‘WE SHALL YET BE A PEOPLE’: NATIVE EFFORTS IN FREEDPEOPLE’S EDUCATION IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1865-1870

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‘We Shall Yet Be a People’: Native Efforts in Freedpeople’s Education in North Carolina, 1865-1870

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In post-emancipation North Carolina, communities of freedpeople actively sought to establish and maintain schools for their children. While accepting aid from the Freedmen’s Bureau and northern missionary societies, freedpeople contributed their own resources and labor to sustain schools and attempted to retain control over the form and content of education in those schools. Black native southerners succeeded in reasserting their control over freedpeople’s education by filling the majority of teaching positions in the schools, and by increasingly pouring their resources into Sabbath schools in which they exercised considerable autonomy. Drawing on the correspondence, monthly reports, and other papers of the North Carolina State Superintendent of Education for the Freedmen’s Bureau, federal census records, North Carolina public laws, reports of the North Carolina State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and other reports and biographies, this study shows that black southerners made up a majority of the teaching force in freedpeople’s schools in North Carolina as early as July 1867, and attempts to paint a collective portrait of these teachers using a sample of 42 teachers. This study also shows that in addition to day-schools, Sabbath schools offered the opportunity to read and write to thousands of freedpeople, including those who could not attend day-schools.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 13
Table 2 14
Table 3 16
Table 4 31

> Sir I will take this opportunity of writing you once more to inform you that we are again without a school [.] [T]he teacher we has is left and gone North[. H]e was a colored man C.H. Gibbs[. H]e was from New Haven Conn and is gone back there…. We labored very hard to get a school here Sir and we have had a good teacher little over twelve months[. J]ust as our children got in a good ways of learning he left and now Sir we are at a loss to know what to do for a teacher…. I haven't any education myself but a very little[. T]his is the handwrite [sic] of my little son been going to school about two years.[1]

The above plea was made to the North Carolina Superintendent of Education of the Freedmen's Bureau in 1868 by Sam A. Perry of Greenville, North Carolina; the words themselves belonged to his son. The name and age of Perry's son are not known, but by 1868, his two years of schooling had already empowered him with the means to petition power, a right which his father had been denied. The elder Perry was acutely aware of his own illiteracy and the limits it entailed, and he was intent that his son, already better educated than he, would not suffer the same feelings of powerlessness. Perry's determination was shared by a community that had "labored very hard" to establish a school and had "rented churches which would do to teach school in."[2] The hope of this illiterate man was for his son, for the future.

Yet Perry was no idealist. His child, like others in the community, was too young yet to be a productive worker. The children in Greenville were, in his words, "dead expenses" (a calculation not shared by former slaveowners).[3] Perry assessed his community's situation in economic terms. The children could not help to produce income but still had to be fed and clothed at the expense of their parents. Sending the children to school would not eliminate that expense, but it would alter the equation. Education was an investment. Children in school were not dead

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[1] Sam A. Perry to Superintendent of Education, Greenville, N.C., 6 January 1868. *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of North Carolina, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1870* (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1971), microfilm. Hereafter, SENC, BRFAL.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

expenses, but expenses with a potential payoff. In a practical sense, that payoff would come in the form of skills that would better position the children to exploit economic opportunities to their advantage. Others viewed the potential payoff, or in the absence of education, the potential costs, in more dramatic terms. In an impassioned plea to the state superintendent of Freedmen's Bureau schools, a black teacher, A. B. Smyer requested aid for a school writing, "O give us assistance for mercy sake please reply immediately and determine whether we must sink or whether we shall yet be a people."[4]

The letters of Perry and Smyer show that in freedpeople's pursuit of education, stakes were high. Education meant opportunity, but it also meant something much more fundamental; "being a people." Education also offered a means to protect a young and fragile freedom. In his landmark work, *Black Reconstruction in America*, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, "had it not been for the Negro school and college, the Negro would, to all intents and purposes, have been driven back into slavery."[5] Du Bois credits this triumph to the "guiding hand of the Freedmen's Bureau and the Northern schoolmarm…."[6] Yet it was the initiative and sacrifice of the freedpeople themselves that secured the gains that were made in establishing schools throughout the South. Seeking autonomy over the form, content, and supervision of their schools, southern black men and women increasingly contributed their resources and labor to the project of freedpeople's education. While aid from the Freedmen's Bureau and northern missionary societies was critical in sustaining their efforts, freedpeople struggled to establish schools and to determine for themselves who would teach in their schools, and by extension, *what* would be taught in their schools, and how school buildings and resources would be used. Black southerners asserted their control over freedpeople's

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[4] A. B. Smyer to Fiske, Catawba Station, N.C. 26 November 1867. SENC, BRFAL.

[5] W.E.B. Du Bois. *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992 [1935]), p. 667.

[6] Ibid. p, 637.

education by assuming the responsibility of teaching, and by pouring their resources and sending their children into Sabbath schools that provided an alternative site for education where external control, and the labor demands of ruling class white southerners, did not extend.

Following the lead of Du Bois, historians have continued to acknowledge the contribution of northern teachers and the missionary and aid societies which sponsored them, in their efforts to establish schools for the newly freed slaves immediately following the Civil War. Studies have also focused on the role of the Freedmen's Bureau in the project of educating freedpeople, an effort which Eric Foner has called the Bureau's "greatest success."[7] A mere survey of titles, including Henry L. Swint's *The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862-1870,* (1967), Jacqueline Jones' *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873*, (1980), and Ronald Butchart's *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction: Freedmen's Education, 1862-1875*, (1980), highlights the emphasis that has been placed on the role of the "saintly souls," and "Yankee schoolmarms."[8] Subsequent scholarship, particularly Robert C. Morris's chapter "The Black Teacher," in his *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861-1870*, (1981), Dorothy Sterling's *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, (1984), Linda Perkin's article, "The Black Female American Missionary Association Teacher in the South, 1861-1870," and Clara DeBoer's *His Truth Is Marching On: African Americans Who Taught the Freedmen for the American Missionary*

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[7] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1867*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 144.

[8] Henry Lee Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862-1870*. (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1967). Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980). Ronald Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction: Freedmen's Education, 1862-1875*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980). See also, Sandra E. Small, "The Yankee Schoolmarm in Freedmen's Schools: An Analysis of Attitudes," *The Journal of Southern History*, Volume 45, Issue 3 (August, 1979), 381-402. "Saintly souls," was the phrase Du Bois used to describe the northern teachers, quoted in Dorothy Sterling , ed. *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*. (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1984), p. 261.

Association, 1861-1877, (1995), has pointed to the important role played by black teachers, and particularly black women, who made up a significant portion of these northern teachers.[9] These works have taken some steps towards acknowledging the efforts of southern black teachers, but have been largely limited in their analysis to teachers associated with the American Missionary Association and a handful of elite black southerners who were educated in the North. Thus, very little attention has been given to the native, southern, black teachers, who, in North Carolina, made up over half of the teaching force in freedpeople's schools as early as July of 1867.

While not focusing primarily on teachers, James D. Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* offered an important corrective to the historiography's emphasis on northern aid societies and the Freedmen's Bureau by focusing attention on the efforts of freedmen to establish schools themselves. This emphasis on the agency of freedpeople has become much more typical of scholarship on the Reconstruction period. This paper will attempt to follow the lead of Anderson and others by focusing on the efforts of freedpeople to take control over the content, form, and supervision of the educational institutions that served themselves and their children. First, this paper will test the broader conclusions made by Anderson regarding the contributions of freedpeople in the establishment of schools in a more restricted space, the state of North Carolina. It will do so relying on the words and actions of the freedpeople themselves, rather than, as Anderson largely does, on characterizations made by Bureau officials such as national superintendent, John W. Alvord. Second, this study will attempt to paint a fuller portrait of the group of largely southern, black teachers who served freedpeople's schools in North

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[9] Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861-1870*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981). Sterling. Linda Perkins, "The Black Female American Missionary Association Teacher in the South, 1861-1870." *Black Americans in North Carolina and the South*. Jeffery Crow and Flora J. Hatley, eds. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Clara Merritt DeBoer, *His Truth Is Marching On: African Americans Who Taught the Freedmen for the American Missionary Association, 1861-1877.* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1995).

Carolina. Finally, the paper will show how communities of freedpeople negotiated with northern missionary societies and the Freedmen's Bureau for control over the education of their children, with a particular focus on the role of native black teachers and Sabbath schools in these efforts.

