I am Black but in My Heart is No Stain of Infamy: Race Relations in Augusta County, Virginia, 1865-1870

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“I AM BLACK BUT IN MY HEART THERE IS NO STAIN OF INFAMY”:
RACE RELATIONS IN AUGUSTA COUNTY, VIRGINIA, 1865-1870

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
David G. Demchuk
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine race relations in Augusta County, Virginia, during that state’s brief yet contentious experience under federal Reconstruction (1865-1870). While the ratio of the blacks to whites in this Shenandoah Valley county did not approach that of counties east of the Blue Ridge, African-Americans were nevertheless an important element in the population, and the historical record indicates a complex relationship between the races, in both labor arrangements and in the county’s political and civic culture. Augusta County was also home to a disproportionate share of the white political leadership that engineered Virginia’s early return to conservative self-rule in 1870. During this period, most Augusta blacks lived and worked alongside white farmers as tenant wage laborers or as domestic servants in the county’s larger towns.

Black interests and concerns of the Reconstruction period--shared in some cases with whites, in others not--provide the work’s structure. Subjects addressed include labor relations, the administration of justice, the races’ participation in Virginia’s Reconstruction politics, and the establishment of black churches and schools.

Primary sources used include: the records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, which operated in Augusta from 1865 to late 1868; reports and correspondence of the American Missionary Association, which administered schools for Augusta’s blacks during Reconstruction; testimony given before the congressional Joint Committee on Reconstruction; Augusta County records and census figures; and two white conservative county newspapers.

The study found that racial antagonisms in Augusta County were not altogether different from other areas of the South where conflicting interests more often led to violence. Although blacks in Augusta did not hesitate to assert their civil and political rights in this period, they faced many constraints from county whites. Through fraud and the charging of high rents, county whites subjugated and mistreated Augusta’s black laborers. White magistrates and jurors often denied county blacks justice in civil and criminal disputes. Augusta blacks were undeterred in their support of Radical Republican policies; however, contrary to black sentiment elsewhere in Virginia, county blacks opposed the exclusion of former Confederates from electoral politics. Augusta blacks were most successful in the establishment of independent churches and schools. Given the role these institutions played in future black achievement, Augusta’s blacks in this period laid the foundations for later progress.
"I AM BLACK BUT IN MY HEART THERE IS NO STAIN OF INFAMY":

RACE RELATIONS IN AUGUSTA COUNTY, VIRGINIA, 1865-1870
In February 1866, ten months after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, Charles Douglas Gray of Augusta County, Virginia, appeared before a congressional committee investigating conditions in the defeated Southern states. The committee was especially concerned with ex-Confederates’ treatment of Unionists and blacks. Gray reported on the situation in Augusta and the surrounding Shenandoah Valley, both laid to waste by General Sheridan’s Union forces in 1864.

A farmer and self-described Unionist who nevertheless voted for secession (a fact of which he was "ashamed"), Gray responded first to questions about lingering disloyalty and the condition of white Unionists in Augusta. He noted with irony that war-ravaged Augusta had been "one of the strongest Union counties in [Virginia]... an old Henry Clay Whig county" before the war; "state pride" compelled many residents to side with the Confederacy. Gray said that Augusta’s Unionists mistrusted the political designs of former secessionists, but he believed Unionists had no reason to "feel at all insecure" in their personal, legal, and business dealings with ex-Confederates. Though outraged by Sheridan’s burnings, Augusta’s ex-Confederates were "resigned to the result" of Southern defeat.

Regarding Augusta’s African-Americans, Gray testified that county whites harbored "a strong prejudice" against blacks. Whites remained unreconciled to
slavery's abolition, Gray told the committee, despite the fact that Augusta's antebellum economy had utilized far fewer slaves than Virginia's eastern counties. Gray recalled that soon after the Confederate surrender, "a great many houses were burned down in my neighborhood, which it was feared would be rented to negroes." Testifying now, some months later, he felt that residents "were beginning to see [arson] was a mistaken policy . . . They are beginning to see that they require and need the negro labor." Gray reported no other forms of violent intimidation of blacks by whites.

When asked by one congressman if he feared a "negro insurrection" in Augusta County, Gray responded negatively, saying that "there are too few [blacks] there, in the first place." Asked about white sentiment for the idea of black schools, Gray said that there was "a disposition to laugh it down, to ridicule it, and make fun of it." Gray felt that the South could "have the best peasantry in the world by securing the negro in all his civil rights." By this, Gray insisted he did not mean the right of suffrage, which he predicted might come "in the course of a generation."1

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INTRODUCTION

The following study examines race relations in Augusta County, Virginia, during that state's brief yet contentious experience under federal Reconstruction (1865-1870). As historian Richard Lowe has pointed out, Virginia's Reconstruction has received less coverage than other important periods of the Commonwealth's history. Certainly, little has been written of the postbellum Shenandoah Valley and Reconstruction Augusta.¹ This lack of coverage does not signify the region's or county's lack of importance in this period. Over the postbellum years, Augusta County was as prosperous as any Virginia county in both agriculture and industry. In 1865, Augusta was the largest Virginia county in area, and its farms possessed a cash value greater than those of any other county in the state. Important in the context of this work, Augusta County was also home to a disproportionate share of the white political leadership that engineered Virginia's early return to conservative self-rule in 1870.²

Reconstruction in Virginia, like in most of the rest of the former Confederate states, passed through two stages. During Presidential Reconstruction (1865-67), ex-

¹The only modern history of Augusta was commissioned by the county's historical society. Richard MacMaster's work devotes few pages to race relations or racialist thought in Augusta County. The work contains some egregious omissions and mischaracterizations of the treatment of blacks during Reconstruction. Richard K. MacMaster Augusta County History: 1865-1950, (Staunton: Augusta County Historical Society, 1987).

²Richmond Enquirer and Examiner, 15 January 1869.
Confederates dominated state government. Though perhaps less ruthless than other Southern governments, the Virginia legislature was nonetheless reactionary, refusing to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, ignoring provisions of an 1864 state constitution passed by the Virginia Unionists in exile, and replacing top officials serving the conciliatory Republican governor, Francis Pierpont. Under Radical (Congressional) Reconstruction, which began in March 1867, Virginia and other former Confederate states were placed under martial law and denied representation in Congress. For the next three years, radical Republicans and conservatives from both the Republican and Democratic parties clashed over how Virginia would satisfy federal requirements for readmission to Congress and the removal of federal troops. These requirements included a new state constitution to be adopted and passed by universal manhood suffrage, and ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment by a government elected under this new constitution. Ultimately, conservative Republicans and Democrats regained control of Virginia’s government in 1870, but not before Radicals rewrote the state’s constitution, granting black men the vote and creating the state’s first public school system.

Although Virginia’s Reconstruction was shorter and less turbulent than that of most other Southern states, Virginia’s black and white citizens struggled to define the extent and meaning of the freedom conferred on ex-slaves in Confederate defeat. The history of that contest in Augusta is largely unexplored. In 1870, blacks accounted for slightly less than a quarter—23.4 percent—of a total Augusta population of 28,763.3

3U.S. Census, 1870.
At their most concentrated, in Augusta’s largest city, Staunton, blacks constituted less than thirty percent of the population. The remaining seventy percent were dispersed evenly across the large county. During Reconstruction, most Augusta blacks continued to live and work side by side with white farmers as tenant wage laborers—that is, a portion of a laborer’s wages was taken by the employer for rent and rations—on mid-sized farms that they had tilled as slaves; sharecropping arrangements existed but were less frequently utilized. Those blacks not employed in agriculture often worked as domestic servants in Staunton or the county’s smaller towns. While the ratio of Augusta’s blacks to whites did not approach that of counties east of the Blue Ridge, African-Americans were nevertheless an important element in the population, and the historical record indicates a complex relationship between the races, in both labor arrangements and in the county’s political and civic culture.

How did race relations play out in an area of Reconstruction Virginia where blacks were a decided minority, yet vital to the economic and political fortunes of a county run by politically shrewd whites? Widescale racial violence of the kind witnessed in some areas of the South did not occur in Reconstruction Augusta. Nevertheless, no proof has been found to assert, as a recent commissioned history of Augusta does, that only the "greatest kind feeling . . . [was] cherished toward the freedmen" by Augusta’s whites.4 Evidence such as Charles Gray’s congressional testimony suggests that racial antagonisms in Augusta were not altogether different

from other areas of the South where conflicting interests more often led to violence.  
Race relations in Reconstruction Augusta involved a calculus of black assertiveness, labor needs, the prerogatives of a mostly racist legal system, and political requirements. Though relations were less fractious in Augusta than elsewhere in Virginia and the lower South, county whites discriminated against Augusta’s blacks in ways similar to these other areas. County whites subjugated and mistreated Augusta’s black laborers, denied blacks justice, and intimidated black voters.

Of course, the story of race relations in Reconstruction Augusta is not solely one of white reaction. The response of Augusta blacks to emancipation was multifaceted and vigorous. County blacks challenged unfair labor practices, asserted newly granted rights, voted in large numbers, and built churches and schools. Because of their smaller numbers, Augusta blacks did not have as much latitude as those elsewhere in the state to fashion an independent community for themselves. Many blacks in Augusta believed their interests were inextricably bound up with those of

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5 We can only speculate as to why Augusta experienced a relative lack of racial violence in this period. Most often during Reconstruction, widescale violence occurred where whites felt it essential to defeat Radical Republican strength, to challenge black land tenure, or to intimidate and control black labor. Presumably, white conservatives in Virginia saw no need for violent measures to control blacks or to effect the state’s "redemption" from federal and Radical Republican rule. Virginia’s Democrats were likely deterred from using terror as a political tool by their successful alliance with the state’s conservative Republicans. Historians have cited the more moderate racial attitudes of the Upper South as another factor that limited violence in Virginia. Where violent outbreaks occurred in Reconstruction Virginia, demographics seem to have played a part. At the time of 1866 race riots in Alexandria and Norfolk, and in confrontations in Richmond and York County that same year, populations of blacks and whites in these areas were nearly equal, or the black population had suddenly increased. Perhaps Augusta was spared violence because of its small ratio of blacks to whites. Michael Perman, "Counter-Reconstruction: The Role of Violence in Southern Redemption," in Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, eds., The Facts of Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of John Hope Franklin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1991), passim.
whites and insisted that blacks did not wish to "draw out from among the white people." Yet, while their public pronouncements often called for accommodation, in private correspondence many county blacks expressed outrage at white transgressions. Although the words of blacks are scarce in the historical record, what survives suggests the range of reactions one might expect from individuals suddenly experiencing freedom.

No single theory of race relations satisfactorily explains Augusta’s immediate postbellum experience. However, C. Vann Woodward’s account of post-Civil War race relations comes closest. In *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, Woodward asserts that while emancipation forced "a simultaneous withdrawal of both races from the enforced intimacy . . . imposed by the old regime," physical segregation of the Jim Crow type did not sprout full-grown during Reconstruction. Rather, Woodward posits that "racial relations of the old-regime pattern often persisted stubbornly into the new order and met head-on with interracial encounters of an entirely new and sometimes equalitarian type." Augusta’s historical record is full of such encounters, whether they occurred at biracial political gatherings, in Freedmen’s Bureau Courts, or at fundraisers for new black churches. Critics of Woodward’s thesis question his portrait of Reconstruction as a period richer in social possibilities than sometimes imagined, insisting that *de facto* segregation was more prevalent than Woodward admits and that

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only federal intervention created the conditions for such interracial encounters. Yet it is Woodward’s claim for the fluid nature of race relations during this period that most resonates in this history of Augusta County. Reconstruction in Augusta was a period during which both blacks and whites tested the limits of custom and each group’s power within the new context of black freedom. Although little is known about the extent of segregation in Augusta County during Reconstruction, each side did not immediately retreat into separate spheres. Blacks asserted their equality in ways that would be unthinkable forty years later. That Reconstruction ultimately failed Augusta’s blacks does not diminish actions they took to express their autonomy in this period.

An assessment of Augusta’s history is hindered by what confounds most historians of the pre-twentieth century South—the lack of black voices. The records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, which came to Staunton in 7


Identification of patterns of segregation in the postwar South has long posed problems for historians. Both Woodward’s work and that of historian Charles Wynes, who has written on postbellum race relations in Virginia, rely on scattered (but nevertheless convincing) evidence to argue that segregation of trains and public places, when and where it was practiced, was uneven and not a universal practice in the postbellum South. While Wynes believes that segregation in Virginia’s hotels, restaurants, and other places of amusement was greater than Woodward suggests, he nevertheless generally agrees with Woodward’s findings for Virginia. Wynes also admits that evidence of segregation is most often taken from Democratic newspapers predisposed to bring such incidents to light, and, conversely, to downplay evidence of any interracial interaction suggesting a social equality between blacks and whites. Charles E. Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia: 1870-1902 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1961), 144-150.
late 1865, partially compensate for this deficit. Created by Congress in March 1865, the Freedmen’s Bureau, as it was commonly known, was responsible for the material welfare of destitute blacks and loyal whites, the education of freedpeople, the promotion of a free labor system, and the protection of freedmen’s rights in legal proceedings. Manned at different times by Northern army officers and civilian agents, the Staunton Freedmen’s Bureau was responsible for Augusta and Highland Counties. Black voices can be reconstituted in the freedpersons’ complaints filed with this office and in the monthly reports Bureau agents sent to their superiors. Although the efforts of Freedmen’s Bureau representatives were often hampered by forces beyond their control, records show that Bureau agents took the interests of Augusta’s freedpeople to heart and acted vigorously within their powers to address black concerns.

