Through my research, I hope to expose what the real conditions of African Americans were in the pre-Civil War era, the Reconstruction era, and in the subsequent decades. Indeed, by developing their own churches, schools, and social organizations before the Civil War, Cecil County’s African Americans were “One Step Closer to Freedom” than blacks in other southern states at the time of their emancipation in 1864.
Introduction:

North, South, or Middle Ground?

The Foundations of Freedom in Antebellum Cecil County, Maryland

The emancipation of the enslaved black people of Cecil County, Maryland in 1864 marked a new era of hope in which both free and freed African Americans could join together to petition whites for their political and social rights. The enthusiasm and determination of Maryland’s newly freed slaves was best encapsulated in a statement made by a former slave, in 1864, “Freedom gives us hope for a better day.” During the antebellum era, Cecil County had developed along a “middle ground.” Unlike other southern states, it had a sizable free black community, had evolved away from the plantation system, and had established shared interests with the industrialized North. The location of Cecil County was one of the key factors that contributed to the moderate views of many of its citizens. Then as now, Cecil County was the northernmost county in Maryland, at the head of the Eastern Shore. It shared a border with Pennsylvania and was adjacent to Delaware. In addition, it was close to major industrial centers, such as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Wilmington, Delaware; and Baltimore, Maryland.

The fact that Cecil County was in close proximity to northern interests contributed to the more accommodating attitudes of its slaveholders. Since slaves could easily escape to free territory, slaveholders had to be more cautious than their southern neighbors in their treatment of slaves. Also, Cecil County’s climate was more suited for wheat growing.

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2 *Martinet Map of 1858*.
3 *Cecil Whig*, 15 March 1865, p. 2.
and tobacco cultivation. As a result, many slaveholders in Cecil County manumitted their slaves after 1830 and hired free laborers to harvest the wheat.⁴ On the other hand, other southern states, such as South Carolina, completely relied on slave labor since their agricultural system was based on the cash crops of cotton and rice. According to a May 18, 1864 article in the Cecil Whig, the average number of slaves in Cecil County was 3,497 in 1790, while in 1860, that number had decreased to 1,546.⁵ The fact that there were fewer slaves by the dawn of the Civil War shows Cecil County had diverged from other southern states by the mid-nineteenth century.

From 1850 to 1910, Cecil County was composed of nine districts, and its major towns were Elkton, Port Deposit, Cecilton, and Northeast.⁶ The town of Elkton was the center of trade and commerce both before and after the Civil War. In 1907, the Cecil Whig described Elkton as having 120 dwellings, a courthouse, and a market house where wool hats were made.⁷ Like Elkton, the town of Northeast focused on industry. A June 22, 1864 article in the Cecil Democrat noted, "The iron works are situated on the main branch of the Northeast River. It consists of two forges and a handsome furnace. The forges will manufacture 300 tons of bar iron in a year."⁸ Conversely, the southern towns of Port Deposit and Cecilton were more agrarian than Elkton and Northeast.

Indeed, most of the slaves in Cecil County were in its southern portion. From the early to mid-1700s, African slaves were shipped from Africa to Liverpool, England, and then to Cecil County. Well into the early nineteenth century, many slaves were sold in Cecil County. This is most evident in a Bill of Sale from 1821 that states:

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⁴ "History of Cecil County," Cecil Democrat, 12 May 1865, p. 2.
⁵ Cecil Whig, 18 May 1864, p. 1.
⁶ Martinet Map of 1838.
⁸ Cecil Democrat, 22 June 1864, p. 2.
I William Moffitt, sheriff of Cecil County, and in consideration of the sum of $1,240 to me in hand, paid by Charles Oldham of Cecil County, sell these Negroes: Negro Isaac, Negro Philip, Negro Hannah, and Negro Mary, signed by William Moffitt.9

Some of the major plantations in Cecil County that focused on tobacco cultivation were the Rose Hill Plantation and the Mount Harmon Plantation. Mount Harmon Plantation, which was located near the Sassafras River, relied on slave labor to clear stumps out of tobacco fields and to harvest tobacco.10

Although Cecil County’s whites had more moderate attitudes toward African Americans and slavery was less prevalent than in other southern states, some slaves were treated harshly, and free blacks were segregated from whites in churches and other public places. The Cecil Whig reported in a March 9, 1861 edition, “In most churches in this county, Negroes are required to sit in the balcony section called ‘nigger heaven.’”11 In addition, some slaves were whipped for minor offenses at the courthouse in Cecil County. An 1840 letter, written by Thomas Sample of Elkton, described the horror he felt when passing the whipping post at the Elkton courthouse. He emphasized, “I refer to the whipping post and the pillory in the back of the courthouse as relics of barbarism. One morning when I was going to school, I saw a healthy colored woman being whipped for simply running away.”12 Both the violence and segregation directed at African Americans demonstrates that despite the fact that Cecil County had developed along a “middle ground,” many whites still exhibited prejudice and violence against blacks before the Civil War.

9 Bill of Sale for Slaves from 1821.
12 Thomas Sample Letter (1840).
In response to their harsh treatment during the antebellum era, Cecil County's free blacks sought ways of developing independence from the white community. As a result, blacks formed their own churches, schools, and social organizations where they raised money to help unfortunate members of their communities and talked about issues that were pertinent to the black community in Cecil County. Most importantly, churches served as the glue that held together African American communities in Cecil County and were the primary training grounds for the assertion of social and political rights. Unlike in other southern states, African Americans had already formed six churches by the time of their emancipation in 1864. Not until the Reconstruction era did South Carolina's elite blacks establish churches separate from those of whites. The fact that Cecil County's black population was composed of more free blacks than slaves by 1860 allowed black leaders to strengthen their communities before emancipation. This was vital in paving the way for a strong black leadership during the Reconstruction era and in the subsequent decades.

Some of the most prominent black communities that emerged in the antebellum era were in Elkton, Cecilton, Port Deposit, and Northeast. According to the 1858 Martinet Map, at the eve of the Civil War, Snow Hill, a densely populated African American community near Elkton, was composed of several dwellings and a church on the outskirts of the community. Snow Hill was founded in 1848 and was prominent long after the Civil War and symbolized blacks' efforts in Cecil County to unify to form strong communities.

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13 *Cecil Whig*, 5 May 1864, p. 2.
14 *Martinet Map of 1858*. 
During the Civil War, Cecil County also differed from the southern slaveholding states in that most of its citizens were outspoken advocates of the Union and denounced secession. According to an 1861 article in the *Cecil Whig*, Cecil County voted to stay in the Union. In addition, both free blacks and slaves rallied behind the Union and enthusiastically enlisted in the Union army stationed at Cecil County.\textsuperscript{15} For example, a June 25, 1864 article in the *Cecil Democrat* revealed that the first black soldiers enlisted at Elkton and Port Deposit.\textsuperscript{16} Although no battles were fought in Cecil County, northern troops used ferryboats to cross Cecil County’s waterways to get to Baltimore and Annapolis. Even though the majority of whites and blacks were loyal to the Union, a significant minority of whites in Cecil County were proponents for secession and joined the Confederate army. Most of the supporters of the Confederacy were from the southern slaveholding regions of Cecil County. The fact that some of Cecil County’s citizens defected to the Confederate side would have important implications after the Civil War in shaping whites’ anti-black attitudes.

At the dawn of their emancipation in 1864, many African Americans saw a positive future. Indeed, the state of Maryland approved the Constitution of 1864 by popular vote emancipating all slaves living within the borders of the state. Conversely, other border states, such as Delaware, did not free their slaves until 1865 when the United States Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment. Maryland also differed from other southern slaveholding states since it was not under the purview of federal Reconstruction, and instead issued a self-reconstruction program, which lasted to 1867. Under this system, disloyal citizens who had supported the Confederacy were fined, could not vote, and

\textsuperscript{15} *Cecil Whig*, 18 August 1861, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{16} *Cecil Democrat*, 25 June 1864, p. 1.
were not allowed to hold public office. However, unlike federal Reconstruction, the Freedmen’s Bureau did not have influence in setting up schools for African Americans after the Civil War.

Rather, Cecil County’s blacks continued to set up their own churches, private schools, and social organizations from 1864 to 1910. Similar to those churches and social institutions established before the Civil War, the post-emancipation churches, schools, and self-help societies were important in unifying the black community, provided help for African Americans of a lower social status, and funded lectures and programs on moral improvements.

