

Mark S. Mitchell. A HISTORY OF THE BLACK POPULATION OF NEW BERN, NORTH CAROLINA, 1862-1872. (Under the direction of Dr. Charles L. Price) Department of History, East Carolina University.

The purpose of this study is to trace the development of the freedmen community in New Bern, North Carolina during Reconstruction. The period selected encompasses the decade following Federal occupation of the town in March, 1862. The main objective is to underline the achievements of the black population in building its own community after the war.

In addition, this study examines the early history of Trent village, a black suburb which grew up outside the town during the war. This community was different from New Bern in that its population, except for a few Northern missionaries and military officials, was entirely black. For this and other reasons, it did not develop in the same manner as the freedmen community in New Bern. The two black societies are compared and contrasted in terms of social composition, residential structure, and political participation.

The presence of Federal occupation troops in New Bern exacerbated the problem of a Southern society in a state of collapse. Five separate incidents involving black soldiers and whites occurred in 1865. As in the rest of the South, rumor--unfounded as it turned out--spread among New Bern whites that a Negro insurrection was planned for Christmas, 1865. Part of the problem was the new treatment whites had to accord

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blacks. Sidewalks and markets, once for whites only, had to be shared with an unending stream of apparently idle freedmen.

Despite these misunderstandings and fears, no major flare-ups occurred. This was partly due to the fact that whites were greatly outnumbered. Moreover, white New Bernians wanted no trouble which would lead to further Federal intervention.

The development of a black community was one of the most enduring aspects of the change from slave to freedman. New Bern blacks built their own churches, established schools, and formed fire companies, social clubs, and aid societies.

Education was considered an important means of acquiring the tools for citizenship. Blacks flocked to Freedmen's Bureau and missionary schools. However, when Northern zeal for helping the freedmen waned, Negro enrollment declined.

Blacks eagerly entered into marriage as proof of their freedom, and the family became a strong and stabilizing factor in the development of the community. Kinship ties were strengthened by adopting the extended family structure, the predominant residential pattern among New Bern Negroes.

The large number of Negroes in the town created problems of poverty and disease. The Freedmen's Bureau was forced to issue rations to relieve suffering, although most whites, and many Bureau agents, felt that this encouraged dependence.

Most whites thought the solution was to get rid of the surplus population by inducing freedmen to return to the plantations. In June, 1866, the Bureau cut off all rations except to the most needy. Many idlers did leave, but this act also created hardship and suffering among those who stayed. The Bureau did help to get the Southern economy moving again by promoting the use of written contracts between freedmen and landowners.

Historians have focused on the Trent village because of adverse publicity it received due to charges of tyranny directed against the camp's superintendent. There is evidence of oppression against blacks, but the matter was handled by the local Bureau office, not by the inspection committee sent South by President Andrew Johnson to dig up dirt against the Bureau. The survival of this village was one of the more remarkable events of Reconstruction and was a tribute to the freedmen's desire to establish their own community.

In 1870, New Bern was sixty-five percent black; Wildwood township, which consisted largely of Trent village, was ninety-five percent black. The population of the two communities was otherwise similar in composition. Children under twelve made up one-fourth the number of freedmen in each town. The shortage of males was not as acute in Wildwood as in New Bern, where fifty-eight percent of the population was female. Both were lower than the national average in numbers of the very young and very old. Ninety-four percent of the residential

structures in Wildwood were family dwellings, seventy-five percent in New Bern. Only a small number in either community were one-parent homes.

Two-thirds of the black males in both communities were employed in unskilled occupations. In New Bern, another one-quarter had marketable skills and earned livings as craftsmen. There was some competition between blacks and whites in the skilled trades, but most black artisans were engaged in providing for their own community. Wildwood was not as economically sophisticated as New Bern; thus, there was less need for many craftsmen. Six percent worked at skilled trades. However, a larger number of Wildwood males owned their own farms than in New Bern.

Opportunities for female employment were limited in each town. Most stayed at home and kept house. In New Bern, over a third were employed in unskilled occupations; in Wildwood, one-quarter.

Blacks in New Bern and Wildwood achieved recognition of their rights as citizens: slavery was abolished, they received the right to vote, the right to testify in court, jury representation, and equal treatment before the law.

They played an active role in ensuring local Republican control. However, they depended upon white Republican political guidance. Whites held most important positions in the city, although many blacks played an important part in both local

and state politics. Politically, Wildwood males followed the guidance of both whites and New Bern freedmen.

A HISTORY OF THE BLACK POPULATION
OF NEW BERN, NORTH CAROLINA, 1862-1872

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Reconstruction era has been the subject of much study and controversy, historians focusing not only on the impact of the post-Civil War period on the South as a whole but also on its effects on the individual states. The purpose of this study will be to narrow further the area for consideration by concentrating on the impact of the war and Reconstruction on the development of the freedmen community of New Bern, North Carolina. Attention will be focused on the evolution of the black urban experience during the decade following Federal occupation of the town in March, 1862.

Before the war North Carolina's societal structure was similar to that of its southern neighbors. Although not a large plantation state, in 1860, 34,658 North Carolina families owned 331,658 slaves, bondsmen comprising almost one-third the total population (992,622). In addition, there were 30,463 free Negroes; however, this class had been declining proportionally since 1830. Small slaveowners, merchants, manufacturers, yeomen farmers, mechanics, tradesmen, laborers, and even the "poor white trash" aspired to move upward into the planter-gentry class, where wealth was generally measured in terms of numbers of slaves and extent of landholdings.¹

¹Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, North Carolina: The History of a Southern State (Chapel Hill, 1954), 395-396, hereinafter cited as Lefler and Newsome, History of a Southern State.

The need to protect this societal structure was one of the pressures which forced the state into the war in May, 1861.

Once the fighting began North Carolina coastal towns were surprisingly easy prey for Union forces, except, that is, for Wilmington, which remained open to Confederate blockade runners until early 1865. Expeditions led by Generals Benjamin F. Butler and Ambrose E. Burnside captured Hatteras Inlet in August, 1861, and proceeded to take Roanoke Island (February 8, 1862), New Bern (March 14), Washington (March 21), Fort Macon (April 26) and Plymouth (December 13). Much of this area was held throughout the war, although it was not exploited to disrupt Confederate supply lines.²

New Bern, the largest town in the occupied area, immediately became the goal of thousands of runaway slaves who soon swelled the city to several times its normal size. Here on January 1, 1863, under the terms of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation,³ they found freedom. In Washington, Congress meanwhile debated measures to provide for their care. In January and again in December, 1863, Representative Thomas Eliot of Massachusetts introduced bills to create a Bureau of Emancipation to care for the 300,000 Negroes already under government protection.

While Congress considered this proposal, General Butler,

²Lefler and Newsome, History of a Southern State, 432.

³Willie Lee Rose, Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment (Indianapolis, 1964), 185-186, 196.

commander of Union forces in Virginia and North Carolina, appointed Lieutenant Colonel J. Burnham Kinsman "general superintendent of negro affairs." Under Kinsman were four regional superintendents, including Chaplain Horace James who became Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina, with headquarters in New Bern. James was to take a census of Negroes in his district, secure employment, and provide medical care, food, and shelter.⁴

Although Eliot's "Emancipation Bureau" bill narrowly passed the House in March, 1864, Senate debate delayed final passage until March 3, 1865. What emerged was the expanded Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands. Oliver Otis Howard, Union commander of the Army of Tennessee, was appointed Commissioner, taking office May 12, 1865. Eliphalet Whittlesey, minister, professor, and Howard's judge advocate during the war, became the first of six Assistant Commissioners for North Carolina.⁵

The newly created Federal agency had its hands full, for the trickle of slaves to the cities became a steady flow at the war's end. In North Carolina thousands of black refugees were stranded in cities such as Wilmington and New Bern, in "contraband camps" on Roanoke Island and at Trent River, and elsewhere, dependent upon government guidance and support.

⁴George R. Bentley, A History of the Freedmen's Bureau (Philadelphia, 1955), 25, 36-37, hereinafter cited as Bentley, Freedmen's Bureau.

⁵Bentley, Freedmen's Bureau, 51-52.

In 1865 and 1866, this assistance took the form of humanitarian relief, protection of rights, and regulation of labor contracts. When Congress took over Reconstruction planning in 1867, the Freedmen's Bureau was called upon to ensure the freedmen's entrance into Southern politics. Through 1868, the Freedmen's Bureau, assisted by Northern Christian and philanthropic societies, helped to maintain the welfare of the North Carolina Negro. On January 1, 1869, the Bureau suspended all but education and veterans' pension assistance. From 1869 until 1872, when Congress decided to discontinue the Bureau, the agency operated on a shoestring budget so limited that it eventually ran out of funds.⁶

However, it is not a primary purpose in studying the New Bern freedmen community to judge the work of the Freedmen's Bureau agents and Christian missionaries who came South to minister to the needs of the ex-slaves, although certain observations in this area will be necessary. Rather, the main focus will be to underline the achievements of the black population in building its own community after the war. It is hoped that this study of one group of freedmen may serve as a microcosm of the attempts of blacks throughout the South to establish their own institutions and societies. Three major areas will be discussed: social conditions, economics,

⁶ John A. Garraty, The American Nation: A History of the United States to 1877 (New York, 1966), 509-511, hereinafter cited as Garraty, The American Nation; Bentley, Freedmen's Bureau, 200-212.

and politics.

The Civil War turned the South upside down; not only was there economic chaos, but society seemed to have collapsed as well. It was only natural for Southerners, black and white, to feel extremely insecure about their futures. The restoration of order and the establishment of a new relationship between the two races evolved slowly. Meanwhile, blacks had to establish institutions and organizations to take care of their religious, social, and political needs.

Many conclusions can be drawn from a break-down of the composition of the black population into such categories as percentage of total population, division of freedmen by age and by sex, and residence statistics of the Negro community. These figures, by interpretation, yield information on more general social questions such as whether there was a dependence on government handouts due to an imbalance in male-female or in age ratios. These figures also reveal the nature of family life among the ex-slaves. What emerges is an outline of the Negro population of the town.

Several economic questions must be considered. In the aftermath of the war, New Bern found itself with a large number of the available Negro laborers in that part of the state. This surplus created many problems, chief among which were poverty and disease. Moreover, resettlement or assimilation would be a slow and painful process. Like Southern society the masterplan for a postwar Southern economy had to be developed step by step.

The black's political status also had to be determined. Once a policy of emancipation was decided upon, this set in motion the whole system of legal devices to define the ex-slave's role in the political system.

In addition, this study will trace the early history of Trent village, a black suburb which grew up outside the town during the war. This community was different from New Bern in that its population, except for a few Northern missionaries and military officials, was entirely black. For this and other reasons it did not develop in the same manner as the community of New Bern freedmen. An attempt will be made to compare and contrast the two black societies in terms of social composition, residential structure, economic potential, and political participation.

CHAPTER II

A SOCIAL OVERVIEW

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Before the Civil War, the South was composed of three elements: whites, slaves, and free Negroes. Within the cities, the number of free Negroes was much smaller than the number of slaves, while slaves were greatly outnumbered by urban whites. As early as 1820, such cities as Baltimore, New Orleans, and Washington, D. C. had become magnets for emancipated slaves. Nevertheless, even in these cities the number of Negroes did not approximate the white population.¹

In contrast, the population of New Bern, North Carolina, in 1860 was evenly balanced between blacks and whites. According to the Federal census of that year, the town included² 2,361 whites, 2,306 slaves, and 675 free Negroes. The city's harbor at the confluence of the Trent and Neuse rivers served as a state port of entry through which were shipped large quantities of grain, lumber, tar, turpentine, and other products. Many white residents, some of whom owned plantations but preferred to reside in the city, owned small but valuable groups of slaves who were set to work about the town as common hands,

¹Richard C. Wade, Slavery in the Cities, 1820-1860 (New York, 1964), 325-327, hereinafter cited as Wade, Slavery in the Cities.

²Craven County Census lists, Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the 8th Census, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior (Washington, 1864), microfilm, volume 5, roll 966, hereinafter cited as 1860 Census, Craven County.

dock laborers, or factory workers, or who were sent out to nearby farms to harvest tobacco, corn, turpentine, and other crops. Most free blacks, on the other hand, earned scanty livings as domestics, washerwomen, seamstresses, dockworkers, or common laborers. A few, however, worked at such trades as coopering, smithing, carpentry, or caulking, which required a basic knowledge of certain skills.

Wealth, real and personal, rested securely with whites. Only a few free blacks owned significant amounts of land within the city. Balsam Jones, a carpenter residing in the fifth ward, owned properties valued at \$1,000, as did William Potipha, a railroad engineer who also lived in that section of town. Caroline Hill, a washerwoman, had deeds to properties worth \$1,000, but she, like Jones and Potipha, was exceptional.³ No other black owned as much as \$600 in property. Most owned no more than the small dwellings in which they lived, if indeed they did not rent or board with friends or relatives.

Residential segregation was unnecessary since political and economic controls were sufficiently strong to ensure at least outward submission. Nevertheless, as in most antebellum communities, a "clustering" effect, in which a few streets had become solidly black, had already developed. Blacks had not begun to move to the periphery of the city, as had been the case in most Southern cities.⁴ This would be the pattern

³1860 Census, Craven County.

⁴Wade, Slavery in the Cities, 275-277; 1860 Census, Craven County.

of postwar New Bern, as the years of war and Federal occupation produced permanent changes in the residential structure of the community.

Less than a year after North Carolina followed her sister states into the Confederacy, the town fell into Union hands. Northern strategists hoped to use the port as a vantage point from which to threaten the key railroad supply line in Goldsboro, sixty miles inland. White inhabitants of the city had been warned daily by the vehemently secessionist New Bern⁵ Progress that Union forces were preparing for attack, but they did not expect the total collapse of Confederate defenses that followed. When the Union troops first appeared several miles up the Trent Road, white residents panicked, dropped everything, packed a few trunks, and, as one contemporary described the confusion, left "dinners cooking, doors open,⁶ and everything to give our Northern friends a feast." So swift was the victory that the Northern army captured one hundred pieces of cannon, later used to fortify the town against Confederate attack, and thousands of barrels of tur-⁷ pentine.

⁵New Bern Progress, February 28, March 1, 3, 1862, hereinafter cited as Progress.

⁶Mary Norcott Bryan, A Grandmother's Recollection of Dixie (New Bern, n. d.), 25.

⁷David L. Craft to David L. Craft, Sr., March 18, 1862, David Lucius Craft Papers, Manuscript Department, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Craft Papers.

With their masters gone and Confederate soldiers hastily retreating, the blacks began to celebrate. Before General Ambrose Burnside could secure the area, the Negroes had overrun the town, unburdening many of the elegant houses of furniture and fine wardrobes. Although Burnside maintained in his report of the battle that nine-tenths of the pillaging was committed by blacks,⁸ Union forces eagerly shared in "picking up a few relics of Secessia"⁹ to take back North.

For a time chaos ruled. Foundries, machine shops, stores, warehouses, and dwellings lay in ruins, while a portion of the town smouldered for weeks. Few businesses remained open, although the resin factories, manned and managed by blacks,¹⁰ continued to supply naval stores for the Union war effort. White flags hung from street posts and at the homes of those few whites who had remained.¹¹ On every street corner Negroes gathered to watch the troops move through or to bask in their first moments of unthreatened idleness. Order was slow to be

⁸Report of General Ambrose E. Burnside, March 21, 1862, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1894-1927), I, 29, 199, hereinafter cited as Official Records.

⁹David L. Craft to Lucy Craft, March 18, 1862, Craft Papers.

¹⁰Oliver Spoor diary, entry for October 27, 1862, Oliver Spoor Collection, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Spoor Collection.

¹¹Regimental Record of Co. A, 25th Mass Vols, March 14, 1862, Samuel Henry Putnam Papers, Manuscript Department, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

restored, and once news of the Northern victory spread throughout the countryside, the city became a haven for runaway slaves. By April, 1864, the black population had risen to 8,661 from a prewar total of 2,981. More than 6,400 had been slaves at the outbreak of hostilities. In January, 1865, the number stood at 10,782.¹² Many others had been transferred from New Bern to refugee camps on Roanoke Island. Those in New Bern crowded behind Union inner defenses due to the constant fear of a Confederate attempt to recapture the city. Many were put to work in building forts and other fortifications, defenses which played a large part in thwarting two Confederate attempts to retake the town.¹³

Even after Appomattox, coastal towns continued to attract former slaves anxious to leave old ways and curious about the world outside the plantation. By April, 1865, some 15,000 blacks were said to be living in New Bern or on its outskirts.¹⁴ One year later, this number had not been

¹²Reverend Horace James, Annual Report of the Superintendent of Negro Affairs, 1864-1865 (Boston, 1865), 3-4, hereinafter cited as James, Negro Affairs.

¹³Vincent Colyer, Brief Report of the Services Rendered by the Freed People of the U. S. Army in North Carolina: in the Spring of 1862, after the Battle of New Bern (Boston, 1867), 7, hereinafter cited as Colyer, Report of Services by the Freed People of the U. S. Army in NC.

¹⁴New Bern Sun Journal, July 2, 1976, reprint of a first person account by Mrs. F. C. Roberts in Carolina and the Cross, July, 1914; Reverend Stephen W. Laidler to S. S. Jocelyn, March 16, 1866, American Missionary Association Archives, North Carolina, Amistad Research Center, Dillard University, New Orleans, Louisiana, microfilm, roll 2, hereinafter cited as AMA Archives, NC.

significantly reduced, despite Southern protests and Freedmen's Bureau efforts to disperse the population. In January, 1867, for example, the Journal of Commerce noted that the total population of the city was 8,000, or an increase of almost fifty percent since 1860. Nevertheless, within three years, the city's population had declined and in 1870 was only slightly higher at 5,743 than the 1860 figure of 5,342. Yet, the number of blacks had risen to 3,724, an increase of twenty-two percent. Meanwhile, whites numbered only 2,019, a decrease of seventeen percent. New Bern, statistically,¹⁵ by 1870 was predominantly black.

Some white residents had trickled back into town during the early months of Union occupation. On March 22, 1862, the New Bern Progress, under new pro-Union management, reported that many of the citizens and merchants were beginning to return. Soon the paper announced that the city was bustling with business, although it admitted that a general lack of confidence prevailed among many members of the economic community.¹⁶ There is no clear evidence, however, that a great number of whites were anxious to come back while the war continued.

¹⁵ New Bern Journal of Commerce, January 24, 1867, hereinafter cited as Journal of Commerce; Craven County Census lists, 9th Census, The Statistics of the Population of the United States, embracing the Tables of Race, Nationality, Sex, Selected Ages and Occupations (Washington, 1872), microfilm, volume 6, roll 1132, hereinafter cited as 1870 Census, Craven County.

¹⁶ Progress, May 25, 1862.

With peace, the number of native whites increased noticeably, prompting the North Carolina Times to comment:

Many of our former residents are returning to their homes and trades. It reminds us of happier days when New Bern yielded the palm to no city in the South, or the country. We hope to see the occasion when they though now ruined in estate may again be prosperous, contented and happy.¹⁷

Peace and prosperity were not that easily achieved. With the town in the hands of Union forces and blacks and whites unsure of their futures, tensions were high as the two races attempted to establish a new postwar social order. Whites were confused and demoralized and felt threatened by reports of violence in other areas. Many felt fear and bitterness at the newfound boldness of the black, especially when they overheard more militant black leaders urging revenge. Nor did the presence of a large number of Negro soldiers serve to promote harmony.

According to many whites, it was bad enough when Northerners patrolled the streets. When not fighting and particularly after the war, there was not much for the soldier to do but sit and wait and not much else to do when waiting but to drink. Therefore, it was common for the troops, when they could obtain enough whiskey, to get drunk and wander into town for a good time. Conditions often got so bad that local military authorities were forced to prohibit troops from leaving

¹⁷North Carolina Times (New Bern), May 12, 1865, herein-after cited as Times.

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the garrison after dark.

Liquor was not needed to inflame passions when it came to Negro soldiers, for the mere sight of black troops patrolling the streets was enough to stir the anger of whites. The North Carolina Times summed up these feelings in an editorial, stating that "the presence of negro troops in the South is offensive to our citizens and is a badge of humiliation."¹⁹ Between the months of May and October, 1865, five separate incidents involving black soldiers and white citizens or local police were recorded. The most serious occurred on August 9, when police attempting to arrest two New Bern blacks were surrounded by a large crowd of Negro soldiers who forced the constables to release their prisoners. Once the sheriff was informed, a police guard was assembled and marched to the scene of the confrontation. By this time the soldiers had been joined by friends, and the street was completely blocked. Threats were exchanged and weapons drawn. A shot rang out from the police ranks, hitting no one. This scattered the black troops and spared both sides from bloodshed. The entire community breathed a sigh of relief when the regiment was mustered out and left

¹⁸Progress, March 26, 1862; Diary of Charles A. Tournier, entry for May 23, 1865, New Bern Historical Collection, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.

¹⁹Times, September 18, 1865.

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the city.

The cause of insecurity was much deeper than the presence of Negro patrols. Law and order were slow to return to the countryside, and law enforcement was primitive at best. The city was beset by thieves, while lawless bands apparently roamed at will beyond the town limits. Reverend Stephen W. Laidler, a Northern missionary, was told by a friend that everyone was carrying a revolver and that "he dare not let it be known that he does not."²¹ Few people were brave enough to venture outside after dark since the streets remained unlit, despite appeals by the press to have the gas works refitted and new lights installed.²² Organized bands of robbers plagued the community, especially during the summers of 1866 and 1869, and periodically the press and local leaders urged the police to close down various grogeries and gambling houses which served as headquarters for these gangs.²³

In the months after the war, the North Carolina Times aggravated tensions by informing its readers that a black

²⁰Times, May 19, June 5, August 9, September 16, October 30, 1865.

²¹Reverend Stephen W. Laidler to S. S. Jocelyn, March 16, 1866, AMA Archives, NC, roll 2.

²²Times, May 22, 1865; Journal of Commerce, October 30, 1866, September 1, 1869.

²³John Robert Kirkland, "Federal Troops in North Carolina During Reconstruction" (Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1964), 226. See also Times, August 21, 1866, June 22, 1869.

insurrection could be expected by Christmas, 1865. Whites were warned to prepare by arming to protect their homes. The paper pointed out that "the Negroes are doing it, and if anyone doubts it, let him go to the different dealers in powder, lead, caps, and firearms in New Bern and see for himself." Immediately thereafter, several black leaders appeared at the editor's office and assured him of the peaceful intentions of most Negroes. Reverend James W. Hood, pastor of the A. M. E. Zion Church and later state Assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction, added that such editorials served no other purpose than to inflame the public. Such rumors, he maintained, were put forward by certain whites who desired a pretext for depriving blacks of rights which they now enjoyed. Nevertheless, the journal added that while it might be true that most blacks were law abiding, if any Negro revolt occurred it would be suppressed immediately and forcibly.²⁴

Although no black insurrection appeared, the fear of mob violence remained. Rumors spread that by June, 1866, southerners in the eastern counties had enlisted four hundred militia for the purpose of putting down any Negro uprising. At the same time, whites believed that blacks, with the advice and assistance of Captain William Weigel of the Freedmen's Bureau in New Bern, were quietly arming and considering the

²⁴Times, December 12, 15, 16, 1865.

formation of their own militia.

