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The Black New South: A study of local black leadership in Virginia and Alabama, 1874-1897

by

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ABSTRACT
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This is a study of local black leadership in Alabama and Virginia in the 1880s. It is both an Intellectual and Social History - comparing the thinking and social setting of the local black elite in these two states using both a biographical and thematic approach. It explores how a protest tradition among local leaders remained strong in the South beyond the end of Reconstruction – a result of the relative 'flexibility' in southern race relations in the 1880s. Through a series of case studies, issues such as civil rights and the participation in party politics will be explored along with those of education and emigration. All of these subjects were significant to the local elite studied here; however, civil rights and education dominated discussion throughout the 1880s. Moreover, a comparative approach will provide a means of studying change and continuity in the thinking of the local black elite over the course of the 1880s; highlighting, for example, how one issue could be more prominent in one state over another, and how this might change over time.

As well as exploring the local context, a comparison will also be made with the national black elite – in particular, with Frederick Douglass. How the thinking of Douglass influenced, and was influenced by, local black leaders, will form part of this study. In addition, this study will determine how representative Booker T. Washington was as a local black leader, arguing that his relationship with other southern leaders in the 1880s was much closer than has been assumed. Above all, this thesis will assess how the local black elite trod the fine, often difficult, line between whites on the one hand, and the southern blacks they represented on the other, in the years following Reconstruction.

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Introduction

This thesis is a comparative study of local southern black leadership in the 1880s, drawing on the experiences of leaders in Alabama and Virginia. Through a biographical and thematic approach, it will argue that local context played a key role on the ideologies of black leaders in these two states, and reveal that a protest tradition continued from the Reconstruction era. Such continuity took on many forms. For example, participation in party politics continued at a local level in these two states throughout the 1880s. This was not simply through involvement with the Republican Party. Political alternatives, including support for the Democratic Party, remained an ever-present reality among southern black leaders throughout this period. In addition, Frederick Douglass played a key role in the thinking of local black leaders, with his advocacy of political and civil rights, as well as pushing for self-help and racial solidarity. What 'protest' meant for these different leaders did vary at the local level, and changed over time depending on local circumstances and the individual.

Indeed, the philosophy of Booker T. Washington was embraced by a number of local leaders, especially in Alabama. Whilst Washington became a nationally-known leader, the extent to which he was, first and foremost, a local black leader speaking for rural blacks in Alabama, will be assessed in this study. Washington was different from many of the local black elite because he was a leader in the rural South, as opposed to the majority who were urban based. Even so, on a broader level, was Washington simply voicing in the 1890s a widespread belief already common among the local black elite that African Americans had to accept the *status quo* for the time being, and focus, instead, on self-help and racial solidarity?

Virginia and Alabama have been chosen because they represent the Upper and Lower South (as well as an older seaboard state with a state less than a century old). However, despite this difference in age, the black elite in both states was urban based, largely in the state capitals. Both Montgomery, Alabama, and Richmond, Virginia,

developed black districts that became from the end of the Civil War onwards, the centres of black political activity in these states.[1] The rapid industrialisation of some areas of the South largely bypassed Virginia, whereas Birmingham, Alabama, became a quintessential New South city, rather like Atlanta, Georgia.[2]

Of course, in order to understand the 1880s, what preceded and then followed this decade must be considered. Perhaps the key difference between the two states was how Reconstruction unfolded and the way in which Redemption came about. Reconstruction in Alabama followed a course similar to other southern states. The state's constitution was amended in 1867, enfranchising more than 90,000 African Americans.[3] The Republican Party was founded in the state that same year, made up of a coalition of African Americans, northern whites and also those from the Tennessee Valley. Most African Americans were Republican supporters, through their involvement with the Union League.[4] However, Union League activity was short-lived – it lasted barely 12 months – due to violence towards its members by the Ku Klux Klan, and loss of interest by the state Republican Party.[5]

However, a legacy of the Union League movement was to unite white opposition to the dominance of politicians in the Black Belt, who were largely Democrats.[6] The Black Belt was the political and economic centre of the state. Cotton continued to be the predominant industry, with Montgomery as a centre for the cotton

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[1] The black population in Richmond grew from 27,835 in 1880 to 32,330 in 1890 (although this was a drop in the percentage of the city's population by 4 per cent). In Montgomery, the black population remained at 59 per cent of the city's population throughout the 1880s, rising from 9,931 in 1880 to 12,987 by 1890. Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (Urbana, 1980), p. 19.

[2] Edward Ayers notes that Birmingham was regarded as 'a dreamed-of Southern industrial city'. The expansion of the state's railroads was a catalyst for the city's growth as well as heavy investment from industrialists, who were supported by the state government. The city's prosperity was demonstrated by its explosion in population. In 1880, the city's population stood at 3,000. This rose dramatically to 26,000 by 1890, and 38,000 by 1900. Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, 1992), p. 59

[3] Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins, The Scalawag in Alabama Politics, 1865-1881 (Alabama, 1977), p.25

[4] Ibid., p. 21

[5] Peter Kolchin, *First Freedom: The Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Westport, CN, 1972), pp. 154-155

[6] Ibid., p. 155; Allen Johnston Going, *Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874-1890* (1951; Tuscaloosa, AL, 1992), p.1

trade. The city re-emerged as the primary industrial centre of the state after the war, which included not only cotton, but also iron and coal (until Birmingham took over). The development of the state's railroad network assisted with this trade, supported financially by the state government. However, it is this same investment that led to the state debt increasing dramatically.

Whilst the Republicans held the vast majority of seats in the state Senate, the Democrats held a significant majority in the state House of Representatives, and after 1870, the Governor's mansion as well. The political deadlock that ensued throughout the first half of the 1870s meant that no clear policy towards tackling the state debt emerged. As historian Allen Johnston Going notes, 'While the state government approached bankruptcy, schools languished, and agriculture suffered from country-wide depression, the legislature could reach no agreement on solving or alleviating the distress'.[7]

By contrast, Reconstruction in Virginia lasted only four years and did not witness the emergence of a Republican-controlled state legislature, even though it became under military rule (as with the other southern states) following the 1867 Reconstruction Act. In addition, it did not experience the level of violence against Republican voters as in other southern states. Whilst violence had been pronounced in Virginia in the immediate post-war years, there was a distinct lack of what one historian regards 'paramilitary violence' in the state during the late 1860s and early 1870s, because Radical Reconstruction had not rooted itself in the state.[8]

Indeed, it has been suggested that the strength of Radical Republicans in the 1867 to 1868 period led to its stunted growth. For example, many white Republicans wished to pursue a more moderate course in Virginian politics. They were unhappy with the Radicals' dominance of the party and of the constitutional convention, which drafted the revised state constitution in 1868. A particular point that angered many was

[7] Going, *Bourbon Democracy in Alabama*, p.7
[8] Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), p.369

the clause in the new state constitution that disqualified anyone associated with Confederacy from gaining political appointments. The result of such feeling was the forming of a coalition of moderate Republicans and Conservatives that won power in the 1869 state elections.[9]

However, there were a number of similarities with Alabama. Railroad construction in the Old Dominion was as intensive, as was the state debt. Even though 'moderates' were in power, the tactics used by whites to control the state elections were similar – fraud, and later, a poll tax. Furthermore, it is perhaps not surprising that African American involvement in party politics in both Alabama and Virginia was so intensive during Reconstruction. In Alabama this was suggested by the level of interest shown in the Union League, whereas in Virginia black political organisation can be traced back to before the end of the Civil War.

Following the end of Reconstruction, a programme of reform was proposed and articulated by southern newspaper editors that embraced racial harmony, sectional reconciliation, and a diversified economy (in particular, a push for further industrialisation). This became known as the New South and the political impetus for it came with the restoration of southern 'home rule', whereby white Democrats regained control of southern state legislatures from the Republican Party. These Democrats have subsequently been labelled as redeemers (the period immediately after Reconstruction thus called Redemption), for they removed the twin imposition of northern carpetbaggers and African Americans from political office, and brought to an end the 'tragic era' of Reconstruction. The story was more complex than this. For example, blacks never held the degree of power that many whites assumed they had, for white Republicans controlled the party and the distribution patronage. Moreover, Redemption in some states had occurred much earlier than the mid-to-late 1870s, such as Virginia,

[9] Ibid., pp. 367-69

which was redeemed in 1869. Alabama, on the other hand, was redeemed later in 1874.[10]

Therefore, the way that Reconstruction came to an end differed significantly in both states. Redemption in Virginia was achieved in a fairly calm manner, with a coalition of moderate Republicans and Democrats (or Conservatives) gaining control of the state legislature from Radical Republicans in 1869. In many ways, Redemption did not carry the level of significance in this state as it would in others, for African Americans were not perceived to be in control of state affairs. By contrast, violence surrounded the end of Reconstruction in Alabama in 1874. It was deemed by the Redeemers (white Democrats) that this would be the only way to bring 'black rule' to an end in the state and shore-up their own power base.

As can be seen, therefore, this research cannot be viewed in isolation from the white South. White responses to how blacks were defining themselves will form a point of comparison that will be drawn on throughout this study. Moreover, the way in which blacks interacted with state politics must also be analysed, for many of the black protest organisations that emerged did so in reaction to local events. The black national and state conventions that were held in this period were a manifestation of this fact. However, did African-Americans have their own vision for a new South, and was this set out in the black press and the state and national conventions? Did a Black New South emerge in this period, spearheaded by the local black elite?

At its heart, this study will be an investigation of the meaning of freedom and citizenship in the South in the 1880s. This is a decade that C. Vann Woodward considered to be one of flexibility and experimentation in race relations, before hardening in the 1890s with the advent of Jim Crow segregation.[11] Does this claim still

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[10] The best work on Redemption in Alabama is. For Virginia, see Jack P. Maddex*, The Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1879: A Study in Reconstruction Politics* (Chapel Hill, 1970).

[11] No study of southern race relations in the late nineteenth century can begin without reference to C. Vann Woodward. His *Strange Career of Jim Crow* provided a re-assessment of the 1880s, and has been used in this thesis where appropriate. Woodward's main thesis rested on the claim that the segregation laws of the 1890s were not a codification of southern 'folkways'; rather,

hold true? What did freedom actually mean for the black community, and how did they realise this when it was set out and defined by whites?

Literature

In terms of the historical literature on Virginia and Alabama, no monograph exists that studies specifically local black leadership in either of these states in the 1880s. To date, only black leaders from the Reconstruction era have been the focus of any systematic study. Whilst some of these case studies have been carried forward into the post-Redemption period, this has not been in any great detail. What follows is a systematic look at the key works for each state.

In the case of Alabama, three works stand out. The first is Loren Schweninger's monograph on James Rapier, the Reconstruction-era Congressman from Alabama. The second is Michael Fitzgerald's work on Reconstruction black politics in Mobile, Alabama. Both of these works do mention the post-Redemption period, but this more as an epilogue to the main substance of the texts. The third monograph is Richard Bailey's work on black leaders during the Reconstruction era. This provides detail on a number of leaders who continued into the 1880s, and beyond. Bailey makes reference to this, but his definition of leadership has been based on those who held political office, whether that was at local or state level. For the 1880s, only Allen Johnston Going's work deals with this decade, providing a systematic approach to the state's Redeemers. Despite its age, his book provides much needed contextual material, and offers an insight into the mind and methods of the white Democrats of this period.

Two other texts on Alabama need to be mentioned: the first is Sheldon Hackney's work on Populism and Progressivism at the turn of the twentieth century;

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they were something new. He regarded the period between the end of Reconstruction and the 1890s as a time of 'forgotten alternatives', where the South could have chosen an alternative route to the hard-line segregation laws. However, a collapse of the restraining forces in the South – southern paternalism, southern liberalism and southern radicalism – as well as a loss of interest in the North, meant that extremism met with little white opposition. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955; New York, 2002).

the other is Matt Brittain's Ph.D. thesis on black political activity post-1870. Hackney's study provides useful material on black thought and action in the state in the 1890s and beyond. My thesis is thus able to contribute to an understanding of what came immediately before this period, which Hackney does not do in any great detail. Brittain's thesis is rather sketchy on a number of points, such as the thinking of the black elite and how they gained power, and has been used simply to fill in some background information relevant to the 1870s and 1880s.[12]

Virginia has even fewer works that mention the 1880s in any great detail. The Readjuster period in the early 1880s is the exception, with a number of works focussing on this period. Jane Dailey's recent monograph is perhaps the best and has been used as the main source for this study, along with the comments made by Steven Hahn in his chapter on biracial politics in the 1880s. Of race relations in this period more generally, one has to turn to the half century-old monograph by Charles Wynes. Despite its age, it has a wealth of information, with its interpretation of the era generally in accord with Woodward's notion of the period as one of flexibility and experimentation in southern race relations. However, it contains little on local black leaders – for them, one has to turn to an even older work: Luther Porter Jackson's *Negro Officeholders in Virginia*. This contains both biographical sketches of the black legislators and federal officeholders from this period, as well as some interpretative comments on the nature of black leadership in this period. Jackson's work has been used substantially in Eric Foner's collection of mini-biographies of Reconstruction black leaders, as well as Steven Hahn's work on black politics in the rural South. Finally, there are a certain number of periodical articles that have been useful. The most notable of these is

[12] Lorin Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction* (Chicago, 1978); Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Urban Emancipation: Popular Politics in Reconstruction Mobile, 1860-1890* (Baton Rouge, 2002); Richard Bailey, *Neither Carpetbaggers nor Scalawags: Black Officeholders during the Reconstruction of Alabama, 1867-1878* (Montgomery, AL, 1991); Allen Johnston Going, *Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874-1890* (1951; Tuscaloosa, AL, 1992); Sheldon Hackney, *From Populism to Progressivism* (Princeton, 1969); Joseph Matt Brittain, 'Negro Suffrage and Politics in Alabama since 1870', Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1958; material on the state can also be found in Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1865-1901* (New York, 1972).

Lawrence Hartzell's article on the black community in Petersburg in the late nineteenth century.[13]

Of the more general works on African American history in the late nineteenth century, there is a large literature. Three works, in particular, provide the parameters for this thesis. The oldest of the three, Howard Rabinowitz's *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890*, has informed this study the greatest. In particular, it is his focus on the black elite, which was urban based, that has provided a starting point for this thesis. The intention in this present study is to revisit and re-evaluate older questions and older debates that were embraced by Rabinowitz and provide a fresh approach. This includes the nature of local black politics, the role of the black church, and the using of a comparative approach. Rabinowitz provides some background information on local leaders, including those based in Montgomery, Alabama, and Richmond, Virginia. However, this is more about mentioning leaders at a specific moment, rather than tracing through their careers.

In terms of the historical debate, this thesis will revisit the Woodward debate; one that preoccupied Rabinowitz. *Urban Race Relations'* main point of focus is challenging Woodward's notion that Jim Crow segregation emerged in the 1890s as a result of a collapse of restraining forces on the South that had prevented it from instigating it earlier. Rabinowitz argues that segregation in urban areas was prevalent much sooner and that, for blacks, it often proved to be an improvement to what had existed, which was exclusion. Whilst this monograph does include the 1880s in its study, it is part of the broader picture Rabinowitz wishes to provide for the post-war period, rather than dealing specifically with this decade.

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[13] Jane Elizabeth Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Post-Emancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA, 2003); Charles E. Wynes, *Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902* (Charlottesville, VA, 1961); Luther Porter Jackson, *Negro Officeholders in Virginia, 1865-1895* (Norfolk, VA, 1945); and Lawrence L. Hartzell, 'The Exploration of Freedom in Black Petersburg, Virginia, 1865-1902', in *The Edge of the South*, ed. by Edward L. Ayers and John C. Willis (Charlottesville, VA, 1991), pp. 134-156.

Another key work that this thesis draws upon is Eric Foner's *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*. This is currently the key work on the Reconstruction era, and provides an essential understanding of how black leaders operated during this period. Foner does provide some analysis on Redemption in Virginia and Alabama, but this is more as an epilogue to the key years of the late 1860s and early 1870s. Furthermore, this thesis will argue that rather than Reconstruction leaving no discernable trace of a black political dynasty, as Foner argues, those leaders involved in Reconstruction politics in the later years of the Reconstruction did continue beyond Redemption and into the 1880s. In the case of Virginia, some local leaders continued in local politics throughout the 1870s.[14]

The final study that this study draws upon is Steven Hahn's *A Nation Under Their Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*. Hahn's study is the closest to this study in terms of subject matter and, to some extent, period. However, my study focuses primarily on the 1880s, whereas for Hahn this decade is sandwiched between his focus on slavery and Reconstruction and the political struggles of the 1890s. Furthermore, Hahn's study is of the rural South, whereas my study is primarily more urban in focus and on two specific states. The urban nature of this study is a result of its focus on local leadership, who formed an elite of local southern blacks residing on the whole in the towns and cities of these two states.

Hahn concentrates on black political activity at the rural grassroots, defining politics in its broadest sense. To be sure, many local black leaders, such as clergymen, lived among the masses at the grassroots, but these men were an elite, occupying a position as spokesmen for the local Congressional district or county. It is these men, who are recorded in the black press as being representatives of the wider black community, whom this study will focus on. Unlike Hahn, where political activity is mentioned in this work, it is in relation to party or electoral politics – arguably how

[14] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York, 1988)

these black leaders would have understood 'politics' in the late nineteenth century. The local black elite provided a bridge not only between local white politicians and the black masses (in their capacity as either local politicians or community leaders), but also between the more nationally recognised black figures and the black masses. The fact that many local blacks revered these 'national' figures, such as Frederick Douglass, would have been as a result of the information they gained from local clergymen and politicians. These key relationships between the local black elite and the 'national' figures will be central to this thesis, and is an area that has been little explored by other studies of black leadership.[15]

Mention must also be made of the collected works on black leadership edited by August Meier, Leon Litwack, and Howard Rabinowitz. Indeed, an afterward written by Meier for one of these collections poses the challenge for future scholarship to concentrate on a systemic approach to the study of local black leadership. As Meier points out, 'explicit attention should be paid to the complex mix of motives and tactical considerations that characterized all of these men in the varying context in which they operated.'[16] It is this approach that this thesis has taken.

In conclusion, much has been written on African American History from the late nineteenth century. However, little has been produced on the 1880s and, in particular, on the local black elite. This thesis thus draws inspiration from Howard Rabinowitz's study on urban race relations. It will provide a fresh perspective and approach to race relations in the 1880s through a more in-depth study of the local black elite. This will be achieved largely through a biographical approach, drawing on the lives of individual leaders throughout the post-Redemption period. Moreover, the

[15] Furthermore, no study of black leadership can be complete without reference to August Meier's *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (1963; Ann Arbor, 1988). Whilst this study is now dated in places, it still provides a crucial starting point in coming to terms with the issues facing black leaders in this period, and the various routes taken by national black figures, such as Frederick Douglass, in trying to solve the problems facing African Americans in this period.

[16] August Meier, 'Afterward: New Perspectives on the Nature of Black Political Leadership during Reconstruction,' in *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era*, ed. by Howard N. Rabinowitz (Urbana, 1982), pp. 393-406.

comparative approach used so effectively by Rabinowitz has provided a good model for the comparison of Alabama and Virginia in this present study.[17]

Sources

The principal source for this study has been the African American press: a major resource for information for any study of nineteenth-century African American and race relations history. These newspapers were weekly and contained not only editorial comment but also frequently included correspondence from local black leaders. Whilst a complete run does not exist for every newspaper, more often than not a picture can be assembled by using either what remains for a specific state, or by using quotes from local papers now extant that found their way into the black 'national' press, such as the *New York Age*, the *Washington Bee*, or the *Cleveland Gazette*. In the case of Alabama and Virginia, different approaches to the source material have been used. For Alabama, a complete run of the *Huntsville Gazette* was found covering the 1880s. This paper was based in the north of the state but also covered events from the state capital. This paper was supplemented by what remains of the Montgomery black press from this era. Virginia was much more challenging, although certainly not unique. The *Petersburg Lancet* and the Washington, D.C. based *People's Advocate* cover the early 1880s. For the rest of the decade, one is reliant on the *Lancet* up until mid-decade, when it became a church newspaper (and thus no longer covered party politics in any great detail); the *National Leader* (based in Alexandria); as well as the *Washington Bee* and *Cleveland Gazette* (both of which frequently covered events from Richmond). The main state black newspaper for the 1880s – and well into the twentieth century – was the *Richmond Planet*. Scattered excerpts in other newspapers, such as the *Cleveland*

[17] Recent historiography has also focused on memory studies, gender, and the cultural perspective. Whilst such perspectives are integral to the African American experience during this period, this study has chosen not to incorporate them. This is because an additional level of complexity would have been added to the story of the local black (male) elite and move away from the principal focus of this thesis, which is a study of this elite's involvement in party politics and their views on matters of civil rights and self-help.

Gazette, as well as the odd edition, are all that remain for the 1880s. The early 1890s is more fruitful. The white press also contained news and comment on the African American community, but this differed between the two states. For example, in Alabama there was much coverage of the black state conventions of 1874 in the white press, but after Redemption such coverage reduced markedly. By contrast, the white press in Richmond, Virginia, continued to cover African American news throughout the 1880s. This difference may well have been due to the potential political power retained by blacks in Virginia during the 1880s, which blacks in Alabama no longer held to the same degree that they had done during Reconstruction.

An issue with writing African American History (as with the study of social history more generally) is the scarcity of manuscript collections. As a result, it is more often than not a significant challenge to exert any sense of coherence to the historical analysis. For example, the reasoning behind why a particular local leader might become more conservative over the course of the 1880s (or vice versa) is left open to conjecture. Whilst this study has not set out to be a collective biography, inevitably certain aspects have had to be left to speculation, especially over questions of individual motivation.

However, despite this, some manuscript sources were found that were useful for this study. One collection was the Freedman's Bank Records, which provide an invaluable record of biographical information for many local leaders that would have otherwise been lost. The Booker T. Washington Papers at the Library of Congress was perhaps the most useful manuscript collection. Others included the Benjamin Harrison Papers, the John Edward Bruce Papers, and a collection of Republican Party material at the Virginia Historical Society.

As ever, one has to be aware of the reliability of the evidence used. In the case of the black press, they were generally supporters of the Republican Party. The Democrat-leaning white press can counteract such partisanship. Indeed, even when the white Democratic dailies are the only source of information regarding African

Americans, they are not necessarily unreliable. If one goes beyond the editorial page, there would have been no reason to falsify information regarding what individual black leaders said at, say, a black convention. One has to be aware that the white papers would have been selective in what they included, thus potentially swinging the tone of the comments one way or another. But this would not have been unique to these papers – editorial constraint and preference was, and is, applicable to any newspaper, black or white. Moreover, the accounts of the proceedings of the black state conventions are generally balanced.

Definitions

This study has also had to come to terms with defining what is meant by a local leader. 'Local leader' has been chosen over 'grassroots leader', since whilst many of these leaders came from humble origins (as with the vast majority of African Americans at this time), they did form an elite. These men entered this group principally through education, with many becoming teachers and clergymen. The term local leader has also been used in connection with those leaders involved in state party politics, for they spoke from personal experience of their local area. In other words, 'local' is used in connection with those men who maintained close contact with the grassroots. Local leader has also been used to describe leaders who served in the state legislature, for they too maintained links with the grassroots. This is more applicable to some of the local leaders in Virginia, for no African American served in the Alabama legislature after 1884.

The black local elite could also be termed as 'state leaders', and at times they were, such as when they represented their respective states at national black conventions. However, they maintained close contact with the grassroots and were, first and foremost, local black leaders. Teasing out the subtle differences in the views of church ministers, as opposed to the professional politicians, will form part of this thesis. By contrast, those men who moved to Washington, D.C. to take up federal

positions (and thus lost their connection with the grassroots) are referred to in this study as the Washington elite. These men were effectively an elite within an elite, or what W.E.B. Du Bois would later refer to as the 'Talented Tenth'.

Structure

In order to investigate the key role played by local black leaders in the New South era, this thesis will be divided into three parts. The first looks at the period of Redemption in each respective state, exploring not only what changed with the end of Reconstruction, but perhaps more significantly, how local black leaders continued to have influence in state affairs despite increasing efforts to restrict their impact. Not only will blacks' involvement in Republican Party politics be studied, but also the alternatives open to blacks. Part Two of this study looks at how this black elite developed over the course of the 1880s, both as representatives of their state (at black national conventions), and in their local context. This section will set out to determine the extent to which the 1880s was a decade of flexibility in race relations, in terms of blacks being able to take an active role in shaping their future. Furthermore, it will set our to explore how far this decade was one of transition between two eras – those of Reconstruction and Jim Crow segregation. The final part of this thesis looks at two case studies: one leader from each of the states. This section will attempt to demonstrate not only the similarities and differences between leaders in Virginia and Alabama, but also how generational and occupational differences impacted on the thinking of the local black elite.

By way of conclusion to this section, it is worth re-iterating the main themes of this thesis. One is to assess how far Booker T. Washington as a typical local black leader of the 1880s, and whether his thinking on matters of civil and political rights, and self-help and racial solidarity, were common to other local black leaders. Another is to explore the relationship between the national and local black elite, and the extent to

which the two groups influenced each other. How far the 1880s was a decade of 'flexibility' in southern race relations will be borne in mind throughout this study, as will the extent to which a protest tradition among blacks was maintained from the Reconstruction era through to the 1880s. Finally, the question of whether or not a Black New South emerged in the 1880s, formulated by the local black elite, will be considered.

Part I

1 The Post-Redemption South: Alabama and Virginia, 1870-1883

As a race, we humbly confess and deplore our poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, and helplessness. But history must attest that these are rather our misfortunes than our faults. That race which derides these our misfortunes are themselves the causes and inflictors of these misfortunes upon us.[1]

Memorial from African Americans in Alabama, December 1874

[T]he treasury bankrupt, the credit of the State grievously impaired, the schools closed or running on crutches…forgetting or neglecting their duty to the people…[was] wasting time and money in trying to defeat the rights and liberties of colored citizens…[2]

Richmond *Virginia Star*, 14 December 1878

Introduction

This chapter will explore how the end of Reconstruction in Alabama and Virginia changed the outlook of African American leaders in these states. To do this, an analysis of the black state conventions will be made to determine the extent to which political and civil rights became less significant than notions of self-help and racial solidarity. The way in which African Americans expressed their situation became more nuanced. On the one hand, they knew the poor situation they faced, in terms of both economics and education, as the first quotation above reveals. Yet, at the same time, even though Redemption had removed their Republican allies in the state legislatures, they were adamant as to where the blame lay; a fact supported by one black newspaper commenting on Conservatives in Virginia, as noted in the second quotation.

[1] *A Memorial of a Convention of Colored Citizens assembled in the City of Montgomery, Ala., on December 2, 1874*, p. 5
[2] Richmond *Virginia Star*, 14 December 1878, cited in Charles E. Wynes, *Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902* (Charlottesville, VA, 1961), pp. 14-15

Aside from party politics and stress on equal civil rights, other subjects would become increasingly significant to black leaders. One was the pursuit of an effective form of education that whites would be willing to finance through local taxes. The subject of migrating to another part of the country (confusingly called emigration, which meant discussion was often blurred with that of migration out of America) emerged also as a talking point among local black leaders. Yet party political discussion never disappeared completely, not only with regards to the Republican Party, but also over a consideration of political alternatives. One such alternative was the Democratic Party, but support for them often came at a price. Third-party politics would be supported to varying degrees throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, most notably the Readjusters in Virginia and the Greenback movement in northern Alabama. Support for such parties, not to mention the Democrats, had gained prominence by the late 1870s due to a growing disillusionment among blacks towards the Republican Party. Finally, one question that has to be asked is to determine how far the discussion about the 1875 Civil Rights Act changed the course of the debate over black equality before the law. It could be argued that a broader definition of 'rights', what one leader from Alabama would note as 'human rights',[3] became central to the thinking of African American local leaders. To this end, each of the two states will be looked at in turn, to highlight the specific concerns of black leaders in their respective states, followed by a conclusion that will draw out the main points of difference, as well as highlighting concerns relevant to both.

[3] This occurred at a national black convention held in Nashville in May 1879 that will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Civil Rights in the South

Throughout the first half of the 1870s this one topic would dominate discussion among blacks at the national and state levels. State civil rights legislation was introduced by A.E. Williams of Barbour County into the Alabama House of Representatives in 1873; with a separate bill introduced in the State Senate. Both were subsequently defeated. What is of interest is that several black legislators in the House were opposed to the bill, and managed to prevent it from being passed. G. S. W. Lewis, the black leader in the House, voted against the proposed bill, regarding its supporters as "purjurers and tender footed proselytes." One has to ask why such opposition existed among the black members of the State legislature. It seemed that many questioned those in support of the legislation because they were merely using it for their own ends, particularly the white Republicans.[4]

Discussion of state civil rights legislation was limited, however, for the pending Federal legislation generated more discussion in Alabama, especially with its timing in the election year of 1874. The idea of extending the 1866 Civil Rights Act was first put forward in 1870 by Senator Charles Sumner from Massachusetts. Whereas the existing Civil Rights Act of 1866 involved employment contracts, property, and court representation for the freedmen, this new act was designed principally to re-enforce the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. It declared that every citizen had an equal right to public places and services and that the federal courts would hear any cases involving discrimination based on race. Moreover, it declared that all citizens had a right to sit on juries, and that all cases of discrimination as defined by the act that could not be settled at the state level would be referred to the U.S. Supreme Court.[5]

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[4] Brittain, 'Negro Suffrage and Politics in Alabama since 1870', p. 18

[5] Charles S. Mangum, Jr., *The Legal Status of the Negro* (Chapel Hill, 1940; reprinted New York, 1970), pp. 27-28; James M. McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to*

More prominent black leaders, those of the Washington elite, were keen to demonstrate to the public why further legislation was required. To that end, Northern and Southern black leaders held a convention in Washington, D.C., in December 1873, to outline exactly what they wanted from such a bill. The convention spelt out clearly in its resolutions, which were presented to Congress in the form of a memorial, what African Americans felt was owed to them as American citizens. '[T]he protection of civil rights in the persons of every inhabitant of the country is the first and most imperative duty of the Government', the memorial to Congress stated, 'in order that freedom in this country and American citizenship may be made valuable to us.' A further resolution read: 'no people can aid in sustaining and upholding either themselves or the nation unless they are fully protected in their pursuit of happiness.'[6]

The resolutions offered by the national convention of 1873 provide an insight into the way that African American thinking about civil rights, at least among the nationally known leaders, had developed during the course of Reconstruction. At the heart of their thinking was the Constitution of the United States, which had over the past eight years been added to with the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments that had, in turn: abolished slavery; provided equal rights for all citizens; and extended the franchise to all citizens.[7]

At first glance, the resolutions here do not seem out of the ordinary, considering how often such comments had been issued by the Reconstruction conventions. However, when studied in a little more detail, certain points are of interest. For instance, the first resolution goes beyond the oft-repeated call for the Federal Government to do its duty and protect its citizens by stating that such protection would enable freedom and citizenship to be 'made valuable to us'. The

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the NAACP (1975; Princeton, 1995), pp. 13-14; Walter L. Fleming, *Documentary History of Reconstruction: Political, Military, Social, Religious, Educational and Industrial, 1865-1906* (1907; reprinted New York, 1966), pp. 295-97

[6] *Memorial of the National Convention of Colored Persons Praying to be protected in their Civil Rights*, 43rd Cong, 1st sess, Senate Miscellaneous Documents, No. 21, p. 5

[7] The best work to incorporate such ideas of citizenship and relate them to the black community is Eric Foner's *Reconstrcution: America's Unfinished Revolution*.

suggestion here is that this was a two-way process: that whilst whites could flout the law, what was stopping blacks from not valuing freedom and citizenship? In other words, why should blacks respect American citizenship if they, as citizens, were not respected? It was a much-repeated statement that freedom came with responsibility, but such responsibility (blacks argued here) had to be honoured by both sides, or not at all. The second resolution referred to the right to the pursuit of happiness: a direct reference to the Declaration of Independence. Furthermore, this was an essential precondition, argued the convention delegates, if African Americans were to be expected to make progress both individually, but also the nation as a whole.

The memorial issued by the Washington convention concluded with a call to the Senate to pass the pending civil rights bill. Indeed, platforms such as the national conventions provided local leaders with a chance to hear first hand the views of black leaders from other states over matters like civil rights. This would be a key feature of them, but one also has to ask to what extent local leaders influenced the 'national' black debate? This will be considered in more detail in the following chapter, focusing on one convention in particular.

One local leader at the Washington meeting, who was also a secretary at this convention, was twenty-five year-old William Hooper Councill.[8] Councill was born a slave in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where the date of birth given for him ranges from 1847 to 1849.[9] He was sold to a planter in Huntsville, Alabama, and until he was emancipated in 1865, he worked as a field hand on a plantation in Jackson County. However, despite being enslaved, Councill managed to grow his own food, which he sold for money (his mother was the one selling his produce), become a craftsman and

[8] *Memorial of the National Convention of Colored Persons*

[9] Robert G. Sherer gives his date of birth as 12 July 1848, whereas Charles A. Brown gives 12 July 1849. His application to the Freedmen's Bank, dated 26 July 1869 and signed by Councill, gives his age as 22, which would mean he was born in 1847. See: Robert G. Sherer, *Subordination or Liberation? : The Development and Conflicting Theories of Black Education in Nineteenth Century Alabama* (Alabama, 1977), pp. 32; Charles A. Brown, 'William Hooper Councill: Alabama Legislator, Editor and Lawyer,' *Negro History Bulletin* 26 (February 1963), pp. 171-72 (p.171); *Freedmen's Bank Records*, Series M816, Roll 1, p. 47, accessed electronically at the Schomburg Center for Black Culture, New York City

raise animals. Initially self-taught, Councill attended a local school for three years after the war, but had to leave due to a lack of funds. Following this, he began teaching in a school in Jackson County, and continued to be privately taught at his own expense, becoming principal of Lincoln School, the first black school in Madison County, Alabama, in 1869. Three years later he was made an enrolling clerk at the Alabama State Legislature,[10] experience that most likely secured him a secretarial position at the national black convention the following year. A position of patronage such as this meant that Councill had become openly affiliated with the Republican Party. Of course, in the southern states in the 1870s, this was by no means unusual. Councill, like other black leaders, was involved in the local discussions over the proposed federal civil rights bill.

Such discussions reached their conclusion in June 1874 at a black convention held in Montgomery, Alabama, organised by the Equal Rights Association (ERA). This was set up by disgruntled Black Republicans who thought that the party was moving away from principles of equality for all in their desperate bid to maintain the party's ascendancy in the state. The ERA maintained strong support at the grassroots level, for the 'rift' that was created 'trickled down to the Republican county conventions'.[11] The organisation even had, so it was recorded, a six thousand-strong militia, presumably to counter violence against them from groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Councill was one of many local leaders present at the ERA convention.

The Democratic-supporting newspaper, the *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, recorded the convention's proceedings and is of interest because it provides us with the mainstream white opinion with which black leaders in the state had to contend. It must be asked why a white southern newspaper took such an interest in a local black convention. One answer would be that as it was an election year, meetings that were deemed party political were scrutinised to see what position they would be taking on

[10] Sherer, *Subordination or Liberation*, pp. 32-33
[11] Brittain, pp. 23-24

key election issues, such as civil rights. Another possible reason would be that African American politicians (or the Republicans more generally) were still regarded as a political threat in the state, and the Democrats were anxious to ensure that their campaign of white supremacy was not threatened in any way.

It was within this political climate that the ERA Convention opened on the 25 June 1874. It was clear from the beginning what the *Advertiser* thought of some of the delegates. The paper noted that: 'There were numbers of strange negroes in the city last evening. It is supposed that they came as "delicates" to the Ekal [sic] Rights Association.' At any rate, they are very "delicate" looking fellows.'[12] The implication made by the paper here, of course, was that these men should not be involved with political activity, reinforcing the idea whites had of blacks as child-like and unfit to govern. Blacks often countered discussion such as this with talk of 'manhood', usually forming part of the language used in the resolutions offered at conventions.[13] This was one of many vignettes that the *Advertiser* gave to its readers during the course of the convention in session. Another noted that the proceedings were 'very orderly', the result of 'mean white men' not being in a position to cause the delegates 'trouble and confusion'. The closest that these men reached was in the lobby, where those whites hoping for political office had turned up. White Democrats were also present in the lobby of the hall of the House of Representatives.[14]

From the first day onwards the issue of civil rights dominated the convention. One delegate, a preacher named Caper, from Jackson County, spoke for an hour on black civil rights. As with most talk on civil rights, mention of Republican avoidance of the subject was never far away. Caper's message, for example, included a stern warning for the Republican Party not to take the black vote for granted. Aspiring white office-seekers must be in support of equality (including voting for an African American

[12] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 25 June 1874
[13] An example of this can be found in the resolutions offered by the ERA convention. Frederick Douglass would also use such language. For more on this, see Chapter 2.
[14] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 26 June 1874

candidate) or not bother at all.[15] It would be the subject of 'mixed schools', in other words, black and white children attending the same school that drew the most attention from the delegates, and also from the white commentators afterwards. Whilst it was clear that the majority of delegates were in favour of the mixed school provision in the Civil Rights bill that was then pending in Congress, those who were opposed did so over the issue of timing rather than inclusion. The opposition, which was not only among sitting politicians, rested on the fact that mixed schooling would be detrimental to the fortunes of the Republican party, especially in the north of the State, at a time when the party was fracturing over the civil rights issue. Councill was much more militant in his approach, this before the apparent 'u-turn' in his political thinking to become one of the most 'conservative' blacks in the South. Noted already as 'the leading negro in North Alabama', Councill stated that justice came before party and that all blacks in northern Alabama supported the Civil Rights bill. His claim that anyone who opposed mixed schools was opposed to black civil rights 'arose a hubbub' among those at the convention, with delegates shouting out "that his charge was false". What is of interest is that Councill came to the convention 'prepared to let the Civil Rights matter rest', but that the way it had proceeded led him to speak out.[16]

In general, the resolutions offered by the ERA Convention focused on the rights due to African Americans as citizens, as stipulated by the Constitution of the United States. This was in line with the sentiment of the Washington convention of the previous year. The delegates went on the attack, denouncing the Democratic tactics, and stated plainly what they wanted – free schools and equal civil rights. Legislation was the key to such rights being protected and the Civil Rights bill was supported to that end, for it was hoped that federally enacted legislation would be beyond the meddling of Southern Democrats. Whilst the delegates were keen to stress that this had not been a Republican convention (and to criticise both parties for their lack of

[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 27, 30 June 1874.

enforcing civil rights), judged by the resolutions it is hard to see that it could have been anything other than a Republican convention – especially so if one considers the position the delegates took on civil rights, and the fact that they had to hold a breakaway convention in the first place. This argument can be maintained even when one takes into account that much of what we learn about this convention is from a Democratic source, which was all too keen to stress the contradictory statements over political allegiance coming out the convention. Moreover, one resolution openly stated that they would support the Republicans, although any other 'official' position would not have realistically been an option considering the track record of the Democratic Party in Alabama. This did not stop some African Americans from supporting the Democrats, however, and as will be shown later, it would not stop black Republican leaders from switching their allegiance to the Democrats following the 1874 election.[17]

1874 election in Alabama

In the spring and early summer of 1875 the writer Charles Nordoff toured the southern states. He was a Republican, writing a series of articles for the *New York Tribune* that would later be turned into a book, as well as a report for the President on the current situation in the South. The political situation in the region was therefore a key part of his study.[18] Whilst travelling through Alabama, Nordoff was told of one particular political meeting in the town of Orville, Dallas County, which had been held during the previous year's state election campaign. The man recounting the tale informed Nordoff that he was an eyewitness to the meeting. He told him that the Republican candidate for the Fourth Congressional District declared to those assembled at the rally 'that any negro who voted the Democratic ticket ought to be swung from the limb of a tree, and called on the men and women present to hold up their hands in approval of this sentiment.' He went on to ask the women present if any of them would stay with their

[17] See below, p. 38
[18] Charles Nordoff, *The Cotton States in the Spring and Summer of 1875* (New York, 1876), pp. 9-10

loved one if they voted for the Democrats.[19] Politicians like this were widely seen by white Democrats (and some Republicans) as demagogues, stirring up the crowds and intimidating blacks to vote for the Republicans. We do not know how many held up their hands, nor whether the crowd was mainly black or white. However, by comparing this with similar accounts from that election campaign, it is likely that a Republican meeting in the aptly named Black Belt was made up of predominantly African Americans, with a few white Republicans present either as observers or to make speeches.[20]

The candidate for the Fourth Congressional District that year (for Dallas County was located in this district) was African American Jeremiah Haralson. He was a former slave who had been born in neighbouring Georgia, later moving to Alabama where he became a field hand. Following the Civil War, Haralson became active in the Alabama Republican Party, serving in the state legislature, first in the House and then in the Senate.[21] One white newspaper in the southern part of the state noted that he was "black as the ace of spades and with the brogue of the cornfield", adding that he was "uncompromising, irritating and bold". As to his political philosophy, Haralson was "fully aware of the strength of the people, insolent to his opponents and always advancing his line of battle while professing to desire nothing but the rights of his race".[22] He had declared his support for the Civil Rights bill at the ERA convention, although he aligned himself with those who thought a 'go-easy' approach to the schools' question was the best way forward.[23] Yet controversy was never far from Haralson. In 1872 he had been indicted for stealing cotton, although the case against him was eventually dropped by a lawyer who himself was later under investigation. In

[19] Nordoff, *The Cotton States*, pp. 88-89 (Haralson's speech is on p.88)
[20] Accounts from an observer for the *New York Times* throughout August 1874.
[21] Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders during Reconstruction* (New York, 1993), p.94
[22] *Mobile Register*, 18 June 1874, cited in Samuel Denny Smith, *The Negro in Congress, 1870-1901* (Chapel Hill, 1940), p. 83; By 1890, the population of Dallas County consisted of 9, 285 whites and 45, 372 blacks. C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge, 1951), p. 79
[23] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 30 June 1874.

1874, during his own election campaign for Congress, Haralson had, in his capacity as president of the Republican county nominating convention, re-nominated for a local political position a man who had against his name eleven cases of malpractice whilst in office. When the grand jury investigated further, the man in question, a tax-collector as well as being in charge of local education and sitting on the local council, had a further ten cases brought against him. The tax collector was eventually removed for drunkenness.[24]

Despite such controversy, Haralson's personality seemed to attract voters and keep him in politics. Indeed, he had a gift for it, and from the speech he made in Orville, a talent for oratory, too. Yet the Orville meeting reveals more than simply Haralson's political style. The use of scare-mongering tactics, for example, was not only a method of choice for the Democrats. Republican demagogues could also intimidate blacks into voting for them. One has to ask why such fears were easily aroused among those standing in the Orville crowd. A significant fear among many Alabama blacks was that they would be re-enslaved should the Democrats regain control of the state legislature. This appears to have been reinforced through the language used by Republicans, equating a Democratic victory with a return of the Confederacy. Whilst it is true that former Confederate 'Generals' did make up elements of the Southern Democratic Party, making such a comparison could only fuel existing fears. Such a fear as this did recede, but it was something that would not disappear completely in the South. A decade later similar fears were aroused with the election of the Democrat Grover Cleveland to the White House.[25]

A final point must be made about Nordoff himself, and the fact that he was a Republican. Whilst we can infer that exaggeration over the Democrats could have crept into his account at times, or that perhaps he accepted a lot of what was said to him at

[24] Nordoff, p. 90

[25] An example of using terms such as 'ex-slaveholder' can been seen in the discussion on the 1874 Montgomery Convention, as well as in Part II in Virginia. The term 'Generals' has been used by Brittain. For more on the 1884 Presidential Election that saw Cleveland become President, see Chapter 3.

face value, Nordoff's account is likely to be more reliable than, say, a Democrat describing similar activities at this time. A white, Alabama Democrat, for example, would have the fortunes of his own party in mind. Moreover, as an outsider, finding out such information may have been easier for Nordoff as people were perhaps more likely to be open about such matters, and there was much more evidence that he had heard but did not include in his account. However, other sources do give validity to Nordoff's comments. The Congressional hearing looking into the violence surrounding the election in the State, which met shortly after the events took place, heard testimony from both Black Republicans and Democrats over the violence or pressures used against both groups. Again, information like this may have only been revealed in such a situation as a Federal court of inquiry.[26]

Black Democrats

Throughout the 1874 election campaign the Democrats were in the ascendancy over the Republicans, using the rhetoric of white supremacy to shore up the base of the Democracy, whilst appealing to white Republican voters in northern Alabama tired of the Republican rhetoric over civil and political rights. The Democrats won the election that November after one of the most violent campaigns seen in Reconstruction. So violent, in fact, that a Congressional inquiry was set up shortly after the results came in to assess the true extent of intimidation faced by those opposing the white supremacists. In the midst of a severe economic depression, the politics of white supremacy dominated the white press, and became *the* campaign issue.

The *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, as the leading white Democratic paper in the state, was an integral part of the Democrat's election campaign. In one edition alone, that of 25 June 1874, the 'Race Issue' dominated the editorial page. The Civil Rights bill that was under debate in the U.S. House of Representatives was a key topic for discussion, which it labelled as the 'Social Equality Bill'. This label became stuck

[26] Alabama Investigation into the 1874 Election, Senate Miscellaneous Documents

to any discussion of civil rights, and summed up the belief of Democrats, and the fears of many white Republicans, particularly in the northern Alabama. However, discussion of civil rights was nothing new, and it is another editorial on that day that is perhaps more revealing of Democratic tactics. Taking inspiration from South Carolina, the paper urged Conservatives in the State (Democrats at this time were still known as this, to differentiate them from 'Radicals') to realise the significance of local offices, and the necessity of preventing Radicals from winning such offices. [27] The Republicans valued the state legislature or Congress rather than grassroots electoral politics. The Democrats, in contrast, realised that the key to victory was both unity and the winning of local political positions, such as the sheriff or justice of the peace, and in so doing removing the potential of local black political activity having any kind of influence.[28]

The Democrats would have been assisted in this task from what today we would consider an unlikely source: African Americans. The phenomenon of black Democrats was revealed at the Orville meeting where Haralson told the crowd what he thought of any black voting for the Democrats. Indeed, it is an issue that has received little attention from historians. Whilst it is true that many blacks were forced to vote for the Democratic ticket – either through fraud or intimidation, or both – there were some blacks who chose to vote for the Democrats, and the difference between these two types of voter was clearly understood.[29] As early as 1868 a black Democratic organisation had been formed in the state, led by Caesar Shorter, who had already become disillusioned with the Republicans. However, by 1872 his views had become so extreme that he put off potential black voters. The result of this was to replace Shorter with George W. Cox, another African American, who called on blacks to vote for Horace Greeley for President. Greeley's Liberal Republican Party ran in opposition to the sitting President, Republican Ulysses S. Grant. As the Democrats did not put

[27] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 25 June 1874
[28] Richard Bailey, *Neither Carpetbaggers nor Scalawags: Black Officeholders during the Reconstruction of Alabama, 1867-1878* (Montgomery, AL, 1991), pp. 259-60
[29] Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (1976; New York, 1979), p. 13; Hahn briefly refers to the subject.

forward a candidate, they rallied behind Greeley, who then subsequently lost. The influence of both Shorter and Cox was limited, however, for most blacks at this time still voted for the Republicans.[30]

This was still the case two years later. In the Congressional hearing that followed the 1874 election, one black leader from Mobile, Alabama, told the committee that he reckoned no more than two-dozen blacks in his district voted for the Democrats through choice, and that most who had voted this ticket had done so in order to protect their jobs.[31] So why *choose* to be a black Democrat? Money was an obvious incentive. At the hearing two black leaders, both of whom had been members of the Alabama legislature, pointed out that financial incentives for blacks were a key bribery tactic used by white Democrats.[32] This is supported by a comment by Nordoff, who cites an example of a black church where the entire congregation – including the minister – became Democrat supporters, 'by a moderate subscription to the church-fund.'[33] However, much of the information given at the hearing seems to have been based on hearsay, for it was clear that black Republican leaders chose not to associate with black Democrats. Indeed, the tone of some of their comments was indifference, bordering on outright dislike for these men.[34]

But the sincerity of some of the comments made by black Democrats is striking, however misplaced some of their remarks may have been. For example, twenty-four year old Lewis Neil (occupation unknown) and a member of the Opelika Black Democratic Club, was convinced that the passing of the Civil Rights bill would mean he would have to socialise with whites, and thus opposed it. Moreover, he believed that once in power, the Democrats would give offices to those blacks who were 'capable of holding office'. However, when describing a white Republican's attempts to try and make him vote for them, Neil told the Congressional hearing: 'I told

[30] Bailey, pp. 86-87, 185, 237, 196, 240. Shorter died in 1883, aged 56. Bailey, p. 314
[31] Alabama Investigation, p. 12
[32] Ibid., pp. 318, 338, 348
[33] Nordoff, p. 92
[34] Alabama Investigation, pp. 318, 338, 348

him [the white Republican] that the radical party never have done what they promised, so far, and told him I voted for them once and would not any more.' When a black Republican tried to bribe Neil with money, and then claimed his former master was really a supporter of blacks, Neil asked him why the white candidate had not freed his slaves prior to the war. The black Republican 'turned around and cursed me for being a son of bitch.' In summing up why he voted for the Democrats, Neil told the hearing: 'I just turned for my own interest,' adding later: 'These people [the Democrats] know me and I know them. They will do more for me than any other man.'[35] Such a comment as this does suggest that he had heard a white Democrat speaking about the ills of Radicalism, especially the Carpetbaggers interfering in State affairs. This is reinforced when he later tells the committee that taxes would be lowered should the Democrats come to power, thus there would be more money to go around, for wages would go up. It would be an error to assume that men, such as Neil, were simply duped into voting for the Democrats over the promise of higher wages. Whilst some may have been, that would have been the case for some black Republicans as well with the promises made by white Republicans. The dominant theme here is one of voting through personal self-interest, which was certainly not unique to black Democrats in Alabama in the mid-1870s.

