

# The ante-bellum background

[Profession](#), [Teacher](#)



## **Introduction**

Prior to the American Civil War, 1861-1865, a system of state education did not exist in the Confederate South. Taxation to subsidise public schooling had not yet been introduced and education remained localised to affluent white communities. Within Georgia, as throughout the South, schools were privately organised and sustained. In 1858, however, Governor Brown secured the passage of law to establish a common school system in Georgia, which intended to provide tuition for every white child in the state. This law was never enacted and instead collapsed with the defeat of the Confederacy.

Nevertheless, Brown's proposed legislation remains significant for its characterisation of contemporary Southern white attitudes; black education held no interest to the state. In a society structured upon African-American slavery, this is unsurprising. Indeed, state legislation prohibited the instruction of African-Americans throughout the South, and Georgia was no exception. In 1833, a Georgia law secured the punishment of any person, by fine or imprisonment, discovered to be teaching any 'slave, negro or free person of colour.'

Despite these proscriptions, the enslaved and free African-American community alike yearned for knowledge; a craving that strengthened during the post-bellum Reconstruction period. This desire was not only motivated by the importance of education to racial progress, but also the realisation that knowledge equated to power. African-Americans anticipated that attaining an education meant 'seizing a weapon' which could challenge the established racial hierarchy. Education symbolised equality.

### **The Early Reconstruction Era**

In December 1864, Georgia surrendered to the Union. Defeat secured freedom for the formerly enslaved and likewise liberated African-Americans from restrictive legislation preventing their instruction. The emancipation of Georgia's slaves was subsequently reinforced by the Thirteenth Amendment, 1865, formally abolishing the institution of servitude throughout the South. In the Reconstruction period, however, African-Americans in Georgia, and the South as a whole, were confronted with crisis regarding their desire for education. The black community lacked existing formal schooling and racial prejudice prevented African-Americans attending the educational institutions of white society.

Moreover, war destroyed the Southern landscape and Georgia itself was 'exhausted and clubbed to her knees.' The destruction of both towns and plantations resulted in widespread poverty. This economic hardship was intensified among the newly emancipated population, who, with a lack of state support, were forced to fend for themselves.

Nevertheless, despite this destitution, African-American schooling encompassed Georgia within a year of surrender, a trend representative of the entire South. Previous historiography has adopted varying approaches to this movement, attributing its emergence to differing factors. Of particular interest to historians preceding the 1980s was the role of Northern whites: the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (the Freedmen's Bureau) and Northern benevolent associations. Peirce, for example, argues the Freedmen's Bureau 'inaugurated the system of [black] instruction' by

providing an infrastructure to coordinate the efforts of philanthropic associations and monetary contributions.

Furthermore, previous scholarship emphasises the role of the Bureau in conjunction with benevolent associations, asserting black education was a 'cooperative venture.' Similarly to the Bureau, Northern aid societies donated material aid and, additionally, transported qualified teachers to the South. With reference to Georgia, Thompson argues African-American education originated from, and was maintained by, the combined resources which Northern whites were able to accumulate. Fundamentally, 'the education of negroes was left to the Freedmen's Bureau and Northern philanthropy.'

Implicit within both these perspectives is the assumption that education was bestowed upon African-Americans, who displayed little initiative towards their own schooling. Indeed, Bentley's *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (1955) judged the freedpeople's response as 'piteous.' Primary evidence, however, contradicts this scholarship. Various sources suggest black communities provided valuable support to the educational movement; financial donations, despite poverty, are regularly recorded. Numerous scholars pre-dating the 1980s were therefore consciously selective in their use of evidence by devaluing, or dismissing, the role of African-Americans, preferring to emphasise the role of Northern whites. This perspective can be ascribed to contextual influences. In the late-1960s and early-1970s, the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum in America. Arguably, this changing social history may have subconsciously impacted upon written history; racial prejudice perhaps obscured personal judgement.

Developing this conservative approach, historians of the 1980s and early-1990s recognise the educational movement involved, to an extent, African-Americans themselves. Whilst scholarship of this decade likewise attributes the emergence of black education to Northern whites, it also acknowledges African-Americans 'seized opportunities offered' to them and made important contributions of their own. Holt argues freedpeople of North Carolina exploited the household economy to assist the maintenance of schoolhouses erected by the Bureau. Similarly, Cimbala emphasises the significance of African-American financial contributions within Georgia; a necessity to supplement Northern funds. Furthermore, Butchart notes that as Northern financial assistance dwindled in 1869 due to lack of funds, African-Americans throughout the South adopted the dual responsibility of financing and operating schools.

Whilst these scholars appreciate African-American education was a joint enterprise, whereby the black community worked in co-operation with Northern whites, only recent research suggests the educational movement originated from 'black impetus.' Modern scholarship has gradually credited the inauguration of African-American education to the African-American community. This conclusion has been applied in particular to Maryland and South Carolina, both of which have been utilised as case-studies generalising the broader movement of the South. Convincingly, Jenkins argues African-Americans of South Carolina educated themselves during the early Reconstruction period; a self-sufficient movement which continued their concealed efforts during the era of slavery. Similarly, Fuke concludes African-American schooling in Maryland derived from the grassroots of the African-

American community. Consequently, Northern whites operated as catalysts within an educational movement created by black society; the Bureau facilitated the 'expansion' of black schooling through the creation of additional schoolhouses and Northern philanthropists enhanced the quality of tuition.

This dissertation intends to ascertain how far these arguments can be applied to Georgia, assessing whether the conclusions determined by Jenkins and Fuke correspond with the experiences of other Southern states. Each chapter will address the educational contributions of a specific group: African-Americans, the Freedmen's Bureau and Northern benevolent associations. Within this structure, rural areas will be compared to their urban counterparts, primarily the city of Savannah. Accordingly, this will enable me to determine to what extent African-American education derived from black impetus throughout differing areas of Georgia.

