"That We May Think Right, Vote Right, and Do Right":
Knoxville's Black Community, 1865-1867

By Jason M. Yeatts

In late 1865, northern journalist Whitelaw Reid traveled through Knoxville, Tennessee, a city of roughly 4,000 that had endured both Confederate and Union occupation. Reid learned quickly that violence had erupted immediately after the war, often between the city's white Unionists and ex-Confederates. Now, in November, Reid noted that the violence between the city's whites had ended, only to be quickly replaced by racially motivated hostility toward freedmen. In Reid's opinion, "The freedmen have more hope from Virginia Rebels than from East Tennessee Loyalists, if the public sentiment of Knoxville may be accepted as a test." Within months after the close of the Civil War, race unified and divided postwar Knoxville.

Race played a significant role in the unification of former Union and Confederate whites in Knoxville. Historian Robert Tracy McKenzie asserted that after the war, white solidarity provided the foundation for "genuine reconciliation" between Knoxville's white Unionists and rebels. The catalyst for this reconciliation occurred on February 13, 1866. On that day, a black soldier, who was guarding a surplus warehouse in the city, killed Lieutenant Colonel Calvin Dyer, a well-known local Union army veteran. Dyer had gone to the warehouse to pick up items he had purchased. The black guard, for whatever reason, perceived him as a threat, and shot and killed him. News of Dyer's death spread rapidly, and within hours a white mob formed. By the end of the day, the black soldier's body hung limp from a rope on Gay Street. McKenzie argued that this single event foreshadowed the racial tensions that would afflict Knoxville during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era.

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1 Whitelaw Reid, After the War: A Tour of the Southern States, 1865-1866, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New York, 1965), 351-52.

Prejudice against Negroes and the freedmen... Historian Charles Faulkner has written about the postwar negro in Tennessee and the anti-Negro violence that led to Negro equality in Tennessee.

Postwar race relations were not only a subject of concern for KentUCKY and Tennessee, but also East Tennessee. On February 13, 1866, the Joint Committee on

It is a melancholy truth that the negro in Tennessee and the neighboring districts... In other parts of the state, and the wealthier sections of East Tennessee, this sentiment was more cordially received.

Nearly four months later, the state's governor, Dewitt C. Senter, opposed a bill that would give the blacks the right to serve on juries.

I know the sentiment is strong against such a law which is likely to be a demoralizing influence among the colored people of East Tennessee. But I believe negroes are better and less, but there is no portion of the people who love the negro more than we do.

DeWitt C. Senter, governor, also opposed the bill. He was a member of the Union Party.

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2 Report of the Joint Committee (Washington, D.C., 1866), 88.
3 Nashville Daily Press (February 13, 1866), 1.
Prejudice against freed blacks was prevalent throughout East Tennessee. Historian Charles Faulknor Bryan Jr. contended that most East Tennesseans, despite their wartime loyalties, refused to embrace freedmen as equal partners in society. He noted that "although East Tennessee was a locus of Southern Unionism, it is evident that this Unionism was marred by racial attitudes little different from that of the most devoted Confederates." Likewise, historian Benjamin Severance said that East Tennesseans "were actively Republican, yet openly Negrophobic," and Thomas Alexander added that an "aversion to Negro equality in any field ... [was] characteristic of East Tennessee."

Postwar race relations varied across the state's three regions. Major General Clinton Fisk, Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau for Kentucky and Tennessee, believed that race relations were most tense in East Tennessee. On January 30, 1866, Fisk testified in Congress before the Joint Committee on Reconstruction and stated:

It is a melancholy fact that among the bitterest opponents of the negro in Tennessee are the intensely radical loyalists of the mountain district... In Middle Tennessee and in West Tennessee the largest and the wealthiest planters of the old slaveholding population have more cordially cooperated with me in my duties than the people of East Tennessee.4

Nearly four months earlier, several state senators from East Tennessee opposed a bill that would allow blacks to serve as competent witnesses in state courts. Senator Benjamin Frazier of Knox County protested saying:

I know the sentiments of my constituents, and am well assured that such a law would startle the whole community. The Union masses of East Tennessee, accepted abolition, not because they loved slavery less, but their country more. As to their love for the negro, I believe no portion of the State has such deep and settled prejudice against him as they have.

DeWitt C. Senter of Grainger County, an East Tennessee senator and later governor, also opposed the bill arguing that it would threaten the harmony of the Union Party.5

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4 Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, at the First Session Thirty-Ninth Congress (Washington, D.C., 1866), 112.
5 Nashville Daily News and Times, October 21 and 25, 1865.
Overall, contemporaries and historians have asserted that white East Tennesseans were a substantial barrier to black independence, and some observers like Fisk and Frazer claimed that blacks in East Tennessee suffered more at the hands of whites than anywhere else in the state. Allegedly, this prejudice was concentrated most visibly in Knoxville. According to this narrative, the city's white population oppressed and exploited the black community, and occasionally blacks suffered racially motivated violence. This depiction, however, exaggerates the bigotry that existed in the city and fails to tell the broader story of the black experience during the immediate postwar period.

A reexamination of this experience reveals that Knoxville was a hub of black progress and success, rather than a center of intense racial prejudice as described by Reid. In spite of marginalization, poverty, and prejudice, the black community in Knoxville flourished from 1865 to 1867 in the specific areas of religion, education, and politics. Knoxville's black community was complex, dynamic, and attained a considerable level of social and racial acceptance in an urban society ruled by white elites.

Slavery in Tennessee disintegrated in the midst of chaotic conditions. In June 1861, Tennessee seceded from the Union and by the next year Union forces had many strongholds across the state. By the end of 1863, federal troops controlled Tennessee. Historian John Cimprich contended that the length and intensity of the Union occupation was "a key disruptive factor" that helped to dismantle slavery in Tennessee. The presence of Union forces encouraged slaves to abandon their masters and to seek refuge in cities and in contraband camps. In cities, some escaped slaves moved into "outbuildings, abandoned homes, and rented rooms," while many others "concentrated in neighborhoods of their own" and erected wooden shacks.

The influx of fugitive slaves into population centers, such as Nashville, Murfreesboro, Athens, Cleveland, and Chattanooga, heightened racial tensions. Nowhere were these anxieties more pronounced than in Memphis. Of all the Tennessee cities, Memphis had the largest black population, which consisted of black refugees and black Union soldiers. Black refugees, who lived primarily in contraband camps, were often employed to build roads and bridges, cut wood, and to serve as soldiers. But they also had access to education—a new opportunity available to slaves. In several camps, federal officials organized grammar and industrial schools, taught by army chaplains and northern teachers. Historian Paul Phillips noted that former slaves put so much faith in the power of education that "they placed an overwhelming demand on their mentor-benefactors for booklearning, which, they believed, would unlock doors of opportunity in freedom."  

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6 John Cimprich, Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865 (Tuscaloosa, 1985), 5, 19-32, 47.

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After the war, the Freedman's Bureau, which would later become the Federal Bureau of Labor, proved crucial in aiding the black refugees who had been driven from their farms and in reuniting families that had been scattered throughout the countryside. Many local freedmen's bureaus had been established in the larger cities, as well as in the smaller towns and cities of the South. Benjamin Rush, a member of the Freedman's Bureau, reported that the bureau's sole purpose of its existence was to provide education to the newly freed blacks in the city or to any other location where they might find employment. The Freedman's Bureau provided for the education of the state's black schoolchildren.

He gave special mention to the school at St. Louis, Missouri, that was "favorably with the public, and the blacks were being educated. The agency was also doing a fair amount of work in the field of education for the blacks owned by the state."