Another feature of black voting that Nordoff touches on, which is linked to the subject of black Democrats, is the role played by women in how their loved ones voted; a role that extended beyond the home, and which had an undertone of intimidation. In Alabama, black women's clubs were formed, in some cases set up by white Republican men, 'of those whose husbands were Democrats or were about to be.' The last part of this statement is of interest because one can deduce that the club was a form of support group, offering advice, perhaps, on how to live without their husbands. This is suggested by the fact that the constitution of another club, this time in Chambers County, Alabama, had a statement in it where members acknowledged that they would

[35] Ibid., p. 151-155

leave their husbands if they voted for the Democrats. In addition, members of these clubs would hand out voting tickets on the day of the election. Yet, this was as far as their involvement extended, and what they were told was limited, given the fact that the tickets they were handing out had a picture of a local white candidate whom they assumed was the President, Ulysses S. Grant.[36]

At the same time there were black Democrat clubs, which were white-financed and largely secret due to the violence members experienced from opponents. Some were openly acknowledged, however, such as the Montgomery Colored Conservative Club.[37] Even so, it seemed that violence haunted black political groups, whatever their political persuasion. Black Republican clubs were targeted by white vigilantes, which the Congressional committee heard about extensively, whereas black Democrat clubs were targeted by their black Republican opponents. The centre of such political activity was often the church, where political clubs met, made up of both men and women. 'The efforts made to hold the negroes under control,' writes Walter L. Fleming, 'indicate that numbers of them were becoming restless and desirous for change.' As he goes on to write: 'This was especially the case with the former house-servant class and those who owned property.'[38]

One has to be wary of such comments, however, as Fleming's account favoured the white Democrats. His comment regarding class distinctions within the black community, however, is valid. As Eric Foner points out, such divisions had 'political implications', where the antebellum free born blacks were more likely to be in business and support conservatism than their fellow freedmen.[39] Yet Fleming's comment on Democrat-supporting blacks – that 'several thousand' blacks were in this position, 'who mustered up the courage to remain away from the polls or perhaps vote

[36] Fleming, p. 776
[37] Allen Johnston Going, *Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874-1890* (1951; University, AL, 1992), n.27, p. 15
[38] Fleming, p. 776
[39] Foner, *Reconstruction*, p. 546

for the Democrats' – must be used with caution.[40] Fleming makes no mention of those African Americans forced to vote the Democratic ticket due to white intimidation, nor of the scores of black Republicans who faced violence, intimidation, or even death. Such information can be gleaned from one source Fleming relied heavily upon for his findings on Republican intimidation towards black Democrats – the Congressional investigation into the 1874 election. The respective parties played down violence towards both sides, even before 1874. Haralson had admitted in writing two years earlier that the Republicans had been intimidated by Democrats at the 1872 election, but then had played down violence in general when the extent of Republican violence towards black Democrats was revealed by an investigating commission. As a result, sources from outside of the State can perhaps give us another, more reliable account of the nature of violence in the run-up to the 1874 election. The Congressional inquiry is one such source, detailing, as mentioned, violence on both sides.[41]

But with regards to black Republican intimidation towards black Democrats (a subject that has been quietly forgotten by historians), northern accounts can be useful. Nordoff is one example, but another is a visiting journalist for the *New York Times*, who toured Alabama in the run-up to the 1874 election. At one Republican meeting, held in the evening outside Montgomery and made up mostly of African Americans, the reporter noticed how dissension was stamped out among blacks. "You he; you's deceivin' my race," shouted one man during the speech of local black Republican, Asa Barber. This was followed by a considerable amount of verbal abuse. "Dat's a Democrat nigger," a number of the spectators shouted, which was followed later by a number of women crying out "Beat him; kill him; the kill the Democrat devil." As the reporter went on to add, the Democrat stood up to the crowd, stating how they were 'poor deluded creatures' who were being lied to by Republicans in order that they may

[40] Fleming, p. 776; for the situation in Mobile, Alabama, see Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Urban Emancipation: Popular Politics in Reconstruction Mobile, 1860-1890* (Baton Rouge, 2002), p. 211
[41] Nordoff, p. 89

vote for them, and that their former masters 'were their best friends'. This provoked more verbal attacks from the women, and violence was only prevented from breaking out when a respected local white planter intervened and asked the Democrat to leave the meeting. The reporter was told later of the social ostracism faced by black Democrats and how some had been severely beaten by black mobs.[42] The violence shown towards black Democrats demonstrates how high the stakes were for blacks in the Deep South. In addition, accounts such as this reveal the tension evident among blacks during this election. The need for unity was paramount and anyone going against this through personal choice was running the risk of social isolation.

The 1874 election in Alabama can thus been seen as a turning point in grassroots black thinking in the state. The choices available to them post-Redemption would be more limited, with the option of emigration out of the state beginning to be taken more seriously, as a black convention held shortly after the election revealed. As the 1870s came to a close a noticeable change had occurred among some of the local leaders. As this chapter will show, some decided to switch allegiance to the Democrats. This situation, however, revealed that the hatred many blacks felt towards their fellow African Americans choosing to side with the Democrats, continued.

Montgomery Black Convention as a response to the Alabama Election

The implications of the election very quickly became clear to African Americans. In a hastily called convention, which met in the state capital of Montgomery in early December 1874, local black leaders discussed the best way forward. Held over two days in the United States District Court Room, with initially 104 delegates from 31 counties, the convention demonstrated how the options available to blacks had suddenly become more limited. Indeed, discussion at the meeting would revolve around the matter of emigration westwards, which in turn revealed significant divisions among local leaders that were revealed when the subject of the convention emerged at

[42] *New York Times*, 4 November 1874

the Congressional hearing. The principal point of contention centred on which course to pursue: emigration out of the state, or stay and try to improve conditions in what appeared to be a worsening climate for blacks. And it was behind-the-scenes where the splits among the black leaders became most apparent.[43]

What strikes the reader is how formal the proceedings of the convention were, and how strictly the delegates adhered to the procedures of conventions in general. Whilst the haste in which this meeting was called suggests that delegates arrived still reeling from the election of the previous month, there is a sense here that they were aware that procedures had to be followed in order to maintain a sense of dignity. This was likely due to the fact that the white press could well publish the proceedings and comment on the way in which the convention was undertaken. As it was, this convention received little attention compared with earlier ones. This is an indication, perhaps, that the Democrats no longer had anything to fear from their Republican rivals.

The subject of emigration dominated this convention, which was presided over by Philip Joseph**,** from Mobile, Alabama. Joseph was a free born black of mixed race who had been educated to a high standard (he was fluent in three different languages). He was newspaper editor and had been involved extensively in the Republican Party, which had begun during Reconstruction when white Republicans set up the Union League to mobilise black voters.[44] In his campaign to run for Congress in 1872, Joseph had run as an Independent against the sitting representative, African American Benjamin S. Turner, thus splitting the black vote with the seat going to a white candidate. He then became a clerk in the state Legislature, and attempted to gain a seat

[43] Alabama Investigation, p. 1112
[44] The significance of the Union League in forging a Black Republican electorate can be found in Michael W. Fitzgerald's book, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South: Politics and Agricultural Change During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, 1989)

there in the election of 1874, but failed.[45] His political career, as will be seen, followed a pattern that was common to many black leaders.

Joseph's influence among Alabama blacks created tension with Haralson.[46] Indeed, at the Congressional hearing, a northern journalist who had covered the convention revealed how Haralson was planning to call a labour convention to 'counteract the influence' of the Montgomery convention.[47] Dissention, or jealousy (as in the case of Haralson), among the delegates did not stop there. Frank H. Threatt, a delegate from Macon county (although his first initials are incorrect in the proceedings), had made the following comment some two months prior to the convention: "if the Republicans were to nominate Jesus Christ and the Democrats were to nominate the devil, I would vote for the devil."[48]

Indeed, the Congressional inquiry seemed to place doubt on the fact that the convention even took place. This seemed to centre on the fact that a U.S. District Court was in session, where some of the supposed delegates were attending as witnesses, not to mention that the state legislature was also in session (and many of the delegates were members of this also). The doubts that were raised at the hearing perhaps add to the suggestion made that not all of the delegates listed were, in fact, present. Moreover, it was assumed that the delegates had been selected at local meetings, but the fact that the call was made at such short notice threw this into doubt, and there is a sense from the transcript of the hearing that the committee doubted that the Montgomery Convention was as representative as was perhaps suggested by Joseph.[49]

The conclusions reached at the convention were outlined in an address to 'the people of the United States' that was signed by Joseph. It defined the overall tone of the convention: a realisation of the situation they now faced and a determination to do something about it. The address stated the main outcome of the convention, which was

[45] Foner, *Black Lawmakers*, p. 124
[46] Alabama Investigation, p. 1127
[47] Ibid., p. 1127
[48] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 16 October 1874, cited in Bailey, p. 254
[49] Alabama Investigation, pp. 1122-28

that emigration out of the South to elsewhere in the States was the only answer to the problems faced by blacks. To that end it announced the creation of an emigration association to look into the possibility of moving black families to the West. This was a response to conditions faced by African Americans in Alabama, and by moving, blacks would thus be able to achieve 'real emancipation…from practical slavery.'[50] There is a real sense here that African Americans were all too aware that emancipation was only half-complete. By using the word 'slavery', the convention was making a marked point of stating that economically, the majority of black southerners remained subservient to the whites around them. However, despite the hardships and injustice faced by many, the address noted that blacks had made progress, even though they faced violence and received little assistance from whites. 'The local civil authorities have been in league with the law-breakers,' remarked Joseph, 'and the sentiment of the communities has applauded the acts.'[51] Rights were not being upheld, they were just 'mere words set upon paper to be scoffed at by the tyrannical ex-slaveholders now calling themselves the democratic and conservative party of Alabama.'[52] Such a comment as this would be made the following year in Virginia, indicating the fact that not only were the Redeemers 'Bourbons', in the sense that they created a sense of continuity from the antebellum era, but that these men had neither learned nor forgotten anything.[53]

Another local leader present at the convention, and who presided over the committee looking into emigration, was William V. Turner. Stating how blacks were not receiving a fair wage for their labour, he called for a committee to be formed to look into the prospect of moving from the state.[54] Turner was one of the older black leaders in Alabama, who was in his fifties at the time of the 1874 election, and had been involved in Republican Party politics since the early days of Radical

[50] Address, cited in Alabama Investigation, p. 1117
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Going uses the term 'Bourbon', whereas Woodward and subsequent historians have used the term 'Redeemer'. Going's term still has some value, as indicated by the views of blacks at these state conventions.
[54] Alabama Investigation, p. 1115

Reconstruction. By the early 1870s he had become associated with the Alabama Labor Union, which favoured emigration.[55] In his role as a labour union supporter, he stressed the benefits of such organisational activity, most notably offering advice over labour contracts, which was a continuation of the work pioneered by the Freedmen's Bureau.[56] Thus this was not a new subject for Turner, nor was it a new solution to the problem of landownership for blacks. However, compared with Joseph, Turner was the more conservative of the two. For example, he had earlier in the year opposed the clause in the proposed federal Civil Rights Bill advocating integrated schools. Whilst in support of equal civil rights for all, he did not think this was the right time for integrated schools in the region.[57]

It was the subject of emigration, however, that defined this convention, and demonstrated the stark contrast that existed between this convention and the one held in the same city some six months previously. The Montgomery convention of December 1874 revealed also the divisions that existed among the local black leaders, although as far as one can tell, this was only revealed later. No evidence has been found that these divisions affected the actual proceedings of the convention. Despite the delegates stressing emigration over civil rights, discussion over the pending federal civil rights bill continued, albeit in the United States House of Representatives in Washington.

Civil Rights Act of 1875

By February 1875, the debate over the civil rights bill had moved to the floor of the House of Representatives in Washington. Sumner never lived to see his bill become law, and it was passed in the "lame-duck" Congress in January 1875, barely two

[55] Foner, *Lawmakers*, p. 217
[56] William V. Turner to the editor, *New National Era*, 28 May 1874, cited in *The Black Worker: A Documentary History from Colonial Times to the Present. Vol. 2: The Black Worker During the Era of the National Labor Union*, ed. by Philip S. Foner and Ronald L. Lewis (Philadelphia, 1978,)pp.179-180 (p. 180)
[57] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 30 June 1874

months before the new, Democratically-controlled Congress was to be inaugurated.[58] There were also white Republicans who supported such legislation.[59] The most prominent speech given by an African American on the subject was by James T. Rapier. A freeborn black, Rapier was a member of Congress for Alabama from 1873 to 1875 and a delegate to the Civil Rights Convention held in 1873.[60] His speech, delivered on the 4 February, was intellectual in tone. He noted the dilemma faced by black politicians over whether or not they should support the bill. Moreover, he pointed out that the debate had thus far been used for political ends.[61] Reinforcing the points made by the ERA convention some eight months earlier, Rapier spoke passionately about how the manhood of the race and their rights as American citizens were inextricably bound together, basing this on the rights inherent in the American republic as formed by the Revolution. Noting the absurdity of the matter, Rapier remarked:

> either I am a man or I am not a man. If one, I am entitled to all the rights, privileges and immunities common to any other class in this country; if not a man, I have no right to vote, no right to a seat here; if no right to vote, then 20 percent of the members on this floor have no right here, but, on the contrary, hold their seats in violation of the law. If the Negro has no right to vote, then one eighth of your Senate consists of members who have no shadow of a claim to the places they occupy; and if no right to vote, a half-dozen governors in the South figure as usurpers.[62]

In line with the sentiment of the Civil Rights Convention of 1873, Rapier noted how citizenship had its limits. As he pointed out, 'if the government cannot secure the citizen his guaranteed rights it ought not to call upon him to perform the same duties

[58] A good background to the act is Bertram Wyatt-Brown's article: 'The Civil Rights Act of 1875', *Western Political Quarterly* 18 (December 1965), pp. 763-775
[59] Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill, 1984), p. 139. Perman's book contains very little on civil rights legislation.
[60] For a biography of Rapier, see Schweninger's James T. Rapier
[61] 'Speech made by James Rapier', in *Great Speeches by African Americans: Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Barack Obama, and Others*, ed. by James Daley (Dover, 2006), pp. 57-58
[62] Ibid., pp. 66-67 (quotation on p. 67)

that are performed by another class of citizen who are in the free enjoyment of every civil and political right.'[63]

But the act that was finally passed by Congress was, as James McPherson notes, merely an act of symbolism – a 'gesture' towards the deceased Sumner.[64] The mixed schools clause which had generated so much debate in Alabama was removed and a new bill drawn up in the House of Representatives, before reaching the Senate for approval, which came in early March 1875.[65] It became a public sign of the Republicans' general disillusionment with upholding black civil rights. Both Republicans and Democrats opposed it: for the Republicans, it was the matter of enforcement; for the Democrats, it was more a constitutional issue. In the Senate, the Northern Democrats avoided the racism of their Southern counterparts and pointed out that as acts of individual discrimination were the target of this bill, the Fourteenth Amendment did not cover such acts. The Southerners, however, voiced their opposition by stirring up fears of racial inter-mixing and the threat this legislation posed to white supremacy.[66] If the story of Reconstruction is to be taken beyond the artificial barrier of the Compromise of 1877, then the 1875 Civil Rights Act is less a last-ditch attempt at shoring-up black support for the Republicans, or a finale to the Radicals control of Congress, and more a signal of how the debate over civil rights had altered by the mid-1870s and how it was to move forward. The Democrats opposition to this bill is perhaps an indication of this, for the question of 'social equality' would continue to be at the heart of the debate over southern race relations in the 1880s.

No sooner had the bill been passed, efforts were being made by Southern state governments to find loopholes in the law, or to change internal state law, such as ending state licences for hotels. Overall, there was little black testing of the law, and

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[63] Ibid., p. 60
[64] James M. McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP* (1975; Princeton, 1995), pp. 13-14
[65] Milton R. Konvitz, *The Constitution and Civil Rights* (New York, 1947), p. 6
[66] Lawrence Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro: Northern and National Politics, 1868-1892* (Urbana, 1976), pp. 46-50

whilst it was seen that federal backing for the law would be needed, little materialised. There was no manpower or funds, or little care by Republicans, to enforce the new bill.[67] An indication of the Republicans' lack of interest is exemplified by President Grant's absence of comment following the passing of the bill. This silence, in contrast with his 'optimism' of 1870, was significant according to one historian, for it showed how the enthusiasm and 'substance' had been lost in the federal government's view of Reconstruction.[68] In addition, there seemed to be some uncertainty as to how to rule on such cases. When touring the South shortly after the passage of the bill, Charles Nordoff considered that blacks were unlikely to demand that the new law be upheld.[69] This can supported by the fact that one early civil rights case brought before a court in Montgomery, which involved four blacks, regarded as 'notorious politicians', being refused first-class tickets at the theatre, ended initially on an uncertain position, for the U.S. District Commissioner did not voice an opinion.[70] The Civil Rights Act had become, therefore, 'a dead letter in the South, and a source of annoyance to its supporters in the next Presidential canvass.'[71]

Party Political Alternatives in the late 1870s

That canvass would be the following year. The contested election of 1876 marked the end of Radical Republicanism and the emergence of a new kind of Republican government led by President Rutherford B. Hayes. Hayes signalled a new direction for the Republican policy towards the South and civil rights, reasoning that once the national government was no longer assisting southern state governments (or interfering with them, as most white southerners thought) blacks would be provided with full protection of their rights by southern white paternalists.[72] This policy was based on

[67] William Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879* (Baton Rouge, 1979), pp. 275-78
[68] Ibid, pp. 272-73
[69] Nordoff, p. 91
[70] *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 13 March 1875
[71] Nordoff, p. 9
[72] Ibid, p. 151

pressure from businessmen who wished to invest in the South, as well as pressure from old-time southern Whigs (often labelled Conservatives) who wished to promote closer links with the North, and who felt they were best placed to protect the freedmen.[73] However, Hayes' southern policy was not just about withdrawing the troops and giving southerners home rule. He also wanted to remove the 'Solid South' of white Democratic voters by restoring the Republican Party in the region.[74] This was based on a policy of encouraging whites to vote the Republican ticket, for the majority of blacks still chose to support the Republicans.

Despite being published more than fifty years ago, Vincent De Santis' book on Republican Party policy towards the South asks what is still largely an unexplored question: why did black leaders support Hayes? His answer rests on patronage; not state patronage, but 'personal appointment'. Indeed, as De Santis argues, many blacks supported Hayes' policy for they saw it as 'an experiment which would be dropped if it failed to produce the desired results.' Hayes had said that he would alter his policy should black rights be denied in the states. Whilst many blacks became angry towards Hayes when he did not alter his policy, they still remained within the Republican Party. De Santis notes that the majority of African Americans at this time were not in favour of independence in politics, so the alternative to Hayes was Grant returning to the White House in 1880, and with him, an unwanted return of military protection.[75]

Even so, many former Republican leaders now began to look for alternatives, one of which was support for the Democratic Party. There was a precedent to such a switch in allegiance by African American leaders, but in the North. Earlier in the 1870s a few black leaders had begun to hint at the possibility of embracing the Democratic Party. George T. Downing of Rhode Island, for example, noted that failure to pass a civil rights bill could cause blacks to abandon the Republican Party. Peter Clark of

[73] This will be explored further in the next section in relation to Virginia.
[74] Vincent P. De Santis, 'President Hayes's Southern Policy', *Journal of Southern History* 21 (November 1955), pp. 476-94 (p. 477)
[75] Vincent P. De Santis, *Republicans Face the Southern Question – The New Departure Years, 1877-1897* (Baltimore, 1959), pp. 130-31

Ohio was another dissenting voice, but such voices were not in the mainstream.[76] However, one must bear in mind that to hold such views in the North was one thing; but as was shown in the 1874 election in Alabama, holding such views in the South and acting them out through the ballot box was quite another.

Indeed, the 1874 election had been a turning point for some of Alabama's black leaders, for many Republicans realised that the political winds were changing. Nordoff noted how Redemption had 'moderated' the views of the Republican 'demagogues' controlling the black vote, and some black leaders were now advising blacks to divide their vote.[77] This may have been encouraged further when the Democrats voiced openly their support for blacks. In an election pledge they stated:

> We now pledge to all the colored people of this State the protection and maintenance of all their rights to equality before the law, and we are glad to recognize that the more intelligent and better class of them are awakening to the fact that their best friends are the white people of Alabama.[78]

This last phrase was presumably a nod to those black leaders encouraging blacks to divide their vote. But white Democrats in the State were also keeping an eye on other Redemption governments, most notably that of Wade Hampton's administration in South Carolina.[79] As Hampton told blacks, 'The best friends of the colored men are the old-slaveholders. They will defend your right to vote because it gives to the South infinitely more power than we ever had before.'[80] In other words, the black vote would boost Congressional representation in Washington, but at the same time give the South greater internal control by removing the threat of Federal intervention.

This threat was still a reality in the latter half of the 1870s, especially as Republicans still controlled the White House. For example, whilst the Democrats in

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[76] Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, pp. 38-39
[77] Nordoff, p. 92
[78] *Montgomery Advertiser*, 1 July 1876, cited in Horace Mann Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (1939; Alabama, 1994), p. 138
[79] Ibid, p.139
[80] *Charleston News and Courier*, 20 September 1878, cited in Woodward, *Origins*, p. 79

Alabama had felt bold enough to hold and ratify an amended State Constitution by the end of 1875, just one year after their electoral victory, no mention was made at the constitutional convention of outright disenfranchisement of blacks through voter qualifications. Segregated schools were put into effect with state funding. Four African Americans had been elected delegates to the constitutional convention, but had no influence in its proceedings. What did affect blacks more was a new election law passed by the legislature the following year, which made petit larceny a cause for disenfranchisement. This did affect a number of African Americans (as it would in Virginia, which passed a similar law the same year, 1876) but that was as far as the Democrats thought they should go, given the fact that the Republicans were still influential in Washington. In any case, the Democrats considered that, if needs be, the black vote could always be manipulated to support the *status quo*.[81]

The new election law did have an effect in the 1876 election, as did a strong Democratic campaign, and the usual fraud and intimidation at the polls.[82] However, another factor was a growing disillusionment amongst blacks towards the Republican Party. Indeed, for the next two years the white Democrats began to acknowledge black Democrats, which one historian believes was influenced by the national situation.[83] The white Democratic press certainly made an issue of their black supporters. The *Demopolis News-Journal* stated openly: 'About 1,000 sensible colored men showed that they are free indeed, and voted the Democratic ticket openly, without fear or favour. All honor to our colored friends who stood up for the good of the State.'[84] The language used here is of interest. The word 'sensible' was often used by the white press to describe African Americans who were doing as whites thought that they should. Describing these voters as 'free' is also of interest, suggesting that they had been freed from the imprisonment of the Republican Party. Four years later William Councill,

[81] Brittain, pp. 40-47; Bailey, pp. 283-284; see also Part II for reference to Virginia's election laws.
[82] Schweninger, pp. 156-57
[83] Brittain, pp. 51-52
[84] Quoted in *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 15 Aug 1876, cited in Mann, p. 138

who had become a Democrat in the mid-1870s and Principal of the State Normal and Industrial School in Huntsville, would remark of voters in Lowndes county that "the better class of the colored people were willing to forget the past", claiming that over a thousand blacks had openly voted for the Democrats.[85] One has to treat such claims with caution, of course. A claim made by the *Montgomery Advance* that there were 980 black Democrats in the state capital was refuted by the black-edited Alabama *Republican*, which claimed that there were only 19 (which may have been an exaggeration, too).[86]

The case of Lowndes County is one example of how black disillusionment with the Republicans played out at the polls; another can be found in Haralson's bid for re-election to Congress in 1876. The state Republican Party was fracturing at this time, with black leaders dividing their loyalties between two of the party's state bosses (both of whom were white). Two of the potential candidates for Haralson's seat were African American: one was James T. Rapier, the ex-Congressman who had spoken eloquently on the House floor in support of the Civil Rights bill, the other was Haralson himself. The split emerged at the nominating convention in September 1876, as it soon became clear that Haralson's re-nomination was far from certain. Haralson, it was later reported, "rolled up his sleeves and pitched into the committee like a thousand bricks," who he thought were out to "defeat him". After two hours, he walked out, and retaliated by running as an Independent candidate. Many Democrats supported Haralson in his re-election bid in 1876, most likely due to his opposition to maintaining Federal troops in the South.[87] Both Haralson and Rapier lost to a white candidate,[88] but Haralson's political methods (which included garnering white support), were by no means unique. As August Meier notes, 'Both expediency and disenchantment with the

[85] Sherer, pp. 33-34; *Huntsville Herald* 6 August 1880, cited in the *New York Sun*, 16 August 1880
[86] *Alabama Republican*, 18 September 1880
[87] Schweninger, pp. 151-57 (the report of Haralson's comments was originally published in the *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 16 September 1876, cited by Schweninger, pp. 153-44); Smith, *The Negro in Congress*, p. 85
[88] Schweninger, p. 156

Republican policy inclined some of them toward political co-operation with paternalistic upper-class Southern whites,' which occurred at the same time as Democrats were courting the black vote to stave off the threat of independent candidates (a method they would use again in the 1890s).[89] In Alabama, the most severe threat to Democratic ascendancy came from the Greenbackers.

Willis Johnson Thomas and the Greenback Party in Alabama

Labour rights had long been an issue for debate among African American leaders, especially over the question of fair wages. Economic equality had always been a significant aspect to the fair treatment blacks felt was due to them, principally over the right as an American citizen to hold land. Throughout Reconstruction the land question had been considered to be the most significant thing the black masses wished for from emancipation. The labour movement can be seen as an offshoot of this, for if owning land was not a realistic option at this stage, then the right to a fair wage certainly was. Arguably, this was an example of what 'civil rights' meant for many blacks. Alongside the right to vote, the right to hold land or earn a living to support one's family were central components of American citizenship. Such a view was hinted at in the Congressional inquiry by those blacks who supported the Democrats, for they saw that the Democracy provided a greater chance to achieve their own personal civil rights, at least in the mid-1870s. Frederick Douglass' broad definition of black rights encompassed such a view of personal rights, although he saw this through the political lens of the Republican Party.

By the late 1870s, however, a political third-way was found by some to be a better alternative. Independent, or fusion, parties emerged, the most notable of which was the Readjuster Party in Virginia, which will be studied in more depth in the next section. However, third-party politics also emerged in the Deep South, and it was in northern Alabama where the Greenback-Labor Movement found considerable support.

[89] Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, p. 27.

This party had originated in the West as a result of the economic depression that had begun in 1873, and support for it swept across rural areas in the South and Mid-West.[90] The Greenbackers, as they came to be known, stood not only for currency reform, but also for fairer elections and more honest government. In addition, it became biracial in nature.[91] By looking at this movement – a precursor to the agricultural movements in the 1880s and the Populists of the 1890s – it gives us an insight into how certain local black leaders operated, and who they represented. In northern Alabama, the Greenbackers won seats in the State elections of 1878, and elected the once Democrat William M. Lowe to Congress.[92] Despite their short period of influence (Lowe lost to the Democrats in 1880),[93] the Greenbackers had their greatest impact in the northern counties of the State**,** in particular, among the coal miners of Alabama.

One black miner from Jefferson County became a well-known figure in the labor movement. Willis Johnson Thomas, noted as a 'small, spare made black man,' first came to prominence in the summer of 1878, when he attended a Greenback-Labor meeting in Jefferson Mines. White activists were seeking black support, and Thomas was asked, as a new member, to come up and speak to the meeting. Whilst initially being uncertain about speaking to the group, his shyness soon disappeared. 'He warmed up the crowd in a most lively manner,' reported white labour activist Warren Kelley, for the *National Labor Tribune*. 'He is an up-and-down Greenback-Labor man, and the colored people hereabouts have settled upon him for a leader in the coming campaign,' noted Kelley, 'and he is not afraid to speak what he thinks.'[94] Meetings continued throughout the summer at Jefferson Mines, and with Thomas placing notices around Jefferson County, anger grew among local Democrats. As one Democrat remarked of Thomas: 'Now, to think that a negro has that much authority in a good

[90] Woodward, *Origins*, p. 24; see also pp. 81-85
[91] Ayers, *Promise*, pp. 45-46; Hahn, *Nation*, pp. 396-400. Hahn notes that black Texans were also drawn to the Greenbackers in 1878.
[92] Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*, p. 129; Woodward, *Origins*, pp. 78, 83-84
[93] Woodward, *Origins*, p. 84
[94] *National Labor Tribune*, 17 August, 29 June 1878, in Foner and Lewis, pp. 254-55 (first quotation on p. 254), 250

Democratic State, is enough for a white man to commit suicide.' It was not just Thomas' influence that angered the man, but also because he was allowed to have such influence in the first place. Noting the changing attitude among local blacks, the Democrat remarked, 'you know three years ago if a negro dared to say anything about politics, or public speaking, or sitting on a jury, or sticking up a notice, he would be driven out of the country, or shot, or hung in the woods.' Clearly, Thomas was deemed a threat to the Democracy in the state. It was thought by the *National Labor Tribune* that if Thomas carried on the way he did, the Greenbackers would achieve victory at the polls.[95]

Yet, as with so many other local black leaders, Thomas' name simply disappears. It is clear, however, that Thomas for a short while did have considerable influence in Jefferson County, and this young man could inspire people. It also appears that here was a new generation of leader that appeared to be more militant. The reports by Kelley to the *Labor Tribune* attest that many blacks joined the Greenback-Labor Party as a result of Thomas' efforts. His honesty, as well as his 'gentlemanly demeanor toward the people' impressed the white members of the party. At one particular meeting, Thomas' many biblical references gave the assembled group more of a religious feel than political. Thomas' name was also mentioned running for election in 1880.[96] In addition, the local leader not only made speeches, but also sent letters to the *Labor Tribune*.[97] Such activities were not unusual, according to one historian of interracial unionism; it was just that Thomas was the most noticeable of a group of black union leaders.[98]

Other black leaders would become supporters of the Greenbackers. Philip Joseph was perhaps the most prominent, but he always remained a Republican, as did

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[95] *National Labor Tribune*, 10 August 1878, in ibid, pp. 251-53 (quotation on p. 252)
[96] *National Labor Tribune*, 17 August 1878, 16 August 1879, in ibid, pp. 253-54 (quotation on p. 254), 263
[97] See *National Labor Tribune*, 8 February, 31 May 1879, in ibid, pp. 255-56, 259-60
[98] Daniel Letwin, 'Interracial Unionism, Gender, and "Social Equality" in the Alabama Coalfields, 1878-1908', *Journal of Southern History* 61 (August 1995), pp. 519-554 (p. 520)

many other black members within the Greenback movement.[99] Whilst local fusion tickets were considered to be the only realistic option for the Republicans at state level, the Republican State Convention in 1880 declared its support for the national Republican Party in the forthcoming federal elections.[100] However, the Greenbackers' defeat in the 1880 Congressional elections was a serious setback to independent politics in the Deep South. Whilst many thought that their sustaining power was from black voters, increasingly blacks either chose, or were forced, to vote for the Democrats.[101] Indeed, the Democrats would continue to woo black voters, whilst former Republican leaders, such as William Councill, would campaign actively for the Democrats in the 1880 election. He became a 'stump speaker' for the Democrats, as well as supporting them in his newspaper, the *Huntsville Herald*.[102] Another black Democratic newspaper of this era was the *Birmingham Advance*, which had been established by black lawyer James A Scott in 1876, renaming it the *Montgomery Advance* in 1877.[103] It was said by Scott (and ignoring Councill's paper) to be "the only straight-out Democratic paper in the South that is edited by a Negro."[104] In the run-up to the 1880s election the paper claimed that the Republicans could no longer be considered as the same party of men like Lincoln. The political world of emancipation was thus gone. The example of the black Democratic press suggests that a not insignificant minority were prepared to speak out for the Democrats, when the risk to life was still a real possibility.[105]

That being said, the Republicans still had a presence at local elections into the 1880s, albeit as a coalition with the Greenbackers.[106] Philip Joseph set up a Greenback-Republican paper, the *Mobile Gazette*, and in 1881 he would apply for a federal

[99] Fitzgerald, *Urban Emancipation*, p. 239
[100] *Mobile Gazette*, 31 May 1880
[101] Woodward, *Origins*, p. 84
[102] *New York Sun*, 16 August 1880
[103] Allen Woodrow Jones, 'Alabama,' in *The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979*, ed. by Henry Lewis Suggs (London, 1983), pp. 23-64 (p. 27)
[104] *Montgomery Directory, 1880-1881*, p. 207, cited in Rabinowitz, p. 232
[105] *Montgomery Advance*, 11 September 1880, cited in Hahn, p.388. For reference to the risks Councill faced, see the *New York Sun*, 16 August 1880
[106] This will be explored in more depth in Chapter 4.

position in Mobile.[107] Moreover, earlier that same year he had led an Alabama delegation to the White House shortly after President James A. Garfield was inaugurated. The address given to the President noted how Alabama Republicans were true Republicans, and as "friends of good government" looked to Garfield for "protection and support". Outlining the election fraud that was rife in the state, a situation that had extended beyond state elections to include those appointing federal positions, the address called on the President to amend the Federal election laws to ensure fairness at the polls. It also outlined the need for blacks to receive fair trials as well as support for a federal education bill where federal, not state, funds would be used to extend educational provision in the state.[108] The fact that this delegation was able to speak to the President is significant for two main reasons. Firstly, it marks the end of an era in how the national Republican Party in Washington would deal with its southern members, especially its black members, who would be increasingly sidelined as the 1880s wore on. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, this event offers an insight into how southern black leaders continued to appeal to the federal government to redress the injustices they faced, and ties in with their notion of what citizenship meant. In other words, as American citizens, they considered it their right to appeal to the President for assistance. This was significant for blacks, especially since the avenues for political expression had narrowed since Redemption. The role that the President had in the minds of African Americans is significant one, a tradition that extended back to Lincoln, would continue with Grant, and on to Harrison at the end of the 1880s.

Conclusion to Part I

As this chapter has demonstrated so far, the thinking of many African American leaders in Alabama did change as a result of Redemption. Most notably, there was a growing

[107] *Huntsville Gazette*, 25 June 1881
[108] Address reprinted in the *National Republican*, 10 March 1881. Another delegate present was P.J. Crenshaw, who would be influential in Alabama Republican politics well into the 1890s.

disillusionment among some blacks with civil rights and party politics, and a growing emphasis on other matters, such a labour issues and, more significantly, emigration. This was reflected in the debates held at the state conventions, most notably after 1874, when discussion of emigration became more noticeable. Even so, civil rights remained a key subject of discussion among local black leaders. Despite the controversy over mixed schools, most black leaders in Alabama were in fundamental agreement as to their support for the Civil Rights Act.

At the same time, doubts increased as to the sincerity of the Republican Party towards upholding the rights of African Americans. As this section has revealed, the lure of alternatives was an ever-present reality, whatever the motivation might be – whether the impetus for this came from white pressure or intimidation, or from a firm belief that the Republicans had not lived up to the hopes of many African Americans. There were two alternatives that the local leadership regarded as viable: support for the Democrats or to get involved with a third party, such as the Greenbackers. The third party alternative would also be a feature in Virginia, as the next section will explore.

Virginia, 1875-1883

Introduction

It is well known that Virginia in the 1870s was unique among the southern states due to the different path it followed during the Reconstruction years. This difference, together with no clear path of change as in the case of Alabama, may explain why there is no modern study of the Reconstruction years for the state. However, whilst Virginia does not fit into the neat compartment of Radical Reconstruction, it did display similar forces at work over a longer time-span. It could be said that the state's moment of Redemption came in 1883, at the end of a period of biracial political co-operation. Indeed, one contemporary newspaper wrote as such in 1883, following the Democratic victory at the State election.[109] In order to appreciate this moment, we have to understand from what the state was supposedly redeemed. The Readjuster Party, who had first come to power in 1879 when they won local elections in the state, dominated the period between 1879 and 1883. It was not until 1881, however, that they achieved complete control of Virginian politics. Using the analogy that this period was Virginia's period of Reconstruction only goes so far, however. Whilst the President did seek support from Independent parties after 1881 as a way to shore up the Republican Party's power base in the South (in other words, to maintain control of the black vote), the Readjusters never had Congressional backing in the way that the Republican-controlled southern legislatures had in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Even so, this four year period was one of biracial politics similar to that seen in other southern states in the early 1870s.

To be more accurate, Virginia's Reconstruction experiment occurred immediately after the Civil War. As with the other southern states, it was occupied by federal troops during this period, the Freedmen's Bureau operated in the state, and

[109] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 9 November 1883

African Americans gained the vote. What did make Virginia unique was the way that Reconstruction came to an end. This did not occur through a violent election, as in the case of Alabama. Instead, a coalition of moderates, made up of Democrats, former Whigs and Republicans, gained control of the state legislature. The case of Virginia in the 1870s, up until 1879, is an example of one of Woodward's 'forgotten alternatives': the conservative alternative.[110] In the Conservative mind, white supremacy was not the narrow philosophy that would come to characterise it later in the century; rather, it rested on the assumption that blacks would progress through assimilation to 'white society's standards, by white men's assistance.'[111] Of course, this paternalistic view rested on the assumption that whites were superior to blacks but that did not mean that blacks were excluded from assimilation. Equality in the Conservative mind was 'a matter of legal status'.[112] To give an example of how this worked in practice, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the former abolitionist and commander of a black regiment during the Civil War, noted on a visit to Virginia in 1878 that blacks were able to travel in first-class railroad cars, as well as in the Richmond streetcars.[113] This is an example of the 'formal equality under law' that typified the Old Dominion at the end of the 1870s. However, one must remember that this did not stop the racial discrimination faced by blacks on a daily basis, from individuals. As Jack Maddex (the leading scholar of the Virginia Conservatives) notes, the Conservatives' view of race relations revolved around the phrases 'racial harmony' and 'formal equality under law', but within a white supremacist framework. 'In the end, as in the beginning,' notes Maddex, 'White Supremacy was nothing but the negation of Black Power.'[114]

In order to understand how African Americans negotiated the political climate of Conservative rule, and the following Readjuster period, a number of key themes

[110] Woodward, *Strange Career*, pp. 47-59
[111] Maddex, p.187
[112] Ibid., p. 188
[113] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 'Some War Scenes Revisited', *Atlantic Monthly* 42 (July 1878), pp. 1-9 (p. 7)
[114] Maddex, p.203

need to be analysed: the continued use of the convention model as a means of expressing black political opinion; the ever-present reality of political alternatives; and the extent to which the issues of civil and political rights, economic advancement, public education, and emigration dominated black thinking at this time. Finally, a point must be made about the Readjusters. It is not the purpose of this study to explore in any great depth the involvement of African Americans in the Readjuster party, for this has been more than adequately explored by other scholars.[115] What this study will explore is how existing modes of organisation, such as the black convention movement, continued to be used by African Americans, and why some leaders chose to remain with the 'Straight-out' Republicans and against 'fusion' with the Readjusters. Such men were in the minority among African American leaders, but this reinforces the point that generalisations about local black leaders cannot be made. Furthermore, the section on the Readjusters will sketch out the political scene facing African Americans in the early 1880s, which would influence local black leaders throughout the rest of the decade.

Civil Rights in the Old Dominion

In common with other states, the Civil Rights bill that passed Congress in early March 1875 drew much comment in the Old Dominion. However, how the Conservative party viewed civil rights was different to that of the Democrats in Alabama. The Conservatives generally regarded a policy of moderation as the best way to deal with a subject that could most likely derail their ascendency. At the beginning of 1874, for instance, the newly-elected Governor, James Kemper, stated that his administration would respect the Reconstruction amendments, but stressed that his state would control how such amendments should be interpreted. As he pointed out, "the political equality

[115] See, in particular, Jane Dailey's *Before Jim Crow* and Steven Hahn's *A Nation Under Our Feet*, pp. 364-411

of the races is settled, and the social equality of the races is a settled impossibility."[116] The Conservative philosophy over civil rights can thus be summed up as 'to enact no law that explicitly discriminated against either race.'[117]

The southern Democratic press followed this line of thinking whereby it informed its readers not to react to the new law with violence or non-compliance (a move away from the violence of five years earlier); rather, the press told whites to keep calm.[118] The *Richmond Dispatch*, the leading Democratic daily newspaper in Virginia, made it clear where they stood in the debate. 'It is the impotent and contemptible expression of the malice and irritability of that radical party which has been damned by public opinion and is now in the throes and agonies of political death,' one editorial exclaimed. In a paternalistic way, it added:

> It is not what the negroes want; but it tends to alienate the races, to check the kindly disposition of both, and curtail the benevolence of one side [the whites] and the usefulness and good order of the other [the blacks], to the serious injury of both.[119]

On the other side of equation, the editorial spoke of Douglass and other leading black figures who would think the bill was not radical enough.[120] However, a few days later, the *Dispatch* included the views of a select number of local black leaders. Peter W. Downing, a Customs House employee, thought that the bill was unnecessary as the Fourteenth Amendment was comprehensive enough. The Rev. J. Morris Williams, on the other-hand, noted that blacks thought that the act was not good enough but added, in a certain resigned way, that many regarded it 'as the best they were likely to get under the circumstances.'[121]

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[116] Cited in Maddex, p. 188
[117] Ibid., p. 188
[118] William Gillette, *Retreat from Reconstruction,* p. 274; Louisville *Courier-Journal*, 1 March 1875
[119] *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 2 March 1875
[120] Ibid., 2 March 1875
[121] Ibid., 5 March 1875

Yet there is evidence that Virginia blacks did test the new law with varying degrees of success. For example, at least one attempt was made even before the bill was actually passed (in fact, the day the President signed it). It was reported from Charlottesville that a black politician called Fisher, with obvious intent, strode through the local Baptist Church and sat in the area reserved for whites. The Sexton, also black, told him to move which he did whilst pleading ignorance. The *Dispatch*, however, thought otherwise, considering that Fisher had been to the church before. The paper regarded this incident as a deliberate attempt to antagonise whites. 'It would be as well to say to the negroes, once for all,' the paper chastised blacks, like an angry parent, 'that we do not intend to grant them social equality, civil rights or no civil rights, and if they desire the good of their race they had better stick as closely as possible to those rights and privileges which the law guarantees them.'[122] Interestingly, the *Dispatch* sets out early its definition of civil rights, in common with other papers such as the *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*. There is a sense here that they are doing this as much for themselves as for their black readers. Most blacks, however, chose not to push for their rights, at least in an overt way. A comment from one Virginian newspaper offers perhaps the best example of the general tone of black reaction in the state to the Civil Rights Act:

> The colored people of Lynchburg seem not to be at all elated by the passage of the civil-rights bill. They are as polite and respectful as before, and appear to fully recognize the fact that they have already every right and privilege to which they are entitled. Besides, if a test-case should be made it would require three years' time and a considerable sum of money to get a final decision from the Supreme Court, and this would be an expense which few of their race are willing to incur. The whites and blacks of the South can always agree if let alone.[123]

[122] Ibid., 2 March 1875
[123] *Lynchburg Republican*, cited in *Richmond Dispatch*, 5 March 1875

This report highlights the major reason why most blacks chose not to file law cases against whites who discriminated against them: the cost. However, even though blacks chose not to test the limits of the new law, black leaders turned to a more traditional way of expressing their opposition.

1875 Richmond Convention

Five months after the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1875, a black convention met in the former Academy of Music in Richmond, Virginia. This was by no means unprecedented, for Virginia was the first southern state to hold a black state convention in June 1865, and had even sent a delegation to antebellum national black conventions in 1830, 1831 and 1864. As this fact alone suggests, the Old Dominion was somewhat unusual as a southern state in terms of black organisation. The lack of paramilitary violence in the state (as opposed to other states like Alabama) meant that black political organisation and activity had more of chance of succeeding in Virginia than elsewhere in the South.[124] Indeed, black state conventions would continue to be held in the state throughout the 1880s and 1890s. An independent streak thus ran through Virginia, demonstrated by a letter to the 1871 Southern States Convention of blacks held in South Carolina. The letter, which was read out on the convention floor, informed delegates that the Virginia delegation would not be present due to the forthcoming State election.[125] This suggests that Black Virginians still thought they had a chance to influence the state elections at this time and, more significantly, that local issues took priority over a larger black organisation beyond the state borders.

Unlike the 1874 Equal Rights Convention in Alabama, which consisted of disaffected Republicans, the 1875 convention in Richmond was not part of a civil rights organisation (although this would be the case with Virginia black conventions in the 1890s) and was nominally independent of any political party or organisational

[124] Hahn, p. 369
[125] *Proceedings of Southern States Convention, 1871*

affiliation. However, as with the December 1874 convention in Alabama, the Richmond convention was essentially a Republican-supporting gathering. The convention held that nine-tenths of African Americans were loyal Republicans who were supportive of the then President, Ulysses S. Grant. Furthermore, it was 'generally understood' by the delegates that one of key objectives of the convention was to wrest control of the black vote away from white Republicans and into the hands of blacks themselves.[126]

Virginia had by this time been under Conservative rule for five years. The moderation of the Virginia Conservatives, particularly over matters of race relations, was part of the New Departure which swept through the Democratic Party in the early 1870s, especially in its northern wing.[127] This was a policy of moderation intended to move away from the party's antebellum reputation of hostility towards blacks. The New Departure reached its height in 1872, when the Democrats supported the short-lived Liberal Republican Party, which was more moderate in its policy towards the South than the Radical Republican supporters of President Grant. However, following the defeat of the Liberal Republicans, the politics of the New Departure waned considerably, which was seen at the state elections that followed. In the Virginia election of 1873, for example, more hard-line Democrats took over the party on a platform of white supremacy.[128] However, as a resolution of the Conservative-controlled State legislature affirms, the party still adhered to the New Departure principles of accepting the Fourteenth Amendment but opposing the proposed federal civil rights bill.[129]

It was within this new climate of race relations that the Richmond Convention of 1875 took place, and it is one reason perhaps why the delegates wished to present a moderate position in order to remind white Conservatives that there was no need to

[126] *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia*, p. 751; *New York Times*, 20, 22 August 1875
[127] Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro*, passim
[128] Perman, *Road to Redemption*, pp. 155-56
[129] Resolution, House Doc.; Grossman, Chapter 2

move away from their existing policy. However, it is clear that the very holding of the convention suggests that blacks would not simply accommodate the *status quo*. As the original call for the convention reveals, this was an attempt by blacks to prove to whites that they were politically mature enough to decide what they considered best for themselves, noting the 'wisdom' in such a course, so that blacks' 'human rights may be secured and preserved'. Politics is not specifically mentioned in the call, or at least the call for more blacks holding political offices, which was often what was meant by 'politics'. However, as mentioned earlier, there was certainly a political undertone to the call that whilst not proven, was certainly picked up by the correspondent for the *New York Times*.[130]

Approximately one hundred delegates attended the first day's proceedings, representing between 40 and 50 counties and cities. Not all the delegates were local politicians, however, as there were also young professionals and businessmen present. A reporter for the *Richmond Dispatch* interviewed a number of the delegates to find out about their background. For example, representing King George County was twenty-five year old J. S. Washington, a graduate of Howard University who was practising law in Washington, D.C. Another delegate was forty-five year-old Mark R. De Mortie who represented Nottoway County. De Mortie was a leading businessman in the state, after having spent his early adulthood in Boston and Chicago as a real estate agent.[131] However, it must be remembered that the leading figures of the convention – those who were in the running for the presidency of the convention – were men who held experience in local politics. The presence of businessmen and professionals is significant, though, for it meant that the convention would have the benefit of the knowledge of those involved in business, education, and the law. Indeed, the role of

[130] *New York Times*, 22 August 1875
[131] *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 20 August 1875

lawyers became a feature of black conventions by the 1890s. In the case of De Mortie, he would run unsuccessfully for a Congressional seat in 1876 and 1882.[132]

The first day of the convention did not pass without incident. As was often the case with conventions, little was achieved in the preliminary session. One newspaper account noted how the temporary president, Peter J. Carter, was in a constant battle to keep order, for there was much 'wrangling over trifling things'.[133] Thirty year-old Carter, a Republican delegate for Northampton County in the Virginia House of Delegates, was no stranger to the workings of conventions. He had already attended the Republican National Convention in 1872, and would do so again in 1876 and 1880. Carter, who was a former slave, had served in the Tenth U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War, and was promoted to the rank of Sergeant Major. Whilst receiving his education late in life, attending the Hampton Institute between 1868 and 1871, he had become a landowner and was currently serving as a justice of the peace. All of these factors, especially the certain authority he must have had over men, would explain why he had been chosen to act as temporary president and keep order whilst a permanent organisation was established.[134] The *New York Times* gave a vivid, Dickensian description of what happened that first afternoon:

> A Committee on Credentials being named and sent out, then began the noise and confusion, every successive motion to adjourn, vacate the chair, or to hear somebody speak, being followed by innumerable "pints of order," appeals from the "cheer," &c. But Mr. Carter…was equal to the emergency, and never did gavel do harder and more effective service than his. Its fierce, repeated, and continued rappings would drown a multitude of eager speakers at once, and completely deafen the reporters and others who were on the stand with him…The evening session, till 8 P.M., was but another

[132] Ibid,, 8 November 1876
[133] *New York Times*, 22 August 1875; *New Orleans Times*, 21 August 1875
[134] Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers*, pp.42-43, and *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 20 August 1875

> contest of Gavel vs. Gabble – there being about a gallon of disorder to every "pint" of order.[135]

This quotation does reveal something of white attitudes towards the black delegates, a certain mocking tone at what whites thought was a case of blacks trying to act 'white' but failing, and making fools of themselves in the process. Moreover, it is of interest that the *New York Times* chose to cover the convention in some detail. This could have been an attempt by the *Times* to show how blacks were asserting themselves since the passage of the Civil Rights Act, and the confusion and disorder that such conventions revealed when blacks tried to organise in any meaningful way. Alternatively, it could have been simply an interest in black reaction to the recently passed Civil Rights Act. However, other papers picked up on the disorder during the first day. One delegate, his name not given, 'attempted to read a long series of resolutions, which, from the tone of the first lines, were violent and denunciatory in the extreme.' This caused considerable commotion, which became excessive at one point when certain delegates 'invaded the platform'. This reinforces the *Times'* description of the melee of that first day. However, what the incident of the militant delegate suggests is that the convention wished for moderation in their deliberations, suggested further by the address that the convention produced, noted as 'quite mild' by one newspaper account.[136]

Moreover, the election of the permanent president of the convention reinforced the need for moderation. After much discussion, Joseph P. Evans was chosen as the convention's president over long-time conventioneer Joseph T. Wilson. Slave-born in 1835, Evans had been manumitted in 1859. Following the war he moved to Petersburg and represented the city in both the House of Delegates and the State Senate between 1871 and 1875. Petersburg experienced an increase in the prominence of Radical Republicanism in the 1870s, represented by men like Evans in the House of Delegates.

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[135] *New York Times*, 22 August 1875
[136] *New Orleans Times*, 21, 22 August 1875

By 1873 the city government was run by the Radicals who provided patronage to blacks. However, such black success was only surface deep. Entrenched economic difficulties faced the town, especially within the African American community, which also suffered from a high rate of illiteracy. The 'panic of 1873' only made things worse. Black influence in city politics declined following elections in the city in 1874.[137] Evans, however, managed to retain his federal positions as a letter carrier and Deputy Collector of Internal Revenue, and well as serving as a minister in the African Methodist Episcopalian Zion (A.M.E.Z.) Church. The *Richmond Enquirer* noted two years prior to the convention that Evans was "very intelligent, very civil, and has the good will of everybody so far as I know."[138] In his speech, Evans told the delegates that politics would be sidelined to allow for more pressing matters to be discussed. In particular, he called for fairer wages, a black labour organisation, and for improved education. His speech was received enthusiastically in the hall.[139]

Evans' approach was 'for moderate and conciliatory measures', whereas Joseph Wilson was regarded as 'an extremist and very violent in the expression of his opinions in regard to the rights of the colored race.'[140] The differences between the two men extended also to the colour of their skin, a fact that was often observed by whites to differentiate between African Americans. As such, the *New York Times* noted that 'Mr. Wilson is a bright mulatto, and Mr. Evans is quite black'.[141] Moreover, the use of 'Mr' in the *Times*' reference to these men would never have been seen printed in a Southern newspaper, for this would have made blacks on the same social standing as whites.[142]

Following Evans' speech, Wilson was then given the opportunity to speak. Joseph Wilson had been born free in Massachusetts and was of mixed-race

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[137] Hartzell, 'Exploration of Freedom in Black Petersburg', pp.135-138
[138] Jackson, pp. 14-15; *Richmond Enquirer*, 19 September 1873, cited in Foner, *Lawmakers*, p. 72
[139] *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 20 August 1875; *New York Times*, 22 August 1875
[140] *New York Times*, 22 August 1875
[141] Ibid.
[142] See chapters 3 and 4.

background. At the time of the convention he was 38 years old, which would have made him one of the oldest there. During the Civil War, he served in the 2nd Regiment of the Louisiana Native Guards, before serving with the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, the most famous of the black regiments. He ended the war with the rank of Colonel, although he was discharged a year earlier in 1864 due to injury, and moved to Norfolk, Virginia. Wilson became a newspaper editor and was involved in the early post-war black convention movement in Virginia. By the late 1860s he had become a Republican and held federal positions in Norfolk, and would attempt to run for Congress in 1876.[143]

Whilst Wilson's speech was less moderate than Evans', his comments were well received. One report suggested that had the delegates heard Wilson's speech before the decision was made as to who would be the permanent president, Wilson may well have been chosen. This is an indication, perhaps, that not everyone in the hall was as keen on moderation as some would have liked. The *New York Times* summarised the speech as:

> Intense in its feeling of indignation and resentment at the insults and wrongs which he asserted were heaped upon the negro, emphatic in asserting his rights as a man and an equal citizen, he disclaimed all desire to array race against race, and said that he only desired that his race should take the same independent stand taken by other races, and, in unity of purpose and action, secure that consideration which would not be accorded while the colored people were political serfs of unworthy white leaders, and were at discord among themselves both as to men and measures.[144]

This summary tells us a number of things. Firstly, the sense of race pride and racial solidarity is evident here. As Evans also stated, the need for united action was of

[143] Foner, *Lawmakers*, pp. 233-34; I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (New York, 1891), 176
[144] *New York Times*, 22 August 1875

paramount importance (one that would be heard again and again at black conventions, often comparing blacks with the Irish). Secondly, the issue of political independence for blacks was crucial, not influence by white Carpetbaggers and Scalawags, 'who have pretended to be his friends'.[145] Indeed, such feeling would intensify as the decade wore on. Thirdly, their rights as American citizens and as men; the word 'manhood' emerging once more in the black convention discourse, linked to the call for political independence and racial solidarity. Unlike Evans, Wilson wanted political and civil rights to be part of this discussion, and thought an address should be issued by the convention to that end.[146] Wilson's militancy may well have been a product of his northern heritage and so he was less deferential than perhaps some of the delegates, many of whom would have been former slaves.