Despite these allegations, the Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau in North Carolina in his Annual Report in October, 1866, was able to report:

In general the feeling among whites and blacks in the Eastern District is as good as can be expected under the circumstances. In some cases the Negroes distrust the whites still but the situation will soon be corrected when the rights of blacks are recognized.²⁶

These rumors underlined the racial animosity and misunderstanding that was prevalent among whites. Partly this was due to the new treatment they had to accord to blacks. Sidewalks and market squares, once reserved for whites only, now had to be shared. Newspapers complained of crowds of idlers blocking thoroughfares so that "ladies and others were compelled to force their way through." Police were encouraged to disperse the vagrants or set them to work on the streets.²⁷ Then there was ration day, when needy blacks lined up outside the Freedmen's Bureau office to receive provisions. Whites complained that "the streets were thronged with all sizes, ages, sexes, and shades of complexion carrying boxes, bags, and every conceivable thing to hold their booty,

²⁵Times, December 22, 1865.

²⁶Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner, October 30, 1866, Reports of Operations, 1866-1867, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for North Carolina, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives, Washington, D. C., microfilm, roll 22, hereinafter cited as Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC.

²⁷Journal of Commerce, October 26, 1869.

reminding one of an antique and horrible display so often
witnessed in Northern cities and towns on national holidays." ²⁸

Some whites were more blunt about their feelings toward the freedmen. The North Carolina Times, for example, offered the following opinion on the subject of equality:

It is a foolish effort to make it appear that one man is as good as another. This violates a fixed law of nature and will override and break down a law of God as firmly fixed and as well defined as any single one of His Divine enactments.²⁹

According to the Times, blacks were naturally indolent and carefree and incapable of self-support. The Negro's newfound freedom, it was felt, would be his undoing, for only ³⁰
"100 years would suffice to sweep them from the continent."

There were those who urged moderation. Even the Times softened its stand once it understood the South's dependence upon black labor. However, the years of slavery had left fears which were not easily forgotten.

As mentioned, in 1860 the town displayed little residential segregation other than a few areas in which several streets were solidly black. No other totally black districts existed. By 1870, however, a definite pattern of racial separation had developed. Two large black communities hovered around the predominantly white business section of the city. One of these was situated west of Hancock Street down New Street to

²⁸Times, May 2, 1866.

²⁹Times, April 5, 1866.

³⁰Times, May 2, 1866.

George, down George to the city boundary. The other black section was Trent village or James City, across the Trent River. The black district within the city comprised wards five, six, and seven. As Figure 1 indicates, within this area blacks outnumbered whites by 2,805 to 549, or over five to one.

Figure 1: Population of New Bern, North Carolina, 1870,
By Race and By Ward³¹

<u>WARD</u>	<u>WHITE</u>	<u>BLACK</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
1	531	145	676
2	362	255	617
3	346	292	638
4	231	227	458
5	404	1,025	1,429
6	78	1,296	1,374
7	67	484	551
TOTALS	2,019	3,724	5,743

A major portion of this district had developed during the war as blacks were pressed tighter and tighter behind Union lines. This was in the southwestern part of the city just west of the old Tryon Palace grounds on George Street. Extending for seven square blocks were hundreds of hastily erected splint houses built in rows to form streets. Add to this the several other blocks of the sixth ward, and this

³¹1870 Census, Craven County.

region included 1,296 blacks, or about thirty-five percent³² of the Negro population of the city.

Moreover, as Figure 2 shows, the housing pattern in the predominantly white wards--the first, second, and third--reveals that many blacks were living in white homes as domestic servants.

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Figure 2: Blacks Living in White Homes, 1870

<u>WARD</u>	<u>TOTAL BLACK POPULATION</u>	<u>BLACKS LIVING IN WHITE HOMES</u>	<u>% BLACKS LIVING IN WHITE HOMES</u>
1	145	58	40%
2	255	45	18%
3	292	40	14%
TOTAL	692	143	27%

Others, probably, were living in old slave quarters and working in nearby white homes and businesses. On the other hand, in the other four wards of the city, only thirty-two³⁴ blacks were listed as live-in servants.

Local whites and Freedmen's Bureau agents argued that the black influx left the town with a sizeable number of dependent Negroes. Newspapers pointed out that most blacks were either women, children, or very old men. Young black men, it was reasoned, had left the area to go back into the countryside

³²1870 Census, Craven County.

³³1870 Census, Craven County.

³⁴1870 Census, Craven County.

to work on the plantations or had availed themselves of the opportunity to travel unrestricted. To some extent these charges are true. Of the total black population in New Bern, 25.6% were under the age of twelve, while 12.6% were fifty or older. Another 13.5% were between the ages of twelve and seventeen, and most of these were females. In the prime working ages of eighteen to forty-nine, females numbered 30.7% of the entire population, while males accounted for only 17.7%.

Obviously, there were not enough black men living in the city, and many homes were left without adult males other than grandfathers, uncles, or older brothers. These figures differ somewhat from those of the black population of the United States as a whole. In 1870, 49% of U. S. blacks were male while 51% were female. In New Bern, in 1870, 58.5% were female, and 41.5% were male. Undoubtedly, many males had gone into the country. Many had also remained there all along working at their old occupations. It must also be remembered that due to the devastation and chaos created by the war, the Negro population was understated by as much as ten percent. Much of this understatement may have been due to the fact that many black males were often in transit from job to job to support themselves and their

³⁵Times, August 8, 1865; 1870 Census, Craven County.

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families.

Moreover, the total number of blacks in the "dependent" age categories, under eighteen and over fifty, was less in New Bern than the national average. In the United States as a whole, 49.5% were under eighteen and 7.9% were over fifty, a total of 57.4%. In New Bern, 39.1% were under eighteen with 12.6% over fifty, a total of 51.7%.

Furthermore, charges that the city and national government had to support a large number of dependent mothers are not borne out. Of the 919 dwellings in which blacks lived, 693, or 75.3%, could be termed family units. Such a residence might include more than one family or several generations of the same family, but there was still a sense of kinship. One hundred twelve units were single type residences in which one or several unrelated persons might be living together. The other 114 residences were white homes in which black servants lived and worked. Of the total number of black residential structures, only 72, or less than eight percent, were one parent homes with small children. This is not to say that all other black children lived with both parents, for often a woman with small children might board with relatives, or

³⁶William Loren Katz, ed., Negro Population in the United States, 1790-1915 (New York, 1968); 166, hereinafter cited as Katz, Negro Population; 1870 Census, Craven County.

³⁷Katz, Negro Population, 166; 1870 Census, Craven County.

two such women might live together. Thus, although there was a great deal of emotional strain created by one-parent relationships, this was eased by the extended family structure.

The development of a black society based on groups of families living in a defined community was one of the enduring aspects of the change from slave to freedman. For the first time Southern blacks were able to develop their own institutions. This must have been one of the more rewarding features of postwar Negro life. No longer were blacks limited in social, religious, and education matters. They could build their own churches, open and run their own schools, devise ways to improve themselves and their community, establish social and benevolent organizations, and hold public celebrations. These were important steps. The freedman's self-worth was raised by seeing what he could do when permitted. Whites were forced to look upon blacks as human beings, especially when blacks began to model their institutions and organizations after white society.

These successes were not realized without struggle. The white community was divided in its support of black efforts. Often national organizations and agencies worked at cross purposes and with conflicting objectives. For example, the Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau in North Carolina seemed to be sanctioning the development of black

³⁸1870 Census, Craven County.

communities when he wrote in July, 1865:

Your freedom gives you new privileges. You can live in families. The marriage tie is as sacred among you as your neighbors. As soon as you acquire the means you can have your own homes and continue to improve them in comfort and beauty. You can learn to read and write and you can support schools for your children and sustain your own churches.³⁹

The first part of this statement was directed at the individual freedman. The second part dealt with goals to be achieved by the community of freedmen. Nevertheless, local Bureau agents found it necessary to distinguish between legitimate black communities and those camps in which freedmen were totally dependent on Bureau support. The breaking up of the latter was motivated by a concern for the economic and medical condition of the freedmen, but such actions often served the purposes of local whites whose sole objective was to remove the black population.

Black involvement in community development took many forms. Some organizational work was aimed at providing needed services. As early as the summer of 1865, freedmen had manned and equipped their own fire company, the Reliance Fire Brigade. Composed mostly of volunteers, the force provided as much security as was possible considering the circumstances in which many blacks lived. Often, when fire broke out in the black quarters, fire fighters would be without any nearby water source to save the highly flammable wooden homes. The Reliance company, nonetheless, was the

³⁹Times, July 1, 1865.

subject of much praise by the city's press. This praise turned to criticism when the black company demanded admittance to the city-wide organization of fire companies. The banding together of the white forces had been promoted to facilitate coordination of the companies during a fire. In fact, the black department often worked alongside whites during major conflagrations. Yet, black fire fighters were barred from joint meetings of the three white companies. When the Reliance company threatened to withhold support during fires and hinted it might seek redress from the state legislature, local journals vigorously denounced such actions. The Journal of Commerce insisted that fire brigades were social institutions entirely free from city control. Indeed, the paper admitted that its opinion was based on color, adding that to admit blacks "would be to recognize the odious principle of social equality and would breed discontent among white members." These arguments were shared by leaders of the city government and by the white companies, and blacks were successfully barred from all planning sessions.⁴⁰

This question of equality also hindered the city's efforts to establish a local militia. Inspired by a need for security against violence which seemed to threaten the entire South, the force was to have an equal number of white and black soldiers. By July, 1869, organizational meetings

⁴⁰Times, August 21, 1866; Journal of Commerce, November 7, 9, 1869.

had taken place, and officers selected. The highest posts were assumed by prominent white political leaders; however,⁴¹ there were a number of black officers among the ranks. The local press, of course, ridiculed these attempts, pointing out that such a force was unnecessary. One journal raised the fear that a local conscription might be needed⁴² since the white quota could not be raised. Still, beginning on July 19, 1869, the New Bern Militia could be seen late every afternoon training on the Academy green. The Journal of Commerce satirized such affairs, commenting on the motley dress of many of the troops who could afford no more than perhaps one item of uniform. Most of the militiamen had had no previous military experience. Their efforts at close order drill seemed droll indeed to local citizens who had seen many experienced troops march through their city during the war. Within a week, even the white officers had stopped attending training sessions of the "negro militia," as it was now called, and by fall the idea⁴³ had to be abandoned.

There were many opportunities for freedmen to join charitable and social organizations. By 1871, the city boasted a black Masonic Lodge and St. Peter's Lodge and

⁴¹Journal of Commerce, July 1, 1869.

⁴²Journal of Commerce, July 19, 1869.

⁴³Journal of Commerce, July 24, August 20, 1869.

Council of Friends, a benevolent society aimed at raising funds to help the city's poor. There were also two brass⁴⁴ bands and several other social and religious clubs.

These associations provided entertainment during leisure hours, helped to alleviate the plight of many indigent blacks, and served as a means to distribute information about various activities of concern to the freedmen. Just as important, these clubs and organizations provided opportunities for black leaders to gain experience in rallying their people behind common causes, political, economic, or social.

Perhaps the best evidence of the black presence in the community was offered during the Emancipation celebrations, when blacks literally took over the major streets of the city. Beginning in late 1863, black leaders met each year to plan a march through town. The proceedings were orderly, and only occasionally in the early years were there any derogatory⁴⁵ references to whites. By 1871, planning for these events had become quite complex. In October, black leaders met to select an organizational committee. During the next two months this group met weekly and by December 30 had published its "Program for the 9th Emancipation Celebration." At 9:00 A.M. on January 1, 1872, the assembled parade began to march

⁴⁴Times, March 8, June 23, August 17, 18, 1871.

⁴⁵Times, July 6, 1865, January 1, 2, 1866.

down the major streets of the business section. At the head was the Grand Marshal, followed by the Commander of the Cavalcade and his assistant, the Elm City Brass Band, the Reliance Bucket and Axe Company, various prominent black leaders in carriages, the teachers and top students of the local black schools, other prominent citizens on foot, and finally the Comet Brass Band. Such celebrations often attracted 2,500 spectators, including a few whites who felt it a political necessity to attend. The procession usually adjourned to a city park where an elaborate program was given, including speeches by local and state politicians and the official reading of the Emancipation Proclamation. A local black leader was honored to be chosen for this responsibility.⁴⁶ By 1874, the New Bern celebration was deemed important enough to have as its speaker Lieutenant Governor⁴⁷ Curtis Brogden.

During the period immediately after the Civil War, the Freedmen's Bureau and the philanthropic societies gradually curtailed their activities so that by 1869 most of their work involved educating the freedmen. However, the task of ensuring the transition from slave to free man was not a passive one. From the beginning, blacks participated actively in the efforts to mold themselves into worthy citizens. A

⁴⁶Republic and Courier (New Bern), November 8, December 12, 18, 1871, January 4, 6, 1872.

⁴⁷Republic and Courier, January 2, 6, 1874.

Negro school had been established in the city as early as April, 1862, but this institution was ordered closed in May of that year by Military Governor Edward Stanley on the grounds that North Carolina "forbade the teaching of slaves to read and write."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, as one missionary noted,⁴⁹ the freedmen had "a craving . . . to learn." Moreover, Northern teachers were optimistic about the blacks' ability:

I supposed that when a race has been deteriorating for ages, ages must be required for their elevation. I expected tedious and unsatisfactory work . . . but I believe that with equal facilities they will learn as fast as the average white children in Northern schools.⁵⁰

Most of the funding for black education came from the Freedmen's Bureau, the American Missionary Association, or the Freedmen's Aid Society Commission of the Episcopal Church, but New Bern Negroes also played a significant part in staffing these schools with teachers. In addition, blacks operated several private schools. The largest of these was run by James E. O'Hara, a Northern-born black who later became a prominent North Carolina congressman and lawyer. In January, 1866, he reported that he had enrolled 82 students, 76 of whom could read and write and 15 of whom were learning Spanish. By 1868, there were four other such schools being operated by

⁴⁸Edward Stanley to Edwin Stanton, June 12, 1862, Official Records, I, 29, 400.

⁴⁹Mary L. Peabody to Edward W. Kinsley, March 22, 1863, Edward Wilkinson Kinsley Papers, Manuscript Department, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

⁵⁰National Freedman (New York), August 15, 1865, volume 1, number 7, 167.

and for blacks. Three of these were dependent on Northern or other philanthropic funds. Miss Nanny Gibbs had opened a female school in the heart of the recently developed black section west of the Tryon Palace property. Miss Augneta Cook had opened the Chapel School and had in attendance over seventy scholars, twenty-two of whom were over sixteen years of age. Most of her charges were ex-bondsmen who, despite their late start, were showing remarkable progress. Miss Cook reported that during the previous year, eighteen students had learned to read and write, and eleven had been placed in intermediate studies. Reverend A. A. Ellsworth, cashier for the New Bern branch of the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company, had also opened a school and had hired Miss Melinda Rue, a native black, to teach. The Ellsworth school had twenty-five paying scholars on its rolls. B. W. Morris' school was located in the A. M. E. Zion Church and had 143 Negroes in attendance. Only fourteen had been free before the war; however, 109 were already in intermediate studies, and 33 were advanced students. In addition, St. Cyprion's School, financed by the Freedmen's Aid Society, reported that its classes were full to overflowing. Four teachers were employed, two of whom were black, to teach the 175 children who attended. The principal noted that every day he received applications from new students, sometimes from children alone, sometimes accompanied by parents or friends, and every day he was obliged

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to refuse admittance.

Although most of the classes were engaged in primary studies, many students had been passed to intermediate levels. School administrators very early saw the need for a black high school, and in January, 1867, the American Missionary Association began negotiations to purchase a suitable lot on which to erect such an institute. Reverend Samuel S. Ashley, then a missionary in Wilmington but later state Superintendent of Public Instruction, suggested the old Palace property as a likely site, "being convenient to the colored population as few of the children would have to cross the railroad tracks to reach the grounds." Tentative and secret plans were made to raise the \$1,000 necessary; however, it was soon reported that the owners refused to sell the land for such a purpose. Apparently, the deal had been set until a lawyer from the Missionary Association mistakenly informed the owners' agent of the reason for the purchase. At that point, the agent cancelled the deal for fear of depreciating the value of the property adjoining. Having met defeat in

⁵¹Times, March 17, 1865, January 16, 1866; Monthly School Reports, 1866-1868, AMA Archives, NC, rolls 3-4; Monthly School Reports, 1867-1868, Statistical Reports of Operations, 1865-1868, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 23; Reverend Levi Branson, Branson's North Carolina Business Directory, 1869 (Raleigh, North Carolina, 1869), hereinafter cited as Branson, NC Business Directory.

⁵²Stephen W. Laidler to George Whipple, September 5, 1866, Reverend F. A. Fiske to Samuel Hunt, October 13, 1866, E. P. Smith to Samuel S. Ashley, January 3, 1867, A. A. Ellsworth to E. P. Smith, January 17, 1867, A. A. Ellsworth to Samuel S. Ashley, January 22, 1867, E. P. Smith to Samuel S. Ashley, January 25, 1867, AMA Archives, NC, roll 3.

this matter, the Association abandoned its plan for an advanced school.

Public education was of course slow to develop in the South, and for this reason the zeal for education among New Bern blacks was remarkable. According to the official city school report of July 15, 1869, some 1,489 black children had enrolled in school during the past year compared to 715 whites, about the same percentage of the total population of the two races. There were eight private white schools attended by an average of forty students and six black schools with⁵³ an average attendance of eighty.

Enrollment and attendance were two entirely different matters, for often the freedman simply had no time or energy to study. In 1870, only 332 blacks reported to Federal⁵⁴ census takers that they had attended school that year. By this time, the initial enthusiasm of Northerners in helping the Negro had waned as benevolent societies found it increas-⁵⁵ ingly difficult to meet operating expenses, and as Northerners in general came to feel that state-supported schools should carry this burden. Many black children and adults still longed to learn, and Negro leaders continued to view education as a major means of achieving equality.

⁵³Journal of Commerce, July 15, 1869.

⁵⁴1870 Census, Craven County.

⁵⁵William Robinson to Oliver O. Howard, August 8, 1866, Letters Sent, July 4, 1865-July 13, 1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 1.

This same eagerness for education and uplifting was also evident in attempts to establish churches. Four such institutions were opened during the period: St. Peter's A. M. E. Zion Church, St. Cyprion's Church, Cyprus A. M. E. Church, and Clinton Chapel.⁵⁶ The most important of these was St. Peter's, which was founded during the war. Blacks had been permitted to hold services at the church before the war, as long as these meetings did not interfere with the white Christian congregation that owned the building. With the Federal occupation and the flight of the white citizenry, the building was taken over by the blacks. Under the advice of certain Negro officials, among them James W. Hood, who for a time served there as pastor, the church assumed its A. M. E. form. By the end of the war, the white congregation had completely dispersed, and the black church members, who numbered 350, were able to raise sufficient funds to buy the building and grounds.⁵⁷

Church membership continued to grow. By 1871, the A. M. E. churches were sufficiently large to hold a joint camp meeting

⁵⁶Times, August 6, 1869, March 12, 1871; Branson, NC Business Directory, 1869, 45, 1872, 68.

⁵⁷Trustees of the A. M. E. Zion Church to Fred A. Seely, March 16, April 7, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Records of the Superintendent of the Eastern District, North Carolina, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives, Washington, D. C., hereinafter cited as Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC. See also Times, June 17, 1871.

at Tuscarora, twelve miles outside of town, attended by over
⁵⁸
 two thousand blacks.

Churches remained important institutions in the community, serving as meeting places not only for religious affairs but for social events and political rallies. In addition, black pastors not only exerted moral and spiritual leadership over their congregations but came to be regarded as community leaders in other matters as well.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, New Bern underwent a profound change in population. Previously a mixed community with all controls in the hands of local whites, the town first became a refuge for many slaves fleeing the plantation, then a permanent residence for many freedmen. White control was no longer as evident although it certainly still existed. Whites were forced to give in on certain social questions, but they held securely the important economic reins of the city.

Despite ill feelings, misunderstandings, and ingrained fears, there were no major flare-ups during the postwar period. Whites were reluctant to challenge the new order for several reasons. First, they were greatly outnumbered by blacks, especially in the early years after the war. Secondly, Southerners wanted more than anything else to be rid of Federal supervision and intervention. The only way to do this was to present a facade of coexistence. Finally, Southerners

⁵⁸Times, October 5, 1871.

very early saw the need to remain on peaceful terms with their labor supply.

Nevertheless, by 1870, a definite pattern of racial separation had developed. A large part of the city was probably for blacks only, even though blacks apparently moved with few restrictions through the major white sections of the city. The large number of blacks, however, made it impossible for the Negro communities to be shifted to the periphery of the town.

There was a definite need among the freedmen to achieve some sort of social stability. Of course, there was much prompting in this respect by Freedmen's Bureau agents and Northern missionaries, who urged ex-bondsmen to get married, build schools and churches, and become baptized Christians. Yet, most blacks took these steps willingly and regarded such acts as proof of their emancipation. Indeed, throughout the 1860's, the number of black petitions for marriage licenses was significantly higher than that of whites.

Furthermore, in the early years after the war, with few limitations placed upon them, New Bern blacks proved their eagerness to improve themselves not only by settling into communities but by attending schools and churches, forming service and benevolent organizations, and working to improve

⁵⁹Times, September 2, 1865; Stephen W. Laidler to S. S. Jocelyn, March 22, 1866, Fred A. Seely to Eliphalet Whittlesey, May 20, 1866, AMA Archives, NC, roll 2; Journal of Commerce, August 3, 1869.

relations with their white neighbors. The major complaint of whites was not of insecurity and fear of crime, which might have been understandable considering their numbers, the lack of street lights, and the state of law enforcement at that time. The primary complaint was the large number of idle blacks who crowded the city streets and markets. This, however, was basically an economic problem magnified by the size of the black population.

CHAPTER III

POSTWAR ECONOMICS AND THE FREEDMEN

New Bern was a prosperous community in 1860. Having access to ocean and inland waterway trade, the town served as an important port for the northeastern part of the state. Railroads connected the city with Beaufort and Goldsboro. A bank, a theatre, two good hotels, and a daily paper served citizens and visitors.

Farmers from the surrounding countryside brought their produce to the city's docks to be shipped North and abroad. Many of New Bern's wealthier citizens lived in fine homes and maintained sizeable plantations in the country. The land was abundant in fertile soil and other natural resources, and this, along with a large supply of slave labor, combined to keep operating expenses low. Tobacco, corn, and cotton were grown in large quantities, while wood resins and lumber were also plentiful. Merchants and commercial agents garnered handsome profits by shipping these products North and importing finished goods to the South.

