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# “Two Steps Forward, A Step-and-a-Half Back”: Harrisburg’s African American Community in the Nineteenth Century

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Those who lived at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder in nineteenth century American cities did most of the “totin’,” “liftin’,” and “choppin’.” They were the casual laborers and servants who regularly shifted from job to job, doing housework, waiting tables, carting goods, cleaning streets, cutting hair, chopping wood, hauling trash, running errands, and doing most of the community’s other necessary but low-paying chores. At Harrisburg, recent immigrants and children of the poor performed part of this work. The bulk fell to its African American residents.

Although Harrisburg was a middle-sized rather than a major urban center after mid-century, its black community was one of the largest in the state. The city ranked sixth among Pennsylvania cities in population from 1850 to 1880, then drifted to eighth by 1900; its black population which numbered second in 1860, was third in 1850, 1870, 1880 and 1890, and fourth in 1900. Until the dawn of the new century the proportion of its black to white residents hovered near ten percent or a little above, greater than that of any other major city in Pennsylvania, including Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Although nearly nine percent of the seaport metropolis’s residents were blacks in 1850, that figure fell to less than five percent through 1900; Pittsburgh’s blacks throughout stood at five percent or less.<sup>1</sup>

As elsewhere, the interactions of three principal forces shaped the black urban experience at Harrisburg: external pressures such as white attitudes and behavior towards blacks, the internal response of blacks to their environment, and such non-racial forces as changes in the economic structure.<sup>2</sup> In common with others of their race, Harrisburg blacks suffered under the dual disabilities of their slave heritage and what has been called the “privatization” of the American economy. White Pennsylvanians, not unlike their countrymen at large, held ambivalent attitudes towards blacks and slavery, alternately displaying sympathy and hostility to both. Economic matters they saw as essentially individual rather than community concerns.<sup>3</sup> Such advances as Harrisburg’s African Americans made came chiefly from their own persistence and the grudging concessions of whites. With few exceptions, African Americans held

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the lowest paying jobs, owned little real estate, and made relatively slight economic and social gains by the end of the century. Industrialization, which so considerably altered the lives of whites, largely passed them by prior to 1900. Progress for blacks on all fronts was slow; every two steps forward were followed by a step-and-a-half back.

During the Revolution, for example, Pennsylvania had been the first state to free its slaves by legislation. The gain of freedom, however, was offset by the provision in the Act of 1780 for gradual rather than immediate manumission. As a result the Commonwealth was among the last of the northern states still holding a few slaves as late as 1840.<sup>4</sup> Similarly Philadelphia, some of whose Quakers were leaders in the abolition movement, and host city for the founding meeting of the American Antislavery Society in 1833, five years later witnessed the firing of Pennsylvania Hall by a hostile mob bent on preventing the meeting of a women's antislavery convention. That same year, 1838, Pennsylvania adopted a new constitution depriving free blacks of the right to vote. Apparently few had voted under the previous constitution and only in a few counties, but it was a privilege that could be exercised. Now persons of color were officially relegated to separate and inferior citizenship.<sup>5</sup> Although the Civil War and the Thirteenth Amendment finally ended involuntary servitude, the mixed attitudes of white Pennsylvanians towards blacks persisted. Whites at Harrisburg reflected that ambivalence.

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The earliest residents, including John Harris, the first settler at Harrisburg, brought slaves with them. Once the frontier passed and agricultural pursuits became the chief livelihood of the region, the number of slaves increased. When the act freeing slaves took effect in 1780, most slaveholders of the community kept their property by simply registering them as the law provided. Children born to slaves after 1780 were free but remained indentured servants of their former masters until the age of 28.<sup>6</sup> According to the first federal census in 1790, Harrisburg had 26 black residents: 25 slaves and Mathias Hootman, who was free. The Harrises were among the community's more persistent slaveholders. The younger John Harris, founder of the town, with six slaves was the borough's largest slaveholder in the first census. A decade later, his son Robert listed five blacks in his household. Four were free (but probably indentured servants) and one was a slave. Robert's sister Mary, widow of Congressman John Hanna, owned a slave woman as late as 1820.<sup>7</sup>

Although most Harrisburg blacks were freed soon after 1790, one or two were listed as slaves in each census through 1830. The freedom they enjoyed was relative at best. Only gradually were they able to set up households apart

Table 1  
Harrisburg Blacks, 1790–1900

Year	Population	Blacks		Slaves		Free Blacks in			
						Wh. Hshlds.		Bl. Hshlds.	
1790	875	26	3.0%	25	96.2%	1	4%	0	0%
1800	1,472	60	4.1%	16	26.7%	44	73%	0	0%
1810	2,287	59	2.6%	2	3.4%	18	31%	39	66%
1820	2,990	177	5.9%	1	.6%	47	27%	129	73%
1830	4,312	493	11.4%	2	.4%	107	22%	384	78%
1840	5,980	646	10.8%			168	26%	478	74%
1850	7,834	886	11.3%			114	13%	778	87%
1860	13,405	1,326	9.9%						
1870	23,104	2,271	9.8%						
1880	30,762	2,906	9.4%						
1890	39,385	3,612	9.2%						
1900	50,167	4,123	8.2%						

Sources: Except for data on blacks, 1790 through 1870, the numbers are from published census records. The figures on blacks are from manuscript census schedules (1790–1840) and Computerized Manuscript Census Data (1850–1870). These figures differ slightly from published data, apparently because of carelessness by early census takers in adding.

from their masters and employers. In 1800 they all lived in white households, as if still slaves. So long as they remained indentured servants, their masters controlled where they lived and kept them close at hand the better to utilize them. Even those who were completely free usually lacked the means to purchase or rent homes, and were therefore obliged to accept room and board with their employers as part of their pay. They strove, nonetheless, to live separately; by 1810 two-thirds did. After 1820 the proportion was three-fourths or more.

Pennsylvania's blacks became more mobile with emancipation, for the most part moving from rural areas to towns and cities. Philadelphia drew large numbers, but a larger proportion located in middle-sized or smaller communities. As the metropolis's blacks swelled from 6,354 in 1810 to 10,507 by 1840, its share of the state's total African American population declined from 47 percent to 41 percent. Only five percent fewer lived in the eleven counties of southeastern Pennsylvania. Harrisburg seems to have attracted many of its blacks from farms in nearby Dauphin County. Each decade its share of the county's blacks increased: a third in 1800, over half by 1830, two-thirds by 1850, and three-fourths by 1860. Joining this flow were migrants from the nearby states of Maryland and Virginia: free-born blacks, manumitted slaves, and fugitives from bondage.<sup>8</sup>

White reactions to the growing black enclave in their midst ranged from sympathy to suspicion to hostility. Sympathetic whites (including Mary Harris

Hanna who still owned her slave) organized and financed churches and schools for them, including a "Negro Sunday School" for adults, and a sabbath school that ran separate classes for young whites and blacks. In May 1817, Daniel Coker, a black methodist clergyman from Baltimore helped organize an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Society in Harrisburg. With fewer than 200 blacks in the area, whites assisted in raising funds by subscription for an "African Church." Dr. Samuel Agnew chaired the drive and George Lochman, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, was treasurer. Agnew and Lochman were white, though a black man, Thomas Dorsey, served as secretary. In this period, whites controlled the boards of most such institutions, assisted by selected blacks.<sup>9</sup>

Once Harrisburg's African Americans became numerous enough, acquired some funds, and developed the necessary self-confidence, they increasingly built up and managed their own institutions and community. Lacking the numbers and resources of Philadelphia's blacks, those at Harrisburg lagged a decade or more in similar developments.<sup>10</sup> Blacks in the larger city, for instance, launched schools of their own between 1800 and 1803. Not until 1817 did Thomas Dorsey open his school for "coloured children . . . both bound and free" at Harrisburg.<sup>11</sup> In 1829 a group connected with the town's original AME Society, withdrew and formed Wesley Union Church which affiliated with the AME Conference already established at Philadelphia. A year later, boasting 115 members (a quarter of Harrisburg's black population), it was the second largest congregation in the conference. Beginning worship in a log building at Third and Mulberry Streets, the congregation by 1839 had built a new brick church on Tanner's Alley behind the state capitol. In 1830 the pastor of that church, with a small subsidy from Dauphin County, opened a school for black children. It closed three years later when the county commissioners stopped all aid and suggested that blacks send their children to public schools.<sup>12</sup>

Only a few Harrisburg whites supported abolitionism. A small group organized the Harrisburg Anti-Slavery society in 1836, and when the founding session of the Pennsylvania Antislavery Society met in the borough the next year, thirteen residents attended as delegates. Nationally prominent abolitionists, Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, jointly addressed a public meeting at the Courthouse in 1847, probably under the sponsorship of the society. However, if still functioning after 1848, its meetings attracted no notice in any of Harrisburg's six newspapers. In the elections of 1848 and 1852, Free Soil presidential candidates who opposed the spread of slavery drew but 11 and 15 votes respectively in the borough. Such antislavery sentiment as persisted took the form of secret support for the Underground Railroad.<sup>13</sup>

At the other extreme were whites who preferred being rid of blacks altogether. For example, Robert Harris joined with other prominent citizens to



*A street scene in the Eighth Ward, Tanners Street from Walnut looking north. Although heavily settled by African Americans, white working families also lived in the district.*

form a local chapter of the American Colonization Society in 1819. This group believed, as they said in an address to the community, that blacks could “never be identified with our national character—nor rise to all the amenities of respected and respectable citizens” and so should be removed to Africa. A rash of suspicious fires in 1820 led to the scapegoating of blacks. In a move against them, the Borough Council supplemented the existing nightwatch with a “citizens’ patrol” that was authorized to “apprehend all suspicious and disorderly persons.” A local newspaper hailed the measure as a success when a number of blacks promptly left town. A second ordinance required “all free persons of color” to register with the Chief Burgess. Strangers of that race who lacked certificates of registration were subject to arrest and punishment.<sup>14</sup> Throughout, gangs of white boys added to the burdens of African Americans by teasing and harassing them on the streets, and on occasion disrupting their church services by such acts as tossing red pepper into the stove, forcing evacuation of the building. The 1847 visit of Douglass and Garrison attracted

spirited rowdies who showered “brickbacks, fire-crackers, and other missiles” on the speakers.<sup>15</sup>

The economic progress of blacks in this period was slow. Those who continued to live in white households or white institutions such as hotels and boarding houses, all worked as servants of one sort or another. Even the great majority of those fortunate enough to live in homes of their own had essentially the same employment. Black males served white families as gardeners, servants, coachmen, and the like. Their wives and daughters cooked for white families, tended their children, washed and ironed their clothes, cleaned their houses, and performed dozens of other such tasks before returning to do the same work for their own families.

