

“Our Future is in Our Own Hands”
Black Educational Activism in Tennessee, 1865-1890

By Brennan Allan Steele

A thesis submitted to the Department of History for honors
Under the Advisement of Dr. Adriane Lentz-Smith
Duke University
Durham, NC
April 13, 2018

Abstract

In the wake of Emancipation, freedpeople across the South declared certain imperatives that they believed would legitimize their separation from slavery and prepare them for their imminent status as citizens of the United States of America. One of those imperatives was access to an equal and adequate education, and black folks came out of slavery ready to fight and advocate for that access. Gaining this educational access would not be inevitable in former Confederate states, as highly partisan political environments and physical violence inflicted by white Southerners not yet ready to let go of the pre-War status quo made black progress difficult. With these conditions as a backdrop, this thesis examines black educational activism in from 1865 to 1890, using the state of Tennessee as a case study. Specifically, it stresses the importance of black educational activism in the evolution of black politicking after slavery. Moreover, this thesis describes black educational activism as freedpeople's method of both understanding the meaning of citizenship and acting that citizenship out.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is particularly important to me. It represents the culmination of my interests at Duke as a History and African/African American Studies double major and an Education minor. More importantly though, it serves as motivation for me as I start my career as an educator in Memphis, Tennessee next year. The determination of those before me to push for educational opportunities for black students in my home state motivates me to put my all into teaching my predominately black students every day.

This thesis would not have been possible without the constant support, advice, and motivation of my wonderful advisor, Dr. Adriane Lentz-Smith. She understood my passion for the subject and encouraged me to produce the best product possible. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Dirk Bonker for his support in the thesis seminar and helping me create a clear historical picture in spite of gaps in the archives.

I would also like to thank all of the staff at the archives I visited. The folks at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, Fisk University Special Collections, and the Rubenstein Library here at Duke were all so helpful in helping me locate resources and navigate archival material.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of the people who served as both emotional and intellectual support, as well as editors, particularly when writing this thesis was tough. Specifically, I want to thank Nathaniel Thompson, the ultimate renaissance man, for humoring my random epiphanies about the direction of my thesis. I would like to thank my girlfriend, Idalis French, for always reminding me that I was capable. Also, I would like to thank all of my classmates and my friends who edited different versions of my thesis and encouraged me throughout the year. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Louis and Sandra Steele, as well as my sister, Jesslyn Steele, for being everything at once – editors, motivators, and listeners. I love you all, and I owe all of my success to you.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter 1 “Colored Children Here Will Prosper More” <i>Black Educational Efforts in Tennessee, 1865-1870</i>	16
Chapter 2 For the Sake of “Impartial School Privileges in Every Public School” <i>The Colored Conventions of the 1870s</i>	46
Chapter 3 “Young, Ambitious, and Full of Zeal” <i>Teachers Turned Black State Legislators in the 1880s</i>	81
Conclusion	116
Bibliography	119

Introduction

On August 7th, 1865, just a few months after General Robert E. Lee's surrender at the Appomattox Court House brought the United States Civil War to an end, over 100 black men convened at the St. John's African Methodist Episcopal Church in Nashville, Tennessee for the first State Convention of Colored Men. These men represented over twenty counties and six wartime regiments.¹ Their goal was simple. They did not assemble to determine how they could avenge previous injustices or even bask in the Union victory of the Civil War; rather, they had all come together to "simply ask for those inalienable rights which are declared inalienable."²

As this was the first convention of this sort, the delegates present adopted a constitution and determined a leadership structure, appointing delegates to each position accordingly. The initial convention also set the organizational structure for individual counties to ensure the work started at the state convention continued at the local level when each of the delegates returned home.³ Over the course of four days, these men passed resolutions that both settled administrative matters and served as petition for the political rights. They also drafted two addresses for external consumption. The first was addressed "To the White Citizens of the State of Tennessee," and the other was addressed "To the Colored Americans of the State of Tennessee." The former articulated a moral and logical argument for an expansion of political rights to black people, while the later took on a

¹ *Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored Men of the State of Tennessee :with the addresses of the*

² *Proceedings of the 1865 State Convention of Colored Men, 7.*

³ *Proceedings of the 1865 State Convention of Colored Men, 7-12.*

“spirit of advice and warning” to ensure that newly freed blacks conducted themselves as the delegates had deemed appropriate and strived for the principles of freedom.⁴

The 1865 convention represented a reckoning of political priorities for the black delegates. In the midst of all of the administrative matters, the convention delegates invited General Clinton B. Fisk, an officer of the national freedpeople’s relief agency called the Freedmen’s Bureau, to address two of their main political concerns. The first was suffrage. The other was education. The black delegates of the convention echoed these same priorities in the addresses that they drafted to both black and white Tennesseans.⁵ Inevitably, suffrage was a major concern for the delegates because having a political voice was a necessary to ensure that they gained representation in their quest for those inalienable rights. Education, on the other hand, had yet to be conceived as a “right.” Nevertheless, the delegates deemed education as one of the principles that was “marked out for all races passing from oppression to the position of freeman.”⁶ As black freedpeople conceptualized what their emancipated status meant, they posited education as central to their freedom, political platform, and their impending citizenship.

This State Convention of Colored Men was remarkable because it represented the first attempt by black Tennesseans to collectively engage in politics on this magnitude. Moreover, these men operated in a moment when the concept of freedom was novel for many black people in the South. Black Tennesseans were just starting to understand and shape the possibilities of the political engagement that came with freedom at the time of this convention. They were on the cusp of a journey to figure out the ways in which they

⁴ *Proceedings of the 1865 State Convention of Colored Men*, 21-27.

⁵ *Proceedings of the 1865 State Convention of Colored Men*, 13-16, 23-24.

⁶ *Proceedings of the 1865 State Convention of Colored Men*, 23-24.

could enact this power and mobilize for substantial change. From the onset, the black men at the convention made it clear that advocating for the education of their children would be integral to that journey.

This thesis explores the role of educational activism in the development of black politicking in Tennessee between 1865 and 1890. Black folks in South had conceptualized education as important long before emancipation, particularly as they connected literacy and educational attainment to freedom during slavery.⁷ In the decades after emancipation, educational activism took shape as black people believed their educational pursuits to be deeply connected to asserting their new place in society and understanding its accompanying political power. In Tennessee, educational activism was thus comprised of the efforts of black folks, both on-the-ground and on the state level, to provide for and improve the conditions of black education. These efforts were not static; they evolved as the constantly changing political environment of the state forced black Tennesseans to both intensify and reorganize their methods of advocacy for educational attainment.

To this end, I argue that over this twenty-five year period, educational activism was key to the development of black politicking in Tennessee. Further, educational activism helped black Tennesseans both envision and shape the meaning of their citizenship, once granted in the first few years after the Civil War. For black Tennesseans, politicking and the understanding of their citizenship were co-constitutive. Black politicking between 1865 and 1890 was a manifestation of the rights of citizenship and the means of belonging to the

⁷ See James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860 - 1935*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press and Heather Williams, *Self-taught: African American education in slavery and freedom*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

broader polity. Through educational activism, black Tennesseans utilized the power of making claims on the government that was granted by their citizenship.

The first black Tennesseans to imagine black political power at the 1865 convention would be faced with a volatile political landscape in the eras of Reconstruction and then Redemption immediately following the Civil War; one that would prove to be crucial to the educational activism of black folks and subsequently, the development of black politicking and their understanding of citizenship. In the period following the Union victory of the Civil War, Reconstruction-era Tennessee was dominated by the Radical Republicans, many of whom had supported the Union's side in the war. As they did in other southern states, Radical Republicans took control of the Tennessee legislature. Compared to the rebel alternative, or those who had supported the Confederacy in the war, this boded well for an auspicious future for black Tennesseans.

Many of the initial legislative actions of the radical Congress directly benefited the cause of citizenship for freedpeople in the state. From the beginning of Reconstruction until 1870, the state's radical Congress ratified the 14th amendment which granted freedpeople citizenship and granted the then-citizens the right to vote prior to the ratification of the 15th amendment.⁸ Perhaps the most important act passed related to education was the "Act to Provide for the Reorganization, Supervision, and Maintenance of Free Common Schools" passed in 1867 which provided state funds for segregated black schools for students up to the age of 20.⁹ Prior to the state law, the Freedmen's Bureau and

⁸ James Welch Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934, 134-162.

⁹ *Acts of the State of Tennessee: Passed at the Second Session of the Thirty-Fourth General Assembly, for the years 1866-67.: Published by Authority*. S.C. Mercer, --Printer to the State., 1867, 32-35.

independent black schools had already started filling the education need.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the act offered an important, even if mild, gesture of support for black education.

The Radical Republicans' hold on the Tennessee political environment was ephemeral, and the year 1870 was marked by an undoing of progress in securing black citizenship. The Redeemers, or the Democratic, ex-Confederate soldiers' party reclaimed legislative power. Almost immediately, the Redeemer legislature reversed many of the laws and protections favoring black Tennesseans. One of the biggest hits was to the pursuit of education, as they repealed the Common School Act.¹¹ This also came in the same year in which the Freedmen's Bureau schools ceased to exist.¹² The Redeemers reigned, with only momentary contestation, for the next decade. By the 1880s, the Democratic wing started to lose power due to factionalism caused by disputes about state debt that had been incurred since the Civil War.¹³ Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, the Republican Party had brief grasps of political power, but none of them were permanent. Despite its radical vibrancy in the 1860s, the Republican Party's commitment to black citizenship remained ambiguous, which correlated with the party's overall lack of political success as black Tennesseans questioned the basis of their party loyalty.¹⁴

Amidst this turbulent political environment, black Tennesseans' forms of politicking evolved as they worked to ensure that their educational enterprises were sustained. In the

¹⁰ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 150; Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009, 31.

¹¹ Alruthus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880*. Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, inc., 194, 182.

¹² James M. McPherson, "White Liberals and Black Power in Negro Education, 1865-1915." in Donald G. Nieman, *African Americans and Education in the South, 1865-1900*, New York: Garland, 1969, 250.

¹³ Roger L. Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1975, 29.

¹⁴ Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880's*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1976, 24-25.

first five years, educational activism encompassed black folks' direct efforts to teach their own students, build their own schools, and other attempts to make sure that they had a significant impact on the education that their children received. With the first major political shift in 1870, their educational activism strengthened and evolved into a targeted use of their political voice. In the 1870s, leaders of the black communities of the state met in several mass gatherings to assert their right to an equal education.¹⁵ Finally, while the state legislature succumbed to intra-party factionalism, black folks effectively mobilized to make up a significant portion of the Republican Party by 1880, leading to political representation as they rallied around candidates of their own race.¹⁶ In the decade of Democratic control, the first black legislator was elected in 1872, and in the following decade, the legislature saw an additional 12 black men walk through its doors.¹⁷

To be sure, black educational activism did not evolve without resistance from white Tennesseans who were not ready to let go of the political, economic, and social status quo enjoyed under slavery. Almost every attempt to further educational attainment for black Tennesseans was met with counter attempt. This repression came in the form of both physical violence and symbolic violence through legal policy. Physical violence in the state was initiated by the notorious white supremacy group, the Ku Klux Klan. Founded in 1866, the Ku Klux Klan terrorized black bodies, schools, churches, and other spaces that represented black freedom and threatened white supremacy. Though the Klan officially dissolved in 1869, Klan sympathizers and other anti-black rebels extraneously continued

¹⁵ For an example see the *Proceedings of the State Convention of the colored citizens of Tennessee, held in Nashville, Feb. 22d, 23d, 24th & 25th, 1871*, ColoredConventions.org. Nashville, TN, 1871.

¹⁶ Dewey Grantham, "Tennessee and Twentieth-Century American Politics." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 3, 1995, 211.

¹⁷ *This Honorable Body: African American Legislators in 19th Century Tennessee* Digital Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2013, share.tn.gov/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/bios.htm.

inflicting violence over the twenty-five year time period.¹⁸ Symbolic violence through legal policy often accompanied the Democratic legislatures. On several occasions, the legislature passed bills directly targeted at black Tennesseans. In 1875, the legislature passed a counter act to nullify the Civil Rights Bill passed nationally granting black Americans equal privileges to public accommodations.¹⁹ In 1888 and 1889, the Democratic legislature, fed up with black progress, passed a series of voter registration laws targeted towards the black electorate in urban areas. Moreover, such symbolic violence was often reinforced by physical violence. In rural areas, these laws were upheld by Klan-esque insurgents who harrassed black voters at polling places.²⁰

The conflicting interest of black politicking with the political and anti-black social environment in which it operated raises certain questions. How did the methods of black activism adjust or evolve within a continuously changing political environment? How did black folks continue their activism in spite of the violence, both physical and otherwise, targeted against their politicking? How did black folks continue to make claim to the rights of citizenship as their environment tried to deny their status as citizen in the first place? This thesis will explore those questions with a specific lens on educational activism. As they envisioned the imperatives in a post-slavery environment, the black men in 1865 only highlighted a few key principles, with education being one of the more prominent. For black folks, education had long been political. As such, black educational activism offers a lens into a citizenship realized through black politicking.

¹⁸ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 170-199.

¹⁹ Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, 254.

²⁰ Richard A. Couto, *Lifting the veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993, 68-69; Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race relations in the urban South, 1865-1890*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, 326-327; Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 217-219.

This thesis joins a rich body of literature that has discussed the importance of education to black folks from slavery onward. Historian James D. Anderson has argued that education, to ex-slaves, was a way to define their status as separate from bondage. Coupled with this notion, he has argued that black folks prioritized an ethos of self-reliance and self-sustenance in educating their black children.²¹ For black folks across the South, education was a practice of freedom. Anderson has also maintained that blacks folks were at the forefront of the advocacy for universal public education, suggesting their belief in education for all children.²²

Building on Anderson's argument, historian Heather Williams has bridged the efforts of black slaves prior to emancipation and their efforts as freedpeople in the immediate years after slavery to educate themselves despite the political and social impediments. She has connected this innate drive to the activism in Colored Conventions, or mass gatherings of black leaders, across the country at the beginning of Reconstruction. Williams has argued that these conventions were used to "concretize their still ephemeral freedom" right after the war" and signal to those in power that they would not back down from their pursuit of education.²³ Lastly, providing local perspectives, Hilary Green has defined a period of "educational reconstruction" between the years of 1865 and 1890 for two specific communities. She has discussed in detail the efforts of black Richmonders and black Mobilians, along with a network of partnerships with governmental agencies and

²¹ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 4-15.

²² Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 4-15.

²³ Williams, *Self-Taught*, 5-12, 72-75.

missionary societies, to use schooling as “as the fundamental vehicle for distancing themselves from their slave past”²⁴

This thesis adds to the existing body of literature with a case study focusing on Tennessee from Emancipation to the passing of state voter registration legislation as a part of the broader genesis of the formal Jim Crow era in the South. The work of historians thus far as functioned to describe specific forms of black educational activism at certain points in the 19th century across the South more generally and in other locales. Along with a specific focus on the Tennessee landscape, this thesis makes a direct link between the various forms of political engagement over twenty-five years. Educational activism did not stop at the on-the-ground efforts. It also included advocacy at state-wide conventions of black leaders and peaked at legislation through actual political representation. Connecting the different forms of educational activism allows for a clear picture of the evolution of black politicking.

Chapter 1 focuses on the early stages of Reconstruction, from 1865 until 1870, in which the most favorable conditions for black schooling were present for black Tennesseans as a result of the Freedmen’s Bureau efforts and educational policies passed by the radical Congress. In this chapter, I argue that in spite these favorable conditions, black folks across the state had to organize to ensure that education aligned with their visions of freedom and citizenship. By using archival materials including newspapers and correspondences, as well as governmental educational reports, I demonstrate how black Tennesseans focused their activist efforts around the schoolhouse to influence and control their own education. In this period, black folks taught, built and sustained their own

²⁴ Hilary Green, *Educational Reconstruction: African American Schools in the Urban South, 1865-1890*. Fordham University Press, 2016, 2.

schools, and participated in other activities to ensure they played a significant role in the educational processes of their children. This chapter also explores educating black students as an act of resistance, particularly as teachers of black children and black school buildings were targeted by white supremacist groups, such as the Klan.

Chapter 2 examines educational efforts in the 1870s as the moment of opportunity for black Tennesseans closed with the reclamation of power by the Redeemer Party. In this chapter, I argue that black Tennesseans intensified their educational activism through an adjustment in their method of politicking. When black leaders of the state convened for several mass gatherings, or Colored Conventions, in the 1870s, they advocated for both state and national governmental redress of the worsening educational opportunities of black children. The conventions in the 1870s differed from the first one in 1865. Utilizing the proceedings from these conventions and the surrounding discourse in newspapers, I illuminate how these black leaders developed their political voice to frame education as their “civil right” as citizens. Examining newspapers also illuminates the white-Republican backlash to complete social equality for all citizens, despite the fact that black folks made up a large portion of the party’s constituency. As they established education the key principles of their citizenship, these debates also led black folks to begin to reconsider their loyalty to the party.

Chapter 3 will end by focusing on the final stage of the evolution of educational activism in the 1880s amidst inter-party and intra-party political turmoil. In this final chapter, I argue that the election of black legislators symbolized the peak of educational activism, and thus black politicking, as black Tennesseans continued to realize the meaning of their citizenship since Emancipation. I also argue that political factionalism allowed

black Tennesseans to mobilize around black candidates instead of holding onto indebtedness to the Republican Party. More specifically, I focus on three of these black legislators who were either former or current school teachers at the time of their election; each of whom also introduced legislation that would improve black education. Taking into account Census Records, city directories, contemporary biographies, newspaper articles, and the state's legislative proceedings, I illustrate how each legislator's personal educational narratives, engagement with the black educational enterprise, and their activism for education in the legislature represented the epitome of both black politicking and the citizenship that black Tennesseans had envisioned. Still, the advent of voter-registration laws by 1890 ousted the presence of black legislators for over seventy-five years. How this happened as well as its implications for black politicking in Tennessee is how Chapter 3 ends.

Black educational activism developed out of black philosophies of education that originated long before Emancipation. Prior to emancipation, black folks across the South correlated education with their prospects of liberation. After emancipation, they continued to prioritize education, but had then correlated education with their prospects of enjoying the full extent of citizenship. This thesis' focuses on black Tennessean education activism serves to deepen an understanding of such conceptions. Moreover, this thesis tells the story of a group of people reckoning with their new political power with the intent to challenge the social and political hierarchies ingrained in their society.

Chapter 1

“Colored Children Here Will Prosper More” *Black Educational Efforts in Tennessee, 1865-1870*

Introduction

On the second day of January 1868, former slave Jacob Brodnax wrote a letter to General John Eaton, Jr., the recently appointed Superintendent of Schools for the State of Tennessee. Writing from Tipton County in West Tennessee, Brodnax discussed a school that he had been running in a former slave neighborhood owned by his former master, George G. Taylor. He had been providing instruction for former slave children since January of 1867. In his letter, Brodnax made a simple petition for the funds that had become legally available for black education in the last year. This seemed urgent to Brodnax because many of the black parents could not afford to pay for their children’s schooling. Brodnax’s primary question for Eaton was “what if anything may be done to serve to colored children of this neighborhood their shear [*sic*] of the school fund.”²⁵

Through this letter, Brodnax demonstrated his understanding of the stakes of educating ex-slaves in the dawn of freedom and the significance of being the teacher himself. He professed his commitment to teaching literacy and “as much of arithmetic as may be necessary.” He also emphasized the importance of the former slave children having a black teacher: in his opinion, “colored children here will prosper more under the control and management of a colored teacher.”²⁶

²⁵ Jacob Brodnax to John Eaton, January 2, 1868, John Eaton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 743, Box 1, Folder 2, III-F-3.

²⁶ Jacob Broadnax to John Eaton, January 2, 1868, John Eaton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 743, Box 1, Folder 2 III-F-3.

Ultimately, Brodnax's letter to the State Superintendent suggested that he understood that he was writing in a time where his freedom still did not guarantee sufficient access to full citizenship. During the first couple of years of Reconstruction, there existed a tremendous gap between freedom and the political power granted to citizens for black folks in Tennessee. When Brodnax wrote this letter, the state of Tennessee had only recently granted him the right to vote. It was no surprise that though the Tennessee legislature had made legal provision for funding black education in March 1867, Brodnax still had to ensure that the students in his county would attain their share over nine months later.²⁷ Moreover, for him, the only way to ensure the progress of his community was to be at the helm of the educational enterprise. He saw such progress, by way of both intellectual capacity and political power, as directly connected to his educational efforts.

Certainly, freedom, citizenship, and progress were still all new concepts for Brodnax, black Tennesseans, and black folks across the South. At the beginning of the decade, these concepts may have seemed like a distant dream for those toiling under the perilous conditions of slavery. Furthermore, it had only been three years since slavery had ended and Brodnax had received the freedom to even write this letter. Thus, Brodnax was writing in a whole new world with a new social reality. Although black folks would continue to reckon with this new reality for decades to come, they were clear that education was integral in their idea of freedom. As alluded to by Brodnax's letter, education would be key to developing black competency towards accessing their newfound political power as citizens.

²⁷ *Acts of the State of Tennessee, passed at the second adjourned session of the thirty-fourth general assembly for the years 1866-67.* Nashville, TN: S.C. Mercer, 1866., 33-48

Brodnax's request may have taken his contemporaries by surprise because of all of the various efforts to educate freedpeople in Tennessee. Reverend John McKee had started the first school sponsored by a Northern missionary society in Nashville in 1863.²⁸ The Federal government commissioned the Freedmen's Bureau in 1865, and the bureau's schools had been successful in the state right after the Civil War.²⁹ Add to that the common school law Brodnax referenced in the letter and there seemingly would be several avenues through which black students could attain education. Yet, Brodnax's letter and his own efforts to educate the former slave children of his own neighborhood suggested that these avenues were not sufficient.

In this chapter, I argue that despite outside efforts and a relatively favorable political environment, black Tennesseans sought ways to influence and control their own education to ensure that it aligned with their visions of freedom and citizenship. Further, education was not something that was bestowed upon former slaves in Tennessee; rather, it was something that black people had to fight for. Jacob Brodnax's efforts were not his alone. In fact, his efforts were part of a larger educational activist effort that advocated for black children's right to an education. Brodnax was amongst the few black folks who chose to directly address the State Superintendent as the highest education authority, but many other black Tennesseans took it upon themselves to educate the children of their own race. Others worked to physically build schools for black students, despite the delay in funds from the state. Still others worked to own and maintain schools where black education was taking place, even if they were not the educators themselves. On-the-ground educational

²⁸ George Hubbard, *A History of the Colored Schools of Nashville, Tennessee*. Wheeler, Marshall & Bruce, 1874. Rubenstein Library. Durham, NC, 7.

²⁹ James Welch Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee, 1860-1869*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1934, 149.

activism took multiple forms between 1865 and 1870, but each effort was vital to budding notions of citizenship.

Most scholarship has focused on the efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau schools and white benevolent societies to educate black people across the South in the period from 1865 to 1870. Historians have often pinpointed the initiation of the Freedmen's Bureau schools as the starting point of post-Civil War education of former slaves, while emphasizing the much-needed organizational structure provided by the Bureau officials.³⁰ The educational efforts of white benevolent societies, particularly those of the North, usually occupy an equal amount of space. Northern missionaries' educational efforts have been described as being motivated by concerns for the future relationship of black folks to the nation as well as the threat of black minds being subjected to Southern white control.³¹ Only recently have there been efforts to stress black agency in their education across the South into the historical literature.³² This chapter does not recount the work of white benevolent societies, though significant yet, were less significant than black folks' own drive for educational attainment. Nor does the chapter focus solely on the Freedmen's

³⁰ For examples see: Henry Allen Bullock, *History of Negro education in the south*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967; Richard A Couto, *Lifting the veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993; Paul David Phillips, "Education of Blacks in Tennessee during Reconstruction, 1865-1870." In Carroll Van West, ed. *Trial and triumph: Essays in Tennessee's African American history*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2002.

