teaching skills.

During Reconstruction, the Freedmen’s Bureau and the missionary associations thought it most productive to keep politics out of the schools in order to gain southern support for the schools and from the state government. Despite these efforts, many white southerners continued to believe that the education of the freedmen should not be in the hands of northern women and men. This is exemplified in the testimony of John B Gordon from Georgia. Gordon states his suspicions about carpetbaggers being in charge of educating the freedmen. He stated that carpetbaggers had convinced blacks to vote the Republican ticket, and that if federal troops were not present, the carpetbaggers would have succeeded in getting the freedmen to burn down neighborhoods: “Question: Do you not know it to be a fact that ninety-nine out of every hundreds of the negroes in this county are, in political feelings and principles, essentially Republicans, and will never under present circumstances, knowingly or willingly vote the Democratic ticket. Answer: No, sir; I believe that exactly the reverse is true. The carpetbaggers told them that if the Democrats got in power they would put the Negros back into slavery; that is one way in which disturbance has been created.”86 Gordon believed that there was no separation between education and politics, a belief rooted in his distrust of northerners. Freedmen, the question implied, would vote Republican whether or not they received education from the

86 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, VI (Georgia), 339.
northern teachers. The Republicans were in favor of the freedmen’s new free status and fought to obtain their freedom, while the Democrats wanted to go back to the old plantation South. Common sense here says that blacks did not vote Republican because they were instructed too but because Republicans were in favor of their freedom. Gordon expressed the common fear that the northern benevolent associations had sent the teachers to the South to instigate racial violence.

Gordon’s testimony showed that logic did not support the suspicions of white southerners. He believed northerner’s wanted to instigate violence between the two races. The freedmen, however, never rebelled or showed any sign that they wanted to rebel. Gordon believed that without the northern presence, there would be complete social harmony: “I have stated from the beginning to the end of my testimony, and I will state it now again, that the Negro in Georgia, if left to himself, would have had the most kindly feelings toward his old master, from the day he was emancipated to the present time.” Gordon showed the typical southern belief that African Americans loved their former masters. The southerners blamed the northerners for the African Americans disloyalty after the war based on the southern perception that African Americans loved their masters before northern intervention. Gordon’s testimony is based on extremely little knowledge of the actual condition and feelings of the freedmen, and largely on the opinions of a prejudiced southerner who was scared of a racial war. Southern whites believed that one of the ways northern teachers were creating social unrest among the recently freed population was through teaching Republican or carpetbagger politics in the classroom.

Joseph F. Galloway, a teacher in Mississippi, and Robert W. Flourney, superintendent of education in Mississippi, claimed in their testimonies that they did not teach politics in their

87 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, VI (Georgia), 340.
schools. Galloway, for example, stated that he did not bring up politics in his classroom on his own accord: “…if the Negroes asked me about it, or asked me what I thought, I would tell them.” Galloway only talked about politics when he was asked. This shows that the northern teacher, at least in this case did not set out to instruct the freedmen on their political sentiments. Galloway, however, explained that the African Americans under his instruction were influenced by him and believed anything he said. Southern whites saw people like Galloway as dangerous because his political feelings would have a strong effect on the freedmen, even though this was not Galloway’s intention. Further, Flournoy, testified that politics was not part of the education in his school, “I never inquired of a teacher his politics; I avoided mixing up politics with my schools in any way; but I know (for I took occasion afterward to make the statement in my paper) that there were eleven, including ladies, who were Republicans, and all the others were Democrats.” This is interesting because Flournoy stated that there were more Democratic teachers than Republican teachers in his schools. So the freedmen would, if politics were being talked about in the classroom, have a greater chance of being instructed by a Democrat. Flournoy’s accuracy needs to be checked, because most northern teachers were Republican. The teachers in his schools could have been mostly southerners. To prove the southerners fear as irrational this statement needs to be proven true. During Reconstruction schools were viewed as dangerous in the hands of northerners because of the position of influence they were in to effect the way the African Americans voted.