The letters and records of the American Missionary Association (AMA) offer further evidence for this study. From 1865 to 1870, the AMA provided teachers for Augusta’s freedmen’s schools. For the most part white New Englanders, AMA

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9 W.E. Burghardt DuBois, Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880 (New York: S.A. Russell Company, 1935), 224. Note: Highland County is a sparsely populated county to the west of Augusta on the border of West Virginia. It is rarely mentioned in any of the sources used for this study and is not discussed here.

10 The diligence with which Augusta’s Freedmen’s Bureau sought to protect blacks interests should not be taken as the rule for bureaus throughout the South. Historians are still debating the effectiveness and role of the Freedmen’s Bureau during Reconstruction. In many areas, agents favored white interests over black or abused their office for personal gain. Elsewhere, agents demonstrated an ambivalence about their mission which reflected that of the Bureau’s leadership. Many historians have faulted the Bureau for failing to appreciate "the depths of racial antagonism" with which black had to contend. Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877 (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 170.
missionaries were new both to the South and to teaching black students. Consequently, their reports illuminate sectional differences as well as Northern racial thinking. These letters clearly demonstrate that black emancipation was a profound experience not only for ex-slaves and southern whites but for Northerners as well.

Other primary sources include testimony such as Charles Gray's given in early 1866 before the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, a congressional fact-finding commission charged with investigating the condition of southern states after the Civil War, including charges of racial discrimination and violence against blacks and southern Unionists. In addition to Gray, several other white citizens from Augusta testified before this committee. Also used were two conservative white newspapers published in Augusta County, the Staunton Spectator ("probably the most bitter [pro-secession journal] in Staunton," according to one congressional witness) and the Valley Virginian. Surprisingly, genuine black voices also appeared in their pages for reasons that will become obvious.

Black interests and concerns--shared in some cases with whites, in others not--provide the structure for this work. W.E.B. DuBois believed that "the emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor." Control over the terms of labor was a prime concern of Augusta freedpeople; an account of the labor situation in Augusta and the Freedmen's Bureau role as intermediary in labor disputes forms the first part of this work. Following this discussion, the impartiality of the civil and criminal courts in cases concerning freedmen is considered; as one Georgian ex-slave who recognized the uselessness of law without equal justice stressed, "To be sure, sah, we wants to

\footnote{Ibid., 16.}
vote, but, sah, de great matter is to git into de witness-box." The role of Augusta County's blacks and whites in the Reconstruction politics of Virginia is then described. The last half of the work addresses the creation of autonomous black churches and schools, the institutions which, again in DuBois' words, helped blacks to build an "inner culture" to sustain them in the new trial of freedom.13


13 DuBois, Black Reconstruction, 667.
CHAPTER 1
"HIS COLOR IS HIS CONSTERNATION": LABOR AND JUSTICE

In Augusta County, whites' initial reaction to Southern defeat in the Civil War and the emancipation of blacks was a mix of fear and uncertainty for the future, particularly the future of race relations and the labor supply. Indicating a fear of black retribution, county newspapers such as the Staunton Spectator were obsessed with the movement and intentions of former slaves. Any migration of a sizeable group of blacks, wherever it occurred in the South, was noted with regularity; in fact, Augusta's newspapers kept a running tally of the black populations of major Southern towns.1 Violent racial encounters of any kind in the Southern states received prominent mention in the county press. The continued presence of some 100,000 armed black soldiers in the South particularly worried commentators.2

Some whites hoped that blacks would now simply leave the South. As one editorial opined, "The exodus of the Jews is to find its counterpart in the departure of

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1 Valley Virginian, 24 January 1866. After Appomattox, whites in Richmond, Virginia and elsewhere in the South continued to require blacks to carry passes restricting travel to that between homes and places of business. No evidence of such a "pass system" exists in the postbellum record of Augusta County. Peter J. Rachleff, "'Members in Good Standing': Richmond's Community of Former Slaves, 1865-1873," Virginia Cavalcade 39(3): 130.

2 Staunton Spectator, 15 August 1865. This concern evaporated when black troops were mustered out in September 1865.
the children of Ham from the land of their bondage." While 100 blacks left Lynchburg for Liberia in September 1865 (a fact duly noted by the *Staunton Spectator*), no such exodus occurred from Staunton or Augusta. When whites found Staunton filled with celebrating, "idle" blacks, editorials threatened a solution for the race and labor problem: the importation of immigrants to replace the ex-slaves. This suggestion, proffered throughout the South, was given serious consideration in Virginia and discussed in Augusta’s papers.³ As the 1865 fall harvest neared, the *Spectator* gave "a hint of warning to the negroes. The downfall of slavery has opened in our southern states a vast and inviting field for European immigration . . . blacks must go to work . . . ."⁴ Virginia’s legislature established a Board of Immigration in March 1866 to attract foreign labor, especially from Scotland and England. The venture failed. Reporting in 1870, the State Commissioner for the Board cited lack of funds as one problem, but he noted a prejudice which also limited foreign settlement—the conviction of many immigrants that it was "the imbecility of the Southern character which had retarded the development of the Southern country and caused its desolation." He pointed out that those immigrants who had come to Virginia often left after earning enough money to join fellow countrymen in settlements in the West.⁵

³*Staunton Spectator*, 8 August 1865; 5 September 1865. Some whites also went so far to predict that freedom would be noxious to ex-slaves, citing the "fact" of runaway slaves who had died inexplicably upon reaching the North, *Staunton Spectator*, 21 November 1865.

⁴*Staunton Spectator*, 5 September 1865.

⁵State Commissioner [unnamed] cited in J.D. Smith, "Virginia During Reconstruction, 1865-1870 - A Political, Economic, and Social Study" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Virginia, 1960), 204-12.
When it became evident that blacks would not be "rooted out . . . by white labor," as one Augusta paper had predicted, Valley whites resigned themselves to their need for black labor and set out to dictate the terms of the relationship. An editorial in the *Valley Virginian* struck a paternalistic tone as it instructed blacks:

> You are here forever unless you die out like the Indian, like the Yankees predict. How you do your part for society is the question. It is to trust your white people; to be prompt and energetic; to comply with all contracts; to work and study, and make up your minds that only by hard work and by trusting to the kind and affectionate feelings of those who raised you, can you exist on this Continent . . . Listen not to the fools or worse, who tell you about "equality" and all that, for that's your ruin and extermination.

In operation, labor practices in Augusta failed to conform to even this patronizing standard. County whites refused or were reluctant to honor labor agreements with blacks and charged excessive rates for their black tenants’ rent and provisions. In doing so, many white Augusta employers made certain that blacks, regardless of whether they "did their part," would be unequal partners in Augusta’s labor relationships.

The General Assembly of Virginia passed a law in February 1866 regulating labor contracts between black laborers and white employers. The law stipulated that blacks could not be bound to labor in excess of two months except where a written notarized contract existed. Freedmen’s Bureau agents in Staunton encouraged freedmen to sign written contracts, preferably by the year. Initially at least, agents felt

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*Staunton Spectator*, 5 September 1865.

*Valley Virginian*, 8 August 1866.

*Valley Virginian*, 23 January 1867.
that such contracts offered blacks greater financial security and legal recourse.9

Despite these official encouragements, however, the yearly written contract was
infrequently employed in Augusta County. The labor for bringing in Augusta’s wheat,
corn, and rye most often operated under daily, weekly, or monthly oral agreements.

An analysis of complaints made to the Staunton Freedmen’s Bureau suggests
that reasons for avoiding long-term written contracts were complex. Bureau reports
show that the decision was not solely that of white employers. Blacks had their own
reasons for entering into short-term agreements. In the immediate aftermath of the

9 Lt. Thomas P. Jackson, Asst. Subassistant Commissioner, 4th Division, 9th Sub-
District, Staunton, to Brig. General Orlando Brown, Asst. Commissioner, Richmond, 29
February 1868, Letters Sent, 1868, Records of the Field Offices of Refugees, Freedmen,
and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105 [hereafter cited as BRFAL, RG105] (National
Archives, Washington, D.C.). The role that the Freedmen’s Bureau played in shaping
post-war labor relationships in the South has figured prominently in Reconstruction
historiography. Eric Foner has ably summarized current thinking on the issue. Foner
believes that federal actions in the postbellum South cannot be understood outside the
context of the ascendent free labor ideology of the mid-nineteenth century. Free labor
ideology, which trumpeted "economic rationality, internal self-discipline, and
responsiveness to the incentives of the market," rested on the conviction that the interests
of capital and labor were identical. Yet Foner asks: "What became of this axiom in an
impoverished society where even the highest agricultural wages remained pitiably low,
and whose white population was determined to employ every means at its disposal to
prevent blacks from acquiring land or any other means of economic independence?" In
Foner’s analysis, the labor contract embodied the Bureau’s belief in free labor (assuming
that the contract was freely entered and followed) at the same time that it offered social
order. The Freedmen’s Bureau, operating with unrealistic expectations of market forces
and believing that blacks were unprepared to be independent farmers and laborers, thus
discouraged black yeomanry. In the Bureau’s eyes, a black who spurned the contract
system in favor of self-employment was "indolent" rather than "industrious." The Bureau
felt that disputes between Southern black laborers and employers were, in Foner’s words,
an "irrational legacy of slavery [not realizing that] the South’s ‘labor problem’ arose not
from misunderstanding, but from the irreconcilable interests of former masters and former
slaves as each sought to define the meaning of emancipation. Perhaps the greatest failing
of the Freedmen’s Bureau was that it never quite comprehended the depths of racial
antagonism and class conflict in the postwar South." Foner, Reconstruction, 133, 156,
169-170.
war, many Southern blacks believed that they would receive free lands from the federal government. This may account for Augusta blacks' unwillingness to sign longer contracts in 1866 but does not explain why this tendency continued until Reconstruction's end.10 One Bureau report mentioned that blacks liked "to know where they stand." Presumably this meant that blacks felt that they were less likely to be defrauded, or fraud would become apparent more quickly, under short-term arrangements. Explaining another reason for freedmen's trepidation over yearly contracts, the historian Eric Foner has noted that end-of-the-year payments "represented an interest-free extension of credit from employee to employer, as well as a shifting of part of the risk of farming to the freedmen." In favoring the short-term agreements, perhaps some blacks desired greater liberty to seek opportunities elsewhere. Other Augusta blacks might have avoided written yearly contracts for the simple reason that they could not read the agreements.11

Whites, it seems, had more cynical reasons for promoting oral agreements. With a "handshake" agreement, a planter could more easily charge that a freedman misunderstood or did not satisfy the terms of a labor arrangement. The Staunton Bureau's record books reveal hundreds of instances where whites allegedly failed to pay at all or in full using such excuses.

Of course, both written and oral agreements were subject to fraud. Referring to grievances involving both kinds of contracts, Lt. George T. Cook, Bureau head in


11T.P. Jackson to O. Brown, 29 February 1868, Letters Sent, 1868, BRFAL, RG105; Foner, Reconstruction, 172.
Staunton for the greater part of 1866, wrote in November:

The condition of the Freedpeople is very unpromising. I have a larger number of complaints from them to the effect that their employers refuse to pay them . . . Most of the cases of refusal to settle with Freedpeople are flagrant attempts to defraud.\(^\text{12}\)

On average, a complaint of this kind was made every other day to the Freedmen’s Bureau.\(^\text{13}\) Some whites blamed the scarcity of money in post-war Virginia for their failure to pay black employees on time. Freedmen’s Bureau agents acknowledged that most day-to-day business transactions between whites in Augusta County were handled without money. Instead, transactions often involved credit and barter.\(^\text{14}\) Apparently whites did not offer blacks these alternatives to cash payments. While a lack of money might have justified delays in payment by employers to freedmen, it did not account for defaults.

Outright fraud was not the only obstacle to black prosperity in post-war Augusta. While some Bureau agents considered the wages blacks received to be "fair and adequate" at $9-$10 a month, high rents and employers' excessive charges for rations also proved debilitating to blacks.\(^\text{15}\) Bureau reports often described rents as

\(^{12}\)Lt. George T. Cook to Capt. R.S. Lacy, 30 November 1866, Letters Sent, 1866, BRFAL, RG105. "Freedpeople" was capitalized in the original.

\(^{13}\)Average taken from Complaints, 1865-68, BRFAL, RG105.

\(^{14}\)G.T. Cook to R.T. Lacy, 26 October 1866, Letters Sent, 1866, BRFAL, RG105.

\(^{15}\)Assessments by Bureau agents of the adequacy of Augusta wages could be confounding. During the growing season, when full employment was the norm, agents often described wages as "fair and adequate"; as winter approached, however, agents qualified their judgments. In December 1866, Lt. Cook spoke of whites "retaining a firm control of blacks through a system of low wages." One can perhaps explain these discrepancies with a comparison to the rest of the state. The average wage paid to male field hands and other able-bodied laborers in Augusta was $9-$10 a month, room and
being "outrageous" and "exorbitant without parallel," though figures were infrequently
given.\textsuperscript{16} Nicolas Cozzens, a black laborer, complained to the Freedmen’s Bureau that
a new owner charged him $36 a year for 1 1/2 acres bequeathed him by his former
master. Assuming Cozzens received the average $9 a month in wages, rent would
have accounted for more than one third of his yearly earnings. This estimate also
presumes that he commanded that wage all twelve months--which was highly unlikely
given that work dropped off during the winter. The burden of his rent was probably
closer to half his earnings. The Freedmen’s Bureau’s complaints of high rents were
supported by blacks not associated with the Bureau. Philip Rosselle, a black who
spoke at a meeting of Republicans, decried "the high rent question" before several
prominent whites.\textsuperscript{17}

High rents might be "outrageous," but they were a fixed burden. Less
predictable was the "settling of accounts," in which a laborer’s debts for rations (and,
in some cases, damages of household goods or tools) were charged against earnings.
The figuring of charges pitted the word of whites against that of blacks. An

\textsuperscript{16}Capt. Roswell Waldo to O. Brown, 30 November 1868, \textit{Letters Sent, 1868}, BRFAL, RG105.