³¹ William Preston Vaugh, *Schools for All: The Blacks and Public Education in the South, 1865--1877*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1974, 1; Ronald E. Butchart, *Northern schools, southern Blacks, and reconstruction: Freedmen's education, 1862-1875*. No. 87. Praeger Pub Text, 1980, 14.

³² For examples see: James Anderson, *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988; Hilary Green, *Educational Reconstruction: African American Schools in the Urban South, 1865-1890*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016; Heather Williams, *Self-taught: African American education in slavery and freedom*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Ronald Butchart also published another book in 2010, entitled *Schooling the freed people: Teaching, learning, and the struggle for black freedom, 1861-1876*, in which he inserts black efforts to educate their communities into previous narratives that claim that this was mainly done by northern missionaries.

Bureau as a bestower of education. Instead, it emphasizes the ever-present influence of black Tennesseans in the education of their children.

Furthermore, this chapter directs attention to white terrorism as political violence targeted at black educational pursuits specifically. The year 1866 saw two major attacks on black education, black freedom, and black existence. First, the bloodiest riot against black emancipation in the Reconstruction era took place in Memphis.³³ Second, the Ku Klux Klan was founded and within a few years had established itself as the South's most notorious white supremacy group.³⁴ Though neither of these instances of violence were incited as a response to black education specifically, each of them targeted black schools as a symbol of black advancement. This violence provided a crucial context for black self-organization in the field of education – a context just as important as the supposedly favorable state and federal legislation.

Tennessee Politics and the Status of Newly Freed Blacks

The realities of a post-slavery society were as much of an adjustment for white Tennesseans, including Radical Republicans, as they were for freedpeople. On the state level, the party's elected officials were initially reluctant to determine the political rights of newly-freed people. The election of William Gannaway Brownlow as governor in 1865 to replace Vice President-elect Andrew Johnson marked the formation of a new post-Civil War political regime.³⁵ Radical Republicanism, led by Brownlow in Tennessee, insisted on Union

³³ Bobby L. Lovett, "Memphis Riots: white reaction to blacks in Memphis, May 1865-July 1866." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1979), 9.

³⁴ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 170, 185-186; Alexander, Thomas Benjamin. *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1950, 176.

³⁵ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 84-85.

loyalty and was characterized by a frustration with Johnson's delayed action in reestablishing a civil government in the state. Nationally, Radical Republicans also often advocated for the rights of freedpeople.³⁶ In his inaugural address, Brownlow asked the General Assembly to address the need for legislation to protect freedpeople from ex-Confederates and to determine their status in the state.³⁷ A journalist and clergyman, Governor Brownlow was supported by Union loyalists both locally and nationally as the right person to lead the reorganization of the state. The *Knoxville Whig*, a paper the new governor had established in 1839, reprinted an article on April 12, 1865 originally published in the *Cincinnati Times* that described Brownlow as "a champion of the cause of free government and the Union."³⁸ The praise of this paper suggested that the new governor would ostensibly prioritize the rights of freedpeople in accordance with the anti-slavery values purported by the Union.

However, the paper overestimated Brownlow's commitment to the cause of freedom. By February 22, 1865, the state of Tennessee had abolished slavery by ratifying its own constitutional amendments under then Governor Andrew Johnson³⁹ In the same *Knoxville Whig*, and prior to his election, William Brownlow had written in favor of the amendments: "To stand by slavery is to stand by rebellion... and to put down the one we have to get rid of the other." What seemed like a declaration of his support of rights for black people actually signified a difference between freedom and advancement, with freedom being granted only to appease the Union administration.⁴⁰ Brownlow stood by the

³⁶ Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee*, 28-32; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 453-454.

³⁷ Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee*, 71 - 72; Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 92.

³⁸ "Parsons Brownlow," *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, 1; Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee*, 19.

³⁹ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 124.

⁴⁰ *Knoxville Whig* in Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 124.

freedom of slaves only has a means to end the Civil War, not as a means towards ending the racist social, political, and economic systems manifested in the institution that had initiated the war in the first place.

When he took office, Brownlow initially focused on punishing the rebels of the state and all but completely avoid the status of freedpeople. In the same general session in which Brownlow was inaugurated, the new governor and the largely Radical Republican legislature, characterized by their Union loyalty, only tangentially discussed the status of the newly freed blacks of Tennessee.⁴¹ Rather than granting black Tennesseans suffrage, Brownlow led the charge in the passing a law that sought to disenfranchise those who had served in the Confederacy. The law specifically stated that suffrage was limited to citizens “publicly known to have entertained unconditional Union sentiments from the outbreak of the rebellion until the present time.”⁴² Despite hope engendered in Brownlow’s inaugural address, Brownlow and the members of the legislature showed little inclination to grant rights to freedpeople in Tennessee. Rather, the State Senate adopted resolutions that would “postpone all bills and resolutions having for their object any legislation upon the colored people of the state, until the meeting of the next session.”⁴³

Governor Brownlow and the Republican legislature only dealt explicitly with the question of the status of the formerly enslaved in 1866. The legislature passed an act entitled, “An act to define the term, ‘A Person of Color’,” and later passed acts giving black citizens the right to sue and the right to be a witness in trial.⁴⁴ The legislature eventually

⁴¹ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 93-94.

⁴² Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee*, 74.

⁴³ *Senate Journal, 34th Tenn. General Assembly, 1st Session, 1865*, 22.

⁴⁴ Neal, John Randolph. *Disunion and restoration in Tennessee*. Knickerbocker Press, 1899, 40; Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 128-132.

passed a franchise law in 1867 that indirectly granted black people the right to vote: the act provided suffrage to “citizens of the United States,” and Tennessee had already ratified the 14th amendment that granted freedpeople citizenship. The franchise law was followed by the common school law, which funded black education. Yet, the last section of the franchise act still signaled legislators’ reluctance to encourage the uninhibited access to the rights and duties of citizenship. The last section stated that, “this Act shall not be so construed as to allow the colored man to hold office or sit on juries.”⁴⁵

This hesitance was striking. Holding office and sitting on juries were key elements of citizenship and signified political power – a power that the Reconstruction government was not ready to give to black Tennesseans. To be sure, enfranchisement was key to developing black political power and promoting black interests. Nevertheless, Governor Brownlow and the Republican legislature were more often acquiescent participants than champions of black uplift when it came to turning freedpeople into citizens. Such passive support was all black people would receive in their ensuing educational efforts.

The Initiation of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Tennessee

While it took two year after the end of the war for there to be significant attempts to address black status and education on the state level, there was a more immediate push for black education and other relief on the national level. Even before the official end of the Civil War, the United States Congress passed an act to create the “a bureau of refugees, freedmen, and abandoned lands,” popularly known as the Freedmen’s Bureau. One of the

⁴⁵*Acts of the State of Tennessee, passed at the second adjourned session of the thirty-fourth general assembly for the years 1866-67, 33.*

bureau's explicit roles was to aid in the transition of freedpeople in the states that had seceded from the Union, but the bureau was initially only commissioned through 1866. General Oliver Otis Howard, commander of the Tennessee army, took the role of the commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, while Brigadier-General Clinton B. Fisk was appointed to be leader of the district composed of Kentucky and Tennessee.⁴⁶ General Howard made education a primary focus of the Freedmen's Bureau, while General Fisk worked towards the initial establishment of schools in the state of Tennessee.⁴⁷

One of the most beneficial parts of the Freedmen's Bureau schools was that they created a systematic and centralized educational system for the education of freedpeople. Traditionally, black education had consisted of schools that were either independent black efforts or led by several different benevolent societies.⁴⁸ John W. Alvord was appointed the inspector and later superintendent of the Freedmen's Bureau Schools nationally. Beginning in 1866, he crafted semi-annual reports of the schools in the former rebel states based on the reports of district directors and his own visits. Speaking to the organization afforded by the Freedmen's Bureau, in July 1866, Alvord reported that there were forty-two organized schools on record in Tennessee, with 125 teachers, and 9114 pupils – statistics he described as “of the most cheering nature.”⁴⁹

As the work of the Freedmen's Bureau unfolded, black Tennesseans began to assert their own concerns for educational attainment and provide updates on the state of black schooling in black-owned newspapers. The Nashville-based *Colored Tennessean* was one of

⁴⁶ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 150.

⁴⁷ Phillips, “Education of Blacks in Tennessee during Reconstruction,” 149.

⁴⁸ Bullock, *A History of Negro Education*, 29,3 5; Phillips, “Education of Blacks in Tennessee during Reconstruction,” 150.

⁴⁹John Watson Alvord. *Semi-Annual Reports on Schools and Finances of Freedmen, January 1, 1866 - July 1, 1870*. US Government Printing Office, *Second Semi-Annual Report*, 11.

those outlets for black Nashvillians. It included school notices, pieces on the state of the black race, and commentary on the progress of Freedmen's Bureau schools. An article written in 1866 described visits to freedmen's schools around the city and explained that "the freedmen's schools are at this time in a very prosperous condition."⁵⁰ This report of black Nashvillians echoed the claims in Alvord's semi-annual reports.

In the first two years following emancipation, the prospects for black education appeared promising on the state and national levels, even as the state legislature proved reluctant to deal with black status. Still, school legislation and the steady efforts of Freedmen's Bureau school suggested that Tennesseans were beginning to embrace the education of former slaves. That said, local violence told a different story that suggested a lack of support for black education.

The Memphis Riots and the Attack on Black Education

By 1866, white Memphians were unsettled with even incremental black progress and took out their anxieties on symbols of black education, amongst other emblems of black freedom. General Fisk claimed that "excepting Memphis, our schools have not been interrupted during the quarter" in his statement in the Semi-Annual Report of Freedmen's Schools in July 1866.⁵¹ What General Fisk was alluding to was what historians have called the "bloodiest reaction to black freedom and the quest for racial inequality during Reconstruction."⁵² According to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, what became known as the Memphis riots began in early May 1866 after a collision described as "an assault of a

⁵⁰ "Schools," *The Colored Tennessean*, 3/24/1866.

⁵¹ Alvord, *Second Semi-Annual Report*, 11.

⁵² Lovett, "Memphis Riots: White Reaction to Blacks in Memphis," 9.

negro-driver on a express wagon.”⁵³ By contrast, the official report from the Select Committee on Memphis Riots appointed by the United States House of Representatives describe the impetus coming from a heated interaction between discharged black soldiers and white policemen.⁵⁴ Regardless of the cause, the outcome was white mobs wreaking havoc on freedpeople. The mobs targeted property, bodies, and aspirations. By the end of the riots, there was over \$130,000 in damage from burnt down houses, schools, and churches, and at least forty-six black people killed and five women raped.⁵⁵

These atrocities were a response to the perceived threat of the political changes on the state and national levels as the relationship between blacks and whites shifted from slave and master to equal citizens. This attempt to reestablish white supremacy in post-slavery context was also not only a claiming of physical space evident in the attacks of black establishments, but also a claiming of dominance over the actual black body through the killing of black Memphians and the rape of black women. One of the women assaulted, Frances Thompson, testified that her attackers claimed that they planned to “burn up the last God damned nigger.” As historian Hannah Rosen has argued, the rape of Frances Thompson and other black women demonstrated the exploitation of the “gendered discourse of race” to resist the increasing presence of black folks in white spaces.⁵⁶

Attempts to reassert white supremacy also connected back to political contestation. Jack Holmes, another historian, has convincingly argued that besides racial strife, the political

⁵³ “The Memphis Riots,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 5/19/66, originally printed in the *Chicago Tribune*.

⁵⁴ United States Congress House Select Committee on the Memphis Riots. *Memphis Riots and Massacres*. Washington, DC: The Committee, 1866, 6; From now on will be referenced as *Report from Select Committee*.

⁵⁵ *Report from Select Committee*, 36.

⁵⁶ *Report from Select Committee*, 97; Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009, 8-10.

environment caused by Brownlow's legal maneuvers, the intense partisanship of newspapers, and post-slavery economic conditions all served as underlying causes for the riots.⁵⁷ As an attempted rejection of black freedom, the Memphis riots epitomized local politics in Tennessee.

Education was a site of contestation both in the riots and the responses that came in the aftermath. The Select Committee convened in July 1866 with instructions to understand the initial cause, progression, and end of the riots, in addition to the nature of the violence inflicted.⁵⁸ The official House report attempted to portray the riots as not in direct opposition of black education specifically. Early in the report, the Select Committee claimed that the newspapers had misrepresented virtually every aspect of the riots. In response to claims that black schooling was a central cause, the Committee maintained that "nothing could be more false and malicious than the charge that the riotous proceedings grew out of the teachings of the Freedmen's Bureau officers and of the teachers of the colored schools..."⁵⁹ Yet, all twelve of the schools for black students in Memphis were burnt down. The report itself described the attacks on teachers of black students as "the most intense and unjustifiable prejudice on the part of the people of Memphis," and estimated the costs of rebuilding the burnt schools as \$2500 each.⁶⁰ Whether it was the major cause of the riots was irrelevant. Black schools and both black and white teachers were primary targets for white rioters.

⁵⁷ Jack DL. Holmes, "The underlying causes of the Memphis Race Riot of 1866." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* (1958), 195-221.

⁵⁸ *Report from Select Committee*, 1.

⁵⁹ *Report from Select Committee*, 5.

⁶⁰ *Report from Select Committee*, 313.

Regardless of attempts by rioters to diminish the threat of black education, the responses of black folks in the midst of the massacre showed a strong commitment to ensuring continuous black education. Although the high demand for education caused some black Memphians to attend schools run by northern missionary societies and Freedmen's Bureau schools operated by white teachers, freedpeople often preferred black teachers. Some of these black teachers had started independent schools with limited funds before the initiation of state-supported education for black children in 1867.⁶¹ One such teacher was Reverend H. N. Rankin, a graduate of Oberlin College, who had started an independent black school in a schoolhouse in South Memphis owned by the African Methodist Episcopal Church.⁶² The white rioters burned down Rankin's school in their rampage, and he was asked to testify in front of the Select Committee. In his testimony, Rankin how rioters had set fire to his school, along with \$190 worth of furniture and fifty dollars worth of books. He also recounted being taunted by a white crowd when he discovered his school had been destroyed: "There were a great many white people in the vicinity, and unknown white persons asked me why I did not have school, and what I would do for a school-house."⁶³

Considering the limited funds that were available for black schooling, Rankin had done a lot for his schoolhouse. In his testimony, former slave Guy Thomas explained that right after the riots and the ravaging of his schoolhouse, Rankin had left town to solicit money to rebuild his school.⁶⁴ Such a quick response suggested that Rankin understood the threat his efforts to educate black students posed, and that he would have to take it upon

⁶¹ Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 31.

⁶² Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 32; *Report from Select Committee*, 236.

⁶³ H.N. Rankin Testimony, *Report from Select Committee*, 313.

⁶⁴ Guy Thomas Testimony, *Report from Select Committee*, 236.

himself to ensure its continuance. As Memphis began to cool down, this ethic of self-organizing and commitment to black education built on the will and self-determination that black folks had carried out of slavery.⁶⁵ Though local politics in parts of the state were still decidedly against black education in May 1866, when the general assembly opened in November, it was on its way to providing funds for black education across the state. It was then that if black Tennesseans really wanted to ensure their education existed, they would have to continue in the same tradition as Reverend Rankin.

The Common School Law and Black Tennesseans' Push for Education

Back at the state level, momentum was building in support of black education, but if the Memphis riots were any indication of views towards black schooling, then any efforts to develop a statewide school system would be met with only limited success. On March 5th, 1867, the radical state legislature passed "An Act to Provide for the Reorganization, Supervision, and Maintenance of Free Common Schools," otherwise known as the Common School Act. Section 17 of this act for the reorganization required the district boards of education of each county "to establish within their respective jurisdictions, one or more special schools for colored children." The act created the office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, which was to ensure the maintenance of all the common schools in the state, and the act mandated a specific organization of governance for education in each county. Each county would be divided into subdistricts, each electing a director. The sub-

⁶⁵ Hahn, Steven. *A Nation Under Our Feet*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003, 43.

district directors would then come together to form the Board of Education for the county and work with an elected County Superintendent to ensure educational arrangements.⁶⁶

The progress in the politics at the state level had already been made apparent with the passing of the franchise act in the month prior. With the passing of the Common School Act, the legislature provisionally confirmed that it was finally ready to explicitly deal with the rights and status of black folks in Tennessee. Even so, black education would be contingent on two conditions: “Special schools” meant segregated schools, and the legislature promised funds for black education only when at least twenty-five black students were enrolled in any given area. Furthermore, this money would not be given at all when the number of black students fell below fifteen.⁶⁷

Although this law marked a tentative step in the right direction, the implementation was delayed due to the lack of actual funding. Locally, the law was also met with racial strife and a resistance to change. Local prerogatives were yet again in contrast with that of the state legislature, leaving black people to continue to organize and build for themselves. The state’s first superintendent became fully acquainted with both the state’s delayed action and the local tensions that surfaced after the free school law was passed. In accordance with the law, Colonel John Eaton, Jr. was elected as the state’s first Superintendent of Public Instruction.⁶⁸ Amongst the New Hampshire native’s relevant experiences were his position as superintendent of schools in Toledo, Ohio and his role as superintendent of Negro affairs under General Grant and the Union governing forces.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Acts of Tennessee, 1866-67*, 33-48.

⁶⁷ *Acts of Tennessee, 1866-67*, 39.

⁶⁸ Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880*. Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, inc., 1941, 179.

⁶⁹ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 144-145.

By the time he officially began his role, Eaton discovered that only little progress had been made towards the implementation of the legislation. In his first annual report as superintendent written in October 1869, Eaton explained that his office had officially opened on October 7, 1867.⁷⁰ Even though he started seven months after the passing of the legislation, Eaton quickly discovered that the state still had not made significant progress in the reorganization, particularly as it related to actually disseminating the funds for the schools. According to Eaton, “the new school law was hardly less a dead letter, for the seven months after its passage in March, until October, when my labors here commenced; for nothing had been done completely, save to levy a tax, and proceed with its collection.” In fact, Eaton also indicated that rather than use the taxes for their intended purpose, they were used to pay off the state debt, with some people supporting a delay of school organization until the state’s debt was resolved.⁷¹

The state’s hesitation to prioritize the school law was not the only hindrance John Eaton, Jr. encountered when he assumed his role as superintendent. The attempt to organize a public school system from state level also reinvigorated the racial prejudice locally that had been particularly high during the war.⁷² A letter written in January 1868 from B.W. White of Pulaski (the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan) had a troubling tone. White believed that he had implemented the new school law in one the sub-districts to the best of his ability considering the racism of the townspeople. White wrote, “That district elected a

⁷⁰ John Eaton, Jr., *Annual report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee for the scholastic year ending October 7th, 1869*. Nashville, Tenn.: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1869, 5.

⁷¹ Eaton, *Annual Report*, 7.

⁷² Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, 180.

board of Directors, but refused to do any thing [*sic*] more on account of the 'nigger.'"⁷³ Even in his annual report, Eaton described the sentiment as common across regions of the state. He described the paradigm shifts of education required after the emancipation of slaves as the "one hard point to pass." Moreover, he claimed that regardless of what the new system would be or who was in charge of it, "the old prejudices were not ready to witness its progress in quiet."⁷⁴ Eaton recognized that the persistence of racism and the unwillingness to change were large obstacles, especially with the initial passing of the law. Furthermore, as illuminated by the backlash in Pulaski, some white Tennesseans harbored such deep-seated prejudices that they even sometimes rejected public education for their own children as long as the system also supported black education.

The ineffectiveness of local control combined with the state's inaction almost guaranteed that black education would remain a far off hope unless black Tennesseans took educational efforts into their own hands. Indeed, black Tennesseans remained steadfast in their commitment to gaining an education and develop their own forms of advocating for their education. The legal ability to attend public schools and the mere possibility of gaining state funding gave them more of an impetus to organize through teaching, building schools, and leveraging other forms of political engagement to ensure their right to education was honored. In fact, as black Tennesseans made claims to their right to an education, they participated in a form activism that embodied the foundations of their citizenship.

⁷³ B.W. White to John Eaton, January 18, 1868, John Eaton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 743, Box 1, Folder 11, III-F-3.

⁷⁴ Eaton, *Annual Report*, 90.

From rural Tipton County, Jacob Brodnax personified the determination of black teachers to make certain black students had access to an education. His letter in January 1868 requesting his students' share of the state funds allotted to common schools (with which this chapter started) represented a direct petition to the state after not having received anything for nine months. It is also a testament to his resolve to teach regardless: he described how his school had already operated for two sessions although low crop prices had "render[ed] the colored people, with some exceptions, unable to pay for teaching their children."⁷⁵ Brodnax was not the only black teacher so committed to black education. Alfred Carr was another black teacher in Springfield, Tennessee, a rural city Middle Tennessee. He was eager to teach arithmetic, geography, and English grammar to the at least 225 black students in the city.⁷⁶

In addition to teaching black children, black people in rural areas across the state were also poised to put in the work of building schools despite the delays and trouble with implementation. As the local school officials were still working to organize the school districts according to the new school law, black people in Strawberry Plains, in East Tennessee, were described as being ready to "cheerfully build themselves schoolhouses for the sake of schools."⁷⁷ This same black self-organization persisted even when county leaders found the requirements of the school law difficult to implement. Despite the fact that the education leaders in Clarksville held negative views of the prospects of black education, black folks in this Middle Tennessee city geared up to build and establish their

⁷⁵ Jacob Broadnax to John Eaton, January 2, 1868, John Eaton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 743, Box 1, Folder 2, III-F-3.

⁷⁶ George W. Walker to John Eaton, September 9, 1868, John Eaton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 743, Box 1, Folder 11, III-F-3.

⁷⁷ James A. Griffes to John Eaton, January 22, 1868, John Eaton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 743, Box 1, Folder 5, III-F-3.

own schools.⁷⁸ The work of the black folks in Clarksville actually legitimized even the action of building schools as educational activism as they persevered through overt resistance.

While the educational efforts black folks in rural areas often involved teaching and building schools, black folks in urban and near-urban counties also leveraged their increasing political power as citizens to influence their children's education despite of the school law's delayed execution. In the election of a Board of Directors as instructed by the school law, one of the predominantly black civil districts in Memphis elected a board that consisted solely of black members, which allowed them to have significant control over the educational functions of the state, including the employment of teachers and the course of study for the students in their civil district. In response, an agitated Shelby County Superintendent of Public Instruction wrote a letter to Superintendent Eaton asking for advice on how to deal with a Board that lacked any white members .⁷⁹ Black folks also directly connected the fight for schooling to their newly gained enfranchisement as the foundation of their rights as citizens. In Rutherford County, just southeast of Nashville, the Superintendent of Schools suggested that black people in his county were starting to mobilize out of irritation with the delay of receiving money from the school fund. He claimed that unless the funds were disbursed accordingly, "the colored people would show their disapprobation [*sic*] at the ballot box in the next election."⁸⁰

To be sure, leveraging political power was not exclusive to urban areas in Tennessee. Nor was it subject to an alignment with Radical Republican ideals. Some black

⁷⁸ R.W. Humphreys to John Eaton, March 24, 1868, John Eaton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 743, Box 1, Folder 5, III-F-3; *Acts of Tennessee, 1866-67*, 35-37.

⁷⁹ W.H. Pearce to John Eaton, March 7, 1868, John Eaton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 743, Box 1, Folder 8, III-F-3.

⁸⁰ A.A. Brown to John Eaton, January 27, 1868, John Eaton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 743, Box 1, Folder 2, III-F-3.