In 1850 federal census takers for the first time gathered data that provided insights into the status of the African Americans beyond number, age category, and whether they were free. In Harrisburg they identified 886 blacks and mulattoes.<sup>16</sup> More than three-quarters lived in 174 family units, housed in 151 separate residences. The other quarter consisted of “singles” who roomed in black households or with their employers, regardless of race. Except for crowding more families into fewer residences, the percentages of blacks living in family units and as singles persisted with little change for the next two decades.<sup>17</sup>

Item	1850	%	1860	%	1870	%
Total Blacks	886		1,326		2,271	
Number of family units	174		233		497	
Number in family units	681	76.7%	1,028	77.5%	1,791	78.9%
Number of singles	205	23.3%	298	22.5%	480	21.2%
Average per family unit	3.9		4.4		3.6	
Number of residences	151		179		364	
% of families w/sep res.		86.8%		76.8%		73.2%

The census’s inclusion of the occupations of males over age fifteen gives some indication of the extent to which blacks had risen above household service by the eve of industrialization. The 195 black males with occupations held only sixteen different jobs. Since more than half (101) designated themselves as “laborer,” the exact nature of their work is not known. A few (four clergymen, two “doctors” and a school teacher) were black equivalents of white professionals and semi-professionals. In an era when white professionals were as likely to have acquired their status by apprenticeship as by formal education, it is improbable that the blacks had specialized schooling of any sort. The clergymen were probably charismatic preachers, the doctors practitioners who healed with folk remedies and herbs, and the teachers persons who were literate.<sup>18</sup>



*African Americans filled a wide variety of serving positions. Here a young black whose name was not recorded worked as a driver for a Harrisburg physician. The picture was labelled 'Dr. Rather and his team, Third Street, August, 1896'.*

Seventeen blacks apparently operated small businesses of their own. Ten had barbershops; of these, six worked alone, the others each had from one to three employees. Five ran oyster houses; and two were teamsters, each with a horse and cart, who transported goods on demand. Seven blacks were skilled craftsmen: four shoemakers, two coopers, and a butcher. Two were boatmen working on the canal. The remaining fifty-four filled serving positions: thirty-four waiters, fifteen servants, three hostlers, and one groom. Although the 1850 census made no provision for listing the occupations of females, it showed nine black women with jobs: five cooks, two servants, one washwoman, and one laborer. It seems safe to assume that seventy-seven other blacks (nine men and 68 women) who lived in white households and had no listed occupations were also servants. Blacks monopolized or dominated a few occupations, providing all thirty-four of the town's waiters, eighteen of its twenty barbers, seventeen of twenty servants, and five of the nine cooks listed in the census. In sum, slightly more than half were unspecified "laborers," over a quarter were servants, and

**Table 2**  
**Occupational Classification of Harrisburg Blacks, 1850–1870**

Occupational Class	1850	1860	1870
Males	n = 195	n = 263	n = 605
Professionals	3.6%	3.4%	1.8%
Self-employed	8.7%	11.0%	9.4%
Craft workers	3.6%	4.6%	2.0%
Industrial workers	.0%	2.3%	3.8%
Servants	27.7%	35.4%	23.6%
"Laborers"	51.8%	34.6%	56.9%
Other employees	4.6%	8.7%	2.1%
Miscellaneous	.0%	1.5%	.3%
Females	n = 9	n = 120	n = 174
Craft workers	.0%	3.3%	2.9%
Industrial workers	.0%	.0%	.6%
Servants	88.9%	93.3%	95.4%
"Laborers"	11.1%	2.5%	1.1%
Miscellaneous	.0%	.8%	.0%

Source: Computerized Manuscript Census Data, 1850, 1860, 1870.

not more than sixteen percent held other occupations. (See Table 2 above.) Harrisburg in 1850 offered its blacks fewer opportunities for higher level jobs than did larger northern cities. At the same time it gave them a better chance at owning real estate, probably because land was less expensive than in larger cities.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 3**  
**Number and Percentage of Blacks in Specific Occupations**

Occupation	1850		1860		1870	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Barber	17	89%	23	92%	25	52%
Carter	0		13	42%	15	65%
Coachman, driver	0		6	30%	11	55%
Cook	5	56%	6	75%	16	30%
Domestic, male/female	0		3	6%	109	24%
Hostler	4	27%	1	10%	18	55%
Laborer	102	21%	94	17%	346	25%
Oysterman/restauranter	5	56%	4	25%	3	14%
Porter	0		10	83%	24	92%
Servant, male/female	17	85%	131	31%	54	29%
Teamster, trucker	2	67%	1	6%	18	35%
Waiter	34	100%	27	87%	52	87%
Washwoman, laundress	1	33%	14	25%	9	60%

Source: Computerized Manuscript Census Data, 1850, 1860, 1870.



Harrisburg tax records in 1825 listed only six black property holders. The richest, James McClintock, owned three houses, two half lots, and a stable.<sup>20</sup> By 1850 local tax records showed twenty-eight blacks (five of whom were women) holding real estate and horses and carriages for hire valued at a total of \$13,300. The federal census for the same year listed thirty black property holders (including three women) with a total of \$20,100 worth of real estate. (See Table 4 below.)<sup>21</sup> Those owning land valued at \$1,000 or more included a barber (\$1,800), a waiter (\$1,500), a servant and a hairdresser (\$1,200 each), and a waiter, a doctor, and a laborer (\$1,000 each).

These gains did not prevent whites from continuing to regard blacks as inferior. Local newspapers that did not simply ignore them, alternately mimicked, ridiculed, patronized, and insulted blacks. In contrast to a later era, the tone was indulgent rather than bitter, and terms such as "nigger" appeared infrequently. The *Telegraph*, a Whig paper generally sympathetic during the early 1850s, nonetheless sought to brighten its columns with squibs about them. With tongue in cheek, it denied a rumor that the odd taste of drinking water one summer was due to the presence of a black corpse in the town reservoir. A bit of ice would remove the alleged "*extract de Africano*" taste, it added. Stereotypes abounded. A report on a "colored camp meeting," noted that from the "loads of water-melons" headed in that direction, it was apparent that physical as well as spiritual needs were receiving attention. A burial rite

Table 4  
Real Estate Held by Harrisburg Blacks, 1850, 1860, 1870

Item	1850	1860	1870
Blacks holding real estate	30	106	69
% black adults with real estate	6.1%	15.1%	5.3%
Value black-held real estate	\$20,100	\$97,300	\$104,800
% of increase		384.1%	7.7%
Average black holding	\$670	\$918	\$1,518
% of increase		37.0%	64.5%
Median black holding	\$600	\$800	\$1,000
% of increase		33.3%	25.0%
Size of Real Estate Holdings			
Real Estate Value	n = 30	n = 106	n = 69
\$5,000-9,999		.9%	4.3%
2,000-4,999		6.6%	23.2%
1,500-1,999	6.7%	5.7%	14.5%
1,000-1,499	16.7%	26.4%	30.4%
500-999	40.0%	35.8%	21.7%
100-499	36.7%	24.5%	5.8%

Source: Computerized Manuscript Census Data, 1850, 1860, 1870.

conducted by the black Odd Fellows Lodge was described as “imposing in appearance, and well conducted.” The editor observed that “the colored gentlemen possess a peculiar faculty in imitating the refined ceremonies of civilized life.”<sup>22</sup>

Travelling troupes of black entertainers and whites in blackface frequently played in Harrisburg. Papers carried notices of such events as the “Ethiopian Serenaders,” a group of “negro melodists,” and Kendall and Dickinson’s “Ethiopian Minstrels” whose “delineations of negro character” were “perfect.”<sup>23</sup> Watching blacks in their churches and at social events provided whites with additional entertainment. “It is rich—so unique and so peculiar to hear a genuine sable divine hold forth and give out his notions of things, temporal and spiritual,” the *Telegraph* observed.<sup>24</sup> Their religious encampments across the river in New Cumberland often drew white crowds who reportedly “went over to see how the camp meeting was going on.” When Harrisburg’s “ladies and gentlemen of color” had a “grand supper” at Shakespeare’s Hall, “quite a number of white ladies and gentlemen of respectability were present, and entertained at a separate table.” The behavior of blacks who attended mixed social gatherings was commented on as if they were children: “The colored folks present were of a most respectable caste and appearance, and their deportment was very exemplary. A proper line of demarcation was recognized and a proper decorum observed.”<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, over-familiarity between the races was discouraged. Young white men, for example, drew criticism for frequenting oyster bars and dance houses run by blacks.<sup>26</sup>

More troubling to African Americans than the newspaper slights, which most probably did not read, was their inability to escape completely the curse of slavery. Even the nearly ninety percent born in Pennsylvania were not exempt. Although by 1850 few of this group had themselves been slaves or indentured servants, most if not all were the children or grandchildren of slaves or bond servants. The older ones could remember seeing slaves in Harrisburg as late as 1830 and could tell stories of forebears who were slaves. The ten percent born in slave states, chiefly Maryland or Virginia, were at greater risk. Those born free or manumitted could lawfully live where they chose; those who were runaway slaves, if discovered, could be seized and returned to bondage at any time. Few knew for certain who were which.