Public Education in the South was based on creating a “complete individual, which was why moral education was such an adamant component. By studying the missions of the northern benevolent associations it is easier to see why northern teachers constructed their class in this

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88 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XII (Mississippi), 670.
89 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi), 86.
way and why southerners objected and feared the northern teachers’ agenda. Religious belief and political ideals were found to be inseparable from public education. The teachers and the associations that hired them shaped the curriculum of public education in the South during Reconstruction.
Chapter 3:

Ku Klux Klan Violence: Southern Opposition to Freedmen Schools and to Public Education

Opposition in Mississippi and in Georgia to the education of the recently freed black population took the form of threats to teachers. These included notes and house visits from the Ku Klux Klan, in many instances whippings of male teachers, and the burning down of school-houses. This violence increased in 1868 when the states adopted public education under their new state constitutions. The biggest complaints against the school system were the resistance to paying a school tax, and the southern whites disdain for the northern teacher. The testimonies for both these states illustrate the type of violence that the Klan inflicted upon the teachers and on the schools themselves. While there are instances of violence in both states (Georgia and Mississippi) to the school systems, Mississippi stands out in inflicting a greater strain of violence on the supporters of the school system. This chapter will focus on the instances of opposition in both states, and will further examine the reasons behind the opposition by analyzing the testimonies of individuals in the Ku Klux Klan trial. The evidence shows that the opposition was not enough to slow the implementation of the school system down, and in the face of this opposition the school system improved.

In Georgia, there were many more instances of school burnings and verbal threats than there were instances of whippings. In Mississippi, there were school burnings and threats but there were many cases where teachers and supporters of the school system stated they were severely whipped by groups of disguised men. This raises the question of why the threats were more extreme in Mississippi than they were in Georgia. It also raises the question of whether the threats in Mississippi affected the school system more than the Klan threats in Georgia. The latter question can be answered by citing testimonies from Georgia that showed how school
burnings and verbal threats were often enough to prevent teachers and students from attending school. For example, in James Atkins testimony, he talks about what happened to his father’s school for freedmen, “As soon as the war closed, 1865 or 1866, he built a school-house, and employed a colored man to teach. His neighbors, as respectable men as I know, burned the school-house so that he had to abandon the project of having colored schools.” Such school burnings meant someone had to pay to build another one. So in this case, the Klan did not use any physical intimidation because school burnings were enough to close down the school. This was shown in contrast to an instance in Mississippi where the teachers were beaten brutally. Joshua S. Morris cited an episode of Klan violence inflicted upon two schoolmasters who were beaten so severely they were too afraid to continue their schools, “Those two men came to Jackson to complain about the disguised men, who had beaten and maltreated them to such an extent that they could not continue their schools without personal danger as they thought.” Even though in both these instances the Klan was successful in stopping the teachers, in Mississippi the Klan took much more extreme measures.

The testimony from both Georgia and Mississippi provide a substantial basis to judge the success of the Klan’s violence in dismantling the school system and driving out the teachers of these schools. The testimony showed instances where the teachers would close their schools because of the fear the threats instilled in them. Some teachers disregarded the threats and continued to teach even after they received severe whippings (whippings were restricted to the male teacher population). First, instances where the Klan’s threats were unsuccessful will be discussed. Wesley Shropshire, a resident of Chattooga County, Georgia and a farmer, shows the persistence of the African Americans in keeping their schools open in the face of Klan

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90 Poland and Scott, *Joint Select Committee*, VI (Georgia), 524.
91 Poland and Scott, *Joint Select Committee*, XI (Mississippi), 302.
violence.\textsuperscript{92} Shropshire, for example, allowed a group of African Americans to build a schoolhouse on his land when he received a letter from the Klan threatening that if he did not stop the freedmen from building, he would be whipped. Shropshire decided to give the freedmen his church to hold classes, but the church was then burnt down by the Klan. These freedmen built yet another schoolhouse in which they were still using at the time of the testimony. The Klan used such violent tactics (threats and schoolhouse burnings) to stop the education of the African Americans; however, they just kept finding a new spot to conduct classes in. In this case, the African Americans did not let the Klan violence stop their education.

Two recently freed African Americans testified in Georgia, who were so scared of the Klan’s threats that they ceased going to school. Caroline Smith, a freed person from Georgia, felt threatened enough by the Klan to stop her own education, “Schools! They would not let us have any schools. They went to a colored man there, whose son had been teaching school, and they said they would just dare any other nigger to have a book in his house. We allowed last fall that we would have a school-house in every district; and the colored men started them. But the Ku-Klux said they would whip every man who sent a scholar there. There is a school-house there, but not scholars.”\textsuperscript{93} Smith did not receive a threat herself. The threat of violence given to another man was, in this case, enough to scare her out of going to school and from obtaining an education. A similar experience was shared by Charles Smith, another African American from Georgia, who would not send his children to school because of the Klan violence, “Talk about having a school down there! They would come in on you and kill you if you sent your children to school; eh! eh! A black fellow got up a school five miles from me and they went in on him, and

\textsuperscript{92}Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, VII (Georgia), 1100.
\textsuperscript{93}Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, VI (Georgia), 402.
liked to have killed him because he was teaching school.” The Georgia testimonies do not indicate if students were assaulted, and if they were how common it was. The testimony only allows us to conclude that whippings and physical forms of violence were not the norm in Georgia.

