

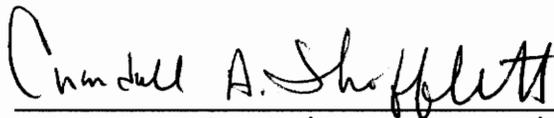
**BLACK RECONSTRUCTION IN NORFOLK, VIRGINIA, 1861-1870  
THE STRUGGLE FOR CHANGE**

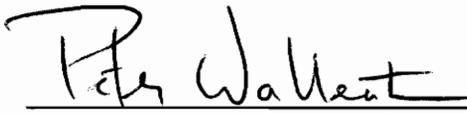
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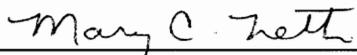
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**Black Reconstruction in Norfolk, Virginia, 1861-1870**  
**The Struggle for Change**

by

Susie Hawley Powell

Crandall A. Shifflett, Chairman

History

(ABSTRACT)

This thesis examines the role of blacks during Reconstruction in Norfolk, Virginia. The years of Reconstruction in Norfolk were years of dramatic change for blacks. Blacks seized the opportunity to exercise control over their own lives and pushed for equality with whites in economic, social, and political realms. This study shows Norfolk blacks were active agents whose actions shaped the course of Reconstruction in their city.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my committee for their time, criticism, and patience. I am also grateful to Linda Harris and Rhonda McDaniel for their continued help. Most of all, I would like to thank my families for their support.

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Reconstruction historiography underwent a vast revision during the 1960's. A central part of this revision involved reexamining the role of blacks in southern Reconstruction. Revisionists portrayed the period as revolutionary, citing the vast changes experienced by blacks in their social, political, and economic lives. Revisionists noted that blacks achieved these changes with aid from: radical Republicans, northern missionaries, the Union army, and Freedmen's Bureau. Public schools and equal citizenship including blacks were heralded as important legacies of the period.<sup>1</sup>

Revisionist findings were soon challenged by Postrevisionist scholars. These scholars found little revolutionary about the period. Instead Reconstruction was seen as a period of lost opportunity, characterized by the conservatism and indifference of Republican policymakers, missionaries, and Freedmen's Bureau agents toward the freedmen. Continued racism, from North and South, prevented blacks from achieving any real, lasting social, economic, or political gains. Postrevisionists found much continuity between Old South and New South.<sup>2</sup>

The most recent comprehensive work on Reconstruction by Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution (1988),

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<sup>1</sup>Eric Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," Reviews in American History 10 (December 1982): 83-86; Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877 (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), xxii-xxiv.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

departed from the continuity versus change focus of Revisionists and Postrevisionists. While Foner focuses on the political change experienced by blacks and whites during Reconstruction, he also examines the vast social and economic changes ushered in during the period. The significance of Foner's work is in its focus on "the centrality of the black experience." Blacks of Reconstruction are no longer portrayed simply as victims of Northern insensitivity and Southern racism. Foner reveals that the actions of blacks shaped the political and economic agenda of Reconstruction as strongly as the actions of white missionaries, armies, and politicians. In its focus on black self-reconstruction, this work served as a model for my thesis.<sup>3</sup>

Other studies that also focus on the role of blacks in Reconstruction that I utilized include: Leon Litwack's Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery (1981); Willie Lee Rose's Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment (1964); Peter Rachleff's Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865-1890 (1984); and Robert Eng's Freedom's First Generation: Black Hampton, Virginia, 1861-1890 (1979). These writers explored blacks' role in Reconstruction and, like Foner, demonstrated that black goals influenced the course of freedom. All writers are careful to point out that, while blacks played a vital role in Reconstruction, their progress was limited by racism and class. They also reveal it is essential to study

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<sup>3</sup>Eric Foner, Reconstruction, xxii-xxiv; Nell Irvin Painter, "Reviews: A Prize-Winning Book Revisited," Journal of Women's History 2 (Winter 1991): 132-33.

black goals and black actions in order to comprehend fully the Reconstruction period.

My thesis examines the role of blacks during Reconstruction in Norfolk, Virginia. This period in Norfolk was unique and remains important in black history. Both existing factors and foreign forces shaped the course of Reconstruction in Norfolk. These factors and actors included Norfolk's role as: urban center, Union army occupation, northern missionary religious and educational institutions; Freedmen's Bureau sponsored experiments in land, labor, and politics; and the efforts of blacks to mold new roles in their institutional, family, political, social, and economic lives. By confining my study to Norfolk, I discovered change driven by black forces. My examination of Norfolk supports Foner's findings that blacks were "active agents" in self-reconstruction and that their drive for "individual and community autonomy" shaped many outcomes of Reconstruction.<sup>4</sup>

Each chapter in this thesis (economic, social, and political) examines the changes experienced by Norfolk blacks during Reconstruction. The years of Reconstruction in Norfolk were years of dramatic change for blacks. Blacks seized the opportunity to exercise control over their own lives and pushed for equality with whites in economic, political, and social realms. The gains Norfolk blacks made toward social, political, and economic equality moved between complete upheaval and return to the status quo.

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<sup>4</sup>Foner, Reconstruction, xxiv-xxv.

Chapter One examines the economic changes blacks sought during Reconstruction. For blacks, the end of slavery meant the beginning of control of their own labor. By the thousands blacks around Norfolk deserted plantations and sought refuge in the city or within army camps. Many for the first time performed work for wages. Many entered new occupations, operating independently as hucksters, oystermen, seamstresses, and in other service industries. Government officers leased land to black farmers and their families. Land ownership became an important goal of blacks. Members of the black community joined together to form land and labor associations. At the close of the war, government officers supervised contracts between laborers and landowners, protecting the rights of free laborers. The system of free labor was now open to Norfolk blacks, and during Reconstruction blacks and whites vied for economic control.

Chapters Two and Three explore the social changes Norfolk blacks experienced during Reconstruction. It was in this private area more so than in economic or political areas that Norfolk blacks realized a full measure of independence. Immediately, blacks secured their family life. Families separated by slavery reunited, and newly formed families relished the end of the threat of forced separation. Family security in turn strengthened the Norfolk black community. At the center of the black community were black churches and black societies. Black churches and black societies departed from white dominated institutions and formed independent institutions with their own

doctrine. As well as serving the benevolent needs of the community, the churches and the societies became organizational centers of black political, economic, and educational campaigns. One of the most successful campaigns mounted by the black community was the educational campaign. With the aid of Northern missionaries, Norfolk blacks established a free school system for all blacks. The creation of the school system was one of the true accomplishments of Reconstruction, testifying to the black drive for self-improvement and the potential of black-white cooperation.

Chapter Four explores the political transformation blacks experienced during Reconstruction. In freedom, Norfolk blacks expected and demanded all the rights and protections of full citizenship. Although it took until 1867 for black men to gain suffrage, political activity was central to the community of black men and black women. At mass meetings men and women joined Union Leagues and endorsed Republican candidates. When suffrage was granted to black men, Norfolk blacks were elected to high office, aided in rewriting the Virginia State constitution, and served on local councils and chambers. Black politicians focused on issues of concern to their constituents: free public schools, civil rights, political rights, labor rights, public privileges, land distribution, abolishing public whipping and lynching, judicial fairness, homestead exemption, and taxes, forever pushing for radical reforms. The black political platform influenced Republican policy during Reconstruction and the

Readjuster period.

Throughout the study, I refer to the "black community" of Norfolk. This should not be interpreted as mob rule, rule by the same group at all times, or rule by a single, like-minded entity. The composition of the black population in Norfolk changed constantly throughout the years of Reconstruction. This population included many individuals. These individuals had different needs and different motivations. In the examples I found, I singled-out named and unnamed individuals and their contributions. Yet, the term "black community" is used often because in many situations the individuals joined together as a group centered in a church, family, or social organization. Not only did these individuals share common goals, they also shared housing, churches, and work environments. Additional factors of race and class drove blacks in Norfolk together as a group. The term "black community" is used because often blacks in Norfolk joined together in the fight for freedom.

Reconstruction in Norfolk begins in 1862 and ends in 1870. The year 1862 was selected as a beginning because the Army occupation of Norfolk was an early catalyst encouraging blacks to test the bounds of freedom. The introduction of Northern institutions in 1863 and 1865 stimulated blacks to push for change, growth, and freedom. While these early years witnessed important changes, the most dramatic changes occurred during formal Reconstruction in 1865. The federal support for legislative and organizational change gave added power to the

black desire for change. When armed with suffrage, blacks began a new important fight for equal rights and equal opportunity. In 1870, formal Reconstruction in Norfolk came to an end. This signaled not only the departure of federal forces and the restoration of state government, but the introduction of a new era of further change in which blacks would have to fight to retain the rights gained during Reconstruction.

The changes ushered in during Emancipation and Reconstruction forever redefined the role of blacks in Norfolk society. Reconstruction in Norfolk was driven forward by the actions of blacks themselves. During Reconstruction, blacks achieved measurable gains in economic, social, and political areas. Blacks wanted the vote, property, and education, as well as freedom in religion, social activity, and work, and they fought to get these things. Blacks in Norfolk armed themselves with a clear set of goals and a clear plan of action, and were only limited by racism and class. Clearly, Norfolk blacks struggled to gain freedom and independence and to redefine their role in society.

The central theme of this thesis is to outline the role and define the goals of Norfolk blacks in Reconstruction. As I indicated briefly in the chapter paragraphs, Norfolk blacks worked for independence in their political, social, and economic lives. They were most successful at achieving these goals when they united as a community and offered each other support and aid. For example, when the black community organized land

associations, members pooled their finances and purchased land collectively. This action enabled this group to fully control their labor. For other blacks independence meant having the freedom to worship openly or knowing one's children could never be forcefully taken away. While priorities varied among individuals, all shared the goal of control of one's own life.

Equality was an equally important goal of Norfolk blacks in Reconstruction. Again blacks felt equality should extend to their social, political, and economic lives. This goal of equality was expressed in their desire for suffrage and equal rights. As fully as blacks expected equal citizenship in freedom, they also expected equal access to economic opportunity. Blacks felt that codes and customs that had restricted their access to employment should be cast aside. They also felt payment based on color should end. Norfolk blacks also wanted their children to have the same opportunity for public education as white children. These examples illustrate the long-suppressed desire of blacks to overcome the longstanding system of caste and race and move to equal footing with Southern whites.

Because blacks did not live in a vacuum, this thesis also incorporates whites working with blacks and sometimes against blacks during this period of transition. Norfolk blacks enlisted the aid of the Union army, the American Missionary Association, the Freedmen's Bureau, Republicans and local white supporters throughout Reconstruction. With each group blacks articulated their goals of independence and equality and encouraged these

groups to further black progress through legal sanction and agency policy. Yet, conflict often arose as blacks pushed for radical measures, and these groups often achieved only moderate reforms. For example, blacks protested the return of confiscated land and defied Freedmen's Bureau orders to vacate. In another protest, Norfolk blacks boycotted missionary schools to signal their displeasure at the AMA's poor record of hiring black teachers. While blacks looked to these organizations for help, they were willing to challenge inequitable policies.

A final goal of this thesis is to place Norfolk in the broader historical context of the Reconstruction experience. Like their Southern sisters and brothers, Norfolk blacks lived in a world of race and caste dominance which constrained their best efforts to take full measure of their freedom. The course of Reconstruction in occupied Norfolk was similar to developments in occupied Hampton and other cities with substantial black populations like Alexandria, Richmond, and Petersburg. The strength of the black communities in these cities served as an essential system of mobilization and support. Overall, the course of Reconstruction in Virginia was mild, and Norfolk's Reconstruction was no exception.

## CHAPTER ONE: BLACK ECONOMICS

The economic conflicts raised by Emancipation and Reconstruction were numerous. The end of slavery signaled the beginning of a new system of labor. For blacks, this meant the freedoms of control and choice in labor. Blacks felt that submission to white domination and subordination should end with slavery. Most white employers were not willing to abandon the old system of labor. Employers fought vigorously to maintain the work discipline of slavery. The years of Reconstruction were marked by the conflicting aims of employer and employee over labor relations.<sup>1</sup>

Conflicts over labor had social implications. Labor is closely tied to the social order, and upheaval in one directly affects the other. During Reconstruction, blacks challenged the caste status of slavery and sought to improve their social standing through economic advancement. Again whites resisted change and sought to revive the labor and social system of slavery.<sup>2</sup>

The conflict over labor control raged throughout Reconstruction. Blacks acted as protagonists in their struggle

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<sup>1</sup>Foner, Reconstruction, 102-4, 170; Leon F. Litwack, Been In The Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 338.

<sup>2</sup>W.E.B. DuBois, Black Reconstruction in America (New York: Antheneum, 1935, 1985), 182, 670; Kenneth M. Stamp, The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877 (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 13-14.

for freedom, and whites acted as antagonists resisting alteration of the old order. The struggle was continuous and resulted in the development of several different labor systems during Reconstruction.

Many scholars have concentrated on the agricultural-labor systems that arose after slavery. The merits of the free labor systems -- wage, rental, sharecropping, and mixed -- continue to be debated. Yet most scholars agree that power remained in the hands of the landed and the controllers of credit. For the most part, freedmen remained landless laborers.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars of urban-labor systems have pointed to its numerous freedoms over rural slavery, but like rural slavery the dominance of white capital and ownership posed an obstacle to black economic advancement. The multitude of jobs open to blacks in urban areas during Reconstruction were manual labor positions. Wages remained low and unemployment high in cities. The potential strength of biracial labor unions crumbled against the rise of racial tensions. For the most part, freedmen remained propertyless laborers.<sup>4</sup>

During Reconstruction blacks lived in a world of caste and

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<sup>3</sup>Foner, Reconstruction, 399-409; Litwack, Been In The Storm So Long, 448.

<sup>4</sup>Peter J. Rachleff, Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865-1890 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 35, 192; Howard N. Rabinowitz, Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 63-96; John Blassingame, "Before the Ghetto: The Making of the Black Community in Savannah, Georgia, 1865-1880," Journal of Social History 6 (Summer 1973): 468-70.

race that constrained their best efforts to take full measure of the meaning of freedom. Their lack of access to capital and land delayed their rise to economic prosperity. In spite of these limits, during Reconstruction blacks created as much freedom as they could in their working lives.

### GENERAL ECONOMY

A single factor, geography, largely determined Norfolk's economic fate. Centered in the southeast of tidewater Virginia, Norfolk is bordered by the Elizabeth River on the south and the west and by Hampton Roads harbor on the northwest. The harbor serves as the gateway to the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Numerous creeks, waterways, and a swamp further constitute the city's predominant water environment. Geography predestined Norfolk's role as an Atlantic Coast seaport city.<sup>5</sup>

It stands to reason then, in 1860, Norfolk's economic vitality centered on its role as a commercial seaport. Norfolk was a central shipping center and the market center for tidewater Virginia and North Carolina. Products traded included cotton, tobacco, truck farm produce, and corn, the staples of Virginia agriculture. The Norfolk port also served as a major importer of manufactured goods from the North and overseas. Norfolk's surrounding marine-rich environment provided the city with a productive seafood enterprise. Although Norfolk remained an

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<sup>5</sup>Map of the city of Norfolk in 1876, Kirn Memorial Library, Norfolk, Virginia.

active center of seaport trade, the activity did not translate into prosperity for the majority of Norfolk residents.<sup>6</sup>

Businesses in the city were strongly tied to the staple and marine economy. Tobacco raised in the tidewater area was brought to Norfolk to ship to overseas markets, to ship North, and to supply the city's five cigar manufacturing facilities. Cotton too, was shipped overseas and North and also used as raw material in Norfolk's thirteen clothing shops. The surrounding marine-rich waters supplied twelve oyster businesses and two fisheries in the city. Products of wheat, lumber, and metals were used in city mills, smitheries, and shops. Like other urban centers in the South, Norfolk's citizens were able to establish a variety of service-based businesses including groceries, barber shops, and bars.<sup>7</sup>

#### SLAVE AND FREE BLACK LABOR

In 1860, Norfolk had a substantial labor force to supply its various industries and businesses. In 1860, the city had 14,620 inhabitants; of that number 10,290 were white and 4,330 were black. The black population was further subdivided into slaves (3,284) and free blacks (1,046). There were 1,331 male slaves and 1,953 female slaves and 359 free black men and 687 free black

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas J. Wertenbaker, Norfolk: Historic Southern Port (Durham: Duke University Press, 1931), 199.

<sup>7</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census, 1860: Products of Industry, Norfolk, Virginia (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1967), 277-82.

women.<sup>8</sup>

Roughly 8 percent (828) of Norfolk's white families owned or employed slaves. Of the number owning or employing slaves, over half (55.3% or 457) employed or owned only one or two slaves. While the majority of these slaves engaged in domestic service, others assisted their master in his trade and developed valuable skills. In either case, the course of the slave's daily routine was largely dictated by the mandate of the owner or employer.<sup>9</sup>

Hiring out a slave's labor was a common urban practice, especially among owners or employers with ten or more slaves. An 1845 city ordinance stated that hired-out slaves could receive one dollar for every day of employment. While most slaves hired to individuals in the city served as domestics, others worked in commercial operations. The 20 slaves of A.G. Newton hired out to work at the Atlantic Hotel. Similarly, the 14 slaves of Jasper Rowe were hired out to the West Point Steamboat Company. Many masters hired out their slaves to work as laborers on farms in Norfolk County. One of the city's largest slaveowners, Judge Baker, who owned thirty slaves, allowed many of them to hire out their own time. By hiring out their own time, Baker's slaves exercised a greater degree of control over their labor than other

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<sup>8</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census, 1860: Free Population, Norfolk, Virginia (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1967), 275-558.; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census, 1860: Slave Population, Norfolk, Virginia (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1967), 259-80.

<sup>9</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860: Slave Population, 259-80.

slaves.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, slavery remained a harsh institution, extracting much physical strength from slaves. Slave narratives collected by Virginia's Works Progress Administration workers offer a glimpse of the harsh labor conditions faced by slaves. Former Norfolk slave Marrinda Jane Singleton remembered the unending schedule of work during harvest time.

Dar was little time fer recreation 'fo' harvestin' time; de greater part of work was done in the field. After de crops had been gathered, we spent winter evenings and days 'round de big house gatherin' pine wood, pickin' cotton and corn seed for de coming year. Dar was no holidays or time fer restin'.

Other accounts by urban and rural domestics revealed the arduousness of being under master or mistress's control. Susan Broaddus, a Virginia slave, recalled her domestic tasks saying,

Was servin' gal fo' Missus. Used to have to stan' behin' her at de table an' reach her de salt an' syrup an' anything else she called fo'.

The concentration of tasks assigned to slaves, whether field or household, often involved continuous physical routines performed under supervision.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, slaves had little control over their labor. Statutes reinforced further an owner's control over slave labor

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid; Richard C. Wade, Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 22-67, 266; Claudia Dale Goldin, Urban Slavery in the American South (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 30.

<sup>11</sup>Charles L. Perdue Jr., Thomas E. Barden and Robert K. Phillips, eds., Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), 267, 55.

and social behavior. Legal Codes in Virginia restricted slaves from assembly, non-supervised religious worship, reading, writing, and intermarriage and specified punishment by stripes (whipping).<sup>12</sup>

Free blacks faced many of the same legal restrictions imposed upon slaves, as well as additional restrictions sanctioned by law or custom. Many of these restrictions prohibited free blacks from achieving economic independence. Laws prohibited free blacks from selling spirits or keeping a saloon. In Norfolk, free blacks could not obtain operation permits or licenses without a character reference from a white citizen. Legal controls limited free blacks' social and economic progress.<sup>13</sup>

Free blacks found their economic freedom further curtailed by unequal punishment for legal violations. For traveling without her free register, Elizabeth Cuffee, a free black woman, was confined to jail. In order to pay her legal expenses of \$12.75, Cuffee was hired out at 10 cents a day by the sergeant in charge of her case. In addition, the sergeant was entitled to a 5 percent commission for hiring her labor. Restrictions and punishments confined free blacks to limited economic accumulation and often reduced them to a status of slavery.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Jane Purcell Guild, Black Laws of Virginia (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 71, 167.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 121; City of Norfolk, Order Book (Volume 41: 1861-1866), 95.

<sup>14</sup>City of Norfolk, Order Book, 11.

Legal restrictions, licensing fees, lack of education, lack of skills, prejudice, taxes, and lack of capital severely limited Norfolk's free blacks from entering the skilled trades in large numbers. Only 19 free black men in the 1860 Census listed trades as artisans (cooper, caulker, painter, brickmason, carpenter, plasterer, and shoemaker). Artisans typically earned a daily wage of \$1.75. Approximately 34 free black men listed occupations in the semi-skilled service trades (barbers, glaziers, confectioners, butcher, baker, bartender, cook, waiter, porter, and sexton). A small number of free black men, approximately 31, took advantage of the marine surroundings and worked as oystermen, boatmen, and seamen. Not surprisingly, the largest number of free black men, approximately 70, were employed as unskilled laborers or servants. Day laborers typically earned a daily wage of \$1.25, and boarding servants typically earned a daily wage of 85 cents. Draymen, hod carriers, hackmen, hucksters, wood sawyers, stackmen, laborers, launderers, and servants held physically strenuous jobs often reserved for blacks alone because of their intense physical demands. Only 15 free black men of working age did not list an occupation, indicating the economic necessity of working for survival in Norfolk's free black community.<sup>15</sup>

While free black men were often confined to the lower levels

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<sup>15</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860: Free Population, 275-558; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census, 1860: Social Statistics of the City of Norfolk (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1967).

of the employment pool, free black women, stigmatized by both race and sex, were limited to even fewer opportunities. Women were employed either in service occupations or as unskilled laborers. The range of occupations open to free black women in Norfolk was limited to laundress, servant, cook, seamstress, or nurse. These occupations involved long hours of strenuous physical labor and placed women in the employer's home where they were subjected to constant supervision as well as threats of physical violence. In addition, free black women were paid a lower rate than free black men and often less than white women engaged in the same service. While boarding male domestics were paid 85 cents a day, boarding female domestics were paid an average of 21 cents a day. Free black women had limited occupational pursuits and earned low wages, confining them to the lower levels of the economic scale.<sup>16</sup>

The small number of free blacks who owned real and personal property offered further evidence of the harsh economic conditions they faced. Only 53 free blacks acquired real and personal property cumulatively totaling \$15,055. Most of these free blacks were between 30-50 years old, had a steady semi-skilled occupation, and were male. Property values ranged from

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<sup>16</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860: Free Population, 275-558; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census, 1860: Social Statistics, Norfolk, Virginia (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1967), 273-78; Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 3.