The size of Harrisburg’s black community and the importance of its north-south transportation routes regularly attracted fugitives to the community, where, a small number of individuals of both races provided these travelers with food and lodging before hurrying them along toward freedom in Canada. Although most continued north, a few remained, thinking they were safe. On at least two occasions local blacks mobilized to free captured runaways. In 1825 a

party of slaveholders took a captive before a county judge for authorization to return him to bondage. Even as the hearing took place, town blacks armed with "clubs and cudgels" gathered outside. When the slaveowners emerged victorious, the blacks fell upon them, hoping to free the captive. Alarmed at such behavior, Harrisburg authorities arrested twenty of the rioters. Eight subsequently went free, but the remaining twelve were found guilty of rioting. Six were sentenced to six months at hard labor, the others to a year. When a group of whites later petitioned the Borough Council to pardon the prisoners, the council voted only to allow them "leave to withdraw their petition." Prior to the trial, a black who had lived in town for at least eighteen years, owned real estate, and ran a business of his own, offered bail for one of the accused. His addressing the judge as "massa," indicated how narrow he gauged the gap between slavery and freedom at that time.<sup>27</sup>

A remarkably similar affair occurred in 1850. Again, runaways were captured in Harrisburg and brought into court on a charge of stealing their master's horses. "Doctor" William M. Jones, a leader in the black community, testified that the prisoners had lived in town for some time and were not the runaways who were being pursued. Although the judge disregarded Jones's testimony, he ruled that the charge of horse theft was a ruse for preventing the men from escaping and accordingly ordered their release. At the same time he intimated that they were fugitives and as such could be reclaimed by their master so long as no undue violence was used. A party of armed southerners waited outside the courtroom to seize the runaways as they emerged. Meanwhile, an even larger party of local blacks surrounded the courthouse, intent on preventing the master from carrying off his property. A short, sharp struggle ensued. Thanks to a thirty-one year old black laborer named Joseph Poeple who rushed into the fray, one slave escaped. Overpowered by the slaveholders, Poeple, "bloody as a butcher," could not free the others. Because of the turmoil in the near presence of his court, the judge ordered all involved parties arrested for contempt.<sup>28</sup> In the end the southerners were allowed to take their slaves home. Local blacks made bail for the rioters, and the judge, responding to a petition of prominent Harrisburg whites, dismissed all charges against them.<sup>29</sup>

Enactment of a new and stronger federal fugitive slave law in September 1850 soon divided Harrisburg whites as never before over slavery and terrified the town's African American community. The new measure provided that slaveholders had only to bring alleged runaways before a special United States commissioner, not a court of law, and swear that the captives were their property. The accused could not testify, and unless some white person gave convincing contrary evidence or the commissioner doubted the claimant, the accused were remanded south.<sup>30</sup>

Richard McAllister, a local attorney who sought to advance himself politically as a Democrat by catering to the pro-southern wing of the party, sought and won appointment as slave commissioner for the area. During his two-and-a-half-year tenure, McAllister remanded nearly every black brought before him as a runaway slave. He also turned the measure into a racket for collecting fees and receiving rewards from grateful owners by engaging the town's elected constables to track down recent runaways and hiring spies of both races to uncover long-time residents who were escaped slaves.<sup>31</sup>

Harrisburg, a Democratic party stronghold at the time, initially seemed indifferent to or even supportive of the law. By March 1853, the inherent evils of the measure as well as McAllister's abuses of it, changed public opinion. Some people were offended that the law deprived free blacks accused of being runaways of the right to testify in their own defense. It separated parents from a child because they were escaped slaves who had to be returned while the child was free because born in Pennsylvania. McAllister's agents seized some blacks known to be free and had not excited crowds come to their rescue they might well have been taken south. A small black boy who mysteriously disappeared from Harrisburg was found somehow to have gotten to Baltimore where he had been sold into servitude; he was returned to his family. A Maryland police officer shot and killed an alleged fugitive while he and one of McAllister's agents were holding the captive between them.<sup>32</sup>

The turning point came when a respected black teamster, James Phillips, a married man with children who had lived in Harrisburg as if free for fifteen years, was picked off the streets as a fugitive slave. McAllister, whose men had detected Phillips's status, remanded him to his master. The master in turn sold Phillips to a slave dealer for sale further south. Angry Harrisburgers hired a lawyer to trace the victim's whereabouts and redeemed him by public subscription.<sup>33</sup>

Several newspapers that once supported the law or accepted it as a necessary evil, turned against it. They pointedly criticised McAllister and the local constables for going beyond the requirements of the law to ferret out and remand fugitives in order to collect fees and rewards. Persons unknown attempted to set fire to McAllister's home while he and his family were on vacation, and when he sought election as a delegate to the Democratic State Convention, he lost in every ward. At the borough elections in March 1853, twenty percent more voters than usual turned out to defeat for re-election those constables who ran slaves for McAllister. When the Commissioner resigned in May 1853 and moved to Kansas, no one was appointed in his place. Two years later, one of his agents and a black accomplice were found guilty of kidnapping blacks and spent three years in prison.<sup>34</sup> Clearly the white community

had developed some concern for justice, whatever their views on blacks and slavery.

Even before McAllister's campaign, fugitives living in Harrisburg apparently attempted to disguise their status by lying to federal census takers as to their place of birth. Phillips, for example, had given Pennsylvania as his birthplace in 1850. Ten years later, after being remanded to slavery and redeemed, he admitted to being born in Virginia. That he was not alone is indicated by the changes that some Harrisburg blacks made in their birthplaces in the censuses between 1850 and 1870. Of fifty-eight such changes between 1850 and 1860, when it was dangerous to be from a slave state, thirty-nine who previously claimed birth in the south now gave a free state as their place of birth. Nineteen shifted from free to slave state. A decade later when the crisis was over and it was safe to tell the truth, forty-eight changed their birthplaces; thirty-six from free to slave state, twelve from slave to free state. Had the changes been mistakes or corrections of previous errors rather than deliberate, the number changed in each direction should have been approximately equal. Instead, by a margin of two-to-one in 1860 the shifts favored safety, in 1870 they shifted in the direction of candor by a margin of three-to-one.<sup>35</sup> Those who could be traced through two or more censuses, of course, were probably only part of the whole number of runaway slaves living in Harrisburg. Some may have consistently listed themselves as free-born in all three censuses even when no longer necessary. Also, the number of fugitive slaves who moved to Harrisburg and lived there too short a time to be recorded in a census, cannot be known.

A series of public debates in February 1853 revealed the growing frustration of many African Americans. Over the course of a month, they listened to local blacks argue the relative merits of America and Africa as homelands for their race. The affair marked the debut of Thomas Morris Chester, the nineteen year old son of a local oysterman and his wife who had escaped from slavery in Maryland several years before and not been detected. Young Chester, encouraged by one of Harrisburg's white antislave lawyers, had decided on a career in law. He attended Allegheny (later Avery) College, an institution established to educate blacks in the sciences, literature, and languages. There, near Pittsburgh, he fell under the influence of Martin Delaney, a black nationalist calling for the return of his people to Africa. Back in Harrisburg in time for the debates, Chester spoke in favor of an African homeland with an "eloquence" that reportedly rivaled "some of the great guns on the hill [white politicians at the capitol]." Not long after, he left for Liberia.<sup>36</sup>

The closing of the slave commissioner's office in 1853 considerably eased tensions in the black community. Local newspaper bias against them also

lessened. As the Know Nothing nativist crusade gained momentum, a new editor at the *Telegraph* focused on "Americanism," prohibition, and the need to curb immigration. Going by the columns of that paper, it appeared that only Irish papists engaged in petty crimes, drank to excess, brawled, and in other ways disturbed the peace. For the moment, the Irish drew the heaviest fire and replaced blacks as the butt of newspaper humor.<sup>37</sup>

The emergence of the new Republican Party by 1856 soon subsumed nativism in the greater effort to halt the spread of slavery. The Civil War, in turn, gave African Americans new hope that the South's "peculiar institution" would soon be ended and fuller freedom achieved in the North. Wartime incidents in Harrisburg demonstrated that blacks still faced daily prejudice. For example, soldiers stationed at Camp Curtin, north of the city, often battled with blacks during their off-duty hours. Whether the soldiers blamed the blacks for the war with all its sacrifices and discomforts, or were simply giving vent to deep-seated racial prejudice is not known. In any event, a number of clashes resulted in damages to the homes and property of blacks.<sup>38</sup>

One of the uglier incidents occurred in May 1863. Soldiers drinking at a beer parlor were asked by the black owner to pay on being served. They threw him out of the building for asking and left, carrying off several tumblers and other objects. A policeman who witnessed the incident arrested the ringleaders, but the magistrate who heard the case released them for lack of sufficient evidence. Not long after, friends of the soldiers went to the black's home where they "destroyed all the furniture in the house," and stole clothing, a lady's gold watch, and \$25 in cash, "the hard savings of the family." After breaking out the windows and doors of the nearby black Masonic Hall, they vandalized five or six homes of blacks, forcing open shutters, breaking sashes, and carrying off anything of value. White troublemakers "piloted" the soldiers, indicating properties that belonged to blacks. The next day, whites in uniform attacked several black men, leaving them "unmercifully beaten." That evening, police in another part of town prevented further assaults on black families. Finally, on Wednesday, the sheriff who had been absent, returned to town and enrolled a large enough force to prevent any further disturbances. Although the *Telegraph* faulted the mayor for not acting promptly, no one was punished.<sup>39</sup> Lesser affairs continued until the end of the war, with the *Telegraph*, now a Republican paper, usually taking the side of the victims and castigating both the offending soldiers and officials who did little about the episodes.

Despite such abuses, blacks were eager to participate in the war. As early as March 1863, Harrisburg blacks made their way north to enlist in a new Massachusetts 54th regiment. Though officered by whites, its ranks were reserved for African Americans. On June 9, only a week after the beer-parlor

riot, a party of twenty-five to thirty recruits left to enlist in a second such regiment, the 55th, also forming in Massachusetts. The next day, under the leadership of Chester, now designated as "a leading colored citizen," yet another 135 blacks, forty-five of whom came from Harrisburg, entrained for Boston. This after a "War Meeting" in Tanner's Alley where Chester and several black clergymen addressed the assemblage.<sup>40</sup> "From barber shops and hotels, from Tanner's Alley and South streets, from 'Bull Run's' classic ground, from suburban settlements and subterranean 'dives' and rookeries, their beauty and their chivalry had flocked," reported the *Patriot* sarcastically. Even so, the paper admitted that Chester's talk was "sensible and patriotic, and was interspersed with passages of genuine eloquence." When the meeting ended with the entire audience singing "the 'John Brown' song . . . , the chorus fairly lift[ed] the roof."<sup>41</sup>

Those who enlisted with such enthusiasm encountered disappointments in the months ahead. Some were rejected from service for medical reasons. Even those who were sworn in faced betrayal. Originally promised pay equal to that of white regulars, they, in fact were offered only what the army paid slaves in the South who attached themselves to army units as cooks, servants, and common laborers. Too proud to soldier for the pay of menials, they declined compensation, even when the Commonwealth of Massachusetts offered to supplement the army's offer to make it equal with the pay of regulars. Not until October 1864, did a reluctant Congress relent and grant the wages due the men.<sup>42</sup>

Within days of the departure of the second group of black enlistees from Harrisburg, rebel armies approached Gettysburg. Their outriders reached as far as the hills opposite Harrisburg where they scouted the bridges into the city. Newspapers reported a flood of refugees of both races pouring into the city from the Cumberland Valley. On June 24, blacks met in their Masonic Hall in Tanner's Alley to organize and offer their services to the governor. Many were refugees anxious to do what they could in the emergency. The next day, 54 volunteers organized into two companies officered by Captains Chester and Henry Bradley, a local barber and major black landowner. Although Pennsylvania ordinarily accepted blacks only if they enlisted for three years, an exception appears to have been made for the emergency. The city armed the units over the mayor's objections, to help ward off the nearing enemy. Since no attack came, they were praised for the good cheer and zeal with which they cleaned and polished equipment. Meanwhile, other blacks, both locals and refugees, were pressed into filling barrels with water and digging entrenchments on the shore opposite the city.<sup>43</sup>

Local officials who had been glad enough to use blacks during the crisis, as soon as the danger passed sought to disarm them and get them out of the city.