The sources used for this paper include the correspondence, monthly reports, and other papers of the North Carolina State Superintendent of Education for the Freedmen's Bureau, federal census records, North Carolina public laws, reports of the North Carolina State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and other reports and biographies. Detailed monthly reports compiled by the state superintendent of education which recorded state-wide totals of schools, white teachers, black teachers, and pupils, as well as Sabbath schools, teachers, and pupils exist for the period of October 1866 to July 1869.[10] Though this represents a relatively short span of time, it covers the height of Bureau activity in North Carolina. These reports reveal certain trends and constitute the best source of quantitative data for freedpeople's education in the state. Some records remain from the months just before and just after this period but are incomplete. The most glaring gap in the records of this period are in the number of schools reported and unreported (meaning that they did not file monthly reports with the Bureau, but were known to it) in the months from April 1867 to September 1867. Other significant omissions include the number of unreported white and black teachers from October 1866 through September 1867 and a few other, sporadic gaps. This period can be divided into three school years, from October 1866 through July 1867, August 1867 through July 1868, and August 1869 through July 1869. While these records offer imperfect measures of the numbers of schools, teachers, and students throughout the state, and therefore are not definitive or exhaustive, they can be used to reveal trends over this period. These trends confirm that the freedpeople played a significant role in their own education and that their role, which included

[10] These totals included estimates of "unreported" schools, teachers, and pupils made by Bureau agents in each district as well as totals from reports submitted directly to the superintendent.

teaching, paying tuition, and establishing Sabbath schools, was generally increasing during this period.

Native Initiative

There is no more profound evidence of the initiative of communities of ex-slaves in securing their own education than their efforts to establish self-sustaining schools. Before the Yankee schoolmarms and northern missionaries descended on the South, communities of freedmen and women seized the moment of their freedom to create new and independent institutions including churches and schools. For the most part, the earliest of these institutions have been hidden from the historical record as they did not possess the bureaucratic apparatus to produce extensive documentation of their existence. What record does remain of these independent, self-sustaining schools can be found in the correspondence of Freedmen's Bureau officials and representatives of northern missionary societies, who took note of the capacity of ex-slaves to act on their own behalf. In November of 1865, Rev. S.S. Ashley, who was busy working to establish schools sponsored by the American Missionary Association, and who would later become Superintendent of Public Instruction for the state of North Carolina, noted in his correspondence with Rev. F.A. Fiske, "next Monday a plantation school will be opened in Brunswick by a colored man, to be supported by the people themselves."[11]

A school that may have predated the school in Brunswick was established by a community of freedpeople in Graham, Alamance County. There, Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Superintendent Charles Wolff found that a group of freedpeople led by Simon Williamson, Henry Turner, and others had rented a plot of land, built a school house, "elected a colored man, Anton

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[11] S.S. Ashley to Fiske, 7 November 1865. SENC, BRFAL.

Simons, as teacher," and commenced teaching 26 pupils paying 25 cents per month in tuition.[12] Like the school in Graham, the plantation school in Brunswick was likely supported by subscription, or tuition paid weekly or monthly by each student. Such self-supported schools also relied on community contributions in the form of schoolhouses, books, and in some cases, room and board for teachers.[13] It is likely that such schools emerged in communities throughout the South, and became known to the Freedmen's Bureau only when, and if, they needed and sought assistance from the Bureau, or as local Bureau agents became aware of them. In October 1866, the Freedmen's Bureau monthly statewide aggregate report recorded 10 schools sustained by freedmen (as opposed to partly sustained by freedmen), a number which increased in the following years (see Table 1 below).[14] This increase may represent new schools, or longer-standing, self-sustaining schools which newly became known to Bureau officials.

The initiative of ex-slaves in securing educational opportunities for themselves and their children is evident also in the hundreds of petitions to the Bureau requesting support for the establishment of schools. The words of these petitions are often compelling and full of the misrepresentations of a petitioner or petitioners eager to present themselves well to a man from whom they requested money. Despite these embellishments, evidence of the petitioners' desire for education lies in the act of petitioning itself, as, after all, the goal of the petitioners was to secure aid for schools. When individual freedpeople, or committees of freedpeople who, lacking education, could not write for themselves, white Bureau agents and others wrote to the state superintendent on their behalf. These scribes no doubt had their own particular motivations for

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[12] Charles Wolff to Rev. F.A. Fiske, Graham, N.C., 18 December 1866. SENC, BRFAL.

[13] For example, S.P. Fowler to Fiske, 21 November 1865. SENC, BRFAL. Fowler acknowledged receipt of a box of books and a bill and reported that he "collected a good part of the whole bill from the children." S.S. Ashley to Fiske, 21 April 1866. SENC, BRFAL. Ashley also indicated that the pupils purchased their own books. William A. Thompson to Fiske, Pittsboro, N.C., 5 March 1867. SENC, BRFAL.

[14] F.A. Fiske, "Monthly Report." October 1866. SENC, BRFAL.

writing, but their words too testify to the initiative of freedpeople who used whatever means they could to seek aid for schools. Many of these white petitioners were northerners associated with the Freedmen's Bureau or missionary associations, but some were local white people such as S.C. Alexander of Crab Orchard and Elisha Allison of Brevard. As intermediaries between local black communities and the Bureau, white petitioners framed their letters with the acknowledgement of freedpeople's desire and motive for establishing schools. W. McFarland wrote to Superintendent F.A. Fiske from Ansonville, N.C., "by request of the Colored People in this Vicinity I write you for information in regard to schools for freedmen… they are very anxious to attend school where they can be taught reading, writing, etc."[15] McFarland's own voice is not overtly evident in the request, but others did not hesitate to frame a letter within an expression of their own motives. The more missionary-minded William Miller wrote to Superintendent Fiske from Statesville, N.C., "I am oppressed by the intense earnestness of the Freedmen to have schools. God's Holy Spirit is manifestly inspiring them with a desire to read the Bible. Oh how much good can be done by religious teachers among this poor despised race!"[16]

When able, freedpeople, and often, committees of freedpeople, wrote directly to the Bureau to request support for their efforts to establish schools. These petitions offer still clearer evidence that the impetus for establishing schools often emerged from southern black communities, rather than from external (northern) sources. The "Colored Committee" of the Hoover District, near Lincolnton, N.C., "most respectfully" wrote to the superintendent:

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[15] W. McFarland to Fiske, Ansonville, N.C., 3 June 1867. SENC, BRFAL. For another example see, John R. Clements to Fiske, Holly Springs, N.C., 20 November 1867. SENC, BRFAL.

[16] William Miller to Fiske, Statesville, N.C., 14 March 1867. SENC, BRFAL. A petition written by H.S. Beals, a teacher and administrator sponsored by the American Missionary Association, noted the intense desire of the freedpeople for education. Beals, stationed in Beaufort, North Carolina wrote, "The interest in education among the Freedmen here is unabated. Many of the scholars come in from the country, walking from four to ten miles to and from school daily. Some children are sent here from a distance of thirty miles. The Freedmen from the rural districts are pleading for schools." H.S. Beals to Fiske, Beaufort, N.C., 20 April 1867. SENC, BRFAL.

> that your petitioners, lately emancipated from slavery by the United States' Government, are yet very poor and tho' in want of some of the necessaries + conveniences of life, yet feel that we are in still greater need of receiving some education in order to fit us for the duties of life + make us useful and intelligent citizens of our native state.[17]

Through petitions like that of the Hoover District school committee, freedpeople astutely framed their requests in terms that would appeal to their potential benefactors, in this case touting education as a means of becoming useful and productive citizens, precisely the language that Superintendent F.A. Fiske used to explain his own mission.[18]

Freedpeople added weight to their requests by including past or projected attendance figures for potential schools, and by adding long lists of petitioners. A request by "the undersigned Colard [sic] Citizens in the vicinity of John Hart Rowan County N.C." for aid in renting a school house was signed by twenty-four petitioners on behalf of roughly thirty expected scholars.[19] The signature of a petition by a committee of freedpeople made the petition a community claim, rather than that of an individual, such as a potential teacher. Many of the petitions to the Bureau were based on the needs of an individual teacher, usually seeking payment for uncompensated labor. The voice of the community and that of the teacher often merged however, as the teacher might have been the best available scribe. A letter signed by the school trustees of Catawba Station was written in the hand of a local black teacher, A.B. Smyer, and represented the interests of both. The trustees, on behalf of "the colored people of this county" claimed that the community would be able to raise $100 towards the construction of a school building, but requested an additional $200

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[17] Thomas Ramson, et. al. to Fiske, Lincolnton, N.C., 1868. SENC, BRFAL.

[18] See Michael Goldhaber, "A Mission Unfulfilled: Freedmen's Education in North Carolina, 1865-1870," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Autumn, 1992).