Furthermore, schools in the African American community served as testaments to blacks’ quest to improve themselves through acquiring a good education. In the 1860s, African Americans in Cecil County set up many private schools. At first, blacks lacked money to build new schools. As a result, the first schools were in the basements of churches. Nevertheless, large numbers of children and adults enthusiastically crowded into the rooms to learn spelling, reading, and arithmetic. By 1872, blacks’ unwavering determination to set up their own educational facilities in Cecil County helped push Maryland to pass the Public School Law of 1872, which called for separate but equal schools for blacks. In reality, like the schools in the south, Cecil County’s black public schools were far from equal and often lacked supplies and funds. In response to their inferior education provided by the state of Maryland, African Americans continued to build their own private schools from 1872 to 1910. In addition to schools, social organizations, such as moral improvement societies and fraternal lodges, brought together African Americans of all social classes and provided help to less fortunate African
Americans. Most importantly, such organizations sponsored lectures and other events, which called for an end to prejudice and the need for African Americans to fight for their political and social rights.

One of the most important means through which Cecil County's African Americans could petition for their social and civil rights was through participation in politics. Well before 1870, Cecil County's blacks were active participants at Republican conventions and joined together with whites to support radical Republican causes, such as universal manhood suffrage and equality. Unlike in other southern states, the Republican Party in Cecil County never tried to "lily white" their party and accepted blacks as speakers and at conventions. Also, despite the fact that Democrats dominated Cecil County's politics from 1864 to 1910, a two-party system always existed in Cecil County. African Americans consistently showed up at the polls from 1870 to 1910, and Democrats' attempts to disenfranchise them were unsuccessful. Conversely, after Reconstruction in states further south, Democrats often ran unopposed from the 1880s on and drove Republicans out of politics entirely after 1890. However, even though blacks in Cecil County had gained the vote in 1870, Republicans only allowed them to achieve small positions within the party and never in public office. Conversely, African Americans in many other southern states were elected to public office during the federal Reconstruction era. African Americans consistently showed up at the polls from 1870 to 1910, and Democrats' attempts to disenfranchise them were unsuccessful.

As was the case farther south, segregation was commonplace in Cecil County. Starting in the 1860s, whites practiced de facto segregation of African Americans from public places in Cecil County. By the early twentieth century, whites in Maryland were
successful in passing the Kerwin Act, which excluded blacks from white train cars and seats on steamships. On occasion, violence was also directed against African Americans whom Democrats feared would take their jobs. However, unlike the south, lynching and violent crimes against Cecil County's blacks were infrequent, and KKK threats rarely materialized into action. Thus, the moderate attitudes of Cecil County's whites toward African Americans' participation in politics, education, and social organizations signify that Cecil County had developed along a "middle ground" and that it was distinct from northern and southern states.
Chapter One:

On the Border of Freedom

Pre-Civil War and Post-Emancipation Background History of Maryland

At the dawn of their emancipation in 1864, many of Maryland’s blacks looked to the future with a sense of hope and stressed that they would do whatever it took to gain their civil rights, which they had dreamed about for so long while in servitude. In the years following the Civil War, Maryland’s blacks were able to win many concessions, such as a public school system in 1867 and the right to serve as lawyers in Maryland’s courts. However, Maryland still very much resembled other former slave states in that it segregated African Americans from many of its facilities, and white violence against blacks was frequent during the Reconstruction era. Maryland evolved on “a middle ground” largely because it had developed a strong free black population prior to the Civil War and contained the views of slaveholders and industrialists alike. Before the Civil War, Maryland was similar to its Southern neighbors because some of its residents were slaveholders, but beginning in the late eighteenth century, Maryland diverged from other slaveholding states by allowing more liberal manumission laws and by developing a larger free black population than any other state in the antebellum period. The free black population was one of Maryland’s most defining features and founded its own school system, social organizations, and businesses. Participation in these institutions gave rise to influential black leaders who garnered support from the free black community and would become the leading voices in African Americans’ quest for civil rights in the years following the Civil War.
After the emancipation of its slaves in 1864, Maryland launched a statewide reconstruction program in its 1864 constitution, though it was never formally reconstructed because it had remained loyal to the Union during the Civil War. Therefore, the Freedmen’s Bureau lacked the strength it had in other Southern states. Nevertheless, in the years 1864 to 1910, Maryland’s African American community strengthened its social organizations, schools, political participation, and leadership. Most importantly, blacks exhibited a greater sense of pride and solidarity in the years following emancipation. Although black Marylanders suffered from segregation and white violence in the postwar era, blacks in Maryland were able to reap many concessions in politics, economics, and education, which signified that Maryland had indeed developed as a “middle ground” in its previous decades.

From 1700 to 1750, the colony of Maryland largely resembled other slave colonies because its residents owned a large number of slaves, and its free black population was negligible. In the years before the Revolutionary War, Maryland’s economy was based largely on tobacco, which required intense labor to grow as well as to cultivate. As a result, Maryland’s planters owned many slaves and rarely manumitted them.\(^{17}\) In fact, Maryland’s free black population only composed about 4% of Maryland’s population in the mid eighteenth century.\(^{18}\) The low percentage of free blacks in Maryland during these years underlines the fact that Maryland’s economy largely depended on slaves. According to one traveler, “Nowhere did travelers take notice of a large number of blacks who were free in Maryland.”\(^{19}\) In its early years, it appeared that Maryland would develop

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 4.
like other Southern states, such as its neighbor Virginia, which had a small free black population and many slaves.

In the years following the Revolutionary War, however, Maryland developed unique trends that set it apart from other Southern states and caused it to emerge along different paths in its southern, eastern, and northern regions. Starting in the late eighteenth century, several factors contributed to the decline of slavery in Northern Maryland and some Eastern Shore counties, leading many planters to either manumit their slaves or allow them to buy their freedom. A leading factor contributing to the decline of slavery, especially in Northern Maryland, was the weakening tobacco economy during the late 1780s and 1790s and the flourishing of diversified farming in many of Maryland’s Northern and Eastern counties. Ira Berlin notes, “Throughout much of the eighteenth century, wheat production had grown steadily in Baltimore and the Northern counties, and the glut on tobacco from western lands drove prices down and contributed to the downfall of tobacco.” By the Revolutionary War, tobacco prices decreased rapidly in both Britain and France, which led to the decline of tobacco cultivation in Northern Counties, like Frederick, Baltimore, and Harford. Also, the constant planting of tobacco in Maryland during much of the early eighteenth century caused the soil to become exhausted and no longer suitable for tobacco. By the 1850’s, only in the Southern counties of Maryland did tobacco flourish since the economy of these counties most resembled the economy of other rural Southern states. Barbara Fields notes, “By the 1850s, tobacco was mostly confined to Southern counties and to the most backward

21 Ibid.
regions of the state as the Civil War approached. The lack of a staple-crop agriculture, lubricated by mortgage credit, gradually led rural planters to dispense with slavery.\textsuperscript{24}

Northern Maryland developed an economy after the Revolutionary War based on wheat, while mixed agriculture dominated Eastern Maryland. Both of these economies were more closely linked to the economy of Pennsylvania rather than to the practice of slavery.\textsuperscript{25} Unlike tobacco, wheat did not require intense labor throughout the year, and at harvest time, wheat farmers preferred to hire harvest hands rather than slaves.\textsuperscript{26} Fields explains, "As long as agricultural renewal in Maryland undermined the old tobacco-slave economy, settlement favored a free labor economy."\textsuperscript{27} Edward Gorsuch, a slaveholder who owned a small farm in Northern Maryland, was typical of the slaveholders of Northern Maryland because he had less slaves and land than planters of the Lower South. Unlike slaveholders in the Deep South, Gorsuch did not grow cotton but raised potatoes, sheep, goats, rye, and buckwheat. According to many residents in Northern Maryland, the Northern counties "farmed and produced 70\% of the rye and buckwheat and over half the wheat grain in the state."\textsuperscript{28}

Since Gorsuch did not need a large number of slaves to tend wheat, he was known for manumitting his slaves once they turned twenty-eight. The timing and circumstances under which Gorsuch freed his slaves suggest, "The movement away from tobacco production toward wheat production played a determinate role in the conclusion that to Gorsuch and his neighbors, slaves were no longer a necessity or even a financially

\textsuperscript{24} Fields, 4, 170.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{27} Fields, 6.
\textsuperscript{28} Slaughter, 6.
desirable feature in the North."  