Tennesseans also found opportunities to propel their educational enterprise by associating with sub-sections of the Democratic Party. Following the Civil War, this party was primarily comprised of former Confederates and Confederate sympathizers. The Superintendent of Public Instruction in rural Gibson County wrote to the Superintendent Eaton to describe the situation of the colored schools in his county. Out of the six or seven colored schools, only two had not been ravaged by the Klan and other rebels. According to the superintendent, the reason these two schools were spared was the fact that a so-called Copperhead, or a white, Northern Confederate sympathizer, supported them. The superintendent also alluded to a relationship between the Copperhead leader and “colored Democrats.”⁸¹ It may have been quite odd for freedpeople to have political affiliations with ex-Confederates, but even as they faced the expectations of their freedom, black folks may have sometimes prioritized their educational goals over partisan politics. Utilizing political power, even if on the other side of the party line, was another method of activism towards protecting the schoolhouse.

In the months following the passing of the common school law, even state officials admitted that black education was not a priority for the state. According to Superintendent Eaton, in those first months, “Tennessee not only did not adopt the enforcement of education...the State did nothing but collect a school tax.”⁸² Nevertheless, black Tennesseans were persistent in their pursuit of education. This persistence was not acknowledged in the attempts to create a statewide common school system – a trend similar to the educational efforts of the Freedmen’s Bureau.

⁸¹ W.A. Stuart to John Eaton, September 28th, 1868, John Eaton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 743, Box 1, Folder 10, III-F-3.

⁸² Eaton, *Annual Report*, 90.

Paternalism and Freedpeople's Support of Freedmen's Bureau Schools

From 1867 to 1869, the enterprises of the Freedmen's Bureau would have not been possible without black support on the ground. Despite the continued success of the Freedmen's Bureau efforts, an increasing mismatch of the worldviews of bureau officials with the motivations and actions of freedpeople often overshadowed black self-management efforts. In its original conception, the Bureau was only supposed to exist through the end of 1866. In fact, it was precisely this impermanence that allowed for its initial approval.⁸³ Yet, with the war officially over, the United States Congress decided to extend the Freedmen's Bureau indefinitely in 1866, though it took overriding President Johnson's veto of the original continuation bill.⁸⁴ Of course, this continuation meant that the Freedmen's Bureau schools would continue to operate. Superintendent of Freedmen's Schools John Alvord expressed his gratitude in the January 1867 semi-annual report when he wrote that the "statesmen understand that intelligence amongst all classes is the foundation of national prosperity."⁸⁵

While the extension of the Freedmen's Bureau schools was a favorable outcome, it also meant the extension of the paternalistic views of the bureau's officials. Historian William McFeely, in his analysis of Commissioner O.O. Howard, has argued that the Freedmen's Bureau actually did little to support black visions of freedom. As McFeely described it, Howard's commitment to blacks did not come out of a belief in their inherent equality; rather, he believed it was a white man's moral responsibility to lead the charge in

⁸³ Bullock, *A History of Negro Education*, 36.

⁸⁴ Bullock, *A History of Negro Education*, 45.

⁸⁵ Alvord, *Third Semi-Annual Report*, 4.

elevating the freedpeople.⁸⁶ On the state level, General Fisk's advocacy for black education was limited by his unwillingness to see it as a means for black advancement and social mobility. In fact, Fisk told black people yearning to experience the true meaning of freedom to go back and work for their old masters. Furthermore, despite the cruelty of slavery, he also told the formerly enslaved to "think kindly of [their] old master[s]," claiming that they were "as kind, honest, and liberal as other men."⁸⁷ Black Nashvillians who wrote for *The Colored Tennessean* highlighted this paternalism, particularly as former slave masters started to advocate for black education in the confines of their plantations. An article titled, "Freedmen's Schools" read as follows:

Many curious things present themselves under the free-labor system. Formerly it was death by law for any one [*sic*] to give a slave any instruction in book learning. And a teacher upon a plantation! Preposterous idea! But now we learn that many planters are desirous that schools should be opened on their plantations. Why? Because they fear that their hands will leave them unless their children have school privileges.⁸⁸

The black Nashvillians writing for the *Colored Tennessean* alluded to a sentiment common to black people across the state who saw this paternalism as counter to their own educational motivations. For slaves, education had been conceptualized as the means to escape bondage. For freedmen, education had been conceptualized as a means to become a full citizen, not to revert back to something akin to their pre-War status.

John Alvord's discussion of Tennessee in his semi-annual reports similarly misconstrued black commitment to education as a glorification of bureau efforts. Between 1867 and 1869, Alvord recorded different views from officers that were antithetical to the

⁸⁶ William S. McFeely, *Yankee Stepfather: General OO Howard and the Freedmen*. New York: WW Norton & Company, 1994, 89.

⁸⁷ Phillips, "The Education of Blacks in Tennessee," 163.

⁸⁸ "Freedmen's Schools," *The Colored Tennessean*, 3/24/1866.

black perspective and culture around education. Some of these ideas included the necessity of Freedmen's Bureau officials needed to convince freedpeople to support their schools, or that it was the responsibility of the bureau to lead the freedpeople out of a "wilderness of ignorance."⁸⁹ Alvord's perspective mirrored that of northern missionaries, some of whom thought of freedpeople in the south as "yet children" in need of enlightenment.⁹⁰

Freedmen's Bureau officials missed a key point regarding black dedication to educational attainment, which was perhaps best illuminated by Superintendent Colonel Thompson's assessment of freedpeople in 1869:

The freedmen are beginning to learn the importance of education, to be inspired with a spirit of honorable independence, and are availing themselves of all proper means by which to advance themselves in the standard of manhood. They need to be taught the necessity of supporting their own schools, and to this end need a few more earnest, cultivated, Christian teachers as pioneers of this work.⁹¹

Thompson's statement implied that black Tennesseans understanding of the importance of education only flourished once the bureau came and started their work. The statement also demonstrated Thompson's inability to see black folks as more than untutored, unthinking children. In actuality, as historian Heather Williams and Stephen Hahn have compellingly argued, freedpeople knew only too well the value of education in the first days of freedom. According to Hahn, "freedpeople clamored for schooling because they viewed it simultaneously as a rejection for their enslaved past and as means of power."⁹² At the very time that Thompson submitted this report, black people across the state were both leaning

⁸⁹ Alvord, *Fifth Semi-Annual Report*, 42.

⁹⁰ James McPherson, "White Liberals and Black Power in Negro Education, 1865-1915" in Donald G. Nieman, ed. *African Americans and education in the South, 1865-1900*. New York: Garland, 1994, 248.

⁹¹ Alvord, *Seventh Semi-Annual Report*, 42.

⁹² Williams, *Self Taught*, 30.; Hahn, *A Nation Under our Feet*, 227.

on an understanding of education's importance they gained while they were still enslaved and also building and starting their own schools.

Colonel Thompson's vision notwithstanding, the statistics in the bureau records painted a different story of black educational commitments in the state. In fact, black commitment to their own education was evident in their willingness to support education despite the approach of the Bureau officials. In January 1867, out of the 105 schools associated with the Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee, freedpeople owned twenty-eight school buildings and sustained wholly or in part thirty-six school buildings.⁹³ At the peak of their support of schools, these formerly enslaved black people sustained to some degree eighty-two schools and owned fifty-six school buildings.⁹⁴

Report Month/Year	January 1867	July 1867	January 1868	July 1868	January 1869	July 1869
Schools sustained, in whole or part, by freedpeople	36	66	81	82	32	59
School buildings owned by freedpeople	28	38	37	56	46	53
Total Schools operated by Bureau (day and night, only)	105	128	127	158	102	139

Table 1: Freedpeople's contributions to Bureau schools.⁹⁵

⁹³ Alvord, *Third Semi-Annual Report*, 68.

⁹⁴ Alvord, *Sixth Semi-Annual Report*, 48.

⁹⁵ Data from Alvord, *Third - Eighth Semi-Annual Reports*

Black Tennesseans may not have outdone the Freedmen's Bureau and other benevolent societies in their school ownership and support for black schools, but these statistics tell a far different story than one that depicted freedpeople as a group of people who needed to be convinced to support the schools. Freedpeople consistently sustained between one-third and one-half of schools, and owned between one-fourth and one-third of their own schools. Even when the total operations of the Bureau declined in 1869, freedpeople still maintained a significant presence. The Freedmen's Bureau would not have operated as it did or meet the demand for black literacy if it were not for the support of freedpeople in Tennessee. Paternalistic condescension was yet another obstacle that pushed black folks into finding creative ways to self-organize and attain influence in their education. Even if black Tennesseans were not directly in control of their education, their presence allowed them a degree of influence as they ensured their children's ability to be educated.

Nevertheless, the benefits of the Freedmen's Bureau for black education were significant. Patronizing or not, the Freedmen's Bureau opened up an important space for black folks to act on their desire to control their education. In her book focusing on the educational reconstruction of Mobile, Alabama and Richmond, Virginia, historian Hilary Green has argued that Freedmen's Bureau actually served as partners in the educational enterprises of black Mobilians and Richmonders.⁹⁶ Similarly, the Bureau in Tennessee was a significant, even if imperfect, in the beginning stages of black schooling. Benefits aside though, paternalism still represented a symbolic violence as officials sought to prevent black folks' realization of their power as freedpeople and citizens in exchange for a return

⁹⁶ Green, *Educational Reconstruction*, 13-63.

to the social status quo of slavery. Still, this symbolic violence paled in comparison to the context of physical violence in which the black educational space was curated.

In Spite of the Threat: The Terror of the Ku Klux Klan

In a period of extreme extralegal violence, paternalistic concerns offered a real, even if frustrating alternative, to outright terror. Freedpeople would find themselves negotiating both to establish schools. Efforts of black Tennesseans to make education work in their best interest in the first few years after Reconstruction were met almost immediately with repression, namely that of the Ku Klux Klan. Though education was not the focal point of the Klan's violence, schoolhouses and teachers became targets of white violence as they represented the quintessence of black freedom.

The Ku Klux Klan was officially founded as a social organization amongst six ex-Confederates in 1866 in Pulaski, Tennessee.⁹⁷ In 1867 the Klan underwent a transformation into a political organization in response to Governor Brownlow's insistence on excluding ex-Confederates from the vote and giving black people suffrage rights instead.⁹⁸ Union Leagues, a set of societies that the Radicals used to politically control the black vote, further agitated the Klan. These Leagues were initially comprised of white Republicans, but once Tennessee gave black people the right to vote, a campaign for black members was initiated with the purposes of ensuring the maintenance of radical political interests.⁹⁹ As the Union Leagues began to gain steam, the Ku Klux Klan organized itself

⁹⁷ Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee*, 178.

⁹⁸ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 175.

⁹⁹ Neal, *Disunion and Restoration*, 58.; Alexander, *Political Reconstruction*, 140-144.

into a full-scale militant organization with the specific purpose of “[restoring] the state government to the white democracy” by the end of 1867.¹⁰⁰

In pursuing that purpose, the Klan intensified its repression efforts. The year 1868 saw the peak of Klan violence, which seemed to beset every effort to educate black Tennesseans of the time period.¹⁰¹ A letter written to Superintendent John Eaton on September 1868 inquiring about the details of the common school law described the impact of the Ku Klux Klan’s terror: “We might have four more colored schools, I believe, in this county,” the School Superintendent of Gibson County wrote, “but for the certainty that the Ku Klux would break them up and perhaps kill the teachers”¹⁰² Even the Freedmen’s Bureau school semi-annual reports alluded to an increased number of outrages on their schools in both 1868 and 1869. In the January 1869 semi-annual report, Superintendent Alvord wrote, “We regret, however, to notice in the earlier reports of the term a large amount of outrage, school-house burning, [etc.], in some of the counties; evidently the work of the Ku-Klux and lower classes.”¹⁰³

By 1868, the violence of the Klan rose to such a high degree that the state government intervened. In that same year, the legislature passed “An Act to Preserve the Public Peace,” or the Ku Klux Act.¹⁰⁴ Historian James Patton has suggested that the act “was one of the most severe pieces of legislation ever inscribed upon an American statute book”

¹⁰⁰ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 179-180.

¹⁰¹ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 185-186.

¹⁰² W.A. Stuart to John Eaton, October 6th, 1868, John Eaton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 743, Box 1, Folder10, III-F-3.

¹⁰³ Alvord, *Seventh Semi-Annual Report*, 40.

¹⁰⁴ *Acts and Resolutions of the State of Tennessee passed at the extra session of the thirty-fifth general assembly, convened at Nashville, July 27th, 1868*. Nashville, TN: S.C. Mercer, 1868, 18-19.

in that era.¹⁰⁵ The punishment it enacted was a fine of five hundred dollars, at least five years of state imprisonment, and that the person or group of people “shall be rendered infamous.”¹⁰⁶ There were extreme lengths taken with this act and other proclamations from Governor Brownlow, but the violence still did not cease. The Klan both continued their own attacks and incited others’ attacks on black freedom.

One of the most striking acts of cruelty occurred in September 1869 and demonstrated that both schools and teachers were under attack. Two young black male teachers, Thomas Wells and Israel Aiken, had graduated from Fisk University in Nashville and moved to rural Dresden in West Tennessee to open up a school. On the second night of September, the two men were taken from their beds into the woods to be brutally beaten, whipped, and assailed as “niggers.” After a warning to cease teaching black students they were forced to outrun a “hail of bullets.”¹⁰⁷ The practice of terrorizing teachers continued well after the dissolution of the Klan in March of 1869, which was occasioned by Brownlow’s resignation as governor and his move to the United States Senate.¹⁰⁸ With Brownlow no longer a factor, black citizens remained as the white supremacists’ chief antagonists.

Black Tennesseans were constrained by white supremacist terror, in addition to white liberal paternalism, as they worked to sustain a system of education. The violence many faced posited black education as a site of political struggle. If white supremacists could not prevent black citizenship, they still could terrorize blacks as they attempted to participate in that citizenship fully. Those whose schools were burned down and those

¹⁰⁵ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 196-197.

¹⁰⁶ *Acts and Resolutions of the State of Tennessee, 1868*, 18-19.

¹⁰⁷ In Phillips, “Education of Blacks in Tennessee,” 161.

¹⁰⁸ Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction*, 200.

whose lives were targeted understood both the fragility of their freedom and the urgency of their education.

Uncertainty of the Future

Those notions became even more clear as this decade ended and the next one began. With Governor Brownlow gone to Washington, D.C., conservative Democrats overthrew the Radical Republicans in the elections in 1869 and swiftly went about undoing many of their policies.¹⁰⁹ Among the policies under attack was the common school law. In their first general session in December 1869, the legislature repealed the Brownlow-era school law, and replaced it with one that reinstated the pre-war state of schools. Of particular detriment to the pursuit of black education, it no longer guaranteed funding for education for all students; rather, it left this decision up to the individual counties to decide if they should collect taxes for schools.¹¹⁰ In essence, the state of publicly funded black education was left up to the whims of local communities, a shift that had already proved disadvantageous for black folks. Black education and black citizenship were a direct threat to local white power.

By 1870, the future of the Freedmen's Bureau schools was also uncertain. In July 1870, Superintendent John Alvord submitted his "tenth and final report on schools for refugees and freedmen."¹¹¹ The increasing integration of common schools into statewide school systems in the southern states was a major factor in the decision of the Freedmen's

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, 182.

¹¹⁰ Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, 182.

¹¹¹ Alvord, *Tenth Semi-Annual Report*, 3.

Bureau to cease its educational activities.¹¹² On some level, it appeared that the Bureau's mission was accomplished. Yet, with the significant changes already enacted in Tennessee's public school system, this could have not come at a worse time for black students in the state.

To be sure, though black Tennesseans effectively maintained, shaped, and influenced their own education in the wake of emancipation, they did so in the context of relatively favorable conditions. Indeed, despite the shortcomings of the common school law, the paternalism of the Freedmen's Bureau, and rampant white supremacist violence, black Tennesseans experienced a brief moment of opportunity. Even with flaws, the existence of systems for black education was significant. It allowed for the acts of teaching as well as building and sustaining schools to be the central focus of black Tennesseans' educational activism. In 1870, the emergence of a vengeful Democratic Party and the cessation of Freedmen's Bureau educational activity meant that this moment of opportunity came to an end.

How would black Tennesseans respond in the absence of systems and policies? How would they respond in less than favorable political conditions that manifested themselves not just locally, but also on a state level? As this chapter has suggested, black folks remained dedicated to educational attainment despite obstacles both systemic and violent. They would have to adjust their forms of educational activism, but these people not too far removed from slavery would not give up on guaranteeing their access to education believed to be not only a key part of their freedom, but also their civil right as citizens.

¹¹² McPherson, "White Liberals and Black Power in Negro Education, 1865-1915," 250.

Chapter 2

For the Sake of “Impartial School Privileges in Every Public School” *The Colored Conventions of the 1870s*

Introduction

On Thursday, April 30, 1874, black men from across Tennessee convened in Nashville for the second day of the State Convention of Colored Men to assess their current circumstances. In the morning session, these representatives of cities and counties across the state passed a set of resolutions so impassioned that the *Nashville Union and American* labeled them, “The Negro Ultimatum.”¹¹³ Black leaders saw the convention as a platform to claim the rights due to them as citizens and challenge the state Republican party to honor the allegiance black folks had shown by supporting a national civil rights bill.¹¹⁴ The delegation resolved that they would “consider the omission of the Republican party to enact” a bill “a base surrender of the rights of humanity to an insidious foe, that has contested every right we enjoy, as they did every right of freedom on the field of battle.” The delegates also pledged to use their “utmost to stamp upon any demagogue who [sought] to betray the privileges of [their] children to their full enjoyment of impartial and equal privileges with public schools.”¹¹⁵

The convention-goers spoke to both national and state politics at once. At the time of this convention, the United States Congress was considering the passage of a Civil Rights Act, that if passed, would allow for equal access to all public accommodations to black

¹¹³ “The Negro Ultimatum,” *Nashville Union and American*, 4/30/1874.

¹¹⁴ Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880*. Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, inc., 1941. 251-252.

¹¹⁵ “The Negro Ultimatum,” *Nashville Union and American*, 4/30/1874.

Americans, including that of public schooling.¹¹⁶ These black leaders from around the state used this as an opportunity both to declare their commitment to the educational access of their children and also demonstrate their power as a political force. To be sure, this convention was not the only meeting of its kind in Tennessee during the 1870s. Over the course of the decade, there were at least four conventions held in the state, with some even bringing black men together from around the nation. Prior to 1870, there had been only two other colored conventions in the state of Tennessee.¹¹⁷

State gatherings of black men increased in frequency in Tennessee in response to the politics of the 1870s. Historian Eric Foner has described the 1870s as the moment in which southern states, disillusioned with radical politics, began to fall to coalitions of former Confederate Whigs and secessionist Democrats, collectively known as the Redeemers.¹¹⁸ Tennessee was no different, and black education felt the effects most acutely. The brief moment of possibility for state-supported educational attainment that black Tennesseans had experience in the first four years after the Civil War had closed. As soon as they took power, Tennessee Democrats wasted no time rolling back the provisions made for common schooling – a move that most directly affected black students.¹¹⁹ Coupled with the cessation of Freedmen’s Bureau schools in 1870, black education in Tennessee was swiftly losing its support. Yet, this attack on education and lost moment of opportunity would not stop black Tennesseans; rather, the leaders of the race were forced to strengthen their advocacy and engage with politics directly.

¹¹⁶ L. E. Murphy, "The Civil Rights Law of 1875." *The Journal of Negro History* 12, no. 2 (1927), 110.

¹¹⁷ Judy Bussell LeForge, "State Colored Conventions of Tennessee, 1865-1866." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2006), 247.

¹¹⁸ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's unfinished revolution, 1863-1877*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988, 421- 425; Roger L. Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1975, 2.

¹¹⁹ Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, p. 182

In this chapter, I argue that in response to the changing political environment on the state level, black Tennesseans intensified their method of educational activism. Though still important, teaching and building schools were no longer enough to ensure that black children in Tennessee had access to an equal education, or even education at all. The abrupt changes in their access to education at the end of the last decade demonstrated the fragility of support for their education. In the 1870s, black Tennessean leaders mobilized through State and National Colored Conventions and other mediums of political engagement in order to leverage their political clout as citizens and push the state and national governments to support black educational access. Black Tennesseans could not be silenced by political maneuvers. Both the demands and the pressure placed on federal and state governments to provide for black education that came out of these conventions were evidence of their insuppressible character.

This chapter traces the increased political acumen and strategizing of freedpeople in the 1870s by examining four of the Colored Conventions that took place in the decade. Through these conventions, black Tennesseans tackled issues such as the lack of state-supported education, the continued violence against the vestiges of their schooling, as well as the attempts to get the state to honor national legislation guaranteeing them equal accommodations, namely public schooling. Furthermore, this chapter will examine how black folks navigated their relationship to party politics, as black Tennesseans' commitment to the Republican Party could not be taken for granted. Along these lines, the chapter will also analyze the ways in which the white Tennesseans, both Redeemers/Democrats and Republicans, resisted and reacted to attempts to grant black folks civil rights. In essence, 1870 represented a moment in which the leaders of the

freedpeople had no choice but to grasp the political capacity of their own citizenship and enact it.

Political Power Shifts

As the moment of opportunity for black Tennesseans to take full advantage of the educational component of citizenship closed at the end of the decade, the political environment at the state level experienced a major shift. Many radical policies, including that of black education, were immediately targeted. A more conservative Republican and Speaker of the Senate, D.W.C. Senter became the gubernatorial successor upon William Brownlow's resignation in 1869.¹²⁰ Governor Senter's conservative leanings were most apparent as he worked to restore franchise to the Confederate rebels who had been explicitly disenfranchised by the Brownlow administration. This policy, in addition to the restriction of martial law, created a new bloc of conservative voters and secured Senter's election to a full term, along with a conservative, or Redeemer, legislature in October 1869.

121

Before the end of the year, the conservative legislature repealed two important laws, amongst others, that represented the state sanctioning of both physical and symbolic violence towards freedpeople in Tennessee. By way of physical violence, the legislature repealed "An Act to Preserve the Public Peace," otherwise known as the Ku Klux Act on November 12, 1869, which stripped the threat of prosecution and other penalties from the repressionist activities of organizations like the Ku Klux Klan. On the symbolic front, the legislature repealed the Common School Act on December 14, 1869, removing key parts of

¹²⁰ Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, 64.

¹²¹ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 1; Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, 72.

the state organizational and financial support for black education.¹²² This repeal left an increasingly conservative state with no impetus to ensure that the black students in each county could attain an education and depicted the new sentiment towards black education in state politics.

The legislature also moved to hold a constitutional convention in January 1870, and the attempt to reverse the black progress that had been stimulated by Radical policies persisted. Out of all of the delegates selected for the convention, only four were white Republicans. There were no black delegates, a sign of a significant shift away from Brownlow's radicalism in the state.¹²³ This shift was further evident in the constitutional provision that were passed over the course of the convention. According to the *Memphis Avalanche*, the convention was "bent on cleaning out if possible every vestige of Radicalism" from the state constitution.¹²⁴ The attack on radicalism put the status of black Tennesseans in flux. On the top the list of issues relating to black folks was voting rights. In the convention, there was still a minority of delegates who could not bear to see black Tennesseans continue with the right to vote. In their view, "the negro race [was] the lowest order of human beings," a place that was destined to them by God. As such, they believed that a separate vote for all the people of the state should be held to determine the status of black enfranchisement.¹²⁵ Despite this minority's best attempts, the convention did not vote in their favor and pass an outright exclusion of black citizens from the ballot box. The

¹²² *Acts and Resolutions of the State of Tennessee passed at the extra session of the thirty-fifth general assembly, convened at Nashville, July 27th, 1868.* Nashville, TN: S.C. Mercer, 1868, 18-19.

¹²³ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 1.

¹²⁴ *Memphis Avalanche* as quoted in Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 2.