The Federal takeover in mid-March, 1862, temporarily halted most economic activity in the city. Nevertheless, within two weeks after Union forces appeared in the city, the New Bern Progress was able to report that New Bern was again "assuming a business appearance, many of its stores reopened and business beginning to grow."¹ Throughout the remainder of the war, the

¹ New Bern Progress, March 29, 1862.

economy continued to expand as whites returned to their trades and as Northern investors arrived to open other enterprises.

To be sure, the fortunes of many native New Bernians had been ruined beyond repair, but the community set to work using its natural advantages to improve its economy. The turpentine and resin works had remained open throughout the conflict and by 1865 were producing quantities for export. Docking facilities had been widened and improved allowing safe and easy navigation for ships carrying 8½-9 feet of water and 300-400 tons² burthen. By October, 1866, cotton was beginning to arrive in large amounts and a number of New York agents were reported in the city seeking to purchase the staple.³ New businesses were beginning to appear, the Journal of Commerce reporting on October 24, 1866, that "at present over 10 new buildings are in the process of completion." The newly established National Bank announced a seven percent dividend after only eight months operation, and although changeable money was scarce, business⁴ was active and encouraging. Old wealth was still in evidence. The Times reported that the assessor had recorded "over 233 gold watches and 57 pianfortes listed for the Internal Revenue tax for the city. This is thought to be ahead of the state of New York, or even New England, and is very good considering the

²Times, September 16, 1865.

³Times, October 15, 1866.

⁴New Bern Commercial, April 19, 1866, hereinafter cited as Commercial; Journal of Commerce, October 24, 1866.

ups and downs through which her people have had to pass."⁵

How much of this business talk was mere braggadocio and how much was truth is not known, but it indicated confidence in some quarters. Large cargoes of merchandise were arriving daily from the North and from the West Indies. People were buying. Everywhere were pedestrians with baskets and carts to hold their purchases.⁶

New and different businesses were settling in the community. Drs. Fogg and Bagley announced their opening and boasted of being able to "draw teeth without pain by the use of nitrous oxid gas."⁷ James Marvin, "the Champion Billiard Player of North Carolina," opened Marvin's Billiard Saloon, an establishment stocked with wines, liquor, cigars, ale, and lager. In May, 1866, the Commercial announced that the property across from the town, called the Battery Chase, had been leased and would be opened as a summer resort. The facility would have a large landing, a bar, a sitting room, and a pavilion. Residents could reach the resort by means of a steamer which would make frequent trips to and from the city.⁸ For those with the means to enjoy urban life, the community offered many new advancements and leisure activities.

⁵Times, October 2, 1866.

⁶Journal of Commerce, November 1, 1866.

⁷Journal of Commerce, June 25, 1866; Branson, NC Business Directory, 1866, 66.

⁸Commercial, May 14, 1866.

The following is a list of businesses or services in New Bern as recorded in the Journal of Commerce, October 24, 1866:

academies-3	fish dealers-40
architects-3	gunsmiths-3
auction houses-3	gas works-1
banks-3	groceries-8
banking houses-4	hardware stores-4
bakeries-3	hotels-2
barber shops-6	ice dealers-1
billiards-2	jewellers-6
blacksmiths-5	libraries-1
boarding houses-12	milliners-6
builders-10	printing offices-2
carpenter shops-8	photographers-2
cigar stores-3	physicians-12
churches-7	painters-3
confectioners-2	post office-1
clothing stores-15	restaurants-5
cabinet makers-2	schools-6
clock makers-2	shoe makers-10
shoe stores-1	ship builders-1
lawyers-11	shipping agencies-2
cabmen-126	saloons-7
druggists-4	savings banks-2
dentists-4	tailors-4
distillers-12	tinners-4
dry goods stores-5	tobacconists-2
fire companies-2	watch makers-3
furniture stores-1	wine and liquor stores-7
	warehouses-10

Within two years, the number of hotels and boarding houses had increased to seventeen, while there were fifteen lawyers⁹ and fourteen physicians living in the city.

In 1869, a uniform licensing system was developed which not only increased revenues but regulated commercial practices.¹⁰
The following fees were established:

⁹Branson, NC Business Directory, 1868, 45.

¹⁰Times, January 14, 1869.

Bankers--\$10 per license
 Auctioneers--\$10 per license
 Liquor dealers--\$1 per license
 Wholesale dealers--\$4 per license
 Tavern, inn and hotel keepers--\$5 per license
 Brokers and commission merchants--\$4 per license
 Theatre owners--percentage to be fixed by the City Council
 Bowling, billiards operators--\$4 per license
 Horse dealers, liveryes--\$4 per license
 Peddlars--50¢ per license
 Manufacturers--\$2 per license
 Lawyers, physicians--\$1 per license
 Express companies--\$5 per license
 Drays--25¢ per license
 Cart horses--\$2 per license

Unfortunately, by 1870, the economy was beginning to slow down, due primarily to the worsening condition of the farmer. Since New Bern depended upon its farm trade, the community also suffered. Another problem, of course, was the lack of industry. In the early 1870's, the press and New Bern business leaders began to urge that factories be built so that finished products could be made locally. Colonel John Poole, editor of the Confederate nostalgia magazine Our Living and Our Dead, explained the problem best:

The shipment of cotton from New Bern in 1872 was 16,000 bales worth \$1,000,000, which if it had been spun into yarn would have been worth \$1,500,000; if woven into heavy clothes, \$2,500,000; if fashioned into printing cloths, \$4,000,000.

Raw materials sent North returned as finished products costing several times as much. Poole urged that spinning and weaving factories be opened. These, he claimed, could employ some two thousand eastern North Carolinians.

¹¹Our Living and Our Dead (New Bern), July 9, 1873.

Thus, although New Bern was blessed with large supplies of cotton, tobacco, lumber, turpentine, low prices and little or no industry began to impede economic growth. By 1872, the number of manufacturers had decreased, and the city was still without a much-needed cotton factory. There were eleven hotels or boarding houses, and only ten physicians still resided in the community.¹²

The depression of 1873 combined with the largest cotton crop in history moved the Republic and Courier to comment:

The city and state should invite the return of business activity by carrying out improvements: building roads, bridges and public buildings which would afford employment to tens of thousands and prevent the necessity of public charities.¹³

The most important economic indicator for many persons, however, was the price of various commodities. Northern immigrants continually complained during and after the war of the high prices and rents in New Bern. Statements of soldiers, missionaries, and educators who took up residence in the community indicate that most goods were at least double the Northern price. Rents were extremely high, the usual demand for room and board being \$40-\$50 per month.¹⁴ The Commercial admitted that housing was in short supply and that rents were

¹²Branson, NC Business Directory, 1872, 69.

¹³Republic and Courier, November 28, 1873.

¹⁴Stephen W. Laidler to S. S. Jocelyn, March 14, 1866, AMA Archives, NC, roll 2.

high; however, the paper denounced an open letter which warned that "when any persons are known to have been turned out of houses for not paying high rents . . . such houses shall be in danger. The present rates must be changed . . . yours truly,
¹⁵
 many workmen."

There is no evidence that food prices fluctuated to any great extent during the period. Eggs, priced at 10¢ per dozen in 1859, had risen to 22¢ in January, 1863, or double their prewar price. However, in May, 1868, a dozen eggs cost New
¹⁶
 Bernians 20¢. Six years later eggs per dozen stood at 25¢. Bacon, on the other hand, sold for 12½¢ per pound in 1859,
¹⁷
 20¢ in 1866 and 12¢ in 1874. Butter remained at 40-60¢ per
¹⁸
 pound throughout the period, depending upon kind and quality.
¹⁹
 Tobacco also showed no significant variation in cost. Coffee

¹⁵Commercial, April 16, 1866.

¹⁶News and Enquirer (New Bern), March 1, 1859; New Bern Progress, January 5, 1863; Ledger Book, May 1868, William E. Clarke Collection, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Clarke Collection.

¹⁷News and Enquirer, March 1, 1859; Commercial, April 3, 1866; Republic and Courier, January 17, May 2, 1874.

¹⁸Oliver Spoor Diary, entry for October 27, 1862, Oliver Spoor Collection; Commercial, April 3, 1866; Journal of Commerce, October 31, 1866; Ledger Book, entries for July 9, August 8, 1868, March 6, 1869, Clarke Collection; Republic and Courier, May 2, 1874.

¹⁹Journal of Commerce, October 31, 1866; Ledger Book, entries for May 23, 1868, January 18, 1869, Clarke Collection; Republic and Courier, December 13, 1873, January 17, May 2, 1874.

started at 18¢ per pound in 1859, jumped to 30-40¢ in 1866,²⁰ and remained there throughout the early 1870's. Thus, although there was a large increase in prices of agricultural products in the early years of the war, by 1866 these rates had stabilized, and there was no great inflationary trend during the remainder of the period.

Added to economic difficulties was the problem of what to do with the surplus labor population. In March, 1862, General Burnside appointed Vincent Colyer as Superintendent of the Poor in New Bern. Colyer's instructions were to provide medical attention, subsistence rations, and employment, where possible. Up to 2,500 blacks were hired by Colyer to work on the city's defenses. As a result of their efforts, twelve forts were built in and around the town. In return, these laborers received \$8 per month plus clothing and rations.²¹ Throughout the remainder of the conflict, blacks provided a valuable service to the Union forces. Unfortunately, at the war's end, they were no longer needed.

By this time, New Bern had become the home of a large number of the available black laborers in the area, many of whom were reluctant if not adamant in their refusal to leave

²⁰News and Enquirer, March 1, 1859; Commercial, April 3, 1866; Journal of Commerce, October 31, 1866; Ledger Book, entries for May 7, 1868, July 18, 1869, Clarke Collection; Republic and Courier, December 18, 1873, January 17, May 2, 1874.

²¹Colyer, Report of Services by the Freed People of the U. S. Army in NC, 6.

the city. But unless most blacks left, a large number would become totally dependent upon government support. In September, 1865, Horace James expressed this fear in a letter to the Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, pointing out that New Bern blacks had had little trouble finding work during the summer harvest, but with winter coming on there
22
would be no employment available.

Local whites also recognized the problem. If New Bern could not provide for blacks, then it seemed likely that the United States government through the Freedmen's Bureau would assume this responsibility, which meant further Federal intervention and meddling.

On the other hand, the city could neither afford nor did it desire to do anything other than complain about the great number of blacks. Even before the war the county poorhouse had been in default in payment of expenses. With the fall of the Confederacy, the town and the county temporarily abandoned
23
all pretense of operating the institution.

The immediate solution, and both local and national agents

²²Horace James to Eliphalet Whittlesey, October 5, 1865, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 8.

²³E. O. Hubbs to Adolphus W. Bolenius, May 22, 1867, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Stephen Moore to James Bomford, Letters Sent, January, 1867-December, 1868, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC; Minutes of the Wardens of the Poor, June 11, 1860, September 9, 1861, Craven County Records, North Carolina, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Minutes of the Wardens of the Poor.

believed it to be temporary, was for the Freedmen's Bureau to issue rations to all needy refugees, whether black or white. This, of course, had been a function of non-combatant military authorities during the conflict. Local newspapers warned that the practice would make the freedmen forever dependent upon government hand-outs, but these supplies undoubtedly kept many displaced persons of both races from starving. In the Assistant Commissioner's annual report for 1867, figures showed that whites in the Eastern District (which included New Bern) received 10,309 Bureau rations while blacks collected 27,202. In addition, under Congressional legislation, 6,800 pounds of pork and 47,600 pounds of corn were distributed to whites, while Negroes received 8,600 pounds of pork and 60,200 pounds of corn. Major distribution areas were set up at the Trent River Settlement, the Freedmen's Hospital, the Bureau Orphan's Farm, Coal Camp, and in New Bern

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proper.

More importantly, the total number and value of rations issued at these points declined month by month as more and more whites returned to their homes and as most blacks either returned to the plantations, found jobs in town, or contracted with nearby farms. Statistics reveal the extent to which the surplus population problem had been solved by 1868. In July,

²⁴Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner, September 25, 1867, Reports of Operations, 1866-1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 22.

1865, Bureau agents listed ration and value totals at 11,500 issues worth \$2,131.15. By October, 1868, only ninety-three²⁵ aged or infirm blacks were receiving rations valued at \$165. This did not mean that destitution among the Negro population had been eliminated. The Freedmen's Bureau, in an effort to force idle blacks either to leave the area or work on Bureau farms, had suspended the gratuitous issue of rations to all but the most feeble.

For the blacks, sickness and death remained constant threats. It was inevitable that disease would strike in an area in which thousands of people had been pressed together, living in conditions of filth and poverty, and with little knowledge of proper sanitary precautions. Drainage was inadequate or non-existent. In visiting the several black communities in and about the city, Sanitary Inspector William H. Doherty of the Freedmen's Bureau noted that the settlements were invariably far too crowded, the yards too small, and the streets covered with stagnant water. He reported that he had to spend most of his time trying to arouse the residents' attention to the necessity of observing certain sanitary rules in keeping their premises clean and free from all decaying²⁶ animal and vegetable matter.

²⁵Ration Reports, 1865-1868, Operations Reports, 1865-1867, 1868, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC. See, for example, Ration Report for New Bern, July 26, 1865, October 16, 1868.

²⁶William H. Doherty to A. Brady, June 2, 1866, Letters Received (A-I), July 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 7.

In 1864, the town had battled a yellow fever epidemic which had killed over 900 soldiers and citizens. Hardest hit were the soldiers. The 15th Connecticut Volunteers, for example, lost eighty percent of its troops to the disease. While the epidemic virtually shut down the white community,²⁷ 145 blacks also lost their lives.

Then, beginning in February, 1866, and lingering through September of that year, the city and especially the black districts suffered through a smallpox attack that weakened where it did not kill. By March, all Negro assemblies had been prohibited and schools were closed. Although Colonel Fred A. Seely of the Bureau quickly pointed out that there was no panic about the disease, nonetheless restrictions were endorsed by²⁸ the white population and by leading blacks. On April 6, a newspaper noted that smallpox prevailed within the city to some extent, just as in all towns and states adjoining. However, the editor opined that the several deaths which had occurred were due largely to negligence, stating that everyone could be vaccinated free by the city physician. An article in the same edition, inserted by a local Christian organization, offered

²⁷Sun Journal, April 2, 1976.

²⁸Stephen W. Laidler to New York Secretariat, March 14, 1866, AMA Archives, NC, roll 2; Fred A. Seely to Eliphalet Whittlesey, March 24, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 9; Special Order No. 8, March 16, 1866, Special Orders and Circulars Issued, 1865-1868, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

hints on staying healthy which included cleanliness of body and abode, temperance in food and drink, and service to God.²⁹ In May, a number of deaths were reported in Trent camp, and the smallpox hospital was reported full. Inspector Doherty pointed out the difficulty in treating the disease. Apparently many cases were hidden from medical attendants by blacks who feared having loved ones sent to the hospital, from which it seemed few returned.³⁰ In June, Doherty observed that the black community of Johnsonville just outside the city had witnessed a large number of deaths, although the transient nature of the population did not permit a more precise list of fatalities. To counteract the increasing incidence of victims being hidden under beds and in closets when Bureau agents came around, the Inspector recommended that a reliable Negro be hired to spend all his time visiting the various settlements, reporting cases and fatalities, and advising the Bureau on removals to the hospital.³¹

By mid-July, the disease was "decidedly abating," although Doherty concluded that much suffering from smallpox, fevers, and cholera would result from the withdrawal of Federal rations on June 1, 1866. By July 30, only nine patients were receiving

²⁹Times, April 6, 1866.

³⁰ William H. Doherty to Fred A. Seely, May 24, 1866, Unentered Letters, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

³¹ William H. Doherty to William Weigel, June 20, 1866, Unentered Letters, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

care in the smallpox hospital; however, Captain William Weigel of the Freedmen's Bureau insisted that all freedmen's schools remain closed for fear the contagion might break out anew.³²

The disease lasted throughout August, and the hospital remained in operation during September, although no new cases were reported after September 1.³³

Meanwhile, various city ordinances had been passed in April, 1866, when it became apparent that a cholera epidemic was imminent. These required that no live hogs could be kept within the city limits, no graves could be dug less than five feet, and no privy sinks were to be made of less than two feet in depth. Violators could be fined up to fifty dollars. As a further warning, the Commercial advised that victims of the disease would be those "who drink, who are unclean, and who keep irregular habits." To prepare for the onslaught, citizens were told to keep clean, to bathe daily, and to keep all garbage from their yards and from the streets.³⁴ Fortunately, the expected outbreak did not occur.

Illness and dependence continued to be problems among the black population. By the fall of 1866, the community of Johnson-

³²William H. Doherty to William Weigel, July 21, 1866, Unentered Letters, 1866-1867, William Weigel to A. A. Ellsworth, July 21, 1866, Letters Sent, April 20, 1866 to August, 1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, N.C.

³³Times, September 29, 1866.

³⁴Commercial, April 17, 1866.

ville had become a ghost town. The few miserable little shanties that remained contained 121 blacks, most of them were women and children. Many others had died during the smallpox attack, while males of the village had gone into the countryside in hopes of finding work. By December, the settlement was totally dependent upon government support and rations had to be issued to

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all residents. Across the Neuse River, on Kimble Hill, the black residents had also fallen on hard times. Having survived the winter of 1866-1867, they looked forward to a prosperous growing season. Unfortunately, their shacks stood on ground that had been restored to its previous owners. Their landlords were demanding rents which they could not hope to pay. Many were forced to go into New Bern and beg for food. Both of these communities did not survive the year.

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In New Bern, conditions of some blacks were just as bad as in Johnsonville and Kimble Hill. Each fall from 1865 to 1868 lists were compiled by Bureau agents of those persons likely to become dependent during the winter months. With rations terminated in June, 1866, many blacks were forced to

³⁵Report of the Sanitary Inspector, Eastern District, July 13, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 7.

³⁶Petition from the residents of Kimble Hill to the Assistant Commissioner, July 10, 1867, Letters Received, November, 1866 - February, 1868, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 1.

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leave the city. These, however, were the able-bodied men and women who did not really need the hand-outs. In this respect, the Bureau's action was justified.

Many aged and infirm blacks, however, were unable to work the long hours required in the fields. For them, winter was an annual fear.

By November, 1868, Stephen Moore, Superintendent of the Eastern District of the Freedmen's Bureau, reported that the poorhouse and jail were crowded. According to Moore, the northern societies and the local ladies' organizations were doing all they could, but much suffering still existed. During the previous month, his own office had had to spend \$98 on the worst cases in order to prevent actual starvation. The Bureau agent recommended that provisions should be made to support 400-500 destitute blacks in Craven and Jones counties for some three to four months in order to relieve their suffering. He also asked for a supply of blankets and material for women and children's clothing since many were "nearly in a naked condition and suffered much from the cold." In January, 1868, Moore was informed by a subordinate that even though rations and clothing were available, many who were

³⁷Times, August 15, 1866; Journal of Commerce, August 14, 1867; Major Adolphus W. Bolenius to Stephen Moore, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

³⁸Stephen Moore to Jacob Chur, October 30, 1867, Letters Received, November, 1866-February, 1868, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 11.

really suffering were too weak to get to distribution points.³⁹

Faced with suffering and starvation among the black citizenry, the local government was forced to take action. In May, 1867, Mayor E. O. Hubbs reported that the county had no funds in its treasury for the relief of the poor. Furthermore, the city had made no appropriation for such purposes and was in fact bankrupt.⁴⁰ Under pressure from the Freedmen's Bureau, the County Wardens of the Poor reported in October, 1867, that a Poor House had been reestablished and a tax apportioned for its support. At the same time they pointed out that during the war the poor from various other counties had congregated in Craven County. It was suggested that these refugees be compelled to return to their native counties in order to "equalize taxation."⁴¹

Work on improving the Poor House was slow. An investigation in March, 1868, revealed that the institution was in "a delapidated and ruinous condition, the fences all gone, with no furniture except an old writing desk." Cost of needed repairs was estimated at \$1,000.⁴² In April, the Treasurer of

³⁹Major Stephen Fleming to Stephen Moore, January 15, 1868, Letters Received, November, 1866-February, 1868, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 11.

⁴⁰E. O. Hubbs to Major Adolphus W. Bolenius, October 25, 1867, Letters Received (A-E), November, 1866-February, 1868, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 10.

⁴¹Stephen Moore to James Bomford, October 25, 1867, Letters Received, November, 1866-February, 1868, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 11.

⁴²Minutes of the Wardens of the Poor, March, 1868.

the County Poor House reported that only \$620.15 of the \$2,500 due from the county had been transferred to him. He was unable to buy food for the inmates and had rented the grounds to an overseer to plant a crop for the summer. Inmates were told to get homes elsewhere since they could no longer be fed.⁴³

Finally, in November, 1868, funds were allotted, and the facility was reopened.⁴⁴ It appeared that the problem of black and white dependency had been eased. During the period 1869-1871, 85 blacks and 83 whites had been cared for by the institution.⁴⁵

Still, many thought the solution was to find a way to get rid of the surplus black population. A few leading whites believed that whites were not raised to work at tilling the fields, picking cotton, or farming turpentine and resins. That was black work. They also believed that blacks would not perform such tasks unless made to do so. Something had to be done to persuade, cajole, or threaten idle, vagrant Negroes into returning to the farms. The main complaint was that these "loafers," as they were referred to, were setting a bad example for their comrades by congregating about the markets and along the wharves. Yet, in most cases, it was also noted that these idlers were "engaged in peddling every conceivable article" to

⁴³ Minutes of the Wardens of the Poor, April, 1868.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the Wardens of the Poor, November, 1868.

⁴⁵ Minutes of the Wardens of the Poor, 1869-1871.

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passersby. Others, undoubtedly, were seeking employment, so that charges of indolence cannot be substantiated, although they cannot be dismissed. From time to time, squads of Negroes were seized and set to work on the streets, or if too young, hauled away to the nearest Freedmen's school. 47

When these methods did not succeed, local authorities invariably fell back on the old plan of shipping Negroes to places where they could get work. This proposal was considered to have merit, even among Freedmen's Bureau officers who pointed out that the demand for labor in some parts of the state was great. Even the Negro community from time to time considered various proposals for black emigration. At a county covention of Negroes in September, 1866, delegates were urged to advise their neighbors to obtain winter employment as soon as possible. Recommendations were made that blacks hire on with the "Texas Cotton Company" or with a Mr. Charles Clark of Beaufort County. 48 At various times in 1865-1866, labor agents from Maryland, Arkansas, and Massachusetts solicited hands. 49 Nevertheless, blacks were loathe to leave

⁴⁶ Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner, September 25, 1867, Reports of Operations, 1866-1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 22.