Gorsuch was considered the leading slaveholder in Baltimore County during the 1840s but possessed only twelve slaves. Ten percent of Northern Marylanders held eight or more slaves, but by the 1840s, only 5% of Northern Maryland’s population was enslaved.  

Even in Maryland’s Eastern Shore counties, slaveholders owned an average of eleven slaves, while planters in Maryland’s Southern counties had fifteen. Fields reinforces this fact by stating, “Few holdings anywhere in Maryland would have rated the name plantation in the eyes of slaveholders from the Lower South.”  

In contrast, planters from the Deep South owned three hundred to five hundred slaves. The lower number of slaves held by Maryland’s planters suggests that Maryland’s economy would not develop like that of other Southern states, such as Mississippi, and by the eve of the Civil War, it would be characterized as a state that had more free blacks than slaves.  

The number of slaves in Maryland decreased from ninety thousand in 1850 to eighty thousand in 1860, which was about an 11% drop in a single decade. Northern counties, such as Cecil County, held the fewest number of slaves and almost entirely relied on the labor of free black people.  

For instance, Maryland’s Northern counties in 1850 had approximately 19.3% of Maryland’s slaves, while free blacks accounted for about 55.5% of Northern Maryland’s population.  

Moreover, the growth of industry in Northern Maryland in the years following the Revolutionary War was a contributing factor to the decline of slavery. After the Revolutionary War, the absence of British goods led many Marylanders to set up  

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29 Ibid., 3.  
30 Ibid., 6.  
31 Fields, 72.  
33 Fields, 72.
industries in Baltimore and Annapolis. William Eddis remarked on the industrial growth of Baltimore by stating, “Persons of a commercial and enterprising spirit emerged from all quarters of this new and promising scene of industry.”

34 The flourishing industry in the cities eventually undermined the slave system that was based on bound labor rather than on free labor. The growing industry in Baltimore and its mercantile ties to Western Pennsylvania contributed to slavery’s slump by 1820.

35 For instance, Baltimore emerged as a thriving metropolis when grain and iron were brought in from the Midwest on the B & O Railroad.

36 The industrialization in the city of Baltimore during the early nineteenth century led many Marylanders to believe that their state “would follow the economy of the free state Pennsylvania rather than the Southern slaveholding states.”

37 In fact, Baltimore’s close link with the economy of Western Pennsylvania gave rise to an urban professional class whose interests largely clashed with those of the slaveholders in Southern Maryland. In 1845, one Marylander emphasized the inefficiency of slavery in a developing market economy by stressing, “Slavery is a dead weight. It has become a wasting disease into the blood of the Commonwealth.”

38 Thus, many Marylanders’ attitude toward slavery during this period can best be described as toleration rather than celebration.

39 Slaveholding citizens often “cast a jealous eye on the rapid growth of industry on both sides of the Bay, and the upper-class slaveholders in southern Maryland tried to seize the political advantage over Northern Maryland.”

40 Industrialization in Northern Maryland, mixed agriculture on the Eastern shore, and the rural slaveholding

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35 Fuks, 26.
37 Fuks, 22
38 Ibid., 184.
39 Ibid., 184.
40 Fields, 19.
society of Southern Maryland caused Maryland to evolve differently in each of its regions, which provided the groundwork for the varying political ideologies of the Civil War era.

However, Maryland differed from the Northern states in that blacks composed only 2% of the population of New England, while they comprised one-third of the population of Maryland. Many Marylanders were also opposed to anti-slavery sentiment for much of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In fact, similarly to North Carolina, anti-slavery attitudes in Maryland were “precarious” and far from tolerated. Most of the members of Maryland’s anti-slavery society were merchants, mechanics, petty tradesmen, and other citizens who had little land to lose, and it did not gain wide support among Marylanders.

Nonetheless, the unwavering efforts of the anti-slavery society combined with the revolutionary ideology of freedom and religious sentiment eventually led to the manumission of some of Maryland’s slaves, especially in its Northern regions dominated by Quakers and Methodists. Berlin notes, “Whereas Upper South slaveholders often displayed their belief in the principles of liberty by indiscriminately freeing their slaves at once, the Lower South masters tended to pick and choose generally by liberating only their illicit offspring and least productive slaves.” Many of Maryland’s Quakers who had owned slaves in the eighteenth century now realized the moral wrong of slavery and manumitted their slaves. According to Fields, the importance of religious sentiment in post-Revolutionary America “lay not only in the direct spur it provided to manumission

41 Fuks, 22.
42 Ibid., 22.
44 Berlin, 31.
but also in a certain respectability that it lent to antislavery opinions in later years.\textsuperscript{46}

Although religious and revolutionary ideologies were only contributing factors to the decline of slavery in Maryland, they still were paramount in leading to the high number of manumissions in Northern Maryland.

The decline of tobacco, the increased industrialization of Maryland's cities, and the revolutionary and religious sentiment of the post-Revolutionary War years led many slaveholders in Maryland to manumit some of their slaves and allow others to buy their freedom. Beginning in the 1790s, slaveholders could now manumit any adult slaves under the age of forty-five by either will or deed. Prior to the 1790s, Maryland slaveholders were only allowed to free their slaves by deed.\textsuperscript{47} The state of Maryland had more liberal manumission laws than any other slave state at the time, and the freeing of slaves laid the foundations for an influential free black society in the nineteenth century. In fact, the frequency of manumission changed the character of Maryland, and from 1775 to 1790, the free African American population had increased by 300%. By 1810, almost one fourth of all Maryland's blacks were free.\textsuperscript{48} The 1850 census demonstrates that in one year alone, slaveowners liberated over five hundred slaves in Maryland, which points to the widespread manumission of Maryland's slaves in the years prior to the Civil War.

Not only did manumission by will or deed contribute to Maryland's free black society but self-purchase or purchase by relatives also allowed many slaves to obtain their freedom. Once blacks acquired their freedom, they often used their meager wages to buy their friends and relatives. A typical example of African Americans' unwavering efforts to purchase their relatives is when Diana Howard, a free black, manumitted Augustus

\textsuperscript{46} Fields, 4.
\textsuperscript{47} Berlin, 29.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 34.
Howard in 1820 by purchasing him from his master, William Brown.\textsuperscript{49} Some slaves were manumitted by white philanthropy. For instance, a wealthy Quaker manumitted James Davis in 1817 by paying his master a certain sum of money for his release.\textsuperscript{50} Freedom suits were an important means in which a slave could obtain his or her freedom. In a freedom suit, a slave petitioned the court for his or her freedom because he or she had a white mother and, therefore, claimed a right to freedom. In fact, freedom suits increased in the post-Revolutionary War period, and many of Maryland’s blacks sought to prove their relation to a free white mother. Petitions of freedom were so numerous that a Maryland attorney recalled, “I was besieged with applications from Negroes who were solicitous to obtain their freedom.”\textsuperscript{51} One of the most notable cases involving a freedom suit was the Butler Case in 1771 brought to the court by William and Mary Butler, who claimed to have a white mother and a slave father. Since they had a white mother, they sued for their freedom.\textsuperscript{52} Although Maryland’s Court of Appeals initially refused to free them, Mary Butler’s later success established an important precedent and led to the increased number of freedom suits in the years following the case.\textsuperscript{53}

However, some slaves did not wish to wait for manumission but instead chose to flee to Pennsylvania. The numerous want ads for runaway slaves during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries yield indicate that the runaway rate was indeed high in this time period. For example, one poster from 1830 offers a reward for a mulatto boy named Nick, who escaped from his master.\textsuperscript{54} Slaves may have opted to escape because of harsh

\textsuperscript{49} Whitman, 96.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 99.  
\textsuperscript{51} Berlin, 34.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 34.  
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 34.  
\textsuperscript{54} Townsend, 212.
masters who offered them little or no hope of manumission. Frederick Douglass explained that unrelenting masters, such as Austin Gore of Talbot County, caused many slaves to seize the opportunity to flee to the nearby North. \(^{55}\) Douglass noted, "Slaves in Maryland were the most restless black people within the slave states because of their proximity to the North. \(^{56}\)