¹²⁵ *Journal of the proceedings of the convention of delegates elected by the people of Tennessee: to amend, revise, or form and make a new constitution, for the state.* Nashville: Jones, Purvis & Co., Printers to the State, 1870, 97.

convention did however authorize a poll tax. With this authorization, the convention still placed barriers on black suffrage, but did so in a way that was not directly discriminatory along racial lines. Poll taxes would affect poor white folks almost as equally as they would black folks.¹²⁶

Although black voting rights were not directly severed, the constitutional provision the convention passed for black education continued a more laissez faire approach to common school education. Much of the concern regarding black education at the constitutional convention focused on the semantics of the mandate, which led to a lesser responsibility on the state level to establish common schools. For instance, prior to the convention, the law regarding common schools began: "It shall be the duty of the General Assembly to provide for the establishment and maintenance of free schools." In the deliberations of how the commitment to common schools should appear in the constitution, some delegates argued that it should be written as "the General Assembly *may*" instead of a strict responsibility as was assumed in the first iteration.¹²⁷ In Article XI, Section 12, the final version read as follows: "...it shall be the duty of the General Assembly, in all future periods of this Government, to cherish literature and science." This section was also unclear about the funding of schools, as this section called for a common school fund without a straightforward directive for accumulating more money for schools, besides the appropriation of poll taxes "from time to time." In fact, the only definitive provision the convention made to free education was that "no school established or aided under this section shall allow white and negro children to be received as scholars together in the same

¹²⁶ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 3-6.

¹²⁷ *Journal of the Proceedings from the Constitutional Convention*, 307.

school.”¹²⁸ By not making the education the explicit responsibility of the state government, the General assembly left common education to the mercy of each county. The addition of the segregation mandate meant that in more overtly racist counties, black children would either be subject to an inferior education or not have access to an education at all. This provision, as well as the rest of the Constitution, was approved in March 1870 in a landslide by voters, with 98,128 voting affirmatively and 33,872 voting negatively.¹²⁹

The Republicans Reorganize

Although the Redeemers were establishing their new power in the constitutional convention, the Radical Republicans had not completely given up the fight to reconstruct the state upon their progressive ideals. In the midst of the convention, Republican delegates from across the state met in Nashville on February 16, 1870 “to organize and perfect a plan to put the Republicans of this State in condition to make some resistance to the overwhelming tide of modern Rebel Democracy that is subverting all that is left of Republicanism in the Constitution and the laws of the State.” Outside of the state, the Pennsylvania *Reading Times* described the convention as an attempt by leaders of the party “to council together upon measures for protecting and defending the organization of the party.” Nevertheless, during the one-day convention the Republican delegates passed resolutions that approved the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments, supported legislation

¹²⁸ *Journal of the Proceedings from the Constitutional Convention*, 437-438.

¹²⁹ F. Wayne Binning, "The Tennessee Republicans in Decline, 1869-1876: Part I." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1980), 478.

that would enforce the fourteenth amendment nationally, and condemned the constitutional convention as “irregular and revolutionary.”¹³⁰

What was provocative about this convention was its emphasis on the impact of the new political environment on freedpeople, including the repeal of the common school law. As a part of the resolutions of the convention, the delegates adopted a memorial written to the President of the United States by leaders of the black population of the state. The memorial addressed the continued violence and outrages that black folks had experienced “by being prey of a well organized band of outlaws,” and the men made their plea to the President for protection since the current state government was not in their favor. These men wrote, ““We have appeal in vain to the authoriys [*sic*] of our State, and in every instance it has only proved more injurious to our people, so much so that is with great difficulty that the colored people can be induced to give information of their true condition.” Not only did the Republican delegates at the convention adopt these resolutions, but they also moved to send it to Congress with a special request that it be read by the President.¹³¹

Black citizenship and its meaning for democracy broadly in Tennessee remained at the forefront of the convention. Specifically, two of the delegates gave speeches that placed the impact of the repealed laws on the black citizens of Tennessee at the center of their motivation for reorganization and resistance of the party. In his speech, the Honorable Andrew J. Fletcher, former secretary of state under Governor Brownlow, outlined how the

¹³⁰ *The Republican party in Tennessee reorganized. To the Republicans of Tennessee and the United States.: Memorial, resolutions and proceedings had at a convention held at the Capitol, Nashville, February 16th, 1870, together with the speeches of Hons. A. J. Fletcher and J. O. Shackelford.* Nashville, TN: 1870, 2-3; “Tennessee. Invitations to Colored Council -- Colored Convention,” *Reading Times*, 2/11/1870.

¹³¹ *The Republican Party in Tennessee Reorganized Proceedings*, 4.

legislative actions of the Redeemers oppressed both white and black citizens loyal to Republican ideals. His enumeration included the repeal of the Ku Klux Act and the passing of restrictions on out-of-district voting, a law Fletcher claimed to target black citizens who had started to vote in other districts to avoid white repression.¹³² With regard to the appeal of the common school law, he claimed that “the common school law was the only hope of the colored children on the State. Legislators hated the freedmen, and therefore went for the repeal of the school tax.” Furthermore, after depicting the specific effects of the lack of state-supported education for black children in East Tennessee, he declared that “the repeal of the school law was a rebel blow, most effectually dealt. It struck a loyal and hated race, and a loyal and hated section.”¹³³ For Fletcher, these injustices drove home the need to resist the increasing power of the Redeemer coalition.

Building on this view, The Honorable James O. Shackelford used black educational concerns to drive his plea for the reorganization of the party. Shackelford’s politics had proved inconsistent in the past. He had sided with the Confederacy in the Civil War, but in the war’s aftermath he was appointed as a Republican judge of the State Supreme Court by Governor Brownlow.¹³⁴ Nonetheless, he centered the beginning of his speech around the universally understood Republican principles. According to Shackelford, “the great and leading principle is loyalty to the Constitution, the Union, and the due enforcement of the laws; they recognize no section but our common country, one and indivisible, with equal rights to all before the law.”¹³⁵ He believed that violation of these basic principle should

¹³² *The Republican Party in Tennessee Reorganized Proceedings*, 9.

¹³³ *The Republican Party in Tennessee Reorganized Proceedings*, 10.

¹³⁴ John Green, *Lives of the Judges of the Supreme Court of Tennessee, 1796-1947*. Knoxville, TN: Press of Archer & Smith, 1947, 158-162.

¹³⁵ *The Republican Party in Tennessee Reorganized Proceedings*, 19.

motivate members of the party to resist the restoration of Tennessee to its pre-Reconstruction condition. Later in his speech, Shackelford admonished the actions relating to black education. He specifically maintained that education should be a guaranteed benefit that came along with black citizenship. Shackelford also argued that the current party in power was not fulfilling their duty of providing this education, even though they had benefited from their labor during slavery.¹³⁶ Ultimately, at the end of his speech, Shackelford leveraged the injustices dealt to black citizens with the shift in power to make changes in the Republican Party: "I can say to you, colored men, as your friend, our hope consists in reorganizing the Republican party upon a broad and liberal basis, and we must and will succeed, as the principles of the party are based upon the doctrine of universal progress and philanthropy."¹³⁷

Unfortunately, despite the Republican Party's best attempts to reorganize, resist, and continue with reconstruction efforts in Tennessee, the party's power was quickly declining. By the time the next gubernatorial election occurred in the November 1870, a larger, united Democratic-Conservative coalition had developed as the radical Republicans were losing the moderate members of their party. In the November election, Tennessee elected the Democratic-Conservative candidate, John C. Brown as the next governor. Additionally, the Redeemers took control of the legislature and the state supreme court.¹³⁸ These 1870s elections demonstrated a definitive settling of Conservative power, solidifying the demise of Republican domination. With this backdrop, Black Tennesseans began to engage more directly and targetedly with political processes. Black political engagement

¹³⁶ *The Republican Party in Tennessee Reorganized Proceedings*, 22.

¹³⁷ *The Republican Party in Tennessee Reorganized Proceedings*, 24.

¹³⁸ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 9-12.

was initiated in collaboration with white Republicans but would soon shift away from such coalition building as it became more evident that white Republicans would not advocate for black concerns when their interests did not converge.

Black Political Engagement and the State Conventions of Colored Men

At the same time that the Redeemers and the Radicals were convening and organizing, black leaders in Tennessee were also convening in the attempt to exercise their own political voice for their rights as citizens. Most Black Tennesseans still had an unwavering commitment to the Republican party, and sometimes worked alongside white Republicans in their attempts to cry out against the continued violent outrages. Even still, they began to use the colored convention, which drew delegates and leaders from across the state, as a mechanism to begin to make more concerted efforts to advocate and petition the government to provide an education for their children.

In their convention efforts, black Tennesseans were building on a legacy of mass gatherings of black folks that had extended into the antebellum period. The convention movement originated amongst free blacks in the North between 1830 and 1864. Historian John Ernest has argued that “conventions enabled blacks to take stock their situation and plan for the future.”¹³⁹ According the Ernest, the process of selecting delegates for the convention was actually quite arbitrary and often left to individual cities and counties to decide. This lack of structure was intentional to ensure that “the diverse interests and organizational affiliations of African Americans capable of attending the conventions” were all represented. Despite the ostensible efforts to represent diverse opinions, women were

¹³⁹ John Ernest, *A Nation Within a Nation: Organizing African-American Communities Before the Civil War*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011, 107.

largely absent from these conventions as the men “were slow to recognize the need for women to play formal roles as delegates.” This also meant that women often played supporting roles such as preparing proceedings for print. Women in the northern colored conventions began giving speeches by 1864, but their voices were still largely missing in proceedings.¹⁴⁰

When the convention movement spread to the South after the Civil War ended, black Tennesseans were among the first freedpeople to adopt the convention tool. The first two State Conventions of Colored Men were held in Tennessee took place in 1865 and 1866. In the wake of freedom, much of the conventions’ energies were put towards matters of voting rights and the initial attainment of citizenship, though there was some discussion of education. Judy Bussell LeForge, another historian, has argued that these initial conventions served as a first iteration of the civil rights movement in Tennessee. According to LeForge, these conventions were where Tennessee freedmen sought to “secure political liberty and full equality” after slavery.¹⁴¹ Additionally, a similar lack of methodology for delegate selection carried over into the post-Civil War era as the convention movement spread to freedpeople in the South. The 1865 Colored Convention laid out a simple structure in a constitution and created a Central Committee to serve as the

¹⁴⁰ Ernest, *A Nation Within in a Nation*, 107-108; The lack of women’s representation in convention delegation can be connected to the black woman’s position at the nexus of two oppressed identities: black and women. The “double jeopardy” of these oppressed identities was cemented in slavery. This subjectivity arguably correlated with their absence in colored conventions. Still, some black women in the South were able to negotiate the political sphere, often in conjunction with their religious affiliation. For more detailed analyses see Deborah Gray White, “Ar’n’t I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South. Rev. ed.” (1999), 27-61 and Elsa Barkley Brown, “Negotiating and transforming the public sphere: African American political life in the transition from slavery to freedom.” *Women Transforming Politics: An Alternative Reader* (2000): 343-76.

¹⁴¹ LeForge, “State Conventions of Colored Men,” 1.

statewide governing body of the conventions, but there were no specific instructions for selecting delegates from individual communities in Tennessee.¹⁴²

By the 1870s, some local cities and counties appeared to have developed their own systems of selecting delegates to represent the interests of the communities. In the weeks before the second convention of the decade, the *Knoxville Daily Chronicle* published the original call for the state convention. The call prompted “every colored man and women in Tennessee” to gather in their communities to nominate delegates to send to Nashville with information about the local schools, churches, employment, agriculture, and violence experienced in their respective counties and cities. Along with the call, the Executive Committee of Knox County invited the citizens of Knoxville to a meeting prior to the convention so that they could gather the information requested. Based on the article, the Executive Committee, which consisted of three men and no women, would automatically represent the black folks in the community.¹⁴³ Essentially, the meeting was a means of collecting community opinion, even if all voices were not adequately represented amongst convention delegates.

Adequate representation notwithstanding, the first state convention of colored men in the new decade met on February 21, 1870 in Nashville, just as the Democrats were finishing up the last sections of the new constitution and five days after the Republicans had moved to resist the new political powers. The most important product of this convention was the report by the convention’s committee on crimes, as it worked in tandem with the Republicans goal of undercutting the rebel regime. It was so powerful that

¹⁴² *Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored Men of the State of Tennessee, :with the addresses of the convention to the white loyal citizens of Tennessee, and the colored citizens of Tennessee. : Held at Nashville, Tenn., August 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th, 1865*, ColoredConventions.org, Nashville, TN, 1865, 28-29.

¹⁴³ “A Call for a State Convention of Colored Men and Their Friends,” *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, 2/16/1871.

white Republican leaders sent a delegation from the colored convention to present the report to the Reconstruction Committee in Washington, D.C.¹⁴⁴ As further evidence of its potency, the text of the report was only printed by the *Nashville Union and American* a month after the convention concluded due to fear of the repercussions from its assertive claims. The report specifically recounted the violence in Middle and West Tennessee, and the language used to describe them was graphic. One part of the report maintained that in communities in these parts of the state black people had “been hunted down like wild animals of the jungles, and murdered in cold blood.” The report pinned the blame decisively on “unrepentant Rebels.” It also alluded to a correlation of violence with the new regime and their actions that stripped radical legislation, particularly the laws providing for their education and their physical protection.¹⁴⁵ Certainly, the concerns of these black leaders who wrote the report were consistent with black folks across the South, particularly as they were recognized by black people around the nation. In January of the same year, New York’s *National Anti-Slavery Standard* claimed that “the loyal people, especially the colored, of every [Southern] State...are in much jeopardy, and suffer greatly from the murderous depredations and the intimidating threats of unmasked rebels, and the Ku-Klux.”¹⁴⁶

Despite its salience across the South, the report of the black delegates would not be enough to provoke federal intervention in the Reconstruction affairs of Tennessee. Another delegation of white citizens from Nashville also reported to the Reconstruction Committee and reported on peaceful conditions throughout the state. The more

¹⁴⁴ Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, 79.

¹⁴⁵ “Reconstruction,” *Nashville Union and American*, 3/20/1870.

¹⁴⁶ “The Southern Legislatures Free Schools,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1/9/1870.

conservative Republican Governor Senter substantiated these claims, preventing action from the federal government.¹⁴⁷ Though their efforts were not entirely successful, the 1870 State Colored Convention of Men set the tone for the nature of political engagement for black Tennesseans while Redeemer politics were taking hold and bringing Reconstruction to an end.

From February 22 to 25, 1871, the State Convention of Colored Men met again in Nashville with the same passion as in the prior year, but with an increased attention on the inadequacy of the education for black children across the state.¹⁴⁸ It had been a year since the bare minimum, segregated establishment of schooling had been written into the Constitution – although black education felt the effects almost immediately. Just three months after the Constitution’s ratification, John Alvord reported a “decreasing number of schools for freedmen” in his last semi-annual report in July 1870 as a result of the State’s withdrawal of support. Quoting Colonel Compton, Alvord also reported that the changes that had left educational enterprises primarily to the work of the individual counties had not yielded “a single free school for the education of freedmen in Tennessee.”¹⁴⁹ In this context, black leaders in the state began to move education to the center of their political agenda.

At the 1871 Convention, black leaders from across the state understood this urgency and placed education at the forefront of their advocacy. In fact, the most substantial part of the Convention’s proceedings was the report from the Committee on Education. The report began with a recognition of the ever present outrages on school teachers and school

¹⁴⁷ Binning, “The Tennessee Republicans in Decline Part I,” 479.

¹⁴⁸ *Proceedings of the 1871 State Convention of Colored Men*, 1.

¹⁴⁹ Alvord, *Tenth Semi-Annual Report on Freedmen’s Schools*, 41-42.

buildings from the Ku Klux Klan and other white outlaws. The committee, comprised of A.L. Carr from Robertson County, John Claiborne from Henry County, R.D. Williamson Maury County, and J.W.H Peyton from Montgomery County, claimed that these outrages were particularly detrimental as the result was “thousands of children...growing up uneducated” and ignorance being “sown broadcast in [the] state.”¹⁵⁰ This inadequate access to schooling was even substantiated by the state’s education department. In a report at the beginning of 1872, the Assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction, J.B. Killebrew described the deterioration of the education system since the initiation of the minimal constitutional provisions for education in 1870. Killebrew specifically highlighted negligible efforts by individual counties to support schools and the high illiteracy rates in the state. Furthermore, Killebrew connected the deplorable condition of education with the political power that black Tennesseans had recently gained. He expressed concern with the fact that “during the last decade the franchise has been extended to 50,000 ignorant voters, whose obligations to society cannot be known unless society provides for their instruction.”¹⁵¹ Although his opinions were potentially tainted with paternalism, Killebrew recognized the consequences of the state’s current educational system for black folks ability to operationalize their citizenship fully.

What the convention’s Committee of Education ultimately concluded from their assessment of the conditions of black education represented an important shift in their advocacy. The committee asserted that it could “see no hope for the general education of the children of our race in Tennessee, unless it be established and adopted by the general

¹⁵⁰ *Proceedings of the 1871 State Convention of Colored Men*, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ Killebrew, Joseph Buckner. *Report of Hon. Wm. Morrow, Superintendent of Public Instruction, ex officio, to the called session of the Thirty-seventh General Assembly of the State of Tennessee: embracing a report by the Assistant Superintendent, J.B. Killebrew.* Nashville, TN, 1872, 27-37.

government who will admit upon equality, colored children.” Even in the few places that there were schools, according to the committee, their children “labor[ed] under the most odious proscription” and felt inferior in schools that were segregated. In the Committee on Education’s opinion, the only way to counter these offences was for the federal government to establish a national system of education.¹⁵² With this report, the committee both showed a complete lack of faith in the ability of Tennessee to provide education for black children and suggested a radical shift in the way that education was run in the country. The men at this convention as leaders of the black community should no longer work within the system that Tennessee had set; rather, they should advocate for a universal system that would ostensibly guarantee them the right to adequate education. Moreover, they used the platform of the convention to make claims to the provisions of the state and national governments that should be utilized to grant black children an adequate education as citizens of the state and country.

Reports on the condition of education in individual counties furthered the convention’s momentum behind educational advocacy. Black men in Giles County (county seat, Pulaski – the birthplace of the Klan) reported the absence of schools and teachers and resulting deprivation of schools for the children in the county.¹⁵³ In West Tennessee, leaders in rural Obion County targeted the state-mandate of separate schools for black and white children, arguing that it was “at variance with the principles of Republicanism.”¹⁵⁴ Still, similar to the meeting in 1870, the State Convention of Colored Men adopted a memorial addressed to Congress and the President of the United States. In this memorial,

¹⁵² *Proceedings of the 1871 State Convention of Colored Men*, 3.

¹⁵³ *Proceedings of the 1871 State Convention of Colored Men*, 4.

¹⁵⁴ *Proceedings of the 1871 State Convention of Colored Men*, 10.

the men made their official request for a national school system. Their plea rested on two notions. The first was the fact that though the rebels had made the oath that they would not obstruct any of the rights and privilege guaranteed to citizens with legislation, they effectively “swept every vestige of a law that looked to the education of the colored children, and every right which maintained the civil right of the colored citizen.” Secondly, the men maintained that ninety percent of black children in the state were not receiving a public education, leaving them “to grow up in a servility and ignorance second only to slavery.”¹⁵⁵ The black men present at this convention had stressed education’s role as the medium by which freedmen would distance themselves from slavery. Perhaps even more powerful, these leaders effectively framed the lack of education as a breach in the fundamental rights accorded to them as citizens. By 1871, black leaders in the state had evidently developed a greater understanding of the ways in which they could utilize their political voice and go a step further than the federal intervention that black Tennesseans had demanded since the first colored convention in 1865. An adequate education was a key component of full citizenship.

The Redeemers Hold Fluctuates

The federal redress of the colored convention’s education grievances would not come immediately; however, the next election cycle proved that the Redeemer’s triumph was neither inevitable nor uncontested. The 1872 elections for both governor and a new tenth at-large Congressional representative seat were a blow to the supposed Democratic-Conservative unity that the Redeemers boasted. For the gubernatorial election, the Radical

¹⁵⁵ *Proceedings of the 1871 State Convention of Colored Men*, 15.

Republicans made another intentional effort to resist rebel rule. Though conservative Governor John C. Brown was re-elected for a second term, the margin by which he won was cut by two-thirds in comparison to his win in 1870.¹⁵⁶ When it came to the tenth Congressional seat, the Democratic-Conservative stronghold was undermined by former President Andrew Johnson, who ran as an independent candidate after losing the Redeemer nomination to former Confederate General Benjamin Franklin Cheatham. Johnson's entrance into the race split the Redeemer vote, and led to a Radical Republican victory to the Honorable Horace Maynard. The disruption in Redeemer unity trickled down to the state level, shifting the balance of power in both the senate and the house towards a moderate composition, with a greater amount of Republicans and Johnson independents.¹⁵⁷ The disruption in unity was also significant for black folks in Tennessee, particularly as it related to their political representation and their fight for educational attainment.

The 1872 radical ticket of Nashville/Davidson County Republicans was evidence of the possibilities of black political representation on a local scale. Along with the local Republican nomination for Maynard for the at-large seat, the *Nashville Union and American* wrote that the ticket provided for the lower state house was "variegated in color and in make up." Amongst those nominated, was a black man, Sampson Keeble. Born in 1831, Sampson Keeble was formerly a slave in Rutherford County, a county just southeast of Nashville. By 1865, Keeble had moved to Nashville and worked as a barber. Following the end of the war, he was also a civic leader of the black community in Davidson County and

¹⁵⁶ Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, 15.

¹⁵⁷ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 16-17.

represented the county in the 1866 Colored Convention.¹⁵⁸ In the 1872 election cycle, the *Union and American* did not seem bothered by this nomination; the article ended by affirming that Keeble was a “straightout Radical” and instruction its readers to “vote the straight tickets.”¹⁵⁹ Within the next week, the *Maryville Republican* celebrated Keeble as the first black man to be elected to the state house of representatives. In talking about Representative Sampson Keeble, the *Maryville Republican* wrote, “Mr. Keeble was the regular nominee of the Republican party – white and colored – of his county. He fully deserves the high honors conferred upon him. To the white Republicans who nobly stood by him we extend our most cordial greeting – they did not flicker.”¹⁶⁰ As the article suggested, Keebles election represented an attempt to create a racial coalition amongst Radical Republicans. In places like Nashville, black folks represented a large constituency of the Republican Party, and white Republicans recognized the necessity to join forces in the face of Redeemer power.

An excerpt from the *Union and American*, republished in *The Citizen and Press* would suggest that Keeble was also a safe and respectable choice. The candidate who had risen from slave to barber seemed the the paper to be “one of the best and most industrious of our colored citizens.” The paper reassured its readers that he was not a “bigoted nigger,” due to the fact that though he believed in equal political rights, he still understood the social differences between black and white citizens. The article also painted Keeble as

¹⁵⁸ “Sampson Wesley Keeble,” “*This Honorable Body*” *African-American Legislators in 19th Century Tennessee* Digital Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2013, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/keeble.htm>

¹⁵⁹ “The Radical Ticket,” *Nashville Union and American*, 11/2/1872.

¹⁶⁰ As quoted in *New Orleans' Weekly Louisianian*, 11/30/1872.

being in “grateful remembrance” of his slave master.¹⁶¹ This depiction may or may not have been true, but regardless, Keeble was not successful in passing legislation. He introduced a total of four bills, including a bill to protect laborer wages and a bill to fund the Tennessee Manual Labor School. Both of these bills would have directly impacted black folks in Tennessee, but these and the other two bills did not receive the necessary votes.¹⁶²

Keeble would only serve one term, and there would not be another state black legislator in either house until the 1880s.¹⁶³ Despite the fact that he did not have the most successful term, his election represented the possibility for greater political engagement and representation for black Tennesseans. Even New Orleans’ *Weekly Louisianian* wrote that Sampson Keeble’s election meant “that either Tennessee has not completely “shut down” on the colored man, or else the colored man couldn’t, under existing circumstances, be thoroughly squelched.”¹⁶⁴ The events of the next couple of years relating to black education would reveal that a bit of both was true.