The notion that this convention was non-party political is, however, a false one. Its resolutions stated that Virginian blacks would remain loyal to the Republicans and to President Grant, although the situation of the party in the state called for action in order to protect it. One resolution noted that part of the problem was

> the appointment of a number of Federal officeholders all over the State, many instances of which occur to us who are pronounced Democrats, who would blush Judas-like were Republican sentiments imputed to them, and of others…preparing the way for a precipitate desertion into the Democratic Lines in case the late lamented Confederacy shall succeed in establishing its power and supremacy again in 1876.[147]

The message here was clear: help Republicans at the grassroots or the Democrats would gain power in the next Presidential election. Moreover, the Democrats were still considered to be Confederates, with the convention using similar language to that used by the December 1874 Montgomery convention. However, the desire to keep party

[145] *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 20 August 1875
[146] *New York Times*, 22 August 1875
[147] *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia*, p. 751

politics away from the convention floor, as Evans had hoped, was not unique to this meeting. Earlier in the month a Black Newspaper Convention in Cincinnati had stressed the need for racial solidarity, and P.B.S. Pinchback, the noted Louisianan black leader, had noted the lack of reference to partisan politics at the same convention.[148]

The Richmond convention has been regarded as a 'labor convention', but this is mistaken.[149] The issue of labour was certainly raised, in terms of call for fair wages and a labour organisation to be set up, but it does not appear that the convention had any formal ties with organised labour. Labour militancy was not as strong in the Old Dominion as in other southern states. Indeed, the white press were keen to stress the conservatism of both black and white Virginian labourers. The *Labor Standard* noted that such conservative thinking was of the 'right kind', out of self-interest and an appreciation of their jobs.[150]

Perhaps the major issue that came out of the 1875 Richmond convention, and one that would provoke widespread debate over the coming decades, was that of education. One voice at the 1875 Richmond convention, Spencer Green from Petersburg, considered it a higher priority than party politics. In a conservative tone he appealed for blacks to work with the whites, to 'bury all animosity,' and called for black teachers to teach in black schools. In 1882, now a Readjuster, he would add that white teachers were unable to "fairly develop the negro's intellect."[151] The Readjusters would place great emphasis on education, which will be explored in more detail later in this section. One white voice that was already known as an advocate for black education was Orra Langstone. In a letter to the assembled convention she advised blacks that they should adhere 'to that party which will educate the colored children; that the free-school feature should be made the longest, broadest, and strongest plank in their platform.' Whilst comments regarding education were made at the Richmond

[148] *Proceedings of National Negro Newspaper Convention*, p. 8
[149] See the brief reference to the convention in Dailey's *Before Jim Crow*.
[150] *Labor Standard*, 26 May 1878, in Foner and Walker, Vol. 2, pp. 296-97
[151] *Petersburg Index-Appeal*, 26 July 1882, cited in Dailey, p. 73

convention, it was made clear that much of the discussion would be left for a separate educational convention – an indication, perhaps, of the significance placed on this subject.[152]

As a result, the Colored Educational Convention met in the city a few days later. It was presided over by the Reverend Jesse W. Dungee, with one of the Vice-Presidential positions going to John W. Cromwell: two men who would become well-known in the State for different reasons. Cromwell, as well as becoming the editor of the leading black newspaper that covered Washington, D.C. and northern Virginia, became a forceful advocate for black education, which he would present to a larger audience at the National Colored Conference four years later in Nashville, Tennessee. Dungee gave an address in the evening where he voiced his opposition to sectarian college education for blacks. Citing the Hampton Institute as an example, he told those present that he had been offered money to study there, providing that he became a Congregationalist. He decided to study in the North, rather than being forced into something that he did not want to do.[153] Such an independence of spirit as this would later lead him to switch his political allegiance from the Republicans to the Conservatives.

It can be said, however, that both of these conventions demonstrate how black Virginians wanted to present to whites a moderate tone, indicating that whilst they wished to be taken seriously as voters, and Republican voters at that (directing their comments to the President), they stressed more their inherent rights as citizens – the opportunity of working for a fair wage and the right to an education. But these conventions demonstrate something more, for the language they used is framed within the political language of moderate paternalism evident in the state. This paternalism was a key aspect to their thinking, even if it was not mentioned explicitly, for both whites and blacks would have taken this as a given. The underlying message the

[152] *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 21 August 1875
[153] Ibid., 25 August 1875

delegates presented to their fellow Virginians was that they had now reached a level of maturity where they could go it alone and decide for themselves, in an adult way through careful deliberation, what they thought was the best course of action to improve their economic and educational condition. The delegates were not repudiating whites, but simply asking to be given some responsibility and standing up for what they believed in. In other words, they were demanding (not in a militant way, but carefully and deliberately) a level of respect from whites, whilst at the same time taking pains not to push whites away completely. For some blacks, the answer they reached after such thought was to move away from the Republicans and join the Conservative party.

Political Alternatives: Jesse W. Dungee and Black Conservatives

As in Alabama, there were some black Virginians who chose to support the Conservative party. Some blacks voted for a candidate because he was a 'gentleman' and this could explain why some blacks chose the party of white supremacy. The white philanthropist J. L. M. Curry noted in 1877 that: "A negro member [in the state legislature] said that he and his race relied for the protection of their rights & liberties, not on the 'poor white trash' but on the 'well-raised' gentlemen."[154] However, as with black Democrats in Alabama, the motives behind African American support for parties other than the Republicans were often complex. Jack Maddex, in his study of the Virginia Conservatives, notes a number of possible motives. Disillusionment with the Republican Party was one reason used by the more 'sophisticated', Maddex notes, whereas for other (presumably less sophisticated) blacks, they 'were Conservative out of ignorance, authoritarian moralism [sic], desire for white men's approval, snobbery, displaced self-hatred, or simple opportunism.'[155]

[154] Campbell, p. 300; Woodward, *Strange Career*, p. 51; The *Charlottesville Chronicle* asked 'sensible colored men to look around with both eyes and see which party contains the most real gentlemen.' 19 October 1883
[155] Maddex, p.197

One African American who chose to support the Conservative Party was the freeborn Jesse Dungee, who was of mixed-race background. He was minister of the Navy Hill black church in Richmond and a Justice of the Peace, and served as a Republican representative in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1871 to 1873. Dungee became known as a spokesman for Virginian blacks. In a letter to the *New National Era* in September 1874, for example, he had spelt out the key problem facing African Americans, especially in Virginia. 'I think that there is not a single parallel in history where a whole race, comprising so large a number as this does, has always been turned out upon the charity of the world,' he stated, 'without homes, money or friends.' Their former masters still held the land, and in Virginia what was required was 'some regular system of labor.' Dungee, however, went further. He advocated emigration to the North in order to obtain the land they required.[156] This letter reveals once again two of the key strands in the thinking of southern black leaders at the time of Redemption. One was the need to address the poor economic situation faced by blacks; the other whether emigration out of the South to another part of the country, or to Africa, was the answer. It must remembered, too, that Dungee's letter was written at a time when African Americans in the Old Dominion were being increasingly marginalised in state politics, and when the Civil Rights bill was being discussed in Congress. For Dungee, the choice was clear, as it was for Philip Joseph in Alabama the same year: would whites respect black civil rights (in its broadest definition) at home, or would blacks be forced to move out of the South. Indeed, Dungee's political life would be one of stark contrasts, moving away from the "Radicals" and closer to the Conservative party. There is also the possibility that he moved back to a more radical position by the early 1880s.

In 1876, though, he decided to leave the Republican Party. Ostensibly, this occurred as a result of the decision to nominate a former local Congressman for mayor

[156] J.W. Dunjee [sic] to *New National Era*, 18 September 1874, cited in Foner and Walker, pp.294-295

who had been opposed to the Civil Rights bill.[157] We learn more of Dungee's decision in a letter to the *Richmond Dispatch* in August of that year, which centred on his disillusionment with the Republican Party. This was due, firstly, to the situation whereby blacks were voting *en masse* for any Republican candidate put to them without regard to his character. Secondly, the Republican state governments had financially mismanaged the South since the war, which was evident in the massive debts the southern states had accrued. And linked to this, Dungee implied that the Republicans were involved in the collapse of the Freedmen's Bank two years previously. Whilst acknowledging that Republicans had given political offices to blacks, they had simply been the 'political tools' to 'do their dirty work', setting blacks and whites against each other. As well as these broader criticisms, Dungee then targeted specific local individuals to home in on his point. The Reverends Derrick and Holmes, both Radicals, were targeted. 'Why do they use their churches for such unholy purposes,' asked Dungee, 'and then pretend that they have nothing to do with politics?' Dungee outlined how Derrick and Holmes had told his congregation not to attend his church and had threatened to burn down both Dungee's home and church in an attempt to make him leave the city. At the end of the letter Dungee outlined his political position. Blacks had to 'make full and manly reconciliation' with southern whites, he argued. He also espoused what would become later the basis of racial self-help: moral uprightness, education, and the ownership of property. 'I was born in the South, and served *twenty-seven years* of my life a slave, and I have travelled over nearly every part of the North, and I know that the colored people of the South are better off than anywhere in the North'.[158]

Dungee's claim of having been a slave is of interest because it is known that he was free born. There is a possibility that Dungee's comments are, at times, unreliable. This is supported by the fact that many of his claims were refuted. For example, one

[157] Rabinowitz, *Urban Race Relations*, p. 301
[158] *Richmond Dispatch*, 9 August 1876

black clergyman stated that Dungee's 'denominational tenets' had made him 'unpopular'.[159] Another clergyman stated that he was a liar, his charge against Rev. Derrick was '*malicious*', adding with a note of sarcasm:

> Sir, does it not seem to be a little strange that the learned, wise, and reverend gentleman should take such a course as this to get himself into the favour of the white people of this city? Does he think that the white people of this city are so ignorant that they do not know a hypocrite when they see him? If he does, he is very much mistaken, for there are high, respectable people in this city that had rather have a dog in their presence than a hypocrite, be he white or black.[160]

Whether Dungee was eventually driven from his church, or simply abandoned his congregation, is open to debate. One Black Republican newspaper which covered Virginian affairs seemed to imply the latter. In a letter to the *People's Advocate*, a correspondent regarded Dungee as a passionate orator, although his lack of education meant that his speeches could be rather hit or miss affairs. Dungee's 'moral strength' was questioned also, a claim supported by the reaction to Dungee's comments on Derrick and Holmes. He was also considered to be indecisive and lazy, although he was singled out as better than the average Black Democrat. The Democrats had not gained anything by bringing Dungee into their fold, the correspondent thought, whereas the Republicans had lost a potential leader.[161]

Meanwhile, Dungee's rift with Derrick, and other clergymen, would continue into the following year. On a visit to an African American church in Petersburg, Virginia, he was subjected to verbal intimidation. One report noted how the minister, the Rev. Henry Williams, Jr., referred to Dungee as a 'traitor to his God, his country, and his race'. Williams had been born in 1832 and would be a minister in Petersburg

[159] Ibid., 10 August 1876
[160] Ibid., 15 August 1876
[161] *People's Advocate*, 12 August 1876

for thirty-five years and also served on the Petersburg City Council.[162] Interestingly, despite the many references to Black Democrats (or Conservatives) as 'Judases', it seems that Williams refrained from using this analogy in church. Following this particular service, Dungee 'was the object of abuse and insult, heaped upon him by members of the church'. He managed to escape, although mention was made later that the incident would be brought before a grand jury. However, evidence has not been found as to whether this was ever followed up.[163]

It must be stated, however, that Virginian black Conservatives were not simply lone voices in the community, for they did organise themselves into political clubs. Colored Tilden Clubs were set up in 1876 to support the Democratic nominee, Samuel J. Tilden**,** for President. The Colored Conservative State Political Union which oversaw these clubs elected Dungee as President. Giles G. Jackson, who would later become a prominent businessman in the state, was also elected onto the committee. Another name on the committee was William H. Pinn,[164] who had become, earlier in the same year, a founding member of the National Independent Political Union. This group, which included the author of the conservative book *The Philosophy of Negro Suffrage*, Jerome C. Riley of Maryland, planned to be structured through a series of clubs, whose aim was "ridding the country of its present corrupt leaders." One black newspaper noted how these black Democrats had been given patronage 'as a reward of their treachery.'[165] Little else has been found regarding this organisation, however, especially as to whether the National Independent Political Union was associated in any major way with the local Tilden clubs. Such clubs were by no means unprecedented. A black Conservative club had been organised in Richmond as early as 1869. Nor was the violence and intimidation new. In the election year of 1873, for example, the property

[162] Jackson, p. 59
[163] *Richmond Dispatch*, 15 November 1877; 20, 21 February 1877
[164] Ibid., 8 September 1876
[165] *People's Advocate*, 20 May 1876

of Conservative-supporting blacks was damaged; some were even beaten. Others were forced to sit at the back of churches or to leave town altogether.[166]

As will be seen throughout this study, the black church played a crucial role in black political activity in the South. Not only was this in terms of a source of black political leadership, but also as a venue for political discussion. In the immediate post-war period, blacks were more often than not refused access to white-owned buildings for their political meetings. As a result, the black church became the main venue for black political organisations. However, whilst some black clergymen did become involved in party politics, whether for honest means or otherwise, there were preachers who refused to take part in political activity, to the point where they would refuse to have notices of a political nature read out in church. Such clergymen were often referred to as 'sensible' by the white press, and as such men were often free-born blacks, they regarded themselves as a class apart from the freedmen, and felt closer bonds to the whites.[167]

Political Alternatives: The Readjusters

Biracial politics emerged in Virginia at the end of the 1870s. As with the Greenbackers in Alabama, the Readjusters found support from rural whites and, most significantly, from large numbers of African Americans. The Readjuster Party, led by ex-Confederate and former Conservative William Mahone, was founded on a policy of re-adjusting the state debt that had grown out of control by the end of the decade. By readjusting the debt, money could then be provided for services such as public education. Those opposed to this, namely the majority of Conservatives and some Republicans, became known as 'Funders', who believed that the state debt should be honoured in full. Other names for the Readjusters included the 'Liberal Party' (as opposed to the Conservative Party), and later the 'Coalitionist Party', which gave

[166] A.A. Taylor, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia* (Washington, DC, 1926), p. 258, 270-71
[167] Taylor, pp. 6-7, 207

prominence to their African American supporters who still considered themselves to be Republicans.

Much has been written about the Readjusters, but they are important to this study for a number of reasons. Crucially, the distribution of patronage provided a political education for many grassroots black leaders. Even though this was not distributed as freely as many would have liked, many Black Readjusters realised that any kind of recognition was better than nothing. In addition, by 1880 African Americans had realised their influence as voters.[168] As a result, they continued to hold all-black conventions throughout this period, rather than simply attend biracial meetings, to demonstrate their influence in Virginian politics. It is also important to remember that there were black leaders who thought fusion with another party a mistake, and along with most white Republicans in the state, they became known as 'Straight-out' Republicans. As with black Conservatives, these men were often scorned, but never with the same level of intensity. It is little wonder, however, that most black leaders in Virginia ended up supporting the Readjusters, considering that by 1878 the Republicans were effectively non-existent in Virginia.[169] Even though they lacked any kind of real power at this time, that did not stop blacks (and some whites) from continuing to support the Republican Party, especially since the Republicans still held the Presidency.

Yet the failure of the Republicans to make any headway in the state can be explained, in part, by the disillusionment felt by blacks towards the party of Lincoln, which extended beyond party lines to a general malaise over political action. In Richmond this manifested itself in the low attendance at a state convention held there in May 1879, possibly as a follow-up meeting to the National black conference held in Nashville earlier in the month. There is a suggestion that the two were linked, for one newspaper hoped that the plan of organisation would be in accordance with what was

[168] Dailey, p. 54
[169] Wynes, *Race Relations in Virginia*, p. 14

outlined in Nashville.[170] Held over two days at the Odd Fellows Hall in Richmond, this was noted as a 'small-sized convention', which must have meant that there was a noticeable difference between this one and the one held previously in 1875. The lack of interest noted by one correspondent probably explains the low turn-out. Indeed, the same correspondent went further, noting how there was a distinct 'lack of intelligent leaders'.[171] However, perhaps it was more cynicism on the part of the delegates as to what such a convention could achieve rather than a lack of effective leadership, something that was hinted at in the *Advocate*.

The convention stressed yet again the need for organisation in order that African Americans might petition for their rights due to them as citizens. However, if this proved ineffective, then migration out of the South to another part of the country was deemed to be the best solution. This was a largely empty threat, however, for there was little interest in emigration in Virginia. One historian attributes this to 'agricultural diversification', which was significant because it opened up economic opportunities to African Americans through the sale of land from white planters.[172] Other resolutions offered by the convention included support for black businesses, black teachers, and for African Americans to sit on juries. Furthermore, the convention stated that Virginia law could not legislate against inter-racial marriages, and that it would endorse Grant for President in the 1880 election. In the end, however, the convention did not include emigration as an official position; rather, it would simply support those who wished to leave the State.[173] As in the case of Alabama, the significance placed on conferring with the national Republican Party was made evident when three delegates were chosen to go to Washington, in order talk with senior Republicans over how to improve the conditions facing Virginia blacks.[174]

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[170] *People's Advocate*, 24 May 1879; see Chapter 2 for more on the Nashville Conference.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Hahn, p.365
[173] *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 21-22 March 1879
[174] *New York Times*, 21 May 1879

The emergence of the Readjusters as a political force later that year changed, for a few years, the political fortunes of black Virginians.[175] Drawing initially its support from white farmers, the Readjusters became increasingly radical over their four years of dominance. Following the 1879 local election, a little over half of the state senators and delegates were Readjusters, which gave them control of the legislature. Thirteen African Americans entered the state legislature as Readjusters (although Republican-leaning party members).[176] Virginian Black Republican George Arnold was not surprised at black support for the new party. 'I need not tell you that the cities of Norfolk, Richmond, Petersburg and Lynchburg have a large intelligent business colored community,' he wrote, '…who can blame them for casting their vote against the men and measures that strive to deprive them of their civil and political liberties?'[177] It is of interest that black businessmen chose the Readjusters, for some did side with the Conservatives (as in the case of Giles B. Jackson). Furthermore, conservative-leaning blacks could be useful in generating support for the Conservative Party from their clients. At the same time urban areas would become 'hotspots' in southern race relations, especially in what most whites regarded as the lack of deference shown by a new generation of urban blacks standing up for their rights. The determination shown by some blacks to make themselves heard through the ballot would have led many to support any party willing to treat them with respect. Linked to this, the Readjusters' stress on improving state education would have appealed to many blacks.

However, many blacks were sceptical when the Readjusters first came to prominence, and even though the number of sceptics declined, their presence never disappeared completely (a fact that has not always been acknowledged). William B.

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[175] For a more recent interpretation of the Readjusters that demonstrates the changing nature of white supremacy in Virginia, see Dailey, *Before Jim Crow* and Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, pp. 400-411

[176] Lawrence L. Hartzell, 'The Exploration of Freedom in Black Petersburg', pp. 140, n17p154

[177] George M. Arnold to Isaiah H. Wears, 20 November 1879, Isaiah T. Wears Papers, cited in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, Vol 2:From the Reconstruction Era to 1910* (1951; New York, 1968), pp. 728-730 (p. 728)

Derrick, who had made so much of Dungee's support for the Democrats, 'publically denounced' the Readjusters at the 1879 election, and was made to resign from his church for supporting the Democrats over their opposition to re-adjusting the state debt.[178] Republican opposition was more moderate although no less sincere. At a Richmond meeting of the Republican Central Committee in January 1880, for example, the threat posed by the Readjusters was made evident. In the discussion over the holding of a state convention, 'the majority regarded the re-adjuster craze more dangerous to the harmony of a convention than anything else'.[179] At a meeting later the same day in the U.S. Court Room, many of those who spoke were African Americans like Joseph T. Wilson and Danville leader William Pleasants (who would be prominent in Virginian affairs throughout the 1880s). 'All spoke against surrendering the party's chances to the Readjusters whose cause seems on the decline,' reported the *People's Advocate*.[180] Yet at another meeting in Harrisburg, blacks made it clear that they would support the Republicans only if it stood by its 'principles of equality before the law.'[181] Robert A. Paul, who led the Richmond Black Militia, provides an example of the quandary facing many black leaders in their view of the Readjusters. Whilst on the one hand the Readjusters shared Republican values over equality, Paul questioned how blacks could side with a party that was led (and had members) who had previously fought for the Confederacy.[182]

An insight into the mentality of the Republican Party's state leadership towards the Readjusters can be gleaned from a letter from the Virginia Republican Party 'boss', William C. Wickham, to President-elect James A. Garfield in December 1880. Wickham is of interest because he was a Republican with a Confederate background. However, after the Civil War he had joined the Republican Party and was a major

[178] William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (1887; New York, 1968), pp. 92-93
[179] *People's Advocate*, 7 February 1880
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid., 27 March 1880
[182] Dailey, pp. 16-17

figure in State politics until his death in 1888. In the letter, he outlined the significance of the 1881 election in the state, for it would 'determine for years to come the political position of the State.' The contest was one over which faction within the Democratic Party would gain power – a contest between whites, considered Wickham, as the Readjusters' claims at fraternity with blacks was barely surface deep, for there was 'no honesty in their professions of special friendship to the negro.'[183] Wickham maintained his support for black Republicans throughout the early 1880s, such as with Alfred W. Harris from Petersburg, who was actively involved in the creation of a state normal school in the early 1880s.[184]

Wickham's close working relationship with blacks became a target for the white press, including the white Readjuster-supporting press. The *Richmond Whig*, for example, in its attempts to discredit Wickham because of his close ties with African Americans, is perhaps a useful source to consult on this. It referred to two incidents: one was Wickham's support for John M. Dawson, a Black Republican candidate for office over white candidates; and an incident in 1880 when Wickham dined in a hotel in Staunton with black Republican William H. Pleasants during the Republican State Convention. The owner of the establishment, who did not allow blacks as guests in his hotel, was 'advised by counsel not to refuse.' In using this incident in the election campaign of 1883, the *Whig* noted that Wickham would 'vote for colored men in preference to white ones, and that he will do the same thing that he did in Staunton, at the Virginia Hotel, in 1880, and that he believes it to be right and proper.'[185] The point to note here is that efforts at biracial cooperation were not limited to the Readjusters, and that there were Republicans on the ground who still saw political opportunities for such cooperation, at a time when Republicans in Washington were beginning to distance themselves from their black supporters.

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[183] William C. Wickham to James A. Garfield, 6 December 1880, Letterbook III, Wickham Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society [hereinafter cited as VHS]
[184] See Chapter 3 for more on Harris.
[185] *Richmond Whig*, 15 September 1883, in Scrapbook I, Wickham Family papers, VHS

The election year of 1881 proved to be a turning point in the relationship blacks had with the Readjuster party. This was not only due to ever increasing support for the party from African Americans who were becoming more self-confident. This can be best demonstrated through a study of the Republican black convention held in Petersburg in March 1881. A resolute tone emerged from the convention, where delegates gave the Readjusters their wholehearted support. Claiming that the success of the national Republican Party rested on the success of the Readjusters, the convention noted how there were fewer than 500 Virginian blacks, 'who can be used to aid in carrying the State for the Bourbons,' opposed to a fusion ticket.[186] However, according to one black newspaper, the call for the convention was not received with widespread enthusiasm from blacks, at least in Richmond. 'Politics are as dead in Richmond as the last herring in the box,' noted the *Advocate*, echoing the comments it had made two years earlier. 'People are generally tired of conventions…called by a lot of interminable sore heads…[and] quarrelsome idle street-corner politicians.'[187] Outside of Richmond there seemed to be more interest. Nominating conventions were held in the run-up to the Petersburg Convention to select delegates, one of which was in the heavily black populated Botetourte County. In setting out the reasons for the meeting, which was held as a Republican meeting in the U.S. Court House, the convention declared that it was 'preserving true Republican principles'. Using the language once used by white Conservatives, the convention aimed to free Virginia 'from the interference and meddlesome dictation of white carpet-bag adventurers and Funder grip-sack officials.' Black opposition to those Republicans wishing to maintain a 'straight-out' ticket was made evident at the meeting. This was targeted at Wickham, where one resolution declared bluntly that he 'and his little "grip-sack" committee

[186] *National Republican*, 17 February 1881
[187] *People's Advocate*, 29 January 1881

cannot read us out of the Republican party, and we spit upon his efforts to do so.'[188] Furthermore, the resolutions stated that not only were those at the meeting opposed to 'dictation by Federal office-holders' over what should be discussed at the Petersburg convention, but that they would not allow a continuation of the same kind of control to which African Americans had been subject as Republicans. The meeting declared in uncompromising language that Republican office-holders had 'misled, deceived, and betrayed us, and have only used us'. A real sense of anger emerges from this convention, revealed through blacks' evident frustration and sense of betrayal at the hands of the Republican Party. The delegates lost track of time and the selection of delegates to Petersburg had to be done at another location for the allotted time in the courthouse had run out.[189]

A month later the Petersburg Convention met. The historian Jane Dailey regards this as 'a declaration of independence from the Republicans' by blacks.[190] In a broadside printed at the end of 1880, Black Republicans stated their intention to be independent in political allegiance and join forces with the Readjusters.[191] This intention was expressed more fully at the convention. It considered that those unfavourable to a fusion ticket had no support for blacks. This was, however, an exaggeration, and such statements could 'impress one that the colored vote of Virginia is almost unanimously for the readjusters. Such is not the fact.'[192] The *Advocate* went further, declaring that some counties – including Botecourte – did not have representation at the convention whereas other counties were represented by non-residents. Furthermore, the paper suggested that black support for Mahone's party would have been greater had the Petersburg convention been more orderly. It declared that the meeting was 'so uproarious and the rulings of its presiding officers so arbitrary

[188] *National Republican*, 17 February 1881. The term 'grip-sack' appears to have been an addition to the vocabulary of political language in the South, alongside 'Carpetbagger' and 'Scalawag'.
[189] Ibid., 17 February 1881.
[190] Dailey, p. 54
[191] Ibid.
[192] *National Republican*, 17 March 1881; *People's Advocate*, 19 March 1881

and unparliamentary [sic] as to neutralize much of the moral effect of it declaration for the readjusters.'[193] Such reporting, and in this case from a black newspaper, clearly discredited the Petersburg convention, and would affect the way black conventions would be regarded by whites in the coming decade. Moreover, whilst disorder was common at black conventions (something not unique to them, of course), the stress to make black political gatherings as formal as possible was a noticeable feature of later conventions, both in Virginia and beyond.

By the time of the 1881 election, Mahone moved closer to the Republicans, hoping to attract more black voters.[194] He saw the possibility of a black alliance in order to consolidate his position and began offering patronage to the black members. From 1882, this could also be achieved through the Governor's Mansion, as the Readjuster William E. Cameron became Governor in that year. Readjuster John P. Rankins, for instance, recommended to Cameron his friend, African American Cornelius Palmer of Jackson Ward, Richmond, for a political position. Palmer was described as an 'honest, sober, truthful and a hard worker' in the Readjuster cause (he had assisted with the Petersburg Convention the previous year). The position Rankins had in mind was for a watchman in Richmond.[195] A pencil note on the back of the letter outlines Cameron's thinking. He suggested by way of a reply that the request be referred to the Caucus Committee, adding that even though he wanted to help there were no current appointments 'which would suit him.'[196] This would suggest that Cameron deemed only certain positions suitable for blacks, such as the position of watchman. However, as early as 1879, one Readjuster made it clear to William Mahone that the party had to be careful not to offend blacks by giving them positions "according to the old idea particularly fitted to the colored man – say for instance the

[193] *People's Advocate*, 19 March 1881
[194] James T. Moore, 'Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia, 1879-1883', *Journal of Southern History* 41 (May 1975), pp. 167-186 (pp. 171-177) Two-thirds of people voting for the Readjusters in 1881 were African American. See Hartzell, 'The Exploration of Freedom,' p. 140
[195] John P. Rankins to William E. Cameron, January 1882, Correspondence Files-Cameron, Governor's Papers, Library of Virginia
[196] Pencil note, ibid.

doorkeepers."[197] Despite such efforts, one historian points out that 'the major administrative and elective offices remained in white control.'[198]

Jane Dailey notes that the Readjusters' distribution of patronage among black supporters challenged the southern social hierarchy. 'As black Virginians were elected or appointed to public office,' she writes, 'they became more visibly authoritative.'[199] White Readjusters were able to reconcile their own prejudices with the offering of patronage to blacks by separating what Dailey calls the 'public' and 'private' spheres. Black civil rights (in the public sphere) could be honoured even though the Readjuster party maintained the view of white supremacy when it came to social relations (the private sphere).[200] The Readjuster period was not a 'full-fledged civil rights revolution',[201] as one historian considers, but clearly opportunities were available to blacks. The continuity of white supremacy from the Conservatives through to the Readjusters was an issue that many blacks could overlook.

The Readjusters gained further support after 1881 from the National Republican Committee and the new President, Chester A. Arthur.[202] Arthur was keen to talk with the independent parties in the South, such as the Readjusters in Virginia, which was something his predecessor was reluctant to do. But he largely ignored African Americans, and helped to hasten their growing resentment towards the Republicans, although it would take another half century for a wholesale change in party allegiance. However, by 1882, a change in the 'ends' of the Republican versus Democrat debate had occurred. No longer was it 'defending or depriving blacks their

[197] Robert A. Richardson to William Mahone, 23 November 1879, William Mahone Papers, cited in Dailey, p. 68
[198] Moore, p. 181
[199] Dailey, p. 68
[200] Ibid., pp. 79-81
[201] Moore, 'Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia,' p. 180
[202] *Petersburg Lancet*, 16 September 1882

political rights,' but 'a partisan struggle over winning their votes.'[203] How this played out in the coming decade will be explored later in this study.

Despite increasing support from the President, there were still Black Virginians who did not support the Readjusters. It is hard to gauge the extent of this opposition since the sources that survive for this period are either from the Readjusters or the Democrats. Known as 'Straight-outs', these blacks were pitied, if nothing else, by the Readjusters. In the Congressional campaign of 1882, forty-seven year-old John M. Dawson, who was a minister at the First Baptist Church in Williamsburg, ran as an Independent Republican. Dawson had already served on the Williamsburg Common Council as well as holding a seat in the Virginia Senate.[204] Whilst regarded as 'honest' and a 'gentleman' by the Readjuster-supporting press, he had 'fallen into bad company'.[205] A meeting of Straight-out Republicans in Norfolk (which included Coalitionists who had become Straight-outs) was regarded as 'blind'.[206] One Readjuster-supporting editor referred to this group as 'The Colored Anti-Mahone Union', an indication of the principal reason why some blacks could not stomach the third party.[207] However, some Straight-out Republicans, like George M. Arnold, declared their support for the Coalitionists in the summer of 1882, supporting John S. Wise, the White Readjuster running for Congress.[208]

Mahone entered into his 'last and most radical phase' in the year leading up to the 1883 election. It was at this point that he gave his full support to an African American from the Southside running for the state legislature.[209] Moreover, the Republican Coalition Club of Colored Voters was organised by the Readjusters to build

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[203] Xi Wang, *The Trial of Democracy: Black Suffrage and Northern Republicans, 1860-1910* (Athens, GA, 1997), p. 202
[204] Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers*, p. 58
[205] *Petersburg Lancet*, 5 August 1882. More on Dawson can be found in Chapter 4.
[206] Ibid., 19 August 1882
[207] Ibid., 16 September 1882. Evidence has been found that the following year at least one black Straight-out Republican organisation was set up, in Staunton, Virginia. *Charlottesville Chronicle*, 21 September 1883
[208] *Petersburg Lancet*, 19 August 1882
[209] Moore, p. 182-83

up black support. Consisting of a series of local clubs, this organisation was to meet once a week to enrol voters, to ensure that the capitation tax had been paid (in order that the electorate could vote), and that information be read out so that voters could be kept up-to-date with events. On election day these clubs would be out in force to ensure that everyone who could vote did so, with representatives present at polling stations to make sure that blacks were able to cast their votes.[210]

In the space of one year, between the Congressional elections in 1882 and the state elections in 1883, African American support for the Readjusters increased. In September 1882, for instance, the *Petersburg Lancet* (a black newspaper that supported the Readjusters) noted how blacks were realistic in their political outlook. 'The Readjuster party, just like the Republican party, has shown a disposition to ignore the negro in its distribution of patronage; yet we can say in all truthfulness that that party has approximated nearer the principles of right that even the Republican party.'[211] A year later, the same paper was less circumspect, claiming that the manhood of African Americans was being recognised by the Readjusters, as 'honest men' and 'loyal citizens'.[212]

In the run-up to the state election in November 1883, black Readjusters circulated an address to voters. It demonstrated how the Readjusters had helped blacks in the state, through education provision,[213] welfare, the removal of voting qualifications, and a reduction in the state debt. In addition, blacks had received patronage from the party. The address, though, stressed what the Readjusters were doing for Virginia, not just for African Americans. The document was, in its own way, an example of racial self-help, for it was showing to other African Americans not only what these leaders had achieved, but what their audience could also, potentially,

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[210] House Doc., 1st Sess., 48th Cong., Vol. 24, Part 1, Doc. 27, p. 161, cited in James Hugo Johnston, 'The Participation of Negroes in the Government of Virginia from 1877 to 1888', *Journal of Negro History* 14 (July 1929), pp. 251-71 (pp. 263-64)
[211] *Petersburg Lancet*, 9 September 1882
[212] Ibid., 25 August 1883
[213] This was highlighted in an editorial in ibid., 27 October 1883

achieve.[214] The document is signed by a list of African Americans from across the state. These names are not only of those holding political office, but more significantly this document provides a unique list of local black supporters of the Readjuster cause. Some former Straight-out Republicans were listed, such as George M. Arnold, whilst others were not, like John M. Dawson. Perhaps more revealing is the name 'Rev. Jesse Dungy', in all likelihood the same Dungee who had been a Democrat in the mid-1870s. That Dungee decided to follow the Readjusters is perhaps not all that surprising since there were former Democrats in the party. However, the Conservative party had become stronger by 1883, renaming itself the Democratic Party, and campaigning on a platform of white supremacy. Perhaps such a move away from moderation on the part of the Conservative explains why Dungee switched his support to the Readjusters. Other Black Conservatives, such as Giles B. Jackson, would move away from politics altogether. The Danville Riot, which took place at election time in 1883, and which saw four blacks killed by a white mob, led to a Democratic victory in the election a few days later. However, black political participation did not end there, as the following chapters will explore.[215]

General Conclusion

As this chapter has revealed, a number of key themes emerge in both Virginia and Alabama in the years immediately following Reconstruction. One such theme is the continued use of the convention movement as a means of expressing the views of the grassroots through their representatives. This was a continuation of the method used by local leaders during Reconstruction to discuss the issues pertinent to the African American community. At the same time, there was a conscious effort to make sure these conventions were representative through the checking of delegates' credentials. Efforts were also made to ensure that these conventions were as orderly as possible and

[214] W.N. Stevens, et al., *An Address to the Colored Voters of the State of Virginia*, included in *Senate Report No. 579*, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 787-91, excerpt cited in Aptheker, pp. 731-734
[215] Senate Report into the Violence at Danville, p. 790; Moore, p. 183

moderate in their tone – in order to maintain a level debate and to prevent any undue hostility from whites. This was not always achieved, however, as in the case of the 1875 Richmond Convention. Another method of expressing their views was by means of memorials to the President and Congress, which at times were presented in person by a delegation of local black leaders. This was a method used by leaders in both states and provided a connection between the localities and the Federal Government.

Another theme that has been revealed is the ever-present option of political alternatives, whether through the Democratic (or Conservative) party, or with a 'fusion' party like the Greenbackers in Alabama or the Readjusters in Virginia. Fusion politics had more success in Virginia than in Alabama, mainly due to the fact that it had more support from both blacks and whites. The reasons for choosing political alternatives over the Republican Party were varied and were fraught with risks, especially for black Democrats. The certain ostracism faced by blacks who chose this path would have been a deterrent for many. Yet there were African Americans at the localities who did choose this path, and would continue to do so in the coming decades. The fact that well into the 1870s local black Democrat clubs were more numerous in Virginia than in Alabama suggests that the political climate was different in the Old Dominion and, as such, opened up windows of opportunity for blacks that were simply not available in Alabama. This would be a feature of Virginia that would continue into the next decade. It must be stressed, however, that whites usually did not take such clubs very seriously and that the majority of African American leaders remained within the Republican fold.

This brings us to the theme of elections. Much of the party political activity involving blacks revolved around federal and state elections. This would be as pronounced throughout the 1880s and 1890s, but it appears that certain elections, such as the 1874 election in Alabama (or the 1883 election in Virginia, which will be explored later in this study) were turning points. In the case of Alabama, the 1874 election was significant not only because it ushered in a Democratically-controlled state legislature (although this was significant), but that it changed the dynamics of

black political activity itself, in terms of what became the key political issues. Whilst the subject of civil rights would continue to form part of black political discussion in Alabama, the Montgomery convention held immediately after the 1874 election showed that emigration became a significant aspect of political discussion among African Americans in the state.

One cannot ignore that emigration was a major theme of discussion among local black leaders in the late 1870s. This subject found more support in Alabama than in Virginia, but it was an issue that would never disappear, and would continue to be an option for some, as this study will explore. At this stage, it can be said that it was at moments of uncertainty in the political climate that talk of emigration (whether this was to the West or further afield) became most acute. In Alabama, this was immediately after the Democratic victory in 1874. In Virginia, this was just prior to the initial Readjuster victory in 1879. It would emerge on a more national level in the early 1890s, again in a period of political uncertainty.

The other major theme discussed by local black leaders in this period was education. In the late 1870s, this was a subject that was more prominent in Virginia than in Alabama. For example, discussion over black education would be evident among African American leaders in the Old Dominion from the 1875 Richmond Convention through to the Readjuster period. Indeed, the meaning and purpose of education among African Americans would become increasingly a major point of discussion among local leaders, especially in the 1880s. This would coincide with the emergence of a new generation of secular, black leaders who were educated (in some cases to degree level), and who received their political 'education' in the Readjuster period. Black enthusiasm for fusion politics in Virginia overshadowed the self-segregating tendencies of the black convention movement, which became apparent in 1883. As in the case of the 1871 Southern States Convention, where one delegation from Virginia did not turn up due to the local elections, so interest in the national black convention in 1883 received little attention from Black Virginians. This was in stark

contrast to the interest shown towards the convention in Alabama, where in some areas the high level of interest was regarded as unprecedented. The year 1883 can be seen as a turning point for many reasons, as the following chapter will demonstrate.

Part II

The following three chapters will explore the 1880s in more detail. Chapter 2 will focus on the most significant national black convention that took place in the post-Reconstruction period – the Louisville convention of 1883. This will introduce a number of key themes that dominated discussion among local black leaders throughout the 1880s, such as civil rights, the extent of involvement with party politics, and the nature of educational provision for African Americans. It will look at the significant divisions that were beginning to occur within the black leadership, as well as ascertaining the response to the convention from leaders in Alabama and Virginia. Chapters 3 and 4 will study, in turn, the views of black leaders in Virginia and Alabama, and will take the story of black leadership in these states from the early 1880s to the mid 1890s.

At this stage, mention must be made of another event that took place in October 1883: the Supreme Court decision in the *Civil Rights Cases*. This decision was a culmination of a series of cases that had been referred to the U.S. Supreme Court from local courts throughout that year. The decision centred on the Fourteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1875. By taking a narrow interpretation of the first section to the Fourteenth Amendment, the Court declared that only acts of discrimination by a state were eligible for prosecution under the terms of the amendment, not that of individuals. As such, the 1875 Civil Rights Act became null and void, for the federal government did not have the constitutional power to legislate against private acts of discrimination. The decision is significant to this study for it provoked a widespread response from African American leaders in both Alabama and Virginia, and reawakened the debate over civil rights that would last throughout the 1880s. It also signalled a judicial end to Reconstruction, and reinforces further the idea that the 1880s were not simply a time of transition between the end of Reconstruction and the Jim Crow laws of the 1890s, but a distinct period in the intellectual and social

history of African Americans. The extent of this distinctiveness will be explored in the following three chapters.

2 The Louisville Convention of 1883

They [black Americans] are bound by every element of manhood to hold conventions, in their own name, and on their own behalf, to keep grievances before the people and make every organized protest against the wrongs inflicted upon them with their power.[1] – Frederick Douglass

We need some common sense, not [a] convention.[2] – Richard T. Greener

In the period after Reconstruction, which was known in the South as Redemption, African Americans continued to hold national conventions. However, they became less frequent as blacks began to look for alternative ways to seek progress outside of politics. The old spirit of black organisation was still present, especially with the 'old-guard' of black leaders who saw it as their right as American citizens to hold conventions. With the undermining of civil and political rights in the South, and the growing insistence by whites in some states for social proscription, keeping black grievances before the public was seen as critical, at a time when many northern whites, including former Radical Republicans, began to lose interest in the rights of the African American. Many former Radicals became interested instead, in reforming education and in issues such as temperance.

During Reconstruction, up to 1873, the need to secure civil and political rights was at the forefront of discussion among the conventioneers. But by the time white Democrats regained control of all southern state legislatures in 1876, the emphasis

[1] Frederick Douglass, 'Parties Were Made For Men, Not Men For Parties: An Address Delivered in Louisville, Kentucky, On 25 September 1883' in *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews. Vol. 5: 1881-95*, ed. by John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan (New Haven, 1992), pp.85-110 (p.95)
[2] Richard T. Greener's comments in the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, reprinted in the *Washington Bee*, 12 May 1883

moved towards a reliance on self-help and racial solidarity through education and economic advancement. This followed a change of priorities in southern black thinking similar to that which occurred in the 1850s, when the previous decade's stress on political and civil rights for northern free blacks became secondary to racial solidarity and emigration to Africa. August Meier has chronicled the developments in black thinking in the post-war period, although this was based predominantly on the intellectual position of northern blacks.[3] However, the early 1880s witnessed a time when black thinking over issues of civil and political rights, and self-help and racial solidarity, were malleable, and varied between the sections. In the North, political independence had become a key issue. In the South, where the majority of African Americans still lived, the situation was more complex. When politics was discussed it usually referred to the Republican Party. However, there were blacks south of the Mason-Dixon line, as well as in the North, who either chose or were forced into voting for the Democrats (the party of white supremacy at this time). Even so, it was in areas such as education, moral development and the economic system in which African Americans found themselves that held the attention of most southern blacks.

What becomes apparent in the 1880s is the growing gulf between the North and the South on the best way to find a solution to the problems faced by blacks. In the debate over the holding of the Louisville Convention, for example, T. Thomas Fortune, a southerner who by the early 1880s had moved to New York City, commented how there were now two black problems: one northern and western; the other southern.[4] Whilst the Reconstruction-era national conventions were able, to some extent, to keep together the conflicting ideas of the black leadership, the controversy surrounding the 1883 Convention demonstrates how such compromises were no longer tenable. Indeed, the fractures in black thinking would widen throughout the 1880s and 1890s, becoming a gulf by the first decade of the twentieth century.

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[3] Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, chapters 1 and 5

[4] *New York Globe*, 7 April 1883

What follows, then, is an analysis of the most significant post-Reconstruction national convention held in Louisville, Kentucky, in September 1883. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that aspects of Reconstruction continued until 1883 when the 1875 Civil Rights Act was declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court, and the *legacy* of Reconstruction continued even longer. One such legacy was the southern local black leadership, which emerged in the 1870s and continued to be active in their communities, in some cases, well into the 1890s. As Chapter 1 revealed, the end of Reconstruction was not, therefore, as significant a change in some areas of the South as has generally been seen, partly because of how soon Redemption came to some areas, but also because of the continuities – one being the southern black leadership.

This chapter will be divided into four parts. The first will look briefly at the forerunner to the Louisville convention – the Nashville conference of 1879. This will be followed by a discussion of the debate surrounding the Louisville convention in the months leading up to it. The opposition to the convention will be studied, as well as the reaction from local black leaders in Virginia and Alabama. The second part will focus on the local meetings held in the run-up to the convention that selected delegates, taking as a case study one district meeting in northern Alabama. The third section of the chapter will analyse the convention itself. Key to this will be to consider the extent that local leaders played a central role in the convention's proceedings, and how much of what was discussed came from the concerns of those in attendance, rather than from the more established black elite. There was enthusiasm for the convention at the grassroots, although how widespread this was is hard to evaluate. It is safe to assume that judging by the number of delegates who attended the convention, and the spread of states from which they came, that there was at least a superficial support for the Louisville meeting by the time most delegates were chosen in August and September 1883. In some areas, though, the Louisville Convention infused communities with a new hope. As one delegate from northern Alabama told Frederick Douglass, 'I have

never known the colored people to enter with so much zealous interest into the selection of representatives.' [5]

Finally, the fourth section will consider the reaction to the convention from both the black and white press. When the call first went out for delegates to the Louisville Convention, in resulted in a widespread discussion in the black press. As this study revolves around Virginia and Alabama, preference will be given to the two black newspapers that covered the affairs of these states: the *People's Advocate*, edited by John W. Cromwell, which covered Washington, D.C. and Virginia; and the *Huntsville Gazette*, edited by Charles Hendley, Jr., based in northern Alabama. However, other newspapers will be mentioned as a means of comparison, as well as to give a broader insight into the convention.

Background

It is important to remember that the Louisville convention was part of a broader black convention movement. The last national convention (or conference) had been held in Nashville in 1879. The majority of the one hundred and forty delegates represented southern states (only Pennsylvania represented the North, Oregon the West, and a few states represented the Mid-West and border-states).[6] It could be argued that as this conference was made up largely of southern leaders, it had a greater chance of representing the views of the majority of blacks who lived in the American South at this time. However, as one historian argues, this conference 'affected only a narrow stratum of the race, the assimilated and prosperous' – an argument that could be levelled at any of the black conventions.[7]

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[5] Herschel V. Cashin to Frederick Douglass, 17 September 1883, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress [http://memory.loc.gov]

[6] Schweninger, *James T. Rapier and Reconstruction*, p. 160. See also the introduction to the reprinted proceedings: *Proceedings of the National Conference of Colored Men of the United States Held in State Capitol at Nashville, Tennessee, May 6,7,8 and 9, 1879* (1879; Philadelphia, 1969)

[7] Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York, 1979), pp. 220-21.

The driving force behind the Nashville Conference, Louisianan P.B.S. Pinchback, argued that blacks had to dispel the white myth that the freedmen "have no complaints to make of murder, violence, intimidation and unlawful deprivation of rights, that all is peaceful and serene, the colored people are happy and simply desire to be let alone."[8] Holding a conference would, therefore, help to shape public opinion (one of the key aims of the black convention movement) by illustrating the reality of southern black life. The subject of emigration proved to be the major talking point of the conference, since it occurred at the time of the Exodust, when large numbers of African Americans were leaving the South for lands to the West. Support for the Exodust movement was mixed, however, for the conference did not wholeheartedly support the movement; rather, it supported the decision of those who felt that leaving the South was the best course for them individually.

The other major talking point at the conference was education. This subject would come to dominate discussion among black leaders throughout the 1880s. A leading voice in the debate was John W. Cromwell, editor of the *People's Advocate*. The 1879 conference proved to be the first major platform for him in outlining how he saw black education progressing. Cromwell gave a paper entitled "The Necessity of Industrial and Technical Education for Our Youth", which outlined the need for a more relevant type of education for the black masses; a type that would prepare them for working life in the South, and one that met their current needs. Cromwell noted that since Emancipation, the so-called training ground for various trades (a result of the 'self-interest' of slave owners) was no longer present, and that this, together with the prejudice exhibited by trade unions, meant that industrial schools were the best way forward for blacks. He considered this to be of paramount importance; not only were there no schools that catered specifically for such a technical education, but the present educational system was on the wrong track, too focused on creating professional men.

[8] *New Orleans Weekly Louisianian*, 7 December 1878, cited in ibid., p. 221

As a result, Cromwell believed that the education offered at that time was creating, in language that Booker T. Washington would use twenty years later, 'lawyers without briefs, doctors without patients, preachers without congregations, starving in the midst of plenty'.[9] Whites, however, were gaining benefit from the industrial education they received through the employment opportunities they secured, and Cromwell believed that by furthering industrial education among blacks, new opportunities would open up for them. As Washington would say in the years to come, this industrial education would give blacks a bargaining chip by offering whites something that was useful to them. The debate over higher versus industrial education would continue to be debated by the black leaders of the next generation. Cromwell would also raise the issue of education in the run-up to the Louisville Convention four years later.

Convention call

The call for a national convention was issued in early May 1883. It listed six main topics facing African Americans that would form the backbone of the discussion: lack of a fair wage; unequal educational opportunities; lack of respect for civil rights; political rights not being upheld; the President not ensuring equal treatment for all; and the need for racial unity, in order to support *en masse* any party willing to take their side. Furthermore, the call noted this moment as 'the eve of a great political revolution', which is of interest for presumably the call was referring to the Presidential election of the following year. This suggests that more than a year before the election, the Democrats were predicted to win, which would have seemed as revolutionary, for they had not gained the White House since before the Civil War.[10] This final point of the call also hints at the loss of faith experienced by African Americans in the Republican Party. The issue of whether or not to endorse the Republicans for the 1884

[9] *Proceedings of the National Conference of Colored Men*

[10] Grover Cleveland (Democrat) did win the election in November 1884. This will be studied in more detail in the next chapter.

election was a topic that was avoided at all costs. Only Douglass referred openly to the Republicans, and even his comments were qualified.