Even though slavery declined increasingly during the first half of the nineteenth century, slaves still existed alongside the free black population in Maryland. Fields explains, "Slavery determined freedom all over the U. S., but in Maryland, the intermingling of the two was so immediate and concrete as to give a unique flavor to slavery and to freedom." \(^{57}\) Slavery operated in a milder form than in most of the other Southern slave states, and Tidewater planters feared that their slaves could easily escape to the nearby North. To prevent their slaves from growing discontented, slaveholders lessened the harshness of slavery by allowing their slaves more independence. Douglass explained, "Slavery in the state of Maryland exists in its mildest form and is totally void of those harsh and terrible peculiarities of the South." \(^{58}\) Slave owners in Baltimore gave their slaves more occupational freedom by teaching them skills and by allowing them to either choose their own masters or hire themselves out. \(^{59}\) Frederick Douglass's master, Hugh Auld, allowed him to make his own bargains for work and collect his own wages as long as he paid him $3 a week. \(^{60}\) Indeed, some slaves were even able to set aside their own freedom funds. For example, Jacques Zacharie bound himself to Charles Pressoir

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 37.
\(^{57}\) Fields, xi.
\(^{58}\) McFeely, 23.
\(^{60}\) McFeely, 51.
for six years with the agreement that he could buy his freedom for $450.\textsuperscript{61} In addition, some masters would not hire out their slaves unless the slave could choose his employer.\textsuperscript{62} The greater occupational mobility of Maryland’s slaves suggests that slaves in Maryland, unlike their Southern counterparts, enjoyed a greater degree of freedom because their masters blurred the dividing line between slavery and freedom by allowing them to earn a little extra cash for self-purchase and by permitting them to choose their own employer.

Maryland’s free black population grew significantly by 1830. In the decades from 1830 to 1860, however, Maryland’s free blacks would find it harder to escape the racist attitudes and actions of Maryland’s white citizens, who feared that free blacks could take their jobs. Also, Nat Turner’s 1831 Rebellion in nearby Virginia caused many whites to cast a wary eye on any free black who could possibly assist slaves in escaping. Edward Gorsuch considered free blacks as “thieves and burdens” to society.\textsuperscript{63} He also credited free blacks with stealing goods, lending freedom papers to slaves, and threatening the capital accumulation that white farmers sought to enjoy.\textsuperscript{64} Consequently, whites established de facto rules for limiting the actions of the free black community. These laws forbade free blacks in counties such as Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne’s from leaving the state. In 1858, four free blacks who attended a religious meeting in Delaware stood trial in Maryland under the jurisdiction of this law.\textsuperscript{65} In Dorchester County, an 1855 convention of slaveholders called for laws limiting the actions of blacks, such as the request that postmasters read the mail of free blacks. A Cecil County Democrat went as

\textsuperscript{61} Whitman, 24.
\textsuperscript{62} Townsend, 33.
\textsuperscript{63} Slaughter, 12.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{65} Fields, 37.
far as stating, "If we can't bring free blacks into slavery, we should at least expel them."

By the 1850s, rigid black codes severely limited the mobility of free blacks, and officials could enslave free black vagrants. Furthermore, hostile whites took the skilled jobs free blacks had once enjoyed in the city of Baltimore. Frederick Douglass points to the increased violence free blacks encountered during the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s by explaining, “White workers no longer work with blacks and feel great animosity toward them.”

Despite the setbacks that the free black community suffered during the late antebellum period, the actions and leadership of the free black community in this dark era allowed African Americans to retain a strong sense of leadership. The establishment of a black church paved the way for black leadership and solidarity. For example, the Sharp Street Methodist Church not only organized social and political events in the black community but also held schools for free black children. The leaders of the black church came to represent the “lifeblood of the black community” and were instrumental in establishing black newspapers and calling for civil rights even before the Civil War. Both the black church and social organizations developed prior to the Civil War symbolized the pride that blacks exhibited in the Reconstruction era and beyond. Thus, the foundations for an influential black community had already been built in Maryland long before the Civil War. Blacks in no other Southern state were able to solidify such powerful leadership before the Civil War. This was important in allowing blacks to gain concessions more quickly than their neighbors in Southern states during the Reconstruction era.

66 Ibid., 72.
67 Berlin, 211.
68 Katz, 60.
69 Townsend, 157.
70 Phillips, 170.
On the eve of the Civil War, Maryland was divided in its support for the Union or the Confederacy, but it did not secede from the Union like most other slave states. However, Maryland's moderate atmosphere evaporated "once loyal slaveholders realized that they were playing for the same stakes as rebel slaveowners in the Confederacy." Many pro-Confederate supporters were from the Southern portion of the state and at the beginning of the war, left Maryland to join the Confederate cause. Many factories owned or operated by Confederate supporters in Maryland produced supplies for the rebel army. Unlike other Southern states, pro-Union sentiment was just as strong as pro-Confederate fervor. By the end of the war, 60,000 of Maryland's men had served on the Union side, while 22,000 joined the Confederate army. The Cecil Whig celebrated the Unionist spirit of the time and condemned Confederate supporters "who are moving Heaven and earth to accomplish traitorous purposes." Even Governor Butler of Maryland banned the Confederate flag and other signs of disloyalty.

In 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which excluded the 450,000 slaves of Delaware, Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland from its purview. Since Maryland was a border state, it was never "formally" reconstructed. Instead, Maryland issued a statewide emancipation and reconstruction program in its state constitution of 1864, which won the narrow approval of Unionists, who held a "precarious hold on the political power of the state."

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71 Fields, xii.
72 Ibid., 98.
74 Fields, 93.
The 1864 emancipation of Maryland’s 87,000 slaves was a moment of great joy for the black population. Many blacks fired cannons and rang their church bells in celebration.\textsuperscript{77} Douglass expressed the hopeful feeling of many of Maryland’s blacks by exclaiming, “What a wonderful change a few short years have wrought. I left Maryland a slave state, and I returned to find her a free state clothed in the garments of liberty.”\textsuperscript{78} Blacks also found hope in the fact that Radicals enjoyed a significant degree of political power in 1864 and made former Confederate supporters take an oath of loyalty. James Dennis was arrested for exhibiting disloyalty to the Union during the Civil War.\textsuperscript{79} Therefore, the Reconstruction era and the years following it provided blacks with a new opportunity to press for educational, political, and social rights, which they had dreamed about for so long.

In the years following the Civil War, African Americans in the state of Maryland considered the education of blacks as the first step in the long process of acquiring their civil rights, in achieving upward mobility, and in training successful and influential black leaders who could press the state of Maryland to pass laws protecting the rights of the African American community. Leaders of both races expressed, “Negroes must educate themselves as a means of improving their status.”\textsuperscript{80} When Frederick Douglass dedicated the Douglass Institute in the late 1860s, which included a concert hall, a lecture hall, and a black newspaper office, he hoped that by building an educational institution for his

\textsuperscript{77} Fuke, 1
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{79} Low, 9.
fellow blacks, he would promote "the intellectual development" of the black community and train influential leaders.\textsuperscript{81}

During much of the Reconstruction era, Maryland refused to hire black teachers and did not allocate funds for the construction of African American schools.\textsuperscript{82} As a result, blacks set up their own schools and at the same time, compelled the state of Maryland to establish a public school system for African Americans. Although the Freedmen's Bureau and the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of Colored People were instrumental in instituting black schools, many blacks still emphasized that they must build their own institutions by raising capital within their community.\textsuperscript{83} The Stanley Institute in Dorchester County was typical of a school entirely maintained by the black community in Maryland.\textsuperscript{84} In the 1860s, African Americans raised funds to build elementary schools, high schools, a college for teachers, and a seminary.\textsuperscript{85} In many rural counties, blacks set up their first schools in churches.\textsuperscript{86}

Between 1866 and 1868, African Americans in Southern Maryland purchased more than fifty pieces of property for schools. Fuke notes, "The acquisition of land for a school house was very much a cooperative affair rooted in rural country life."\textsuperscript{87} Black families in Baltimore contributed over $2,500 toward the construction of schools for their children, and a church in Harford County held a fair to raise $140 to build a school.\textsuperscript{88} Rebecca Primus, an African American from Hartford, Connecticut, served as a teacher for the Freedmen's Bureau in Royal Oak, Talbot County, from 1865 to 1869. Her letters

\textsuperscript{81} McFelly, 243.
\textsuperscript{82} Foner, 40.
\textsuperscript{83} Fuke, 23.
\textsuperscript{85} McDougall, 27.
\textsuperscript{86} Fuke, 94.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 92.
\textsuperscript{88} Fuke, 99.
reinforce that blacks did whatever it took to appropriate funds for the construction of schools.\textsuperscript{89} In a letter from 1866, Primus explains, “They (blacks) are very much interested in the school question here, and even members of the community donate funds for the construction of the Primus Institute.”\textsuperscript{90} In fact, blacks showed so much enthusiasm and self-effort in building the Primus Institute that an ardent ex-Confederate willingly gave windowsills for the school and according to Primus, “spoke in favor of the school.”\textsuperscript{91} Thus, the Primus Institute and other black schools were symbols of African American progress and pride in education during the Reconstruction era in Maryland.