Of the state's black schools...

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8 Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Land, a.k.a., the Freedmen's Bureau, 1865-1869 (Washington, D.C., 1867), 6.
Victorians have asserted that white East Tennesseans were opposed to black independence, and some have indicated that blacks in East Tennessee suffered the same discrimination as in the South. Allegedly, this was particularly the case in Knoxville. According to this perspective, the black population was pressed into servitude and exploited by the white majority for economic gain and personal advancement. This experience was not unique, but rather a part of a larger racial and economic disparity that existed throughout the South.

However, recent research reveals that Knoxville was a hub of intense racial prejudice and segregation. After the war, contraband camps soon closed, and the Freedmen's Bureau, which Congress established in March 1865, took charge of providing aid to white refugees and freed blacks. By early October 1865, the Bureau's Assistant Commissioner Fisk reported that camps had closed in Nashville, Memphis, Clarksville, Gallatin, Hendersonville, Murfreesboro, Pulaski, and Chattanooga. Many blacks left the camps to establish homes in the countryside. Fisk noted that the "exodus from crowded cities and towns to farms has been large." Yet, thousands of blacks remained in urban areas. Cities offered blacks an expanded range of employment opportunities. Blacks in Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, Knoxville, and other cities worked as domestic servants, barbers, drivers, firemen, and common laborers. More educated urban freedmen worked as independent businessmen, lawyers, physicians, teachers, and skilled laborers in manufacturing.

Urban blacks had educational opportunities that rural blacks often lacked. In general, the Freedmen's Bureau, together with northern churches and benevolent societies, worked primarily to organize black schools in urban centers. In the summer of 1867, Major General William P. Carlin, the new Assistant Commissioner for Tennessee, stated that freedmen schools were flourishing in the state's large cities, but "few schools [had] been established in the smaller towns and villages, and very few in the country." A year earlier, Benjamin Runkle, the Bureau's Sub-Assistant in Memphis, reported that large numbers of blacks in West Tennessee had moved into the city for the sole purpose of receiving an education. Even so, all black schools, whether in the city or the countryside, struggled under the weight of violence, poverty, inexperienced teachers, and scant political support. But these challenges failed, for the most part, to curb blacks' determination to obtain an education in the immediate postwar years. By January 1869, the Bureau's Superintendent of Education for Tennessee, James Thompson, praised the city's black schools, claiming that "all over they stood in excellent condition. He gave special applause to the schools in Nashville, which he said compared "favorably with any white schools in the same grades." When the Bureau finally closed its educational work in Tennessee in the summer of 1870, blacks owned over half the buildings and grounds of the state's freedmen schools.

Of the state's major cities, Nashville provided black Tennesseans with the most favorable urban conditions for building communities, obtaining

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9 J.W. Alvord, Fourth Semi-Annual Report on Schools for Freedmen, July 1, 1867 (Washington, D.C., 1867), 68; Taylor, Negro in Tennessee, 174; Phillips, "Education of Blacks," 100-101. In early 1869, the Freedmen's Bureau withdrew most of its officers from the southern states, leaving in place only education superintendents and claims agents. In the summer of 1870, the agency removed its education superintendents, and in June 1872, Congress terminated the Bureau. See, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Tennessee, 2.
education, and accessing public services. According to historian Don Doyle, the city emerged from the Civil War as one of the South's "most aggressive centers of economic development and social change." Its business class—financiers, merchants, and manufacturers—became leading promoters of the New South movement, second only to businessmen in Atlanta. Yet, in order to establish Nashville as a powerful economic force, the city's businessmen faced tough questions about how to handle the large black population. In a post-slavery world, what economic and political roles would blacks play? To what extent were whites responsible for training blacks for these roles? And how could racial tensions be mitigated so that a peaceful biracial labor force could be maintained? Ultimately, Nashville's elites promoted policies that preserved white supremacy—what Doyle called "the new paternalism"—but also gave blacks "limited public support to improve their health, education, and welfare." But the extension of black liberties was not only the product of white men's benevolence. For their part, Nashville's freedmen struggled diligently for the full benefits of citizenship. In 1865, black leaders organized the first State Convention of Colored Men, which met annually in Nashville for two decades. That same year, blacks in Nashville unsuccessfully petitioned the state legislature for the right to vote, arguing that the government could give "the colored man . . . a vote as safely as it trusted him with a bayonet.

Also, the city's freedmen, together with northern missionary societies, established schools to train black teachers: Fisk University and Central Tennessee College (now part of Trevecca Nazarene University) in 1865 and Roger Williams University in 1867. The black community flourished in Nashville largely because local leaders considered the black minority a greater economic advantage than a political or social danger.10

However, urban blacks in postwar Tennessee suffered prejudice, unemployment, poor living conditions, and segregation from whites. Whereas the countryside offered space to maintain some racial distance, cities forced whites and blacks to walk the same streets, shop at the same markets, work in the same buildings, and compete for the same jobs. At best, these close urban interactions remained tense but peaceful. At worst, they erupted into violence. In Memphis in May 1866, what started as a small clash between policemen and discharged black soldiers grew into a citywide riot against the black community. One historian has argued that economic competition between the city's blacks and Irish immigrants created a volatile environment. Violence also erupted in other parts of the South. Nearly three months after the Memphis riot, a race riot erupted in New Orleans, killing over thirty blacks.11

The black experience in postwar Knoxville resembled the conditions found in other Tennessee cities, as urban blacks renegotiated their power in the new racial, social, and economic order. Knoxville underwent rapid changes between 1861 and 1867. During the Civil War, Knoxville’s white residents divided between Unionists and Confederate sympathies and suffered constant military occupation. For the first half of the war, Confederate troops occupied the city. In late August 1863, Confederate forces, facing the threat of a powerful Union attack, abandoned the city and forfeited it to General Ambrose Burnside’s Army of the Ohio. In November, Confederate troops under the command of General James Longstreet attempted to recapture the city during the Battle of Fort Sanders, but failed. Until the war’s end, Union troops remained in Knoxville.

The presence of the Union army resulted in the emancipation of local slaves. Within weeks of the arrival of troops in early September 1863, slaves from surrounding counties flocked to Knoxville. Military leaders used these fugitive slaves to help the Union cause. Some blacks worked as laborers, while others enlisted in the army. In early 1864, hundreds of black men in the city joined what would become the 1st Regiment of Heavy Artillery, Colored Troops (US). By January 1865, the unit numbered 1,800 men and encamped

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1. McEnroe, Lincolnites and Rebels, 142, 165-72. For a detailed study of the deep and violent divisions between Unionist and Confederate sympathizers throughout East Tennessee during the war and Reconstruction, see Noel C. Fisher, War at Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerrilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869 (Chapel Hill, 1997). Two important studies that analyze the extent and nature of Confederate support in East Tennessee during and after the war are: Todd W. Groce, Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870 (Knoxville, 1999); and John D. Fowler, Mountainmen in Gray: The Nineteenth Tennessee Volunteer Infantry Regiment, C.S.A. (Knoxville, 2004).
on the city’s outskirts. The military presence fostered the growth of the black population in Knoxville. In 1860, blacks numbered 752, or 20.3 percent of the city’s population. By 1870 the black population had increased to 3,149, or 30.1 percent.13