There was a stigma against teachers of freedmen’s schools, especially teachers from the North. Klan threats pressured white southerners not to seek employment in the colored schools, and ironically inhibited one of their own objectives, which was to get northern teachers out of the public schools. In Mississippi, one scholar concluded: “Black schools especially found it difficult to find qualified instructors, since few native whites, fearing social ostracism or worse, applied in the beginning to teach in these schools.” White southerners obtained this fear from watching what the northern teachers endured in their society. Typical day-to-day treatment of northern teachers in the South was the denials of common courtesies and the refusal to provide the northern teachers with places to live. The northern teachers’ presence in the South upset the normal social hierarchy, “No doubt the very fact that the teachers closely associated with the Negroes contributed to this feeling. Such association, which broke down racial and traditional taboos, was a direct violation of the caste system. The advocacy of social and political equality further aggravated the estrangement between the Negro and his former master, and hence deepened the animosity which the whites felt toward the teachers.” It cannot be forgotten that because the northern teacher was refused housing a majority of the time, many teachers took up residence in freedmen’s houses, which was unthinkable to many southern whites (who had

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94 Poland and Scott, *Joint Select Committee*, VI (Georgia), 599.
96 Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South*, 96.
previously “housed” slaves, not lived in the homes of African Americans.) The southerners felt that the northern teacher was a direct threat to their normal lives. Seeing white teachers and their black students intermingle in this way suggested that the African American was capable of being elevated. Luckily for the freedmen, northern teachers were willing to come and endure the social ostracism because of their belief that they were fulfilling a higher moral duty of elevating the black race and because they were an extension of a victorious northern society that had bested the South in warfare.

One instance of the poor treatment northern teacher’s received was shown in the case of Sarah A. Allen; she was a teacher from the North who came to Mississippi from Illinois. She was asked to leave by the Ku Klux Klan and to disband her school. Allen said in her testimony to the joint select committee, “I taught six weeks, until I think the 18th of March, when I was told to leave; warned to leave, between 1 and 2 o’clock at night by about fifty men, I think; they were disguised.”98 Allen’s intimidation by interaction with the group of disguised men exemplified the typical way women teachers were approached by the Klan in Mississippi. Usually the threat came in the middle of the night by a group of disguised men who would come to a woman’s house and make the suggestion that she leave town. Usually, the men were very polite, but would state the second warning would not be as pleasant. Women were generally treated more gently than men because women were scared off easier. This does not mean that every woman shut down their schools because of verbal threats, but a woman being whipped at this time would have been very scandalous.

Allen explained what she felt motivated her tormentors: “They did not want radicals there in the South; did not want northern people teaching there; they thought the colored people could

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98 Poland and Scott, *Joint Select Committee*, XII (Mississippi), 777.
educate themselves if they needed any education.” The Klan’s objective in targeting northern teachers was to get the northerners to relinquish control of education in Mississippi. Witnesses in the Ku-Klux hearings suggested that white southerners feared the doctrines that were being taught in the freedmen schools, and Republican Party’s sentiments that were supposedly being spread by northern teachers. Reuben Reynolds, a former confederate soldier and practicing lawyer, claimed that people in Aberdeen, Mississippi did not have a problem with the actual school system for African American students, but did have a problem with the doctrine the teachers of the freedmen schools were said to be teaching, “But evidently the doctrine inculcated in that school to these pupils was to array the black man against the white man – especially to prejudice him against the southern white man…They stated that they were taught that a conflict between the two races was inevitable, and when that conflict came, they must be prepared to exterminate the white race.” Reynolds testimony depicted the freedmen schools as a possible place to instigate racial violence. Southerners depicted northerners as exploiting the vulnerability of blacks to persuade them to vote for the Republican Party. The Republican Party during Reconstruction believed that “slavery and the rights of blacks must take precedence over other political questions.” Republicans embraced the expansion of federal authority. White southerners particularly linked Republican ideals to the beliefs of the “carpetbagger” or “radical” Republicans, “carpetbaggers generally supported measures aimed at democratizing and modernizing the South—civil rights legislation, aid to economic development, the establishment of public school systems” and supported “establishing free institutions, free schools, and the

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99 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XII (Mississippi), 778.
100 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XII (Mississippi), 924.
101 Foner, Reconstruction, 229.
102 Foner, Reconstruction, 231.
system of free labor.”103 Southern Democrats feared most the social beliefs of the Republicans and the expansion of federal authority. Reynolds affiliation with the Democratic Party in part explains why Reynolds testimony attempted to justify the objective of the Democratic Party and the Klan which in part was to break up the free school system and to ruin the credibility of the northern teachers. Southerners wanted northerners out of the South because they were a constant reminder of their loss in the Civil War. There is not much evidence that supports that the notion that northerners were trying to instigate racial violence. It was true that African Americans voted Republican, but this was inevitable because Democratic politics worked to keep them as slaves. These reasons seemed to be fabricated by the southern Democrats to justify the Klan violence towards the northerners.