⁴⁷ J. J. Van Horn to Jonathan Worth, July 23, 1867, Jonathan Worth Letter Book, 1865-1868, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina; Times, May 29, June 21, 1865.

⁴⁸ Times, September 10, 1866.

⁴⁹ Times, July 6, September 6, 1865; Eliphalet Whittlesey to Fred A. Seely, March 26, 1866, Letter Sent, July 4, 1865-July 13, 1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 1.

the site where they had first found freedom, and it was only after the issue of gratuitous rations was ceased in June, 1866, that the black population began to dwindle to any extent.

As one newspaper noted, many blacks seemed to be hanging on to the delusion that lands would be distributed to them. Thus, from year to year, there was some uncertainty whether Negro labor could be relied upon to cultivate the next crop.⁵⁰ Some planters began to question the desirability of having to depend upon an unreliable labor source and wondered "whether Negro labor should not be entirely dispensed with." Others simply felt that perhaps white labor would not only be more attractive but more productive as well. As early as December, 1865, the Times observed that although "in some cases the old class of laborers remained upon the farms, most did not." Therefore, the South, and especially planters in and near the city,⁵¹ should encourage the immigration of foreign laborers. In April, 1866, J. E. Nash and C. M. Graham were appointed "Agents of Emigration" at New Bern and were "prepared to receive orders for Emigrants of Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, England, and Ireland" at the rates of \$180 per year for men, \$100 per year for women, and \$50-75 for children. Mr. Graham, it was noted, resided in New York and would personally attend to the selection.⁵² Others called for a plan to invite Chinese

⁵⁰ Times, November 24, 1865.

⁵¹ Times, December 28, 1865.

⁵² Commercial, April 11, 1866.

immigration, pointing out successes in Louisiana and Cuba.

Immigration movements continued to gain support throughout the 1870's. North Carolina newspapers, among them the New Bern Republic and Courier, called for a state-wide organization to prepare statistical tables on soil, climate, production, and agricultural advantages so that foreigners would⁵⁴ be encouraged to settle in the state. However, for various reasons the immigration movement offered no solution to the labor problem. As early as June, 1866, the Times advised that plans for white and immigrant labor be suspended. A labor force had to be found immediately to harvest the next crop, and such proposals for European or other immigration would take time. The Times added that if blacks were not hired⁵⁵ they would be driven by animal wants to steal. In fact, the Times, despite its animosity toward blacks, continued to promote Negro labor. In 1869, the journal advised that there were thousands of acres of land to be worked and room enough for all. Two years later, a Times editorial offered these comments: "Treat the colored race right and retain them among us. They are better house or field help than any foreigner⁵⁶ we can get."

⁵³Times, August 16, 1867, August 6, 1869.

⁵⁴Republic and Courier, February 1, 1873.

⁵⁵Times, June 26, 1866.

⁵⁶Times, May 18, 1871.

The traditional William A. Dunning school interpretation of the labor question and the Freedmen's Bureau role in the matter, as offered by J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, is that labor problems were exacerbated by Bureau interference in contracts between owner and black and by the Bureau's general influence⁵⁷ in creating dissatisfaction among the ex-slaves.

During the transitional years of Reconstruction, however, Bureau activities in some ways helped to settle the problem. During the first summer of 1865, blacks were at the mercy of unscrupulous planters who might agree to one wage and then pay another. In addition, verbal contracts between planter and black were not nearly so binding, and if enough laborers simply walked away from the plantation, the crops would be lost. Bureau officers encouraged the use of written contracts between labor and management. Local journals joined in, advising that it was "important to owners of plantations and to freedom to have all matters of agreement regarding labor and pay thoroughly understood before work was commenced."⁵⁸ By March, 1866, local Bureau agents were helping planters run down hands who had contracted but had fled, although the Assistant Superintendent in New Bern added that many employers did not make it to the interest

⁵⁷J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina (New York, 1914), 197, hereinafter cited as Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina.

⁵⁸Journal of Commerce, January 6, 1867.

of their hands to stay.

By October, 1866, a contract system had evolved which offered two alternatives for work, by annual wage or by share. Under the yearly contract system, one-half the laborer's wages were held until the end of the year, at which time deductions were made for the time lost due to illness or absence. Laborers worked ten hours per day, six days per week, in return for which they were given rations and quarters and were paid in monthly installments, usually receiving \$10-15 for men, \$4-8 for women. There were two forms of share-crop contracting. Under one, the owner supplied everything except the labor, for which the freedman received one-third the crops. If the freedman furnished one-half the seed and one-half of the feed for the cattle, then he shared equally in the crops. The share system was advocated by New Bern Freedmen's Bureau agents since a freedman could use his family⁶⁰ to help in the fields. Many blacks were induced to return to the plantations, but a large number preferred to remain in the city and hire out on nearby estates.

The development of an apprentice system helped to reduce the number of dependent black orphans and destitute children. Bureau agents expressed some misgivings, although in general

⁵⁹Fred A. Seely to Eliphalet Whittlesey, March 21, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 9.

⁶⁰Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner, October 30, 1866, Reports of Operations, 1866-1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 22.

the practice was encouraged. In some cases it appeared that children were forcibly bound out without their parents' consent. The Assistant Commissioner on one occasion warned that unregulated use of the system fostered the old idea of compulsory labor.⁶¹ According to the Craven County apprentice bonds records, children could be bound out at any age for a term which lasted until they reached the age of twenty-one. In such manner, black children were apprenticed as house servants, housekeepers, carpenters, coopers, and all other suitable occupations. The guardian of the apprentice provided a sufficient diet, washing, lodging, apparel "and other things necessary both in sickness and in health." Instruction was given in reading, writing, and arithmetic. At the end of the term, the apprentice was provided with a predetermined amount of money, a new suit of clothes,

and a Bible.⁶² Despite shortcomings in the system, a large number of orphans and paupers, black and white, found comfortable homes and in some cases were able to acquire marketable skills.

Black employment opportunities in and around the town were more plentiful than might be expected. Nor was unemployment or idleness the problem that whites claimed it was. Vagrancy was unacceptable to the community, and Negroes were expected to

⁶¹Stephen Moore to Luther Huff, March 28, 1867, Letters Sent, January, 1867-December, 1868, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC: William Robinson to Oliver O. Howard, August 8, 1877, Eliphalet Whittlesey to Oliver O. Howard, Letters Sent, July 4, 1867-July 13, 1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 1.

⁶²Apprentice Bonds Records, 1868-1870, Craven County Records, North Carolina, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

find jobs in town or leave to find work on the plantations. New Bern's economy depended upon its serving as a market for products from the countryside. This meant that most black jobs were in some way related to the farming, fishing, shipping, and turpentine industries.

As Figure 3 shows, 541 black males or 63.2% of the city's male Negro population worked in unskilled occupations. Of these, many worked as farm or common laborers. However, blacks had long monopolized the Southern boating trade, so that it was not uncommon for a large percentage of the city's Negroes to be employed as boatmen, mariners, or fishermen.

Black management and operation of the city's resin works during the war had been a boon to the Union effort. After the conflict, control reverted to whites, but a large number of blacks earned livelihoods in resin or lumber industries as turpentine workers, saw mill workers, or lumbermen.

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Figure 3: Black Males Employed in Unskilled Occupations, 1870

farm laborers	120
common laborers	68
domestic servants	30
fishermen	32
boatmen	57
turpentine workers	14
saw mill workers	22
lumbermen	63
railroad workers	34
carters	32
other	69
	<u>541</u>

⁶³

Ira Berlin, Slaves Without Masters (New York, 1974), 218-219

⁶⁴ 1870 Census, Craven County.

Unskilled blacks worked on the margin of the economy, mired in poverty, often living in conditions as low or lower than in slavery. At the same time, the South's dependence upon the cultivation of its lands made black labor valuable. Before, as slaves, they had worked without compensation. Although paid little, as free laborers their wages gave them self-respect and pride.

Not all black males were at the very bottom of the labor system. Many had marketable skills which freed them from the drudgery and low pay of the common laborer. By 1870, as Figure 4 shows, the town had a surprising number of black males who were employed in skilled or semi-skilled craft occupations.

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Figure 4: Black Males Employed in Skilled Occupations, 1870

carpenters	68
smiths	27
coopers	26
shoe makers	17
brick masons	17
barbers	10
painters	7
butchers	6
caulkers	5
cooks	4
other	25
	<u>207</u>

These fields represent 24.1% of the employment possibilities open to blacks. This figure is even more remarkable since skilled blacks were competing directly with the white laboring class. White laborers throughout the South were increasingly critical of this competition and called for curbs to black

⁶⁵ 1870 Census, Craven County.

admittance among their ranks.

An interesting example of hostilities between the two races in the job market was in the service occupation of barbering. Oddly enough, barbering had for many years before the war been considered "nigger work." Urban free Negroes had found it to be a rewarding occupation requiring little capital or labor. At the same time, whites felt barbering was a servile job and in most cases preferred to be "served" by blacks. Few whites opened shops. Facing the economic realities of postwar New Bern, several whites had ventured into the trade, led by German immigrants who opened a profitable establishment in the Gaston Hotel. Blacks resented this interference and resorted to a variety of tactics including under-pricing and extended hours of operation to try to shut down their competitors. Both sides railed at each other for unfair business practices, carrying the war first into the papers and finally to the mayor's court. There, each accused the other of violating curfew laws, slander, and price cutting. Since each had assumed a totally unreasonable stand, the mayor had no choice but to dismiss both suits.⁶⁷ The competition continued, neither side being able to corner the market. White barbers, of course, had no intention of serving blacks, but they resented white business at the Negro shops.

Skilled blacks held their own in all trades despite white

⁶⁶ 1870 Census, Craven County.

⁶⁷ Journal of Commerce, June 30, 1869; Times, June 30, 1869.

calls for restrictions. Artisanhip was a valuable commodity in any community, and blacks survived the free market despite their color. At no time was there any attempt to identify white and black skilled workers as a class. Despite similar problems in dealing with the stewards of capital--merchants, land-owners, and bankers--the legacy of racial prejudice left the two groups antagonistic.

Skilled and unskilled blacks accounted for 87% of the adult male population. The remaining group can be termed professional or proprietary. Of these, most were farmers. Indeed, once they realized that promises of land were myth, many blacks set about to acquire what they had not been given. The Freedmen's Bureau had encouraged this by leasing abandoned lands outside the city during and immediately after the war. Blacks had eagerly rented valuable acres of cotton, turpentine, and tar. In some cases, Negroes had contracted for large portions of agricultural land and had given employ-⁶⁸ment to many of their color. Despite objections that such efforts were wasted on blacks who lacked the necessary tools, seed and teams, black farmers survived. By 1869, the Times was forced to admit: "Blacks are working hard to build profitable businesses and with a few acres are showing they can⁶⁹ earn a living."

The Times also recommended that landowners sell their

⁶⁸Times, August 15, 1869, February 8, December 30, 1871.

⁶⁹Times, August 15, 1869.

land at fairer prices, even to blacks, so that there would⁷⁰ be "fewer loafers and the land more generally cultivated."

From 1869-1871, the county showed a great increase in the number of small black farms; in 1871 alone, two-thirds of all real estate transfers were made by blacks, proving the race's intention to "farm it on their own hook." Moreover, a number of tracts covered one hundred acres or more. City farmers were more modest, but their growing numbers revealed⁷¹ diligent attempts to rise above dependence.

The range of proprietary and professional occupations⁷² included:

farmers	57
grocers	10
hostlers	7
preachers	7
policemen	4
teachers	3
saloon keepers	2
cook shops	1
physicians	1
other	15
	<u>108</u>

This does not include the many small black enterprises which operated out of homes and served as increments to regular wages. Nor does it include the number of illegal or semi-legal groggeries, saloons, and gambling houses where blacks gathered.

Opportunities for adult females were limited. Although many more black females worked than white, the small number of

⁷⁰Times, August 24, 1869.

⁷¹Times, February 8, May 16, December 30, 1871.

⁷²1870 Census, Craven County.

jobs open to women meant a high unemployment rate. Of 1,416 black females over eighteen years of age, 690, or 48.7%, stayed at home keeping house. In homes where there were two or more adult females there was often not enough work to go around so that 114 females, or 8%, listed no occupation at all.

Of the remaining 612 females, most found work in servile occupations as cooks, laundresses, housekeepers, and domestic servants. A large number also went off into the fields to work. As Figure 5 indicates, 515 black females or 36.3% of the Negro adult female population found work in unskilled occupations.

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Figure 5: Black Females Employed in Unskilled Occupations.

domestic servants	337
farm laborers	90
laundresses	70
waitresses	7
cooks	2
housekeepers	6
factory workers	3
	<u>515</u>

Of the other black females, seventy-four, or 5%, worked in semi-skilled occupations as seamstresses (48) or nurses (26). The remaining black women operated cakeshops, cookshops, and groceries or were employed as teachers.

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Economic activity among black children was not as prevalent as might be expected. Of 1,452 children under the age of eighteen, only 291, or 20%, worked. Most workers in this class were be-

⁷³1870 Census, Craven County.

⁷⁴1870 Census, Craven County.

tween the ages of twelve and seventeen. Less than three percent of those children below the age of twelve were expected to add to the family's income. In addition, unavailability of employment for females made it less likely that a female between the ages of twelve and seventeen would be working. Still, a large number (114) found jobs as domestic servants, while others were employed as nurses, venders, or farm hands. Males in this age group usually worked at some occupation, either helping a father or brother at a trade or hiring out on local farm crews. However, unless apprenticed earlier, males usually⁷⁵ began their working career at age fifteen.

Despite restrictions, ignorance, and inexperience, New Bern blacks gradually found their niche in the economy. Most worked hard for meager wages and could count as theirs only the few possessions with which they furnished their homes. Yet, as they learned to economize, a number of industrious blacks found their wages more than matched expenses. Some used this extra money to purchase real estate, while others improved their living standard.

Still others followed Freedmen's Bureau agents' advice and placed their surplus cash in the local branch of the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company. There blacks could deposit sums as small as one dollar and receive five percent interest per annum on deposits held six months. Established in March, 1865, the bank grew slowly during its first two years in existence, but

⁷⁵1870 Census, Craven County.

by late 1868 it was doing a brisk business. In November, 1867, deposits over drafts showed a net increase of over \$400 in funds⁷⁶ and total deposits amounted to \$12,880.57. In January, 1868, the branch began to publish a monthly journal designed to encourage freedmen to save their money rather than fritter it away on whiskey or unnecessary luxuries. By 1871, local blacks had savings of \$48,444.17 due them. As late as February 14, 1874, shortly before mismanagement and poor investments at the national level unraveled the entire system, deposits amounted to \$40,621. During its existence, the bank was "the only bank in the United States in which colored men held positions behind counters and where they could hope to learn monetary matters." Unfortunately, only about \$12,000 of the money owed to blacks in New Bern was collected, and the frugality and resourcefulness which the bank had helped to instill was perhaps lost in the disillusion-⁷⁷ment that followed the bank failure.

The black's rise in economic status by no means signalled a fall in the position of the white. Whites retained a firm grip on the economic reins of the city. The major industries--merchant enterprises, shipping, and turpentine works--were in their hands. Wealth, real and personal, was theirs to control.

⁷⁶Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner, September 25, 1867, Reports of Operations, 1866-1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 22; New Bern Republican, July 27, 1867.

⁷⁷New Bern National Service Bank Monthly, January 1, 1868; Republic and Courier, November 8, 1873; Journal of Commerce, January 2, 1874.

No black could hope to equal the estate of Edward R. Stanley, President of the North Carolina Railroad, who in 1870 possessed \$30,000 in real property and \$50,000 in personal effects. Nor could they match Kauffman Baer's merchandising and dry goods store which was valued at \$45,000. The largest black estates were those of William Potipha, a railroad engineer (\$3,000 real, \$300 personal); and Robert Mosely, a grocer (\$2,000 real, \$200 personal). Of the total number of New Bernians who owned \$100 or more in real or personal property, only 18.8% were blacks.⁷⁸ This figure, nonetheless, represents the many blacks who looked upon their freedom not as freedom from responsibility but as an opportunity to make something of themselves.

The Reconstruction period has been generally described as one of extreme economic ruin. Destruction of valuable farmland, confiscation of property by the Federal government, shortages of many necessities, and lack of capital hindered recovery and growth. State and local governments labored vainly to provide even the simplest framework of governmental services. Citizens could not afford to pay extra taxes needed to rebuild the city.

New Bern could not escape these difficulties. Deficit spending became a way of life for the city government. It must be reiterated that there was no total disruption of economic activity, however. The early Federal occupation served to

⁷⁸1870 Census, Craven County.

mollify the effects of the war. Not only were local Southerners induced by the town's stability to return to their businesses, but Northern investors were also attracted. New businesses were opened, old ones were expanded, and improvements were made in docking facilities which permitted an increase in shipping.

The city still depended heavily on the agricultural and turpentine farms in the countryside for its survival. Fluctuations in prices for these commodities affected all citizens. If the farms did well, then the city also prospered. Likewise, if landowners had difficulties harvesting a good crop, then the entire community suffered.

One problem which did not materialize was a shortage of labor. In fact, the influx of black refugees during and after the war temporarily created a surplus of workers. This in turn caused other problems. Many freedmen became destitute, totally dependent upon government rations. Living in poverty and filth, they became prime targets for disease. Usually those who suffered most were the old and women with children to support. These were unable to go into the countryside to look for work. Able-bodied men and women had the freedom to move about in search of employment. Many took advantage of this opportunity. Yet, while it is true that many old or dependent blacks were left behind, many young men and women stayed, raising families, working at jobs in or about the town, and building a black community.

Just as the city depended on the outlying farms, so, too, did a large proportion of the black population rely on the

plantations for jobs. The much-maligned Freedmen's Bureau provided a valuable service to landowners and workers alike. The agency's emphasis on contracts binding to both parties gave freedmen job security and assured planters that the crops would be harvested. Certainly there were violations and breeches of faith on both sides, but the system was infinitely better than any oral arrangement.

The impact of emancipation may have been more permanent and more profound in the economic sphere than in any other area. Social privileges were soon lost. In time Northern and Southern leaders would agree that it was best for all parties if the Negro was left out of American politics. Black labor, however, would remain a vital cog in the Southern economy. It could not be replaced by white, Chinese, or any other labor. Black crop-lien farmers, sharecroppers, and tenant farmers would be exploited mercilessly by merchants, landowners, businessmen, and politicians. But they would survive. Many, in some small way, despite suffering and poverty, would realize their dream of forty acres and a mule.

CHAPTER IV

THE FREEDMAN'S ROLE IN POSTWAR POLITICS

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation announced freedom for slaves, but at the war's end New Bern blacks knew they were far removed from real equality. They were called "freedmen" instead of slaves, but they still had to make the transition from slavery to freedom. This would not be easy. Starting in Mississippi in 1865, Southern states passed laws designed to restrict the Negro's freedom of action, North Carolina's "Black Code" being enacted in March, 1866.

With the war over, blacks had hoped to protect the social privileges they had so recently secured--the right to have a family, to be educated, and to live in communities of their own choosing. At the same time they hoped to defend themselves and their families from acts of revenge which they felt would be forthcoming from the white community.

They wanted equal treatment before the law and the abolition of cruel punishments reserved by the judicial system for them alone. They wanted an end to compulsory labor laws and wished to be assured that they would not be kept at work without pay until the crops were harvested and then driven off without food or shelter.

Their rights were to be guarded in two ways. First, if they were given the right to vote, blacks would have a voice

in protecting their interests and could elect representatives to enact legislation for their benefit. Secondly, they hoped to use the courts as an arbiter for any action--civil, criminal, or legislative--which they believed to be discriminatory. In order to do the latter, they had to be represented before the courts. They had to be permitted to testify, to serve on juries and, if possible, to sit as judges.

North Carolina blacks began their fight for political rights in 1864 when a delegation traveled to Washington, D. C., to ask President Lincoln to support a black suffrage movement. In this group were A. H. Galloway and John R. Good,¹ political activists in New Bern.

The movement gathered force in 1865, and a statewide convention was proposed to discuss the freedmen's political, economic, and social condition. As a preliminary step, local blacks planned a mass meeting in New Bern on August 27, 1865.

Whites quickly pointed out that although blacks had been freed from slavery, their demands for equality should not be carried too far. Freedom should not be mistaken for political independence. If the New Bern meeting was for the purpose of demanding immediate equality, then blacks were gathering in vain. Southern whites had no intention of granting this. If equality was ever to come, it would be ensured by "modesty

¹Times, May 21, 1864.

and moderation on the part of the race now."²

The August 27 meeting attracted a large crowd of Negroes as well as a few sympathetic whites. A. H. Galloway, acting as temporary chairman, proposed John Good as President, and Good was duly elected. Joseph Green served as Vice-President and George Price and Amos York as secretaries.

President Good reminded the gathering that the purpose of the meeting was to choose delegates to a freedmen's convention in Raleigh. That assembly, in turn, would try to influence the state constitutional convention which would be meeting at the same time.

A committee of five was appointed to prepare resolutions "expressive of the sentiment of this meeting." This group, which consisted of John Randolph, Jr., William McLivaine, James W. Pierson, William H. Johnson, and the Reverend Joseph Green, then retired to prepare its report.

While the committee was out, Galloway took the podium and outlined the wants and needs of the black population. Blacks, he said, wanted to take the necessary steps to fit into society. They wanted to learn to read and write. They wanted to vote and were willing to make education the qualification for that privilege. He then warned that whites would be reluctant to give them these rights, but in the end they would be won.

With all their grumbling--and they say they will quit the country and go to Europe if the Negro is allowed to vote--and I know it would be no loss to the govern-

²Times, August 28, 1865.

ment if they did quit--I tell you it wouldn't be six months before they would be putting their arms around our necks and begging us to vote for them for office.

Galloway worked the audience skillfully, gathering applause at one point, laughter at another. His speech, described by a Times reporter as having "a vim and . . . easy grace that would do credit to many an orator with a white skin," proved him to be the leading spirit of the assembly. He was alternately respectful and derisive of white authority:

The white man says he don't want to be placed on equality with the negro. Why, sir, if you could only see him slipping around at night, trying to get into negro women's houses you would be astonished.

A treble voice in the corner answered this statement with, "That's the truth, Galloway."

As the resolutions committee started to return, he grew serious, promising to fight until his people had gained the rights of free men to vote and testify in court. He would agitate these questions long and loud and prove that "the only way you can close the negro's mouth is to throw the ballot down his throat."

The committee then submitted its report, which included the following resolutions: (1) that the people of New Bern heartily approve of the Raleigh freedmen's convention; (2) that injustices committed against blacks reveal the hatred and prejudice which their former owners still hold for them; (3) that the Raleigh convention urge the state reconstruction

convention that it is to everyone's interest to give the blacks the vote; (4) that black freedom is unprotected without the vote to sustain it.

Galloway, Randolph, and Price were empowered to draw up, have printed, and distribute throughout the state circulars discussing the New Bern meeting and calling for support of the Raleigh convention.