[19] John Douglas, et al. to the Superintendent, Rowan County, August 1868. SENC, BRFAL. See also, A. A. Scruggs to Fiske, Lenoir, N.C. 20 July 1867. SENC, BRFAL. Scruggs' name led a list of forty names and marks including those of at least twenty-one freedmen requesting aid for establishing a school in Lenoir.

in aid from the Freedmen's Bureau. The committee (or Smyer) also lauded its two black teachers, Smyer and his wife as "people who labor the benefit of their race."[20]

The ex-slaves' efforts to continue schools in the absence of teachers sponsored by northern missionary societies provides further evidence of their independent initiative. When sponsored teachers left their schools for summer vacations, freedpeople often sought to continue the schooling of their children. In the summer of 1867, Superintendent Fiske had noted the efforts of freedpeople's communities to open private schools that "were established to meet the wants of the Freedmen during the summer vacation."[21] When a very successful northern black teacher, Robert Harris, left Fayetteville in June of 1868, J.W. Hood sought to secure continued financial assistance over the summer so that the school could continue.[22] Perhaps in response to this demand, the following year Harris wrote to H.C. Vogell, who replaced Rev. Fiske as the Freedmen's Bureau Superintendent of Public Instruction for North Carolina in 1868, "we know of no other business to engage in which promises so much for the elevation of our race and the good of the State, and we cheerfully give up our Summer vacation for the good of the cause in which we are engaged."[23] Their initiative was such that freedpeople, who had waited so long for the opportunity to become educated and to freely and openly establish and maintain schools, felt they could not afford and did not desire a summer vacation.

Freedpeople also showed their initiative and determination through their willingness to defend schools against the sometimes fierce opposition they faced. In December 1866, Nash Chandler wrote to Fiske "to inform you of a plot or conspiracy to mob me + to break up the

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[20] A. B. Smyer to Fiske, Catawba Station, N.C. 5 February 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[21] Fiske, "Remarks," August 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[22] J.W. Hood to Fiske, Fayetteville, N.C., 24 June 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[23] Robert Harris to Vogell, Fayetteville, N.C., 7 June 1869. SENC, BRFAL.

Freedmen's school in this place."[24] The anticipated attack did not occur. Chandler attributed this to both the intervention of a Col. William Bingham who was a teacher of the young men who had threatened the school and the presence of "a guard of about fifty colored men, who were armed with such weapons as were at their command, such as old confederate muskets, sticks, stones…."[25] The freedpeople were prepared to fight for the schools they had so long awaited.

Native Contributions

In addition to taking initiative in establishing schools, freedpeople contributed their time, resources, and labor to maintain them. Indicators of financial contributions made by freedpeople include measures of the number of schools sustained or partly sustained by freedmen, the number of school buildings owned by freedmen, and the number of pupils paying tuition. These indicators do not add up to a dollar amount or a concrete measure of the material contribution of freedpeople, but do indicate trends in the extent of freedpeople's contributions in terms of the number of schools receiving aid and in the proportion of pupils contributing directly to the support of their schools and teachers through tuition payments. As reported monthly, the number of schools fully sustained by freedmen, the number of schools *partly* sustained by freedmen, and the number of buildings owned by freedmen reveal a clear pattern in accordance to the "school year," with the numbers dipping during the summer months of each year and peaking at an earlier point in each of the three years. Given the fluctuation from month to month over the course of the school year, mean numbers for each of the three school years can be used to reveal trends during the period.

Table 1 shows that while the number of schools fully sustained by freedmen, and thus fully independent of external aid, leveled off during the last two years, the number of schools partly

[24] Nash Chandler to Fiske, 6 December 1866. SENC, BRFAL.
[25] Chandler to Fiske, 20 December 1866. SENC, BRFAL.

sustained by freedmen, and the number of buildings owned by freedmen increased markedly. The percentage of pupils paying tuition also shows a general increase from October 1866 to July 1869. While in the first school year included in this period (October 1866-July 1867) the percentage of pupils paying tuition remained close to ten percent, by the third school year, from August 1868 through July 1869, over a quarter of the pupils were paying some amount of tuition.

Table 1[26]

Selected indicators of freedmen's contributions	Year 1 Oct.1866-Jul.1867 (Mean[27])	Year 2 Aug.1867-Jul.1868 (Mean)	Year 3 Aug.1868-Jul.1869 (Mean)
Schools sustained by freedmen	27	44	42
Schools partly sustained by freedmen	22	43	177
Buildings owned by freedmen	17	49	92
Percentage of schools all or partly sustained by freedmen	38%	41%	65%
Number of pupils paying tuition	602	2,085	3,658
Percentage of total pupils paying tuition	10%	22%	25%
Number of pupils	7,661	10,406	14,400

The case of a school in New Bern sheds some light on the trend of the increasing percentage of pupils paying tuition, even as the state stepped up efforts to establish public schools. Two black teachers there, W.J.M. Morris and Melinda Rue, had been paid $20 and $10 per month, respectively, by the A.M.A., and while they received this support, their school remained a free school. By 1869, however, northern missionary associations like the A.M.A. were losing their financial support as interest among the missions' constituents in the cause of assisting the ex-slaves began to wane. This trend coincided with the increasing efforts, on paper at least, of the state to

[26] Data compiled from records contained in SENC, BRFAL.

[27] Mean numbers in the chart are rounded to the nearest whole number.

provide universal public education, and thus missionary association officials could explain their withdrawal of support in terms of ceding control to the state.[28] In June, 1869, the A.M.A. ceased paying salaries to Morris and Rue. In order to continue the school, the teachers resorted to charging twenty cents per pupil, per month, in tuition.

Morris and Rue exemplify how freedpeople contributed their labor to the establishment and maintenance of schools, not only in the construction of school houses and desks or in fundraising, but as teachers. While northern white teachers, sponsored by missionary societies, played an important role in staffing schools, particularly in the immediate post-emancipation years, freedpeople's schools were increasingly served by black teachers in the years that followed. In October 1866, the Bureau reported twenty-one white, and nineteen black teachers. In the following months, from November 1866 through June 1867, the percentage of white teachers fluctuated around 75%. In July of 1867, however, as northern teachers likely took summer vacations, the percentage of black teachers rose to 54%. With the exception of the months of January and February of 1868 when the percentage of teachers who were black was 49% and 46%, respectively, the percentage of the total number of day school teachers who were black remained over 50%, and above 60% after April 1868. Table 2 shows that the mean number and percentage of day school teachers who were black increased in each of the three "school years," for which the Freedmen's Bureau completed aggregate monthly reports.

Table 2[29]

	Year 1 Oct.1866-Jul.1867	Year 2 Aug.1867-Jul.1868 (Mean)	Year 3 Aug.1868-Jul.1869 (Mean)

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[28] The 1868 North Carolina Constitution provided for the establishment of a public school system, supported by taxes for both white and black scholars. Legislation for a public school system was ratified April 12, 1869. Edgar W. Knight. *Public School Education in North Carolina* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916).
[29] Data compiled from monthly reports, SENC, BRFAL.

	(Mean[30])		
Total number of white teachers	86	90	111
Total number of black teachers	31	128	256
Number of black teachers as percentage of the total	26%	57%	70%

Given that black teachers made up such a large percentage of the teaching force, they certainly warrant more scholarly attention than they have previously received. Several celebrated cases of northern black teachers, including Charlotte Forten and others, have received due attention, but only a handful of southern black teachers have appeared in the literature.[31] Some effort should be made to paint a collective portrait of the legions of black teachers who filled freedpeople's schoolhouses. From a list of approximately 450 names of teachers as indicated in an undated list in the North Carolina Freedmen's Bureau Records, 61 could be identified with reasonable certainty in the 1870 census.[32] Of these, 19 were white teachers, eleven of them natives of northern states.[33] The remaining 42, who are listed by the census as black or mulatto, offer a non-scientific sample of the black teachers who staffed the freedpeople's schools. Because one of the factors considered in constructing this list was that the occupation of the person listed in the census was "teaching school," "school teacher," or, in two cases, "minister of the Gospel," this

[30] Mean numbers in the chart are rounded to the nearest whole number.