Another instance of aggression toward northern teachers is shown in the testimony of Cornelius McBride. McBride came to Chickasaw County, Mississippi from Cincinnati, Ohio to teach at a colored school. He claimed that for about seven months the white people of Chickasaw treated him nicely and allowed him to teach a white Sunday school class as well.104 The welcoming feeling McBride had, however, was short lived. He was visited by the Klan as Allen was, but his experience was much more violent. The added violence could be because he was male. The Klan assaulted McBride in the middle of the night and severely whipped him: “I asked them why they were whipping me what I had done to merit that treatment. They said I wanted to make these niggers equal with the white men; that this was a white man’s country. They said, “God damn you! Don’t you know this is a white man’s country? … Some colored people brought me word that if I held that examination the Ku-Klux would come again and kill me that

103 Foner, Reconstruction, 298.
104 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi), 325.
time for sure.” The examination was an end of the year exam for the African American students. If the students performed well on their exams, it would be evidence that the schools were a success and that African Americans were equally capable of intelligence as whites were. Furthermore, the Klan wanted to prevent the examination from taking place to prevent northerners from gaining credibility. For this reason, the Klan wanted to prevent the African American students from taking the exam. The Klan told McBride that they did not like him helping elevate blacks. The Klan’s threat in this instance was not successful. McBride did not close his school. He walked into his examination that he was warned not to hold with a gun on his shoulder for protection and the Klan never bothered him again. An important element of McBride’s testimony was that he was at first treated kindly and all of a sudden was treated harshly. This shows that at the beginning of Reconstruction (1866-67) there was a period of time when the sentiment towards the free schools was improving, but come 1868 with the election around the corner, the sentiment quickly changed for the worse.

The timing of the increase in violence toward public schools in the South is significant. In the Semi-annual Reports for Schools for Freedmen claimed that prior to 1868-69 violence towards teachers and the public schools was on the decline and public sentiment was said to be improving towards public schools in general. In 1867, for example, the hostility in Georgia was abating and the public was increasingly accustomed to the idea of universal education. In contrast to the positive sentiment that was being reported in 1867, the Semi-annual Reports showed that opposition was again increasing in Georgia, “…for the last three months there has been more bitterness exhibited toward all men engaged in the work, and there are few but have received threats, both openly and anonymously. Several have been driven from the fields in fear of their

105 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XI (Georgia), 326-327.
personal safety.” Why was the opposition to the public school system reignited? Some historians say that the increase in opposition was due to the anxiety surrounding the election of 1868, which was the first election in which African Americans were permitted to vote. The election of 1868 showed why southern whites thought that northern teachers were dangerous. Southern whites feared that the Radical Republicans would win with the added votes from the newly enfranchised blacks. The election of 1868 provides a backdrop on which to base the southerners’ fear of northerners spreading Republican ideals. Now more than ever, increased Republican sentiment was a valid fear of southern Democrats. If the northern teachers were scared out of town, they could not use the classroom as an opportunity to urge loyalty to the Republican Party.

In 1868, when political tensions were at an all-time high what was taught in the freedmen schools mattered to these white southerners and they feared that these schools would become incubators for Radical Republicanism. Northerners close contact with the freedmen population was feared most because of their position to influence their students politically. William Jennings alludes to this in his testimony. Jennings was an assessor of internal revenue for the fourth district of Georgia and a member of the Republican Party. Jennings testified about the general sentiment that Georgian’s had against northern teachers in the state: “It is simply unexplainable, except, as I remarked a while ago, that it is a prejudice against Yankees. Secondly, they say they come down here and give bad political advice to their former slaves. The charge is that they mix politics with their education.” When education was in the hands of the northerners, white southerners felt anxious that politics would be preached, and that this would cause problems for the Democratic Party, and create racial tensions. The 1868 election only highlighted this tension:

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107 Alvord, Semi-annual Report, VI, 28.
108 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, VII (Georgia), 1133.
“When the victory of the Radicals seemed assured the Yankee teacher was caught in a cross-fire between local white-conservative and black-and-tan radical groups. The years 1867 and 1868 saw a decided increase in the activity of the Union League and of the Ku-Klux-Klan. Rumors of brutality, murder, and of incendiarism were widespread.” ¹⁰⁹ In 1868, the main concern was that educating blacks threatened the southern hierarchy. During 1868, the election and school tax combined to create a more hostile environment, and the northerners were simply stuck in the middle. The increased violence spurred on by the election anxieties resulted in a more viscous way of dealing with the northern teachers.