In establishing how far formal African-American schooling was motivated by the black community in Reconstruction Georgia, educational archives of the Bureau will provide a primary body of evidence. These records, dating from 1865-1870, consist of statistical data and school reports compiled by the Bureau, as well as letters received and sent by the agency. For Georgia, there are 15 microfilm rolls of correspondence, each containing 200-300 items. Moreover, a further 12 rolls comprise of accounting records and school reports composed by teachers and Bureau agents. To gain a sense of contemporary proceedings from such a vast source, I sampled approximately

five letters and school reports per month from Savannah and varying rural counties of the state.

Whereas archives of the Bureau are easily attainable, records of benevolent associations are comparatively limited. Documentation of the American Missionary Association (AMA) is stored within America, and the restricted material available online does not relate to Georgia. Consequently, the dissertation will instead utilise letters received by the Bureau from the AMA, alongside primary references within secondary material.

### **Chapter one**

#### African-American Schooling in the Early Reconstruction Period: 1865-1870

Despite impoverishment confronting Georgia after defeat in the Civil War, formal African-American schooling encompassed the state during the early Reconstruction period. By January 1870, 194 African-American schools regularly reported to the Bureau, and a further 105 schoolhouses were believed to exist. These schools served over 8, 000 pupils throughout Georgia. Traditional historiography attributes the inauguration of this educational movement to the Freedmen's Bureau and Northern philanthropic organisations.

Indeed, Northern white intervention commenced relatively early following Georgia's surrender. Whilst the original Freedmen's Bureau Act, March 1865, did not contain provisions for African-American education (Congress failed to appropriate finance for this purpose until July 1866), informal Bureau activity within Georgia began in the winter of 1865. However, devoid of Congressional support, Georgia's officials lacked monetary reserves and

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were restricted to exploiting their limited resources; abandoned property under Bureau control. Nevertheless, the Bureau capitalised on the supplies it did possess and its earliest contribution can be dated to mid-November, 1865, when Davis Tillson, the state's second assistant commissioner, authorised derelict buildings in Savannah to be utilised as African-American schools.

Similarly, philanthropic associations instigated their benevolence within Georgia in the latter months of 1865. The AMA initially transported qualified Northern teachers to the state in????, and NEFAS dispatched its first instructors in November. By December 1865, these aid societies had established African-American schoolhouses in Savannah, Augusta, Atlanta, and Columbus.

However, whilst Northern white activities commenced promptly in Reconstruction Georgia, the origins of formal African-American schooling cannot be attributed to these efforts, as previous scholarship suggests. Arguably, African-American education derived from the grassroots of black society. In the summer of 1865, months following Georgia's defeat, and months prior to Northern white intervention, Alvord embarked upon an exploration of the South. Concluding this tour, Alvord estimated 79 black schoolhouses were already established in Georgia, illustrating that African-American schooling was inaugurated independently. This development accords with the conclusions determined by Jenkins and Fuke.



### **The Foundations of African-American Education**

The origins of African-American education in post-bellum Georgia, then, can be attributed to black society. The foundations of this movement derive, ironically, from the era preceding the Civil War. Despite legislation prohibiting instruction of African-Americans, a considerable number had acquired a clandestine education. Subsequent to Confederate defeat, members of Georgia's black community who already possessed understanding of reading and writing became educators of the race. Accordingly, the introduction of formal African-American schooling in Reconstruction Georgia was, as argued by Jenkins for South Carolina, a 'continuation of the...efforts under slavery.'

In spite of restrictive legislation, many African-Americans in Georgia obtained literary skills before 1860. This learning process occurred, however, primarily within urban areas, whereby a more diverse environment than rural districts allowed differing opportunities to acquire education. Surprisingly, in a society characterised by white superiority, some slaves were instructed by their masters or his family. Regardless of potential prosecution, Savannah whites, on occasion, dismissed state laws forbidding the tuition of African-Americans. Domestic slaves, in particular, benefitted from this compassion. 'Uncle Reuben' of Savannah, owned by a master possessing few slaves, was rewarded for his loyalty and educated by the family.

However, the majority concealed their learning from white society, instead attaining tuition surreptitiously from fellow African-Americans. As black ministers were literate, churches within pre-bellum Savannah were employed as secret institutions of education. Consequently, Sundays proved a

significant day for black tuition; whilst white society attended white churches, slaves with travel-passes, alongside their free counterparts, exploited African-American churches where, in addition to religious instruction, ministers often bestowed the rudiments of literacy. Reverend J. Simms, for example, a former slave who purchased freedom, educated African-Americans, slave and free alike, within his Savannah church until 1861.

Furthermore, free African-Americans of Savannah likewise obtained a clandestine education within a secular context, further disregarding state prohibitions. Unlike the urban enslaved, fettered by servitude, free African-Americans attended black schoolhouses operating covertly throughout the city. Mrs Deveaux, a free African-American, secretly taught from 1830 until the end of the Civil War. This institution remained invisible to white society, successfully educating members of Savannah's black community.

Similarly, Susie King Taylor provides evidence of such surreptitious tuition. Unlike most slaves, Taylor, aged seven, was granted freedom by her master and subsequently lived with her free Grandmother in Savannah.

Consequently, Susie acquired an education. Each day, Taylor attended a secret school organised within the home of Mrs Woodhouse, a free African-American. To avoid arousing suspicion within the white community, Taylor's schoolbooks were disguised and Mrs Woodhouse's 25 pupils each entered and departed the property individually. Within two years, Mrs Woodhouse had taught Taylor 'all she knew.'

Moreover, Lucy and Sarah Chase, white NEFAS educators transported to Savannah, December 1865, support the existence of covert schoolhouses in their account published in the Worcester Evening Gazette; '[they] would have schools, under the old regime...in spite of the laws.' Specifically, the Chase sisters describe a free African-American male who operated a pre-bellum 'secret school' in his Savannah residence. Following this tutoring, pupils frequently continued their studies at home, concealing their activities from white society.