As the session drew to a close, A. H. Galloway, John Randolph, Jr., John R. Good, and George A. Rue were elected delegates to the state freedmen's convention.³

Before the Raleigh assembly was held a preliminary meeting took place in Wilmington in September to make the necessary arrangements. New Bern blacks once more assumed major roles. The committee of three appointed to promote the convention idea throughout the state consisted of three New Bernians: Galloway, Price, and Randolph.⁴

On September 20, 1865, the first freedmen's convention to be held in the South assembled at the A. M. E. Zion Church in Raleigh. Delegates had three things in mind they wanted to secure: the right to testify in court, jury representation,⁵ and the right to vote.

³Times, August 30, 1865.

⁴Elaine Joan Nowaczyk, "The North Carolina Negro in Politics, 1865-1876" (Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1957), 5, hereinafter cited as Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics."

⁵Journal of Freedom (Raleigh, North Carolina), October 7, 1865.

About one-half of the counties were represented. Because of traveling costs, only sixty of the one hundred twenty-two elected delegates were able to attend. Most were former slaves, most still lived on plantations or farms, and less than one-quarter could read and write.

John R. Good, a New Bern black, was chosen temporary chairman and worked hard to assure that the meetings were orderly and were conducted in a parliamentary manner. James W. Hood, a free Negro minister from Connecticut and former pastor of a New Bern church, was chosen President. John P. Samson of Ohio, James H. Harris of Raleigh, Isham Sweat of Fayetteville, William Smith of Wilmington, Stewart Ellison of Raleigh, J. P. Shanks of Charlotte, and Sergeant Littleton of the First North Carolina Heavy Artillery were chosen vice-presidents. John Randolph of Greensboro served as secretary, J. B. Caswell as treasurer, and O. Bass as chaplain.⁶

The convention was like any other gathering of men from different backgrounds and with different aspirations and was all too human in its proceedings:

There were parties, cliques, demagogues, ambitious men--there was log rolling, wire pulling . . . the great body of the delegates not only had a pretty clear concept of what they wanted to do but also what they did not want to do . . . Many were like noisy, ignorant children. Others . . . appeared to imagine that tears, shouts, sobs and ejaculations were as much in order as in the prayer meetings.⁷

⁶Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 6-10.

⁷Sidney Andrews, The South Since the War as Shown by 14 Weeks of Travel and Observation in Georgia and the Carolinas (Boston, 1866), 122-124, hereinafter cited as Andrews, The South Since the War.

During the two weeks' sessions, the convention held both plenary and committee meetings. One of the most important committees was instructed to write an address to the state constitutional convention. This group consisted of four members, three of whom--Good, Rue, and John Randolph, Jr.--were from New Bern. This document began with a summary of the freedmen's condition and asked, among other things, for economic assistance, citizenship rights, educational facilities, the removal of discriminatory laws, provision for black orphans,⁸ and protection for freedmen workers.

The convention as a whole adopted six general resolutions: (1) that blacks should not flock to the cities but rather should remain at home, live soberly, modestly, buy lands and homes, observe marriage rules, and attempt to cultivate friendly relations with their white neighbors; (2) the convention expressed reverence and gratitude for martyrs John Brown and Abraham Lincoln; (3) the assembly saluted the passage of the 13th Amendment; (4) the assembly expressed gratitude for the work of the Freedmen's Bureau; (5) the assembly expressed the hope that more schools would be established to educate freedmen; (6) the assembly approved the proposed recognition of Cuba and Haiti and thanked the Republican party for all it had done for blacks.⁹

The delegates returned to their homes, but their work was

⁸Andrews, The South Since the War, 127-131.

⁹Journal of Freedom, October 7, 1865.

not completed. As a result of the convention, several organizations were established to pursue black goals. On September 30, 1865, midway through the conference, the Raleigh Journal of Freedom began publication with J. Q. A. Crane as publisher and Edward P. Brooks as editor. Its major objective was to
 10
 push for Negro suffrage.

A political organization was needed, and the convention, before it adjourned, agreed to transform itself into the State Equal Rights League. Headquartered in Raleigh, the League accepted membership by contribution from anyone. It disclaimed any form of secrecy and was dedicated to securing the repeal of all laws regarding distinctions of color. John Good, as Vice-President of the organization, headed the New Bern chap-
 11
 ter and led local blacks in attacks on discrimination.

An outgrowth of the League was the Colored Education Convention which met in Raleigh on October 2, 1866, to discuss ways to promote education and look after the suffering poor. Officers at this assembly included New Bernians John Good,
 12
 Vice-President, and John Randolph, Jr., Recording Secretary.

In January, 1867, the State Equal Rights League met to discuss the National Loyal League which was to assemble in Washington, D. C. As rarely happened during this period, of

¹⁰Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 12.

¹¹Journal of Freedom, October 7, 1865; Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 12-13; Republican (New Bern), July 27, 1867.

¹²Sentinel (Raleigh), August 25, October 4, 1866.

the four delegates selected, none was a New Bernian.¹³

These events, of course, took place against the background of a country sharply divided about what to do to restructure Southern society. As early as December 8, 1863, Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan of Reconstruction had provided for the readmission of the Southern states. This plan called for the recognition of the Negro's freedom and for Negro education, but it did not require that blacks be given the right to vote. Congress reacted in 1864 with its own policy statement in the Wade-Davis bill, but again there was no mention of black suffrage. The same was true of the Johnson plan of Reconstruction of May, 1865.

As a result Southern state governments generally were left free to handle the Negro situation as they saw fit. Fear, prejudice, and politics combined to produce black codes which bore a striking resemblance to measures which had restricted Negro rights in the antebellum South. All were designed to limit speech and activity and to keep the freedmen in the fields. The enactment of these codes and the South's utter lack of any sign of repentance in sending in December, 1865, as its representatives to Washington unreconstructed Confederates hardened Congress.

The President and Congress had also drifted far apart. Johnson vetoed the Freedmen's Bureau bill and then the Civil Rights bill, declaring that Negroes were not ready for the

¹³Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 15.

privileges of citizenship. He then began to attack members of Congress and vehemently opposed the proposed 14th Amendment. As a result, on April 9, 1866, his Civil Rights veto was overridden. Two months later Congress passed the controversial amendment to the Constitution.

The capstone came when all the Southern states but Tennessee rejected the amendment. Congress reacted on March 2, 1867, by passing its first Reconstruction Act. This legislation treated the South as a conquered territory, dividing it into five military districts and declaring martial law. To be readmitted the former states were required to adopt¹⁴ new constitutions giving blacks the right to vote.

The North Carolina state convention had met in October, 1865, to adopt the changes then required for readmission to the Union. An ordinance was passed prohibiting slavery. A bill was submitted to the General Assembly which defined as persons of color Negroes and their issue to the fourth generation, applied apprenticeship laws equally to both races, validated slave marriages, and called for written labor contracts. The law also permitted black testimony in cases where Negroes were involved and in other cases where consent of both parties was obtained. Criminal laws were to be applied equally, with the exception that a black convicted of raping a white woman would be hanged. The document was silent on

¹⁴John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans (New York, 1947), 297-323, hereinafter cited as Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom; Garraty, The American Nation, 432-447.

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black suffrage.

This did not mean that during the period before military control was instituted the subject of black suffrage was not discussed by whites. The Raleigh Sentinel in August and September, 1865, for example, printed letters calling for limited, "qualified" suffrage, if only to forestall Radical plans for a more extreme measure.¹⁶ In New Bern the Times came out in 1866 in favor of giving blacks all rights and privileges accorded to foreigners and thereby require freedmen to "undergo a probation period" before being granted full citizenship.¹⁷ Other state residents called for property as well as education requirements. Among this group was Governor Jonathan Worth, who in January, 1867, shortly after the North Carolina General Assembly had rejected, at his urging, the 14th Amendment, stated that he wanted "some standard of intelligence or property . . . adopted by which the better class of them . . . may have the privilege."¹⁸

Yet, as a general rule, Southern whites preferred military occupation to black political participation, and little was done to frame constitutions in keeping with the guidelines of the first Reconstruction Act. Congress thus was forced to pass a second Reconstruction Act which required military

¹⁵Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 153-154.

¹⁶Sentinel, August 8, September 1, 11, 1865.

¹⁷Times, February 17, 1866.

¹⁸Jonathan Worth to Lydia Maxwell, January 16, 1867, Jonathan Worth Letter Book, 1865-1868, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

authorities to register voters and supervise elections of
¹⁹
 delegates to new constitutional conventions.

Events moved swiftly from that point. In April, 1867, a Republican Organizing Convention met in Raleigh, the "first mixed convention of any size in the South." Blacks had gathered beforehand at Flagg's Hall in the city to choose their delegates. Among them was John Good, who served as one of the four vice-presidents at the party conference. The convention adjourned after passing a resolution in support of universal
²⁰
 manhood suffrage.

In the summer of 1867, General Daniel E. Sickles, commander of the second military district of which North Carolina was a part, appointed officials to oversee voter registration and the election of delegates to a state constitutional convention. Among New Bern blacks chosen for this responsibility were Moses Hill of the second ward, Clinton D. Pierson of the fifth,
²¹
 and B. W. Morris of the sixth.

On July 18, 1867, Craven blacks gathered to discuss the situation. Voting strategy was mapped out as well as tactics for the constitutional convention. New Bern blacks were prominent in the Craven assembly and assumed all offices. Richard Tucker was appointed President, Alexander Bass Vice-President, and Mingo Croom and B. W. Morris secretaries. At

¹⁹Garraty, The American Nation, 438.

²⁰Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 18.

²¹Register of Registrars, 1867, Craven County, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 32.

the end of the meeting a statement was prepared which said that Craven blacks gratefully accepted their voting responsibility, that they believed a universal public education system was necessary, and that blacks should be represented²² on the local school board.

On September 4, 1867, a Republican convention was held to discuss plans for the upcoming November 19 election and the constitutional convention. In attendance were 286 delegates from seventy-two counties, with blacks outnumbering whites. Richard Tucker was one of eight vice-presidents. Again a²³ resolution was passed favoring unrestricted suffrage.

The constitutional convention which began on January 14, 1868, was somewhat different in representation from the 1865-1866 assembly. In 1865, a majority of the delegates had been members of the old Whig party, and all, of course, had been white. In 1868, under the new state party system, there were 107 Republicans and thirteen Conservatives. Among the Republicans were at least eighteen new white residents in the state, so-called "carpetbaggers," and fifteen Negroes. Black delegates were led by James W. Hood and A. H. Galloway, who by now had moved to Wilmington. From New Bern came Clinton D. Pierson who served on the Committee on Punishment and Penal Institutions.

Conservatives were greatly outnumbered and soon realized

²²Republican, July 27, 1867.

²³Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 26.

they were able to do little more than protest each Republican proposal. On the other hand, blacks took an active part in the proceedings. As a group they were unanimous in their concern to protect their rights as individuals and as citizens. When the assembly adjourned on March 18, 1868, they could look back with pride at what had been accomplished for their race: universal suffrage, the abolition of race and property qualifications for holding office, and equal treatment under the
²⁴
 law.

The new constitution was submitted and approved by the people, and on June 8, 1868, the state was readmitted to the Union.

In some areas black rights had evolved before 1868, thanks in great part to aid rendered by the Freedmen's Bureau. In the courts, Bureau agents were instructed to intervene when blacks were the victims of discrimination in order to secure
²⁵
 equal justice.

A case in point was that of Ephraim Kingman, a fifteen-year-old New Bern black arrested for assaulting a white man. He was arraigned before the mayor's court and then transferred for trial to the Freedmen's Bureau court. There he was sentenced to one month hard labor upon the streets, and two weeks later was released upon payment of a ten dollar fine. He was

²⁴Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 33-34, 51; Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 253-273.

²⁵Fred A. Seely to Major Henry Camp, May 7, 1866, Letters Sent, April 20, 1866-August, 1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

then picked up, indicted by the county court without communication with the Freedmen's Bureau, and put in jail to await trial five months later. Only when the Bureau discovered and²⁶ protested the situation was the boy released.

Court testimony was another matter. Opinions on this subject were mixed. The Times was in favor of giving freedmen all rights and privileges regarding testimony but questioned the degree of weight which should be placed upon that evidence²⁷ considering its source. In such a circumstance black evidence could be rendered worthless if a judge instructed the jury to consider it "tainted."

In Craven County, by April, 1866, Negroes were permitted to impeach white evidence. The test case was the State vs. Sarah Richardson. Miss Richardson, a Negro, was arrested for selling liquors without a license. Her accuser was a white man. Defense proposed to produce several witnesses, all of whom were black, to contradict his testimony and to claim that he was a man of ill repute and bad character.

The court refused to hear the testimony, at which point the Freedmen's Bureau intervened. After quite a bit of

²⁶Isaac Rosekrans to Major Adolphus Bolenius, May 12, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 8; Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court to Fred A. Seely, June 8, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 9.

²⁷Times, November 2, 1865, June 21, 1866.

haggling with the state and with the county solicitor, it was agreed that under the proper foundation, black witnesses could be asked questions about the character of a white, but it was still up to the jury whether to believe them.²⁸

By 1866, New Bern blacks had also learned that their rights could in some instances be recognized by actions of the courts. Hannah Castex, a freedwoman, appealed to the freedmen's courts for possession of property she claimed she had bought while a slave. Before the war she had lived as the wife of Raymond Castex, New Bern white, and had bore him two children. These he freely recognized as his sons and treated with favor. He also gave Hannah small sums of money, and little by little she saved enough to buy a house in his name. Castex died suddenly in 1862, and under the laws of the state, as a slave, she had no title to the house. The Administrator of the will freely admitted to the court that Castex had intended to make provision for her, but his unexpected demise had prevented this. In the end, she was restored the house.²⁹

²⁸Jonathan Worth to Eliphalet Whittlesey, April 7, 1866, Fred A. Seely to Eliphalet Whittlesey, April 12, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 9; George Green to Fred A. Seely, April 10, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1868, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

²⁹Robert Castex to Major General Oliver O. Howard, September 15, 1865, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 7; Fred A. Seely to Eliphalet Whittlesey, January 23, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 9.

During the period 1865-1867, there seem to have been no claims in New Bern to jury representation, although evidence from other parts of the state indicates that qualified blacks³⁰ were included on jury lists.

The constitution of 1868 guaranteed black participation in the courts. With restrictions on officeholding eliminated, not only could blacks testify and serve on juries, but they could also sit as judges. Perhaps the most noted black magistrate in New Bern was Clinton D. Pierson, who was praised for³¹ his fairness by all segments of the population.

Suffrage immediately made blacks a powerful influence in New Bern politics. They saw no reason to support their former owners and voted en masse for the Republican party. Conservatives, on the other hand, made no attempt to attract blacks. Rather, they charged Republicans with using unfair and dangerous tactics in wooing Negro voters. These methods, Conservatives warned, would lead to racial hatred, violence, and bloodshed. They pointed as an example to a Republican editorial warning that if all Conservatives were enfranchised³² they "would reduce the negro again to slavery."

Conservatives did warn blacks that by voting Republican they were biting the hand that fed them. As a Journal of Commerce writer asked:

³⁰Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 228.

³¹Journal of Commerce, May 29, 1868.

³²Journal of Commerce, November 22, 1867.

Can the blacks afford to estrange their 'best friends?' They are following strangers who have no interest in them except their votes. They should drive the Radicals from office. Who are the landholders, who are the employers of blacks?³³

Economic intimidation, nonetheless, did not work because Conservatives had nothing politically to offer blacks and because there was no way for Conservatives to carry out their threats without hurting themselves.

One Conservative criticism which did have merit was that although black Republicans outnumbered whites by four to one (approximately 780 to 200 in 1870), whites controlled the party. The Conservative press constantly asked the black population why they had not been given their proportion of offices and wondered how they liked the idea "of 20 whites and 1 or 2 blacks choosing all the offices for them."³⁴ Surely, the Journal of Commerce thought, the more intelligent Negroes would see how they were being used by Republicans to ride³⁵ into power. Never was it mentioned, however, whether black Conservatives would have been nominated for office.

Particularly disturbing to Conservatives was the rumor that a Union League of some five hundred members existed in New Bern. As the election to the constitutional convention of 1868 drew close, they wondered whether a so-called "party of freedom" required military drilling and mustering into

³³Journal of Commerce, July 17, 1869.

³⁴Journal of Commerce, August 18, 1867, June 2, July 24, August 17, 1869.

³⁵Journal of Commerce, November 7, 1869.

"secret leagues, orders and associations."³⁶ How much secrecy was necessary in a community in which black and white Republicans greatly outnumbered Conservatives cannot be ascertained.

During the period 1868-1874, white Republicans did control the city. The mayor was always white. In the city council there were usually one Conservative, four white Republicans, and two blacks. This resulted from the arrangement of the political wards. The first ward was so overwhelmingly Conservative or Democratic that seldom was a Republican candidate nominated.³⁷ The second, third, and fourth wards were apparently split between white and black Republicans with whites controlling the offices. In the fifth ward blacks outnumbered whites, but only occasionally was a black nominated for office. The sixth and seventh wards were controlled³⁸ by blacks, and they held most offices.

Of the nine justices of the peace elected all were Republican, but only two or three were black. The town clerk on occasion might be black. The three school board committeemen elected were usually white, although blacks were elected twice to this position.

Between the 1868 and 1875 state conventions, New Bern blacks were elected to the following offices:

³⁶Journal of Commerce, May 16, October 4, 1867; Sentinel, October 31, 1868.

³⁷Republic and Courier, May 9, 1874.

³⁸Analysis of the black population of New Bern by political ward, 1870 Census.

state senate	2 terms
state house	7 terms
city council	8 terms
justice of the peace	10 terms
city clerk	2 terms
school board	2 terms

In addition blacks served ten times as registrars and ten times as judges of election.

Despite white control several blacks rose to local and even state prominence. Chief among these was A. H. Galloway, who apparently came South during the war and settled in New Bern. Although he lived there only a short while, he played an important part in rallying freedmen to support the suffrage movement. In 1864, he was a member of the delegation to see Lincoln. In 1865, he served on the committee to promote the Raleigh freedmen's convention and led the New Bern delegation to that assembly. In 1868, after he had moved to Wilmington, he was a black leader in the constitutional convention and was elected to the state senate where he served until his death in 1870.³⁹

John R. Good, born in 1820, had been a free Negro barber in New Bern before the war. He was also a member of the delegation to Washington in 1864. Although he could not read and write, his natural leadership abilities and knowledge of parliamentary law made him a logical choice to preside over the first mass meeting of New Bern blacks in 1865. As a delegate to the Raleigh freedmen's convention, he was chosen as

³⁹Times, May 21, 1864, August 30, 1865; Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 9.

temporary chairman and was given the task of organizing the conference. He also helped to draw up the address by the assembly to the state convention of whites meeting at the same time. He served as Vice-President of the State Equal Rights League and of the Colored Education Convention. In April, 1867, he was named one of four vice-presidents at the Republican Organizing Convention. He was a registrar of election in the sixth ward in 1874. That year he also served as justice of the peace and later was elected to the state house of representatives.⁴⁰

B. W. Morris, a leading black educator after the war, also found time for politics. He was a registrar in the sixth ward and was elected secretary at a mass meeting of New Bern blacks in July, 1867. In the 1868 special session of the General Assembly he was one of the "most active in the legislature," and was one of twenty-one blacks to serve in the state house of representatives during the 1869-1870 term. He was one of two blacks elected to the New Bern school board during the period.⁴¹

Richard Tucker, an undertaker living in the third ward, could neither read nor write, but he had an intense desire to

⁴⁰Times, May 21, 1864, August 30, 1865; Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 9-10, 13, 16, 94, 201; 1870 Census, Craven County, 6th ward of New Bern; Republic and Courier, November 8, 1873, April 25, 1874.

⁴¹Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 58, 68, 138, 191-192; Times, July 27, 1867; 1870 Census, Craven County, 6th ward of New Bern; Journal of Commerce, August 6, 1869.

see his people educated. He donated a lot in the city for use as a teachers' institute and insisted that all his children attend school. He served three times as registrar and twice as inspector of election. In July, 1867, he was elected president of a mass meeting of local blacks, and in September of that year he was one of eight vice-presidents at the state Republican convention. In 1868 and again in 1874 he was elected justice of the peace. In 1870 he was elected to the state house of representatives and in 1874-1875 was one of ⁴² four blacks to serve in the state senate.

Israel B. Abbott, a house carpenter from the sixth ward, was a popular speaker at local gatherings. He was an inspector of elections in 1871 and also was elected as an anti-convention candidate in that year. In 1872 he was one of ⁴³ seventeen blacks to sit in the state house of representatives.

E. R. Dudley, born in 1840 and a cooper living in the seventh ward, was elected to the city council in 1868 and served ⁴⁴ in the state house during the 1871 and 1872-1874 sessions.

⁴²Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 28, 194, 201; Register of Registrars, 1867, Craven County, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 32; Times, July 27, 1867, April 22, 1868, August 4, 1869, April 22, June 8, 1871; Journal of Commerce, July 25, August 6, 1869; Republic and Courier, April 25, May 9, 1874; 1870 Census, Craven County, 3rd ward of New Bern.

⁴³Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 194; 1870 Census, Craven County, 6th ward of New Bern; Times, April 20, July 17, August 3, 1871; Republic and Courier, November 8, 11, 1873, May 9, 1874.

⁴⁴Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 194; Branson, NC Business Directory, 1868, 45; 1870 Census, Craven County, 7th ward of New Bern; Journal of Commerce, July 25, 1869; Republic and Courier, April 25, 1874.

George Price served as secretary of the New Bern freedmen's meeting in 1865. He was also a member of the committee selected at Wilmington to promote the Raleigh freedmen's convention. In 1870 he was elected by the Republican convention to fill the unexpired vacancy in the state senate caused⁴⁵ by the death of A. H. Galloway.

Clinton D. Pierson, also a free Negro barber in New Bern before the war and a resident of the fifth ward, was one of fifteen blacks at the 1868 constitutional convention. He was elected justice of the peace in that year and was commended by all sides for his fairness, even in cases involving black⁴⁶ against white.

Other New Bern blacks who held elective office or served in some other political capacity were:

Alexander Bass--vice-president, mass meeting of local blacks, July, 1867.⁴⁷

Thomas Battle--New Bern nominating committee to send delegates to the Raleigh freedmen's convention, August 1865; elected to the school board, August, 1869.⁴⁸

Austin Blunt--New Bern nominating committee to send delegates to the Raleigh freedmen's convention, August, 1865.⁴⁹

⁴⁵Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 10, 97, 100.

⁴⁶Register of Registrars, 1867, Craven County, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 32; Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 33; 1870 Census, Craven County, 5th ward of New Bern; Journal of Commerce, May 29, 1868, July 25, 1869.

⁴⁷Times, June 18, July 27, 1867.

⁴⁸Times, August 30, 1865; Journal of Commerce, August 6, 1869.