[31] Notable exceptions include Mary S. Peake, a Virginia native and graduate of Oberlin who is credited as being the first freedmen's school teacher, Francis L. and Thomas W. Cardozo, and Sara Stanley of New Bern, N.C. All of these teachers were sponsored by the American Missionary Association and were free before the Civil War. See James McPherson ed. *Lockwood & Forten: Two Black Teachers During the Civil War.* New York: Arno Press, 1969. Lockwood's piece is a biography of Peake. On the Cardozos, see Edmund L. Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, & Race Relations: Charleston's Avery Normal Institute*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990. For Sara Stanley, see Ellen Nickenzie Lawson and Marlene D. Merrill, *The Three Sarahs: Documents of Antebellum Black College Women*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984.

[32] Names that were unique to the location corresponding to the location listed in the Bureau records for an individual were assumed to represent a match, as were individuals whose name and location matched, and listed teaching school as an occupation.

[33] Of the remaining eight, seven were natives of North Carolina and one was a native of South Carolina.

sample is biased towards the inclusion of teachers who were still working in that capacity in or around 1870. The sample is also likely to be biased towards the inclusion of males, as female teachers whose surnames changed between being listed in the Bureau records and being listed in the 1870 census would not have been located. Despite these, and other, limitations, this sample can still be of some value in offering tentative suggestions about the pool of black teachers. The mean number of black teachers during the school year from August 1868 through July 1869 was 256. Using this number as an estimate, a sample of 42 represents roughly 15% of the total.

Of the forty-two teachers in the sample, thirty-three (79%) were natives of North Carolina, suggesting that an overwhelming majority of the teachers who were recorded as black in the Freedmen's Bureau school records were also natives of North Carolina. Three (7%) of the teachers in the sample were natives of South Carolina, and two (5%) of the total came from each of the states of Virginia, Mississippi, and Pennsylvania. Thus, in this sample 95% of the teachers were natives of the South. Table 3 shows a breakdown of this sample by sex, and the mean age and race, as listed in the census, by sex. The female teachers were younger, on average, and were twice as likely to have been recorded as mulatto.

Table 3

	N	Mean Age	Percentage Black	Percentage "Mulatto"
Male	32	31	72%	28%
Female	10	26	40%	60%
Total	42	29	64%	36%

Unfortunately, it is difficult to tell what proportion of the teachers were ex-slaves and what proportion had been free previous to the Civil War. Certainly, free black people had been better situated to become literate before emancipation, and thus were poised to seize upon leadership roles during Reconstruction. There is ample evidence, however, that enough fissures existed in

the slave regime to allow some portion of the slave population to become literate.[34] So we must not assume that all of the black southerners who became teachers during Reconstruction had been free. Indeed a few of the teachers named in this paper were evidently ex-slaves who had become literate under slavery (see examples below). Others became literate during the immediate post-emancipation years in freedpeople's schools, and then became teachers themselves.

As much as literacy meant freedom for the students, teaching and earning an income could mean freedom for a teacher. Teaching offered an opportunity to escape more traditional occupations, including laboring on farms. While the prospects of securing a steady income either through the subscription or tuition payments of students or through sponsorship of a northern missionary society were anything but certain, they were at least as good as any other viable option available to them. For some, teaching appeared to offer the best opportunity for survival. For black men, in particular, teaching school provided opportunities for further career advancement. As community leaders, school teachers were well positioned to fill political posts. Two of the teachers in the above sample, S.A. Busbey of Greene County, and W.T. Mabson of Edgecombe County became involved in the local politics of North Carolina's famed "Black Second."[35] Hiram Husband, a black teacher in Alamance County described his decision to take up teaching in the following terms:

> I have been teaching them commencing in October 22 AD 1866 and have continued until [sic] February 27 AD 1868 and I wish to continue my school if possible that we had money to go on with but the colored friends are not able to pay their tuition enough to support the teacher… I have taught them to enable me to nerish[sic] my body with food.[36]

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[34] See William Preston Vaughn, *Schools for All: The Blacks & Public Education in the South, 1865-1877 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974),* p. 2. Henry Allen Bullock. *A History of Negro Education in the South From 1619 to the Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). Jones, p. 59-61.

[35] Anderson, Eric. *Race and Politics in North Carolina, 1872-1901: The Black Second* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), p. 39, 42.

[36] Hiram Husband to Fiske, Alamance Co., N.C. 17 March 1868. SENC, BRFAL.

Another teacher, John S. Dula, "a young freedmen," apparently was willing to take payment from his pupils in either cash or grain, indicating that even if an income was not available, he hoped teaching might sustain his body.[37] Dula, however, had apparently expected more, as he had previously written to Fiske complaining that he had received little of the $25 per month that he claimed to have been told he would receive.[38]

Others stressed that teaching was a sacrifice, implicitly suggesting that other opportunities might offer a better chance for financial gain. The expression of such sentiments may merely have been the strategy of petitioners seeking to impress upon the Superintendent both the earnestness of their devotion to teaching and their dire need for financial assistance. These expressions too, reveal that the teachers believed in the possibility that their work could offer some measure of financial security and independence (from arrangements such as sharecropping if not from dependence on external sources of aid). In a plea to Superintendent Fiske, Catawba teacher A.B. Smyer wrote:

> We can't pay for our land and build a house and pay the teacher and clothe our families, nay we can hardly clothe ourselves… I have my family to maintain as well as these poor people. I am nearly as any of them and it is hard for me to teach for nothing and board my self.[39]

For others, better economic opportunities may have indeed existed, and thus teaching was a true financial sacrifice. A black teacher in Warrenton, William Cawthorne, for example, wrote to Fiske to request a replacement for himself so that he could return to his trade as a shoemaker.[40]

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[37] C.C. Jones to Fiske, Patterson, N.C., 2 May 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[38] John S. Dula to Rev. F.A. Fiske, Caldwell County, N.C., 27 November 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[39] A. B. Smyer to Fiske, Catawba Station, N.C., 26 November 1867. SENC, BRFAL. See also, J.H.M. Johnson to Fiske, Tarboro, N.C., 22 May 1867. SENC, BRFAL. Johnson wrote to Superintendent Fiske claiming "if any school in this state is entitled to aid it is my school," and "I have done my duty to the Freedmen and spent nearly my last dollar for their education."
[40] William Cawthorne to Fiske, Warrenton, N.C. 17 April 1866. SENC, BRFAL. Note, Cawthorne was Secretary pro tem. at the Freedmen's Convention in Raleigh in October 1866.

On the whole, the correspondence of the teachers to the superintendent offers only rare glimpses into the background and motivations of the teachers. One example is a letter from freedwoman Lucy Brown. Brown wrote to Superintendent Fiske in March 1868 concerning her subscription school of twenty-one scholars in Haywood, North Carolina. The school, she explained, would have to be closed if she did not receive aid with which she could pay rent for the schoolhouse. At stake was not just the survival of the school, but Brown's livelihood. Brown depended on her monthly salary of $15.75 (based on the $0.75/month tuition of her twenty-one pupils), to provide for herself and her three children. Brown explained her predicament to Rev. Fiske:

> My husband died the 12th of last June and left me no permanent home, and scarcely anything else except my three little dependents…and I was forsed[sic] to teach school to support and educate my little ones…Rev. Sir, if you can assist the fatherless in any way please do so forthwith. The rent of the two houses is not paid for from the 3rd of February last, if you can pay for the rent of the houses or help me in anyway you will please remit your donation to me, or to Mr. L.K. Harris my former master who owns the houses I occupy…. Had it not been for the little learning that my former kind master gave me I should now be a hated beggar.[41]

Brown's "kind master" was now demanding rent on the school house, and thus threatening the school's survival, but under whatever circumstances Brown was able to learn, she saw her education as the only thing keeping her and her family from becoming beggars.