\$10 to \$2,500 with a mean of \$284.<sup>17</sup>

Compared to other cities in Virginia in 1860, Norfolk did not stand out as an economically prosperous city for free blacks. In Fredericksburg, a smaller town, 21 free blacks owned real estate property compared to less than ten real estate property owners in Norfolk. In the more populous city of Richmond, five times as many free blacks owned property as did free blacks in Norfolk. Importantly, gains for free blacks in Fredericksburg and Richmond could be attributed to the overall economic health of these cities. Industry in Richmond particularly provided an increasing number of skilled job opportunities for free blacks. In Norfolk, the economic position of the majority of free blacks was restricted by the small number of industrial opportunities. The stagnant state of Norfolk's economy provided another obstacle to the growth and formation of a strong black economic structure.<sup>18</sup>

Slaves and free blacks alike wanted change in their economic status. They believed that change would come only when slavery ended and the enslaving limits placed on free blacks were abolished. The Civil War was the catalyst for such changes.

#### UNION OCCUPATION AND EARLY RECONSTRUCTION EXPERIMENTS

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<sup>17</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860: Free Population, 275-558.

<sup>18</sup>Luther Porter Jackson, Free Negro Labor and Property Holding in Virginia 1830-1860 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1942), 142; Ira Berlin, Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 248-49.

The Civil War ushered in many changes for blacks in Norfolk. Union troops captured Norfolk on May 10, 1862, and the city remained under Union Army control until April 1865. For the black community of Norfolk, these years were marked by a series of great changes. A number of important land, labor, and social experiments, forever altering the status of blacks, took place in and around Norfolk during the Civil War years. Experiments in free labor on government farms, soldiering for the Union Army, education and relief from Army and Northern missionaries, and growth of the black population all took place from 1862-1865.<sup>19</sup>

Beginning in 1861, slaves sensed their coming freedom. With the coming of the Civil War, many rural slaves claimed freedom and escaped to the cities and to Union lines. In the city, rural slaves sought not only an escape from harsh physical field labor, but also refuge in an established black community. Running away marked the first steps taken by slaves to secure freedom. Testing the boundaries of freedom in this way, slaves demonstrated their eagerness for freedom. Hereafter, slaves did not retreat from the course to secure independence.<sup>20</sup>

One of the first steps taken to alter the status of Southern blacks involved the actions of Benjamin Butler, Commander of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. In May 1861, Butler

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<sup>19</sup>Lenoir Chambers, "Notes on Life in Occupied Norfolk, 1862-1865," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 73 (April 1965): 133.

<sup>20</sup>Louis S. Gerteis, From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy Toward Southern Blacks 1861-1865 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), 7.

declared three escaped slaves at Fortress Monroe "contraband" of war. In July 1861, Congress reinforced Butler's decree with the First Confiscation Act, discouraging the return of fugitive slaves by Union soldiers. Within a year, in July 1862, Congress strengthened the Confiscation Act by forbidding the return of fugitive slaves and liberating the slaves of those serving in the rebellion. Later that year, September 1862, President Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation became effective January 1, 1863, forever freeing slaves in the rebel states. Because Norfolk was occupied by Union forces at the time of the Proclamation, Norfolk slaves were not freed by the Proclamation. Regardless, slaves in the area surrounding Norfolk abandoned bondage.<sup>21</sup>

The number of rural slaves fleeing to Norfolk increased dramatically upon the city's capture. George Neville, a white citizen of Norfolk, complained to his fiancée about the constant arrival of blacks in the city. Neville wrote,

There must be very few negroes left in this section of the country; thousands have come here from the neighboring counties of Virginia and North Carolina. They come in droves from twenty to a hundred.

Census figures taken by Union soldiers between July 1, and August 20, 1863, give an indication of the dramatic numbers of blacks fleeing to Union lines. Virginia Hayes Shepherd, a slave child

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<sup>21</sup>Ira Berlin, ed., Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie S. Rowland, associate eds., Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867, The Destruction of Slavery, Series I Volume I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 61-65.

whose mother brought her to Norfolk during the war, remembered the aura of freedom in Norfolk during the war.

We come to Norfolk durin' the war. Come for freedom an' [to] be safe. When the war was goin' on, Norfolk was full of soldiers, an' everythin' else. They either came to Norfolk or Hampton....Slaves wasn't quite free. Abe Lincoln said they was, but Lee hadn't surrendered yet. Mos' o' them thought they was free.

During this period, Union officers recorded 18,983 blacks in the counties of Norfolk, Nasmond, and Princess Anne. These numbers represent a dramatic increase from the prewar county population of approximately 6,000.<sup>22</sup>

In response to overcrowded conditions in the city, the Army established contraband camps at Craney Island and just outside Fort Norfolk. Palmer Litts, a missionary sent to Norfolk by the American Missionary Association (AMA), reported 1,200 contraband at the Craney Camp on December 1, 1862. Before the end of the month, Litts recorded the arrival of 300 additional contraband. The different commanders of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina had various plans for the contraband. While Generals Wool and Butler sought to utilize the labor of the contraband, General Dix made plans to transfer them North. The contraband rejected Dix's plans for Northern transfer, and he acquiesced.

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<sup>22</sup>Letters from George Neville to Nellie Newman, August 19, 1862, Special Collections Alderman Library, Charlottesville, University of Virginia; Perdue, Weevils in the Wheat, 262; Berlin, Freedom: The Destruction of Slavery, 91; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, 1870: Population Statistics (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 281.

Instead, Wool's and Butler's labor programs were adopted.<sup>23</sup>

Life within Union Army lines in Norfolk provided the first experiment in paid wage labor for former slaves. Blacks were employed as laborers paid with wages and rations. Blacks pursued a variety of skilled occupations as teamsters, mechanics, stevedores, scouts, and spies, and as such, rendered useful service to the Union Army. In some units, skilled black craftsmen received as much as \$15 a month payment. Unskilled blacks labored on trenches, fortifications, and other barricades, receiving payment of \$10 monthly. Black women served the ranks as laundresses, cooks, and nurses. While most women worked for rations for themselves and their families, some women received payment of \$5 monthly. For former slaves, the payment of wages for labor in the Army set the wage standard they agitated for in future employment.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most revolutionary measures taken by the commanders of the Union Army was the enlistment of black soldiers. In November 1863, Benjamin Butler enlisted blacks into the ranks of the Department of Virginia. When some Norfolk recruiters forced blacks into military service, the black

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<sup>23</sup>Letter from Palmer Litts to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, December 1, 1862, American Missionary Association Manuscripts (AMA), Virginia (New Orleans: Dillard University Microfilm, 1985); Berlin, Freedom: The Destruction of Slavery, 63-66.

<sup>24</sup>Ira Berlin, ed., Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie S. Rowland, associate eds., Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867, The Black Military Experience, Series II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 115.; Gerteis, Contraband to Freedman, 19-20.

community, with missionary support, protested. In response to black protest, Butler issued new guidelines for recruitment. Still, problems of impressment continued. Yet, voluntary enlistment of blacks from tidewater Virginia and North Carolina was high, with as many as 11,000 recruits. Once in the Army, blacks fought for equal pay, education, and equal treatment. The role of black soldiers in the "war for the liberation of slavery" led to new hope in the black community for transcending established boundaries in the future.<sup>25</sup>

Charles Grandy, a runaway slave who fled to Norfolk, worked for the Union Army in Norfolk in 1862. Grandy, who was hiding out in the countryside, was discovered by a Union soldier, who took him back to the camp where Grandy worked as a cook. The officers offered to pay Grandy wages for his work, but Grandy refused saying he would work for anything they could give him, no matter how small, as long as he didn't have to return to slavery. Eventually Grandy was recruited as a soldier in the 19th regiment of Wisconsin Company E. Within a year he was transferred back to Fortress Monroe, and he served there for a year. Grandy also served in the Navy for a year as a cutter boat serviceman on the U.S. Lawrence. Grandy remained in Norfolk after the war, working as a laborer in the Navy Yard.<sup>26</sup>

Like Charles Grandy, Cornelius Garner was a runaway slave who escaped to Norfolk and enlisted in the Union Army in 1864.

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<sup>25</sup>Berlin, Freedom: The Black Military Experience, 115.

<sup>26</sup>Perdue, Weevils in the Wheat, 113-18.

Garner recounted his wartime experiences with pride in his service.

I fit in de battle o' Deep Bottom on de James River wid de ole 38th regiment. We had colored sojers an' white officers. We licked de 'federate good an' made 'em treat [retreat] up to a Place called Chaff's farm. Never will I fergit dat battle....Our regiment was de fust into Richmond an' we was de fust to plant our colors on de capitol. All de Union sojers black er white 'ceived de same treatment den....After de war my regiment was sen' souf way down in Texas for to ketch a rebel general whut was still fightin'....Den I come home er back to Virginny an' left de a'my in 1867.

As a soldier in the Union Army, Garner fought to secure freedom for himself and for thousands of other slaves.<sup>27</sup>

Like their enslaved brothers, free blacks found work with Union forces. While employment with the Army and Navy offered a steadier and better work environment than many in-town opportunities, military assignments came at the cost of separation from families. On two separate occasions, Captain Wagner called for 239 black stevedores and General Dix required 300 black men to restore fortifications. While black men welcomed the opportunity for employment, they feared for the safety of the families they left behind. Responding to the request of the black community, Union officials provided guard service to families of servicemen.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Perdue, Weevils in the Wheat, 103.

<sup>28</sup>Letters from Bro. Green to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, May 27, 1863 and July 2, 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Rev. Coan to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, September 5, 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Berlin, Freedom: The Black Military Experience, 658.

Yet, even the Army could not provide protection from cold and disease for all needy families of servicemen. One missionary, Mary Watson, often visited her most promising students' families at home, and was frequently saddened by the conditions she found. In one report, she described the home of one of her male students. The student lived in a cellar with his mother and six brothers and sisters, while their father was serving in the Army. The family possessed only two old chests, two stools, one pine table, and one bed. The mother was able to draw rations only for the two youngest children. Still, the mother remained optimistic about her condition saying to Mary, "I'se glad now. I'se very poor now, but thank de Lord I'se free!" Mrs. Watson often reported similar conditions in other homes, homes with broken panes of glass and exposed areas. What outraged Mrs. Watson the most was that people charged as much as \$4 to \$6 rent per month for these cold, comfortless sheds, barns, and basements.<sup>29</sup>

The stepped up recruitment of black soldiers swelled the population in city camps. Conditions in the contraband camps around Norfolk were plagued by the economically destitute situation of the fleeing blacks and the limited resources of the Union Army. Containing thousands of people in a small area resulted in unsanitary and unsafe health conditions. At the Fort Norfolk and Craney Island camps, several families were crowded

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<sup>29</sup>Letter from Mary Watson to Rev. George Whipple, February 1865, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Rev. Beals to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, September 7, 1863, Portsmouth, AMA.

into cloth tents equipped only for four occupants. Shanties were erected from available resources and offered scant protection from exposure. In a short period of time, exposure led to sickness and death. Reports of fourteen deaths a day were not uncommon in the months of summer and early winter.<sup>30</sup>

Missionaries, government officers, and blacks worked together to combat poor conditions in the camps. Missionaries frequently requested clothing for the freedmen from northern supporters. Missionary John Oliver wrote, "The wants and destitution of this people emerging from the yoke of bondage call loudly to the people at the North. They want clothing of every description and need it soon." Blacks in the city's churches donated clothing and \$40 to aid the contraband. In addition, blacks agitated the Army and the missionaries for a hospital and medical care for the sick. The Army responded by confiscating a building and supplying rations to the sick, and the missionaries provided medical supplies. Still, the Norfolk Pest House only provided care to the most severe cases. Missionary John Oliver reported, "At Pest House there are over 380 of them in the worst condition that you can conceive human beings to be in." No Norfolk doctor offered medical care to the contraband. Because of inadequate care and supplies, children, the elderly, and the

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<sup>30</sup>Letter from John Oliver to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, December 30, 1862, Norfolk, AMA.

infirm suffered greatly in the camps.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, the Union Army provided the bulk of the aid for the contraband, yet missionary reports detailed incidents of abuse against the contraband at the hands of Union soldiers and officers. When General McClellan requested additional black laborers, officials in Norfolk used force to round up contraband. AMA missionary John Oliver described the impressment as "one of the most cruel acts of injustice and barbarity which has undertaken my notice since I have been in this rebellious state." The missionaries also reported abuses by soldiers, most commonly theft, from those who had so little to spare. Brother Brown reported that "the men...took horses and cows...took everything from the colored people and beat those that had nothing for them to take." Challenged by nature and victimized by Union forces, the contraband faced a difficult struggle for survival in the camps.<sup>32</sup>

In an effort to alleviate suffering and provide for better health conditions, the government transferred the contraband from camps to confiscated farms. In January 1863, 1,625 contraband resided at Craney Island. By March 1863, the Union Army transferred contraband from Craney Island to nearby farms in groups of 50 and 60. Only the aged, the infirm, and orphans did

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<sup>31</sup>Letter from Palmer Litts to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, December 12, 1862, Craney Island, AMA; Letters from John Oliver to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, 5, 17 December 1862, Fort Norfolk, AMA.

<sup>32</sup>Letter from John Oliver to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, December 30, 1862, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Bro. Brown to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, July 16, 1863, Norfolk, AMA.

not go to the farms, but to Ferry Point Orphan Asylum and Pest House in Norfolk. By the end of September 1863, the remaining contraband were transferred to facilities in the cities of Hampton and Norfolk.<sup>33</sup>

Harsh treatment at the hands of Union soldiers and civilians coupled with overcrowded conditions in the city led some blacks to retreat to the countryside. On the abandoned farms in the Norfolk County, individuals, families, and groups established subsistence farming practices, sometimes under military and missionary supervision. Blacks on the abandoned farms took control of their own lives and labor, establishing work routines suited to their needs.

Together contraband, missionaries, and Union officials worked to stabilize the contraband's life on the confiscated farms. After prompting from blacks and missionaries, government supervisors divided the farm land into ten-acre plots for cultivation. With few available tools, seeds, and livestock, blacks survived by subsistence farming. Blacks constructed additional housing in the form of new huts and repaired old slave quarters. Even with the additional housing, conditions on the farms remained crowded. Once again, blacks combatted conditions similar to those experienced in the camps, disease, lack of

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<sup>33</sup>Letters from W.O. King to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, 17 March, 30 September 1863, Craney Island, AMA; Letter from Bro. Brown to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, July 11, 1863, Norfolk, AMA.

clothing, poor shelter, and limited aid.<sup>34</sup>

On the farms under government supervision, blacks were divided into family work units or gang work units. In the initial years of these agricultural labor experiments, 1862-1863, workers received share payments for their labor. Through the urging of the black workers, government superintendents and overseers requested change of payment to wages of \$6 to \$8 per month. By 1864, blacks began renting farm land directly from the government, paying rent with shares and cash. In 1865, superintendents reported profits from farm production to the government. An average of 3,000 freedmen were employed on the government farms in Norfolk and Princess Anne counties. The experiments in wage labor, share payment, and fixed rental taking place on these farms foreshadowed postbellum practices.<sup>35</sup>

In Norfolk County, the Union government operated 27 farms with 3,785 acres of cultivated land. The government payment schemes varied from rental, share payments, tenancy, and DNA. On most government farms, supervision by a white superintendent or overseer remained common practice. Only one farm, Cook Farm, was operated exclusively by freedmen.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Letter from W. Henry Morris to Rev. George Whipple, February 24, 1864, Baxter Farm, AMA; Letters from T.P. Jackson to Rev. George Whipple, 7, 22 April, 13 October 1863, Wise Farm, AMA.

<sup>35</sup>Gerteis, Contraband to Freedman, 40-42.

<sup>36</sup>Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, List and Description of Houses and Lands in Norfolk City, June 1865 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1971); DNA schedules denote properties not farmed under a payment schedule.

Throughout the war years, the plight of blacks remained closely tied to the economic abilities of their white caregivers. When the Union forces needed the horses and mules used on the farms, they were taken regardless of protest from black farmers. Similarly, when the Union Army was short of cash, the farm laborers were the first not to receive their monthly earnings. Over time farm overseers and superintendents found it difficult to encourage blacks to labor beyond subsistence needs. Supervisor Mark Barker reported the laborers often asked, what was the use of working, when they did not believe they would ever receive any pay.<sup>37</sup>

The missionaries were highly critical of the government's disregard for blacks' needs during wartime. They fully supported the idea of using the farms to improve blacks' status, yet, they felt the government did not perform the full measure of its duty in securing the farms' success. Both the missionaries and the blacks were especially angered by the Union government's failure to protect the farms from looting and guerrilla attacks by Union soldiers and the white community. This issue especially caused the freedmen to question the Union's commitment to fulfilling their needs.<sup>38</sup>

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Government supervised and supplied subsistence farming.

<sup>37</sup>Letter from Professor Woodbury to Rev. George Whipple, September 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Mark M. Barker to Rev. George Whipple, November 3, 1863, Gayle Farm, AMA.

<sup>38</sup>Letter from Thomas P. Jackson to Rev. George Whipple, April 22, 1863, Rolleston Farm, AMA; Letter from Miss R.W. Smith to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, August 29, 1863, Gayle Farm, AMA; Letter from

Prompted by the government's shortcomings, the missionaries supplied materials to the freedmen whenever they could, but resolved themselves to make blacks self-sufficient. Supplies of clothes continued to be distributed among the young, aged, and infirm. Able blacks were required to pay for clothing. From this money, the missionaries would supply the freedmen with raw materials of cloth, leather, and tools. With these materials, skilled blacks furnished their farm community with clothes and shoes. One missionary, Rev. Bell, made a proposal to empower blacks economically. Since blacks did not receive credit at local stores, Rev. Bell proposed that blacks use AMA credit. Bell's plan was approved and blacks participated in the credit system.<sup>39</sup>

The black children of Norfolk suffered greatly during the war. Epidemics took the lives of children; 71 died of measles in September 1863 and 17 died of small pox in April 1864. Shortages of food and constant exposure also contributed to the mortality rate of black children. Reverend Beals lamented, "During the course of my service, I have followed scores of children to their graves, who, but for cold and hunger, would have been here

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Professor Woodbury to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, October 29, 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Bro. Morris to Professor Woodbury, March 2, 1864, Baxter Farm, AMA; Rev. W.S. Bell to Rev. George Whipple, March 10, 1864, Wise Farm, AMA.

<sup>39</sup>Letter from Thomas P. Jackson to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, October 13, 1863, Rolleston Farm, AMA; Letter from Rev. Coan to Rev. George Whipple, May 4, 1864, Wise Farm, AMA; Letter from Rev. W.S. Bell to Rev. George Whipple, February 15, 1864, Wise Farm, AMA.

today." Lobbying for help for needy children, the black community and the missionaries successfully obtained a facility at Ferry Point for a children's hospital and asylum. Miss Patton, matron of the asylum, staffed her facility with skilled black nurses from the local black population. In addition to administrating the asylum, Miss Patton traveled between the cities and the countryside, providing service to those too ill to travel to Ferry Point for care. On many return trips, she brought back severely ill children to be hospitalized.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the turbulent war years, blacks in Norfolk city and county worked for economic change and economic freedom. Slaves stole freedom by fleeing to Union lines. Once within Union lines, slaves advanced their economic status as paid wage laborers and soldiers. Blacks in the country initially farmed land for subsistence and later farmed the same land for profit. Some farmers eventually became economically self-sufficient enough to rent confiscated land from the Union government. Blacks throughout the area united to aid one another through times of want. This new sense of economic self-determination, born in the Civil War years, continued to grow in the years after the war.

#### FORMAL RECONSTRUCTION

April 1865 signaled the end of the Confederacy and the

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<sup>40</sup>Letter from Miss Pitts to William E. Whiting, September 23, 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Rev. Beals to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, September 7, 1863, Portsmouth, AMA; Letter from Miss Patton to William E. Whiting, April 24, 1864, Ferry Point, AMA; Letter from Orlando Brown to Miss Patton, February 20, 1864, Norfolk, AMA.

beginning of freedom for all blacks. In this new world, white employer and black employee struggled with each other over labor conditions. Blacks wanted equal access to land and employment, while landowners and employers wanted to consolidate their power of land and over labor. This struggle for control was waged throughout the years of Reconstruction.