The call also spelled out how many delegates each state would be allowed. Representation was set as one delegate for every 25,000 people, which gave Alabama 24 delegates and Virginia 25. The states of the Deep South had roughly the same number of delegates, whereas the North had considerably fewer due to the lower black population at this time.[11] However, no complete list of delegates has been found. One can get a rough idea of where these delegates came from in their respective states by looking at the more detailed proceedings of the 1879 Nashville Convention. The districts from which these men came would have been the same in both cases, for it was based on the congressional districts of each state. The importance of representation emerged even before the call was formally issued. The *New York Globe* noted that only by having a broad spectrum of states represented, from both the North and the South, could it be known whether the plan of action decided at the national convention would be applicable to both sections.[12]

It is no exaggeration to say that no other national black convention in the post-Civil War period was as talked about as the one held in Louisville. Two major issues were debated in the run-up to the convention: one, whether there should even be a convention, the other, where it should take place. For Louisville was not the first choice; the nation's capital was the original choice but this was dismissed relatively early on in the planning stage for fear that it would be interfered with by aspiring politicians. The 1880s was a golden age for the Washington black elite. Made up of academics, politicians and other professionals, this group believed themselves to be hugely influential. Former black politicians, such as P.B.S. Pinchback and Blanche K. Bruce, were based in the city as well as the influential Frederick Douglass, whose house was on the other side of the Potomac River in Anacostia. However, the

[11] *Washington Bee*, 5 May 1883
[12] *New York Globe*, 7 April 1883

Washington black elite did not escape criticism. William Calvin Chase, the editor of the *Washington Bee*, was perhaps the most outspoken in his criticism, which would continue into the 1890s. John Edward Bruce, another black journalist, was another notable critic.[13] However, Chase did have rather erratic behaviour; his views veered between outright hostility to these Republican politicians and courting them. For example, he visited Blanche at home in Washington, and was reported as saying that black support for the Republicans had not waned (an issue that would be a matter of controversy at the Louisville Convention).[14]

Despite this, the criticisms did have some substance to them. As C. Vann Woodward noted, 'the average cotton-field Negro voter had little more in common with the outstanding Negro politicians of the South than he had with the corporation lawyers who ran the Republican party in the North.'[15] This comment, in itself, might be a touch exaggerated, but it does make the point clear that not only were there class divisions within the African American community, but that the efforts and concerns of the Washington black elite would only be of limited value to the black masses. The tension that existed, therefore, between these different classes within the black community was at the heart of the black convention movement. Moreover, this became a tension between the elite who were outspoken in their support for the Republican Party, with generally little questioning, and the rest who were often more circumspect.

The decision not to hold the convention in Washington, where such political interference could be a possibility, was also an attempt to counter the white argument that the black conventions were held primarily for the benefit of black politicians. This had broad support from the nation's black press. A number of southern papers, such as

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[13] Jacqueline M. Moore, *Leading the Race: The Transformation of the Black Elite in the Nation's Capital, 1880-1920* (Charlottesville, VA, 1999), pp. 12, 9-10. See also Philip Dray, *Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction Through The Lives of the First Black Congressmen* (New York, 2008), pp. 319-320

[14] *New York Times*, 12 August 1883. See Chapter 3 for more on Chase.

[15] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge, 1951), p. 217

the Selma (Alabama) *Pioneer*, favoured a southern location.[16] Nashville was once again an option, as was Louisville, Kentucky. Black newspapers in Virginia and North Carolina thought Richmond, Virginia, a good location.[17] In the end, however, Louisville, a popular location for conventions, was chosen. In September and October 1883, alone, there were a number of them: an educational convention, a bankers' convention, as well as the Convention of Associated Charities.[18] The city was also in a border state between the North and the South, so could satisfy blacks from both sections who feared any convention held elsewhere would be unduly influenced by the section in which the convention found itself. Kentucky could not escape, however, the racial preferences of the day. Despite having what a local newspaperman called the "ear of the North", attempts had already been made to segregate the city's streetcars. However, while this had been achieved by the mid-1880s, it was not set in stone.[19] In April 1883, for example, a biracial state convention was held in the city to discuss the state of education.[20]

The black press were generally in favour of holding a national convention. The *People's Advocate* noted, for example, that the majority of correspondence it received favoured a convention being held. The paper put forward reasons why African Americans should meet in this way:

> That he is still deprived of the fruit of his labor in many sections of our country; that he is the victim of the spirit of caste; that his civil and political rights are not fully enjoyed; that even in the house of his friends, the Republican party, he does not receive

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[16] Cited in the *New York Globe*, 19 May 1883

[17] See, for example, an excerpt from the Tarboro (North Carolina) *Sentinel*, cited in ibid; *People's Advocate*, 21 April 1883

[18] *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 25 September 1883

[19] Henry Watterson, *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 12 May 1883, cited in Stephen Robert Robinson, 'Henry Watterson and the New South Creed, 1865-1919,' unpublished M.Phil. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2007, p. 34; Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky, Vol. 1: from Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891* (Frankfort, KY, 1992), pp. 297-98

[20] Victor B. Howard, *Black Liberation in Kentucky: Emancipation and Freedom, 1862-1884* (Lexington, KY, 1983), pp. 174-75.

> that consideration to which his votes and service should entitle him; that as a class he is ignorant and poor and for this reason discriminated against, needs but to be stated.[21]

One can see emerging here continuity in the grievances felt by African Americans that Reconstruction had not resolved, nor had the Redeemers chosen to resolve, despite statements to the contrary. As was the situation in the late 1870s, many of the Redeemers wished for blacks to switch parties and vote for the Democrats.

However, supporting the Democrats was not the only option. Black independence in politics had become a much-debated issue by 1883, and would continue to be so throughout the 1880s. African American T. Thomas Fortune, the editor of the *New York Globe*, brought it to the forefront. One area where political independence was popular was the Mid-West, from the Greenbackers in the 1870s to the Populists in the 1890s. It is perhaps no surprise that blacks were in support of such political movements, especially when one considers that they were agrarian movements, often uniting white and black poor alike. The *Advocate*, however, whilst supporting the Republicans, felt that the convention should not be partisan. It considered the task ahead 'much more difficult than that which confronted the pioneers of the anti-slavery movement.'[22] One wonders if Douglass, a 'pioneer' himself, would have agreed with this. What such a comment by the *Advocate* demonstrates is that a new generation of black leaders was acknowledging that ending slavery was one thing, how to survive in freedom was quite another. Blind obedience to the Republican Party was not the answer. So this convention was a moment in black intellectual history whereby the old and new generations came together. However, what appeared to be a break from the past was the growing influence of the new generation, which even Douglass welcomed in a letter to his son. Using the adage "old men for counsel, young

[21] *People's Advocate*, 5 May 1883
[22] Ibid.

men for war", he admitted that 'it may be as well for me to stand aside and allow some *younger* man to come to the front'.[23]

At the same time, however, Cromwell used language that was reminiscent of the Reconstruction-era leaders. He noted that full equality would take time, 'the result of years, if not generations, of persistent and united effort.' He thought that the role of the convention would be to direct such efforts. As the *Advocate* pointed out, 'It matters not what our past conventions have been, or are now likely to be. They are indispensably connected with the idea of organic action which is essential to our future well being.' Such comments appear much milder than those that would emerge in the decades to come, but they do indicate that the language of Reconstruction was still in use in the early 1880s. The argument here essentially ran that with their efforts combined, and with time, blacks would show whites that they deserved full equality, and that one way to demonstrate their progress was to organise a very American type of meeting: the convention. The *Huntsville Gazette* said much the same thing. 'In answering the question as to the necessity or use of a Convention,' the paper noted, 'it must be remembered that Conventions are the recognized and time-worn mediums through which, almost without exception, every undertaking great or small has been accomplished in America.'[24] Douglass would voice a sentiment similar to this in his keynote speech at the convention. It must be remembered, too, that the desire to show whites the progress made by African Americans was an important reason for the black conventions to be held, partly because of the wide press coverage such conventions received in the mainstream press.[25]

Not everyone supported the idea of a convention, however, wherever it might be held. In May 1883, some four months before the national convention was due to

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[23] Frederick Douglass to Lewis Douglass, 18 July 1883, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress [http://memory.loc.gov]
[24] *Huntsville Gazette*, 21 July 1883
[25] Chase's paper makes the point of the significance of black progress. *Washington Bee*, 14 April 1883

meet, a meeting was held in Timms' Hall in Washington, D.C. Numbering about a hundred men, it was a protest against the idea of holding any kind of convention. Leading the opposition campaign was Richard T. Greener.[26] A native of South Carolina, Greener had been in support of black efforts to move west, so once again, he ran counter to Douglass and many other black leaders. However, the fact that as many as a hundred men were present at this meeting suggests that opposition to the convention was not from an insignificant minority. The speakers all stated that the committee issuing the call had been wrong to do so, and that Washington was not the place to hold a convention. Moreover, this was not a sectional issue. Many of those who spoke and who were at this protest meeting were from the South.[27]

Those present in Timms' Hall believed that the convention call was made by 'a few citizens' of Washington, D.C., 'without proper authority and without consulting the representative colored men of the different states and territories'; that it was called for political purposes, in other words, to control the black vote (although Cromwell noted that even though this point was published, it was said to have been struck out of the official proceedings); and that the call should be from men from the states, not from Washington.[28]

Greener was also angered by his name being published with the call. In a statement written for the *New York Sun*, he said that he had never attended any of the committee meetings and that, more significantly, he did not support the holding of a national convention. Greener directed his remarks here at the Washington elite, whom he regarded as selfish, and whose priorities lay with gaining political office. 'They have neither attempted to make our race a permanent political factor,' he added, 'nor have they ever outlined a policy looking to the permanent good of our people, socially,

[26] William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York, 1991), p. 314.
[27] L.P.M Watson from Alabama and T.B. Pinn from Virginia were among those who spoke.
[28] *People's Advocate*, 19 May 1883

politically, or in an industrial sense.'[29] Moreover, Greener thought at an estimated cost of $20,000, the convention was a waste of money. He also asserted that not only would the convention be too political and not representative enough, but that it would not work. As he remarked of the convention movement to date, none had 'ever developed an idea that was acted upon by the race' or that 'did not sink into oblivion with the froth of the resolutions.' He stressed, finally, that he did not think the conditions faced by African Americans were as harsh as many made them out to be, that law could only go so far in protecting black rights, and that ultimately the responsibility for improvement lay with blacks themselves.[30]

Of all the criticism and reservations on the holding of a national black convention, less impassioned voices did emerge from both the North and the South. One such voice was the educator J. Willis Menard from Florida. He answered all the main points of the convention call in turn, stating that a convention would not solve anything. For example, in his opinion, receiving a fair wage was dependent on market economics, not an extension of the law. Moreover, African Americans would have to rely on the Democrat-controlled state legislatures in order to get better schools. As for the protection of civil rights, Menard had his doubts that the convention could resolve anything when the entire Federal government and army could not enforce such rights. For Menard, both the dividing of the southern white vote and biracial co-operation at the state level, such as in Virginia with the Re-adjusters, were the only answers to the problems facing blacks.[31]

Menard, and others, revealed their sense of frustration at the national black leadership, as well as calling into question the necessity of holding any convention. What these comments also demonstrate is a realisation that the tactics used during Reconstruction no longer worked. Men such as Douglass were still holding on to the

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[29] *New York Sun*, citied in *New York Globe*, 19 May 1883
[30] Ibid.
[31] *New York Globe*, 26 May 1883

idea that what was attempted ten years previously could still be tried in the 1880s. In making the convention call, Menard remarked, Douglass had 'an error of the head and not of the heart.'[32]

One has to ask why, in some cases, vehement opposition existed. A possible answer would be that any attempt to try and unite the black community was always going to run into problems, due to the varying personalities and points of view of the black leadership. The key to this was the matter of representation, for it was believed that leaders from the individual states should decide what was to happen, not just the elite in Washington. However, support for the convention was mixed, as the black press revealed. Some communities in the North, for example, were not in favour of large-scale mass organisation.[33] Mixed opinions were also evident in the South, as will be explored in more detail in the next section.

In addition, the Timms' Hall opposition meeting itself attracted antagonism from those in support of the national convention. The most notable critic of the critics was Frederick Douglass' son, Lewis. In a letter published in the *People's Advocate* in May 1883, under the heading 'Angry Opposition', Lewis Douglass tore down the arguments of Greener's meeting. He wrote that their reasons for opposition were 'shallow, false, and deceitful', and of the criticism that the national convention would be unrepresentative, Douglass fired back: 'The retort might be made by asking the envious, jealous, and over ambitious opponents of the convention whether they receive their inspiration from representative men; and if they do how are we common Negroes to know that the prophets have spoken?'[34] Such invective reveals the depth of feeling of those who saw the holding of a convention as essential and disunity among the leaders as counterproductive.

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Great Barrington in Massachusetts was one such place – the boyhood home of W.E.B. Du Bois. See Francis L. Broderick, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Negro Leader in a Time of Crisis* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 1.

[34] *People's Advocate*, 19 May 1883

During the summer of 1883, the debate over the convention turned to the matter of what was to be discussed at Louisville. As he did in Nashville in 1879, John Cromwell once again stressed the need for education to take priority. The education system was a subject of which the public needed to become more aware, he said, and a problem the nation as a whole had to sort out. He listed the three main priorities that the delegates should discuss. Firstly, he called on the need for African Americans to campaign in support of federal funding for education. Secondly, returning to his paper from the Nashville Conference, the convention should promote industrial education. Finally, he urged that the black vote should be used to uphold civil rights.[35] An indication of what Cromwell meant by this last point can be inferred from an editorial from 14 July 1883. Here he stated the need for a national black organisation, with local leagues, whose brief would be to work out a strategy to campaign for upholding the law, 'in the spirit in which it was framed' (presumably, Cromwell was referring here to the Civil Rights Act of 1875), as well as to encourage 'the steady progress in local pubic sentiment.'[36] Cromwell was, therefore, highlighting three key aims: the significance of local action by blacks; that this, in turn, would help to alter local (white) public opinion; and, finally, that this would encourage the federal courts to interpret the law within the context in which it was drafted.

Cromwell's call for an organisation that would put into practice the work of the convention appears to have been heeded. A resolution called for an organisation to be set up along the lines of what Cromwell had proposed in the *Advocate*. This would be in a similar style to the Irish Land League for it would have local branches. However, it provoked a mixed reaction, not surprising since such organisations had never been that successful in the past.[37] Cromwell's aim was to provide protection, to support black

[35] Ibid., 18 August 1883; also 9 June 1883 for Cromwell's view on education

[36] Ibid., 14 July 1883

[37] The Equal Rights League had been created in 1864 with little success, and the American Protective Society to Prevent Injustice to the Colored People of 1879 did not appear to have been ever organised.

businesses and to resist "the abridgement of the legal rights accorded to the race by the organic law of the land." Black leaders at this time frequently used the word 'organic law'. It implied natural law, or one's inherent rights. In America, this meant one's rights as set out by the Constitution.

There was a mixed response to the idea of a national black organisation along the lines proposed by Cromwell. The Birmingham (Alabama) *Pilot*, for example, was in support of such a plan: "No race, as a body, is so neglectful of its material progress as the colored people, and we feel certain that this would cement us in closer bonds of union." The paper stated that strength came from unity, and opposition would emerge against an organisation due to the potential strength that such a body could possess.[38] Once again, the notion of unity equalling power emerges as an important theme, as it did in the Nashville Convention of 1879. The Baltimore *Afro-American*, on the other hand, was not in favour of any kind of organisation, believing that it would never get off the ground, as with the Equal Rights League that was set up after the 1864 National Convention. The paper added that blacks had all the rights they needed anyway. 'To this we would reply,' said the *People's Advocate*, 'that we have made much progress as a class since 1864, in education, in wealth, and in appreciation of the necessity of organised action.' Moreover, as the paper was keen to stress, the Equal Rights League was not entirely pointless, for it had achieved something in a few states. As to the *Afro-American*'s second point, the fact was that whilst blacks did have equal rights in theory, in practice most of them did not. Look to the South, Cromwell urged the *Afro-American*, and they would see the need for such organisation.[39]

As well as debating what should be on the convention's agenda, there was also a discussion over who should control the proceedings. In an editorial entitled "Shall the Convention Represent the People?" the *Huntsville Gazette* declared that the national convention should be led by the southern delegation. The chairman should be either

[38] Cited in Ibid., 21 July 1883
[39] Ibid., 4 August 1883

from the South, it stated, or, failing that, southern blacks should have the say on who became the chairman (electing Frederick Douglass, for example). To the South it said: 'Send honest and competent delegates to Louisville and take care of their own interests. We want a Convention representative of the intelligence, progress, hopes and aims of the race or no convention at all.'[40]

So in the late summer of 1883 meetings were held across the South to select delegates to go to Louisville. In an interview with *The Star*, Douglass noted that men from many states had written to him to say that they were sending delegates, including Texas, Arkansas, Nebraska, Illinois and Maryland. One letter that survives is from a local meeting in northern Alabama, which will be studied in more depth in the next section. Whites, too, were offering their support. The Mayor of Indianapolis, for example, wrote to Douglass saying that if the organising committee decided to abandon the idea of holding the convention in Louisville, it could always be held in his city.[41] What follows is a study of some of the local conventions held prior to the national convention.

Responses to the convention call in Virginia and Alabama

The convention was on the whole supported in both Virginia and Alabama. However, their responses differed due to their respective local situations. In Virginia, concern was raised over the proposed convention's impact on their bipartisan experiment in state politics. In Alabama, reservations were expressed regarding the usefulness of the convention. One district in northern Alabama, however, did take the matter of the convention seriously. Their response will be studied in more depth in this section of the chapter. As with many other states across the South, blacks met to discuss what they considered to be important issues for the convention, as well as to select delegates to represent them.

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[40] *Huntsville Gazette*, 18 August 1883

[41] Cited in the *New York Times*, 6 September 1883

No evidence has been found to indicate the level of support from different areas of Virginia, although this was not necessarily through lack of interest, or that they had more concern for the forthcoming state election. An answer may come from a small item in the *People's Advocate*. It mentioned a number of states that had either already elected or were about to elect delegates to the Louisville Convention. However, it also added that state conventions were 'only recommended' for the purpose of selecting delegates. There was nothing stopping a state from simply electing the necessary number of delegates without a convention.[42] Whilst Virginia did send delegates to Louisville, it is surprising that no mention of how they were selected has been found.

It must be stated, though, that fears were expressed that the holding of a national convention would affect the progress of local black bipartisan politics. As explored in Chapter 1, the Readjuster party in the Old Dominion was, on the surface, a bipartisan party made up of renegade Democrats and Republicans, and supported by the majority of African American leaders in Virginia. The *Advocate* was quick to dispel fears that a national convention would somehow impact on the progress of black political involvement in Virginia. It pointed out that

> No such convention would, against the voice of a state delegation, dare to do aught to hazard the political or other interests of any one commonwealth, and of one thing there need be no fear – the colored people would sacrifice life, if need be, before they would stem the tide of progress which the Liberal movement h[as] set in motion.[43]

So in Virginia local biracial politics would come before an African American-run national convention. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that one of the Virginian delegates to Louisville, George M. Arnold, was a Republican supporter, rather than a

[42] *People's Advocate*, 21 July 1883
[43] Ibid., 2 June 1883

Readjuster. The *Petersburg Lancet* was noticeably quiet on the subject of the convention, indicating further that the black press in the state were more concerned with the fortunes of the Readjusters.[44]

Reservations about the forthcoming convention were also heard in Alabama in the summer of 1883. "Jack Daw", writing in the *Huntsville Gazette*, stated that whilst he was in favour of the convention being held, it had to achieve something. 'I know if we only meet, and only make speeches and pass resolutions and go home,' he pointed out, 'no good will be accomplished.' The fact that Douglass had joined in the call was significant, according to Daw, for 'will any lover of his race dare to doubt the wisdom of the one man that we have taken pride in pointing to as a leader?' Action was needed, and whilst he thought politics should not become a 'business' for blacks, at the same time he felt that blacks should not stand by and do nothing. In saying this though, Daw was in support of the established group of black leaders leading the convention, men such as James T. Rapier, a former Congressman for Alabama, former Louisiana Lieutenant-Governor P.B.S. Pinchback, and Frederick Douglass.[45]

Despite the many reservations heard across the country local communities did meet to select delegates to Louisville. One such place was the Eighth Congressional District of Alabama. On 14 July a notice was published in the *Huntsville Gazette* requesting the 'citizens of Madison county' to meet in the U.S. Court Room in Huntsville on Saturday 28 July, in order to discuss a proposal for a district convention which would select delegates to Louisville. Holding meetings in the local court was not unusual in America for it was a tradition that went back to Colonial times. Moreover, the symbolism would not have been lost on the local community, for the court was the representative of the Federal government in the town, the symbol of American citizenship and freedom. What is of interest, first and foremost, is that these black

[44] One of the few references to the Louisville Convention in the *Lancet* can be found in an edition from October 1883. *Petersburg Lancet*, 20 October 1883
[45] *Huntsville Gazette*, 9 June 1883

meetings were allowed to take place in what was often perceived as a white institution. Very often local meetings such as these would be held in local black churches. The importance of the court is reinforced further when one considers the significance African Americans placed on jury service, something that was often denied them. This gives greater significance to these meetings being held in such a place, for the courthouse would later become, alongside Jim Crow segregation, an example of the institutionalised racism faced by southern blacks. The use of the court as a place for African Americans to hold meetings did not only occur in northern Alabama. The courthouse of one town in Georgia was used for a local black meeting.[46] In Omaha, Nebraska, the black state convention there met, at no expense to the organising committee, at the City Council building.[47]

Out of the meeting at Huntsville came a decision to call another meeting on 11 August to elect delegates to go to the district convention in Decatur. Out of a total of forty-two delegates who would go to Decatur, fifteen were to come from Madison Country. Twelve delegates were elected at the Huntsville meeting; three more were later chosen following a meeting in the offices of the *Huntsville Gazette*. The Madison County delegation then left Huntsville for Decatur at 1am on Friday 1 September.[48]

Decatur was described by promotional material of the day as 'the natural gateway of Alabama.' It was a significant crossing point for the state's railroad, which saw a large rise in its population by 1888.[49] This ease of access meant it was an ideal location to hold the district convention. A.T. Walker of Limestone County delivered the opening address. He stressed the need for the convention to be 'uninfluenced by partisan prejudices, passions or selfish motives as public servants'. He went on to say

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[46] See below, p. 108

[47] I.B. Burton to Editor, *People's Advocate*, 18 August 1883

[48] The delegates chosen at a meeting in Madison County were H.C. Binford, Francis Davis, William H. Gaston, Charles Hendley, Jr., T.S. Cooper, H.J.R. Williams, J.M. Rice, T.W. Townsend, and Joe Burton. A further three were selected later who were Pope McDaniel, James Isaacs, and Jone Bone. *Huntsville Gazette*, 14, 21 July, 4, 18, 25 August 1883.

[49] *The City of Decatur, Alabama, Present and Prospective: Its Advantages as a Home; Inducements Offered Merchants, Manufacturers and Capitalists* (New York: Southern Commercial Publishing Company, 1888), pp. 5, 9

that it was the 'duty' of the gathering to chose 'our ablest and best men' to go to the national convention, 'to help rightly to influence public opinion and wisely plan for this and coming generations of the race.' Douglass at the Louisville Convention would echo such language, especially in the need to influence public opinion. Walker went on to add that the forthcoming national convention was 'now promising to be the greatest of all Colored Coventions' and that it would be a wake-up call for the Republican Party to treat African Americans with more respect. Stressing the need for effective leadership, Republican politician Herschel V. Cashin delivered the main speech at the Decatur convention. Georgian-born Cashin was of mixed-race and had trained as a lawyer. He had been elected to the Alabama state legislature in 1874 and 1876 and had held a federal position in Decatur throughout the 1880s.[50] Cashin stressed that rather than further legislation, what was required was an upholding of their rights as set out in the Constitution. African Americans were progressing, he said, obtaining an education and working towards racial uplift. The problem was that "his efforts are retarded by cruel and inhuman treatment, his common rights are disregarded and life too often barbarously taken by lynch law." Cashin's speech was not radical by any means. In fact, from a modern perspective his comments sound almost conservative. However, there was a clear strain of protest running through his speech. His remarks over the injustices faced by blacks on the railroads and in the courts are examples of this. Moreover, his comments on the railroads indicate that this flashpoint in southern race relations was already a major issue, at least in northern Alabama.[51]

The resolutions offered by the Decatur convention provide a window into African American thinking in one district of the Deep South, and the concerns that at least some of the delegates to Louisville would take with them. The convention declared that blacks should 'make every necessary effort, legal and otherwise' to correct the

[50] Howard N. Rabinowitz, 'Holland Thompson and Black Political Participation in Montgomery, Alabama', in *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era*, ed. by Howard N. Rabinowitz (Urbana, IL, 1982), pp. 249-280 (n85p279)
[51] *Huntsville Gazette*, 8 September 1883

grievances against them. No specifics were given here, but presumably this was thought the purpose of the Louisville convention. Two further resolutions offered were both on the same theme: that African Americans should not rely on others to help redress the wrongs against them. This was an indication, perhaps, of the low regard in which Republicans were held, as well as the failure of independent movements in the South, such as the Greenbackers, who had been strong in northern Alabama.[52] One can see from this that notions of self-help and racial solidarity were strong in this community, as was the significance placed (rather vaguely) on civil and political rights.

The delegates to Louisville were asked to carry forward these resolutions and put forward Douglass' name for chairman of the national convention. As will be seen, other conventions did not stipulate what the delegates should raise at the convention. Other resolutions offered at Decatur included one from Reuben M. Lowe from Madison County, who suggested that the national convention should not be involved with any aspiring Presidential candidates. Francis Davis, also from Madison, proposed that the Louisville convention should make a stand against intemperance and stress the significance of education.[53] Other states echoed similar sentiments. The year before a Kansas black convention, for example, had actually called for prohibition.[54] Finally, it was agreed that County Executive Committees should be set up in all eight counties of the Eighth Congressional District of Alabama, which would represent their communities for two years at a time. The brief for these committees was somewhat vague, however, with many African Americans excluded from the political process; this was, in a sense, their own independent political system at the local level. Republican leaning, but not technically tied to the Party, these committee meetings were an expression of local black political thought that operated *within* the political system. Their origins lay with the Union League, set up during Reconstruction to

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[52] For more information on the Greenbackers, see Chapter 4

[53] *Huntsville Gazette*, 8 September 1883

[54] *Proceedings of the Convention of Colored Men, held in…Parsons, Kansas…April 27-28, 1882* (Parsons, 1882), reprinted in Aptheker, pp.684-85 (685)

organise black political activity within the Republican Party. However, it is clear that the overriding theme of this particular meeting was a desire for the Republican Party to live up to its ideals.

Prior to the final announcement of who would be going to Louisville, a touch of humour coursed through the convention. As with the national convention, moments of light relief were a feature of the convention movement. When the issues under discussion were serious, and when the divisions often all too evident, such light relief became all the more important. This was either in the form of music, a picnic (as will be seen later in this section), or simply a wry comment from one of the delegates. In this district meeting, for example, one delegate asked that the edition of the *Huntsville Gazette* containing the meeting's proceedings be distributed for free among the backwoods counties. Laughter rung through the hall when a comment was made by another delegate, who stated that if these counties wanted to know what was going on, they should simply have to buy the newspaper.[55]

Despite its success in getting representatives together and forming a series of key resolutions, the Decatur convention did not escape criticism. The point at issue was that this meeting was irrelevant to ordinary African Americans. The *Huntsville Gazette* felt compelled to respond to criticism from the *Huntsville Independent*, in large part because the editor, Charles Hendley, was one of the delegates to the Decatur gathering:

> Certainly it is a mistake to charge the Decatur Convention with being a body of politicians with obscure objects. Its doors were wide open to the public and the press, the proceedings occupying several columns in this journal last week.
>
> The delegates were direct from the people and exceptionally free from politicians. The discussions and resolutions were of a social, industrial, and educational character. One of the principal objects of the Convention was to select delegates to the National Convention. This duty was performed in a manner uniformly satisfactory to

[55] *Huntsville Gazette*, 8 September 1883

> the people of the District. Its other deliberations, we believe, were of an elevating and encouraging character, reflecting credit upon the people whom the Convention represented.[56]

As Hendley points out here, the Decatur Convention achieved what it set out to do. In his view, it was as representative as such a meeting could possibly be; it was free from partisan politics; and it covered a wide range of subjects. In other words, what more could you expect from such a meeting? In the end, three delegates from the convention were chosen to go to Louisville. They were William H. Gaston from Madison, Herschel V. Cashin from Morgan, and Professor Y.A. Wallace from Lauderdale.[57] A meeting was held on 15 September to raise money to cover the delegates' costs for travel to Louisville.[58]

Other conventions like this met across the South and Mid-West that summer. In Omaha, Nebraska, the meeting quickly split between the 'political clique', numbering roughly four, and the other 32 delegates. This particular state convention is of interest for another reason. It is the only one of the local conventions where women are mentioned. Despite not actually taking part in the proceedings other than being spectators, they were involved in the entertainment for the convention. In this particular case, they arranged a picnic during the day and a festival in the evening. An organisation was also set up at this meeting that would help immigrants to the state to find land.[59]

In a local meeting in Topeka, Kansas, similar to one held in the court house in Huntsville, Alabama, local leaders gathered to elect delegates to a state convention in Lawrence, Kansas. However, not everyone present supported the holding of a national convention, believing that Kansas had no need to send delegates. It stated that 'the

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[56] Ibid., 15 September 1883
[57] For more information on Gaston, see Chapters 5.
[58] *Huntsville Gazette*, 15 September 1883
[59] I.B. Burton to Editor, *People's Advocate*, 18 August 1883

colored race was doing well enough in Kansas and had no grievances' and that a convention would simply be used politically.[60] Indeed, a convention held in the state the previous year had stressed education, economic advancement and temperance over civil and political rights.[61] However, those in favour of a national convention managed to overrule this and stated, unlike the Decatur convention, that these local delegates were be sent to Lawrence 'without instructions'.[62]

Some local meetings were Republican-affiliated affairs, such as the state convention in Maryland.[63] In Georgia, William Pledger, who would become a leading light in the state's Republican Party, organised efforts there and Mifflin W. Gibbs, another influential southern leader, attended a state convention in Arkansas.[64] However, the delegates in Arkansas and Georgia held very different views. In the former, for example, a resolution was adopted that gave support to President Arthur, calling him 'eminently statesmanlike, just, and discreet.'[65] Meanwhile, the Georgia state convention appeared not to represent all the views of black Georgians. In August, a well-attended local meeting in the Muscogee Court House stated its lack of interest in the planned national convention. The meeting considered the call as a 'national wrong' and, according to one paper, 'resolved…that such a call at this stage of our political history would prove detrimental to the welfare and advancement of our race.' The 'tenor of the debate' at Muscogee indicated that only the aspiring politicians, those 'who were after an easy living at the expense of the people', wanted the Louisville convention. Moreover, the 'true policy' of blacks, the meeting stated, was to focus more on one's own family and livelihood than on political activity. As the *New York Times* summed up this meeting, in words that Booker T. Washington would later echo,

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[60] *New York Globe*, 25 August 1883
[61] *Proceedings of the Convention of Colored Men*, reprinted in Aptheker, *Documentary History*, pp. 684-85
[62] *New York Globe*, 25 August 1883
[63] *New York Times*, 14 September 1883
[64] *Huntsville Gazette*, 8 September, 18 August 1883; Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, *Shadow and Light: An Autobiography* (1902; reprinted Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 175-78
[65] *New York Times*, 29 August 1883

those present felt that only when blacks became 'self-sustaining citizens' would they would have power. And just to add further emphasis, this would be more 'real power than all the conventions in the world.'[66]

And it was not only communities in Georgia that disagreed with the convention. According to one black newspaper, opposition to the national convention remained among many African American communities. The *New York Globe* reported that the elections held to select men to go to Louisville had been undertaken 'under protest', with local leaders expressing their anger at the nature of the call and suitability of holding a convention at all.[67] It did appear that Greener was not alone in his opposition.

This hint at discontent among the local black elite emerged during the convention itself, and was picked up on, to some degree, by at least one Democrat-leaning paper. Even though it is hard to assess how widespread such discontent was, and how widespread it was in the South, its existence is, nevertheless, significant. It shows that generalisations cannot be made about support for conventions from the local elite, or about the role of the national black elite. It was not enough, as it had been during Reconstruction, to have leaders simply known at a national level – men who had once held either a seat in Congress or a Federal position. Whilst such leaders had held a symbolic role for the aspirations of African Americans, important though this was, it could not always provide the practical assistance that African Americans, especially in the more rural areas of the South, so desperately needed.

As Bess Beatty notes in her study of the political views of the black elite: 'The Louisville convention revealed how far the political revolution of the 1860s had receded.' Beatty's study gives only a very brief account of the Louisville convention

[66] Ibid., 18 August 1883
[67] *New York Globe*, 8 September 1883

and, as a result, generalisations have been made.[68] In light of what the majority of local leaders thought both before and during the convention, perhaps this moment reveals something else. Whilst it is true that the number of blacks holding federal government positions had declined, black participation in politics was still a reality at this time. The Louisville delegates were, therefore, major beneficiaries of the 'political revolution' that was instigated during Reconstruction, and were determined to make their voice heard. The local black leadership were acknowledging that the black elite's role should no longer be as important as it had been the previous decade, and that such men could no longer assume that they spoke for all blacks. Such charges would be levelled at Booker T. Washington the following decade, although this time it would be from more militant blacks, rather than the more conservative-leaning local leaders in the 1880s.

Convention proceedings

The Louisville Convention was called to order at 12 noon on the 24 September 1883. Delegates from twenty-six states and the District of Columbia packed into Liederkranz Hall, and out of the 282 delegates, 243 were from the South.[69] In the hour leading up to the call to order the delegates met in caucuses to decide what issues they would bring to the convention floor. Delegates from Missouri asked one of the southern delegates to join them, a sign that the Mid-West and the South felt they had common issues. As the reporter for the *Louisville Courier-Journal* put it (the paper that would become the *de facto* recorder of proceedings), 'The object at this meeting seemed to be the formation of a treaty between the West and South, in which they were to pool their issues and stand by each other.'[70] One has the sense here, especially after the reporter mentioned the noise coming from the Pennsylvania and Tennessee delegations, that the voice of the Mid-West and South (likely to be more rural districts covered) did not want to be

[68] Bess Beatty, *A Revolution Gone Backward: The Black Response to National Politics, 1876-1896* (Westport, CN, 1987), pp. 54-56 (p. 56)
[69] McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, p. 314.
[70] *Louisville Courier Journal*, 25 September 1883

drowned out by the border and northern states. This was perhaps a touch unrealistic, considering that the vast majority of the delegates came from the South – a fact not lost on some, for it was reported that delegates from the Eastern states were accusing the South/Mid-West alliance of being too overbearing in the convention.[71] What struck the *Courier-Journal* reporter was the independent tone of the delegates, where some of the delegates made it clear that the proceedings were not going to be dominated by the Republican Party.[72]

What was different about this national convention was obvious to those in the hall. Few of the old guard of black leaders were present; most 'were men but little known outside of their respective localities which they represented, and yet their ability to grasp the situation was apprent [sic].' The delegates were classed as: 'Trained politicians…successful educators, men rising in professional life, lawyers, doctors and editors.'[73] Another eyewitness described the scene as 'a fine-looking body of men…the representative men of the race'.[74] This level of local representation was similar to the situation in 1879. However, what was different between this convention and the previous one in 1879 was the presence of far fewer prominent leaders. For example, P.B.S. Pinchback, who had been a leading figure at the 1879 convention, and would be again in 1890, was unable to be present in Louisville. In his telegram to the convention, which was read our before the delegates, he apologised for not being present due to the last-minute nature of his election to the convention. However, he stressed the need for such gatherings as an expression of 'public sentiment', which was essential for the provision and enforcement of law to protect civil rights. He hoped that the convention would be 'harmonious, dignified, discreet and beneficial to those it represents'.[75] As to

[71] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 26 September 1883. An investigation of such an alliance cannot be pursued with functional analysis due to the lack of evidence.
[72] *Louisville Courier Journal*, 25 September 1883
[73] *People's Advocate*, 6 October 1883
[74] *Louisville Courier Journal*, 25 September 1883
[75] Ibid.

the other prominent leaders, such as Blanche K. Bruce, no evidence has been found as to the reason why they chose to stay away.

The convention began with music and then prayers were offered which thanked God for their chance to meet in this way. Whilst the role of music and religion in the convention's proceedings is not surprising (since other conventions would have adopted a similar pattern), the role of music in the black conventions is significant. It provided a mix of formality and celebration and encompassed a variety of both instrumental and choral music. It was an outward display to those within the hall and outside that African Americans could meet like this and that they could celebrate the fact that they were American citizens.[76]

Proceedings started slowly. The selection of the Committee of Credentials, for example, took considerable time, and it was reported that the temporary President of the Convention lost control of the delegates, who 'kept up a constant volley of motions and counter motions, questions of order and statements of the same'. That first evening Douglass was voted president of the convention, although this was not without controversy. One delegate from St. Louis, Missouri, opposed Douglass's nomination, questioning his status as the all-encompassing leader. 'This caused a perfect storm of indignation,' one reporter noted, 'and he was hissed and hooted with great vehemence'. The man this delegate put forward for president withdrew his name from the running. However, another delegate, this time from Tennessee, 'began on onslaught on Douglass'. As the *Courier-Journal* reported remarked:

> The attempts to silence him only made him worse and gave him opportunities to make charges of unfairness against the convention, which won him many followers, first in the audience and then among the delegates[.]

[76] All accounts of the convention's proceedings refer to the music. See, for example, *Louisville Courier- Journal*, 25 September 1883

The election of Douglass became considerably less certain. The delegates from South Carolina put forward Daniel A. Straker as an opposing candidate. The confusion in the hall led to accusations being hurled across the floor. W. H. Young, one of the Tennessean delegates, accused Douglass of planning to promise the black vote to the Democrats should Senator Benjamin Butler win the Democratic nomination for President. Another delegate from Tennessee voiced the same accusation.[77] Another report of the first day's proceedings indicated that opposition to Douglass came from those who disagreed with his unyielding support for the Republican Party, whereas Straker was sent to the convention from a state convention that had declared its hostility to the Republican Party. After nearly seventy speeches the election was held and Douglass won over Straker, although by how much depended on which newspaper was read.[78] The disruption to the convention that first day does indicate the depth of feeling that existed in the hall, especially over party politics and the supremacy of Douglass, who was to give the keynote speech the next day. For some of the delegates present, Douglass was far from the esteemed leader that everyone thought he was, although as was reported, the overwhelming majority thought highly of him. In addition, the hostility shown reveals that many in the hall were not in whole-hearted support of the convention, or at least agreed with the criticisms made of it.

The next day's proceedings opened with a 'fervent and eloquent prayer' given by the Rev. B.W. Arnett (later to be elected the convention's chaplain), followed by the Lord's Prayer chanted by the New Orleans Jubilee Singers. After a welcome address, Douglass rose to speak.[79] From the outset Douglass' speech was aimed at all of America, black and white. During the speech, however, he changed the direction of his intended audience; one moment to whites alone, the next to both races. He did this so that his message would reach as wide an audience as possible, for Douglass was not

[77] *Louisville Courier Journal*, 25 September 1883
[78] *People's Advocate*, 6 October 1883. The *Advocate* reported 201 votes to 50, whereas the *New York Globe* reported it as 190 to 74.
[79] Ibid.

simply addressing the delegates in the hall, but the country as a whole who read his comments the next day in the newspapers. Indeed, as the *New York Times* pointed out, the presence of a large number of 'white spectators' was not lost on the observer. In Kentucky, the paper went on to say, 'negro assemblages, even of a political nature, are rarely attended by whites'. This was not due to any 'race quarrels,' the paper was quick to point out, rather that the races kept largely to themselves.[80] It is unclear how many of these people were in the hall for the convention, or just to hear Douglass speak. One could guess and suggest they were there for Douglass, given the fact that he was the most famous African American of his generation.

The keynote speech began by Douglass telling his audience that blacks had still not recovered from slavery, not only economically, but also in the lack of respect they received from whites. Douglass called on the delegates – the leadership of the race – to be intermediaries between whites and blacks, for they were the representatives of the race who were crucial in forging a mutual understanding between the two groups.[81] From this opening he then targeted his comments at white Americans. He reminded them in unambiguous language of the role played by African Americans in the history of the United States:

> Having watered your soil with our tears, enriched it with our blood, performed its roughest labor in time of peace, defended it against enemies in time of war, and at all times been loyal and true to its best interests, we deem it no arrogance or presumption to manifest now a common concern with you for its welfare, prosperity, honor and glory.[82]

[80] It was also reported that some 2,500 people were in the hall that day. *New York Times*, 26 September 1883
[81] Blassingame and McKivigan, eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, p.86
[82] Ibid., p.87

The way to articulate such concern was, therefore, through the holding of conventions. Douglass spoke of how blacks were still living in 'the shadow and blight of an extinct institution.'[83] He felt compelled to try to convince those opposed to the convention why it was sorely needed. To begin with, Douglass stated who the critics actually were. White objection was one thing, he told his audience, for it was hardly surprising given that they had for centuries looked down on blacks. Black objection, however, was another story and Douglass offered a harsh critique. 'Such men, it seems to us', he noted, 'are either deficient in self-respect or too mean, servile and cowardly to assert the true dignity of their manhood and that of their race.' Whilst such an admission was 'disagreeable and humiliating', it was one that had to be made. To put it bluntly, Douglass added, these blacks were traitors to their race.[84] On the grounds that, under law, there was no need for this convention, Douglass responded that as far as 'organic law' went blacks had 'nothing to complain of, to ask or desire', for the law was colour blind. He added, quickly, that further legislation might well be required. This may have been a reference to the Civil Rights of Act of 1875, which had been declared unconstitutional in a local court in Texas, and the Supreme Court was about to rule the same a month later. Moreover, there was strength in union, many voices were more effective than a few in getting the message across, as well as gaining a better understanding of the current situation facing the majority of blacks.[85] As we have seen, Douglass was expressing a view similar to that expressed by the editor of the Birmingham *Pilot*.

Aside of demonstrating black unity, the conventions had another, perhaps more significant, purpose to them. They were, for Douglass, 'the safety-valves of the Republic, a wise and safe substitute for violence, dynamite and all sorts of revolutionary against the peace and good order of society.' In that sense, they were

[83] Ibid., p. 92
[84] Ibid., pp. 88-90
[85] Ibid., p. 90

almost conservative in their outlook. The conventions emerged for a reason, and if they did not then it would be plain for all to see.[86] In answer to the criticism of holding a *black* convention, Douglass countered that blacks had no choice, 'we must do this or nothing, for if we move our color is recognised and must be.'[87] Despite all that blacks faced in the South – the lynchings and the colour line – African Americans were 'hopeful people' and Douglass considered the convention to be a demonstration of this fact.[88] In answer to those who felt that the convention would harm the Republican Party, Douglass had this to say: 'If the Republican Party can not stand a demand for justice and fair play, it ought to go down.'[89] Douglass would remain faithful to the Republicans, although was criticised for not being critical enough of them, particularly by the end of the 1880s.

The sixty-five-year-old then reached the core of his speech, outlining the key issues affecting African Americans. He began with labour, stating that blacks should not be excluded from labour unions. The black point of view had to be heard, especially as they were 'the labouring people of the South.' There was a New South, Douglass went on, with all the wealth and progress that that term meant, but if that were the case, why were the living conditions, the clothes, and food, of its labourers so poor? It was not, as whites thought, because blacks were 'lazy to work, or…indifferent to their physical wants'. Rather it was because blacks were not receiving their fair share: 'The Black man does the work and the white man gets the money.' Moreover, Douglass insisted that the lack of black property holding should be placed in some sort of context. The view of this, he argued, should not be from the position of how far blacks had to go in this regard, but how far they have come. The lack of property was

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., p. 91
[88] Ibid., p. 94
[89] Ibid., p. 95

not helped by the credit system with the local merchant – a product of sharecropping that left blacks in perpetual debt.[90]

Aside of the economic situation faced by blacks, Douglass then went on to state the areas where they demanded some kind of concerted action by the federal government. One such area was education, for the 1880 census had revealed just how low the literacy rates were for both races in the South.[91] Douglass supported federal aid for education and called for a commission to be set up to look into the educational needs of African Americans, providing funds especially for industrial education. Financial aid was also called for those who had lost money as a result of the failure of the Freedman's Bank in 1874. Douglass called for an extension in the time required to fill out the claims forms for black war veterans so that more could benefit from this. However, whilst he called on the federal government to help blacks receive an education, African Americans had to show, too, that they were proactive in their commitment to education and obtaining property. In addition to this, Douglass revealed that they should be assisted to settle in the West like whites and given 160 acres to make a living. Through such an opportunity, he insisted, African Americans could show their determination to help themselves.[92]

Douglass then moved on to the contentious issue of civil rights. There was some debate over whether this section of his speech should be included in the published proceedings; it was eventually but it did not become part of the convention's official statement. The main thrust of Douglass' argument was similar to that used by the Southern writer George Cable two years later in the *Century* magazine: civil rights and social privileges must not be confused. 'His color, not his character', wrote Douglass, 'determines the place he shall hold and the kind of treatment he shall receive.'

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[90] Ibid., pp. 96-102

[91] In Alabama, for example, 42 percent of school-age blacks were in education, whereas in Virginia the figure was as low as 28 percent. Correspondingly, there were about the same number of white school-age children in both states: 49 percent in Alabama, 48 percent in Virginia. T. Thomas Fortune, *Black and White: Land, Labor and Politics in the South* (1884; reprinted New York, 1968), p. 53

[92] Blassingame and McKivigan, eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, pp. 102-105

Douglass maintained that this was attributable to prejudice on the part of whites, a level of prejudice he believed that could only be found in the United States. On the subject of 'political equality', or the lack of, Douglass considered this to be a more alarming situation than in the case of civil rights. The denial of the vote through fraud, violence, and intimidation, was not a party issue but a simple matter of law and order. Douglass pointed out that white southerners conducting themselves in this way were breaking the law and should be stopped.[93]

A related theme, but one that was a bone of contention for whites, was the political ambition of blacks. Such ambition resurrected memories among whites of the 'tragic era' of Radical Reconstruction; an experiment that was about to end the following month with the Supreme Court decision declaring the 1875 Civil Rights Act unconstitutional. In addition, Douglass stressed that whites should not criticise blacks for being politically ambitious. He portrayed the essential dilemma faced by the new generation of educated blacks:

> We are far from affirming that there may not be too much zeal among colored men in pursuit of political preferment; but the fault is not wholly theirs. They have young men among them noble and true, who are educated and intelligent – fit to engage in enterprises of "pith and moment" – who find themselves shut out from nearly all the avenues of wealth and respectability, and hence they turn their attention to politics. They do so because they can find nothing else. The best cure for the evil is to throw open other avenues and activities to them.[94]

All Americans were part of the prosperity of the country, Douglass maintained; all men had a political role to play. The situation of a governing class, and a ruled class, he considered to be wrong and evoking the language of Lincoln to conclude his speech,

[93] Ibid., pp. 105-108
[94] Ibid., p. 109

warned that the government of the country was in peril if such a situation continued.[95] As David Blight notes of this speech, Douglass was keen to remind his audience that the Civil War was the central aspect to the dilemma facing African Americans: how to progress when hatred still existed and when there were those who wanted to 'permanently reverse that [the Civil War's] revolution'.[96]

There was much response to Douglass' speech from the white mainstream press. Following the publication of his entire speech, Henry Watterson of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* devoted his lead editorial to an analysis of Douglass' comments. To begin with, Watterson still wondered why the convention was held. He noted that whilst such conventions were not harmful in themselves, they must actually suggest something. 'Mr. DOUGLAS [sic] has a number of grievances against society as at present constituted,' he pointed out, 'but we fail to see that they are any more justly the complaint of the negro than of the white man.' Such a comment as this is not unsurprising from a Democrat like Watterson, but what is of interest is that such views were being supported by Republicans too, as well as by some African Americans. The fact that the holding of such views – resting on the premise that blacks now had to shoulder the responsibility of freedom on an equal footing with whites – was becoming more widespread, especially among former white abolitionists, indicates a significant change from the Reconstruction era. How African Americans continued to view freedom, in the light of the Supreme Court decision the following month, will be analysed in the next chapter.[97]

The Louisville editor also conceded that whilst Douglass may be justified in some of his remarks, he noted that the issues were much more complex than African American leaders assumed. Watterson stated flatly that any resolution to the problems

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[95] Ibid., pp. 109-110

[96] David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), p. 309

[97] For a good account on the white abolitionists, see James M McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP* (1975; Princeton, 1995)

facing blacks could 'not be done in one generation' and used Biblical language to reinforce his point, bringing in references to the Israelites in Egypt (an approach that was also not uncommon to African American leaders, many of whom were church ministers). However, what concerned Watterson was Douglass' preaching of the 'gospel of discontent.' According to the editor, blacks had to be 'more industrious' (although he acknowledged that some could be described as such), should buy land, all the time fostering good family values. And whilst he was swift to point out that his fellow Democrats were not courting the black vote, he thought a division of the black vote the best course of action. On Douglass' most contentious point – black office-seeking – he thought this unwise, for it was based on colour. Despite such remarks, however, he demonstrated his respect for Douglass, noting his 'earnestness' and 'eloquence'.[98] Such respect was mutual, up to a point. A resolution was accepted by the convention, which thanked Watterson's paper for its coverage of the convention in a 'full and impartial manner'.[99]

The speeches continued that first day, although at times the chairman found it hard to maintain order. The *Courier-Journal* thought that too many politicians were present, which it considered to be a severe hindrance to the proceedings, and even to the overall effectiveness of the convention. However, some speeches were better than others.[100] Straker from South Carolina delivered an address later in the day, in what the newspaper noted as a 'vigorous style'.[101] The speech stressed the progress made by blacks despite the difficulties they had faced. Douglass rose to speak once more. What was going to be a short statement became another speech, encouraged by those, mainly women, who were unable to hear his earlier speech. One reporter regarded Douglass' second speech of the day as better than the first. Douglass spoke of the Compromise of 1877 and his talks with the incoming President at the time over the need to stay firm

[98] *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 27 September 1883
[99] Ibid.
[100] *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 26 September 1883
[101] Ibid.

towards the South. He stressed once more that whilst the Republicans were by no means perfect, they were far better than the alternative.[102] 'This speech was so thrilling,' reported the *People's Advocate*, 'that, upon its conclusion, the convention rose as one man and sang "John Brown's body,"' the song from the Civil War era in the struggle against slavery.[103] And to demonstrate the level of respect in which the delegates held Douglass, three cheers were called for: "Fred Douglass, the greatest negro that ever lived."[104]

The following day, Wednesday, was when the real work of the convention took place. It was also the most acrimonious day. One Kentucky delegate put forward a resolution that African Americans should stand by the Republican Party. This displeased many in the hall, although not as much as when a resolution was put forward supporting President Arthur for the Republican Presidential nomination the following year. The *New York Times* gave a vivid account of what happened next:

> As soon as it was read out nearly every delegate leaped to his feet, and the convention was lost in confusion. The South and West hissed loudly with cries of "table it." It seemed that only a few delegates from the North and East favored the resolution, and the opponents of the indorsement of Arthur's Administration carried things with a whoop.[105]

One white newspaper thought the chairman's decision to postpone the question of whether or not to support the Republican Party to a committee, wise, thus avoiding a split in the convention.[106]

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[102] Ibid.
[103] *People's Advocate*, 6 October 1883
[104] *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 26 September 1883
[105] *New York Times*, 27 September 1883. See, also, the *New York Globe*, 29 September 1883 and the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 27 September 1883
[106] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 27 September 1883

The situation quietened down during the evening session on that last day. Committee reports were made and business moved quickly, probably due to the fact that time was running out. The key work of these committees revolved around the following: to petition Congress for federal aid for education; to make clear to the American public the grievances faced by black labourers; to memorialise Congress to help financially those who had lost money in the collapse of the Freedmen's Bank; to be more assertive in their prosecution of cases regarding the denial of civil rights; and to establish a protective organisation made up of representatives from each state and the District of Columbia.[107] The three key resolutions that were passed centred on civil rights (where Douglass' comments on this subject were adopted by the Committee on Civil Rights), education and labour. The convention called on Congress to provide $7 million for southern public education, which may have been influenced by the Congressional committee that had met earlier in the month to investigate southern education and labour.[108] The committee's chairman, Senator Henry W. Blair of New Hampshire, was to put forward his bill for federal aid later that year, a bill that would be discussed throughout the 1880s. With regards to the labour question, the convention called for a Congressional committee dedicated to the southern labour issue to go on a fact-finding mission to the South. The conventioneers believed that the answer lay with encouraging northern investment in southern farms, hiring black labour, and thus giving African Americans the chance to eventually buy their own farms. At the same time, the convention wished to see equal wages for both blacks and whites become a reality. As the *New York Times* noted: 'No political resolutions were incorporated, and the convention acted upon none of those proposed.'[109]

The level of detail recorded in the various newspaper reports of the convention's proceedings was quite considerable, especially of the smaller, more

[107] *People's Advocate*, 6 October 1883
[108] Fortune, *Black and White*, pp. 178-79
[109] *New York Times*, 28 September 1883

personal details. One account noted that on the first day a number of the 'younger delegates' had found their way to the bar, 'apparently too often,' the white reporter noted, 'but not more so than an equal number of white delegates would have done.'[110] One Virginian delegate, Colonel George M. Oswald, was noted as the convention's comedian. He was the final delegate to leave the hall following the end of the convention, found by another delegate 'groping in dark.'[111]

Reaction

The Louisville Convention gained widespread publicity both during its proceedings and afterwards. The African American-run A.M.E. Church *Christian Recorder*, for example, was one of the few black periodicals that did not cover the convention. It did, however, make a single comment the following week. It thought that what was needed more was a convention of black ministry that would be able to reach out to their white brothers.[112] The *Recorder* added that if the statement issued by the convention had no impact on the country, this would be due to ingrained racism on the part of the public.[113]

The African American reaction in Virginia and Alabama was, unsurprisingly, somewhat different. In the *People's Advocate*, for example, Cromwell suggested that what was required now was for blacks to find the 'bed-rock'. Using a river as a metaphor, Cromwell stated that blacks had been 'drifting along on the stream of sentiment and resting on the uncertain sands of politics for too long.' African Americans had to find something stable on which to base their progress, and that this had to be done without depending on whites. Referring to the end of the 'age of sentiment', or in other words, the end of the Reconstruction *mentality* in the country, African Americans now had to stand on their own two feet and be men, and to

[110] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 26 September 1883
[111] *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 27 September 1883
[112] A call for a black ministers convention was made later in October 1883.
[113] A.M.E. Church *Christian Recorder* 21 (4 October 1883)

Cromwell's mind the Louisville Convention had been a demonstration of blacks realising this point. African Americans now had to find a new way forward, he argued, especially as the economic gap between whites and blacks was considerable. Education was the key, especially in obtaining skills in manual trades, which would provide a base on which to build. Booker T. Washington would later voice similar sentiments and even in the same language. 'Politics may serve us well in the matter of securing proper recognition,' wrote Cromwell, 'but it won't make skilled artisans of our boys nor millionaires of our fathers.'[114]

The response from Alabama differed from that offered by Cromwell. One of the Decatur delegates, William Gaston, felt that he should write something about his experience at the convention for those he had represented. He believed that it had achieved much of what the district convention wanted of their representatives, as set out in Douglass' speech. Politics dominates Gaston's letter, in particular, the Republican Party. It was time, Gaston thought, for blacks to stop feeling as if they owed the Republican Party anything. In his opinion it was the African American war veterans and pioneers that were instead owed something. 'I am a Republican,' he declared, 'but a free one, and unbound by any particular cords of gratitude, and shall act in future accordingly.' Blacks had to work within the existing political system, however, not through an independent party or to abstain from voting. Through their six million votes they could 'give success somewhere, and demand a proper recognition.' A similar opinion was expressed by Fortune the following year, although he was in favour of political independence should it be necessary.[115] However, Fortune would have agreed with Gaston, who believed that African Americans should work with those who were prepared to help them in their 'peaceful struggles for prosperity and enlightenment.' Gaston would continue to use such language throughout the 1880s. It was a realistic approach that meant working within the system. The theme of Gaston's

[114] *People's Advocate*, 29 September 1883
[115] Fortune, *Black and White*, p. 127

letter is clear, therefore: African Americans wanted simply to receive the recognition that was due to them. Such 'peaceful struggles' lay firmly with the right to receive an education, and thus 'prosperity and enlightenment.'[116]

As for the white press in Virginia and Alabama, they focused more on the harm caused by the convention. In Virginia, the Democrat-supporting *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, disagreed with Douglass' comments, as well as calling the Louisville meeting the 'Frederick Douglass negro convention' (a phrase not unique to this paper). Responding to the black leader's call of encouragement for blacks to hold political office, the *Dispatch* called on its readers to vote against blacks gaining a place on Richmond's school board. The paper also decided to reprint an interview Douglass gave with the Norfolk *Landmark*, stating that "race" would be a thing of the past, which the paper hinted would be the case should occurrences such as a mixed-race school board become the norm.[117]

In Alabama, the *Montgomery Daily Advertiser* was perhaps representative of the prevailing Democrat opinion. Using a typical paternalistic phrase, it stated that: 'most sensible negroes' were against the convention being held; thought the national convention would cause more harm to African Americans and as such, felt they had been vindicated. 'True they [the convention] did not in so many words, declare in favour of any particular party,' the editor noted, 'but they did in effect arraign the whole body of white people of this country.' In other words, this would be yet another reason for whites to perpetuate the "Solid Democratic South". This editorial can also be viewed as at the more extreme end of white responses. African Americans, the editor believed, would end up as the Native Americans were fast becoming, 'driven before the irresistible march of the white man.' However, the editor's final comments were the most telling. He made reference to northern industrialisation and its impact on race relations, stating that blacks and whites would be forced into social contact on an equal

[116] *Huntsville Gazette*, 20 October 1883
[117] *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 29, 30 September 1883

footing, a fact that would not only have an impact in the North but also in the South. Indeed, the impact in the South would be greater, in his view, for with industrialisation in the South, the dilution of the "colour line" would be more noticeable, due presumably to the larger African American population.[118] This fear was perhaps generated from the growing industrialisation of the South in the early 1880s, especially in Alabama. The "new" city of Birmingham was proof of this.