While individual financial independence was an important motivation for southern black teachers, many viewed their work in broader community, or racial, terms. For example, John Dula wrote, "I desire to improve myself and aid my unfortunate race as much as possible…,"[42] a sentiment echoed by A.B. Smyer, who wrote, "if I could I would teach for my race as long as I

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[41] Lucy Brown to Rev. F.A. Fiske, Haywood, N.C., 21 March 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[42] John S. Dula to Rev. F.A. Fiske, Caldwell County, N.C., 27 November 1867. SENC, BRFAL.

have life and could be able to do so,"[43] and J.H.M. Johnson, also portrayed his work in terms of community uplift, writing, "I have labored with all energy and perseverance for the education of our people."[44]

Accepting Aid-Negotiating for Control

Self-supported schools appear in the records of the Freedmen's Bureau at the point which they could no longer sustain themselves without assistance *or* when they sought to take advantage of the opportunity to secure funding from the government to lighten the burden of their sacrifice. A letter from Rev. Henry Tupper of Raleigh reveals that his church building, which was owned by its black congregation, had housed a freedpeople's school for the previous three months without compensation. Given the opportunity, however, Tupper contracted with the Bureau to be paid a sum of $15.00 per month for rental of the building.[45]

In other cases, self-supporting schools sought aid from the Freedmen's Bureau once they had exhausted their resources, or because they believed that public aid would allow them to serve greater numbers of scholars. Arthur Anderson petitioned the Bureau in October 1867, "having had a subscription school in our neighborhood for one month and having thereby exhausted pretty much all our means in supporting said school we ask your aid that we may continue the school."[46] Anderson reported that twenty-three scholars attended the school, but estimated that as many as forty would attend if the school were "free."[47] John Hyman requested a teacher for a school in Warrenton, N.C. with the desire that the school might be a free school. He wrote, "we request a

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[43] A. B. Smyer to Fiske, Catawba Station, N.C., 26 November 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[44] J.H.M. Johnson to Fiske, Tarboro, N.C., 22 May 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[45] Henry Tupper to Fiske, Raleigh, N.C., 1 January 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[46] Arthur Anderson to Fiske, Hillsboro, N.C., 23 October 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[47] Ibid.

teacher to be sent to us if he can be sent under circumstances that will enable us to have really and in fact a '<u>free school</u>'"[48]

Communities of freedpeople demonstrated that they were willing to support schools without aid, but as it was offered through the Freedmen's Bureau and northern missionary societies, they sought to take advantage of financial and material assistance to ease their burden. In other cases, communities sought aid because they feared that they would be forced to close their schools without it. R. Fitzgerald wrote to Superintendent Fiske on behalf of a black school committee in Goldsboro, N.C.:

> Owing to the prevailing poverty of the colored people at Dudly Wayne Co. N.C. and their consequent inability to raise the requisite funds, the closing of the colored school at that place, heretofore a self-sustaining one, is fastly being apprehended, as the teacher there [has] not been paid her full wages for some time…. The poor people are indeed very earnest and would willingly resign all comforts of life (would there be any) in order to bestow upon their children an education and thus rendering them fit objects of all the rights and privileges heretofore so cruelly infringed upon.[49]

The poverty of freedpeople limited their ability to sustain schools, despite their best efforts. The aid that was made available by the federal government and benevolent societies enabled schools to survive, and in some cases, grow and thrive. This aid was welcomed, and as discussed above, actively sought after. Accepting aid, however, meant ceding independence. As dependence on external aid increased, freedpeople's control over the operation of schools decreased. A school's teacher, however, exercised considerable control over the day to day operations of a school and the content of its curriculum, and thus the question of who would teach was of critical importance and was contested by the Freedmen's Bureau, the various missionary societies, white southerners, and freedpeople. In addition to the question of who would teach, the questions of who was

[48] John Hyman, et al. to Fiske, Warrenton, N.C., 13 September 1966. SENC, BRFAL. Note, Hyman attended the Freedmen's Convention in Raleigh in October 1866. SENC, BRFAL.
[49] R. Fitzgerald to Fiske, Goldsboro, N.C., 20 February 1868. SENC, BRFAL.

qualified to teach, and how school buildings and resources were to be used were contested by freedpeople who sought to assert their control over the education of their children.

The evidence on the question of teacher preferences among communities of freedpeople, in terms of sex and race, evades simple generalization. The specific requests of freedpeople for teachers of a certain type varied widely. Some requests indicated a preference for female teachers, others for males. Many school committees specifically requested black teachers, while a few others requested white teachers. Other groups suggested the teacher they preferred by name, often having made previous arrangements with the potential teacher. The unifying theme of these requests was that the freedpeople's communities or their representatives sought to determine for themselves who or what type of teacher would preside over their schools. Aaron Wilson, for example, wrote on behalf of "others cold, citizens near White Oak Spring," requesting aid for a school of seventy five scholars and recommended Joseph W. McKee, "as *our choice* for teacher"[50] (emphasis added). Their choice, however, had to be negotiated with that of the sponsoring society or the Freedmen's Bureau which provided essential aid, and was often conditioned by the expected reaction of white people in the surrounding area.

In Elizabeth City, freedpeople requested that Superintendent Fiske arrange for white teachers to open a school for their community. The petition indicated that the freedpeople feared opposition to black teachers commencing a school, but also that they hoped the school would later be taken over by black teachers.[51] Thus, the true preference of the freedpeople, that black teachers would conduct their school, was tempered by a sober assessment of the expected response of white people in their community. Though such considerations might have been appropriate in other

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[50] Aaron Wilson to Fiske, Orange County, N.C., 23 September 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[51] E.A. Philbrook to Fiske, Elizabeth City, N.C., 2 December 1866. SENC, BRFAL.

locales as well, requests for white teachers were rare. More common among the correspondence to the superintendent's office were the petitions that not only indicated a preference for black teachers but directly requested them. The petitions for teachers included requests such as "colored man preferred," "anxious to procure a competent colored teacher," "[we request] a competent colored male teacher," and "we would like to have a teacher + we prefer a colored one," indicating a clear preference for black teachers, and in some cases indicating a gender preference as well.[52] Preferences for male teachers might have been made, as in a request from Rockingham, N.C. due to concerns for safety. William McFarland wrote to Fiske, "I do not think it best to send a Lady Teacher here as they would be subject to much contempt," showing, again, how preferences were shaped by the expected response of the community at large.[53]

A letter to Gov. Holden reveals another, very practical reason for preferring black teachers in which the author [illegible] wrote, "it would be necessary to employ a colored teacher as a white teacher could not find a place in that neighborhood to live on account of prejudice."[54] The prejudice the author refers to would have been that of local white people who, he suspects, would be unwilling to board a freedpeople's teacher, and would not tolerate a white teacher boarding with freedpeople. In Gaston County, a white landlord refused to allow a black family to board Margret Clark, a native white teacher. The landlord was responding to rumors that Clark "had been carrying on with some black men."[55]

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[52] William Jones to Fiske, Townsville, N.C., 13 February 1867. SENC, BRFAL. Byron Luflin to Fiske, Greenville, N.C., 2 April 1868. SENC, BRFAL. William Cawthorne to Fiske, Warrenton, N.C., 17 April 1866. SENC, BRFAL. Nelson Kelly to Fiske, Chapel Hill, N.C., 3 October 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[53] William McFarland to Fiske, Rockingham, N.C., 17 July 1867. SENC, BRFAL. Other examples of requests for male teachers include: Harry Webb to Fiske, Louisburg, N.C., 19 April 1866. SENC, BRFAL. F. Allison to Fiske, Rocky Mount, N.C., 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[54] [illegible] to Governor Holden, Enfield, N.C., 7 April 1869. SENC, BRFAL.
[55] [illegible] to Fiske, Dallas, N.C., 13 June 1868. SENC, BRFAL.

Some white southerners indicated that they favored the employment of southern white teachers in the Freedman's schools. W.B. Jones wrote in 1866, "some [white people] who express themselves in favor of schools for freedpeople desire that the societies which send teachers here should send money in lieu of teachers and hire resident teachers."[56] Jones appears to have been suspicious of the motives of the white people to whom he refers. At stake were potential jobs for white southerners, and more importantly, southern control over how and what the freedpeople were taught. White southerners largely resented the "Yankee schoolmarms" and other outsiders who they believed interfered with and disrupted Southern life by filling the heads of the freedpeople with notions of social equality and entitlement. White southerners seem to have preferred southern teachers, white or black, over northern ones.[57] Other sources suggest that white southerners preferred that black teachers teach black students, as one Bureau agent reported, "there seems to be no objection to the education of freedpeople by colored teachers but a dislike to have white people engage in the work is manifested."[58]

In addition to consideration of potential responses from white people in their communities, freedpeople had to negotiate their preferences with the missionary societies which often paid teachers, and the Freedmen's Bureau which determined what additional aid a school might receive. S.S. Ashley wrote in 1866, "I am satisfied that the successful prosecution of this work [freedpeople's education] requires the establishment either within this State or within the reach of the people of the state of an efficient Normal school for the education of colored young men and women as teachers."[59] Thus, early in the development of freedpeople's schools, some white people

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[56] W.B. Jones and J.B. Beckworth to Fisk Brewer, Smithfield, N.C., 14 September 1866. SENC, BRFAL.
[57] "In some places indifference is manifested but in most sections there is strong opposition to the introduction of teachers from the north," in "Monthly Report," Edenton, N.C., February 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[58] Dodge, "Monthly Report," Edenton, N.C., May 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[59] S.S. Ashley to F.A. Fiske, Wilmington, N.C., 28 December 1866. SENC, BRFAL.

were convinced that there must be black teachers. The northern societies who sponsored teachers shifted their preferences from employing only northern, mostly white female teachers to preferring black instructors.[60] C. Kennedy of the New York Branch of the Freedmen's Union Commission wrote to Fiske in February 1867, "if you can find [a] competent colored teacher for Townsville, we will pay him $25 or $30 per month. We want a half dozen colored teachers but are having difficulty in finding them."[61] While these developments offered considerable room for the freedpeople to negotiate for the support of the native black teachers they typically preferred, there remained a significant sticking point, that of the competency of the teachers.