Evidence therefore suggests a number of African-Americans in Savannah acquired understanding of reading and writing prior to the Civil War, undermining legislation intended to prohibit such academic advancement. Contrastingly, opportunities for clandestine instruction in rural Georgia were limited; tense race relations and the isolated nature of the environment resulted in fewer means to obtain education.

Under slavery, cotton cultivation dominated rural Georgia and the economic livelihood of whites depended upon African-American labour. Consequently, race relations were strained. Planters perceived African-Americans in terms of their property value and financial concerns 'superseded the consideration of slaves.' Thus, masters refused to instruct slaves for fear the educated worker could destabilise the established hierarchy, resulting in slave rebellion and economic loss. J. H. Dent, a slaveholder in Northern rural Georgia, commented 'one great error is to...enlighten the Negro. In doing so, you...arouse his suspicions.' Accordingly, few slaves, if any, acquired education from their master. George Womble, a former slave of Clinton,

Georgia, emphasises this difficulty in achieving literacy, recalling the enslaved on his plantation were ' never given the chance to learn to read or write.'

Furthermore, whereas churches provided alternative sources of education for urban slaves, they remained wholly religious to rural slaves. Whilst given opportunities to attend sermons by their masters, the rural enslaved were largely preached to by white ministers. According to James Bolton, a slave of Oglethorpe County, ' they weren't no church for niggers on our plantation... we went to the white folkses church and listened to white preachers.' Likewise, Womble was required to attend his master's church, receiving the Sunday service of a white minister.

Occasionally, however, white churches permitted rural slaves to be ministered by African-American preachers. Nevertheless, such sermons remained subject to white supervision, preventing the surreptitious schooling which occurred within urban black churches. Plantation slave William Ward commented the local black pastor was overseen by his master, with the sermon ' always built according to the master's instructions...reminding slaves they...must lead a life of loyal servitude.' Consequently, as slaves were addressed by white ministers, or by black preachers under the direction of their masters, churches within rural Georgia rarely provided slaves with academic education.

Nevertheless, despite evident efforts of plantation owners to keep slaves uneducated, African-Americans sometimes exploited younger members of their master's family. The account of Womble refers to the neighbouring

plantation where slave boys transported books of the master's children to and from school, simultaneously receiving instruction upon how to write. Thus, despite prohibitive legislation and the resolve of white society, some slaves, albeit the fortunate minority, acquired a degree of literacy in rural ante-bellum Georgia.

Similarly, free rural African-Americans struggled to obtain the rudiments of literacy; evidence of covert instruction within private residences is rare. This lack of evidence can be attributed to the lower free black population in rural regions. As illustrated by Table 1, the number of free blacks in Chatham County, where Savannah is located, was significantly higher than rural counties preceding the Civil War. Consequently, free African-Americans were more sporadic in the countryside, resulting in fewer literate individuals from whom fellow African-Americans could acquire tuition. Nevertheless, one cannot dismiss such secret instruction occurred.

Furthermore, little evidence suggests clandestine schooling occurred within rural black churches of Georgia. Owing to their dispersed population, free rural blacks were unable to create a strong community and, consequentially, only a 'handful' of African-American churches were erected in each rural county; in Dougherty County, a single black church existed. Whilst these institutions were ministered by black preachers, only some were independent of white society. Frances Kemble, a Northern white traveller, reported, although free African-Americans possessed their own Baptist church in Darien, 'a gentleman officiated in it (of course, white).'

Accordingly, white supervision prevented such churches being utilised as secret schoolhouses.

However, in those African-American churches which, similarly to their urban counterparts, remained autonomous, one can speculate black ministers served as academic teachers. Indeed, surreptitious instruction in rural Georgia must have occurred; Russel Noah, a free African-American of Madison, as later explained, developed literary skills in the pre-bellum era and became a teacher in the Reconstruction period. However, due to the sporadic locations of independent churches, such clandestine tuition could only have benefitted a minority of each rural county's free black population. Thus, compared to Savannah, it was challenging for rural African-Americans, both slave and free alike, to acquire the rudiments of literacy in pre-bellum Georgia, though privileged individuals did.

When examining the state in its entirety, evidence illustrates that, despite regional variations, numerous African-Americans possessed basic literary skills prior to the Civil War; an existing approximation suggests five percent of slaves and two-thirds of Georgia's free African-American population were literate by 1860. African-Americans actively pursued their aspiration for education by diverse and resourceful methods. This self-motivated movement commenced in both urban and rural regions, albeit with more success in the former, decades before the involvement of Northern whites in the state. Accordingly, the African-American response to their desire for knowledge can hardly be described as piteous, as previous historiography suggests.

### **Independent African-American Schoolhouses**

These determined endeavours in ante-bellum Georgia were not a prologue to the Reconstruction period; they were ‘formative and foundational,’ providing the basis for formal black schooling. By utilising the academic knowledge obtained before the Civil War, African-Americans independently established schoolhouses immediately following Confederate defeat, December 1864. This movement occurred months before Northern white intervention in Georgia, as previously illustrated by Alvord’s report. Those literate individuals at the time of Georgia’s surrender became the first educators of the race and, to facilitate this tuition, the black community, despite poverty, organised numerous schoolhouses.

This movement transpired especially within Savannah, whereby African-Americans betook to education with ‘speed and energy.’ Devoid of funding to purchase or rent structures specifically for black schooling, African-Americans instead capitalised upon limited resources in their possession. Similarly to pre-bellum clandestine instruction, private residences provided accommodation in which tuition could occur at little cost. In September 1865, Susie King Taylor, who was educated in such a covert manner as a child, opened a school within her Savannah home. Each month Taylor received \$1 from every pupil. These payments, although low, proved sufficient to fund the day to day management of the school and supplied Susie with a small salary. Furthermore, according to Taylor, several schools were already in operation throughout Savannah within residences of fellow African-Americans, including one ran by Mrs Jackson upon the same street as Susie’s

own schoolhouse. In the absence of many alternatives, African-Americans sacrificed their homes for the purpose of educating others.