Importantly, both Northern military forces and Northern missionaries continued to play a significant role in shaping the course of Reconstruction in Norfolk. While the war forever ended slavery, the Union government had not devised a concrete plan for blacks beyond emancipation. It had, however, created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) on March 3, 1865. The Freedmen's Bureau was charged with aiding the former-slaves in the transition to freedom. Its work was primarily social and economic in nature. The Virginia office of the Freedmen's Bureau began operations in June 1865, under the direction of Orlando Brown. Functions of the Virginia Bureau included: dispensing rations, supervising labor contracts, supervising court proceedings, and attending confiscated and abandoned property. Policies of the Bureau influenced the course of Reconstruction in Norfolk.<sup>41</sup>

Since the Freedmen's Bureau and the Union Army both came under the control of the War Department, it is not surprising that the early policies of the Freedmen's Bureau continued

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<sup>41</sup>BRFAL, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Virginia, 1865-1869 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1971).

functions the Union Army had performed in Norfolk during the war. The Norfolk Bureau's personnel consisted of Army officers and former missionaries, many of whom had served in the area during the war. Although familiar with the plight of blacks in the area, the Norfolk office of the Freedmen's Bureau remained confined by federal mandate when acting on behalf of the freedmen.<sup>42</sup>

Issuing rations was one of the chief services the Freedmen's Bureau provided the blacks of Norfolk. Destitution remained a condition facing many blacks in the first years of freedom. Charles Grandy, a black serviceman, recalled the widespread destitution in Norfolk at the close of the war.

Nobody owned de niggers; so dey all come to Norfolk, look lak to me. Hundreds hungry an' wid out house to sleep in was walkin' 'roun' beggin'. De army fed a lot o' dem, but it couldn' feed all. We use to steal bread an' stuff it in our shirts when we come off duty. When we git out, we would give it to de hungry women an' babies. Lawd! Dey didn' have no food attall. Women an' chillun use to die two an' three a day f'om bein' hungry.

The earliest Bureau reports recorded 818 destitute freedmen in Norfolk. While many families managed subsistence survival, the aged, infirm, orphaned, and widowed depended on rations for survival. In the final years of the Bureau's operation in Norfolk, the elderly and the young children remained the only constant recipients of rations. While the policy of limiting rations affected all blacks, urban blacks fared better than rural

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<sup>42</sup>BRFAL, Assignment of the Subassistant and Assistant Commissioners, First District, Norfolk, Virginia, June 1865 - January 1869.

blacks. Through benevolent church societies and other social societies in the city, poor blacks received regular contributions of \$20 to \$30 from their neighbors to aid with the purchase of food, clothing, and shelter. Rural blacks continued to rely on the Bureau and missionaries in time of need.<sup>43</sup>

Another function the Freedmen's Bureau adopted from the Army involved the supervision of abandoned and confiscated property. In June 1865, the Bureau controlled 155 properties, of which 107 were city dwellings and 47 were parcels of farm land. While some of the properties had held particular military value, most properties consisted of farm land or dwellings deserted by owners during the war. Several of the higher-ranking military officers had occupied abandoned rebel houses in the city as did missionaries and freedmen. In addition, 47 farm properties were worked by freedmen, 27 under government supervision.<sup>44</sup>

At the close of the war, whites who had abandoned their property under wartime occupation returned and reclaimed their property holdings. Blacks occupying the whites' property voiced strong objections to missionaries and Bureau officials concerning the return of the property to the whites. Blacks felt that their slave labor had earned them a stake in the land and that their service in the Union Army entitled them to the confiscated

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<sup>43</sup>Perdue, Weevils in the Wheat, 118; BRFAL, List of Destitute Freedmen, June 1865; BRFAL, Monthly Ration Reports, August 1865 - November 1868; Letter from H.C. Percy to Rev. Hunt, July 9, 1866, Norfolk, AMA.

<sup>44</sup>Letter from A.S. Flagg to Orlando Brown, Monthly Report of Abandoned and Confiscated Lands, June 1865, BRFAL.

property of the returning rebels. They also clung to the rental provision of forty acre plots for refugees and freedmen in the Freedmen's Bureau bill. While Norfolk Bureau agents and missionaries sympathized with the objections raised by Norfolk's black community, Bureau policy dictated the return of property to qualifying former-rebels. In May 1865, General O.O. Howard, Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, issued Circular Order No. 3, which authorized the return of confiscated and abandoned property to former owners.<sup>45</sup>

From month to month in 1865 the number of dwellings controlled by the Bureau diminished as owners reclaimed their property. By 1866, control of 20 to 30 properties in the city remained steady. Two of the properties on Brewer Street controlled by the Bureau were occupied by black persons, Miles Butt and T. Johnson. Both persons rented the property from the government for five dollars a month for the period of one year. As 1867 progressed and the future of the Freedmen's Bureau became uncertain, the Bureau steadily lost control of more and more property. By November 1868, in the twilight of its operation, the Norfolk Bureau controlled only two properties, Craney Island

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<sup>45</sup>Colored Citizens of Norfolk, "Equal Suffrage Address," in Maxwell Whiteman, ed., Afro-American History Series Collection III: The Black Intellectual (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1971), 1-4; BRFAL, Circular Order No. 3, May 22, 1865, Issued by Major General O.O. Howard; LaWanda Cox, "The Promise of Land for the Freedmen," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 45 (December 1958): 413.

and Wise Farm.<sup>46</sup>

While Bureau officials tried to protect the right of blacks to farm land in the county, many returning white property owners simply forced blacks from the land. Circular Order No. 3 required owners to permit blacks to remain on cultivated land until planted crops could be harvested or otherwise compensate blacks for the labor, products, crops, and expenditures they had invested. On some farms, the Bureau negotiated settlements in favor of the freedmen, yet even financial compensation could not resolve the problem of dispossession the freedmen now faced. Without property to farm, even for subsistence, blacks in the country faced destitution.<sup>47</sup>

In a demonstration of massive protest, blacks on Taylor Farm in Princess Anne County displayed their belief in entitlement to property by refusing to disperse from the property. William Taylor applied to the Freedmen's Bureau for restoration of his property on September 11, 1865. At that time, approximately 1,000 black people lived and worked on Taylor's property. By the end of the month, the Freedmen's Bureau agreed to restore Taylor's land, under the condition that he allow blacks to remain to harvest the crops and in addition, provide work and shelter for as many blacks as possible after the harvest. Complying with

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<sup>46</sup>BRFAL, Monthly Reports of Abandoned or Confiscated Land, June 1865 - November 1868, Norfolk, Virginia.

<sup>47</sup>BRFAL, Circular Order No.3, May 22, 1865, Major General O.O. Howard; BRFAL, Requests for Restoration of Property, June 19, 1865 Baxter Farm, August 28, 1865 White Farm, September 11, 1865 Taylor Farm.

Bureau orders, in December 1865, Taylor contracted with 19 black men. Only those men and their families were to remain on his property; the remaining blacks were to leave immediately. The dispossessed blacks protested, refusing to leave even under the order of the Freedmen's Bureau. On March 1, 1866, Bureau agents attempted to remove the freedmen and were met with armed resistance. Several injuries resulted from the clash and several freedmen were arrested and jailed for their actions. In October 1866, approximately 130 freedmen remained on Taylor Farm. Taylor desired further removal of freedmen, but conceded to the Freedmen's Bureau that he would not interfere with the remaining freedmen. The families remaining on the farm voiced their concern to the Bureau, stating that they received no "mercy or justice" at the hand of Taylor. The Bureau responded to the freedmen's complaints by threatening further removal, if Taylor again requested Bureau aid. The families fulfilled their contracts with Taylor.<sup>48</sup>

The Bureau's action at Taylor Farm had a psychological effect on blacks in the surrounding farms and in the city. In this year-long struggle, blacks had hoped to triumph with the aid of the Bureau. Instead, the Bureau betrayed them. Respect for Bureau agents diminished, and Captain A.S. Flagg reported that

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<sup>48</sup>BRFAL, Taylor Farm: Letter from Charles Johnston to Orlando Brown, September 11, 1865; Letter from William Austin to Mr. Taylor, September 22, 1865; Letter from Orlando Brown to A.S. Flagg, December 5, 1865; Letter from Mr. Taylor to William P. Austin, December 7, 1865; Letter from Charles E. Johnston to A.S. Flagg, March 1, 1865; Letters from William Austin to Orlando Brown, 3 October, 5 December 1866.

blacks described agents as "mere sticks of wood" offering no real assistance to them in time of great need. While support of the Bureau by the mass of blacks diminished after the actions at Taylor Farm, black leaders pointed out that the Bureau provided the only access to services that the white community otherwise denied blacks. Although defeated at this juncture, the black community of Norfolk continued to call for land distribution.<sup>49</sup>

While freedmen suffered at the Bureau's handling of the transfer of land to the former owner at Taylor Farm, agents negotiated smoother transfers on other farms in Norfolk County. Even though agents reached fairer agreements with owners, the freedmen experienced a great loss of freedom and independence over their work routine. David Johnson rented a farm on Tanner's Creek from the government on shares until December 31, 1865. On October 7, 1865, James H. Johnston applied for the restoration of his property. Johnston's request was granted under the condition that he continue to rent to Johnson. While Johnson was fortunate enough to retain control of a portion of the land, he lost a measure of independence by being placed under Johnston's supervision.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Leading Colored Citizens of Norfolk, "Freedmen's Bureau Meeting in Norfolk," in Philip S. Foner, ed., The Black Worker: A Documentary History from Colonial Times to the Present, Volume II (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 347.

<sup>50</sup>Letter from Thomas P. Jackson to Orlando Brown, October 7, 1865, Tanner's Creek Farm, BRFAL; Letter from Thomas P. Jackson to Orlando Brown, August 2, 1865, White House Farm, BRFAL; Letter from Thomas P. Jackson to A.S. Flagg, October 13, 1865, Dozier Farm, BRFAL.

The failure of land distribution favoring freedpeople was a blow to Norfolk blacks' bid for greater freedom. Land acquisition was a goal of many freedpeople. Former slaves wanted to farm their own land and break all ties to their former owners. Free blacks wanted confiscated urban buildings to establish their own businesses. Blacks lost their bid for a real measure of freedom as land and buildings were returned to former owners.

Over time it became obvious that employers sought a return to previous slave labor conditions while blacks sought a departure from the labor conditions of slavery. As former property owners continued to return and resume control of property and the laborers on it, black protest to the Freedmen's Bureau detailing physical abuse and non-payment became more pronounced. Freedmen resented supervision by owners because it was a condition associated with slavery. They also complained about white resistance to contract negotiation.

On June 26, 1865, a committee representing the black community of Norfolk presented the Freedmen's Bureau with a list of grievances and a demand for rights they felt were being denied by the white community. The pamphlet reported that planters in Norfolk County were pledging to employ only their former slaves, thus denying freedmen the independence to select employers of their choice. In addition, the pamphlet reported that planters agreed to offer adult males payment of no more than \$60 a year. A final grievance outlined in the pamphlet described that when black men challenged these practices, planters responded with

violence and refusal to pay. The committee expressed the community's desire to work, but refused to accept the planters' labor provisions. Norfolk blacks demanded that the Bureau supervise the terms of the labor contracts between blacks and employers.<sup>51</sup>

These contracts reflected the struggle for control of labor waged between employer and employee. The contracts supervised at the Bureau Office in Norfolk reflected a variety of arrangements. The contracts stipulated payment methods of wage, share, or rental for agricultural laborers and wage or board for domestic servants and apprentices. Most contracts were drawn between agricultural laborers and landowners, and domestics and employers.<sup>52</sup>

In 1865, wage contracts were rare. Few planters had access to cash after the war. On November 13, 1865, A.M. Lindsay contracted the labor of Jim Gillis as a general farmhand for 14 months at \$12 per month. Contracting for wages marked an advantage for Gillis. For unlike share pay, Gillis was guaranteed payment regardless of the crop yield or the rate reached by employer and laborer after the sale of the crop. Also, the payment rate of \$12 per month represented fair

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<sup>51</sup>Colored Citizens of Norfolk, "Equal Suffrage Address," 2-4.

<sup>52</sup>Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Records of the Assistant Subassistant Commissioner of Norfolk, Virginia, Labor Contracts, Record Group 105, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

compensation for labor.<sup>53</sup>

Share arrangements constituted the majority of contractual arrangements in 1865. Because capital was scarce, both employers and employees entered into this arrangements. On December 13, 1865, Nathaniel Warden contracted the labor of Mark and Alex Warden as share laborers. Mark and Alex Warden agreed to work until their share of the crop equaled 135 bushels of corn. The following day, Isaac Warden made a similar arrangement with Nathaniel Warden. Isaac limited the terms of his contract to 75 bushels of corn and limited the time period to cover only "the crop season," approximately five months. This stipulation represented an important change for blacks in the quest for more control of labor. Confining work to the crop season cast blacks as croppers only and freed them from other plantation duties associated with slavery, giving them the freedom to do as they desired in the time away from labor.<sup>54</sup>

Some contracts reflected the personal goals of freedpeople. On December 22, 1865, Susan B. Allen contracted the service of Josephine Burk for three years with payment of board, clothing, and schooling. While the conditions of board and clothing were not uncommon, requesting schooling stood out as a marked departure. Josephine Burk's personal addition to this contract

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>BRFAL, Labor Contracts, Norfolk, Virginia; Leslie A. Schwalm, "African-American Women and Their Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Lowcountry South Carolina," Working Papers in Women's History, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1990, 18-9.

bore the mark of a woman who wanted the full measure of her new freedom.<sup>55</sup>

Not all domestic servants obtained contracts with autonomous stipulations. In many ways, apprenticed domestic service continued the master-servant tradition of slavery. On December 20, 1865, Mrs. R.F. Porter contracted the labor of Hannah Frances Hopper to perform diligently and faithfully the duties of servant until 18 years of age. Clothing, suitable food, and suitable board were the conditions of payment. Under the apprenticeship system, Hannah did not have the power to dictate better working conditions. In a similar contract, Margaret Wiggins agreed to serve H.W. Seymour for three years for payment of "lawful" currency. Seymour alone had the power to determine the payment rate.<sup>56</sup>

In spite of their desire to secure contracts exploring equitable labor arrangements, many blacks contracting with employers received offers only duplicating the labor status of slavery. James McBride contracted with three men, Thomas Ferebee, Edmund Lamb, and Henry Dozier, to lease land for one-half share of the crop. In addition, McBride further stipulated that the men also repair fences, maintain hedges, and clear ditch drains. Maintaining plantation irrigation systems involved days of intense labor and was considered the "most hated aspect" of plantation labor. As additional evidence of his unequitable

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<sup>55</sup>BRFAL, Labor Contracts, Norfolk, Virginia.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

advantage, McBride also held a lien on the men's half of the crop for advances of seed and machinery. Often such arrangements kept laborers in perpetual poverty.<sup>57</sup>

Harsh contracts preserved the strenuous physical labor routine required in slavery as well as dictating white terms of social control to blacks. William Warden contracted with three men, John Riddick, Jacob Jordan, and Isaac More, for two years. Warden offered the men the land rent-free providing they were not arrested or convicted of a crime and that they "labor all the time until the crop is cultivated." The contract also required the men to clear the land of timber and maintain ditches.<sup>58</sup>

In town meetings and at Bureau offices, blacks lodged complaints addressing problems arising within the new contract labor system. Non-payment for work remained the most frequent complaint registered by blacks. In addition, blacks expressed anger at unjust physical treatment by employers. Employers often responded with threats of violence directed to blacks who tried to collect overdue payment. The most inequitable practice brought to the attention of the Freedmen's Bureau involved the lien/peonage payment system. In this system, employers paid blacks in clothing and rations often because cash remained unavailable. Employers also charged blacks exorbitant prices for rent, machinery, and necessities, thus leaving a large number of

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

blacks in debt to employers at the end of the crop season.<sup>59</sup>

Although in 1865 employers tried to implement a contract system binding laborers to work conditions resembling slavery, by 1866, blacks successfully worked to create a more equitable system of free labor. Within the year, through continued agitation, protest, and strike tactics, freedmen secured more equitable labor contracts. All the contracts between agricultural laborers and employers stipulated cash payments at the end of every month. Most experienced laborers received at least \$12 a month, while some less experienced laborers received monthly payments of \$10 to \$4. Another important change in these contracts involved the time of labor contracted. Instead of contracting for a year or longer, the contracts covered shorter time periods of 6 months, 3 months, or the crop season. Under these conditions, workers labored only during crop seasons and had more of their own time to farm independently and participate in social activities of their choice.<sup>60</sup>

The negotiation of labor contracts was a visible sign of the conflict between employer and employee over the control of labor. The process of change was constant with victories and defeats registered on both sides.

The landed and capitalist establishment set forth a statutory assault on workers in 1865-1866, designed to secure

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<sup>59</sup>Letter from William Austin to Orlando Brown, August 1, 1866, Norfolk, BRFAL.

<sup>60</sup>BRFAL, 1866 Labor Contracts, Norfolk, Virginia.

their dominance over the worker. In those years, the city council of Norfolk revised tax and licensing ordinances directly restricting black entrepreneurs. In addition, operating fees were increased in an effort to curtail black economic development. The city also revised the vagrancy law, setting punishment at one year of hired-out labor for those arrested for idleness. At the state level Virginia's General Assembly enacted a series of Black Codes to control further the urban black population. The codes included vagrancy guidelines and encouraged contractual labor agreements. The state Vagrancy Act stated that able persons who were idle should be hired-out for three months for the best offer. If the vagrant ran away, an additional months work without pay was required of him.<sup>61</sup>

The black community responded to the legislatively-enforced economic crackdown by organizing. On June 5, 1865, church and community members and leaders assembled at the Catharine Street Baptist Church to formulate a plan of action. By June 26, Dr. Thomas Bayne and Pastor John M. Brown distributed a pamphlet expressing the demands of the black community of Norfolk. Two of the strategies called for the creation of black land and labor associations for economic security. The objects of the labor associations were: protection of the laborer, fair regulation of the payment rate to laborers, provision of facilities offering

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<sup>61</sup>City of Norfolk, Revised Ordinances (Norfolk: Daily Old Dominion, 1866), 175-81; True Southerner, January 4, 1866; Richard Lowe, "Another Look at Reconstruction in Virginia," Civil War History 32 (March 1986): 62.

employment to laborers, a system of registration for laborers, and providing legal representation in labor contract disputes. Land associations aimed to elevate members of the black community to higher economic status. By design, members of the land associations contributed small installments on land mortgages held by the association. Once a member paid off the loan and interest, the association turned over the title to the member. In establishing these organizations, the black community of Norfolk clearly understood the necessity of land and labor improvements in securing a prosperous economic future.<sup>62</sup>

One of the first labor organizations formed in the city was the Oysterman's Protective Association. The association was created largely in response to a repressive law from the Virginia Legislature. The law put a head tax of four dollars on every individual participating in the oyster trade and an additional tax of three dollars per ton on vessels engaged in the oyster trade. At the first meeting, over 500 members joined the association and paid the minimum one dollar subscription fee. The money was used to send members of the association on lobbying trips to the state and federal legislatures. In addition, association officers and members of the executive committee organized seaway protests with members going out to test the law. Although all attempts at seaway protests were unsuccessful, the protests did show the ability of the black oystermen to organize and agitate for improved conditions. Due to separate actions by

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<sup>62</sup>Colored Citizens of Norfolk, "Equal Suffrage Address," 7-8.

black and white oystermen, the legislature eventually curtailed the law in 1870. Blacks addressed the oyster tax at the Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868. Black delegates wrote, "No tax was to be imposed for the privilege of catching oysters, but the amount of sales of oysters caught by citizens in any one year was to be taxed."<sup>63</sup>

Another important labor association supporting Norfolk's blacks was the Eureka Laboring Company. The company, which was organized by Dr. Thomas Bayne, provided blacks with employment information and helped secure legal representation in lawful disputes. The company also sponsored a community-wide resolution calling for a boycott of businesses that denied equal rights to blacks.<sup>64</sup>

Dr. Thomas Bayne also organized a successful land association, the Eureka Land Association. The association purchased 30 acres of land, and member-buyers erected 25 houses around which they cultivated one acre of land. Another land association in the city modeled its prospectus after John A. Andrew's American Land Company and Agency. The Land, Homestead, Settlement and Labor Association of Norfolk was headed by Calvin Pepper, a white attorney. The company offered services in labor and land acquisition. Members paid a 50 cent membership fee that

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<sup>63</sup>True Southerner, 12 April, 22 March 1866; Norfolk Journal, 7, 10 December 1866; Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1926), 240.

<sup>64</sup>True Southerner, 12 April, 22 March 1866; Colored Citizens of Norfolk, "Equal Suffrage Address," 9-10.

was deposited in the local branch of the Freedman's Bank. By March 8, 1866, over 112 members had joined the association with contributions totaling \$1,743. Active support of such agencies by the black community of Norfolk strongly indicated their desire to reap the benefits of economic freedom.<sup>65</sup>

National Unions attempted to organize in Norfolk in 1869 and 1870. Isaac Myers came to Norfolk and tried to organize support for the National Labor Union and the Colored National Labor Union. Myers was able to recruit a small number of Norfolk dock workers.<sup>66</sup>

The number of black entrepreneurs increased after 1865. Norfolk's market provided an active center of trade. Black activity in the market increased after the war. Black men and women maintained a number of permanent stalls in the market square. Some peddlers who did not keep stalls were active agents in the market as well. Black butchers, eatery vendors, fish dealers, oyster dealers, fruit dealers, vegetable vendors, and grocers all maintained substantial business at the market. Lithographs of the era offered an additional glimpse into the unique culture of market life. Black women vendors were depicted with their children in tow. Clearly the mother's work was necessary for survival of the family and care of the family

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<sup>65</sup>Letter from Charles E. Johnston to A.S. Flagg, April 1, 1866, Norfolk, BRFAL; True Southerner, 8, 22 March 1866.

<sup>66</sup>Earl Lewis, In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 15.

necessitated keeping the children with mothers even at work.<sup>67</sup>

The market also fostered a rich black work culture separate from white culture and white cultural control. Many vendors and peddlers attracted buyers to their wares through song.