The mainstream white press was more mixed in its response to the convention. *Harper's Weekly*, for example, noted that the meeting was 'a very interesting and pathetic assembly'. Whilst the aim was to set out the opinion of black citizens, the periodical noted that it did not achieve this. It thought that the convention's focus on the laws and social customs that were discriminatory towards blacks was misguided, for it was prejudice that was the 'enemy' not the laws, which were not inherently against blacks. The periodical noted: 'The fact of the meeting of the Convention, and its dignified and serious protest and appeal, will be of undoubted service to the colored citizens.' The editor added, in light of the recent Supreme Court decision, that African Americans 'need not regret the fate of the Civil Rights Bill. The wrongs under which they suffer are not to be remedied by law.'[119] *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* wrote a less favourable piece. It felt that the demand for political position was by 'a certain class'. The newspaper felt that whilst it was right for blacks to uphold, and fight for, the rights that were due to them, especially where the laws were not working to uphold the Constitution, African Americans should not organise in order to gain political office. The underlying theme here was that the country did not want a return to the days of Reconstruction.[120]

The *New York Times*, as well as other papers, also wanted to make it clear to its readers that Douglass' influence at the convention was not as great as some thought. It

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[118] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 29 September 1883
[119] 'The Late Colored Colored Convention,' *Harper's Weekly* 27 (27 October 1883)
[120] 'The Color Line in Politics,' *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 6 October 1883

reported that the keynote speech delivered by Douglass was not accepted as the agreed sentiment of the convention. The new resolutions that were drawn up were done so by George W. Williams of Massachusetts, a known advocate for improved education for blacks. In his 1883 book on Black history, Williams thought that issues such as education should have been given a higher priority since Emancipation.[121] The *Times* pointed out that the attempts of Douglass' 'friends' in the convention to introduce politics into the equation 'excited deep feeling in the convention,' adding that most were 'opposed to the extreme views uttered by Mr. Douglass'. Moreover, the paper stated that this comments were edited before being published by the convention, stating that Douglass should think twice about his position as the *de facto* leader of African Americans.[122]

Of course, one has to be cautious about taking such comments at face value, considering the fact that the only known copy of Douglass' speech in pamphlet form is exactly the same as was reported on the day. There were clearly those at the convention who disagreed with Douglass' position. However, many more were in support of him. As the *New York Globe* reported, Douglass had 'placed himself in line with the sentiment of the masses'.[123] Quite how far politics would be included in this convention was always open for debate. Whilst talk of the Republican Party might have been a subject that was off the table – except for Douglass – talking about individual black political participation could not be avoided. Any discussion of American citizenship would invariably turn to the matter of the franchise, for this was fundamental to what American citizenship was all about, just as it was a fundamental right for Americans to hold conventions. However, the more widely read newspapers, such as the *New York Times* and the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, were more balanced in their assessments of the convention than the state newspapers typified by the *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*

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[121] William Toll, *The Resurgence of Race: Black Social Theory from Reconstruction to the Pan-African Conferences* (Philadelphia, 1979), p. 25
[122] *New York Times*, 29 September 1883; *Montgomery Daily Dispatch*, 27 September 1883
[123] *New York Globe*, 29 September 1883

and the *Richmond Daily Dispatch*. As a result, the *Times*' comments do have some value. It summed up the convention thus:

> On the whole, the plea of the colored men shows an intelligent appreciation of their wrongs and rights. Its demands are by no means extravagant, and it is gratifying for the evidence it exhibits of a growing capacity in the race to work out its own salvation in the face of adverse influences and cruel discouragements.

Mention is made here of the progress made by blacks in working out their own future, an opinion that the *People's Advocate* would have echoed. The *Times* was also in favour of blacks dividing their vote, and made particular reference to the Freedman's Bank. It called the Federal Government's handling of the collapse of the bank a 'disgrace,' for no provision was made for those who had lost money. The paper thought that it would take little for the Government to provide the depositors with money to cover their losses.[124] It is of interest that this paper should stress the wrongs that resulted from the collapse of the Freedman's Bank, however, considering the low esteem with which the Republican administration was held, such remarks are perhaps not surprising.

Conclusion

The Louisville Convention proved to be the last that had any real hope of achieving anything positive. A planned convention the following year, to be held in Richmond, Virginia, never materialised, although one did occur in Pittsburgh. The next major national convention would be held in Washington in February 1890, but as the proceedings of this demonstrated, the black convention movement had run its course. By this time, too, a rival organisation – the National Afro-American League – was gaining support from more militant blacks, whereas more conservative African

[124] *New York Times*, 28 September 1883

Americans focused on educational improvement over civil and political rights (at least in public). The convention movement had been the glue that had held militants, conservatives, and the majority who fell in between, together and with its demise, these groups fracture.

Some important points must be made about the Louisville Convention. Firstly, it demonstrated the potential power of local black leaders in determining their future. Communities differed in their approach, such as whether to send their delegates to Louisville with specific instructions, or whether to let them do as they thought best. The enthusiasm for the convention that was evident within some communities, and the importance they placed on it, is striking, as is the opposition to the convention. This reinforces the point that generalisations about the southern black leadership cannot be made. The early 1880s were, therefore, a time when southern race relations were not set in stone, which supports Woodward's contention of the decade as one of flexibility in southern race relations. How far such fluidity in race relations really extended throughout this decade will be the focus of the following two chapters.

A second point is the reverence in which Frederick Douglass was held by the local black elite. This would change dramatically the following year when he married a white women, an act that caused more outrage within the black community than among whites. Douglass' keynote speech at the convention was infused with the language of Reconstruction that by the 1890s would seem outdated. However, whilst many in the hall had become disillusioned with the Republican Party – especially the Arthur administration – Douglass could not disown completely the party in which he had been an active member. It is important to note, however, that Douglass' comments were qualified – that the Republicans could not take advantage of the black vote and assume that it would always be in their favour. On this point, Douglass would have had the support from the grassroots, as has been shown in northern Alabama, for example.

A third point to mention is that of the white response, which was mixed at best. What is perhaps of most interest is how Douglass' demand that African Americans

have a fair share of political offices held the attention, and created hostility, from the white press. Henry Watterson's comments in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* are a case in point. However, when one looks at the final comments of the convention, no mention was made of a desire for blacks to seek political office. What is more obvious is the emphasis on the need for fair wages, equal educational opportunities for blacks, and the need for sound moral training. From this, one can infer that such issues were perhaps more significant to the grassroots than how many government positions would be held. Whilst political involvement was a demand at the convention, the desire to hold federal government positions was not seen as a high priority. This highlights one significant difference between the more nationally known black leaders and those at the grassroots.

One final point must be made of what ideology, if any, drove the delegates to these conventions. It seems that the majority espoused the free market philosophy, which according to Meier had great impact on black thought.[125] For many, it was becoming all too clear that economic stability and security would have to come before blacks had a chance for full participation in political affairs. That is not to say that they opposed any black *participation* in the political process; rather, they opposed the office-seeking mentality that pervaded many of the black elite in Washington, D.C. Moreover, government intervention was not what they called for in the convention. Instead, they wanted the laws in place to be upheld. One southern state – Tennessee – had already passed a segregation bill, a sign of what state government intended, or at least desired to some degree, to do. Those who wished for such legislation would welcome the Supreme Court decision the following month.

The delegates knew that the future lay in their hands and that blacks had to work out for themselves not only their economic future, but which of the parties they thought represented their best interests. How far this extended in the states under study

[125] Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, p. 23

will form part of the following two chapters. Suffice it to say that at this stage, the majority of the Louisville delegates opposed out-and-out support for the Republican Party. Indeed, support for Free Trade alienated them further from the Republicans, pushing them closer towards the Democratic Party. Some in the hall would have supported Douglass' adherence to the Republican Party, but generally this was seen as a product of an era that had passed. And it is this realisation that the Reconstruction-era had come to an end that perhaps defines the Louisville Convention. Whilst federal aid was called for to assist public schools (though it is significant that this was not race-specific), the delegates at this convention realised that the Federal Government was less interested in them and that the government could no longer be considered as their safety blanket. In the future, black progress lay in a joint effort between African Americans and state legislatures. The era of Redemption had begun.

3 Black Virginian Voices from the 1880s

> We are freemen and citizens of this country and when we are wrongfully treated we should let the world know it, and place the blame where it properly belongs.[1]

Introduction

The state election of November 1883 proved to be a turning point in the thinking of Virginian black leaders, just as the 1874 election had been for Alabama's black leaders. This was exemplified by the events just prior to the election in Danville, a town in the south of the state. Danville was a 'Readjuster stronghold', where local black leaders were influential in the municipal government.[2] It was this influence that angered many white Democrats, who played on the prejudices of white Readjusters in a circular issued just prior to the election. The Readjuster leaders responded by urging members of their party to not react with violence. However, violence soon resulted, following a fight between white and black youths that spun out of control. The result was a riot;[3] four African Americans were left dead with armed white Democrats on the streets. Many black voters who had not already been intimidated to stay at home on polling day now chose to do so – the result was a Democratic victory on election day four days later.[4]

The Danville Riot revealed how fragile blacks' rights were and, as the quotation above reveals, it heightened awareness among black leaders that white Virginians had to be reminded that African Americans were equal citizens. To that end, this awareness led to a renewed interest in the state black convention movement, which would become increasingly distanced from party politics as the decade wore on.

[1] *Petersburg Lancet*, 1 December 1883
[2] Hahn, p.402
[3] African Americans referred to the riot as a 'massacre'; whites called it 'self-defence'. Ibid., p.404
[4] Ibid., pp.402-405

However, by the end of the decade, a new generation of black leaders began to reassert themselves in electoral politics, just as the previous generation had done during the 1870s.

At the same time, the Republican Party continued to attract black leaders. Unlike much of the South, Virginian blacks continued to hold political office (although this would decline over time) and even attempt to send representatives to Congress. After an exploration of the issues raised by the Danville riot and subsequent election, this chapter will explore the nature of local black leadership in the Old Dominion throughout the 1880s and into the 1890s. In particular, it will assess the extent of generational change in the state's black leadership, together with the impact of higher education on the ideologies of these leaders. This will be achieved through an exploration of those moments whereby local leaders voiced their opinions – state and federal elections, and at black state conventions.

The Danville Legacy

The end of 1883 proved to be turbulent for blacks in the Old Dominion. The Supreme Court decision in the *Civil Rights Cases*, the Danville Riot and subsequent defeat of the Readjusters, and victory for the Democrats – all happening within a month – was a sign to black leaders that Radical Reconstruction was finally over. To see how local leaders responded to these events, it is perhaps useful to compare this situation with that of Alabama nine years earlier. In 1874, it will be remembered, blacks held an emergency convention in Montgomery to discuss the best course of action. Emigration proved to be the option that won widespread support, but this would take place only in the event that the Democrats did not uphold black civil and political rights. In other words, local leaders were going to wait and see how the political situation would develop. In Virginia, the November 1883 election was dubbed by the leading Democratic paper in

Alabama as a moment of Redemption.[5] Clearly, it could see parallels between their own campaign to rid Alabama from Radical rule and the Democratic victory in Virginia. As had happened in Alabama, blacks in Virginia held a convention shortly after the election to discuss the current situation, and would continue to use the convention method throughout the coming decade.

Virginia had already held a state convention in February 1883. It took place in Washington, D.C., which inevitably posed the question why it was not being held in Virginia. The black press were uniformly against the convention being held outside of the state, regarding this as evidence of the dominance of black politicians in such meetings, who were simply holding this convention for themselves.[6] 'While we haven't any charge against office-holders,' noted George Freeman Bragg in the *Petersburg Lancet*, 'we much prefer to see such a conference made up of representatives of the people, and not sore-heads, ejected office-holders, cliques and henchmen.'[7] The language used here by Bragg would be repeated many times in the black press throughout the 1880s, suggesting that the question of how representative some black leaders actually were was open to debate.

With the February convention presumably in mind, the organisers of the convention held after the November election decided to select Norfolk, Virginia. Its main purpose was to take stock of the Danville riot and to press for the truth to be known about the events that had taken place. As stated in the convention call, blacks did not want the history of the event to be written simply from the Bourbon perspective. The Norfolk convention was held on 13 December 1883. Approximately sixty delegates attended; many however were unable to attend due to the difficulty in

[5] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 9 November 1883
[6] This was the principal reason why the national black convention that year was held in Louisville, not Washington, D.C. For more on this, see Chapter 2.
[7] Bragg was responding to comments made another black newspaper, the *Virginia Star*. *Petersburg Lancet*, 10 February 1883. Chase regarded the delegates as 'so-called colored politicians'. *Washington Bee*, 20 January 1883. See, also, 10 February 1883.

reaching Norfolk.[8] It was called to order by convention veteran Thomas Bayne, who had attended conventions in the mid-1860s. Peter J. Carter, who had been involved in the 1875 convention, was made chairman. He noted the unprecedented nature of this convention; how a meeting such as this had never happened before. This reinforces the point regarding the significance of the Danville riot and subsequent election. As the *Richmond Dispatch* noted, Carter considered that a 'great responsibility rested on the delegates present.'[9] The address issued by the convention was noticeable by its calm tone, stating how blacks would rise above the recent events. It condemned those involved in the killings in Danville and called for them to be held to account. This sense that justice had not been done echoed the view of Governor William E. Cameron earlier that month. In his message to the House of Delegates, Cameron stated how the reputation of the state had been affected and he left no one in any doubt about his view of the matter:

> men were killed, men were wounded, of no matter what party, of no matter what color, and that, contrary to all law-serving habits of this people, no man has been accused, arrested, or tried for his part in the killing or wounding.[10]

The convention also proposed to raise money to help those left behind. As with the Montgomery convention in 1874, the Norfolk convention called for emigration societies to be formed should the need be there.[11] This provoked a negative response from Bragg. 'We must not leave, we cannot leave,' he wrote passionately, 'but must remain at our post and do our part of praying, fighting, and at the same time be

[8] *Petersburg Lancet*, 22 December 1883. A point about the logistical problems facing black conventions has been explored in a recent study of the Afro-American Council. This organisation revived the defunct Afro-American League at the turn of the twentieth century, although this in itself lasted barely a decade. Benjamin R. Justesen, *Broken Brotherhood: The Rise and Fall of the National Afro-American Council* (Carbondale, IL, 2008), pp. 16-17.
[9] *Richmond Dispatch*, 14 December 1883
[10] Message of Governor William E. Cameron to the House, 5 December 1883, *Journal of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia, for the Session of 1883-84* (Richmond, 1883), pp. 17-23 (p. 22)
[11] *Petersburg Lancet*, 22 December 1883

submissive to the civil authorities and rest our cause in the hands of a Just God.'[12] This last statement offers an insight into the way Bragg's thinking would develop over the coming years. It was both militant and accommodating in its approach – a middle way that many local leaders would employ in the 1880s.[13] It also revealed how the subject of emigration would continue to be a divisive issue among southern black leaders.

The 1884 Federal Election

It is important to stress that the Readjusters' defeat in 1883 did not put an end to blacks' involvement in party politics.[14] Unlike other southern states, they held seats in the state legislature throughout the decade. As had been the case throughout the post-Reconstruction era, federal elections proved to be a moment whereby many black leaders – namely the politicians – voiced their opinions on the situation facing those whom they represented. Such moments also highlighted the divisions amongst these leaders over the best course to pursue with regards to black uplift.[15] The 1884 federal election was no exception to this trend. A major issue for black Virginians that year surrounded the nomination of African American Joseph P. Evans as a Republican candidate for the Fourth Congressional seat. What divided black leaders was whether or not an African American should stand for election, in what was a black majority region of Virginia. Widespread support for Evans existed among the grassroots. However, some established black political leaders thought this was not the time to attempt to send an African American to represent their district in Congress. This highlighted how some established black political leaders were diverging from the grassroots. These differences were also linked to the generational change that was taking place within the black leadership more generally in the United States, which had already emerged in the

[12] Ibid., 29 December 1883
[13] This concept of a middle way will also be explored in Chapters 4 and 5.
[14] This is something that Hahn stresses in his chapter on biracial politics in the rural South.
[15] Two works that mention black uplift in some detail are August Meier's *Negro Thought in America* and Kevin Gaines' *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth century* (Chapel Hill, 1996)

convention movement. Many of these younger leaders were university-educated professionals, such as lawyers and doctors. The extent to which their thoughts on party politics differed from those of the older generation will also be explored in this section.

The centre of attention during the 1884 election campaign in Virginia was the Fourth Congressional District in the Southside. This was the area south of Richmond, which included the city of Petersburg. As revealed in Chapter 1, Petersburg had a large black population and was a centre for black party political activity throughout the early 1870s. The city provided one of the power bases for Mahone and the Readjuster Party, supported by the *Petersburg Lancet*. It comes as no surprise that with its large black population many in this district wished to have an African American represent them in Congress. Interest in the forthcoming election began in earnest in March 1884, just four months after the state election that brought the Democrats back into power. It started with the selection of delegates to the Readjuster-Republican state convention. The Coalitionists, or Liberals, would soon come under the Republican Party banner, after Mahone had converted straight-out Republicans to follow him in a common cause against the Democratic Party.[16] In terms of who should go to the state convention, the *Lancet* was clear. 'Let the people select the men who are to represent them,' one editorial read. Officeholders would be best avoided, because whilst they were 'good men', they could possibly be influenced by party bosses. The names of men who would be effective representatives, the paper thought, included Peter J. Carter and Joseph P. Evans (as mentioned in Chapter 1), as well as R.G.L. Paige, who will be studied in more detail later in this section.[17]

The platform adopted at the Readjuster-Republican convention later that spring included the usual call for 'an honest ballot, and a fair count', education for all, and outright opposition to the Democrats, or Bourbonism as it was called. A protective tariff, however, was also advocated by the convention, in line with what was beginning

[16] *Petersburg Lancet*, 12 April, 3 May 1884
[17] *Petersburg Lancet*, 8 March 1884. See, also, 29 March, 13 June 1884.

to dominate political discussion in the North. The platform supported such a tariff, for it believed that not only would it secure the economic prospects of the state, but that it would also protect American (and Virginian) labour from the consequences of free trade. This hints at a broader trend not only within the Republican Party, but also in black political discussion in the 1880s and 1890s – blacks identifying themselves increasingly with the state (so regarding themselves principally as citizens of Virginia) rather than foregrounding their status as American citizens. As will be seen, this emerged as blacks realised that the state government would be the only route through which to secure their basic rights. The final plank of the Republican platform was its support for the re-nomination of Chester A. Arthur as President of the United States.[18]

With broad policy drawn up, the next decision to make was who was to be nominated as Congressional representatives. From early on in the campaign, the black press in the region supported the idea of black Congressional representatives. The *People's Advocate* thought that an African American congressman would serve the best interests of those he represented. 'There are times when it is necessary to have on the floor of Congress some one to defend the Negro from the sneers, insinuations and bitter attacks of Negro-haters,' wrote Cromwell, 'when the Negro in his own person can more fitly defend his race and look out for its interests than the most competent white man.' He regarded the Second and Fourth Congressional Districts as prime ground for such a proposal. However, this was not just a defensive position, for Cromwell thought that a black congressman would be the best way for Virginia blacks to receive more recognition in political spoils, as they did in other southern states. 'As it is now,' he pointed out, 'the collectors [of revenue], the postmasters, the readjuster State and county officers are white in a State in which five-twelfths of the population is colored.' Not to mention that the majority of Readjusters were African American.[19]

[18] Ibid., 3 May 1884
[19] *People's Advocate*, 22 March 1884. De Mortie had himself been a candidate for Congress in 1876.

Support for a black Congressman from Virginia gathered momentum throughout the summer of 1884, at least in the Fourth Congressional District. The man put forward as a suitable candidate was Joseph P. Evans, who had been involved with Reconstruction politics, as well as chairing the 1875 Richmond black convention (see chapter 1). Some local black leaders were more supportive of the idea than others. Mark R. De Mortie, for example, gave tacit support to the idea of a black candidate, but made it clear that he was not automatically supporting the white candidate, James D. Brady, as was assumed by the *Richmond Planet*. 'Having, since 1874, contended that the Fourth district should send a colored man to Congress, and thereby break the color line,' he wrote to the *Planet*, 'it would be inconsistent in me, at this late day, when I am not a candidate to oppose the nomination and election of a colored man.' At a meeting in Richmond, De Mortie had stated that he would do all he could to assist the nomination of a black candidate, and noted in his letter, that 'I occupy that position now.'[20]

Others were more direct in their support. Armistead Green from Petersburg, for instance, was one such individual. He noted how he had known Evans for thirty years, a friendship that had begun during slavery when they had met at secret religious meetings. Green considered Evans to be a true Republican, 'the true candidate of the people,' who had risked his life for the party's cause. He stressed the need for local blacks to support Evans, for this was now 'the best opportunity they have had for years'.[21] The *Lancet* reminded readers just prior to the November election that Brady had opposed black candidates for official positions and that he had been an Andrew Jackson Democrat (which meant that his support for blacks' rights was questionable).[22] Local meetings were held across the district to give support to Evans.[23] One local leader in Petersburg, the Rev. C. B. W. Gordon, wrote:

[20] Letter to the *Richmond Planet*, reprinted in the *Petersburg Lancet*, 31 May 1884
[21] *Petersburg Lancet*, 27 September 1884
[22] Ibid., 1 November 1884
[23] Ibid., 18 October 1884

> let every man of the negro race say with the bold hero of the battlefield "Give me liberty or give me death," and go forth with unbroken ranks and fight manfully for that which is ours by reason of right, and send Joseph P. Evans to Congress as the representative of the negro race.[24]

The fact that many meetings took place, and the support for the Evans campaign from at least one local leader (although doubtless there were more), gives an indication of the enthusiasm generated for having an African American as a Congressional representative from the Fourth District. Gordon had only just become minister of the Harrison Street Baptist Church when he wrote this letter. Indeed, his interest in party politics would cause considerable controversy in the city four years later.[25]

However, at least one black voice was against Evans' nomination. Former state legislator R.G.L. Paige from Norfolk, Virginia, thought this was the wrong time to send an African American to Congress. His views demonstrate the differences evident within the Virginian black leadership – between the established elite and the rising generation. In measured terms, he outlined his views in a letter to Bragg, which was published in the *Lancet*:

> I believe I know something of the views of all leading colored gentleman in Virginia those who have been members of the Legislature and otherwise, and with due respect to all of them I feel sure that the cause of our people led by liberal and strong minded southern white men would not be enhansed [sic] by their being elected on [the] color question as congressmen or members of the legislature.

[24] Ibid., 20 September 1884
[25] Harold S. Forsythe, 'African American Churches, Fusion Politics in Virginia, and the Republican Gubernatorial Campaign in 1889', in *Afro-Virginian History and Culture*, ed. by John Salient (New York, 1999), pp. 211-26 (p. 222)

Paige thought that compromise was required for the time being so as not to antagonise whites and prevent the efforts of men like Mahone and Governor Cameron. If he had to choose a potential black candidate, then Alfred W. Harris would be his choice. 'He has done for the colored people in this state what probably will only be appreciated in years to come,' wrote Paige.[26] He was referring to Harris' efforts in founding the Petersburg Normal and Collegiate Institute, the first black college to be established in Virginia, in 1882. Harris was part of a new generation of black leaders that emerged in the 1880s. He was free born in 1854 and graduated from the Howard University Law Department in 1881. He was a practising lawyer, as well as a state legislator during the Readjuster era.[27]

In the end, Evans ran as an Independent candidate, but failed in his bid for Congress. In the aftermath of the election, Bragg wrote in his paper that illiteracy was the main barrier facing black progress, especially in the political realm.[28] Federal aid was the only way in which education in the state could be financed effectively.[29] He spoke scathingly of the older generation of black political leaders. 'Apparently they seem willing and ready to sink the whole race into a cesspool of filth and degradation in order to gratify their own personal aims and ambition,' he wrote. He believed that during Reconstruction, whilst achieving something, the 'gripsackers and carpetbaggers' had 'inculcated in them [black officeholders] some very low and debase principles'. The implication here was that the older black political class were Republicans merely for personal gain. Bragg was encouraged, however, to see a new generation of leaders emerging, 'willing to disregard party names'.[30]

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[26] *Petersburg Lancet*, 9 August 1884. For a more detailed exploration of the role of Howard University in creating an ideological foundation for many of the new generation of leaders, see Chapter 6.
[27] Lawrence L. Hartzell, 'The Exploration of Freedom in Black Petersburg, Virginia, 1865-1902', in *The Edge of he South: Life in Nineteenth Century Virginia*, ed. by Edward Ayers and John C. Willis (Charlottesville, VA, 1991), pp. 134-156 (p. 139); Jackson, pp. 87-88
[28] *Petersburg Lancet*, 15 November 1884
[29] *Petersburg Index-Appeal*, reprinted in the *Petersburg Lancet*, 20 December 1884
[30] *Petersburg Lancet*, 15 November 1884

The 1885 Lynchburg Convention and independent politics in Virginia

As was the case in the previous decade, the possibility of political alternatives was an ever-present reality. Hints at the changing attitude of some black leaders in the state had re-emerged in 1883, before the Readjusters' defeat at the polls. As mentioned in the introduction to Part II, five civil rights' cases were being heard in state supreme courts in 1883. When the courts found the 1875 Civil Rights Act unconstitutional (before the cases were referred to Washington), some black leaders saw this as a sign that federal protection for civil rights was no longer guaranteed, and talk of political independence emerged in the black press. The federal courts' conservative view of civil rights, together with the President's lukewarm stance on upholding blacks' rights, would explain the disillusionment felt by many black leaders towards the Republicans. This had also been noticeable at the Louisville convention.

However, it was not until the next state black convention in 1885 that political independence emerged as a key talking point in the Old Dominion. Its timing was no accident. 1885 was an election year in the Old Dominion, for that November the state governor would be chosen. The Readjuster governor, William E. Cameron, was standing down and it soon became clear that the tensions within the state Republican Party – between those who supported Mahone, and those that did not – had not gone away. Indeed, such divisions would play out at the black state convention. Questions also existed over the Democratic candidate – Fitzhugh Lee, son of Confederate general, Robert E. Lee. Since the memory of the war was still raw for most black Virginians, naturally old questions resurfaced regarding the Democrats' commitment to black rights. Yet this was tempered by the national situation, where the presence of a Democrat in the White House was not proving to be the nightmare that some had envisioned. Indeed, the address produced by the convention would praise the 'liberality' of the Cleveland administration.[31]

[31] *New York Times*, 1 October 1885

The state convention would meet in Lynchburg. That year two African Americans had been elected to the city council, in a relatively quiet spell in local politics. This would change the following year with the rise of the Knights of Labor union as a force in politics.[32] The committee issuing the convention call had been organised at the Petersburg Convention of 1881, whose secretary, John B. Syphax, would play a prominent role at the Lynchburg meeting. Syphax was born in Arlington, Virginia, in 1835. He was a free black and educated in the nation's capital. His family were influential blacks – his brother was involved in developing the public education system in Washington, D.C. Syphax served one term in the Virginia House of Delegates in the mid-1870s, as well as being treasurer and a justice of the peace in Alexandria County.[33]

Whilst the Lynchburg convention call was issued to African Americans, the language it used – how it would look into achieving 'general advancement', which would be 'calmly considered' – suggested that the intended audience was as much white as black. Indeed, the call was published in the *Richmond Dispatch*, the leading Democratic daily.[34] Approximately one hundred delegates would attend the meeting from every Congressional district, but not from every county. As the *Dispatch* would note, 'The *personnel* of the Convention is much above the average of such conventions.'[35] At least one black member of the Richmond City Council, John Adams, was present. Adams was a plasterer by profession and a graduate of Lincoln University, who had already served three years on the Richmond City Council.[36]

Syphax announced on the day before the convention, somewhat prematurely, that the convention would not support the Republican candidate for state governor and would therefore be independent in its choice. The *Dispatch* noted how he was 'the

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[32] Michael J. Schewel, 'Local Politics in Lynchburg, Virginia, in the 1880s', *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 89 (April 1881), pp. 170-180 (p. 174)
[33] Jackson, pp. 41, 61
[34] *Richmond Dispatch*, 25 August 1885
[35] Ibid., 1 October 1885
[36] Michael B. Chesson, Richmond's Black Councilmen, 1871-96,' in *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era*, ed. by Howard N. Rabinowitz (Urbana, 1982), pp.191-222 (pp.199-200)

leading spirit of the movement', which suggests that Syphax was far from alone in his view. It added, however, that Republicans thought little of this 'movement', and there were local African Americans who regarded Syphax as 'a pretender and schemer,' and the independence movement a moneymaking scheme to extort finance from the parties. This rumour was denied, leading the *Dispatch* to conclude that the convention would be 'lively'.[37]

Political independence proved to be the dominant theme of the convention. The leading Virginian advocate for black political independence by 1885 was Rosier D. Beckley, who would become a prominent spokesman for the Democratic cause throughout the 1880s. Little is known of Beckley's background. He must have been one of the oldest at the meeting, for he had been a delegate to the 1864 national black convention held in Syracuse, New York. Later he was president of the 1865 black mass meeting in Norfolk, Virginia, so his election as chairman (or president) of the Lynchburg convention was not unexpected. During Reconstruction he was linked to the Virginia Republican Party (along with Peter J. Carter, who had been involved with the 1875 Richmond convention), as well as holding a federal position in the state. In the early 1870s Beckley was noted as a 'representative man' of black Virginians; his 'conduct and character' reflected well on the state's black population.[38] In 1879 he was involved in the organising conference in preparation for the National Conference of Colored Men that was held in Nashville in May of that year. Sometime after that he moved to Washington, D.C., where he held a federal position, but retained links with Virginia. Beckley's name was mentioned in many newspaper accounts of the Lynchburg convention, although two papers recorded different initials for him. One cannot assume automatically that this was simply a mistake, but since no other Beckley has been found as having attended, and that another newspaper account recorded that

[37] *Richmond Dispatch*, 30 September 1885

[38] E. Nash to R.D. Beckley, 15 December 1873, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress Digital Collection. Since no published proceedings of the convention have been found, this study will state that Beckley was chairman of the convention (rather than president), since this was the more commonly used term.

the convention's president was Rosier D. Beckley, then it can be safe to assume that it was in fact the same man.[39] Moreover, the views he expressed at the convention are consistent with later remarks he made.

In his address as chairman, Beckley stressed how the gathering was not affiliated to any political party but stressed the need for blacks to think for themselves unhindered by party loyalties. As the *Richmond Dispatch* summarised his speech, 'The negro was tired of being considered a bondsman of the Republican Party'. Beckley added that he had been an anti-Mahonite (which might explain why little was heard of him during the Readjuster era), and despite the fact that many in the hall were pro-Mahone, Beckley was still elected chairman of the convention. Perhaps the most significant remark made by Beckley focused on outside perception of the convention. As Wilson had stated at the 1875 Richmond convention, people (particularly whites) were looking on the convention as a sign of the progress made by blacks and that they were, as the *New York Times* summarised, 'worthy to be citizens'.[40]

The convention address, however, was primarily aimed at black Virginians. It was an unambiguous statement in support of independent voting, stating how the moment had come to end the 'unqualified support' for the Republican Party. Outlining how blacks had supported the Republicans since the war, particularly during the 'dark days of reconstruction' when the party was the only one supporting blacks, the conventioneers noted their gratitude towards the Republicans but pointed out that now was the time 'to think, act, vote, and speak for ourselves'. This had become even more apparent, the address stated, since the Republicans had 'practically abandoned us'. No doubt this was a not-so-subtle reference to the Supreme Court decision of two years previously. It was now time to work with white southerners, the convention declared, in the knowledge that whites generally wished to see black rights upheld, and therefore for blacks to use the vote wisely. 'We also condemn the raising of the race issue by any

[39] *Richmond Dispatch*, 1 October 1885, *New York Times*, 1 October 1885, Minnesota *St. Paul Daily Globe*, 9 October 1885
[40] *New York Times*, 1 October 1885

class of men who essay to lead the masses,' the address pointed out, 'because it can do nothing but prove detrimental to our cause and our interests.'[41]

Only one speech, made by John Adams, proved to be unfavourable to the address, although no evidence has been found as to what exactly he said. What is known is that he received an unsupportive response. In all only six votes were cast against the address, some of which were cast by a group suspected of being sent to the convention by Mahone to disrupt the proceedings. Beckley responded by stating that he would support the Democratic candidate for state governor. It was such a stance that would come to define Beckley's position for the rest of the decade.

Such a view would have been supported by at least one spectator at the convention, T. Thomas Fortune. Indeed, he had made a speech there advising the convention to stake out an independent line in politics and work with white southerners.[42] Fortune would use the Virginia gubernatorial election that year as an example of the decline in support for the Republicans for his pamphlet *The Negro in Politics*, published in 1886. He thought it great 'impudence' that the Republican candidate for state governor, John S. Wise, expected to win based on blacks supporting him, given that he did not believe in social equality or school integration. Wise did receive the majority of black votes, however, and Fortune noted how Virginian blacks were 'especially indignant' that the Lynchburg convention 'denounced in fitting terms this political trickster.' This suggests that few blacks supported the independent line taken by the Lynchburg convention. Yet there were a number of blacks who did back the successful candidate, Democrat Fitzhugh Lee, noted Fortune, which he regarded as a favourable sign that blacks 'were losing confidence in the politicians and are relying more and more upon their own discretion and leadership.' The actions of President Cleveland in maintaining black officeholders was also regarded as a good sign,

[41] Ibid. See, also, *Richmond Dispatch*, 1 October 1885.
[42] *Richmond Dispatch*, 1 October 1885

encouraging blacks to look more favourably upon the Democracy.[43] Opportunities to hold a federal position did not only exist in Washington. In Norfolk County, Virginia, the consequence of such voting for Lee manifested itself almost immediately. Eighteen black caulkers replaced white Republicans in the role.[44]

Interestingly, both the black and white press were dismissive of the convention. The African American newspaper, the *Richmond Planet*, noted:

> We repudiate the actions of the "Colored Convention" recently held at Lynchburg so far as it professed to represent the colored people of this State. It was nothing more nor less than a few men who represented nobody but themselves, and who were in the pay of the Democratic bosses. We know whereof we speak and are prepared to substantiate what we say.[45]

Another quotation from the *Planet*, a variation of the one cited above, noted that the convention 'was nothing more nor less than a gathering of sore-headed politicians with a few recruits in the pay of the Democratic bosses.'[46] George Freeman Bragg, who was known for his scorn of the black political class, echoed this view. The convention had been representative up to a point, he observed, but it had been 'burdened with retired politicians who have pretty much outlived their usefulness and remain barnacles and impediments to the progress of the race.' Whilst the address was 'sensible in many respects,' he thought it 'indicative of the disappointment and hard luck of some unfortunate colored politicians who sadly regard dealing in politics the means of

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[43] T. Thomas Fortune, *The Negro in Politics: Some Pertinent Reflections on the Past and Present Political Status of the Afro-American, Together with a Cursory Investigation into the Motives Which Actuate Partisan Organisations* (New York, 1886), pp. 51, 60, 69, 64, reprinted in *T. Thomas Fortune, the Afro-American Agitator: A Collection of Writings, 1880-1928*, ed. by Shawn Leigh Alexander (Gainsville, FL, 2008), pp. 27-73. It was reported that in Petersburg many blacks voted for Lee. *Petersburg Lancet*, 7 November 1885

[44] *Petersburg Lancet*, 28 November 1885, See, also, *Cleveland Gazette*, 28 November 1885

[45] *Richmond Planet*, quoted in *Cleveland Gazette*, 10 October 1885. No extant copies of the *Planet* from this period have been found, so the extracts reprinted by the *Gazette* are all that remains.

[46] *Richmond Planet*, quoted in *Cleveland Gazette*, 17 October 1885.

earning a living.'[47] Bragg's comments suggest that he saw the Lynchburg convention as a direct descendent of the February 1883 convention that was held in Washington, D.C.

One must be aware of two factors in explaining Bragg's position that point to the fact that he was not necessarily a spokesman for all Virginian black leaders. He had set up the *Lancet* in 1882 at the age of nineteen and been an ardent supporter of the Readjuster movement, although he had not held political office. These two points would automatically make him wary of anything that suggested that blacks vote for the Democrats, for those who did support Lee, like Beckley, had been both officeholders and opposed to William Mahone. The other main factor in explaining Bragg's intellectual position in 1885 was his increasing conservatism. By the autumn of 1885 the *Lancet* had renounced its support for any political party, and chose instead to focus on racial self-help.[48] This change in tone was hinted at in the paper's reaction to the 1884 election. What is also of interest is that Bragg was only twenty-two years old, hardly a seasoned black leader, who had become more conservative with age. Bragg demonstrates that not all of the new generation of black leaders emerging in the 1880s were militant. At the same time, he was moving in a very different direction from the majority of black leaders in the 1880s, as the 1888 election would demonstrate. Bragg would later be ordained in the Episcopalian Church, preaching initially in Norfolk, Virginia, before moving to Baltimore, Maryland.[49]

By contrast to the response of the *Lancet*, the white press proved largely indifferent. The *Shenandoah Herald*, however, did react to the convention, although quite why, is unclear. One reason could be that as a white, Republican paper, it would naturally want to make an example of those blacks leaning towards the Democrats. The existence of white Republican newspapers in Virginia was not unusual for the 1880s. The Shenandoah region was a Republican stronghold in the state, as well as anti-black

[47] *Petersburg Lancet*, 10 October 1885
[48] Hartzell, 'The Exploration of Freedom,' pp. 143-44
[49] J. Carleton Hamilton, 'Bragg, George Freeman, Jr.', in *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, ed. by Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston (London, 1982), pp. 57-58

(in an area where the black population was comparatively smaller than that of the Southside region). Uniquely, this paper presented a pictorial representation of the 'Lynchbug [sic] convention'. Images 1 and 3 both depict the stereotype of African Americans as figures of fun – in this case, the caricature of Jim Crow, dancing and acting the fool, but dressed in suit and hat. These drawings were mocking the 'best families', as the paper referred to them. This class of African Americans, often free born and wealthier than the vast majority of blacks, were often the very same men that the *Lancet* scorned as selfish politicians. However, many of them had become Democrats. The *Herald* referred to them as 'Funders', such as black Democrat J. B. Syphax.[50] Image 2 reinforces the idea of the delegates as members of the 'best families' – in this case, a caricature of a black leader by the name of Bowe. The paper regarded him as a sell-out, with the sketch suggesting that he was blind to reality and not acting in the interests of his fellow African Americans.[51]

[50] See Chapter 1 for more on the Funders.
[51] *Shenandoah Herald*, 16 October 1885. Two previous issues also carried these pictures: one had all three, the other just Image 1. See 2, 9 October 1885.

THE LYNCHBUG CONVENTION.

We give below a pictorial account of Boss Barber's Lynchburg colored convention which met and adjourned last week, with results stated below.

This is the same "d—d nigger" that has danced and expounded for bourbonism in all campaigns since 1870. He is largely related to the "best families."

J. B. Syphax, democratic orator before the democratic convention held at Lynchburg to denounce gentlemen? It was at Lynchburg that John W. Daniel clasped hands with Derrick and Boone and gave forth the never-to-be-forgotten exclamation, "When you, my countrymen, thus behold the best men of both races thus united in a common cause, we are bound to win."

This is supposed to be Mr. Howe, of Richmond city, who started the movement to sell out his race to boss Barbour and bourbonism. He was the president. He has his eyes nearly popping out of his head looking for the boys whom he expected to follow him, and even with the aid of his hat as a spy glass he cannot see them.

These two complete the number attending the Lynchburg convention which was to do such wonders for boss Barbour. They are supposed to have been carried by the boss from Alexandria to dance the ruelet and amuse the audience while the "best people" got in their outside work.

But the convention went, met and adjourned. The honest colored people did not put in an appearance. Bourbonism is short in its expense account and gets no compensating colored organization or vote. Its assembling serves to show, however, how those "best people" who are always yelling "d—d nigger party" are all the time trying by low means to secure the colored vote to bourbonism and barbarism.

The black elite, based in Washington, D.C., was made up of the 'old families', whose members had been largely free before the war, and were influenced by upper-class white society in their lifestyle.[52] Family background was all-important to this group, founded on the antebellum experience – 'their place in the slave system, their role in opposing it, and the extent to which their families had been free from it.'[53]

[52] William B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Indiana, 1990), pp. ix-x

[53] William B. Gatewood, 'Aristocrats of Color: South and North, The Black Elite, 1880-1920', *Journal of Southern History* 54 (February 1988), pp. 3-20 (p. 5)

Education was one defining feature of the group, but this was more noticeable in the rising middle class rather than of the elite, whose intimate experience of slavery was often a few generations removed. That such a group made up much of the nationally known and the state black leadership is perhaps no surprise, with their sense of *noblesse oblige*. Their involvement in the cause for equal rights demonstrated 'their access to the white power structure', whilst they demonstrated through their lives the possibilities of black uplift.[54] This symbolism was a feature of all black leaders, however, the distance between the elite and the black masses was often considerable. Of course, with this the distance, one has to question how representative of the black masses the elite were. The issue of representation becomes more apparent for those who left the state to pursue careers in Washington, D.C.

That members of the Virginian black elite, like John B. Syphax, chose the independent route suggests an inherent elitism in the state's black political independence movement. It is highly likely, for example, that Syphax belonged to the "old family" of Syphax that lived in the Washington, D.C. Furthermore, the fact that black political clubs supporting the Democrats were founded in many states in the mid-1880s, reinforced this elitism, which was not confined to the capital. The creation of black Democratic clubs in Washington, D.C., for instance, would have influenced black Democrats in Virginia. Richmond's proximity to the capital meant that it was influenced by political trends emanating from there, and is an example of how Virginia's political situation was unique to the South.

One such club in Washington was the Colored Club of Ward 11, formed by supporters of the Democratic President, Grover S. Cleveland. At its conference in 1885, the committee of resolutions noted how 'designing politicians' had stirred up the rumour that the election of a Democratic President would turn back the clock for blacks, and stated that Cleveland had so far done more to remove the colour line than any other

[54] Ibid., p. 7

president.[55] It is interesting that the language used here, such as 'designing politicians', was similar to that used by the opponents of black Democrats. As in the 1870s, when black Democrat Jesse Dungee would throw the Republicans' language back at them, so black Democrats in the 1880s would do the same.

Together with these local clubs, the Lynchburg convention had proved to be the prelude to the black political independence movement in Virginia. Another black convention had met in Danville in April 1887 'to organize the Negro vote into an independent political power,' voting for those who would 'agree to advance the industrial interests of the race.'[56] The movement reached its peak in the state in September 1887 when Beckley and other black Democrats formed the Independent Club of Colored Virginians. Even though there is no evidence to suggest that the convention in April and the launch of this independent club were linked, it can be safe to assume that they were. There was growing sentiment against Mahone, who now controlled the state Republican Party, and this club fed into this opposition. Based, initially, in Washington, D.C., its objectives included an upholding of black rights, an end to prejudice (including a veiled criticism of Mahone's tactics), and a demonstration of the core differences between the Republicans and Democrats. The club's manifesto warned of the danger of a Republican victory in the state and declared the group would assist the Democrats to victory in the forthcoming state elections. By assistance, it meant delivering the black vote to the Democrats.[57]

The *Washington Bee* thought the club 'peculiar' and had short shrift for Beckley. It regarded him as a failed office holder, who had switched from the Republicans to the Democrats in order to obtain patronage in Washington, and had then fallen out with the Democrats when they failed to recognise him. It is likely that Beckley wanted a promotion, for he had been appointed as the Democratic Doorkeeper

[55] *A Conference Held by the Colored Club of Ward 11, Washington, D.C., 4 June 1885*, Grover Cleveland Papers, Library of Congress
[56] *Cleveland Gazette*, 2 April 1887
[57] *Washington Bee*, 10 September 1887

of the House of Representatives in January 1884, and no evidence has been found to suggest that he had been promoted since then. Indeed, it was at the 1883 state election that Beckley had switched to the Democrats.[58] The *Bee* was also keen to point out that Beckley had no support in the Old Dominion, and that the other members of the club's committee were unknown. This fact alone may suggest that many of the club's membership were part of a new generation of leaders. The main point the *Bee* wished to stress, however, was to ask how any black could support the Democrats after what had happened at Danville.[59] Two years later the paper wondered out loud what the state Democratic boss really thought of men like Beckley.[60]

One has to remember that the *Bee* had been sceptical of independent political movements since its open argument with T. Thomas Fortune earlier in 1883. There may have been more support for such a movement than the *Bee* realised. In a letter to the paper from Arlington, for example, an African American wrote that it was high time blacks created their own 'political destiny' and would support anyone who would help them achieve this.[61] Of course, it cannot be stated for sure that this letter was written by an African American; sometimes letters such as these were actually written by whites. In saying this, however, there is nothing to suggest that a white Virginian wrote this letter.

Moreover, it was not just the *Bee* that poured scorn on black Democrats, as revealed in a satirical item that was printed in the *Cleveland Gazette*.