On July 8, Mayor A.L. Roumfort rehearsed before the city council his objections to arming them in the first place and allowing them to take the weapons home afterwards. Turning to the refugees, he complained that they were receiving rations from the city and asked that steps be taken to remove them from the community. To support his request, he presented a petition from 33 citizens "praying for the removal of the Colored people" in and about Tanner's Alley, and South and Short Streets. Their concern was the number of blacks and their "filthy condition" which might lead to an epidemic, "there having been already several cases of small pox among them."<sup>44</sup> The council adopted a resolution to have the refugees removed, and the next morning the police collected over 300 of them near the mayor's office. That evening they were "sent up the valley . . . in an extra train."<sup>45</sup>

In November 1865, following the end of hostilities, the "Black boys in blue" were honored at a parade in Harrisburg, followed by a "grand dinner." Because Governor Andrew Curtin was ill, former Secretary of War Simon Cameron reviewed the soldiers from his home on Front Street and made a short address. Chester served as Chief Marshal. A recruiter of black soldiers early in the war, he had declined himself to serve in the United States Army because blacks could rise no higher than sergeant. Instead he became the war's only black news reporter, working for the *Philadelphia Press*.<sup>46</sup> William Howard Day, of whom much would be heard later in Harrisburg, gave the principal address. Among other things, these leaders hoped to use the occasion to build support for extending the suffrage once more to blacks. According to the local Democratic organ, the *Patriot*, the goal of the "Darkies Jubilee" was to promote "niggers" holding office, intermarrying with whites, and ruling America.<sup>47</sup> The vote in fact was denied Pennsylvania blacks until adoption of the 15th Amendment to the federal Constitution in 1870.

Coverage of African Americans by Harrisburg newspapers soon became reminiscent of the pre-war years, but with a difference. By 1867, bitter, racist invective appeared as blacks became pawns in the politics of Reconstruction. The Democratic *Patriot* turned increasingly negrophobic. It frequently referred to blacks as "nigs," "niggers," "coons," "smokes," "darkies," and "the culled population," and made much of variations in complexion: "tan colored street walker," "ebony-colored scoundrel," "a Yaller gal," "wenches of every conceivable hue, from liver color to a dirty, light yellow. . . ." Even the *Telegraph*, controlled from behind the scenes by Simon Cameron and seeking to secure the vote for blacks, sometimes strayed from "colored person" or "negro." Both papers, for instance, referred to the black section of town as "Buzzard's Glory."<sup>48</sup> Intermarriage of blacks and whites drew especially strong denunciations from the press. The *Patriot*, for example, described a drunken white



woman, who had a black husband, as "mean and groveling enough to be married to a nigger." Such marriages were rare, however, and whites kept their objections vocal rather than turning to physical violence.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, the *Patriot* filled its local column with reports of blacks involved in rapes, attempted rapes, brawls, and drunken sprees. It even blamed them for unsolved crimes such as a rash of chicken thefts in the Sixth Ward in the autumn of 1867. "Depredations of this kind occur very frequently in that section of the city," it noted, "and the supposition is that they are committed by negroes who have no ostensible means of livelihood, but nevertheless manage to subsist very comfortably." The ward's "large and worthless negro population . . . huddled together promiscuously in small filthy shanties, many of them without occupations or employment, and too lazy to work if they had an opportunity." It was from that district that "juvenile beggars" came daily to beg for food at the homes of whites. With winter nearing, the *Patriot* warned, the "condition of these wretches will become still worse, and their depredations more numerous."<sup>50</sup> Quite unintentionally the item spoke volumes as to how blacks fared in post-Civil War Harrisburg.

The real concerns of the *Patriot* were political; its appeals to defeat Radical Republicans in Pennsylvania were racist. It warned that, if elected, the Radicals would soon be "breaking down the barriers of race," and elevating blacks to positions as voters, jurymen, office holders and "controllers of legislation." They would compel school directors to admit blacks "upon perfect equality with the white children." Their proposal for equal access to transportation would require railroad officials to admit any black male, however "dirty and unkempt, possibly drunk and a blackguard, but at any rate odoriferous," to cars set aside for women. There he would be free to take a seat by the side of "whichever lady best pleases his fancy." Yet another measure would be to force industries to admit them to apprenticeships. Although their work would be inferior, they would compete with whites for jobs and drive down wages.<sup>51</sup>

The *Patriot's* concern that Republicans were trying to use blacks to advance their political ends was justified. Re-elected to the Senate in 1866, Simon Cameron was constructing the archetypical Gilded Age state political machine with himself as boss. His chagrin at his machine being able to dominate the state but regularly failing to carry the city where he lived can be imagined. To offset the Democratic Party's alleged manipulation of the Irish vote to carry communities such as Harrisburg, the Cameron machine sought to enfranchise blacks who, it assumed, would vote Republican.

Given the limited social and political gains of Harrisburg's African Americans in the 'fifties and 'sixties, how did they fare economically? Although industrialization came to the city later than to other comparable communities

in the northeast, it proceeded rapidly after 1849. That year the Pennsylvania Railroad reached town and soon connected the capital city with Philadelphia to the east and Pittsburgh and Chicago to the West. Within five years a cotton factory, a large anthracite blast furnace, iron rolling mills, a railroad car manufacturing plant, and a firm specializing in machinery sprang up. The war helped by transforming Harrisburg into a major railroad center. There enormous quantities of supplies and men from the Midwest were transferred from east-bound trains of the Pennsylvania Railroad to south-bound trains of the Northern Central headed for Washington, D.C. and the eastern front. The conflict also stimulated the expansion of all of Harrisburg's major industries except the cotton mill.<sup>52</sup>

Managers in the city rarely hired blacks to work in the new factories. Industrialization, nonetheless, benefitted blacks indirectly during the 1850s. The building of shops and mills, hundreds of new homes for a swelling workforce, and schools, stores, and other structures, created a need for people to haul materials, clear worksites, and clean up after construction. Many of those jobs went to blacks, raised their incomes, and increased the number able to acquire real estate. The progress of the blacks that decade appeared to be shortlived, seeming largely to evaporate during the decade of the 'sixties.

Although African Americans increased significantly in number during the two decades, their number did not quite maintain their proportion of the city's total population (see Table 1 above).<sup>53</sup> Until the 1860s, their community had been relatively stable. Contentment, inertia, or perhaps lack of alternatives, kept a considerable number of the same people living in Harrisburg for ten, twenty, or even thirty years.<sup>54</sup> Of 101 heads of black households in 1840, for example, a third reappeared in the 1850 census, a fifth were still there in 1860 and an eighth after thirty years. The 183 heads of black households in the 1850 census had even higher persistence rates; nearly half remained at least ten years, and a quarter for twenty. With the war and its aftermath, however, persistence declined noticeably. Only little more than a quarter of heads of household (72 of 261) in the 1860 census were in Harrisburg ten years later. Persistence trends for all blacks, as opposed to just heads of household, were essentially similar. A fifth of all residents in the 1850 census were there a decade later, and an eighth twenty years later. On the other hand, of all 1860 blacks, the rate was half what it had been a decade earlier; that is, a tenth rather than a fifth persisted.<sup>55</sup> Why this was so is not clear. Certainly the drive to capture runaway slaves in the 'fifties would seem sufficiently disruptive to produce an outflow. But whatever the motivations during that decade, only half as many left Harrisburg as would during the next.

Industrialization was accompanied by both more jobs and a greater variety of occupations for blacks. In 1850, 191 black males were employed at only sixteen different occupations. By 1860 that had grown to 254 holding thirty-five different job classifications and a decade later to 559 in 40 occupations. Inasmuch as the 1850 census did not call for listing female occupations, the nine black women shown with jobs had been at the whim of the census taker. In 1860 one fifth of the city's black women above the age of fifteen years (115) filled fifteen different occupations. Although the number expanded to 153 (only eighteen percent of black women over fifteen) in 1870, the number of different jobs they held declined by one.<sup>56</sup>

The kinds of work performed also changed. Between 1850 and 1860, for example, a higher percentage of males moved into occupations other than unspecified laborer or one of the varieties of servant. Despite the general practice, at least half a dozen held factory jobs and others listed as laborers in the census may in fact have performed menial tasks in industry. Although the percentage of professionals declined slightly that same decade, both self-employed persons and craftsmen increased. Where fewer than a sixth had been in those categories in 1850, by 1860 they totalled more than a fifth of all employed males.

These encouraging developments for blacks did not continue in the following decade. The percentages of professionals, self-employed persons, and craftsmen all declined. Only persons employed in factories increased. Put another way, the percentage employed as laborers or servants reached a peak in 1870. That represented a substantial setback from 1860, and was slightly worse than 1850. The types of work open to women remained dismal throughout the period. Because census takers reported the jobs of so few women in 1850, it is impossible to measure with any precision whether or not their situation improved. Inasmuch as 112 of 120 in 1860 were cooks, domestics, servants, and washerwomen, precision would seem to make little difference. By 1870 matters were worse; only six out of 174 were not servants or laborers.

By 1870, black males no longer dominated such relatively desirable jobs as barbering or running oyster bars and small restaurants, nor were black women any longer the majority of hired cooks. Those jobs were now shared with immigrants and their children. On the other hand, black men increased their holds on such occupations as carters, coachmen, hostlers, and porters; black women on laundering and other domestic service.

Persistence in the city, combined with slightly higher percentages of blacks holding better-paying jobs, resulted in increased ownership of real estate by 1860. Landowners more than tripled in number, the percentage of adult blacks owning real estate increased, and the value of their combined holdings



*Among the casual jobs performed by blacks was rag-picking—the collecting, sorting, and cleaning of rags for use by various industries. Ca. 1900.*

advanced nearly five-fold. The average value of land holdings also rose by \$250 during the 'fifties. Where nearly a third of landholders in 1850 owned plots valued at less than \$500, only a fifth owned plots so low in value a decade later. The wealthiest real estate holder in 1850, a barber named John Williams, had property worth \$1,800. Eight blacks owned land valued above that figure in 1860, the wealthiest, a retired clergyman named Albert Bennett, holding land worth \$7,000.