Immediately after the war, turmoil plagued the city. As ex-Confederates returned to Knoxville, they faced hostility from local Unionists, which sometimes led to violence. In early September 1865, Confederate veteran Abner Baker entered the Knox County courthouse, where he shot and killed Union army veteran Will Hall. Baker was immediately jailed. But within hours, a large group of federal soldiers took Baker out of the prison and hanged him. Just a month earlier, J. Crozier Ramsey, a prominent local Confederate sympathizer who had fled to Nashville, reported to his sister in Charlotte, North Carolina, that sentiment in Knoxville remained hostile toward rebels and that atrocities were frequently committed against Confederate sympathizers. Ellen Renshaw House, a Confederate supporter living in Knoxville, recorded in her diary in August 1865 that violence between ex-Confederates and Unionists had become so bad that “no man’s life is safe.” But these hostilities were short lived. In February 1866, Abner Jackson, a resident of Knox County, noted that wartime animosities were “confined to very low people” in the county; ex-Confederate and Union officers mingled harmoniously. By the spring of 1866, J. Crozier Ramsey received reports that tensions had eased in Knoxville.14

As violence between Unionists and ex-Confederates declined, Reconstruction politics took center stage. After the war, Republicans (most of the former Unionists) gained control of Tennessee’s government. In March 1865, William G. Brownlow, an East Tennessee newspaper editor and staunch Unionist, was elected governor. He moved quickly to cement his party’s power by advocating for the disfranchisement of former Confederates in Tennessee. In June 1865, the General Assembly passed a franchise act that limited the vote to free white males who were “known to have entertained unconditional Union sentiments from the outbreak of rebellion to the present time.” Nonetheless, conservatives remained a political threat. In August 1865, they gained five of the state’s eight congressional districts, and in March of the next year they swept county elections in Middle and West Tennessee. Brownlow responded by calling for a revision of the franchise law. Many East Tennesseans threatened to secede from the state if ex-Confederates were not more thoroughly restricted from voting. The legislature soon

13 McKenzie, Lincolnites and Rebels, 142, 183-86; Michael J. McDonald and William Bruce Wheeler, Knoxville, Tennessee: Continuity and Change in an Appalachian City (Knoxville, 1983), 27.

14 McKenzie, Lincolnites and Rebels, 218-19; Daniel E. Sutherland, ed., A Very Violent Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House (Knoxville, 1996), 181; Joint Committee on Reconstruction, 128; J. Crozier Ramsey to E.A.R. Brock, August 5, 1865, Ramsey Family Papers, University of Tennessee Special Collections (hereinafter UTSC).
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William Gammonay Brownlow, a minister, journalist, and politician, was a fixture of Tennessee politics in the 1860s. While governor, from 1865 to 1869, he expanded the electorate to include freedmen in Tennessee. Engraving by J.C. Buttre, 1870, from the University of Tennessee Special Collections.

yielded to the political pressure and in May 1866 revised the suffrage law to make it harder for ex-Confederates to register to vote. Furthermore, in February of the next year, Republicans passed a bill that gave black men the right to vote. In the end, both suffrage changes benefited the Republican Party in the gubernatorial election of August 1867, but not without a fierce backlash from conservatives. Violence broke out throughout the state just weeks before the August election. In Knoxville, a small riot erupted in late July, resulting in the death of a black man.15

The summer of 1867, though, was not the first time freedmen in Knoxville suffered racially motivated violence—attacks had occurred since the first months that followed the end of the Civil War. Black soldiers were particularly vulnerable to violent situations. As the only troops on active duty, the 1st Colored Artillery had the initial responsibility of policing the city. This became difficult in the summer of 1865, when Union veterans of the 8th, 9th, and 13th regiments of the Tennessee Cavalry descended on the


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city to be paid and mustered out of service. In late August, a black soldier attempted to arrest a drunken veteran of the 8th Tennessee. A friend of the veteran tried forcibly to stop the arrest. In defense, the black soldier ran his bayonet through the friend. The entire 8th Tennessee responded by vowing to kill every black soldier in the streets that night. Several days later, a black soldier was found dead, floating in the Tennessee River with a musket tied to his back. And, as already noted, in February 1866, a mob hanged a black soldier for killing Colonel Dyer. Concerning this last incident, however, the evidence suggests that the rapid hanging of the black guard had more to do with the death of Colonel Dyer than with the race of the perpetrator.16

Blacks in postwar Tennessee also faced economic challenges. In the fall of 1865, Knoxville's city government denied blacks the right to be retailers in the public market. This ruling may have been a response to the actions of a local black man, James Taylor. In September 1865, Taylor bought a stock of peaches and resold them "by the dozen for speculation." The Market Master quickly ended Taylor's enterprise and fined him for breaking the market's rule against speculation. The local Freedmen's Bureau agent appealed the case to the City Recorder on behalf of Taylor, but the fine stuck. Whether or not the restriction against black retailers was a direct response to Taylor, it was certainly an attempt by the city government to curb black businesses in the marketplace.17

The most blatant forms of racial prejudice originated from poor whites. In November 1865, journalist Whitelaw Reid observed that an "inborn poor-white hatred of the negroes" pervaded Knoxville. The following year, in September, the Freedmen's Bureau Superintendent for Knox County, S.W. Grosbeck, reported that the city's policemen showed a strong prejudice against blacks. In some instances, they beat or imprisoned blacks "for reasons existing in their prejudices for the negro only, and not for any violation of laws." According to Grosbeck, the policemen's behavior was "a reliable index to the feelings and sentiments of the [city's] more ignorant white inhabitants toward the Blacks."18

Although racially motivated violence and bigotry existed in Knoxville, as in other Tennessee cities, it was the exception, not the rule. The growing black community gained a level of respect and acceptance not seen in many other parts of East Tennessee. In November 1866, Samuel Walker, Grosbeck's replacement as the Freedmen's Bureau Superintendent for Knox County, reported that "the blacks are industrious; with few exceptions they work and pay them honestly. The City Council endeavors to extend to them all the rights allowed by existing laws." Ultimately favorable urban environments emerged in this mountain city that allowed blacks to build a thriving community. Rather, it was socially and economically advantageous and sometimes black leaders embraced differences. But despite these successes in the immediate post-Civil War period, established churches, schools, and cultural institutions did not immediately follow. Significant political influence was slow to emerge.

Black churches were one of the first institutions to thrive in Knoxville. The church building served as a place for gatherings, education, and social events. The church also stood at the forefront of efforts to integrate churches throughout the South where their leadership combined their resources to build schools and churches. It is certainly true in Knoxville that the first school and church began to assert their rights, and the church continued to labor vigorously in the city.19

Blacks in Knoxville began building their own church in 1864. Three black men, John S. Washington, James B. Prine, and William Spain, formed the Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Shortly after, the congregation moved to a new church on Kingston Pike, but it eventually moved back to the original church building. It is unknown who the first white minister was, but they quickly moved to turn the church into a more substantive congregation. The church soon moved to a new building, and the congregation invited Rev. William W. Huser, a Presbyterian pastor.20

Black Presbyterian churches, like many black religious institutions, were formed to provide a sense of community and to ensure that the community had a voice in the political process. The Freedmen's Bureau, established in 1865, aimed to help blacks secure their rights and to ensure that they were able to vote and run for office. The bureau provided assistance to blacks in the form of education, employment, and legal aid. The bureau also established schools and churches, which provided a sense of community and a place for blacks to express their views. The bureau's efforts were successful, and by the end of the Reconstruction period, blacks had secured their civil rights and were able to participate in the political process.