While a few free southern black men and women such as Mary S. Peake and Sara G. Stanley had opportunities to travel north for instruction at places like Oberlin College, most of the men and women who would become teachers in freedpeople's schools lacked access to such formal training. As a result, their competency was constantly questioned by the missionary associations from which they requested support. In her study of northern teachers in freedpeople's schools in Georgia, Jacqueline Jones writes that northern officials, "believed that black teachers lacked the formal training to be effective instructors and that enlightened white men and women must assume major responsibility for establishing – and to a great extent teaching in – black schools throughout the state."[62]

Doubts of the competency of southern teachers were not based solely on race. Robert Harris, an A.M.A. sponsored northern black teacher in Fayetteville, N.C., also expressed reservations over the ability of black southerners to assume teaching roles. Harris had employed two black women, Mary Payne and Caroline Bryant as assistants, but wrote to A.M.A. field agent

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[60] Jones, p. 69-70.
[61] C. Kennedy to Fiske, New York, N.Y., 26 February 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[62] Jones, p. 68-69.

Rev. E.P. Smith, "they are engaged only as a temporary experiment and I hoped that in this we should have had one or two competent teachers from the South. I cannot recommend either as worthy of a commission."[63] It is not clear exactly what Harris's standards for competency may have been, but it is clear that Payne and Bryant did not meet them. While he found the teachers of some use, he wrote further, "these native teachers are not competent to manage a school, or to give proper instruction to those who are beyond the alphabet. We can only use them as assistants and they are poor at that."[64]

Indeed, lacking formal schooling of their own, few of the native southern teachers would have been qualified or even able to teach advanced subjects. Haley Blackwell wrote to Fiske from Oxford, N.C., "our present teacher [J. W. Freeman, a black male] cannot teach many of the scholars any longer with any benefit to them as his education is quite limited and we want one that can teach grammar, geography, Arithmetic…"[65] Blackwell's letter reveals a desire for advanced schooling, but also shows that the arrangement with Freemen was acceptable, if only on a temporary basis to provide a rudimentary education. J. Foote revealed similar standards in his request for a teacher, "a colored man or woman with a tolerable education would do."[66] Clinton Ciley reported to Fiske that "a mulatto man has promised to teach until a better teacher can be got…"[67] So while a priority was placed on reading, and anyone who possessed this skill might be called upon and employed to teach, educational aims were not limited to mere literacy, but aspired to gains in all branches.

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[63] Robert Harris to Rev. E.P. Smith. 9 January 1867. American Missionary Association Archives (microfilm).
[64] Ibid.
[65] Haley Blackwell to Fiske, Oxford, N.C., 2 May 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[66] J. Foote to Fiske, Plymouth, N.C., 14 February 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[67] Ciley to Fiske, Lenoir, N.C. 30 June 1867. SENC, BRFAL.

The willingness of freedpeople to accept financial assistance did not, however, indicate a willingness to become wholly subject to the wishes of the Bureau in the application of those funds. A Bureau agent in Warrenton, N.C., N.H. Downing, wrote to Superintendent Fiske to complain that when the teachers of a freedpeople's school left for the summer, local freedpeople started a new school.[68] Downing was incredulous at this self-assertion. He viewed the act as a lack of appreciation for the work of the Bureau. Ten days later, Downing wrote again to Fiske, "the Freedmen do not want my advice, + have no desire to be counseled by me in regard to their schoolhouse. They seem to want all the honor, they requested me to hand over the papers you sent and I did so."[69] What Downing framed in terms of an effort to deprive him of honor was the assertion of control by the freedpeople over the operations of their schoolhouse.

In June of the following year, the teacher of the freedpeople's school in Warrenton, Mr. Hempstead, lodged his own complaint with Superintendent Fiske about the behavior of the freedpeople there. Like Downing, he complained that the "leader among the Colored Com." had "not minded [Hempstead's] suggestions,"[70] in the construction of the schoolhouse. The larger problem, according to Hempstead, was that "the impression of many of the blacks seems to be that the house is not a schoolhouse but a Methodist Church and that the school is being kept in a Methodist Ch."[71] Hempstead's concern was that the tuition money he had collected (from the black scholars) was being used for the purposes of the church rather than the school, and, more to the point, that they were taking no consideration of his needs as a teacher. He was additionally concerned that the freedpeople might be misusing funds received from the Bureau. He wrote to

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[68] N.H. Downing to Fiske, Warrenton, N.C., 21 October 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[69] Downing to Fiske, Warrenton, N.C., 31 October 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[70] Hempstead to Fiske, Warrenton, N.C., 8 June 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[71] Ibid.

Fiske, "Will you tell me on what grounds these have received aid from the Bureau? Does the Bureau give them money to build churches[?]"[72] The freedpeople likely viewed the money as their own, given that it was collected from among their families, and put it to use as they saw fit. Where Hempstead saw conflict in spending "school money" for the purposes of building a church, the freedpeople likely viewed the missions of the church and school in service of the community as wholly reconcilable.

Indeed the relationship between churches and schools was very strong. In many cases, churches provided a preexisting community network that could be readily mobilized in support of schools. They also provided an institutional label upon which group claims could be made for Freedmen's Bureau aid.[73] Resources, including buildings, could be shared among churches and schools. The sharing could go both ways, as existing churches could rent or donate the use of buildings for schools, or, as above, school buildings could be used by churches.[74] In other cases, buildings were built by communities with both uses in mind.[75] Finally, church and school intersected in the form of the Sabbath school, which will be discussed below.

The Sabbath School Alternative

One reason that the contribution of black, and particularly native black, teachers has been undervalued is that little attention has been paid to the place of Sabbath Schools in Reconstruction

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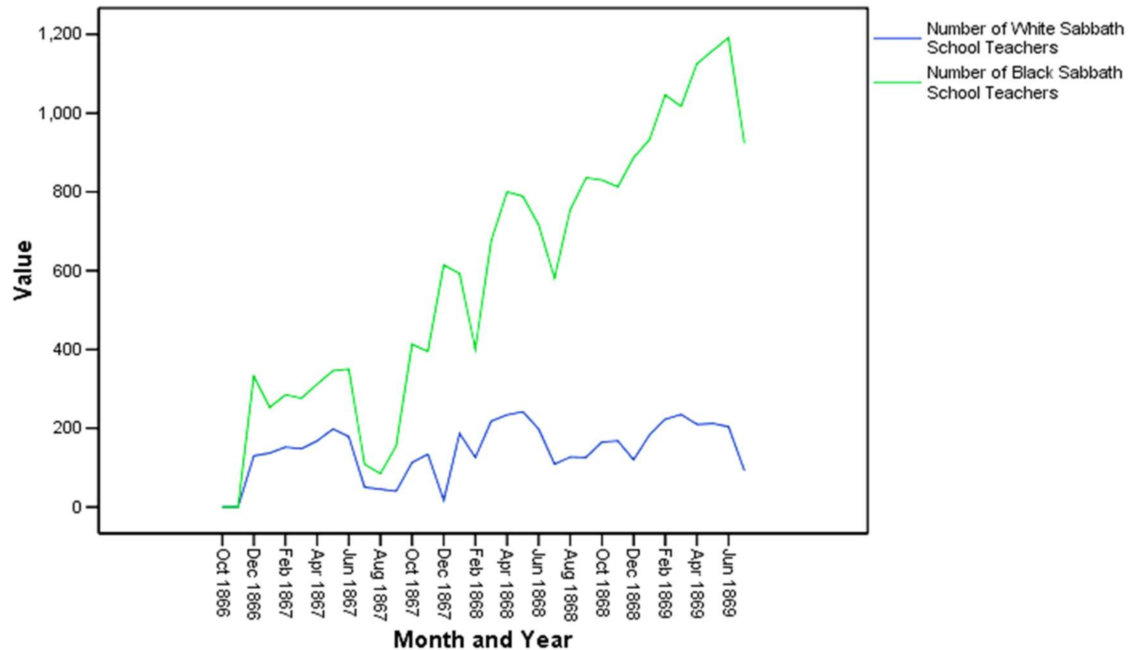
[72] Ibid.
[73] See for example, A.M.E. Minister to Dr. H.C. Vogell, Hookerton, N.C., April 1868. SENC, BRFAL. The minister of the Hookerton A.M.E. Church wrote on behalf of the community to secure aid to continue a day school. See also, Perry Miller, et al. to Fiske, Asheville, N.C., 10 December 1867. SENC, BRFAL. Miller and a committee of the African Zion Methodist Episcopal Church requested aid in erecting a building for education and worship.
[74] William Matton to Fiske, Charlotte, N.C., 22 February 1868. SENC, BRFAL. Matton wrote, "they have built a school house which answers the purpose of a church as well…."
[75] Aaron Wilson to Fiske, Orange County, N.C., 23 September 1867. SENC, BRFAL. In his letter, Wilson refers to the "white Oak Spring School House (& church)."