Moreover, African-Americans of Savannah exploited the one aspect of community life in which they enjoyed full control; the church. Central institutions prior to the Civil War, African-American churches possessed greater importance in the Reconstruction period, facilitating further schools in the city. Earliest letters received by the Bureau in 1865 indicate African-American schooling commonly occurred in church property owned by African-American Baptists. In July 1865, just seven months following Georgia's surrender, former slave Maria Jones organised a school within a black Baptist church, educating 27 fellow freedpeople. To sustain this tuition, Jones depended upon \$1 a month per scholar. Whilst the total was not always supplied, pupils consistently donated what they could afford.

The examples above were organised and sustained independently by the grassroots of Savannah's African-American community, despite impoverishment. This self-reliance is epitomised by the Savannah Education Association (SEA), a black organisation founded by church leaders. Under the auspices of the SEA, two schoolhouses were established in Savannah during January 1865; one located at Oglethorpe and the other, symbolically, in the former Bryan Slave Mart. These schools, taught by 16 African-American teachers, were 'supported by the association.' To supplement SEA funding, the black community donated \$1000 following the schoolhouses' establishment. Furthermore, while pupils were not required to pay tuition fees, they chose to finance the salaries of the staff; voluntary contributions



which remained 'enough to supply the needed fund.' Accordingly, the schools were wholly self-sufficient, educating over 700 African-Americans prior to Northern white intervention.

Similarly, rural African-Americans organised formal schooling before the involvement of Northern whites in Georgia. However, this process did not occur as rapidly or extensively when compared to Savannah; whereas 27 independent black schoolhouses operated in Savannah by November 1865, just 1 existed in Oglethorpe County. With fewer opportunities to acquire literary skills in the pre-bellum countryside, fewer individuals could become teachers in the Reconstruction period. In many rural counties, ministers comprised the majority of the literate black population. Furthermore, rural African-Americans were consumed with poverty and, similarly to their urban counterparts, could only exploit resources already in their possession. Consequently, African-American churches facilitated the earliest black schooling in rural Georgia. However, as only a handful existed in each rural county, black schoolhouses remained low in number prior to Northern white support.

Nevertheless, schools were established and sustained independently. In Marietta, Cobb County, August 1865, Reverend Eeli accommodated a school within his church, educating 95 freedpeople. To ensure continuance of this instruction, each pupil, when able, donated ? 50 per month. Similarly, Russel Noah of Madison, Morgan County, learned to read and write as a free African-American in the ante-bellum period. Whilst Noah had 'never taught school before,' he began teaching in September 1865, utilising a church in Madison

as a schoolhouse. Likewise, Noah's pupils donated a small sum to maintain this tuition. Moreover, Reverend Caldwell operated a night school in his church at La Grange, commencing in September 1865. Whilst black schoolhouses in rural Georgia were by no means common before measures of Northern whites, those which did exist were organised and maintained by the black community.

Evidence therefore illustrates, in both rural and urban Georgia, African-Americans independently inaugurated formal black schooling during the early Reconstruction period, prior to Northern white intervention. This education was impelled by local black impetus and was a continuation of the clandestine efforts preceding the Civil War. Despite legislation prohibiting instruction of African-Americans, several members of Georgia's black community successfully pursued their desire for education. Developing these pre-bellum foundations, literate African-Americans became teachers in the post-bellum era and numerous schoolhouses were self-sufficiently organised to facilitate such tuition. Accordingly, African-American education was not 'left to the Freedmen's Bureau and Northern philanthropy' as previous scholarship has argued. Indeed, as acknowledged by Alvord, Georgia's African-Americans had already made 'commendable efforts to educate themselves and their children' in the summer of 1865.

This educational movement in Georgia accords with the conclusions determined by Jenkins and Fuke for the states of South Carolina and Maryland, both of which argue African-American schooling derived from the grassroots of black society. However, Jenkins and Fuke further assert rural

African-Americans were more highly motivated than their urban counterparts in establishing schoolhouses. Jenkins maintains rural African-Americans perceived themselves as less sophisticated than their urban contemporaries and thus pursued education ‘ more diligently.’ Moreover, Fuke claims rural African-Americans were more enthused due to pride; blacks desired to seek as much control over daily life as possible.

Conversely, the opposite occurred in Georgia. Within Savannah, African-Americans organised schoolhouses more rapidly and extensively than in rural areas of the state. This discrepancy can be explained by ante-bellum trends. Whilst rural African-Americans in Georgia, likewise to their peers in Maryland and South Carolina, perhaps considered themselves less sophisticated than urban black society and yearned to establish schooling out of pride, one fact remains: there were fewer opportunities to acquire clandestine education in the pre-bellum countryside. Accordingly, fewer literate individuals could be utilised as teachers in the early Reconstruction period. Consequently, it is logical that African-American schools were more sporadic and slower to develop in rural areas of Georgia.

## **Chapter Two**

### The Freedmen’s Bureau

In Maryland, Fuke concluded the Freedmen’s Bureau was a catalyst for the ‘ expansion’ of education owing to the provision of schoolhouses throughout the state. Furthermore, he judged that whilst this growth ‘ depended heavily on the support of the Bureau...it drew equally from the hard work of the black community.’ These arguments are likewise applicable to Georgia, with one

exception. Whereas Fuke generalises his claims to the entirety of Maryland, evidence illustrates his conclusions are more relevant to urban, in comparison to rural, Georgia.

In accordance with Fuke's argument, the Bureau developed the existing foundations of African-American schooling in Georgia, serving as an accelerant to the educational movement formed by black society. Likewise to Maryland, the Bureau enabled the growth of African-American education through the creation of additional schools; advancement impoverished African-Americans could not achieve independently. However, as argued by Fuke, this role of the Bureau, although significant, was only one influence within a process which combined the efforts of the agency and the African-American community of Georgia.