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Valley Virginian}, 31 July 1867.
unfavorable settlement could be disastrous for freedmen as winter approached, especially if the employer dismissed the freedman at the end of harvest, as often occurred in Augusta. Capt. Roswell, who headed the Staunton Freedmen's Bureau for the latter part of 1868, described the process and its effects:

[They] are left without means of support for themselves and their families. As the Colored people, almost without exception, are obliged to rent the houses they live in (their extreme poverty preventing them owning property) and as their landlords universally charge such exorbitant prices for their hovels and are cruelly exacting in the prompt payment of their tenants--much suffering may ensue . . . Many colored men have suffered great injustices at the hands of their employers in this manner. No matter how just may be the account some imaginary or trivial grievance is brought into requisition which nearly or quite counterbalances it--and the colored man, anxious for a settlement of some kind, readily yields, and he soon finds that if he is not indebted to his supposed debtor--he has little or nothing coming to him.18

The cycle of poverty engendered by such relations is easy to fathom.19

An example from Freedmen's Bureau records illustrates how fraud could operate on several levels. Robert Mealy, a black man, was employed as a dining-room

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18R. Waldo to Gen. O. Brown, 30 September 1868, Letters Sent, 1868, BRFAL, RG105.

19Throughout its tenure in Staunton, the Freedmen's Bureau provided material support for destitute freedpeople, especially in the hard winter months. Attending to the welfare of these freedmen proved to be a vexing problem for the Bureau. Agents worried that providing material aid to freedmen appeared to support idleness rather than independence. Indeed, the head of the Freedmen's Bureau in Washington, General Oliver O. Howard, took it as a point of pride that the Bureau had not become a "pauperizing agency" by the time of its demise in 1869. Nevertheless, four years of civil war had produced countless destitute blacks and whites who looked to the federal government for assistance. In Augusta, although little documentation remains of the extent of Bureau assistance, agents regularly reported that they had exhausted quarterly allotments of rations. We do know that Augusta's "overseer of the poor," George Bunch, quarreled with Freedmen's Bureau agents over who was responsible for the care of ex-slaves; Bunch, a secessionist, believed that the county had no responsibility whatsoever for blacks. Foner, Reconstruction, 152; T.P. Jackson to George Bunch, Augusta Overseer of the Poor, 29 April 1867, Letters Sent, 1867, BRFAL, RG105.
servant by William Peyton, a lawyer from Staunton, at Peyton's West Virginia
vacation home from the end of July through August 1868. For his service, Mealy was
to receive $14.80. Peyton deducted $7.00 for board and rations and $2.50 for
"breakages" (not itemized)--leaving a balance of $5.30. Peyton refused to pay the
balance. Though Mealy made his complaint in Staunton, no record exists of his
receiving the balance due.20

Some freedwomen were at an added disadvantage when dealing with
employers. Once valuable capital to slaveholders, children were now liabilities to
freedwomen when they sought employment. Bureau records contain many reports of
black women who had difficulty finding employment in rural Augusta because of their
families--employers feared that they would have to provide for the youngsters.21
When they did find employment, freedwomen had trouble supporting themselves,
much less their children. At $4-$5 a month, their wages were half that of freedmen.
Many black women might have found some security in marriage. A registration of
Augusta's married freedpersons performed by the Freedmen's Bureau in 1866
identified 721 couples, averaging 3 children per family.22 Yet the system of low
wages in Augusta still required both spouses to work to support the black family.

Thus, the economic situation of Augusta's ex-slaves during Virginia's
Reconstruction was precarious. Evidence of black movement out of the county is hard

Sent, 1868, BRFAL, RG105.

21G.T. Cook to R.S. Lacy, 26 October 1866, Letters Sent, 1866, BRFAL, RG105.

22G.T. Cook to R.S. Lacy, 31 June 1866, Letters Sent, 1866, BRFAL, RG105.
to measure, but a comparison of the 1865 population with that of 1870 reveals little change. It appears from the constancy of wages that whites were able to keep a supply of labor equal to demand. High rents and low wages were enough to keep blacks bound to the land.  

Blacks were not without an advocate when the problem of high rents and labor disputes arose. Through March 1866, a Freedmen’s Court in Staunton arbitrated all labor disputes between blacks and whites. Established throughout the South by Bureau agents, Freedmen’s Courts operated under no uniform standard. In some areas, a single Bureau agent adjudicated contract disputes between freedmen and whites. In Augusta County, a three-man tribunal composed of a representative of the freedpeople (in some places, this person was a freedman; Augusta’s freedpeople were represented by a white), the planters, and the Freedmen’s Bureau heard civil complaints.  

Bureau officials in Washington instructed agents to monitor criminal cases involving freedpeople for improprieties when they reached Augusta’s Circuit Court.

Typically, the Freedmen’s Court called in both parties to a dispute, heard charges, then rendered a verdict. Settlements were sometimes made immediately at the

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23 Southern planters used any number of arrangements to limit the bargaining power of laboring blacks during Reconstruction. In Nelson County, Virginia, just over the mountains east of Augusta, whites forced blacks who sought employment to carry "consent papers" demonstrating that the laborer had been "released" by his former employer. Elsewhere, whites conspired to limit wages, drew up uniform contracts, and refused to rent or lease land to freedmen. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 415-416.

24 The three men on Staunton’s Freedmen’s Court were Capt. Frederick Tukey of the Freedmen’s Bureau, Harry Risk, and W.J. Dews. Nothing is known about how the latter two men were chosen to sit on the court. As discussed below, Dews apparently represented freedmen interests on the court. Testimony of William J. Dews in Congress, *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction*, 112.
office. In instances where the employer refused to settle, or failed to pay as ordered, the military was the ostensible enforcer. We do not know how effective such collections were because records are incomplete. Correspondence between Staunton’s agents and those employers in default suggests that the government had limited resources to enforce the Freedmen’s Court’s decisions; military force was more often a threat than a reality. Nevertheless, it appears that Augusta’s Freedmen’s Court at least guaranteed a fair hearing when both parties came before them.\(^{25}\) Although the courts usually sided with the freedmen, Bureau agents occasionally dismissed freedmen’s claims.

The federal government had felt compelled to establish Freedmen’s Courts in the fall of 1865 after Southern states failed to rescind statutes barring blacks from testifying in any trial. In direct response to this federal interposition, the General Assembly of Virginia partially removed the ban in early 1866, allowing blacks to testify in cases where they were party to a dispute (blacks continued to be excluded from juries).\(^{26}\) John B. Baldwin, a prominent Augusta lawyer and speaker of the unreconstructed Virginia House of Delegates, explained his state’s modest change of heart regarding black testimony before the Congressional Joint Committee on

\(^{25}\)For a good description of the various legislative, judicial, and executive powers exercised by Freedmen’s Bureaus, see George R. Bentley *A History of the Freedmen’s Bureau* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1955), 152-168; also see DuBois, 220-230. As alluded to in the introduction, the efficacy and empathy of Freedmen’s Bureau agents was not uniform throughout the South. For an example of a poorly run Bureau office, see Ayers’ description of the Savannah (GA) bureau, *Vengeance and Justice*, 154.

\(^{26}\)Despite isolated federal attempts to challenge the practice, black Virginians were systematically excluded from juries well into the early twentieth century. Wynes, *Race Relations in Virginia*, 139-41.
Reconstruction. Baldwin spoke not only to the issue of black testimony but to the whole issue of black equality in describing why whites were attempting to dictate the terms of black freedom:

In regard to negro testimony there is a diversity of sentiment among our people. I believe everybody agrees that one of the effects of freedom will be, sooner or later, to place the negro and the white man, in this matter of testimony, on a perfect equality before the law . . . but there is a diversity of opinion in reference to the expediency and safety of undertaking to do that thing all at one job . . . I think the feeling now is to place in the hands of the negro the right to testify in all matters affecting his person, his property, or his family . . . You gentlemen of the North, who have not a mass of 300,000 or 400,000 suddenly emancipated negroes in your midst, can hardly appreciate the caution which we feel to be necessary in dealing with any of these problems . . . we must let the public feeling of white people mature . . . There is no unkind feeling towards the negro in a position where he is not asserting an authority . . . I do not like the negro as well free as I did as a slave, for the reason that there is now between us an antagonism of interest to some extent, while, before, his interest and mine were identical.  

Acknowledging the state law, Bureau leaders in Virginia requested agents to turn over all legal matters to the local courts. In Augusta County, the freedman’s experience with local justice began in March 1866. It quickly proved frustrating. The first obstacle to equal justice for blacks was the race prejudice of so many magistrates and jurors. Freedmen often found it difficult to receive a preliminary hearing before Augusta’s court officials. In July 1866, Lt. Cook of the Freedmen’s Bureau reported that he did not know of a single instance when a complaint of a freedman


\[28\] In the southern legal system, the magistrate was the first line of appeal for blacks claiming injury. After a preliminary hearing, magistrates would either dismiss a case, levy a fine, or, in more serious cases, turn the case over to a circuit or superior court. Augusta County had several magistrates, who held court wherever and whenever it was convenient.
against a white man had been noticed by a magistrate. While Bureau agents noted some improvement in individual magistrates over time, agents found that they could not trust the magistrates as a class. When preliminary hearings were held (often at the insistence of the Freedmen's Bureau), one agent observed that the law "will be stretched to the utmost to convict a colored man or acquit a white man." Lt. Col. Jordan, referring to local magistrates in August 1868, noted "their marked indifference to the interest of the freedpeople [and] their unconquerable prejudice against the colored race." He also reported "an ignorance of the rules of evidence" and "blunders" in procedures.29

In one instance, a magistrate's spurning of due process almost led to a violent confrontation with a Freedmen's Bureau official. With the Bureau's assistant superintendent away on business in January 1866, William J. Dews was put in charge of Bureau affairs. Dews, a Unionist who had fled to the North for part of the war, served as a member of the Freedmen's Court in Staunton, apparently representing freedmen. During Tukey's absence, Dews learned of a freedmen being held in the county jail without a hearing. Dews petitioned Staunton Mayor Nicholas Trout, who authorized the prisoner's release. However, while escorting the man from jail, Dews encountered a hostile crowd led by a magistrate, a city lawyer, and Staunton's Overseer of the Poor, William Bunch. Dews liberated the man only with the assistance of the town sergeant ("a loyal man"), other white Unionists, and blacks. At

one point, the situation became so tense that Dews wired military officials in Charlottesville for assistance should it be necessary.\textsuperscript{30}

Such outrageous contravention of law dismayed those freedmen who had complaints. Because of the lack of justice in the system, many blacks simply refused to bring suit against whites. As Lt. Cook described the situation in the fall of 1866:

The Freedmen are very quiet and seem disposed to submit to almost any imposition rather than have any altercation with the whites. Repeated trials seem to have convinced them that they cannot obtain redress before magistrates and when informed that the Bureau cannot give them trial, they have as a rule declined to proceed further, preferring to submit.\textsuperscript{31}

Many freedmen mentioned that work would be difficult to find if prospective employers knew that they had instituted suit against a former employer.\textsuperscript{32} Most blacks also could not afford the expense of a trial. Because of a backlog of cases, Augusta's civil courts often took months to hear a case. In the meantime, laborers had to feed their families.\textsuperscript{33}

Feeling that the freedmen could not get justice before magistrates, Lt. Cook wrote his superiors toward the end of 1866 asking that the Freedmen's Courts be reinstituted in Augusta County. With a commitment on the part of the military to enforce the court's decisions, Cook felt that freedmen's rights might be better respected. Cook's petition was one of several sent by agents throughout the South


\textsuperscript{31}G.T. Cook to R.S. Lacy, 30 September 1866, \textit{Letters Sent, 1866}, BRFAL, RG105.

\textsuperscript{32}G.T. Cook to R.S. Lacy, 30 November 1866, \textit{Letters Sent, 1866}, BRFAL, RG105.

\textsuperscript{33}R. Waldo to O. Brown, 30 September 1868, \textit{Letters Sent, 1868}, BRFAL, RG105.
which acknowledged prejudices in the administration of justice toward freedmen.\textsuperscript{34}

Though Cook would soon return to his home in Buffalo, New York, his request won the tacit approval of the Bureau’s Superintendent, Gen. Oliver O. Howard. Beginning in early 1867, Freedmen’s Courts reopened in Augusta and operated until the end of the Bureau’s tenure in late 1868.\textsuperscript{35}

While the Freedmen’s Bureau handled civil cases involving blacks, the Augusta Circuit Court and grand juries continued to prosecute criminal matters. The Freedmen’s Bureau had a somewhat mixed impression of the circuit court’s ability to adjudicate fairly cases involving freedmen. On average, Bureau agents assessed criminal trials of freedmen to be “fair and impartial so far as presiding judges are concerned.”\textsuperscript{36} Circuit Court Judge Hugh W. Sheffey, a prominent Staunton manufacturer, banker, and Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates during the recent war, was described as particularly even-handed. Less reliable were jurors in circuit court cases.

One incident brings this fact into sharp relief. On June 26, 1866, Floyd Adams, a young black who worked as a "caller" for the Virginia Hotel in Staunton, was assaulted on a train station platform by Madison Dooms, an employee of the railroad. Several people witnessed Dooms strike Adams over the head with a club. This was not the first time Dooms had struck hotel porters. The attack drew much

\textsuperscript{34}Bentley, \textit{History Freedmen’s Bureau}, 158.

\textsuperscript{35}G.T. Cook to R.S. Lacy, 30 November 1866, \textit{Letters Sent, 1866}, BRFAL, RG105.