Now's yer time to git snap-beans,  
Okra, tomatoes, an' taters gwine by;  
Don't be foolish virgins;  
Hab de dinner ready  
When de master he comes home,  
Snap-beans gwine by.

While the songs of the vendors often served to entertain customers, they also served to express the sorrow of the black worker. The work-songs of the women vendors were often hymn-like.

I live fore miles out of town,  
I am gwine to glory,  
My strawberries are sweet an' soun',  
I am gwine to glory,  
I fotch 'em fore miles on my head,  
I am gwine to glory  
My chile is sick, an' husban' dead,  
I am gwine to glory.

Though still constrained by many hours of work in order to survive, blacks made their own choices and enriched their own culture through work routines.<sup>68</sup>

An important development of freedom in Norfolk involved changing occupational roles for women. The market's urban economy allowed women a break from domestic service occupations

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<sup>67</sup>City of Norfolk, "City Directory," Norfolk, Virginia, 1872-1873.

<sup>68</sup>William W. Brown, My Southern Home: The South and Its People (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 209-11; Lithograph of Norfolk Market Square in 1865 from Frank Leslie's Weekly, Kirn Memorial Library, Norfolk, Virginia.

and a chance to become entrepreneurs. Black businesswomen like Nancy Jones and Dinah McCoy ran eating houses at the local market. As managers, these women were able to control every aspect of their own labor from hours of operation to choosing the menu. While they had to work many hours in the kitchen cooking and in the stalls serving, they toiled for their own profit. A small group of black women entrepreneurs opened their homes to the large number of homeless blacks as boarding houses. Women, like Eliza Williams, met a great need in the black community and at the same time supported themselves.<sup>69</sup>

Women's domestic job descriptions became more task specific, indicating the movement by black women to limit time spent on domestic service outside of their home and increase time with their families. The number of washerwomen, laundresses, and seamstresses in Norfolk grew in the years of Reconstruction. As "independent contractors" these women worked in their own home at their own pace. These professions gave black women independence by allowing them to work in their own homes and to decide how much time and attention they spent caring for their family.<sup>70</sup>

The Norfolk branch of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company was actively supported by the area's black community. Organizations, individuals, and families opened accounts as

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<sup>69</sup>City of Norfolk, "City Directory," Norfolk, Virginia, 1872-1873.

<sup>70</sup>Schwalm, "African-American Women and Transition," 23; Dorothy Sterling, ed., We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1984), 359.

investments for future purchases of land, housing, education, and luxuries. The number of deposits from black depositors increased every year, starting at 587 in 1866 and increasing to 1,632 by 1868. Deposit amounts grew from \$7,888 in 1866 to \$46,319 in 1868.<sup>71</sup>

Working with city authorities and their own resources, the black community successfully provided care for sick, elderly, and infirm blacks. One issue that strongly concerned Norfolk's black community was the care of the sick and indigent. Throughout the years of Reconstruction, the Freedmen's Bureau provided the sick and the indigent with rations and shelter. In an ongoing plan the Norfolk Bureau turned over the care of the sick and the indigent to the city's civil authorities in September 1867. While Bureau agent Edward Murphy was pleased by the civil authorities' willingness to accept the responsibility of care, he questioned the city's financial ability to do so. Murphy's reservations were justified, for the city did not levy a poor tax and refused care to those who were not residents prior to 1861. In response to the shortfall, the black community pressed the city council to provide care for the sick and the indigent blacks at the city's Alms House. The blacks succeeded in their efforts to secure admission, although the facility was segregated by race. Still, the facility could not house all those blacks in need, so again the black community met the shortfall through

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<sup>71</sup>Index to Deposit Ledgers in Branches of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, 1865-1874 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1971), 1-118.

collections from benevolent church societies. In addition, the black community established a Soup House for those in need.<sup>72</sup>

During the years of Reconstruction, Norfolk's black population showed a substantial increase, while the white population remained constant. Census figures from 1870 list the black population at 8,766 and the white population at 10,462. In 1860 the white population was only slightly smaller, 10,290 and in contrast the black population was substantially smaller, 4,330.<sup>73</sup>

Property owning by blacks also increased from 1860 to 1870. By 1870, 83 blacks owned real property valued at \$85,921 and personal property valued at \$8,765 for a combined value of \$94,686. In 1860, only 53 blacks owned real and personal property cumulatively totaling \$15,055. Although an increase from the previous decade was apparent, property owning blacks constituted a very small portion of Norfolk's black population. Eight free blacks who had owned real and personal property in 1860 appeared again as real and personal property owners in 1870. The small gains demonstrate the economic difficulties faced by

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<sup>72</sup>Letter from Edward Murphy to Orlando Brown, 30 April, 30 September 1867, Norfolk, BRFAL; Letter from R.J. Drummond City Collector to Norfolk Freedmen's Bureau, September 1866, Norfolk, BRFAL; Letter from J.H. Remington to Orlando Brown, November 30, 1867, Norfolk, BRFAL.

<sup>73</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, 1870: Population Statistics (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1965), 281.

blacks in Norfolk.<sup>74</sup>

Changes in occupations pursued by blacks further highlight changes fostered in the years of Reconstruction. Former slaves pursued professions previously prohibited to them by law. Both black men and women assumed teaching positions. Black clergymen now controlled their churches without the hindrance of white supervision. Daily wages for artisans rose to \$2.25. Black men worked in maritime occupations in substantial numbers. Because of restrictions dismantled during Reconstruction, a small professional class of blacks emerged in Norfolk. For the first time in Norfolk, occupations such as notary publics, lawyers, and dentists were held by blacks.<sup>75</sup>

However, the majority of the black population still operated on the lowest levels of the economic scale. Most men were laborers and most women performed domestic tasks. While domestics saw a wage increase to \$2.50 daily, day laborers wages went down to 75 cents a day. The campaign to restrict black advancement that started in 1865 showed signs of success.<sup>76</sup>

Norfolk blacks witnessed subtle changes in five years of freedom. They ascended into freedom as propertyless and mostly penniless laborers, thus hindering their economic advancement.

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<sup>74</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, 1870: Population Statistics, 59-305; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, 1870: Social Statistics of the City of Norfolk (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1965); U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860: Free Population, 275-558.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

Yet, blacks worked diligently for continued freedom in their working lives.

During the period of Reconstruction, the black community of Norfolk witnessed a cycle of change in their economic status. In an early step, slaves emancipated themselves, running away to Union lines and hiding-out in Norfolk city. The Union Army aided blacks in altering their economic status, employing them as wage laborers and soldiers. Many contraband farmed confiscated land under Army supervision. After the war, Norfolk blacks were determined to maintain the freedoms they had secured as farmers, wage laborers, and soldiers.

The years of formal Reconstruction, 1865-1870, were marked by intense conflicts between employers and freedpeople for control of labor. Norfolk's freedpeople wanted a work environment where they managed their labor independently. Employers and landowners insisted on maintaining the old order of submission and obedience. This tension resulted in a variety of working conditions, some markedly fair and others equally unfair. As long as freedpeople were not the principal owners of capital and land, they would operate at a disadvantage.

Norfolk blacks lived in a world of race and caste dominance that constrained their ability to achieve a full measure of freedom. Aware that land-ownership and access to capital were keys to economic freedom, Norfolk blacks worked collectively to gain economic power. Pooling financial resources through land and labor associations, Norfolk blacks created a small rise in

black land-ownership and capital acquisition.

Statistical measurements attest to blacks' financial improvement during Reconstruction. While some measures show only a small degree of improvement, no figure can measure the value of freedom to blacks. Even though blacks still fought with employers for better working conditions, they had more bargaining power now than before. These gains were not lost to blacks, for though change might now be subtle, they were determined that it would continue.

Throughout this chapter I have pointed to the collective action of blacks for economic advancement. This collective action was an outgrowth of strength of the black family and the black church. In this personal sphere, Norfolk blacks realized the full measure of freedom.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE BLACK FAMILY AND THE BLACK CHURCH

Emancipation and Reconstruction had an impact on the black family in Norfolk. Gaining control of their personal lives was one of the most valued freedoms blacks obtained during Reconstruction. Many blacks in Norfolk welcomed the freedom to secure their family life. During the years of Reconstruction in Norfolk, black families gained stability and provided support to other institutions.

Early historical impressions of the black family in America were based on literary and social myth rather than fact. In the literature from the Colonial Period to the 1930's black men and black women were portrayed as licentious, promiscuous sexual beings. Writers concluded that unrestrained sexual behavior was the chief cause of family instability among blacks. This stereotyping of black sexual conduct and its effect on the black family would influence the literature for many years.<sup>1</sup>

One of the earliest studies of the family was E. Franklin Frazier's The Negro Family in the United States (1939). This comprehensive work on the black family dominated the field for nearly thirty years. Frazier theorized because of slavery, black family life was forever doomed to suffer the problems of "matriarchy" (mother-headed) and "class" (poverty). The institution of slavery retarded the growth of "normal" black

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<sup>1</sup>Winthrop D. Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 150-1.

families. Although Franklin's findings would be challenged, his focus on matriarchy, class, and slavery were remained pivotal points when examining black families.<sup>2</sup>

Many writers built their studies on Frazier's work. One well received work that supported many of Frazier's ideas was Daniel Patrick Moynihan's The Negro Family: The Case for National Action (1965). Moynihan's study concluded that there was a "strong relationship between slave families and twentieth century Afro-American families." Moynihan confined his study of twentieth-century black families to those in urban areas. Here he found many poor, mother-headed families. Moynihan concluded that family disorganization and unstable family life among Negro-Americans is a product of their history and caste status in the United States. Like Frazier, Moynihan traced the roots of problems facing twentieth-century, poverty-stricken, mother-headed black households to slavery.<sup>3</sup>

Herbert Gutman's study, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom: 1750-1925 (1976), redefined the scholarship of the black family, offering a comprehensive view of rural and urban black families during both slavery and freedom. Gutman found that slaves from all regions of the country adapted to preserve families. In families he analyzed, Gutman discovered "similar domestic arrangements, kin networks, sexual behavior, marital

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<sup>2</sup>Herbert Gutman, "Persistent Myths About the Afro-American Family," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 6 (Autumn 1975): 182, 188.

<sup>3</sup>Gutman, "Persistent Myths," 183.

rules, and naming practices." These findings led Gutman to conclude that there were "cultural and social determinants" driving slave family behavior.<sup>4</sup>

Gutman's findings were a major reinterpretation of the black family. Gutman's evidence directly refuted previous beliefs about class, patriarchy, and urban/rural environment and their effects on the slave family. First, he found that "'class' factors alone - income, skill, property, and middle-class occupations - did not determine the presence of a two-parent household." Both skilled and unskilled black men and black women sustained families. Second, Gutman challenged the myth of patriarchy. Both antebellum and postbellum black households often had a male and a female present and were in fact double-headed. Black family units were dynamic not static and often the core family included extended family members or relatives. Third, female-headed households and extended households were more common in urban areas than rural areas. Other studies of urban black households of the nineteenth-century support Gutman's conclusion about the predominance of two-parent households. Clearly, blacks maintained stable family units in slavery and in freedom.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Herbert Gutman, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom: 1750-1925 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 3, 102, 443-44; Gutman, "Persistent Myths," 193-94.

<sup>5</sup>Gutman, Black Family, 443-44; Gutman, "Persistent Myths," 193-94; Paul Lammermeier, "The Urban Black Family of the Nineteenth Century: A Study of Black Family Structure in the Ohio Valley, 1850-1880," Journal of Marriage and the Family 35 (August 1973): 440; Elizabeth Pleck, "The Two-Parent Household: Black

Since Gutman, historians and anthropologists who have examined slave families and free black families continue to challenge the Frazier-Moynihan thesis of the pathological nature of matriarchy/mother-headed families. In The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860 (1984), Suzanne Lebsack found evidence of financial success and family stability among free black women. In his essay, "A Slave Family in the Ante-Bellum South" (1975), Loren Schweninger described a mother-headed antebellum slave family that was stable and economically prosperous. These studies of stable slave and free black families cast doubt on the Frazier-Moynihan thesis. In Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present (1980), Jacqueline Jones found that for black women freedom "had meaning primarily in a family context." Jones concluded after emancipation, black family relationships solidified.<sup>6</sup>

Important to undermining the negative connotation of matriarchy was Carol B. Stack's All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community (1970). Stack studied twentieth-century urban black families. Instead of a pathological family, Stack presented the sophisticated socializing units black urban

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Family Structure in Late Nineteenth-Century Boston," Journal of Social History 6 (Fall 1972): 4.

<sup>6</sup>Loren Schweninger, "A Slave Family in the Ante-Bellum South," Journal of Negro History 60 (January 1975): 30, 44; Suzanne Lebsack, The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 89, 103; Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow, 58.

women in the 1960's developed to ensure the survival of their families. Stack countered the negative belief that poor black families are "fatherless, matrifocal, unstable, and disorganized." Operating from the cultural context of the black family and not the imposed values of white culture, Stack revealed,

What role the ties of kinship or friendship play in the black community, who socializes the children born in the ghetto, what folk criteria qualify a woman to give birth or to raise a child, what may be the adaptive functions of sexual unions and multiple household kin networks.

Stack concluded that the "adaptive features of urban black families comprise resilient response to poverty." With their findings, these female writers dismantled earlier beliefs and opened the field to reexamination.<sup>7</sup>

The changes ushered in during Reconstruction benefitted many black families in Norfolk. For many blacks freedom meant full control of family life. From 1862 to 1870, blacks took every measure to reunite family members long separated by slavery. Gaining legal recognition of marriage, encouraged blacks to marry and start a family. The end of slavery signaled the end of forced family separation and signaled the promise of security for all black families.

Examining changes in black family composition in Norfolk from 1860 to 1870 highlights an important shift in family composition. At the same time it reveals an important element of

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<sup>7</sup>Carol B. Stack, All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 24, 104, 124.

consistency, the ability of blacks to sustain stable family units under difficult conditions. As Gutman, Stack, and other scholars of the family have shown, blacks maintained stable family units in slavery and in freedom.

The household composition of free black families in Norfolk based on the 1860 census is summarized in the following table.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION OF FREE BLACK FAMILIES, NORFOLK, 1860

Simple Nuclear	61
Supplemented Nuclear	17
Augmented Nuclear	10
Single Parent Female	83
All Other	189

The most typical free black household in 1860 was headed by women. This dominance of female-headed households was common for urban areas in the antebellum South. The "all other" classification includes families of single women with children living together and three generations of women (grandmother, mother, child) living together. These women, whether related or unrelated, resided together for emotional and economic support. These women faced difficult economic conditions and made adjustments to stabilize their family life.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>"Simple nuclear" were husband, wife, with or without children; "Supplemented" were simple nuclear with relatives; "Augmented" were simple nuclear with non-related boarders; "All other" were most commonly: several single women with children living together; three generations of women living together; individuals residing with non-related family as servant; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860: Free Population, 275-558; Crandall Shifflett, "The Household Composition of Rural Black Families: Louisa County, Virginia, 1880," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 6 (Autumn 1975): 239-50; Crandall Shifflett, Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South Louisa County, Virginia, 1860-1900 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 84-85;

The household composition of black families in Norfolk's first ward based on the 1870 census is summarized in the following table.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION OF BLACK FAMILIES, FIRST WARD, NORFOLK, 1870

Simple Nuclear	114
Supplemented Nuclear	26
Augmented Nuclear	22
Single Parent Female	41
All Other	198

Changes in black family composition occurred during Emancipation and Reconstruction. While the "all other" category of family organization represented a significant portion of the black family population, "all other" was no longer dominated by female-headed households. Instead, the dominant group was single persons residing as servants in a non-related family household. The simple nuclear family was the dominant form of family organization in 1870, a change from 1860. While single-parent, female-headed households still appeared, their numbers dropped after slavery. The persistence of supplemented and augmented nuclear families showed the willingness of black families to support family members and community members. Many of the non-related members in augmented families were young orphans taken in by nuclear families.<sup>9</sup>

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George Blackburn and Sherman Richards, "The Mother-Headed Family Among Free Negroes in Charleston, South Carolina," Phylon 42, (March 1981): 12; Gutman, The Black Family, 443.

<sup>9</sup>"All other" were most commonly individual servants residing with non-related family; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870: Population Statistics, First Ward, Norfolk, Virginia, 59-104; Shifflett, Patronage and Poverty, 85; Shifflett, "Household Composition of Rural Black Families," 239-50.

Tracing individual black families through the census further demonstrates the ability of blacks to maintain stable family units. It also reveals the dynamics of change experienced by black families during a ten-year period. The Wilson family of Norfolk, like other black families in Norfolk, was dynamic not static. In 1860 Peter Wilson, a thirty-two-year-old hackman, maintained a simple nuclear household with his thirty-six-year-old wife Elizabeth and their four young children. By 1870, the Wilson family had grown to include three new children and an unrelated boarder, Magnum Riggins, a twenty-eight-year-old waterman. Peter Wilson owned a retail grocery and his oldest son contributed to the family income while the younger children attended school. In ten years the Wilson household had changed from a simple nuclear family to an augmented nuclear family.<sup>10</sup>

The Williams family of Norfolk demonstrated the strength of a mother-headed household. In 1860 Elizabeth Williams, a fifty-year-old shopkeeper, resided in a household with her four children. The children, two girls and two boys, were in their twenties. The daughters, Frances and Mary, worked as seamstresses in their mother's shop. The sons, Walter and George, were seamen. In 1870 three of Elizabeth's children maintained their own households. Elizabeth resided with her oldest daughter Frances, who now worked as a schoolteacher.

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<sup>10</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860: Free Population, Norfolk, Virginia, 275-558; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870: Population Statistics, First Ward, Norfolk, Virginia, 59-104; Shifflett, Patronage and Poverty, 86-88.

Elizabeth Williams maintained her household throughout the years of Reconstruction.<sup>11</sup>

The indexes of deposit ledgers for the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company in Norfolk reveal much about family ties. Many parents established family accounts in which all children are named and all have deposits. During its nine years of operation in Norfolk, one hundred and nine family accounts were established at the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company.<sup>12</sup>

Family ties and family care were not limited to blood relatives. The willingness of blacks to open their families to those in need was common in Norfolk. The number of augmented families represented the community spirit of Norfolk blacks. Also, the registers and indexes to the deposit ledgers for the Freedman's Saving and Trust Company branch in Norfolk contain numerous trust accounts established and maintained between non-family members. Most accounts are in the interest of older persons whose access to the bank was limited. The black family acted as a social welfare agent during Reconstruction.<sup>13</sup>

Reuniting families was an important goal for blacks during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Against the chaotic conditions of war, the opportunity for slaves to reunite their families

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<sup>11</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860: Free Population, 275-558; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870: Population Statistics, 59-305.

<sup>12</sup>Index to Deposit Ledgers in Branches of Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, 1865-1874 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1971), 11-54.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 100-18.

arose. AMA missionary Harriett Taylor told her superiors that there were "good effects in the reunion of husbands and wives or parents and children, long separated by the power of slavery." A jubilant woman told Miss Taylor, "I reckon I'm glad of the war for if it had not been for that I never would have seen my old man again." Miss Taylor reported that the woman had been separated from her husband for five years and he escaped from his master to find her. The climate of freedom created by war inspired slaves to search for family members.<sup>14</sup>

Other missionaries related similar accounts of risky family reunions. AMA missionary Mary Clark told of a family (husband-wife-two sons) who planned an escape, hid in the woods for days, and then fled to Union lines. The family took this measure to avoid separation because their master was moving south. Miss Clark also related a story of a young female student who had been reunited with her brother. The girl confided in Miss Clark that she hoped her other brothers and sisters would return soon.<sup>15</sup>

At the immediate close of the Civil War, blacks strongly expressed their desire to reunite families. Freedom held the promise of family security. AMA missionaries recorded the responses of Norfolk blacks upon the fall of Richmond. References to family reunification abounded and signaled the importance of family to blacks. H.C. Percy reported the response

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<sup>14</sup>Letter from Harriett Taylor to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, March 30, 1863, Portsmouth, AMA.

<sup>15</sup>Letter from Mary Clark to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, December 31, 1863, Norfolk, AMA.

of an elderly woman to the Richmond news, "Tank de Lord, deres no more handcuffin de childin now!" Mary Watson made an announcement about the fall of Richmond to her students and explained its implications. Her students joyfully responded exclaiming, "I'se got a Mother..Father..Brother..Sister.. there and now I shall see um." The spontaneity of their response indicates the close association of family and freedom.<sup>16</sup>

The quest to reunite families separated by slavery continued throughout the years of Reconstruction. AMA missionary Cordelia Hydorn reported an incident of a female student receiving information of her sister. Miss Hydorn described her as "radiant with joy" upon hearing of her sister's return. The student asked permission to leave class in order to give the news to her family. Others who did not receive news actively searched for family members. Advertisements such as this one from the September 29, 1870, edition of The New National Era were common, especially in black papers.

Martha Ward wishes information concerning her sister, Rosetta McQuillin, who was sold from Norfolk, Va., about thirty years ago to a Frenchman in Mobile, Ala. She is about forty-nine years of age, light complexion, and much freckled. Her former master was Mr. McQuillin, who resided on Briggs Point. Any information concerning her whereabouts will be kindly received by addressing to: P.O. Box 216 Norfolk, Va.