The most immediate sign that Tennessee had not completely “shut down the colored man” also occurred as a result of the breakdown of Redeemer unity, and this time it benefited black schooling. The first three years of the decade were a vacuum for common school education, as there was little legislation to regulate it besides a 1871 amendment that further placed the onus of school funding on local counties.¹⁶⁵ In his 1872 report, the acting Assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction reported that less than thirty counties

¹⁶¹ “Representative Keeble,” *The Citizen and Press*, 12/19/1875.

¹⁶² “Bills Filed by the 19th Century African American Legislators in the Tennessee General Assembly,” “*This Honorable Body*” *African-American Legislators in 19th Century Tennessee* Digital Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2013, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/billsfiled.htm>

¹⁶³ Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, 248.

¹⁶⁴ *Weekly Louisianian*, 11/30/1872.

¹⁶⁵ Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, 182; *Acts of the State of Tennessee passed by the third session of the thirty-sixth general assembly for the year 1870-1871* Nashville, TN: Jones, Purvis & Co., Printers of the State, 1871, 129-130.

had taken any action towards funding public education. In fact, much of the local resistance to levying taxes to fund education was the result of prejudice as local authorities did not want their black neighbors to also attain an education.¹⁶⁶ Considering the state of schools, the fluctuation in Redeemer power allowed the state legislature to pass a new act to develop the first formalized school system since 1867.

On March 6, 1873, the United States Congress passed “An Act to establish and maintain an Uniform System of Public Schools.” Some of the main features of the law included the reinstatement of an official state superintendent who would visit each of the counties, to be appointed by the governor, instead of elected by the people. The law also included a funding scheme based on state taxes, local taxes, and poll taxes.¹⁶⁷ Historians have argued that the system provided a better education for both white and black children across the state.¹⁶⁸ Overall, there was one aspect of the law that remained consistent with the provision set out in the 1870 Constitution. Section 30 read, “Provided, that white and colored persons shall not be taught in the same school but separate schools under the same general regulations as to management, usefulness, and efficiency.”¹⁶⁹ Segregation was still the rule in education, even though black folks saw it as a mark of inferiority and inequality. Over the last few years of Reconstruction, separate education became a question of civil rights on the national level and a question of Republican loyalty for blacks in Tennessee.

¹⁶⁶ Killebrew, *1872 Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction*, 23-39.

¹⁶⁷ *Acts of the State of Tennessee, passed by the thirty-eighth general assembly. 1873*. Nashville, TN: Jones, Purvis & Co., Printers to the State, 1873, 39-51

¹⁶⁸ Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 17-18.

¹⁶⁹ *Acts of the State of Tennessee, 1873*, 46.

Civil Rights and the Black Political Voice

By 1874, discussions about passing a Civil Rights Act that would guarantee the rights of citizenship to all Americans, including black folks, were gaining steam in Washington. The bill was originally proposed in Congress by Senator Charles Sumner in 1870. A Massachusetts native, Senator Sumner was known for his advocacy for the rights of black Americans, even prior to their emancipation. He often advocated alongside black folks who protested various forms of discrimination in public accommodations and schooling. In fact, he was perhaps best known for his anti-slavery speech and his prominent role in developing the Thirteenth Amendment.¹⁷⁰ Sumner's track record made it only natural that he would introduce the Civil Rights Bill in 1870, a bill that guaranteed black citizens in the country equal access to public conveniences, such as hotels and theaters. In its original version, the bill also included equal access to public schooling, which for Sumner meant integrated schooling. Besides inherent prejudice in Congress, the educational specifications of the bill continued to prevent the bill from being voted into law for several years. In the midst of his fight, Senator Charles Sumner passed away on April 27, 1874.¹⁷¹ Sumner passed just as black leaders in Tennessee were weighing in on the Civil Rights Bill, which led to a war of words in the Volunteer State.

The State Convention of Colored Men met once again in Nashville on April 28-29, 1874 with a tone and message that echoed the assertion of *The New Orleans Weekly Louisianian* that "the colored man couldn't...be thoroughly squelched." What came out of this convention was arguably one of the most forceful declarations that an equal, integrated

¹⁷⁰ Chad G. Marzen, "Charles Sumner: History's Misunderstood Idealist." *Okla. City UL Rev.* 35 (2010), 607-608; Murphy, "The Civil Rights Law of 1875," 110-111.

¹⁷¹ Murphy, "The Civil Rights Law of 1875," 111.

education was a fundamental right since Emancipation. The *Nashville Union and American* reported on the convention in articles it labelled with titles such as “The Negro Ultimatum” and “No Compromise Short of Complete Equality with the Whites,” symbolizing the ardent characteristic of the convention and its resolutions.¹⁷²

The speeches given at the convention signaled the intensification of the black political voice in Tennessee. The appointed chairman pro tem of the convention, Abraham Smith gave the first speech. He began the convention on a particularly condemnatory note, maintaining that the “their freedom was a delusion and mockery,” which hearkened back to the fact that it took over two hundred years to persuade America of the ills of slavery. According to Chairman Smith, “No government could prosper that withheld equal rights from a portion of its citizens for no other reason than that their skins were black.” Concurring with this sentiment, W.F. Yardly of Knox County gave a speech after Smith directed towards the actions of Tennessee. Calling on the government to honor its obligation to black Tennesseans, he maintained that “there were laws in the State that detracted from the rights of citizenship on account of color, while the great fundamental law of the land recognized each and every man as equal before the law.” He further asserted that the State had completely disregarded that 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, especially the rights and privileges granted to black Tennesseans through the citizenship status bestowed in the 14th Amendment. As it related to black education, Yardly referred back to the state constitutional provision passed in 1870 that was “in direct conflict with the letter and spirit of the fundamental law of the Government” by allowing race to be the exclusionary tool for public schooling. Additionally, Yardly spoke directly against any

¹⁷² “The Negro Ultimatum,” *Nashville Union and American*, 4/30/1874.

claims that black people did not want civil rights. Towards the end of his speech, Yardly placed his hope in the Civil Rights Bill that was pending in Congress and urged each of the delegates to utilize their political clout to push the Republican Party in Tennessee to also support the bill.¹⁷³

Nevertheless, these black leaders made loyalty to the Republican Party contingent upon the party's alignment with their own ideals. In his initial speech Chairman Abraham Smith warned that it "would never do for colored men to rally around any set of men, simply because they called themselves Republicans, and while much might be due to race, more was due to humanity." Samuel Lowery, one of the delegates from Davidson County, disbanded rumors that black Tennesseans were planning to leave the Republican Party in light of the large percentage of the party that they comprised. Yet, he still warned that "unless the Republican party of Tennessee adopted the civil rights measure, the colored people could not go hand in hand with them any longer." In Lowery's opinion, it would be in the Republicans' best interest to not overlook the civil rights of black Tennesseans if they did not want to risk defeat.¹⁷⁴

Following the speeches, the delegates began adopting several resolutions over the course of the two-day convention, and in these resolutions, the delegates effectively connected education to the issue of civil rights. Lowery offered the first resolution, part of which read:

...this convention of colored citizens repel indignantly and with contempt, any misanthrope who would seek to fasten and fetter with prejudice our children and posterity; and we earnestly invoke the National Congress to pass the Civil Rights bill,

¹⁷³ "Civil Rights," *Nashville Union and American*, 4/29/1874.

¹⁷⁴ "Civil Rights," *Nashville Union and American*, 4/29/1874.

giving to our children impartial school privileges in every public school, State, and National, throughout the United States...¹⁷⁵

Other resolutions asked Congress to pass the Civil Rights Bill, describing common schooling as “the medium through which education will reach the masses of the citizens” and nondiscriminatory access to public schools as “the most potent power to develop true Republicanism and love of country, good feeling and personal regard mutuality.”¹⁷⁶ The delegates of the conventions utilized these resolutions to develop an argument for impartial education that rested both on their inherent rights as citizens and on an appeal to the American ethos.

At the 1874 Convention, these black leaders had taken several new steps in the development of their political voice. Beyond the equation of segregated schools with inferiority, the delegates declared that an adequate education was not simply an afterthought of their citizenship but fundamental civil right. Furthermore, the oratory in the convention directly represented that same education that should be their civil right in action, as each of their own educational backgrounds had contributed to their ability to participate in this demonstration of citizenship. Moreover, they let the white Republicans know that black loyalty to the party was not a given, but needed to be earned. By leveraging the sheer number they represented in the Republican Party along with their humanity, these leaders representing black Tennesseans reminded Republicans that their loyalty should not be taken for granted.

If this was not enough of a reminder, the black delegates also directly called out former Governor, Republican Senator William Brownlow who had vocally opposed the civil

¹⁷⁵ “Civil Rights,” *Nashville Union and American*, 4/29/1874.

¹⁷⁶ “The Negro Ultimatum,” *Nashville Union and American*, 4/30/1874.

rights bill, particularly as it related to the integration of schools. In the words of the delegates, “we deprecate the departure from the principles of humanity and justice of one in whom we have so often reposed so much confidence as true friend of the colored race.” The *Union and American* headlined this conflict with the subtitle, “Brownlow Branded with the Mark of Judas.”¹⁷⁷ This and other impassioned resolutions made were almost immediately prompted backlash from both white Democrats and white Republicans. In his analysis of the Reconstruction era, historian and activist W.E.B DuBois has argued that there was a “counter-revolution” leading up to 1876 as black were acquiring the necessary “knowledge to thwart the worst designs of the new slave drivers” through black schooling efforts.¹⁷⁸ Though “new slave drivers” was likely a description of the Redeemers, much of the counter-revolution in Tennessee was spearheaded by white Republicans, including Senator Brownlow himself.

Tennessee Opposed to Civil Rights Bill

Following the colored convention, prominent leaders of both the Democratic and Republican Parties in the state admonished the black leaders for their demands for mixed schooling. On May 1, 1874, the *Nashville Union and American* published the transcription of an interview held with the Democratic Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Tennessee appointed under the 1873 school law, Colonel John M. Fleming. By this point, the bill was making progress in Congress, but the former Confederate official still discounted both the actions of the State Convention of Colored Men and any claims that

¹⁷⁷ “The Negro Ultimatum,” *Nashville Union and American*, 4/29/1874.

¹⁷⁸ DuBois, William Edward Burghardt. *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a history of the part which black folk played in the attempt to reconstruct democracy in America, 1860-1880*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013, 596.

black children were being educated inadequately. Asked about his views on “the action of the Colored State Convention” Fleming argued that if the Civil Rights Bill passed, then he could not “regard the action of the Colored Convention as other than hostile to the public school system of Tennessee, and really at war with the best interests of such of the colored people as desire to give their children the benefit of a common-school education.” Fleming also suggested that though the races were mandated to be educated separately the Tennessee law was unbiased in their provisions for students, expressing satisfaction with a 38% black student enrollment in comparison to 50% for the white population.¹⁷⁹

Superintendent Fleming’s views on the prospects for the state of education in general if the bill was passed were also bleak. In Fleming’s opinion, the result would be “disastrous” as “no one needs to learn from another.” Furthermore, he rested on the fact that “there are certain social incompatibilities and repulsions which neither legislation nor judgements of courts can reconcile or destroy.”¹⁸⁰ Fleming’s argument against the mixing of schools rested in the social anxieties that came out of the fear that white supremacy would be threatened were schools to enforce racial mixture. His attitude towards black education was further evidenced in his annual report as superintendent for the year 1873-74 in a section ominously titled “Co-Education of Races,” which was followed by a circular letter sent to local counties that advised a temporary cessation of teacher and school contracts as to avoid the potential of the bill’s enforcement.¹⁸¹

Though Fleming’s party affiliation influenced his negative opinions on the bill, the black leaders at the convention, as well as the black Tennesseans they represented, also

¹⁷⁹ “The Negro in Schools,” *Nashville Union and American*, 5/1/1874.

¹⁸⁰ “The Negro in Schools,” *Nashville Union and American*, 5/1/1874.

¹⁸¹ John Fleming, *Annual report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee for the scholastic year ending August 31st, 1874*. Nashville, Tenn.: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1874, 25-30.

faced opposition from the party they supported. At the helm of that opposition was Senator William Brownlow, the former Republican governor of the state. With the rather instigating title “Brownlow’s Ultimatum to the Negro,” the *Union and American* discussed a column the senator submitted to the *Knoxville Chronicle*. As a comeback to the resolutions the convention targeted at him, Brownlow wrote, “If the members of the late Colored Convention can afford to present to the world such evidence of base ingratitude to myself who has done more for them than any other Tennessean, I can well afford to be indifferent to their abuse and despise their threats.” The majority of the column was an angry retaliation by Brownlow who felt that he had already done enough for black folks in Tennessee, particularly as he credited himself with giving them the basic rights of citizenship, including voting. His most disparaging attack related to integrated schooling. As he contended that he was “reflecting the views of almost every white man in the Republican ranks,” he described the “co-education of the races” as a “sum of villianies and quintessence of abomination.”¹⁸²

With this column, Brownlow had replied to the black delegates at the convention with a message that was equal to theirs in its passion, but the commitment to enforcing the color line in education by Senator Brownlow, Superintendent Fleming, and other southern white people of all party affiliations stemmed from something deeper than the threat of students interacting in schools. For opponents of “co-education,” the more pressing threat was a tainting of white purity. In debates about black equality, white moderate Democrats, and some white Republicans as well, often objected to any pressure for social equality. Ultimately, most of these folks believed that education of black and white students in the

¹⁸² “Brownlow’s Ultimatum to the Negro,” *Nashville Union and American*, 5/15/1874.

same schools “established social equality and denied the realities of racial difference.” Moreover, equality in public education was often connected to more private matters and symbolized a threat of miscegenation.¹⁸³ The Pennsylvania segregation case of 1867, *West Chester and Philadelphia RR Co v Miles* was still relevant in debates of the Civil Rights Bill, as it claimed that “from social amalgamation it is but a step to illicit intercourse, and but another to intermarriage.”¹⁸⁴ Mixed education represented a form social amalgamation that threatened to lead to interracial activity that would place white supremacy and visions of white democracy in jeopardy.

These same social anxieties were represented by the reluctance of local Tennessee Republicans to support the Civil Rights Bill at the party’s September convention in Chattanooga. During the 1874 gubernatorial nomination proceedings, debates ensued between white and black delegates, as the white delegates seemed to actively avoid the question of civil rights. Black delegate W.H. Porter from Knox County asserted that those men who were not supporters of equality were not “sound Republicans.” One white delegate, Lewis Tillman thought the concern should be to eliminate prejudice, not “enforcing social equality,” and that there did not need to be anymore legislation for those means. Other white delegates were apparently silent on their views. A black delegate from Shelby County, Mr. Thompson, was described by the *Daily Appeal* as “determined...to compel the white delegates to indorse or oppose the civil rights bill, or to show their hands.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Kirt H. Wilson, *The Reconstruction Desegregation Debate: The Politics of Equality and the Rhetoric of Place, 1870-1875*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2002, 113.

¹⁸⁴ Steven A. Bank, "Anti-Miscegenation Laws and the Dilemma of Symmetry: The Understanding of Equality in the Civil Rights Act of 1875." *U. Chi. L. Sch. Roundtable 2* (1995), 306.

¹⁸⁵ “Negro Dictation,” *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, 9/22/1874.

The reluctance of the party to affirm their rights exasperated the black delegates who had trusted the Republican leadership. The Republican Convention eventually came to a compromise in which they supposedly affirmed the “full and equal enjoyment of accommodations, advantages, rights and privileges by all citizens,” but the compromise included a caveat that “it was unnecessary and unwise to attempt, by Congressional legislation or otherwise, to compel, as between such races, creeds or colors, the joint exercise of such accommodations, right, or privileges.”¹⁸⁶ The convention also nominated Horace Maynard for Governor, a candidate who endorsed civil rights but not racially mixed schools.¹⁸⁷ As historian Kirk Wilson has argued, Republican idealists and even some moderate Republicans nationally often spoke of equality of black folks, but few actually were invested in it.¹⁸⁸ The Republicans in Tennessee had effectively covered up their prejudice under a toothless commitment to equality; a commitment that was definitive in its prevention of equal education.

Similar reluctance to the Civil Rights Bill existed in Washington as well. Congress finally passed the legislation after five years on February 27, 1875, and it was signed into law on March 1, 1875. Not surprisingly, the final version of the bill was devoid of any directives for public schools, an issue that Charles Sumner had especially wanted resolved.¹⁸⁹ Further evidence of the Republican Party’s meaningless commitment in Tennessee came as the backlash to Civil Rights in the state gathered steam. By 1875, Redeemer power had reasserted itself, and James D. Porter of Henry County had become

¹⁸⁶ “Maynard,” *The Morristown Gazette*, 10/7/1874.

¹⁸⁷ “Chattanooga,” *Nashville Union and American*, 9/17/1874.

¹⁸⁸ Wilson, *The Reconstruction Desegregation Debate*, 187.

¹⁸⁹ Murphy, “The Civil Rights Law of 1875,” 111.

governor of the state, representing the Democratic-Conservative coalition.¹⁹⁰ On March 11, 1875, the state legislature passed a counter bill entitled, “A bill to define the rights, duties, and liabilities of Inn Keepers, Common Carriers and Proprietors of places of public amusement,” that allowed owners of the same accommodations that the Congressional act outlined to “control access and exclude persons” as they wished.¹⁹¹ Tennessee’s counter legislation made segregation legal in not just schools but in all public spaces. This counter legislation was also precisely part of the counter-revolution that Dubois described.

National Convention of Colored Men Questions Republican Loyalty

In the aftermath of the events of 1874 and 1875, black Tennesseans became disillusioned with the Republican Party. By 1876, this disillusionment with the party was so widespread among black leaders across the country that they convened a National Convention of Colored Men in Nashville to organize in light of their continued status as second class citizens. Besides the ensuing presidential election, an invitation to the National Convention of Colored Men published in *The Memphis Daily Appeal* cited “the unhealthy mind relative to the colored people in the south,” “the unfinished mission undertaken by the nation to exalt our race to the standard of American citizenship,” and “the denial of our rights in certain portions of our country, through the means of a vitiated public sentiment” as some of the key reasons why the gathering was necessary.¹⁹²

At the convention’s meeting from April 5 to 7, 1876, black men from around the nation took on allegiance to the Republican Party as the chief topic of discussion. The

¹⁹⁰ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 22-23.

¹⁹¹ “Tennessee Establishes Jim Crow” in Green, Robert P., ed. *Equal protection and the African American constitutional experience: a documentary history*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000, p. 129.

¹⁹² “The Colored Convention,” *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, 4/5/1876.

Chicago Tribune reported about two delegates, former Governor Pinckney Pinchback of Louisiana and Senator C.S. Smith of Alabama, who both took definite positions in opposition of the black allegiance to the Republican Party. Pinchback argued that black folks “would never again vote the Republican ticket in solid column as heretofore,” and that it was time that party politics move beyond racial lines. Senator Smith took this argument to the next level. He insisted that blacks stay apart from the Republican Party and instead vote for “honest and competent men, without reference to party.”¹⁹³ *The Whig and Tribune* out of Jackson, Tennessee, recounted the speech of Judge Gibbs, the convention chairman, who seemed to be more amenable on the matter. In his speech, he argued that black people had “cause for complaint, for dissatisfaction. The party in power since the war have not given us protection...as it was their duty and within their power to do.” He then called on the delegates to think about the history of the political parties in the country, reminding them that “the Democratic party has not given us ground for hope.” Following this speech, there was no immediate resolution about the status of their party loyalty, beyond the decision to pass on any endorsement of a presidential candidate.¹⁹⁴

According to the *New York Herald*, the delegates eventually came to a consensus on their view of the Republican Party, as the paper wrote that the convention adopted resolutions “indorsing [*sic*] and reaffirming devotion and adherence to the national republican party and its principles, but stating that, nevertheless, there are just reasons for complaining against those members who have proved recreant to their trusts.” Still, the resolutions as a whole were remarkable and did not omit the fight for educational equality,

¹⁹³ “The Convention,” *Chicago Tribune*, 4/7/1876.

¹⁹⁴ “The Nashville Convention of Colored People,” *The Whig and Tribune*, 4/8/1876.

as they also included a resolution that advocated for compulsory education in the South.¹⁹⁵ The delegates may have decided aligning with party politics was in their best interest, but they would not back down on guaranteeing education as part of their experience and rights as citizens.

Conclusion

Despite a renewed allegiance, Republican commitment to black citizens of the United States would also be questionable in the next year. Redeemer victory in the early 1870s was not certain, but it eventually came in 1877, even if only symbolically. After a contested presidential election, Reconstruction officially ended in 1877 with the Hayes-Tilden compromise, which removed federal troops from the South in exchange for the presidency of northern Republican, Rutherford B. Hayes. The compromise also represented the departure of the Republican Party's commitment to ensuring that black folks were afforded the basic rights of American citizens.¹⁹⁶ This sentiment was described in *The Nation*, which claimed that "the negro...will disappear from the field of national politics. Henceforth, the nation, as a nation will have nothing more to do with him."¹⁹⁷

This weekly magazine was mistaken as by 1879, black leaders were once again working to address the issues of their communities in the new political environment. At a National Conference of Colored Men held in Nashville, black men from across nation gathered "not as Republicans, not as Democrats, but as free, independent American citizens, for the purposes of presenting to the country the grievances of the colored people." Black migration was a large topic, but there was also much discussion about other

¹⁹⁵ "Colored Men in Convention," *The New York Herald*, 4/8/1876.

¹⁹⁶ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 575-582.

¹⁹⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 582.

issues including education and labor.¹⁹⁸ It was perhaps most appropriate that this national conference in the last year of the decade was held in Nashville, as it participated in the same performance of political power that was the cornerstone of black Tennessean political and educational advocacy throughout the 1870s.

When the moment of opportunity to invest efforts into teaching and building schools closed in 1870, the leaders of the black population in Tennessee realized that it was time to shift their method of advocacy. Through State and National Colored Conventions, these black men grappled with and began to understand their political voice and agency. These conventions were spaces in which black Tennesseans both worked to enact and embodied their political power. Furthermore, the delegates also used these conventions to force the government to act on their behalf as citizens. By placing education at the center of their political agenda, the delegates at each of the conventions connected access to equal, integrated schools to their civil rights, citizenship, and humanity. Moreover, these conventions became spaces of resistance, particularly as they challenged the Republican Party's real commitment to their rights in the face of increasing Redeemer power.

The new reality of a post-Reconstruction South aside, the State Colored Conventions of the 1870s, and the National Convention in 1876 in particular, primed black Tennesseans to push for their own representation in the state legislature after Reconstruction officially ended – an effort that led to a dozen black men in state office in the next decade. Contrary to what *The Nation* may have projected, black Tennesseans did not disappear from state politics. Moreover, the black state legislators of the 1880s refused to allow the lack of equal educational access for their children to go undisputed.

¹⁹⁸ *Proceedings of the National Conference of Colored Men of the United States, Held in the State Capitol at Nashville Tennessee, May 6, 7, 8 and 9, 1879.* ColoredConventions.org. Washington, DC: R.H. Darby, 1879, 3-4.