Both the Freedmen’s Bureau and the Baltimore Association of Moral and Educational Improvement of Colored People were closely linked with the black community and were key in shaping educational objectives as well as setting up colored schools prior to 1867.\textsuperscript{92} The Freedmen’s Bureau set up four schools in Dorchester County and helped to initiate a black school board.\textsuperscript{93} One of the most notable schools established by the Freedmen’s Bureau was the Berkley School in Harford County, which was “able to provide at least satisfactory facilities for blacks.”\textsuperscript{94} The schools set up by blacks and the Freedmen’s Bureau gained an enthusiastic following among members of the black community, who traveled miles to attend school.\textsuperscript{95} Adults as well as children saw education as the key to, what would later be called, the Washingtonian principles of self-help and racial uplift. An eighty-year-old black woman exclaimed, “I am determined to

\textsuperscript{89} Farah Griffin, \textit{Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends} (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc., 1999), 9.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{92} Fuке, 23.
\textsuperscript{94} Savage, 273.
\textsuperscript{95} Fuке, 102.
make an effort to read the Bible before I die.\textsuperscript{96} According to many blacks, education was one of the most important components of self-improvement and would lead to greater concessions, such as the ownership of land and the acquisition of a respectable job. Constant pressure from blacks and from the Freedmen’s Bureau led Maryland’s Constitutional Convention of 1867 to order the funding of black public schools.\textsuperscript{97} Maryland’s government set up the Francis Ellen Harper School in 1889 in the city of Baltimore for black children.\textsuperscript{98}

Although Maryland established a public school system for blacks, the public school system that it founded for them was far from equal and was largely segregated.\textsuperscript{99} The white school system financed by the white taxpayers was much better funded than the black school system. An 1871 accounting record for the commissioners of public schools shows how much money was spent monthly for white and black schools by the state of Maryland. The allocation of funds for white schools annually was a total of $11,346.16 as opposed to only $653.84 for black schools.\textsuperscript{100} Also, the government determined where black schools could be built and often restricted them to old buildings with narrow halls and staircases. One building lot, which was rejected for a white school because it was inadequate, was denied to a colored school “on the grounds that it was too valuable.”\textsuperscript{101}

As a result, blacks still chose to set up many of their own schools so that they could build them in newer buildings and improve their curriculum. For instance, in the 1890s, blacks improved their schools by choosing buildings with wider staircases. Since blacks

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 89.
\item McDougall, 26.
\item Savage, 273.
\item Levy, 16.
\item P. Merrill, \textit{Black America Series Baltimore} (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 1999), 58.
\item Sherry Olson, \textit{Baltimore The Building of an American City} (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 187.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
were restricted from colleges, such as the all white Annapolis Naval Academy as of 1890, they set up their own colleges, such as Morgan College in Baltimore and Howard and Lincoln Colleges in nearby Washington, D. C. and Pennsylvania. The development of these black colleges by the early 1900s showed the significant advancement of blacks since the end of the Civil War. By the 1880s, public protest from the black community finally led the city of Baltimore to pass an ordinance authorizing the employment of black teachers. The 1888 case, which a teacher brought to the city of Baltimore pressing for the equal pay of white and colored teachers, led the City Council to equalize the salaries of white and black teachers.

Despite Maryland’s blacks winning many concessions in education, they, like their Southern neighbors, suffered from violence initiated by whites, who considered the education of African Americans a threat to white dominance. In Havre de Grace, Harford County, a black woman teacher was struck by Robert Galloway on her way to school. In another incident, a church was burned in Cecil County because blacks were setting up a school in it. These cases point to the fact that violence by the white community in Maryland against blacks was triggered when whites feared that blacks would advance socially, educationally, or economically. As long as blacks did not seek social betterment, they were safe from the harassment of hostile Marylanders. Therefore, the classroom was an important representation of hope but also was a source of rage and frustration for some of Maryland’s whites.

103 McDougall, 27.
104 McGuinn, 5.
105 Fields, 145.
The acquisition of land by the free black community in the years following the Civil War was also a symbol of racial uplift among blacks in Maryland, and the ownership of land, no matter how small it was, gave blacks a sense of worth and independence. Timothy Tice, a black lawyer, defined real estate, as “the most empowering of all African American commodities and the ownership of land was the quickest way to solve the Negro problem.”106 John Langston, a black lawyer in the North, also expressed the importance of land in contributing to self-betterment. He advised blacks in Maryland to “get money, get land, and sow your own acres.”107 In one city, blacks were able to acquire small landholdings each worth at least $800. In fact, Joseph Singer of Queen Anne’s County owned four acres of land in 1870 and raised his own hogs.108 The Woods Annual City Directory of Baltimore indicates that from 1864 to 1871, black landholders in Baltimore County in fact tripled from 4,000 to 12,000. Even blacks from Maryland’s Eastern Shore and Southern counties, who were too poor to buy small landholdings, believed that the ownership of a garden plot provided them with at least a sense of pride. Land was important in bolstering the blacks’ sense of autonomy and confidence in the post-Civil War years.

By 1920, Baltimore’s black population had increased 27.8% despite the squalid living conditions of most blacks during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.109 During this period, many blacks lived in neighborhoods that were characterized by overcrowding and disease. Only a few blacks in Baltimore were able to obtain their own homes, and black doctors and lawyers were forced to move into secondhand neighborhoods that were

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107 Ibid., 9.
108 Olson, 60.
less desirable than those of whites. Factories and slaughterhouses dominated the Fifth Ward, where many prominent blacks lived, and liquid waste covered the streets.\footnote{Fuque, 199.}

By the late 1880s and early 1890s, the arrival of rural blacks in Baltimore added to the overcrowding and crime that plagued Baltimore's black community during the early twentieth century.\footnote{McDougall, 38.} Tuberculosis was rampant in black areas, such as Biddle Ally, and African American steel and coal workers lived in one-room barracks described by whites as "crude shanties with pine board floors."\footnote{Olson, 236.} Wealthy whites imposed land-use ordinances to regulate the housing market and to shut off "undesirable" blacks from their neighborhoods.\footnote{McDougall, 46.}

While urban black neighborhoods suffered from segregation, disease, and squalor, living conditions for Maryland's rural blacks were equally deplorable prior to 1910. When Frederick Douglass visited Talbot County, he noted, "Blacks live in shanties on the outskirts of town because they eked out insufficient wages from being day laborers and domestic servants."\footnote{McFelly, 293.} The Buck Town District of Dorchester County in 1866 suffered so much from poverty that one house with seven blacks living in it had only a peck of apples to eat.\footnote{Fuque, 12.} The unequal living conditions of Maryland's blacks reveal that African Americans in Maryland suffered from poverty and disease, similar to Southern blacks.