education. To be sure, the Sabbath school was not the same thing as a day school, but nonetheless provided opportunities for the education of children and adults, and did so in an arena in which black southerners were able to exercise a far greater degree of control than in schools that were dependent on Bureau aid. The significance of the Sabbath schools, lay, in part, in the number of pupils that were able to attend, even if they could not attend a day school. For the period of October 1866 to April 1868, the number of Sabbath school pupils (reported and unreported) remained close to, or below, the number of day school pupils (reported and unreported). In May 1868, however, there were over two thousand more Sabbath school pupils than day school pupils. The gap between the number of Sabbath school pupils and day school pupils grew steadily thereafter, with the difference reaching over ten thousand in May 1869.

Thus, from May 1868 to July 1869, at least, many thousands more pupils were schooled in Sabbath Schools than day schools, even if we assume that each pupil counted at a day school might also have been counted as a Sabbath school pupil. In gross terms, the number of Sabbath school pupils reached as high as 25,000 in May 1869. These Sabbath schools were primarily, and increasingly, staffed and maintained by local black communities, typically in association with an independent black church. The figure above shows a dramatic increase in the number of black Sabbath school teachers while the number of white Sabbath school teachers remained relatively steady. As the absolute number of black Sabbath school teachers rose, the proportion of black teachers in relation to the whole, which remained above 60% throughout this period, reached as high as 91% in July 1869. During this same period, the number of Sabbath schools recorded in the Freedmen's Bureau records increased from 58 in October 1866 to 321 in July 1869, peaking at 399 in May 1869. The mean number of Sabbath schools for the first "school year" of this period



(October 1866-July 1867) was 85. This number increased in each of the following years, to 159 from August 1867 through July 1868, and to 332 in the year from August 1868 to July 1869.

Table 4[76]

	Year 1 Oct.1866-Jul.1867 (mean)	Year 2 Aug.1867-Jul.1868 (mean)	Year 3 Aug.1868-Jul.1869 (mean)
Number of Black Sabbath School Teachers	226	518	960
Percentage of total number of Sabbath school teachers who were black	66%	77%	85%
Number of Sabbath schools	85	159	332
Number of Sabbath school pupils	6,837	10,249	19,547

There is little evidence in the Freedmen's Bureau records to show exactly what went on in these schools, which is largely a function of their autonomy, but it is very likely that the nature of the "curriculum" of the Sabbath schools was explicitly Christian. The textbooks, when available, were testaments. In this way, however, the Sabbath schools probably did not differ significantly

[76] Data compiled from SENC, BRFAL.

from private or Bureau-funded schools. The difference would have been that the Christian curriculum of the Sabbath schools was fashioned and interpreted by black teachers rather than by northern missionaries and their societies.

William Doherty, a white Bureau agent who kept unusually thorough records of the Sabbath schools in the district surrounding Elizabeth City, offered these remarks:

> These Sunday Schools, in general, very humble, taught exclusively by Cold persons, who can just read - + held in private houses, or in Cold Churches, often only in open sheds – Yet they are doing a good work, in teaching to read the Holy Scriptures – Every Negro [?], where anyone can read, has been supplied by me, with a Bible or Testament – And all these Sunday Schools have been repeatedly supplied with Books, Bibles, papers, etc.[77]

Doherty appears to have limited his involvement with the Sabbath schools to supplying Bibles and other materials, while leaving the teachers to their work. The title "teacher," was no doubt used more loosely to describe the leaders of the Sabbath schools than their counterparts in the day schools. Accordingly, there was no parallel in the correspondence regarding the Sabbath schools to the extensive dialogue between Bureau agents and the state superintendent over the competence of day school teachers. One likely cause of the relatively laissez-faire attitude of officials like Doherty was the fact that the missionary societies and the Bureau did not pay the teachers' salaries or offer any support beyond supplying Sunday school materials. The reach of the Bureau into the affairs of the schools, then, seems not to have gone past the content of the materials it supplied. The operation of the schools, including the interpretation and use of school materials, thus, fell to the black communities themselves.

In his November 1868 monthly report for the district of Elizabeth City, Doherty reported that the day schools had been suspended due to a lack of funding. He wrote, "no teachers of day

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[77] William Doherty, "A List of the Sunday Schools in the Sub-District Elizabeth City, NC Among the Freedmen." November 1868. SENC, BRFAL.

schools at present – the people are utterly unable to support them on account of the failure of crops these two years and the Northern Societies have sent no teachers this season."[78] In the same report, however, Doherty listed 42 "colored" teachers for the district's 22 Sabbath schools. His Sabbath school report for that month lists 21 "Superintendents," likely the head teachers, of their respective schools. Of these 21, only one was listed as being white, and all were males. The largest school in the district was the Elizabeth City Colored Church Sabbath School, with 120 pupils. William C. Butler, a 33 year-old mulatto and Methodist Minister, served as superintendent. Doherty's report also listed the date on which "Books, Bibles, Papers, [and] Supplies" had been delivered to each of the schools.

Many black children would have had their first introduction to formal education in Sabbath schools. This introduction was important in giving the freedpeople the rudiments of education as well as socializing them for future schooling. A Mr. Barringer of Salisbury, N.C. reported to Superintendent Fiske in 1867, "we have no doubt it has done them good as well as started them in education, [they are] now asking for school."[79] The Sabbath school was a place where freedpeople could and did learn to read. J. R. Montague wrote to Fiske in May 1868 to relate to him the efforts of freedpeople in the Dutchville district. The letter shows the initiative of the freedpeople to establish Sabbath Schools with educational objectives, their success in teaching children to read, as well as their desire to continue to improve the school. Montague wrote:

> The Freedmen in the Dutchville District near me, about 12 months since, purchased an acre, of land. To be used for school and church purposes only. They commenced a Sunday School, and prayer meeting among themselves. No white person [was] assisting them. They had a large Sunday school, and good order in their meeting. About 12 have learned how to read. Many of them are now studying, and work in

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[78] William Doherty, "Monthly Report." November 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[79] D. Barringer to Fiske, Salisbury, N.C. 25 November 1867. SENC, BRFAL.

> the field for support, taking lessons from Moses [Hester, a local black who served as teacher] and each other.[80]

Having been impressed by the initiative and the character, which he taught "better than usual" for "colored People," Montague had taken it upon himself to be a missionary to the people. He had become a regular preacher at their church, and wrote to Fiske on their behalf to request books. Montague wrote, "they are worthy of your benevolence, being hard run for bread for their families."[81] On the progress of schools in Franklin County, William Linseay wrote that of 17 children attending Day school and 95 in Sabbath School 25 were able to read testaments.[82]

Sabbath schools were viewed, both by freedpeople and Bureau agents or white teachers, as potential precursors to day schools. A white preacher in Greensboro wrote to Fiske, "they are very anxious that their children should be able to read… To this end I have established for the present a Sabbath school among them hoping to be able to get them a teacher & have a day school by Autumn when their children can be spared farm labor." [83] In New Bern, a black Sabbath school teacher, Aaron Biddle, believed that the two meeting houses used for Sabbath school could be made into a day school with the addition of a teacher. It is not clear whether Biddle planned to be that teacher, if he could get financial support, or if he assumed that the Bureau would send a teacher.[84]

Two black teachers from Alamance County, Henry C. Isley and Daniel Ray, filed a hand-written monthly report[85] to Superintendent Fiske for their Sabbath school in March 1868. In addition to reporting an enrollment of 18 males and 21 females, the teachers included a plea, "this