Chapter 3

“Young, Ambitious, and Full of Zeal”

Teachers Turned Black State Legislators in the 1880s

Introduction

On the morning of Monday, January 5, 1885, the House clerk for the 44th General Assembly of the State of Tennessee likely received a Certificate of Election signed by the Shelby County sheriff, J.W.D. Cannon. That certificate stated that, based on an election held on November 4, 1884, “Green E. Evans received the highest number of votes, was duly elected, and [was] therefore entitled to the office of Representative for Shelby County for the term provided by law.”¹⁹⁹ Evans, a thirty-six year old black man from Memphis, was then qualified by the Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of Tennessee, Judge J.B. Cooke, along with the over 90 other representatives from counties across the state. With that, Green Evans, a former slave, had been granted power symbolic of the full extent of citizenship.²⁰⁰

Evans was not the sole black representative in the lower house of the 44th General Assembly. He was joined by three others: Samuel A. McElwee of rural Haywood County who was beginning the second of three terms, William A. Fields, a fellow representative of Shelby County, and William C. Hodge of the increasingly urban Hamilton County in East Tennessee.²⁰¹ Green Evans, Samuel McElwee, and William Fields all hailed from counties in the southwestern corner of the state, but their collective presence did not go unnoticed in

¹⁹⁹ “Green E. Evans,” *“This Honorable Body” African-American Legislators in 19th Century Tennessee* Digital Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2013, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/evans.htm>

²⁰⁰ *Journal of the house of representatives of the state of Tennessee, forty-fourth general assembly of the State of Tennessee*. Nashville, TN: Albert B. Tavel, Printer of the State, 1885, 1-3.

²⁰¹ “Biographies of 19th Century Legislators,” *“This Honorable Body” African-American Legislators in 19th Century Tennessee* Digital Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives (from here on referred to as “TSLA Digital Collection”), 2013, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/bios.htm>

other parts of the state. Out the eastern division of Tennessee, the *Cleveland Gazette* proclaimed:

The legislature of Tennessee has among its members three colored members, Mr. McElwee, Mr. Fields, and Mr. Green E. Evans. These three gentlemen are all school teachers, and give evidence of aspirations to become lawmakers. They are young, ambitious and full of zeal, and if an opportunity is given may prove themselves equals and superiors of many Tennessean Senators before the adjournment of the present session.²⁰²

For the *Gazette*, the ambition and eagerness that these three men shared made them a force to be reckoned with in the General Assembly. As a black newspaper, the *Gazette* likely had high hopes for the legislation these men could pass towards the improvement of the condition of black Tennesseans. Beyond their shared devotion to their roles in political leadership, what was even more remarkable was the fact that each of these men had been school teachers at some point prior to their election to the state legislature. In fact, William Fields' most recent occupation listing was as a school teacher for the Fifteenth District Public School for black students in Memphis.²⁰³

To be sure, these three men were not the only black state legislators in Tennessee in the decade after Reconstruction officially ended. From 1881 until 1888, there were twelve black men who served in the State House of Representatives.²⁰⁴ All of them had respectable careers that included work in law, ministry, and business. Moreover, the legislation that many of the black representatives introduced was clear in its attempts to ease the plight of black Tennesseans. Yet, a focus on Green Evans, Samuel McElwee, and William Fields is warranted due to a direct link between their occupations and legislation filed. Each of these

²⁰² *Cleveland Gazette*, 01/24/1885.

²⁰³ A.E. Sholes, *Sholes' Memphis Directory of 1884 and Guide to the Taxing District, Shelby Co., Tenn.* Memphis, TN: S.C. Toof & Co., 1884.

²⁰⁴ "Biographies of 19th Century Legislators," TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/bios.htm>

former teachers attempted to pass education-related legislation that would most immediately provide for and improve common schools for the black children across the state.²⁰⁵

In this final chapter, I use these three men to argue that black legislators represented the pinnacle of educational activism in black Tennesseans' reckoning with the meanings of freedom and citizenship in the first few decades after emancipation. Each legislator's personal educational narratives and engagement with the educational enterprise embodied the freedpeople's perspective that education was the means to separate themselves from their past slave status and establish themselves as citizens. The legislation that these legislators introduced illustrated the state's black leaders' attempt to conceptualize education's operation, with the goal of ensuring that the statuses of free and citizen were less contingent and fragile for black children. Black Tennesseans were no longer just making claims on government educational provisions; they were now a part of the government.

While chapters one and two chronicled the development of educational activism over the first fifteen years after the end of the Civil War, this chapter will discuss the 1880s as a moment in which efforts to teach and build schools and utilize a collective political voice for educational improvement bore fruit. This chapter will start with a discussion of the political environment of the 1880s that allowed for the mobilization of voters to elect the bloc of black state representatives who made their initial appearance in 1881. The chapter will also analyze the presence of these black legislators as a potent force against issues such as the beginning of Jim Crow discrimination. The crux of the chapter will focus

²⁰⁵ "Bills Filed by the 19th Century African American Legislators in the Tennessee General Assembly," TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/billsfiled.htm>

on depicting the lives of Samuel McElwee, William Fields, and Green Evans, as well as examining the educational-related legislative activities in order to illuminate the nature of late-nineteenth century black educational activism.

Still, the last black state legislator to submit a Certificate of Election to the House Clerk in the nineteenth-century was elected to the 45th General Assembly. After that, there was not another black state lawmaker in Tennessee until 1965.²⁰⁶ With such an abrupt and lasting ending to this presence, the chapter will explore the impact of voter suppression policies on black political representation, while arguing that personal and political work of these black legislators were vitally influential for the advancement of education across the state.

State Debt Controversy and the Possibility of Black Mobilization

The post-Reconstruction period was fraught with intra-party tension amongst Tennessee Democrats, and the state's Republicans once again used this to attempt to regain power. The Republican Party was not successful in maintaining any power, but black voters posed another issue for Republicans. The tensions of party politics also ultimately granted the black voters an opportunity to reconsider their political allegiance to Republicans.

The primary source of the Democratic tension was the state debt issue. In 1873, the state had passed a Funding Act with the intention of funding all overdue bonds to date and followed through on over \$6 million worth of old bonds. Despite initial success, by 1875, Tennessee began defaulting on the interests payments which led to a significant level of debt just as federal troops were being removed from the former Confederacy permanently.

²⁰⁶ "African-American Members of the Tennessee General Assembly 1873-2016," TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/pdfs/TNGenAssemBlack.pdf>

²⁰⁷ In response, the Redeemer government met with bondholders to determine the course of action. The result was an agreement to a partially-funded debt, but with an interest rate that would increase progressively. Any adjustments to the funding scheme for state-debt would require an alteration in state taxes. This initial agreement translated to a significant increase in taxes for the citizens of Tennessee.²⁰⁸

The impacts of the state-debt issue on taxes signaled the beginning of the end of the Redeemer hold on the state's Democratic Party. Though many of the Democrats in the legislature were Redeemer-aligned in their support of the initial funding model, a significant amount of Democrats objected to the plan, and opted to scale down the debt even more, especially for the sake of lower taxes.²⁰⁹ These legislators called themselves "low-taxers," and created a large faction in the Democratic Party, pitting themselves squarely against the Redeemers.²¹⁰ Beyond partisan divides, the development of the low-tax opposition signified that the state-debt had also stirred up class divisions in the largely-white party. The threat of an alteration in the level of taxation and interest rates for lower classes disrupted the unified white political front of the Democratic Party and led to confusion at the party's convention to nominate a candidate for the governorship. After unsuccessful Redeemer attempts to nominate candidates, the low-taxers rallied behind Judge Albert S. Marks, a lifelong Democrat with no clear side on the state-debt issue, as the party's gubernatorial selection. Marks was eventually elected as Governor of the State of

²⁰⁷ *Acts of the State of Tennessee, passed by the thirty-eighth general assembly. 1873.* Nashville, TN: Jones, Purvis & Co., Printers to the State, 1873, 34-35; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 29.

²⁰⁸ Roger L. Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896.* Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1975, 30.

²⁰⁹ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 30.

²¹⁰ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 28.

Tennessee in 1878, effectively displacing Redeemers from the seat they had held for the better half of the decade.²¹¹

Despite this shift, the Democratic Party's general power continued to be unstable as the state-debt issue had yet to be resolved. Under the leadership of the Marks Administration, the legislature developed a new resolution that would fund the debt at a lower percentage and interest rate. While this new resolution appeased the remaining Redeemers and many low-taxers, the majority of those championing the low-tax revolt approved the new measure only if it was approved by voters, despite the fact that it gained approval from bondholders. In an 1879 referendum, the majority of Tennesseans voted against the new state-debt provision, a result that strengthened the divide between low-tax Democrats and Redeemers.²¹² The state-debt issue had become a point of intense dissension within in the Democratic Party by the time of the 1880 gubernatorial elections. Operating as practically two different parties, the Redeemers and the low-tax Democrats each nominated their own candidates for governor. The dissension of the party led to disunity across the state between the rich and poor, as well as between rural and urban areas. As a result of these divided opinions in the party, Republican Alvin Hawkins became the new governor.²¹³ Governor Hawkins was the first Republican to be elected to the position in the state in over ten years.

Nonetheless, Republican control was short-lived. Governor Hawkins was overly-confident in the ability for the curators of Reconstructionist policies to make a complete resurgence in the state. In a letter to U.S. Representative W.B. Stokes, he expressed his

²¹¹ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 33-35.

²¹² Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 35-37.

²¹³ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 45-48.

elation that the Democratic Party's "split [continued] to widen," which led to unbounded opportunities for the future.²¹⁴ In a collaboration between Republicans and state-credit Democrats, those in opposition to low-taxers, the legislature passed a law that would fund the debt at its full amount.²¹⁵ This caused an uproar amongst low-tax Democrats, who began a targeted effort to reclaim political power. Led by the influential Senator Isham Harris, some of the state-credit Democrats unified with low-tax Democrats and filed suit against the new debt funding law. The state supreme court eventually declared the law unconstitutional. The court ruling was arguably the first sign of the end of Republican rule, as the Democrats reorganized with Senator Harris' lead under the New South concept of Bourbonism, emphasizing limited government and low taxes, by 1882, and maintained their power throughout the decade.²¹⁶

The struggle to reassert political power was only one of Tennessean Republicans' issues in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The loyalty of black voters to the party was increasingly uncertain as well. Republican devotion was already wavering in Tennessee and across the South due to the party's lukewarm support of the Civil Rights Act of 1875. Nonetheless, at the turn of the decade, black voters mustered up a semblance of uninhibited allegiance to the Republican Party, aiding in the election of Governor Hawkins in 1880. As the state-debt controversy continued though, some black Tennesseans started to support the policies of low-tax Democrats, which signaled that black folks were starting to explore other options amongst the factionalism of the period.²¹⁷ Black Republicans were

²¹⁴ As quoted in Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 48.

²¹⁵ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 52.

²¹⁶ Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, and Populists*, 54-56.

²¹⁷ Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880's*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1976, 24-25.

also beginning to notice that the party would only readily support white Republicans for office, and some black folks alleged that the party would rather support a Democrat than a black Republican.²¹⁸

Such issues notwithstanding, black voters in the state remained largely Republican, but there was a clear shift in perspective on the basis of this party affiliation. In 1883, an article entitled “The Negro and The Republican Party” spoke to the opinions of black folks across the South and seemed to put to rest any natural loyalty notions behind black Republicanism. The writer claimed that “it is not true, however, that we are at this time paying old debts to the Republican party. We have already pulled the party through times enough to cancel all outstanding obligations.”²¹⁹ Instead, the writer suggested an allegiance to the political ideals of Republicanism instead of the actual men of the party and their fluctuating political support. According to the author, black folks remained Republicans because the party stood “on principles which, would it carried out, make [them] citizens as other men are citizens – free and equal before the law.”²²⁰

This shift in perspective of party alignment also opened up the opportunity for black loyalty to a different distinction: race. On March 18, 1883, the *Christian Recorder* out of Philadelphia maintained that even in a Democratic administration, it was desirable for a black Republican to serve, as it would be “all for the good of the people.”²²¹ As black people around the nation reconceptualized their party politics absent of white Republican allies, they also began to mobilize more actively around black Republican candidates for political

²¹⁸ *The Memphis Daily Appeal* as quoted in Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 26-27.

²¹⁹ “The Negro and the Republican Party,” [paper title unspecified], 1883, JC Napier Papers, Special Collections, Fisk University Libraries, Box 3, Folder 1.

²²⁰ “The Negro and the Republican Party,” 1883.

²²¹ *The Christian Recorder*, 3/8/1883.

office. In the 1880s, this was particularly true in Tennessee, especially in conjunction with the possibilities that opened up with the class-induced factionalism amongst the Democratic Party. The mobilization around black candidates from black voters in Tennessee set the state for the entry of the first of the twelve black state legislators in 1881. Eight of the state legislators came from four counties in which black people represented the majority according to the 1880 census. All in the Western part of the state, Shelby County was 56% black, Fayette County was 70% black, Haywood County came in at 67% black, and the black population was holding on to a 50.1% majority in Tipton County. By 1888, four black legislators had represented Shelby County, two represented Fayette County, and Haywood and Tipton Counties both sent one black state legislator to the state House. The other four legislators represented Davidson County and Hamilton County, and black people represented at least a third of the population in each county.²²² In the early 1880s, Black Tennesseans, in particular black Republicans, were able to capitalize on the political strife around state-debt and party loyalty to both run for political office and rally around their own candidates. This mobilization resulted in a slate of candidates who attempted to work directly on their behalf at one of the highest levels of the state. Furthermore, with the exception of 1881-1882, these black state legislators represented these counties under a Democratic Administration for a large part of their presence in the House, just as the *Christian Recorder* advocated.

²²² Population Density, 1880. *Social Explorer*, (based on data from U.S. Census Bureau; accessed February 15, 2018)

The Fight Against Racial Discrimination

The 42nd General Assembly commenced in 1881 with four elected black representatives in the lower house – a group that did not hesitate to make their priorities clear. This group of political officials included Thomas A. Sykes of Davidson County, Issac F. Norris and Thomas F. Cassels of Shelby County, and John W. Boyd who represented rural black interests in Tipton County.²²³ As the first benefactors of the mobilization around black candidates, these men were met with visible support from those citizens of Tennessee that they represented. On January 6, 1881, the *Knoxville Chronicle* wrote that from the beginning of the 42nd General Assembly, “a large number of colored persons [had] assembled in the galleries of the house to observe the proceedings.” The *Chronicle* explained the presence of black Tennesseans in the house as a result of the fact that there had been four black men elected as representatives, which was a “novelty,” according to the paper.²²⁴ While it was indeed novel, the *Chronicle’s* explanation was an oversimplification. The black people who gathered in the galleries arguably not only viewed the black lawmakers’ evidence of the progress that blacks in the state had made since emancipation but also as in a position to solidify the contours of their citizenship.

In an effort to deliver on this expectation, a large portion of the black lawmakers’ legislative efforts went towards countering the racial discrimination policies of the state. By the time the representatives entered the legislature, the 1875 counter act to the national Civil Rights Act was still in full effect in Tennessee. In the 1875 act, the provision that allowed a person to take action against any discriminatory party operating public

²²³ “Biographies of 19th Century Legislators,” TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/bios.htm>

²²⁴ “From Nashville,” *Knoxville Chronicle*, 1/6/1881.

accommodations such as hotels and public transportation was repealed. In fact, it legalized the exact opposite action and allowed operating parties to discriminate at will.²²⁵ Memphis teacher Julia Hooks was one victim of this arbitrary discrimination when she was bypassed at an integrated movie theater for white women and their children. In her “defiant resistance,” Hooks was depicted as a difficult and angry black woman in newspaper accounts.²²⁶

Black Tennesseans especially felt the effects of the counter law on railroads. Railroad companies often relegated black passengers to the smoking and baggage cars while still charging them first-class prices. Beyond the transactional discrimination, black passengers, particularly black women, were also often taunted by white passengers.²²⁷ One black woman who had a discriminatory experience on the railroad was another Memphis teacher, Ida B. Wells, who would later become a journalist and leading activist against lynching. Wells sued the railroad company after was harshly removed from her first-class seat in transit between her Memphis home and her school in rural Shelby County. Although she won the case in the lower court, on appeal, the State Supreme Court overturned the initial decision.²²⁸

With such discrimination as a context, the first four black legislators, led by Thomas A. Sykes took an initial shot at repealing the 1875 legislation during the 42nd General Assembly. Representative Sykes first introduced House Bill no. 70, which was a direct repeal of the legislation, on January 12th, 1881, some nine days after he walked through the

²²⁵ Stanley J. Folmsbee, "The Origin of the First "Jim Crow" Law." *The Journal of Southern History* 15, no. 2 (1949): 235-247.

²²⁶ Beverly G. Bond, "Every Duty Incumbent Upon Them: African American Women in Nineteenth-Century Memphis" in Carroll, Van West, ed. *Trial and triumph: Essays in Tennessee's African American history*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2002, 213.

²²⁷ Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 102.

²²⁸ Beverly G. Bond, "Every Duty Incumbent Upon Them," 213.

doors of the House. The bill passed through two readings, but on the third reading, the bill was struck down in a close vote, with 31 votes in opposition and 29 votes in favor.²²⁹ The 42nd General Assembly was the one point in which Republicans had mustered to take back some power during the state-debt controversy. Republicans held at least half of the seats in the House, which meant that some white Republicans were also complicit in the bill being struck down.²³⁰

Though the bill was struck down, the black state representatives did not back down from the fight to address racial discrimination. Their response to the House's decision demonstrated their commitment to an equal experience of citizenship for those constituents of their own racial community. On March 30th, the four representatives banded together and submitted a protest to the rejection of House Bill No. 70. The protest had four clauses, each of which was filled with strong language declaring their indignation with the inability of the House to protect black citizens of the state from racial discrimination. In the protest, the legislators claimed that the 1875 discrimination act was "a palpable violation of the genius, letter and spirit of [their] system of free government" and "a violation of every principle of right of justice." The lawmakers saw the act as directly contrary to the values of freedom and liberty that the state and country purportedly rested on.²³¹ Perhaps the most provocative argument of their protest came from the fourth clause:

Because, while four hundred thousand people of the State of Tennessee are citizens *de jure*, under the provisions [sic] of the act sought to be repealed by House Bill No. 70, they are aliens *de facto*, and entitled to no rights that railroads, hotels, and theaters are bound to respect.²³²

²²⁹ *Journal of the house of representatives of the state of Tennessee, forty-second general assembly of the State of Tennessee*. Nashville, TN: Tavel & Howell, 1881, 89, 420, 540.

²³⁰ Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 103.

²³¹ *House Journal 1881*, 840-841.

²³² *House Journal 1881*, 841.

This clause made it clear that the legislators understood the issue of racial discrimination as more than just a moral issue. Curtailing racial discrimination was inextricably linked to the goal of ensuring that black citizenship went beyond words in a national law, amendment, or proclamation and was put into practice in the everyday lives of the over 400,000 black folks of the state. For the legislators, racial discrimination signaled a lack of commitment to actualizing a form of citizenship that was on the same level of that of white Tennesseans. Possessing the same rights in public accommodations was foundational to that effort.

In addition to the first set of black legislators, other black legislators throughout the 1880s unsuccessfully attempted to get it repealed. Both Shelby County's Leon Howard and Hamilton County's William C. Hodge submitted bills that would repeal the law in 1883 and 1885, respectively to no avail. Instead of repealing the law, the 42nd General Assembly passed a Senate Bill that addressed the issues brought up by the black legislators under the guise of "separate but equal" in 1881. The bill then was officially called "an act to prevent discriminations by railroad companies among passengers who are charged and paying first class passage, and fixing penalty for the violation same" after it passed has been described as the first official "Jim Crow" law in the South by historian Stanley Folmsbee.²³³

Essentially, the act permitted railroad companies to segregate first-class cars, so long as they were "kept in good repair, and with the same conveniences, and subject to the same rules governing other first class cars, preventing smoking and obscene language." Failure to

²³³ Folmsbee, "The Origin of the First "Jim Crow" Law," 235, *Acts of the State of Tennessee, passed by the forty-second general assembly. 1881*. Nashville, TN: Tavel & Howell., Printers to the State, 1881, 211-212.

comply came with a fine of one hundred dollars.²³⁴ When the bill came to a vote, it passed overwhelmingly with a vote of 50-2, with Representatives Sykes and Norris voting against it. Representative Boyd was not present for the vote and Representative Cassels opted out of voting.²³⁵

As evidenced by their votes, the black legislators were not appeased by the “separate but equal” legislation. Opposition to the bill continued throughout the rest of the legislative term and throughout the rest of the 1880s, but there was not enough momentum to make any significant change.²³⁶ The act had effectively maneuvered around calls for repeal, while also placating the few white Republicans who may have felt morally obligated to address the issue of racial discrimination of black Tennesseans. It was also abundantly clear that the state was not yet ready to guarantee completely the equal rights that ostensibly came along with citizenship to black folks, even though they had effectively mobilized for political representation.

The black legislators of that first assembly of the decade made it clear that they were there not just to be emblematic of the progress in the political rights of citizenship for black Tennesseans. Rather, these legislators were there to push the state to grant the people of their race unrestricted access to the rights of citizens in all areas. Over the course of the decade, the legislation that the twelve black men introduced, with varying degrees of success, was largely directed towards remedying the issues that plagued black communities across the state. By 1888, the legislators as a collective had sponsored over ninety pieces of legislation, both the form of bills and resolutions. These bills focused on

²³⁴ *Acts of the State of Tennessee, 1881*, 211. Cassels was responsible for getting the fine increased from \$50 to \$100.

²³⁵ *House Journal 1881*, 987; Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 104.

²³⁶ Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 105-107.

issues including laborer wages and treatment, the continued mob violence and lynching across the state, and higher education for black students.²³⁷ Even when legislation was not explicitly focused on black issues, legislation developed by these congressmen often aligned with their private careers or experiences outside of the legislature. For instance, Thomas Hodge out of Hamilton County developed legislation to regulate laborer treatment, as a stone cutter and house mover himself. As an attorney also from Hamilton County, Styles Hutchins introduced legislation to regulate the activities and contracts of attorneys.²³⁸ Such was the case for teachers Samuel McElwee, Williams Fields, and Green Evans. Although they were not the only legislators to develop legislation to improve black education, their former or current roles as teachers critically intersected with their advocacy for black Tennessee children. To be sure, each educator had their own angle for boosting black schooling. Regardless, they all advocated and pressed their respective General Assemblies to recognize black citizenship by advancing the education of the black children in the state.

Samuel A. McElwee and Black Normal School Education

When it came to advancing educational opportunities for black students, Representative Samuel A. McElwee was active in pushing the legislature to provide more funding for both normal school education for black teachers, and subsequently the common schools at which they would then teach. Perhaps, however, McElwee's own personal educational journey and work in education was just as convincing as his prowess

²³⁷ Bills Filed by the 19th Century African American Legislators in the Tennessee General Assembly," TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/billsfiled.htm>

²³⁸ Bills Filed by the 19th Century African American Legislators in the Tennessee General Assembly," TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/billsfiled.htm>

in Nashville of his belief in education for black Tennesseans, and black Southerners more broadly. Samuel McElwee was born into slavery in Madison County in 1858. Following the conclusion of the war, his family moved to largely black and rural Haywood County, which was further west in the state in 1866.²³⁹ He was recorded in the 1870 census as living in District 6 of the county, with his mother, father, and two sisters, who collectively could claim \$150 in personal estate. By the time of this census, McElwee was twelve years old and was working as farmhand.²⁴⁰



Photo of Samuel McElwee,
TSLA Digital Collection

From this point on, contemporary biographies about McElwee framed his educational journey around self-reliance and self-determination. In fact, at least two contemporary guidebooks for black folks around the nation viewed him as a prime example of what the race should aspire to – a sentiment apparent in both the content and the titles of each of the pieces. These primers were as much proscriptive as they were biographical, as they symbolized the notions of black uplift that often accompanied educational activism. A book originally published in 1887 entitled *Men of Mark: eminent, progressive and writing* was written with the intent of informing the black masses of “the work of [the] greatest colored men” and eloquently featured McElwee.²⁴¹ Describing McElwee as a “brave soul,” the author claimed that “the chains of slavery bound his body

²³⁹ William J. Simmons and Henry McNeal Turner, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising*. No. 247. Cleveland OH: Revell & Company, 1887, 335.