As with jobs, gains in property ownership during the 'fifties reversed during the war decade. The number of landowners dropped more than a third, leaving only about one adult in twenty holding real estate; even so, the combined value of their holdings increased nearly seven percent. The value of the average holding increased some sixty-five percent, but much of that gain may have been wartime inflation.

Among African American real estate holders, those who remained in Harrisburg from one census to another saw the value of their land rise. Half of the land owners in the 1850 census reappeared a decade later with average holdings one-and-a-half times greater in value. Nearly half of those, in turn,

Table 5  
New and Continuing Black Real Estate Holders

1850			1860			1870		
No.	Value	Aver.	No.	Value	Aver.	No.	Value	Aver.
30	\$20,100	\$670	15	\$26,000	\$1,733	7	\$ 16,000	\$2,286
			<i>new</i> 91	71,300	784	17	27,400	1,612
			106	\$97,300	\$ 918			
From 1850 to 1860:			From 1860 to 1870:			<i>new</i> 45	61,400	1,364
15 (50%) persist			24 (23%) persist			69	\$104,800	\$1,519
15 (50%) lost			82 (77%) lost					

Source: Computerized Manuscript Census Data, 1850, 1860, 1870.

remained another decade and saw the value of their holdings, on average, increase another third. Similarly, new real estate holders in 1860 who remained through 1870, enjoyed a doubling in value of their average holding. But did land ownership serve to keep owners in the community? In contrast to 1850, only a fifth of new property owners in 1860 remained a full decade. An additional fifteen landowners of 1860 remained in the community through 1870 but had lost their property. At least in the period under consideration, persistence favored increased value of real estate holdings. Ownership of land, however, of itself did not determine whether people remained in the community.

Until 1860, economic conditions improved for Harrisburg's blacks and their community enjoyed relative stability. Even if all who later admitted birth in a slave state are excluded, between eighty-five percent and eighty-eight percent were born in Pennsylvania and many, regardless of birthplace, appeared in two or more consecutive censuses as residents of the city. Job prospects were improving, and land ownership, though restricted to a small minority, was on the increase.<sup>57</sup> After 1860 these trends all shifted direction. Fewer blacks remained between 1860 and 1870, the percentages in jobs other than unspecified laborer or servant declined, and considerably fewer owned real estate.

These generalizations about the 'sixties, accurate enough for the whole African American community of Harrisburg, can be misleading. Although their total percentage remained steady, the composition of the black community changed markedly in that decade. By 1870, only slightly more than half gave Pennsylvania as their birthplace. The others were natives chiefly of Maryland and Virginia. Obviously a large number, probably newly emancipated slaves for

the most part, migrated into Harrisburg during and immediately after the war. Equally important, a significant number of Pennsylvania-born blacks, including property owners, left the city.

Why these simultaneous migrations took place is not clear. The treatment of blacks in the city during and immediately after the war, and the near approach of Confederate armies on two occasions, may have induced blacks to leave. But could they have expected better treatment, or perhaps better occupational opportunities, in other northern communities? And were the threats of enemy occupation sufficient to induce permanent moves rather than temporary flights to safety? Until these questions can be answered, the motivation of those who left will remain a mystery.

Similarly, why former slaves from Maryland and Virginia came to Harrisburg in such large numbers is not known.<sup>58</sup> Possibly some had relatives living there and came to be near them. Some refugees may have come during the war and avoided expulsion when the city purged itself of such groups following the battle of Gettysburg. The *Patriot* in August 1867 offered another explanation. For the past two years the Freedmen's Bureau had been quietly shipping small groups of blacks to northern cities to ease the refugee burden in Washington. No less than 50,000 had been scattered throughout the eastern and middle states, "generally as hotel and house servants." As usual, the *Patriot* sniffed political conspiracy. The goal was to add to the number of potential Republican voters in the north.<sup>59</sup>

Certainly the Bureau provided transportation for refugees to northern communities where jobs were offered. It sent the great majority south, however, where field hands were in demand, and altogether transported only about 30,000 freedmen to all places.<sup>60</sup> Bureau records for the District of Columbia (where many of the moves originated) show that only 48 refugees were sent to Harrisburg between the end of the war and 1869. They traveled alone or in parties not exceeding five, almost all at the request of persons wanting household servants. The names of the migrants were listed in 28 instances, all coming to Harrisburg between April 1866 and July 1867.<sup>61</sup> Of that number, only four appeared in the manuscript census of 1870. The impact of the Bureau's policy on Harrisburg appears to have been slight: few blacks were shipped in, fewer remained long.

Setting aside why they moved, the two migrations in effect produced two subgroups within the black community by 1870. The first were used to life as free persons. They were born either in Pennsylvania or some other northern state, or if born in the south, had resided in the north for at least a decade. The other group, only slightly smaller, was made up of the newcomers from Virginia and Maryland who either had been slaves or had spent their lives

in a slave-holding community and migrated to Harrisburg after the close of the war.

The latter group differed in several ways from those who had spent much or all of their lives in relative freedom. For example, over sixty percent of the adults could not read or write, raising illiteracy among all black adults in Harrisburg, which had been 23.5 percent in 1850, to 43.2 percent in 1870. Adults born in slave states, regardless of how long they subsequently lived in the North, were far less likely to learn to read and write than those born in the North. Well over half of those who had lived in the North (but not Harrisburg) for at least ten years and more than a third of those who had lived in Harrisburg for a decade or more remained illiterate. By contrast, less than a fifth of the newcomers from free states were illiterate, while the illiteracy rate of northern-born blacks who had lived in Harrisburg at least a decade was little more than one in ten.

**Table 6**  
**Illiteracy and Real Estate Holding Among Harrisburg Blacks, 1870, by Length of Residence and Place of Birth**

Group	Total Number	Real Estate					
		Illiterates		Holders		Value Total	Value Average
		No.	Perct	No.	Perct		
All Blacks age 20 & more	1,299	561	43.2%	69	5.3%	\$104,800	\$1,519
Free State Residents:							
Persister POB free state	128	14	10.9%	20	15.6%	43,000	2,150
Persister POB slave state	54	19	35.2%	14	25.9%	22,100	1,579
Newcomer POB free state	365	70	19.2%	11	3.0%	13,400	1,218
Newcomer POB S1, Pa 10+ yr.	<u>48</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>58.3%</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6.7%</u>	<u>2,700</u>	<u>900</u>
Total	595	131	22.0%	48	8.1%	\$ 81,200	\$1,692
Slave State Resident till 1865:							
Newcomer POB slave state	704	430	61.1%	21	3.0%	\$ 23,600	\$1,124
All persisters, 10 yrs. +	182	33	18.1%	34	18.7%	\$ 65,100	\$1,915
All newcomers, - 10 yrs.	1,117	528	47.3%	35	3.1%	39,700	1,134
All POB free state	493	84	17.0%	31	6.3%	\$ 56,400	\$1,819
All POB slave state	806	477	59.2%	38	4.8%	48,400	1,274

Source: Computerized Manuscript Census Data.

Persister = listed in Harrisburg in census of 1850, 1860, or both.

Newcomer = not listed in Harrisburg in previous census.

POB = place of birth.

Only three percent of black newcomers moving to Harrisburg between 1860 and 1870, whether southern- or northern-born, held real estate as compared to nearly nineteen percent of those who had lived in the community for more than a decade. Though place of birth did not much affect the percentage of newcomers holding land, the average value of the holdings of those born in the south was eight percent lower on average than of northern-born newcomers. Over time, if the previous experience of Harrisburg blacks held, the recently freed men from the south were more apt than their northern counterparts to acquire real estate. The average value of those holdings, however, would be less. A quarter of southern-born blacks in 1870 who had persisted in Harrisburg for ten or more years held real estate as compared to fewer than sixteen percent of northern-born persisters, but the value of their holdings averaged 40 percent less.

In part the differences in land ownership were related to occupational opportunities. The southern-born newcomers, because of their previous experience as slaves, found employment chiefly as laborers and servants. None in Harrisburg became professionals, only a handful set up in business for themselves, and few were craftsmen. Among the better paying jobs of barbering and waiting table in hotels, the southern-born were either poorly represented or completely absent. Instead, they found work at lower paying jobs, including more than seventy percent of the blacks listed as "laborers" and the great majority of black carters, hostlers, porters, servants, and teamsters. To the limited extent that blacks found factory jobs, eighty percent were southern-born newcomers.

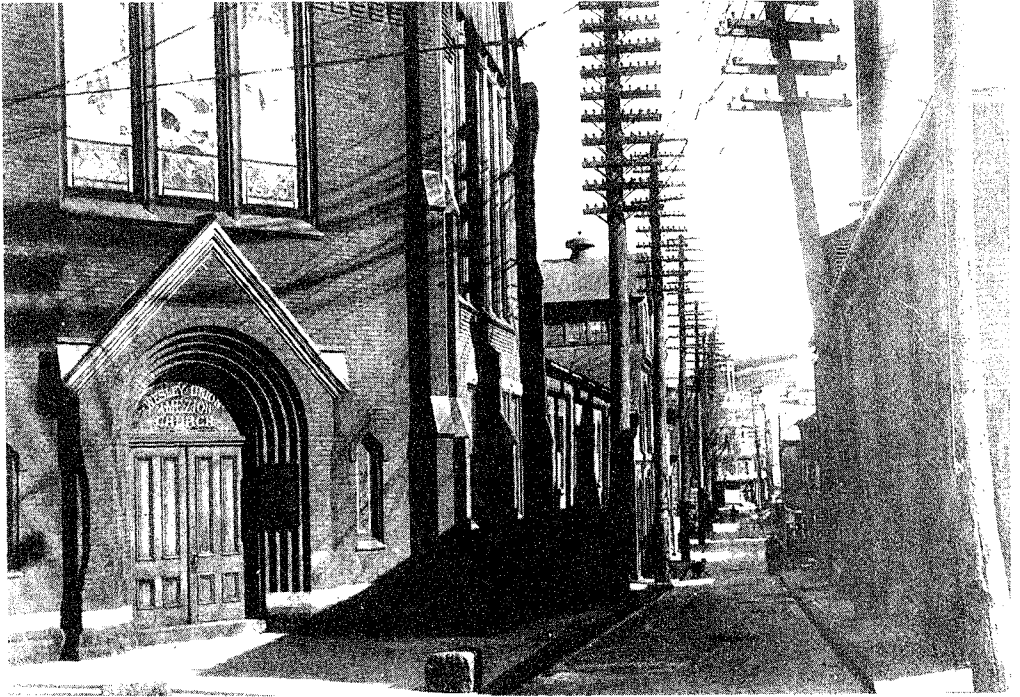
Clearly Harrisburg's black community as a whole suffered economic setbacks during the 1860s. However, those losses were at least partially the

Table 7  
Selected Occupations of Various Harrisburg Blacks, 1870

Occupation	Total Blacks	Persisters	Northern Newcomers	Southern Newcomers
Laborer	344	39	58	247
Barber	25	15	10	0
Carter	15	1	0	14
Hostler	18	3	5	10
Porter	24	6	3	15
Servant	20	0	6	14
Teamster	18	2	4	12
Waiter	52	15	16	21

Source: Computerized Manuscript Census Data.