\textsuperscript{36}Italics added. G.T. Cook to R.S. Lacy, 6 July 1866, \textit{Letters Sent, 1866}, BRFAL, RG105.
publicity and the consternation of the Virginia Hotel's owners. After Adams complained to the Freedmen's Bureau, Mayor Trout bound Dooms over for $100 to answer to the grand jury. Meeting on July 4, the grand jury found no reason to indict. Dooms had explained that he was acting on orders of the station manager to keep the platform clear.\(^{37}\)

Writing to superiors about the Adams case, Lt. Cook expressed his conviction that Dooms's excuse would never have covered an assault on a white person. The jury's decision had "literally given the white man permission to knock the Negro down without fear of molestation."\(^{38}\) Assaults apparently did occur regularly for a time following the Adams beating. Bureau records show a rash of assault complaints by freedmen in the summer and fall of 1866, with the number dropping off during the winter.

It seems unlikely that the Adams case would have reached the grand jury had

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\(^{37}\) The following is the charge given to the grand jury by Judge Sheffey in June 1866, two weeks before Adams was assaulted: "Gentlemen, I cannot too earnestly invoke your aid in throwing the protecting power of the law around the freedmen in your midst: it is not only your sacred duty, but your interest and that of all for whom you act, to be stern in shielding the person, the property and the right of freedmen from violence and wrong. They are called elsewhere, "the wards of the nation;" they are, in my judgement, peculiarly the wards of the people of the South, to be cared for, watched over, encouraged, elevated and protected in all their rights . . . it is not to be wondered at, that their weak heads were turned by this sudden change--that cut loose from the ties that once bound them to their old homes, they drifted away into strange places; that they gathered in crowds into those (to them) earthly paradises, the towns and cities of the South; and that deprived of the watchful care of many of them have perished miserably in the highways of freedom! . . . Gentlemen, let us rest assured, that we, the whites of the South, have interests and duties connected with these freedmen of which we cannot divest ourselves . . . Our best interests are involved in this race of freedmen, as the tillers of our soil, and as our servants and dependents," Staunton Spectator, 16 June 1866.

\(^{38}\) G.T. Cook to R.S. Lacy, 6 July 1866, Letters Sent, 1866, BRFAL, RG105.
the young man not complained to federal officials and had the assault occurred in a less public place. The court records of Augusta County reveal that cases where whites were arrested for assaults on blacks were rare.39 Bureau officials explained that often when a black man went before a magistrate to make a complaint of assault against a white, both men would be bound over to keep the peace. If the black was unable to make bail, he would be confined to jail. Obviously, such disregard for due process discouraged many blacks from bringing charges.40 In light of the magistrates' prejudice, the fact that the Circuit Court was fair and impartial mattered little.

The disgust blacks felt with the justice system was palpable. In a letter written to the Bureau's Capt. Jackson protesting the 1867 arrest of three black friends in Staunton, Nelson Irwin poured out his anger:

My case and cause are those of thousands, just as I am affected they will be affected also. There is a deep laid organization here that governs and controls every thing by might, in defiance of truth and justice. In the least instance a black man is taken up and imprisoned, his color is his consternation, and [with] every lawless act committed he is accused . . . We gave to the rich white men our best years, our strength, our sweat, and now that we are free we get meaningless tyranny and injustice . . . I am black but in my heart there is no stain of infamy.41

Despite efforts by Irwin and others to obtain fair treatment in labor

39 Court Books, No. 8-13, Augusta Co. Courthouse, Staunton, Va. Registers of cases were examined for evidence of such assaults. Blacks were identified by color in the court records.

40 G.T. Cook to R.S. Lacy, 30 July 30 1866, Letters Sent, 1866, BRFAL, RG105.

41 Nothing is known of Nelson Irwin beyond this letter; he does not appear in the 1870 census for Augusta County. The three black friends for whom Irwin appealed had been arrested for larceny; Jackson felt that two were guilty, although he doubted the case against the third. T.P. Jackson to Gen. Terry, January 8, 1867, Letters Sent, 1867, BRFAL, RG105.
relationships and the county's legal system, Augusta blacks found little relief beyond that offered by the Freedmen’s Bureau. In maintaining a system of high rents and low wages and by disregarding contracts, whites had shown whose interests would come first. Because their wages remained marginally higher than those paid elsewhere in the state, Augusta's blacks had little incentive to relocate. Whites in Augusta were thus able to keep a more or less captive labor force. In terms of equal justice, Augusta’s white residents showed an egregious disregard for the rights of blacks. Augusta whites apparently did not rely on extralegal forms of "justice," such as lynching and rioting, to coerce blacks. Nevertheless, whites like John Baldwin were disingenuous when they claimed that denying blacks "perfect equality before the law" constituted a more civilized response. Blacks like Nelson Irwin recognized such white conduct to be no such thing.
CHAPTER 2
"EVEN A DOG KNOWS HIS FRIENDS": POLITICS

The "rich white men" referred to in Nelson Irwin’s letter were well represented in Augusta County. In the postbellum political battles that marked Virginia’s quest to satisfy the federal government’s requirements for reentry into the Union, these men wielded an influence disproportionate to their numbers and assured white domination of the state and blacks like Irwin. In doing so, the white patricians of Augusta---Alexander H. H. Stuart, John F. Baldwin and General John Echols---demonstrated how "might" could be cloaked in the most subtle maneuvering and rhetoric. Yet Augusta blacks did not sit idly by as Stuart, Baldwin, and others effected Virginia’s "redemption." County blacks organized themselves, challenged men like Stuart in public forums, and voted for Radical Republican measures intended to augment black freedom.

The end of Reconstruction in Virginia was far too complicated to describe thoroughly here. A brief summary suffices to explain its salient challenges for Augusta blacks and whites. In March 1867, after Virginia and other states rejected the Fourteenth Amendment, Congress abolished the South’s sitting governments, set up five military districts, and called for elections for constitutional conventions to establish new state governments. Readmission to the Union would be contingent on
reformed governments passing both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, thus guaranteeing civil and political rights for blacks. Most importantly, blacks would vote for delegates to the constitutional conventions and to ratify or reject the resulting constitution.

In Virginia, Radical Republicans, led by Henry H. Wells, dominated the campaign for a convention. In August 1867, Radical blacks and whites met in Richmond to discuss strategy and platforms for the impending convention. Most of Virginia’s 120,000 eligible white voters opposed the idea of a constitution framed by Radicals and blacks, but remained unorganized as the vote for approving and selecting delegates for the constitutional convention neared. Consequently, on the strength of the black vote in eastern Virginia and conservative white apathy, blacks and liberal Republicans succeeded in calling a convention in October 1867, with the Radicals electing a majority of the convention’s delegates. The constitution they wrote allowed for universal suffrage and a public school system and included two clauses which disfranchised former Confederate officials and barred all who had fought for the South from political office. The last two clauses were as controversial as the notion of black suffrage. The vote on ratification was originally scheduled for May 1868, but for a variety of reasons was delayed until July 1869. Wells had himself nominated for the governorship of Virginia, which was to be decided at the same election.

Augusta’s former slaveholders entered the fray at this point. Shocked by the Radical success in framing the constitution, whites coalesced behind conservative Republicans and Democrats and formed a Conservative Party to combat ratification. The Conservative movement was spearheaded by the thousands of former Confederate
army officers and government officials facing disfranchisement and banishment from political office should the constitution be ratified. The latter included Augusta’s A.H.H. Stuart and John B. Baldwin. Stuart—a former U.S. Congressman, member of Fillmore’s Cabinet, prominent leader of the "Know-Nothing" Party, and staunch Unionist before siding with Virginia in the Civil War—joined with the lawyer Baldwin to support a Conservative Republican, Gilbert C. Walker. In so doing, they hoped to undermine the Wells ticket. At the same time, Stuart and Baldwin also formed and served on a "Committee of Nine," which succeeded in early 1869 in persuading President Grant to allow Virginians to vote separately on the state constitution’s disfranchisement and officeholding clauses. Supporting their work in Staunton and Richmond was General John Echols, at the time president of the National Valley Bank.

In a matter of months, Stuart and Baldwin and other Conservatives persuaded most white Virginians that black male suffrage was the price Virginia had to pay to rejoin the Union on conservative white terms. By July 1869, Virginia’s constitution, with the proscriptive clauses voted out, was law, and Walker was Governor. Virginia reentered the Union in January 1870 with a government predisposed to limit the power of blacks.¹

¹Richard Lowe is the most recent historian to examine Reconstruction in Virginia. Lowe falls into what might be called the post-postrevisionist school of Reconstruction historiography. That is, Lowe does not fully subscribe either to the revisionist view, which sees congressional Reconstruction as "an honest and sincere attempt by black and white Republicans to convince the American people to live up to the ideals of the American republic," or to the postrevisionist school, which holds that significant reform was hamstrung by essentially conservative (and racist) Northern and Southern Republicans. Agreeing with postrevisionists, Lowe believes that the majority of white Virginia Republicans viewed black suffrage more as an expedient means to power than as a sacrosanct principle. Lowe further joins postrevisionists in criticizing Northern inaction in the face of conservative intimidation of freedmen and the failure of Northern
Central to a discussion of Augusta race relations is one of the few bright spots of Virginia’s "redemption": blacks’ first participation in Commonwealth politics. In the years of Radical Reconstruction in Virginia (1867-70), black Augustians engaged their former masters in a calm but pointed debate. While not a single Augusta black appears to have been influential in statewide political meetings, African-American voices were heard for a moment in Augusta County.2

Despite their underrepresentation at the state level, it is clear that Augusta blacks organized themselves in this period and overwhelmingly supported Radical Republicans to court actively "southern mountain whites." Lowe also believes that on crucial issues such as the disfranchising and officeholding clauses, Virginia’ Radical Republicans failed to appreciate the strength of opposition both within and without their party. Yet, Lowe tilts toward the revisionists in noting the accomplishments of black and white reformers: attainment of universal male suffrage in Virginia and the establishment of the Commonwealth’s first public school system. While this study addresses race relations, this author’s analysis of Reconstruction in Augusta accords with Lowe’s statewide view. Richard Lowe, Republicans and Reconstruction in Virginia, 1856-70 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991), passim; Lowe’s research is summarized in Richard Lowe, "Another Look at Reconstruction in Virginia" Civil War History 32(1): 56-76.

2The best portraits of Virginia’s black political leadership in Reconstruction are contained in works by Alrutheus Taylor, Richard L. Hume, and Luther P. Jackson. Another important source, a Freedmen’s Bureau’s attempt to identify prominent blacks, is addressed in the next chapter. The conclusion that no Augusta black figured prominently in state politics during this period rests on a comparison of Augusta census information, Freedmen’s Bureau records, and other sources with lists of prominent blacks compiled by Taylor and Hume. Both authors note that the majority of black leadership came from those areas with the largest black populations, the Tidewater and Southeastern Virginia. Taylor and Hume’s research dispels the notion that black political leaders were "the destitute, illiterate politicians portrayed so often in [early twentieth-century] accounts." Most often these prominent blacks were ministers, skilled laborers, or farmers, wealthier than most blacks, often mulatto, and literate. Many were involved in establishing independent charitable and educational organizations within the black community. Taylor, Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia, passim; Richard L. Hume, "The Membership of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 86(Oct. 1978); Luther P. Jackson, Negro Office Holders in Virginia, 1865-95 (Norfolk: Guide Quality Press, 1945).
measures in the two major elections. Secret meetings of Radical blacks were mentioned disparagingly more than once in speeches by Augusta whites; the *Staunton Spectator* warned blacks in May 1867 that it was "not safe for them to meet in nightly conclave to conspire, plot against and abuse those to whom they wear faces of kindness and good will." Of course, Augusta blacks discussed politics among themselves, and at least one Augusta black subscribed to the Washington, D.C., Republican newspaper, the *Washington Chronicle.* County blacks--joined by less than 250 white Radicals--provided more than 1,000 Radical votes in the elections for the convention and for Wells and the new constitution, with Radicals trailing Conservatives by 600 in the first contest and over 2500 in the second. The only anomaly in Augusta black political behavior came when two-thirds of the county’s black voters rejected the disfranchisement and officeholding clauses of the Constitution. In nearly every other Virginia county, blacks voted overwhelmingly to disfranchise the Confederate elite and to deny public office to former soldiers.

White sentiment toward black political participation in these years was well represented in the editorials of Augusta’s newspapers. Their content and tone were a mixture of wooing paternalism and baldfaced threats. This mix is encapsulated in a March 1867 *Valley Virginian* editorial written in response to the federal government’s

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3.*Staunton Spectator*, 30 April, 7 May, and 12 November 1867.


5.*Staunton Spectator*, 29 October 1867; 13 July 1869.

call that month for new constitutions in the former Confederate states. In a matter of a few column inches, the paper's editor took a soft and a hard tack. He implored white readers to "take more interest in this class [negroes]; we must show them we are their best friends . . . ." But at the same time he warned in capital letters and boldface at the close: "WE MUST TAKE CHARGE OF AND CONTROL THE NEGRO POPULATION." Of course, some blacks were able to read; the message was not lost on them as they organized for political action.

The public debate between blacks and whites was shaped somewhat by the prominence of men like Stuart, Baldwin, and Echols. Blacks probably would not have enjoyed the forums they did without the forbearance of Augusta's most influential whites. The meetings received extensive coverage, not simply because of the novelty of blacks speaking out, but because powerful men attended and felt obliged to listen. Some were Radical meetings attended by blacks and the few Radical and moderate Republican whites in Augusta; others were open affairs where blacks and prominent whites heard each other's views.