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[80] J. R. Montague to Fiske, Tally Ho, N. C., 17 May 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[81] Ibid.
[82] William L. Linseay to Vogell, Franklin County, 2 September 1869. SENC, BRFAL.
[83] G. W. Welker to Fiske, Greensboro, N.C., 21 May 1866. SENC, BRFAL.
[84] A. A. Ellsworth to Fiske, New Bern, N.C., 2 December 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[85] Most monthly reports were submitted on printed forms distributed by the superintendent.

is a Sabbath School. Being desirous of obtaining an education not having money on hand to carry on a weekday school. We desire aid on our efforts."[86] With extra aid, they hoped, they could transform their Sabbath school into a day school. The Sabbath school gave petitioners a more solid basis for their estimates of student participation for a day school and proved the eagerness of freedpeople in the area to obtain an education. Once a day school had been established, a Sabbath school could be a means for recruiting new students, as John A. Gale reported from Wadesboro, "as the Sabbath School improves in interest so the day school is improving."[87]

Just as the Sabbath schools often preceded day school, they also served as substitutes when day schools had to be closed. School closures could be caused by the absence of a teacher or by the absence of students who were compelled to assist their families [for the ultimate benefit of a landowner] in harvesting crops. Alex Redding reported to Fiske that while educational efforts in Belvidere had been progressing well, 'the destitute circumstances of the freedmen and the pressing necessity that we adjourn our day schools through crop time." Redding added, "we wish to continue a Sabbath school [in the] mean time."[88] In Rock Fish, N.C. schools were held on Saturday and Sunday during May of 1868 because the scholars were required to labor in the fields.[89] In Dover, North Carolina, William Lego reported that Sunday was the only day that children were free from field labor and thus only a Sunday school could be maintained there.[90] Thus, even when landlords made claims on children's labor and time, keeping them from seeking educational opportunities, the Sabbath school offered an alternative site for them to continue their education, under the tutelage of literate black neighbors.

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[86] Henry C. Isley and Daniel Roy to superintendent, Alamance Co., N.C. March 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[87] John A. Gale to Vogell, Wadesboro, N.C., 12 June 1869. SENC, BRFAL.
[88] Alex Redding to Fiske, Belvidere, N.C., 16 March 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[89] James M. Savage to Fiske, Rock Fish, N.C. 10 June 1868. SENC, BRFAL.
[90] William Lego to Fiske, Dover, Craven Co., N.C. 22 March 1868. SENC, BRFAL.

The Meaning of Education

A.B. Smyer's plea, "O give us assistance for mercy sake please reply immediately and determine whether we must sink or whether we shall yet be a people,"[91] underscored his belief that education was part of what it meant to be a people. Indeed while freedpeople lived under the constant threat of having their newfound liberty revoked in a society still dominated by a class of people bent on returning them to a status as near to slavery as possible, literacy represented a piece of freedom that, once attained, could not easily be taken away. Still, Smyer's words serve as a reminder that in 1867, "sinking" was still a very real possibility. Not least of the problems that Smyer and other teachers would face was the hostility of local white people. William Cawthorne, a black shoe-maker turned teacher, wrote, "you know the majority of the white people here are opposed to a freedmen's school. They know they are free now and as long as they can keep them in ignorance they are as great a slave to them as they ever were in a sense."[92] Cawthorne's letter speaks to the efforts of some white people to reassert control over ex-slaves. Opposition to educational efforts was manifested through harassment of teachers and scholars and in the most extreme instances, the burning and destruction of schoolhouses. In their hostility, however, white opponents too implicitly acknowledged that education had meaning. Freedpeople's education represented a threat to the status quo.

Recognition of the threat posed by freedpeople's pursuit of education, could however, in certain circumstances, lead white people to support freedpeople's schools. To some white southerners, freedpeople's education, if left to the freedpeople and the Freedmen's Bureau, meant a loosening of their control over freedpeople's labor. Some white southerners dangled the promise

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[91] A. B. Smyer to Fiske, Catawba Station, N.C. 26 November 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[92] William Cawthorne to Fiske, 25 November 1865. SENC, BRFAL.

(and actuality) of schools before the freedpeople in order to maintain control over a labor supply, in some cases with the help of Freedmen's Bureau agents and representatives of northern missionary societies.

One such agent was H.S. Beals, a representative of the American Missionary Society. Beals was certainly sympathetic to the cause of the freedpeople, but had his own ideas as to why their education was so important. Beals wrote, "it will be impossible to induce Freedmen to go out on the farms unless we can send the schools with them, with all their privileges."[93] The freedpeople's desire for education, particularly in rural areas, posed a threat to labor control. The willingness of freedpeople to move from the country to the city, where there were schools, drew them away from their work in rural farms. Beals determined that the answer to this problem was to send the schools to them (to the rural areas). In addition to his concern for labor control, Beals had a broader concern for social order. He wrote, "watching the many disorders in the schools as well as in the community where ignorance prevails, I am more than ever convinced that the security of the race lies in their education."[94] Beals claimed that, as an uneducated class, black people could not function orderly in the absence of the restraint of civil law.

In 1866, S.S. Ashley, also an American Missionary Association official, made similar observations regarding the problem that freedpeople's devotion to education presented to planters:

> There are several parts in this district [Wilmington] where the planters are establishing schools as a matter of self-defense ie the Freedmen insist on coming to the City because by so doing their children can attend schools therefore plantation schools are a necessity if the farmer would retain their hands.[95]

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[93] H.S. Beals to Fiske, Beaufort, N.C., 20 April 1867. SENC, BRFAL.
[94] ibid.
[95] S.S. Ashley to Fiske, Wilmington, N.C., 3 May 1866. SENC, BRFAL.

This phenomenon was noted also, by Beals, who suggested that "schools be sent to them [rural black residents]" so that they would remain to work the fields.[96] Indeed there is evidence of planters establishing schools for freedpeople on their plantations elsewhere as did Mr. W.H. Warden of Rowan County and William S. Battle who made arrangements "to teach the freed children whose parents are under his employ," by a white lady who would be acceptable to his neighbors.[97]

That freedpeople's education carried meaning is further evident in the reactions of white people who desperately cried out for educational opportunities for poor white children, lest they fall behind the progress of their black peers. Antebellum State Superintendent of Common schools, Calvin H. Wiley addressed freedpeople's education in his final official report on education in the state in 1866, "and let it be added that a new race of freedmen now enter the lists in intellectual competition with those who have been the ruling class; and that while we rejoice to see those people rising in the moral scale, it will be a reproach to the whites to be outstripped by them."[98] W.L. Miller, a white Bureau agent, also viewed the matter of education in racial terms, "shall our own race be allowed to sink whilst we are trying to elevate the poor blacks[?]"[99]

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[96] H.S. Beals to Fiske, Beaufort, N.C., 20 April, 1867. SENC, BRFAL.

[97] F.A. Fiske to W.H. Warden, Raleigh, N.C., 10 September 1866. SENC, BRFAL. F. Allison to Fiske, Tarboro, N.C., 19 July 1867. SENC, BRFAL. Of course not all planters acquiesced to freedpeople's demands for educational opportunities. William Matton wrote to Fiske that the freedpeople were "hired at such low wages, that they are barely able to live, and are the subjects of all sorts of oppressive treatment, in many cases employers deny them the privilege of attending night school, and the general sentiment of the former owners is decidedly hostile to their advancement or education." William Matton to Fiske, Charlotte, N.C., 22 February 1868. SENC, BRFAL. The white people who endeavored to establish schools on their plantations or land did not hesitate to request compensation from the Freedmen's Bureau for their efforts. A Rev. Duckworth of Transylvania County who had agreed to house and teach a freedpeople's school on his land requested that Superintendent Fiske, "please inform [him] how to proceed so as to secure the money," and he added, "they [the freedpeople] will pay me the balance of their tuition by subscription." Rev. J.H. Duckworth to Fiske, Dunnes Rock, N.C., 7 September 1868. SENC, BRFAL.

[98] "Calvin Wiley, "Report of the Superintendent of Common Schools," *The Daily Sentinel*, Vol. 1, No. 141. Thursday 25 January 1866.

[99] W.L. Miller to Fiske, Charlotte, N.C., 1 February 1868.

The reaction of white southerners to freedpeople's education shows that they perceived the educational progress of the freedpeople to be a threat to the racial and economic status quo. For their part, the freedmen indeed sought to secure their status as free people and viewed education as one way to pursue and protect that status. Because education figured so centrally to their freedom, black southerners took the initiative to establish and maintain schools, and thought they welcomed and sought aid from Freedmen's Bureau and northern missionary societies they sought to maintain their control over the schools and did so through their role as teachers and by pouring their resources into Sabbath schools where they enjoyed considerable autonomy.

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