16 McKenzie, Lincolnites and Rebels, 216; Sutherland, ed., Very Violent Rebel, 183-84. After Dyer's murder, Brownlow's Knoxville Whig published two articles, February 14 and March 28, 1866, praising his character and patriotism. In neither of these pieces is his killer mentioned, suggesting that the killer's race mattered little to those who mourned Dyer's death.
18 Reid, After the War, 352; "Report of S.W. Grosbeck," September 1, 1866, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-999, Roll 34, Target 2.
20 Foner, Reconstruction, 820.
In late August, a black soldier was killed by the 8th Tennessee. A friend of the black soldier, who was in the defense, the black soldier ran his gun on Tennessee responded by wounding the black soldier. Several days later, a black man, the Tennessee River with a musket tied to his leg, was killed. In January 1866, a mob hanged a black man near one of the Tennessee respondent by waving the rope to the right. Several days later, a black man was killed by a musket tied to his leg. In January 1866, a mob hanged a black man near one of the Tennessee. The last incident, however, the man who was black guard had more with two men who were perpetrators of the perpetrator.  

The economic challenges. In the fall of 1865, blacks were not allowed to be retailers in Knoxville. In response to the actions of a mob in January 1865, Taylor bought a stock of goods for speculation. The Market Master was again for breaking the market's rules. That night, Taylor's agent appealed the fine but the fine stood. Whether this was a direct response to Taylor, or an attempt to curb black businesses is unknown.

The fear of blacks originated from poor whites. It was observed that an "inborn poorman's disease." The following year, in December 1865, S.W. B. Dyer showed a strong prejudice against "inmates of the prison."  

Authority and power among the whites were invoked, but not for any violation of any law. Instead, the fear was that the blacks were a reliable and well-behaved group in the community's eyes.  

The property existed in Knoxville, but there were no laws, only the rule. The growing acceptance of blacks is not seen in Knoxville. By September 1866, Samuel Walker, a local Superintendent for Knox County, reported that "freedmen are quiet and peaceable, and generally industrious; with few exceptions the whites treat them kindly and deal with them honestly. The Civil Authorities particularly of this city are disposed to extend to them all the rights and privileges to which they are entitled by existing laws." Ultimately, Knoxville, like Nashville, provided blacks a favorable urban environment in which to taste the fruits of liberty. It was in this mountain city that blacks overcame social and political obstacles to build a thriving community. To be sure, theirs was not a unified community. Rather, it was socially and economically diverse. Internal squabbles occurred, and sometimes black leaders used the Freedmen's Bureau to mediate their differences. But despite the challenges, the city's blacks achieved many successes. In the immediate postwar years, leaders of the black community established churches, created educational opportunities, and gained significant political influence.  

Black churches were the centerpiece of Knoxville's black community. The church building served multiple purposes. The structures accommodated schools, political events, and social gatherings. Along with the family, the church also stood at the center of black life. After gaining freedom, blacks throughout the South withdrew from predominately white congregations, combined their resources, and established churches of their own. This was certainly true in Knoxville. During the Union occupation, blacks in the city began to assert their right to religious self-determination. After the war, they continued to labor vigorously for their religious independence.

Blacks in Knoxville made their first push for religious independence in 1864. Three black members left Knoxville's integrated but white-controlled First Baptist Church and began meeting in the basement of the First Presbyterian Church. Soon after, they acquired the pastoral services of Rev. T. Embry and formally organized the Mount Zion Baptist Church. For a short time, the congregation worshiped in the basement of the Presbyterian Church, but it eventually moved to the city's old Methodist Episcopal building. It is unknown how long the congregation used this building, but they quickly moved to a black schoolhouse in East Knoxville. In 1866, the congregation invited Rev. William Howell, from Ohio, to serve as its new pastor.

Black Presbyterians imitated their Baptist brethren and also sought religious independence after the war. Eleven black members of the Second

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20 Fonner, Reconstruction, 88-92.

Built in 1866 the Logan Chapel served as the home for the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E. Zion). In the late 1860s the church served as a meeting place for black leaders and also as the location for the Winns School.

From The Negro and East Tennessee, comp. R.S. Beard (Knoxville, 1913).

Presbyterian Church wanted a separate congregation from whites, but lacked financial resources and a pastor. A visit from Henry H. Garnett (a very prominent and well-educated northern black clergyman), however, addressed those two needs. In May 1865, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. met in New York to discuss the church’s mission to southern blacks. The assembly’s leadership appointed Garnett and John B. Reeve to “look after the interests of such colored people in the South as might desire to identify themselves with the Presbyterian Church.” After the meeting, Garnett traveled to Knoxville. When he arrived, he learned that eleven black Presbyterians wanted a church of their own. That summer, a relationship of trust developed, and Garnett offered them enough financial resources to set up their own church. As a result, on September 4, 1865, they established the First Colored Presbyterian Church (later called Shiloh Presbyterian Church), which was arguably the first black Presbyterian church organized in the South.22

In February 1866, Rev. George W. LeVer, a black missionary from New York who had served as a chaplain for the 20th Colored Volunteer Infantry during part of the war, came to Knoxville to serve as the pastor. His first months proved difficult, but by the end of the year conditions improved. Membership and funding swelled. Eventually, the congregation purchased a lot on Clinch Street and in December 1866 erected its first building. The accomplishment caught the attention of Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig, which announced completion of the building on December 12, 1866.23

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Around the time that black Presbyterians in Knoxville were achieving religious independence, a group of black Methodists were doing the same. In 1865, under the leadership of Rev. Alfred Anderson, the Logan Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E. Zion) was established. Anderson arrived in Knoxville in 1855 as a twenty-year-old free black and opened an ice cream shop on Main Street. He quickly gained the favor of many whites in the city. On June 28, 1855, the Knoxville Register praised him, saying, “Alfred Anderson has superior ice cream served daily and sent to any part of the city on order.” It is unknown how long Anderson operated his business, but by 1860 he was employed as a Methodist preacher. Anderson emerged after the war as a prominent black leader in Knoxville. During his pastorate, Logan Chapel grew rapidly. At the end of 1866, the church erected its own house of worship, described in the Whig as a “comfortable and spacious building.” In sum, by the end of 1865, black Knoxvillians had established a Baptist, a Presbyterian, and a Methodist church, and a year later, the Presbyterian and Methodist congregations had successfully erected their own church buildings.

Knoxville’s black churches functioned as more than centers of religious activity, they also housed schools. By the summer of 1867, black schools met in the basements of the city’s black Methodist and Presbyterian churches. These schools, however, were not the first in the city. In 1864, Laura Ann Scott Cansler (the daughter of a free-born mulatto) and R.J. Crewe (a white northerner) opened, separately, two schools for the city’s blacks. Cansler started the Burnside School, which was established by a white northerner, opened separately, two schools for the city’s blacks. Cansler started the Burnside School, and received its first building. The Whig, December 12, 1866.

In 1864, Laura Ann Scott Cansler, here with her husband Lawson Cansler, opened the Burnside School, arguably Knoxville’s first organized black school. From Robert J. Booker, Two Hundred Years of Black Culture in Knoxville, Tennessee, 1791 to 1991 (Virginia Beach, 1993), 38.