The first known Radical meetings in Augusta occurred in the spring and summer of 1867 and dealt with the issue of the impending constitutional convention. At a meeting in March, in addition to choosing delegates and passing resolutions to carry to the convention, blacks proposed that one of Staunton's notable whites should speak before them. They invited General Echols to attend a meeting on April 27, 1867. A partial record of this gathering appeared in the *Staunton Spectator*. In his opening remarks, General Echols congratulated blacks on their freedom, but, forsaking

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7*Valley Virginian*, 20 March 1867.
decorum, declared the black members of the audience "ignorant." He suggested that Augusta's former slaves forget "real or imagined past wrongs." When Echols asked if the blacks present desired the revolutionary schemes of the Radicals, one man said yes; another rejoined, "'He don't speak for this community.'" Echols closed by warning blacks that their uniting as a class would result in "'the destruction of [their] race'," as white southerners would drive them into the inhospitable North.

Following Echols's speech, four Augusta blacks spoke: Henry Davenport, Philip Rosselle, Benjamin Downey, and James Scott. Their comments suggested the spectrum of black opinion in Augusta at this time. (The views of nine black men who reportedly voted the Conservative ticket throughout this period were never published). Again, the Spectator summarized and quoted the participants. Henry Davenport, a 39-year old laborer and elder of the newly established black Methodist church in Staunton, spoke of a "'united brethren'" and rejoiced that blacks and whites could come together in equality. Philip Rosselle, another Methodist elder, said he did not care who had set him free. Looking at a Maj. A. Garber, another prominent white in the audience, Rosselle said, "'I belonged to Major Garber's father, and I suppose if he had known fighting would set me free, he would not have fight [sic].'" Rosselle complained of "high rents and low wages" before he sat down. Benjamin Downey, an illiterate laborer, spoke next. He said that he did not want to look at both sides of the picture, as General Echols had suggested. Inventing a new metaphor for new circumstances, Downey wanted to "'bust the picture open and look in the middle of it.'" He said he knew the black man well, but not the white man, though he had been in his company sixty-four years. Downey asked why southern whites "waited so long
before becoming such good friends." In any case, he planned to "'bring the music out of it'," apparently meaning that he hoped to make the best of his new situation. The Spectator's editor heard only bitterness in James Scott's voice. Scott, also a lay Methodist leader, said that he would support the Radical Republicans throughout. He would follow the party that fought for his freedom. He closed by saying he "'knew his friends, even a dog knows his friends.'" He did not need the help of whites "'to cross over the bridge'" to freedom.8

The next major meeting of black Radical Republicans offered a glimpse of one type of white Republican who operated in Augusta politics. Unfortunately, the report of this meeting provided only a small measure of Augusta's black sentiment. Held on July 28, 1867, the meeting was called to appoint delegates to the Republicans' nominating convention for governor to be held on August 1.9 David Fultz, a former slaveholder and "old line Whig" turned conservative Republican lawyer, had apparently organized the gathering. A 1867 Freedmen's Bureau report characterized Fultz as someone who stood "on the middle ground between the President [Andrew Johnson] and the [more radical] Congress" and who opposed those aspects of Radical Reconstruction he construed as "punishing the South."10 Fultz spoke little of the

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8Staunton Spectator, 30 April 1867; U.S. Census, 1870: Connections between these Methodist elders and Augusta's local black leadership are discussed in following chapters.

9Valley Virginian, 31 July 1867; no list of delegates survives.

10"Reports on Prominent Whites and Freedmen, March-May 1867," Miscellaneous Records, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Virginia, BRFAL, RG105, M1048, Reel 67, 1977 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.). David Fultz's background--lawyer, former slaveholder, and ex-Whig--was similar to that of John Baldwin, except that Fultz remained loyal during the war. Indeed, given his background and reticence about black civil rights, Fultz had more in common with Baldwin and other
merits of black men's new voting privileges. Instead he warned of the "influence of demagogues," by whom he meant Radical Republican men of Wells' ilk. The purpose of the constitution was to free Virginia from military rule, he said. He did not mention the opportunity it presented to further consolidate black rights. Philip Rosselle also spoke briefly at this meeting. As rendered by the Valley Virginian, his comments were conciliatory. He countered the notion that whites despised blacks; rather, he believed that perhaps the whites of Augusta "loved them too well."

Captain Thomas Jackson of the Freedmen's Bureau spoke next. In his opening comments, Jackson supported blacks' affiliation with a political party as the only vehicle by which they could guarantee their rights. In a jab at whites who were disqualified from voting on the constitution, the Captain said that the question behind all the Virginia's electoral activity was "loyalty . . . or disloyalty" to the Union. In a slight amendment to his introductory comments, Jackson concluded by saying that blacks had spent too much time away from their field work attending political

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conservatives than with many of his Republican counterparts. Fultz may very well have gone with Baldwin and other Conservatives following the Radical domination of the Republican state convention in August 1867, after which most moderate Republicans defected to the Conservative party. As Richard Hume has noted, historians have yet to identify adequately the characteristics of "native white reconstructionists" such as Fultz or Baldwin. In his examination of the membership of Virginia's Constitutional Convention of 1867, Hume believes that the salient differences between Conservative and Radical whites existed chiefly over the proscription of former Confederates' political rights and black suffrage; few native Radical whites promoted further civil and political rights for blacks (in fact, seven of seventeen Radical whites attending the convention had once owned slaves). Hume, "The Membership of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-68," 471-74.
meetings. Blacks, reported the *Valley Virginian*, were upset by this charge.\(^{11}\)

The only other meeting on record occurred in February of 1869, as Stuart and Baldwin were in the process of subverting Radical ambitions. Unfortunately, the *Spectator* provided few details, except to say that the meeting nominated delegates for a Radical Convention in Petersburg late that month, among them Philip Rosselle and Henry Davenport.\(^{12}\)

The press reaction to these meetings was swift. The *Staunton Spectator*’s response to the April 1867 meeting, which preceded the election of the constitutional convention, was titled "A Word to the Freedmen." (Although he undoubtedly knew that most blacks fell into the Radical camp, the editorialist nevertheless assumed a divide and turned his invective against black Radical Republican leaders, referring to them as "they"). The editorial called the freedmen’s embrace of Radical Republicanism a "folly approximating madness." The *Spectator* baldly stated that the contest over the framing of the constitution was an issue of black versus white. "If they throw down the gauntlet of defiant opposition, they may rest assured that it will be taken by the whites." Blacks should remember their numerical inferiority and their dependence on white employers, the piece warned. The editorialist did not doubt that blacks would vote for the constitution; his words were simply a threat of the

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\(^{11}\)Jackson’s comments at this political gathering summarize the Freedmen’s Bureau’s de facto economic policy in the Reconstruction South: to guarantee fair treatment of black labor by planters while at the same time discouraging "shirking" by ex-slaves. Inevitably, blacks who attended political gatherings and struck for better conditions viewed their own actions differently. It should be said that Jackson’s criticism was an anomaly among otherwise positive Bureau reports about the labor habits of Augusta’s blacks submitted during Reconstruction. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 154-157.

\(^{12}\)Staunton Spectator, 23 February 1869.
consequences.\textsuperscript{13}

John Baldwin was probably more subtle in his rhetoric before blacks, but in his local politicking a year after the above editorial, he believed that the time had come for whites to take up the gauntlet of racial opposition. In a talk before whites in early 1868, \textit{before} he and Stuart had negotiated politics to their liking, Baldwin did not mince words about the impact a Radical constitution would have on the white's world:

If the people adopt, \textit{or allow the Constitution to be adopted}, it will lead inevitably to negro domination . . . Under the Constitution, none but negroes and scalawags can hold office. Taxation will be enormous, because the negroes who will vote the tax will not have it to pay. [Whites] will be compelled to send children to mixed schools. The militia will be mixed--the negro always in the front rank.\textsuperscript{14}

A year later in June 1869, just before the constitutional election he engineered, Baldwin spoke at the request of blacks. It is not known what he said, but the \textit{Spectator} considered his speech "wise advice"; if blacks chose to disregard it, whites were "justified in holding them responsible."\textsuperscript{15} Blacks apparently listened, voting predictably for the loser Wells and for the constitution, but returning the vote and access to public office to Augusta's patricians and ex-Confederates. Baldwin had performed masterfully on the local, state, and national stages in assuring his class's continued dominance.

In his State of the Union address in December 1869, President Grant devoted only a single sentence to the freedmen:

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Staunton Spectator}, 23 February 1867.

\textsuperscript{14}Italics added. \textit{Staunton Spectator}, 28 April 1868.

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Staunton Spectator}, 29 June 1869.
The Freedmen, under the protection which they have received, are making rapid progress in learning, and no complaints are heard of lack of industry on their part when they receive fair remuneration for their labor.16

Grant's claims are hard to substantiate for Augusta County because the Freedmen's Bureau pulled out at the end of December 1868. In July of that year, Radicals in Congress had bowed to pressure from conservative Republicans and Democrats, agreeing to the closure of all but a few Bureau offices by the end of 1868. Political motives lay behind this acquiescence. For many Radicals, it was important only that the Bureau remain open long enough to discourage white fraud and intimidation in the November presidential elections. When it was announced that the Bureau was leaving Staunton, Captain Roswell Waldo, the agent who oversaw the withdrawal, wrote that the freedmen "seem to dread the future." Indeed, throughout 1867 and 1868, Waldo and his colleagues insisted to superiors that the Bureau was the only guarantor of black freedom in Augusta County.17

As was the case in labor relationships and the justice system, the balance of power in the political realm remained unfavorable to Augusta's blacks. Although Augusta's political contests were relatively free of violence, county blacks nevertheless organized themselves amidst a largely hostile white population. Like their counterparts throughout the South, blacks in Augusta could not be intimidated from supporting the Radical Republican agenda. However, the fact that a majority of Augusta's African-

16Staunton Spectator, 14 December 1869.

17R. Waldo to O. Brown, 14 December 1868, Letters Sent, 1868, BRFAL, RG105. On his departure, Capt. Waldo took a ten-year old black girl, Mary Montague, to live with his family on his farm near Cleveland, Ohio. Mary's mother felt that with one less mouth to feed, the whole family might escape the poor house.
Americans voted against disfranchising the white elite suggests that men like Stuart and Baldwin remained necessary friends to many blacks, if not James Scott, who wanted nothing of white patronage. Of course, Augusta blacks may have been prompted by principle to vote against the proscriptive clauses, feeling that their new voting rights would be sullied by the support of such anti-democratic measures.

Reflecting on the obstacles faced by Augusta blacks in their various struggles with county whites, Colonel Jonathan Jordan of the Freedmen’s Bureau aptly described the condition of a people advancing despite the conditions they found in Augusta County:

I think [Augusta blacks] deserve a vast deal of credit for accomplishing what they have toward becoming a thrifty and self-supporting people, especially when we consider the disadvantage under which they labor. It cannot be expected of any people that they should make any more rapid advancement than the Freedmen are now making in the South when they are surrounded by every influence calculated to discourage and dishearten them . . . . When the same field to honorable ambition and industrious effort is opened to these people, when they feel that they have full and impartial justice and protection under existing laws, I believe they will take advantage of every opportunity within their reach and so advance as to show their old Masters that they are capable of higher things in the scale of civilization than that of being mere hewers of wood and drawers of waters.18

18 J.W. Jordan to O. Brown, 30 June 1868, Letters Sent, 1868, BRFAL, RG105.
CHAPTER 3

"TO BUILD THEM A CHURCH": EDIFICES OF FREEDOM

The attempt by Augusta blacks to consolidate their freedom did not end with their struggles for economic, legal, and political justice. As we have seen, their economic position remained precarious throughout Virginia’s Reconstruction. While blacks’ collective voice had been heard in the framing of Virginia’s new constitution and their vote for Wells, the efficacy of black political power to promote further change was uncertain. Much of the everyday lives of county blacks remained subject to an unpredictable calculus of individual encounters with various whites. To bolster their collective power and augment their independence, blacks needed a more solid base from which to work. Augusta blacks found this base in the churches and schools they created during the five years of Virginia’s Reconstruction.

In their efforts to fashion these new institutions, blacks faced many obstacles. Not the least of these barriers was a shortage of resources. As it happened, blacks proved remarkably adept at pooling their meager assets to initiate and sustain efforts to build churches and schools. Where their resources proved insufficient, blacks held fundraisers and appealed to both local whites and northern associations for support. The Freedmen’s Bureau also lent a hand. The relationships that evolved in these encounters with whites make up one part of the story of black institution-building in
Augusta County. As often as not, black autonomy—as it was enacted by blacks and perceived variously by northern and southern whites—proved the most problematic issue. Divisions within the black community itself, most notably between competing denominations, also presented difficulties. Yet, despite these challenges, blacks demonstrated a remarkable resourcefulness in their pursuit of richer spiritual and educational lives. That determination remained the most salient characteristic of blacks’ efforts to build an independent life for themselves.

Within a year of the surrender at Appomattox, Augusta County’s first autonomous black church was in operation. The report of a Northern teacher suggests that whites provided the impetus for this novel effort. In November 1865, John Scott, a teacher sent south by the American Missionary Association (AMA), wrote that white members of the Staunton Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had "shut the colored people out of a church they helped to build." However, if Augusta County’s experience was at all similar to that of other regions of the South, it is possible that black Methodists voluntarily chose to withdraw. The breakup of biracial congregations

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1 John Scott to Samuel Hunt, Superintendent of Education, American Missionary Association, 18 November 1865, *American Missionary Association Archives* [cited hereafter as AMAA], Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana, reels 204-218, University of Virginia Microfilm Collection, Charlottesville, Virginia. The Staunton Methodist Episcopal Church belonged to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The issue of slavery had long bedeviled the Methodist Church, causing it to split into separate Northern and Southern conferences in the 1840s. Nevertheless, several churches in the Shenandoah Valley remained affiliated with the Northern, or Baltimore conference, until the outbreak of hostilities. However, the experience of war apparently severed all loyalties. Testifying before Congress in 1866, an agent of the American Bible Society, the Rev. E.O. Dunning, testified that, despite efforts of the Northern conference to effect a rapprochement, all white Methodist congregations in the valley had "gone over to the South." Testimony of E.O. Dunning in Congress, *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction*, 44-45.
was a wide-scale phenomenon in the postbellum South, often brought about by a combination of whites' refusal to grant blacks equality within churches and blacks' desire for independence. A large majority of black Southerners chose separation over what one historian has called "associate membership" in churches, whereby blacks were relegated to separate pews and denied a role in church governance. Faced with calls for greater black equality, whites often acquiesced in black decisions to start their own congregations.