As established, African-Americans in Reconstruction Georgia actively inaugurated their own schooling prior to Northern white intervention. However, this tuition was only available to a minority of the black population, especially within rural counties, and poverty hindered the ability of the community to further expand such schooling. Following the Civil War, devastation encompassed the state; ' destitution and hunger were the kissing cousins of defeat.' W. Gannett, a NEFAS representative touring Savannah, April 1865, reported ' there is little money in the city, in black hands or white.' Similarly, Miss Banfield, a Northern teacher, described Savannah's African-American community in November, 1865, as ' very poor.'

Likewise, within rural Georgia, impoverishment was ubiquitous and often more intensified than urban regions. Plantations were destroyed during

conflict and starvation caused widespread distress. Mr Townsler, a freedman of Griffin, informed the Bureau, in September 1865, the local black community was ‘ poor’ and ‘ destitute of all conveniences and comforts necessary.’ Accordingly, African-Americans within early Reconstruction Georgia lived at a level of subsistence.

Consequently, although the black community organised schoolhouses throughout the state prior to Northern white measures, these institutions often struggled to be maintained. In November 1865, Maria Jones, who previously opened a Savannah school, July 1865, feared it would be impossible to teach the following month as the children were ‘ too poor to pay for their tuition.’ Similarly, in a church schoolhouse of rural Athens, there was a ‘ general disposition among the colored people to educate their children,’ but ‘ very few’ could afford tuition payments. Thus, by November 1865, the future of Mr Schevenelle’s school, established just four months earlier, appeared bleak.

As African-Americans were unable to sustain independently established schoolhouses, it was unfeasible for them to self-sufficiently expand the foundations of black education. Consequentially, whilst the black community inaugurated formal African-American schooling in Reconstruction Georgia, its growth can be attributed to the Freedmen’s Bureau.

The original Freedmen’s Bureau Act, March 1865, contained no provisions for African-American education. During the initial year of the agency’s existence, Congress failed to appropriate financial support for black tuition and the Bureau’s educational powers remained limited. Nevertheless,

informal activity commenced within Georgia in the winter of 1865; abandoned buildings were authorised as schoolhouses for the African-American community. In Savannah, November 1865, Tillson secured property previously utilised by Union forces as black schools. However, as derelict buildings were located predominantly in cities, original benevolence of the Bureau was restricted to urban Georgia. Nonetheless, in the later months of 1865, the agency was already enhancing African-American education where black communities could not, providing accommodation in which further tuition could occur.

The Bureau's educational activities became more effective in July 1866 when, in response to increasing demands for federal provisions specific to African-American education, Congress secured \$500, 000 for repairing and leasing black schoolhouses throughout the South; an act interpreted loosely by the agency to establish more schools. Furthermore, this statute allowed the Bureau to seize former Confederate property to facilitate black schooling. Similarly, in March 1867, Congress donated an additional \$500, 000 to the Bureau for the purpose of African-American education. These appropriations proved crucial to the development of African-American schooling in post-bellum Georgia, and the South as a whole.

From July 1866 to July 1870, the Georgia Bureau utilised these Congressional enactments to assist the establishment of black schoolhouses throughout the state; a process which occurred in Maryland also. Within this four year period, approximately 105 buildings, some of which were previously owned by the Confederacy, were rented by the Bureau and donated to Georgia's

African-American community specifically to provide surroundings for black education. Furthermore, by July 1870, the Bureau had financed, in part, the construction of over 50 schoolhouses, including Beach Institute at Savannah, expending over \$110, 000.

Consequently, the Bureau's material and monetary contributions created an additional 150 African-American schools in Georgia. Thus, in accordance with Fuke's conclusions, the Bureau facilitated the expansion of African-American schooling, acting as an accelerant to the educational movement already established by the black community of the state. As a ' booster of black schooling,' the Bureau augmented the local efforts of African-Americans into a large-scale movement.

However, whilst Fuke's argument applies to Georgia when generalising the educational movement in the state as a whole, evidence suggests Bureau activities occurred more enthusiastically within urban regions; a distinction not emphasised by Fuke. Reporting on the progress of African-American education for the year of 1866, Alvord noted there were approximately 100 rural counties in Georgia whereby black schoolhouses were yet to be established. Similarly, in July 1868, Alvord commented the educational aid of the Bureau was concentrated ' at the centre,' in towns, as opposed to being ' distributed throughout the entire state.'

Thus, the Bureau had not ' spread a thin blanket of education as widely as possible' in Georgia, as Fuke implies for Maryland. It instead focused its attention upon urban cities, ironically where aid was less needed. This variation can be explained by the differing measures adopted by Bureau

agents in each state. In Maryland, the Bureau's primary aid for African-American education was to provide lumber for the construction of schoolhouses, 60 of which had been established by mid-1866; more than the total constructed by the Georgia Bureau between 1866 and 1870.

Consequently, such donations could be distributed in rural and urban areas, and the Bureau's benevolence was received throughout the state.

Contrastingly, in Georgia, the Bureau preferred to rent existing structures for the purpose of black education. As properties suitable for this function were primarily located within urban areas, the Bureau's educational measures were restricted to cities.

Moreover, Bureau efforts may have been confined to urban Georgia due to practicality. Owing to post-war migration, the African-American population was concentrated within five primary cities: Savannah, Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus and Macon. Concentrating work in such regions maximised the Bureau's efficiency. Aid could be limited to certain areas whilst benefitting a significant proportion of Georgia's African-American community.

Nevertheless, whilst Bureau measures failed to reach the remotest counties of Georgia, and black schools remained relatively sparse in these regions, the agency significantly developed African-American education when examining the state as a whole. Impoverishment would have prevented black society from independently establishing the further 150 schoolhouses organised by the Bureau. Despite the restricted location of its activities, the Bureau proved to be a valuable catalyst in the growth of African-American schooling within Georgia.



However, according with Fuke's conclusion for Maryland, although the Bureau expanded African-American education in Georgia, Bureau schools were not endowments passively bestowed upon African-Americans; they were joint enterprises. Indeed, impetus in the establishment of such schoolhouses still often derived from African-Americans themselves. Whilst the Bureau's financial donations, as previously stated, allowed the construction of approximately 50 black schoolhouses within the state, the initial foundations of these schools were nonetheless created by black society.