Blacks took active measures to reunite families separated by

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<sup>16</sup>Letter from H.C. Percy to Rev. George Whipple, April 1, 1865, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Mary E. Watson to Rev. George Whipple, May 1, 1865, Norfolk, AMA.

slavery.<sup>17</sup>

The actions blacks took to preserve families during times of military service demonstrated the depth of their commitment to their families. Many soldiers and laborers stationed at contraband camps legalized preexisting marriages in mass ceremonies performed by missionaries and army chaplains. Black men who served the government as laborers or soldiers demanded that the Union Army protect and care for the families they left at Army camps. These men expected the government to provide rations and care for the women and children. They also secured a provision to have their families guarded against rebel attack. Benjamin Butler's General Order No. 46, issued December 5, 1863, promised black enlistees and freedmen protection of and subsistence for their families. In their husbands' absence, black women held the government to its responsibilities. When the Army threatened to stop issuing rations to dependents, Norfolk women protested vehemently and convinced the Army to continue issuing rations. Soldiers' widows fought for and often secured their husbands' bounty and back pay from the Army.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Letter from E. Cordelia Hydorn to Rev. Samuel Hunt, March 1, 1866, Taylor Farm, AMA; Dorothy Sterling, ed., We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 313.

<sup>18</sup>Letter from W.O. King to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, April 1, 1863, Craney Island, AMA; Letter from William Coan to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, September 5, 1863, Craney Island, AMA; Letter from R.S. Smith to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, July 7, 1863, Gayle Farm, AMA; Letter from John Oliver to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, July 27, 1862, Fortress Monroe, AMA; Letter from William P. Austin to Orlando Brown, January 7, 1867, BRFAL; Berlin, Freedom: The Black Military Experience, 658, 663-4; Berlin, Freedom: The Destruction of

Differing cultural attitudes between blacks, missionaries, and government officials toward marriage caused tension between the groups. As Leon Litwack stated:

The insistence of teachers, missionaries, and Freedmen's Bureau officers that blacks formalize their marriages stemmed from the notion that legal sanction was necessary for sexual and moral restraint and that ex-slaves had to be inoculated with "the obligations of married state in civilized life."

Slavery divided black families. Under conditions of separation, black men and women moved ahead with their lives and found new mates. One man, who had been separated from his first wife and children and was now living with another woman, told AMA missionary Mary Watson that he still loved his first wife and he wanted to see her again. Miss Watson criticized him and counseled him of his duties to his current wife. Miss Watson also reported, "I have found several cases of men and women living together without having the marriage ceremony performed." When Miss Watson questioned one of her night students about not having legalized his marriage, he replied, "Law - some together 'fore dese times, when ceremonies wont of any count to colored folks." In some instances black newspapers like the True Southerner warned blacks not to seek a marriage license in civil court, but in the freedmen's court. The True Southerner would

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Slavery, 65, 68; City of Norfolk, Marriage Register Corporation Court, February 9, 1865 - December 17, 1865, Volume 1.

run announcements of these marriages.<sup>19</sup>

Blacks did legalize their marriages in significant numbers during the years of Reconstruction. Black ministers, Thomas Henson, John Brown, and Lewis Tucker, performed marriages and registered them in the city corporation court records. These ministers and others registered the following number of marriages: 1865, 96; 1866, 105; 1867, 104; 1868, 73; 1869, 60; 1870, 66.<sup>20</sup>

The family was vital to black success during Reconstruction, providing a source of emotional and economic support. On an emotional level the change in family life during Reconstruction was measurable. Forced family separation was no longer a threat. The ability to control family affairs was now a black power. Families also provided emotional support and security from the hostile white community. In addition, families provided economic support. Economic conditions during Reconstruction were harsh and families took in boarders and relatives to ease the financial burden on themselves as well as their boarders.

#### THE BLACK CHURCH

At the center of black family and black community growth and

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<sup>19</sup>Litwack, Been in the Storm, 240; Letter from Mrs. Mary Watson to Professor Woodbury, February 6, 1865, Norfolk, AMA; True Southerner, January 4, 25, 1866; City of Norfolk, Corporation Court Marriage Register, December 7, 1853 - April 29, 1879, Volume 1.

<sup>20</sup>City of Norfolk, Corporation Court Marriage Register, December 7, 1853 - April 29, 1879, Volume 1.

support was the black church. Leon Litwack called the black church "the central and unifying institution in the postwar black community." Like Litwack, Peter Rachleff saw the church and the family as the "critical social institutions" of black life. In consensus Eric Foner said, "the church was second to the family as the focal point of black life. The church was the most striking example of the thriving institutional structure blacks created in the aftermath of emancipation."<sup>21</sup>

In freedom, the church became the strongest independent black institution. It supported the growth of other institutions, educational, political, and charitable. The black church produced the chief black political leader of Reconstruction reform, the minister. The church was central to black success in Reconstruction.

The growth of the First Baptist Church Bute Street parallels growth experienced by other black churches in Norfolk during Reconstruction. The church was founded in 1800. Initially, the congregation was made up of both black and white members, but in 1816 whites withdrew from the predominantly black congregation. Upon withdrawal of whites, blacks assumed such leadership positions as preacher and trustee. When Nat Turner's rebellion took place in 1831 in Southampton County, a white preacher assumed control of the congregation and some white members returned. The next white exodus coincided with Union occupation

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<sup>21</sup>Litwack, Been in the Storm, 471; Rachleff, Black Labor, 10, 23; Foner, Reconstruction, 88, 95.

in May 1862. First Baptist Church Bute Street, like other congregations with many black members, was supervised by a white minister, Reverend C. Goodall; however, the church clerk, Lewis Tucker, a black man, led the church services. In 1863 Tucker became the first formally ordained black minister in Norfolk. During the years of Reconstruction, the church served many needs of the black community. The church basement became one of the first black school-rooms. In 1865 during formal Reconstruction, white control in the church ended. The church organized political rallies for equal suffrage and Union Leagues. Charitable societies based in the church flourished, aiding veterans, widows, and the destitute. In 1868 Reverend Tucker hosted and organized the Virginia Baptist State Convention in Norfolk.<sup>22</sup>

The four major black churches in Norfolk, First Baptist Bute Street, Bute Street African Methodist Episcopal, Catharine Street Baptist, and Saint Luke's Protestant Methodist, served as hosts for black education. AMA missionaries sponsored Sabbath Schools that thrived in the black churches throughout the years of Reconstruction. The black churches were also the sources of the campaign to secure public education for black children in Norfolk. The churches organized members into building and funding committees for securing schools. The committees repaired and built four schoolhouses and raised \$266.24 for schools.

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<sup>22</sup>History and Archives Committee, A Documented History of the First Baptist Church Bute Street, Norfolk, VA, 1800-1988 (Virginia Beach, VA, Hills Printing Co., 1988), 1-9.

Under leadership of strong ministers, Norfolk's black churches achieved their goal of public education. The church community even sponsored the first black superintendent, Thomas Henson, who was the pastor of Catharine Street Baptist Church. Ties between the church and school were strong.<sup>23</sup>

The AMA, the Freedmen's Bureau, and the military authorities recognized and utilized black church leadership. In 1862, when General Dix needed laborers to restore the military fortifications around Fort Norfolk and Fortress Monroe, he appealed to church leaders for help in locating reliable men. Captain Wagner contacted the leaders of the First Baptist Church Bute Street for help in locating experienced stevedores. The AMA missionaries, sometimes reluctantly, recognized the authority of black preachers. Brother Lewis Tucker's reputation was well known among AMA organizers in New York. Many visiting supervisors attended Sunday services at his church. The Freedmen's Bureau also utilized black leadership to disperse information and gauge needs of freedmen.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Letter from L.C. Lockwood to Brethren, October 4, 1862, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Ebenezer Knowlton to Rev. George Whipple, February 29, 1864, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Coan to Rev. George Whipple, February 9, 1864, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Lillie L. Duffin to Rev. George Whipple, March 14, 1864, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from J.C. Haskell to Rev. E.P. Smith, March 4, 1868, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from H.C. Percy to Rev. George Whipple, September 3, 1868, Norfolk, AMA; Letters from H.C. Percy to Whiting and Whipple, monthly from November 1868 to June 1869, Norfolk, AMA.

<sup>24</sup>Letter from L.C. Lockwood to Brethren, October 4, 1862, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Bro. Green to Brethren, July 2, 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Bro. Green to Brethren, May 27, 1863, Norfolk, AMA.

The black church memberships' desire to control their own affairs was the root of many disputes between the AMA and the black church. The AMA clearly wanted to guide early organizational policy among the black churches. The black church, newly free from white supervision, wanted to form policy independently from AMA supervision. When the black church sought a new minister or a new Sabbath school teacher, church members asked the AMA to send black men not white men. AMA supervisor Professor Woodbury explained,

...a minister who comes as a pastor over a church uncalled by that church is not welcome. They feel that religion is something they possess...They have been obligated to listen to white ministers provided or placed over them by their masters, while they have had men among themselves whom they believed were called by God to preach, who were kept silent by the institution from which they are now freed and to have white preachers still placed over them is too much like old times to meet with their approval.

The AMA was disturbed by the physically active participation of the black congregation in the church service. This cultural difference was a source of pride for blacks and a source of trouble for stoic northern Methodists. Brother Tucker explained to AMA missionary W.O. King, "It don't seem as if we poor ignorant Africans could come to the savior as you educated folks do. We have to worry it out."<sup>25</sup>

The early benevolent and social organizations based in the church provided the services of an extended family and developed

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<sup>25</sup>Letter from John Oliver to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, January 26, 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Professor Woodbury to Rev. George Whipple, September 7, 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from W.O. King to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, September 2, 1863, Craney Island, AMA.

into vital, lasting social welfare organizations. AMA missionary Janet Duncan formed an abstinence society with her students at their request. The students promised to give up tobacco and she pledged to forgo coffee and tea. The AMA and black congregations formed many such societies during Reconstruction motivated both by Northern missionary morality and by blacks' desire to erase their reputation of vice. One of the most important functions the church societies fulfilled was benevolence. In all of the black churches, societies made regular collections to support the needy and to provide for burial of members. AMA missionary H.C. Percy described the societal ceremony:

...The various societies, Daughters of Saint Luke, Bible Stars, Humble Sons of God, Good Samaritans, Sons of Adam, move forward in procession with each member depositing his five, ten, or twenty-five of the practical currency. The amount of each society was announced with the sum total often reaching twenty to thirty dollars.

The church played an important role in serving the needs of the community.<sup>26</sup>

Other social organizations, vital and important to support of the black community, came out of their previous secret status and thrived during Reconstruction. Approximately ninety-seven organizations maintained accounts at the Freedman's Bank, giving an approximation of the number of strong organizations that operated during Reconstruction. While a large number were

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<sup>26</sup>Letter from Janet Duncan to Rev. George Whipple, April 1864, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from H.C. Percy to Rev. Samuel Hunt, July 9, 1866, Norfolk, AMA.

directly associated with area churches, others developed over the need for organized labor, entrepreneurs, land, benevolence, societal, and political movements. These organizations encouraged black members' desire for self-improvement. Like the church, these organizations helped blacks progress.<sup>27</sup>

One of the most vital roles of the church was that of political organizer. The church supplied political leaders, served as a host for rallies, provided the political platform, kept members abreast of political events in Richmond and Washington, and organized voting drives. The democratic organization of church committees served as a model for democratic government. The church also served as the chief informer of political rights and duties. Blacks in Norfolk took pride in national affairs and participated actively in political events. On June 5, 1865, a public meeting was held at the Catharine Street Baptist Church to formulate a course of action for self-reconstruction and to call for equal suffrage. Church leaders were political leaders. Reverend John M. Brown and Reverend Thomas Henson served on the committee organizing the drive for suffrage and Brown co-authored the equal suffrage address with Thomas Bayne. Union Monitor Club meetings were held at black churches. The church was also the site for the registration of voters and the organizer of the State Convention participants. The ties between politics and the black church in

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<sup>27</sup>Index to Deposit Ledgers in Branches of Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, 1865-1874 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm, 1971), 100-18.

Norfolk were strong.<sup>28</sup>

The black church was the central public institution of black community life. Black churches in Norfolk functioned as spiritual centers, benevolent providers, political organizers, and educational centers during Reconstruction. Through church organizations the black community gained autonomy.

The family and the church were vital to black success during Reconstruction. Blacks relished the personal freedom of family security. Through the church, Norfolk blacks built an institutional structure that fostered the growth of their personal and their public lives. These essential social organs, the family and the church, supported blacks during Reconstruction.

The success of the black public education program in Norfolk would not have been possible without the support of the two central social entities in black life, the family and the church. With the aid of Northern missionaries, Norfolk blacks established a school system. The establishment of a school system was central to Norfolk blacks' desire for self-improvement.

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<sup>28</sup>Rachleff, Black Labor, 23; Letter from Rev George Green to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, April 18, 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Virginia, "Equal Suffrage Address" in Afro-American History Series Collection 3: The Black Intellectual (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1971), 1-26.

### CHAPTER THREE: BLACK EDUCATION

In the nineteenth century the education of slaves and free blacks was controlled by law and custom. Section 39 of the 1848 Criminal Code of Virginia declared unlawful any "assemblage (of slaves) for the purpose of instruction in reading or writing". Slaves found guilty of violating this section of the code were punished with thirty-nine lashes. Slave narratives demonstrate the limits placed on their education. Cornelius Garner, a Norfolk slave, testified,

We won't 'lowed to read and write. Dar won't no schools you know, in dem days like 'tis now and no matter how we yearned fer knowing how to read and write we had no way on earth of doing so.

Norfolk's free black population took advantage of schooling opportunities. The 1860 Census showed over three-quarters of free blacks in Norfolk attended school; even so, over half of these free black adults were illiterate. One popular local school for free blacks was run by Mrs. Margaret Douglas. Her school was closely monitored by local officials and in 1853 she was arrested for educating slaves and served one month in the city jail. For slaves and free blacks in Norfolk, educational opportunities were limited.<sup>1</sup>

The years of Reconstruction provided blacks in Norfolk with

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<sup>1</sup>Guild, Black Laws, 167; George Holbert Tucker, Norfolk Highlights 1589-1881 (Norfolk: Norfolk Historical Society, 1972), 121; Perdue, Weevils in the Wheat, 100; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census, 1860: Free Population, 275-558 (Adults calculated as those over fifteen years of age with 319 literate and 335 illiterate).

an unprecedented opportunity for education. The zeal with which they pursued education highlights the importance they assigned to it. During Reconstruction blacks, in Norfolk founded permanent educational institutions through collective action, community support, and individual sacrifice.

Revisionist and Postrevisionist studies have offered diverse interpretations over the establishment of schools for blacks in the South. While Revisionists view education as one of the true triumphs of Reconstruction, Postrevisionists regard education simply as an instrument of social control. Recently scholar Eric Foner called for a shift from this triumph/tragedy focus. Foner advised that blacks' goals should be placed at the center of the historical evaluation of education saying, "the desire for education was related to blacks' overall conception of the meaning of freedom."<sup>2</sup>

Eric Foner's Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877 (1988) provides an important examination of the education system formed during Reconstruction. Foner found education at the core of blacks' idea of freedom. He detailed great sacrifices by black communities throughout the South in order to provide for a school system. Also, Foner noted blacks' realization that educational advancement was tied to economic advancement and other measures of self-improvement. Examining education from blacks' point of view, Foner concludes that it was

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<sup>2</sup>Eric Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," 86-87.

an important component of freedom.<sup>3</sup>

Foner's generalizations hold true for education in Norfolk. Norfolk blacks made great sacrifices to establish a school system. They contributed money as well as their labor and materials to maintain schools. Adults and children attended academic and industrial schools to gain basic knowledge and job skills.

Most studies preceding Foner's that addressed education focused on the relationship between Southern blacks and Northern missionaries. In his study of Reconstruction, Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery (1981), Leon Litwack examined how the interaction between Southern blacks and Northern missionaries shaped educational systems throughout the South. Because the education of blacks in the South was undertaken largely by missionaries, Litwack found moral teaching at the center of learning. While he highlighted the achievements of this movement to educate Southern blacks, overall Litwack found fault with the freedmen's aid movement for its failure "to reduce the dependency of blacks on white men and women for counsel and leadership." Litwack found this especially true in the case of the black teacher. While the black community received black teachers with great anticipation, fellow white missionaries confined them to subservient roles. Like Litwack, Jacqueline Jones in Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873 (1980) found "evangelical abolitionism"

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<sup>3</sup>Foner, Reconstruction, 96-8.

as the goal motivating northern missionaries as well as the theme behind their teachings. Also like Litwack, Jones documented the struggle by blacks to exert more control over schooling and the conflict that resulted between blacks and missionaries because of divergent goals.<sup>4</sup>

The relationship between blacks and missionaries in Norfolk echoes that development outlined by Litwack and Jones. Moral teaching was at the center of AMA schooling. Missionary teachers founded temperance societies and encouraged thrift among their students. Initially, white men dominated missionary schools. Black encouragement led to increased openings as faculty and supervisors in Norfolk schools. In Norfolk there was a strong drive within the AMA to make blacks self-sufficient because of the AMA's precarious financial situation.

Another important study that examined the relationship between Northern missionaries and Southern blacks is Willie Lee Rose's Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment (1964). Rose's work cannot be underscored for it acts as an important cultural study of two diverse groups. Rose attributed black children's ability to master primary levels of letters and numbers to "a long heritage of oral communication of folk customs, songs, and stories." She attributed problems writing, spelling, and reading to the "total unfamiliarity of the children

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<sup>4</sup>Litwack, Been in the Storm So Long, 452, 493, 498; Jacqueline Jones, Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 8, 14, 64, 84.

with most of the words found in the Northern primers." While she saluted the missionaries for their dedication to education, she pointed to the chief motivation of some Northerners by describing them as "planter missionaries." Rose stressed the missionaries' contradictory response to blacks' educational progress. There was a significant change in attitude among the missionaries towards blacks as blacks lost their servile manner and became "less obedient." The missionaries interpreted this as ingratitude, but Rose felt they failed to "recognize the signs of growth of freedom."<sup>5</sup>

Two important works that examined the educational system in Virginia are Betty Mansfield's Ph.D. dissertation, "That Fateful Class: Black Teachers of Virginia's Freedmen" (1980) and Robert Engs, Freedom's First Generation: Black Hampton, Virginia, 1861-1890 (1979). Mansfield's work described the educational background and teaching experiences of Northern black teachers sent to Virginia cities to teach. She highlighted significant developments in the system of education for blacks throughout Virginia. The format she utilized pointed to the continuous involvement of blacks from the North and from Virginia cities in the growth of the educational system. Engs also highlighted the role of individual blacks in building an important and lasting educational institution at Hampton Institute. While Engs saluted the joint effort of blacks and missionaries to create an

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<sup>5</sup>Willie Lee Rose, Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1964), 71, 229-30, 366, 369.

institute of higher learning for blacks in Hampton Institute, he noted the growing divergence between black and missionary goals. This disparity stemmed from "racial, cultural, religious, and regional prejudice" founded in white paternalism, and it ultimately dimmed the potential promise of Hampton Institute.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of the problems of racism and religious differences between blacks and missionaries in Norfolk, the school system that they produced together was a positive and permanent achievement. As Engs points out, AMA missionaries and the schools they set up were paternalistic. Yet, blacks made their way into all levels of school administration in Norfolk. As the AMA's financial troubles increased, local blacks stepped up their contributions. At the close of its service in Norfolk, the AMA was certain Norfolk blacks could manage a school system.

The development of Norfolk's black public educational system during Reconstruction provides an important portrait of a successful Reconstruction program. The accomplishments of the program reached beyond education. The black struggle to build schools strengthened the internal community structure by uniting the community through collective action. The value of education to Norfolk blacks was made clear in their political drive to guarantee public education for everyone. Underlined in the campaign was blacks' belief that everyone was entitled to an

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<sup>6</sup>Betty Mansfield, "That Fateful Class: Black Teachers of Virginia's Freedmen" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1980), 80-314; Engs, Freedom's First Generation, 64, 139.

equal opportunity. The schools required the development of a professional-class of black teachers, elevating some blacks to a higher economic base. Finally, education helped combat the popular white stereotype of black intellectual inferiority. For Norfolk blacks the educational opportunities that grew from Reconstruction strengthened the goals of self-improvement and self-determination.

In the development of public education in Norfolk, blacks again became protagonists in the struggle for freedom. At first, local whites used violence and intimidation to deter black progress. Later, whites employed economic boycotts and political tactics to undermine the established black educational system. Even missionary allies impeded black independence in education. AMA policy and practice was often racist, paternalistic, and guarded. Norfolk blacks continually pushed the AMA for more black teachers and administrators, and a greater role in curriculum development. In a world of race and caste dominance, Norfolk blacks were constrained in their drive to realize full educational freedom.

#### INFORMAL RECONSTRUCTION 1862-1864

The first phase of black educational development in Norfolk, 1862-1864, was distinguished by development in spite of adversity. Wartime conditions, limited resources, and an ever-changing student population made establishing initial schools difficult. Through black encouragement and assistance, the AMA

established temporary day schools and Sabbath schools in late 1862. Black initiative and missionary aid fostered the expansion of schools in the country and in the city. With the continued support of the black community, the AMA schools were functioning on a daily basis, and serving an increasing number of students by 1864. Norfolk blacks were active agents in school building.

The Federal occupation of Norfolk that began in May 1862 coincided with an "occupation" by Northern missionaries. The benevolent group with the most substantial field service in Norfolk throughout the Civil War and Reconstruction was the American Missionary Association (AMA). The AMA came to Norfolk to found permanent schools for blacks. The AMA home office in New York intended to instill blacks with the moral responsibilities of freedom. The missionaries believed that the institution of slavery deprived slaves of moral teaching.<sup>7</sup>

The initial months of contact between AMA missionaries and Norfolk blacks foreshadowed a relationship that would be marked by cooperation and conflict. At the outset the AMA supported the established free black schools. In the next major development, the AMA aided local blacks in establishing Sabbath schools separate from white controlled religious institutions. The AMA sponsored college-educated Northern black teachers, who led an especially strong drive to develop schools for blacks in Norfolk.