*Wesley Union Amezion Church, Corner South Street and Tanner Alley, Harrisburg, 1911.*

result of the dual migrations that deprived the group of many of its more prosperous residents, and replaced them with persons only recently liberated from bondage. The latter group, however hardworking and ambitious, could hardly be expected to adjust to life as free persons, move from a rural to an urban setting, fit into a new community, find good jobs, and become landowners all in less than ten years. The fact some two dozen did acquire land by 1870 was remarkable in itself and testified to their desire to improve.<sup>62</sup>

It could be done, as the career of Turner Cooper illustrated. Newly freed and illiterate, Cooper came from Alexandria, Virginia, in 1868 with his wife and seven children. The census of 1870 found him working as a brickyard employee. No doubt with the assistance of his two older sons who were laborers, he had acquired real estate worth \$1,500. A religious man, Cooper hated living in Harrisburg's "Bloody Eighth" ward and so sought a location in the Allison Hill district several blocks east of the capitol beyond the transportation corridor. There he not only built himself a home, but with the help of a white carpenter and five blacks, at least two of whom were also illiterate natives of Virginia, began the Springdale neighborhood. By 1890 it was a "thriving, populous community of blacks and whites."<sup>63</sup>

During the final three decades of the century, Harrisburg's African Americans improved their condition. As had been true from the beginning, churches were central in the social life of their community. Not counting storefront congregations, Harrisburg blacks supported six churches. The oldest, largest, and most prestigious was Wesley Union AME. Newer churches included Bethel AME (founded in 1835) and a Presbyterian congregation. A southern influence was reflected in two Baptist churches and a Church of God. By 1890 the Roman Catholic diocese was supporting a mission for blacks. These groups not only offered regular worship services, and the rites usually associated with Christian family living (weddings, baptisms, and funerals), but a wide range of social functions as well. They sponsored concerts and musical programs, staged plays, and raised funds for charity. They also brought distinguished black lecturers to the community, including Frederick Douglass (whose 1847 visit had been disturbed by white troublemakers), Booker T. Washington, and William E. B. DuBois.<sup>64</sup>

As was true of the white community in the same period, lodges became popular. There were two Odd Fellows groups in the 1880s and a third by the turn of the century. Over a hundred belonged to five Masonic lodges during the 1890s and there was a black chapter of the Elks. Those who had fought in the Civil War formed a unit of the Grand Army of the Republic. Other social groups included bands, choirs, and an orchestra. Blacks organized and supported charitable organizations for their own poor and insurance and mutual aid societies similar to those that were common among immigrant groups in those same years. During the 'eighties, they also launched a number of weekly newspapers: *The Times* (1880–1894), the *Home Journal* (1882) which merged in 1883 with the *State Journal* (1883–1885), and the *Advocate Verdict* (1887–1920).<sup>65</sup>

Although blacks encountered both discrimination and segregation, neither was absolute nor rigid. Churches and lodges were segregated, and blacks had their own labor unions and cemetery. On the other hand, blacks were admitted to the public library, the city hospital, and the trolley lines without discrimination. They also served on both petit and grand juries, and sued and were sued in the courts with apparent fairness. After 1870 the local Republican machine protected their right to vote and later to run for and hold some public offices.<sup>66</sup>

Encouraging blacks to vote had started as a device for shifting Harrisburg from a Democratic to a Republican party stronghold. The impact on city politics was almost immediate following black enfranchisement in 1870. The Eighth Ward, where the largest number of blacks lived, in 1869 had elected a Democrat as councilman with sixty-three percent of the vote. One year later,

with blacks voting for the first time, the Republican candidate for mayor, though unsuccessful in the city at large, carried the ward with more than fifty-three percent of the vote. Thereafter the ward regularly elected Republicans to the city council with majorities ranging from fifty-two to seventy percent and contributed eighty-one, fifty-three, eleven, and thirty-four percent of the margins of victory for Republican mayors elected in 1872, 1874, 1876, and 1879.<sup>67</sup>

In time, blacks came to expect more from enfranchisement than merely being allowed to support the Cameron machine and its local candidates. In 1882 a revolt broke out in the Eighth Ward. There blacks complained that a Republican mayor whom they had helped elect failed to give them any recognition in his appointments to the police force. Even the *Telegraph* supported their claim, complaining that blacks were "an integral part of our city, pay taxes, support public institutions and by their votes keep in power in this city the party which gave Mayor [John C.] Herman his office." Philadelphia blacks, the Democratic *Patriot*, pointed out, had helped elect a Democrat mayor of that city when its Republican mayor refused to appoint black police officers. Meeting a few days before the election, aggrieved blacks adopted resolutions threatening that if not given some appointments, they would "pursue our own respect and protection." In the voting a week later the Sixth and the Eighth Wards, both heavily black and usually solidly Republican, each elected one Democratic councilman with the help of black voters. Thereafter, blacks began holding a few public offices; among others, that of alderman in the Eighth Ward in 1884.<sup>68</sup>

The situation in housing and schools was more complex. From very early in the century, Harrisburg's housing for blacks followed the southern pattern of being located on alleys to the rear of the homes of the wealthier whites who gave them employment. Eventually the district immediately east of the Capitol, which became the heart of the Eighth Ward, emerged as the principal enclave for blacks. In 1857, William K. Verbeke, a wealthy real estate developer, purchased a block there that contained some twenty to thirty "huts" occupied by blacks. To provide for them, he bought ten acres in Susquehanna Township "some distance" above the borough line, an area that would be annexed to the city in 1860. There he sold lots to such of the displaced blacks as wished to relocate, moved their houses for them, and allowed them to repay him at the rate of one dollar a week. "Verbeketown," as blacks called the area, became the nucleus of their second major location, the Sixth Ward, north of the Capitol.<sup>69</sup> Although blacks lived in all nine wards of the city, more than a third lived in the Eighth Ward, nearly as many in the Sixth Ward, and all but eight percent

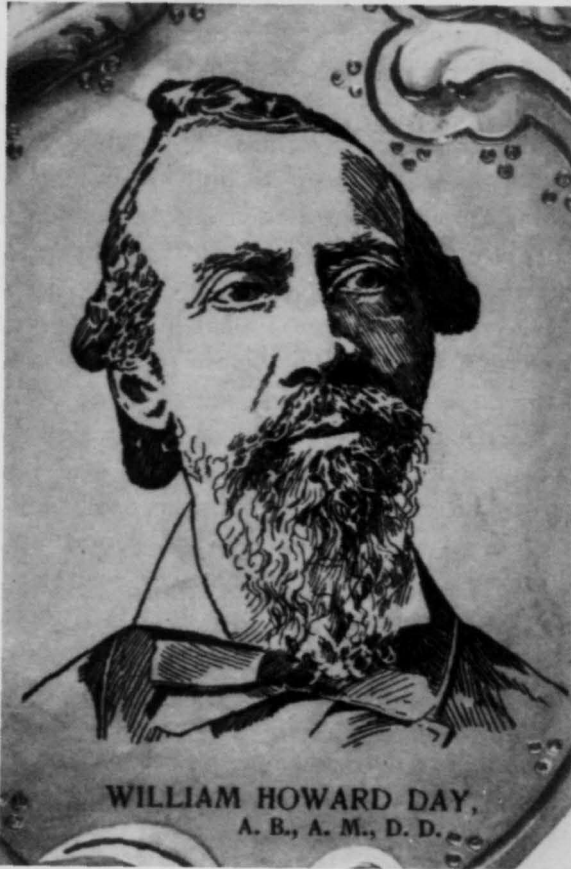
in six wards. Few lived along the river or in the newer developments in the outer districts of the city.<sup>70</sup>

Despite state law to the contrary, neighborhood grammar schools generally were segregated in practice. The black schools were staffed by teachers and administered by principals of the same race. The city's two high schools, which were segregated by gender, remained completely white until 1879. The entry of blacks that year produced open hostility in the white community. Four years later, two blacks graduated from Boys High School in a class of 36. White resentment again flared when it was learned that one of the blacks ranked first in the class. Six or seven other blacks failed to graduate that same year from Girl's High School, allegedly because of "teacher prejudice." The next year, two blacks graduated from each of the schools without incident.<sup>71</sup>

A sample study of 235 couples from the two central black wards in 1880 provides further insights into the improving situation of that race. Those born in the south still constituted about half the population: well over half of the heads of family and forty-five percent of their spouses were born in Virginia or Maryland. Both partners were natives of Pennsylvania in only twenty-seven percent of the instances, while thirty-one percent included one partner born out of state. The postwar newcomers and more recent migrants from the south were marrying into established local families, thereby hurrying reunification of the divided black community.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile, the occupational status of males improved. Although two-thirds were still unspecified laborers and servants, that was twelve percentage points lower than a decade before. Jobs were available for them at a tar works, at quarries and tanneries, and of course as haulers of goods, among other things. Industrial workers stood at nineteen percent, a gain of fifteen points since 1870. Factory jobs were chiefly in iron and steel, with some blacks travelling five miles to Steelton, south of the city, each day. It may safely be assumed that their jobs were the least skilled and lowest paid. Even so, these jobs provided steadier work and perhaps higher incomes than could be earned as casual laborers. Skilled craftsmen, such as Turner Cooper, made up a tenth of the sample as compared to only two percent of all black males in 1870.

The percentage of professionals, after dropping to 1.8 percent in 1870, had climbed to 3.4 percent in 1880, the same as in 1860 and the same as for all residents of the city in 1880.<sup>73</sup> One of this group, Dr. William H. Day, emerged as a leader not only of the black community but of Harrisburg as a whole. Born in New York City and holding both a bachelor's and a master's degree from Oberlin College and an honorary Doctorate of Divinity from Livingston College, he had moved to Harrisburg in 1872. For several years a teacher and administrator in the public schools, he became the first black elected to the city



*William Howard Day*

school board in 1878 and served fifteen years. Elected by his twenty-five white colleagues to preside over the board between 1891 and 1893, he was one of the earliest blacks in America to be so honored.<sup>74</sup>

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The majority of scholars of northern urban blacks from DuBois in 1899 to the present have agreed that the conditions of African Americans generally deteriorated economically, socially, and politically between the Civil War and the end of the century. The benefits of the industrial revolution passed them by because white owners usually refused to hire them for any but the most menial factory jobs. European immigrants encroached on the better paying occupations traditionally held by blacks (barbering, carting, waiting table, catering food).