Whoever instigated the split in the Methodist congregation, Augusta black Methodists were soon at work raising funds to construct their church, which became known as the Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church, Colored (hereafter referred to as the black ME Church). Given their lack of ready capital, blacks resorted to methods of fundraising popular in nineteenth-century America. The *Valley Virginian* described their efforts in January 1866:

> The Freedmen had several fairs and concerts during the holidays to raise money

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2 Foner, *Reconstruction*, 88-89. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, attempted to mollify its black membership by allowing them separate churches and black pastors. The church leadership steadfastly refused, however, to give blacks title to their churches or to allow blacks any role in church governance. There is no evidence that suggests this option was offered to the black Methodists of Staunton. William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 118.

3 Apparently, Staunton’s Methodist Episcopal Church, Colored, joined the Washington Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, also known as the Baltimore Conference. A member of the black Methodist Church represented Staunton at a national meeting of the Washington Conference in 1872. The Washington Conference was organized in 1864 to encompass all the black congregations within the Baltimore Conference. Given that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, did not allow blacks to own property in the immediate postbellum period, it is assumed that the new black church, with its all black Board of Trustees and purchases of property, had severed all ties with the Southern conference. MacMaster, *Augusta County History*, 31.
to build them a church. We understand they have raised by the fair and contributions of our citizens, enough to purchase the old Market House, and intend to fix it up comfortably for a church.4

A significant number of those contributions came from Augusta’s white citizens. Reporting the results of one fair held in an abandoned carriage house, the missionary Scott reported that proceeds amounted to three hundred dollars, with an additional two hundred raised "by subscription among the white people of the place."5 The white patrician A.H.H. Stuart donated five dollars, but offered a snide remark with his contribution; he would give another five dollars if the Freedmen’s Bureau would leave Staunton.6 The black children of Staunton’s AMA day school raised fifty-four dollars with a concert of religious songs. With a quarter of the building’s $2,000 cost already paid, the old Market House was occupied in late February 1866. An ME "Benevolent Society" was put into operation at this time. The extent of its activities are unknown.7

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4 *Valley Virginian*, 10 January 1866.


7 *Valley Virginian*, 14 February 1866; Scott to Hunt, 18 April 1866, *AMAA*. In his investigations of black labor in Richmond, Virginia, the historian Peter J. Rachleff has discovered over four hundred such societies operating in Virginia’s capital shortly after the Civil War. These "secret societies," with names such as the Sons and Daughters of Noah and the United Daughters of Ham, offered death and funeral benefits, poor relief, spiritual and educational instruction, and served as forums for nascent trade and political organizing. According to Rachleff, the societies provided a "framework for collective self-improvement and mutual assistance." Rachleff believes that Richmond’s tobacco factories, with their large black work forces, offered unique opportunities for organizing and recruiting members of these societies. Peter J. Rachleff, "‘Members in Good Standing:’ Richmond’s Community of Former Slaves, 1865-1873," *Virginia Cavalcade*, 39(3): 130-143, 39(4): 148-157.
Augusta’s black Methodists had barely moved into their new house of worship when plans were begun for an edifice more worthy of their new status. By May of 1866, the congregants were in the middle of a drive to finance the construction of a church near the prestigious all-white Staunton Academy for Boys. Blacks were aided in their efforts by an eight hundred dollar profit realized when they sold the market house-turned-church to a Presbyterian congregation in September 1866. (Apparently, the black ME Church members had paid off the mortgage by this point, perhaps using "harvest money" from their labors as hired hands in Augusta’s fields). While the black Methodists received "the best wishes of the [white] community in their enterprise," their tenure in the old Market House had not been without negative comment from whites.\textsuperscript{8} Referring to the blacks’ style of worship, the local paper inveighed:

As a friend of the colored people we would advise them that they are stirring up a great prejudice, by the unnecessary noise they make at such late hours every night in their church. Parson [Ephraim] Lawson would do well to moderate this annoyance and teach his people that noise is not religion.\textsuperscript{9}

Services were first held in the new black ME Church in May 1867.\textsuperscript{10}

In their efforts to raise funds for this second church, the black Methodists faced competition from an unexpected quarter: another black church. In April 1866, Emilia Rodney, representing the Philadelphia-based African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), arrived in Staunton. Rodney began taking subscriptions for an AME

\textsuperscript{8}Valley Virginian, 26 September 1866.

\textsuperscript{9}Valley Virginian, 27 June 1866.

congregation that she hoped to begin in the city. The reactions of black and white
Stauntonites to this AME initiative offered a glimpse into how both groups negotiated
the existence of new black churches. The dispute that followed between the two black
congregations played itself out publicly in the pages of the *Valley Virginian*.

Black ME congregants accused Rodney of misrepresenting herself to white
citizens as a solicitor for the new ME church. In a "Card from the Colored People,"
the Rev. Ephraim Lawson, pastor of the black ME church, warned whites in late May
1866 to "be careful who they pay money to." Lawson went on to describe what he
saw as the divisive intent of the AME:

The impression seems to exist among the citizens, that the colored people wish
to 'draw out from among the whites' in church and business matters, and
become independent of them; thus acknowledging little obligation to them.
We are sorry to hear that this doctrine is taught by some of our color from the
North, who are endeavoring to form a sect, new to us, here, but so far as that is
concerned, we have no sympathy for them. We do not desire this foolish
independence, but are very thankful for sympathy and aid from the whites, and
respectfully acknowledge our obligations.11

It is impossible to prove Lawson's charges against the AME. However, a letter

11*Valley Virginian*, 30 May 1866. The African Methodist Episcopal [AME] Church,
the first independent, black-run Protestant denomination, had its roots in the Bethel
Church of Philadelphia, founded in 1786 by Richard Allen and other blacks who resented
the discrimination they encountered within their Methodist congregation. According
to the historian William E. Montgomery, the creation of the AME church was "a defiant act
by assertive blacks who also were devoted to regular Methodist theology and polity." In
the late nineteenth-century, the AME church would become a locus of the evolving black
nationalist movement; however, in the immediate postbellum era, AME "separatism"
consisted chiefly of the recognition that neither the Northern nor Southern branches of
Methodism were prepared to offer blacks an unfettered role in church governance or
ownership. The federal government's policy of turning over captured church property of
disloyal Methodists to the Methodist Episcopal Church, North--denying the same to the
AME--certainly did not draw the AME toward a rapprochement with the white church.
Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree*, 73, 89, 240.
from the AMA teacher John Scott suggests that more than the AME's alleged misrepresentations may have piqued the governors of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Scott, who at the time rented space from the ME Church for his school, wrote to colleagues in New York that AME recruitment had been successful in "drawing off part of the congregation belonging to [black ME] Church . . . thereby weakening the body."¹²

For their part, the AME responded with their own conciliatory rhetoric. In "Another Card from the Colored People," the Rev. A. Woodhouse, the pastor of the AME congregation, vehemently denied espousing a doctrine of "drawing out" from whites. Lest there be any misunderstanding, Woodhouse declared that "the doctrine we teach, wherever we go, is that we keep as close to whites as possible." AME efforts to support a church in Staunton were apparently successful. Trustees announced the laying of a cornerstone in late June 1866.¹³

The private thoughts of the AME congregants and ME Church members regarding their relationship with Staunton's whites cannot be known. Given the debate's public forum and the need of both congregations for white support, the mollifying tone of the open letters is not surprising. And, of course, Staunton's blacks very well may have wanted to prove to whites that their independent congregations were not, in themselves, a statement of a thoroughgoing black separatism, but merely independent places of black worship.

¹²Scott to Hunt, 26 April 1866, AMAA.

¹³Valley Virginian, 6 July 1866; Staunton Spectator, 19 June 1866.
By 1869, Staunton also had an independent black Baptist church.\textsuperscript{14} Unfortunately, very little is known about how or why it split off from the parent congregation, the Staunton Baptist Church. John Scott, the AMA missionary, wrote to the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher on behalf of the black pastor, Henry Dickenson, soliciting three hundred dollars to complete a new church. Scott also mentioned that the black Baptists had joined with the black ME Church to purchase land for a black cemetery "because the cost of burying in the grounds of the whites was so much."\textsuperscript{15}

It is a shame that no manuscripts of these black churches survive. The absence of information about the leaders of the black Staunton churches is especially unfortunate. The leaders of black churches were often leaders in the black community as well. One of the few independent black social institutions in the postbellum South, the church was often the locus of black community. As one contemporary observer noted, black ministers were "preachers because they are leaders [rather] than leaders because they are preachers."\textsuperscript{16} Not surprisingly, their position as community leaders often led Southern ministers to an involvement in politics. Some of the most

\textsuperscript{14}In the postbellum period, the greatest number of churchgoing Southerners belonged to the Baptist Church. The earliest reliable statistics of black church membership come from the 1890 Federal Census, which show that over half of the members of all-black churches belonged to the Baptist faith. In Virginia in 1890, an overwhelming majority of blacks--83 percent of worshipers--were Baptists. Historians have several explanations for the church's popularity among blacks: its congregationalist philosophy allowed black churches freedom from outside authority and white control; individual churches were allowed to select and dismiss ministers, insuring that the style and content of preaching was under the control of the congregation; and the creation of new churches was dependent on nothing but the wherewithal of the faithful. Montgomery, \textit{Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree}, 108.

\textsuperscript{15}Scott to Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, 5 May 1869, \textit{AMAA}.

\textsuperscript{16}Foner, \textit{Reconstruction}, 93.
prominent black politicians involved in Virginia’s political reorganization were ministers.\textsuperscript{17}

In Augusta County, extant records reveal only a tenuous connection between the county’s black religious leadership and its political counterpart. In comparing the names of those blacks who spoke at Augusta political gatherings with known church leaders, only three names appear in common: Henry Davenport, Philip Rosselle, and James Scott, all of whom were trustees of the black Methodist Episcopal Church. Beyond brief sentiments expressed in white newspapers, little is known of these men’s politics other than that, predictably, they voiced radical Republican opinions.\textsuperscript{18} None of them seems to have played a substantial role in statewide politics.

A Freedmen’s Bureau report prepared in early 1867 might have offered historians a more thorough picture of black leadership in Augusta County. In March of that year, Brevet Brigadier General Orlando Brown, the Assistant Commissioner of the Bureau for Virginia, ordered agents to provide him with the names of "six of the most intelligent of the freedmen belonging to each county, in whom both races have confidence, and who have the most influence over their own people." Coming on the heels of the first congressional Reconstruction Act, which called for biracial participation in the military regimes that were to replace the South’s standing state governments, Brown’s search for "influential" freedmen was apparently intended to

\textsuperscript{17}Taylor, \textit{Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia,} 206-7.

\textsuperscript{18}Staunton Spectator, 30 April 1867; Valley Virginian, 30 May 1866.
garner a list of potential black candidates for public office.\textsuperscript{19}

Agent Frederick Tukey responded for the Staunton office, offering the following names: John Christian, James Carter, Frank Overton, Jacob Thornton, Henry Davenport, and Wright Bolden. Of these six men only Davenport is known to have spoken openly about politics. Unfortunately, Tukey’s powers of observation were something less than an historian’s dream. Beyond listing their occupations, Tukey’s standard for inclusion seemed to be only that the men possessed "good sound, common sense" and that they were "respected by both races."\textsuperscript{20} None of the men the

\textsuperscript{19}Richard Lowe, "The Freedmen’s Bureau and Local Black Leadership," \textit{Journal of American History} 80 (3): 989-998. Lowe’s article examines common characteristics of the 621 freedmen identified by Bureau agents in 41 subdistricts of Virginia (some agents identified more than six freedmen). Compared to the average Virginia black male, the freedmen in the Bureau reports were more likely to be literate and freeborn. More than one third of the men chosen were mulatto compared to the one seventh that category represented in Virginia’s population. The men also tended to be wealthier than the average black. Lowe’s analysis reveals that the Bureau’s choices of likely black leaders rarely corresponded with those elected by blacks in local and state elections during Virginia’s reconstruction. Lowe is not surprised by this fact, given that agents were instructed to select freedmen "in whom both races have confidence and who have the most influence over their people." Certainly the more radical black leaders were not likely to be chosen by agents acting under this rubric. Interestingly, those blacks who held public office during Reconstruction were even more disproportionately literate, freeborn, mulatto, and comparatively wealthy than those selected by the Bureau. Only 20 of the 621 men identified by the Bureau were among the 350 blacks who held public office in Virginia during and immediately after Reconstruction. Offices held included overseer of the poor, member of the county of commissioners, city council member, customs inspector, and member of the general assembly.

\textsuperscript{20}Reports on Prominent Whites and Freedmen, March-May 1867, Miscellaneous Records, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Virginia, BRFAL, RG 105, M1048, Roll 67 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.). The full text of Tukey’s report follows: "1st. John Christian: keeps an eating saloon, is a man of good sound, common sense, and writes a very good hand, is all right in sentiment and principle, and respected by both races; 2nd. James Carter: Farmer, writes a very good hand, is a Christian man, and much respected by both races; 3rd. Frank Overton. Laborer. writes his name indifferently, but has good common sense and the respect of all classes; 4th. Jacob Thornton. Laborer. writes his name, is intelligent, and answers all the points
Bureau identified went on to hold public office in Virginia.