AMA missionaries were eagerly received by the black community of Norfolk, and together they established clandestine

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<sup>7</sup>Chambers, "Notes on Occupied Norfolk," 133.

Sabbath schools and day schools. Federal forces denied the AMA permission to start schools in Norfolk in May 1862. Because of their abolitionist doctrine, the AMA was shunned by white churches. Lewis Lockwood, pioneer AMA missionary in Hampton, founded a program in Norfolk based in the black community's established schools. One popular school Lockwood took pride in was run by Miss Lucinda Spivery, a free black woman from Williamsburg. On a visit to Miss Spivery's day school he praised the school curriculum as well as the classroom leadership of outstanding students. Several advanced students assisted Miss Spivery as monitors. In particular Lockwood noted the achievements of a single monitor, seven-year-old Maria Chieseman. Lockwood said "she managed the reading class with skill and dignity."<sup>8</sup>

Norfolk blacks were anxious to set up Sabbath schools with the AMA. For blacks, Sabbath schools provided religious teaching away from the direction of white churches. At this time the majority of white churches followed the proslavery doctrine. In the early fall Lockwood met with a committee of black Methodists in Portsmouth to confer about Sabbath schools advising them "to manage the thing themselves very discretely ...as they have a proslavery pastor." Another AMA Sabbath school organizer was Thomas De Saliere Tucker. Tucker was one of a handful of black missionaries from Northern schools who came to Norfolk as AMA

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<sup>8</sup>Engs, Freedom's First Generation, 52; Letter from Lewis C. Lockwood to Brethren, October 4, 1862, Norfolk, AMA.

workers. Tucker responded to the needs of the Norfolk community with remarkable insight. Tucker, who had attended Oberlin College, helped establish the Sabbath school at Bute Street Baptist Church. This school proved a cornerstone of the black education movement in Norfolk.<sup>9</sup>

John Oliver was a black Bostonian AMA teacher who had a great deal of influence founding Norfolk's early AMA services. Oliver's AMA work took him all along the Virginia peninsula and eventually to Richmond. In Norfolk his work encompassed humanitarian, educational, and religious pursuits. In a bold step Oliver requested permission from the military commander General Egbert L. Viele to open a school for black children in Norfolk. While Oliver obtained Viele's permission to open a school, he had a difficult time convincing black church members to let him use their church as an openly declared schoolhouse. Oliver commented to his superior about the situation saying, "the only difficulty will be to overcome their fears that no further harm will come to them from present or returning rebels." Openly adopting a school run by Oliver posed an additional risk for the black community because he had been publicly accused by a white minister of inciting slaves to insurrection. He had vocalized his opinions of slavery in Rev. Richard Allen's predominantly white church meeting saying, "Urge the people to do all which is

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<sup>9</sup>Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 80; Letter from Lewis Lockwood to Brethren, October 4, 1862, Norfolk, AMA; Engs, Freedom's First Generation, 50 (Tucker's middle name also listed as DeSoto).

lawful and right for themselves, to learn the use of Liberty. If they do not, freedom will never be thrust upon them." Because he was an outspoken critic of the religious wrongs of slavery and a proponent of teaching the practice of liberty to slaves, Oliver was scorned by Norfolk's proslavery community. Oliver was aware he had furthered the animosity between whites and blacks and stated his fear that this animosity would lead to "the colored people ... being instantly destroyed by the whites of Norfolk."<sup>10</sup>

Local black teachers played an equally important role in establishing black education in Norfolk. Initially the AMA did not send a large number of Northern teachers to Norfolk; therefore, many of the AMA supported schools were taught by local free black residents. George W. Cook, a free black resident of Norfolk, with the help of his brother-in-law, Dempsey Farber, ran schools at Fort Norfolk and in the city. Plagued by instability of wartime environment, classes were held randomly and maintained few steady scholars. Cook's wife held classes in their home and charged one dollar tuition per month per child. Possessing limited finances and scant instructional material, the Cooks came under harsh criticism from the Northern missionaries. John Oliver felt especially disappointed in Mr. Cook's work and requested his removal saying,

Mr. Cook is little or no practical service to this people. He does not go there regular and when he does he takes with him something to sell and when that is done he returns to the city.

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<sup>10</sup>Letter from John Oliver to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, December 17, 1862, Norfolk, AMA; Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 84.

On the one hand, the AMA encouraged local blacks to act in their own behalf and, at the same time, it expected local blacks' behavior to mimic northern ways.<sup>11</sup>

The first few months of AMA schooling in 1862 were plagued by precarious conditions of wartime and weakened by the naivety of the early missionaries. One missionary, Palmer Litts, found conditions on Craney Island difficult. Litts reported, "The facilities for education are very limited as places are required for shelter or anything is prepared in the shape of school room or a place of divine service." He also found conditions so poor that the wants of starvation superseded the need for education. Litts confided, "For the present we can do but little for these people in the line of education as their physical wants must first be supplied." Litts was able to conduct classes sporadically and found himself making unexpected adjustments in order to accommodate the large number of students. To begin his instruction at the primary level he requested "two or three charts of the alphabet in large letters...two-hundred copies of the National Primer and First Readers." While Litts was distracted by the many impediments he found at Craney Island, he was inspired by the hunger for learning among the people. He confided,

What little intercourse I have had with the people, I find them very desirous to be instructed and from what

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<sup>11</sup>Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 96; Letter from George Cook to Brethren, September 17, 1862, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from John Oliver to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, December 17, 1862, Norfolk, AMA.

I know of the proficiency made by those in the school at Hampton, I believe they are very attentive to whatever instructions are given.

Wartime conditions discouraged missionary teachers, but the students encouraged them.<sup>12</sup>

Some Northern white missionaries were overwhelmed by the chaotic conditions and were unable to perform effectively. John N. Bebout, an AMA missionary, found conditions on Craney Island too difficult to manage. He reported many problems preventing his work from going forward writing, "the people and young are very anxious to learn, but there is not much chance, only as I can gather a few around a card out doors." He decided to look elsewhere for a more suitable situation. Bebout was attracted to Downey Farm, which was approximately five miles from Hampton, because he found a more suitable teaching environment. He requested a transfer saying,

I talked to over twenty colored men on Downey Farm near Hampton all very anxious to have me there to teach. They said they would pay all for my expenses, which would be an item worth considering. There is a house which would hold 75 scholars. I would prefer to go there.

Bebout's transfer was refused and he was removed from the area due largely to the request of C.B. Wilder, Superintendent of the Contraband at Fortress Monroe. Wilder felt Bebout was more concerned with making money than educating blacks.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Letter from Palmer Litts to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, December 1, 1862, Craney Island, AMA.

<sup>13</sup>Letter from John N. Bebout to C.B. Wilder, December 30, 1862, Craney Island, AMA; Engs, Freedom's First Generation, 32, 63-64.

The initial months of missionary work in and around Norfolk foreshadowed both the success and the failure that would come to characterize missionary work throughout the Civil War and Reconstruction. The individual power struggles, the AMA bureaucracy, poor financing, low supplies, hostile local response, and the involvement of Northern and local blacks continued to shape the course of education in Norfolk. While initially the unstable wartime conditions inhibited black education in Norfolk, blacks achieved success because of their own determination, their own initiative, and their own desire for self-improvement.

The first full year of AMA's sponsored instruction in Norfolk began in January 1863. In the early part of the year instruction remained sporadic and poorly organized. By mid-year conditions in the schools stabilized considerably and instruction became more specialized. The influx of large numbers of contraband into Norfolk swelled enrollment and fostered the AMA's reliance on student monitors and local teachers. Significant developments in Norfolk's educational system came about as the result of continued cooperation between local blacks and AMA workers. By year's end cooperative efforts yielded new school buildings, continuing the expansion of the educational system.

W.O. King, a white AMA appointee assigned to Craney Island, reported a successful month of instruction of both children and adults. His monthly report for January 1863 reflected his positive attitude due to recent progress among his students.

King stated,

We have not been able to teach systematically or regularly; but I think we have done a great deal for them in distributing books, awakening a desire to learn; and stimulating them to teach others for there are quite a number that could read some.

King also reported a new requirement that the children learn letters before receiving Union Primers. Under the new guideline, King gave away three-hundred Union Primers, a reflection of the progress students were making in reading. King also requested additional help from the AMA citing a recent rise in population at the contraband camp from seventeen-hundred to two-thousand.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of threats and actions by members of the white community, the black community continued to support day schools and Sabbath schools. As the number of contraband in Norfolk grew, resistance by the white community to the growing number of black classes grew as well. John Oliver reported that white property owners would not rent out rooms for use as schools for blacks, but would rather "burn them down." Oliver also reported that the "secessionists have burned several buildings that the government had in use." <sup>15</sup>

The resistance demonstrated by blacks in Norfolk inspired blacks in nearby Portsmouth. At the request of blacks in Portsmouth, John Oliver organized schools at the black churches in Portsmouth. The churches acted as support systems for one

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<sup>14</sup>Letter from W.O. King to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, January 7, 1863, Craney Island, AMA.

<sup>15</sup>Letters from John Oliver to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, 14, 26 January, 5, 17 February 1863, Norfolk and Portsmouth, AMA.

another. If persecution became too great in Norfolk, students came to Portsmouth for school lessons, and vice versa. In January and February 1863, Oliver recorded between one hundred to two hundred students attending classes in Portsmouth. While most of the black students were free, some were slaves whose owners were serving in the Confederate Army or contraband from North Carolina and Maryland. Oliver relayed a message to his superiors from the Colored Methodist Church praising the AMA school for the appointment of a black Methodist pastor. This request was significant because it indicated the desire of the black congregation to exercise greater control over their own religious affairs.<sup>16</sup>

The continued desire of blacks to learn caused the AMA to send more teachers to Norfolk. By late February 1863 and into early Spring new missionaries arrived in Norfolk and Portsmouth. One of the newest arrivals, Miss Harriett Taylor, symbolized the AMA's confidence in field of Norfolk, for now women could join the service. Until now, AMA officials had been reluctant to send women teachers to a hostile area. Taylor encountered unique problems as the only woman serving in Norfolk at this time. She could not reside in the house with her male colleagues; and because she taught black students, she could not secure housing with a white family in the area. She considered herself "fortunate" to find shelter with a black family. Even though this black family faced assault, the family made the sacrifice

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

and welcomed AMA teachers who helped Norfolk's children.<sup>17</sup>

Miss Taylor's correspondence testified to black children's educational aspirations. Taylor described Oliver's two hundred scholars in Portsmouth as "remarkably orderly and studied considering the brief time that they have been under instruction." She was surprised by their "cleanly" appearance and noted that all "wear shoes, handkerchiefs, and gloves in school." Miss Taylor noted the strong desire of her students to learn, for many stayed after the six-hour class session to raise questions. She reported that a female student told her, "I am very grateful to you for coming so far to teach me and I hope I shall learn well," and one of her male students said, "School is my home. I would rather be here than anywhere else."<sup>18</sup>

As black pupils advanced, the classes became more sophisticated to meet the varying needs of the students. Harriett Taylor reported that her school had adopted several new levels of instruction to meet the different needs of the pupils. Each missionary instructed his own class of primary, secondary, and advanced students. By grouping students by level of ability, the students benefitted more from their instruction.<sup>19</sup>

At the urging of black students, the missionaries found themselves making additional changes to better serve the needs of

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<sup>17</sup>Letter from Harriett Taylor to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, February 24, 1863, Portsmouth, AMA.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Letter from Harriett Taylor to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, March 30, 1863, Portsmouth, AMA.

the students. Soon advanced classes incorporated oral addresses by the students, a characteristic of their black heritage. These addresses provided a showcase of eloquent speakers as well as a platform of the social and economic concerns of the black community. In these oral addresses students directly refuted the black Sambo stereotype. Not only were these speakers able to summarize the problems facing the community, but also did so in poetic form. Harriett Taylor described to her AMA supervisors one slave student's classroom address saying, "This 'chattel' is certainly a humble specimen of humanity; with his own earnings he has redeemed himself and his five children from slavery, purchased a house and a large garden plot." She had been moved by his achievements as well as his words:

I believe I am a human man and not a brute!...We must show our owners that we are men and that we can take care not only of ourselves, but also after our brothers who have no work and nothing to eat or wear.

Both blacks and missionaries benefitted from the addition of the black oral tradition into the AMA classes.<sup>20</sup>

By mid-year, conditions in the AMA schools had stabilized considerably. By April 1863, the schools were reporting improved regular attendance by the pupils. M.H.S. Beals reported one hundred fifty students in his day school class, and of those students sixty learned to read that month. His evening school class contained sixty-three adults who he felt possessed "clear and intelligent ideas across a variety of subjects." Beals

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid; Rose, Rehearsal for Reconstruction, 320.

reported that all students had an "anxiety to learn."<sup>21</sup>

As the number of contraband seeking shelter in Norfolk grew, so did the need for more schools and teachers. To express the black community's desire for more schools, Deacon Brown of the Bute Street Methodist Church met with Rev. George N. Green of the AMA. The six to eight thousand contraband now residing in Norfolk could not be serviced by the existing schools. Soon representatives from other black-supported churches met with Green to express their willingness and desire to offer their facilities for schooling. Almost immediately a Sabbath school was organized at First Baptist Church. Other churches soon followed, collectively supporting six hundred new students. Nine local black teachers served as instructors of the new Sabbath schools. By the end of April 1863, two hundred new scholars signed up for classes, and that number doubled within the week. Green reported that the only factor curtailing enrollment was the lack of available AMA teachers.<sup>22</sup>

In May 1863, the missionary sponsored schools offered steady instruction and enrollment increased. Teachers found themselves making schedule changes to accommodate their ever increasing enrollment. Because of the large numbers of students, the day schools held separate sessions for two hours each day. The

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<sup>21</sup>Letter from W.S. Beals to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, April 1, 1863, Portsmouth, AMA.

<sup>22</sup>Letters from George N. Green to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, 18, 21, 28 April, 11 May 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 102.

evening schools, which were filled by adults and working-aged children, also had two-hour sessions. For example, on the first day of school, enrollment in one day school totaled three hundred fifty students and enrollment in one night school totaled three hundred students. The very next day enrollment in both schools increased dramatically to six hundred in the day school and five hundred in the evening school. Throughout the month, the combined enrollment in day and night schools averaged one thousand students. Because of the large numbers of students, AMA teachers sought instructional aid from the top students. Between five and nine female monitors assisted AMA teachers in individual classes.<sup>23</sup>

The desire of local black citizens to help educate children in their community often entailed great commitment and sacrifice. While AMA commissioned teachers were supported financially for both housing and instruction, local teachers and monitors only received pay for teaching and it was less than the salary paid to AMA commissioned teachers. The AMA office in New York did not have the financial resources to pay and house local teachers and monitors. In order to survive as a teacher Mr. Hawkins, a local man teaching in Suffolk, had to moonlight as an oysterman. Such actions by members of the black community illustrate the

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<sup>23</sup>Letters from Rev. Green to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, 6, 11, 7 May 1863, Norfolk, AMA.

commitment to educate as many people as possible.<sup>24</sup>

After much lobbying by the AMA and the Norfolk black community, in October 1863, the Adjunct General's Office handed over the keys to two of Norfolk's public school houses. While the School No. 2 at Queen Street had been damaged by rebels and needed repair, the School No. 4 at Fenchurch Street was ready for immediate occupation. Unlike the basement rooms the missionaries had been using, the new school rooms were furnished with desks, blackboards, and stoves. Each room was occupied by one teacher, one monitor, and fifty pupils. The most advanced pupils were selected for instruction in this new environment.<sup>25</sup>

With aid of the black community and the protection of the Northern Army, the AMA continued to expand the number of schoolhouses and teachers serving Norfolk. Blacks provided labor and the Army provided furnishings, rations, and fuel for the schools. In addition to School No. 4, new School No. 9 and two repaired rooms of School No. 2 were in use in November 1863. By December 1863, the construction of School No. 3 was almost complete. By the end of the year more than three thousand blacks received educational instruction in the Norfolk schools from twenty-one

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<sup>24</sup>Letter from W.O. King to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, September 2, 1863, Craney Island, AMA; Letter from Professor Woodbury to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, September 7, 1863, Norfolk, AMA.

<sup>25</sup>Letters from Professor Woodbury to Rev. George Whipple, 20, 29 October 1863, Norfolk, AMA.

teachers in eleven day and evening schools.<sup>26</sup>

March 1864 marked the one-year anniversary of the organization of AMA schools in and around Norfolk. The anniversary month was marked by more school openings in the black churches, the arrival of more AMA teachers, the increasing enrollment of new students, the creation of an experimental school, and the strengthening of country schools. Monthly reports for April 1864 show an average of twenty school days in the month. Four thousand students were enrolled in classes with an equal number of males and females. The curriculum included reading, spelling, writing, written and mental arithmetic, geography, needlework, and singing.<sup>27</sup>

While Norfolk's black community fully supported the AMA's educational efforts, the community requested more opportunities for black teachers. Together black teachers and community members agitated for all-black run programs. Responding to the request of the community, Professor Woodbury, who was the AMA Superintendent of Instruction in Norfolk, authorized the establishment of a unique all-black teacher-student experimental school in Norfolk. Professor Woodbury supported the idea for the

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<sup>26</sup>Letters from Professor Woodbury to Rev. George Whipple, 7, 10 November, 16 December 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 102; Engs, Freedom's First Generation, 52-53.

<sup>27</sup>Letters from Rev. Coan to Rev. George Whipple, 12, 24 March 1864, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Mary E. Burdick to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, April 23, 1864, Norfolk, AMA; Monthly Reports for City of Norfolk AMA Schools, April 1864, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from H.C. Percy to Rev. George Whipple, November 15, 1864, Norfolk, AMA.

school because he felt that, "with the requisite culture, the colored teacher will get nearer to their own race in a thousand and one ways." The school's teachers were five black women from the North: Blanche V. Harris, Clara Duncan, Edmonia G. Highgate, Sallie L. Daffin, and Sara G. Stanley. All the women were experienced teachers, Harris and Duncan were graduates of Oberlin College and Highgate had been an instructor at the Colored Industrial School of Binghamton, New York. Along with the standard curriculum, the school offered industrial instruction including sewing and other labor skills. The school received much support and praise from the black community, especially from the leaders of the black churches. Unfortunately, the ill health of several of the teachers resulted in the school's closing after only one month. The AMA could not attract new Northern black teachers to continue the special school. While the school lasted only for a short time, it reaffirmed the black community's power to influence education in Norfolk.<sup>28</sup>

The success of city schools enabled the AMA to expand to the country. As the number of AMA missionaries in Norfolk city and county increased and the military presence on the farm stabilized, the schools established on the county farms adopted educational routines practiced in the city. One of the most successful and lasting schools was established on Wise Farm in Princess Anne County. Three women, H.L. True, Charlotte

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<sup>28</sup>Letters from Professor Woodbury to Rev. George Whipple, 10 February 1864, 7 November 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 103-19.

MacDonald, and Isabella McKechnic, provided organization and instruction on the farm. Separate sessions for advanced, intermediate, and primary students were held each day for two hours. Sewing for both males and females and religious instruction were also offered. At the beginning of the month the school enrolled two hundred day students and one hundred night students. By the end of the month, the combined enrollment increased to three hundred fifty students. Teachers' reports documented rapid advancement from the primary to the advanced program.<sup>29</sup>

While other farm schools were not as militarily secure as Wise Farm, the farm community and the missionaries worked together to create a productive educational program. AMA missionary William Henry Morris, a free black honor student from Ashmun Institute, structured the instruction on Baxter Farm in Princess Anne County around the needs of the farm community. The farm housed 204 people and only those under twelve-years of age (eighty-nine children) were exempt from farm labor and received regular daily instruction. Morris also held instructional sessions at night and, at the community's request, included religious devotionals in the lesson. Morris was pleased with the program he formulated and expressed his satisfaction saying, "if diligent application to study is a test of their love of learning I shall hope for much in due season." While economic survival

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<sup>29</sup>Letter from Lucy Bell to Rev. George Whipple, February 11, 1864, Wise Farm, AMA; Letters from H.L. True to Rev. George Whipple, 2, 22 February 1864, Wise Farm, AMA.

dictated the amount of time spent on instruction, the Baxter Farm community was strongly committed to learning.<sup>30</sup>

Blacks built independent schools in remote areas in and around Norfolk County where the missionaries had not established schools. In Suffolk, the black community of Union Town worked diligently to educate themselves. In the small schoolhouse built by community members, a mulatto man instructed between forty and fifty adults daily free of charge, and two former slaves instructed one hundred forty children daily free of charge. The school strengthened this small black community through fellowship and cooperation.<sup>31</sup>

After two-years of cooperation, Norfolk blacks and Northern missionaries had established an impressive school system. Blacks supported the education system with money, labor, and staff support. Their intense involvement in school development and their participation in learning demonstrated the importance of education to blacks.

#### FORMAL RECONSTRUCTION 1865-1871

When the rebels returned at the close of the Civil War, they threatened the educational freedom that blacks had come to enjoy. Upon their return to Norfolk, whites ousted blacks from all public school buildings. Conditions remained hostile until

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<sup>30</sup>Letter from William Henry Morris to George Whipple, February 24, 1864, Baxter Farm, AMA; Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 140.

<sup>31</sup>Letter from W.O. King to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, April 1, 1863, Craney Island, AMA.

military authority resumed in Norfolk. In 1865 in Virginia and across the South the freedmen's schools came under federal control. In many cities the Freedmen's Bureau took over organization, instruction, and supervision of benevolent sponsored schools. In Norfolk the AMA resumed instruction in twelve mission schools. While the AMA in Norfolk accepted assistance from the Freedmen's Bureau, benevolent schools dominated the city's black education system.<sup>32</sup>

In freedom the black community's commitment to education grew even stronger. During the years of formal Reconstruction, the black community in Norfolk acted to establish more schools, to support financially the school system, and to head the drive for the city's commitment to public education for all children.