Northern labor barred blacks from union membership and apprenticeships; and northern whites, by refusing to engage either black professionals or black artisans, in effect limited their clientele to members of their own race who paid poorly. As white business firms grew larger and undersold them, the number of black enterprises and entrepreneurs declined. Meanwhile, de facto segregation in northern cities forced them into increasingly black enclaves, barred them from equal educational opportunities, sometimes restricted their right to vote, and usually kept them from holding any but the least important public offices.<sup>75</sup>

Most of these studies have involved much larger cities than Harrisburg: Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, to name only six. At the same time, but especially before 1900, blacks did not constitute as great a part of the populations of these centers as at Harrisburg. From 9.8 percent in 1870, Harrisburg's proportion of blacks slowly declined to 8.2 percent by 1900. By contrast, these larger cities had black communities ranging from less than one percent throughout, as at Milwaukee, to five percent by 1900 at Pittsburgh. It was after 1914, when World War I and post-war restrictions halted European immigration, that the Great Migration of southern blacks to northern cities and factory jobs began. Although the roots of ghettoization and the rise of a black industrial proletariat could be traced to the post-Civil War decades, the greatest deterioration in black conditions came in the new century.<sup>76</sup>

Harrisburg's experience differed from the others. The newly freed blacks who came immediately after the Civil War, were the last great wave of that race to come prior to World War II. Moreover, between 1870 and 1920 they were a shrinking portion of the city's population. Although highly concentrated in the Sixth and Eighth Wards, they were not restricted to a black ghetto. Similarly, although a fifth of married males among them found factory jobs by the end of the century, Harrisburg developed no large black industrial proletariat.

The African American community at Harrisburg also faced a much smaller proportion of immigrants, especially of the "new immigrants" who flooded in from southern and eastern Europe between 1890 and 1914. This was important because the two groups of outsiders were often antagonistic and frequently competed for the same housing and jobs. In the larger cities already cited, and at nearby Steelton, immigrants constituted between a fifth and a third of the population throughout the period from 1870 to 1920. By contrast, Harrisburg's foreign-born never exceeded an eighth of the total population and the New Immigration after 1890 was negligible. Through most of its history, the city's proportions of blacks and immigrants were roughly equal. From a high of 12.1 percent in 1870, the proportion of immigrants gradually fell to 4.9

percent by 1900. By 1920, blacks constituted 6.9 percent, the foreign-born 5.5 percent.<sup>77</sup>

The primary reason that neither the New Immigration nor the Great Migration caused more than demographic ripples at Harrisburg was due to a major change in the city's economic structure after 1880. Its highest rate of population growth, over seventy percent each for two decades, occurred between 1850 and 1870 when the community industrialized. Between 1880 and 1910, that rate slowed to between twenty-five and thirty-three percent, then dropped sharply, and eventually turned negative. By 1880 industry had peaked in the city. After that date few new mills or factories arose and the economy gradually shifted from an industrial base to one resting on governmental and administrative functions. Meanwhile, at the larger cities, industrialization went on apace, attracting first southeastern Europeans and then southern blacks.<sup>78</sup>

In the absence of repeated large waves or even a steady flow of newcomers from the South after 1870, Harrisburg's whites had little reason to fear inundation by blacks or feel a need to repress those already there. No large foreign-born group vied with them for jobs. As a consequence, blacks enjoyed a relatively calm period not unlike that between 1820 and 1850, during which they rebuilt their community and institutions, and resumed the fight for the modest gains here described. Too small a group to be independent of the white economy, blacks pushed for improvements but also sought accommodation.<sup>79</sup> Race relations, if not especially good, also were not antagonistic or marked by violence. In characterizing the degree of progress achieved by 1900, much depends on the scale used. Measured against their original servitude, the gains made by Harrisburg's African American community were significant. Measured against the goal of complete freedom and equality, they were painfully small and left much undone.

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## Notes

1. Published Census of the United States: 1870, 1: 243-57; 1880, 18: 733-902; 1890, 50: 570-74; 1900, 1: 637-41. In 1850 Harrisburg also had fewer residents and blacks, but a larger proportion of blacks than such northern cities as Albany, Boston, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Cincinnati, New York, Providence, and St. Louis. Closest was St. Louis with 5.21 percent blacks. See Leonard Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850* (Chicago, 1981), p. 246.
2. Kenneth L. Kusmer, "The Black Urban Experience in American History," in Darlene Clark Hine (ed.), *The State of Afro-American History* (Baton Rouge, 1986), pp. 91-122, esp. pp. 105-108.

3. Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City* (Philadelphia, 1968). Alternating waves of negro-phobia and sympathy for blacks is a prominent theme of Gary B. Nash's, *Forging Freedom, The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988).
4. Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation, the Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago, 1967). Thirty-six percent of Pennsylvania's blacks were slaves in 1790, ten percent in 1800, a little more than three percent in 1810 and thereafter one percent or fewer through the census of 1840. Edward R. Turner *The Negro in Pennsylvania* (Washington, 1911 [reprinted New York, 1969], p. 253.
5. Ira V. Brown, "Pennsylvania and the Rights of the Negro, 1865–1887," *Pennsylvania History*, 28 (January 1961): 45–46. According to Turner, *Negro in Pennsylvania*, pp. 184–85, blacks voted in at least seven counties, including Dauphin, prior to 1838.
6. William Henry Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1883) [hereafter *History Dauphin County*], pp. 20–21; *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania, 1780*, pp. 67–73.
7. U.S. Census, manuscript schedules for Harrisburg (on microfilm), 1790–1840.
8. Computations based on data from the *Ninth Census of the United States* (Washington, 1878), 1: 58–59, 243–257. The eleven counties were Adams, Berks, Bucks, Chester, Cumberland, Dauphin, Delaware, Franklin, Lancaster, Montgomery, and York. Curry, *Free Black in Urban America*, pp. 239–40, suggests urban areas were attractive because they concentrated demand for unskilled labor, offered greater educational and social opportunities, and contained larger pools of potential marriage partners. Urban areas also provided anonymity which allowed free blacks some escape from the personal hostility of whites and fugitive slaves reduced likelihood of detection.
9. Mary D. Houts, "Black Harrisburg's Resistance to Slavery," *Pennsylvania Heritage*, 4 (Dec. 1977): 10; Rev. Jeanne B. Williams to author, July 5, 1989. Williams, a student of AME history in Pennsylvania, has generously shared her research with me.
10. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, pp. 66–133.
11. Ibid., p. 204; Houts, "Black Harrisburg's Resistance," p. 11, quoting from an advertisement in the *Dauphin Oracle*.
12. Williams to Eggert, July 5, 1989; Egle, *History Dauphin County*, pp. 348–49, 367.
13. Statement of principles and membership list, Historical Society of Dauphin County (HSDC); Garrison to his wife, Aug. 9, 1847, *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge, 1973), 3: 506–09; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Aug. 19, 1847. For election returns, see *Harrisburg Keystone*, Nov. 14, 1848; *Pa. Telegraph*, Nov. 11, 1852. For underground railroad activities, see Egle, *History Dauphin County*, p. 557.
14. Houts, "Black Harrisburg's Resistance," pp. 10–11, quoting a newspaper report and borough ordinances.
15. Passim, Harrisburg newspapers, 1849–1850; Garrison to his wife, Aug. 9, 1847, *Garrison Letters*, 3: 507
16. For a forthcoming book on Harrisburg's industrialization after 1850, I put the entire manuscript census schedules for the city in 1850, 1860, and 1870 on computer and have produced a number of listings and computations (hereafter cited as Computerized Manuscript Census Data). Whether a person of color was designated as black or mulatto was left to the discretion of the census takers. Sometimes parents in a given family were listed as black while one or more of their children were listed as mulattoes, or vice versa. For some persons they changed from one census to the next. Given such unreliability, I classified both mulattoes and blacks as black.
17. Persons with the same surname who lived in the same household were classified as family members. Those with different surnames, including some who may have been family members, were classified as "singles."
18. Two black doctors were variously listed in the manuscript censuses between 1850 and



- 1870 as "doctor," "I. Doctor" (probably meaning Indian Doctor), and "druggist."
19. Curry, *Free Black in Urban America*, pp. 258–61, 268.
20. Houts, "Black Harrisburg's Resistance," p. 11.
21. Fourteen people in the federal manuscript census were not listed in the county tax records, ten in the county records were not in the census, and 5 listed in the country rolls were shown in the census but without property. Since the local assessment included items not included in the census, and the census listed real estate wherever located, it is not surprising that the two did not agree on the value of holdings in a single instance. "County Assessment, Real Estate, Horses and Carriages used for Hire," Dauphin County Courthouse, Harrisburg.
22. *Telegraph*, Aug. 14, 1850; Sep. 4, 1850; Mar. 24, 1852. The Democrat *Keystone* almost never mentioned local blacks; the *Democratic Union's* comments were unsympathetic.
23. *Democratic Union*, Sep. 12, 1849; *Telegraph*, Oct. 20, 1852.
24. *Telegraph*, Apr. 3, 1852.
25. *Ibid.*, Aug. 20, 1851; Mar. 12, 1851; Sep. 8, 1852.
26. *Morning Herald*, May 22, 23, 1855.
27. Houts, "Black Harrisburg's Resistance," pp. 9, 11.
28. *Telegraph*, Aug. 28, 1850.
29. For a fuller account of this incident, see Gerald Eggert, "The Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg: A Case Study," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography*, 109 (Oct. 1985): 541–545.
30. U.S., *Statutes at Large*, 9: 462–65; Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers, Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850–1860* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968), pp. 3–25.
31. For McAllister's motivation, see his letter to Simon Cameron, July 25, 1853, Cameron Papers, HSDC; for his conduct in office, see Eggert, "Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg," pp. 547–550.
32. Eggert, "Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg," pp. 546–47, 550–52.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 552–53.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 553–67.
35. The changes were determined by comparing place of birth for the same persons in Computerized Manuscript Census Schedules, 1850 through 1870.
36. *Telegraph*, Feb. 5; *Borough Item*, Feb. 23, 1853; and interview with Chester in the *Patriot*, Sep. 13, 1892. For Delaney's ideas, see Cyril E. Griffith, *The African Dream: Martin R. Delaney and the Emergence of Pan-African Thought* (University Park, PA., 1975) pp. 18–29. After 18 months in Africa, Chester returned to Thetford Academy in Vermont for two years. Between 1857 and 1862 he alternated three stints of teaching, newspaper editing, and dabbling in politics in Liberia, with fund-seeking and promotion of Liberia in the United States. See Allison Blakely, *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York, 1982) p. 107; biographical essay in *Thomas Morris Chester, Black Civil War Correspondent* [hereafter *T.M. Chester*], R.J.M. Blackett, ed. (Baton Rouge and London, 1989), pp. 14–34. For Chester's later visits and speaking engagements in Harrisburg, see *Morning Herald*, Oct. 31, Nov. 1 and 8, 1854; *Telegraph*, Dec. 28, 1854 and Jan. 3, 1855.
37. The *Telegraph* fell into the hands of Stephen Miller, a Methodist lay-preacher and prohibitionist, who turned it and the *Morning Herald* which he founded into Know Nothing organs. Gerald Eggert, "'Seeing Sam': The Know Nothing Episode in Harrisburg," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography*, 109 (Oct. 1985): 308–314.
38. Janet Mae Book, *Northern Rendezvous, Harrisburg during the Civil War* (Harrisburg, 1951), pp. 64, 65, 84–85.
39. *Patriot*, May 27; *Telegraph*, June 1, 1863.
40. *Telegraph*, June 9, 1863. A check of published rosters of the regiments turned up only 40 men from Harrisburg, see Luis F. Emilio, *History of the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863–1865* (Boston,