The election of 1868, however, not only reawakened the intimidation in Georgia (social ostracism and school-house burnings,) it also brought to Georgia a more intense form of violence. “The sentiment aroused by the election of 1868 was so strong in southwestern Georgia that it was impossible even to rent a house, and a boarding place was not to be considered.”¹¹⁰ This was especially surprising in Georgia, where a lesser strain of violence existed from 1866-1867. It was also reported in the Semi-annual Reports on Schools for Freedmen that the opposition to the schools in 1868 and 1869 resulted in some teachers being killed by the Klan: “…Mr. P. H. Gillen, a white man, and resident of Maxey’s Station Oglethorpe County, was taken out in night, whipped nearly to death, and forced to leave. Numerous outrages of the like character have been committed by disguised men in the night-time in the counties of Warren, Green, Taliaferro, Wilkes, Elbert, and others… Notwithstanding these difficulties the school work goes on with increased efficiency.”¹¹¹ As African Americans electoral participation increased, so did southern white violence directed at black schooling. Alvord made it clear that

¹⁰⁹ Swint, The Northern Teacher in the South, 99.
¹¹⁰ Swint, The Northern Teacher in the South, 99.
this new more intense violence did not affect the schools in Georgia. This could be because of the efforts of the blacks in Georgia being more adamant about their education than in other places.

Another example of a teacher being tormented because of her political beliefs is presented by Rufus B. Stone who told the story of a teacher from the North, Miss Davis, who worked in Tupelo, Mississippi. The white community resented her presence, “the fact that she is teaching, and has been teaching, a colored school there, and that she is the only person there, male or female, who advocates Republican principles.”112 The main problem southerners had with Davis was that she was teaching political beliefs they did not believe in, and the southerners were forced to support this financially. This reveals another main reason why the Klan threatened the school system. When the school tax was enacted in 1868, southerners started paying for the schools. These schools were preaching political ideologies opposite of their own. This was a huge problem for the white southerners. In The Hinds County Gazette, a newspaper of Raymond, Mississippi, an editorial argued that African American children were being taught to hate their former masters, “The great and only objection that the white tax payers have had to the colored schools, have been first, that they cost too much money for the little real knowledge imparted; and second, that the teachers while in the support and pay of the tax-payers, were engaged, chiefly, in teaching the colored children to despise and run over the white people who pay all the money for the support of the school houses”113 This suggests that the anger, in part, derives from the feeling that if the whites are going to be the ones paying and supporting the education of the black children that the southern ideals should be what the students were learning, not what the northerners saw fit to teach them. This editorial stated first that schools cost too much while

112 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XII (Mississippi), 1021.
113 The Hinds County Gazette, November 10, 1875, Raymond, Mississippi edition.
“imparting little real knowledge.” This shows that southerners thought the schools were ineffective, suggesting, that paying for the schools was a waste of money. The “little real knowledge” also suggests that African American education needs to have a practical value attached to it, meaning that teaching African Americans morals and math would not be useful to what the southerners thought African Americans needed to be used for (labor, field work.) Secondly, because southerners now directly funded the schools, white southerners believed they should be in charge of who teaches and what is taught. In this way, the Klan assaults were an attempt to take back control of a situation they directly felt entitled to control.

An obvious solution to the school tax problem was to keep the schools as private institutions so people who wanted and could afford to send their children could do so, and the people who wanted to educate their children at home could do so as well. In this way, the white southerners would have freedom over their child’s education and would not have to pay for the education of other people’s children, “Most antebellum Mississippians believed that the responsibility for the education of the young should be left to individuals and not public authorities; the state should only become involved when necessary to provide the rudiments of learning for the more ambitious of the dispossessed whites.”114 This suggests that a popular sentiment in Mississippi was against public education itself which in part explains why both white and black school-houses were targeted by the Klan. Southern whites rejected government intervention in their personal affairs, and believed that state-mandated education was just that.