⁴⁹Times, August 30, 1865.

William Burton--delegate, seventh ward, 1871 county
Republican convention.⁵⁰

Virgil A. Crawford--judge of election, seventh ward,
1871; delegate, 1871 county Repub-
lican convention; elected city council-
man, 1871, 1873.⁵¹

Mingo Croom--secretary, mass meeting of local blacks,
July, 1867; elected justice of the peace,
1868; elected to the city council, 1868,
1869.⁵²

George S. Fisher--elected city councilman, 1871.⁵³

Joseph Green--vice-president and member of resolutions
committee, mass meeting, August, 1865.⁵⁴

Moses Hill--registrar, 1867; elected justice of the peace,
1868.⁵⁵

William H. Johnson--resolutions committee, mass meeting,
August, 1865; judge of election,
fifth ward, 1871; delegate, fifth
ward, county Republican convention,
May, 1874.⁵⁶

Willis Lewis--elected justice of the peace, 1869.⁵⁷

⁵⁰Times, June 25, 1871; Republic and Courier, November 8,
1873.

⁵¹Times, June 8, 25, 1871; Branson, NC Business Directory,
1872, 68.

⁵²Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 201; Times,
June 18, July 27, 1867; Branson, NC Business Directory, 1868,
45; Journal of Commerce, August 8, 1869.

⁵³1870 Census, Craven County, 5th ward of New Bern; Branson,
NC Business Directory, 1872, 68.

⁵⁴Times, August 30, 1865.

⁵⁵Register of Registrars, 1867, Craven County, Assistant
Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 32; Nowaczyk, "North Carolina
Negro in Politics," 201.

⁵⁶Times, August 30, 1865, April 20, 1871; Republic and
Courier, May 7, 1874.

⁵⁷Journal of Commerce, July 25, August 6, 1869.

William McLivaine--resolutions committee, mass meeting,
August, 1865.⁵⁸

J. S. Mannix--secretary, county Republican convention,
July, 1869; elected city clerk, 1869;
delegate, fifth ward county Republican
convention, 1871, 1874.⁵⁹

Joseph Mumford--delegate, seventh ward, county Republican
convention, July, 1867; judge of election,
1871; registrar, 1875.⁶⁰

George Physic--justice of the peace, 1868; judge of
election, 1871.⁶¹

James W. Pierson--resolutions committee, mass meeting,
August, 1865.⁶²

John Randolph, Jr.--resolutions, delegate nominating
committee, mass meeting, August,
1865; Wilmington committee of three,
September, 1865; delegate Raleigh
freedmen's convention; committee to
draw up address to state constitution-
al convention, Raleigh freedmen's
convention; recording secretary,
Colored Education Convention, 1866;
delegate, seventh ward, county Repub-
lican convention, 1874.⁶³

⁵⁸Times, August 30, 1865.

⁵⁹Journal of Commerce, July 25, August 8, 1869; Times,
June 8, 25, 1871; Republic and Courier, May 7, 1874.

⁶⁰Times, April 20, June 25, 1871; Republic and Courier,
April 25, 1874.

⁶¹Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 201;
1870 Census, Craven County, 5th ward of New Bern; Times,
April 20, 1871.

⁶²Times, August 30, 1865.

⁶³Times, August 30, 1865; Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro
in Politics," 10, 14; Republic and Courier, May 7, 1874.

E. L. Richardson--delegate nominating committee, mass meeting, August, 1865; elected justice of the peace, 1869; registrar and judge of election, 1871.⁶⁴

George A. Rue--delegate, Raleigh freedmen's convention; committee to draw up address to state constitutional convention, Raleigh freedmen's convention, 1865.⁶⁵

George Stanley--delegate nominating committee, mass meeting, August, 1865.⁶⁶

Jupiter Tucker--delegate, third ward, county Republican convention, 1871, 1874.⁶⁷

G. B. Willis--elected justice of the peace, 1869; elected to the state house, 1870; registrar and judge of election, 1871.⁶⁸

Amos York--judge of election, 1871; elected to the city council, 1874.⁶⁹

New Bern remained somewhat outside the realm of state politics from 1871 to 1875. In 1871, Conservatives, reacting to what they considered the excesses of the 1868 constitutional convention and the regime of Governor Holden, succeeded in forcing a referendum on a new constitutional convention. This idea was overwhelmingly rejected in New Bern and Craven

⁶⁴Times, August 30, 1865, April 22, June 8, 1871; Journal of Commerce, July 25, August 6, 1869.

⁶⁵Times, August 30, 1865; Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 10.

⁶⁶Times, August 30, 1865.

⁶⁷Times, June 25, 1871; Republic and Courier, May 7, 1874.

⁶⁸Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro in Politics," 194; Journal of Commerce, July 25, August 6, 1869; Times, April 22, June 8, 1871.

⁶⁹1870 Census, Craven County, 4th ward of New Bern; Times, June 8, 1871; Republic and Courier, May 9, 1874.

county by a vote which followed strict party lines. In the state, however, the measure was only narrowly defeated. This by no means stopped the Democratic party, and in 1875 another convention was held. In both referendums it is evident that the Republican party relied on threats of what a convention would mean to whip up black support. These threats included the return of the whipping post and apprentice laws strongly resembling slavery. Again New Bern would not budge and voted against the new convention. The state, on the other hand, voting in district blocs, ratified the convention plan. This convention passed two resolutions which directly affected blacks: interracial marriages were forbidden and separate schools were required.⁷⁰

From 1864 to 1875, New Bern and North Carolina blacks fought to secure specific privileges. First, they wanted recognition of their rights of citizenship. They were successful. Slavery was abolished, black codes were struck down, and they eventually received the right to vote. Secondly, they wanted equal rights. This came with the right to testify in court, jury representation, and non-discriminatory punishments. Thirdly, they wanted protection of their rights as workers. Written contracts and Freedmen's Bureau assistance assured this.

Much has been written about the evils of Reconstruction

⁷⁰Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 643.

politics. Undoubtedly there were crooked politicians in North Carolina and in New Bern, both black and white. It was a corrupt period nationally as well. But later there was evil, too, in the Northern politician who conveniently forgot the plight of the Southern black and in the Southern politician who unashamedly stripped Southern Negroes of their rights.

The work that was done, admittedly under pressure, for the Southern black during Reconstruction could have stood as a testament in race relations for the North as well as the South. It was not to be so.

CHAPTER V

THE TRENT RIVER SETTLEMENT

Federal authorities found it impossible to protect, house, and feed all of the blacks who migrated to New Bern during the war. Conditions were overcrowded, and to have tried to handle such a large population within the confines of the town limits would have caused more suffering and disease than already existed.

It was decided to set up camps outside the city to take care of the overflow, with the idea that once the war was over blacks would return to the farms. Military authorities never planned for these settlements to be permanent; however, they also did not count on the blacks' reluctance to leave or on their ability to build a primitive but stable community.

During the first year of the war black refugees who could not find quarters with friends in town were placed in these camps. There were three: two were outside the interior line of fortifications, the other was inside and easily defended. In February, 1863, Confederate troops made a feint toward New Bern, and Negroes in the camps fled back into the city for fear of being captured. Blacks were hesitant to return to the settlements.

It was then decided to consolidate the camps and move the freedmen just over the Trent River bridge south of the city, still well inside Union defenses. Streets were laid out, and lots of fifty by sixty feet were assigned. By 1864, some eight

hundred cabins had been built, and 2,798 freedmen were living¹ there.

At the end of the war some residents left the camp to live in town or return to the plantations. Others migrated North where Federal authorities found them jobs as domestic servants. Many had no desire to leave. At the same time freedmen continued to leave the countryside, and many moved into the village. In June, 1865, its population was still 3,000. One year later² this number had been reduced to 2,052.

Such a large village of ex-slaves outside the city caused much concern among white New Bernians. The Times commented that the Trent River bridge connecting "Hayti with the continent" furnished an "easy and pleasant means of communications between the races"; but relations, nonetheless, were strained. Negroes from "Slabtown," as the camp was referred to, seemed lazier and more dependent than freedmen in New Bern. Whites complained that they were constantly crossing the bridge to beg for food and that government rations only made them more dependent. Something should be done to force these idlers to³ leave and return to the plantation.

Military officials were inclined to agree. They admitted

¹James, Negro Affairs, 7.

²Eliphalet Whittlesey to Oliver O. Howard, June 8, 1865, Letters Sent, July 4, 1865-July 13, 1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 1; T. N. Doherty to Colonel A. Brady, June 2, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 7.

³Times, June 21, September 28, December 12, 1865.

that while many freedmen were working, others did nothing but lounge around waiting for rations to be distributed. In the judgment of one Bureau agent:

Nothing will ever induce the freedmen to leave the settlement and engage in agricultural pursuits in the country but the stringency of action, necessity and hunger. They have had much done for them and will continue to receive it as long as it is proffered. /It is/ no real kindness to keep them in a situation of dependence.⁴

Conditions in the camp apparently were deteriorating. Some families had enough to feed themselves, but if the head of the household were sick for a week or two, the members of his family came close to starvation. As in New Bern they feared the coming of winter. There were reports of deaths, chiefly among widows with small children, who found it impos-
5
sible to provide food, fire, and clothing.

Sanitary conditions also were poor. Freedmen were encouraged to make ditches and shores around their lots to carry off stagnant water, but there were never enough. A drainage ditch along the breastworks which encircled the village was used as a privy, even though Inspector William H. Doherty had recommended that the ditch be filled and public privies
6
be erected in suitable places.

⁴Stephen Moore to Oliver Howard, November 19, 1866, Letters Sent, April 20, 1866-August, 1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

⁵Archibold W. McKillip to Stephen Moore, August 23, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

⁶William H. Doherty to Fred A. Seely, May 24, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

The hospital was always overcrowded, and the situation there worsened after the smallpox attack during the summer of 1866. The food was usually spoiled, the bread sour, and the coffee bad. The kitchen was poorly equipped, and the furniture was filthy and insufficient. Clothing was badly needed; many of the patients were in rags and some were nearly naked. Rains threatened at any time to wash out the roof of the larger ward.⁷

In addition to these problems, pressure was being applied to have the settlement restored to its owners. Negotiations began in 1863, and by late 1866, the owners had enlisted the support of General Oliver O. Howard, ex-Governor John M. Morehead, Assistant Commissioner James Bomford, and Superintendent of the Eastern District Stephen Moore.

Nationally the Bureau received adverse publicity for its administration of the village. Ironically, this controversy involved charges made by American Missionary Association representative Stephen W. Laidler against the Reverend Edward S. Fitz, superintendent of the settlement.

Upon arriving in New Bern Laidler toured the village and reported to his superiors that the camp was grossly mismanaged. Subordinates were running the settlement in Mr. Fitz's absence, one of whom "had attained the reputation as one of the most

⁷Stephen Moore to Eliphalet Whittlesey, June 19, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 8.

remorseless slave drivers in the district before the war."⁸

The missionary continued to criticize local Bureau activities and on April 20, 1866, charged Fitz with the following:

- (1) that he hung two boys up by their wrists;
- (2) that he ordered a woman to jail after being told she had used disrespectful language toward him;
- (3) that he imprisoned and fined little boys \$5 for playing ball on Sundays;
- (4) that he kept these boys in prison without a hearing;
- (5) that he kept a man in prison for three months for not paying a debt, during which time the man's wife and child died of smallpox and the man was then compelled to bury them;
- (6) that he refused to supply coffins in which to bury destitute freedmen who had died of smallpox;
- (7) that he charged extortionate fines, such as a \$60 fine against an old man for warning another freedman that he was to be arrested.

Laidler added that he had noticed an usual amount of trepidation among the other Bureau officers, whom he suspected of similar acts of oppression.⁹

Fitz at once realized the gravity of these charges and asked that a Court of Inquiry be summoned to investigate them. His request was honored. Eastern District Superintendent Fred A. Seely in his report to the Assistant Commissioner recommended that the matter be handled within the Bureau, although he

⁸Stephen W. Laidler to the Secretariat, March 20, 1866, AMA Archives, NC, roll 2.

⁹Stephen W. Laidler to the Secretariat, April 20, 1866, AMA Archives, NC, roll 2.

thought the inquiry should be conducted by someone not
associated with the local office.¹⁰ Lieutenant Joseph T.
Allison was called in from Warrenton and within the week
issued his report.

On the first charge of hanging a boy by the wrists,
the accusation was not sustained, although Allison pointed
out that Fitz often made no attempt to ensure that prisoners
were not maltreated by guards.

The second charge was not sustained, although it was noted
that Mr. Fitz' trials "were often conducted with indecent
haste and without the dignity and equity of decision which
should characterize the judicial decisions of a Freedmen's
Court."

The third charge, of imprisoning and fining little boys
for playing ball on Sundays, was not sustained.

The fourth charge, of keeping prisoners in jail without
a hearing, was not sustained.

Mr. Fitz was found guilty "by extenuation" of the fifth
charge of imprisonment and maltreatment of a prisoner whose
wife and child were stricken with smallpox. Fitz was judged
negligent in not seeing to it that guards did not exceed their
orders.

¹⁰Edward S. Fitz to Fred A. Seely, April 14, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC; Fred A. Seely to Eliphalet Whittlesey, April 11, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 9.

The sixth charge, of denying coffins, was not sustained since there were none to furnish.

The seventh charge was partially sustained. Fitz, it was found, at times charged unreasonable fines.

In conclusion, Allison found Fitz guilty of maladministration and recommended that he be dismissed.¹¹ Apparently the matter was settled.

Not so, for before a military commission could review and act upon these findings, Generals James B. Steedman and Joseph F. Fullerton, with a New York Herald reporter in tow, arrived in New Bern to inspect the local Freedmen's Bureau office. They toured the Trent camp and reported:

Opposite New Bern is a settlement composed exclusively of freedmen . . . whose condition is deplorable. They are living in small huts and are decrepit and helpless under government rations. Reverend Fitz has exercised the most arbitrary and despotic power.¹²

These comments reached the public through the Herald reporter, causing quite a stir about the treatment of blacks in the South and about the maladministration of the Bureau. The North Carolina Times rushed to the Bureau's defense, pointing out that the inquiry was not a trial but a hearing. The Herald correspondent, the New Bern paper claimed, was¹³ merely seeking a sensational news story.

¹¹Joseph T. Allison to Fred A. Seely, April 24, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

¹²Times, May 17, 1866.

¹³Times, May 22, 1866.

Assistant Commissioner Whittlesey complained to his superior, General Oliver O. Howard, that the matter was under investigation when the generals arrived. They had demanded the inquiry records, hastily held their own superficial hearings, and then released the records and the charges to the public before any punitive action could be taken against Fitz.¹⁴

The general furor over the affair gradually subsided, but the sniping between Laidler and local Bureau agents had just begun. The missionary wrote to the New York Secretariat of his organization that conditions in the camp were even worse than revealed in the Herald article.¹⁵ In response, Lieutenant Allison repeated charges he had made at the inquiry that Laidler had initiated the suit for malicious reasons and not for the freedmen's benefit.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Fitz was quietly dismissed, the reason given as being part of a general reorganization of the district.¹⁷

The battle of words continued throughout May, June, and

¹⁴Eliphalet Whittlesey to Oliver Howard, May 14, 1866, Letters Sent, July 4, 1865-July 13, 1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 1.

¹⁵Stephen W. Laidler to the Secretariat, May 22, 1866, AMA Archives, NC, roll 2.

¹⁶Joseph T. Allison to Fred A. Seely, April 24, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC; Joseph T. Allison letter to the Times, May 20, 1866, in the Times, May 22, 1866.

¹⁷Fred A. Seely to Eliphalet Whittlesey, May 16, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 9.

July, 1866. On May 21, Trent freepersons Foy Tooley, Alonzo Dickson, and Elisa Simpson sent statements to American Missionary Association headquarters. Laidler was accused of scolding Tooley's wife for not cooking a good enough breakfast and of calling her a "lying old bitch." Tooley also claimed that at night he often heard Laidler "yell and howl and run about the house like a crazy man, begging for the Lord's forgiveness." Dickson was present when Laidler insulted Mrs. Tooley and corroborated Tooley's account of Laidler's strange nocturnal activities. Miss Simpson, who lived in Fitz's house, said that Laidler often used very insulting language to her and on one occasion broke into her room after she had retired for the night.¹⁸

Despite these allegations Laidler continued to have many Negro friends and supporters. James W. Hood wrote to A. M. A. Secretary George Whipple that Laidler's service was invaluable to the religious movement.¹⁹ Laidler himself told Whipple that if any testimony were required, he could have a petition signed by a thousand persons within a few days.²⁰ However, in an effort to keep peace,²¹ Laidler was transferred North.

¹⁸Petitions to the New York Secretariat, May 21, 1866, AMA Archives, NC, roll 2.

¹⁹James W. Hood to George Whipple, June 17, 1866, AMA Archives, NC, roll 2.

²⁰Stephen W. Laidler to George Whipple, June 23, 1866, AMA Archives, NC, roll 2.

²¹George Whipple to Stephen W. Laidler, July 15, 1866, AMA Archives, NC, roll 2.

Much of this trouble had resulted from the bickering and jealousy between the two agencies, but the entire episode cast doubt on the Bureau's ability to run such camps. The evidence was damning. At least one agent, Fitz, was guilty of abuse of power. Freedmen in the camp were living in squalid conditions. Some lounged about the settlement with nothing to do.

More than ever the Bureau wanted to force the freedmen to go back to the farms. This desire was motivated by several factors: concern about the freedmen's condition, the cost of providing for the freedmen, the belief that rations and other handouts fostered dependence, and the need to move the labor force where it was needed in order to stimulate the economy.

To achieve its objective, local agents were instructed to warn freedmen that after June 1, 1866, government rations²² would be given only to the most feeble. Friends of the Negro protested that such a policy would lead to further poverty, disease, and even death. Yet, everyone agreed that a flood of emigrants could be expected.

In the meantime a plan had been formulated to take care of those freedmen who were too poor or too sick to leave. Once the size of the Trent village was reduced, the Bureau would move the remaining blacks to a poor farm. Such a venture, it was hoped, would pay its own way.

²²Times, May 15, 1866.

For this purpose, the Bureau first took over the buildings and grounds of the old Craven County poorhouse. Located one mile outside New Bern, this tract contained thirty acres of land, a large house, and a garden.²³ By the end of the summer of 1866, forty-one persons, including twenty-three black and three white orphans, as well as twelve Negro adults and three white women, were cultivating six acres of cotton. At harvest these crops brought in \$221, well over expenses. However, in October, 1866, the orphans were moved to a state home in Goldsboro, and the land was returned to the Wardens of the Poor.²⁴

In April, 1866, arrangements had been made with Isaac Brooks, lessee of the Lyons Pasture plantation, seven miles outside New Bern, to establish a destitute farm. Brooks would furnish the land, stock, tools and seed, while the Bureau furnished the hands, rations, shelter, medicine, and other supplies. Once general rations were stopped, it was thought that destitute freedmen would flock to the farm. By July, however, few had appeared, and only sixty-nine of nine hundred acres were cultivated. Lieutenant Allison, Bureau supervisor,

²³William H. Doherty to William Weigel, June 11, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

²⁴William H. Doherty to William Weigel, June 12, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC; Fred A. Seely to Eliphalet Whittlesey, April 28, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 9.

complained of a labor shortage but added that he thought the population would increase once permanent quarters were
²⁵
 erected.

By October only thirty Negroes were living in the four spacious barracks which had been built, and the enterprise seemed to be a failure. The death blow was dealt in January, 1867, when the farm was abandoned. Two reasons were given: (1) expenses for the six-month period, June-December, 1866, were \$1,173.95, not including rations, several times the money brought in by the harvest of 224 bushels of corn; (2) perhaps a smaller farm nearer New Bern would save on transportation costs and be more convenient to those liable to seek
²⁶
 aid.

With the farm abandoned, four black families took advantage of the opportunity to lease the land from Mr. Brooks. In June, 1867, however, they had to apply for rations until their crops were in. Harvest proved too big and costly an operation for them, and in August the plantation was put up
²⁷
 for sale. Plans for a poor farm were soon dropped altogether.

²⁵William H. Doherty to William Weigel, June 12, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

²⁶Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner, October 30, 1866, Reports of Operations, 1866-1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 22; Archibald W. McKillip to Stephen Moore, January 29, 1867, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

²⁷Thomas P. Johnston to Stephen Moore, July 30, 1867, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

The destitute farm failed because it could not be made self-supporting immediately. This was due, in large part, to the fact that the Bureau had no authority to force blacks to move to the farm. Without the necessary labor, elaborate plans for the construction of barracks, supply houses, equipment houses, and classrooms were useless. There was no impetus for the blacks to go to the farm except in the face of impending starvation.

Although the farm was not successful, the Bureau still wanted to get out of the Trent camp. The only way to do this was to restore the land to its owners. The village, part of a tract of land containing 500-600 acres, had belonged to Peter G. Evans, who died in 1863; but his heirs, through their mother, immediately petitioned for restoration.

This was granted except for the land on which the Trent village was located. In November, 1866, Mrs. Ann Evans and her children reapplied, pointing out that they were in dire need of the revenues from the property. They did not want to evict the freedmen, only to gain a reasonable rent.²⁸ Archibald W. McKillip, superintendent of the camp, recommended that the petition be approved. Colonel Stephen Moore, acting on this advice, informed General Howard that the only way to induce the Negroes to return to the country was to abandon the camp.

²⁸Mrs. Ann Evans to Oliver O. Howard, November 21, 1866, Letters Received, July, 1866-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 7.

This second petition was only partially approved, and the outer grounds were restored. Mrs. Evans was told that the entire estate would be transferred, but that it was "not considered expedient to send these freedmen away" with winter²⁹ approaching.

In February, 1867, ex-Governor John M. Morehead, a relative of the heirs, took up the cause, asking Colonel Moore to endorse³⁰ a policy of total restoration. This Moore did in a letter to his superiors on March 19, adding that with spring coming on, many planters had already offered to employ the freedmen but "a large portion remain still and a part are in utter idleness."³¹ After further negotiations, Moore's advice was followed, and on June 23, 1867, the entire village was turned over to its³² owners.

Throughout the discussions and controversy over the settlement, Freedmen's Bureau agents overlooked one important point: most freedmen had no intention of leaving. Once again the Bureau was hampered in that it could only advise the residents

²⁹Stephen Moore to Colonel James Bomford, December 19, 1867, Letters Received, November, 1866-February, 1868, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 11.

³⁰John M. Morehead to Stephen Moore, February 4, 1867, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

³¹Stephen Moore to James Bomford, February 19, 1867, Letters Received, November, 1866-February, 1868, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 11.

³²Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner, September 25, 1867, Reports of Operations, 1866-1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 32.

to evacuate the camp, warning them that the owners would expect rents and that these would have to be paid on time. Having lived there for as long as three years, most freedmen regarded the village as home and refused to depart.