Gay Street in Knoxville, 1869. During the Civil War R.J. Creswell opened a school for blacks in the abandoned Baptist Church on Gay Street. From the McClung Historical Collection, Knoxville.

after receiving permission from General Ambrose Burnside. In May 1864, Creswell opened a school in the abandoned First Baptist Church on Gay Street. Union authorities had forced the congregation to abandon the building. The school boasted an enrollment of more than one hundred students. On the whole, black education blossomed in the summer of 1864. A white resident of Loudon noted in June that a female slave from the town had run away and settled close to Knoxville so she could go to school.²⁵

The location of Creswell’s school quickly came into question. In October 1864, Union military officials returned the church building to the Baptist congregation, and the congregation’s leaders forced Creswell’s school to vacate. A deacon explained that it was the church’s policy that no part of the building could be used for anything other than “religious services connected with the Baptist church.” Creswell struggled to secure a new space for the school. Eventually, he procured an old blacksmith shop for $20 per month, but financial difficulties continued. In the fall of 1864, Creswell decided to put his school under the supervision of the Freedmen’s Mission of the United Presbyterian Church (FMUPC).²⁶

²⁵ “Statement Respecting School Property and Repairs in East Tennessee,” June 4, 1867, Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000, Reel 6, Target 3; Booker, Two Hundred Years, 37-39; R.W. McGranahan, ed., Historical Sketches of the Freedmen’s Missions of the United Presbyterian Church, 1862-1904 (Knoxville, 1904), 22-23; Mary Jane Reynolds to Simeon D. Reynolds, June 20, 1864, Mary Jane Johnston Reynolds Letters, 1864, UTSC.

²⁶ Bryan, “Civil War in East Tennessee,” 323-24; McGranahan, Historical Sketches, 22. McGranahan notes that after Creswell came under the supervision of the FMUPC, his sister, Lizzie G. Creswell, was hired as a second teacher.
After the war, the Burnside School continued to flourish, but for unknown reasons Cansler did not report to the Freedmen's Bureau. From 1865 to 1867, her school is absent from the Freedmen's Bureau's monthly school reports. Even so, some evidence suggests that it continued as a self-sustaining school. In a letter to the Freedmen's Bureau Head, Major General O.O. Howard, in November 1865, Assistant Commissioner Fisk noted that at least one black school in Knoxville, most likely the Burnside School, sustained itself independently.

The Freedmen's Bureau most likely never established a school or held school property in Knoxville but rather supported the work of benevolent organizations—transporting teachers, subsidizing the purchase of land and buildings, paying teachers' salaries, and helping pay for building repairs. One of the earliest benevolent organizations to work in Knoxville was the Cincinnati-based Western Freedmen's Aid Commission. It opened a school in November 1865, employing four white and two black teachers. As of November 1865, the school enrolled 253 black students, with an average attendance of 163. Nearly half of the students could read. Even so, the school struggled to survive as the white Methodist church that housed it ordered it to vacate immediately that same month. The school needed assistance fast. Thomas Brigham, the superintendent for the Commission in Knoxville, wrote to the Freedmen's Bureau: "We are trying to build a church and school house. [We] would respectfully solicit help from the Freedmen's Bureau." It is unknown what happened to the Commission's work in Knoxville. After November, its school vanished from the Freedmen's Bureau's monthly school reports.

The FMUPC thrived in Knoxville after the war, but not without some challenges. In the fall of 1865, the FMUPC purchased a government building for $180. But before the school could open, a group of hostile citizens burned the building to the ground. The FMUPC, though, viewed the incident as an anomaly, arguing that only a handful of the city's whites had committed the crime and did not represent the views of the entire white community. In general, R.J. Creswell praised white Knoxvilleans, saying, "The whites [in Knoxville] are more friendly than at any other Post." In the spring of 1866, the FMUPC faced another challenge when a group of aggressive whites ordered Creswell to "close up his negro schools and go north," Creswell

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23 Booker, Ten Hundred Years, 38; Henry Lee Swint, ed., "Reports From Education Agents of the Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee, 1865-1870," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 1 (1942): 56; Freedmen's Bureau agents knew that some independent black schools chose not to report to the agency. They also knew that some teachers exploited the system; that is, they opened a school, got paid, and then closed it.

responded by appealing to Governor Brownlow, who forced the leader of the hostile group to apologize.29

From 1865 to 1866, the FM UPC operated the majority of the city's black schools. In April 1866, it owned two buildings, operated five schools, and employed eight teachers, with a total enrollment of 300 students. In October 1866, the FM UPC reduced its number of teachers to five. Nonetheless, it started the fall term with 332 black students, with an average attendance of 186. Just over 25 percent of all the students were more than sixteen-years-old, nearly 25 percent had math skills, over 30 percent could read at advanced levels, and over 35 percent could write. The FM UPC also operated one Sabbath school, which enrolled 250 students. Overall, in the fall of 1866, black education in Knoxville appeared strong.30

Table 1. School Statistics for the Freedmen's Mission of the United Presbyterian Church (FM UPC) in Knoxville, 1866-1867

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching and Student Body</th>
<th>October 1866</th>
<th>January 1867</th>
<th>May 1867</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Student Enrollment</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Attendance</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over Sixteen Years of Age</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabbath School Attendance</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As the school year progressed, enrollment declined. Between October and May 1866, FM UPC's school population decreased from 33 percent. The decline was primarily due to the age of sixteen and older, which experienced a 7 percent drop. From 1865 to 1866, the percentage of students over 16 years old dropped 50 percent. The school's curriculum offered no occupational training, which likely contributed to the decline in attendance.

The Garnet League in Tennessee

The Garnet Leaguers of Tennessee: A Monthly School Report,

The League of Nations

In the spring of 1867, the Garnet League had a high enrollment of 300 students in Knoxville. The league was a group of educated black leaders in Knoxville who supported the education of black students. The School mustered 23 members for the Garnet League.

In the fall of 1866, although the enrollment had declined from the previous year, May 1867, by over 300 students, the school still had a 44 percent attendance rate. The school boasted an enrollment of 23 members (including 10 females). The school's report to the readers, 70 members of the Garnet League, was kind.31


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percent could read at advanced
The FMUPC also operated one
ents. Overall, in the fall of 1866, 85,000.

Freedmen's Mission of the
PC) in Knoxville, 1866-1867

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<tr>
<th>October</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>May</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>1867</td>
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<td>325</td>
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<td>250</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>180</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Report of the United Presbyterian
Association of R. J. Cresswell, September 8, 1865,
the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1030,
newly purchased government building,
into the First Presbyterian Church,
1866. In an interview with
from Knoxville recounted: "I've had
the old First Presbyterian church. My
we our education and give us clothes
that was just after the surrender." See,
and Federal Writer's Project, Tennessee
from Interviews with Former Slaves (reprint,
Knoxville," April 30, 1866; "Superintendent's
Mission, Knoxville," October 1866, all
the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000.

As the school year progressed, student enrollment and achievement
decreased. Between October 1866 and January 1867, total enrollment at the
FMUPC's schools dropped 40 percent, and the average attendance dropped
33 percent. There was, moreover, a 60 percent drop in students over the
age of sixteen, a 40 percent decline in advanced readers, and a nearly 50
percent drop in students who could write. The Sabbath school also suffered,
dropping 50 percent in enrollment from October. In its reports, the FMUPC
offered no explanation for these sudden declines, but the matter seems to
have involved the establishment of a new black school in Knoxville by the
Garnet League in December 1866.\(^{11}\)

The Garnet League was headquartered in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.
According to the Whig's description:

> The league is composed solely of colored people of that city, who
> have associated themselves in their grand enterprise for promoting
> the educational and religious improvement of the freedmen, the
> stimulation of a higher standard of literature and civilization, by
> sending among them as numerous as possible their own "kith and
> kin" as teachers and ministers, to instruct them in all their moral
> and religious duties.