The act of Congress dating to July 1866 (providing \$500, 000 for the leasing and repairing of black schools throughout the South), although interpreted by the Bureau to allow the construction of new schoolhouses, meant that African-Americans were required to contribute towards the establishment of such institutions. If Georgia's African-American community could finance and raise the framework of a schoolhouse, the Bureau would 'repair' the structure and subsidise its remaining construction. Accordingly, Bureau money ensured the assembling of schoolhouses. However, it was African-American motivation which prompted them.

Similarly, whilst the additional \$500, 000 appropriated by Congress, March 1867, was non-specific as to its use, and could potentially be utilised to wholly finance the construction of new schools, the Georgia Bureau refused to employ funding in this way. Georgia's officials continued only to pledge monetary support to those who displayed initiative towards education. Thus, throughout 1867, J. R. Lewis, the Georgia Bureau's Superintendent of

Education, authorised financial donations towards the erection of black schoolhouses only if African-Americans had paid for the landsite and had made ‘ progress’ in its construction. Again, while Bureau funding allowed the creation of these schools, their impetus still derived from African-Americans themselves.

Fundamentally, the Bureau simply provided subsidy for the completion of a process already commenced by the African-American community. This role of the agency can be perceived as a microcosm of the wider educational context in Georgia; the Freedmen’s Bureau developed the existing foundations of African-American education, serving as a catalyst within a movement formed by black society.

Furthermore, African-American schools within premises rented by the Bureau were likewise cooperative institutions in which the agency and Georgia’s black community contributed. As the Bureau provided financial support for leasing properties, African-Americans desired to do ‘ all they possibly can to help themselves’ regarding maintenance of the schools; a challenge which, according to Alvord, was met with ‘ enthusiasm.’ Despite impoverishment, African-Americans were ‘ willing to pay’ for the secondary expenses of Bureau schools and ‘ liberally’ donated money for the purchase of school equipment, as well as building repairs.

Moreover, as the Georgia Bureau’s finances dwindled, the responsibility of subsidising Bureau schools fell increasingly to African-Americans themselves. As early as August 1867, the Bureau reported a lack of monetary reserves, stating ‘ the small fund of last year has been exhausted.... funds are very

limited indeed.’ Consequently, in order to continue black tuition in such schoolhouses, Lewis informed teachers they must ‘rely on the colored people’ to provide money for rent. In response, the black community ‘contributed more than ever before, though struggling with debts,’ and henceforth assumed a ‘large share’ of the cost. In the six months from January to July, 1869, African-Americans expended approximately \$20,000 renting school property. By July 1870, the Bureau ceased its educational work throughout the South for want of funds, leaving African-Americans in Bureau schools to manage them self-sufficiently.

Thus, although African-Americans could not afford to rent property in the initial years of Reconstruction and required the Bureau’s financial support to expand black schooling, such benevolence was not accepted passively. Despite impoverishment, African-Americans contributed money, demonstrating commitment towards education. Indeed, as Bureau funds declined, the black community accepted more of the financial burden to sustain their schools. Consequently, African-American education within Georgia was not merely ‘left to the Freedmen’s Bureau’ even after its inauguration.

Accordingly, as argued by Fuke for Maryland, the Bureau was vital to the growth of black education in Georgia. The agency advanced schooling where African-Americans themselves were unable to, providing a further 150 schoolhouses throughout the state. Without this aid, African-American schooling would have been more sporadic than it already was. Thus, likewise to its role in Maryland, the Bureau enhanced the existing foundations of

African-American education, serving as a catalyst to a movement inaugurated by the black community; a process which occurred, however, more intensely within urban Georgia.

Nonetheless, in accordance with Fuke's conclusion, to attribute all praise to the Freedmen's Bureau, as previous scholarship has chosen to, denies the altruistic and self-sacrificing efforts of the black community towards their education. Although the Bureau expanded African-American schooling, Georgia's black population did not adopt a passive position in this development. Bureau schools were joint institutions. Indeed, the impetus for such schoolhouses often derived from African-Americans themselves and, once established, the black community willingly contributed funds to sustain their tuition.

### **Chapter Three**

#### Northern Benevolent Associations

Previous scholarship concerning Reconstruction Georgia argues that, in conjunction with the Freedmen's Bureau, Northern Benevolent Associations were 'entirely responsible' for establishing African-American education. Yet this conclusion does not take into consideration the foundations created by African-Americans themselves. Contrastingly, for the state of Maryland, Fuke has demonstrated that, as African-American schooling derived from the grassroots of black society, Northern whites instead served as facilitators to African-American education; the Bureau expanded black schooling and Northern Benevolence enhanced the standard of teaching available to the African-American community.

Likewise to his conclusion of the Bureau's role, Fuke's argument regarding Northern aid societies is applicable to this case-study of Georgia. Whilst African-American education was inaugurated by the black community, and supported by the Bureau, there were limits to what African-American teachers, who were devoid of formal schooling preceding the Civil War, could achieve independently. Although many acquired a degree of literacy in the pre-bellum era, their understanding was frequently basic and, consequently, inaccurate information was imparted. Thus, by transporting qualified educators to Georgia and establishing higher education within the state, Northern aid societies augmented the quality of African-American tuition.

Prior to Northern benevolence, African-Americans, in both rural and urban Georgia, resourcefully utilised members of the black community who had obtained literary skills in the ante-bellum era as educators of the race. Indeed, as observed by Alvord, the black population were quick to 'communicate to each other what they already know [sic]' in the months following Georgia's surrender. However, while literate African-Americans became teachers in an effort to 'uplift their brethren,' the education offered was often of a low standard.