In fact the camp had begun to show signs of permanency soon after it was established, and not all military officials had viewed it as temporary. Horace James, Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina during the war, was one of the first to advocate a permanent settlement:

If we must have camps or African villages in which to shelter and feed refugees then this settlement, located healthfully on the bank of the Trent, is a model for imitation.³³

After the war James became Superintendent of the Eastern District and urged the government to purchase the land and sell it to the freedmen. He convinced Eliphalet Whittlesey of the feasibility of such a plan, and the Assistant Commissioner in his annual report of 1865 stated that under the proper conditions the village could be self-supporting.³⁴ Washington refused to support such a plan, however, and with a national policy of restoration already underway, Whittlesey warned James not to "encourage the freedmen to build on land which they are not sure of holding."³⁵

³³James, Negro Affairs, 8.

³⁴Eliphalet Whittlesey to Horace James, September 25, 1865, Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner, September 28, 1865, Letters Sent, July 4, 1865-July 13, 1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 1.

³⁵Eliphalet Whittlesey to Horace James, October 25, 1865, Letters Sent, July 4, 1865-July 13, 1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 1.

This warning came too late, for construction had begun in the camp in 1864. James reported at that time that in addition to military offices, there were a hospital building, a blacksmith shop, cookshops, stables, a variety store, a school, a church, and eight hundred dwellings. Many of these homes were no more than makeshift cabins, but James estimated³⁶ that total improvements on the land amounted to \$16,000.

In September, 1865, he noted that many residents were leasing outside property, owned mules, horses, and carts, or ran shops and mechanic trades. Income from the village for that month, including rents of fifty cents per lot and sale of products financed by the Bureau, totaled \$935 while expenses were several hundred dollars less. The land, he insisted, should be sold to those who had made improvements on their lots. As proof of the community's potential, he cited one³⁷ shop which was sold for \$55.

In May, 1866, with the population of the camp still around 2,000, the Bureau decided that until the freedmen left the settlement should be organized as a distinct township with independent offices. A permanent system of taxation was instituted which included the following fees:

keeping a shop	\$5 per month
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³⁶James, Negro Affairs, 7-10, 52.

³⁷Horace James to Lieutenant Frederick H. Beecher, September 20, 1865, Letters Received, July, 1865-October, 1866, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 8.

selling at a stand or on the street	\$2 per month
license for a dray	\$2 per month
ground rent	50¢ per month

To prevent outsiders from gaining an economic advantage in the camp, persons coming by boat or crossing the bridge to trade also had to pay these taxes.

In addition land surrounding the village was rented to freedmen in return for one-third the crops. Funds collected from taxes and rents paid all expenses except destitute rations and medical supplies. Salaries of the superintendent and his clerk, camp laborers, teamsters, guards, and hospital attendants, plus the cost of all repairs were paid in this manner. ³⁸

During this period Trent freedmen were aware that efforts were being made to have the land restored to the owners. In February, 1867, Lieutenant McKillip, superintendent of the camp, was approached by fifty freedmen who wanted to know why the abandoned land in the settlement was not being rented out as usual for the growing season. It was time for plowing, and these blacks and their families wanted some assurance that the land would be available. ³⁹

³⁸Times, May 7, 1866; Eliphalet Whittlesey to General Campbell, May 7, 1866, Letters Sent, July 4, 1865-July 13, 1867, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 1.

³⁹Archibald W. McKillip to Stephen Moore, February 22, 1867, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

By this time the population of the camp was 1,760, a drop of almost three hundred in the seven months since rations were stopped. Five hundred fifty houses were occupied, meaning that since 1864, 250 had been abandoned or torn down. The population, however, seemed to be stabilizing. Below is a breakdown of the population in June, 1866, compared to ⁴⁰February, 1867:

	June, 1866	February, 1867
under age 14	35.6%	31.7%
males 14-49	21.8	24.1
females 14-49	34.6	35.7
over 50	8.0	8.5

These figures indicate that there were more Trent freed-men and women moving into the prime working age category. Thus, the cessation of rations had not changed the nature of the camp or caused any mass evacuation, although it possibly achieved its objective of speeding the departure of idlers looking for handouts.

Therefore, by 1867, there were two different views of the settlement. On the one hand were military authorities, whites, and the owners who wanted to do away with the camp. They painted a picture of Bureau maladministration, rising costs, abuse of power by camp officials, and suffering, poverty,

⁴⁰William H. Doherty to Stephen Moore, June 2, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

indolence, and dependence among the freedmen. This group also pointed out that by retaining the camp, the Bureau denied the owners their right to property.

On the other hand were the few advocates of the settlement and the freedmen themselves. They emphasized the opportunities and advantages the community offered.

Blacks could learn to read and write in schools operated by the Bureau and by Northern benevolent societies. In 1865, the camp had four schools with eight teachers and five hundred pupils.⁴¹ In 1866, there were six schools with over seven hundred students. One of these was an evening school attended by a number of adults. Some could not leave work until 8 P.M., but they gladly rushed to school for an hour's study. Men from all occupations--carpenters, boatmen, cooks, grocers, butchers,⁴² and farm hands--wanted the rudiments of an education.

Blacks had the protection and security of person and property and could rely on Bureau assistance in economic matters. The village was remarkably free from crime--during the six month period June-December, 1866, there were no arrests⁴³ in the settlement. Destitute freedmen were fed, housed and

⁴¹Isaac Rosekrans to Horace James, December 4, 1865, Letters Received, August 1865-June, 1866, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

⁴²Archibald W. McKillip to Stephen Moore, October 17, 1866, Unentered Letters Received, 1866-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

⁴³Arrest Reports, June to December, 1866, Operations Reports, 1865-1867, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

clothed. Workers could have their labor contracts read and approved by Bureau agents.

The Bureau's hospital facilities, though limited, were more than could be provided by other means. Early in 1867, Dr. Stephen Fleming was put in charge of the medical center, and he instituted many reforms, even while negotiations for the transfer of the settlement from Bureau authority were⁴⁴ taking place.

There were also intangible advantages that the community offered freedmen. Long hours of hard work in the field could be offset by social gatherings. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the future of the village, there were as yet no permanent organizations such as those in New Bern, but the church served as a convenient center for social events, meetings at which to distribute information, and political assemblies.

But the course of action had been decided upon, and the Bureau, as mentioned, restored the settlement to its original owners. There were no immediate effects on the size of the village, however, because it was impossible for the owners to drive the eighteen hundred freedmen living in the camp off the land. To have tried would have been time-consuming, costly, and possibly quite violent. Instead, the owners determined

⁴⁴Stephen Moore to James Bomford, July 6, 1867, Letters Received, November, 1866-February, 1868, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 11.

to make the best of it, hoping to show a profit from the rents they collected.

A rental system had been employed by the Bureau, but by 1867, it enjoyed only minimal success. Rents were collected when the freedmen could afford to pay them, which usually meant that they were late or not paid at all. Apparently there was opposition to the rents, for one agent complained that some freedmen were discouraging their neighbors from making monthly
45 payments. The owners were even less successful. House rents were placed at between twenty-five cents and one dollar per month, depending upon the size of the house and the lot surrounding it. If all monthly rents were paid, total income would be \$200 per month. During the first six months under the original owners, a total of only eighty-five dollars was collected. Yet, true to their word, the owners evicted no
46 one.

It is difficult to determine why the freedmen did not pay their rents. Certainly there was resentment toward the Bureau's abandoning the camp and leaving the ex-slaves tenants of a white landlord. This may explain resistance to the rents under Bureau supervision, since blacks knew that negotiations

⁴⁵Stephen Moore to James Bomford, February 19, 1867, Letters Sent, January 1867-December, 1868, Superintendent's Records, Eastern District, NC.

⁴⁶Stephen Moore to Jacob Bomford, February 24, 1868, Letters Received, November, 1866-February, 1868, Assistant Commissioner's Records, NC, roll 11.

for restoration were taking place. Some residents could justifiably plead poverty, while a portion--that group villified by the press as idlers and hang-about--simply had no intention of paying. Information on the camp decreases significantly after the Bureau's departure, but one may surmise that within a short period of time the owners, having recourse to legal action, were able to get their monies, especially in light of the fact that the population of the village did not decline.

In November, 1869, Trent village became part of the newly established township of Wildwood.⁴⁷ Few residents left, and by 1870 it made up over three-fourths of the population of this new district. By this time the settlement also had a new name--James City, being named after the Bureau agent who had first sought to make it a permanent community.

In 1870, Wildwood township contained 2,241 people, all but 108 of whom were black. The male Negro population numbered 45.8% of the total, compared to 41.5% in New Bern, and a classification by age of the two communities reveals the following:

	Wildwood	New Bern
under 12	27.3%	25.6%
12-17 male	6.0	5.3
12-17 female	6.6	8.2
males 18-49	19.3	17.7

⁴⁷Times, November 30, 1869.

females 18-49	27.3	30.7
males 50 and over	7.3	5.3
females 50 and over	6.1	7.3

This chart indicates that 53.3% of the population in Wildwood and 51.7% in New Bern were under eighteen or over fifty years old, compared to the national average of 57.4%.

In Wildwood, 529 of 552 residences, or 94.1%, were family dwellings, compared to 693 of 919, or 75.3%, in New Bern. Wildwood contained few whites, and there were no blacks⁴⁸ living in white homes as domestic servants.

What do these statistics reveal about the nature of the population and the residential patterns of the two communities? First, that the population was similar in composition; there were no striking variations in any age group. Children under twelve made up around one-fourth the number of blacks in each town. There was a shortage of males, although the problem was not as acute in the settlement and environs as in New Bern.

Secondly, charges of dependence due to age are not completely substantiated. Neither had an overwhelming number of the very young and the very old, and both were lower than the national average. It must also be remembered that many blacks over fifty still were able to put in long hours in the fields.

The most important feature of the residential structure was the fact that the family unit was the predominant living

⁴⁸1870 Census, Craven County, Wildwood township.

situation. Certainly the Freedmen's Bureau and the missionary societies stressed the importance of the family in an effort to have the former slaves conform to the accepted norms of white society. It is sometimes forgotten that blacks themselves viewed marriage and family as proof of freedom. Most entered willingly into these arrangements--ones which had often been denied them on the plantation.

The economic picture in Wildwood was somewhat different than in New Bern. Before the war the Trent camp had been farmland, part of the Evans estate. During the conflict several thousand runaway slaves were moved en masse to the settlement. To that point there had been no urban development as in New Bern. There were no permanent structures, no churches, schools, stores, or parks; nor were there any community services, hospitals, restaurants, police, or fire companies. These had to be provided.

Wildwood did not have the economic sophistication of New Bern and thus offered fewer types of jobs. Not being a market, Wildwood offered fewer opportunities for employment in related occupations, such as carting or draying. Limited in capital, the community had even less need for a large number of craftsmen, other than those needed to provide residents with necessities.

As Figure 6 shows, over two-thirds, 67.8%, of the Wildwood males were unskilled workers, compared with 63.2% in New Bern. But whereas only 22.2% of New Bern's unskilled

workers were farm laborers, in Wildwood well over half hired out as farm hands. Otherwise, this class showed the same dependence on rural economies in both communities. Most gained their living from the rivers, from the woods, or from the farms. Both groups supplemented their incomes by selling produce from their truck gardens.

Figure 6: Black Males Employed in Unskilled Occupations,
Wildwood Township, 1870

farm laborers	218
lumbermen	86
common laborers	23
fishermen	18
boatmen	18
railroad workers	7
saw mill workers	7
turpentine workers	4
stevedores	3
teamster	1
carter	1
waiter	1
	<u>387</u>

Only thirty-four, or 6.0%, of Wildwood's black males worked at skilled trades (see Figure 7), a percentage four times smaller than in New Bern (24.1%).

Figure 7: Black Males Employed in Skilled Occupations,
Wildwood Township, 1870

carpenters	8
coopers	7
millers	5
shoemakers	4
blacksmiths	3
painters	2
butchers	2
baker	1
mason	1
wheelwright	1
	<u>34</u>

Of the remaining 150 males, 122 were farmers, many of whom lived in Trent camp and leased out lands nearby. From this group came the wealthiest Wildwood residents. Of thirty-seven blacks in the township with at least \$100 in real or personal property, twenty-six were farmers. Four owned more than \$100 in real property, Garret Mony with \$500 in holdings and Jessie Brooks with \$300 having the most. Mony and Brooks were well off in other respects, each possessing more than ⁴⁹\$2,500 in personal effects.

Allegations to the contrary notwithstanding, there was very little unemployment among Wildwood males, at least by 1870. More likely, there was a great deal of underemployment, just as in New Bern. In the spring, summer, and fall there was always plenty of farm work, but by December there was little to do except try to earn a little extra income from the rivers and forests. Such times required close budgeting of supplies to ensure against cold and foodless winters.

As in New Bern, most Wildwood females kept house--472 of 716, or 65.9%, while 9.5% were unemployed, compared to 8.0% in New Bern. Those who stayed at home had the important tasks of keeping the family in clothing and providing the best meals possible considering the limited provisions. However, of the remaining 176 adult females, 122 were farm laborers, a much larger proportion than in the city, where only ninety

⁴⁹1870 Census, Craven County, Wildwood township.

50

of 1,416 worked on the farms.

As a whole suburban blacks were not as well off as New Bern freedmen. None had large estates such as those owned by William Potipha and Robert Moseley. Many more depended not only upon the small wage they received as farm laborers but also upon the meager produce from their gardens. Denied either, they were bound to suffer.

Politically, Wildwood black voters outnumbered white voters by 500 to 31⁵¹ and were nearly as numerous as New Bern Negro voters, but they played a minor role in county politics. At mass meetings white Republicans and New Bern blacks assumed major positions. Partly this may have been due to a lower literacy rate, but there were other factors. New Bernians had not had to worry about being evicted from their homes, and with the population stable, leaders could build up followings. New Bern black leaders lived among and could closely associate with white leaders who controlled the party. A number of New Bern's Negro politicians, among them A. H. Galloway, John R. Good, and Clinton D. Pierson, had been free before the war. Although they had had to play the white man's game, at the same time they had been able to own property and above all to call themselves free men. This gave them a certain amount of self-esteem which freedmen had

⁵⁰1870 Census, Craven County, Wildwood township.

⁵¹1870 Census, Craven County, Wildwood township.

to learn.

The survival of Trent village was one of the more remarkable events of Reconstruction. Here was a community which was planted in the wilderness and inhabited by illiterate freedmen who were expected to live off nearby farmland owned by their former masters. Its sole reason for existence was as a home for runaway slaves. During its early years it was nurtured by Freedmen's Bureau supervision, rations, supplies, and medical care and by the efforts of Northern benevolent societies. Yet this support came with the advice to go back to the plantation and enter into contracts with their former owners. If the freedman was totally dependent upon this government guidance and assistance, why did he not heed such advice and leave, especially after government handouts were stopped?

This was partly due to inertia which the freedman had developed during his stay in the village. It had been a major step for the slave to run away from the plantation; it was hard for him to imagine what returning would be like. Perhaps he would be better off economically if he returned to the countryside, but in the end he found it easier to stay in the camp and find work where he could.

Mainly, though, it was due to a desire among the freedmen, however primitively articulated, to have a community of their own. For this reason the settlement endured, even after being

assimilated into Wildwood township. In 1880, four years after Reconstruction ended and the South was "redeemed," 1,150⁵² blacks listed themselves as residents of "James City."

⁵²"James City," 10th Census, 1880, Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880) embracing Extended Tables of the Population of States, Counties, and Minor Civil Distinctions, with Distinction of Race, Sex, Age, Nativity, and Occupations: Together with Summary Tables, Derived from other Census Reports, Relating to Newspapers and Periodicals: Public and Illiteracy: the Dependent, Defective, and Delinquent Classes, etc. (Washington, 1883).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The motivating factor in the North's decision to involve itself in war with the secessionist states was not an overwhelming desire to free the Southern slaves; but the Civil War which followed became a catalyst for profound social, political, and economic changes in the status of the Southern Negro, changes which formed part of the framework for the long and often painful process of building a "new South." The freedman experience in New Bern and environs, 1862-1872, revealed the extent to which the ex-slave's status was modified as a result of the war and subsequent Union occupation and reconstruction policies.

For slaves, "community" had traditionally meant only those activities and assemblies permitted by the master. Moreover, the fact that a bondsman could be sold away from family and friends made every slave community potentially unstable. Freedom opened up a wide range of opportunities for blacks to gather together, establish lasting ties, and create permanent organizations.

One manifestation of this desire for association was the eagerness with which ex-slaves entered into marriage. As Frances Simkins and Robert Woody noted in South Carolina During Reconstruction, the establishing of a household distinguished the freedman from his fellow ex-bondsmen and undoubtedly

gave him a greater sense of individual accomplishment.¹
 Ex-slaves were supported and encouraged in their efforts by both Northern and Southern whites, who lectured blacks on their new role in society and urged them to conform to established social mores.²

Historians have also pointed out the error in confusing the number of women who no longer worked in the fields as evidence of increasing Negro inclinations toward idleness.³ The large number of black women in New Bern who kept homes and cared full-time for their children is ample proof of the success that freedmen had in adopting the white custom of the stay-at-home wife. Through marriage the family became a strong and stabilizing factor in the development of a sense of community, and kinship ties were strengthened by adopting, through economic necessity as much as by design, the extended family structure, the predominant residential pattern among New Bern Negroes.

Freedmen society had to be built from the base up; there were no existing organizations to arrange religious meetings,

¹Frances Butler Simkins and Robert Hilliard Woody, South Carolina During Reconstruction (Chapel Hill, 1932), 359, hereinafter cited as Simkins and Woody, South Carolina During Reconstruction.

²Joel Williamson, After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877 (Chapel Hill, 1965), 308, hereinafter cited as Williamson, After Slavery; Willie Lee Rose, Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment (Indianapolis, 1964), 263, hereinafter cited as Rose, Rehearsal for Reconstruction.

³Simkins and Woody, South Carolina During Reconstruction, 359; Williamson, After Slavery, 308.

social events, or political gatherings. There were no associations to deal with black problems, other than Northern-controlled governmental and benevolent agencies. White Southerners certainly showed little desire to help in this respect. Nevertheless, churches and schools had to be built, community services had to be provided, aid societies had to be established, and political organizations had to be created. Much of this was done under the direction or at least with the aid of Northern societies, but New Bern freedmen did their share and in many cases acted independently. The Reliance Fire Brigade, the local Masonic chapter, St. Peter's aid society, and the four Negro churches all were formed largely through the efforts of the ex-slaves.

Black education has been discussed a great deal by historians. Joseph Gregoire de Roulhac Hamilton's Reconstruction in North Carolina casts doubt on the wisdom of attempts to provide freedmen with the rudiments of education. Hamilton charged that not only did Northern efforts to teach the freedmen jeopardize Southern racial harmony by unrealistically promising that doors would be opened by education, but such instruction "in most cases was productive of little if any good." Hamilton concluded:

With a due appreciation of the courage, devotion and often the self-sacrifice of the teachers of the North, one is still forced to the conclusion that, as a class, they lacked moderation, tact, knowledge of the real condition of the negro, and, in far too many cases, that most priceless possession, common sense. Certainly so far as concerned the attitude of the white people of

the State towards education, it was productive of direct injury from which recovery was very slow, if indeed it has ever come.⁴

George R. Bentley, in his study of the Freedmen's Bureau in 1955, also concluded that the agency's educational efforts would have been more successful if they had not antagonized whites.⁵ Other authors have agreed that Northern teachers were generally suspected by local whites of "stirring up the Negroes" by preaching Radical Republican politics and social equality.⁶

However, Roberta Sue Alexander, who examined the education of freedmen in North Carolina during Reconstruction, maintained that most North Carolina whites did not oppose the education of blacks, as long as instruction emphasized what whites believed to be the blacks' subordinate role in postwar society.⁷ Sandra E. Small, in a study of twelve "Yankee schoolmarms," found that many Northern teachers neither accepted social equality, agreed with Radical Republican politics, nor felt that blacks were ready for suffrage. Freedmen's Bureau and

⁴Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 317-320.

⁵Bentley, Freedmen's Bureau, 178.

⁶W. McKee Evans, Ballots and Fence Rails (Chapel Hill, 1966), 226, hereinafter cited as Evans, Ballots and Fence Rails; Sandra E. Small, "The Yankee Schoolmarm in Freedmen's Schools: An Analysis of Attitudes," Journal of Southern History, XLV (August, 1979), 385, hereinafter cited as Small, "Yankee Schoolmarm."

⁷Roberta Sue Alexander, "Hostility and Hope: Black Education in North Carolina During Presidential Reconstruction," North Carolina Historical Review, LIII (April, 1976), 116-118.

missionary teachers were mainly concerned with instilling in the ex-slaves a respect for the American work ethic and were afraid "lest relief ruin the moral fiber of the freedmen."⁸

W. E. B. DuBois claimed that black education certainly must be viewed as one of the "benefits" of Reconstruction. He added that the so-called "Negro rule" of Reconstruction being roundly condemned by Dunning school historians at the time of his writing (1910) had actually served as an impetus⁹ to the Southern public school movement, a point hotly debated by Hamilton, who believed Southern whites' willingness to support a public school system was reduced in reaction to the poverty caused by, and the abuses of, Northern control of state government. But while Hamilton is correct in pointing to the prewar efforts of Calvin Wiley and other state¹⁰ educators in advancing the public school idea, it cannot be denied that discussion of the issue during Reconstruction served to define what had to be done, not only for blacks but for Southern whites as well.

As important as these considerations was the impact of education on the freedmen. The most immediate gains from

⁸Small, "Yankee Schoolmarm," 385-401.

⁹W. E. B. DuBois, "Reconstruction and Its Benefits," American Historical Review, XV (July, 1910), 795, hereinafter cited as DuBois, "Reconstruction and Its Benefits."

¹⁰Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 609-610, 617-619.

emancipation had been in terms of physical rights. The ex-slave had control over his own person; he was no longer the property of another. He was also free to train and use his mind for purposes other than to combat the boredom and humiliation of slavery. Able to learn to read and write without legal restriction, he gained access to new and powerful thoughts. He could write down and preserve his opinions for friends and followers to read. This was slow and tedious work after a long day in the fields, but New Bern blacks, eager to learn, crowded missionary and Freedmen's Bureau schools. When these were full, they opened their own and taught themselves. As Bentley has suggested, this was a psychological lift to the freedman, improving his self-esteem and preparing him for his new role in society.¹¹

Black participation in this postwar Southern society, however, was severely restricted by white racial prejudice and fear. Southern whites typically portrayed blacks as lazy, carefree, and immoral. Unfortunately, many Northerners who came South to aid the Negro shared the belief that blacks were inferior beings.¹² Black voting, after all, was more a Southern than a Northern phenomenon during Reconstruction.

Some uncertainty and fear was understandable. With law and order broken down, all expected violence of some kind to

¹¹Bentley, Freedmen's Bureau, 171.