²⁴⁰ Tennessee. Haywood County. 1870 U.S. Census, population schedule. Digital images. Ancestry.com. February 15, 2018. <http://ancestryheritagequest.com>; Photo of Samuel McElwee: “Samuel Allen McElwee,” TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/mcelwee.htm>

²⁴¹ Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 1.

not half so tightly as ignorance his mind.” The book heralded the fact that while McElwee was a farmhand, he still continued his studies and often studied at night after his daily fieldwork was completed. Despite his limited time to study, McElwee still passed the necessary exams to finish school in 1874. Following this, McElwee attempted to work his way through Oberlin College in Ohio, but was unable to stay due to limited funds.²⁴² Yet, instead of returning to his farmhand work, McElwee began to teach school to black children in Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee²⁴³, evidence of his commitment to not only his own educational attainment, but also to black children of the South.

Another guidebook, *The College of Life or Practical Self-Educator: A Manual of Self-Improvement for the Colored Race...*, also featured Samuel McElwee in its chapter “The Guide to Success.” Focusing on McElwee’s later life, the manual described how McElwee had continued his studies while he was teaching and would recite Latin, Greek, and algebra. These studies eventually led him to admission into Fisk University, from which he graduated in 1883. Most notably, McElwee was still a student when he was elected and began his first term as the representative for Haywood County. The manual described him as among the black men who were examples of “what may be done by one who aims high and cultivates the best qualities with which nature has endowed him.”²⁴⁴ With language that echoed the black ethos of self-help, the manual described McElwee in a way that also illuminated the fervor that he brought to the state legislature.

²⁴² Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 335.

²⁴³ Simmons, *Men of Mark*, 335.

²⁴⁴ Northrop, Henry Davenport. *The College of Life: Or, Practical Self-educator; a Manual of Self-improvement for the Colored Race... Giving Examples and Achievements of Successful Men and Women of the Race... Including Afro-American Progress Illustrated. The Whole Embracing Business, Social, Domestic, Historical and Religious Education*. Chicago: Chicago Publication and Lithograph Co., 1895, 139-140.

With such an educational journey and heavy involvement in the education of black children, it was no surprise that the first piece of legislation that McElwee introduced, while he was yet a student, was towards increasing state funding for black normal schools. By the 1880s, the Annual Reports of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction were notably less charged and widely silent when it came to the state black common school education throughout the state in comparison with the reports of the late 1860s and 1870s, with the exception of enrollment and teacher data. Nonetheless, these reports did place an increased focus on the training of the state's teachers. The reports emphasized Normal Institutes, a sort of continuing education for teachers, that would continue to uproot "the habit on the part of [the state's] teachers of clinging to old methods, simply because they are old."²⁴⁵

Despite this emphasis on teaching training and pedagogy, the reports only rarely directly mention the development of black teachers.²⁴⁶ With the underdevelopment of black teachers in mind, McElwee introduced House Bill No. 12 on January 5, 1883, which would amend the appropriations of the state normal school law originally passed in 1875. The new bill sought to increase the funding for the education of black teachers from \$2500 to \$5000.²⁴⁷ In an impassioned speech to the legislature, McElwee claimed that it was the state's responsibility to provide education for all of its citizens equally, regardless of race. According to McElwee, the state was already indebted to black children, as out of \$390,000

²⁴⁵ Thomas Paine, *Annual report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee for the scholastic year ending August 31st, 1884*. Nashville, Tenn.: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1884, 10-11.

²⁴⁶ For an example see Frank Smith, *Annual report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee for the scholastic year ending June 30th, 1888*. Nashville, Tenn.: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1888.

²⁴⁷ Bills Filed by the 19th Century African American Legislators in the Tennessee General Assembly," TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/billsfiled.htm>; *Journal of the house of representatives of the state of Tennessee, forty-third general assembly of the State of Tennessee*. Nashville, TN: Albert B. Tavel, Printer of the State, 1883, 79; Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 111.

in previous federal funds provided for higher education in the state, only \$300 had been expended on black education. His speech included a plea that, according to the *New York Globe* appealed directly to his republican principles:

I ask this appropriation, because we are worthy of it. I ask it because we are poor. I ask it because there are many worthy young men and women of African descent in our state who would make good and efficient teachers, if they had the aid which this bill will give them. I ask it because the happiness and prosperity of any state depends upon the intelligence of its citizens.²⁴⁸

A skilled politician, McElwee rested his request for this bill to be passed in the universal ideals of the state and nation. His plea came along with a declaration of the black Tennesseans worth as a citizen, which for McElwee should guarantee appropriate funding to supply for the education of the race's teachers. Moreover, he attempted to convince the legislature that success of its citizens, including its black citizens was integral in ensuring the success of the state more broadly. In McElwee's appeal, the only way to guarantee the well-being of Tennessee was to make certain that even its poorest citizens could develop their intelligence. The zeal behind his speech for the bill's passing was unequivocally connected to his dedication as student and as a teacher himself. The bill would eventually get passed into law, but with a lower appropriation of \$3300.²⁴⁹ Regardless, once a slave, Samuel McElwee had just utilized his educational capital towards advocating for the educational status of children across the state from his seat in the state legislature.

Still, Samuel McElwee did not confine his petitioning for greater financial support to the state funding. Federal aid for common school education was a consistent national issue during the 1880s as well. At the center of the federal funding debate was the Blair Bill. Developed by Henry Blair, a Republican senator from New Hampshire, the bill would

²⁴⁸ *New York Globe*, 2/3/1883.

²⁴⁹ *House Journal 1883*, 397-398

apportion federal money to states for their common school education based on illiteracy rates. That is, the states with higher literacy rates would receive a greater portion of federal funds.²⁵⁰ In one iteration of the bill, Tennessee was to be granted the highest amount funds based on the state's illiteracy, behind Georgia, Alabama, and North Carolina.²⁵¹

The bill struggled to get the necessary support from either house in US Congress, but Samuel McElwee saw its potential to not only improve the funding for education of Tennessee, but also as a way to increase the funding allotment for black children beyond the \$3300 already secured. On January 9, 1885, McElwee submitted a House Joint Resolution asking the lower house to support the Blair Bill. The question of support of the Blair Bill was eventually postponed indefinitely due to a widespread belief of unconstitutionality. This postponement came in spite of support of the bill from some rural white Tennesseans.²⁵² The reluctance to support the Blair Bill in the state was also echoed at the national level, as the bill never received enough support to be passed into law.²⁵³ Samuel McElwee was not as successful in his activism for federal aid, but his commitment to black education across the state was still readily apparent.

William Fields and the Push for Compulsory School Enrollment

Funding for black common schools was not the only concern in the 1880s for black Tennesseans. The initial enrollment and attendance of black children in schools was not a

²⁵⁰ Allen J. Going, "The South and the Blair Education Bill." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44, no. 2 (1957), 267-272.

²⁵¹ Henry William Blair and United States. Congress, *The Education Bill: by Henry W. Blair*. Washington, D.C.: [s.n.], 1887. *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*, 3.

²⁵² *Journal of the house of representatives of the state of Tennessee, forty-fourth general assembly of the State of Tennessee*. Nashville, TN: Albert B. Tavel, Printer of the State, 1885. 77,122-123; *Appendix of the House Journal of the forty-fourth general assembly of the State of Tennessee, first session, 1885*. Nashville, TN: Albert B. Tavel, Printer of the State, 1885. 119, 128

²⁵³ Going, "The South and the Blair Education Bill," 267.

guarantee, and Representative Williams Fields of Shelby County tackled the issue head on with his legislative power. Considerably less was recorded about William Fields than the other legislators discussed in this chapter. The 1880 Federal Census reported Fields at twenty-eight years old, placing his birth in Tennessee in 1852. He lived in Shelby County with his wife Elizabeth, as well as his three children, brother-in-law, and cousin. His race



Photo of William Fields,
TSLA Digital Collection

was recorded as “mulatto,” which was potentially evidence of at least his slave ancestry, if he was not a slave himself.²⁵⁴ Despite this lack of biographical information, Fields’ commitment to the education of the black children of Memphis could not be overstated. In several of the city directories of the 1880s, Fields was reported of being a teacher at two of the cities schools for black children, Fifteenth District Public School no. 5 and Fifth District Public School. He was also reported to be the principal

of the Fifth District Public School in the 1883 Memphis City Directory. Moreover, he was still recorded as a school teacher when was elected to the state legislature.²⁵⁵

William Fields’ teaching career illuminated his belief in the necessity of education for the black children of his state. Beyond this however, the realities of black education in Tennessee and national conversations around black education provided further evidence of legislation to foster black educational success in the 1880s. While the Annual Reports of the

²⁵⁴ Tennessee. Shelby County. 1880 U.S. Census, population schedule. Digital images. Ancestry.com. February 15, 2018. <http://ancestryheritagequest.com>; Fields may also be spelled as Feild or Feilds in some census records and other sources

²⁵⁵ A.E. Sholes and C.F. Weatherbe. *Sholes’ Memphis Directory of 1882 and Guide to the Taxing District, Shelby Co., Tenn.* Memphis, TN: S.C. Toof & Co., 1882; G.F. Weatherbe *Directory of the Taxing District of Memphis, Shelby County, Tenn., 1883.* Memphis, TN: Rogers & Co., Book and Job Printers and Publishers, 1883. A.E. Sholes, *Sholes’ Memphis Directory of 1884 and Guide to the Taxing District, Shelby Co., Tenn.* Memphis, TN: S.C. Toof & Co., 1884; Photo of William Fields: “William Alexander Feilds,” TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/feilds.htm>

State Superintendent of Public Instruction were largely silent about literacy rates, black illiteracy in Tennessee was still a significant issue in this decade. In the 1880s, illiteracy rates were based off of the percentage of the population above ten years old. In 1880, 71.7 percent of black Tennesseans were illiterate, while 27.3 percent of white Tennesseans were illiterate. The state population's writing ability was also disproportional. Overall, 26.63% of the state's citizens did not know how to write. On a racial level though, this equated to 18.99% of white Tennesseans with an inability to write compared with 48.20% for that of black Tennesseans.²⁵⁶

These illiteracy rates were not exclusive to Tennessee; they were representative of the trends for black folks across the South, and even in some states across the nation. The deplorable rates of black literacy led to an increase in discussions around compulsory education, particularly in black newspapers in the North and South alike. As early as 1883, the *Washington Bee* gave a four-pronged reasoned argument in support of compulsory education. The first reason given by the paper was that "if compulsory education were established in the United States, the colored race throughout the country would receive better educational advantages." The paper's second and third reasons included the appropriations and necessary government regulations that would come along with compulsory education and be beneficial to black schooling. The fourth reason the paper put forth connected directly with the reality of the 1880s. If compulsory education was established, the *Bee* claimed that "illiteracy in the South would be obliterated and thus intellectually improve the negro."²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 218; Blair, *The Education Bill*, 10, 16.

²⁵⁷ "The Bethel Literary," *Washington Bee* 1/20/1883

Although compulsory education applied to all students, both black and white, advocates saw it as directly related to the educational attainment of the black population specifically. A more forceful rationale came from a letter to the editor in the *New York Freeman* from an Alabama man, who claimed that “[the leaders of the race] wanted the masses educated and compulsion was the nearest way to it...where the masses are ignorant they are indifferent to educating the young.”²⁵⁸ Compulsory education was conceptualized to be the method of educating the race as a whole, even though “ignorance” prevented them from seeing its connection to their advancement in their status as free.

Beyond the simple advantages of compulsory education, black folks also began to conceptualize compulsory education as essential to the realization of citizenship by the end of the decade. In 1887, New Orleans’ *Weekly Pelican* based its argument for compulsory education in the high illiteracy rate in the South. Furthermore, it argued that “humanity and progress – twin sister in such an issue – demand that every child...be taught at least the fundamental elements of a common school education, those branches of learning which are both essential and requisite to American citizenship.”²⁵⁹ With this, compulsory education was imbued with the power to make permanent an otherwise fragile citizenship status. The appeals for compulsory education caused black folks to sharpen their understanding of the importance of education and its connection to citizen in the first place. These arguments in support of compulsory education resonated with the importance black Tennesseans placed on education in the 1880s. A black woman by the name of Flora Elms wrote an editorial to *The Knoxville Negro World*, in which she claimed that “the only true way to better the

²⁵⁸ “Compulsory Education,” *New York Freeman* 5/8/1886

²⁵⁹ “Compulsory Education,” *Weekly Pelican*, 8/13/1887.

condition of the Negro” was a “free and unbounded road to education and wealth.”²⁶⁰ Based on arguments from black journalists around the country, compulsory education was one way to achieve such a road to education.

White-owned newspapers also indicated support of general compulsory education, though not as unequivocally as black folks. Representative of urban perspective, the *Memphis Daily Appeal* described the deteriorating condition of education in Memphis, causing a paradigm around compulsory education. The paper reported that “many enlightened and not illiberal men, who were originally opposed to popular and compulsory education, have, on a closer familiarity on the subject, seen the necessity for it.” Echoing black connections of compulsory education with citizenship, the paper also argued that “compulsory education must go hand-in-hand with universal suffrage.”²⁶¹ Rural perspectives were also slowly changing about the importance of education. The *Knoxville Daily Chronicle* reported on the East Tennessee Farmer’s Convention and included discussions of public schooling. Overall, the delegates to the farmer’s council supported both an increased interest in the importance of schooling and compulsory education, with some also connecting education with voting rights. There was some dissenting opinion, it was not directed towards compulsory education entirely. Rather, it did not “indorse [*sic*] the extreme views of some of the gentlemen in reference to such a monarchical system.”²⁶² Such dissent notwithstanding, it appeared that white Tennesseans were slowly understanding the need for compulsory education as well.

²⁶⁰ “The Negro,” *The Knoxville Negro World*, 11/26/1887.

²⁶¹ “Our City Schools,” *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, 12/2/1881.

²⁶² “Farmers in Council,” *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, 5/11/1882.

Within this context, Representative William Fields introduced House Bill No. 119 to the lower House of the 44th General Assembly, with the working title “A Bill to be entitled An Act to Require Parents and Guardians to Send Children to School.” The bill required all parents of the state to send children between the ages of seven and sixteen to school. Moreover, the bill called for both a misdemeanor charge and a fine between ten and fifty dollars for those parents who did not comply with the law. Arguably more notable than this punish was Section 3 of the bill which called for the bill to take effect immediately because “the public welfare [required] it.”²⁶³ Surprisingly, the bill never came to a vote.²⁶⁴ Perhaps this was because white Tennesseans had still not gotten completely on board, or other legislators had not been able to reckon the fact that compulsory education would also improve black education. Nonetheless, the bill represented a similar ethos of education as those who were writing about compulsory education across the nation. Both the punishment ascribed to the bill’s violation and timeline requested for its implementation demonstrated William Fields’ sense of urgency when it came to ensure the black children in the state were educated. The seriousness he applied to the matter was distinctly a product of his occupation; his advocacy was informed by his role as a teacher.

Green E. Evans and Efforts for Self-Administration

Like Samuel McElwee and William Fields, Green E. Evans used his legislative power to endeavor to improve the condition of black education in Tennessee. However, unlike his colleagues in the 44th Congress, Evans opted for intra-racial improvements than policies

²⁶³ “Bills Filed by the 19th Century African American Legislators in the Tennessee General Assembly,” TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/billsfiled.htm>

²⁶⁴ *House Journal 1885*, 156, 505.

that would be less universally beneficial. Born a slave on September 19, 1848, Green Evans grew up in Fayette County on a plantation whose owner personally claimed over 50 slaves,



Photo of Green Evans,
TSLA Digital Collection

effectively making him one of the most well-off men in the county.²⁶⁵ He eventually gained freedom after the war and moved to Memphis. While in Memphis, Evans worked as a porter and attended a night school for a while, but ultimately enrolled in Fisk University in 1868.²⁶⁶ In fact, the first time Evans showed up in the Federal Census was in 1870, with a bloc of other students from the university. Listed as a “scholar,” Evans lived with about twenty-five other students that ranged from the ages

of twelve to twenty-four, hailing from states across the South including Mississippi, Virginia, Kentucky, and South Carolina.²⁶⁷ Additionally, Evans was one of the original members of the world famous Fisk University ensemble, the Jubilee Singers. Evans joined the ensemble, known for singing traditional spirituals, for its tour in effort to raise money for the university. During this tour, Evans was described as “sober, industrious, and politically-minded,” though he ceased his participation in the group after two years.²⁶⁸

Most notably, in addition to paying his way through school by being a groundskeeper, Green Evans also spent his summers during Fisk as a school teacher. His

²⁶⁵ “Green E. Evans” TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/evans.htm>; L.D. Whitson, *Personal Sketches of Members of the Forty-fourth General Assembly of Memphis*, TN: Rogers & Co., Book and Job Printers and Publishers, 1883, 91-92.

²⁶⁶ Andrew Ward, *Dark midnight when I rise: the story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers*. New York: Amistad Press, 2001, 81.

²⁶⁷ Tennessee. Davidson County. 1870 Census, population schedule. Digital images. Ancestry.com. February 15, 2018. <http://ancestryheritagequest.com>

²⁶⁸ Toni P. Anderson, “Tell Them We are Singing for Jesus”: *The Original Fisk Jubilee Singers and Christian Reconstruction, 1871-1878*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010, 36, 74; Photo of Green Evans: “Green E. Evans” TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/evans.htm>

efforts mirrored the on-the-ground educational activism of blacks folks across the state right after the Civil War. Near the Tennessee-Mississippi border, Evans started a school and used “his own hands to help lay the *very foundations* [sic] of [the] school.” Not only was Evans integral in building the schoolhouse, as well as the desks and benches on his own. Prior to erecting his own building, he taught eighty-seven students in a bush arbor for Sunday school. The school Evans built hosted fifteen children during the week and was a great success for two consecutive summers.²⁶⁹ As evidence of his commitment to education, Evans continued his role in black educational enterprise even after leaving Fisk and returning to Memphis. From 1878 to at least 1880, Evans was recorded as school teacher in Shelby County in both the city directories and Census records.²⁷⁰ Evans determination apparent as a school teacher was transferrable to his political career, especially as it related to black education.

Unlike the other Samuel McElwee and William Fields, Green Evans had significant political experience, from which he had also experienced his share of political scandal, prior to his election to the state’s General Assembly. After leaving Fisk in 1872, he was mentored by the black political boss of Memphis, Ed Shaw. Over the course of the next decade, he held several political offices in the city, including deputy wharf master and mail agent.²⁷¹ Most notably, Evans was a city councilman from between 1877 and 1880.

²⁶⁹ Gustavus D. Pike, *The Jubilee Singers: And Their Campaign for Twenty Thousand Dollars*. Boston, MA: Lee & Shepard, 1873, 69.

²⁷⁰ A.E. Sholes, *Directory of the City of Memphis, for 1878*. Memphis, TN: S.C. Toof & Co., 1878; A.E. Sholes, *Directory of the Taxing District of Memphis, for 1879*. Memphis, TN: S.C. Toof & Co., 1879; Tennessee. Shelby County. 1880 Census, population schedule. Digital images. Ancestry.com. February 15, 2018. <http://ancestryheritagequest.com>

²⁷¹ A.E. Sholes, *Directory of the City of Memphis, for 1876*. Memphis, TN: Boyle and Chapman, 1876; A.E. Sholes and C.F. Weatherbe. *Sholes’ Memphis Directory of 1882 and Guide to the Taxing District, Shelby Co., Tenn.* Memphis, TN: S.C. Toof & Co., 1882. Ward, *Dark midnight when I rise*, 395.

Ironically, Evans was elected to the former seat of Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest.²⁷²

Even in his success, Evans was not afraid to hold a dissenting opinion with the broader Republican party. As a mail agent in 1882, white Republicans forcibly removed him from his position. According to the *Memphis Appeal*, the Republicans in the city were set on “bulldozing every colored man who dares to disobey the orders of the officeholding overseers.” Green Evans had not disobeyed any of the orders of the party’s gatekeepers though. In fact, the paper described him as a “zealous, active working Republican partisan” who had been “faithful and efficient in the discharge of his duties as mail agent.” While Green Evans did not disobey the orders required of his role, he did go against the accepted partisan position of the prolonged state debt controversy. Evans had sided with the low-taxers and voted against the attempts by Republicans to readjust the state debt, thus justify his removal. The *Memphis Daily Appeal* described his removal as a “scandal to the politics of America.”²⁷³ By the time he served in the state legislature in 1885, Evans’ character appeared outweigh any opposition to his prior dissent with the party position. As a state legislator, Evans was described as an “able Representative” who was “polite and deferential to the House and to the Speaker, and [well liked].”²⁷⁴

In the General Assembly, Green Evans, like the other two teachers-turned-legislators, introduced legislation that demonstrated his commitment to the education of black children in Tennessee; however, his course of action differed from that of the others. On one hand, both McElwee and Fields had supported and developed legislation, the Blair

²⁷² Ward, *Dark midnight when I rise*, 396; “Green E. Evans” TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/evans.htm>

²⁷³ “The Removal of Green Evans,” *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, 10/10/1882.

²⁷⁴ Whitson, *Personal Sketches*, 91-92.

Bill resolution and compulsory school attendance, respectively, that would ultimately improve education for both black and white children. The legislation that Green Evans submitted, on the other hand, would solely improve black education, and potentially signaled an acceptance of the status quo of segregated schooling. In February of the 44th General Assembly, Evans submitted legislation to “provide for appointment of an Assistant Superintendent of public instruction” who would specifically be responsible for the black common schools. This role was also to be held by a black person, whose offices would be headquartered in Memphis.²⁷⁵

Though the bill was ultimately tabled, what was particularly important was the what the introduction of such a bill meant in the first place.²⁷⁶ Historian Joseph Cartwright has argued rather simply that efforts to appoint a black assistant superintendent represented “both a tacit acceptance of the segregation in public schools and a desire to have black schools administered by blacks.”²⁷⁷ While this bill could have been read as an acceptance of segregation, even if only implied, just a decade earlier, the leaders of the black community were advocating for equality in education, which included mixed schooling. This filing of this bill had to have represented a more nuanced context.

Black educational efforts outside of the legislature illustrated a particular on-the-ground perspective of schooling. As Evans was developing his legislation, the South and Tennessee, more specifically, saw a growing push for black teachers and black-operated educational facilities. Although the widespread advocacy for black teachers in Tennessee

²⁷⁵ Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 112; “Bills Filed by the 19th Century African American Legislators in the Tennessee General Assembly,” TSLA Digital Collection, <http://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/billsfiled.htm>

²⁷⁶ *House Journal 1885*, 593.

²⁷⁷ Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 113.

began as early as 1869, the combination of the increasing amount of qualified teachers from the nation's black colleges and 1875 Civil Rights Act omission of schooling in its accommodations led black southerners to petition for control of their schools.²⁷⁸ Black requests in to take over their schools were Tennessee were slowly honored, and by the end of the 1880s, black teachers had replaced many white teachers in schools that taught black children.²⁷⁹ The Pearl School, in Nashville, was the last black school in the city to be completely staffed by black faculty in 1887.²⁸⁰ The city's black paper, *The Tennessee Star*, demonstrated their enthusiasm with the change, by writing that they "regarded the turning over of Pearl School to colored teachers a thing worthy of thankfulness."²⁸¹ The sentiment of *The Tennessee Star* illustrated the context in which Green Evans introduced his legislation. While black Tennesseans may have accepted segregation as the status quo of education, they did not accept education in its current administrative and instructional structure. Rather, black folks once again sought to take control of their own education. With this in mind, Evans, as former teacher himself, introduced legislation that was also in sync with those efforts. Green Evans' legislation was more inward facing for black folks than that of Samuel McElwee and Williams Fields, but what was constant among them was their persistent and passionate attempts to use their positions as a platform for educational activism.