> The average Negro Democrat looks seedy. He is usually attired in a threadbare suit and wears a wornout [sic] expression all over him. He smells like a distillery, too. He has a lend-me-a-quarter look in his eyes. What's the matter? He boasts of the richness of the Democratic vineyard. They forage, he tells us, on the fat of the land. Then why should

[58] Ibid.; *Petersburg Lancet*, 19 January 1884
[59] *Washington Bee*, 10 September 1887
[60] Ibid., 24 August 1889
[61] Ibid., 3 September 1887

> he look so hungry and lean and demoralized? The Negro Democracy should brace up and resolve to be a man.[62]

The *Richmond Planet*, under the editorship of John Mitchell, Jr., echoed this view of money not being plentiful (or spent wisely, as the quotation above seems to suggest). Mitchell remarked that the short life of most of the black Democratic clubs in the country could be attributed to this lack of funds.[63] Mitchell was active in the Richmond Republican Party at this time, which might account for why he was easily dismissive of black Democrats. Moreover, African American interest in the Democratic Party had waned in some quarters. 'Perhaps not a baker's dozen to-day entertain any hope that any good thing can come out of the Democratic party as far as they are concerned,' remarked a despondent T. Thomas Fortune in 1890. His disillusionment had begun with the election of Republican Benjamin Harrison to the White House in 1888.[64]

Virginian Politics in the late 1880s and early 1890s

During his re-election campaign of 1892, black newspaper editor and city councilman John Mitchell wrote a letter to fellow black Republican and editor, Magnus L. Robinson. Mitchell praised the work of Robinson and hoped that despite problems he would be successful that year. 'Of course I fight on different lines than laid down by you.' Mitchell wrote: 'I win over the colored people by coming in personal contact with them and bringing them over to my way of thinking.'[65] This does suggest that Mitchell considered himself more of a grassroots leader than Robinson, who stood aloof and won over people through his newspaper editorials or conversations with senior

[62] Taken from the *Press*, reprinted in the *Cleveland Gazette*, 11 August 1888
[63] *Richmond Planet*, 25 October 1890
[64] T. Thomas Fortune, 'The African in Politics', *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Magazine* 70 (15 March 1890); See, also, *Huntsville Gazette*, 16 November 1889, where in an open letter Fortune stated that he could no longer support the Democrats, but nor was he an avowed Republican.
[65] John Mitchell, Jr. to Magnus L. Robinson, 12 March 1892, Magnus L. Robinson Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia

Republicans. Indeed, Robinson had corresponded with race leaders in Washington, like Douglass.

Robinson was free born in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1852. He was privately educated, and was for a time a baker. He later enrolled in the Law Department at Howard University but could not graduate due to ill health. Soon after this Robinson became a teacher and journalist. After serving as a reporter on the *Baltimore Daily Bee* (the first African American to be a reporter on a white newspaper) he established his first paper, the *Virginia Post*, in 1880. In the early 1880s he was involved in Republican Party politics,[66] and was a delegate at the 1881 Petersburg black convention.[67] It was also in this year that he became a Readjuster, not before he had received criticism for his 'straight-out' stance up until that time.[68] Indeed, in the Congressional elections of 1890, Robinson was described as a 'political accrobat' [sic], noted the *Washington Bee*, 'first on one side and then on the other side'.[69] Throughout the 1880s Robinson continued teaching in Alexandria before starting another newspaper in Washington, D.C., *The National Leader*, in 1888. Robinson's paper became a leading black newspaper in the Presidential campaign, supporting Republican nominee Benjamin Harrison. Two years later, he moved the paper to Alexandria where it continued until at least the end of the century.[70]

The 1888 election was the height of Robinson's influence as a black Republican. It could be argued that he was no longer a local leader, but his readership may well have been, and he did remain tied to Virginia (and, indeed, would move back there). In a letter to Benjamin Harrison, shortly after his nomination as the Republican candidate for President, Robinson was both complimentary and frank. '*The colored*

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[66] *Washington Bee*, 26 January 1884; I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (1891; New York, 1969), p. 153
[67] Penn, *Afro-American Press*, p. 153
[68] *People's Advocate*, 5 November 1881
[69] *Washington Bee*, 25 October 1890. It is somewhat ironic that the *Bee* chose to make this comment, considering how Chase was regarded as, to use a modern term, 'flip-flopping' on issues.
[70] There is a very brief overview of Robinson's journalistic career in Henry Lewis Suggs, ed., *The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979* (London, 1983), pp. 380-81

people will look to you for an expression of sympathy to their political status in the South.' He asked, almost demanding, Harrison: '*Give us your view as to the condition of our people* in the South?'[71] The last few words were not underlined, suggesting it was an afterthought. But it does stress the significance Robinson placed on the situation facing southern blacks at the grassroots.

Whilst Robinson focused on presidential politics, other black leaders became interested, once again, in sending a black representative to Congress from the Fourth Congressional District. The candidate in question was John Mercer Langston, who had returned to his native state in the mid-1880s to take charge of the Petersburg Normal and State School. When he was dismissed from this role in early 1887, he turned his attention to politics. One significant obstacle faced Langston: William Mahone. Langston did attempt to woo Mahone early in his campaign, realising the influence that he held among blacks.[72] This failed, however, and Langston was forced to run on an Independent ticket, whereas the Republicans under Mahone nominated white Virginian A. W. Arnold.

Not surprisingly, Langston's bid for Congress drew much support from the black grassroots in 1888, fuelled by political activism on the part of many local black leaders. One such supporter was long-time local Republican leader, Ross Hamilton.[73] Others included Matt N. Lewis and Scott Wood, both lawyers like Langston and both former federal office holders in the state.[74] Aside of individuals, clubs were organised (some of them women's clubs) throughout the Fourth Congressional District – one county had thirty-five such clubs. Independent newspaper support came from the

[71] Magnus L. Robinson to Benjamin Harrison, 28 June 1888, Benjamin Harrison Papers, Library of Congress
[72] William F. Cheek, 'A Negro Runs for Congress: John Mercer Langston and the Virginia Campaign of 1888', *Journal of Negro History* 52 (January 1967), pp. 14-34 (pp. 14-15, 18)
[73] Harold S. Forsythe, '"But My Friends Are Poor": Ross Hamilton and Freedpeople's Politics in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, 1869-1901', *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 105 (Autumn 1997), pp. 409-38 (pp. 434-36)
[74] Cheek, p. 25. Wood was a law graduate of Howard University in Washington, D.C. The significance of Howard, in particular, its law department, will be explored further in Chapter 6.

William W. Evans of the *Virginia Lancet*.[75] Evans, the son of Joseph P. Evans, was himself involved in local Republican politics. He was elected City Gauger of Petersburg in 1884 and represented Petersburg for one term in the Virginia House of Delegates.[76]

However, not all black leaders were as enthusiastic. William Wallace, a black preacher in Petersburg, thought that supporting Langston would simply reinforce the colour line and provoke hostility from whites. This was in response to Langston's comment that he would be hostile to any white man who did not vote for him. Wallace pointed out that it was thanks to the Readjusters (and, by implication, William Mahone) that blacks had access to public education, could sit on juries, and received care for the mentally ill. Wallace wrote succinctly: 'Did Mr. Langston contribute anything to this great blessing to the colored people in Virginia?'[77]

Indeed, William Evans noted how the former Readjuster leader still enjoyed considerable support from Virginian blacks.[78] A delegation of blacks from Maryland and Virginia, which included both A.W. Harris and William Evans from Virginia, visited President-elect Harrison to encourage him to appoint Mahone to his cabinet.[79] Back in Virginia, Mahone's bid for the Governor's mansion in the gubernatorial election of 1889 provides another example of his popular support from local blacks. It also demonstrated the vitality that still existed in state Republican Party politics.

On the day of the election, the *Washington Bee* witnessed events in Richmond. In the third precinct, for example, 900 black voters were standing in line all intending to vote for Mahone. In the fourth precinct, more than 600 blacks were waiting outside

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[75] Ibid., pp. 18-19, 26
[76] Jackson, p. 15
[77] *To the Members and Congregation Worshipping at New Hope Baptist Church, Sussex County, Virginia*, 31 October 1888, reprinted in James Hugo Johnston, 'Negroes in the Government of Virginia from 1877 to 1888', *Journal of Negro History* 14 (November 1929), pp. 251-271 (pp. 269-70, quotation on p. 270)
[78] *National Leader*, 2 February 1889. As editor of the *Virginia Lancet*, Evans was heavily involved in Republican Party politics, which drew attention from other black newspaper editors, such as John Edward Bruce of New York. W.W. Evans to John Edward Bruce, 17 May 1890, John Edward Bruce Papers, Schomburg Center for Black History and Culture, New York City
[79] *National Leader*, 9 February 1889

the polling station, some had been waiting there all night.[80] Such support was encouraged by black clergymen, who responded to Mahone's request for help in his campaign. Urban black ministers issued a circular to black churches across the state to engage with the campaign, and support the Republicans. Not everyone agreed with such involvement, but they were in the minority. Mahone clearly realised the crucial role black clergymen played at the grassroots, through what one historian notes as the 'prestige of their spoken word.'[81]

However, Charles Gordon, a black clergyman from Petersburg, was ostracised for opposing both Langston and Mahone. It was reported by the *Richmond Planet* following the election that there was "much dissatisfaction" from other ministers with Gordon, for he had "voted the Democratic ticket or failed to support the Republican ticket". Gordon admitted this to be the case, stating (so it was reported), "that they [fellow black ministers] were persecuting him on account of his politics". Gordon tried to split away from the church, and take supporters in the congregation with him, but with little success. This affair does have echoes with Dungee's attempts to break away from the Republicans in the mid 1870s, and the hostility towards him that such action provoked.[82]

The 1889 gubernatorial election saw a Republican defeat, as well as the end of era in local party politics. The beginning of the new decade brought into sharp focus the reality of party political activity in the state. Interest in it from blacks was still there, to be sure, but fraud at polling stations would reach new heights in the coming years. Some black leaders began to question the stress placed on electoral politics, and instead focused increasingly on economic and educational issues, as demonstrated by the discussion at the Richmond convention in April 1890.

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[80] *Washington Bee*, 9 November 1889
[81] Forsythe, 'African American Churches, Fusion Politics in Virginia' p. 220
[82] Quotations from the Richmond Planet, 15 March 1890, cited in ibid., p. 222. The threat of expulsion for any member of a black church congregation not supporting Langston was common. Cheek, p. 28

1890 Richmond convention

Conventions continued to be the main forum for black leaders to discuss ideas into the 1890s. Indeed, the national black convention movement was revived in 1890. One was held in Washington in the February of that year, which proved to be the last of its kind. As the proceedings demonstrated, the national black convention movement – in the model of those that had met during Reconstruction – had run its course. A month earlier, in January, a different kind of black convention had met. The recently organised Afro-American League had arranged it under the leadership of T. Thomas Fortune. However, these conventions came under criticism from the *Washington Bee*, which denounced them as simply opportunities for 'self aggrandizement.' It would be economic progress and educational advancement that would do more than any convention, argued the paper, adding that the 'wirey [sic] politicians' and 'quasi leaders' should 'retire from the field of action and let the people rule.'[83]

It is hard to verify how much support such a view as this had from blacks. The *Bee*'s editor, William Calvin Chase, was known to be a somewhat erratic figure. Black leaders in Richmond appeared to ignore such comments. At a black conference held in the city at the time of Chase's remarks, the decision was made to hold a state convention the following year.[84] The purpose was "to take into consideration the political, educational, moral, and financial interests of the colored people," in order that blacks could "enact such a general policy for the government…to enhance and improve their condition." It would be held after the national black conventions were set to convene and meet in the run-up to municipal and Congressional elections. As such, the "general policy" formulated would indicate the current thinking among the state's black community on their condition.[85]

The convention was called to order in April 1890. Around seventy delegates arrived at the Third Street Methodist Church presided over by Joseph T. Wilson, who

[83] *Washington Bee*, 21 December 1889
[84] *Richmond Dispatch*, 18, 19 December 1889
[85] Ibid., 15 April 1890

by now was a veteran of twenty-five years in black state conventions. On the first day he spoke at length, outlining the political situation faced by blacks. "The Republican party does not know what to do with us and the Democratic party wants to get rid of us," he said, "and we are at sea without sail or anchor drifting with the tide."[86] This echoed Douglass' comment from 1872 that the Republican Party was the deck for the blacks.[87] By way of taking control of their situation, Wilson advised blacks to focus instead on economics. This was in stark contrast to his earlier militancy, as expressed in his comments at the 1875 convention. He now stressed the importance of education and land, and encouraged blacks to support black businesses and professionals. Wilson used statistics to shore up his argument. He claimed, for example, that whilst $2 million had had been spent by Virginia blacks on churches, few schools had been constructed. The implication here was that blacks should focus more on the here-and-now, rather than the next world, an interesting point considering that they were meeting in a church. Other black leaders were voicing such a view at this time, as the next chapter will reveal. Perhaps more interestingly, Wilson told blacks that if they could move to the North or West, then they should do so, for more opportunities were available to them there than in Virginia.[88] Not everyone shared this view, however, for on the second day W.H. Brooks, of Richmond, thought that prosperity could still be achieved in Virginia. He did nevertheless support Wilson's call to support black business.[89]

Yet the mildness of tone that Wilson's address introduced to the convention was short-lived. Tensions were raised when John Mitchell, a city councilman and editor of a black newspaper, the *Richmond Planet*, introduced a resolution calling on blacks to support black candidates as representatives from the Second and Fourth Congressional Districts. In response, Alfred W. Harris pointed out that the convention was not intended to be a political meeting, thus endorsing Wilson's call for blacks to move

[86] Ibid., 16 April 1890
[87] Douglass' comments are cited in August Meier, 'Blueprint for Black People', in *Frederick Douglass*, ed. by Benjamin Quarles (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1968), pp. 143-164 (p. 159)
[88] *Richmond Dispatch*, 16 April 1890
[89] Ibid., 17 April 1890.

away from party politics. E.A. Randolph, a lawyer and former city councilman, agreed. However, Randolph's former colleague, lawyer James Hayes, 'had a good deal to say about local politics', noting that blacks should still be involved with politics, taking an independent line if necessary. This was a controversial remark, with Hayes being shouted down by a number of delegates.[90] Such turmoil was similar to that experienced in 1875. Then, as in 1890, the black delegates were desperate to present a moderate tone to white observers.[91]

However the moderate tone was also something that was emerging from the grassroots. A delegate from Culpepper County, for instance, thought it 'unfortunate' that party politics had been brought up. 'His people had sent him to the convention to learn something that would help their material progress,' one newspaper reported, 'and he wanted such matters discussed.'[92] This was supported by the Rev. J. Anderson Taylor, of Richmond, the following day, who thought blacks had to develop self-help strategies, rather than expecting the federal or state governments to assist blacks.[93]

In the end the resolutions dealt with matters other than party politics. Rather than referring to the fact that it was 'not unnatural' for African Americans to support the Republicans, the resolutions stated that black Virginians were citizens of the state, and should be accorded the respect this conferred on them. More stress was placed on ways to promote self-help and racial solidarity. Organisations were, once again, seen as the best means by which blacks could combine to strengthen their position. These would be at county level and their aim would be to promote black business, discourage excursions, and promote thriftiness and home ownership.[94] Obtaining wealth would give blacks a strong position in society, so read the resolutions, as well as enhancing the state of Virginia. Another theme was that of 'moral improvement', where the black

[90] Ibid., 16 April 1890.
[91] See Chapter 6 for a study of Hayes.
[92] *Richmond Dispatch*, 16 April 1890
[93] Ibid., 17 April 1890
[94] Such an organisation was set up in the state in May 1897. See Chapter 6 for more details on this.

clergy would have a role in promoting and encouraging this. All that was said regarding education centred on the Blair bill and the actions of the state legislature. The failure of the Blair bill to pass Congress was 'a blow at popular education', which was not helped in the state by the appointment of the new Superintendent of Public Institutions, who was known for his hostile views towards black education. Governor McKinny, who had been in office for only a few months, drew criticism from the convention for his support for a reduction in the funds available for the State Colored Normal School and removing the black trustees from its board. The resolutions concluded, as if added at the last minute, that emigration was a voluntary act and should not be forced upon the black community. These resolutions thus reflected the moderate tone that Wilson and others wanted to portray to whites, stressing matters of self-help and racial solidarity rather than party politics.[95]

The Richmond convention did provoke reaction in the black press, as well from white Democratic newspapers based in the state. The *Richmond Dispatch*, the leading Democratic state daily, noted how the convention was 'orderly' and demonstrated 'responsibility', although the reference to the Governor was 'not in good taste'. Ultimately, the paper thought that it did not achieve anything meaningful.[96] Another Democratic newspaper, the *Charlottesville Chronicle*, approved of the convention's focus on moral uplift, and the role black ministers were playing in this. Not surprisingly, it criticised African Americans who still pushed for political involvement, noting the 'foolish speeches and resolutions by professional negroes (and politicians (?)) who had no earthly business in such an assemblage'. Furthermore, the convention's proceedings revealed that blacks 'comprehended the disease that effects the negro race in this country,' the paper added, 'but that it knows and has the courage to apply the effective

[95] *Richmond Dispatch*, 17 April 1890.
[96] Ibid., 18 April 1890

remedy.'[97] The disease was presumably the poverty and illiteracy facing many blacks, the remedy the push for moral uplift.

The *Washington Bee*, on the other hand, was scathing of the convention, which it dealt with in an editorial on the African American relationship with the Republican Party. The editor, William Calvin Chase, resumed his hostility towards black independent politics that he had begun in 1883. He thought any hostility towards the Republicans was 'an attack on the rights of the Negro.' At the same time, those who had declared themselves independents unmoved Chase, for he regarded the 'moving spirits' of the convention as 'men who had lost their political prestige.' And adding to his growing impatience with the convention movement, which he had held throughout the 1880s, he thought it was time to wind them up. As he stated of conventions, with just a hint of irony, 'they amount to as much as the Negro vote does in the South.'[98]

Other reports in the black press were mixed. The *Detroit Plaindealer*, for example, thought the convention had 'taken a step backwards' in declaring its intention of not pushing for the upholding of the franchise.[99] And writing in Fortune's *New York Age*, the black Virginian lawyer Rudolph W. Rose, who had been a delegate at the convention, stressed how an independent political voice had been emerging for some time from Virginian blacks. He wrote that blacks would rather 'sacrifice party principle' than their 'political freedom'.[100] Rose was a member of the Virginia Gentleman's Club, which was made up of young men who were 'non-partisan, non-sectarian', and 'independent', gathering together for the purposes of racial uplift. Interestingly, the club had elected delegates to the Richmond convention,[101] which furthered the independent spirit of the 1890 convention in such a way that it was a

[97] *Charlottesville Chronicle*, 25 April 1890
[98] *Washington Bee*, 3 May 1890
[99] *Detroit Plaindealer*, cited in the *Richmond Planet*, 17 May 1890. Unfortunately, no extant copies have been found for the *Richmond Planet* from April 1890, so no editorial comment of the convention from Mitchell has been found, nor a black perspective for the proceedings.
[100] *New York Age*, 3 May 1890
[101] *Richmond Planet*, 17 May 1890

continuation of the independent streak that emerged at the Lynchburg and Danville conventions before it.

The 1890 Richmond convention once again revealed the tensions that existed within the local black leadership when it came to party politics, as had been the case in 1875 and 1885. Where the 1890 convention differed was not over which party to support, but whether to take part in party politics at all. The emphasis many local leaders now placed on self-help and racial solidarity, rather than electoral politics, was a significant contributory factor in the tensions within the hall. This was exacerbated by the generational differences that now existed among Virginian black leaders. Whilst no list of delegates has survived for this convention, from the information that remains it does appear that a new generation of local black leaders had by this time emerged in Virginia, and were beginning to make their presence known. Older 'voices' were still active, such as Joseph T. Wilson, but younger men were beginning to dominate local black organisation. This would become apparent at the next black state convention held in 1897.

Yet the 1890s witnessed the declining role of blacks in the state's electoral politics. Whilst John Mitchell would sit on the city council until 1896, his defeat that year marked the culmination of a trend that had already begun. Richmond conventioneer William H. Pleasants noted, whilst the Lodge Bill (on federal regulation of all elections) was being debated, that it would be left to blacks to ensure the enforcement of the bill in order that their vote be counted. 'Every man of them, the instant he makes that demand, might just as well pack up his worldly all and leave the district, never to return.' He added: 'His employment would be taken from him and his personal safety menaced.'[102] Black participation in electoral politics, in other words, was simply not worth it.

Pleasants' comments in 1890 are worthy of note for here was the disillusionment of a committed Republican expressed publically. Pleasants was a

[102] *New York Times*, 5 August 1890

member of the black political class that was being overtaken by younger men like Mitchell. A large part of this was due to the generational gap between them. As noted in Chapter 1, Pleasants had been a key figure in the state Republican Party in the 1870s. This continued throughout the 1880s; indeed, a speech he made in Danville was regarded by some as a contributory factor in the riot that broke out there in 1883. Others disagreed that he had such a role, including local whites.[103] This did not prevent Pleasants from participating further in public life, for during the 1880s he attended both Republican and non-party political black conventions. He was long-time chairman of the Danville Republican Party, noted on his death in 1896 as 'our leader'.[104] Pleasants was of the generation of men like Peter J. Carter and Joseph T. Wilson, and their passing from the political scene was another indicator of how the 1890s differed from the 1880s in black thinking on race relations. Both Wilson and Pleasants had both adopted a more conservative approach, as indeed Mitchell would by the end of the decade.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, black leaders in Virginia continued to exert influence in electoral politics throughout the 1880s. Langston's bid for Congress would be the last of its kind in the nineteenth century. Black involvement in party politics continued into the 1890s, however, largely at the municipal level. In Richmond, this activity was concentrated in Jackson Ward, a predominantly black district of the city. It could be argued that open support for the Republicans was easier in Richmond than in Montgomery, Alabama. As Steven Hahn notes of Mitchell's campaign against lynching, for example, it was easier for him to comment on a subject such as this than if he had

[103] See, for example, the comments made by white Danville resident W.P. Robinson, U.S. Senate, *Testimony in Regard to Alleged Outrages in Danville, Virginia*, Report No. 579, 48th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington, D.C., 1884), p. 400

[104] *Cleveland Gazette*, 5 May 1890; *National Leader*, 12 January 1889; *Richmond Planet*, 14 March 1896

lived further south, for Richmond was away from the worst of southern violence.[105] The same could also be said for party political activity and the ability to adopt a more militant approach to black rights than further south. Such a hypothesis will be tested in relation to Alabama in the next chapter.

Furthermore, that grassroots activity in party politics continued throughout the 1880s was an example of the legacy of the Readjuster era. Again, Hahn's analysis of this period uses the Evans campaign, but in particular Langston's bid for Congress in 1888, as examples of this legacy.[106] However, political independence became increasingly popular, in particular in the mid-1880s. This was not about supporting a third party, as it was in the late 1870s, or would be in the 1890s with the Populists. Rather, 'independence' really meant either actively supporting the Democrats, or at least considering them. An example of this would be the support for Fitzhugh Lee, the Democratic candidate for state governor. In contrast to the 1870s, support for the Democrats came largely from the elite of local leaders – officeholders or those aspiring to hold federal patronage. Only one example has been found of a local leader supporting the Democrats in the gubernatorial election in 1889, for example. The interest in political independence had begun with northern black leaders in the early 1880s, exemplified by the Chase-Fortune debate in this period. Indeed, Fortune became the figurehead for the black political independence movement. Despite this, the majority of the Virginian black leadership – as demonstrated in the Congressional campaigns of the 1880s, and in Richmond politics – continued to support the Republicans.

At the same time, black state conventions continued to be used as a forum for black leaders from across the state to discuss the key issues affecting the African American community. However, compared with the conventions of the 1870s, it is hard to know how representative they were, as little is known of how the delegates were

[105] Hahn, p. 428
[106] Ibid., pp. 408-411

chosen. But it can be said that there was support for the holding of state conventions, especially after the 1883 election. This was despite the fact that fewer delegates than normal were able to attend, which may well have been due to the time of year. In addition, the 1885 Lynchburg convention brought to the fore the interest some leaders had for political independence. This was short-lived, however, for by the Richmond convention of 1890, the debate centred on either active involvement in the Republican Party, or with no party at all.

The 1880s also witnessed the emergence of a new generation of black leaders in the state. Some were more conservative leaning, such as George Freeman Bragg, whereas others would be more militant, such as John Mitchell. However, by the end of the 1890s, even Mitchell would adopt a more conservative position. Following an exploration of the situation in Alabama, the final chapter of this study will focus on one Virginian leader as a case study of this new generation in local black leadership. He was a secular leader – a Howard University trained lawyer – who adopted a militant position towards black rights, in particular, over the right to vote.

4 Black Alabamian Voices from the 1880s

> I am not unmindful of the fact that we in the South are surrounded by prejudice, deprived of a share in government, in most cases, and are too often shot down and lynched, and denied our just rights on public carriers. It is my firm conviction that every right of which we are now deprived can be secured through business development, coupled with education and character.[1] – *Booker T. Washington* (1894)

Introduction

This chapter will explore Alabama in the 1880s through a series of black voices, one of whom was Booker T. Washington, as cited above. This decade was a transitional one in the state in terms of race relations, as it would be in other southern states. Political and civil rights on the one hand, and self-help and racial solidarity on the other, dominated discussion among local black leaders. However, by the early 1890s, the rope-like link between the two that had been formed in Reconstruction – in particular, through the black convention movement – began to unravel. The two became increasingly polarised as leaders divided over the best course of action for improving the political, economic, and educational situation of African Americans. This chapter will, therefore, aim to demonstrate this unravelling process.

Yet as the Reconstruction mode of thinking disintegrated, a new strategy emerged among local leaders – a broader notion that encompassed basic human rights. These were fought for, and advanced by leaders through black educational and economic development, and also an upholding of the rights they had already gained during Reconstruction by means of petitioning. The use of the petition, whilst not new

[1] Booker T. Washington, 'Taking Advantage of our Disadvantages', *A.M.E. Church Review* 10 (April 1894), pp. 478-83, reprinted in *Booker T. Washington Papers* [hereinafter the published volumes are referred to as the BTW Papers], *Vol. 3 (1889-1895)*, ed. by Louis R. Harlan (Urbana, 1974), pp. 408-412 (p. 409)

to the 1880s, became the main conduit for expressing blacks' grievances. Gone was the stress on gaining political patronage (although that was still a feature of some leaders' activism), and instead there was a push to work with anyone, and with any political party, willing to help them. That is not to say that blacks' turned their back on the Republican Party, for the majority did not, but scepticism did increase among some blacks. Furthermore, by the 1890s, the widespread fraud that occurred at elections meant that African American influence in state party politics was becoming increasingly irrelevant.

It is within this context that the most famous Alabama black leader must be studied. Washington's remarks in 1894, as quoted above, reveal his core strategy in terms of 'racial uplift'. Much has been written on Washington, but one area that has received little attention is his relationship with local black leaders. Indeed, it was during the 1880s and early 1890s that Washington was, first and foremost, a local black leader based in the Black Belt of Alabama. To what extent did he influence the other leaders around him, and vice versa? This question will form a key part to this chapter. To begin with, however, two local voices will be analysed to determine the extent to which black thinking over issues of civil and political rights, and self-help and racial solidarity, changed during the course of the 1880s. This will provide a backdrop for a study of other leaders through which the key issues will be explored. These two leaders have been chosen as the baseline because both were clergymen, and so are typical of the average local black leader in the state, and because what they say covers many of the main strands in black thinking at this time.

Two local voices

In October 1883 a black clergyman from Birmingham, Alabama, gave testimony before a Senate hearing over the working conditions of southerners. The investigating committee were particularly interested in southern race relations, and were keen to hear from blacks themselves. The clergyman in question was the Rev. Isiah H. Welsh (or

Welch), a minister of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church for thirteen years. Welsh was originally from Selma, Alabama, but had moved to Birmingham earlier in 1883. His testimony gives a unique insight into one clergyman's views on a range of subjects just after the Supreme Court decision had been handed down. Indeed, he began by touching on the matter of separate churches, which he felt to be beneficial to racial harmony. The ease and compliance with which this was done from both sides suggested that in social relations, separateness was the best way forward. Another legacy of the Reconstruction era that had been less successful than the creation of black churches, Welsh thought, was the era's political legacy, which had caused 'unpleasant feeling' between blacks and whites. As he told the committee,

> a class of men that came down to this country some years back, and gave us very bad advice and instruction…Our people were instructed and led by men who really did not feel very much interested in us, and when we were exposed to danger and death that, to a very great extent, deserted us in the time of our greatest need.

He had observed all of this through his association with the Freedmen's Bureau and, presumably, as a minister. Welsh's criticism therefore lay with the way in which African Americans were introduced into the political realm. His criticism of the Republican Party, especially the Carpetbaggers, was all too clear. Indeed, Welsh saw a link between black political activity and the movement of blacks out of the South. Blacks were 'induced' by the Carpetbaggers to rally in support of the Republican Party 'with the promise of pay.' Removing blacks from their farm work led to white hostility and threats to terminate labour contracts. Blacks were then faced with little choice but to leave the land. He made clear, however, that relations between whites and blacks had improved. Asked by the committee whether the chances of blacks voting for the Democratic was as likely as whites voting for the Republicans, Welsh replied:

> They are beginning to think for themselves politically. They are a [lit]tle divided since the decision on the civil rights bill, and I am afraid they will be more divided. It is hard to determine the political sentiment among our people now; a very difficult matter.

Welsh seemed to think a division of the black vote would not be a good thing, although he did not state precisely why this was the case. As he made clear towards the end of his testimony – 'the matter of politics will take care of itself in the South.' What is striking about this last comment is how early it was made. This drawing back from party politics was more commonly heard in the 1890s, but it is important to stress that some leaders were moving in this direction before then.

Aside from politics, the other main area on which Welsh chose to focus was education. In fact, he saw that politics and education were inherently linked: the former becoming more honourable with the improvement of the latter. Welsh advocated industrial education, which would benefit both blacks and whites, feeling it should receive federal support. This could serve as a reimbursement to those blacks who had saved money in the Freedman's Bank to support their children in school, but who had now lost those funds due to the bank's collapse. In other words, this would not be an act of charity on the part of the federal government; rather, a fulfilment of an obligation to which Welsh considered them bound. However, blacks also had a role to play in their own uplift, and Welsh considered thrift to be a good way of promoting self-help.[2]

Five years later, in 1888, another black clergymen promoted racial self-help, although his approach was far more militant that Welsh's, and belies the notion that militancy had evaporated from southern black thinking by the end of the 1880s. Moreover, this militancy did not just emerge from the new generation of secular leaders, as in the case of Virginia, but also from black clergymen. One such leader was the Alabama-based Rev. M. Edward Bryant, editor of the *Southern Christian Recorder*. In 1889 Bryant denied writing an article for the Selma *Southern Independent* claiming

[2] Senate Report on Work and Labor, 1884, pp. 372-79

that a race war was imminent, and that black supremacy in the South was inevitable. The piece was reprinted in other papers. The *Charlottesville Chronicle* in Virginia, for example, claimed that this was 'the real feeling of a great many "negro preachers" who do not express it.' The editor of the *Chronicle* then turned on white Republicans, asking how they could support a party that included black supremacists (assuming, of course, that all black preachers voted Republican).[3] Bryant was forced to leave the state, as were the editors of the *Independent*.[4]

Bryant had already stated his more militant position, in a speech that was reprinted in the *Christian Recorder* in January 1888. He noted the legacy of slavery in the present situation in the South in terms of black oppression. 'The Negro is so treated today in regard to his civil, political and social rights in many parts that any condition would be preferable to his present social condition.' Then bringing himself into the narrative, Bryant spoke bluntly: 'We are robbed, swindled, cheated, assassinated, falsely imprisoned, lynched, told to stand back and every indignity heaped upon us.' He advised a number of ways that blacks could improve their condition, one that contained the usual self-help philosophy, but one that was tinged with a certain militancy. For example, he advocated a labour organisation, a black league to be set up to prosecute lawsuits (such as against railroads that discriminated) and promote black schools, newspapers, and businesses. Yet his leagues would also be for self-protection: blacks should not work for anyone who did not respect their civil rights; only white businesses that respected them should be patronised; and only black schools could be expected to offer a fair education to African Americans. He did not want social equality with whites, simply his civil rights, arguing that both whites and blacks had a mutual interest and that racial harmony should be the goal.[5] This rhetoric was nothing new, but the

[3] Selma *Southern Independent*, quoted in the *Charlottesville Chronicle*, 13 September 1889
[4] *Cleveland Gazette*, 31 August 1889, cited in Aptheker, Documentary *History*, p. 656. This had echoes of what happened to another local leader, Jesse Duke, some three years earlier. See p. 197
[5] *Christian Recorder*, 19 January 1888, excerpt cited in Aptheker, pp. 673-74

path Bryant was treading here was somewhat different to that of the black Reconstruction leaders who had advocated integrated schools in 1874.

From these two case studies it is evident that continuity as well as change existed in the views of local black leaders in Alabama. The stress on racial self-help was ever-present; indeed, it would increase as the 1890s wore on. However, the emphasis on civil rights would increase, and by the early 1890s broaden out to encompass what today could be referred to as essential human rights. Well into the 1880s, therefore, black leaders continued to protest actively for their rights. This did not just centre on political and civil rights, but rights more broadly; in other words, an upholding of blacks' human rights. As will be seen, petitioning became a crucial part of this process. Three key themes as revealed by Welsh and Bryant will now be explored in turn: party politics, and political alternatives; civil rights; and self-help and racial solidarity. The final theme explored in this chapter, which became prominent in the 1890s, was emigration out of the South.

Party Politics

The question as to whether blacks should take part in party politics was one heard throughout the 1880s, and more loudly in the 1890s. In fact, there were two questions facing black leaders. Should blacks be involved in party politics? And, if so, which party (or parties) should be supported? If the answer to the first question was in the affirmative, then the next issue to address was how to have a working relationship with whites. In other words, how much were local leaders prepared to compromise in order to maintain any influence within a political party. In some ways, whites answered this question for blacks. By the early 1890s, for example, there were essentially two Republican Parties in Alabama: the 'lily whites', made up of mainly whites; and the 'black and tan' faction to which most blacks belonged. The division was created largely from a failure of the 'regular' party to support black patronage. Indeed, federal patronage become a key talking point among many local black leaders by the end of the

1880s, who saw a chance to increase their share of the spoils with the election of a Republican President, Benjamin Harrison. This section will also reveal how some black leaders emerged as quickly as they disappeared from the electoral scene. Others were in for the long haul.

The state election in August 1882 was bitterly fought. In northern Alabama the contest had been between Democrats and an independent coalition of Republicans and Greenbackers. The independents based their campaign on Democratic mismanagement, stressing the failed school system and the election law that encouraged fraud at the polls. Despite the gains made by the independents, the Democrats won an overall majority. Indeed, one commentator on the election, former Alabama politician William V. Turner, saw it as a missed opportunity for the independents – an election that really should have seen victory for them.[6]

The Democrats, however, proved too strong an opposition. Indeed, black political assertiveness in Alabama would be severely checked in the autumn of 1882. Jack Turner, a black man from Choctaw County (and no relation to William Turner), was lynched by a mob of whites and, apparently, some blacks.[7] Turner was, as his biographers note, 'perceptive and articulate, an orator capable of spellbinding power,' not to mention 'his prepossessing physical appearance and courage'. This meant, perhaps inevitably in the harsh racial climate of the Deep South, that Turner was going to create 'controversy and confrontation.'[8] As with Jeremiah Haralson, he clearly had a talent for public speaking.

In the summer of 1882 Turner was alleged to have been involved in a conspiracy to murder whites in the county. The allegation proved to be false, for it had been based on forged documents that appeared to implicate Turner and a number of other African Americans. There was immense reaction to his lynching, and an independent investigation was called for to determine just what had happened. African

[6] *Huntsville Gazette*, 19 August 1882
[7] See Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, pp. 391-93, n51p573.
[8] Ibid, p. 12

Americans themselves met and called for an investigation.[9] Turner's murder was, in a sense, a backlash against black radicalism in the State. He had been active in politics since the early 1870s, campaigning for the Republican Party in the county. Turner came to the fore, politically, in 1874, when he and a number of other blacks held meetings in their homes to canvass support for the Republicans.[10] Turner continued with his political campaigning into the 1880s, and in the 1880 election, he gave his support to the Greenbackers, carrying on his political activity until his death following the state election. Indeed, his name lived on, at least for a while. "Jack Turnerism" became a euphemism for secret black political meetings, which the white, largely Democratic press, relished in reporting as subversive. This, in large part, helped the Democrats to electoral victory in the November congressional election.[11]

The 1883 Supreme Court decision changed the political situation in the state in a similar way to that in Virginia. The disillusionment of the Republicans had intensified among some local leaders, but it would be an error to assume that this was widespread. Its presence, however, was no less significant. Shortly after the Court's decision was announced, for example, the Rev. W. Polk hosted a black protest meeting in his Montgomery church. 'This decision is an insult to our race' he told those present. 'I have always been a good Republican, but now I believe we should give our allegiance to that party which will give us our rights even if it runs the Devil's ticket or Ben Butler.'[12] The ever-present doubts as to the sincerity of the Republican Party over their support for civil rights was made evident here, as well as the possibility of political alternatives.

The Republican ascendancy of the post-war era was coming to an end, replaced with a political situation whereby both Republicans and Democrats had no clear majorities. The result was a relatively quieter era in electoral politics, with no President

[9] William Warren Rogers and Robert David Ward, *August Reckoning: Jack Turner and Racism in Post-Civil War Alabama* (Baton Rouge, 1973), pp. 112-113, 115
[10] Ibid, p. 24
[11] Ibid, pp. 157, 165
[12] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 26 October 1883. Benjamin Butler was a leading Democrat.

holding a second consecutive term until the twentieth century. Furthermore, the Republican Party was, once again, fracturing between its more radical and conservative factions. In Alabama, the more conservative wing of mainly white Republicans favoured a fusion ticket with the Greenbackers. The more radical wing, supported by most blacks, wished for a 'straight-out' ticket. This fracturing was made evident at the state elections in August 1884, which saw many blacks voting for Democratic candidates against the advice of local black Republican leaders, such was their disillusionment with the state Republican Party.[13] It must be remembered that voting at the state and federal elections brought into play a variety of factors, so it was often the case that a voter might vote for different parties at different elections. The most common scenario would be that a fusion ticket would be supported at the state or municipal level, whereas a straight-out ticket would be supported at the Presidential election. In 1884, if an African American in the Black Belt voted for the Democrats in the summer state elections, it was likely that he would vote Republican at the November election. Indeed, the federal elections in November of that year witnessed the return of one seasoned black politician, and the rise to prominence of another.

Whilst not exactly new to the scene of Alabama politics, William J. Stevens was beginning to be seen as the leading black Republican in the state. Born in Selma, Alabama, in 1845, he became active in the Alabama Republican Party in the 1870s, serving in the state legislature for one term after Redemption. However, in 1880, it was reported that Stevens had decided to remove his name as a Republican candidate for office.[14] By this time, too, he had decided to concentrate on running his Selma bar and, in 1886, launched the *Selma Cyclone*.[15] He was once noted as having a 'cool head, an eloquent tongue and a big heart',[16] so it was inevitable that, one way or another, a man with such qualities would end up in politics. Like many local black leaders, Stevens

[13] This is referred to Joseph Matt Brittain's thesis.
[14] *Alabama Republican*, 18 September 1880
[15] Biographical reference in *BTW Papers, Vol. 2,* n1p351; *Huntsville Gazette*, 13 November 1886
[16] *Huntsville Gazette*, 19 May 1888

had already taken advantage of the opportunities open to loyal Republicans, becoming a clerk in the Office of the Collector of Revenue in September 1883.[17] He was a bitter critic of the white Republicans holding federal positions in the state, calling them a 'sell-out crowd', whom he considered to be betraying Republican principles.[18] His comments over the white dominance of federal spoils was most likely provoked by the failure of local black leader Henry Binford, from Madison County, to gain a federal appointment in the summer of 1884. Binford's failure had lowered the morale of local Black Republicans.[19] However, there is the possibility that Binford simply was not the right man for the job. That same month, African American Matthew H. Banks was chosen to serve on the Decatur city council, so blacks were still being chosen for office.[20]

Another target of Stevens' was Jeremiah Haralson, who had made a comeback into Alabama politics. Haralson had left the state to become a night inspector at the customs house in Baltimore, Maryland.[21] He was moved to the day shift, from which he was forced to resign in April 1882 following a dereliction of duty (another inspector was also under investigation at this time).[22] Less than two months later, a Republican convention in Dallas County, Alabama, re-nominated him as their representative for the Fourth Congressional District.[23] He subsequently lost the election but that did not stop him running again in 1884. Stevens regarded Haralson's return to the state as a joke, although much of his criticism may have stemmed from the fact that both men had aspirations to run for Congress.[24] Dismissing Haralson as 'the deadest negro politically in Alabama', he added, 'Why the women laugh at him, and the little boys even call him

[17] Ibid., 15 September 1883
[18] Ibid., 1 November 1884
[19] Ibid., 14, 27 June, 12 July 1884. A commentator in the *Huntsville Gazette* had already noted how unfair the patronage system operated – how blacks were not receiving their fair share. 19 January 1884
[20] *Huntsville Gazette*, 27 June 1884
[21] *New York Times*, 9 November 1879
[22] *Baltimore American*, 16 April 1882, cited in *New York Times*, 18 April 1882. See, also, *New York Times*, 13 May 1882
[23] *New York Times*, 6 June 1882
[24] The *Huntsville Gazette* thought Stevens was the right man to represent the Fourth Congressional District. 27 June 1884

a Democrat. And if he does run, he will not poll 50 votes.'[25] Haralson cuts a rather pathetic figure here, but he received harsher words from Stevens the following month, when Stevens outlined the voting record of Haralson. 'The people are amazed over the fact that they had stood this man so long.' Haralson's time was up, considered Stevens: 'Now they have his scalp in their belts; they look forward to-day when they can hang the scalps of certain Federal office holders up with his.'[26] The implication made by Stevens here was that like the prevailing sentiment towards the Native American in this period, Haralson was a figure of fun, a relic of the past.

Despite the opposition he faced, Haralson won the Republican Party nomination for the Fourth Congressional District (the seat he had held in the mid-1870s).[27] Meanwhile, in the First Congressional District, two former black Reconstruction politicians were involved in the election campaign. Frank Threatt, for example, was nominated as the Republican candidate for Congress (and lost),[28] and Philip Joseph was selected as a delegate from Mobile to the National Republican Convention.[29] Following his defeat in the November Congressional election, Haralson would leave the state once more, although he would reappear at a Montgomery black conference in 1889.

The 1884 election was, of course, significant for another reason. The Democrats won the White House at that election, the first time since the Civil War, a significance not lost on blacks. However, it was also stated that in the Fourth Congressional District at least, there was no widespread alarm from blacks at the election of Cleveland, simply 'disappointment' that the Republican candidate James A. Blaine had not won. Indeed, as the *New York Times* remarked, the election demonstrated that white Republican hostility towards blacks was more significant than

[25] *Huntsville Gazette*, 20 September 1884
[26] Ibid., 11 October 1884. Stevens' reference to 'scalps' was an analogy to the Native Americans' use of scalping enemies, which had been taken up by the U.S. Army in their slaughter of American Indians in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.
[27] *National Republican*, 10 April 1884. See, also, *Huntsville Gazette*, 13 September 1884
[28] *Huntsville Gazette*, 27 September 1884
[29] *National Republican*, 10 April 1884

Democratic intimidation. In addition, as one Alabama Democrat pointed out, violence was no longer used to control the black vote – the unspoken comment made was that more subtle methods were used, although he did not specify anything.[30] According to one historian, the more subtle methods used by the Democrats in manipulating the black vote centred on their control of the local electoral process. So on the day itself, for instance, an election inspector in the Black Belt – there to oversee the election, and who also happened to be a Democrat – simply did not show up at the polls, thus preventing blacks from voting.[31]

Regardless of this, the 1884 election campaign highlighted the significance that local leaders placed on party politics. This was either in the symbolism held by the vote itself, the winning of a Congressional seat, or of a federal position in the localities. The campaign also revealed the ever-present divisions between both white and black Republicans, and between black Republicans themselves. However, the 1884 election can be regarded as the end of an era. No longer would election campaigns carry quite the same significance for blacks; indeed, as the 1880s wore on, the Republican Party fractured further.

It was the subject of federal patronage, more than any other, that divided the party in Alabama. Hopes were raised that something might be done to redress the imbalance in its distribution, which favoured whites over blacks, with the election of Republican President Benjamin Harrison in 1888. An editorial calling for a fairer distribution of patronage appeared in the *Selma Southern Independent* shortly after the election in December 1888 (before the editors were run out of town following the alleged piece by Bryant). The editors endorsed a recent move to call a black conference made up of black Republicans. 'We want it distinctly understood that we do not

[30] *New York Times*, 29 November 1884
[31] Going, pp. 33, 37-38

endorse the color line,' noted the paper, 'but we want the Negro to have a proportion or share of the federal offices.'[32]

The conference met in Montgomery in February 1889, bringing together a number of black leaders. These included Jeremiah Haralson, Hershel Cashin, who had been active in the state's organisation for the Louisville convention, and Booker T. Washington. Other leaders present had been involved in the Birmingham protest meeting in 1883 that had petitioned the state railroad commission and the state Governor, such as William Reuben Pettiford, who in the 1890s would become a leading figure in Birmingham's African American community. Pettiford was a free born African American who had been born and raised in North Carolina. Initially a farmer, he moved to Selma, Alabama, in 1869, where he enrolled at the State Normal School in Marion, teaching to pay for his studies. He joined the local Baptist Church (having been baptised in 1868) and read for a Theology degree at Selma Institute (later a university), which he left after a year to become a pastor of a church in Union Springs, Alabama. Pettiford became an ordained minister in 1880, moving to Birmingham in February 1883 to become the pastor at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in the city.[33]

A wide range of issues was discussed at the conference, and resolutions offered that called for a reform of the election laws, improved public education (and linked with this a call for the passing of the Blair bill), denouncing the lawlessness in the states, and an upholding of civil rights, particularly with respect to the railroads. The conference did not endorse any particular candidate for political office, and whilst having Republican sympathies, wanted to support all those who wished to sustain good race relations. The call for a black state university was also made, and a certain symbolism was attached to this, for one resolution centred around the need for blacks themselves to buy land and push forward the project and demonstrate the progress they

[32] *Selma Independent*, cited in *Huntsville Gazette*, 15 December 1888
[33] Simmons, *Men of Mark*, pp. 460-465

had made. However, while former political leaders like Haralson were allowed to make speeches, it was decided by the caucus that Councill would not be allowed to speak, despite having been invited to deliver a speech by the organising committee, a sign that local leaders were eschewing this controversial figure. Quite why Haralson ended up being invited to this conference is a mystery, considering that he was not what could be termed a local leader. Controversy continued to stalk him, however. In December 1885 he had been arrested for attempted fraud. 'His friends and those who know him well,' reported the *Selma Post*, 'feel confident that he will be able to exonerate himself from the charge.'[34] Haralson, though, would not remain long in the state, for in April 1889 he moved to Louisiana.[35]

The split started to widen further in March 1889. A black convention met in Birmingham, and sent Samuel R. Lowery and J.H. Thomason as a delegation to petition the newly inaugurated President, Benjamin Harrison to demand recognition by the Republican Party. This process of visiting the Federal Executive had a direct comparison with the Alabama delegation that had visited President Garfield in 1881. Fifty-eight year old Lowery was a silkworm farmer and lawyer, who in 1875 had moved to Huntsville, from Nashville, Tennessee.[36] Thomason had already been involved in petitioning for black rights in 1883. The address that the delegation brought with them declared that the President needed to be informed of the 'real condition' facing blacks in the state and how African Americans, as loyal Republicans, 'deserve a proper recognition'.[37] Alabama was not alone in making the federal government aware of conditions in the South. As A.N. Johnson of Selma noted in a letter to Fortune's *New York Age*, concerning local support for the Afro-American League, committees had met in his state, and elsewhere, to memorialise the forthcoming Congress 'the grievances of the Negro race in the South.'

[34] *Selma Post*, quoted in *Huntsville Gazette*, 5 December 1885
[35] *Huntsville Gazette*, 4 April 1889
[36] Simmons, *Men of Mark*, pp. 144-45
[37] 'Address to the President', 21 March 1889, *Benjamin Harrison Papers*, Library of Congress

Despite the divisions within the Alabama Republican Party, that did not mean that they failed to organise in any meaningful way, or that local black Republican figures had little influence within the state party. William Stevens would continue to have considerable influence throughout the 1890s, as a spokesman for the blacks' political interests in the state. Peter Crenshaw, for example, who had been among the blacks who had visited Garfield in 1881, would continue to be involved in local Republican politics until the end of the century. Henry Binford and Hershal Cashin were other key figures, both of whom continued to participate in local party politics throughout the 1890s.[38] The influence the Republicans as a whole within state politics had become meaningless, however, for the Populist insurgency provoked an upsurge of Democratic activity. There were also black grassroots leaders who chose to back the Democracy in the 1890s.