¹²See, for example, Rose, Rehearsal for Reconstruction, 369; Small, "Yankee Schoolmarm," 387.

break out anew. Whites expected ex-slaves to turn on them and exact revenge. Their dignity and self-respect were threatened by a new and radically altered social order which they believed the North would impose on the defeated states. Blacks, on the other hand, had other problems with which to contend. They were free but unsure of what freedom meant. Emancipation had taken away the focal point of their existence, plantation life, frequently leaving them homeless and confused about their new role in society. They, too, worried about revenge--by whites against them. These fears added to the disorder wrought by the war and, combined with prejudice, made rethinking of racial attitudes difficult.

Moreover, the development of postwar residential segregation and the separation of the two races in churches, schools, and in all other activities isolated blacks from whites and strengthened fears and misunderstandings.

Early twentieth century historians did little to alter the view of either the freedmen or the consequences of Reconstruction. William A. Dunning, for example, stated that the ex-slave's condition was such that he could not for generations expect to be "on the same social, moral and intellectual plane with the whites." Dunning then used this preconception to assert that legal restrictions contained in the black codes "were justified by well-established traits and habits of the negroes."¹³

¹³William A. Dunning, Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877 (New York, 1907), 58, hereinafter cited as Dunning, Reconstruction, Political and Economic.

Hamilton, while more concerned with economic and political rather than social attitudes, explained such codes as an attempt to make the freedman realize that for the first time in his life he had responsibilities--that while Southern whites went to work to provide the necessities of life for both races, the Negro, basking in idleness, threatened to ruin the Southern economy.¹⁴

The continued predominance of such ways of thinking throughout the first half of this century did little to provide a rational explanation of the development of a new postwar racial relationship, if in fact a new relationship did emerge. After the war white Southerners were reluctant to face the possibility that defeat might mean the forced discarding of old social theories. To them black was more than a skin color: it was a symbol of slavery. In North Carolina, for example, it was safe to assume that nine of every ten Negroes had been slaves. During the era of slavery slaves were usually seen performing some kind of labor; they were not often seen congregating in the town, along the sidewalks, or on the docks.

In New Bern, with a proportionally larger prewar free Negro population, the white view of the black was perhaps different. However, during the thirty years before the Civil War state laws had been enacted which restricted the free black's freedom of movement and association, and his

¹⁴Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 158.

right to bear arms, vote, trade, teach, or preach.¹⁵ Therefore, even in New Bern, there were certain kinds of activities in which the white population did not expect the black to be engaged.

This situation changed immediately with the Federal occupation of the city. New Bern was soon crowded with runaway slaves who blocked the sidewalks, created congestion in the markets, and huddled together along the wharves. To say that this was a novel sight to whites returning to their homes and businesses after the war would be an understatement. Added to this shock was the sight of Northern white men conversing with the freedmen, giving them food and clothing, and urging them to attend schools taught by white women. The world was indeed turned upside down! It is understandable that the worst fears might flourish in such an environment.

The uneasiness expressed by both races in New Bern during the summer and fall of 1865, the threats of violence, and the few incidents that occurred between black soldiers and white police must be viewed not only in the context of a developing postwar social order, but also in light of general discomfort¹⁶ felt throughout the South. Fears of reprisals, uncertainty about wages, inadequate labor supplies in some areas, the

¹⁵Lefler and Newsome, History of a Southern State, 117.

¹⁶Dunning, Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 47-48; Dan T. Carter, "The Anatomy of Fear: The Christmas Day Insurrection Scare of 1865," Journal of Southern History, XLII (August, 1976), 345-364.

mythical promise of forty acres and a mule--these fed on one another to make matters worse. New Bern had other difficulties as well: a large number of dependent Negroes, Federal occupation troops, both black and white, and no street lights. These conditions exacerbated the problem of defining a new social code. By 1867, many of these problems had been partially solved, but the new social code which evolved did not eliminate the fears, misunderstandings, prejudice, and stereotypes which had been instilled in whites for generations.

The economic situation in the South overshadowed all other considerations and demanded immediate resolution. In New Bern several problems were involved. First, the large number of blacks who remained in the town after the war created many difficulties, chief among which were poverty and disease. Second, a lack of industry and the capital to develop it created a heavy dependence on agriculture for economic survival. Third, an entirely new economic system had to be evolved which included the freedman as free laborer.

It is undoubtedly true that to many freedmen the early weeks of freedom were viewed as an end to the drudgery of slavery. Many wandered off the farms and into towns such as New Bern where they created housing, labor, food, and medical problems. But the motivations for such travels were as complex and individual as the freedmen themselves. To say that ex-slaves selfishly abandoned the crops in the field in search of wanderlust begs the point. While it must be agreed that

freedmen "put their freedom to the test" by leaving the
¹⁷plantation, to assert that this was due to the happy, aim-
 less, irresponsible character of the ex-slave is a shallow
 stereotype and reflects a complete ignorance of the complex-
 ities of human nature. There were a variety of reasons for
 the mass migration which occurred throughout the South:

(1) many plantations were not functioning in the aftermath of
 the war, so to have stayed might have meant starvation; (2)
 slaves who might have stayed on the plantation during the
 war out of loyalty to a kind master might have felt this debt
 to be repaid; (3) many were looking for friends or family
 from whom they may have been separated for many years; (4)
 the plantation and plantation labor were symbols of slavery
 that they longed to forget; (5) Freedmen's Bureau handouts
 tempted many who were barely subsisting otherwise; (6) many
 were anxious to test this new freedom by seeking opportunities
 elsewhere; (7) undoubtedly many freedmen, just as many whites,
 were disposed to indolence, the ex-slaves viewing government
¹⁸rations and housing as the easy life.

A few words must be said about the paradoxical role of

¹⁷Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 156; Dunning, Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 11.

¹⁸Horace Mann Bond, "Social and Economic Forces in Alabama Reconstruction," eds. Kenneth M. Stampp and Leon F. Litwack, Reconstruction: An Anthology of Revisionist Writings (Baton Rouge, 1969), 77; Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation (Cambridge, 1977), 61.

the Freedmen's Bureau in the labor situation. On the one hand, gratuitous rations inevitably encouraged dependence. However, to have ignored the plight of starving ex-slaves, and of whites for that matter, would have belied the humanitarian stance the Federal government had assumed in the last stages of the war and in the first few years of Reconstruction. This was a situation which the North, and especially the Freedmen's Bureau, was slow to deal with, mainly because there was no viable solution. In his first instructions to subordinates, Assistant Commissioner Eliphalet Whittlesey stated that a primary Bureau objective was "to aid the destitute without encouraging dependence."¹⁹ That is, rations had to be issued to relieve suffering, but there must be some effort to make the ex-slaves realize that such actions were only temporary and were not to substitute for goods gained by their own labor. Poverty, however, was a way of life for the Negro, cast out into society without possession. To distinguish between the needy and the lazy was a time-consuming if not impossible task. In such circumstances many were fed who did not need assistance, while others suffered for lack of care.

Part of the problem was the piecemeal approach employed. The Bureau was never sure of its authority nor even of its continued existence from year to year. Congressional approval

¹⁹Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 299. See also Bentley, Freedmen's Bureau, 77.

of its establishment was for one year only, and support had to be mustered again in 1866 and in the years to follow. Moreover, by 1866, the agency had become a pawn in the struggle between President and Congress and thereafter was regarded²⁰ as a tool of the Radicals.

Nor did Federal land policy help matters. Enacting legislation in 1865 provided that the Bureau rent out abandoned lands to ex-slaves. General Howard confirmed this policy in his Circular No. 13 of July 28, 1865, in which he advised officials to divide lands controlled by the Bureau²¹ into lots and begin renting them out to worthy blacks. Many New Bern Negroes took advantage of this opportunity to become small farmers and gained enough experience at management and finance to carry on throughout Reconstruction. Not only did this encourage industry among the ex-slaves, it also provided funds for the continuation of other Bureau services. Property rights, however, even those of a defeated people, were regarded as sacred, and the Bureau soon found itself returning most "abandoned lands" to previous owners. Agents then had to explain to a further discouraged black population that lands once rented out were no longer available. Negroes, living on the hope of forty acres and a mule, saw the progress they had made largely from their own labors lost and were

²⁰Thomas A. Bailey, The American Pageant: A History of the Republic, volume 1 (Lexington, Massachusetts, 1956), 496-497.

²¹Bentley, Freedmen's Bureau, 93.

disheartened. This was particularly unsettling in situations such as Trent camp where in 1867 blacks pleaded in vain with the Bureau agents to rent out lands upon which they had earned their previous year's living. It serves no purpose to dwell on the fact that once Trent village was restored the owners evicted no one, despite rents unpaid. Perhaps this was irresponsibility on the part of the freedmen, or perhaps it was a protest. The main point is that in an instance where Reconstruction policy could have lifted the black out of poverty, dependence, and the conditions in which he later found himself, the zeal for helping the freedman had waned, and in the end he was abandoned.

But it would be unrealistic to assume that all ex-slaves could have immediately become small farmers. Even with training and experience, not every freedman, nor every white, was capable of land management. Nor would it have been realistic to set up the Negro with a homestead when millions of whites, North and South, were not so fortunate. That would have required a complete reshaping of national, economic, and social priorities. In any event, many blacks had to enter the labor market, where they bartered their toil for subsistence.

Here the Freedmen's Bureau deserves only praise. At a time when Southern whites feared, in some cases with just cause, that Negroes would work a short time, take their wages,

and run off leaving partially cultivated crops to die in the fields, the Bureau encouraged binding written contracts to ensure a labor force from planting time to harvest. On the other hand, many freedmen feared a return to slavery if they worked for their old masters or were afraid of being turned out after harvest without wages, rations, or crop shares. Bureau officials advised blacks that written contracts which carefully spelled out terms of labor and compensation protected them against such abuses. Far from unsettling labor conditions, the Freedmen's Bureau helped to get the Southern economy moving again by bringing together the region's two major resources, land and labor.

Unfortunately, labor contracts, unintentionally or otherwise, tied blacks to the farms where they became tenants, sharecroppers, or field hands. This resulted from a tendency among whites, North and South, to view the Negro situation as foremost a labor problem and from the South's general inability to share in the industrial revolution which hit full gear after the war. Induce the freedmen to return to the fields, it was reasoned, providing them with a minimum wage and certain social and even political privileges, and the problem would be solved. This was based partly on the humanitarian assumption that jobless blacks, huddled in the cities, would starve unless relocated. There is much evidence that whites were correct in fearing the overcrowded conditions in the towns.

The New Bern black population problem was only alleviated after repeated efforts to encourage freedmen to return to the plantation and after cessation of rations forced the indolent to emigrate. But in the general concern to remove the urban black population, whites overlooked those freedmen who were willing and able to earn a living and who could provide needed services to the city. Furthermore, acceptance of a servile theory of the black economic role, the almost absolute white control of capital, and an extreme reluctance among white skilled laborers to admit black competition in many trades mired most black families in poverty for generations.

The freedman's political situation during Reconstruction was quite complex. It was far from clear at the war's end what his role would be in the new Southern state governments. Conservatives immediately sought to limit his political participation, claiming that he was too ignorant and too dependent upon the advice of others to have any meaningful impact on the functioning of government. Many state Republicans, on the other hand, undoubtedly saw in the mass of uneducated ex-slaves a force to be used to their advantage, a large electorate to be employed to keep them in power.

This is not to say that Radical Republicans were not genuinely committed to securing black suffrage. Recent scholarship has accepted the view that the Radicals were indeed sin-

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cere in their concern for the plight of the freedmen.

However, most Northerners did not intend that Reconstruction should make the Negro their political, much less their social, equal. Except in five New England states, with only six percent of the Northern Negro population, blacks were denied the right to vote. Between 1865 and 1868, eight states--Wisconsin, Minnesota, Connecticut, Nebraska, New Jersey, Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania--rejected Negro suffrage.²³ With this in mind many Conservatives viewed black suffrage mainly as a tool for partisan political purposes. As a result they fiercely resented all attempts to use blacks to further Northern political interests.

Such observations do not mean that Negroes were totally passive regarding their political future. As early as 1864, North Carolina blacks were vitally concerned with securing privileges for their race. That year they petitioned President Abraham Lincoln for his support of their effort to gain the right to vote. Black New Bernians played a big part in calling together the first Southern state convention of freedmen.

²²Larry Kincaid, "Victims of Circumstance: An Interpretation of Changing Attitudes Toward Republican Policy Makers and Reconstruction," Journal of American History, LVII (June, 1970), 61; LaWanda and John H. Cox, "Negro Suffrage and Republican Politics: The Problem of Motivation in Reconstruction Historiography," eds. Kenneth M. Stampp and Leon F. Litwack, Reconstruction: An Anthology of Revisionist Writings (Baton Rouge, 1969), 156-157.

²³Avery O. Craven, Reconstruction: The Ending of the Civil War (New York, 1969), 262, hereinafter cited as Craven, Reconstruction; Garraty, The American Nation, 510-511.

North Carolina Negroes commenced publication of a newspaper to lobby for equal rights and organized the State Equal Rights League to push for political privileges--all this taking place almost two years before black suffrage was begun under Congressional Reconstruction policies.

Once black political participation began, New Bern freedmen played an active part in ensuring local Republican control. However, black political leadership was not accepted at that time, even among the freedmen themselves. Inexperienced in party politics, campaigning, and the legislative processes, New Bern blacks turned to white Republicans for guidance. When they did, white Conservatives warned that they were biting²⁴ the hand that fed them, but there was never any political reason during Reconstruction for New Bern blacks to vote Conservative. And even though local Conservatives taunted blacks for being so easily manipulated by the Republican party and for allowing the minority of whites to assume the most important party positions, it is clear that if blacks had switched political allegiance to the Conservative party they would not have gained in the number of offices held or in benefits secured.

Nevertheless, the Conservative charge that white Republicans in New Bern held positions of leadership out of proportion to their numbers is substantiated. While Negroes might

²⁴Evans, Ballots and Fence Rails, 158.

be chosen for a few positions, even on the state level, local party reins remained in white hands. Local government was administered by whites according to the prevailing belief in the efficacy of limited government. Of course, city finances were a thorny problem, for to tax new businesses heavily would be to discourage economic growth and recovery. Still, black neighborhoods cried out for relief from overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and lack of food and other necessities. The white response, North and South, was to encourage the Negro to go back to the plantation.

Political privileges also came in time to include admission to the courts, first as witnesses, later to impeach even white testimony, then as jury members, and finally as lawyers and judges. Such efforts were directed at protecting social and economic benefits which blacks had won. Moreover, the wisdom and actions of such jurists as Clinton D. Pierson, a New Bern Negro admired by black and white alike for his sense of justice and fair play, went far to correct the distorted image of the Negro as an inferior. Such local black leaders as Pierson, Galloway, Good, and Tucker also favorably altered the Negro's estimate of his own self-worth.

Mention must be made of the role of the Freedmen's Bureau and its agents in state and local politics. J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton expressed the opinion that the Bureau "became by judicious manipulation the most active radical political

agency in the South."²⁵ However, there appears to be no evidence of any Bureau intervention in the political affairs of New Bern. While it is true that Bureau agents did play an active part in encouraging blacks to register to vote and were called upon to make recommendations for appointments as registrar and judge of election, there are no instances in the records of the local and district offices of any attempts to manipulate the political activities of the freedmen. And while such contacts may have been initiated in private conversations or through the auspices of the Union League, there is no support in local Bureau records for the charge that the Freedmen's Bureau actively promoted Union League activities. Rather, evidence suggests that in the realm of politics as in other areas most Bureau agents were concerned merely with performing their military duty, which was to protect black rights with the least possible intervention.²⁶

Bureau efforts to establish freedmen refugee camps during and after the war have also been misunderstood. The Trent village outside New Bern was begun as an attempt by military authorities to solve the problem of overcrowding created by the mass migration of runaway slaves to the city. It was planned to serve as no more than a way station until blacks there could be dispersed. Unfortunately, the Bureau had

²⁵Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 294.

²⁶See LaWanda and John Cox, "General O. O. Howard and the Misrepresented Bureau," Journal of Southern History, XIX (November, 1953), 455.

neither the funds nor the authority to resettle the large number of blacks who by 1867 still called Trent village their home. The Bureau's only course of action, once restoration of the lands to their owners was decided upon, was to stop issuing rations and encourage the freedmen to leave. The withdrawal of government handouts did force many idlers to leave, but it also created hardships, especially when coupled with the Bureau's indecision about renting out surrounding farmlands while the case was being settled, for the many blacks who had lived there as long as three years, built homes, and developed a primitive but stable community. Despite these difficulties Trent village survived. Today there is still a small black community outside New Bern known as "James City."

Trent freedmen, through no choice or fault of their own, also became involved in partisan politics and thereby gained a place in the history of Reconstruction, particularly as written by the Dunning school of historians.²⁷ This cadre of writers chose to emphasize the so-called investigation of the camp by Generals Steedman and Fullerton as proof of Bureau maltreatment and abuse of blacks under their charge. Steedman and Fullerton had been sent South to scout out information which could be used by President Johnson in his campaign against the Bureau and against Congress.²⁸ What emerged from

²⁷See, for example, Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 321-323.

²⁸Bentley, Freedmen's Bureau, 126.

their report was the picture of a camp run by Massachusetts clergyman Edward S. Fitz where tyranny, extortionate fines, and sadistic punishments were the order of the day. That there was evidence of abuse of freedmen in the village cannot be denied. However, correction of the situation was swift, with Fitz being relieved of his position two days after the generals arrived. This action came about not as a result of the generals "taking charge" of the situation nor due to the sensational news stories sent North by a New York Herald reporter accompanying the officials. Rather, a thorough investigation had been made by the Bureau itself, conducted by an agent not associated with the New Bern office.

It is both sad and ironic that so much attention was devoted at the time to Bureau maladministration and not to alleviating the plight of freedmen not only in Trent camp but throughout the South. This is not to dismiss the sorry actions of some members of the Freedmen's Bureau, for there were undoubtedly other agents who exercised the same despotic powers as Fitz. However, poverty was endemic among freedmen; the real issue was how to make the best use of taxpayers' funds and at the same time develop a wide-ranging program to pull the ex-slaves up from ignorance and destitution. Mired in politics, hampered by constant calls for the termination of the agency, constricted within by the need for military discipline and by limits to what could and should be done, the Bureau ultimately failed to produce any lasting positive

changes in the Negro's conditions.

How then could Reconstruction have been different? What course of action should have been followed? Hamilton suggested that Federal policy as a whole postponed "for some time a settlement of relations of the two races upon any basis acceptable to the white people."²⁹ This may be true; however, he viewed Federal Reconstruction as a pervasive attempt to alter irrevocably the entire substance of Southern life. No such effort was made. Congressional actions, geared to party politics and ever mindful of being accused of proposing Negro equality, jerked along in starts and fits with no clear concept of what was needed: a change, a reorientation of national racial attitudes.

And while Radicals may have been genuinely interested in improving the ex-slaves' condition, by 1868 most Northerners felt that enough had been done for blacks in relief, education, and in civil rights.³⁰ Thus, a national policy of re-education was unrealistic and politically unviable. Whites, North and South, wanted to forget the war, send the soldiers

²⁹Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina, 420.

³⁰Michael Les Benedict, "Preserving the Constitution: The Conservative Basis of Radical Reconstruction," Journal of American History, LXI (June, 1974), 87-88, hereinafter cited as Benedict, "Preserving the Constitution"; Willie Lee Rose, "The Aftermath of Reconstruction at Port Royal," ed. Charles Crowe, The Age of Civil War and Reconstruction, 1840-1900 (Homewood, Illinois, 1966), 446; Richard B. Drake, "Freedmen's Aid Societies and Sectional Compromise," Journal of Southern History, XXIX (February, 1963), 182-183.

home, end the crusade, and get on with their normal lives. This was the sentiment behind Grant's 1868 campaign slogan:
³¹
 "Let Us Have Peace."

In 1910, W. E. B. DuBois, speaking on the benefits of Reconstruction and lamenting the short-lived successes of Federal intervention to help the Southern Negro, opined that "a Freedmen's Bureau, established for ten, twenty, or forty years with a careful distribution of land and capital and a system of education for the children might have prevented
³²
 the extension of slavery" that came after the war. Thaddeus Stevens had expressed similar sentiments almost fifty years earlier:

We had turned or were about to turn loose four million slaves without a hut to shelter them or a cent in their pockets. The infernal laws of slavery had prevented them acquiring an education, understanding the commonest law of contract, or of managing the ordinary business of life. The Congress was bound to provide for them until they could take care of themselves.³³

That such zeal was not shared or carried on by other Congressmen strengthens Hamilton's argument that it would have been better for the Negro to work out his fate with his former master rather than to have his expectations raised only to be crushed by the indifference of the Federal government.

Yet, Reconstruction cannot be considered a total failure. The freedmen experience in New Bern proved that gains were made.

³¹Benedict, "Preserving the Constitution," 88.

³²DuBois, "Reconstruction and Its Benefits," 785.

³³Quoted in Craven, Reconstruction, 138.

Emancipation secured the physical rights to move about and acquire an education. New Bern blacks celebrated, peacefully but joyously, this physical emancipation each January 1 with an elaborate mass parade. They congregated in public places, as evidenced by the number of ex-slaves who crowded the city markets and docks looking for work, selling food and other wares, or enjoying leisure moments. Ex-slaves not only attended schools, they also opened their own. They fulfilled social needs by forming churches, aid societies, social clubs, and political organizations. Family ties were begun, and the family became an important factor in the durability of the black community.

Economically they gained the right to possess personal and even real property. Most had little money with which to make purchases, but a few were able to build up substantial estates. They also gained the right to choose one job from another--admittedly from a limited number of options--rather than be ordered to perform a certain task. Most were limited by lack of skills and capital to menial labor, but many owned farms or ran their own trade shops. In addition, with the advice and encouragement of Freedmen's Bureau agents, farm workers entered into legally binding contracts with local planters with written proof of wages and terms of labor.

These physical, social, and economic rights were to be protected by newly acquired political rights. With the franchise blacks could vote for candidates who promised to govern

for their benefit or who would write and enact legislation designed to solve the problems they faced. They also gained admission to the courts.

All these gains meant that during Reconstruction blacks had to be recognized openly, in the town square, before the justice of the peace, in labor contracts, and at the polling booth, as citizens and human beings. That these advances were not solidified and were easily revoked could not erase the fact that blacks had stood for a short time as equals in these matters.

In the end New Bern freedmen and ex-slaves throughout the South had to fall back upon their only source of survival--themselves. Clustered in hovels which they called homes, along muddy and crooked paths they called streets, they built their own communities. They were not possessed by any sense of righteousness and martyrdom. They were, after all, only human beings subject to the same temptations and greed of a violent and often corrupt period. But it was this same elemental human-ness, combined with fear, indolence, and all the other characteristics found in both whites and blacks, which banded them together and made them stay in New Bern, even at a time when everyone, perhaps including themselves, was convinced that they should go.

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