Within correspondence received by the Bureau, the spelling and grammar of black instructors is frequently poor. A letter composed by Eeli, who organised a school in rural Marietta, 1865, illustrates this concept when informing the Bureau of the 'follering reports:' there were 95 'knowne' pupils who were 'tort' in a schoolhouse which had 'bin' organised since August and was owned by the 'collard' Baptists. Similarly, Reverend Rucker of Marietta

concluded a school report by acknowledging his scanty literary skills: ‘ if my reporte is not right...you will pleas look over that and forgive.’ Furthermore, in rural Greensborough, African-American teacher Charles Brown enquired whether the Bureau could provide slates and pencils ‘ if posibel.’ Similarly, in urban Savannah, black instructors displayed only basic knowledge of writing. Maria Jones, who established a school in the city, July 1865, could spell accurately, yet possessed little understanding of grammar: ‘ I am colored teacher. Have been teaching since July.’

Accordingly, a ‘ smattering of education’ attained in the pre-bellum era was considered enough to qualify a black teacher; those with literary skills, however limited, were beacons to their illiterate counterparts. However, whilst these instructors could educate fellow African-Americans in their ABC’s, inaccurate habits, such as those manifested in Bureau letters, would have been transferred to students. Consequently, only the rudiments of literacy could be imparted independently within the black community and, even then, they were done so imperfectly.

Georgia’s first African-American teachers were therefore perceived by Northern whites, government and benevolent, as inept. Following a tour of the state, mid-1866, J. R. Lewis commented black teachers were ‘ incompetent...[and] could scarcely read,’ a belief echoed by NEFAS/AMA representatives. By 1869, Lewis’ opinion had not altered: their ‘ ignorance’ generally did ‘ more harm than good.’ Similarly, Alvord considered African-American educators to be ‘ poorly prepared’ as they instructed ‘ only in the alphabet’.

Consequently, from late-1865 to 1870, approximately 370 qualified Northern teachers were transported to Georgia by philanthropic associations, primarily the AMA and NEFAS; a process which likewise occurred in Maryland and South Carolina. Fundamentally, these teachers enhanced black education where African-Americans could not. Unlike their African-American counterparts, white instructors had completed higher education and possessed experience in the classroom. Lucy and Sarah Chase, transported by NEFAS to Savannah, December 1865, were ‘ of the highest rank of New England’s ladies’ and had ‘ proven themselves’ as talented teachers. Similarly, Linda Jacobs, likewise sent to the city by NEFAS, had ‘ demonstrated her ability to fill any place you may assign her.’ Moreover, the AMA sponsored Miss Meye, ‘ an experienced teacher,’ and a male ‘ normal school graduate’ to teach within Georgia. Such educators, according to Alvord, were ‘ competent in every respect;’ a contrast to poorly prepared black instructors.

Moreover, alongside superior scholarship, Northern white teachers were equipped with educational resources that African-American teachers lacked, further enhancing the standard of teaching available to black society. African-American schoolhouses established and maintained independently were frequently devoid of academic textbooks. While some black teachers utilised the Bible as a primer, the text was too advanced and proved ineffectual for this purpose. White educators transported to Georgia, however, furnished ‘ a large quantity of scholar’s books.’ Teachers sponsored by NEFAS taught with Progressive Readers and those supported by the AMA used Wilson’s Primary Speller, Fetter’s Primary Arithmetic and McGuffey’s

Reader. These textbooks were based upon the primary curriculum of Northern common schools and thus provided a more academically enriching classroom environment compared to the self-sufficient endeavours of the black community.

By transporting teachers and resources to Georgia, benevolent associations ensured short-term improvement in the quality of African-American tuition. In receiving a better education themselves, Northern instructors progressed African-American schooling beyond the standard taught independently within black society. Furthermore, in contrast to the informal efforts of black teachers, primers standardised African-American instruction, providing a solid, comprehensive curriculum. Thus, in accordance with Fuke's conclusion for Maryland, aid societies enhanced the quality of black schooling in Georgia, serving as catalysts to African-American education.

However, Fuke generalises this argument making little distinction between urban and rural regions, suggesting Northern munificence was distributed reasonably evenly throughout Maryland. Nonetheless, within Georgia, philanthropic activities demonstrated an 'urban bias' similarly to the Freedmen's Bureau. According to Alvord, educational measures of benevolent associations were concentrated in the 'principal cities.' Furthermore, from late 1865-1870, approximately 70 percent of Northern teachers transported to Georgia were sent to urban areas. This variation between Maryland and Georgia is explicable by the relationship between the Bureau and Northern societies; the Bureau functioned as a central organisation in the educational movement, coordinating the efforts of aid



associations. Thus, it is logical that philanthropic activities within both Georgia and Maryland were directed in the same manner as those of the Bureau within each state.

As an extension to Fuke's conclusions, this case-study of Georgia suggests higher education also benefitted the standard of African-American tuition. In addition to furnishing short term support for black schooling, albeit more so in urban regions, benevolent associations provided long-term assistance to African-American education in Georgia. As established, black teachers who were devoid of professional training could only teach to a limited level. To progress their ability to instruct beyond the rudiments of literacy, these instructors required a better education themselves; a process unachievable within the black community. Accordingly, African-Americans required Northern support in order to 'teach the teachers.'

During the early Reconstruction period, the AMA placed emphasis upon higher education and by 1870 it had established approximately 157 normal schools throughout the South, a number of which located in urban Georgia. Storrs school in Atlanta and Lewis High School in Macon, for example, served as institutions of teacher training whereby black teachers received specialised instruction equivalent to their white counterparts.

The most significant contribution of the AMA, however, was Atlanta University, founded June 1867, at the cost of \$20, 000. Teacher training commenced in 1869, intending to fulfil the 'much needed' work in the state – the 'preparation of black teachers' for African-American schools. By April 1869, the college possessed a normal class of 30 pupils, with an additional

70 scholars expected the following autumn term, all of whom were ‘taught the methods of imparting instruction [for] successful teaching.’ Furthermore, by 1870, the university had educated approximately 70 African-American graduates able to teach to a level comparable to Northern whites.