Southern whites did not want to be forced by the state to send their own children to school. In a rural economy like that of Mississippi, children were often needed to work, so the school

114 Harris, The Day of the Carpetbagger, 321.
requirement doubly effected the financial situation of families in Mississippi (this was the case for some Georgians as well.) Another problem southern whites had with state intervention of education was the fact that they were essentially paying for the education of other people’s children, and this did not sit well with the southern whites, especially because some of these children were African American: “General taxation for this purpose is questioned. Paying for “educating other people’s children” for the public welfare, is not well understood… taxation for schools implies the unquestioned right to have schools.” Southern whites rejected the argument that education would be beneficial to society as a whole, and that because of this education should be a state funded institution. Who, Alvord asked, was to determine that schooling is a right that everyone should have? Southerners were certainly not under the impression that education should be provided to everyone. Poor whites worked on farms, so a formal education seemed irrelevant to them. The argument of white southerners was heavily based in the class structure that was at work in the South.

This form of opposition was shown in the testimony of Alex Huggins, a resident of Aberdeen, Mississippi, a former employee of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and in August of 1870 appointed superintendent of schools. First, the type of violence inflicted on Huggins will be discussed. Huggins reported on the Klan’s threats, and its support for private education. One night, Huggins received a visit from the Klan at his house. The Klan demanded Huggins to leave within ten days and relieve the people of Aberdeen from all the taxes of the county. If Huggins did not comply, the Klan told him, he should certainly die, “He told me that the rule of the camp was, first, to give the warning; second, to enforce obedience to their laws by whipping; third to kill by the Klan altogether; and fourth, if that was not done, and if the one who was warned still

116 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi), 264.
refused to obey, then they were sworn to kill him."\textsuperscript{117} The Klan’s visit to Huggins showed the intensified violence they inflicted after the school laws were enacted. After Huggins said he would not leave the county, the Klan took him from his house and severely whipped him, and told him they would kill him, “They continued to strike their blows on my back in the same way until they had reached fifty. None of them struck more then ten blows, some of them only three and some as low as two. They said they all wanted to get a chance at me…”\textsuperscript{118} Huggins testimony perfectly showed the type of violence supporters of education received by the Klan.

Huggins explained the reasons the Klan gave for his warning: “I asked them if they were not satisfied with his school; they said ‘No;’ that they (the Klan and the residents of Aberdeen Mississippi) liked Davis well enough as a teacher but that they were opposed to the free-school system entirely; that the whites could do as they always had done before; that they could educate their own children; that so far as the negroes were concerned, they did not need educating, only to work.”\textsuperscript{119} Huggins reported another story about another teacher, Mr. Ebart that highlighted the Klan’s demand for a private school. The Klan visited him and told him that he could only stay and teach if he turned his public school into a private school and refused any money or aid from the state.\textsuperscript{120} Huggins testimony showed that the Klan wanted to shut down the school system because it threatened their previous way of life. Blacks, specifically, the Klan pointed out should not be educated because they need to work. If blacks were educated beyond their place in society, who would perform the menial labor? The Klan told Huggins that whites can be educated themselves as they always had been. This does not suggest that the Klan believed all whites should receive an education. The Klan assumed the whites would be able to educate their

\textsuperscript{117} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, XI (Mississippi), 272.
\textsuperscript{118} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, XI (Mississippi), 273-74.
\textsuperscript{119} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, XI (Mississippi), 272.
\textsuperscript{120} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee}, XI (Mississippi), 282.
children themselves, which excludes poor whites, as well as African Americans from being educated.

The opposition the Klan had to the white schools strengthened the claim that issues such as the public school itself and taxes were opposed more than the education of African Americans. This does not mean that the absence of the school tax would diminish the opposition to the school system. This only suggests that race was not the highest form of opposition to the schools. In his testimony, Jefferson B. Algood tells the story of a teacher, Mr. Dericut, and his experiences with the Klan, “He was to have taught a free school in the neighborhood of Mushulaville and a few nights before he commenced it, or before he would have commenced it and taught a few days, the Ku-Klux, or some individuals disguised, visited him and notified him that he could not teach a free school, and he desisted and did not do it. It prevented him from doing it. I think in a few nights afterward the school-house was burned.”

It is important to note that Dericut was a white school teacher who received threats from the Klan. Algood demonstrated that just the threat of violence was enough to stop Dericut from teaching. Looking more closely at Algood’s testimony, it is clear that white schools in Mississippi were opposed just as much as schools for freedmen. This suggests that the opposition to public schools did not rest in educating the African American community. Algood was asked why this school was burned, to which he replied: “Only opposition to free schools, I suppose.” The Klan’s violence kept white students from getting an education as well. Because Dericut was a teacher at a white school, he most likely was from the South. So after the taxes were enacted, the Klan’s target population grew to all supporters of the public schools instead of just northern teachers. The

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121 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi), 500.
122 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi), 502.
expansion of the school system to include all children in the South led the Klan to increase its violence in order to bring the system to its end.