Since black leaders were disgusted with the squalid living conditions that their fellow blacks lived in, they sought to establish their own communities and set up better housing. For example, Frederick Douglass built the Douglass Place in Baltimore, which was a
five-story complex, for poor blacks. The building was entirely funded by Douglass and replaced the miserable shacks that the African Americans of Fells Point had once occupied.\textsuperscript{116} Also, the Snow Hill black community of Port Deposit, Cecil County, was founded by black merchants and symbolizes the solidarity of Maryland’s black community.\textsuperscript{117}

The jobs that African Americans held in the years after the Civil War were as deplorable as their living conditions. Only after African Americans set up their own businesses and created jobs within their community did they gain a sense of pride and worth. Attainment of a respectable and well-paying job was important to the African American community because blacks knew that the job one held often determined what kind of property he could obtain and the status he would hold. During the Reconstruction years in Maryland, African Americans, like Southern blacks, were mostly confined to unskilled low-paying jobs and frequently remained as agricultural workers on the plantations, where they had been slaves. For the most part, the occupational structure of Tidewater communities remained the same as it had for decades since few blacks rose from the lowest economic level. For instance, Bill Sampson, who was a sixty-year-old former slave, stayed at the Lloyd House, a plantation in Maryland, and received a wage of $10 to $15 per month for agricultural services.\textsuperscript{118}

Most agricultural laborers were either tenant farmers or sharecroppers. In fact, Fields explains, “A substantial portion of black people identified as laborers appears in the census as agricultural tenants rather than owners.”\textsuperscript{119} Since sharecroppers had virtually

\textsuperscript{116} Savage, 272.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 273.
\textsuperscript{118} Fuke, 3.
\textsuperscript{119} Fields, 177.
no control over their crops, they often fell into debt and poverty, which eventually caused them to sink into a hopeless state of dependency that very much resembled their previous condition of servitude. Other rural occupations that blacks held during the 1860s and 1880s included low-ranking jobs, such as railroad workers, chicken farmers, and oyster diggers. Oyster diggers were looked down upon by whites and were viewed as “uneducated, immoral, and shiftless.”

Like rural blacks, African Americans who lived in Maryland cities, such as Baltimore and Annapolis, were confined to undesirable jobs during much of the nineteenth century. Douglass emphasizes that many white caulkers feared that blacks would drive them out of their jobs after the Civil War and now refused to work alongside African Americans. Douglass revealed, “Over the years, blacks have been driven from skilled jobs in the yards, and black workers in Fells Point are beaten by whites who feel threatened by them.” Consequently, white animosity and a strike by white caulkers in 1865 led the Abraham and Henderson Wharf in Baltimore to give into white demands and to ask blacks to step down from their jobs as caulkers.

Since many blacks were fired from skilled jobs, they were forced to take menial occupations in the cities’ massive water and railroad projects. Blacks employed at the Lock Raven Reservoir Project recalled that their jobs required a tremendous amount of hard labor and were dangerous. Black women also suffered from lack of employment and were confined to lowly occupations, such as domestic servants and seamstresses in Baltimore. The 1870 census shows that the majority of black women worked for wages,

[126] Olson, 186.
[127] Ibid., 183.
[129] Olson, 184.
[130] Ibid., 153.
while white women were able to stay at home during the same year.\textsuperscript{125} This fact reveals that many African American families needed an extra income to survive.

Despite the fact that many of Maryland’s African Americans suffered from a lack of employment and low wages, some blacks were able to obtain respectable jobs and establish businesses by working together within their communities. From 1878 to 1899, a small black professional class emerged in the city of Baltimore, and some blacks were barbers, caterers, and storekeepers in Maryland’s black towns. The 1890 census indicates that Whitfield Winsey, an African American doctor, was admitted to the medical society even though he was banned from practicing in Baltimore’s new hospitals.\textsuperscript{126} Blacks were also successful in convincing the state of Maryland to let black lawyers serve on Baltimore’s courts. Prior to 1876, Chapter 246, Section 3 of Maryland’s laws limited the privilege of practicing law to white male citizens. When Mr. Taylor, a black Massachusetts lawyer, applied for the right to serve as a lawyer on a Baltimore court, he was refused on the basis that the city of Baltimore “will not extend this privilege to Negroes.”\textsuperscript{127} Taylor took the case to the Supreme Court of Baltimore and won. The Court ruled, “There is no reason white lawyers should be protected against blacks, and no qualified man should be excluded from practicing law on the basis of color.”\textsuperscript{128} This court case set an important precedent, and blacks were now able to practice law in Maryland. For instance, Ashbie Hawkins, a politician, set up a flourishing legal practice in Baltimore in 1890.\textsuperscript{129}

\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{125} Levy, 77.
\textsuperscript{126} Olson, 234.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 256.
\textsuperscript{129} McDougall, 4.
Moreover, Maryland’s blacks were successful in establishing their own businesses. These businesses were often short-lived and lacked sufficient capital. The fact that Maryland’s African Americans were even able to set up short-lived businesses during this period points to the strength of the black community in the state of Maryland. The 1902 *African American Ledger* reinforces blacks’ optimistic attitude that setting up businesses will erase the “color line.” The *Ledger* explains, “When we get to be a business community, the race question will in great part disappear as we increase more and more in wealth and business capacity.”

The Chesapeake Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company perhaps epitomized a business that was entirely established and run by prominent members of Baltimore’s black community. Isaac Myers and John Locks, two influential black leaders, were able to raise $10,000 from the black community to maintain their business for twenty years. The Northwestern Family and Supply Company was the largest black-owned business and specialized in groceries, clothing, and household goods.

Blacks founded many smaller businesses as well, such as a grocery store run by Wiley Bates in Annapolis that sold both food and soap. African Americans often took great pride in their ability to buy the latest consumer items sold at black-owned stores. Paul Shackel notes, “African Americans in the late 1890s and early twentieth century found hope in the consumer culture.”

Archaeological evidence of glass and ceramic pieces from Maryland’s Maynard-Burgess House suggests blacks’ willingness to buy expensive

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130 Ibid., 31.
132 McDougall, 31.
133 Ibid., 31.
134 Shackel, 81.
135 Ibid., 20.
consumer items. In 1870, an African American exclaimed, “Consumer goods have implications of pride. A black must be a producer to be an independent consumer.”

Therefore, many of Maryland’s African Americans felt that the establishment of businesses and a thriving consumer culture were keys to racial uplift and respectability.

Black labor unions were a major source of pride for African Americans in Maryland and symbolized their independence from the white community. After black caulkers were driven out of their jobs in 1869, Isaac Myers, a black leader, called a meeting of colored molders, painters, and brick makers at the Douglass Institute and urged them to form their own labor unions. Myers emphasized, “If citizenship means anything at all, it means the freedom of labor.” Myers was successful in organizing the first black labor union, which he coined The Colored Caulkers Trade Union Society. At the National Labor Union Conference in Philadelphia, Myers expressed to whites, “The white laboring men of this country have nothing to fear from the colored. We desire to see labor elevated and made more respectable, to have higher wages, and our hours regulated.” Most of Maryland’s labor unions remained segregated throughout much of the nineteenth century. Starting in 1880, the Knights of Labor recruited blacks, and by 1910, the American Federation of Labor removed its racial restrictions because it wished to boost its “bargaining power.” However, African Americans resisted the call of the AFL and the Knights of Labor by forming their own labor unions between the years 1864 to 1910.

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136 Mullins, 2.
137 Olson, 184.
138 Ibid., 184.
140 Olson, 184.
141 McDougall, 31.
Although the Freedmen’s Bureau had a more limited role in Maryland during the Reconstruction era than it did in other Southern states, it was still important in negotiating fair labor contracts between blacks and their employers as well as persuading the government of Maryland to end the apprentice system. Douglass extolled the Freemen’s Bureau by stating, “The Freemen’s Bureau represents the commitment of the government to attend to my people.”142 The Freedmen’s Bureau was most successful in defeating the apprenticeship system, which was designed to bind black children into a state of “virtual slavery.” Former slaveholders sought to continue the practice of “slavery” by manipulating the state’s apprenticeship laws and by seizing black children from their parents, who they claimed were not suitable to care for them.143 Many whites found the impressment of black children as “justifiable retaliation against emancipation.”144 In Calvert County, an eyewitness reported that he saw black children being taken away on ox carts, and in the weeks of emancipation alone, two thousand black children were indentured in Anne Arundel County on the Eastern Shore.145 Unlike white apprentices, black children were not required to be educated and could be sold, whipped, jailed, or threatened.146

Many black parents protested against the seizure of their children and sought to put an end to the apprentice system. Hester Antony, an Eastern Shore black woman, would not leave her children until her former master threatened to “blow her brains out.”147 Since most black parents were unsuccessful in freeing their children, they asked for the

142 McFeely, 243.
144 Low, 11.
145 Fuke, 70.
146 Low, 12.
147 Fuke, 75.
assistance of the Freedmen’s Bureau in issuing petitions for the release of their children. One Bureau official explained that in 1866, “Not a day passes by that my office is not visited by some poor woman who has walked perhaps ten to twenty miles to see the agent of the Bureau.”