In freedom, blacks regarded education as an important tool for intellectual and economic advancement. AMA schools in Norfolk specialized to meet the needs of the black community. Industrial schools were popular among employable-aged blacks because they offered an academic learning environment as well as a skills-training program. The AMA also embraced industrial schools with vigor because missionaries like Miss Drake felt it was "part of our work to teach these people industrial economy." AMA missionary Miss Harriett M. Buss expressed a similar view, linking economic need with personal respectability. She said,

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<sup>32</sup>Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 164; Engs, Freedom's First Generation, 45; Letter from H.C. Percy to Rev. Samuel Hunt, September 8, 1866, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from H.C. Percy to Rev. E.P. Smith, October 6, 1868, Norfolk, AMA.

One of the greatest wants among them is the elevation of their women. Their household arrangements need an entire reconstruction. An industrial school could be thoroughly instructed in all common household arrangements, and taught to be tidy and economical in their dress and in the management of a house so as to render home neat, cheerful, and attractive and also engage in some branch of industry for their own support.

While Miss Buss's ideas reflect Northern ideas of uplift, black women welcomed the opportunity to increase their industrial skills. At the black community's request, the AMA expanded the curriculum to include marketable professional skills such as clerical and bookkeeping courses. Students eagerly purchased books and supplies for such courses.<sup>33</sup>

The expansion of the night school further demonstrated the black community's commitment to education. Evening classes were filled to capacity by anxious adults. The AMA missionaries lauded the efforts of adults who made time to improve their learning skills. Miss Reed said, "Their progress and perseverance are alike encouraging...I often wish that those who will not think these people can learn, could see and hear for themselves." In addition to support from the missionaries, adults often received special encouragement and assistance from their own children. Miss Reed reported to her superiors that one of her female students helped her mother write letters. In a similar incident, AMA missionary Robert Harris reported that a

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<sup>33</sup>Letter from Miss Drake to Rev. M.E. Strieby, February 8, 1865, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Harriett M. Buss to Rev. E.P. Smith, February 1, 1869, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from H.C. Percy to William E. Whiting, October 21, 1865, Norfolk, AMA.

black serviceman who had returned from duty was taught to read, write, and spell by his children.<sup>34</sup>

The black school system in Norfolk city served as a model for new schools in the surrounding counties. Communities that wished to implement a black supported public school system sought guidance from Norfolk. One such black community was Cuffey Town in Norfolk County. After consulting with the public school commission at Norfolk, the Cuffey Town black community established a self-sustaining public school system. First, the community appointed five Trustees: Rev. William Hodges, Miles and Arthur Cuffey, and David and Oliver Smith, to organize and implement the school project. The Trustees obtained one-quarter acre on Green Ridge Road from Mericka Smith for the school. The Trustees then asked the public in Cuffey Town and Norfolk for money for the project. By following Norfolk's example and requesting its assistance, Cuffey Town built a lasting school system.<sup>35</sup>

White hostility toward black education often resulted in violent confrontation. Robert Harris, a black AMA missionary serving the Providence Church community, reported increased threats from whites against his school. In a letter to his superiors, Harris described repeated threats from whites about

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<sup>34</sup>Letter from Miss Reed to Rev. George Whipple, May 3, 1865, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Robert Harris to Rev. George Whipple, June 28, 1865, Norfolk, AMA.

<sup>35</sup>Letter from William Hodges to Rev. George Whipple, October 15, 1865, Cuffey Town, AMA; Letter from Thomas P. Jackson to Rev. George Whipple, October 26, 1865, Cuffey Town, AMA.

burning the school and the refusal by whites to sell any supplies to the school. Harris also recorded incidents where students were physically attacked by white muggers and stripped of their books and supplies. In spite of increased hostilities and incidents of violence directed at school activities, Harris and his students stood firm. As a gesture of defiance, the students and families made monthly financial contributions keeping the school supplied and operating. Monthly contributions averaged seventeen dollars. Their defiance demonstrated their commitment to improving their situation.<sup>36</sup>

While white hostility failed to deter blacks from attending school, economic depression did affect classroom attendance, especially in the county. AMA teachers reported significant decreases in attendance as blacks struggled to make ends meet. Children who previously attended school now worked or stayed at home with siblings while parents worked. Many adults who had attended night classes now traveled greater distances to find work and could not set aside time for school. In spite of a desire for education, harsh economic conditions forced many blacks to choose between work and school.<sup>37</sup>

Because the city offered more employment, school attendance

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<sup>36</sup>Letters from Robert Harris to Rev. Samuel Hunt, 1 January, 1 March 1866, Providence Farm, AMA; Letter from John Wesley Cromwell to H.C. Percy, Monthly Report December 1866, Providence Farm, AMA.

<sup>37</sup>Letters from Miss S.F. Goodell to Rev. Samuel Hunt, 1 June, 31 March 1866, Taylor Farm, AMA; Letter from B.G. Bryan to Rev. Samuel Hunt, May 1, 1866, Wise Farm, AMA.

there remained high. Yet funds for new schools remained scarce and church basement school house conditions remained poor and crowded. In his 1866 annual inspection report of Norfolk schools, Chaplin C.A. Raymond reported, "The want of suitable school houses is the one feature in the work of educating the colored people, which during the three years past has attained no perceptible improvement."<sup>38</sup>

As the AMA experienced financial strain, missionaries and blacks in Norfolk formulated a plan shifting all school responsibility to the black community within a two-year period. The plan proposed dramatic changes in the existing system. One proposal called for charging tuition of fifty-cents per student per month. Another important feature of the plan called for Normal classes. Only the best pupils participated in Normal classes for teacher training. This feature proved effective as Normal students maintained classes while missionaries took a summer recess. The black community continued to step-up its commitment to education.<sup>39</sup>

In December 1866, the AMA maintained eleven schools in Norfolk. The total number of students enrolled that month was 918. Of those 918 students, 674 had learned to spell and read and 623 learned to write. There were fifteen sessions of day school for six hours each day and there were ten sessions of

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<sup>38</sup>Letter from Chaplin C.A. Raymond to Chaplin R.M. Manly, March 1, 1866, Norfolk, AMA.

<sup>39</sup>Letters from H.C. Percy to Rev. Samuel Hunt, 8, 3 September 1866, 11 November 1865, Norfolk, AMA.

night school for two hours each night. The students were not required to pay tuition. Fifty-nine students had been free before the war. While the Freedmen's Bureau and the Federal Government provided buildings for day school, the night school and Sabbath school were held in black churches. Other benevolent organizations maintained several schools and the freedmen wholly supported four independent schools.<sup>40</sup>

By 1867 an important goal of the Norfolk black community was strengthening black leadership in the public school system. Qualified black applicants sought positions of superintendent of the Norfolk public school system and the Norfolk Sabbath schools. John Wesley Cromwell, a black man who graduated from the Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth, agitated the AMA for the position. While the AMA accepted him for a teaching position, he was refused the position of superintendent. AMA missionary J.C. Haskell reported, "the people seemed to dislike the idea very much that one of their number should be deprived of the honor of being Superintendent of their Sabbath school."<sup>41</sup>

While here the community expressed their disappointment verbally, in a coming dispute the black community took a stronger stance and threatened the AMA with an economic boycott. The incident involved the teaching application of Phebe E. Henson.

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<sup>40</sup>AMA Teachers Monthly Report, December 1866, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from William P. Austin to Orlando Brown, Monthly Report of Operational Conditions, December 5, 1866, Norfolk, BRFAL.

<sup>41</sup>Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 188; Letter from J.C. Haskell to Rev. E.P. Smith, September 30, 1867, Norfolk, AMA.

Miss Henson was the daughter of Thomas Henson, a black preacher in Norfolk, and she requested a teaching position in Norfolk with the AMA. Instead Miss Henson was assigned to Drummondtown on the Eastern Shore. Angered by the AMA's disregard for their wishes, the community threatened Superintendent Percy with the withholding of funds. Percy reported the community's threat relaying the following to his supervisors:

The colored people are taking more than the usual interest in the schools now and as many think you never send out colored teachers, it might make a difference for your receipts here if this lady comes to Norfolk.

Funds from the black community decreased for several months.<sup>42</sup>

Blacks continued to exert their independence and, in June 1868, the competition between benevolent schools and independent black schools intensified. The AMA maintained eight schools and enrolled 490 pupils. Other benevolent societies sponsored four day schools. In these benevolent day schools four black teachers instructed 203 pupils. The freedmen sustained five day schools, in which five black teachers instructed 203 pupils. In order to support the independent black schools, 145 students paid tuition totaling one hundred dollars. The freedmen also maintained one Sabbath school with twenty teachers and 244 pupils.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>There are several spellings of Phebe's last name: AMA records cite as Henderson, Mansfield cite as Henson, and Norfolk Journal cites as Hanson; Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 206; Letter from H.C. Percy to Rev. E.P. Smith, October 6, 1868, Norfolk, AMA.

<sup>43</sup>BRFAL, District Superintendent Monthly School Report, First Sub-District, Norfolk, Virginia, June 1868; Letter from J.H. Remington to Orlando Brown, Monthly Report Destitute Freedmen and

In the early years of Reconstruction 1865-67, the financial commitment of the Freedmen's Bureau and the AMA to the Norfolk schools remained strong. In 1868 financial strain weakened these organizations, and the burden fell upon the black community to preserve the existing educational system. With the end of the Freedmen's Bureau looming in 1869, in 1868 Commissioner Howard in Special Order No. 47 authorized the transfer of school building titles from government control to benevolent control guaranteeing a school system for blacks. This measure helped prop up AMA services in Norfolk by moving money usually allocated for rent to teacher salaries and supply inventory. This was significant since the number of schools maintained by the AMA had dropped from twelve in 1866 to seven in 1868. These measures aided in the immediate survival of the black school system in Norfolk.<sup>44</sup>

In 1868 as AMA financial assistance waned and black political power grew, Norfolk blacks launched an active campaign for a free public school system in Norfolk. The early stages of the campaign focused on support from within the black community. Black churches mobilized the community in this movement. Ministers from the black churches organized meetings on the subject of school sponsorship. At the initial meeting, the community appointed a committee with representatives from each of the four wards in the city. The committee held monthly meetings

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Refugees, October 31, 1868, Norfolk, BRFAL.

<sup>44</sup>Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 207; AMA Teachers Monthly Reports for December 1866, 1867, and 1868, Norfolk, AMA.

in each ward at which contributions for the public school fund were collected. Church-based ladies' societies held feasts for the benefit of the schools. Church-based children's societies held concerts for the benefit of the schools. Reverend Lewis reminded his congregation of the importance of financially supporting the schools even in hard times saying, "What these are no hard times, guess you forgot when it was nine and thirty (thirty-nine lashes) for learning the A-B-C." From November 1868 through March 1869 the churches donated \$170.36 to sustain AMA schools, and in June 1869 they donated another \$95.88. Black aid could not sustain the AMA's operation and the Norfolk Association ceased operations in March 1870.<sup>45</sup>

In the second stage of the campaign for city sponsored black public schools, the black community lobbied the Norfolk city council for financial support. The Norfolk city council was a bicameral body consisting of a Select Council and a Common Council. Both bodies were all-male and all-white. For approximately the next two years, late 1868 to early 1870, the community, the AMA, and the councils battled for financial control of the black public school system. After much internal debate, the Select Council voted to appropriate four thousand dollars for the black schools in 1869. The Common Council

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<sup>45</sup>Letter from J.C. Haskell to Rev. E.P. Smith, March 4, 1868, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from M. Rodgers to Rev. E.P. Smith, March 17, 1868, Norfolk, AMA; Letters from H.C. Percy to William E. Whiting, 27 November, 11 December 1868, 8 January, 2 February, 9 March, 12 June 1869, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from H.C. Percy to Rev. George Whipple, March 5, 1870, Norfolk, AMA.

rejected the appropriation. For a year, the battle for support of the black schools raged in city council. The in-fighting was further stalled by diversions to the Finance Committee. In spite of the deliberate effort to deny support to black public schools, the black community of Norfolk continued fighting for financing. Blacks were encouraged by the provision in the new State Constitution for state supported public schools. Finally, in January 1870, both councils passed an ordinance appropriating four thousand dollars for the black public schools.<sup>46</sup>

After winning the battle for financial support of its school system, the black community's next goal was the election of a black superintendent to supervise black public schools. The black community supported Rev. Thomas Henson, a black clergyman, for the position. Reverend Henson was not accepted as an appropriate candidate by a nominating committee and a white superintendent was appointed. In protest Henson penned an eloquent letter to the editor of the Norfolk Journal. In the letter, "Commissioners for the Colored Schools," Hanson asked,

Why are white men appointed commissioners or to committees by the unauthorized law of custom, and colored men be compelled to abide by the law of the statute? Why this distinction?...It does not require a philosophic eye to see the inconsistency or partiality in such a course.

In response to the protest the board appointed a black

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<sup>46</sup>Letter from H.C. Percy to Rev. George Whipple, September 13, 1868, Norfolk, AMA; Letters from H.C. Percy to Rev. E.P. Smith, 16 September, 13 October 1869, Norfolk, AMA; Letters from Marshall L'Hommedieu to Rev. E.P. Smith, 3, 17 November 1869, 20 January 1870; Henry S. Rorer, "History of the Norfolk Public Schools, 1681-1968" (Norfolk: Kirn Memorial Library, 1968), 59.

superintendent for black schools.<sup>47</sup>

The black community continued its battle for financial support of the black public schools. In July 1870, blacks supported the Virginia General Assembly's head tax. The black community also solicited funds from outside organizations like the Peabody Fund which donated one thousand dollars for the 1871 school year.<sup>48</sup>

Even after the city council authorized funds for black public schools, black private schools still supported a significant number of students. In January 1870 the freedmen sustained six independent schools, three day and three night. The private schools enrolled 218 pupils and employed four black teachers. All but one dozen students paid monthly tuition. The freedmen also maintained three Sabbath schools with eighty-six teachers and 321 pupils. Census figures for 1870 show that more than half of the population of black children attended school in Norfolk.<sup>49</sup>

Norfolk blacks continued their work for public schools through political measures, agitating city council for more facilities. In 1871 city council established a black school in

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<sup>47</sup>Norfolk Journal, March 5, 1870; Norfolk Journal, March 8, 1870; Mansfield, "That Fateful Class," 312-14.

<sup>48</sup>Letter from H.C. Percy to Rev. George Whipple, March 5, 1870, Norfolk, AMA; Letter from Marshall L'Hommedieu to Rev. E.P. Smith, March 5, 1870, Norfolk, AMA; Norfolk Journal, July 11, 1870; Rorer, "History of Norfolk Public Schools," 61.

<sup>49</sup>BRFAL, District Superintendent Monthly School Report, City of Norfolk, Virginia, January 1870; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census, 1870: Population Statistics, 59-305.

each of the four city wards, increasing the number of black public schools. All public schools, both black and white, fell under the control of a single superintendent, Superintendent Lamb. The black community remained vigilant protectors of the public schools, closely monitoring the actions and appropriations by city council for the schools.<sup>50</sup>

Clearly education was a vital element of freedom for blacks in Norfolk. During the period of Reconstruction, 1862-71, Norfolk blacks committed themselves to education, creating and maintaining a system of public schools. For Norfolk blacks, the schools were an essential social institution that provided for educational advancement and economic uplift.

Throughout Reconstruction Norfolk blacks struggled with the AMA and with local councils for control of the education system. The AMA was an ally in setting-up and maintaining schools for blacks in Norfolk. Yet, Norfolk blacks were continuously agitating the AMA to allow for greater involvement and representation in the schools. Local city councils inhibited black educational advancement by denying financing and denying leadership positions within the school administration. Race and caste dominance continued to constrain Norfolk blacks' drive to take full measure of educational freedom.

The black fight for public control of the school system coincided with their ascent into politics. Political power

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<sup>50</sup>Rorer, "History of Norfolk Public Schools," 59; Tucker, Norfolk Highlights, 121.

through the suffrage gave blacks a renewed hope for true democratic change. Norfolk blacks wanted to translate their vote into real political power that could guarantee them the equality they felt freedom entitled them to. The political transformation blacks experienced during Reconstruction was dramatic.

## CHAPTER FOUR: BLACK POLITICS

No other aspect of Reconstruction was potentially as revolutionary as the political. Amendments Thirteen, Fourteen, and Fifteen along with the Civil Rights Act revolutionized the American political landscape. For the first time in American history the Federal government guaranteed the fundamental and personal rights of all citizens of the United States regardless of "race, color or previous condition of servitude."

The realization of this guarantee of legal as well as political equality was a goal of black political organizations. Two years after their emancipation blacks were granted suffrage and they transformed their votes into real political power. Blacks played important roles in the political transformation of the Reconstruction governments in the Southern states by voting, holding political office, and rewriting state constitutions. Eric Foner has called black political participation "one of the most striking features of the period." Through political participation, blacks translated their goals into realities.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars of Virginia's political Reconstruction have described the period from 1865 to 1870 as "mild" and "exceptional" in comparison to Reconstruction in other Southern states. In "Another Look at Reconstruction in Virginia" (1986), Richard Lowe found that the most radical phase of Reconstruction

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<sup>1</sup>Foner, "Reconstruction Revisited," 89, 91.

in Virginia lasted only three years, 1867-1870. During this period the state's constitution was rewritten and universal manhood suffrage was practiced. Yet, Lowe pointed out that, while some reforms were adopted, radical elements never dominated the political events of Reconstruction. Another scholar, Jack Maddex Jr., concurred with Lowe's findings. Maddex stated that centrist members of both the Republican and Conservative political parties dominated the course of political Reconstruction in Virginia. In "Virginia: The Persistence of Centrist Hegemony" (1980) and The Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1879 (1970), Maddex reported that "Virginia never elected a Republican governor"\* and, while the "Republican party won a majority in the convention which wrote the state's Reconstruction constitution," the Conservative party won the governorship and a majority in the state legislature.<sup>2</sup>

While Republicans did not win legislative majorities, Republicans did win some local offices with black support. In the gubernatorial election of 1869, Republicans were victorious in seventeen of the eighteen counties with strong black voting

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<sup>2</sup>Richard Lowe, "Another Look at Reconstruction in Virginia," Civil War History 32 (March 1986):57; Richard Lowe, "Republicans, Rebellion, and Reconstruction: The Republican Party in Virginia, 1856-1870" (Ph.D., diss., University of Virginia, 1968); Richard Lowe, Republicans and Reconstruction in Virginia, 1856-1870 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991); Jack P. Maddex Jr., "Virginia: The Persistence of Centrist Hegemony," in Otto Olsen, ed., Reconstruction and Redemption in the South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 113; Jack P. Maddex Jr., The Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1879 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970); \*Gilbert C. Walker was elected Republican governor of Virginia in 1869.

blocs. Some Virginia cities, like Petersburg, with a majority of black residents, maintained a radical local government after Virginia was redeemed. At the local level Republican candidates sought reforms for their constituents. Black support was crucial to Republican success in Virginia's predominantly black cities and counties.<sup>3</sup>

For Norfolk blacks, political empowerment was the key to achieving many of their goals. Norfolk blacks believed that their new freedom entitled them to the same rights as other American citizens. They understood the power of the vote and campaigned vigorously for two years before being granted suffrage. They also understood the necessity of removing restrictive legislation and creating legislation guaranteeing blacks the same protections and rights as white citizens. For Norfolk blacks, political activism was necessary to secure equality.

At the close of the Civil War, Virginia was on the road to restoration. In Summer 1865, Virginia Governor Francis H. Pierpont, following the example of President Andrew Johnson, instituted a mild Reconstruction policy. Virginia white Unionists, white Republicans, and blacks were troubled by Pierpont's measures. Defying the movement in Virginia toward

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<sup>3</sup>Joseph P. Harahan, "Politics, Political Parties, and Voter Participation in Tidewater Virginia During Reconstruction, 1865-1900" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1973), 1; Lawrence L. Hartzell, "The Exploration of Freedom in Black Petersburg, Virginia, 1865-1902," in Edward L. Ayers and John C. Willis, eds., The Edge of the South: Life in Nineteenth-Century Virginia (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 135.

restoration, blacks around the state assembled and demanded equal suffrage. In the October 1865 statewide election conservatives and enfranchised former-secessionists won majorities in the Virginia General Assembly and the U.S. Congressional seats. In December 1865 the Virginia General Assembly adopted Black Codes including a Vagrancy Act and Contract Law and disallowed blacks to testify against whites in court. White Unionists, white Republicans, and blacks rejected the political push toward prewar conditions. They also lobbied Congressional Republicans, demanding action, and in December Congress refused to seat Virginia delegates. This back and forth struggle between forces of reform and restoration continued throughout Reconstruction.<sup>4</sup>

Norfolk blacks were adamant over proposals of restoration of a civil government in which they were not represented. At the end of February 1865, led by H.F. Trumble and George W. Cook, Norfolk blacks drafted a resolution calling for civil government on "a loyal and equal basis." The Norfolk resolution was distributed to political and military leaders in Washington. Norfolk blacks, who had enjoyed freedom under military occupation, rejected any government in which they were not represented and called for equal citizenship.<sup>5</sup>

The momentum for political mobilization among Norfolk blacks

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<sup>4</sup>Lowe, "Reconstruction in Virginia," 60-62.

<sup>5</sup>Colored Citizens of Norfolk, "Equal Suffrage Address," in Maxwell Whiteman, ed., Afro-American History Series Collection Three: The Black Intellectual (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1971), 9.

grew in the early months of 1865 and culminated in the formation of the Colored Monitor Union Club on April 4th. Club members elected officers and held numerous meetings disseminating their views to Norfolk's black population. Both men and women participated in political rallies, but only men served on committees, and the suffrage campaign was for universal male suffrage only. The goal of the Norfolk Colored Monitor Union Club was to lead the black political drive for equality. The organization stated its goal in a published address.