This new generation of African-American educators could therefore teach to a higher quality than the first black instructors of the state, enabling African-Americans to self-sufficiently progress their education beyond its previously limited level. This was both a preference of Georgia’s black community, for African-Americans preferred to send children to black teachers, as opposed to white, and, increasingly, a necessity as Northern associations became ‘crippled’ for want of funds. Fundamentally, whilst African-Americans independently inaugurated formal black schooling, Northern benevolence allowed black teaching to continue independently.

Accordingly, the conclusion determined by Fuke for Maryland applies to Georgia; Northern aid societies augmented the quality of tuition where African-Americans could not self-sufficiently progress beyond certain limits, serving as catalysts to black education. Whilst literate African-Americans became the first educators of the race, their standard of teaching was restricted. With scanty literary skills themselves, black instructors only imparted basic knowledge. Thus, qualified Northern teachers immediately enhanced the standard of African-American education in Georgia. However, unlike their contemporaries in Maryland, Georgia’s rural black communities were somewhat dismissed. Furthermore, developing Fuke’s argument, higher education in Georgia likewise benefitted the level of black instruction;

African-Americans could independently teach to a higher quality, improving the long-term conditions of black schooling. Whilst black society initiated its own tuition, Northern philanthropy enhanced it.

## **Conclusion**

Scholarship regarding African-American education in the Reconstruction South has transformed during the last 50 years, gradually acknowledging the efforts of African-Americans themselves. However, only recent historiography concludes such schooling derived from black impetus. This argument has been applied, in particular, to Maryland and South Carolina. Jenkins argues African-Americans educated themselves in post-bellum South Carolina in a self-sufficient movement continuing the concealed efforts of the pre-bellum era. Similarly, Fuke demonstrates African-American schooling in Maryland derived from grassroots impetus and Northern whites operated as catalysts within this movement created by black society; the Bureau facilitated its expansion by creating additional schoolhouses and Northern philanthropists enhanced the quality instruction.

This dissertation intended to ascertain how far these combined conclusions apply to Georgia. Evidently, research suggests the educational movement in Georgia did largely accord with its counterparts in South Carolina and Maryland, with one exception; variations in the concentration of educational efforts are apparent. Nevertheless, the inauguration of formal black schooling in post-bellum Georgia, likewise to Maryland and South Carolina, can be attributed to the African-American community. This process, as concluded by Jenkins, commenced in the period preceding the Civil War.

Despite legislation prohibiting instruction of African-Americans in Georgia, numerous individuals, slave and free alike, pursued their desire for education, acquiring a degree of literacy. Whilst this process occurred throughout the state, it was more challenging for rural African-Americans to obtain literary skills. Developing these foundations, African-Americans with even a modicum of knowledge became the first educators of the race in post-bellum Georgia. To accommodate such tuition, the black community exploited resources in its possession, organising formal schoolhouses prior to Northern white intervention. Indeed, 75 independently established and maintained schools existed by the summer of 1865. Essentially, African-Americans taught each other whatever they knew and wherever they could.

This educational movement was a continuation of pre-bellum efforts; formerly clandestine activity prior to the Civil War merely manifested itself visibly in post-bellum Georgia. Accordingly, the conclusions of Fuke and Jenkins apply to the state: formal African-American schooling was inaugurated independently by the black community. However, whereas their research suggests rural African-Americans were more motivated in establishing black schoolhouses, the antithesis occurred in Georgia; with fewer opportunities in the ante-bellum countryside to acquire education, fewer individuals could be utilised as teachers in the early Reconstruction period. Nevertheless, despite the concentration of educational efforts in urban Georgia, black schooling was initiated throughout the state by African-Americans themselves.

Furthermore, Fuke's conclusions concerning Northern whites in Maryland likewise apply to Georgia, again, however, with one exception. As in Maryland, the Bureau served as a catalyst in Georgia, expanding African-American education. Following the agency's money and material donations, the number of black schoolhouses substantially increased in the state; advancement impoverished African-Americans could not accomplish independently. Nonetheless, despite the similarity of the Bureau's overall influence in both states, a distinction can be ascertained. Whereas aid was distributed throughout Maryland, it was restricted primarily to urban Georgia; a variation explicable by the differing measures favoured by Bureau agents of each state. However, despite urban bias, the Bureau proved a valuable contribution in the growth of African-American schooling when examining Georgia as a whole.

Nevertheless, although the Bureau expanded black schooling in Georgia, African-Americans did not adopt a passive role in this development, likewise to their contemporaries in Maryland. The impetus for Bureau schools frequently derived from the black community and, despite impoverishment, African-Americans sacrificed money towards their education. Bureau schools were therefore cooperative ventures and not endowments.

Moreover, Fuke's argument regarding Northern philanthropy in Maryland likewise applies to Georgia with one exception. Similarly to their role in Maryland, aid societies augmented the quality of black tuition in Georgia, serving as facilitators to the state's educational movement. Whilst literate African-Americans became the first educators of the race, their standard of

instruction was limited. Thus, by transporting qualified teachers to Georgia, Northern munificence enhanced the level of instruction available to black society. However, although the influence of Northern benevolence was similar in Maryland and Georgia, a distinction can be determined; educational activities were distributed throughout Maryland yet concentrated predominantly in urban Georgia. This pattern, within both states, echoes the measures of the Bureau. As the Bureau coordinated the efforts of Northern associations, it is logical their activities were directed in the same manner as those of the agency itself.

Extending Fuke's conclusion, higher education within Georgia further developed the standard of African-American tuition. By providing black teachers with professional training equivalent to their white counterparts, the AMA allowed African-Americans to teach to a higher standard than the level previously attained. Whilst African-Americans independently inaugurated black schooling, Northern benevolence allowed black teaching to continue independently.

Accordingly, although discrepancies between the rural and urban experience are apparent when comparing Georgia to Maryland and South Carolina, the educational movement in Georgia, when examining the state as a whole, largely accords with the combined conclusions determined by Fuke and Jenkins; formal African-American schooling in the Reconstruction period was inaugurated self-sufficiently and Northern whites did act as catalysts within this process established by black society.