1891), pp. 327–90; Charles B. Fox, *Record of the Service of the Fifty-Fifth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry* (Cambridge, 1868), pp. 90–144. That many who signed up subsequently were rejected for medical reasons may explain the difference in numbers.

41. *Patriot*, June 10, 1863.

42. Fox, *Record of the Fifty-fourth*, pp. 17–18, 37.

43. *Telegraph*, June 25, 26; Robert G. Crist, *Confederate Invasion: 1863* (Camp Hill, Pa., 1963), pp. 8, 27.

44. Minutes of City Council, July 8, 1863, Office of the Clerk, Martin Luther King, Jr. Municipal Center, Harrisburg; reports in *Patriot* and *Telegraph*, July 9, 1863.

45. *Telegraph*, July 10, 1863.

46. *Ibid.*, Nov. 13, 1865. After the war, Chester returned to England, studied law, and, in 1870, became the first American black admitted to the British bar. Moving to Louisiana, he was active in Reconstruction politics from 1871 to 1877. Afterwards he served as U.S. Commissioner of Courts in New Orleans, and special assistant to the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Texas. Chester was admitted to the bars of Louisiana (1871), the District of Columbia (1879), and Pennsylvania (1881). He returned to his boyhood home, ill, in April 1892 and died there September 30. Biographic essay, *T.M. Morris*, pp. 50–91; Blakely, *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, pp. 107–08.

47. *T.M. Morris*, p. 48; *Patriot*, Nov. 13, 1865.

48. *Passim*, *Telegraph* and *Patriot* for 1867.

49. *Patriot*, July 27, 1867; Michael J. Nestle-  
roth, unpublished paper, "The Black Community of Harrisburg: 1860–1910. A Study of the Black Community of a Small Northern City" (copy on file, HSDC), p. 11, found eight interracial marriages in the city during the 1880s, but no instances of white violence against them. He also reported that a black professional baseball player in Harrisburg who married to a white woman was jeered, but not removed from the team.

50. *Patriot*, Oct. 1, 1867.

51. *Ibid.*, Sep. 7, 25, and 28, 1867.

52. Based on research for my forthcoming book on the industrialization of Harrisburg, 1850–1900.

53. That trend would continue into the twentieth century with the percentage of blacks declining to 7.1 by 1910 and 6.9 by 1920, then rising to 8.0 by 1930, 8.7 by 1940, 11.3 by 1950, 18.9 by 1960, 30.7 by 1970, and 43.6 by 1980.

54. To determine persistence among blacks, I had the computer separate out black families and put them in alphabetical order by head of household for the censuses of 1850, 1860, and 1870. This facilitated checking by hand. Using families rather than individuals resulted in greater accuracy because from one census to the next the names of individuals were spelled differently, sometimes initials rather than given names were used, age did not always increase ten years, and place of birth changed. Only by careful examination of names, ages, and other characteristics of all family members was it possible to be reasonably sure of identification. Another benefit was that this system allowed a more certain identification of persons with common family names. Persons not living in family units were listed separately and counted as persisters only if their names, ages, and other characteristics were very close from one census to the next. Attempting to program a computer to make such judgments, in my opinion, would be too complex to be practicable. Unfortunately, persisting women were probably undercounted. Because they adopted the family name of their husbands, those who married between censuses were lost. Even so, slightly more women than men persisted in each census, suggesting that among blacks, at least, males rather than females tended to be more mobile geographically.

55. Computerized Manuscript Census Data, 1850, 1860, 1870.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Literature on urban blacks is slight for

the decade of the 1850s. Most pre-Civil War studies (for example, Nash's *Forging Freedom* and Curry's *Free Black in Urban America*) end in 1840 or 1850. Studies of the post-war period, such as Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South 1865–1890* (New York, 1978); Elizabeth Haskin Pleck's *Black Migration and Poverty, Boston 1865–1900* (New York, 1979); George C. Wright's *Life Behind A Veil, Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky 1865–1930* (Baton Rouge, 1985); and Roger Lane's *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860–1900* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), for the most part begin in 1860 or later. The absence of comparable materials makes uncertain whether the gains of Harrisburg's blacks in that decade were common in urban centers, restricted to smaller cities, or unique.

58. Apparently the greatest block of former slaves to leave the south at the end of the war went west rather than north. See Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York, 1976), p. 433. Harrisburg seems to have been an exception, adding at least 704 blacks who moved to Harrisburg after 1865 and remained through the census of 1870.

59. *Patriot*, Aug. 19 and 28, 1867.

60. George R. Bentley, *A History of the Freedmen's Bureau* (Philadelphia, 1955), pp. 124–25; John Alcott Carpenter, *Sword and Olive Branch, Oliver Otis Howard* (Pittsburgh, 1964), pp. 114–115; Paul S. Pierce, *The Freedmen's Bureau: A Chapter in the History of Reconstruction* (Iowa City, 1984), p. 100.

61. Records Relating to the Transportation of Freeman and Bureau Personnel, July 1865–1868; Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia, Record Group 105 (on microfilm, M1055, reel 17), National Archives. Neither former Secretary of War Cameron who at the time was opening his Lochiel Iron Works in Harrisburg, nor any other Harrisburg entrepreneur, contacted the Bureau for refugees to serve as cheap factory labor between 1865 and 1872. As Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*, p. 27, found for

Boston, the bureau served chiefly as "an employment bureau for domestic servants."

62. W.E. Burghardt DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (New York, 1899), p. 269, argued that emancipation and pauperism went hand in hand in post-war Philadelphia. Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*, pp. 44–67, questioned whether post-war migrants from the south accounted for the general decline of conditions for Boston's blacks. She found many newcomers from Virginia who already had acquired urban habits and skills, having first lived in Richmond or some other urban center, and had an adult literacy rate of 32 percent. She also cited Theodore Hershberg's finding that Virginia blacks migrating to Philadelphia had an adult illiteracy rate of 35 percent (p. 53). I believe that the adult illiteracy rate of more than 61 percent for black newcomers from the south to Harrisburg by 1870, indicates a much larger number of recent field hands without urban experience there.

63. Pauline Allen, newspaper article entitled "Freed Slave began Hill Development," *Patriot*, Feb. 9, 1982.

64. Nestleroth, "The Black Community of Harrisburg," pp. 20–22.

65. Ibid., pp. 23–25; Glenora E. Rossell, *Pennsylvania Newspapers: A Bibliography and Union List*, 2nd ed. (Pittsburgh, 1978), pp. 83–87.

66. Nestleroth, "Black Community of Harrisburg," pp. 5, 18, 32–33.

67. Election returns as reported in the *Patriot*, Oct. 14, 1869; Oct. 12, 1870; Oct. 14, 1872; Feb. 17, 1874; Feb. 16, 1876; and Feb. 20, 1879.

68. *Telegraph*, Feb. 7; *Patriot*, Feb. 8, 16, 22, 1882; and Feb. 20, 1884.

69. Egle, *History Dauphin County*, p. 323.

70. Nestleroth, "Black Community of Harrisburg," p. 13.

71. Ibid., pp. 30–31. For the law and practice regarding Blacks in schools in Pennsylvania, see Ira V. Brown, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*

*History* (University Park, Pa., 1970), pp. 52–54.

72. Nestleroth, “Black Community of Harrisburg,” pp. 6–8.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29; item prepared at the office of the Harrisburg School Board, Genealogical File, State Library, Harrisburg; obituaries, *Telegraph*, Dec. 3, 1900 and *Patriot*, Dec. 4, 1900.

75. In addition to DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, see, for example, Peter Gottlieb, *Making Their Own Way: Southern Blacks' Migration to Pittsburgh, 1916–30* (Urbana, 1987); David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, 1973); Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870–1930* (Urbana, 1976); Lane, *Roots of Violence*; Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*; and Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee, The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915–45* (Urbana, 1985). For a southern border city, see Wright, *Life Behind a Veil*.

76. The principal thrust of Kusmer's study was after the Great Migration, while Gottlieb's and Trotter's explicitly dealt with the era after 1915. For the proportions of blacks in Harrisburg, see note 53 above; for the other cities, see the studies cited or the published census for appropriate years.

77. The percentage of foreign-born at Harrisburg were: 1880, 7.5; 1890, 6.6; 1910, 6.4; 1920, 6.9; 1930, 4.6; and since 1940, between 3.9 and 2.5. Calculated from published census figures, 1860–1980. The data on the other cities are from the studies cited or the published census. For Steelton, see John Bodnar, *Immigration and Industrialization, Ethnicity in an American Mill Town, 1870–1940* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1977), p. 15.

78. The data on population is from published census figures. I trace the gradual shift in Harrisburg's economic structure in my forthcoming book on industrialization at Harrisburg.

79. Wright, *Life Behind A Veil*, has argued that the gains made at Louisville, Ky., (in some respects more impressive than those at Harrisburg) were essentially token devices of whites to co-opt black leaders and placate the rest of the race to keep them “in their place.” Kusmer, in “The Black Urban Experience in American History,” pp. 106–08, pointed out that blacks in northern cities shifted to an accommodationist stance before World War I as segregation and hostility to blacks increased. Once the size of their communities grew after World War I, and professionals became less dependent on a white clientele, black militance increased.