...to promote union and harmony among the colored portion of this community, and to enlighten each other on the important subject of the right of universal suffrage to all loyal men, without distinction of color, and to memorialize the Congress of the United States to allow the colored citizens the equal right of franchise with other citizens; to call frequent meetings, and procure suitable speakers for the same; to form auxiliary clubs throughout the Eastern District of Virginia, to give publicity to our views all over the country, and to assist the present administration in putting down the enemies of the government, and to protect, strengthen and defend all friends of the Union.

This statement of purpose clearly expressed blacks' desire for equal suffrage for men, the necessity of political mobilization of blacks in the eastern region, and the election of loyal Union men to local and national office.<sup>6</sup>

The Colored Monitor Union Club was one of many political organizations in the Norfolk black community. Many of the black political clubs in Norfolk were church sponsored. Members of black congregations united and elected political representatives

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 10.

who were responsible for drafting resolutions for equal citizenship, suffrage, representation, and legal recognition. It is no surprise that two of the most influential black political leaders in Norfolk, Reverend Thomas Henson and Reverend John M. Brown, were also the spiritual leaders of church congregations.<sup>7</sup>

Recognizing the growing power of the black constituency, white Unionists in Norfolk called for the formation of a joint political force. On May 23, 1865, both blacks and whites joined together at a mass meeting and formed a biracial Unionist organization. Those whites who had a history of supporting black concerns, T.L.R. Baker, Calvin Pepper, and Thomas F. Paige Jr., were elected chief officers of the organization. Blacks held the majority of the seats on the committee drafting the organization's resolution. The resolution called for election of loyal representatives and a legitimate government elected by all male citizens "regardless of distinction of birth, sect, creed or color." The Unionists nominated their own representatives for State office because "the candidates now before the public are in no way representative of the loyal citizens of Norfolk."<sup>8</sup>

While the biracial group agreed on the issue of loyalty, not all white Unionists supported black suffrage. Only two of the three candidates nominated for State office "pledged themselves to vote for the enfranchisement of the colored population." While white Unionists/Republicans wanted the support of black

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 11.

constituents, not all whites favored radical reforms.<sup>9</sup>

Suffrage was a key demand in all resolutions drafted by Norfolk blacks. Demonstrating their resolve, they did not limit their demand to paper and speeches as they attempted to vote in a local election. In an organized and orderly process, Norfolk blacks tested their right to vote in local elections on May 23, 1865. Blacks in wards one, three, and four were denied access to the polls, but blacks in the second ward were permitted to vote. Still, blacks from wards one, three, and four registered their votes at the Bute Street AME Church. While blacks in the second ward were permitted to vote, their votes were recorded on a separate tally and were not counted by the Inspectors of Elections. In response, blacks mounted a legal drive protesting the election practices to the State legislature. Blacks urged Calvin Pepper, Esq. to take affidavits detailing the election practices to the State legislature.<sup>10</sup>

White non-recognition of blacks' equal voting status did not diminish the black drive for equal rights. In early June 1865, Norfolk blacks gathered at area churches and prepared an equal suffrage/equal rights address. For the entire month of June, this document was revised and debated by the black community. Many blacks and a small number of white Unionists signed the document. The widely publicized document, the equal suffrage address, consolidated ideas discussed since February. The

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 11-13.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 13-14.

demands outlined in the document became the platform of the Democratic Republican Association.<sup>11</sup>

As well as representing the political demands of the people of Norfolk, black political leaders carried their message to the Colored State Convention in Alexandria in August 1865. The members of the Norfolk delegation were Edward W. Williams, William Keeling, George Cook, Nicholas Barber, and Reverend John M. Brown. Williams, Keeling, Brown, Barber, and Cook served on committees, and Cook, Keeling, and Brown played a dominant role in drafting convention appeals. Delegates from cities and counties throughout Virginia met in Alexandria and formed a statewide political policy benefitting all blacks in the state. The appeal drafted by committee and adopted by delegates called for equal protection under the law and equal access to government.

We claim, then, as citizens of this State, the laws of the Commonwealth shall give to all men equal protection; that each and every man may appeal to the law for his equal rights without regard to the color of his skin; and we believe this can only be done by extending to us the elective franchise, which we believe to be our inalienable right as free men, and which the Declaration of Independence guarantees to all free citizens of this Government and which is the privilege of the nation. We claim the right of suffrage.

William Keeling summarized the spirit of the convention saying, "A great work has yet to be done by the colored people,

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 15-16; Earl Lewis, In Their Own Interests: Race, Class and Power in Twentieth Century Norfolk, Virginia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 11-12; Tommy Lee Bogger, "The Slave and Free Black Community in Norfolk, 1775-1865" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1976), 311.

themselves. Let us ask, let us continue to petition, until we are set equal before the law with all men."<sup>12</sup>

Norfolk blacks continued their campaign for equal rights by sending a delegation to Washington. Delegates Thomas Bayne, Edward W. Williams, Reverend John M. Brown, and Calvin Pepper prepared addresses for and interviewed with Congress, the Executive, the Freedmen's Bureau, and the Army. As well as equal rights, the delegated proposed land reform as set out in the National Homestead Settlement and Labor Agency. Economic independence was an important political goal of Norfolk blacks. Bayne and Pepper stayed on in Washington, representing Norfolk at the National Equal Rights Association meeting in early February 1866. The black community of Norfolk sent a clear message to Washington expressing their feeling that "taxation without representation was tyranny."<sup>13</sup>

Norfolk blacks' vigorous campaign for the suffrage and equal rights caused tension between blacks and whites. Norfolk whites resented Norfolk blacks demands for equality. Black involvement in political activities often resulted in white violence against blacks. Violent confrontation and subtle retaliation followed parades celebrating the Emancipation Proclamation. Between four and five thousand slaves and free blacks from Norfolk city and

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<sup>12</sup>Philip S. Foner and George Walker, eds., Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865, Volume II (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 262-64.

<sup>13</sup>True Southerner, December 14, 28, 1865, February 8, 1866, March 8, 1866.

the surrounding counties celebrated their "emancipation" in a parade on January 1, 1863. Slaves reported to AMA missionaries that owners who saw them at the parade punished them for their participation and informed them that no one had the power to free them. AMA missionary John Oliver reported that John Milton, a young black man who organized the parade, was vandalized for his actions. Milton owned a stable, and white vandals killed several of his horses and shredded his harnesses. Blacks reported to Freedmen's Bureau officials that employers threatened to discharge employees who voted or voted incorrectly in local and national elections. Whites in Norfolk used physical violence and economic intimidation to deter blacks' freedom.<sup>14</sup>

Often the violence escalated to firearm assaults. On July 11, 1863, Second Lieutenant A.L. Sanborn, who was leading the First Regiment Colored Volunteers on a march down Main Street, was shot by Norfolk doctor David M. Wright. Wright was tried, convicted, and hanged for Sanborn's murder despite a desperate appeal from his family to President Lincoln. One of the most shocking firearm attacks in Norfolk took place on April 16, 1866, ending in a violent race riot. Norfolk blacks organized the march to celebrate the passage of the Civil Rights Bill. Black demonstrators marched with banners proclaiming "The Ballot Box Free to All", "The Rising Sons of Freedom Society", "The Monitor

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<sup>14</sup>Letter from John Oliver to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, 14 January, 28 February 1863, Norfolk, AMA; Chambers, "Life in Occupied Norfolk," 141; Letter from J.H. Remington to Orlando Brown, January 31, 1868, Monthly Report of Operations and Conditions, Norfolk, BRFAL.

Union Club". Black war veterans, armed with firearms, marched alongside demonstrators. An incident between black youths and an intoxicated police officer resulted in a pursuit that ended at the home of Robert Whitehurst. In the resulting scuffle between Whitehurst and blacks, several people were shot including Whitehurst and his stepmother. Order was restored by Major Stanhope and his troops. For several days bands of white men shot at any black person on the streets of Norfolk. In the days of street violence March Bennett, a black soldier, was shot and killed. Three other blacks, Frederick Jordan, Henry Mercer, and Ellen Cross, were injured in street violence. Other blacks were wounded, but refused to come forward for fear of arrest. Major Stanhope was attacked by members of the local fire company and as a consequence Stanhope proclaimed marshall law. On April 19, 1866, seven black men were arraigned and charged with the murder of Whitehurst and his stepmother. All the men were released except one, Edward Long, who was charged with second-degree murder and sentenced to eighteen years imprisonment. Freedmen's Bureau officer William P. Austin reported that the evidence proved Long was innocent and that any "unprejudiced and impartial jury would have acquitted him." No white men were charged with Bennett's murder or with the assault of Jordan, Mercer, or Cross.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Chambers, "Life in Occupied Norfolk," 142; John Hammond Moore, "The Norfolk Riot 16 April 1866," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 90 (April 1982): 157-64; True Southerner, April 19, 1866; Letter from Charles E. Johnston to Orlando Brown, May 11, 1866, Monthly Report of Operations and Conditions,

Like the race issue that fueled political riots, racism also prevented blacks from equal protection under the law. For its duration in Norfolk, Freedmen's Bureau officials intervened in court cases involving freedmen in order to guarantee equal protection. Bureau officers concluded that racism was the root of the problem. William P. Austin reported that "white men's ideas of the rights of colored men are so biased by prejudices and the old principles of slavery that they cannot be relied upon in cases." Most problems occurred in cases where blacks testified against whites. Freedmen's Bureau officer Barnes reported that "the general belief is that the colored man cannot tell the truth unless the white man should be a man of no character whatever." Not only did officers report that testimony was not weighed equally, but verdicts, convictions, and sentencing also reflected the law of racism. William P. Austin reported that "whenever the law leaves discretionary path the jury or magistrates to punish or not it is generally inflicted upon the colored man to the full extent of the law while the white man escapes." Blacks and Freedmen's Bureau officials believed that such inequitable practices would continue as long as blacks were not seated on juries.<sup>16</sup>

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Norfolk, BRFAL; Letter from William P. Austin to Orlando Brown, June 8, 1866, Records Relating to Court Cases Involving Freedmen, Case of State versus Edward Long, BRFAL.

<sup>16</sup>Letters from William P. Austin to Orlando Brown, September 3, 1866 and February 1867, Court Cases Involving Freedmen, Norfolk, BRFAL; True Southerner, January 25, 1866; Letter from Officer Barnes to William P. Austin, February 25, 1867, Court Cases Involving Freedmen, Norfolk, BRFAL; Letter from J.H.

Virginia's opportunity to fulfill the promise of equality for all male citizens came in 1867. In 1867, Norfolk blacks seized the opportunity to play a greater role in politics. In that year Virginia was forced to implement a radical plan of Reconstruction. When the Virginia General Assembly rejected the Fourteenth Amendment, the U.S. Congress intervened and mandated a number of legislative reforms. In early March 1867 under the watch of martial law, Virginia was required to hold a constitutional convention elected by universal manhood suffrage. The new state government was required to rewrite the state constitution including a provision for the Fourteenth Amendment. Virginia had to adhere to Congressional standards of Reconstruction in order to come out from under military law and gain readmission to the Union.<sup>17</sup>

Under the order of the U.S. Congress, blacks in Norfolk gained the franchise they had lobbied for so vigorously. Elections were held in mid-October 1867 on the convention and convention delegates. Approximately 1,945 black men registered to vote in Norfolk city election, and 1,823 (94%) voted in the election. Black men in Norfolk cast their votes in support of a state convention and chose Radical Republicans Henry M. Bowden (white) and Thomas Bayne (black) to represent Norfolk at the convention. Because black men possessed a numerical majority at

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Remington to Orlando Brown, November 30, 1868, Court Cases Involving Freedmen, Norfolk, BRFAL.

<sup>17</sup>Lowe, "Reconstruction in Virginia," 63-64.

the polls, approximately 247 votes, over white men, the election resulted in a victory for Norfolk blacks.<sup>18</sup>

The Virginia "black and tan" Underwood Convention convened in Richmond in early December 1867 and ran until mid-April 1868. Of the one-hundred and three delegates attending the convention, twenty-four were black. The Reconstruction convention showed the political, economic, and social strains separating Virginia Republicans. Important and potentially radical issues debated at the convention, voting, officeholding, and public education, again demonstrated the disparate goals of Virginians. Norfolk's Thomas Bayne proposed one of the most radical measures of the convention, integration in tax-supported public schools. Bayne's proposal was soundly defeated sixty-seven to twenty-one. Both black and white (including Bayne's co-delegate Henry Bowden) delegates argued that such a measure would only compound racial tensions. Defeat of radical measures like Bayne's demonstrated the moderate nature of reform in Virginia. The new state constitution did include important moderate reform measures, such as: enfranchising freedmen, providing for tax-supported public education, instituting the secret ballot, and mandating tax reform. While the nature of the constitution was moderate, its reform measures represented a real chance for racial equality in Virginia. Black Virginians campaigned vigorously for approval of

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<sup>18</sup>Norfolk Journal, October 24, 25, 1867; Harahan, "Voter Participation in Tidewater," 263.

the new constitution.<sup>19</sup>

The vote for the new state constitution and gubernatorial election was postponed until July 6, 1869. President Grant also mandated that a separate vote be held for the test-oath and disfranchising clauses, the most radical measures of the constitution. Moderate forces dominated the political course of both Republican and Conservative tickets. Within the Republican Party radicals and moderates nominated and supported two separate tickets. Seeing an opportunity to secure victory, Conservatives withdrew their ticket and allied with moderate Republicans. The contest became Regular Republicans versus "True" Conservative Republicans. The True Republican ticket of Gilbert C. Walker and John F. Lewis defeated the Radical ticket of Harry H. Wells and J.D. Harris, 119,535 to 101,204. The constitution was adopted 210,577 to 9,136 and the clauses were defeated 84,410 to 124,360 disfranchising and 83,458 to 124,715 test-oath. By the fall of the year the new General Assembly approved the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and Virginia was readmitted to the Union in January 1870. The opportunity for radical reforms had passed and Virginia was on its way to redemption.<sup>20</sup>

Norfolk did not vote with Virginia's majority in the 1869 election. Like other cities and counties in Virginia with a substantial black population, Republican candidates were

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<sup>19</sup>Richard L. Hume, "The Membership of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 86 (October 1978): 463-81.

<sup>20</sup>Lowe, "Reconstruction in Virginia," 72-75.

victorious in Norfolk. Voter registration tallies recorded 2,422 white men and 2,470 black men registered to vote as of June 1869. Vote totals for the July election revealed 2,064 (85%) white men and 2,023 (82%) black men voted. At the nominating convention of Norfolk's black Republicans the following men were endorsed: House of Delegates: James F. Newton (black) and Henry M. Bowden (white); State Senate: Willis A. Hodges (black); and Thomas Bayne (black) for Congress. Bowden was the only endorsee to win his office. While Bayne ran a close race with white conservative David J. Goodwin, Newton and Hodges received only a small percentage of the vote. The state constitution was adopted overwhelmingly 3,189 to 128. The clauses vote was much closer, but both were adopted in Norfolk. While Radical Republicans Wells and Harris were defeated in statewide total by Walker and Lewis, in Norfolk they won by a narrow margin. In a local election held May 24, 1870, black men were elected to four city council seats, and white radicals were elected to several seats including: commissioner of the revenue, inspector of the streets, clerk of the market, and keeper of the almshouse. While Norfolk blacks made inroads into local politics, they faced heavy opposition to reforms locally and statewide.<sup>21</sup>

The Conservative victory in Virginia signaled the end of

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<sup>21</sup>Harahan, "Voter Participation in Tidewater, " 270; Norfolk Journal, July 2-9, 1869; Lewis, In Their Own Interests, 20; Luther Porter Jackson, Negro Office-Holders in Virginia 1865-1895 (Norfolk: Guide Quality Press, 1945), 59, 65; Bogger, "Slave and Free Black Community in Norfolk," 323; Wertebaker, Norfolk: Historic Southern Port, 245.

radical reforms favoring blacks. Conservative politicians and public officials statewide continued to exclude blacks from juries and disfranchised freedmen for minor offenses. In the meantime, blacks in counties with substantial black populations pressured local politicians to continue reforms. Norfolk's Richard G.L. Paige pressured the legislature to maintain reforms and even pushed ahead, calling for an end to lynching. While Norfolk blacks managed to hold on to some city and county offices, they could not institute reforms to give them the equality to which they felt entitled.<sup>22</sup>

The political careers of two black men, Thomas Bayne and Richard G.L. Paige, highlight the remarkable political achievements of Norfolk blacks during Reconstruction. Bayne was a central black delegate at the Underwood Convention. For the duration of the convention and for the duration of his life, Bayne pushed for radical reforms that favored blacks. Paige represented Norfolk blacks in the House of Delegates for two terms, 1871-1875 and 1879-1882. Like Bayne, Paige's political career was distinguished by representing the interests of blacks in Norfolk County. He was especially vigilant about economic reform favoring blacks and ending unlawful lynching of blacks. The election of these black men alone stands as a significant achievement of Reconstruction. The continuation of Paige's political career even after formal Reconstruction ended in

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<sup>22</sup>James T. Moore, "Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia, 1879-1883," Journal of Southern History 41 (May 1975): 168-73.

Virginia attests to Norfolk blacks' ability to maintain political influence.<sup>23</sup>

The political gains Norfolk blacks made during Reconstruction were promising yet of short duration. Black men gained suffrage, held elective office, and participated in rewriting the State constitution. Their political platform influenced Reconstruction Republican policy. Blacks tried to create an environment of equality in Norfolk, but equality was resisted by whites. Yet, Norfolk blacks did not abandon their cause and continued to support representatives who adhered to their political concerns. Black legislators pushed for equitable labor practices, civil rights reform, and ending lynching. While their legislative numbers were small, Norfolk blacks never abandoned their quest for equality.

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<sup>23</sup>Jackson, Negro Office-Holders in Virginia, 1865-1895, 2, 32-33, 75.

The period of Reconstruction in Norfolk was marked by change and upheaval in the lives of freedpeople. Blacks approached freedom with high expectations for equality and independence. What they discovered was a society not yet willing to grant them a full measure of freedom.

The most hostile foe Norfolk blacks encountered during Reconstruction were local whites. At every juncture where blacks asserted their freedom, whites attempted to turn back black progress. As the chief owners of property, capital, and land, whites tried to curtail and contain black economic progress. As much as blacks fought in the Civil War to end slavery, whites fought to preserve the institution where they had great power over laborers and great wealth for themselves. In the political arena as well, whites fought to maintain their power and dominance. They resisted strongly and defeated soundly measures for radical reform. As much as Norfolk blacks wanted reform during Reconstruction, Norfolk whites wanted redemption.

Even their white allies, Northern missionaries, the Freedmen's Bureau, Northern teachers, and Republicans, had not intended for blacks to have full equality. Though they aided blacks in achieving change, their programs were tempered by paternalism, racism, and conservatism.

Norfolk blacks could say proudly that they were responsible for helping to bring about many of the gains they made during Reconstruction. They achieved economic, social and political

gains largely through collective efforts. The educational, benevolent, social, political, and religious institutions they formed during Reconstruction sustained them throughout Reconstruction and for years to come.

The measurable economic gains Norfolk blacks made during Reconstruction were minimal. While all blacks now controlled their labor, few blacks controlled the land and capital necessary for full economic independence. Even so, Norfolk blacks sought their economic independence in many ways. Some black women withdrew from field labor and concentrated their laboring efforts in their own homes. Many men negotiated vigorously for labor contracts of their own terms. For the first time members of the black community united in collective organizations. They pooled financial resources and purchased land collectively. Through labor organizations, Norfolk blacks sought more equitable working conditions. All these efforts were deliberate attempts to exercise greater control in their working lives. While few gains were monumental, the gains were important expressions of blacks' desire for an expanded economic role, and the gains served as foundations for future organizational and individual growth.

The political gains Norfolk blacks experienced during Reconstruction were promising yet of limited duration. Black men were granted the suffrage and exercised their right to vote in state and local elections. A small number of black men were elected to office. Norfolk's own representatives, Thomas Bayne and Richard G.L. Paige, used their political position to further

the progress of blacks in their district. These men sought radical reforms favoring black equality throughout their political careers. Blacks supported Republican candidates and were instrumental in developing the party platform.

The greatest gains experienced by Norfolk blacks during Reconstruction were in their social lives. Freedom had a profound effect on black families, black churches, and black education. Throughout the years of Reconstruction, family members who had endured forced separation under slavery were reunited with each other. Black men and black women freely married and started families. The black church solidified its role as the central public institution of black community life. The church served many needs of the community. It acted as a benevolent extended family member caring for the sick, orphaned, and the aged. The church fostered the development of social organizations that were benevolent as well as social. The church served as the backbone of black political organization and mobilization, providing candidates and spreading the message. The church also fostered the growth of black education in Norfolk. Blacks eagerly sought academic and industrial training, hoping to improve their lot as freedpeople.

While the family, the church, and the school certainly provided immediate benefits during Reconstruction, their long-term benefits were equally important. These institutions survived beyond Reconstruction, providing Norfolk blacks with vital institutional foundations. The family provided emotional

comfort and generated economic progress. The church continued to provide leadership, benevolent care, and spiritual comfort to Norfolk's black community. Schools continued to grow, turning out a larger base of black teachers for Norfolk's public schools, and fostered the growth of students seeking advanced education as black professionals. Each area, family, church, and school continued to grow and in turn strengthen the black community. These institutions sustained Norfolk blacks throughout Reconstruction and beyond.

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