In early December 1866, the League sent Henrietta Jones—described as
"a highly educated colored woman"—to establish the Winan School in
Knoxville. It grew rapidly, so much so that by February 1867 the League
had hired another teacher, Professor O.H.C. Hughes, a well-educated black
leader in Knoxville. Under the direction of Jones and Hughes, the Winan
School made progress "second to [that of] no Freedmen school in the state
[of Tennessee]."\(^{11}\)

In the first half of 1867, black education in Knoxville expanded.
Although several FMUPC students moved to the Winan School in late 1866,
enrollment at the FMUPC's schools rebounded from its previous decline. By
May 1867, total enrollment increased by nearly 30 percent, advanced readers
by over 30 percent, writers by 11 percent, and Sabbath school enrollment by
44 percent since the beginning of the year. Also in May, the Winan School
boasted an enrollment of 156 students and an average attendance of 104
(including two white students), with 48 over the age of 16, 71 advanced
readers, 70 writers, and 150 in the League's Sabbath school. By the spring
of 1867, over 400 blacks in Knoxville attended an organized school of some
kind.\(^{33}\)

\(^{11}\) "State Superintendent's Monthly School Report," January 1867, Records of the
Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000, Reel 6, Target
2; Brownlow's Knoxville Whig, February 13, 1867.

\(^{33}\) "State Superintendent's Monthly School Report," May 1867, Records of the Superintendent
Despite the success of its education programs, in June 1867 the FMUPC reduced its presence in the city. That month, the FMUPC cut three of its day schools, leaving one in operation. Even so, the FMUPC still employed four white teachers, and maintained a high school enrollment. It is unknown what caused this sudden reduction in programs, but a lack of financial support and a shift in focus are two likely reasons. In May, the FMUPC reported that it relied on funds from the Freedmen’s Bureau to transport its teachers. The use of the Freedmen’s Bureau’s services suggests that the FMUPC’s Knoxville branch was struggling financially. Thus, the FMUPC may have eliminated three of its schools in order to cut expenses and maintain a high quality of black education. A month after dropping its schools, the FMUPC ended its reliance on the Freedmen’s Bureau for transportation of its teachers, which indicates that the reductions alleviated financial stress.44

The elimination of three of its city schools also indicates a shift in focus for the FMUPC. With the establishment and success of the Winan School in Knoxville, the FMUPC may have turned its attention to other locations where blacks lacked educational opportunities. This reason seems most likely, because in the latter half of 1867, the FMUPC began concentrating its efforts in the rural areas of Knox County. In August, the FMUPC operated four schools outside of Knoxville. F. Schade reported to the Whig that the FMUPC offered rural blacks “highly valued and appreciated” educational programs. Ultimately, the FMUPC reduced its presence in Knoxville in mid-1867 and responded to a growing demand for schools for rural blacks.45

Throughout 1867, the Garnet League helped Knoxville’s black community take ownership of its education. By June of that year, the Winan School held classes in the Logan Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, a black-owned building. In September, F. Schade, again writing in the Whig, complimented the students of the Winan School for their dedication to learning. He described the school as doing vital work, which would cultivate a generation of educated blacks to someday lead their communities. Schade named two young men specifically, saying, “William Franklin and Jerry Jarnagon, will, if encouraged, make speakers of which any community might be proud.”46

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45 Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig, August 7, 1867.
46 “School Property and Repairs,” June 4, 1867, Reel 6, Target 3; “State Superintendent’s Monthly School Report,” June 1867, Reel 6 Target 2, all in Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000; Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig, September 11, 1867.
Black education was closely tied to politics. Prominent black leaders in Knoxville worked diligently to acquire state and local support for black education. In August 1866, Knoxville’s black community elected M.J.R. Gentle—a free black who came to the city in the early 1850s—to represent Knoxville at the State Convention of Colored Men held in Nashville on August 6, 1866. The convention elected him president, and under his leadership they passed resolutions on education, agriculture, manufacturing, and mining. One resolution asked the state legislature “to make annual appropriation of public school funds adequate to secure to black children the advantages of a common school education.”

Gentle’s election to this state convention, however, was not the first time Knoxville’s black community organized politically. In April 1865, a group of East Tennessee black leaders sent a petition to the state legislature asking for full political and civil rights. They stressed that “without our political rights, our condition is very little better than it was before.” Historian John Cimberich argued that Knoxville’s black community likely produced this petition. That same month, the community sent William Scott and Rev. Alfred Anderson to Nashville to work for black rights. Scott remained in Nashville to attend the first State Convention of Colored Men and edit the state’s first black newspaper, The Colored Tennessean. But Anderson returned to Knoxville to establish the Logan Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church.

Anderson’s emergence as a prominent black leader in Knoxville was significant. Just as black churches had multiple functions in the black community, so, too, did black pastors. As historian Eric Foner notes, “Preachers came to play a central role in black politics during Reconstruction.” Anderson, along with other black pastors including Rev. George LeVere, fused together religious leadership and political activity. This connection between black politics and religion became most apparent in early 1867.

On New Year’s Day, 1867, somewhere between 1,600 and 2,000 black Knoxvillians marched in the city’s streets to commemorate President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. Black communities throughout the North and South observed the anniversary with celebration. The Whig recorded the scene in Knoxville:

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37 Booker, Two Hundred Yars, 19; Canady, “Negro Life,” 321.
39 Foner, Reconstruction, 93. Light skin color may have given the city’s black leaders an advantage. Rev. Alfred Anderson, M.J.R. Gentle, Dr. J.B. Young, and James Mason were mixed race. Even so, it is unknown to what extent skin color variations mattered to Knoxville’s black community. See, U.S. Census, 1860 and 1870, Population Schedules, Knox County, Tennessee.
Headed by the colored band of this city... the colored people of Knoxville marched in procession through our principal streets. The procession contained several carriages filled with the speakers of the day, and banners and standards of various kinds and designs waved aloft, denoting the patriotism of the colored people and designating the various societies composing the procession. Several of the flags belonged to the disbanded colored regiments, and showed proof of having been in the storm of battle, borne by the colored defenders of the nation's perpetuity.

The procession stopped at Governor William Brownlow's Knoxville residence and gave three cheers for him, the state legislature, and Congress. The parade then moved on to cheer in front of the residence of U.S. Representative Horace Maynard, the headquarters of General Luther S. Trowbridge, and the Whig office. At each location, the crowd expressed respect and enthusiasm. The procession culminated at the Logan Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, LeVere, Gentle, and Anderson each addressed the members of the crowd and exhorted them to lives worthy of their freedom and "to fit themselves for their new and more advanced citizenship."  

The parade showcased black Knoxvillians as a large, strong, well-organized, diverse, and talented political and social force. Their community included musicians, gifted orators, military veterans, and civic leaders. A month after the parade, black leaders from East Tennessee met in Knoxville to encourage the state legislature to pass a bill granting black suffrage. The meeting occurred at the Logan Chapel on the evening of February 12, 1867. A majority of attendees were from Knoxville. Anderson called the gathering to order, Henderson Alexander served as the convention's president. M.J.R. Gentle served as secretary, Professor O.H.C. Hughes (a teacher with the Wian School) served as the chairman of the committee of resolutions, and Dr. J. B. Young and William F. Yardley signed the statement of resolutions.  

The resolutions passed at the meeting displayed a complex mixture of politics, religion, and education. Members praised the state legislature for standing "in defense of humanity and enfranchisement." In addition, they resolved to support both the radical wing of the Republican Party and William Brownlow in the upcoming state elections in August. But members also expressed some frustration, noting that the state's Republicans had "not secured all we may have desired—indeed we are permitted to wait in the jury box, nor allowed to hold office." In spite of their frustration, however, those at the meeting resolved to wait in the hope that one day they would "rejoice in the exercise of every right belonging to an American citizen."  