That the Augusta freedmen cited in the Bureau report never held public office did not mean that they did not play an important role in Augusta's black community. Three of the men named--Henry Davenport, James Carter, Frank Overton--served on the governing boards of Augusta's independent black churches. The record shows that church elders could be powerful spokesmen for black interests. After all, it was the Methodist lay preacher James Scott who told an audience of prominent white politicians that blacks needed no help to "cross over the bridge to freedom." In their successful attempts to establish independent churches, the leaders of Augusta's black religious community evidently considered the autonomous church an important buttress to freedom's bridge.²¹

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[apparently refers to Brown’s questionnaire]; 5th. Henry Davenport. cannot read or write, but has a high degree of practical common sense, and eminently noted for his piety, and it is said (I cannot vouch for the truth of it) than when he prays in a building that has a shingled roof, the roof always has to be patched the next day; 6th. Wright Bolden. Laborer. and is all right."²¹

²¹Staunton Spectator, 30 April 1867.
CHAPTER 4
"FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF LEARNING": BLACK EDUCATION IN RECONSTRUCTION AUGUSTA

The establishment of black churches in Augusta County and elsewhere in the South was affirmation that the long and secretly prayed for "Day of Jubilee"—emancipation—had finally come. The chorus of voices that filled Augusta’s African-American churches nearly every night in 1866 was the full flowering of a spirituality long in development. Despite sermons by white preachers declaring slavery to be their preordained lot, blacks had held furtively to the redemptive message inherent in Christianity. In their secret services and spirituals, slaves had maintained a faith that circumvented the proscribed religion available in their masters’ churches. With emancipation, Augusta ex-slaves brought that faith into the open and gave it a public home in their own houses of worship.

If faith was a hard thing to stifle, the hungering of the slave’s mind for literacy and knowledge had proven easier for whites to control in the antebellum South. Every state except Tennessee banned the instruction of slaves before the Civil War. Virginia had some of the strictest anti-education laws, passed after the literate Nat Turner rebelled against his masters in 1831. Although many free blacks were given the latitude to educate themselves and some slaves received a surreptitious education from sympathetic masters, over ninety percent of the South’s adult black population
remained illiterate in 1860. When freedom came, blacks rushed to gain the education long denied them. Many ex-slaves simply sought to read "the Word" for themselves. Others understood that economic success required literacy. Most appreciated that an education, in W.E.B. DuBois' words, was "the key to more." All of these motives were present in blacks' pursuit of education in postbellum Augusta.

Much of what we know about black educational efforts in Reconstruction Augusta comes from the records of the American Missionary Association (AMA), which sent its first emissaries to Staunton in November 1865. Established in 1846 by Lewis Tappan and other prominent northern abolitionists, the AMA had been staunchly antislavery from its inception. With Tappan's involvement, the association did not shy away from promoting political activity to end slavery. At the beginning of the Civil War, the association was more well known for its political abolitionism than for its missionary activity in places such as the old Northwest.

With the outbreak of war, however, the AMA turned its attention to helping freedpersons in the Union-occupied areas of the South, beginning at Fort Monroe and tidewater area of Virginia in September 1861. Throughout the war, the AMA "provided relief, attempted to help backs acquire land, demanded civil and political rights for former slaves, established schools and churches, and fought for a system of public education in the South." The AMA was active in Augusta County throughout

\[1\] DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*, 638.


Virginia’s Reconstruction, sending a total of twelve instructors, all of whom taught in Staunton. The AMA concentrated its efforts there in providing day and night classes for the freedmen.

The record left by the AMA teachers is rich in detail in several areas. In fact, other than the records left by the Freedmen’s Bureau, the AMA letters from Staunton offer the single best recollection of institutional activities and attitudes of Augusta blacks in the immediate postwar period. The AMA correspondence confirms what DuBois describes as the freedpeople’s "frenzy" for education. Augusta’s blacks went to great lengths to attain schooling. But more than the freedmen’s desire to learn is evident in the AMA records. The racial attitudes of both Augusta’s whites and northern missionaries are readily apparent, as are the opinions of these whites toward each other.

The reception the AMA teachers initially received from Augusta County’s whites was openly antagonistic. The AMA teachers complained to their northern sponsors that local whites had bestowed on them the title "nigger teachers" and made them the object of "frequent sneers."\(^4\) Augusta whites reserved their most thorough public humiliation for John Scott, the head of the AMA’s endeavor for the duration of its work in Staunton. Seen by whites in the company of one of his black female students on a main Staunton thoroughfare, Scott was the subject of the following, vitriolic attack in the *Valley Virginian*:

> Last Sunday morning, our citizens were shocked and disgusted by an exhibition one John Scott, from Waterbury, Conn., a teacher in the Freedmen’s School, made of himself, by escorting a negro girl down New Street. On coming down

\(^4\)Scott to Hunt, 18 November 1865; Dewey to Hunt, 31 January 1865, *AMAA*. 
the street white persons "hissed" this creature, Scott; soon afterwards, the girl came back by herself, and the coloured people, collected on Crawford's corner, "hissed" her. She had evidently disgraced herself in their eyes, by associating with this fellow, and we agree with them. We saw a notice, the other day, of the arrest of an officer for the same offense, in Petersburg, and we call the attention of those in authority to the disgraceful conduct of this man Scott. The Supt. of the Freedmen's Bureau owes it to himself; to the ladies who teach in the School, as well as to this community, to discharge this disciple of Miscegenation at once. If he wants to marry the negro, let him do so, if she is willing; and speedily emigrate to Liberia or some other congenial clime, where to his sweet content, he can dwell in the sweet embrace of the "negro de L'Afrique." He don't suit this country.5

Scott felt compelled to explain in the paper's next edition that the woman had merely wanted to borrow a bible. We can only assume that Scott told the truth when he assured the city's whites that, apart from this one instance, he had "never walked with any colored man or woman, in this place or any other." Presumably a pious man, Scott must have been mortified by the paper's attack and its mention of miscegenation. Beyond this one incident, the county's papers made no further negative comment about attempts to educate blacks.6

Other sources confirmed Scott's description of the hostile climate educators and freedpeople encountered in Augusta in the first years of Reconstruction. William J. Dews, the Staunton music instructor and Unionist who served on the Freedmen's Court, testified before the Joint Committee on Reconstruction in February 1866 that whites "would not willingly contribute for the education of . . . blacks" were it not for the presence of the Freedmen's Bureau and the Union army. Appearing before the same committee, the Rev. E. O. Dunning of the American Bible Society concurred

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5 Valley Virginian, 4 April 1866.

6 Valley Virginian, 10 April 1866.
with Dews about the importance of federal support for black education. Dunning, a resident of Winchester, recounted a beating William L. Coan, the AMA’s superintendent for education in Virginia, had recently received at a train depot in Gordonsville. Apparently, Coan had commented on the manners of a local woman who had moved his luggage and purloined his seat on a train during a stop. A prominent citizen assaulted Coan for his remarks; when told that Coan was an AMA superintendent, the depot crowd expressed "exultation that he had been knocked down." Dunning also described how "colored schools had been broken up [where] troops had been withdrawn," citing the case of Waynesboro, where the "secesh portion of the people" had forced a white woman teacher to leave, thus closing a freedmen’s school.7 White Augustians’ resistance to the education of freedpeople apparently lessened somewhat over the course of Virginia’s Reconstruction. In the years following his encounter with the Valley Virginian’s editorialist, Scott noted that Augusta’s whites grew resigned to the fact of educated blacks. This amelioration of white opposition to freedmen’s education was evident elsewhere in the state. Teachers of blacks in Richmond wrote in 1868 that "public sentiment against the education of the freedmen is being gradually overcome." Further indicating this change, federal authorities noted that white Virginians increasingly sought teaching positions at Bureau schools. In 1869, the man charged with overseeing the opening of Virginia’s public

7 Testimony of William J. Dews in Congress, Report of Joint Committee on Reconstruction, 112; Testimony of the Rev. E.O. Dunning, Ibid., 47. Other forms of intimidation were also reported in Virginia. Arson destroyed schools on more than one occasion and teachers faced more intimidating forms of harassment elsewhere in the state. The sources used in this study contain no evidence of arson against schools in Augusta County. DuBois, Black Reconstruction, 646.
school system believed that the number of white Virginians gaining employment with the Freedmen's Bureau or starting their own schools was "considerable."

Within a month of arriving in November 1865, Scott and his staff of four teachers had nearly four hundred students attending day and night classes. In order to accommodate the large number of pupils, classes were "graded" according to ability. The first classes were taught in four rooms rented to the AMA by a black barber for $225 a year.

Scott and the other teachers—all women—were immediately struck by the fact that the majority of black students attended night classes. The preponderance of night school students contradicted the teachers' previous experience in AMA assignments elsewhere in Virginia. Most of the night scholars were between fifteen and twenty years old. Apparently, the "necessity of labor" determined the schedules of these Augusta students, "who in other places would go to day school." Consequently, the

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8 Issues of class are generally avoided in this work; nevertheless, racial conflict intersected with class conflict throughout Reconstruction. In Virginia, this relationship was particularly evident in 1868, when Virginia's "radical" convention proposed the state's first public school system. For elite whites, the idea of supporting education for poorer whites was almost as distasteful as the idea of educating blacks. White acceptance of black education was tested in the political contest surrounding ratification of the new constitution and election of a state government. White conservative politicians used the race issue to mask their opposition to the higher taxes and implied threat to their hegemony implicit in a public school system. When public schools became a certainty, white attitudes moderated once again. *AMAA, passim; Taylor, Negro in Reconstruction of Virginia,* 142; Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861-1870* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 135.

9 Scott to Hunt, 16 December 1865; Scott to Hunt, 13 March 1865, *AMAA.*

10 C.E. Dewey to Hunt, 26 December 1865, *AMAA.* This observation, made in 1865, requires some qualification. Many of Staunton's AMA teachers had previously taught in Union-occupied areas of Tidewater Virginia, where the AMA had operated schools since
AMA teachers considered "the night school more important than that of the day."\textsuperscript{11} Those laborers who attended night school, with its classes ending as late as nine, often did so after a long day in the fields. Nevertheless, Annie Dunn, of Milltown, Maine, remarked that she had never seen "the eagerness manifested to learn, that there is here."\textsuperscript{12} Acknowledging the beginning level of her students, Mary Williams, of Greenfield, Massachusetts, taught "no writing . . . no geography . . . no arithmetic." Rather, in late 1865, most of Williams’ students commenced "with the alphabet, and are now reading in words of two or three letters."\textsuperscript{13}

Freedpersons overcame more than exhaustion to attend school. Many blacks travelled long distances to Staunton to get an education. One fatigued teacher admitted that "when [her students] come three or four miles as some of mine do, I feel that I should not complain." One eager woman walked six miles to attend classes and said that she would be willing to walk twice as far "for the privilege of learning." Others faced more severe trials in attempting to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the AMA. In one letter, Scott complained that "scholars living with white people have, in some cases, been severely whipped for coming to school at night."

\textsuperscript{11}Mary D. Williams to Hunt, "Report," November 1865, AMAA.  
\textsuperscript{12}Annie A. Dunn, 17 November 1865, AMAA.  
\textsuperscript{13}Mary D. Williams to Hunt, "Report," November 1865, AMAA.
Most remarkable were cases in which black parents sent their children to Staunton to live, so that they might benefit from the schools there. Often, such arrangements required that parents hire their children to white families, in exchange for a child's board and the opportunity to attend school.14

Pecuniary matters presented problems for some freedpersons wishing to get an education. For practical and philosophical reasons, the AMA charged a small tuition of ten cents per student per month on average. Tuition was essential to support the operating expenses of the cash-strapped AMA schools. Indeed, without the contributions of freedmen, northern organizations and the Freedmen's Bureau would have been hard-pressed to sustain their educational work in the South.15 But more than necessity prompted the AMA to charge tuition. John Scott was conveying a belief prevalent among AMA proselytizers when, in March 1866, he lectured his black students on "the subject of Free Labor and Its Reward." In a letter to superiors, Scott described his lecture as necessary for a "people [who] have no idea of the responsibility of supporting schools, churches, or any public responsibility whatever; nor even of the duty of furnishing themselves a respectable home." This sentiment, as counter as it is to the truth about black enterprise in Augusta and elsewhere in the South, nevertheless represented the belief of the AMA and most white Northerners that

14 Dunn to Hunt, 17 November 1865; Dewey to Hunt, 31 January 1866; Scott to Hunt, 16 December 1865; Scott to Hunt, 28 February 1866, AMAA.

15 In the period 1865-1870, over five million dollars was expended for the education of southern blacks; of this amount, blacks contributed from $800,000-$1,000,000--nearly one-fifth of the total. Given the economic condition of ex-slaves, this amount is astonishing and belies assertions that blacks did not appreciate the importance of supporting educational institutions. DuBois, Black Reconstruction, 648; Foner, Reconstruction, 98.
ex-slaves were a benighted people who could not succeed without missionaries instructing them in "civilized" (that is, northern economic and religious) values. The AMA believed that tuition would make ex-slaves value the education they received. For some blacks, this small charge proved burdensome. One woman could not afford tuition for her several children and had the fee waived. Another young boy did various small jobs for storekeepers to raise his own tuition. In place of money, the AMA also accepted wood and oil lamps with which to heat and light their classrooms.