In the testimony of Finis H. Little, the constitutional provision for public educations effectiveness was called in to question. Little was a resident of Aberdeen in Monroe County, Mississippi. He lived in Aberdeen for four years as a farmer and merchant, and member of the state senate.\textsuperscript{123} He had also previously served in the Union Army.\textsuperscript{124} Little testified, “There has never been any school tax, however, levied or collected in Monroe County, under the recent law. There may have been two years ago, but there has been none under the school law which was enacted by the legislature in 1870… Schools were organized and put into operation, with the expectation that the tax would be levied and collected…school-houses were built, school-teachers employed, and schools put in operation.”\textsuperscript{125} Little believed that the tax was never collected because of fear of the Ku-Klux-Klan.\textsuperscript{126} If the tax was never collected, then was it the reason the Klan opposed the school system? Part of Little’s objective in his testimony was to show that the southerners were solely opposed to educating the freed population; so by saying that the tax was never collected, he implicitly denied that taxation was a reason to oppose the system. Even though the tax was not collected in Monroe County, Mississippi, the tax was most likely collected in other counties and in other states. The impending threat that the tax would be collected could provide enough fear to justify the opposition to the tax. Little’s background in the Union Army provided him with the incentive to portray the southerners as racists who were creating reasons to oppose the system that covered up the real reason which was based in racial

\textsuperscript{123}\textsuperscript{123} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi)}, 358.  
\textsuperscript{124}\textsuperscript{124} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi)}, 358.  
\textsuperscript{125}\textsuperscript{125} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi)}, 367.  
\textsuperscript{126}\textsuperscript{126} Poland and Scott, \textit{Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi)}, 367.
prejudice. Little’s testimony was intended to generate more sympathy for the northern teachers and the freedmen while simultaneously demonizing white southerners.

Little argued that the tax was just as heavy on the freedmen as it was on the white people to further diminish the validity of the white southerners’ complaint that they carried the entire tax burden.\(^{127}\) Contrary to what whites generally believed, Little stated that the burden to educate the black children did not fall entirely on the whites as some freedmen owned property and would be taxed. Little was asked, “Does it not strike you as pretty severe, that a few families of Negroes who perhaps pay no taxation but their poll-tax and who have perhaps four or five children apiece should when they can get together twenty-five children of school age… be entitled to have a school-house built. And have a school teacher for their benefit?”\(^{128}\) This question adequately expressed the problem the majority of white southerners had to the school tax, and was phrased to make the system seem unfair, however, Little argued that the blacks owned taxable property such as their cattle, and that this tax would weigh at least equally as heavily on blacks as it did on whites. Little’s testimony attempted to invalidate the complaint that the whites only objected to the school tax rather than to the education of black children.

Alexander K. Davis expressed similar opinions to Little’s in regards to the legitimacy of the objection to the new state school law. Davis was a black man from Macon, Noxubee County, Mississippi, and a law student.\(^{129}\) Davis believed that the white people objected to supporting the education of other people’s children, and the southern whites believed they should only have to worry about educating their own, “I met a leading man in the northwest corner of the county who keeps a store up there, a wealthy man, and he told me he thought it an outrage. He thought the

\(^{127}\) Poland and Scott, *Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi)*, 373.

\(^{128}\) Poland and Scott, *Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi)*, 470.

\(^{129}\) Poland and Scott, *Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi)*, 469.
principle was wrong that he should be taxed to educate other people’s children; he said he had to educate his own, and he did not think it was right. It is generally said that what he says is the sentiments of his whole community.” The school law created a change in the southern society that did not sit well with the majority of the white southerners. While whites were able to educate their children at home because they knew how to read and write, the African Americans were generally illiterate, so educating their children at home was not a viable option. Two main objections were to the compulsory school requirement and paying to educate other people’s children. Mandatory schooling would also pose a problem for white people because white families needed their children to work on their farms in a rural economy. Getting rid of the school tax would conveniently leave African Americans uneducated because missionary associations would not be able to fund schools forever. Reconstruction was tough economically on most white people in the South. It was suspicious that all of the southern white solutions to their problems with the school system would leave blacks uneducated.

The Klan violence carried out in Mississippi and Georgia damaged the common school system overall. Despite the violence, the school system in the South continued to expand in terms of the number of school houses built, teachers employed, and pupils to teach. The Klan violence mostly affected white support for the school systems. Because school systems could flourish without support of the people in the South shows how little power white Democratic southerners had during Reconstruction. The Semi-annual Reports indicated regardless of Klan violence, public sentiment came to accept the idea of public education. In 1868, the Eighth Semi-annual Report stated: “There never was a time, either before or since the war, when the people of all classes were as interested in the subject of popular education as now. The prejudice

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130 Poland and Scott, Joint Select Committee, XI (Mississippi), 478.
that has heretofore existed among the whites against schools for freedmen has almost wholly subsided, and a thirst for knowledge among the freedmen is increasing.”¹³¹ This passage suggested that freedmen still wanted to be educated and that the southern whites were adjusting to this fact.