Religious references were frequently made in the cause of political reform. The parades, processions, and political meetings all reinforced the idea of spiritual redemption and moral uplift. The attendees also expressed confidence in the progress of the nation, its social and educational enlightenment, and its role in the world.

[That education is an arm of oppression, that it is a source of usefulness... that knowledge is to shed abroad a new light, to change the course of politics, to change the course of the world.]

At the same time, white Republicans such as the Union and Republican Leagues. The stated purpose of every political group, or circuit, was to secure black votes in the upcoming congressional elections. Republican candidates succeeded in gaining black support for black suffrage, together with a landslide victory for the Republican ticket in all of Tennessee's congressional districts and all but three seats in the governorship, with only 2,982 votes against Ewell.

Ibid.  
Ibid.

41 Brownlow's Knoxville Whig, January 9, and February 20, 1867.
42 Brownlow's Knoxville Whig, February 20, 1867.
Religious references saturated the resolutions. Participants considered the cause of political freedom nothing less than a divine cause. God, not politicians, therefore, deserved the highest praise. One resolution began, "Resolved. That we recognize the unerring hand of Providence in the affairs of this nation, and as our first and most pleasing duty, we solemnly acknowledge in a special manner our boundless obligations to the gracious and Almighty God, who in the fullness of time, has so visibly and triumphantly led us from withering servitude to enfranchised freedmen."41

Attendees also expressed a commitment to black education. In their view, the progress of education was essential to securing full freedom, enlightenment, social acceptance, and prosperity. They resolved,

"That education is the strong and potent shield to protect us from the arm of oppression, to lead our feet into the ways of freedom and usefulness. . . . We will, with one accord unite our hands and hearts to shed abroad among us the gifts of mental light, that we may think right, vote right and do right, hoping by our energies, industry and economy, to acquire wealth, whereby we may add our contributions to the strength, glory and honor of the national character."42

At the same time black leaders were meeting at the Logan Chapel, white Republicans throughout Tennessee began to organize black Union Leagues. The stated purpose of these leagues was "to inculcate the principles of loyalty and good citizenship" among black men; the unstated purpose was to secure black votes for the Republican Party. In April 1867, the black Union League in Knoxville boasted a membership of 500. Overall, Radical Republicans succeeded in gaining the political support of freedmen. Black suffrage, together with the disenfranchisement of ex-Confederates, led to a landslide victory for the Republicans in the 1867 state elections. They won all of Tennessee's congressional house seats, every seat in the state senate, and all but three seats in the state house. Republican William Brownlow won the governorship, with 74,034 votes, over conservative Emerson Etheridge, who obtained only 22,550 votes. In Knoxville, Brownlow triumphed with 982 votes against Etheridge's 343 votes.43

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 William Gillespie McBride, "Blacks and the Race Issue in Tennessee Politics, 1865-1867" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1989), 186; Patton, Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee, 179; D. Burt to W. P. Catlin, April 30, 1867, Records of the Assistant Commissioners for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-999, Reel 19, Target 1, The Union League in Maryville, Tennessee, was biracial—not segregated as it was in Knoxville. For details about the Maryville Union League, see Severance, "Loyalty's Political Vanguard," 25-46. Concerning Union Leagues in general, see Blight, Race and Reunion, 49-50. About the 1867 elections, see Alexander, Political Reconstruction, 159-60; Charles A. Miller, The Official and Political Manual of the State of Tennessee (Nashville, 1890), 170; Brownlow's Knoxville Whig, August 7, 1867.
By the summer of 1867, Knoxville’s black community had achieved substantial progress. The community counted three churches, two of them having erected their own buildings, a number of black schools, and a strong political presence in the city and region. However, blacks in Knoxville lacked political, social, and economic stability in white society. Most obvious, blacks did not possess equal political and civil rights, they relied on benevolent organizations for education, and many black congregations lacked church buildings of their own. The city’s black community responded to these challenges through political activity.

In late August 1867, weeks after the gubernatorial election, a group of black leaders in Knoxville—including Dr. J.B. Young, Alfred Anderson, William Yardley, James Mason, and Henderson Alexander—announced a statewide convention for black Tennesseans to be held in Knoxville on September 24, 1867. The call for delegates appeared in the Whig. The newspaper stated, “We have carried the elections by a vast majority, yet there remains much to be done, matters connected with our future welfare and happiness to be considered, and we hope and trust that every city, county, and district will be represented by delegates.” It is significant that this convention invited delegates from across the state. Only six months earlier, black leaders in Knoxville had held a convention only for black East Tennesseans. At that point, their leadership held regional, but not statewide, appeal. But by August, the city’s black leaders took unprecedented steps to achieve statewide political leadership among black Tennesseans.46

Black education also advanced in the latter half of 1867. That summer, LeVere made plans to start a new school in the basement of the black Presbyterian Church. First, however, he needed to complete construction of the church’s basement. To cover some of the expenses, the Freedmen’s Bureau gave LeVere $200. By October 22, enough of the basement had been finished for LeVere to open his school. It started with thirty-six students. By December, all but two students were paying their own tuition, allowing the school to become self-sustaining. In addition, this marked the first time (as far as available evidence indicates) that black students in Knoxville paid their own tuition. In December, which generally served as a time for New Year’s resolutions, the city’s black community met each evening. In addition, the city’s black community, in an effort to raise money for the school, held a New Year’s celebration on December 31st. The school’s operating funds were raised by the sale of tickets to the New Year’s celebration. By February 1868, the school had a new building and had grown to more than one hundred students. The school’s financial stability was secured, and it operated for the next several years.

Public support was evident throughout 1867. In the November report, the Freedmen’s Bureau reported on the growth and expansion of black schools in Knoxville and the surrounding region. It noted that the school at Knoxville was “very good,” and that the school at Maryville was “very well conducted.” The school at Maryville was also reported to be “very well attended.” The school at Maryville was also reported to be “very well attended.” The city’s black community also made progress in other areas. In the November report, the Freedmen’s Bureau reported that the black Baptist Church was building a new building for its new building in Knoxville. The church was also reported to be “very well attended.” In addition, the black Baptist Church was also reported to be “very well attended.” The church was also reported to be “very well attended.”

On November 6, 1867, a meeting was held in Knoxville to establish an Episcopal seminary to train black clergymen. The meeting was held in the new building of the Episcopal Church. The meeting was attended by representatives from around the state, representing a theological seminary. The meeting was held in a large hall, and favorable urban environment. The meeting was held to discuss the future of the school. The meeting was held to discuss the future of the school. The meeting was held to discuss the future of the school.

46 “School Property and School,” November 28, 1867, Reel 6, Target 2.47

From Booker, Two Hundred Years, 40.

In September 1867, James Mason and other members of Knoxville’s black community, held a statewide convention for black Tennesseans in Knoxville. From Booker, Two Hundred Years, 40.
in the black community had achieved the goal of three churches, two of them black churches, and a strong degree of educational and civil rights, they relied on the Freedmen's Bureau for education, and many black leaders announced their intention to support the church. The call for support in the Whig newspaper carried the messages by a vast and far-reaching networks among black leaders in Knoxville as "exceedingly good." A month later, she reported that it was "very good." Samuel Moore, the Knoxville District Superintendent for the FMUPC, reported in early January 1867 that "there is no opposition" toward black schools. By the end of 1867, black education in Knoxville had advanced greatly.