Eventually, the unwavering efforts of Judge Hugh Bond and Henry Stockbridge convinced Salmon Chase of the U.S. Supreme Court to agree to secure the release of apprentices in the 1867 case Turner v. Hambleton. Chase ruled that Hambleton, the former owner of Elizabeth Turner of Talbot County, could not bind her. He stated in his court opinion, “Elizabeth’s indenture is indeed void under the Civil Rights Statute of 1866.” By 1868, the system of apprenticeship, which was now banned in Maryland’s constitution of 1867, disintegrated.

The Freedmen’s Bureau was also instrumental in negotiating fair contracts between rural black farm laborers and their employers and in “assisting blacks to gain an independent foothold as self-sufficient farmers.” Bureau agents of Maryland insisted that employers guarantee blacks housing, medical care, and a fair yearly wage. Blacks often sent Bureau agents letters urging them to investigate their unfair treatment by employers. Jefferson Bolts of Montgomery County complained to the Bureau, “For three months of work, all I received was $1.25 of tobacco.” Bureau officials were successful in settling many cases between blacks and their employers and, thus, were extolled by Maryland’s black community.

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148 Low, 14.
149 Ibid., 8.
150 Ibid., 25.
151 Fuke, 25.
152 Ibid., 26.
Although the Bureau was vital in helping Maryland’s blacks gain an independent foothold as farmers, it lacked power because it did not have authority in some sections of Maryland, such as counties near Washington, D.C., it was unable to set up regulations enforceable to the law, and it refused to help blacks achieve occupational mobility.\(^\text{153}\) Richard Fuke states, “Federal officers sought to establish free people as self-reliant workers but did not look further to occupational mobility.”\(^\text{154}\) In addition, Bureau agents rarely helped blacks acquire their own land. Even when the Freedmen’s Bureau set up government farmers in St. Mary’s County, Bureau agents did not protest when President Johnson ordered that the property be returned to its former owners. One black commented that the confiscation of government farms was “the most shameful outrage which has been imposed on our people in four years.”\(^\text{155}\)

Many blacks praised the actions of the Freedmen’s Bureau but founded their own organizations as well. These organizations fostered a sense of black pride and self-reliance. One of the most important institutions that blacks built within their community was the church. The church not only served as a worship center for African Americans but also was the focal point of the black community where active leaders emerged. One of the most influential leaders among African Americans in Baltimore was Benjamin Turner, who was involved in politics, literary circles, church work, and was important in pressing Maryland’s government for civil rights.\(^\text{156}\) The church was instrumental in establishing charitable organizations to help sick and impoverished blacks and held camp meetings at Haslups Grove and Chews Woods. The Bethel African Methodist Episcopal

\(^{153}\) Ibid., 30.  
\(^{154}\) Ibid., 31.  
\(^{155}\) Ibid., 33.  
\(^{156}\) Ibid., 175.
Church was the largest of all African American churches, and it organized numerous fundraising fairs and served as a public lecture hall where blacks could debate important political issues and civil rights.\footnote{Levy, 15.} Olson explains, “The social activities black churches organized were important in building black solidarity and pride.”\footnote{Olson, 188.} Since the church was such an integral part of the black community, it was the subject of white violence and hate. Angry whites burned a church near Clarksburg, Montgomery County, because it conducted a black school.\footnote{Folds, 144.}

Blacks also founded a multitude of beneficial societies and self-help programs to assist sick and poor African Americans, whom the white community refused to help. In Baltimore alone, blacks were in charge of seventy-nine beneficial societies with an average of over eighty members each.\footnote{McDougall, 30.} These societies were important in strengthening the black community in Maryland as well as providing a training ground for black leaders. Both the Colored Ladies Union Association and the Brown Benevolent Society were instrumental in raising money for unfortunate blacks and in helping members of the black community. Benevolent societies offered blacks “an opportunity to meet others” and collected funds to pay for black funeral costs and hospital expenses.\footnote{Fuze, 180.} Similar to benevolent societies, Maryland’s black fraternal organizations, such as the Masons and Odd Fellows, provided financial assistance to blacks in need and represented blacks’ beliefs in what would later be called the Washingtonian principles of self-help and racial uplift. For instance, Masonic lodges in Havre de Grace during the 1870s raised a large
amount of money for charitable causes.\footnote{162} Without self-help organizations, the black community in Maryland never would have been as strong as it was in much of the twentieth century.

In the years following the Civil War, Maryland’s black population believed that the enfranchisement of the African American community would pave the way for even greater concessions. Douglass reinforced the African Americans’ belief that the ballot was a symbol of racial pride by stressing, “Slavery in this state will not be abolished before the blacks obtain the ballot.”\footnote{163} Frederick Douglass voiced his anger that African Americans were denied the ballot prior to 1870 in Maryland. When Douglass was riding on a train car, he saw a black man, who was a well-known leader in the African American community. Douglass noted, “I feel contempt for the criminal ignorance of the U.S. to deny him the simple right to the ballot because he is a nigger.”\footnote{164}

Even though blacks did not possess the ballot in Maryland prior to 1870, they still actively participated alongside the Republican Party in pressing for universal manhood suffrage and civil rights. Both black and white Republicans sat together as delegates on conventions. In 1867, Maryland’s Republicans of both races attended the Border States Convention.\footnote{165} In this Convention, blacks also were permitted to participate on Republican committees, which were set up to defeat the constitution of 1867 that was framed by Democrats in order to abolish loyalty oaths and ban black enfranchisement.\footnote{166} Despite the efforts of Republicans, however, in thwarting the redemption of Democrats,

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\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{162} Ibid., 181.
\item \footnote{163} Foner, 68.
\item \footnote{164} “Frederick Douglass,” Harpers Weekly (1867): 1.
\item \footnote{165} Margaret Callcott, The Negro in Maryland Politic 1870-1912 (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1969), 33.
\item \footnote{166} Ibid., 17.
\end{itemize}
by 1867, the Democratic Party had gained an important foothold in Maryland’s General Council.

Although Democrats in the state of Maryland were opposed to black suffrage, the Fifteenth Amendment passed by Congress in 1870 awarded blacks the right to exercise the ballot. In the election of 1870, African Americans flocked to the polls to celebrate their new political right. Elijah Quigley was the first of his race to cast the ballot.167 The attainment of the ballot was an important milestone for African Americans in Maryland and added 30% to Maryland’s electorate.

Unlike other Southern states, the Democratic Party in Maryland from 1870 to 1895 voiced little opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment and rarely brought up the issue of race in election campaigns. The reason for the Democrats’ mild acceptance of black suffrage can be partly explained by the fact that they hoped to “discourage other civil rights legislation.”168 Some Democrats sought to gain black support by holding integrated rallies in Charles County. Despite the fact that Democrats won black support in Baltimore, most blacks still favored the Republican Party.

Despite the fact that in the years from 1870 to 1895 the Democrats won most elections in Maryland, the Republican Party, for the most part, still had a strong following among Maryland’s African Americans who widely participated in it. Although blacks strengthened the Republican Party significantly, white Republican leaders confined blacks to menial jobs and did not back African American congressional candidates. Callcott explains that one white Republican suggested, “Blacks are content in serving on

167 Ibid., 3.
168 Ibid., 22.
Republican councils. In fact, Eric Foner points out, "Maryland lagged behind the whole south in the number of its federal appointments made to blacks." Out of 1,311 federal appointments awarded by Republicans in 1881, only twenty-four were given to blacks.

Since African Americans sought to assert a greater voice in the Republican Party, they formed their own committees, such as The Colored Equal Rights League and The United Brotherhood of Liberty. The United Brotherhood of Liberty was successful in persuading Maryland's government to permit blacks to serve on juries. Blacks also met in 1889 at the Colored Republican Committee that resolved, "President Harrison should at least appoint one colored man to a presidential office in Maryland." Even though the blacks at this convention were unsuccessful, it still symbolized the self-effort of blacks in forming their own political organizations. Black Republicans enjoyed increased job benefits from the years 1896 to 1900 when the Republican Party gained power for a brief time. One of the most prominent blacks who served on an Eastern Shore council in Belair was H. Maynadier St. Clair.