Political Alternatives

For some black leaders, support for the Democrats was a more worthwhile option than remaining with the party of Lincoln. As shown in Chapter 1, support for the Democrats did increase following the election of 1874. Whether this was through choice or coercion is something that is hard to quantify. In 1884, the Montgomery *Colored Citizen* pointed out that if the state Democratic Party would assure blacks that their vote would be counted fairly, then blacks could support them. The ultimate goal for both sides, considered the paper, was for more friendly relations between whites and blacks.[39] Two years later, an anonymous letter in the *Huntsville Gazette* implied that the only reason some blacks voted for the Democrats was because of their disillusionment with the Republican Party over its sincerity towards upholding black rights.[40] And by 1888 a black Democratic club had been established in Huntsville,

[38] For more on Cashin, see Rabinowitz, 'Holland Thompson', n85p279
[39] *Colored Citizen*, 3 May 1884
[40] *Huntsville Gazette*, 25 September 1886

which was derided by one correspondent to the *Huntsville Gazette*.[41] In any case, most African Americans in the state continued to support the Republicans throughout the 1880s, although as one historian points out, realistically their vote counted for little after 1885.[42] Certainly the 1893 Sayre Election Law (which led to the elections being more susceptible to fraud due to the introduction of the secret ballot) reduced the numbers further.[43] Yet as the previous section showed, black Republicans continued to operate at the local level. A change occurred, however, in the early 1890s. This was due to the Populist insurgency in the state, where poor whites sought to gain power over the mainstream state Democratic Party. Their efforts to woo black voters succeeded in some cases, more so in other states, such as North Carolina. In Alabama, their efforts backfired on them. One event more than any other – the Miners' Strike of 1894 – led to many blacks supporting the Democrats.[44]

Even so, black support for the Democrats had already increased in the state. This manifested itself in the establishment of black Democratic clubs, which were, as Chapter 1 showed, nothing new. What was new was the meeting of a black Democratic conference, which took place in Montgomery at the end of 1892. The delegates have been described as 'the willing tools of the Black Belt "oligarchy"', which was made evident in the resolutions.[45] Here, the black Democrats considered that blacks should side with southern whites, those who had given them employment so that they could buy property, paid the taxes for the black schools, and assisted them with farming. 'For a Negro to vote against these men, would be for him to go against himself;' the

[41] Ibid., 10 March 1888
[42] Horace Mann Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (1939; Tuscaloosa, AL, 1994), p. 141
[43] J. Morgan Kousser notes that the black turnout at the gubernatorial election of 1892 was roughly 63 per cent, whereas at the 1896 election (after the Sayre election law had been enacted) the turnout had reduced to 49 percent. Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven, 1975), p. 137
[44] See below, p. 190
[45] Bond, p. 140

resolutions stated, 'to vote with these men would be to go for his own interest, and to down race prejudice and race antagonism.'[46]

The leading light at this conference was a black lawyer, H. Clay Smith from Birmingham. Indeed, the following year, he was regarded as the leading black Democrat in the South. He chaired national black Democrat meetings, such as one in April 1893 that sought to discuss the current situation regarding federal patronage for African Americans. Only thirty-seven years old in 1893, Smith is an example of the new generation of secular black leaders, who were both lawyers, and involved in party politics. Unusually, Smith had sided with the Democrats. No evidence has been found as to why he had chosen the Democrats, but perhaps the moderate policies of Grover Cleveland had encouraged him, as well as a degree of pragmatism as to the way southern politics had evolved since the end of Reconstruction. The *Washington Bee* regarded him as 'a good politician and one of the most highly educated negroes from the South.'[47] Later in 1893 Smith was appointed by President Cleveland as United States Counsel at Santas, Brazil, a post he held until 1896.[48]

As well as the holding of conferences, support for the Democrats also came from the black masses. This was nowhere more evident than the 1894 gubernatorial election, which saw the election of Democrat William C. Oates to the Governor's Mansion. The Republicans were so divided that they did not put forward a candidate for the office, but rather the lily white faction supported the Populist candidate.[49] The question to ask is that why, at a time when the Populists were at the peak in the state, did black voters support the Democracy? Or was this a case of mass fraud? Fraud was certainly levelled at the Democrats, and it is more than likely that it did take place on a

[46] *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, 2 December 1892, cited in Bond, p. 140
[47] *Washington Bee*, 10 June 1893
[48] Ibid., 22 July 1893; J. Clay Smith, *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844-1944* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 272, n11p304
[49] Hackney, pp. 33-34

wide scale, despite claims to the contrary.[50] However, it is the fact that the charges were systematically challenged that is of interest. The Democrats were on the defensive, but also wanted to make it clear that the Populists were not as pro-black as some thought, at least in Alabama. For a start, the black and tan faction of the Republican Party, led by William Stevens, refused to support the Populists. Stevens in the end voted for Oates.[51] However, it was the role of local leaders that was more crucial in Oates gaining widespread black support. The unease with which other black leaders (apart from Stevens) held the Populists was revealed both privately and publically. Even before the 1894 election, local black leader Jerry B. Blevins wrote of the Populists as latter-day Confederates.[52] However, in 1894, it appears that the black clergy played a greater role than the established black political leadership in swaying the black masses. A number of the clergy publically supported Oates' candidacy and told their congregations to vote accordingly. These leaders also made speeches in favour of Oates,[53] so as with the 1889 election for Mahone in Virginia, black preachers were crucial in mobilising the black vote. It was claimed by Oates that he received some 25,000 black votes in that election. Moreover, the violence surrounding a recent miners' strike in the state further encouraged the black swing to Oates. Oates spoke against the strikers and declared that if elected Governor he would ensure that African American rights were protected. 'These sentiments were applauded loudly by the colored voters present…where he spoke,' Oates later wrote, oddly in the third person,

[50] Kousser notes that the 1892 gubernatorial election demonstrated that 'ballot box fraud had become a vocation.' Kousser, p. 43; Oates systemically countered the charges of electoral fraud at the 1894 election (the election in which he won). William C. Oates to Morgan and Pugh, 12 March 1896, Morgan Papers, Library of Congress

[51] Robert David Ward and William Warren Rogers, *Labor Revolt in Alabama: The Great Strike of 1894* (University, AL, 1965), p. 125

[52] J.B. Blevins to William Coppinger, 7 August 1890, cited in Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910* (New Haven, 1969), p. 8; Robert Saunders, 'Populists and the Negro, 1893-1895,' *Journal of Negro History* 54 (July 1969), pp. 240-69 (p. 256); Sheldon Hackney, *From Populism to Progressivism* (Princeton, 1969), pp. 34-35

[53] Oates to Morgan and Pugh, 12 March 1896

'and it is a notorious fact that a greater number of colored voters at that election voted for him than ever voted for any democrat in the State prior thereto.'[54]

In can be said, therefore, that black support for the Democrats was not always achieved through coercion. Either through personal choice, or as a response to local events, blacks saw in the Democrats the best hope in securing their rights. Even avowed Republicans like Stevens, chose to support the Democrats at state level. This switch indicates the changing situation facing blacks in the early 1890s, where the relative calm of the 1880s was giving rise to greater political tensions as a result of the Populist insurgency.[55] Yet there was another major issue in the debate over southern race relations that dominated discussion more than party politics in the mid-1880s – that of civil rights.

Civil Rights

Shortly after the Supreme Court handed down its decision in the Civil Rights Cases, a mass meeting was held in Birmingham, Alabama. As in the immediate aftermath of the 1874 election, African American leaders chose to hold a mass protest meeting in order to take stock of the recent court decision. As already indicated, the use of mass meetings was still the main forum for local leaders to air their views. This method was supported by many leaders, including former Reconstruction politician, and delegate to the 1874 Montgomery convention, James K. Green. Speaking before a Senate hearing on labour relations, that was collecting evidence in Birmingham at this time (he may well have been at the Birmingham protest meeting, too), Green noted that whilst he was not happy with the Supreme Court's decision, he did not think it wise to pass more laws securing blacks' civil rights. Green regarded the Constitution as guaranteeing

[54] Ibid.
[55] This is explored by Woodward in *Strange Career*.

these rights under the Fourteenth Amendment and thought that if blacks had grievances to air this should be done through the use of mass meetings.[56]

The Birmingham meeting appears to have been more significant than the one held in Montgomery in 1883. It was more like a convention for resolutions were passed and a petition drawn up. The resolutions put forward by the Birmingham meeting followed the tone made evident in Polk's address in Montgomery the previous month. They were forthright in their approach, declaring the decision 'a surrender of the principles' of the Union during the Civil War. Under the chairmanship of the Rev. J.H. Welch**,** the meeting stated that only by developing stronger ties with southern whites would black rights be secured, for this would prove to be 'the last refuge of the colored people', as one local newspaper put it.[57] On the common misapprehension that civil rights meant 'social equality', those present at the meeting were clear that they had no desire to mix with whites. However, at the same time, they maintained that equal enjoyment of public facilities was their right as citizens.[58]

The petition that emerged from the meeting was presented to the Alabama Railroad Commission over the unfair treatment blacks were receiving on the state railroads. It was framed around the inherent rights blacks had, not only as citizens of the United States, but also as citizens of Alabama. Outlining how blacks were routinely forced into the "smoking car", and how once in this car black women were not given the respect they deserved, the delegation called on the commission to use its powers to end the injustice faced by blacks on the railroads, and offer them their own separate (and equal) car. As the petition read:

> We say, unhesitatingly that the colored people do not desire to ride in the same car with the white people, simply because it is the white people's car; and the reason why a number of our ladies and gentlemen persist in obtruding themselves into the car set

[56] Senate Report on Work and Labor, p. 454
[57] *Birmingham Age*, quoted in *Huntsville Gazette*, 10 November 1883
[58] *Huntsville Gazette*, 17 November 1883

aside for white people is to secure equal accommodations and protection from tobacco smoke, insulting and offensive language.

Providing separate but equal facilities would encourage the 'friendly feeling' between the two races, the document noted, 'satisfied' that they spoke for 'our people'.[59] The commission found in favour of the delegates, proposing amongst other things that railroad companies have separate cars for blacks and whites, giving the companies thirty days in which to comply. Following this announcement, African Americans in Montgomery met, thanking the commission for their 'decision in favor of separate and equal' railroad cars.[60] According to Booker T. Washington, who made reference to the petition in a speech of July 1884, there was widespread support for the commission's 'just decision'.[61] The same delegation that petitioned the railroad commission also went to see the state Governor, where, among other things, they stressed the need for more schools in the state. The address presented to the Governor suggested that black educational supervisors be appointed throughout the state to oversee the work of black schools.[62]

Shortly after the black meeting in Birmingham, James A. Scott, one of the delegates chosen to petition the commission, testified before the Senate inquiry into southern labour relations. Scott, as already mentioned in Chapter 1, was a lawyer, newspaper editor, and a supporter of the Democratic Party. He outlined before the committee the positive response the delegation had received from the Railroad Commission and the assurances that something would be done to address the discrimination blacks faced on the railroads. In accord with Welch, Scott offered the most memorable summary of the delegation's position on this subject. 'Our people do not care whether they are put in the front of the train or in the middle or at the tail end,'

[59] *Petition of Colored Citizens of Birmingham*, Relations between Labor and Capital, House Docs, Vol. IV, pp. 457-58
[60] *Huntsville Gazette*, 22 December 1883
[61] 'The Educational Outlook in the South', *BTW Papers, Vol. 2*, pp. 255-262 (p. 259)
[62] Senate Report on Work and Labor, p. 382

he stated, 'so long as they have proper accommodations and proper protection.'[63] Asked whether he thought this would resolve the matter of the 'civil rights bill' (a reference to the recent Supreme Court decision), Scott thought it would. He had considered the bill as a 'piece of political clap-trap', adding that he had never seen African Americans making use of 'the privileges that it conferred on them'. Scott acknowledged that the best hope for blacks was to seek protection of their rights from the state.[64]

From the perspective of post-Jim Crow segregation, that blacks should actively seek separate and equal facilities comes as a bit of a surprise. Of course, the early 1880s was a time when both sides of the debate on southern race relations were still active. The point to stress is that many black leaders in Alabama wanted separate and *equal* facilities, but as will be seen, equality rarely happened in practice. The decision of the Railroad Commission meant little in reality, however, for blacks would continue to face discrimination throughout the 1880s. Writing in 1885, Booker T. Washington outlined such treatment. 'The mere thought of a trip on a railroad brings to me a feeling of intense dread,' he noted, 'and I never enter a railroad coach unless compelled to do so.' Reinforcing the message from the Birmingham delegation, Washington reasoned that if blacks were not to be allowed in the first-class car, then the railroad companies should provide a separate first-class car for blacks. 'We have no desire to mix,' wrote Washington. 'We can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand for maintaining the right.'[65] This last comment would later come to define Washington's view of black civil rights.[66]

Discrimination on the railroads continued throughout the decade. In 1887, two black leaders filed complaints against the railroads. Philip Joseph, for example, took his complaint directly to the chairman of the Pullman Company. Joseph protested that a

[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] *Montgomery Advertiser*, 30 April 1885, in *BTW Papers*, *Vol. 2*, pp. 270-74
[66] Harlan, *The Wizard of Tuskegee*, p. 163

railroad employee had refused to give him a sleeper birth on a train, knowing that one was available. Pullman had the employee in question fired.[67] The other case involved William Councill, who had filed a complaint with the newly created Inter-State Commerce Commission (that regulated inter-state railroads). As the story went, Councill had sat in the first-class carriage amongst whites whilst on a train in Georgia (as his ticket entitled him to), and as a result, he was verbally insulted by his fellow passengers and told to leave. Councill refused to move, and when ordered into the second-class car by the conductor, he again refused, which resulted in him being forcibly removed from the first class car into the second-class car, which one paper at least referred to as the "Jim Crow" car.[68] Indeed, the correspondent for the *Selma Cyclone* added that the train was "slowed up" and that Councill was forced off the train, 'left standing in a ditch'. The paper added that the Inter-State Commerce Law (from which the Commission would have worked) would be able to do what the Civil Rights Act of 1875 could not do – that is, outlaw discrimination on the railroads. It praised Councill for his 'courage and firmness' and believed that this would prove to be a 'good test case'.[69] In its final decision, the commission declared that separate and equal railroad cars be provided for both blacks and whites.[70]

It is clear that this incident provoked considerable controversy in Alabama. Indeed, the situation deteriorated to the extent that Councill tendered his resignation from his position as principal of the Huntsville Normal School. Many black leaders would have welcomed Councill's resignation. This not on account of the current controversy, but one from two years previously, when Councill had been charged with sexually assaulting one of his pupils and attacking her uncle. He was exonerated, but many local leaders felt that he should have resigned anyway.[71] However, Councill's

[67] *Washington Bee*, 11 June 1887
[68] *Selma Cyclone*, quoted in *Huntsville Gazette*, 28 May 1887; *Chattanooga Times*, quoted in *Huntsville Gazette*, 30 July 1887 (where the reference to Jim Crow can be found).
[69] *Selma Cyclone*, quoted in *Huntsville Gazette*, 28 May 1887
[70] *Cleveland Gazette*, 10 December 1887
[71] *Huntsville Gazette*, 23 May 1885

absence from the school would not last long, for he managed to oust the interim principal, northern black Democrat Peter H. Clark, and return to the school the following academic year.

Councill's ability to hold on to power at the Huntsville Normal School was due to his close ties with local whites. At the time of his resignation in 1887, for instance, Councill had acknowledged the support of his friends, and that sufficient evidence existed (including witness statements from many whites) that he had not committed the ultimate southern crime of sitting with white women. Furthermore, in an attempt to defuse the situation (and maintain his position among whites, as Booker T. Washington would do later), Councill reiterated his views on "social equality".

> I have always been, am now, and shall ever be opposed to it [social equality] in all its phases. My liberal conduct and sentiments of the past shall be my policy in the future, regardless of the efforts of demagogues to prove me to the contrary and drive me from a course of persistent liberality and of unselfish devotion to the welfare of my race and my country.[72]

The editor of the *Cleveland Gazette* took Councill to task over these comments, asking him to clarify his views. The paper understood them to mean that blacks were not socially equal to whites.[73] No evidence has been found to suggest that Councill ever proffered a response. However, he expanded his views over social equality in the book he completed in December 1887. Here he stated that he did not believe social equality existed, and that it did not follow that freedom automatically conferred such equality.

> Freedom *per se* brings nothing but abstract principles, but it opens the avenue for all that is grand and noble in this life and in the great hereafter. Freedom, legislative

[72] Letter quoted in *Huntsville Gazette*, 13 August 1887
[73] *Cleveland Gazette*, 3 September 1887

> enactments and judicial adjudications cannot make men socially equal. The merit must be in the individual himself, and find a corresponding merit in some other individual.[74]

Councill was saying that obtaining freedom was merely the first step. If any kind of social equality were to happen, it would be down to individuals to work this out.

One has to ask why the *Cleveland Gazette* chose to single Councill out, when other black leaders maintained that they did not want social equality? It could stem from the fact that because Councill was recognised by whites (less so by blacks) as an influential black leader, some blacks feared that a high-profile African American stating such views on equality could lead whites to believe that all blacks thought this way. This was made evident in June 1888, when Councill was lambasted in the black press over his stance on civil rights. The criticism centred on his refusal to support resolutions at a black teachers' convention that called on the state legislature to ensure equal accommodation on the railroads for blacks.[75] However, such a reaction also demonstrates the change that had taken place in black thinking on segregation over the course of the 1880s. Whereas black leaders in Alabama were happy to state in 1883 that they did not want social equality, provoking little reaction, by 1886 the implications of such a stance were becoming clearer to many leaders. This was as a result of a comment made in the *Montgomery Daily Advertiser* about introducing state legislation to prevent either race from going into each other's railroad cars. Jesse Duke, a black newspaper editor in the state spoke out against this, regarding such a move as 'absurd', for it would prevent friendly relations between whites and blacks.[76] Duke, however, would not remain in the state much longer. The following year he was forced to flee Alabama as a result of comments he made on lynching.[77]

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[74] William H. Councill, *The Negro Laborer: A Word to Him* (Huntsville, AL, 1887), pp. 25-26 (quotation on p. 26)
[75] *Tennessee Star*, quoted in the *Washington Bee*, 9 June 1888
[76] *Montgomery Herald*, 25 September 1886
[77] Jones, Allen W., 'The Black Press in the "New South": Jesse C. Duke's Struggle for Justice and Equality', *Journal of Negro History* 64 (Summer 1979), pp. 215-228

Five years later, however, in 1891, such segregation would be state mandated. When the bill to enact this was being debated by the state legislature, local black leaders called a conference to discuss their position. It was reported that black leaders wanted to follow the course adopted in Louisiana where an Equal Rights Association had been set out to bring legal cases against the railroads to court. As a result, ten black lawyers were to be present at the forthcoming black conference to offer legal advice. Indeed, some leaders considered that bringing legal cases against the railroad companies was the only way they would secure equal treatment for blacks on the railroads. However, the leaders made clear that they did not want to 'mix with the whites.'[78]

When the conference was announced in January 1891, it was noticeable that the names listed in the call were very different from the conference of two years earlier. Part of this had to do with the call being issued in Mobile, but what was noticeable was the number of black clergymen listed. Moreover, the aims of the conference were different. This was not about federal patronage; instead, it focused on civil rights and education. However, as with the 1889 conference, one of the results of the conference would be to petition the state legislature, 'to redress certain wrongs' that the call listed, such as that of black convicts, and by state laws – a reference to Jim Crow segregation law on the railroads.[79]

The black conference of 1891 was not without controversy. H. Clay Smith, the black lawyer and Democrat, and the *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, had both denounced the critical comments made by Booker T. Washington on the apportionment bill for state schools.[80] Washington hurriedly wrote a rejoinder into the *Advertiser*, stating that the paper's criticism was not justified, that he was committed to his work in the state and that everyone knew this. 'My whole life since I have been in the State, as

[78] *Birmingham Age-Herald*, 19 January 1891, cited in Hackney, p. 44
[79] *Huntsville Gazette*, 10 January 1891
[80] Bond, 140

an educator,' he wrote, 'has been given to showing that education will cement the friendship of the two races, not alienate them.'[81]

All of this was somewhat at a tangent to the main focus of the conference – the pending railroad segregation bill. Despite their best efforts, time ran out for the African Americans wishing to prevent the segregation bill becoming law. It passed the state House of Representatives on 20 January 1891, and no sooner had black leaders met on 3 February than the state Senate passed the bill on 5 February.[82] The petition that blacks had wished to present to the legislature was now worthless. The new law appalled the *Huntsville Gazette*: "can the state afford to legalize such barefaced robbery?" [83] As one historian remarks, 'in the face of white solidarity and the absence of a militant organization, Negroes did nothing.'[84]

Aside of petitioning, the use of the courts as a means of redressing black grievances over their civil rights was becoming a key strategy for northern and southern African Americans in the early 1890s. This was inspired in large part by the Afro-American League, which was founded by T. Thomas Fortune, and was organised through a series of local leagues. The idea was not new. John W. Cromwell had proposed this in 1883, as Chapter 2 explored. Later, Fortune took up the idea, regarding an organisation structured from the grassroots upwards would enable a unified approach but still take into account concerns unique to local areas. Local committees had already been set up in the wake of Harrison's election to petition Congress. A. N. Johnson, who had been secretary to the Montgomery Conference, and had also been involved in the Birmingham meeting, thought that by bringing all of the local committees together, they could achieve something.[85] As a result, branches of the Afro-

[81] *Montgomery Advertiser*, 6 February 1891, reprinted in *BTW Papers, Vol. 3 (1889-1895)*, pp. 128-29 (p.129)
[82] Hackney, p. 45
[83] *Huntsville Gazette*, 8 August 1891, cited in Hackney, p 46
[84] Hackney, p 46
[85] *New York Age*, 30 November 1889

American League sprung up across the country, including in both Montgomery and Birmingham.[86]

The main driving force behind the legal challenge to Jim Crow, however, came from the newly created National Citizens Rights Association, set up by Albion W. Tourgée. This league had organised the 1890 Washington black convention, as referred to in Chapter 2, and had its roots in Louisiana. Tourgee had support from local black leaders; its membership was over 100,000 by 1892. However, Tourgee's association failed to gain support from middle-class, northern black leaders. This lack of the support from the North reinforced what one historian has noted as the 'growing chasm' between northern and southern blacks, for the latter supported Tourgee's organisation.[87] Writing to him in March 1892, A.N. Jackson, a clergyman from La Fayette, Alabama, supported the work he was doing, noting dryly that the 'South is a pretty good organized mob and will remain so until bursted [sic] by the Federal Government.'[88] This suggests a probable reason for southern black support for the Equal Rights Association. The Federal Government was still regarded by most African Americans as the final arbiter of justice, and in the legal context, this would be the U.S. Supreme Court. However, there must have been some wonder as to whether the court would indeed support black rights, considering the decision it had made in 1883. Such pessimism perhaps explains why there was so little black protest against the court's decision in 1896, the culmination of Tourgee's campaign in Louisiana, where the court upheld 'separate but equal' in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case.

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[86] Ibid., 7 December 1889

[87] Mark Elliott, 'Race, Color Blindness, and the Democratic Public: Albion W. Tourgee's Radical Principles in *Plessy v. Ferguson*', *Journal of Southern History* 67 (May 2001), pp. 287-330 (pp. 310, 311-313)

[88] A.N. Jackson to Albion Tourgee, 23 March 1892, in Foner and Lewis, *The Black Worker, Vol. 4*, p. 300. Jackson had also become editor of the *Birmingham American Citizen* in December 1888; *Huntsville Gazette*, 15 December 1888; see, also, Suggs, *The Black Press in the South*, p. 33

Self-help and Emigration

The other major strand in the thinking of black leaders at the grassroots was that of education. The key figure here, of course, is Booker T. Washington. Much is known about Washington, of course, but it is often forgotten that he started out as a local figure in the Black Belt of Alabama. Tuskegee had been achieved through a deal brokered between African American Lewis Adams (who had been a delegate at the 1874 Montgomery convention) and Democrats in the state legislature. For a return of black votes, the Democrats supported the appropriation of funds to establish a black Normal school in the Black Belt.[89]

A question that has been in the background of this study has been whether or not Washington was the typical local black leader. After he became nationally known in 1895, perhaps not. But during the 1880s it is likely that he influenced a number of local leaders, and perhaps, in turn, was influenced by them. Washington became the most famous black advocate for industrial education, which he had experienced himself as a student at Hampton Institute in Virginia. About a year after he had been in Alabama, Washington delivered a speech to the Alabama State Teachers' Association. He stressed that whilst there was a need for higher education, this should be in conjunction with industrial education. Even though black professionals were needed, the African American community also required 'inventors, machinists, builders of steamboats and successful planters and merchants.' Washington added that it would be these people that would 'do more to banish prejudice than all the laws Congress can pass.'[90] This last point sums up Washington's stance on civil rights – individual effort over government assistance. He would maintain this position over the coming decades, a position to which many local black leaders would have adhered.

As Washington's speech revealed, a central aspect to the debate over black education was the *type* of education that blacks would receive and how this would be

[89] Harlan, *The Wizard of Tuskegee*, pp. 113-14.
[90] 'A Speech before the Alabama State Teachers' Association', 7 April 1882, in *BTW Papers, Vol. 2*, pp.191-95 (p.195)

funded. Already a number of black leaders were advocating industrial schools. This was hardly a novel idea and perhaps throws doubt on the assumption that Washington's stance on education was influenced solely by his experience at Hampton. The Reconstruction black conventions had supported the idea of industrial education, as had those that followed.[91] Former Virginian black John W. Cromwell, for example, was a notable advocate, as explored in Chapter 2. One historian has pointed out that industrial education became part of 'a larger complex of ideas emphasizing self-help and economic and moral development.'[92] This was the personification of Washington's philosophy, especially in the 1890s, but Washington was not alone in supporting this type of education for the black masses. Reuben M. Lowe, a black educator from Madison County, who was involved in the post-Redemption Alabama Republican Party, was also a staunch supporter of industrial education throughout the 1880s.[93] William Councill would extol this type of education in a book written in 1887. It read, at times, like a self-help manual, eulogising the home, property ownership, and study (in particular, the reading of newspapers).[94] Furthermore, he stressed the need for blacks to give each other a chance in life, with industrial education providing such a means – what he termed the 'morals of labour'. All of this was framed, not uncommonly, in religious terms, for Councill was an ordained minister. He peppered his account with Biblical references; indeed, the opening section of the book read like a sermon.[95]

Councill would become a leading force in the strand of black thinking that focused on self-help and racial solidarity. Whilst Washington would continue to dominate the scene, his national prominence was increasing in the early 1890s, even before his famous Atlanta Compromise speech of 1895. Two events demonstrate

[91] Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, p. 94
[92] Ibid., p.95
[93] *Huntsville Gazette,* 13 September 1884, 19 December 1885 and 2 February 1889
[94] Booker T. Washington would also stress the value of reading. 'Sunday Evening Talk,' 26 October 1890, in *BTW Papers, Vol. 3*, pp. 91-94.
[95] Councill, pp. 3-4

Councill's standing in this area. One was his advocacy of emigration, which would have won him many adherents at the grassroots, the other, and equally popular, was his stress on self-help.

Councill's prominence in black education was well known, given his position as principal of the Huntsville Normal School in northern Alabama. That others considered him to be so was made evident at a meeting of 'representative colored men' at the Lakeside A.M.E. church in Huntsville in January 1894. Councill was made President and declared that the aim of the meeting was racial uplift: 'mentally, morally, and financially.' Those present were largely educators or ministers, or indeed both. They included Henry C. Binford, from Decatur, and William H. Gaston, who had been a delegate at the 1883 Louisville convention.[96]

In his opening speech, Councill outlined what areas would be discussed. Crucially, no mention of politics was made. Instead, the focus was on improving education, farming, business, and labour in general. Another aim, according to Councill, was to 'seek to bring back and cultivate the love of the white man for the black man.' Yet a darker side to Councill's call for more harmonious race relations also emerged, one that he was far from alone in expressing. He attacked blacks for not doing enough to help themselves. 'Until negroes learn to respect one another and build one another up,' he said, 'they cannot expect any great measure of help from other races.'[97] His view supported a commonly held white view (both in the North and the South) that the South faced a 'negro problem'. No evidence has been found to illustrate what those in church thought of these views. Self-help was a key aspect to the thinking of the majority of black leaders, but none had framed it quite in this way. What is known is that in the discussion of emigration, at least one of those present at the Lakeside church, William H. Gaston, disagreed with Councill's advocacy of the 'Back to Africa' movement.

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[96] Chapter 5 focuses on Gaston.
[97] *Huntsville Gazette*, 13 January 1894. See, also, *Indianapolis Freeman*, 20 January 1894

Emigration could be regarded as the ultimate expression of self-help and racial solidarity. This had begun when blacks had moved from rural areas to the towns and cities after the Civil War, and had continued in the late 1870s with the Exodust to Kansas. Many black leaders, even before the Civil War, had proposed emigration to Africa. Indeed, it became a key topic at the black conventions held in the 1850s. The early 1890s saw the resurgence in interest in what became known as the 'Back to Africa' movement.

During the 1880s, when the subject of migration was mentioned, it usually implied movement within the United States, and was something that the majority of black leaders could subscribe to in varying degrees. However, black leaders at state and national level were often out of step with the masses on this issue. In 1886, for example, it was reported that a blacks were moving west from Alabama to Arkansas.[98] Three years later, Booker T. Washington made reference to about 600 African Americans from Alabama who had moved to Louisiana and Mississippi. Washington also noted that some blacks from Montgomery had moved even further west to California.[99] However, in a speech to black students in 1890, Washington opposed migration out of the South, either westwards or to Africa.[100] A year earlier, in 1889, Alabama newspaper editor and clergyman A.N. McEwen concurred with Washington that blacks should remain in the South.[101]

Signs that blacks at the grassroots disagreed with Washington came just a month after he delivered his speech. A black mass meeting in Bessemer, Alabama, decided to memorialise Congress calling for Senator Ben Butler's bill on the financing of black migration to Africa be passed. The memorial stated that the blacks of Bessemer "favor a complete separation of the races, emigration of the colored race to the Congo Free State, and we hope Senator Butler's bill will be passed." Further on the

[98] *Huntsville Gazette*, 30 January 1886
[99] Booker T. Washington to George Washington Cable, 1 February 1889, *BTW Papers, Vol 2*, pp. 511-512
[100] *Montgomery Advertiser*, 18 January 1890
[101] *Alabama Baptist Leader*, 9 May 1889, cited in Penn, *Afro-American*, p. 304

memorial stated: “We are in great political trouble here, but we cannot help it. Time had brought it on us.” It declared that “knowledge” had to have “her way”, and that it was this knowledge that was saying they should leave.[102] Support for emigration to Africa was still being expressed two years later, this time at a black mass meeting in Thomas, Alabama.[103]

These differences in opinion reflect a similar trend that occurred in the late 1870s, when a number of black leaders divided on the issue of migration out the South. The Exodust of the late 1870s had found considerable support in Alabama. This was not only from the masses, but from leaders, too, such as James Rapier, who had travelled to Kansas in 1880.[104] That same year, it was reported that 10,000 blacks were to be present at an emigration meeting in Montgomery, eager to hear the views of the Rev. William H. Ashe, another local leader who had travelled to Kansas.[105] The rest of the 1880s proved to be a quiet period in discussion over emigration to Africa, but it resurfaced in the early 1890s.

Indeed, one black leader who was openly in favour of the Back to Africa movement in the early 1890s was William Councill. This was a noticeable change from the late 1870s, when he had been cautious about the idea of African Americans moving westwards to Kansas.[106] By the early 1890s, he had become more militant on the subject. Councill became involved with the national black convention that was held in Cincinnati in November 1893. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner had been the driving force behind the meeting, and it is of interest that a subject like emigration should bring together men with different ideologies. Turner had been a radical, involved in the Republican Party, and an outspoken critic of the Federal Government. Councill, as already mentioned, had become more conservative. Following his 1887 legal case, he

[102] *Washington Evening Star*, 6 February 1890
[103] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 20 August 1892
[104] Schweninger, p. 171
[105] *Alabama Republican*, 18 September 1880
[106] *Proceedings of the 1879 Nashville Convention*

had focused instead on self-help, and following his advocacy of emigration, he turned to yet another ideological path: accommodation within the *status quo*.

Councill became involved with Turner's convention, acting briefly as its temporary chairman, and later heading the Committee on Emigration. The committee's final report favoured emigration to Africa, but it was received unfavourably by the delegates. Turner who realised that he would not receive the backing for emigration that he had hoped eventually abandoned the report.[107] Two things are of interest about Councill's involvement in the 1893 convention. The first is that it appeared that he was accepted more as a leader among blacks outside of Alabama than from the local leaders within the state. The second point is his position on emigration. At the last national black convention to discuss the issue of emigration, at Nashville in 1879 (although this was concerning migration west rather than to Africa, confusingly still referred to as emigration), Councill had cautioned against any rash decisions. By supporting Turner in 1893, Councill had appeared to throw caution to the wind. However, it could also be explained by the fact that he had the ear of the grassroots (through his role as a school principal), and that he, like so many other black leaders, realised that they had to change their position in the early 1890s. However, not all local leaders shared such a view, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

Conclusion to Part II

The 1880s was a transitional decade in both Alabama and Virginia, as it would be in other southern states, and indeed in the North. The subject of civil rights was a key issue throughout the decade, which became more pronounced after the 1883 Supreme Court decision. This was not only in terms of what was deemed discrimination, and against whom, but it also reinforced among blacks the need to organise, to convene, and petition for their rights. The Court's decision confirmed for some local leaders the need to work with southern whites, although there remained the hope that the Federal

[107] Redkey, *Black Exodus*, pp. 188-89

Government would listen to their demands, especially when a Republican moved into the White House in 1889.

Whilst the subject of civil rights was dominant in both states, the platforms from which leaders in Virginia and Alabama spoke differed. In Virginia, election time continued to be the moment whereby local leaders voiced their opinions on the key issues of the day. By contrast, local leaders in Alabama used their position of leadership – as clergymen or school principals – as a means of representing the views of the black masses to other blacks as well as to whites. Whereas in Virginia the legacy of the Readjusters meant that African Americans continued to be active in local party politics throughout the 1880s and into the 1890s, no such legacy existed in Alabama, for third party politics never gained the same level of support in the state. It must be remembered, though, that a select few of local black leaders, such as William Stevens, continued to hold influence within the state Republican Party. However, Stevens and others never held a seat in the legislature at any time during the 1880s, whereas there were local blacks in Virginia who did hold seats in the Virginia House of Delegates, albeit briefly.

Another key difference between the two states was the way in which the views of African Americans were expressed. In Virginia, the convention movement was the preferred method, often coinciding with local gubernatorial elections, such as in 1885. By contrast, local black leaders in Alabama raised issues as they emerged, although mass meetings were held in response to those events that directly affected African Americans. The Supreme Court decision of October 1883 was one such event, as was the election of Benjamin Harrison in 1888. In other words, local leaders in Alabama were more removed from the machinations of state politics than their Virginian counterparts, who still felt they could effect some real change in local affairs. Alabama black leaders were up against a seemingly powerful Democratic Party and focused their efforts in party affairs to internal Republican Party squabbles, or the day-to-day affairs of city politics. However, leaders in both states valued the use of petitions and

memorials to express the collective view of African Americans. As in the 1870s, this was linked to key events, such as responding to the Supreme Court decision of 1883.

As already mentioned, civil rights was a key subject of discussion among local black leaders in both states. This was especially so in the case of discrimination on the railroads. Education was another subject that was discussed in both states – regarded by most leaders as the key to advancement – although it attained a higher profile in Alabama due to the prominence of two black colleges in the state. The most notable black educator, of course, was Booker T. Washington, but it is important to remember that other figures, too, were prominent in the state, most notably William Councill.

There were other issues that whilst prominent in one state, were not in the other. In Virginia, for example, political independence proved to be major talking point among local black leaders in the mid to late 1880s. This was a legacy of the Readjuster era, but one that had dissipated by the early 1890s. In Alabama, however, emigration proved to be a more important topic. In both states, black support for the Democrats was an ever-present reality, especially in the early 1890s.

A final, brief, mention should be made of the local leaders. A new generation of black leaders emerged in Virginia in the 1880s. They were predominantly secular, often professionals, who were militant in the advocacy of equal civil and political rights for African Americans. By contrast, the majority of local black leadership in Alabama either had a religious background, or were involved with education. Few were professionals, and those who were involved in party politics had been so since the 1870s. Whilst those involved in party politics were more militant in their advocacy of equal rights, the majority of local leaders steered a course that was moderate. The following section will use two case studies as a way of exploring this further.

Part III

The purpose of this final section is to explore in more depth some of the issues raised by this analysis of the local black elite. In order to do this, a leader from each of the two states will be studied to compare and contrast the varied nature of local black leadership, and how this differed over time. Taking a biographical approach will provide a way into exploring how black thinking over the key issues – civil and political rights, and self-help and racial solidarity – developed over time. This will also allow for a picture to emerge as to the significance of the 1880s on these two case studies.

Therefore, Chapter 5 will be a study of William Gaston, a black clergyman from Huntsville, Alabama. It will focus on his role as a clergyman, as well as the influences on his thinking both before and during the 1880s. A fundamental aspect to this chapter will be to determine whether or not Gaston's views changed considerably over the course of this decade. Comparison will inevitably have to be made with Booker T. Washington, questioning how far Washington's influence reached into the localities of the state in which he was based.

Chapter 6 will focus on James Hayes, a black lawyer from Richmond, Virginia. It will place him within the context of the new generation of African American leaders who emerged in the 1880s. Many of these younger men were secular leaders, notably lawyers, who had gained influence at the localities since Reconstruction. Moreover, this chapter will also question the extent to which the law was becoming the new weapon in the fight against racial discrimination. Finally, this chapter will consider how far Hayes' militancy in the 1890s was at odds with the thinking of many local leaders. The key comparison here is with black newspaper editor, and former militant, John Mitchell, who had moved to a more conservative position during the course of the 1890s.

5 The Mind of William Gaston*

I am an American citizen born on American soil[1]

In the winter of 1864, towards the end of the Civil War, an African American soldier was trying to return to his regiment, the 12th United States Colored Troops. The Sergeant Major had been wounded at the Battle of Nashville and, after tiring of being in hospital, set out to rejoin his command. In an attempt to return to Nashville across the Tennessee River, he found himself caught in cross fire between Confederate and Union soldiers. Pleading with an elderly man to lend him his boat so that he could get to the other side, the soldier was told that if he just let the river take the boat it would hit the opposite bank. As the soldier recounted later, 'It was getting very late toward evening, when the head of my bateau struck a snag and sent me on a Go Round which lasted until rescued by a Confederate white lady.' The white woman, accompanied by a black woman of about eighteen, questioned the soldier as to why he was out on the river in a boat without oars. By this time the soldier had floated down river for about five miles, and after recounting his story of the elderly black man, the lady responded, "Well, he has left you in a perfect Go Round!" The black soldier eventually reached the other side of the river, and managed to get back to Nashville where in a few days he was able to return to duty.[2]

The black soldier in question was William H. Gaston, who in 1882 recounted this story in a letter to the editor of the *Huntsville Gazette*, an African American newspaper based in northern Alabama. Gaston, a black preacher, had recently returned to Alabama from Arkansas, and soon began a correspondence with the *Gazette* that would last for a decade. His final letter, which included the statement that is cited at the

*Waldo E. Martin's *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* inspired the title of this chapter. Martin's study influenced my thinking on Gaston, in particular, how Gaston embraced much of Douglass' own thoughts on the meaning of the Civil War for African Americans.

[1] *Huntsville Gazette*, 23 January 1892

[2] Ibid., 4 February 1882

beginning of the chapter, returned to the major theme running through all his letters that began in 1882. Gaston considered himself first and foremost an American citizen, a status conferred on African Americans through service in the Union Army during the Civil War. What it meant to be an American was the question that lay at the heart of Gaston's thinking.

In order to explore Gaston's intellectual position, an analysis of his correspondence to the *Huntsville Gazette* will be made. This will aim to highlight his main areas of thought as a local black leader, how this differed from other local and national black leaders, and to assess whether his thinking over political and civil rights, self-help and racial solidarity changed in any meaningful way between 1882 and 1892. This will determine whether or not Gaston was a typical local leader, and how his views compared with the most notable southern black leader at the end of the nineteenth century, Booker T. Washington. One must also bear in mind the intended audience of Gaston's letters: African Americans. How Gaston expressed himself – a writing style that often had the cadence of a sermon about it – may offer us an insight into how Gaston preached, and of preachers as local black leaders. The church was one of the few platforms for local black leaders when political party activity was either undesirable on the part of the individual, or there were no openings. It must have been the case that many black clergymen, as one observer noted, 'are rather preachers because they are leaders than leaders because they are preachers.'[3]

Background

Huntsville is the seat of Madison County, located on the Tennessee line in the far north of Alabama. It had been the original state capital when the state was formed in 1819, and where an important slave market once existed until it was moved to Montgomery after 1840. The area was rich in farming but in the city, slaves also worked in factories,

[3] Sir George Campbell, *White and Black: The Outcome of a Visit to the United States* (London, 1879), p.132

flour mills and cotton presses. Slaves were also hired for labour although this was outlawed in 1828 for whites were uneasy about 'independent slaves'.[4] Even so, black slaves in Huntsville did have a degree of independence when it came to their religious life. As early as 1820 black Baptist churches existed in the city. In 1821 the pastor of the African Huntsville Baptist Church was William Harris, a freeborn African American, whose church had 76 members. By 1840 this figure had increased to 265. A slave named Lewis led another church, the African Cottonfort Church.[5] However, despite this apparent independence, Huntsville's leaders became more defensive over the 'peculiar institution'. In 1835, for example, a mass meeting in the city defended the Constitutional right of slavery. Twenty years later, a Madison County grand jury called for an end to all-black churches, 'because so many Negro preachers were trouble makers.'[6] This was extended in 1859 when the *Southern Advocate*, a newspaper based in the city, led a campaign to remove free blacks from the state.[7]

Gaston was born a slave in Huntsville, a fact that he remarked on later in life. His exact date of birth is unknown – two dates are given – either 1830 or 1835. The first comes from the 1870 census, which gives his age as 40, whereas his 1867 application to the Freedman's Bank, which he signed, records that he was 32 years old. Considering that two historians have questioned the 1870 census in Alabama for its accuracy, the bank account application may well be more reliable. We know that he signed it as he also signed his wife's application the following year (it stated so on her form and the two signatures match). However, both the census and the application form agree that Gaston was born in Huntsville, of mixed-race, and that he was a teacher. The bank account application offers us further information, such as the names of his three children, that his father had died in 1862, his mother lived with him in Huntsville, and that he had a brother whom he had not heard from in a long time. As mentioned earlier,

[4] James Benson, *Slavery in Alabama* (1950; reprinted Alabama, 1994), pp. 154, 209-212 (quotation on p. 212)
[5] Ibid., pp. 232, 300
[6] Ibid., pp. 354, 232
[7] Ibid., p. 378

Gaston had served with the 12th United States Colored Troops during the Civil War, reaching the rank of Sergeant Major. As with other post-war black leaders, like Joseph Wilson in Virginia, Gaston's leadership qualities were recognised early on. Furthermore, the likelihood that he was literate, or became so, during the war, meant that he would have assumed some sort of leadership role.[8]

We do not know much of Gaston's life during Reconstruction. He returned to Huntsville after the Civil War and became a schoolteacher. In 1867, he and his wife registered as voters, a significant event for Gaston for the power held in the ballot paper for individual blacks was something he would stress over the next thirty years. Tempering this, however, was the ever-present fear of attack from the Ku Klux Klan, which was especially powerful in northern Alabama. By the early 1870s he became involved in political activity, albeit at a certain distance. For example, he was an alternate delegate at the 1872 National Republican Convention,[9] and most likely a delegate at the 1871 Alabama Labor Union Convention held in Montgomery (a 'Gaston' is listed).[10] Sometime after this he moved to Arkansas, returning to Huntsville in 1881.[11]

'My people'

The two main themes that emerge from Gaston's first letter to the *Gazette* in February 1882 are racial solidarity and migration, themes that would also dominate his last letter to the paper a decade later. He began by recounting the story mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and as a preacher would use a homily as a preface to scripture, so Gaston linked his story to the present condition facing African Americans. 'This hard laboring, suffering and almost starving people are left to Go Round from

[8] Freedman's Bank Records, Series M816, Roll 1, Pages 16 and 21, Accounts 54 and 96; 1870 Census; Freedman's Bureau Records, Roll 14
[9] Freedman's Bureau Records, Roll 14; 1867 Voter Registration, Alabama State Archives Online Resources [last accessed 1 November 2010]; Woolfolk, p. 145
[10] Foner & Lewis, *The Black Worker, Vol. 2*, p. 120
[11] *Huntsville Gazette*, 10 September 1881

pillar to post, from one State to another,' noted Gaston, 'fleeing from a monstrous pressure, which, in a more gigantic form, meets them wherever they go'. Adding angrily, at what the freedmen faced after the war: 'No clothing, no implements, and not even a shadow of a foot of land had they, though they sent out three hundred thousand able-bodied men to the rescue of the Government.' After outlining the poverty faced by southern blacks he called on black leaders to appeal for Federal assistance to help the poor. 'Being a minister,' he concluded, 'I ask no office at the hands of my people, and make no petition for federal patronage; but I do sincerely ask that the condition of my people be looked after.'[12]

Gaston's controlled anger here is all the more powerful considering where his letter was published. The *Huntsville Gazette*, as with other black newspapers of this period, was predominantly Republican, and aside from personal announcements, party politics dominated the pages. Gaston's letter was noticeable because of its length, and for the stark realities it portrayed. The land issue, for example, was one area that Reconstruction had not adequately tackled, for white southerners still controlled most of it. The land redistribution promised towards the end of the war – Sherman's infamous call that 'forty acres and a mule' would be provided for every freedman – never materialised for most blacks.[13] The result of this poverty was that many blacks looked to move to the West to search for land, just as whites were doing in the North. The Exodust of 1879-1880, which saw thousands of blacks move from the South to Kansas, had subsided, but African Americans were continuing to leave the state. During his time in Arkansas, Gaston may well have encountered at first-hand African Americans who had moved there from other parts of the South, or were on their way to states further west.

Linked with Gaston's observations of the poverty and desperation of blacks was his identification with the black masses – 'my people'. This theme of racial

[12] *Huntsville Gazette*, 4 February 1882
[13] A good overview of Reconstruction's economic policy can be found in Eric Foner's *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*.

solidarity was one that would appear time and again in his letters. The question as to whether he was a representative leader will be explored in more depth later in this chapter. Suffice it to say at this stage, Gaston both identified with, but also remained an observer of, the black condition in Alabama.

The Black Soldier

As suggested by his first letter, Gaston placed great significance on the meaning of the black soldier. This is not surprising, considering that Gaston himself had served in the Civil War and thus could speak from personal experience. His later employment as a pensions claim agent would have broadened his awareness further. Gaston saw in military service justification for black citizenship, reinforcing a point made by Douglass in 1863: "he who fights the battles of America may claim America as his country."[14]

The black soldier became the subject of three of his letters written throughout the 1880s. In the first, written in March 1882, Gaston outlined how the government had systematically ignored black war veterans. In response to the claim that the government had other, more important matters, than dealing with pension claims, Gaston remarked: 'That may be so, but it has not half so much to do as it did to be victorious in its struggle for supremacy in the late war.' In a similar way that Douglass would do, Gaston was trying to keep the meaning of the Civil War alive in people's memories: not only what the war meant, which for Douglass was the conflict between slavery and freedom, but the sacrifice made by black war veterans in pursuit of freedom. 'Thousands enlisted, leaving wives, fathers, mothers, children and friends knowing nothing for which they battled,' stated Gaston, 'except to help sustain a national freedom that they often doubted the future enjoyment of.' Gaston suggested here that such a sacrifice was an act of faith, and thus an act of true sacrifice for blacks

[14] Frederick Douglass, 'Why Should a Colored Man Enlist,' cited in Waldo E. Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill, 1984), p. 63

considering that the outcome was far from clear. The federal government had not honoured this, he argued, and outlined the condition faced by the average black veteran (one that reads semi-autobiographically):

> He [the veteran] goes to work to purchase a little home; and for the purpose takes his present earnings with what little money he had bled for as a soldier, and puts it in that national skating rink (Freedman's Savings Bank) if I may so call it for. I don't care to say what I believe it to have been to the colored people throughout this entire country…[money] swept from him by means of falsehood, corruption and fraud which only the Almighty himself can take just recompense of.[15]

Such uncompromising language was a feature of Gaston's letters, which had an ability to cut through to the heart of the matter. His bitterness over the collapse of the Freedman's Bank is telling – we do not know how much money Gaston lost with the bank's failure. But it is the sense of injustice that rankled with Gaston, and the apparent ease with which the Federal government dismissed the claims of black war veterans.

The two other letters he wrote on this subject, in 1885 and 1889, highlighted the concerns of black claimants that officials in Washington would ignore their claims. Gaston, however, was keen to reassure people that their claims would be acknowledged.[16] Indeed, he had considerable success in his role as a pensions claims agent.[17] In 1889, for example, he managed to arrange a pension of more than $1100 dollars for one Alabama black veteran. 'Eld[er] Gaston has made quite a success in the line of business,' reported the *Gazette*, 'and parties interested would do well to consult him in their cases.'[18]

[15] *Huntsville Gazette*, 18 March 1882
[16] Ibid., 7 February 1885, 16 November 1889
[17] Ibid., 20 March 1886, 13 July 1889
[18] Ibid., 13 July 1889

'What we might, and should do for Ourselves'

The central question that emerged from Gaston's first two letters, therefore, was what was to become of southern blacks? Since support from government was unreliable, although no less important, grassroots leaders increasingly began to push the notion of self-help. In an October 1882 letter, Gaston outlined the situation in northern Alabama, stating how blacks now had to be resourceful, and acknowledge those who were helping them progress. Only then, he considered, could blacks ask for more from the state and federal government, showing whites that they were helping themselves. As Douglass noted fifteen years earlier: "We must not beg men to do for us what we ought to do for ourselves."[19]

Gaston saw that one way of promoting this was for blacks to support the purchase of land for 'a kind of laboring, self-supporting [non-sectarian] College.'[20] The stress Gaston placed on education is hardly surprising, considering he was a teacher, but it was an area that had become increasingly significant by the early 1880s. 'Education is what our people want and what they must have,' remarked Gaston in an earlier letter to the *Gazette* in June 1882. 'Otherwise we are hopeless for any future career of usefulness.'[21] Such a comment was by no means unique. There was already a state normal school for blacks in Huntsville, run by William Councill, and the previous year had seen the establishment of the Tuskegee Institute in Macon County, run by Booker T. Washington.

The stress on matters of self-help was perhaps deliberate in these letters from 1882. No reference was made to party politics, or to the election campaign that was raging throughout the state that year. As revealed in Chapter 4, the 1882 election was particularly violent and divisive. Choosing not to mention the murder of Jack Turner, or the failure of the Greenbackers, makes sense considering Gaston's moderate

[19] Frederick Douglass, 'The Color Question,' 5 July 1875, cited in Martin, *Mind of Frederick Douglass*, p. 68
[20] *Huntsville Gazette*, 28 October 1882
[21] Ibid., 3 June 1882

temperament, which emerges from a study of his letters. That is not to say, however, that he avoided the subject of party politics altogether, as a letter of 1883 reveals.

Suffrage

Despite the Democratic victory in 1882, Gaston's attention turned to the next presidential election. In November 1883 Gaston wrote his most militant letter, focusing on black suffrage and the 1884 election. This letter formed one part of his response to the 1883 Supreme Court decision (the second part would come the following year), combating the increasing disillusionment blacks now felt towards the Republican Party, and the Federal Government more generally. Both the November 1883 and January 1884 letters form the core of his thinking over black civil and political rights, but they also mark the end of the first phase in his thinking on these matters, which became apparent as the 1880s went on. His focus on black suffrage at this time may have also been influenced by his recent election to the Huntsville City Council as an Alderman for the Fourth Ward. Furthermore, the following year he would attend a Republican precinct meeting in the city whereby delegates were chosen for the county convention.[22] This was, therefore, a renewed spell of involvement with the Republican Party for him (as was the case in the 1870s when he attended the National Republican Convention), and a public statement of his support for the party.

Yet one has the sense with his November 1883 letter that Gaston was circumspect about party political activity – as far as we know, he did not actively canvass for the Republicans, for there is no evidence surviving of any of his sermons. However, the style of his November letter gives the reader the sense that this had once been a sermon, or that he used a sermon as a template for the letter. Not only is this revealed in the many Biblical references (not uncommon for a black preacher to use in a secular setting, for the two were very much interlinked, as many African Americans would have appreciated), but also the pace of the letter, its tone and style. The religious

[22] Ibid., 5 April 1883

overtones also emerged in his discussion of self-help, through his reference to the Protestant work ethic. The call to exercise their right to vote may well have been, therefore, a subject matter for his weekly sermon.

Gaston regarded the forthcoming Presidential election as crucial. This would be the chance for blacks to demonstrate the true power of the vote, and provide a wake-up call to the Republicans to adhere to their true principles, a point of view he had already stressed in his letter on the Louisville convention.[23] In answer to the position increasingly being taken by Republicans that blacks stand away from political activity, he responded passionately:

> Let me say to my people, There will be no place for standing off in the ensuing presidential campaign; for in my opinion, a standing off [is] only sleep to be aroused and precipitate you deep into that gulf of disfranchisement now lying under the hands of the present leaders of our republican party. I say fellow freedmen, To ballots, to ballots, and straddle no fence in 1884.

Gaston's fear of black disenfranchisement is revealed here. He considered that if blacks refrained from voting, this would give the wrong message to whites. What is of interest is that Gaston saw the threat of disenfranchisement coming more immediately from the Republicans, not the Democrats. In his view, removing the vote from blacks was the likely outcome of the increasing lack of interest among Republicans in upholding black political rights. The recent decision of the Republican-dominated Supreme Court would no doubt have confirmed Gaston's fears in this regard. Furthermore, he noted how blacks 'never forced' their 'right of suffrage upon the republican party', for it was they who did so when they called on blacks to fight to defend the Constitution. This ties in with his thinking over the rights gained through military service that he had stressed the previous year. Moreover, Gaston added to his response to the Louisville convention. 'I

[23] See Chapter 2, pp. 122-23

am a republican,' he wrote, 'but hope never to be so blind and inactive as not to see, and endeavor to show the injustice and ingratitude, continually practiced on my people by the present leaders of the republican party.'[24] By coming out to vote, therefore, blacks could vent their anger towards the Republicans, which they had every right to do as citizens. The importance of the vote was recognised by another black leader from an unexpected quarter. Later in the 1880s, William Councill would note the significance of the vote, regarding this as the proper channel with which blacks could influence change.[25]

'Colored Citizenship'

At the end of 1883 Gaston was asked to write a piece for a special edition of the *Gazette* in January 1884.[26] His chosen subject was black citizenship, and so this letter provides us with Gaston's thoughts about the implications of the recent Supreme Court decision, which declared the 1875 Civil Rights Act unconstitutional, and which took a narrow definition of the first section of the Fourteenth Amendment. From the outset, Gaston made clear where blacks stood. 'We have been placed upon a common level with the people of this immense nation,' he wrote, 'and it will require every effort of vigilance, perseverance, study &c., on our part to educate and catch up with the requirements of the present decade.' Gaston acknowledged here that the 1880s were demanding something more from blacks due to the growing reluctance on the part of the federal government in continuing to regard African Americans as 'wards of the nation'. By way of defining what he meant by citizenship, Gaston noted the views of one white educator, who in a speech at the time of the Supreme Court decision noted how blacks had to have education, and went further to suggest that citizenship should be exercised through educational or property qualifications.[27] Gaston pointed out how

[24] *Huntsville Gazette*, 17 November 1883
[25] Councill, *The Negro Laboror*, p. 29
[26] *Huntsville Gazette*, 17 November 1883
[27] The educator in question was possibly a Dr. Talmage, although this is not clear.

this was becoming 'the prevailing sentiment', but made clear that he did not think these necessary qualifications for citizenship. In other words, citizenship was inherent regardless of whether people had any formal education or owned property. However, he noted, pragmatically, that if this was to be the 'prevailing sentiment', then it was up to blacks to 'prepare to meet the demands of both.'