²⁷⁸ Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race relations in the urban South, 1865-1890*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, 172-173.

²⁷⁹ Rabinowitz, *Race relations in the urban South*, 173-177.

²⁸⁰ Rabinowitz, *Race relations in the urban South*, 177.

²⁸¹ "Our Protest," *The Tennessee Star*, 11/25/1887.

The End of An Era

When Samuel McElwee geared up to campaign for reelection to his fourth consecutive term as the state legislative representative of Haywood County, he was met with strong opposition for the first time. In November 1888, white supremacists antagonized voters on election day at various polling locations in the same manner as the Ku Klux Klan and other paramilitary groups and roved the county with rifles in order to threaten anyone who did not support an all-white ticket. Even after a day of intimidation, more white repressionist showed up at night armed with various weapons with the intent “to squelch any inclinations among the defeated Republicans to rise.” The white supremacists would see their expected result, and Samuel McElwee did not get reelected to the state legislature. McElwee only received 732 votes, which was 1500 less than his average in the last three elections.²⁸² William Fields and Green Evans were only in the legislature for one assembly, but Samuel McElwee had been a staple in the caucus of black state legislators throughout the 1880s. The end of his tenure signaled both the end of an era and the beginning of yet another retaliation to black progress by white Tennesseans. Not only was Samuel McElwee not returning to the state legislature in 1889, but there would also be no black man entering the doors of the lower state house, as an incumbent or otherwise.

Black Tennessean mobilization around black politicians had become too threatening for white people in the state, both Republican and Democrat, by the end of the decade. In 1889, Colonel T.B. Edington gave a Memorial Day speech in Memphis, in which he maintained that there was “an irrepressible conflict between white suffrage and negro

²⁸² Couto, Richard A. *Lifting the veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993, 68-69.

suffrage.” In what became a famous speech reported on by newspapers across the nation, the Republican and former Union officer declared that “the enactment of negro suffrage was the great crime of the age.”²⁸³ Much of his anguish was directly squarely at the trend in Memphis and other cities and counties with high percentages of black voters to support black candidates. He argued that black folks would never “attain to that position of superiority that will permit [their] vote ever to become anything but a race vote.”²⁸⁴ The ability of black Tennesseans to rally around black politicians had obviously threatened him as well. He expressed concern of “domination of the white race by the blacks,” an occurrence the he deemed would be “white slavery.”²⁸⁵

Colonel Edington’s speech represented the fears of white Tennesseans and white southerners broadly who saw their dreams of a white-dominated democracy in danger because of the results of black suffrage. Furthermore, the mobilization around black candidates that manifested from black suffrage led white folks to feel a loss of control of the political direction of the South. Much of the opposition of black suffrage came from frustration the fact that it appeared no matter what, black people always voted by a “racial standard.”²⁸⁶ Risking any loss of white domination was not an option. In Tennessee – and across the South – the only reasonable option became black disenfranchisement.²⁸⁷

As the primary recourse to regain political superiority, the Democratic legislature of Tennessee, with support from moderate Republicans, legally disenfranchised the same group of people that had just be enfranchised two decades before. In 1889, the state

²⁸³ *Pulaski Citizen*, 6/13/1889; “Crusade Against the Negro,” *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, 6/10/1889.

²⁸⁴ “Crusade Against the Negro,” *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, 6/10/1889.

²⁸⁵ “Crusade Against the Negro,” *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, 6/10/1889.

²⁸⁶ Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 202.

²⁸⁷ Rabinowitz, *Race relations in the urban South*, 305.

legislature passed a voter-registration law that was intended to affect black votes significantly. The law first required that voters register for an election at least twenty days prior. Any voter who did not register by the twenty-day deadline would not be eligible to vote.²⁸⁸ Moreover, the law introduced the Australian secret ballot system, which listed candidates alphabetically by office without any party signifiers or symbols. The law also prevented an outside help for voters, stressing that the ballot must be independent and secret. The 1889 registration law targeted illiterate voters, of which black Tennesseans made up the greatest proportion. By 1890, illiteracy rates had declined significantly, but 54.2% of black citizens above the age of ten were still illiterate. The state legislature was intent on stifling the black vote; so much so that they only initiated the legislature in counties of Shelby and Davidson and the cities of Knoxville and Chattanooga, as the urban centers of the state. This was a move to target some of the areas of the state with large black populations, while holding on to the white illiterate voters in rural areas.²⁸⁹ Black voters in rural areas were likely intimidated similarly to those in McElwee's home of Haywood County.

In efforts to completely obliterate the influence of the black vote, the legislature also reinstated poll taxes in 1890. The tax law was initially written into the 1870 constitution but was reversed in 1873 after politicians began paying for their voters' poll taxes just ahead of elections. The 1890 law set poll taxes at two dollars, which was too expensive for both black voters and the Republicans that often supported.²⁹⁰ With that, the white leaders

²⁸⁸ "The Registration Law," *Southern Standard*, 4/6/1889.

²⁸⁹ Rabinowitz, *Race relations in the urban South*, 326-327; Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 217-219.

²⁹⁰ Rabinowitz, *Race relations in the urban South*, 325-326.

of the state had effectively suppressed the black vote and influence for years to come, and there would not be another black state legislator in Tennessee until 1965.

Although Fields and Evans never had a fighting chance to be a state representative again and McElwee was ousted out of his seat after 1888, these three legislators and the other nine men that served alongside them remained significant symbols of progress and the understanding of citizenship through political representation and educational advocacy. In 1887, Knoxville's black newspaper, the *Negro World*, published an article entitled "Retrogression or Progression?" in an assessment of the condition of black folks in Tennessee, and the South more broadly. The author argued that the black man had seen a significant amount of progress from when his mind was "wrapped in the darkness of ignorance" some thirty years prior under slavery. As a sign of the progress alluded to, the author noted the "institutions of learning filled with competencies of [their] own color" and colleges that produced graduates "competent to adorn any position." At the end of the article, the author proclaimed that despite naysayers who thought progress was slow, the prospects of black futures were still high. The author charged readers to "march onward, overcoming all obstacles" and "cultivate the desire for wisdom, stopping never in [their] march."²⁹¹

Samuel McElwee, William Fields, and Green Evans were both embodiments of, and integral to furthering, the progress that this *Negro World* author depicted. From slaves to teachers and legislators, each of them had paved the way to educational attainment and citizenship for black children across the state. Though many of their efforts were not successful, their presence in the legislature was the result of local efforts to mobilize that

²⁹¹ "Retrogression or Progression?," *The Knoxville Negro World*, 10/15/1887.

would be built on for generations to come. Furthermore, the legislation they developed kept black education at the forefront of black politics, which would make education a political imperative even after they left state political office. The late-1880s voting legislation was one the “obstacles” the article described. Even after the institutionalization of Jim Crow, the work that these former teachers did in the state legislature would allow the march towards uninhibited citizenship and equal education to continue.

Conclusion

“Our future is in our own hands,” the journalist who wrote the 1887 “Retrogression or Progression?” article in Knoxville’s *Negro World* claimed. This journalist proclaimed black ownership of their future despite the fact that just over two decades before many African Americans had been enslaved, and even after freedom, progress had not moved as swiftly as many black folks in the state had hoped.²⁹² Yet, the journalist’s sentiment mirrored the hope and determination of the first black Tennesseans to convene at the 1865 State Convention of Colored Men just as they were starting to reckon with their political power as freedpeople. With the chains of slavery broken, the possibilities of the future seemed endless.

The journalist and the men at the 1865 Convention were also aligned on the importance of education when it came to their future potential. Just as the convention delegates made education one of their key principles for freedom and citizenship, the *Negro World* writer emphasized how the increase in educational opportunities since slavery had equipped black folks to push forward. “Where there is intellect, there is power,” he wrote.²⁹³ Black education led to black power. That connection between intellect and power was what motivated the push for education by the black folks across the South. In Tennessee, it motivated black teachers, black convention delegates, and black state legislators from Emancipation until the dawning of Jim Crow in the 1890s, and thereafter, to ensure that all of the black children of the state and equal, adequate access to education.

²⁹² “Retrogression or Progression?,” *The Knoxville Negro World*, 10/15/1887.

²⁹³ “Retrogression or Progression?,” *The Knoxville Negro World*, 10/15/1887.

Black folks' discourse around the importance of education and its relation to power, politically and otherwise, grounded this thesis. Black Americans made these connections long before Emancipation, but in the two and half decades following the Civil War, educational activists strove to actualize a concept already understood. Educational activism was integral to the development of black politicking as freedpeople both adjusted to and asserted their new place in a society built on their servitude. Additionally, once the 14th amendment was ratified, educational activism helped blacks folks both conceptualize and realize the meaning of their citizenship. In fact, black politicking and citizenship went hand-in-hand. Black politicking was the acting out of the rights of citizenship, while citizenship gave the grounds to make claims on the government for education and other issues in the first place.

The *Negro World* article demonstrated black Tennesseans' efforts to ensure that their children attained an education were not inevitable; the repression that followed every attempt to improve black education was not inevitable either. From 1865 to 1890, black Tennesseans who engaged in educational enterprises endured physical violence from the Ku Klux Klan, their sympathizers, and other rebel groups bent on reestablishing the white supremacist status quo that slavery had afforded them. Outside of physical violence, the state's political environment left black Tennesseans at the will of the highly partisan and variable legislature. Over the course of the twenty-five year period, the state legislature both passed and repealed laws that would provide for black education, passed legislation that would make national civil rights provisions defunct in the state, and legally disenfranchised black folks after initially giving them the right to vote. Regardless, as a part

of the evolution of their politicking, black Tennesseans intensified and adapted their educational activism to continue their fight in spite of violence and political changes.

Even after 1890, Black Tennesseans, and black folks across the South, would continue to use their traditions of educational activism to shape their present. Moreover, many of the methods of black politicking that arose in the twentieth century built upon those that had been developed in the aftermath of the Civil War when concepts of freedom, citizenship, and political power were all very new. As black folks continued to advocate for the government to recognize their rights as citizens in the next century, education would continue to be their weapon. Education did not only provide a mechanism for envisioning citizenship; education provided power.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archival Collections

Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

John Eaton Papers

William Gannaway Brownlow Papers

DeWitt Clinton Senter Papers

This Honorable Body: African American Legislators in 19th Century Tennessee Digital Collection

Rubenstein Rare Book and Material Library, Duke University., Durham, North Carolina.

Tennessee Broadside Collection 1861-1920

Special Collections, Fisk University Library, Nashville, Tennessee.

James Dallas Burrus Collection

John Mercer Langston Collection

James Carroll Napier Collection

Newspapers

Brownlow's Knoxville Whig

Chicago Tribune

The Christian Recorder

The Citizen and Press

Cleveland Gazette

Colored Tennessean

Knoxville Daily Chronicle

The Knoxville Negro World

Maryville Republican

The Memphis Daily Appeal

Memphis Avalanche

Morristown Gazette

Nashville Union and American

National Anti-Slavery Standard

New York Freeman

New York Globe

The New York Herald

Pulaski Citizen
Reading Times
Southern Standard
The Tennessee Star
Washington Bee
Weekly Louisianian
The Weekly Pelican
The Whig and Tribune

Published Primary Sources and Government Documents

Acts and Resolutions of the State of Tennessee passed at the extra session of the thirty-fifth general assembly, convened at Nashville, July 27th, 1868. Nashville, TN: S.C. Mercer, 1868.

Acts of the State of Tennessee, passed at the second adjourned session of the thirty-fourth general assembly for the years 1866-67. Nashville, TN: S.C. Mercer, 1866.

Acts of the State of Tennessee passed at the first session of the thirty-sixth general assembly for the year 1869-70. Nashville, TN: Jones, Purvis & Co., Printers of the State, 1870.

Acts of the State of Tennessee passed by the third session of the thirty-sixth general assembly for the year 1870-1871 Nashville, TN: Jones, Purvis & Co., Printers of the State, 1871.

Acts of the State of Tennessee, passed by the thirty-eighth general assembly. 1873. Nashville, TN: Jones, Purvis & Co., Printers to the State, 1873.

Acts of the State of Tennessee, passed by the forty-second general assembly. 1881. Nashville, TN: Tavel & Howell., Printers to the State, 1881.

Alvord, John Watson. *First -- Tenth Semi-Annual Reports on Schools and Finances of Freedmen, January 1, 1866 - July 1, 1870.* US Government Printing Office.

Appendix of the House Journal of the forty-fourth general assembly of the State of Tennessee, first session, 1885. Nashville, TN: Albert B. Tavel, Printer of the State, 1885.

Blair, Henry William, and United States. Congress. *The Education Bill: by Henry W. Blair.* Washington, D.C.: [s.n.], 1887. *Nineteenth Century Collections Online.*

Dow, Harlow and F.P. Dow. *Dow's Memphis Directory for 1885*. Memphis, TN: Public Ledger Job Print, 1885.

Eaton, Jr., John. Annual report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee *for the scholastic year ending October 7th, 1869*. Nashville, Tenn.: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1869.

Fleming, John. Annual report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee *for the scholastic year ending August 31st, 1874*. Nashville, Tenn.: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1874.

Hubbard, George. *A History of the Colored Schools of Nashville, Tennessee*. Wheeler, Marshall & Bruce, 1874. Rubenstein Library. Durham, NC.

Journal of the house of representatives of the state of Tennessee, forty-second general assembly of the State of Tennessee. Nashville, TN: Tavel & Howell, 1881.

Journal of the house of representatives of the state of Tennessee, forty-third general assembly of the State of Tennessee. Nashville, TN: Albert B. Tavel, Printer of the State, 1883.

Journal of the house of representatives of the state of Tennessee, forty-fourth general assembly of the State of Tennessee. Nashville, TN: Albert B. Tavel, Printer of the State, 1885.

Journal of the house of representatives of the state of Tennessee, forty-fifth general assembly of the State of Tennessee. Nashville, TN: Marshall & Bruce, Printer of the State, 1887.

Journal of the proceedings of the convention of delegates elected by the people of Tennessee: to amend, revise, or form and make a new constitution, for the state. Nashville: Jones, Purvis & Co., Printers to the State, 1870.

Killebrew, Joseph Buckner. Report of Hon. Wm. Morrow, Superintendent of Public Instruction, *ex officio, to the called session of the Thirty-seventh General Assembly of the State of Tennessee: embracing a report by the Assistant Superintendent, J.B. Killebrew*. Nashville, TN, 1872.

Northrop, Henry Davenport. *The College of Life: Or, Practical Self-educator; a Manual of Self-improvement for the Colored Race... Giving Examples and Achievements of Successful Men and Women of the Race... Including Afro-American Progress Illustrated. The Whole Embracing Business, Social, Domestic, Historical and Religious Education*. Chicago: Chicago Publication and Lithograph Co., 1895.

Paine, Thomas. Annual report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee *for the scholastic year ending August 31st, 1883*. Nashville, Tenn.: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1883.

Paine, Thomas. Annual report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee *for the scholastic year ending August 31st, 1884*. Nashville, Tenn.: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1884.

Pike, Gustavus D. *The Jubilee Singers and their campaign for twenty thousand dollars*. Boston, MA: Lee & Shepard, 1873.

Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored Men of the State of Tennessee, :with the addresses of the convention to the white loyal citizens of Tennessee, and the colored citizens of Tennessee. : Held at Nashville, Tenn., August 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th, 1865, ColoredConventions.org, Nashville, TN, 1865.

Proceedings of the State Convention of the colored citizens of Tennessee, held in Nashville, Feb. 22d, 23d, 24th & 25th, 1871., ColoredConventions.org, Nashville, TN, 1871.

Proceedings of the National Conference of Colored Men of the United States, Held in the State Capitol at Nashville Tennessee, May 6, 7, 8 and 9, 1879. ColoredConventions.org, Washington, DC: R.H. Darby, 1879.

The Republican party in Tennessee reorganized. To the Republicans of Tennessee and the United States.: Memorial, resolutions and proceedings had at a convention held at the Capitol, Nashville, February 16th, 1870, together with the speeches of Hons. A. J. Fletcher and J. O. Shackelford. Nashville, TN: 1870.

Senate Journal of the First Session at the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, 1865. Nashville, TN: S.C. Mercer, 1865.

Sholes, A.E. *Directory of the City of Memphis, for 1876*. Memphis, TN: Boyle and Chapman, 1876.

Sholes, A.E. *Directory of the City of Memphis, for 1878*. Memphis, TN: S.C. Toof & Co., 1878.

Sholes, A.E. *Directory of the Taxing District of Memphis, for 1879*. Memphis, TN: S.C. Toof & Co., 1879.

Sholes, A.E. and C.F. Weatherbe. *Sholes' Memphis Directory of 1882 and Guide to the Taxing District, Shelby Co., Tenn*. Memphis, TN: S.C. Toof & Co., 1882.

Sholes, A.E. *Sholes' Memphis Directory of 1884 and Guide to the Taxing District, Shelby Co., Tenn.* Memphis, TN: S.C. Toof & Co., 1884.

Simmons, William J., and Henry McNeal Turner. *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising*. No. 247. Cleveland, OH: GM Rewell & Company, 1887.

Smith, Frank. Annual report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee for the scholastic year ending June 30th, 1888. Nashville, Tenn.: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1888.

Smith, Frank. *Annual report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee for the scholastic year ending June 30th, 1889*. Nashville, Tenn.: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1889.

Trousdale, Leon. *Annual report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of Tennessee for the scholastic year ending August 31st, 1878*. Nashville, Tenn.: Dept. of Public Instruction, 1878.

Tennessee. Davidson County. 1870 U.S. Census, population schedule. Digital images. Ancestry.com. February 15, 2018. <http://ancestryheritagequest.com>

Tennessee. Haywood County. 1870 U.S. Census, population schedule. Digital images. Ancestry.com. February 15, 2018. <http://ancestryheritagequest.com>

Tennessee. Shelby County. 1880 U.S. Census, population schedule. Digital images. Ancestry.com. February 15, 2018. <http://ancestryheritagequest.com>

United States Congress House Select Committee on the Memphis Riots. *Memphis Riots and Massacres*. Washington, DC: The Committee, 1866.

"United States, Freedman's Bank Records, 1865-1874." Digital images. Ancestry.com. February 15, 2018. <http://ancestryheritagequest.com>

Weatherbe, G.F. *Directory of the Taxing District of Memphis, Shelby County, Tenn., 1883*. Memphis, TN: Rogers & Co., Book and Job Printers and Publishers, 1883.

Whitson, L.D. *Personal Sketches of Members of the Forty-fourth General Assembly of* Memphis, TN: Rogers & Co., Book and Job Printers and Publishers, 1883.

Secondary Sources

- Alexander, Thomas Benjamin. *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1950.
- Anderson, James D. *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- Anderson, Toni P. "*Tell Them We are Singing for Jesus*": *The Original Fisk Jubilee Singers and Christian Reconstruction, 1871-1878*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010.
- Ayers, Edward L. *Southern Crossing: A History of the American South, 1877-1906*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011.
- Bank, Steven A. "Anti-Miscegenation Laws and the Dilemma of Symmetry: The Understanding of Equality in the Civil Rights Act of 1875." *U. Chi. L. Sch. Roundtable 2* (1995): 303-344.
- Barkley Brown, Elsa. "Negotiating and transforming the public sphere: African American political life in the transition from slavery to freedom." *Women Transforming Politics: An Alternative Reader* (2000): 343-76.
- Binning, F. Wayne. "The Tennessee Republicans in Decline, 1869-1876: Part I." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1980): 471-484.
- Binning, F. Wayne. "The Tennessee Republicans in Decline, 1869-1876: Part II." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1981): 68-84.
- Bullock, Henry Allen. *History of Negro education in the south*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Butchart, Ronald E. *Northern schools, southern Blacks, and reconstruction: Freedmen's education, 1862-1875*. No. 87. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1980.
- Butchart, Ronald E. *Schooling the freed people: Teaching, learning, and the struggle for black freedom, 1861-1876*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Cartwright, Joseph H. *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880's*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1976.

- Couto, Richard A. *Lifting the veil: A political history of struggles for emancipation*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993.
- Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt. *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a history of the part which black folk played in the attempt to reconstruct democracy in America, 1860-1880*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013.
- Ernest, John. *A Nation Within a Nation: Organizing African-American Communities Before the Civil War*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.
- Folmsbee, Stanley J. "The Origin of the First "Jim Crow" Law." *The Journal of Southern History* 15, no. 2 (1949): 235-247.
- Foner, Eric. *Reconstruction: America's unfinished revolution, 1863-1877*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Grantham, Dewey W. "Tennessee and Twentieth-Century American Politics." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (1995): 210.
- Green, John W. *Lives of the Judges of the Supreme Court of Tennessee, 1796-1947*. Knoxville, TN: Press of Archer & Smith, 1947.
- Green, Hilary. *Educational Reconstruction: African American Schools in the Urban South, 1865-1890*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016.
- Going, Allen J. "The South and the Blair Education Bill." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44, no. 2 (1957): 267-290.
- Hahn, Steven. *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Hart, Roger L. *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1975.
- Holmes, Jack DL. "The underlying causes of the Memphis Race Riot of 1866." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* (1958): 195-221.
- LeForge, Judy Bussell. "State Colored Conventions of Tennessee, 1865-1866." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2006): 230-253.

- Logan, Rayford Whittingham. *The Negro in American life and thought: The nadir, 1877-1901*. New York: Dial Press, 1954.
- Lovett, Bobby L. "Memphis Riots: white reaction to blacks in Memphis, May 1865-July 1866." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1979): 9-33.
- Marzen, Chad G. "Charles Sumner: History's Misunderstood Idealist." *Okla. City UL Rev.* 35 (2010): 607-624.
- McDill, Robert McKee, 1872-. *The Early Education of the Negro in America, with Emphasis on the Work of the McKee School in Tennessee*. Hastings, Neb. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1943.
- McFeely, William S. *Yankee Stepfather: General O.O. Howard and the Freedmen*. New York: WW Norton & Company, 1994.
- Murphy, L. E. "The Civil Rights Law of 1875." *The Journal of Negro History* 12, no. 2 (1927): 110-127.
- Neal, John Randolph. *Disunion and Restoration in Tennessee*. Albany, NY: Knickerbocker Press, 1899.
- Nieman, Donald G., ed. *African Americans and education in the South, 1865-1900*. New York: Garland, 1994.
- Patton, James Welch. *Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee, 1860-1869*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1934.
- Population Density, 1880. *Social Explorer, (based on data from U.S. Census Bureau; accessed February 15, 2018)*
- Rabinowitz, Howard N. *Race relations in the urban South, 1865-1890*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Rosen, Hannah. *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

Ryan, James Gilbert. "The Memphis Riots of 1866: Terror in a black community during Reconstruction." *The Journal of Negro History* 62, no. 3 (1977): 243-257.

Taylor, Alrutheus Ambush. *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880*. Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, inc., 1941.

"Tennessee Establishes Jim Crow" in Green, Robert P., ed. *Equal protection and the African American constitutional experience: a documentary history*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000, p. 129.

Vaughn, William Preston. *Schools for All: The Blacks and Public Education in the South, 1865--1877*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1974.

Ward, Andrew. *Dark midnight when I rise: the story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers*. New York: Amistad Press, 2001.

White, Deborah Gray. *Ar'n't I a woman?: Female slaves in the plantation South*. New York: WW Norton & Company, 1999.

Williams, Heather Andrea. *Self-taught: African American education in slavery and freedom*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

Wilson, Kirt H. *The Reconstruction Desegregation Debate: The Politics of Equality and the Rhetoric of Place, 1870-1875*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2002.

Woodward, C. Vann. *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913: A History of the South*. Vol. 9. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1981.

Van West, Carroll, ed. *Trial and triumph: Essays in Tennessee's African American history*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2002.