The period from 1900 to 1910, when the Democrats once again seized power, was an especially dark period for African Americans because the Democrats attempted to disenfranchise Maryland's blacks. One Democrat expressed, "This is a white man's country." Similar to other Southern states, the Democrats proposed legislation to disenfranchise blacks, such as the Wilson Amendment of 1904 that would make it

169 Ibid., 75.
170 Foner, 2.
171 Callcott, 75.
172 Ibid., 80.
174 Callcott, 153.
impossible for illiterate blacks to cast a vote. The Poe Amendment also was designed to
disenfranchise blacks by requiring all voters to understand the state constitution. This
amendment resembled Mississippi’s disenfranchisement legislation, which had enacted a
similar “understanding clause.”\textsuperscript{175}

However, Maryland differed from its Southern neighbors in that the Democrats’
Attempts to disenfranchise blacks were largely unsuccessful. One of the most compelling
reasons why Democrats failed was the heterogeneity of Maryland’s white populace.\textsuperscript{176}
Since disenfranchisement laws imposed restrictions on Maryland’s foreign-born citizens,
the measures never gained wide support. Also, Maryland’s influential black population
was effective in protesting disenfranchisement. Thus, “the successful maintenance of
Negro voting rights” gave a unique quality to Maryland.

Like blacks in other Southern states, African Americans suffered from increased
violence after the Civil War, and Jim Crow laws, imposed in 1904 and 1908, segregated
blacks from many white facilities and organizations. Blacks had less contact with whites
after the Civil War. They no longer worshiped with or entertained on a regular basis with
whites. Steamships confined blacks to separate sleeping quarters, and the Holiday and
Front Street Theaters in Baltimore forced blacks to sit in the back.\textsuperscript{177} Violence against
blacks was also a major problem in Maryland from 1864 to 1910. Anti-black
organizations, such as the Copperheads, discussed issues concerning the dangers of black
advancement.\textsuperscript{178} The \textit{Evening Capital} of Anne Arundel County emphasized the

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{177} Fuke, 211.
\textsuperscript{178} Griffin, 192.
widespread violence by revealing, “Judge Lynch was busy in 1886.”\textsuperscript{179} Black soldiers were perhaps the favorite targets of violence by whites because they symbolized the pride of the African American community. In 1865, a former black soldier, Joe Nick, was beaten for wearing his uniform. The violence and segregation that was evident in Maryland in the post-Civil War years demonstrate the setbacks that Maryland’s blacks faced in their independence.

The years 1864 to 1910 represented a period in Maryland’s history in which African Americans were able to reap many concessions in education, economics, and politics. Blacks developed their own businesses, churches, and social organizations during this period, and increased black leadership laid the groundwork for a greater sense of pride for many African Americans. Although Maryland’s blacks were able to enjoy more independence than African Americans in Southern states during the years following the Civil War, “Through the eyes of many of Maryland’s blacks, Maryland was moving at the pace of a diamondback terrapin and in the direction, now backwards, now sideways, of the crabs that live in the bay.”\textsuperscript{180}

\textsuperscript{179} Mullins, 68.
\textsuperscript{180} Fields, 206.
One Step Closer To Freedom

The "Self-Reconstruction" of Cecil County, Maryland and the Seeds of African Protest and Leadership of Cecil County's Black Community from 1864-1910

Stephanie Hill

History Department

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PREFACE

At the dawn of their emancipation, Cecil County’s African Americans looked toward their future with hope, pride, and determination. Cecil County had developed along a “middle ground.” In the decades prior to the Civil War, it supported the Union cause, had a large free black population, and focused more on industry than the slave labor system. In the decades after the Civil War, Cecil County’s blacks continued to set up their own social organizations, churches, and schools, which were the primary foundations for the black community. The same leaders who had set up these institutions actively participated in politics and registered new black voters. It is significant that in Cecil County violence against blacks was rare, blacks never were disenfranchised, and they consistently voted in large numbers from 1870 to 1910. This signifies that Maryland was neither the North nor the South but was somewhere in between.

My interest in both the antebellum and Reconstruction eras has led me to write “One Step Closer to Freedom.” I was first inspired to write this paper upon completion of an African American history class in my sophomore year. In this class, we covered the topic of Reconstruction. Although the Reconstruction era was short-lived, it still marked an important turning point in American history in that it laid the foundations for the assertion of African American social and political rights. Some historians even describe this period as the first Civil Rights Movement, and I believe that Reconstruction was necessary in paving the way for future advances by the African American community. It was during these years that blacks found a voice in politics, participated in their own self-help and moral improvement societies, and established schools and churches within their
own communities. There are many studies of the federal Reconstruction era. However, there are very few books and articles concerning the topic of reconstruction of Border States after the Civil War. Maryland is unique in that it was not under the purview of federal Reconstruction, but rather it issued a self-reconstruction program, which called for the disenfranchisement of disloyal citizens who had supported the Confederacy. I decided to put special emphasis on the self-reconstruction of Cecil County, Maryland and the history of African Americans during this era and in the decades after Reconstruction because virtually nothing has been written on the topic. The only material on the subject is contained in primary resources.

The central question that I hope to address in “One Step Closer to Freedom” is how the self-reconstruction of Cecil County is like or unlike the radical Reconstruction in the south. Also, I analyze the aftermath of Reconstruction, its effects on the African American community, and their responses to segregation, violence, and attempted disfranchisement during the Jim Crow decades, 1890-1910. I plan for this paper to be the basis of my dissertation, where I will rework the evidence I have, conduct further research, explore in depth the political economy of Cecil County’s African American communities, and complete my analysis.

I have conducted my research for this project over a period of four semesters. I began the project by doing preliminary research, which focused on reading secondary sources that focused on Maryland’s history. I then traveled to the Maryland State Historical Society in Baltimore, the Cecil County Historical Society, and the Cecil County Court House to do extensive research on African Americans’ participation in politics, schools, churches, and social organizations. My research on these topics began in the spring of
2004, continued throughout the summer, and culminated in the fall of 2004. At the Cecil County Historical Society, I analyzed many primary documents, such as maps, tax assessment records, almshouse lists, state laws, church records, and eight newspapers, including all editions available from 1846 to 1910. These newspapers included the Baltimore Sun, the Midland Journal, the Cecil Democrat, the Cecil Whig, the Port Deposit Correspondence, the Elkton Star, the Cecil Star, and the Cecil County News. While the Midland Journal, the Port Deposit Correspondence, the Cecil Star, the Cecil County News, and the Elkton Appeal were white Democratic papers, the Cecil Whig was a Republican paper edited by whites. Since the articles in these newspapers are often biased, they cannot be interpreted as completely reliable sources but rather must be compared to other documents, such as church records and the census. Church records provided useful information on when a church was established and its programs.

In addition, I went to the Baltimore Historical Society to look at census records. Census records were useful in providing information about the occupations, property holding and education of African Americans living in Cecil County. For fifteen weeks, I analyzed land deeds, wills, and mortgage records at the Cecil County Court House. I first went to the Register of Wills to look up information on prominent blacks from Cecil County. From these names, I was able to research land records on how much property blacks owned in a particular year. The wills and land records revealed that African Americans owned considerable property in Cecil County. This disproves what the historians at the Cecil County Historical Society say about the economic status of Cecil County's blacks. They indicate that only a few African Americans owned property in Cecil County. However, according to land deeds, this is not the case. There were many
substantial African American property owners in the period 1864 to 1910. Although I conducted extensive research on the political economy of black communities throughout Cecil County, I did not include that subject in my thesis for reasons of time and space. I hope to do more research in the future concerning this topic.

Furthermore, I traveled to the Cecil County School in Elkton, where the school board meets, to look through the School Board Minute Books from 1864 to 1910. These records included important information on the cost of schools, the number of schools at a given time, and the salaries black teachers and principals were paid. It was rewarding to look through these books since no one has conducted research on Cecil County’s early schools. Not only did I have the opportunity to do extensive primary research, but I also saw some of the extant African American schools and churches, which were built in the Reconstruction era. One such building is the St. Mark’s A.U.M.P. Church, which is located in Elk Neck. I also went to the Mount Harmon Plantation to learn about the pre-Civil War history of Cecilton.

While researching I came across several problems. For example, some editions of the Cecil Democrat were missing. Also, it is unfortunate that the actual proceedings of self-help organizations and colored political club meetings are lost to history because such evidence would give a more accurate picture of what happened in Cecil County’s African American communities. The most challenging pieces of evidence to work with were land deeds because such records do not list whether a person is white or black. I had to first go to the census and land assessment books to find the names of prominent African Americans in Cecil County. Also, some of the documents were hard to read since they were handwritten.