Thus, through perseverance, many blacks were able to get an education. Yet, for a number of reasons, thousands of Augusta County's ex-slaves were denied the opportunity to learn. An 1867 Freedmen's Bureau report summarized both the problems these freedpeople faced and the need for greater federal and Association support:

If prejudice against education is not less strong, policy dictates tolerance if not support . . . by opening schools in country districts [the government can] reach a large class whose labor continuously on farms is necessary to their own welfare and the prosperity of the country at large [or] when means are . . . inadequate to board their children in towns where schools exist and must

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16John Eaton, Superintendent of Contrabands under General Grant, introduced tuition fees for freedmen's schools on the Tennessee-Mississippi border as early as 1862. Eaton believed the fees "did much toward rendering schools self-supporting, and also toward developing a sense of dignity and responsibility in the Negro." General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, mentor to Booker T. Washington and a founder of Hampton Institute, was the foremost proponent of this "bootstraps philosophy" in Virginia, requiring his AMA teachers in the Tidewater area to turn away students who did not pay a ten cent tuition. Armstrong believed that "no class of people is so easily pauperized as Anglo-Africans. It is almost impossible to give to them largely without doing as much harm as good." Morris, Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction, 16, 154-56.

17Sarah H. Davison to E.P. Smith, Superintendent of Education, AMA, 1 March 1869; Scott to Hunt, "Superintendent's Report," January 1866, AMAA.
consequently deny their children education or abandon their proper labor in the country and seek precarious employment in towns already overcrowded.\footnote{Jackson to Capt. John A. McDonnell, 3 June 1867, \textit{Letters Sent, 1867}, BRFAL, RG105.}

Given these conditions, both the Freedmen’s Bureau and the AMA did what they could to expand educational opportunities throughout Augusta County.

The Freedmen’s Bureau and the AMA made small appropriations throughout the period 1865-1870 to encourage fledgling educational efforts in county towns. Schools in Laurel Hill, Arbor Hill, and Waynesboro received funds with which to build schoolhouses. Yet, despite the efforts of both organizations, none of these towns could boast an active school for freedmen in 1868. In one instance, a white school teacher explained the reasons that prevented freedmen from receiving schooling. Waynesboro’s William Cithrow excused the lack of a school for blacks by declaring that "having a white school on [his] hands [he] found [his] duties too heavy."\footnote{William Cithrow to Col. J.W. Jordan, 21 May 1868, \textit{Letters Received 1868}, BRFAL, RG105.} In fairness, more than white priorities hampered efforts to broaden education in the county. A Bureau appropriation to Waynesboro touched off another dispute among black churches in 1868; Baptists and Methodists argued over who could rightly use the church for which federal funds had been designated. The Methodists refused to educate children of Baptists at the church.\footnote{Lt. Roswell Waldo, Sub-Assistant, 9th District, to McDonnell, 20 October 1868, \textit{Letters Sent, 1868}, RG105. Perhaps such fractiousness was to be expected amid the turbulence of Reconstruction, when freedmen had scarce capital and opportunities for federal aid in building churches were infrequent; Freedmen’s Bureau agents in a South Carolina town encountered Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Episcopalians "worshipping together, ‘or what is nearer the truth, quarreling together,’” because only one...}
Where schools were established, conditions exasperated AMA teachers. At the AMA's first school location—the barber's—a teacher occupied a room fourteen by sixteen feet, with his fifty pupils and one light. Upon leaving the black barber's property, Scott and the other teachers used the black ME Church in Staunton at the time it occupied the old Market House. That building contained one room, fifty feet square. Consequently, the teachers each occupied a corner to instruct their pupils. One teacher return addressed her envelope to superiors thus: "S.W. Corner of the Church, New Street." In 1868, the AMA school was located in the new ME church. By that time, the Methodist Episcopal minister, Ephraim Lawson, had decided that the church sanctuary could not be used, in John Scott's paraphrase, "for such unholy purposes as the education of children." Instead, teachers and students had to use the church's cramped and fetid basement for their lessons. For Lawson's intransigence, Scott accused the minister of being a man "of much pomp and arrogance."^{21}

In isolation, Scott's opinion of the black minister might simply be an instance of two egos clashing. Against the backdrop of other statements by Scott concerning blacks, however, the AMA headmaster's opinion of Lawson reveals Scott's deep-seated convictions regarding blacks' abilities, convictions which hindered the AMA's ability to create a more lasting legacy in Augusta County. Scott and his AMA colleagues believed that the majority of Southern blacks needed a thoroughgoing moral and practical education following the Civil War. In the opinion of Staunton's suitable church was available. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree*, 86.

^{21}Scott to Hunt, 21 January 1866; Dewey to Hunt, March 1866; Scott to E.P. Smith, 28 November 1868, *AMAA*. 
missionaries, northern whites were best suited to edify Southern blacks. Consequently, the AMA teachers in Augusta often attempted to stifle, either through neglect or design, enterprising blacks' efforts to build on aid rendered by the Association.

In many respects, the missionaries' opinions reflected racial thinking prevalent among nineteenth-century whites. For many white Northerners operating in the postbellum South, the region was a laboratory in which ostensibly benign Northern opinions about blacks could be tested. An example of this thinking was evident in the forms on which teachers were requested to file their reports. The forms included the following question: "Do Mulattoes show more ability than blacks?" To their credit, Augusta's AMA teachers indicated that no difference could be discerned. Of course, most AMA teachers had had little contact with blacks in the North, coming predominantly from rural New England backgrounds. Their involvement with Augusta's blacks was bound to be a novel experience.

The racial opinions of the AMA teachers manifested themselves soon after the missionaries arrived in Staunton. To Scott's eyes, the first young blacks he encountered in the city's streets "looked as much like young monkeys from the rise swamp of Bengal as like human beings." Margaret Burke, a colleague of Scott, refused to live in the same boarding house as blacks, even after Scott refused "to allow these people [blacks] to use at all our sitting room [or] eat with us . . . ." Another colleague "did not expect to find so many pretty and interesting children among colored people." Most of these comments obviously do not betray a hatred toward blacks (Burke may have been an exception, although her aversion to cohabitating with blacks was never fully explained.) Yet the range of comments suggests that AMA
teachers assumed a natural superiority to blacks or believed that freedpeople had been degraded by slavery. Either assumption had potentially damaging repercussions for black advancement in Augusta County.\textsuperscript{22}

This doubt about black talent was demonstrated most clearly in Scott’s opinions of blacks’ abilities as teachers. Even as a teacher shortage impinged on his lessons, Scott could not bring himself to train blacks in pedagogy. When three blacks, including one black Union soldier, volunteered to assist him in late 1865, Scott reluctantly agreed. Beyond commending their spirit, Scott observed only that "they are not trained to the business and we see many defects." When Scott had to replace an AMA teacher forced suddenly to leave in mid-1866, he hired one of his black students, Maria Dowry. In a report on Dowry’s abilities made to superiors, Scott gave what would prove to be his most appreciative assessment regarding a black’s professional competency. Dowry was "black, intelligent, a Christian, and to my surprise governs

\textsuperscript{22}Scott to Hunt, 28 February 1866; Scott to White, 27 January 1869; Davison to Smith, 1 January 1869, AMAA. Wherever the AMA operated, tensions inevitably developed over the issue of social equality between whites and blacks. In Norfolk, Virginia, a dispute arose in a mission home shared by white and black AMA teachers. One white teacher, Mary Reed, refused to eat or sleep with her black colleagues. In her opposition, Reed believed she represented the views of her white colleagues. However, at least one of her white colleagues dissented. Samuel Walker, who had been romantically involved with one of the black teachers, said that he would not be "a fit laborer" for blacks if he practiced such segregation. William L. Coan, the AMA superintendent for Virginia, represented a consensus opinion of AMA leadership when, on the one hand, he promoted the hiring of black teachers and opposed "caste," while, on the other, he proscribed social relations of his black and white charges, not wanting to antagonize Southern whites. It is safe to say that the racial thinking of white missionaries reflected the diversity of such opinions in the North. Richardson, \textit{Christian Reconstruction}, 204.
well," wrote Scott.  

Scott's reluctance to promote black teachers existed despite his knowledge that many blacks were taking it on themselves to teach former slaves, and that the AMA had decided as early as 1865 that the training of black teachers was essential to the success of its cause in the South. Scott was aware that Staunton blacks were operating several small private schools. Yet on more than one occasion the AMA's leader in Augusta County wrote that he considered these black schools to be "petty" institutions, which could only undermine the work of his own. Unfortunately, nothing is known of these schools beyond Scott's curt dismissal of them. More receptive to black initiative, the Freedmen's Bureau agents spoke approvingly of a young black teacher, Sophia J. Reed, who had opened a school with eighteen pupils in Churchill. By providing Reed with books from the American Tract Society, the Bureau did more in one gesture to support an independent black educator than Scott had done during his entire tenure in the county. In March 1869, as Scott prepared to conclude what would be the AMA's last year in Augusta County, he expressed his conviction that "there really ought to be a schoolhouse entirely independent of [the control of] the colored people; and I doubt the perfect success of a school until that is accomplished."  

23 Scott to Hunt, 26 December 1865; Scott to Hunt, 2 June 1866, AMAA.  

24 Scott to Smith, 12 December 1868, AMAA.  


26 Scott to Smith, 3 March 1869, AMAA. The number of blacks among the ranks of AMA teachers increased from 28 in the 1866-67 school year to 105 in 1869-70. In the latter year, black teachers represented one-fifth of the AMA teaching force in the South.
Scott based his formula for the "perfect" school—one free of black oversight or management—on his often-stated belief that blacks remained debased by slavery. Yet in decrying black attempts to educate others, Scott added another rationale, one which perhaps spoke to fears of which he was just becoming conscious. Three months before Scott left Augusta County for good, the missionary advised AMA superiors against investing in schools run by blacks. Scott wrote that "in regard to the feeling [blacks] have in regard to their rights, they would annoy teachers constantly with their notions if they owned any right in the building."\textsuperscript{27}

"[T]he feeling they have for their rights . . . if they owned any right in the building"—Scott's words were ironically apt given the nature of the change he had witnessed in Augusta County during Virginia's Reconstruction. In those five years, Augusta blacks began to construct an edifice of freedom, supported by the twin pillars of the church and the school, the spirit and the mind. In late 1869, Augusta blacks had much for which to be thankful. As often as not, they could thank themselves for their gains. Blacks' control over the majority of their churches was inviolate. Augusta's African-Americans had adopted a state constitution that promised free, albeit segregated, schools for all. Of course, another century would pass before blacks possessed full ownership of their civil rights. Yet with regard both to blacks' feelings about themselves and their ownership of their institutions, blacks in Augusta County

These black teachers were drawn from three sources: Northern blacks, free Southern blacks, and blacks taught in AMA schools. The AMA's John G. Fee, an abolitionist from Kentucky, believed that black teachers would help ex-slaves "see what they can be" and that their example would "put down the spirit of caste." Richardson, Christian Reconstruction, 191.

\textsuperscript{27}Scott to Hunt, 3 March 1869, AMAA.
had fashioned something over five years of which they could not be dispossessed, something obvious in their efforts to build autonomous institutions: their pride.
CONCLUSION

As Reconstruction closed in Augusta, race relations were by no means fixed. In their ongoing efforts to obtain justice, achieve political power, and build autonomous institutions, Augusta blacks demonstrated that independence required more than constitutional guarantees. While county whites grudgingly accepted some aspects of blacks' freedom, such as the right of blacks to vote, they continued to practice and abet injustice against blacks in the workplace and the courts. The conservative capture of Virginia's government in 1870 did not bode well for future gains by blacks. Historians who insist on models would argue that race relations in Augusta County were now suspended somewhere between a paternalistic stage—in which one race is assured of its own dominance, and therefore insists chiefly on social distance—and a competitive stage—in which relations are marked by estrangement and leeriness of gains by a minority, to be followed by a growing insistence on physical segregation.¹

Those interested in the story of race relations in Augusta County in the decades after Reconstruction have to rely on Charles Wynes's Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902. Wynes's book, a test of the Woodward thesis in Virginia, mentions Augusta only in passing but is thorough in its description of overall trends. Wynes finds that the Woodward thesis—which, to restate, holds that white supremacy of the

¹Woodward, American Counterpoint, pp. 243-246.
type enforced by physical segregation and black disfranchisement was not an immediate postbellum reaction but the product of turn of the century political concerns—was "essentially sound" for Virginia. Like Woodward, Wynes never argues for "a golden age" of race relations in the two or three decades following the Civil War; a seemingly indelible racism continued to cast blacks as a people less worthy than whites. Rather, both historians see a steady deterioration in race relations over this period, with the emphasis on deterioration. In Virginia, this deterioration was capped by the disfranchisement of blacks under the 1902 state constitution, the de jure segregation of the state's trains, and the de jure and de facto separation of the races in other spheres of public life.

This history of a moment in Augusta County's past reveals the subtleties of how blacks and whites first responded to the fact of black freedom. Accepting Wynes's and Woodward's conclusions about post-Reconstruction race relations in Virginia, this study's findings support Woodward's belief that those who draw little distinction between race relations during Reconstruction and other ignominious periods of Southern race relations "do injury to the nuances of history." During Reconstruction, the races in Augusta did not assume an irreconcilable divide. While a majority of whites made it clear that they would insist on white domination, they could not be confident of their success. In the face of whites who viewed almost any move by African-Americans to assert their independence or to improve themselves as provocative, blacks applied their rights and enriched their lives with schools and

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2 Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, 144.

churches. Confronting their employers at Freedmen’s Bureau hearings, Augusta’s blacks demanded fair treatment and compensation for their labor. Though frequently denied justice in county courts, Augusta’s African-Americans pursued their legal rights wherever and whenever possible. In politics, blacks did not hesitate to organize themselves, to challenge whites in public meetings, and to vote their interests. County blacks were most successful in establishing and supporting churches and schools for themselves. Given the role that these institutions played in future black achievement, Augusta’s blacks in this period laid the foundations for later progress.
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