Furthermore, the *Ninth Semi-annual Report* in 1869 stated that the violence caused by the election of 1868 did not diminish the schooling effort, it actually improved during this time:

> “Political excitement in the State had also a bad effect, but the superintendent, by extensive inspection, public addresses & c., has succeeded not only in maintaining the number of schools, but in carrying them on to a higher standard of excellence in both instruction and scholarship.”¹³²

The statement that schools were improving during this time of increased Klan violence suggested that the threats the Klan made against teachers were often ignored. Teachers decided to teach despite being under constant threat. This shows the teachers, especially the northern teachers, dedication to their greater moral cause. The desire for the blacks to obtain an education and the desire of the northern teacher to provide the freedmen with morally sound instruction was pivotal in the development and further improvement of public education in the South.

This chapter attempted to find the legitimacy in the white southerner’s objection to the school system. It can be concluded that the school tax was damaging to the financial situation of families after the civil war, and that the school systems threatened not just the class structure but also the expected way of life for southerners in terms of compulsory school requirements. Without the implementation of the school law which established the tax, the school system would still have been opposed because of the southern white’s racial prejudice, political tensions,

and the presence of the northerner. It seems the school law just intensified the opposition by providing more reason to object. Most importantly, the schools were not destroyed by the violence and if they were, often rebuilt, so the southern school system was established despite Klan opposition.
Conclusion

This paper is a comparison on how public education for the African Americans developed in Georgia and Mississippi assuming that these states were representative of the entire South. Georgia was representative in both its rural and urban economies, the visibility of the African Americans efforts to educate themselves independent of whites, and its early implementation of a school system. Mississippi was interesting to study in comparison to Georgia’s great success in its educational efforts of the freedmen from the start of Reconstruction. This opened the discussion to what were the barriers in Mississippi and in other states that created a slower growing school system. Mississippi, for example, had more intense opposition from the Klan, had a larger rural population, and had less avid African American support, probably because fewer African Americans had been educated before the Civil War. By looking at these two states, the opposition to a public school system was analyzed, the nature of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the northern benevolent associations were discussed, and the typical teacher in the South was defined.

Analyzing the history of African American education in the South allows one simultaneously to see the development of public education for both white and black children in the South because they were one and the same. The various oppositions there were to the school system in the South exemplified by Klan violence and threats to the supporters of public education show how white southerners tried to stop the implementation of a public state-mandated school system. Although people who testified before Congress gave many reasons as to why the school system was opposed, and few of them stated directly they opposed the education of freedmen, it can be concluded that the school system would have been opposed during Reconstruction regardless because that program included the education of African Americans, such education directly threatened the social class system in the South.
It is interesting to think how the public school system would have been developed without the educational reform of the Reconstruction period. One would have to really take in to consideration the validity of the other claims of opposition to the school system. The question comes down to, would the school system be opposed to as violently as it was if the school system excluded African Americans? How heavily did the tax fall on the majority of southern whites and how much did southerners detest state intervention into what they believed were private affairs? The school system, however, would have taken much longer to come to fruition in the South because there was no strong desire among the whites for public education, and the school system’s success was largely due to the African Americans strong desire to be educated.

One topic that is not widely discussed in the implementation of the school system for freedmen was the segregation or integration of schools. When the state constitutions were drafted, they were drafted without a mention of separate schools. It is apparent that there were designated schools for whites and blacks, but it is not stated if this was rigidly enforced. It was known that in particularly rural area schools were sometimes built far away from certain families because of the sparse population. In this case, would whites and/or blacks travel even farther to go to a black or white school? Most interestingly, school segregation did not seem to be a topic of interest for whites or blacks. It seemed to just be assumed that there would be separate schools for white and black students. It would be useful to study further the issue of racial segregation in schools during Reconstruction.

African American education in Reconstruction South was marked by the freedmen schools which were the direct result of the Freedmen Bureau and northern missionary association reformist efforts. Their vision to elevate the black race by providing them with the means to do so was largely based in their past as evangelical abolitionists, and their deeply held religious
beliefs. The freedmen schools were faced with many obstacles, most significantly Klan violence, but because education was beneficial to the whole society, and was a necessary part in controlling the newly freed black population in the post-Civil war South, education was made available for both white and black children throughout the South. The greatest legacy of post-Civil War Reconstruction was the establishment of a public education system in the South.
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