Gaston regarded citizenship as an interaction between the individual and the state. 'There is nothing required, more on the part of ourselves to make us useful citizens,' he wrote, 'than education, industry and economy.' This was very much in the spirit of the self-help philosophy that he had already written about in 1882, and ideas that Booker T. Washington would also expound on the national stage in the coming decades. At the same time, however, he stressed the role that the government had to play (implying here the Federal government), as he had explored in his letter of the previous year. 'I am not prepared to admit,' he stated adamantly, 'that it is not in the power of any party to ameliorate the political or civil condition of any class of its citizens.' Furthermore, he noted that citizens should only support a party that was prepared to assist them. Thus both personal advancement and government support were required to fulfil the requirements of citizenship. This was highlighted when Gaston stated that blacks would not have reached where they were by their own efforts. Citizenship in a republic was ultimately realised by whatever party was in power, so as a result, blacks had to 'look to their ballots for future protection.'[28] Self-help and self-assertion were both therefore required.

The role of education was key to Gaston's thinking on the nature of citizenship. Others agreed with him. One commentator in the *Gazette* thought Gaston's comments 'timely and wise.'[29] Education had always been central to the debate over civil rights. As discussed in Chapter 1, the question of school integration proved to be a highly divisive issue, and one that came to dominate, in the eyes of whites, what civil rights

[28] *Huntsville Gazette*, 5 January 1884
[29] Ibid., 19 January 1884

meant in practice. By the early 1880s, the black debate had moved from integrated schooling to the need to encourage black education more generally.

Following his letter of January 1884, Gaston expanded his views over the broader role of education at a state educational meeting later that year. Held in the Huntsville Methodist Episcopalian Church, this provides a rare glimpse into Gaston speaking in public. Not surprisingly for a preacher, it was noted that he was an effective orator. From the outset, he maintained an optimistic tone, declaring how 'proud' he was to be an African American. However, he admitted that he saw himself more 'an American citizen' than a 'Negro'. This provides an insight into the integrationist framework inherent in Gaston's interpretation of American citizenship, which was both inclusive and diverse. In other words, it allowed for race pride. Crucial to integration was education, for both young and old, white and black. This was useless, however, unless supported by strong 'principle' - a theme already touched on in his January letter, where he referred to both 'personal' and 'party' principle. His optimism that 'true citizenship' would be achieved, as he noted in his letter, was reinforced in his speech, stressing how far blacks had come and how the 'color barrier' was 'giving way'.

This speech, however, marks a subtle change in Gaston's thinking. Whereas his letter on black suffrage had been militant in its tone, and his thoughts on citizenship in January 1884 stressed the equal importance of personal and party principles; here the stress is more on blacks relying on themselves to advance in life. This change in Gaston's thinking could well be attributed to Washington. Speaking before the National Educational Association in Madison, Wisconsin, in July 1884, Washington thought, not surprisingly given the venue, that education was the answer to resolve 'the question of civil rights.' As he told his audience: 'The best course to pursue in regard to the civil rights bill in the South is to let it alone; let it alone and it will settle itself.' Washington pointed out that effective teaching and the money to support it 'will be more potent in settling the race question than many civil rights bills and investigating

committees.'[30] Gaston's language followed in similar vein. 'We may talk, grumble, go to the ballot box and vote,' he told those assembled at the meeting, 'but our grievances must continue until by industry and thrift and education we command power and respectability to remove them.' He added: 'Then in travelling we will have first class accommodation, without wives and daughters being subjected to inconveniences and abuse.'[31]

'Excursions Must Go'

Gaston's letters also reveal the nature of his work as a preacher. In 1888, for example, Gaston decided to write on the subject of excursions. Gaston had written no letters in the previous four years, for as blacks were progressing educationally, he thought there was little need to voice his thoughts in the paper, despite requests from people. There may well have been other reasons for this, too. One would have been the workload of a local black leader such as Gaston: church minister, teacher, alderman, and pensions claims agent. Another was his ill health, for it was reported frequently that he was bedridden for weeks at a time.[32] In any case, to placate those wishing to hear from him, he turned his attention to the subject of personal finance. The focus of his letter was the holding of regular, organised excursions, which he thought a waste of money; and those held on a Sunday he opposed outright. The point of Gaston's letter was to detail the poverty faced by African Americans and how he felt the message of thrift still required pushing. 'I have had occasion to go round much among our people, and have found the sufferings of many in the winter from cold and hunger to be appalling,' he wrote, calling on blacks to, among other things, 'save money to purchase homes, pay

[30] 'The Educational Outlook in the South', *BTW Papers, Vol. 2 (1860-1889)*, pp. 255-262 (p. 257)
[31] *Huntsville Gazette*, 30 August 1884
[32] Ibid., 12 April 1884, 21 May 1887, 7 July 1888

debts, [and] settle rent'.[33] As a preacher, Gaston would have had constant contact with the grassroots and thus been in a position to know the condition faced by many blacks.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the role of the black preacher in black thought and action at the localities was significant. As W.E.B. Du Bois memorably put it in *The Souls of Black Folk*, the black preacher was 'A leader, a politician, an orator, a "boss," an intriguer, an idealist' all rolled into one.[34] The role provided a position of authority that was usually denied to African Americans, when even those in political positions either held relatively menial roles, or when in higher roles, often ended up subservient to whites (such as in the Republican Party). The point regarding authority is a significant one, for as one scholar on the black church has noted, it was particularly important for black men, who been emasculated under slavery and were unable to assume the traditional 'dominant male role' as 'defined by American culture.' The Baptist Church, to which Gaston belonged, enabled African Americans to have considerable power due to the relative independence of each church, as opposed to the more hierarchical nature of either the Methodist or Episcopalian churches. However, the Methodists gave the black masses the chance to exert their influence by voting on appointments within the church. The role of the black church as an extended family certainly had political implications, not least in its potential as a means of organising blacks collectively.[35]

The black church, and those who preached in them, did not escape criticism from secular black leaders, or indeed from some black clergymen. The most outspoken critic was Booker T. Washington. In a piece written for the *Christian Union* in August 1890, Washington rounded on the black clergy for being too concerned with lining their pockets and being unfit to lead, supporting his comments with the assertion that

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[33] Ibid., 11 August 1888
[34] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; New York, 1963), p. 141
[35] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Black Church in America* (New York, 1974), pp. 48-49. Frazier uses the term 'a nation within a nation' to describe the black church. More recently, Steven Hahn has termed black political activity in the rural South as 'a nation under our feet'. Hahn explores the role of the church in community organisation, together with the significance of kinship ties among black families in political activity (using the term 'politics' in its broadest sense).

this was based on his contact with black preachers since he had moved to the Deep South. 'I have no hesitancy in asserting that three-fourths of the Baptist ministers and two-thirds of the Methodists, are unfit, either mentally or morally, or both,' he wrote, 'to preach the Gospel to any one or to attempt to lead any one.' He added that in rural areas he had not encountered any educated preachers.[36] Washington's comments caused controversy in the state. The Eufaula Baptist Association, for example, boycotted Washington's school.[37] Despite this, some black clergymen did support him, such as noted northern black minister, Daniel Payne. In a response to the criticism he faced, Washington later in the same year wrote that it was pointless 'mincing matters,' for 'every Bishop, every presiding elder, every leading man who comes into contact with the ministry knows exactly what we are talking about.'[38]

Gaston may well have been one of these presiding elders who scorned the more illiterate, rural black preachers, however, no evidence has been found as to what he thought of his fellow clergymen. It appears, however, that the black community respected Gaston. He travelled widely on church matters related to the Primitive Baptists, the branch of the church to which he belonged; spoke at many educational meetings, throughout the 1880s; and was active in developing the school associated with his own church in Huntsville. It must not be forgotten, either, that he was on the city council throughout the 1880s; his most notable achievements involved improving the city's public black school.[39]

'The Race Problem Solving Itself'

The beginning of the 1890s marked a further change in Gaston's thinking with the publication of another letter in May 1890. Indeed, it was deemed important enough for

[36] Booker T. Washington, 'The Colored Ministry, Its Defects and Needs,' *Christian Union* 42 (14 August 1890), pp. 199-200, reprinted in the *BTW Papers, Vol. 3*, pp. 71-75 (quotation on pp. 72-73)
[37] William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge, 1993), p. 330
[38] BTW, 'The Colored Ministry', *BTW Papers, Vol. 3*, p. 102
[39] *Huntsville Gazette*, 24 November 1888

the *Washington Bee*, the more widely read black newspaper based in the nation's capital, to reprint the letter in full.[40] No evidence has survived as to how the *Bee* obtained the letter – the most likely explanation was that Charles Hendley, Jr., the editor of the *Huntsville Gazette*, forwarded it himself. However, the fact that it was published indicates that the *Bee* may well have considered Gaston to be voicing an opinion common to other southern blacks the paper had encountered. Alternatively, it may just be that it regarded this as simply a well-expressed letter that was worthy of a broader audience.

The title of Gaston's 1890 letter, as cited above, reads superficially like something that Washington would have written. Personal advancement, or racial uplift as it was often called, had to have a strong foundation. Whereas he had once referred to this as 'principles', now he used the word virtue. His letter struck an optimistic note, as had previous letters, where he informed his readers of the progress blacks had made. Yet Gaston's piece came with a subtext, for black advancement in education and economics would only come about 'if no less opportunities are extended to our people than at present.' In other words, the federal government had to continue to support them, specifically through the passage of the Blair Education Bill. Speaking on behalf of 'hundreds and thousands of our people', Gaston gave his full support to the bill, which at this time was in its final stages of debate.[41] Indeed, he had already endorsed the bill publicly in a letter of the previous year.[42] The Blair bill, which provided federal funds for public school education, had first been tabled in the early 1880s. Moreover, the bill accepted separate but equal schools for both whites and blacks, and the funds would be divided between both sets of schools.[43] Gaston was far from alone in his support. R.C.O. Benjamin of the Mobile *Negro American* advocated for the bill to be

[40] *Washington Bee*, 24 May 1890. The letter here was entitled: 'The Race Question. A Southern View of It'
[41] *Huntsville Gazette*, 17 May 1890
[42] Ibid., 28 September 1889
[43] *BTW Papers, Vol. 2*, n2p285

passed, as did Washington, albeit privately, in 1885.[44] Another black preacher, A.M.E. Church Elder Winfield H. Mixon, called on blacks to 'hold mass meetings all over the State and petition Congress to pass the Blair education bill.'[45] Mixon would be a consistent advocate for black educational advancement throughout the late 1880s and early 1890s. As he noted to Washington in 1891, 'The greatest draw-back to my race is, they leave [J]erulsaelm – the school room, too soon.'[46]

However, there is one particular aspect to Gaston's letter that is of interest, and reveals continuity in Gaston's thinking. 'The colored people of the south should be patient,' he wrote, 'but never failing to petition to congress for every right to be bestowed upon them as citizens.'[47] Petitioning had been the time worn method for blacks to assert their rights collectively and demand that they be upheld. By mentioning this at the same time as demonstrating patience, Gaston was providing a significant reminder to blacks that the upholding of their citizenship was a responsibility of both the government and themselves. The previous year had seen the inauguration of a Republican President, Benjamin Harrison, and Gaston noticed the positive signals coming from the White House. This was especially the case with Harrison's assistance to war veterans and their families and the appointment of blacks to political office. The implication here was that blacks would receive a fair hearing.

Black Self-help and Emigration

At this time of heightened political activity at the grassroots, Gaston was asked on many occasions, both in person and by letter, to comment on what the federal government was doing for African Americans. He felt that the national government had done all that it could do and that, in line with his growing stress on black self-help, he

[44] *Washington Bee*, 12 February 1887; Booker T. Washington to John Elbert McConnell, 17 December 1885, in *BTW Papers, Vol. 2*, pp. 284-85
[45] *Dallas Post* [edited by W.H. Mixon], quoted in *Huntsville Gazette*, 16 January 1886
[46] W.H. Mixon to BTW, 22 December 1891, Booker T. Washington Papers, Library of Congress
[47] *Huntsville Gazette*, 17 May 1890

thought now was the time for blacks 'to do more for themselves.' Progress was being made, Gaston reiterated, particularly in education. Black Republicans had nothing to moan about, thought Gaston, for not everyone could be 'ministers in Hayti and Liberia,' nor 'expect to be all Auditors, Receivers, Postmasters etc.' This line of thinking was identical to that used by Washington. Yet he repeated his statement that Harrison had appointed more blacks into positions of patronage than any other President, countering the criticism that was being levelled at Harrison for not doing more for blacks. On the ground, Gaston thought that racial prejudice was in decline, noting how 'many of the white people of our section are showing their willingness to educate and aid our people to elevate and lift themselves to that standard required and expected of American citizens.'[48]

Six months later Gaston wrote his final letter to the *Gazette*. It focused on the subject of emigration out of the South that had once again become a point of debate among African American leaders. As opposed to the late 1870s, discussion in the early 1890s focused on emigration 'back to Africa'. Gaston opposed this, stating that he was an American, born a slave in America, and since emancipation, an American citizen. This letter provided his longest statement on slavery, noting how the institution was 'forever at an end' and that the feared racial war following emancipation never materialised. This legacy of slavery, Gaston thought, should not be what caused blacks to leave, for it was never an American creation. Rather, 'it was encouraged, fostered and even forced upon American colonies by [the] English Parliament'; adding it was they who should have assisted blacks following the Civil War. In other words, Gaston was once again reaffirming his belief in American democracy, how African Americans should be proud to be American citizens, and that America was where they belonged. The federal government was good to all, noted Gaston, and where suitable appointments for blacks were found, they were offered to them. Furthermore, he argued

[48] *Huntsville Gazette*, 6 June 1891. For black criticism of Harrison, see Stanley P. Hirshon, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877-1893* (Indiana, 1962)

that if blacks had to leave the South, then the West or South West of the United States would be good alternatives.

The better option, Gaston thought, was to stay in the South and assist whites in reforming the region's agricultural industry, in particular, its dependence on cotton. He acknowledged the hardships faced by blacks but argued that they had to be met in the South. Echoing the more conservative thoughts of Washington, and of Councill at the 1879 Nashville Conference, Gaston argued that it 'became the imperative duty of every man and woman, to begin to look around, that nothing may be done too hastily.' The language use is of interest here – 'duty' emerges as a key word. This reinforces the point made by other black leaders that freedom came with responsibilities that could not be shirked.[49] Gaston's views were not shared by other black leaders, in Alabama and further afield. The extent to which he differed on the question of emigration would soon become apparent. At a black convention in 1893, described in the previous chapter, many black leaders voiced their support for the 'Back to Africa' movement, including William Councill.

Conclusion

As this chapter has revealed, William Gaston provides a useful case study in analysing the dynamics of local southern black leadership. As a teacher and clergyman, Gaston would have automatically assumed a leadership role in a community that valued education and the role of the church as the centre of the community. In this sense, therefore, he can be classed as a typical local black leader. Men like Reuben Lowe and Henry Binford also combined pastoral leadership with political or secular leadership positions. However, Gaston differed from other leaders in the 1880s because he came from a religious background. A new generation of secular leaders was emerging in the South at this time, men such as Booker T. Washington and William Stevens. However, even here, Christian thought infused much of this group. For example, whilst

[49] *Huntsville Gazette*, 23 January 1892

Washington was a secular leader – in the sense that he was not a church minister – it could well be argued that his ideology was based on Christian thinking, such as his stress on Providence.

Gaston's ideological stance rested on two fundamentals: his experience as a preacher and his military service during the Civil War. He viewed American citizenship as an interaction between the individual and the state, with the responsibilities resting on both. It required 'principle' from both sides, principles that had their roots in the Civil War. Like Douglass, Gaston regarded the meaning of the war as central to post-war American citizenship. The abolition of slavery and the granting of citizenship to blacks fulfilled for him, as with Douglass, the ideals as set out by the Declaration of Independence. Moreover, military service in itself demonstrated the loyalty of blacks towards the Union and had earned them their citizenship. Serving in the military was a significant act for African Americans. This was not so much for what blacks gained from army service, such as education or political awareness (although these were important, as Steven Hahn has stressed), but rather that they took an active involvement in contributing to their own freedom, and reinforcing the claim that they had earned their right to call themselves Americans. It is on this matter that Gaston was in accord with Douglass. Whites had to remember this, too, thought Gaston, especially white Republicans. He stressed the need for the party of Lincoln to remain true to its principles, and it was such principles that blacks themselves had to remember, rather than recognition through patronage. Whilst Gaston's position towards the Republicans was not as bound as Douglass', his single biggest influence intellectually would have been the elder black statesman. This would have been reinforced, no doubt, by hearing him at the Louisville black convention.

Yet at the same time, blacks themselves had a role to play, and Gaston became more precise in his words as the years went on. His views did not change but rather evolved, and this subtlety is important to remember. Initially, he placed equal stress on the role of the government and of the individual. As time went on, however, Gaston

began to stress the role of the individual more, because he thought the government had assisted blacks with as much legislation as they could constitutionally provide, and the reality was that it was unlikely to do anything further (after 1883, and certainly after 1890). Its role was to support blacks to become upstanding citizens, and since education was the key to this development, Gaston thought that legislation such as the Blair bill was desirable. However, personal advancement had to accompany this, which led him to become more precise in his language, using words such as 'virtue' and 'duty'. The former was something that individuals had to do from within themselves, the latter what they had to do as citizens for the country as a whole.

It can be said that Gaston became more conservative during the 1880s, for he came to believe that personal advancement through education was the key to black progress, rather than relying on the federal government for assistance. At the same time, however, he believed that blacks should uphold through petitioning their rights as citizens. As Washington would remark at the end of the century, 'I do not favor the Negro's giving up anything which is fundamental and which has been guaranteed to him by the Constitution of the United States.'[50] An analysis of Gaston's letters reveals that his thinking was along similar lines. Furthermore, as with Washington, Gaston held a pragmatic view that African Americans had to work within the system, and within the South, rather than move elsewhere. His staunch pride at being an American prevented him from leaving the country of his birth. Gaston would have been influenced by the views of men such as Douglass and Washington. Douglass would have resonated with Gaston as a leader from the Civil War era, whilst Washington's work in Alabama would have found favour with Gaston from what he saw around him. Even so, as his letters reveal, Gaston's own personal experience was more significant to his thinking than the views of other black leaders. The Civil War gave Gaston his intellectual foundation on black citizenship; his role as a preacher and his power base of the church gave him the means to put his ideas into practice. The *Huntsville Gazette*

[50] Booker T. Washington, *The Future of the American Negro* (1899; New York, 1969), p. 160

gave him a platform where he could articulate his views to a wider audience. Gaston never regarded himself as a leader *per se*, but it is evident that he was a leader and that others considered him to be such.

6 James H. Hayes and the Negro Protective Association of 1897

> Mr. Hayes fought manfully and skilfully…and won for himself a name of which he and his race need be proud.[1]

Introduction

This final chapter concentrates on a member of the new generation of black leaders who emerged in the 1880s: Richmond lawyer, James H. Hayes. In addition, the chapter looks at a black organisation that emerged at the end of the 1890s with which Hayes was closely involved, which reveals how black thinking over the issues discussed in this thesis had evolved by the end of the century. No biographical account of Hayes has ever been published as a stand-alone piece. Up until now, any mention of him has usually been in connection with other local leaders, such as John Mitchell, or with fellow Richmond black city councilmen.[2] However, there is much evidence relating to Hayes, albeit in fragmentary form. We know, for example, that he was a member of a new generation of secular black leaders who realised that the law proved to be the sole remaining weapon for fighting discrimination. Unlike his contemporary Mitchell, Hayes remained on a militant path throughout his life, which eventually led him away from Richmond towards Washington, D.C. Whilst there is no great physical distance between these two cities, the move was significant nonetheless. It became increasingly harder to maintain a militant position in the Old Dominion by the early twentieth century, indicated by the change in ideological position of men like Mitchell. Party politics diminished significantly in Richmond over the course of the 1890s through a new electoral law and, eventually, through changes to the state constitution. This

[1] *Richmond Planet*, 22 February 1890, cited in Samuel N. Pincus, *The Virginia Supreme Court, Blacks and the Law, 1870-1902* (New York, 1990), p. 46

[2] References can be found throughout the following two works: Ann Field Alexander, *Race Man: The Rise and Fall of the "Fighting Editor", John Mitchell, Jr.* (Charlottesville, VA, 2002) and Michael B. Chesson, 'Richmond's Black Councilmen, 1871-96', in *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era*, ed. by Howard N. Rabinowitz (Urbana, 1982).

chapter, therefore, studies these changes, in terms of party politics and those involved in black political activity. But it also reveals continuity – crucially, in terms of a protest tradition, which continued in an altered form with the founding of the Negro Protective Association in 1897.

Background

James Hayes was born in Virginia in either 1855 or 1858.[3] Nothing has been found concerning his early years, save for a comment he made at the end of the nineteenth century regarding the collapse of the Freedman's Savings Bank. A teenager at the time (1874), Hayes interpreted the bank's collapse as doing "more to rob the Negro of hope…than any other occurrence."[4] This supports comments already made in this study that the collapse of the bank had far-reaching consequences. In 1883 Hayes became a teacher at the Navy Hill School in Richmond, Virginia. Even at this time he was noted as an able public speaker, soon becoming the principal of Valley School in Richmond.[5] This was a direct result of the Readjusters controlling the city's school board. However, Hayes lost his job in 1884 – a casualty of the Democratic takeover of the state legislature. For a brief spell he worked as a reporter on John Mitchell's *Richmond Planet*; he had been both a pupil and colleague of Hayes' in Richmond. It was also around this time that Hayes enrolled in the Law Department at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Howard University had been founded in 1868. It was named after Oliver Otis Howard, the director of the Freedmen's Bureau, and whilst accepting students of any background, it came to be dominated by black students. John Mercer Langston was a founding member of staff, teaching law, and he created the Law Department in 1871.[6]

[3] Chesson, p. 199; Harlan offers 1855 as a date in his biography of Booker T. Washington.
[4] Quoted in Peter J. Rachleff, *Black Labor in Richmond, 1865-1890* (Urbana, 1989), p. 71
[5] Alexander, passim.
[6] William Cheek and Aimee Lee Cheek, 'John Mercer Langston: Principle and Politics', in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Leon Litwack and August Meier (Urbana, 1988), pp. 103-126 (p. 118)

That same year, one observer noted the significance of the law student to the black community in America:

> They are the pioneers of an interesting and exciting destiny. With them, unlike their more fortunate white brethren, the bitterest struggle begins when they receive their sheepskins. They go forth to war against a tempest of bigotry and prejudice. They will have to fight their way into society, and to contend with jealousy and hate in the jury-box and in the court-room, but they will win, as surely as ambition, genius, and courage are gifts, not of race or condition, but of God alone.[7]

The courtroom was thus a microcosm of society itself, indicating the challenges facing those African Americans who became professionals, separating themselves not only from whites, but from the majority of blacks, too. Not only was Howard the key centre for studying law, but as Maxwell Bloomfield notes, those who taught at the university 'brought to their teaching something of the same crusading zeal they had formerly displayed as antislavery activists.' Furthermore, they saw the creation of a black legal profession as 'a potential breakthrough' in the campaign for equal civil rights, and Bloomfield makes reference to the fact that this had begun with the black conventions of the 1840s and 1850s.[8] Indeed, there had been black lawyers in the South since the late 1860s, so the law department at Howard was simply formalising something already in practice.

What this suggests is that whilst a new generation of professionally trained African Americans were using new methods in the fight for upholding black rights, this was all part of the black protest tradition that had begun both before, and immediately after, the Civil War. Indeed, by the early 1890s, Detroit black lawyer D. Augustus Straker highlighted the broader role black lawyers would play in the African American

[7] John W. Forney, *Anecdotes of Public Men* (New York, 1873), 180-181, cited in Maxwell Bloomfield, 'John Mercer Langston and the Rise of Howard Law School', *Records of the Columbia Historical Society of Washington, D.C.* (1971-1972), pp. 421-438 (pp. 422-423)
[8] Ibid., p. 423

community. 'By reason of his knowledge in the government of society he is looked upon by his race as a leader of public affairs,' wrote Straker, 'not only in business transactions, but also in matters of social advancement.'[9] This would indicate that black lawyers were taking on a role that had previously been assigned to black clergymen, a trend greater in Virginia than Alabama, as already suggested by this thesis.

To add further weight to this argument, Virginian African Americans formed a sizable segment of the law students at Howard University throughout the 1880s and early 1890s. For example, among the ten graduates of 1879, half were from Virginia (including Richard G.L. Paige from Norfolk, Virginia). The next few years saw an increase in the number of students, as well as an increase in the number of states represented. By 1884, for instance, there were a total of thirty-seven students, made up of five post-graduates, eighteen seniors, and fourteen juniors. By the time Hayes graduated in 1885, Virginia was once again dominating the list, with half of the seniors and juniors from the Old Dominion. However, the number of law students fell by nearly half the following academic year (1885-1886), from 30 to 17. This can be accounted for by the effect of the new Democratic Presidential administration. As the annual statement in the Howard University catalogue for the period suggested, this was a direct result of the reduction of government positions available to African Americans, who relied on such jobs during the day to fund their studies at night. This appeared to be a brief setback, however, for student numbers increased the following year. By 1892, the Howard Law School had sixty-three students, with the largest proportion from Virginia.[10]

[9] D. Augustus Straker, 'The Negro in the Profession of Law', *A.M.E. Church Review* (October 1891), pp. 178-184 (p. 182)
[10] Catalogues of the Officers and Students of Howard University, from 1873 to 1893

Lawyer and Politician

Hayes had been a high-flying student at Howard, noted by one black newspaper as a 'rising member' of the legal community in Richmond.[11] Indeed, for a time, he was in the employment of John Mercer Langston. An item in the *Washington Bee* from June 1886 offers an insight into how the Richmond and Washington black communities regarded Hayes:

> Jas. H. Hayes, Esq., the black Patrick [Henry] of the colored race, who graduated in law from the Howard University law school arrived in the city [Washington] last week. This distinguished young practitioner was the valedictorian of the class of '85. He has a law practice in Richmond, and is beyond doubt one of the brilliant Negro lawyers in the country.[12]

The 'Patrick' here refers presumably to the first Governor of the independent Virginia, Patrick Henry, suggesting the eminence with which the black community regarded Hayes. Indeed, his leadership qualities, and confidence (which would have made him excel in the courtroom) led him to be elected to the Richmond City Council in 1886. The four years he served on the council proved to be his introduction into Virginian politics, where he challenged the racism that he perceived to exist in the city's government. This emerged early on in his term when he demanded to know why black workers had been deliberately prevented from carrying out work on the city council building.[13]

First and foremost, however, Hayes was a lawyer. There is evidence of numerous cases involving Hayes. One notable example was his defence of a black man, William Muscoe, who had been convicted of murdering a white man in 1890. Following an initial guilty verdict, Hayes managed to appeal to the Supreme Court,

[11] *Huntsville Gazette*, 3 October 1884
[12] *Washington Bee*, 5 June 1886
[13] *Richmond Dispatch*, 4 January 1887

although the verdict stood. 'Although of little comfort to Muscoe in the end,' writes Samuel Pincus, 'Hayes had proved that a back attorney could act with skill and courage in defending a fellow black man in a hostile environment.'[14]

Aside from city politics and his legal cases, Hayes began to take an interest in state politics. At the gubernatorial election of 1889, for example, he told the *Washington Bee* of the electoral fraud that was rife in the city. The *Bee* described the scene in Richmond's Fourth precinct, which offers a glimpse of Hayes' character:

> We took our stand opposite the polls and watched the movements of lawyer Hayes, who wanted to vote. He stole up to head of the line and took charge of a tally book which was left in his care by a Mahone supporter, by that means he got in his vote.[15]

From such experiences it is not surprising that Hayes stood up at the black convention the following year to demand that blacks uphold their right to vote.

Hayes was not alone in his participation in Richmond politics. He was a member of a group known as the 'post office gang'. This was a term that extended to anyone in Richmond's black community that held a federal position. One historian of the black city councillors notes how Hayes was the most significant member of the group (even though it was Hayes' wife who worked in the post office).[16] The 'post office gang' was one faction of the state Republican Party based in Jackson Ward, Richmond. John Mitchell headed the other main faction. By the time of the 1890 city council elections, the two black leaders came head to head. Hayes supported independent, black candidates for Jackson Ward – the 'reform ticket' – whereas Mitchell supported white Republican boss, James Bahen. Hayes stood for re-nomination to the city council but was not re-elected, whereas Mitchell was elected to

[14] Samuel N. Pincus, *The Virginia Supreme Court, Blacks and the Law, 1870-1902* (New York, 1990), pp. 45-46 (quotation on p. 46)
[15] *Washington Bee*, 9 November 1889
[16] Chesson, p. 205

the Board of Aldermen.[17] Undeterred, Hayes put forward another ticket in the city council elections of 1892, even establishing his own newspaper, *The Southern News*, to publicise the reform agenda. However, the Bahen and Mitchell faction won that year also. As Ann Field Alexander has noted in her study of John Mitchell: 'In many ways factionalism in Jackson Ward, despite all the sound and fury, was little more than a sign that the body politic was healthy.'[18] This is in marked contrast to Alabama at this time, and demonstrates how Richmond was different from other parts of the South (and, indeed, other parts of Virginia.)

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s Hayes remained loyal to the Republican Party. His newspaper supported President Harrison's re-election campaign and he attended the 1888 Republican National Convention in Chicago,[19] although his name was not on the roll of delegates or alternates at the convention.[20] However, his loyalty to the Republicans did not mean that he thought all blacks should necessarily vote for the party of Lincoln. In the only extant copy of his newspaper, *The Southern News*, from October 1892, Hayes noted how politics for blacks had become a 'religion', adding that 'should a colored brother change his politics, he has committed the highest crime known'. Hayes was more liberal in his approach. 'But isn't it time to quit this sort of meanness.' He argued, 'If a Negro wants to be a Democrat, let him go, bid him god speed, wish him well and hope that he has bettered himself. If a Negro wants to go in with the Third Party, don't abuse him but let him go.'[21] These comments reveal a number of things. Firstly, they showed that despite the efforts of Beckley, and others, to divide the black vote in the 1880s, their efforts had been in vain. Most African Americans in the state remained loyal to the Republican Party. Secondly, the reference to third party politics (at this time, the Populists), would perhaps explain his own

[17] *Richmond Planet*, 17, 24 May 1890
[18] Alexander, p. 85
[19] *Washington Bee*, 30 June 1888
[20] *Proceedings of the Ninth Republican National Convention Held At Chicago, Ill., June 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 25, 1888.* (1888), p. 102
[21] *The Southern News*, 15 October 1892

willingness to support a third party later in his life. And lastly, there is a paternalistic tone to these comments, highlighting his leadership role in the black community. Hayes thought that blacks should be able to decide for themselves what was best for them individually, rather than simply voting *en masse* for the Republicans.

Yet the mid-1890s began to see a shift in the fortune of black involvement in Richmond politics, best exemplified by Hayes' contemporary, John Mitchell. His defeat at the 1896 city elections was due largely to electoral fraud, and assisted by new franchise legislation, the Walton Act of 1894.[22] Mitchell noted how blacks in Jackson Ward were furious that they were prevented from voting at the city elections in June 1896.[23] Moreover, the fraud that took place in the federal election that November was 'unprecedented' for Richmond, according to the historian Ann Field Alexander. Some 2,300 ballots cast by blacks for the Republican Party were unaccounted for in the final count. Mitchell was belligerent in his conclusion. "If the time has come that we must be placed in jail for demanding our rights," he wrote, "the sooner we get there the better."[24] This was after legislation calling for federal supervision for all elections (the Lodge Bill) failed to pass Congress.

Hayes may well have concurred with such belligerence. It is likely that the rising black disenfranchisement would have encouraged him to pursue the legal route at fighting it. In addition, the mobilisation of the black community was seen as particularly critical, which Hayes and other leaders soon realised. In 1897, Virginian blacks decided to return once again to a well-tried method of expressing their views and mobilising their community: the convention.

[22] According to Kousser, the percentage of blacks voting for opposition parties (either Republican or Populist), declined from 46 percent in 1893 to 2 percent in 1897. Kousser, pp. 174-175
[23] Alexander, pp. 86-87
[24] Ibid., p. 88

Negro Protective Association of Virginia

In the spring of 1897 Hayes was one of a number of local black leaders calling for African Americans to organise. The result was that in May 1897 a black convention met in the True Reformers' Hall in Richmond under the auspices of the Negro Protective Association. Hayes was secretary to the organisation, so would be in communication with a number of local leaders. The Association's principal aim was to organise the Virginian black community, regarding this as the best means to assist with blacks' 'educational, material and political growth.' Attempting to organise the black community was nothing new; indeed, the aim of the organisation had echoes of the 1875 and 1890 Richmond conventions. The opening address was certainly reminiscent of the past. It stated how Virginian blacks were loyal Republicans who had been 'snubbed' by the party, and that by organising themselves – becoming more influential in the process - they would receive more recognition from the party. The political strength that was achievable through organisation was suggested by one the convention's resolutions, which stated that one purpose of the association would be to 'solidify the entire Negro vote'. This would be a demonstrable effect of putting race first, party second, which the convention regarded as of paramount importance. However, the resolution added a caveat – that the 'betterment of the Negro' was the association's prime objective, before party politics.

But that was not to say that they would refrain from party politics altogether, as the 1890 convention had suggested, nor support political independence, as the 1885 Lynchburg convention had done. The association wanted to make clear that blacks were still loyal supporters of the Republican Party.[25] The prominence given to party politics made this convention stand out from all the others that had taken place in the Old Dominion since the Readjuster era. The state Republican Party had split by the mid-1890s, which led to blacks, including Hayes, having a degree of prominence in

[25] *Proceedings of The Negro Protective Association of Virginia, held Tuesday, May 18th, 1897. In the True Reformers' Hall, Richmond, Va.*, p. 3

party affairs through their particular wing. This might suggest a renewed pressure on the Republicans to recognise them. This largely failed, as demonstrated in the state elections of that year.[26]

However, the other resolutions emanating from the convention were on more specific issues. One centred on jury service – stating how a petition would be presented to the state judiciary to demand that black jury service should be protected. Another focused on education, appealing to the state's counties to provide funds for improving education. The Freedman's Bank was still a topic of discussion some twenty-three years after its collapse, for another resolution once again called on the federal government to provide financial assistance to those who had lost money. As with the 1890 convention, the association also pushed support for black business. One new subject was that of lynching, for a resolution called for justice to be meted out by bringing both white and black criminals to court.[27] This may have been in response to Mitchell's newspaper campaign against the practice of lynching.[28]

The most specific and pointed resolution, however, declared that the association was not in favour of the proposed Constitutional Convention. It felt that it would create 'burdens which will impose in the way of additional expenses upon the finance of the State.' The resolution stated this from the position of blacks as 'small property holders and tax-payers', in other words, as Virginians. This stress on the rights of blacks as citizens of Virginia is a noticeable feature of the proceedings and has echoes of the 1890 Richmond convention. No reference is made for blacks to appeal to the Federal Government for assistance. There is a realisation here that blacks now had to work within the state political system, one that as taxpayers and property holders identified them with the fortunes of white Virginians. Such a change of focus could well have been influenced by the Supreme Court decision of the previous year that declared 'separate but equal' segregation on the railroads as constitutional, indicating to

[26]Republican Party of Virginia Papers, 1896-1926, Virginia Historical Society
[27] *Proceedings*, pp. 2-3
[28] Numerous articles and statistics appeared throughout the 1890s in the *Richmond Planet*.

blacks the extent of the Federal Government's withdrawal from upholding black rights.[29]

As with other conventions, a significant aspect of the meeting was the keynote address. At this convention, Virginian black John H. Smythe, who had previously been Minister to Liberia, was chosen to deliver it. Smythe noted how the current situation was a significant time in American race relations. Contrary to the statements made by the opposition to the association, Smythe considered that the association would not be drawing the colour line, nor be anti-Republican. For Smythe, union equalled strength, and that a separate black organisation would be able to address grievances unique to blacks. The role of the Negro Protective Association would be: to promote self-help; raise money to fund legal cases 'to test the legality of statutes which bears more heavily on blacks than whites'; and achieve financial independence, such as being able to send delegates to conventions without having to ask for money from their 'white friends'.

In order that the association might be able to achieve these aims, Smythe stated how 'absolute, unqualified devotion and loyalty to this cause' was essential from all members. He explained to the convention the reason why he had to make such a stark statement:

> our present motives and purposes are so out of keeping with our former actions in holding conventions for one ostensible purpose, but really for the advancement of the political fortune of some men or some party of men, that in the face of our declared purpose for union, effective union, to advance our race interests – we are discredited and doubted by our white friends who do not respect us because they feel assured that they can change our purpose…by the bribery of office – for which they know us to be as anxious and desirous as themselves.

[29] *Proceedings*, pp. 2-3

This was a blunt statement but one that Smythe felt needed to be made, if anything, for whites reading these proceedings. It reinforced the notion expressed from Reconstruction onwards that organisation and union were fundamental to the development of the African American community. It also highlights the role of party politics and patronage in the relationship between black and white leaders. What Smythe suggests here is that clear objectives were now required on the part of blacks in order to benefit the many rather than the few.

Aside of the need to be clear about the convention's objectives, the published proceedings reinforce the idea that this would be an organisation for all blacks. Firstly, the reader is given a proposed outline of the organisational structure of the association that reached into the grassroots. This is likely to have been modelled on both the Afro-American League from seven years earlier, with which Mitchell had been involved, and also with the way in which delegates had been selected to the national black conventions. Delegates from each magisterial district would meet at a county convention with the intention of selecting delegates to the district convention. At the same time, delegates from each city precinct would meet at a city convention to select delegates. Each of the ten Congressional Districts would hold such a convention, each sending three representatives to the state convention, where the state and executive committees would be selected. The Executive committee would be made up of six members selected by the state committee. As the proceedings indicate, there was a broad spectrum of individuals present at the first state convention of the association – some former politicians, others clergymen, others whose names appear here but then disappear. It was also proposed that women play a role in the association – setting up their own committees to help raise money for the organisation. The resolution put forward for this was tabled after two delegates (one of whom was Matt Lewis, who had been a key supporter of Langston in 1888) 'strenuously opposed' it.

The other notable feature of the association, as revealed by published proceedings, was the publication of nineteen letters in support of the convention. These

were from local black leaders, many of them addressed to Hayes in his role as secretary of the association. The letters were from across the state and give an indication of the level of support for the Negro Protective Association. One letter, from Robert Orrich of Winchester, Virginia, to A.W Harris, who was state chairman, perhaps sums up the general tone of the correspondence:

> This union should extend from one end of Virginia to the other, in order that we as a race should thoroughly understand one another. When a load is carried, every Negro in the State should help carry it. What is good for you in the lower part of the State is good for us in the upper part…We are no longer children. We are men, and have proven ourselves men in the United States.[30]

Of course, only selected letters were published; we have no indication as to how many other letters were received, or how many leaders disagreed with the association. As Smythe hinted, there was opposition to the organisation, but whether this came from African Americans, as well as whites, is hard to say.

Limited evidence has been found regarding the true extent of this organisation. Branches of the association were set up in Richmond and Norfolk. However, as the *Planet* noted, those elected to the Norfolk district convention were key players in one particular wing of the state Republican Party. The paper noted that blacks had to protest against aspiring politicians taking over the association and using it for their own ends.[31] It is hard to ascertain what happened to the organisation. However, the founding of the Negro Industrial and Agricultural Association in 1900 was the likely descendent of the Negro Protective Association. Its aims included buying land to farm and setting up an industrial school. It was noticeably non-political, although one historian has considered this to be a cover, for Hayes became the association's lawyer in 1901 to campaign against disfranchisement. Both the Negro Protective Association and the Negro

[30] *Proceedings*, pp. 5-6
[31] *Richmond Planet*, 10 July 1897

Industrial and Agricultural Association were based in Richmond, but even the growing rise of black disenfranchisement did not escape the city, as Hayes' legal work at this time revealed. Within the space of the three years, from 1897 to 1900, outspoken support for the Republicans either became harder for blacks, or was futile due to the rapidly declining influence of their votes. Indeed, Hayes' militancy took a new turn in the early twentieth century when, in 1902, he founded the National Negro Suffrage League. This organisation had to be moved eventually to New York as a result of the growing hostility towards black militancy in the Old Dominion. The aim of the League was to prosecute law cases against disenfranchisement. This had been built up from his work in Virginia following the new constitution of 1901, which had disenfranchised most African Americans. Hayes therefore maintained his militant stance towards black political rights. By contrast, his contemporary John Mitchell had taken a more conservative route by the first decade of the twentieth century.[32]

In conclusion, James Hayes provides a useful case study in understanding the new generation of local black leaders who emerged in the 1880s. It would be an error, however, to think of Hayes as typical of this new generation. For example, the other major black lawyer of this period, Giles B. Jackson, was of a different ideological persuasion. Furthermore, other black leaders of this new generation, such as George Freeman Bragg or black minister Daniel Webster Davis, were less radical than Hayes.[33]

Hayes was a determined individual who rose to prominence in the law profession. Howard University was the likely source of his desire to further the condition of the African American community. His advocacy for the black vote, underpinned by his legal background, meant that he spoke with authority on the constitutional rights held by blacks. It could be said that Hayes' outgrew Richmond as much as he was forced to leave the city due to growing hostility towards the African

[32] Alexander, passim
[33] The moderation of Davis, for example, can be inferred from a study of his private papers, which are largely from the early twentieth century, and are located at the Virginia Historical Society.

American community. For those black leaders who remained in the city, such as John Mitchell, disillusionment followed their earlier militancy. Hayes remained committed to fighting for blacks' political rights, but arguably he was able to remain doing so as a result of moving his operations to Washington, D.C. Hayes was also of an independent mind – advocating political independence whilst he remained an avowed Republican. However, even he would embrace third party politics by the 1912 Presidential election, supporting Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Party. By then, he was far removed from the world of Jackson Ward politics in Richmond. Indeed, little mention of him was made in the state press (and, indeed, in the black press more generally) when he died in 1917. Whilst Hayes ultimately failed in securing the black franchise, his focus on the law as a method for fighting racial discrimination was one that would be developed and used to good effect with the rise of the civil rights movement a generation later.

Conclusion

This thesis has been an exploration of black leadership in the American South, through a comparison of Virginia and Alabama in the post-Redemption period. It set out to fill a gap in the scholarship identified by August Meier in the early 1980s. This was the call for a systematic study of local black leaders, which in turn would reveal more clearly the complexities of African American thinking in the late nineteenth century. Such thinking revolved around issues of civil and political rights, and self-help and racial solidarity. The introduction to this thesis posed a number of questions – questions that have remained in the background of the study, and which now need answering more directly.

The first of these questions considered the extent to which the local black elite was influenced by, and influential on, Booker T. Washington. It has often been assumed that Washington was speaking merely from his own point of view, influenced by his education at the Hampton Institute, and from the political manoeuvrings of the 1890s, and beyond. There has always been a sense in the literature that he spoke for few of the local black leaders around him. Rather, he was swayed more by political considerations and was too concerned with the views of influential whites.

However, as this thesis has demonstrated, the views that Washington expressed in the 1890s had been widespread among local black leaders in the 1880s. Indeed, on the subject of education, at least, local black leaders in both Virginia and Alabama were in accord with him, and most likely, influenced his own thinking. By contrast, the majority of the local elite were interested in speaking out on matters involving party politics, whereas Washington steered away from such a course. In addition, Washington was at odds with some of the local black elite over the matter of political alternatives. Washington remained a Republican; he never supported the Democrats in the way that William Councill did. Even so, issues of self-help and racial solidarity, so favoured by Washington, were widely

endorsed by other local leaders throughout the 1800s. The fact that Washington was in the 1880s a local leader, first and foremost, suggests that much of his philosophy was influenced by, and influential on, other local black leaders around him. In addition, the means of protest supported by local leaders throughout the 1880s, and beyond, such as petitioning, were supported by Washington.

Another question that this thesis has attempted to address is that of the validity of the Woodward thesis and, in particular, his claim that the 1880s was a time of 'flexibility' in southern race relations, before the hardening of attitudes in the 1890s. There is still credence to such a claim, for by the very fact that local black leaders could still, through choice, participate in party politics at this time suggests a degree of flexibility. Woodward also spoke of the 1880s as a time of 'forgotten alternatives' – white liberalism, radicalism, and paternalism – that declined in influence with the rise of white extremism and Jim Crow segregation. However, as this study suggests, despite a decline in these alternatives blacks continued to participate actively in party politics and upholding their rights as American citizens. Black political protest did continue into the 1890s, often in the most unlikely of places, but perhaps what was more significant was the consistent stress throughout the 1880s and early 1890s on self-help and racial solidarity.

This was the philosophy that Booker T. Washington embraced, and whilst the majority of local black leaders did not go to the same lengths as Washington, they would have embraced the philosophy behind Washington – that of black pride, and perhaps more significantly, pride in American citizenship. The legitimate rights blacks held as citizens, rights they had gained through the Reconstruction amendments, supported and nurtured this pride in being both citizens of their state and of the country as a whole. For as well as self-help, there was a sincere belief that the Federal government should honour its word and uphold African Americans' right to vote, and to have equal civil rights – fundamentally, to be considered Americans. This integrationist viewpoint was central to

the thinking of the local black elite, more so than black separatism, which is where this study differs from the interpretation put forward by Steven Hahn. There was a feeling of black distinctiveness in the American experience, to be sure, but the ultimate aim of local black leaders at the end of the nineteenth century was to embrace as much as they could the share of the American experience that was rightly theirs as American citizens. Moreover, this was the worldview they expounded to the masses at the pulpit or through the black press.[1]

Of course, a key question underlying every chapter of this thesis has been to investigate these local leaders, their backgrounds, views and strategies. It can be said that the local black elite was made up of men from a variety of backgrounds. Some had risen to a position of leadership from slavery, often with the help of military service during the Civil War. William Gaston would be an example here, whose military career shaped his view of American citizenship. Others were born into free families, or had gained freedom prior to the Civil War. Many men in this category became members of the Washington elite – those leaders who were appointed to federal positions in the capital, such as Rosier Beckley of Virginia. Finally, the new generation of black leaders who emerged in the 1880s came from a variety of backgrounds, but many chose a more secular route, often becoming lawyers, such as James Hayes. This highlighted how the role of the law was becoming more significant to local leaders as a way of supporting and furthering blacks' rights. The law became the foundation for the black protest tradition that had emerged during Reconstruction and continued into the 1890s.

[1] This sense of being part of the American experience was a continuing trend from Reconstruction, which continued into the twentieth century. R. Volney Riser's *Defying Disfranchisement* is a recent work on the fight against disenfranchisement that emphasis this point of continuity in a protest tradition among African American leaders. The fact that this work was published whilst this thesis was being written means that there is no analysis of it here. R. Volney Riser, *Defying Disfranchisement: Black Voting Rights Activism in the Jim Crow South, 1890-1908* (Baton Rouge, 2010)

However, the local black elite cannot be studied in isolation. The relationship they held with national black figures, such as Frederick Douglass, is complex and significant. On the one hand, there was considerable support for Douglass from the localities, as demonstrated by the enthusiasm shown towards him in his election as chairman of the Louisville Convention. This particular convention also revealed dissatisfaction with the national leadership, however, and some came to question Douglass' continued support for the Republican Party. Even so, such opposition was never at the same level as the support for Douglass, which remained largely undiminished in many parts of the South. Moreover, Douglass' stance during the Civil War, especially the meaning he placed on the conflict in terms of liberty and equality, resonated with many local leaders.

As much as the relationship between the local and national black elite was significant in framing the intellectual position of both groups, local black leaders in the South were trying to make their way, and guide those whom they led, towards a more prosperous future. As the title of this thesis suggests, an analysis of local black leadership in the South reveals that African Americans were active in determining their future – in creating a Black New South. It was the local black elite – those who held positions of power – who formulated an ideological framework from which to work. Articulated nationally at the black conventions, and locally in the black press, black leaders discussed what was required for African Americans to progress.

However, the use of the term 'New South' must be used with some caution, for there is no one clear definition of the New South. It could be argued that there were many 'new Souths', depending on who you were, where in the region you were, and the period in which you lived. The most common interpretation is that of an economic programme of reform that became popular in the 1880s and 1890s, put forward by white newspaper editors, the most famous of which was Henry Grady of Atlanta. Booker T. Washington was regarded as the black figurehead of the New South. But Washington's own thinking on

black advancement rested on education, albeit one particular type. Educational reform was never at the forefront of the 'white New South', but for black leaders, this was a crucial aspect to their own thinking on how blacks could advance economically within the region.

In real terms, the Black New South meant a push for improved education, equality in public accommodations, but also a realisation by the local black elite that they could not do this without political support from whites, or without a united effort from all blacks in furthering their own cause. Furthermore, as already mentioned, this was all incorporated in an integrationist framework, where black and white alike were all striving to be respected as American citizens. This thesis is, therefore, a significant start in defining the Black New South. It reveals that local black leaders articulated a clear strategy for African American advancement – in other words, their own version of a new South. Whilst they often differed on the method, they were in accord over what they wanted to achieve. By the early 1890s this can be best summed up as a fight to protect their basic human rights.

More broadly speaking, this study has also been an exploration of the meaning of freedom to African Americans in the late nineteenth century. It has focused on how a local elite attempted to negotiate a path between the black grassroots on the one hand, and whites on the other. These local leaders were symbolic of how African Americans could progress, and the positions they could attain. Moreover, this elite also held a position between the black grassroots and the national black leaders. Through attendance at national black conventions they would be able to impart the knowledge and ideas gained at such meetings to their constituents, whether that be at election time, or at the pulpit.

Finally, it must be stressed that the local black elite was a complex group of individuals. Some of them were more radical than others – William Stevens in Alabama or James Hayes in Virginia compared with the more conservative Booker T. Washington in Alabama or Jesse Dungee in Virginia. Furthermore, whilst motivation is hard to quantify, the local black elite were no different to any other group of people. Men such as William

Gaston were driven by their faith in God as well as their faith in America. Others, such as Jeremiah Haralson, were driven by personal advancement. And the black elite represented the full political spectrum, from radical and moderate Republicans on the one-hand, to the Democrats on the other. Ultimately, the local black elite was complex, with its members striving for the betterment of themselves and those whom they represented. The underlying purpose of this study has been to try and understand this group, and how it strove to understand the meaning of American citizenship.

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