Knoxville's black churches achieved new levels of independence and growth in late 1867. In August, several blacks in the city made plans to establish an Episcopal Church. According to the Whig, they were "making an effort to raise means to erect a new house of worship on State Street between Asylum and Reservoir." In September, the newspaper reported that the black Baptist Church had recently celebrated the laying of the cornerstone for its new building in East Knoxville. Two months later, the black Methodist Church demonstrated that its influence had spread well beyond the city. On November 6, 1867, the Tennessee Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church convened at the Logan Chapel, with sixty delegates from around the state. Conference leaders decided to establish a theological seminary in Knoxville, believing that the city offered both a favorable urban environment and a strong black community to support incoming students. To pay for the seminary's construction, leaders passed a resolution requiring every member of the denomination to contribute fifty cents. Finally, as the year came to a close, the black Presbyterian Church achieved citywide exposure. For several days in late December, the Church held a large fair in the city to raise funds to complete its basement, which

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housed LeVere’s school. The fair caught the attention of the Whig, which not only announced the event but praised its success. By the end of 1867, the growth of Knoxville’s black churches represented greater levels of influence in the city and state.69

For the next two decades—before racial violence spiked at the turn of the twentieth century—Knoxville’s black community thrived. In early 1868, David Burt, Freedmen’s Bureau Superintendent of Education for Tennessee, reported that at least one normal school—which educated black students interested in becoming teachers—had been established in Knoxville. By 1881 three more schools had started: Knoxville College (1875), Austin High School (1879), and the Tennessee School for the Deaf (1881). Also, by the 1880s, eight new black churches were organized: Second Colored Baptist Church (1866), Mount Pleasant Baptist Church (1872), Seney Chapel (1875), Clinton Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church (1875), First United Presbyterian Church (1877), Little Brown Church (1881), Little Zion Baptist Church (1882), and Bethel A.M.E. Church (1883). In 1886, Logan Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church erected a new house of worship on Commerce Avenue that seated nearly a thousand people. One history of Knoxville has claimed that


*Founded in 1875 by the Presbyterian Church, Knoxville College began as a normal school to educate teachers and quickly become a center of black higher education in East Tennessee. From Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Knoxville College, Knoxville, Tennessee, for the Year Ending May, 1882 (Knoxville, 1882).*

49 Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig, August 28, September 15, and December 25, 1867; Knoxville Daily Free Press, November 17, 1867.
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(1831), Little Zion Baptist Church
hish on Commerce Avenue that
Knoxville has claimed that

ville College began as a normal school to
education in East Tennessee. From
College, Knoxville, Tennessee, for the
ville, 1882).

William F. Yardley, an active member of
Knoxville's black community throughout the
postwar period, ran for governor in 1876. From the
Beck Cultural Exchange Center.

at the time of the structure's completion it was
"the third largest [church building] in the United
States owned by colored people." 69
Blacks also became more active in politics after
1868 when they gained the right to hold office. In
1872, prominent black leader and physician Dr.
J.B. Young campaigned, although unsuccessfully,
for city mayor. Four years later, William Yardley,
another local black leader, ran for governor as an independent. According
to Robert Booker, Yardley was "hailed by the press and public alike for
his ability at public speaking ... [and] he was noted for his eloquence in
introducing visiting dignitaries who came to Knoxville." Although Yardley
received only one percent of the statewide vote, his campaign demonstrated
the rising influence of Knoxville's black community. For the next decade,
the city's black leaders formed numerous committees to interview local
political candidates, both Republicans and Democrats. Beyond education,
religion, and politics, blacks made gains in other areas too. They established
well-respected fraternal societies, served as policemen, practiced law and
medicine, and, as early as 1871, organized labor associations. 81

In the years immediately following the Civil War, Knoxville's black
community flourished. While they faced numerous challenges, blacks
established their own churches, advanced the cause of their education,
and achieved statewide political influence. But why in Knoxville? Why did
blacks succeed in the city, while in the surrounding region they faced acute
prejudice? What made the city a favorable urban environment? One likely
reason is that blacks in Knoxville were a minority and, thus, posed no serious
social, political, or economic threat to the majority of elite and middle-
class whites. Furthermore, the Republican Party benefited from the black
community's support. Another likely reason that the city proved agreeable
was that black freedom often profit ed the city's elites. Business elites in

69 Nashville Union and Dispatch, February 11, 1868; Booker, Two Hundred Years, 23-34, 39-44;
Rule et al., Standard History, 452. Concerning the rise of elite conservatism and the black
exodus from the city in the early twentieth century, see McDonald and Wheeler, Knoxville,
Tennessee, 34-36.

81 Booker, Two Hundred Years, 60, 63, 85-91; Lamon, Blacks in Tennessee, 49; McDonald and
prominent, largely elite, black fraternal gathering was the Masonic Brotherhood, Meridian
Lodge, No. 4. See, Knoxville Daily Chronicle, January 1, 1873.
Knoxville, like their counterparts in Nashville, quickly joined the New South movement. Immediately after the war, business leaders worked diligently to promote the city's economic growth. Knoxville sat at the junction of several rail connections, possessed large quantities of natural resources like iron and coal, and had access to a large labor pool (blacks and rural migrants) that could be used to fuel industrial expansion. Fixated on enlarging the city's commercial and industrial influence in the region and desperate for workers, businessmen considered blacks a greater economic advantage than a social or political threat. Nevertheless, blacks were not simply political and economic puppets. They may have benefited from favorable urban conditions, but it was their own courageous efforts to form dynamic communities immediately after the Civil War that allowed blacks to achieve varying degrees of religious, educational, and political authority in Knoxville.32

Deconst

The 13th Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry and the Lost Cause

John

On October 10, 1864, the 13th Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry of the Carter County contingent met on a two-fold. They had gathered in the special dedication of a monument near the Elizabethton cemetery for patriotic music, resident orator, and any well-known pivot. It came in killing the furlough to Morgan. Samuel Scott won the 13th Tennessee Cavalry. The officers and men contended, the "conscription" of Morgan's death came nothing short of murder, with Lost Cause rhetoric in the veterans of the 13th who had perpetuated.

32 McDonald and Wheeler, Knoxville, Tennessee, 10:31.
Deconstructing the Myth: The 13th Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry and the Death of General John Hunt Morgan

By Melanie K. Storie

On October 10, 1913, in Elizabethton, Tennessee, veterans from the 13th Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry (US) posed for a photograph on the steps of the Carter County courthouse. The occasion that autumn afternoon was two-fold. They had gathered for their 17th annual reunion and to take part in the special dedication services for the new Soldiers’ Monument. For two days Elizabethton celebrated the service of its veterans. Bands played patriotic music, residents waved American flags, and town buildings were adorned with patriotic bunting. While the regiment did not participate in any well-known, pivotal battles during the Civil War, its defining moment came in killing the flamboyant Confederate cavalryman, General John Hunt Morgan. Samuel Scott and Samuel Angel, veterans and regimental historians for the 13th Tennessee, later wrote, “This was the first fight of importance... The officers and men showed the gallantry... of veterans.” Further, they contended, the “conspicuous part” played by the regiment in the death of Morgan won them “distinction.” Confederates nevertheless insisted that Morgan’s death came as a result of an unfair fight; some even alleged it was nothing short of murder. After the war these viewpoints became meshed with Lost Cause rhetoric, elevating Morgan’s image to that of folk hero while veterans of the 13th Tennessee were depicted as gratuitous bushwhackers who had perpetuated an atrocity. During the postwar years, John Hunt

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1 “Reunion of Veterans Held at Elizabethton,” Bristol Herald Courier, October 12, 1913.